“It’s an Entity. It’s Not a Book:”
21st Century Israeli Women Encounter the Song of Songs Through Music

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Introduction

During the foundational years of the modern State of Israel, there was a need to create a canon of cultural touchstones for the new nation. One of the ways that newly created works of art, music, and literature were given authenticity was through an emphasis on biblicism in both secular and religious spheres, rooting this new culture in ancient texts. This also helped solidify ties to the land in which the events of the Bible took place. The Song of Songs, a book of erotic poetry, enjoyed a priviliged position in the context of Israeli Biblicism due to its deep connection to the land. The backdrop to the sexual drama of the Song is about tending the land, emphasizing the produce and plants that grow there.

The Song of Songs is such a deeply beloved text that the mishnaic Rabbi Akiva described it as the Holy of Holies. It has provided extremely fertile ground for allegorical readings. Early readers, such as the rabbis of the *midrash*, were largely uncomfortable with the overt sexual imagery, and so sublimated it into a religious metaphor. By the time of the European Enlightenment, in the 18th Century, the pendulum had swung back toward literalist readings. Then, at the turn of the 20th Century, as Zionism became a real political ideology and Jews worked the Land of Israel, the Song became re-allegorized, a metaphor for love of the land and a collective society. As Ilana Pardes writes, "the great resonance of the Song was, in a sense, due to its potential to serve both as a very personal, aesthetic touchstone and as a base for a national one."[1] The Song stood in for folk songs, and then became an inextricable part of Israeli song.

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[1] Ilana Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers: the Song of Songs in Israeli Culture* (Seattle, WA: Univ. of Washington Press, 2014), 50-51.

The Song is structured much like a *wasf*, a form of Arabic wedding poetry where the lovers describe each others' bodies. Although there is this regional parallel, the Song is highly unusual among the books of the Bible. It does not mention God. It grants more agency to the female character, the Shulamite, than to any other female character in the Bible. As Phyllis Trible writes, "Women… are the principal creators of the poetry of eroticism."[2] The beauty of the poetry, the connection to the land, and the depth of the female character have all contributed to the immense popularity of the Song in Israeli culture.

The emphasis on the Bible in Israeli culture has faded in the secular sphere in the last fifty years. The project of nation-building is no longer in the foreground, and the deliberate crafting of a shared canon is no longer necessary. Why, then, does the Song remain a major influence in Israeli music and culture? How is it being used today, in 2020?

The topic "Song of Songs in Israeli music" is a massive scope. This project has narrowed the focus to capture a few snapshots of how the Song is being used musically in 2020. It consists of three case studies of Israeli women who have intimate relationships with the Song of Songs which are expressed through music. This paper will examine how Yula Beeri, Victoria Hanna, and Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum have encountered the Song, and how each of them relates to it through music. It will explore how they are influenced by the history of Israeli song in relation to the Bible, but also how each of them has curated her own influences to form a unique perspective on the text. This paper, as much as it is about Israeli music, is also about how women have agency in their own

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[2] Phyllis Trible, "Love's Lyrics Redeemed," in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 145.

relationships to the Bible. It shows how the same text can be deployed in different contexts to serve different goals and represent different things. Yula Beeri, Victoria Hanna, and Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum have created new re-allegorizations of the Song, showing how, as Victoria Hanna says, “It’s an entity. It’s not a book.” The Song is a living document, which demands its readers to cultivate a personal relationship with it.

Yula Beeri & INDIGA: "It's about madness love, it's about sexy love."[3]

Yula Beeri is an Israeli woman who had been living and working in New York City as a professional musician for about ten years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. She is a singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist, with her primary instrument being bass guitar. She has worked in many different musical projects, including the women's vocal trio Hydra, and Y&I with her husband, Isaac Gardner. Yula's projects are varied, but tend to lean towards the genres of punk and experimental rock. She remembers writing her first songs as soon as she learned to talk, and spent some time at Tel Aviv's Arts School as a child. The musical influences that she describes from her childhood include Kate Bush, Klaus Nomi, and Kaveret, which are all avant-garde musicians that combine different genres and styles. Yula particularly described an experience listening to *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* as a teenager. *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* was a project to both celebrate and modernize Bulgarian folk music through the Bulgarian State Television Female Vocal Choir. The CD was released in Switzerland in 1975, and the arrangements are by Filip Kutev, who

> blend[ed] the signature elements of traditional Bulgarian vocal music – dissonances, quarter tones, drones and asymmetrical rhythms – with arrangements derived in part from the impressionism of Claude Debussy and the twelve-tone innovations of Arnold Schoenberg. The result was unlike anything heard anywhere before, a roots-based music shot through with avant-garde flourishes.[4]

For Yula, the sound of the Bulgarian women's music was "nothing short of divine." It is "all folk music, folk songs that talk about people, but for [her] musical

[3] All quotations are taken from an interview with Yula Beeri conducted by Lianna Mendelson over Zoom on 17 November 2020 unless otherwise cited.

[4] Chris May. "*Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares*: How this all-female Bulgarian folk choir became a timeless cult phenomenon," The Vinyl Factory, February 28th, 2017, https://thevinylfactory.com/features/mystere-des-voix-bulgares-4ad-story/.

experience of the harmon[y], it sounded completely out of this world." Yula had wanted to become involved in singing Bulgarian folk music, but found the idiosyncratic vocal ornaments and the style to be too difficult without specific training in it. However, she continued to enjoy this music and allow it to influence her.

Growing up as a secular Israeli in Tel Aviv, Yula studied the Bible in school, but at the time it did not feel particularly alive or interesting to her. She felt like she pushed her Jewish identity to the side as she pursued her musical career. Around the spring of 2019, her interest in the sound of women singing together and "a very sincere wish… to explore [her] Jewish heritage in a way that feels right to [her], in a way that [she] can connect to it" coalesced in the birth of INDIGA.

On their website, INDIGA describes themselves as "an NYC based vocal trio performing verses from Songs [sic] of Songs to original music. The blend of ancient Hebrew texts alongside uniquely harmonized melodies influenced by world music creates a timeless musical experience."[5] In addition to Yula, the other two members of the group, Emily Ben Ami, and Gil Avidor, are also Israeli women, although they have all been based in New York City for several years. They often perform covers of Jewish and Israeli songs and liturgical pieces with original arrangements. For example, their first videos on Instagram are "*Dayenu*" and "*Ma Nishtana Haleilah Hazeh Mikol Haleilot*" from the Passover *seder*, with three-part harmony and Yula accompanying on the mandola, a lower-pitched version of the mandolin.[6] All of their original music is set to verses from Song of Songs. They have four of these original songs, representing Song 1:1-4, 1:5-7, 1:8-12, and 5:1-6, 8. The ultimate goal is to create a song cycle of ten to

[5] "Home," indiga, https://www.indigaproject.com/.

[6] "Happy Passover from Indiga." indigamusic. Instagram video, April 21, 2019. https://www.instagram.com/p/BwhoZ-0Ff9e/?igshid=t1j98w3tcn21.

twelve pieces of music, with accompanying pieces of visual art by illustrator and designer Pepi Marzel, who is Yula's stepmother.

In fact, it was Pepi who guided Yula to Song of Songs for the text of INDIGA. Yula started the project with a sound in mind before she selected a text. A neighbor had invited her to sing as a substitute in a women's vocal trio. Speaking of that experience, she says:

> All of a sudden, all the insecurities that I had in the past years regarding everything vanished, and I felt like I've been singing this music all my life. And since then, I started writing in the same fashion. And INDIGA happened specifically where I so much wanted to take all the the love that I have for vocal music, for women singing together and express it.

Yula had an existing professional relationship with Emily, and met Gil through Facebook. Once the three of them tried singing together, they found the blend of their voices to be extremely complementary. To pair with the "divinity" of their sound, Yula felt that she needed a text with the weight of Jewish tradition behind it. She asked Pepi for a suggestion, and "she didn't hesitate" before telling Yula to look at Song of Songs. The Song resonated with Yula in several ways. Firstly, Song of Songs is one of only two books of the Hebrew Bible which does not mention God, so it is the most accessible and relatable biblical text to use in her secular context. Secondly, and more importantly, she connected with the way the text speaks about love, and the woman's agency in pursuing that love, and how human the story feels to her. She also felt like the text itself, the recitation of the Hebrew, gave her "rhythmic ideas and harmonic ideas."

The four pieces that INDIGA has already recorded are similar in some core ways. They have all inherited the asymmetrical sense of rhythm from the Bulgarian folk music. All four pieces are quite rhythmic with a fairly steady pulse, but establishing the meter is

extremely challenging. All four pieces sound far more organic than they truly are. Each of them consists of a few core melodic patterns that are repeated with different harmonies layered on. Although it sounds like the harmonies are improvised in the moment, Yula actually works them out in advance. She records a track of each part and sends them to Emily and Gil to learn aurally. She says that fitting the harmonies together is her great joy in writing the music.

INDIGA notes that one of their goals is "creat[ing] a timeless musical experience." Their music seems to really connect with the way Chris May described *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*, "roots-based music shot through with avant-garde flourishes." Yula seems attached to "otherworldly" sounds, music that is not necessarily identifiable as being of a particular time or place. The people creating it and the text that it is based on give this music a place under the umbrella of Israeli music, but the sound of this music does not necessarily fit into any expected genres. Even the accompanying instrument, the mandola, adds to that sense. It sounds like a lute, which is most associated with the Renaissance. The music feels both ancient and new, which works together with a text which is both ancient and being used in new ways all the time.

Example 1: ***Shir Ha Shirim*** (text: Song 1:1-4, music: Yula Beeri, 2019)

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.	שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה׃
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, For your loving is better than wine.	יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־טוֹבִים דֹּדֶיךָ מִיָּיִן׃
For fragrance your oils are goodly, Poured oil is your name. And so the young women love you.	לְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שֶׁמֶן תּוּרַק שְׁמֶךָ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֲהֵבוּךָ׃
Draw me after you, let us run. The king has brought me to his chamber. Let us be glad and rejoice in you. Let us extol your loving beyond wine. Rightly do they love you.[7]	מָשְׁכֵנִי אַחֲרֶיךָ נָּרוּצָה הֱבִיאַנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲדָרָיו נָגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בָּךְ נַזְכִּירָה דֹדֶיךָ מִיַּיִן מֵישָׁרִים אֲהֵבוּךָ׃

[7] Trans. Robert Alter, 2019.

The Song of Songs opens with a sensuous exploration of alliteration. The attribution to King Solomon was likely not part of the original poem, but rather added later as part of the redaction process to lend a layer of legitimacy. However, the distinctively sibilant verse 1:1 - *"Shir HaShirim Asher Li-Shlomo"* - sets the scene for the sound and the rhythm of the text. In fact, the first chapter contains no fewer than thirty instances of the letter שׁ, making [ʃ] the dominant phoneme, like the rustling of a spray of henna blooms in the north wind. This is poetry that is beloved as much for the physical sensation of reciting its sounds as for its imagery. In describing her connection to this text, Yula Beeri says "It's not even the meaning of the words that I respond to so much more so than their onomatopoeic qualities… I am a sonic creature way more than I am a scholar."

And so, INDIGA sets the scene for the world that their Song of Songs inhabits by starting with these verses, Song 1:1-4. The music video, which was filmed in Brooklyn's Prospect Park in the spring of 2019, begins with audio of birdsong and rustling leaves, then fades to show Yula, Emily, and Gil sitting barefoot on a large tree stump. Each of them is wearing a beige peasant dress. Each has her long hair loose and flowing in the breeze. Behind them, trees are just starting to put out their spring leaves.

The Song is teeming with references to the plant-life of the Land of Israel, blossoming, and springtime. However, these particular verses do not take place outside, but rather within the chambers of the king. The association of Song of Songs with the natural world is so strong that filming outside, amongst the trees, still reads as appropriate even if not directly applicable to the verses in question.

Each of the three singers is playing the Shulamite. Yula describes the singers as "three nymphs" and that their character should be "serene" and "romantic." Their simple dresses might belong to the Shulamite of Song 1:6, who works at tending vineyards, rather than the decorated *bat-nadiv* of Song 7:2. Their bare feet might come from Song 5:3, when the Shulamite is awakened by her lover, but protests that she has already washed her feet. There is significant ambiguity about the Shulamite's hair. She is described as having "*tzamatech*" three times, in verses 4:1, 4:3, and 6:7. It is paired with her eyes or her temples each time, and so from context, it is clearly something attached to her head. Historically, most translations, including the Septuagint, have used "veil," but contemporary Jewish scholars, including Chana and Ariel Bloch and Robert Alter argue that this word functions better in both the grammatical and the symbolic sense if read as "hair." For the Shulamite to be covered in a veil would be incongruously chaste in contrast with the overt sensuality of the rest of the Song. Her temples and her eyes peek out from behind her sheets of hair. While *tzama* more likely refers to braided hair, the choice of portraying the Shulamite with loose hair speaks to her youthfulness and sexual availability. This is reinforced by barefootedness. In making these stylistic choices for their Shulamite, INDIGA portrays her as a young, naive peasant girl.

The music begins with an ostinato figure on the mandola. That ostinato undergirds most of the song, with only occasional variation. The singing begins with a wordless melody oscillating between the tonic and the lowered seventh, emphasizing the modal character of natural minor. There is a steadiness to the pulse of the rhythm, perhaps reflecting an assuredness in the relationship. But the tonality is ephemeral and much less steady. The natural minor scale that is used in this piece has no strong leading

motion to the tonic, and both phrases of the A section begin on scale degree seven. At the B melody, which first appears with the text "*L're-ach sh'manecha tovim*," there is a modulation to the second scale degree. The tonic can be hard to aurally identify, and it shifts back and forth. On the last iteration of that B melody, with the text "*Nagila v'nism'cha bach,"* the mandola drops out, leaving the three voices exposed in tight harmony. They finish, lingering on scale degree 2. It feels unresolved, open ended. The A melody mostly consists of descending motion, which is often used in music to indicate finality. The fact, then, that the piece concludes on the B melody makes the lack of cadence more striking. Perhaps there are still questions about the Shulamite's relationship to her lover, since the other young women love him too. Perhaps the lack of a final cadence acknowledges that the story continues.

The setting of the text is largely syllabic. The rhythm is guided by the sonority of the words and feels very natural and intuitive. This song and its music video seem to be responding more to the "onomatopoeic qualities" Yula mentioned and the overall aesthetic world of the Song than the meaning of this particular excerpt of text. They construct a scene and an image of the Shulamite that is not described in these words, but is instantly recognizable as connected to the Song.

Example 2: ***Sehora Ani*** (text: Song 1:5-7, music: Yula Beeri, 2019)

I am dark but desirable, O daughters of Jerusalem, Like the tents of Kedar, like Solomon's curtains. Do not look on me for being dark, for the sun has glared on me. My mother's sons were incensed with me, they made me a keeper of the vineyards. My own vineyard I have not kept. Tell me, whom I love so, Where you pasture your flock at noon, lest I go	שְׁחוֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאוָה בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם כְּאָהֳלֵי קֵדָר כִּירִיעוֹת שְׁלֹמֹה׃ אַל־תִּרְאוּנִי שֶׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת שֶׁשְּׁזָפַתְנִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בְּנֵי אִמִּי נִחֲרוּ־בִי שָׂמֻנִי נֹטֵרָה אֶת־הַכְּרָמִים כַּרְמִי שֶׁלִּי לֹא נָטָרְתִּי׃ הַגִּידָה לִּי שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי אֵיכָה תִרְעֶה אֵיכָה תַּרְבִּיץ בַּצָּהֳרָיִם שֶׁלָּמָּה אֶהְיֶה כְּעֹטִיָּה עַל עֶדְרֵי חֲבֵרֶיךָ׃

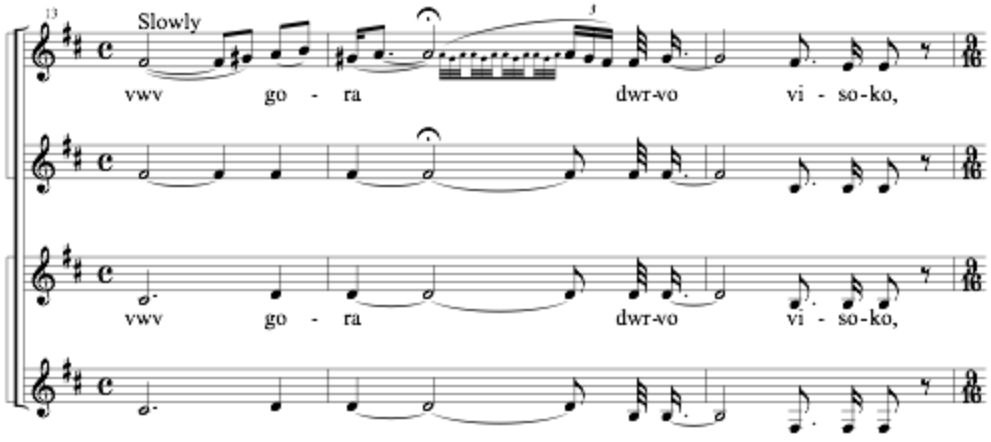
straying after the flocks of your companions.[8]	

The music video for "*Sehora Ani*" was filmed in Prospect Park on the same day as "*Shir Ha Shirim*," and yet is largely contrasting. Rather than outside, amongst the trees, this video is filmed inside an ornate tunnel whose patterns look like Stars of David. Yula, Gil, and Emily are wearing black shirts and heavy jewelry. Yula describes this piece as "more stern." While "*Shir Ha Shirim*" is ethereal, like the singers might float away at any moment, there is a weightiness to "*Sehora Ani*." The singers stand around a microphone in an equilateral triangle, which is one of the most stable shapes. The camera rotates between them, not lingering on any one much more than the others. There is a stability and an equality in how the video is set up. Although INDIGA is primarily Yula's project, she seems to be trying to lead in a non-hierarchical way. In this video, no one is conducting or leading the group. We see each of the singers look to each other in order to stay together. The Song is particularly noted for its reciprocity, that each of the lovers is able to give voice to their desires, and that neither exerts power over the other.[9] Yula mentioned this equality as one of the things that really drew her to the text of Song of Songs. The non-hierarchical aesthetic of the group is reflective of what she sees in the Song.

The piece is a capella, and features all three voices throughout singing together homophonically. There is one main melodic fragment that is first presented in unison, and then repeated with different harmonizations throughout. Yula said that that melodic fragment is directly based on Bugarian folk music. The music of *Le Mystère Des Voix*

[8] Trans. Robert Alter, 2019.
[9] Phyllis Trible, "Love's Lyrics Redeemed," 160.

Bulgares contains many idiosyncratic stylistic elements, some of which map clearly onto the style of INDIGA in this piece. These include the use of a distant lower harmony as a drone, a steady rhythmic pulse but an uneven meter, and the usage of timbre and voicing. In both styles, the voice which carries the melody shifts frequently, and the blend is paramount. The placement of the singing is quite forward, bordering on the strident. The Bulgarian State Female Vocal Choir uses a "belting" technique, which carries more of the resonance from their chest up through the range. One ornament that seems common in their music but specific to their style is found in measure two of Notation No. 1, where it is notated as a series of lower neighbors in the soprano voice. This figure is sung very quickly with a shift in register, like a yodel. INDIGA does not use any ornaments in this style, but often does include fast descending melismas that may be influenced by some of the other features of *Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares*. Another similarity between some of the Bulgarian pieces, including "*Pilentse Pee,"* shown in the first measure of Notation No. 1, and "*Sehora Ani*" is ascending stepwise motion at the beginning of a phrase, while the other voices sustain their pitches, which creates dissonant harmonies.



Notation No. 1: "*Pilentse Pee* - A Nightingale Sings" by Krassimir Kiurchiiski

Yula cites *Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares* as one of her biggest inspirations in creating women's vocal music, and its influence pervades INDIGA. However, it is by far most prominent in "*Sehora Ani*." This text, depicting the Shulamite as dark and beautiful, can be read both in a racialized or a class-based way. The Shulamite may be dark because that is her natural skin color due to her ethnicity, or she has become sunburnt from performing manual labor outdoors.

This text was popular in Israeli song from the pre-state period through the 1950s. The settings from that time period were largely composed by Ashkenazi men to be sung by Yemenite women, such as Shoshana Damari, Hanna Aharoni, and particularly Bracha Zefira. These women served as "mediators of authentic traditions to immigrants from Europe,"[10] bringing primary expertise in music of the Middle East.

The early-state musical canon was derived by synthesizing "hybrid blends of Eastern and Western patterns."[11] During the process of developing the musical language and culture of the nascent state, from the 1920s through the 1950s, the Oriental was viewed as connected to the land and authentic. Portraying the Shulamite in an Orientalist way exoticised her and positioned her as "other" in relation to culture-brokers of European descent. On the other hand, this frame positioned her within the Biblical landscape, and brought the Biblical landscape into the Modern State.

Relating to the image of the dark Shulamite through the Bulgarian folk music perpetuates the Orientalist readings of earlier interpretations, although it also twists the image. Bulgaria is a European nation, so the use of its music does not cultivate

[10] Yosef Goldenberg. "*Hishtakfutah shel Sh'lilat haGolah b'Zemer haIvri* (Negation of the Diaspora in Hebrew Songs)" in Katedra. Vol. 111. *Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi* publishing. (Spring 2004): 132.

[11] Ilana Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers: the Song of Songs in Israeli Culture* (Seattle, WA: Univ. of Washington Press, 2014), 47.

Middle-Easternness. Instead, this portrayal leans into foreignness without the specificity of time and place. A listener with no expertise in Bulgarian music might not be able to hear its footprints in INDIGA's music, but it is certainly aurally identifiable as ethnic. Basing their sound in a folk tradition, using music about love and landscapes that would be sung by the common people, seems appropriate for Song of Songs.

For Israeli musicians, Orientalism is a tool for planting roots. Yosef Goldenberg describes this phenomenon, writing:

> Whereas the essence of Orientalism used by composers of the Western culture involved depicting "otherness," the Orientalism of those claiming to be descendants of the old Orient, was aimed at building self-identity. The ordinary remoteness of location that enables an exotic diffusion of imagination was replaced by a remoteness in time (archaism), depicting Biblical time and assumed Biblical landscapes.[12]

INDIGA uses the foreignness of their musical influences to connect more deeply to the Biblical text they use. The archaism of the musical style lends timelessness and helps them imagine their Biblical world.

Example 2: ***Kol Dodi*** (text: Song 5:1-6 & 8, music: Yula Beeri, 2019)

Kol dodi dofek, Hark! my lover knocks. -I have come to my garden, my sister, bride, I have gathered my myrrh with my perfume, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk. - Eat friends, and drink, be drunk with loving. I was asleep, but my heart was awake: Hark! my lover knocks. -Open for me, my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is drenched with dew, (Hark! my lover knocks) my locks with the drops of the night. -I have put off my gown. How can I don it? *Kol dodi dofek,* Hark! my lover knocks.	קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק, קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה אָרִיתִי מוֹרִי עִם־בָּשָׂמִי אָכַלְתִּי יַעְרִי עִם־דִּבְשִׁי שָׁתִיתִי יֵינִי עִם־חֲלָבִי אִכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דּוֹדִים: אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֵר, אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֵר קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחִי־לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעְיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי שֶׁרֹּאשִׁי נִמְלָא־טָל (קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק) קְוֻצּוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לָיְלָה: פָּשַׁטְתִּי אֶת־כֻּתָּנְתִּי אֵיכָכָה אֶלְבָּשֶׁנָּה... קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק, קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק

[12] Goldenberg, "Negation of the Diaspora...," 132.

My lover pulled back his hand from the latch, and my heart raced within me. I rose to open for my lover. My hands dripped myrrh, and my fingers liquid myrrh, over the handles of the bolt. I opened for my lover, but my lover had slipped off, was gone. My breath left me when he spoke. I sought him, but I did not find him. I called him but he did not answer. I make you swear, O daughters of Jerusalem, I make you swear, O daughters of Jerusalem, should you find my lover, what shall you tell him? That I am in a swoon of love, that I am in a swoon of love. Hark! my lover knocks. Open for me, my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is drenched with dew.[13]	דּוֹדִי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־הַחֹר וּמֵעַי הָמוּ עָלָיו׃ קַמְתִּי אֲנִי לִפְתֹּחַ לְדוֹדִי וְיָדַי נָטְפוּ־מוֹר וְאֶצְבְּעֹתַי מוֹר עֹבֵר עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל׃ פָּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי חָמַק עָבָר נַפְשִׁי יָצְאָה בְדַבְּרוֹ בִּקַּשְׁתִּיהוּ וְלֹא מְצָאתִיהוּ קְרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי׃ הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם, הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם אִם־תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דּוֹדִי מַה־תַּגִּידוּ לוֹ שְׁחוֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי, שְׁחוֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי׃ קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחִי־לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעְיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי שֶׁרֹּאשִׁי נִמְלָא־טָל

"*Kol Dodi*" begins with a lone voice knocking, steadily repeating "pum, pum," on the same pitch before the other two voices enter with an ostinato on the words "*Kol dodi dofek*." While the "pum" eventually stops, the repetition of "*kol dodi dofek*" undergirds almost the entire piece. Yula called attention to this ostinato, that its persistent repetition should be maddening. There is something slightly off-kilter about this piece. Like "*Sehora Ani*," it inherited an uneven meter from the Bulgarian influence. The uneven meter is one of the musical devices used to further the storytelling in this song. This song shares many characteristics with "*Svatba* (The Wedding)" from *Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares*. In addition to uneven meter, the similarities include rhythmic onomatopoeic vocal effects and the way the texture shifts, with the melody and the text found in different voices at different points in the song.

[13] Trans. Robert Alter, 2019.

"*Kol Dodi*" includes verse 5:1. Although this has been canonized as part of the same chapter, it was not originally part of the same poem, and is thematically better linked to the end of Chapter Four. It describes love as an abundant feast, full of wine and honey. The singing at the end of this verse is staccato and percussive, matching the pizzicato of the mandola. When the text says, "I have drunk my wine," the voices are all at slightly different rhythms to each other. This creates a staggered effect, an image of drunkenness. As the next phrase moves to the collective voice, exhorting the friends to drink together, the voices reunite in homophony. They can sing together, and drink together, and tell the story of the Shulamite's desire together.

Song 5:2 begins with a diametrically opposed image. How can the Shulamite be simultaneously asleep and awake? This provides a surreal framework for this encounter between the Shulamite and her lover. She moves as if through a dream. Ultimately, this is a story of near misses, of longing and love that cannot quite achieve completion. The Shulamite's lover is close enough that she can hear his voice, and yet by the time she opens the door, he has vanished. She searches for him, but cannot find him. The driving pulse of the repetitive ostinato makes the whole piece feel persistent and insistent.

As the Shulamite realizes that she has missed her lover and becomes more desperate, in verses 4-6 & 8, the text is taken over by a single singer. The other two singers sing the ostinato, and it feels like those two pieces are detached from each other. The rhythm and melody of the melodic descant does not seem connected to what is going on in the other voices, almost as though the Shulamite has disconnected from reality. Perhaps this entire episode is a dream after all.

This setting omits verse 7, in which the watchmen find the Shulamite and harass her, pulling off her veil. The world that is created in this song is one in which a woman can pursue her lover much more safely than that of the Bible, although her experience is still unsettling, her desperation driving her slightly mad. She still hears knocking even after her lover is no longer there.

Towards the end, the Shulamite exhorts the Daughters of Jerusalem. She sings "*Hishbati et-chem, b'not Y'reushala'im*" twice, with a broad, ear-catching hemiola. The rhythm and repetition at that moment creates drama and shows how seriously she expects the Daughters of Jerusalem to uphold their vow, to find her lover and tell him that she is in a swoon of love.

Perhaps in this retelling of the story, the lovers are successfully reunited. "*Kol Dodi*" ends by returning to Song 5:2, where the lover begs the Shulamite to let him in as he stands in the rain. Or, perhaps this is just a memory, the Shulamite dreaming of him coming back to her again.

Victoria Hanna: "It's a part of me"[14]

Victoria Hanna went viral in 2015 for her music video "The Aleph-Bet Song (*Hosha'ana*)." Alternately dressed as a student and a teacher at an Orthodox Jewish girls school, she explores each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. She maps each of the letters onto her body, and chants them in combination with different vowels. She combines the Aleph-Bet with pieces of the *Hosha'anot* liturgy for *Hosha'ana Rabah*, which is the seventh day of the festival of *Sukkot*. On each day of *Sukkot*, a set of *piyutim*, liturgical poems, are recited as people circle the synagogue with their *lulavim* and *etrogim* in a ritual intended to bring on the winter rains. The procession concludes by beating willow branches on the ground to symbolically remove sins.[15] The music video references this ritual as Victoria Hanna beats a chalkboard with a willow branch and the syllable "*ma*" appears in Hebrew on the board. The use of the *piyutim* relates to the usage of the Aleph-Bet throughout the song because each *piyut* is an alphabetical acrostic.

This first video introduces many of the themes that continue throughout Victoria Hanna's body of work. These themes include a connection to *Sefer Yetzirah*, the embodiment of language and the use of the sonic qualities of the language to shape the musical expression, centering the image and voice of women, and the use of surreal imagery.

One of Victoria Hanna's main guiding texts is *Sefer Yetzirah*, "The Book of Creation." This kabbalistic text focuses on the ten *sefirot*, divine energies, and how they relate to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It describes the phonology of the

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[14] All quotations are taken from an interview with Victoria Hanna conducted by Lianna Mendelson over Zoom on 7 December 2020 unless otherwise cited.

[15] "What Is Hoshanah Rabbah?," My Jewish Learning, October 9, 2020, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hoshanah-rabbah/.

letters, how they are formed in the mouth and body, but also ascribes to them spiritual, symbolic meanings. In "The Aleph-Bet Song (*Hosha'ana*)," the way Victoria Hanna treats the sounds of the letters as meaningful in and of themselves comes directly from *Sefer Yetzirah*. In addition, she uses a line from the end of one of the *Hosha'anot* as a refrain in the song, repeating the words "*T'luyah al b'lima."* The last word, "*b'limah*," meaning "emptiness" or "nothingness," appears as a leitwort in *Sefer Yetzirah*. It seems likely that this line was chosen as the refrain due to its sound and its reference to *Sefer Yetzirah* rather than its meaning. Victoria Hanna digs much deeper into *Sefer Yetzirah* in her self-titled debut album, pulling lyrics directly from the text. The aesthetics of the album are described as "realiz[ing] the book's embodied and evanescent view of language."[16]

Victoria Hanna's musical style can be described as "kabbalistic rap." Much of her music features strong percussion, over which she intones syllables of Hebrew or Aramaic. She is often accompanied by a choir of her own voice. She uses a lot of speechlike textures, but also includes moments of chanting, sometimes in a cantorial style. Her father was a rabbi and c*hazzan* from Egypt, and so she grew up surrounded by the sounds of *piyutim* and Sephardic *chazzanut*, and listened to the music of the Egyptian diva Umm Kulthum.

As she explored the world and the world of sound, she discovered that she "like[s] pure expressions, raw expressions." She describes the act of creating music as a fragile and emotional process, an internal dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious. She lays bare that process in her workshops and in talks like the one she gave at a music

[16] Shai Secunda, "Quarried in Air," Jewish Review of Books, June 10, 2020, https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/5209/quarried-in-air/.

cognition and neuroscience conference in 2013.[17] When describing her creative process in composing, she says that she first speaks the text until she finds its rhythm and then the melody arises organically from the text. Guided by *Sefer Yetzirah*, she ascribes different attributes to each letter based on its shape and sound. *Alef,* with its sprawling legs, is open and infinite. *Nun* is internal and private.

Victoria Hanna's music constantly feels like an experiment, that she's pushing her voice to the limits of all of its different timbres. Shai Secunda writes that in the album *Victoria Hanna*, "the most versatile instrument is the artist herself, not only her voice, which ranges across 'oriental' scales, and her tongue and teeth, which hiss and click rhythmically, but also her entire body, which reverberates with *Sefer [Yetzirah]*'s vision of simultaneously carnal and other-worldly language."[18]

Victoria Hanna also takes the "carnal" and "otherworldly" into the imagery that she uses. In "The Aleph-Bet Song" there is a scene where a character vomits honey onto an open Aleph-Bet workbook. In addition to being a carnal image of bodily processes, this is a subversive Jewish image. It references a widespread Jewish ritual, dating back to at least the Middle Ages, of giving children honey on a slate to introduce them to the sweetness of learning as they enter school. But Victoria Hanna literally reverses the process, egesting rather than ingesting. This ritual traditionally would have marked the transition of the male child from the domain of the female, the home, to the domain of the male, the *yeshiva*. This video repositions it within an all-female universe that prioritizes women's study.

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[17] Victoria Hanna, "Victoria Hanna - I Sleep and My Heart Is Awake," YouTube, February 9, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVXp5cWfBVM.

[18] Secunda, "Quarry in the Air."

Ultimately, Victoria Hanna's attachment to Song of Songs grows from two places - from her childhood experience with it, and from her connection to *Sefer Yetzirah*. She remembers growing up and reciting Song of Songs every Friday before *Kabbalat Shabbat*, repeating it to the point that the text is "stamped on [her] lips." She feels that she grew into it over time, is still growing into it. As a child, she recited the text without thinking much about the meaning, but she developed a relationship with the Song that evolved as she grew from a young woman to a married mother of three. Many of the ways that she relates to *Sefer Yetzirah* also inform how she uses Song of Songs. She says that "the secret is being hidden in the sound, not necessarily in the meaning," and gives the example of Song 1:1, comparing the sonority of "*Shir HaShirim Asher Li-Shlomo"* to its lackluster English counterpart, "The Song of Solomon." On her debut album, five of the ten songs use lyrics directly from Song of Songs. In the next few pages, three examples from Victoria Hanna's discography will show how she engages with the Song through her music, while addressing themes of the female voice and body, connection to Jerusalem and Judaism, and the surreal. Her musical style is designed to connect deeply to the sound of the text in a way that feels organic and timeless.

Example 1: ***Sheharhoret*** (text: Song of Songs 1:5 & 1:6 & Rabbi David ben Zachariah HaLevi, music: Emanuel Amiran and Victoria Hanna, 2017)

My lust is for the flawless daughter of kings. She shall respond by praising me. She shall sing songs and sage words Upon the drum and my harp. The radiance of her appearance is like the radiance of the sun, awesome like a lion. From the ambrosia in her mouth, my lot was drawn. I shall not hunger, nor shall I thirst.	חשקי בבת מלכים תמה תענה במהללי תשיר בשיר ואמרי חכמה על תוף ונבלי זיו תארה כזיו השמש איום כמו ארי מן העסיס בפיה שמה עלה בגורלי לא ארעבה וגם לא אצמא חלקי ומזלי, חלקי ומזלי, חלקי ומזלי

My portion and my destiny. Do not look upon me for I am black, for the sun has gazed upon me (Song 1:6). I am black and beautiful, o daughters of Jerusalem (Song 1:5) My lust is for the flawless daughter of kings. She shall respond by praising me. She shall sing songs and sage words Upon the drum and my harp. In her, I shall find rest for my soul, The nectar and the balm. From the ambrosia in her mouth, my lot was drawn. I shall not hunger, nor shall I thirst. My portion and my destiny Do not look upon me for I am black, for the sun has gazed upon me (Song 1:6). I am black and beautiful, o daughters of Jerusalem (Song 1:5).[19]	אַל־תִּרְאוּנִי שֶׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת שֶׁשֱּׁזָפַתְנִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ (שיר א׳ ו׳) שְׁחוֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאוָה בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם (שיר א׳ ה) חשקי בבת מלכים תמה תענה במהללי תשיר בשיר ואמרי חכמה על תוף ונבלי בה אמצאה לנפשי נופש הצוף והצרי מן העסיס בפיה שמה עלה בגורלי, עלה בגורלי לא ארעבה וגם לא אצמא חלקי ומזלי, חלקי ומזלי, חלקי ומזלי אַל־תִּרְאוּנִי שֶׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת שֶׁשֱּׁזָפַתְנִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ (שיר א׳ ו׳) שְׁחוֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאוָה בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם (שיר א׳ ה)

This song, *Sheharhoret* in example 1, combines a dance tune by Emanuel Amiran with the spoken text of a relatively obscure late-sixteenth century Yemenite *piyut* by Rabbi David ben Zecharia HaLevi.[20] The text of the *piyut* only holds loose connections to Song of Songs. The *Bat-Melachim*, the daughter of kings, could be connected to the *Bat-Nadiv*, the daughter of nobles, who dances in Song 7:1-2. Although there is no overlap in the Hebrew, the imagery in Song 4:11, "Nectar your lips drip, bride, honey and milk are under your tongue," is very similar to the ambrosia in the mouth of the lover in

[19] Trans. Lianna Mendelson

[20] Avner Bahat, "*Piyut, Zimrah, uMachol Shel Y'hudei Teiman*" [*Piyut*, Song, and Dance of the Jews of Yemen], *Hazmanah l'Piyut*: An Invitation to Piyut, accessed January 3, 2021, http://old.piyut.org.il/articles/286.html.

the *piyut*. Comparing the woman's beauty to "radiance of the sun" could come from Song 6:10, although, again, similar imagery is achieved through different Hebrew words. All of the actual text of Song of Songs is set to a dance tune by Emanuel Amiran, "*Al Tiruni*," which includes parts of Song 1:5 and 1:6, albeit out of order. "*Al Tiruni*," especially as recorded by Hanna Aharoni, is a textbook example of biblical elements in early Israeli music. It is accompanied by accordion, recorder, and drum, with a strong sense of meter and rhythm. The instruments mostly play in unison, avoiding strong harmonies. Hanna Aharoni's Yemenite accent completes the biblical image of the scene. Victoria Hanna places "*Al Tiruni*" and the *piyut*, "*Chishki b'vat melachim tama"* in dialogue with each other. The *piyut* is speaking to a beautiful woman; Song 1:5-6 speaks from the point of view of the beautiful woman.

There is a long-running scholarly debate about Song 1:5 and the meaning of "*Shechora ani v'navah*" - Is the Shulamite beautiful because of her blackness, or in spite of it? At face value, the conjunctive *vav* means "and," but it could also mean "but." The "but" reading was canonized already by the 4th century Latin Vulgate, which translates the verse as "Nigra sum sed formosa." Brian P. Gault traces biblical and extra-biblical references to both dark and fair skin, finding "a culturally conditioned perspective of fair skin as beautiful."[21] Throughout the Bible, people are typically described as "fair" or "ruddy" when being portrayed as beautiful, including the Shulamite's lover in Song 5:10. Darkened skin is often the result of some kind of tragedy. For example, in Lamentations 4:7-8, the nobles are described as white as snow and fair as milk when they are living in

[21] Brian P. Gault, "I Am: Poems of Self-Description." In *Body as Landscape, Love as Intoxication: Conceptual Metaphors in the Song of Songs*, 59-88. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpwhfs4.7, 73.

luxury in Jerusalem, but blacker than soot in the poverty of exile.[22] Thus, the Shulamite feels self-conscious about her dark skin. In Song 1:6, she feels like she needs to justify it, explaining that her complexion is a result of the sun beating down on her while she worked in the vineyards. The biblical association of dark skin with misfortune and low social position that Gault describes endures even in the racism of today. And yet Song 1:5-6 has taken a privileged place in the canon of African-American literature as a prooftext for Black beauty.[23] This text has been used in both disempowering and empowering women of color.

By combining these two texts, Victoria Hanna takes a clear stance on the Shulamite as an object of desire, choosing to read her as beautiful. She is not just burnt by the sun, but radiant as if she were the sun herself. She is a nurturer, one who feeds her lover with the ambrosia in her mouth. She may be self-conscious, saying "Don't look at me," but her lover says that he needs her to sustain him, that she is his very fate.

The usage of Emanuel Amiran's folk dance tune positions this piece within the canon of Israeli song, and yet also subverts the paradigm of the Ashkenazi male composer writing music for the Mizrachi woman singer that pervaded the pre- and early-state periods. Victoria Hanna, a Mizrachi woman descended from Persian and Egyptian Jews, centers her own vision and body, and retakes control of how she chooses to engage with the text.

The juxtaposition of a 16th century Yemenite text with Zionist folk dance and 21st century avant garde musical sensibilities creates something wholly new yet rooted in

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[22] Ibid., 60.

[23] Ilana Pardes. "The Song of America: From Walt Whitman to Toni Morrison." In *The Song of Songs: A Biography*, 172-218. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019.

a breadth of tradition. All of the *piyut* text is a rap, spoken in rhythm with a few melodic moments. The Song of Song's text is sung to Amiran's melody, by multiple voices as a choir. There are no additional singers credited, so it seems to be several tracks of Victoria Hanna's singing layered together. The multiplicity of voices in these moments recalls the collective expression of folk dance, and also reflects the daughters of Jerusalem. The instrumentation includes drum, keyboards, violin, viola, mandolin, psaltery, and zither. The psaltery and zither are mentioned in the Bible. Although there is not enough evidence to know how similar modern psalteries and zithers are to their ancient counterparts, their use lends a "biblical" sound. The use of percussion and percussive strings creates a driving beat underneath the vocals. The bowed strings move in a sweeping motion, with frequent quick glissandi. In the "biblical" music popular in Israel in the '40s and '50s, the instrumentation was largely winds and percussion, as strings were seen to be overly sentimental.[24] Here, even the bowed strings are not melodic, used mostly for effect, which ablates their sentimental tendencies. The tonality in *Sheharhoret* is also modal, with no leading tone, which was a common feature in "biblical" music as well.[25] The piece feels unstuck in time, as though it is both ancient and new. Between the incorporation of a piece from the Zionist, biblicist era and the instrumental and vocal choices Victoria Hanna has made, she is crafting a new biblicism, rooted deeply in the sounds of the language.

Example 2: "*Yonati*" (text: Song of Songs 2:14, music: Victoria Hanna, 2012)

My dove in the rock's crevices, In the hollow of the cliff, Show me how you look, Let me hear your voice,	יוֹנָתִי בְּחַגְוֵי הַסֶּלַע בְּסֵתֶר הַמַּדְרֵגָה הַרְאִינִי אֶת־מַרְאַיִךְ הַשְׁמִיעִינִי אֶת־קוֹלֵךְ

[24] Yosef Goldenberg, "Negation of the Diaspora...," 8.
[25] Ibid., 7.

For your voice is sweet And your look desirable.	כִּי־קוֹלֵךְ עָרֵב וּמַרְאֶיךְ נָאוֶה׃

The verse displayed in Example 2, Song 2:14, bears the weight of many symbolic uses throughout Jewish tradition. In the midrashic anthology *Song of Songs Rabbah*, the dove symbolizes the people of Israel, yearning for God as their lover, either as they stood at Sinai awaiting the Ten Commandments, or as they crossed the Red Sea while fleeing Egypt.[26] Song 2:14 appears in the Talmud, in *Berachot* 24a, as the prooftext for *Kol Isha*, an injunction against women singing in public that persists in some communities. The Talmud says that a woman's voice is nakedness, because the verse says "your voice is sweet," and the words for "nakedness" and "sweet" share two letters of their roots and sound the same in the original Hebrew. This verse is also used as part of the liturgy at a *Zeved Bat*, a Sephardic ceremony for naming a baby girl, where the dove represents the little girl emerging into her community for the first time.[27] Every setting of this verse adds to the portfolio of symbolic meanings. Those sung by a woman singer are especially powerful, as she voices the text that was traditionally used to silence her.

Victoria Hanna has released at least three versions of her setting of this verse. Each version is centered around the same melody, but the different aesthetic choices paint different pictures and different reads on the text. The first, recorded live as part of the Festival of *Piyut* in 2012 is totally a capella. The second, a studio recording released on her self-titled debut album in 2017, is accompanied by a string quartet. The most recent, released on September 14th 2020, is a "special home recording for Corona times," and

[26] Ilana Pardes. "'My Dove in the Rock's Crevices': Midrashic Disputes ." In *The Song of Songs: A Biography*, 31-37. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019.

[27] "La Fijola: Naming Baby Girls at Home," Sephardic Studies Program (University of Washington, 2019), http://jewishstudies.washington.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/sephardic-life-cycles/la-fijola.

features Victoria's young daughter, Saya, accompanied by oud and electric bass. Victoria Hanna describes these different versions as "see[ing] a woman wearing different clothes," that it is the same text, the same entity, but that one might interact with it differently in different situations.

The original melody is based on the phrygian scale, which has a lowered second and no leading tone. Again, the modal quality is a feature of "biblical" music in Israeli song, as a rejection of Western tonality.[28] The use of modes also creates a sense of timelessness, that the music could be much more ancient than it actually is. The piece starts out with the declamatory statement of "*Yonati*" - "My dove." In the a cappella recording, this first word is a primal cry like the sound of a shofar. At the end of the phrase, after a sustained note, her voice leaps up a fifth, similarly to how most shofar blowers sound *t'kiah*. There are many *silsulim*, trills which are characteristic of the musical style of Middle Eastern Jews. As well, Victoria Hanna emphasizes her pronunciation of the *ayin* as an unvoiced glottal fricative, which is another characteristic from her heritage. This piece has a sense of urgency, as though the speaker is desperate to see and hear the dove. The ornaments keep a sense of motion, as there are even trills in the sustained notes. Between "*Seter*" and "*Hamadreiga*," there is a large upward leap of a tenth. The melody often features cascading downward motion. All of these features show the speaker's insistence. The piece grows in intensity and speed through two repetitions of the verse, until words can no longer contain the excitement. The B section of the piece consists of a vocalise, repeated nine times with slight variations each time, and the starting pitch alternates between two notes a half step apart. This pitch alternation increases tension, again emphasizing the excitement of the speaker. She speaks to her

[28] Yosef Goldenberg, "Negation of the Diaspora...," 7.

lover, the dove, in the wordless language of birds, the language that might finally reach the lover. Finally, at the end, she calls out once more, returning to the shofar-like cry that opens the piece. This piece gets the dove's attention and shows intensity and excitement about the union between the lovers.

The version of *Yonati* on the album *Victoria Hanna* utilizes the same Phrygian melody, but the arrangement with the string quartet creates an extremely different feel. The strings open the piece, layering over each other in a lush harmonic texture without a strong sense of meter. There is none of the shofar quality in the singing, with the timbre less forward and bright and none of the leaps up at the end of phrases. This piece feels suspended in time, the urgency gone. After Victoria Hanna sings the piece all the way through once, there is a brief instrumental interlude where the pizzicato strings sound like birds scrambling over a cliff face. When the voice comes back in, there is a dramatic upward modulation and a shift in the intensity of the singing, as though the singer is starting to realize that her lover might not be able to show her the face and voice that she so desires. At the end of the piece, she chants "*Yonati, Yonati*," one more time. Without the lift at the ends of the phrases, the phrase concludes on scale degree 5 and feels unresolved. The repetition and the lack of resolution makes it sound like she is calling after the dove. In the last few measures, the violin floats up to the highest register in the piece and decrescendos into nothing, representing the dove flying off into the distance. It seems as though the lovers are able to meet in the original a capella version, but miss each other in this version.

The most recent release is a video of Victoria Hanna singing this piece with her preteen daughter, Saya. They wear matching red dresses. Watching mother and daughter

sing together, it is hard to think of this as a story of lovers. Instead, it functions as an extension of the use of this verse in the naming ceremony for a daughter. Victoria Hanna does not usually have her children in her music or social media. Saya is clearly new to the public eye, as she struggles to look at the camera and fidgets. This very much seems to be the presentation of a daughter into a community.

In this video, *Yonati* is mashed up with the *piyut* "*S'i Yonah*," which is attributed to Shalom Shabazi in the credits of the YouTube video but to David ben Zechariah HaLevi in the *piyut* database of the National Library of Israel.[29] The *piyut* is about a dove singing in joyous song. The melody is upbeat and communal. Because this video was filmed in fall 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are only five people present: Victoria Hanna, Saya, an oud player, a bassist, and a videographer. During the *piyut* section, the instrumentalists sing along too, giving a feeling of accessibility and collectivity to this arrangement. Saya and Victoria shout "*Al tifni*" - "Do not turn down the devil's path." They sing the line "*Yonati*" antiphonally. This version becomes a story of maternal love, of a mother and daughter sharing their sweet voices together.

Example 3: *Ani Yeshena* (text: Songs of Songs 5:2-5&8, music: Victoria Hanna, 2017)

I was asleep, but my heart was awake: Hark! my lover knocks. -Open for me, my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. -I have put off my gown. How can I don it? I have bathed my feet, how can I besmirch them? My lover pulled back his hand from the latch, and my heart raced within me. I rose to open for my lover. My hands dripped	אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֵר קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחִי־לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעְיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי שֶׁרֹּאשִׁי נִמְלָא־טָל קְוֻצּוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לָיְלָה׃ פָּשַׁטְתִּי אֶת־כֻּתָּנְתִּי אֵיכָכָה אֶלְבָּשֶׁנָּה רָחַצְתִּי אֶת־רַגְלַי אֵיכָכָה אֲטַנְּפֵם׃ דוֹדִי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־הַחֹר וּמֵעַי הָמוּ עָלָיו׃ קַמְתִּי אֲנִי לְפִתֹּחַ לְדוֹדִי וְיָדַי נָטְפוּ־מוֹר וְאֶצְבְּעֹתַי מוֹר עֹבֵר,

[29] "*S'i Yonah*," *Atar haPiyut v'haT'filah* [The Site of *Piyut* and Prayer] (National Library of Israel), https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/he/Song/Pages/Song.aspx?SongID=760#53,114,2419,45.

myrrh, and my fingers liquid myrrh, over the handles of the bolt. I make you swear, O daughters of Jerusalem, should you find my lover, what shall you tell him? That I am in a swoon of love	קַמְתִּי אֲנִי לִפְתֹּחַ לְדוֹדִי וְיָדַי נָטְפוּ מוֹר עֹבֵר עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל׃ הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִָם אִם־תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דּוֹדִי מַה־תַּגִּידוּ לוֹ שֶׁחוֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי׃

The music video for "*Ani Yeshena*" opens with Victoria Hanna standing in a street in the Old City of Jerusalem, wearing a nightgown with her eyes and mouth closed. The music is disembodied, her singing coming from somewhere else. The first line, "*Ani Yeshena v'Libi Er*," is chanted in a cantorial style. It is declamatory in a way that sounds like a call to prayer. The spectral figure of Victoria Hanna opens her eyes and begins rapping on the text "*Kol Dodi Dofek.*" She repeats the *quf* at the end to create the sound of knocking on the door.

The quality of the video is grainy, with wide angles and a greenish tinge. The shot keeps zooming in and out. The picture cuts in and out, with distortions and flashes of light. Victoria appears in different positions from frame to frame without the audience seeing her move. The whole effect is like security camera footage from a horror movie. This ghostly imagery is interspersed with contrasting scenes of Victoria Hanna praying at the Western Wall. In these scenes, her hair is neatly pinned up. She looks around with wide-eyed innocence as she tries to reach the holy stones amongst a vibrating throng of other women. This image of her is very controlled and pious in comparison to her loose-haired, wild-eyed self running down the street in a nightgown.

After singing to the end of Song 5:5, the nightgown suddenly and mysteriously transforms into a wedding gown. As Victoria Hanna, dressed as a bride, knocks frantically at ornate doors, the scene cuts to other women praying at the Western Wall,

their shuckling mirroring the rhythm of the knocking. Near the end, the bride stands motionless as a crowd of men walk past her. The next shot pans across a bookshelf full of Jewish holy books. The very last image of the music video shows Victoria curled up to sleep on the ground, with one of the Jewish holy books lying right next to her.

The Old City of Jerusalem plays a very visible role in this music video. In some ways this video tells Victoria's story. She says:

> I feel it, I'm a daughter of Jerusalem, I was born in Jerusalem, and I think it's something very special, to be born in Jerusalem… And then I remember myself in many situations walking alone, in the streets of Jerusalem, in Shabbat evening, in the middle of the night. So I can feel this situation about this girl, this woman who is walking alone in the streets of Jerusalem.

She describes relating to this story in different ways at different times in her life, as a young girl, reciting Song of Songs on Friday night, "as a young woman yearning to find her beloved," and now as a married mother of three. The different stages of her life are represented by the different characters that she takes on during this music video: The young girl prays at the Kotel, the young woman looks for her beloved, and then finally she settles down as a bride and mother. The last image returns to the costume of the young girl, perhaps showing that all the other characters are built out of a young girl's dreams.

The video tells a story that utilizes the imagery of the verses, but is not truly faithful to the narrative. In Song 5:2, it is clearly the lover who knocks, but in this video, Victoria as the Shulamite/bride is the one who knocks. In the text, the lover also speaks. His hand reaches toward the latch. And yet there is no lover in the video at all. Although Victoria is frequently surrounded by people, hers is the only face that the audience ever gets to see clearly. She is alone even in the crowd. Song of Songs has a long association

with marriage, both in metaphors in the *Midrash* and in its popularity at Jewish weddings. However, there is no indication in the Song that the Shulamite and her lover ever intended to wed. The only mention of a wedding is Song 3:11, which refers to King Solomon's wedding as an aside. Therefore, the choice to dress one of the characters as a bride is reflective of Jewish traditions regarding the Song, but not necessarily the literal text.

The focus on the holy books adds another layer of meaning. In the end, this version of the Shulamite ends up with a book, not a lover. Between the absence of a human lover and the prominence of the books, the story has been metaphorically reimagined. The speaker is searching for her place in the Jewish tradition and her personal connections to its text. The lover becomes Judaism, or God, or perhaps even the Song itself. The three characters which represent three phases of Victoria's life show the evolution of her relationship with Jewish texts, from a child who was "just reciting" without considering the meaning to now, as a learned adult. There are some texts, namely *Sefer Yetzirah* and *Song of Songs*, that Victoria Hanna is thoroughly coupled with and embodies through her music.

This song and video also play with the dreamscape present in the text. The opening line, "*Ani Yeshena v'Libi Er,"* is sung in a completely different style to the rest of the text. This could indicate that everything that follows the declaration of "I was asleep, but my heart was awake" is a dream. Dreaming would explain the surrealism of the video, the muted colors, and the constant shifts in point of view.

This dream emerges as a grotesque nightmare. Victoria Hanna has used the grotesque in other ways, which include the use of the honey as part of a bodily process in

"The Aleph-Bet Song (*Hosha'ana*)" and a post to her Instagram story of a yawning cat mouth with several extra rows of teeth. Referencing Philip Thompsons *The Grotesque*, Fiona C. Black writes, "the grotesque both expresses the 'estranged or alienated world' and attempts to 'control and exorcise' its demonic elements."[30] The music video is estranged from the world by the unnerving impossibilities in the visual elements, the alienation of the characters in it, and Victoria Hanna's sui generis musical aesthetic. Some of the timbres she chooses to use with her voice sound quite strident, especially when she sings Song 5:5, "I rose to open for my lover." Black defines "the grotesque body [as] the body in process, never the complete, closed, and hardened body, but always the body *in the act*."[31] Song 5:5 makes a good example for the body in the act, as the myrrh dripping from the Shulamite's fingers could be a metaphor for sexual body fluids. Victoria Hanna is always concerned with "the body in the act." Her deep study and embodiment of *Sefer Yetzirah* causes her to constantly be thinking about the role that the body plays in connecting to and conveying the text.

Victoria Hanna re-allegorizes the Song of Songs, with Jewish texts standing in as her lover. She puts herself, her voice and body and vision, at the center of her work. In "*Sheharoret*," she portrays both parties in the relationship. In "*Yonati*" and "*Ani Yeshena*,*"* she longs for and searches for her lover. She explores the sound of the Hebrew text and the sound of her own voice. Recently, on October 15th 2020, she released a brand new version of Song 4:15, "living waters flow from Lebanon." The text of Song of Songs flows out of her like living water, and she is still continuing to find new pieces of it to engage with.

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[30] Fiona Black. "Beauty or the Beast? The Grotesque Body in the Song of Songs." *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 8, no. 3 (2000): 310.

[31] Ibid.

Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum & Kehilat Zion: "My DNA is *Shir HaShirim*"[32]

Kehilat Zion is a progressive Jewish community in Jerusalem, which was founded in 2013 by Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum. Zion defines itself as an "*Eretz Yisraeli*" community, a community that is rooted in the Land of Israel. The Song of Songs is deeply woven into the liturgy of Zion and Rabba Tamar's vision for the congregation.

Rabba Tamar speaks of her grandfathers as her most profound influences. One grandfather was an Ashkenazi *chazzan* from France. A Holocaust survivor, he made it a mission to contribute to the preservation of the *nusach* of Alsace and Lorraine. Her other grandfather was from Morocco and helped found the synagogue Marom Yisrael in Bat Yam. Rabba Tamar spent a lot of time as a youth at Marom Yisrael, where she was the only girl in the children's choir. Growing up in a Sephardic synagogue, she was accustomed to chanting Song of Songs before *Kabbalat Shabbat* every week. She remembers sitting on her grandfather's lap and hearing the "echo" of the Song, where different members of the community would chant pieces of it, one after the other in a "democratic" way, which felt to her "something very, very open and pluralistic, without speaking the values of openness and pluralistic." As she crafted her own synagogue community, she wanted to preserve the sensation of that childhood memory. On the website for Kehilat Zion, in the liner notes for the community's 2016 CD, and in interview, Rabba Tamar describes the rules for Zion's worship:

> We had guidelines on the way: that we could imagine our grandparents sitting in prayer on our one side and our grandchildren on our other side; that we

[32] All quotations are taken from an interview with Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum conducted by Lianna Mendelson over Zoom on 30 December 2020, unless cited otherwise.

> will recognize at least one melody in each prayer and renew at least one other melody; that we should walk in an ancient memory and renew it with humility.[33]

To honor the memory of her grandfather, Rabba Tamar bases her *d'var Torah* on Song of Songs each week, saying that it is her "oath." She describes the Song as her "starting point," the text that first engaged her in Judaism, and so it is important to her to use it even though it adds a layer of challenge to her preparations. Each week, she has to tie together "reality, *parashat hashavua* (the weekly Torah portion), and *Shir HaShirim*." She views the Song as an ethical document, that "it is really a vessel and a vehicle to make ethics of *klal* (collective society)." For her, the Song is meaningful because the relationship described within it is reciprocal. The lovers each have agency and hold power. There is emphasis on the collective and their mutual responsibility, signified by the use of plural language. She says that her grandfather used the Song to teach her "the ethics of love. He would say that love must be a realm of people who feel guarded, who feel respected, who feel dignified, and who feel… *hadadiyut*, (reciprocity, mutuality) and feel that there's someone looking for them."

Just one example of how Rabba Tamar uses the Song of Songs to inform her preaching according to these values comes from the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service at Kehilat Zion on November 20th, 2020. She quoted Song 8:1 - "Would that you were a brother to me, suckling my mother's breasts."[34] Then, she connected to a midrash from the Malbim, a nineteenth-century Russian commentator. According to the Malbim, this verse is the soul talking to the body, saying "be my brother." Rabba Tamar expanded on the midrash, saying that the relationship between body and soul is a reminder of the importance of

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[33] "Prayer," Kehilat Zion, accessed January 11, 2021, https://zion-jerusalem.wixsite.com/newengsite/prayer.

[34] Trans. Robert Alter, 2019.

self-care and community care. Especially in the days of a pandemic and social isolation, it is a reminder to everyone to take responsibility for their community and to reach out to others and ask what they can do for each other. She then brought in the Torah portion for the week, *Toldot*, which describes the birth of and the struggles between twin brothers Isaac and Esau. The discussion of the Torah portion served as an introduction to the guest speakers for the evening, two Arab residents of East Jerusalem who were invited to speak about the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on their communities. The Song of Songs was used as a running thread in creating a connection to current events and a pastoral message to the community, a discussion of the weekly Torah portion, and as a framing device for social justice speakers.

Rabba Tamar was exposed to a diversity of Jewish experiences her entire life. Her childhood synagogue, Marom Yisrael, is a Sephardic synagogue that attracted Jews originating from all over North Africa and Turkey. She also experienced French Ashkenazi traditions through the other side of her family. Beth Kissileff writes about how Rabba Tamar was excited to learn and expand on what she learned in her traditional Orthodox upbringing:

> When she went to the army, the secular people she met had a take on what constituted *the aron hasefarim yehudim* (the Jewish bookshelf) that was different than the *Torani* (traditional Torah-oriented) bookshelf of her youth. She says she went around with lists of what she needed to read. Those encounters with her secular peers made her a "much more rooted Jew in the project called *eretz yisrael, medinat yisrael*" (the land of Israel, the state of Israel).[35]

With all of these experiences, Rabba Tamar has a deep understanding of Song of Songs both as a religious text and as a foundational Zionist text. She is also attuned to the

[35] Beth Kissileff, "Re-Dreaming Jerusalem: The Unorthodox Vision of Rabbi Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum," *CJ: Voices of Conservative/Masorti Judaism*, March 27, 2014, pp. 34-35.

importance of regional and cultural differences in Jewish practice. Although Rabba Tamar does not have formal musical training nor identify as a musician, she has a lovely singing voice and often sings harmony with the *chazzan*. Her liturgical visioning extends to the music, and she "was involved in the most intensive way in each and every *manginah* (tune) in Zion." The goal was to create a modern "*Nusach Eretz Yisraeli*," a liturgy and music that connect to their time and place.

Figure 1 **-** Outline of the Song of Songs liturgical rubric at Kehilat Zion

Text	**Text Source**	**Music Source**
"*El Ginat Egoz*"	Song 6:11, 7:12-13, 4:16	Sarah Levi-Tanai
"*Dodi Yarad l'Gano*" *"Vihi No'am Adonai"*	Excerpt from *piyut* by Haim haKohen Psalm 90:17	Traditional Moroccan
Verses of Song of Songs	Song of Songs	Chanted according to the cantillation, various traditions
Piyut	Various	Various
Verses of Song of Songs	Song of Songs	See above
"*Ribon Kol HaOlamim"*	*Siddur Nusach Sefaradi*	Hadass Pal Yarden (most commonly)
Song of the Land of Israel	Various	Various

Kehilat Zion has developed a syncretic liturgical rubric focused on Song of Songs which precedes *Kabbalat Shabbat,* as shown in Figure 1. Some of the elements are fixed; others are fungible. During services on October 30th, 2020, one of the speakers referred to "Carlebach, and *Nusach* Kehilat Zion, and *Nusach* Kehilat Tzion which turns Carlebach into a Mizrachi *piyut*," which speaks to some of the musical influences of the

community and also the way they think about combining styles and elements to create a cohesive whole out of disparate parts.

Song of Songs is typically chanted by the various members of the community, who are encouraged to share whatever trope systems or melodies they are familiar with, or even to just read the text. It is imperative to Rabba Tamar that anyone feels able to participate, and that there is no hierarchization of knowledge. During the summer, when Shabbat arrives later, the service is abbreviated in order to allow the usage of musical instruments before Shabbat arrives, and so they might only chant a few verses. During the winter, all eight chapters are typically chanted, as there are no musical instruments and length is less of a concern. The Covid-19 pandemic has also caused some modifications to this format. Services are currently (as of January 2021) live-streamed with only Rabba Tamar, one *paytan*, and a videographer in attendance. They have typically been chanting only the first and last chapters of the Song in the live-streamed services. During a typical in-person service, there may be several different melodies and cantillation systems on display. Even when there are fewer participants in the service, the community still hears different traditions from week to week. Hadass Pal Yarden chants according to the *Sefardi Yerushalmi* tradition of cantillation. When Nerya Refael Knafo leads, he uses a Moroccan style of cantillation.

Example 1: ***El Ginat Egoz*** (text: Song 6:11, 7:12-13, 4:16, music: Sarah Levi-Tanai, 1943)

To the walnut garden I went down to see the buds of the brook, to see if the vine had blossomed, if the pomegranate trees were in flower. (Song 6:11) Come my lover, Let us go out to the field, spend the night in the henna… Let us rise early in the vineyards. We shall see if the vine is in flower, if the blossoms	אֶל־גִּנַּת אֱגוֹז יָרַדְתִּי לִרְאוֹת בְּאִבֵּי הַנָּחַל לִרְאוֹת הֲפָרְחָה הַגֶּפֶן הֵנֵצוּ הָרִמֹּנִים: (שיר ו׳ יא׳) לְכָה דוֹדִי נֵצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה נָלִינָה בַּכְּפָרִים: (שיר ז׳ יב׳) נַשְׁכִּימָה לַכְּרָמִים נִרְאֶה אִם פָּרְחָה הַגֶּפֶן פִּתַּח הַסְּמָדַר (שיר ז׳ יג׳)

have opened (Song 7:12-13) - Arise, O north, and come, O south, blow on my garden, let its perfumes flow, Let my lover come to his garden and eat its luscious fruit. (Song 4:16)[36]	עוּרִי צָפוֹן וּבוֹאִי תֵימָן הָפִיחִי גַּנִּי יִזְּלוּ בְשָׂמָיו יָבֹא דוֹדִי לְגַנּוֹ וְיֹאכַל פְּרִי מִגְדָּיו (שיר ד׳ טז׳)

Example 1, "*El Ginat Egoz,*" is used as the opening song for the Shabbat evening service. It serves as a familiar touchpoint for most Israelis that gives voice both to the text of Song of Songs and to the secular musical culture of the State of Israel. Written by Sarah Levi-Tanai in 1943 as part of a Passover song cycle for Kibbutz Ramat HaKovesh, "*El Ginat Egoz*" has become one of the most important Israeli folk dances. Levi-Tanai herself experienced the confluence of Eastern and Western influences. She was mostly raised at Meir Shfeya, a youth village and agricultural school in northern Israel, where she fostered a connection to the Land of Israel and experienced a primarily Ashkenazi cultural framework. As an adult, she made a concerted effort to connect with her Yemenite heritage and learn about Yemenite music, but it was not something she grew up with.[37] The verses in "*El Ginat Egoz*" (Song 6:11, 7:12-13, and 4:16) describe the flora of the Land of Israel as it blossoms in the spring. It is a pastoral, agricultural image. The rebirth of spring became a metaphor for the birth of the State of Israel and the return to the Jewish homeland. The agricultural imagery connects to the construction of the "New Jew," who practices their Judaism through working the land. Ilana Pardes describes the group dances that accompany this song as cultivating a "sense of communal eros" through the "sensuous pleasure"[38] of moving one's body as part of a collective.

[36] Trans. Robert Alter, 2019.
[37] Ilana Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers*, 47.
[38] Ibid., 50.

Rabba Tamar views this opening song as the "*sha'ar*," the gate or entry point into the service. She refers to Psalm 87:2, "God loves the gates of Zion," as a reminder of the importance of starting the service with something that is broadly accessible to as many people as possible. The use of "*El Ginat Egoz*" "leave[s] a very open gate to give the Zionist story a significant place and to see the music of the... Israeliness as a prayer and to acknowledge that." It indicates to secular Israelis that they have a place at Zion, while still remaining directly connected to the Biblical text and being comfortable for people who come from a more traditional religious background.

This selection of verses is also very well suited to *Kabbalat Shabbat*. The title of the core *piyut* of *Kabbalat Shabbat,* "*L'cha Dodi*," comes from Song 7:12, "Come my lover, let us go out to the field." *Kabbalat Shabbat* is an enactment of a wedding between Shabbat and the Jewish people. The Tzfat Kabbalists who developed this liturgy used to dress in white and go out to the field to greet the Shabbat bride as the sun set on Friday evenings. Using this verse as part of the opening song creates an evocative image that connects to the origins of *Kabbalat Shabbat.* Surrounding it with verses that speak in detail about the agricultural life of the Land of Israel helps to expand that image and connect it more deeply to the land itself.

Another core piece of the Zion liturgy is the inclusion of a *piyut* amidst the chanting of Song of Songs. The *piyutim* are typically chosen by the *paytan*, the musical leader of the service. Some examples of these *piyutim* include "*Sha'ar Asher Nisgar*," "*Ya'alah Ya'alah, Bo'i l'Gani*," and "*Yonati, Ziv Yif'atech*." Each of these *piyutim* uses imagery from the Song of Songs. Some of the past and current members of the prayer-leading staff at Kehilat Zion are leading experts in *piyutim*, including Uri Kroizer

and Ya'ir Harel, who edited a volume of 101 *piyutim* that was published in 2018. There is a serious depth and breadth to the knowledge that informs the use of *piyutim*.

The *piyutim* create moments for congregational singing. They choose relatively simple tunes, which are presented strophically so that the congregation can become familiar through repetition. The *piyut* is often rhythmic and upbeat, encouraging people to participate by clapping and tapping their toes, even if they are not interested in singing along. For Rabba Tamar, the *piyutim* help address "the problem of the Hebrew… Most Israelis actually understand the Hebrew [of the liturgy] and they don't relate to it." People who understand the Hebrew of the liturgy have to engage with the theology of the liturgy, and that can create a barrier for some people. *Piyutim* create a different angle and an opportunity for connection through Hebrew poetry. They provide beautiful imagery, and couch theology in metaphor.

Piyutim and their melodies tend to emerge from oral traditions that are specific to certain communities. These specific ethnic traditions were not much in the public eye during the 20th century, due to what Professor Haviva Pedaya describes as "the attitude that refused the legacy of the Diaspora and left no place for any tradition whether Yiddish or Oriental."[39] However, the 21st century has seen an eruption of *piyutim* and resources to help people connect to and experience them. The website "*Hazmanah l'Piyut*: An Invitation to Piyut" debuted in 2005, and was acquired by the National Library of Israel over a decade later. This website collects and preserves a diverse body of *piyut*, with texts and video and audio recording. As well, Beit Avi Chai, a cultural center in Jerusalem, has hosted the Jerusalem *Piyut* Festival since 2008. Philosophy professor Meir Buzaglo says:

[39] Peggy Cidor, "Singing Praises," The Jerusalem Post, September 26, 2005, https://www.jpost.com/local-israel/in-jerusalem/singing-praises.

These programs and the interest in *piyutim* are a way for young people to express that they are no longer willing to have a dichotomous dialogue with Judaism: either you are observant or you are not, and if you are not, then you have nothing in common with your own Jewish heritage.[40]

Kehilat Zion itself is a project that rejects the religious-not religious dichotomy. Its goal is to create a prayer space that is attractive to Jews of all backgrounds. *Piyutim* are written for a religious context, but thanks to their popularity in the mainstream of Israeli popular music, *piyutim* have gained a secular audience. Their use in Zion is another element that is carefully designed to appeal to Jews across the religious spectrum. Rabba Tamar says that the *piyutim "*give a sense of *hemshechi'ut* (continuity), of *masoret* (tradition)." Zion capitalizes on a current trend while engaging with an ancient tradition.

Example 2: text of the *piyut* ***Yonati, Ziv Yif'atech*** (R. Yisrael Najara)

My dove[41], your splendor is like Orion and the Pleiades Because of my love for you I will sing a song on *alamot*[42] Most beautiful of maidens, My desire for you makes slumber wander far from my eyelids Your lips are like roses, dripping with myrrh[43] of love Your eyes are like doves[44], burning with blazing fire Your speech is sweeter to me than the songs of singers and musicians singing of might and strength Rejoice for I will quickly build the city most praised in the world The sons of Edom and Seir I will break like pottery I will free your legs from chains, And I will arouse my rage against your enemies like a warrior. Your hands will be weak no more, fear not, Gazelle[45].	יוֹנָתִי זִיו יְפְעָתֵךְ דָּמָה לְכְסִיל וְכִימוֹת וַאֲנִי לְאַהֲבָתֵךְ אָשִׁיר שִׁיר עַל עֲלָמוֹת נָאוָה מִכָּל עֲלָמוֹת נָאוָה מִכָּל עֲלָמוֹת נָדְדוּ לִתְשׁוּקָתֵךְ מֵעַפְעַפַּי תְּנוּמוֹת שִׂפְתוֹתַיִךְ שׁוֹשַׁנִּים נוֹטְפוֹת מֹר אַהֲבָה עֵינַיִךְ כְּמוֹ יוֹנִים בּוֹעֲרוֹת אֵשׁ לֶהָבָה מִדְבָּרֵךְ לִי עֲרֵבָה מִדְבָּרֵךְ לִי עֲרֵבָה מִשִּׁיר שָׁרִים וְנוֹגְנִים הוֹגִים עֹז וְתַעְצוּמוֹת רָנִּי כִּי חִישׁ אֶבְנֶה עִיר הַהֻלָּלָה בְּתֵבֵל בְּנֵי אֱדוֹם וְשֵׂעִיר אֶשְׁבּוֹר כִּשֵּׁבֶר נֵבֶל רַגְלֵךְ אֶפְדֶּה מִכֶּבֶל רַגְלֵךְ אֶפְדֶּה מִכֶּבֶל וְעַל שׂוֹנְאַיִךְ אָעִיר קִנְאָה כְּאִישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת אַל יִרְפּוּ יָדַיִךְ עוֹד צְבִיָּה אַל תִּירְאִי אֶת יֶתֶר צֹאנֵךְ אֶפְקֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקֹרְאִי אֶרְעֶה בְּכָל הַר וָאִי אֶרְעֶה בְּכָל הַר וָאִי

[40] Ibid.

[41] "*Yonati*" refers to a beloved, as it is used in Song 2:14, 5:2, & 6:9.

[42] An unknown musical instrument mentioned in Psalms 46:1 and I Chronicles 15:20

[43] Song 5:13

[44] Song 5:12

[45] "*Tz'viah*" refers to a beloved, as it is used in Song 4:5 & 7:4.

I will remember the rest of your flock, Israel who I have called; I will shepherd them on every mountain and coast. I will return them from the land of their wandering, I will settle the ruined cities[46]	אֲשִׁיבֵם מֵאֶרֶץ נדֹ֔ אוֹשִׁיב עָרִים נְשַׁמּוֹת

"*Yonati, Ziv Yif'atech*," as seen in Example 2, is one of the commonly used *piyutim* at Zion. It features on the CD "*P'nei Shabbat*," which was produced by Kehilat Zion in 2016 as a record of their *Kabbalat Shabbat* service. This text is traditional to weddings among B'nei Israel Jews in India, and in Afghanistan. The tune is Afghan.[47] It was arranged for Zion by Yaron Pe'er, a multi-instrumentalist and practitioner of world and ancient musics.

Since *Kabbalat Shabbat* is envisioned as a wedding, the romantic imagery that makes this *piyut* appropriate to its original context is fitting for *Kabbalat Shabbat*. Much of those images are direct allusions to the Song of Songs (see footnotes). This text also imagines redemption in similar terms to "*L'cha Dodi*," particularly as it discusses rebuilding a ruined city.

The instrumentation of the CD includes guitar, lyra, lute, bouzouki, harmonium, Mizrachi guitar, saz and bağlama, ney, and percussion, many of which are played by Yaron Pe'er. These instruments are mostly plucked strings from the Mediterranean and Middle East. The ney is an end-blown Persian flute. The harmonium is a portable pump organ that developed in Denmark in the 18th Century and is now used most prominently

[46] Translation modified from: Abigail Denemark Ossip, tran., "Yonati Ziv Yifatech," Zemirot, Shirot, V'Tishbachot: Liturgy Resources by Abigail Denemark Ossip, accessed December 30, 2020, https://www.abbiedoespiyyut.com/yonati%20ziv%20yifatech%20t.

[47] "Yonati, Ziv Yif'atech," Hazmana l'Piyut (National Library of Israel), https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/he/Song/Pages/Song.aspx?SongID=378#52,112,912,32.

in Indian music.[48] The lyra is a three-stringed bowed instrument used for folk and dance music on the Greek island of Crete.[49] This panoply of instruments sounds generally Middle Eastern, but is not specific to a particular place or time. This contrasts with the tunes themselves, which are chosen in order to provide distinct connections to various traditions. The opening song, "*El Ginat Egoz*" and "*Shir HaEmek*," which comes after the Song, are from the canon of Songs of the Land of Israel and connect directly to the land and the state of Israel. "*Yonati, Ziv Yif'atech*" relates to Afghani Jewish music and the broader landscape of the *piyut* revival. Later in *Kabbalat Shabbat*, the Psalms are chanted to a variety of different *nuscha'ot*, including Yemenite, Ashkenazi, and *Sefardi Yerushalmi*. The instrumentation helps unite these different styles, helping them to sound more similar and softening some of the stylistic differences. For example, the Ashkenazi music is accompanied by the lyra and harmonium. This would certainly not be a native instrumentation. The harmonium acts as a drone, which might be intended to mimic the congregational hum that is traditional in Ashkenazi communities. But these instruments contribute a Mediterranean character that helps relate it to the tunes that come before and after.

Kehilat Zion is more interested in a "tossed salad" model of ethnic mixing than the assimilation demanded by the melting pot.. Rabba Tamar wants everyone to feel that their particular background is welcome, whether that refers to their place of origin or practice of religion, and that no one background is given a privileged position.

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[48] Vishwas R. Gaitonde, "The Birth, Death, and Reincarnation of the Harmonium," The Mantle, 2016, https://www.themantle.com/arts-and-culture/birth-death-and-reincarnation-harmonium.

[49] "*Lyra v'Lauto*," Yaron Peer: Devotional Art, 2014, https://www.yaronpeer.com/instruments/%d7%9c%d7%99%d7%a8%d7%94-%d7%95%d7%9c%d7%90%d7%95%d7%98%d7%94/.

In the quest for equality, one of Tamar's goals is to expand the role of women. She experiences women leaders as "so candid and so honest and so decent, and they create a world that has a lot of place for many people around them, for a team around them. And they create a world that is not hierarchy, and a world that has such dignity and a world that is safe." This viewpoint connects again with the non-hierarchical world of the Song.

Rabba Tamar says:

> I grew up in a world, with all its beauty, that the more I grew up, the less I learned, because I wasn't invited as a woman. And the men knew everything. It was a lot about knowledge, and the feeling was they knew it all... And I wanted everyone to feel equal, that we're all learning.

This experience caused her not only to foster the leadership of women, but also to empower people who have not had the chance to learn certain things. She encourages anyone to participate in the congregational reading of the Song, even if they don't have any experience with it. She is perfectly happy for people who do not know the cantillation to read the text. She talks about receiving pushback for allowing American students to read the Song, because their Hebrew was awkward and slow. To her, their commitment to learning Hebrew is an act of love, and they deserve to read even if they are not as proficient.

She is especially proud of *paytanit* Hadass Pal Yarden. Hadass is a singer and musicologist with expertise in Turkish and Ladino music. Hadass comes from a secular background and was not involved in synagogue or liturgical music before she became involved in Zion. "She was not given a gate to the *masoret* (tradition). So she was this musicologist and musician, but not invited to *shul*," until she and Rabba Tamar got to know each other through their childrens' *gan*. To Rabba Tamar, Hadass' worship

leadership is a "triple achievement" - that she is a woman, a person of a secular background, and a single mother. If Zion wants to attract people of varying backgrounds, it is important that the leadership team also reflects that diversity. Hadass drives her car to the synagogue on Shabbat and holidays, and that is not only accepted, but celebrated as an important point of diversity within the community. Hadass has worked on her literacy in the prayer texts and *nusach*, and has developed total ownership over them. She wrote the music for the petition after the Song of Songs, which has now become an integral part of the custom at Zion. It was also her suggestion to use "*El Ginat Egoz*" as the opening song for services. Rabba Tamar says that what they were looking for in "*El Ginat Egoz*" was "that kind of Israeli thing that it feels ancient, but also is very relevant."

Kehilat Zion realizes its vision of redemption through the synthesis of diasporic traditions. The combination of musical and liturgical pieces from around the world creates an imagined pre-diaspora where all Jewish traditions are able to coexist harmoniously. Rabba Tamar would relate this to her vision of *Kibbutz Galuyot*, the ingathering of the exiles. She says:

> My feeling is that the Israeliness is what that means, like *Kibbutz Galuyot.* Many, many different *galuyot* coming, from [Persia], from Ashkenaz, Russia, Ethiopia. It's so unsafe to mesh all of that together. And so much could be lost and so much hierarchy could be created and was created.

She positions her community as part of an imagined idealized past, like the idyllic dream world of the Song, where everyone is equal and everyone has a voice. Kehilat Zion embodies values of equality and communal responsibilities as informed by its relationship with the Song.

Conclusion

Song of Songs is pervasive within Israeli musical culture. It is constantly emerging in new places. Now, it often appears as fragments in pop songs which are not otherwise biblical or religious. Some examples include "*Stam Dika'on*," on Omer Adam's 2015 album *Modeh Ani*, which quotes Song 2:14. Another song on the same album, "*Kumi Yafati*" quotes Song 2:11 and uses other Song of Songs language in describing flowering grapevines and blossoming pomegranates. Yuval Dayan's "*Libi Er*," also released in 2015, takes its title and refrain from Song 5:2. The title of Idan Raichel's popular "*Hinach Yafa,*" released in 2002, appears in the Song three times. Its description of searching for a lover, and the imagery that describes the lover come from the Song. These usages of the Song are precisely what Dr. Naomi Cohn Zentner is describing when she writes:

> By the 1970s, quoting of complete biblical verses gradually disappeared from secular Israeli popular music. However, the lyrics of many Israeli songs unrelated to biblical issues were interspersed with biblical phrases which had become an integral part of Modern Hebrew vernacular.[50]

At the end of her 2013 book *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers: The Song of Songs in Israeli Culture*, Ilana Pardes includes a chart of 185 Israeli songs, written between the pre-state period and 2011, whose texts quote or reference the Song of Songs.[51] This list represents a diverse array of Israeli musical idioms, from Yemenite and Ukrainian folk tunes, to dance tunes and pop hits. However, even this extensive list is not comprehensive. It misses some art songs and some songs that are used for liturgical

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[50] Naomi Cohn Zentner, "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection: Scriptural Events, Places, and Personalities in Israeli Popular Music," *Journal of Synagogue Music*. Vol. 34 (Fall 2009), 174.

[51] Ilana Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers: The Song of Songs in Israeli Culture,* (University of Washington Press, 2013), 138-147.

purposes. And even in the few short years since its publication, countless more examples have arisen. In fact, the only one of the songs examined in this paper to appear on the list is "*El Ginat Egoz*." Most of the other pieces are too recent.

This project is an attempt to update this database with newly written songs and new contexts of performance for these songs. In focusing on three case studies, this project has tried to capture a few snapshots of how Song of Songs appears in music by Israeli performers in the current moment of 2020. All three contexts are totally different. Yula Beeri is a secular Tel Avivian, working largely abroad and using this musical project of INDIGA to connect to the Jewish identity that she is often removed from. Victoria Hanna grew up immersed in Jerusalem, immersed in Orthodox Judaism. Her performances of the Song are avant garde performance art, helping her to connect to the body and the spaces she inhabits. Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum went from singing on her grandfather's knee at the Moroccan synagogue in Bat Yam to serving as a rabbi in a unique "*Eretz Yisraeli*" congregation in Jerusalem, rooting its ethic and building its community through Song of Songs.

Early Israeli biblicism was concerned about having too much pathos, and so performances were intended to be unemotional. "*El Ginat Egoz*" was written as a dance tune. Early recordings of it are extremely rhythmic, with prototypical accompaniments, such as accordion, recorder or flute, and percussion. When Kehilat Zion sings "*El Ginat Egoz*" in their worship context, it is not as a dance piece but as a connection both to the days of the Bible and to the heyday of the kibbutzim. Their version is less strongly rhythmic, with strong emphasis on vocal harmonies. They embrace sentimentality and nostalgia. Some streams of early Zionists were trying to recreate an idealized biblical past

through their musical expression. Twenty-first century Israelis are still looking for that biblical past, but have an additional layer of romanticization for an agricultural and egalitarian Zionist past.

The usage of the Bible in Israeli song can be split into two eras: the 'dream' era prior to the 1960s, and the 'awakening' era thereafter.[52] The dream era is characterized by emphasis on diaspora negation, connection to the land, and the importance of the collective. From the late '60s on, the awakening period, biblical references in music focused more on individuals than national narratives. This era was also characterized by a move away from folk-style music towards rock and pop styles. This change in musical choices reflects cultural shifts following the Six-Day War in 1967. The territory captured in the Six-Day War gave Israelis access to holy biblical sites that they had only been able to imagine. As Anita Shapira writes, "the encounter with the land of the Bible… destroyed the romance of the Bible: It was a foreign country, inhabited by another people."[53] It was no longer sufficient to imagine a biblical dream-world; Israelis had to navigate the complicated political realities of the land they inhabited.

As feelings of triumph gave away to disillusionment, and as Israel modernized, the socialist, collective values that the state was founded on faded away. As Naomi Cohn Zentner writes:

> Up until the 1960s the general populace was thought of in collective terms, considered first and foremost as part of the Zionist enterprise in Israel. After the mid 1960s, with the crumbling of Israeli society's collectivism, it

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[52] Sarah Hafri-Aflalu, "*Shir HaZemer HaYisraeli M'sochei'ach im HaMikra* (Israeli Song Converses with the Bible)" *Sha'anan*: 2005), 161-196, quoted in Naomi Cohn Zentner, "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection: Scriptural Events, Places, and Personalities in Israeli Popular Music," *Journal of Synagogue Music*. Vol. 34 (Fall 2009), 185.

[53] Anita Shapira, "The Bible and Israeli Identity." *AJS Review*. Vol. 28, no. 1 (2004), 32.

> became more common to address the wishes, feelings and tastes of the individual, something that had been considered unpatriotic in earlier years.[54]

It is important to be clear that the three case studies discussed in this paper do not comprise a sufficient sample to extrapolate on trends within Israeli musical culture. However, there are some recurrent themes within the case studies that merit discussion.

Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum speaks of "re-dreaming Jerusalem." She searches for a way to connect *Yerushalayim shel Mata* - the real, earthly Jerusalem - to *Yerushalayim shel Mala* - the idealized, heavenly Jerusalem. I want to posit that the three women profiled in this project engage with the Song of Songs through a "re-dreaming" framework. They combine musical and ideological pieces from both the "dream" and "awakening" eras, and they use the Song as a tool for imagining the dream-worlds they wish to see.

These contemporary uses of the Song speak to the importance of the individual. The choice of verses that INDIGA and Victoria Hanna have used tell the story of the Shulamite as a person with interiority. In their songs, she is proud of the beauty of her suntanned skin. She frantically searches for her lover in the night. Even at Kehilat Zion, which emphasizes the collective as one of its most important values, the collective is created by appealing to people's sense of individualism through musical and liturgical choices that reflect a multiplicity of individual experiences.

The emphasis on the individual exists in tension with an understanding of the Song as a de-hierarchized text that treats the Shulamite and her lover as equals. INDIGA avoids addressing the tension between collective equality and the individual by having all three of its singers play the Shulamite. Rabba Tamar wants every person to be able to feel

[54] Naomi Cohn Zentner, "Singing the Bible," 185.

that they have a role in her community, and she tries to avoid privileging knowledge too much.

All three subjects of this project connect to the Song as a vehicle for empowering the female voice, creating a world where women's voices are at the center of the conversation. "The 'woman' constructed in the Song of Songs is a far more powerful and unruly character than elsewhere in the Bible,"[55] whether a particular reader experiences her as a metaphor for the human in relation to the divine or as a real woman exercising sexual agency. For Yula, the Song brings women's voices together. For Rabba Tamar, it is an opportunity for women to find their voices as prayer leaders. For Victoria Hanna, the Song is a tool for plumbing the relationship between her own voice and body.

Part of the Song's enduring appeal is its pastoral scenery and detailed descriptions of the plant life of the Land of Israel. It also addresses the Daughters of Jerusalem, and describes the town that the Shulamite lives in as a guarded, walled city. Although the current walls of the Old City of Jerusalem are Ottoman and postdate the period described in the Song by over a thousand years, it is easy to imagine the Shulamite searching for her lover on those walls, as in Victoria Hanna's "*Ani Yeshena*." Kehilat Zion, too, connects to a vision of Jerusalem that comes from the Song.

All three of these musical projects contain ethnic elements that are used to create a sense of timelessness. They use some of the elements of the Orientalist framework of early-state biblical music, but with the lens shifted to archaism. The ethnic elements, which include instrumentation, modality, and meter, are deliberately not specific to a particular time or place. This archaism is sentimental, intended to tug on the heartstrings.

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[55] David Carr, "Gender and the Shaping of Desire in the Song of Songs," *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol.119 (2000), 233-248.

The Song is particularly suited to move between dream and awakening in its cultural context because the text itself moves between dream and awakening. In relating to the Song of Songs as a foundational text of their musical expression, Yula Beeri, Victoria Hanna, and Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum re-dream a musical world that prioritizes women's bodies and voices, gives space to both the collective and the individual, and exists without hierarchy.

The Song of Songs concludes "You who dwell in the garden, friends listen to your voice. Let me hear it."[56] The three women examined in this project dwell in the garden of the Song of Songs. They use the Song to guide their vision, and sing it to let their voices be heard.

[56] Song 8:13, Trans. Robert Alter

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