



The Telling

Into the Melting Pot

**East Riding Theatre
Sunday 26 May 7.30pm**

Into the Melting Pot

Suzanne Ahmet Blanca
Patience Tomlinson Queen Isabella (*offstage voice*)

Clare Norburn *singer*
Avital Raz *singer*
Emily Baines *recorders*
Giles Lewin *oud*
Jean Kelly *harp*

Nicholas Renton *director*
Clare Norburn *playwright*
Natalie Rowland *lighting designer*

Supported by Arts Council England, The Shores Charitable Trust and Unity Theatre



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Into the Melting Pot

Yefe Nof	Lyrics Judah Halevi 12th century music Yinon Neeman 1936-65
Virgen Madre gloriosa	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 340
La Serena	Sephardic traditional song
Rosas das rosas	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 10
Santa Maria Amar	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 7
A Madre de Jesu Cristo (<i>Instrumental</i>)	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 302
Maria Matrem	from <i>Llibre vermell</i>
Lamma Bada	Andalusian/Arabic traditional song
O que diz que servir ome (<i>Instrumental</i>)	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 311
Mui Grandes noit e dia	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 57
	<i>interval</i>
Pues que tu reinna del cielo	from <i>Cancionero de Palacio</i>
La Rosa Enflorese (Los Biblicos cantan)	Sephardic traditional song
Por razon tenno d'obeder (<i>Instrumental</i>)	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 113
Noches, noches	Sephardic traditional song
Quen crever na Virgen Santa	Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 107
Ondas do Mar	Martin Codax 13th-century Galician Troubadour from <i>Cantigas d'Amigo</i>
Una ora e la ventana	Sephardic song
Morena me llaman	Sephardic traditional song

Into the Melting Pot is set in July 1492, in the home of a Jewess, Blanca. Time is running out in the face of Ferdinand and Isabella's edict that Jews must convert to Catholicism or leave.

But in a sense this is the story of any man and woman in any time. The tools and language of persecution don't change much down the centuries. And even in the small amount of time since writing this show in autumn 2017, *Into the Melting Pot* has gained a new resonance in the face of the rise of anti-Semitism, the stories of individuals from the Windrush generation and enforced migration from Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine and Gaza. Things haven't moved on that much since 1492, it seems...

In the early thirteenth century, what we now know as modern Spain was a patchwork of five independent states (Castile, Leon, Aragon, Navarre and Granada). While each region and individual cities had different ethnic and religious allegiances, for much of the period different religious and ethnic communities lived side by side. Jews and Muslims had roots in the peninsula going back to the seventh century.

Blanca's story echoes down the centuries, with obvious resonances in Nazi Germany but also earlier: the pogroms of 1391, when thousands of Jews were killed across Iberia – and also the displacement and dispossession of Palestinian homes in 1948.

Yet, back in the Middle Ages, for centuries, Jews, Muslims and Christians largely lived side by side on the Iberian Peninsula. Many had a fierce loyalty to their homeland, identifying with the rich cultural melting pot just as strongly as their own faith. For example, many Jewish women took traditional local names (Juana, Leonor, Isabella – and our heroine Blanca) rather than traditional biblical ones.

The music in tonight's show largely centres around two traditions: Alfonso's *Cantigas de Santa Maria* and the Sephardic Jewish tradition, which are songs of love and longing. In between are Arabic traditional songs; the earliest song cycle by thirteenth-century troubadour, Martin Codax from Galicia (the north-West corner of Iberia); and Christian pilgrim songs from the *Libre Vermell* (associated with the monastery of Montserrat).

The Sephardic songs are part of an oral tradition. Many of the songs date back to the period after the expulsion of the Spanish Jewish diaspora as they settled in Eastern Europe and North Africa. Written in Ladino, a Spanish dialect, these songs connect them with the country they still saw as their homeland.

Alfonso el Sabio ('The wise')

When I started structuring the programme, I had an idealised view of King Alfonso X of Castile and Leon (born 1221; reigned 1252-1284). I knew about him first and foremost because of his musical legacy: the collection of 427 *Cantigas de Santa Maria* – songs in praise of the Virgin Mary.

My programme notes of the past refer to him as 'a relatively liberal King, whose court included a mixture of Muslim, Jewish and Christian musicians'. The music of the *Cantigas* is indeed infused by this melting pot of cultures and musical languages. The fact that Jewish and Muslim musicians were welcome at court was indeed in stark contrast to the rest of Europe which was largely taken up with the Crusades against the Muslims, while Jews were expelled from many European countries, including France, Germany and England.

But Alfonso's 'liberalism' was in part a political expediency. He inherited a patchwork land of ethnic and political tensions. But also his tolerance only went so far, insisting that Jews had distinguishing marks on their heads: 'You're different – so wear your difference loudly'. We are within touching distance of Nazi Germany. And today in the UK, like Blanca, we try to convince ourselves: 'it can't happen – won't happen here – not here'. Can we really be that sure?

Clare Norburn

Yefe Nof

Landscape of beauty, joy to the world,
Headquarters of a sovereign multitude.
For you my soul yearns,
From the far, far West.
Great compassion is stirred within me
By remembrance of future past,
Your glory, which was revealed,
Your dwelling places, doomed by the sword.

Virgen Madre gloriosa (Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 340)

Glorious Virgin Mother

God's daughter and wife

Holy, noble, precious,

Who can know how to praise you, or who is capable of praising you?

For God who is light and day

Because of our nature

We would not see his face

If it were not for you, who are the dawn.

La Serena (Sephardic traditional song)

If the sea were made of milk

I would become a fisherman

And fish my misery

With words of love.

Rosas das rosas (Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 10)

Rose of roses, flower of flowers,

Woman of women, Lady of ladies.

Rose of beauty and fine appearance

And flower of happiness and pleasure,

lady of most merciful bearing,

And Lord for relieving all woes and cares.

Santa Maria Amar (Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 7)

[This story tells how Holy Mary protected the pregnant abbess who, weeping, had fallen asleep before her altar]

We must love and beg the grace of Holy Mary so that the shameless devil lead us not into sin and error.

I shall recount a miracle that took place

Which the Mother of God performed for an abbess

Because, as I learned much later, she was devoted to her.

The devil deceived her, so she became pregnant

by a man from Bologna, who was the steward of the convent

A man who should have received and kept secret her act and misdeed.

The nuns were gleeful to hear of this
because the abbess would not allow them the slightest transgression.
And they had some malice towards her.....
[the nuns report her to the Bishop]

Mariam Matrem (from *Llibre vermell*)

Maria, pure virgin mother, we lift you high
We raise you to Jesus Christ in harmony.
Maria, refuge, defend us,
Jesus, total refuge, hear us

Lamma Bada (Andalusian/Arabic traditional song)

When she started to sway
her beauty drove me to distraction
I am a prisoner of her eyes
She is a tender branch, swaying in the breeze.

Mui Grandes noit e dia (Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 57)

Night and day we must give hearty thanks to Holy Mary.

In Montserrat the Virgin performed a wonder
Which will be heard of far and wide
If she gives me power.
It was for a good lady
Who on the wondrous great mountain
There went down to a spring
With all her company
To dine and rest before going on their way.

As they sat eating beside that spring
Down from the mountain
Came rushing Reimund, a fierce bandit and knight.
He and his band stole all they had
And left them without a farthing.
Night and day we must give hearty thanks to Holy Mary.

[The subsequent verses tell of the lady arriving at Montserrat and the monks hearing her story. The prior rides off to find the bandits. In their gluttony, the robbers have choked on the chicken bones in the food they have stolen. They pray for forgiveness and vow never to rob good Christians again.]

Pues que tu reina del cie (anon)

text: Juan del Encina (from *Cancionero de Palacio*)

Since you, Queen of Heaven, are worth so much,
Grant us a remedy for our ills.

You who reigns with the King
Of that Heavenly realm;
You, light of our law,
Light of the human race;
Who, for cleansing our disgrace, helps us so,
And grants us a remedy for our ills.

La Rosa Enflorese (Sephardic traditional song)

The nightingales sing, singing with love
And my spirit is consumed, increasing my sorrow.
The rose blooms in the month of May
My soul darkens suffering with love.
Come quickly, my dove, come quickly to me,
Come quickly, my soul – for I shall die.

Noches, noches (Sephardic traditional song)

Nights, nights, good nights
Nights are for falling in love.

In my bed I am restless.
Tossing, turning like a fish in the sea,
Oh, like a fish in the sea.
There were three little sisters,
All three equally alluring,
Oh, all three equally alluring.

Quen crever na Virgen Santa (Cantiga de Santa Maria no. 107)

The Holy Virgin will aid those in distress if they believe in Her.

Concerning this, the Mother of Mercy performed a miracle, in the city of Segovia...

A Jewess who was caught up in a crime and arrested
was taken to be hurled from a high and rugged cliff...

She cried 'Mary..... come to my aid!'

The Jews pushed her over the cliff, shouting 'There she goes!'

But the Virgin came to her... She did not perish, but fell clear of the rocks...

Ondas do Mar (from *Cantigas d'Amigo*)

Waves of the sea of Vigo, Have you seen him?

Pray to God, he comes back soon!

Una ora e la ventana (Sephardic song)

An hour by the window

Half an hour on the balcony

Your sister's a snake

Oh, she won't let us, oh! she won't let us make love.

Morena me llaman (Sephardic traditional song)

They call me the dark one – Though I was born fair,

Parading about my beauty – I lost my colour.

The Telling

The Telling attempts to break new ground, where new writing and music collide; it is also known for intimate performances of carols and medieval/folk concerts in pubs.

Pre-pandemic, in 2019/20 the group undertook 28 performances including at Buxton International Music Festival, Music at Oxford, Little Missenden Festival, Brighton Early Music Festival, Newbury Spring Festival, Keele Concerts Society, Kingston Early Music, Totnes Early Music Society, and collaborations with other groups including The Sixteen. The Telling also spearheaded its own early music festival in Liverpool.

During 2020/21, The Telling received critical praise for online arthouse films of concert-plays. Most notably *Vision* by Clare Norburn, which follows the extraordinary medieval Abbess Hildegard of Bingen played by Teresa Banham, was selected by *The Guardian* as one of the top three online summer music highlights alongside the Salzburg and Edinburgh Festivals. In 2021, *I Spie*, starring Dominic Marsh, Danny Webb and Alice Imelda, toured the UK and was released on film. The Telling delivered online workshops which began with weekly singing sessions that ran for over a year throughout the 2020/21 lockdowns.

In 2022, The Telling was shortlisted by the European early music organisation REMA for two awards and was selected for BBC's The Space Pitch Perfect scheme to develop an online play with music, *Love in the Lockdown*, and pitch

it for national BBC radio. Written by Clare Norburn, *Love in the Lockdown* starred Alec Newman and Rachael Stirling, and was rehearsed and filmed entirely on the actors' and musicians' own recording devices from their own homes. It was shortlisted in six categories for the SceneSaver Awards at which Nicholas Renton won the Best Director award.

The Telling records for First Hand Records: the first CD, *Gardens of Delight*, was selected for *BBC Music Magazine's* April 2019 playlist; a second CD, *Secret Life of Carols*, reached number 25 in the Classical Charts in December 2019 and was included in *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail* and Classic FM's lists of Best Christmas Albums. The most recent CD consists of the soundtracks of the *Vision* and *Unsung Heroine* concert-plays, released in memory of Ariane Prüssner, which received a four-star review from *BBC Music Magazine*.

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