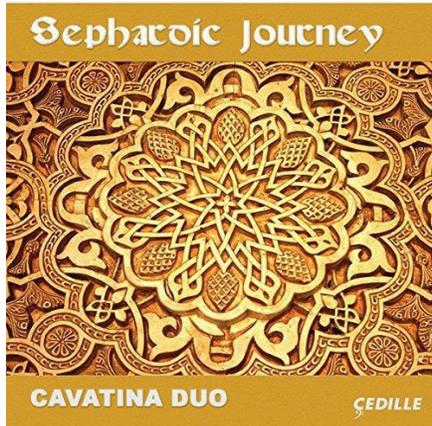


## In Celebration of a Lost Culture: Sephardic Journey by the Cavatina Duo



NewMusicBuff - Allan Cronin

This tasty little disc of world premieres commissioned through grants to Cedille Records in Chicago consists of new works which celebrate the culture of the Sephardim, the Jews of southwestern Europe, primarily Spain. It both memorializes and resurrects the rich music of this all but lost culture. In the last few years we have seen a growing interest in this culture through settings of texts in the original Ladino language as well as in the melodies which sprang from their folk traditions.

The Cavatina Duo consists of Eugenia Moliner, flute and Denis Agabagic, guitar. Moliner is originally from Spain and Agabagic is originally from Yugoslavia (now Bosnia-Herzegovina) and they are husband and wife. Both have a strong interest in the folk musics of their respective cultures and in exploring other folk music cultures. Their previous album for Cedille, The Balkan Project, similarly demonstrates their affection and scholarship for the cultures of that region of the world.

Five composers were commissioned for this project: [Alan Thomas](#) (1967- ), Joseph V. Williams II (1979- ), Carlos Rafael Rivera (1970- ), David Leisner (1953- ) and Clarice Assad (1978- ). This is one of those wonderful crowd funded efforts through Kickstarter.

Thomas' contribution adds a cello (played by David Cunliffe) to the mix for this Trio Sephardi in three movements each of which is based on a traditional Sephardic song. The piece makes good use of the vocal qualities of the songs quoted and the lyrics seem to exist as a subtext even though they are not sung here.

Isabel by [Joseph V. Williams](#) is a sort of homage to Isabel de los Olives y López, a Sephardic woman who lived during the time of the Spanish Inquisition. She outwardly converted to Catholicism but lived secretly as a Jew. One can hardly miss the sad irony of this tale of religious intolerance from the 15th

century and its relevance for today. This piece is based on a resistance song which masquerades as a love song, again a metaphor for our times. It is scored for flute and guitar.

We move again into the realm of the trio, this time with violin (played by Desiree Ruhstrat), for this piece by [Carlos Rafael Rivera](#) called, "Plegaria y Canto". This is the most extensive single movement amongst all the works on the disc and is a deeply affecting and dramatic piece for which the composer's notes provide insights.

The last two pieces utilize the forces of the [Avalon Quartet](#) for whom this is their second appearance on the Cedille label. Their first disc, Illuminations, was released last year. They are currently in residence at Northwestern University and Cedille does a great job of promoting the work of talented Chicago area musicians.

Love and Dreams of the Exile is [David Leisner](#)'s poignant contribution. Its three movements tell an aching tale of love, pain and, ultimately, transcendence.

[Clarice Assad](#) is a Brazilian composer too little known in the U.S. She is indeed related to the famed Assad family of musicians and she clearly has as abundant a talent. Her Sephardic Suite concludes this program with this three movement essay on love and relationships.

Bill Maylone is the engineer with editing by Jean Velonis and the executive producer is James Ginsburg. Photography of the Alhambra Palace by Maureen Jameson graces the cover. Design is by Nancy Bieshcke.

This is music of an oppressed culture and it is tempting to look upon the creative impetus which oppression sometimes seems to provide but the message here is one of sadness and nostalgia but also of hope. It is perhaps a tribute to the ultimate triumph over said oppression even if it took 500 years. There is some comfort and healing to be had from the celebration of this lost culture and that is the triumph of this disc.