

Texts and Tunes Of Family ...and 'Flying'

By Seth Rogovoy



Cambridge, Mass. native Yaeko Miranda Elmaleh hardly seems to have had a choice from birth. Her grandfather was an accomplished impressionist painter and musician who performed with Gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt and other musicians during the 1940s and '50s bohemian era in Paris; a grandfather in El Salvador was classically trained in guitar under Agustin Barrios Mangore; and a great-grandfather in Boston was a jazz clarinetist and owner of the second largest jazz collection in the United States during his time.

So it comes as no surprise that Elmaleh has played violin since she was three. A finalist in the Boston Symphony Orchestra youth competition and "First Prize" winner in the Arlington Philharmonic competition, she was classically trained at the New England Conservatory Preparatory School under Fudeko Takahashi, and was the recipient of many awards and soloed with many ensembles and orchestras in Massachusetts.

Later, Elmaleh went on to study violin under Michele Auclair and received her B.A. in music from the New England Conservatory, where she studied with Ran Blake and Klezmer Conservatory Band founder Hankus Netsky. While studying with Netsky, she discovered a connection to klezmer, Jewish and Gypsy styles of music.

Featured in the Berkshires at last year's "A Summer Celebration of Jewish Music," Elmaleh currently performs and freelances in Boston and New York – most recently in the New York run of "Shlemiel the First" under the musical direction of Zalmen Mlotek. She also plays violin with the renowned Klezmer

Conservatory Band under the leadership of Netsky, and recently recorded her eponymous debut album (www.yaekoplaysviolin.com) featuring guitarist/mandolinist Brandon Seabrook, cellist Ariel Friedman, and accordionist Michael McLaughlin.



Yaeko Miranda Elmaleh ... transcends the separation between herself and her instrument

As heard on her CD, which features traditional music from Old World and New, ranging from "Beregovski Hope #99" to "Doina/Hora/Honga" – a kind of cross-cultural musical journey through Eastern and Central Europe – to "Philadelphia Sher," a popular American klezmer tune that she undoubtedly learned from Netsky, who stems from a prominent Philadelphia klezmer family, Elmaleh's sound can be best described as soulful and passionate.

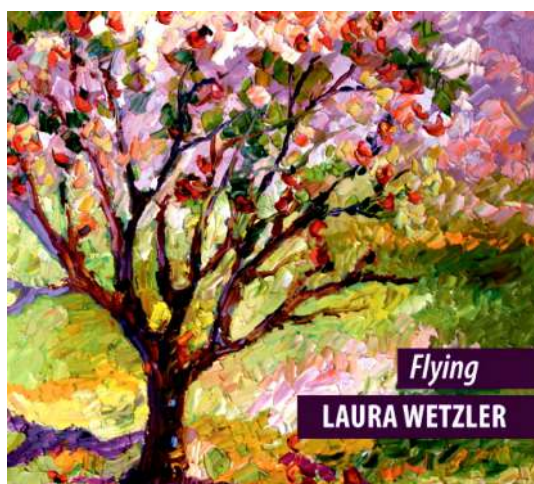
Her accompanists are sympathetic and well-versed in the material, and easily straddle the klezmer/Gypsy divide, which is more a question of nuance and ornamentation in most cases than anything else.

When Elmaleh performs she transcends the separation between herself and her instrument, and instead one hears an authentic voice, rooted in the dedication of years of training, respect for diverse musical traditions, and her deep familial ties.

Laura Wetzler, who calls the hilltowns just east of the Berkshires home, has long been a leading voice on the contemporary Jewish music scene. Her latest CD, "Flying" (www.laurawetzler.com) is a bit of a departure; it features Wetzler, the folk singer-songwriter, as opposed to Wetzler the Jewish artist. But the Jewish artist is never far from the surface – the title track is an ode to two sisters of the Resistance, and "High on a Hill" celebrates a family legacy.

Fans of this essential Jewish artist will find plenty to love about Wetzler's "Flying."

Seth Rogovoy (seth@rogovoy.com) is the editor of BerkshireDaily and The Rogovoy Report (www.rogovoy.com) and the author of BOB DYLAN: Prophet Mystic Poet and The Essential Klezmer: A Music Lover's Guide to Jewish Roots and Soul Music.



Laura Wetzler's latest is 'Flying'

Traveling with Jewish Taste® Purim Treats Around the World

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



When we American Jews, mostly Ashkenazi, think of Purim, our mouths begin to water in anticipation of Hamantaschen. Whether made from cookie or yeast dough, and filled with mohn (poppy) or prune, apricot, or chocolate, the three-cornered delights are an annual treat so yummy that some bakeries now feature them year-round.

But there is so much more to savor at Purim, that this month, instead of chronicling my own personal travels, I offer a Purim culinary world tour, along with two recipes to enhance your holiday gustatory pleasure.

But first, a message from our all-time favorite – Hamantaschen! The recipe I use is so good that, even years after my three children had "graduated" from nursery school, the school's director kept inviting me to come back to bake with the kids. That recipe – the secret is the orange rind in the dough – is, by the way, that of my former Hebrew School teacher here in Pittsfield, the late Adele Goldblum (z"l).

The word "hamantaschen" is actually a play on words. "Mohn" means poppy in both Yiddish and German. "Tasche" is the German word for pocket or purse. Together, the two words form "mohntaschen," the pastry's original name since the Middle Ages, and still a popular dessert in Germany.

Since we Jews love to play with words, we added the "ha" to add our own twist to the delicious treat and make the pastry Haman's pockets. It was in these pockets that the evil vizier carried the lots, or Purim, designating the days for the Jews to be hanged on the gallows – in case you don't know the story, Haman did not accomplish his goal, but ended up hanging on those same gallows!

In Israel, the identical pastry is referred to as "oznei Haman," or Haman's ears.

Tradition has it that Queen Esther, in order to observe kashrut while living in the palace of King Ahashverus, maintained a strict vegetarian diet, relying on legumes, seeds and nuts for protein – legend has it that caraway seeds were her favorite.

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Almond crescent cookies



Caraway bundt cake



Hamantaschen



Mohntaschen



Bourekas

TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE,

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In honor of her reverence for Jewish law, vegetarian dishes (chickpea pizza, anyone?) are popular Purim mealtime choices around the world, as are desserts based on seeds (e.g., caraway bundt cake).

My friend and fellow congregant, David, an Israeli of Moroccan descent, explained to me that when he was growing up, and still today, all the Moroccan women in his neighborhood prepare a wonderful sweet dairy couscous with dried fruit.

He lent me his Moroccan Jewish cookbook, giving me the honor of believing that I could translate the Hebrew and the metric measurements into useable English. His recipe does not include nuts, but others do. You will find one recipe in the sidebar.

The Jews of the Caucasus Mountains are proud of their origins in ancient Persia, so for them the holiday has a personal resonance. These Members of the Tribe enjoy a halva called Hadassah, after Queen Esther's Hebrew name. I have found several recipes for this delicacy, all different, but none resemble the sesame-based confection my father used to buy for me at Sam Mandel's Columbus Avenue delicatessen when I was a child.

By the way, this Purim happens to be the centennial anniversary of the founding of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America. Back in 1912, the group's founders chose the name Hadassah, not only because of the establishment on the holiday, but because they hoped to emulate the courage and steadfastness of its namesake.

The holiday of Purim falls on the first full moon after Tu B'Shevat, and Jews of Yemenite background prepare almond crescent cookies to eat and to share. My guess is that the Yemenites realized that nobody would get the connection between the full moon and a round cookie that looks like every other cookie on the block, so the crescent shape lets us know that it is in honor of the holiday's position in the calendar. Butter, brown sugar, and finely ground almonds make these cookies delectable alone, or with tea.

While not necessarily a Purim dish, I think bourekas should be added to the list of traditional holiday treats. They are a very popular Middle Eastern nosh and, since they are indeed triangular in shape, they make a savory Hamantaschen to serve as appetizers or, as Israelis do, with salad, olives, and leben or shamenet (alternatively, plain yogurt).

Carol Goodman Kaufman, an organizational psychologist and writer, is the author of *Sins of Omission: The Jewish Community's Reaction to Domestic Violence* (Westview Press, 2003). She serves on the National Board of Hadassah and chairs the Jewish Community Relations Council of Central Massachusetts. Kaufman divides her time between Worcester, West Stockbridge, and the world.

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One type of 'Hadassah' or Persian halva

Sweet Dairy Couscous with Cinnamon and Almonds

This dish is very popular among Moroccan Jews at Purim. While you are certainly welcome to prepare the pasta the old-fashioned way, mixing semolina flour with water, rolling the dough into tiny balls, sifting it over a sieve to remove any excess flour, then steaming the final product over boiling water or a stew – you don't have to.

American supermarkets carry instant couscous in packages. Phew!



Ingredients:

1/2 cup butter, cut into small pieces	3/4 cup slivered almonds, toasted
1 - 1/2 cups couscous	1 cup mixed dried fruits, chopped
Pinch of salt	1 - 1/2 cups milk
1 teaspoon of cinnamon	1 cup hot milk or cream

Directions:

Cut butter in small chunks and let come to room temperature. Combine couscous with a small pinch of salt in a medium saucepan. Shake pan to spread couscous in an even layer. Cut the butter into small pieces and distribute half of it over the couscous. Bring the one and one-half cups of milk to a boil in a medium saucepan. Pour milk evenly over couscous. Immediately cover pan tightly and let stand for five minutes. Place remaining butter pieces over top, cover, and let couscous stand one minute. Fluff mixture with a fork, tossing until mixture is blended. Spoon into individual bowls, and sprinkle cinnamon, dried fruits, and toasted almonds over the couscous. Serve with heated milk or cream.

Persian Halva

The word "halva" means "sweet" in Arabic. This Persian recipe is very different from that for the sesame candy familiar from Jewish American delicatessens. More like a slightly gelatinous pudding than a candy, this dessert is customarily included in baskets as part of the custom of sending *mishloah manot* to friends and neighbors.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons oil	1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 cups grain white rice	1 teaspoon ground cardamom
4 cups water	2 or 3 strands of saffron
1/2 cup sugar	1/2 cup boiling water

Directions:

Heat the oil in a large skillet over high heat and fry the rice until it is lightly browned. Transfer rice to a heavy-based saucepan, add water and all but one tablespoon of the sugar, and the spices except saffron. Cook over very low heat, stirring frequently, until mixture is smooth, about forty-five minutes. In a bowl, mash the reserved sugar with the saffron and add boiling water. Stir this mixture into the rice and continue to cook, stirring, for ten minutes. Let cool, then pour into individual bowls and chill.

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