

# *MUSIC*

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## FARKAS, Flórián

### Talya G.A Solan — Singer with Soul

Recently I have been searching on Internet for Sephardic music and I have come across the name of Talya G.A Solan. Her music enchanted me instantly and I have requested from her an interview in order to make her better known to the readership of the Journal of Eurasian Studies. She consented immediately and we have had a pleasant talk on October 15, 2014, using Skype. You can find the outcome of our discussion on the following pages.

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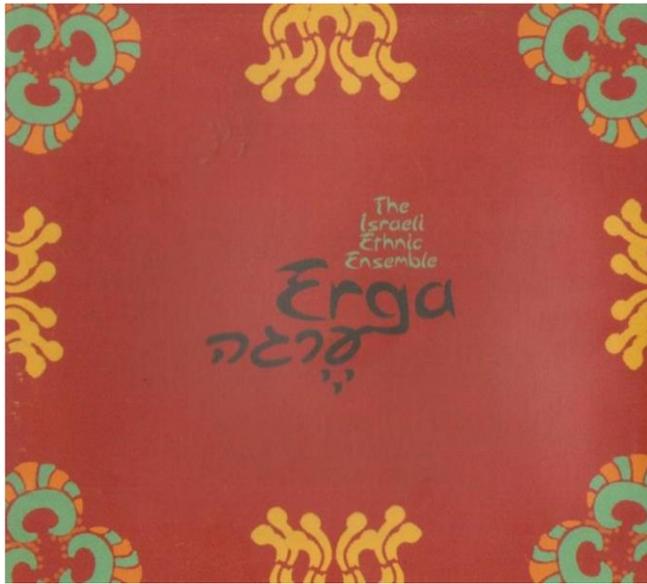
*Flórián Farkas: Recently I was preparing a lecture on Kabbalah and I wished to have some nice Sephardic music for background listening. In this way I came across you singing the Ladino song [Morena me llaman](#), performed in Wroclaw. I became so enchanted that I could not listen to your singing in 'background mode'. Your singing is not simply music but an expression of your inner self, which comes across without any doubt.*

**Talya G.A Solan:** The Wroclaw concert was a very pleasant one. I was not even aware that somebody filmed it and after the concert I was contemplating what a pity that we have not let it recorded. Later I discovered that somebody just did that and posted it on YouTube! The public was very receptive and enthusiastic and that gave us lot of energy. In fact it took place in a restored synagogue, in the old Jewish quarter of Wroclaw. It is nice to experience that the synagogue is a kind of cultural center, an active place where lots of events take place. It houses several museums, too.

*FF: Next to the Internet postings do you have recorded CDs as well? I could not locate any on major Internet retailers.*

**TS:** My music is a niche and it is always fine to have exposure. On the other hand I have two CDs, released in Israel. The one is with *The Israeli Ethnic Ensemble*, the other is with my other group — *Yamma Ensemble*.

*FF: Could you tell me more of these CDs?*



TS: Most of the music I sing with The Israeli Ethnic Ensemble connects with my Ladino roots. My grandmother came from a Sephardic family from Plovdiv, Bulgaria. She and my mother spoke that language actively, a kind of secret language. Though I do not speak it actively, when my friends in Spain heard me singing exclaimed: what an ancient Spanish it is! With Yamma my singing is focused on Hebrew; it is my original own music. I like very much to sing in Hebrew, original and traditional music. I also like very much to write poetry. The ancient biblical text of the Psalms or the Song of Songs inspires me a lot. I have read the Song of Songs more than thousand times but its metaphorical nature still does not fail to fascinate and inspire me.

For me the strongest sense is hearing. I experience the world specially through my ears — the beauty of sound, of the language. I do not care how people look like, what color their eyes or hair are, how muscular their body is, I am always listening and I am captured by the sound. Everything starts with alef. The ear is the real thing, all the rest is just the lie of the external side. My world is made up of sounds, voices, intonation.

FF: *How did your inner voice develop? In my view this cannot be learned, it has to come naturally.*

TS: I am the only musician in the family. All my colleagues in Israel are coming from families with a lot of musical tradition. On the other hand also my sisters are dealing with the sound. They are teachers of Hebrew and Arabic, so the sound of the language is playing a very important role in their lives as well.

My music is not the music of the stars. When I was 30 years old, I was somehow sad of that but then the contra-bassist of the band replied to me: and how many musicians can sing what you sing when they are 20? Obviously not so many. Hence it goes with a certain age, personality, experience, maturity. When

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I was a teenager I wished to become a pop singer. Now it is totally different. I am very happy with the choice I have made. The music I am singing is my real myself.



*FF: Are you a professional musician?*

**TS:** Until 10 years ago I have worked full time as a researcher for TV and media productions. The music had a smaller place in my day. I have not performed professionally.

Since then I am focusing mainly on music, however I still work from time to time in researching when an interesting suggestion appears.

Next to these activities I also founded a not-for-profit organization named Music Port ([www.musicport.org.il](http://www.musicport.org.il)) with the aim of helping Israeli musicians to perform out of Israel, which is not an easy task. It is in pilot phase focusing right now on ethnic, folk, and jazz, later hopefully we can include other genres too. It is not for starts but for those who are less known and are without agents, etc. Classical music has a lot of support from the government though. I wish to deal with the beauty of life and to help others as well.

*FF: You have quite an amazing family background. On your mother side you are from Bulgaria and from the father side from the Yemen...*

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**TS:** Yes, on my mother side they came from Spain to Bulgaria, then in 1947 to Israel. I owe many beautiful things to my grandmother: the beautiful language, excellent food... Her ancestors were expelled from Spain in 1492 and then went to Bulgaria, which was at that time part of the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim world of then was much more tolerant than Christian Europe. This year I visited Cordoba where I was invited together with my group to the 13<sup>th</sup> International Sephardic Festival. I also visited the Jewish quarter, which houses a museum now, the Museum of Inquisition, where all kind of torture instruments are displaced. Its dark, cruel atmosphere made a deep impression on me. I have written a travelogue in Hebrew, which was then translated to English by a [Jewish blog](#) in the US.

My father's family comes from Yemen. They came to Israel in 1943 and they are a traditional Yemenite family. Nevertheless, I was much more influenced by my mother side. My look is Yemenite but my voice and the color of it is Bulgarian. It comes to me more easily to sing in the Bulgarian style, the Yemenite technique is more difficult. There is a Bulgarian women choir, who released a wonderful album: *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*. They are amazing; they are a great inspiration to me. They mostly perform Bulgarian traditional music, but here they sing Sephardic music: [A señora novia](#).



*FF: Do you speak Bulgarian?*

**TS:** Unfortunately not. Granny, who passed away, spoke it.

*FF: Have you visited Bulgaria?*

**TS:** Yes, I even gave a concert at the Bansko Jazz Festival. In Bulgaria I have had an interesting encounter with my culinarian heritage. In Bulgaria they prepare the stuffed pepper with lots of different cheeses, unlike in Morocco where it is stuffed with rice and meat. It was exactly as my granny prepared it!

*FF: How much time do you spend on tours?*

**TS:** It depends. The political situation plays also a role in it. I will be for 2 weeks in December 2014 in Switzerland with the Kedem Ensemble, which is an international group and I am touring with them as a guest. Then I will have a full month tour in March 2015 in Germany. (04.03.2015 Düsseldorf, 08.03.2015 Meschede, 10.03.2015 Kempen, 11.03.2015 Gelsenkirchen, 12.03.2015 Remscheid, 13.03.2015 Siegen, 15.03.2015 Sankt Augustin, 17.03.2015 Hamm, 18.03.2015 Köln, 19.03.2015 Wuppertal, 20.03.2015 Detmold, 21.03.2015 Paderborn, 26.03.2015 Gütersloh, 27.03.2015 Aachen)

*FF: What is your favorite concert setting?*

**TS:** I prefer small, intimate spaces, like churches. I love to feel and see the faces of people in front of me.

*FF: As you mentioned your musical upbringing was not rooted in the family. Who was/were your teacher(s)?*

**TS:** I studied at the Tel Aviv University but I did not take any operatic studies there, though I studied the theory of music. In parallel I took private classes with Mrs. Rachel Hochman. I feel myself privileged that Mrs. Rachel Hochman, Israel's greatest voice productions teacher accepted me and became my voice coach. I am working with her more than 10 years now. She is the best teacher because she teaches not only voice and breathing techniques but she coaches me on a journey, on my inner Tao.

She taught me among others things that sincerity is the most important one in an artist's life; that I need to understand myself. I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to sing, but I did not know what. I was at that time raw material. It is a false myth that one can become an instant star. And she helped me with this process. With her guidance I realized that as a teenager I was more screaming than singing. She taught me to be controlled, civilized, how to build up a performance. She has had the greatest influence on my musical personality.

*FF: Did she also help you find your genre?*

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**TS:** Actually yes. Thanks to her I have experienced various music styles like pop, musicals, jazz, blues, even classic...

One of the significant events I have experienced regarding my musical path occurred during a university lecture. The lecturer demonstrated us how the Israeli music has come into existence: every immigrant took his/her musical heritage and then matched them to a Hebrew text, and voilà! Finally he put on a Ladino song from his private collection. I immediately was bewitched. Rachel, who also comes from a Bulgarian Sephardic family, immediately realized that this style fits my voice and music personality. She directed me toward this beautiful musical heritage. She also emphasized that the oud is very suitable to my voice. Oud is my favorite instrument. Its sound goes straight to the heart, it is emotional, one feels the desert, the earth, everything. The oud is considered the piano of the Middle East, because it best reflects the musical traditions of this region.

So in the end I ended up singing Sephardic music. I had it in my blood but I discovered it from outside.

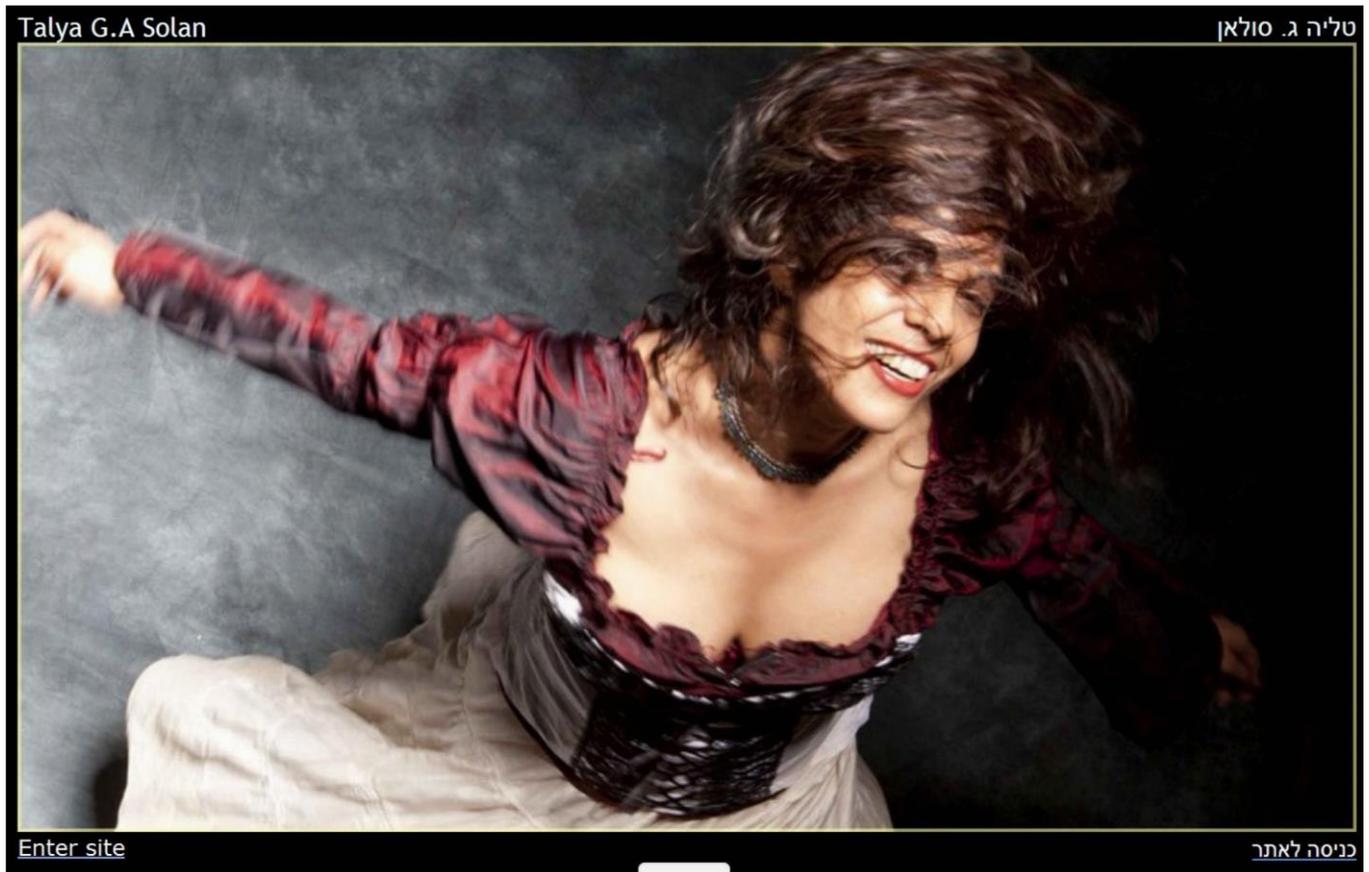


**FF:** *Outside performing what does music mean for you?*

**TS:** I need to be very economical with my time. Therefore I do not have a TV set, I do not need it. What I need I can find on the Internet and what is paramount is to have a good sound system.

There is no day passing not having music in my life. Either singing or listening to music. Listening to a good performance is a catalyst for me. I want to have it inside me.

*FF: Thank you very much for your insights! I wish you much pleasure with your upcoming concerts and I hope I can enjoy your singing live soon.*



<http://talyaga.com/>

