

Progress on Pizmonim Website

David M. Betesh

Last year, I wrote an article presenting the community with the ‘facelift’ of Pizmonim.org, the flagship website of the Sephardic Pizmonim Project. The project, dedicated in memory of Hazzan Gabriel A. Shrem, aims to preserve all aspects of Sephardic Middle Eastern liturgical culture, emphasizing the pizmonim from *Shir u'Shbaha Hallel veZimrah*, the red pizmonim book. This article is to update you on what has been accomplished over the last 12 months.

All the goals that we set forth in last year's article have been accomplished plus much more.

- The complete text of the entire pizmonim book is on the website thanks to the Sephardic Heritage Foundation, under the new leadership of David Catton, the grandson of the late Mr. Sam Catton. Now you can click on any page number to get a PDF file of the song on that page.

- The new address of Pizmonim.com has been acquired thanks to Mr. Erol Dusi, who has donated this address to us free of charge
- We established a bulletin board to keep you up to date with pizmonim of the holidays, maqamot, and other relevant parts of the project
- An automatic “Date-Parasha-Maqam” feature was created by Sam Franco and Charlie Shrem
- Commentary and notes have been written on many pizmonim. The notes include the composer, the general theme, when the pizmon is sung, and any other insight that is known about the pizmon
- A new High Holiday section has been featured in memory



of Rabbi Selim Dweck and Mr. Eddie Mishan, two very respected members of the community and contributors to this project, who have passed away near or during the High Holiday season. This section is a combination of over 60 different ancient melodies used throughout the High Holiday season. It is available on the website throughout the year

- Hundreds of old recordings from great hazzanim (trained Jewish musicians) have been posted courtesy of Morris Arking who provided the project with his personal treasured recordings
- This past summer, 20 songs were recorded by Mr. Isaac Cabasso of Beth Torah Congregation (each year since 2004, Mr. Cabasso has recorded approximately 20

pizmonim per year). Thank you Cabby!

- A new Spanish version has been established. Since this project reaches an international audience, it has been requested that webpages be translated into Spanish for the communities of Mexico, Panama, Brazil and Argentina. This has been done
- “Hazzanut Forum,” on Yahoo! Groups, has been established by Joseph Mosseri. Many insights are brought to light by members of the forum and it is definitely worthwhile joining if you haven't done so already. You can join by clicking on the button on the bottom of Pizmonim.com and following the directions
- A Tefilah (prayer) section has been established with the text

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Lucette Lagnado Visits the SCC Women's Center

Randi Shomer

Community member Lucette Lagnado, author of *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*, recently thrilled her fans when she spoke and signed copies of her book at the Sephardic Community Center's Women's Center.

Her memoir tells the story of her family's exodus from Cairo to the New World, settling in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. She was just six-years-old at the time.

"I am utterly overwhelmed, but nothing, nothing, has prepared me for the passion, the beauty, the grandeur, the tenderness, the excitement—and above all, the overwhelming, bountiful love that I encountered at 1901 Ocean Parkway," said Lagnado, upon addressing the standing-room-only audience.

She spoke enthusiastically with her guests—many of whom were members of the community she was first introduced to in 1963 upon arriving in the United States. Feeling as if she had never left Egypt, Lucette imparted that our community has completely guided her in writing this novel, recounting the life and the country she and her family had left behind. Investing her hopes and ambitions into the fabric of the novel, Lucette has had eminent success, receiving countless emails and letters, and positive reviews and praise in response to the book.

The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit begins by recreating Cairo, Egypt in the years between World War II and Gamal Abdel Nasser's rise to power. Lucette's father Leon was a boulevardier (man about town) who conducted business on the elegant terrace of Shepheard's Hotel, and in the dark bar of the Nile



Poopa Dweck and Lucette Lagnado

Hilton, dressed in his signature white sharkskin suit. With the fall of King Farouk and Nasser's nationalization of Egyptian industry, Lucette and her family lost everything. Neighborhoods of their fellow Jews were disbanded, and the Lagnados had to make their escape. Lucette and her family encountered poverty and hardships upon moving from Cairo to Paris, and to New York, in sharp contrast to the lives they left behind.



Nadim provides music for the audience



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Progress on...

of the prayers that can be sung throughout Shaharit and Mussaf of Shabbat. There are also many unique pieces of prayers recorded in this section

- Preservation: About 30 songs have been saved this year, leaving us with 190 unknown songs in the entire pizmonim book, remaining to be recorded. The list is on the website and we urge all knowledgeable people to examine it and see if they know any of the missing songs or have any of the recordings of the songs that are on the list.

I'd like to thank Rabbi Ricky Hidary who has taught me everything there is to know about designing websites. None of this could have been done if it weren't for his constant and invaluable teaching.

This project connects Jews throughout the world. To date, over 30,000 people have visited this website and I have received many emails from foreign countries like Israel, Mexico, China, the Philippines, Gibraltar, Argentina and England, telling me how much they enjoy the website and how it is used as a learning tool for the members of their respective communities. It's a phenomenon!

I experienced this phenomenon in person just this year on Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur, while they were bidding in the Sephardic Synagogue of Greater Boston, I happened to get into a conversation with the gentleman sitting right next to me (a complete stranger). He told me that he was also a college student and that he goes to Suffolk University. He said that he is from New Haven, Connecticut, and is of Lebanese ancestry. I told him that I also have heritage from Lebanon (the Zeitouni family) and asked him: "Is there a synagogue in New Haven?" He said that there were only Ashkenazi synagogues. Throughout the prayers, I noticed that he knew the melodies of the prayers pretty well. I then asked him, "How do you know the Sephardic melodies if you don't have a local synagogue that practices them?" He told me that there are a lot of recordings on the Internet that he listens to in order to be up to date with his heritage. I then commented: "Oh, that's interesting. Where on the Internet can I find this?" He told me, "Check out Pizmonim.com, they have a lot of good stuff..."

That definitely made my day! □

Lucette...



Her poignant tale documents the extraordinary upheaval through the eyes of a child. Eighty thousand Jews had lived in Egypt, and over one million Jews lived in surrounding Arab countries. Today that number is tiny.

Lucette Lagnado is a special senior writer in the New York Bureau of the Wall Street Journal. She covers hospital and health systems in the US, concentrating on the poor, the elderly and the uninsured. She has been the recipient of numerous journalism awards.

To write the book, Lucette asked herself, "How does an investigative reporter investigate her own family?" Mainly, she reached out to the people that lived in her family's world. Two years ago she returned to Cairo as a reporter, and was welcomed back to Egypt. As Lucette told her story, many Egyptian community members had tears in their eyes, recalling their own memories as well.

The event was a huge success. With delightful music provided by Nadim, hundreds of guests enjoyed a delicious array of pastries and fruit. Francine Dweck and Linda Ebani, co-chairman of the SCC's Women's Center, along with Sari Setton, organized this wonderful evening. The evening would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of the Sephardic Community Center, Marlene Ben Dayan (who knew Lucette as a child) and the Sephardic Bikur Holim, the Sephardic Angel Fund and Chehebar Foundation.

The SCC's Women's Center holds a monthly book club. On November 15th the book club will feature *The Decision* by Reuben Bibi, and on December 20th, *The History of Love* by Nicolas Krauss. Anyone interested in purchasing *The Man in the Sharkskin Suit*, or learning about upcoming events in the Center, can contact Sari Setton at (718) 954-3140, or send her an email at sari@scclive.org. □

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