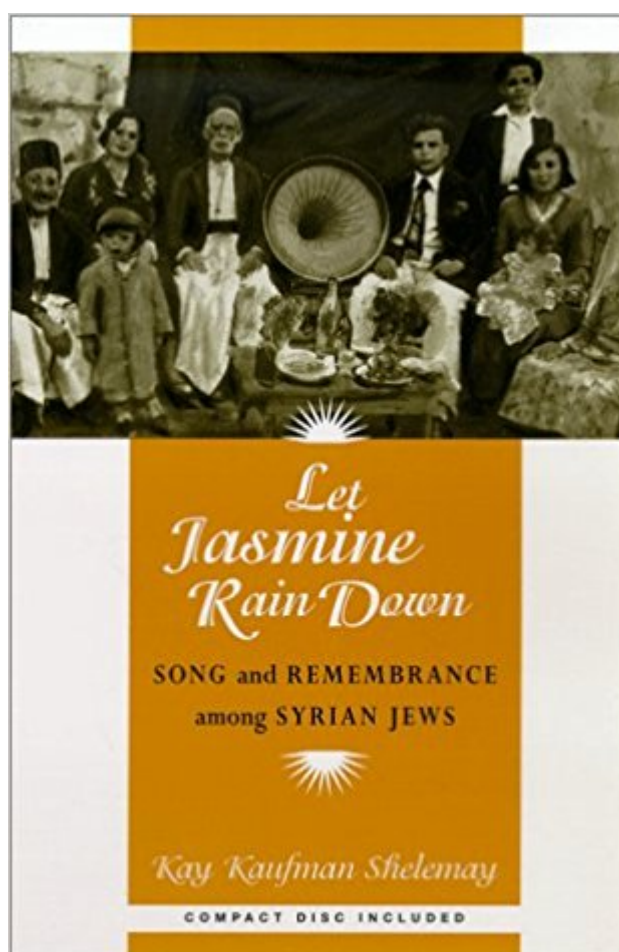


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# Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song And Remembrance Among Syrian Jews (Chicago Studies In Ethnomusicology)



## Synopsis

When Jews left Aleppo, Syria, in the early twentieth century and established communities abroad, they carried with them a repertory of songs (pizmonim) with sacred Hebrew texts set to melodies borrowed from the popular Middle Eastern Arab musical tradition. *Let Jasmine Rain Down* tells the story of the pizmonim as they have continued to be composed, performed, and transformed through the present day; it is thus an innovative ethnography of an important Judeo-Arabic musical tradition and a probing contribution to studies of the link between collective memory and popular culture. Shelemay views the intersection of music, individual remembrances, and collective memory through the pizmonim. Reconstructing a century of pizmon history in America based on research in New York, Mexico, and Israel, she explains how verbal and musical memories are embedded in individual songs and how these songs perform both what has been remembered and what otherwise would have been forgotten. In confronting issues of identity and meaning in a postmodern world, Shelemay moves ethnomusicology into the domain of memory studies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Presently, two books examining the music of the large community of Syrian Jews living in Brooklyn are available: one by Mark L. Kligman focuses more on liturgy, cantors, and musical structure; the earlier and more interesting volume, reviewed here, is by Kay Kaufman Shelemay. Presenting a more inclusive anthropological study, she presents how musical compositions, both traditional and

newly produced, are intrinsic to the daily life and continuity of the community. While the lyrics are in Hebrew, melodies follow Arabic maqams (modal systems) and, indeed, aesthetics and values are firmly rooted in Arab culture as well as Jewish. The tunes are borrowed from popular Arab songs of earlier generations (for example, of Abd al-Wahhab) and sometimes well-known (and surprising) Western melodies. Besides sung in the synagogue, the pizmonim (songs), including paraliturgical hymns and improvisational introductions, are heard at home and less formal settings to honor individuals and to celebrate holidays, births, weddings, circumcisions, bar/bat mitzvahs, and other important events. The book discusses history, immigration, and the patriarchal separations in music (men compose and are cantors; women may perform at home; and following orthodox ways--in Judaism and Islam--women sit in a distant, separate section in the synagogue). New lyrics are tailored to incorporate names of those being honored as well as to reference the holiday or event. Particular maqams are likewise prescribed. Older songs, ingrained from childhood upbringing or from those spongelike teen years, become nostalgic and serve to bond and identify. The songs are essentially prayers. A 64-minute CD with 17 examples are included, along with lyrics in Hebrew and English; moreover, some, appearing as chapter preludes, have the melodic score. With thorough, multifaceted analysis, Shelemay richly describes this unique community and the essential role of Judeo-Arabic music. When Jewish music is typically associated with Ashkenazy and European Klezmer traditions, it is good to learn about and listen to different Jewish cultural styles. This is an excellent, well-written, and important book.

Kay Kaufman book brings to light the Syrian Aleppo Jewish community so unique in their tradition's of adapting the Maqam system to the Shabbat Service's, Weekly Torah reading, to the Yearly Jewish Festivals, and Piyutim dating back to the 1600 CE to Rabbi Israle Najara...

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