

Kay Kaufman Shelemay. **Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews.** Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Pp. xvii + 291. Index, illustrations, photographs, bibliography, compact disc. \$65.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

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Combining historical and ethnographic research in *Let Jasmine Rain Down*, Kay Kaufman Shelemay aims to elucidate the story of a genre among Syrian Jews. Pizmonim, as Shelemay writes, “mean many different things to various individuals,” but at the same time the repertoire of pizmonim songs carries deep historical meanings for the communities of Syrian Jews across the globe who compose and perform them. As Shelemay convincingly demonstrates, the meanings embedded in pizmonim over time and through performance intricately link with remembrance, the cognitive practice of praising an individual who has passed away. Pizmonim songs, often performed on occasions to honor those who are living, simultaneously work to honor other individuals with whom the songs are historically connected. These individuals may be the composer of a song or a well known performer of it, but in each case over time that individual has become part of a particular song’s history.

The structure of the book invites the reader to examine a few of these histories and the remembrances they constitute. A “prelude” precedes each of the six chapters, and each prelude is a short ethnographic description of a specific moment of pizmonim performance. Through this construction, Shelemay introduces the reader to some of the intimate and memory-laden contexts within which Syrian Jews use pizmonim songs and also introduces some of her key research associates. Each prelude gives the story—in condensed form—of a pizmonim, tracing it from composer up to the current moment of performance. It is in these micro-casestudies that the simultaneous individual and communal significance of pizmonim songs becomes apparent.

While most of her field research occurred in Brooklyn during the mid- 1980s, Shelemay also had opportunities to visit leading figures

of the Syrian Jewish diaspora in both Mexico City and Jerusalem. The geographic breadth of her fieldwork complements the temporal depth of archival and historical research she conducted. The accompanying compact disc, comprised of musical field recordings and excerpts from interviews, provides illuminating aural data that enliven Shelemay's rich descriptions and cogent explanations.

Shelemay's book traverses ethnography and psychology, history and performance studies as she unveils the multiple layers of meaning encoded in the music and lyrics of *pizmonim*. In truly interdisciplinary fashion, Shelemay demonstrates through the pages of *Let Jasmine Rain Down* that musical art forms are not necessarily end products to be studied but are rather processes of identity and community to be examined as important moments in the ongoing movement of people through time and space. Shelemay's book argues for an understanding of musical practice as one way to navigate the shifting relationships between groups and individuals, past and present. In so doing, it offers ethnomusicologists a viable analytical model for examining the careers of particular musical genres the world over.

**Fiesta de la Candelaria, Tlacotalpan, Veracruz.** 1993. Colegio de México. Cátedra Jaime Torres Bodet. Seminario de Tradiciones Populares. Fonogramas, no.1. Price unavailable.

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*La Fiesta de la Candelaria* is a two-disc set with booklet that provides a broad sonic overview of the festival of the same name, the focus of the ritual year of Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, Mexico. The festival is a complex, syncretic ritual dedicated to the Virgin Mary that combines the sacred and the secular, the old (like the musical pieces called *sones jarochos* and the *fundangos* or danced *sones*) and the new (such as modern *norteña* and salsa music). The celebration lasts for fifteen days and centers around the period of January 31 through February 2. During those three days many special events take place including regattas, the running of the bulls, *la mojiganga* (humorous, carnivalesque play-acting in large masks)