



Against
the
Grain
Records

A Y R E
L I V E

AYRE: LIVE

**“It is as if she was born to sing it, or, even better,
born for each other, she and Ayre.”**

— Composer, Osvaldo Golijov

A lush fusion of Arabic, Hebrew, Sardinian, and Sephardic folk melodies and texts, Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ayre* is a brilliant example of 21st-century cultural counterpoint. This recording is the culmination of performances in Toronto for audiences at the breathtaking Ismaili Centre. Against the Grain Theatre Founding Member Miriam Khalil has now sung this technically challenging and deeply moving song cycle in numerous cities across Canada, the United States and Argentina, making this her signature piece.



Mañanita de San Juan (*Morning of St. John's Day*) 4:39

Traditional Sephardic romance

(Music and Lyrics: Traditional Sephardic romance)

Una madre comió asado (*A mother roasted her child*) 4:42

Traditional Sephardic song after *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*

Tancas serradas a muru (*Walls are encircling the land*) 3:07

Lyrics and Music by Melchiorre Murenu (Sardinia, c. 1820);

Francesco Ignazio Mannu (Sardinia, c. 1795)

Luna (*Moon*) 1:58

Music by Gustavo Santaolalla

Nani (*lullaby*) 4:42

(Traditional Sephardic lullaby)

Wa Habibi (*My love*) 6:02

Traditional Christian Arab Easter song

Aiini taqtiru (*My eyes weep*) 3:11

Traditional Christian Arab Easter song

Kun li-guitarati wataran ayyuha al-maa' (*Be a string, water, to my guitar*) 1:21

Poem by Mahmoud Darwish (from *Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky*)

Suéltate las cintas (*Untie your ribbons*) 1:42

Lyrics and Music: Gustavo Santaolalla Instruments: Voice, guitar

Yah, annah emtza'cha (*O God, where shall I find you?*) 3:48

Poem by Yehudah Halevy (c. 1112)

Ariadna en su laberinto (*Ariadne in her labyrinth*) 9:43

Lyrics: Traditional Sephardic romance

Bonus *Osvaldo Golijov pre-show speech* 9:23

Miriam Khalil, Soprano
Oswaldo Golijov, Composer

AGAINST THE GRAIN ENSEMBLE

Joanna Wu, Flute
Juan Gabriel Olivares, Clarinet
Gabriel Radford, Horn
Dave Burns, Percussion
Elmer Ferrer, Guitar
Kristan Toczko, Harp
Alexander Sevastian, Accordion
Jeremy Flower, Electronics
Carol Gimbel, Viola
Raphael Weinroth-Browne, Cello
Roberto Occhipinti, Double Bass

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Sound Engineer, Pouya Hamidi
Produced by Joel Ivany, Miriam Khalil and Against the Grain Records
Mixed by Dennis Patterson, Big Smoke Audio

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All photos, Darryl Block Photography

AYRE: LIVE

The first time I heard *Ayre*, in 2008, I was struck still. I recognized two of the pieces as I had sung them my whole life during Easter Holy week. I was moved that someone would incorporate, holy music from Arabic culture and frame it so uniquely and beautifully. I was also stunned by the use of Palestinian and Hebrew poetry intertwined into one and the use of sephardic lullabies and Sardinian protest songs intermingled together to create one unforgettable journey.

In 2016, my friend Barry Shiffman asked if I would sing *Ayre* at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. His good friend, Osvaldo Golijov would be there and would coach us through it. As a result of this serendipitous performance, *Ayre* was then programmed in numerous places, including our *Against the Grain* Theatre performance at the Ismaili Centre in Toronto when this Live recording took place.

I am so grateful for this piece and for all of those who have helped to make this recording happen. Joel Ivany, my husband, and Barry Shiffman for originally programming it and for believing in me: of course Osvaldo Golijov, for writing such an incredible song cycle; and my parents for first teaching me the songs that I would later recognize in this incredible work.

— Soprano, Miriam Khalil





IN—MANY —WORLDS AT—THE SAME—TIME

*Original interview from
the house program in 2016.*

BY NIKITA GOURSKI



In 2004, the Argentine-born composer Osvaldo Golijov wrote his song cycle *Ayre* for a voice nobody had heard before.

The voice was famous and celebrated, belonging to American soprano Dawn Upshaw, but it had never sounded like this, with rich shades of darkness and flashes of menace—even violence— intermingling with the purity and angelic stillness that was more typical of her identity as a vocalist. 🐾

Ayre—which Upshaw sang at its world premiere in 2004—required her to assume a plurality of emotional registers, while summoning, at Golijov’s urging, something darker and unexplored from within. After recording the song cycle

for Deutsche Grammophon in 2005, she told music writer John Schaefer: “I never knew I had a lot of these voices [in me until Golijov wrote the music]. I don’t understand how he knew I could even make certain sounds without hearing them first.”

When soprano Miriam Khalil first heard the recording of *Ayre*, she was instantly transfixed, both on a personal level and as a singer. Especially because some of the material wasn’t new to her. Traditional Arabic songs, “*Wa Habibi*” and “*Aiini taqtiru*,” which Golijov had arranged for the middle section of *Ayre*, had been a part of Miriam’s childhood in Ottawa ever since she and her family had settled there after emigrating from Syria. In the nation’s capital, at the Melkite Catholic Church, she heard those two songs “every single year of my life” during Easter mass. It would prove to be a valuable experience to draw on this past summer, as she plunged into *Ayre* as a performer at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

When I called Golijov to ask about Miriam’s performance in *Ayre*, he observed, “It’s very interesting. I wrote [the song cycle] with Dawn [Upshaw] so much in my mind, but Miriam takes it to a whole new place.

“The fact that she speaks Arabic from her childhood makes the Arabic sound very true. But also every other song she sings, there is this tor-
rential power in her voice. That’s something that I love. Even when she restrains it, you can sense the energy and the undercurrent, that tension between sometimes singing very intimately but with that wonderful and sweeping undercurrent.”

“The first thing [Osvaldo] told me,” Miriam recalled, “was ‘I don’t want it to sound like opera at all. These are folk songs.’”

The experience of hearing *Ayre* for the first time is both vivid and disorienting. Golijov has called it a “forest that can grow in all directions;” a diary that explores “the music I inhabit;” and a journey, in both spiritual and geographic terms. Eleven folk songs chart a pilgrimage along the Mediterranean coast, moving from southern Spain to Italy to Jerusalem (with two small detours to Argentina through original compositions by guitarist, producer, and frequent Golijov-collaborator Gustavo Santaolalla). That the cycle begins in southern Spain during a moment of cross-cultural harmony (Jews, Arabs, and Christians lived in relative peace on the Iberian Peninsula until the Alhambra Decree of 1492 expelled non-Catholics from Spain) poignantly connects with our current reality of massive dislocation and refugee migration.

Most of the melodies are based on traditional material from Jewish, Arabic, and Christian cultures. The earliest texts date back to the 12th century. The sung languages include Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish, Sardinian, and Ladino (a nearly extinct vernacular spoken by Sephardic Jews in 15th-century Spain). It's a living history of musical echoings and borrowings, of deeply personal routes of exile criss-crossing the boundaries of language, time, and the shifting ground of one's own identity. The atmospheric multiplicity of the piece is dazzling: it veers from the semi-chaos of a medieval street fair to the tenderness of a lullaby (whose quiet words belie the uncanny terror of the text); from an angry mob alive with violence, to a mother's ethereal voice in the night offering comfort to her child.

"My constant state of exile defines who I am," Golijov told me during our conversation. "Even when I was a child in Argentina, I was living in many worlds at the same time." Those worlds included European classical music, traditional Jewish and klezmer songs, as well as the new forms of tango emerging from the composer Astor Piazzolla, whose performances Golijov experienced live in Argentina.

If it was an eclectic musical education, it also imbued Golijov with the belief that authentic creation was not the exclusive provenance of European capitals and centres; that other places on the world map had a legitimate stake in the project of musical expression. Meanwhile, under the regime of General Videla, Golijov became increasingly aware that his Jewishness was incompatible with Argentina's powerful elite, and moved to Jerusalem. He lost his home, but gained a vital encounter with Arabic music and language, slotting it into the ever-expanding cosmos of his orbiting influences.

The simultaneity of Golijov's different worlds is acutely felt and heard in *Ayre*. The klezmer of American clarinetist David Krakauer, the folk songs of Lebanese superstar Fairuz, the climbing scales of jazz trumpeter Miles Davis all intermingle with traditional melodies of manifold origins. Similarly Golijov's arrangements deploy not only traditional chamber instruments but also ones like the ronroco (a small Andean guitar), and the laptop, grafting the new with the old, and setting many worlds in motion at the same time.

The perceptual mode of simultaneity manifests itself another way. In a late trilogy of songs, Golijov layers the verse of Mahmoud Darwish, the national Palestinian poet, with work from Yehudah Halevi, the 12th-century Jewish poet of exile. Nine hundred years of history evaporate as the Jewish poet from the medieval era and the eloquent voice of the nationless Palestinian people seem to recognize each other—suspended in a human oneness that is simultaneously solid and dissolving, of two worlds at once. 🍷

Nikita Gourski is a Toronto-based editor, writer and opera enthusiast. He hails from Belarus.

TRANSLATIONS



1. Mañanita era, mañanita de San Juan (Morning of St. John's Day)

Text: Traditional Sephardic Romance

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

Music based on Sephardic street calls.

Mañanita era, mañanita de San Juan
Cuando Morod y Cristianos salían a guerrear
Guerreaban y morían
Quinientos de cada parte

In the morning of St John's Day
Moors and Christians went out to war
They were warring, they were dying
Five hundred on each side.

Cautivaron a Rondale
Almirante de las mares
Que se le rompió la espada
Ye nel medio del combate
El se vido en la prisone
Y se puso a llorar

Rondale, admiral of the seas,
Was taken captive.
His sword broke
and in the middle of the battle
He found himself in prison
and started to cry.

Oyido l'habia l'infanta
Desde su alto castiyo
"No yores Rondale
ni te querad hazer male
casa te con migo mis viñas y caudales
darte yo sien marcos de oro
si te cazares con migo."

The princess heard him
from the heights of her castle:
"Don't cry, Rondale,
don't harm yourself
I'll give you 100 gold marks and
Whatever else you want
You'll marry me, my vineyards and brooks."

'Mal Fuego queme tus viñas
Tus viñas y tus hogares
En Paris tengo mi esposa
con dinero ya hogares.
Yo con eya, m'he de cazare."

"May bad fire burn your vineyards
Your brooks and your homes
I have a wife in Paris
with money and homes
that's the one I marry"

Como eso oyerá l'infanta
Lo mandara a matare

When the princess heard this
She had him killed.

2. Y Una Madre Comió Aasado (A Mother Roasted her Child)

Lyrics and Music: Trad. Sephardic song after Jeremiah's Lamentations

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

Y una madre comió asado
y a su hijo el arregalado

And a mother roasted
and ate her cherished son:

miri madre los mis ojos
que tanta ley meldí con ellos

"Look at my eyes, mother.
I learned the law with them

miri madre mi frente
que tefillines pusi en ella

Look at my forehead, mother,
I wore the phylacteries there

miri madre mi boca
que tanta ley meldi con ella

Look at my mouth, mother:
I learned the law with it."

3. Tancas Serradas a Muru (Walls are Encircling the Land)

Lyrics and Music by Francesco Ignazio Mannu (Sardinia, ca. 1795)

Translation: Remo Bodei

Tancas Serradas a muru
Fattas a sefferr' afferra.
Si su Chelu fid in terra,
L'haian serradu puru!

Walls are encircling the land
Seized with greed and in haste,
If Heaven was on Earth
They would grab it too!

Procurade e moderare,
Barones, sa tirannia,
Chi si no, pro vida mia,
Torrades a pe' in terra!

Moderate your tyranny,
Barons, otherwise,
I swear for my own life,
That we'll unhorse you.

Declara est gia sa gherra
Contra de sa prepotenzia,
E cominzat sa passienza
In su pobulu a mancare

War has been declared
Against your prepotency
The People are losing their patience.

4. Luna (Moon)

Music by Gustavo Santaolalla (Instrumental)

5. Nani (lullaby)

Traditional Sephardic Lullaby

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

Ay, dúrmete mi alma,
Dúrmete mi vista,
Ay, que tu padre viene,
Con mucha alegría.

Sleep my sweetheart, sleep...
Sleep, apple of my eye.
Your father is coming,
And his spirits are high.

Ay, avrimex mi dama,
Avrimex la puerta.
Que vengo cansado
De arar las huertas.

Open the door, wife.
Open the door
Because I'm coming
Tired from ploughing the fields.

Avrir no vos avro
no venix cansado,
Sino que venix
De onde nuevo amor.

I will not open to you.
You are not tired.
I know you are coming
From the house of your new love.

6. Wa Habibi (My Love)

Lyrics: Traditional Christian Arab Easter Song

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

Music based on traditional Christian Arab and Muslim Arab melodies.

Wa habibi, wa habibi
Ayyu halin anta fih?
Man ra'aka fashajaka
Anta, anta al muftadi?

My Love, what is the sin of
our times and our children?
These wounds have no cure.

Ya habibi, ayyu zanbin hammal a'adlu banih?
Fa'athaduka jirahin laysa fiha minshifa'!

My Love, My Love
What has befallen you?
Who saw you and grieved for you,
You who are righteous?

7. 3aini Taqtiru (My Eyes Weep)

Music and Lyrics: Traditional Christian Arab Easter Song

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

3aini taqtiru wa laa tathbutu
li 'annahu la qarara illa an yarhama
wa yanthura Al-rabbu min al-sama'
Da3awtu bi-ismika ya rabbi
Isma3a sawti
La tahjuba uthnuka
3an istighathati
iqtarib yawma ad3uk.

My eyes weep without pause
For there is no rest
Until God reveals Himself and gazes from the sky
I raised my prayers in Your name,
O God
Do not withhold your ear
Listen to my voice and come today.

8. Kun Li-Guitari Wataran Ayyuha Al-Maa' (Be a String, Water, to my Guitar)

Poem by Mahmoud Darwish

Translation: Clarissa Burt

From "Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky"

Kun li guitarati wataran ayyha al-maa'
qad wasala'l fatihun wa madha'l fatihunal qudama

Be a string, water, to my guitar,
Conquerors come, conquerors go...

Minassa3bi an atathakara wajhi fil maraya
fa kun anta thakirati kai ara ma faqadat

It's getting hard to remember my face in the mirrors.
Be memory for me
So I can see what I've lost.

man ana ba3da hatha rrahil ijama3i
li sakhraton tahmilu ismi fouqa hithabin
tutillu 3alla mamada wan qada
Sab3u ma'ati 3amin tushayizuni khalfa souri'l madina
3abathan yastadiru'l zaman
li'unqitha madyian min burhatin
tabdu'l aana taarikha manfaya fiya
wa fil akharin

Who am I after these paths of exodus?
I own a boulder that bears my name
On a tall bluff overlooking what has come to an end.
Seven hundred years escort me beyond the city walls.
Time turns around in vain to save
my past from a moment that gives birth
to the history of my exile
in others and in myself.

Kun li guitarati wataran ayyha al-maa'
qad wasala'l fatihun wa madha'l fatihunal qudama

Be a string, water, to my guitar.
Conquerors come, conquerors go...

junuban, shu3uban, turammimu ayamaha fi
rukami' tahawul.

Heading south as nations decompose
on the compost of change.

A3rifu man kuntu ams,
famatha akun fi ghadin tahta rayati Columbus el
Atlasya?

I know who I was yesterday,
But who will I be tomorrow
Under the Atlantic flags of Columbus?

Kun li guitarati wataran ayyha al-maa'
La misra fi misra
la fasa fi fasa wa shamu tan'a
la saqra fi rayati'l ahli
la nahra sharqa nakhil il muqasr bi khuyuli'l
magholi' sarai3ati

Be a string to my guitar, water, be a string.
There is no Egypt in Egypt, no
Fez in Fez, and Syria is too far away.
No hawk on the flag of my people,
No river running east of a palm tree besieged
By the Mongols' swift horses.

Fi ay Andalusin antahi
ha huna am hunak?

In which Andalusia did I meet my end?
Here, in this place? Or there?

sa'arifu ani halaktu wa anni taraktu
huna' khaira mafi: maadiyan

I know I've died, leaving behind what is
Best of what is mine in this place: my past.

Lam yabqa ghaira ghitarati
Kun li guitarati wataran ayyha al-maa'

I've got nothing left but my guitar.
Be a string, water, to my guitar.

qad wasala'l fatihun wa madha'l fatihunal qudama

Conquerors come, conquerors go.

9. Suéltate las Cintas (Untie your Ribbons)

Lyrics and Music: Gustavo Santaolalla

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

Suéltate las cintas
de tu cabello y la falda
y devoremos la noche
hasta el alba

Untie the ribbons of your hair and your skirt:
let's devour the night until dawn comes, just like this,

Así, Ay Muchachita descalza

Barefoot girl.

No necesitamos cielo
si vos tenés a mi espalda
y la cintura enlazada

We don't need the sky when you have my back
and I embrace your waistline, just like this.

Así, Ay, Tu cintura de plata

Your silvery waistline.

Si mañana en el pueblo
te ríes sola, espera
No digas el secreto
en que me llevas

If tomorrow, in the village, you laugh by yourself, wait,
keep the secret in which you carry me, just like this.

Así, Ay Junco, flor, miel ya arena

Weed, flower, honey and sand.

10. Yah, Anna Emtzacha (Oh, Where Shall I find You?)

Poem by Yehudah Halevy (ca. 1112)

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

Music based on Sephardic calls to prayer

VOICE 1

Y-ah An nah! Em-tza-e-cha? M'-ko-m'-cha Na-a-lah
Ve Ne-e-lam Y-ah An-nah! M'kom-cha Ne-e-lam Y-ah
An Em-tza Y-ah An-hah!

Oh, where shall I find You?
Your place is high and hidden.
And where shall I not find You?
Your glory fills the World.

VOICE 2

Y-ah An Em-tza-e cha. Ke-bo-de-cha Ma-le O-lam
Ma-le O

I have sought Your nearness.
I called upon You with all my heart.
And in going out to meet You
I found You coming toward me.

11. Ariadna en su Laberinto (Ariadne in Her Labyrinth)

Lyrics: Traditional Sephardic Romance

Translation: Hamete Benengeli

Music: Quodlibet of traditional and original Sephardic Melodies.

Lloro por vos cava llero
Que vos vas y me dexax.

"I cry because you leave me"