

## Lesson 8:

# *Hafla!* Sephardic and Middle Eastern Music

Appendix C – Note to Teacher  
(Background information on *piyutim*)

## Background Information for Teachers

*Piyutim* are Jewish liturgical poems. “The earliest *piyutim* were composed in the first centuries of the Common Era in the land of Israel, but this body of literature grew considerably in Spain, beginning in the 10th century, with prolific *paytanim* (liturgical poets) such as Joseph Ibn Abitur, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Isaac Ibn Ghayyat, Moses Ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, and Abraham Ibn Ezra, among others. Although this was a particularly productive period for *piyut*, the composition and musical arrangement of *piyutim* has continued until today in Jewish communities around the world.

While the tradition of *piyut* began as a way to enhance or adorn Jewish liturgy, it has evolved beyond the scope of formal prayer to serve many dimensions of Jewish ritual and life. Today, *piyutim* are recited in a variety of contexts: prayer services, individual prayer, life cycle events, communal celebrations, etc. Some *piyutim* have become a standard part of the Jewish liturgy (e.g. Adon Olam), while others are reserved for lifecycle events or Jewish holidays and festivals. The body of melodies that accompany *piyut* texts is incredibly varied and rich, influenced by traditional music from countries around the world where Jews settled.”

(From <http://piyutnorthamerica.org/what-it-piyut/>)

These poems and other Jewish traditional music played an important role in the development of modern Mizrachi music. Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi explain that there are links between the traditional Jewish music of the Arab world (*piyut*) and modern Mizrachi music: “For example, tunes drawn from traditional repertoires, such as songs from the diwan (Yemenite Jewish religious poetry) became popular Mizrachi songs.” (From *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* By Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi pg 193). When listening to early Mizrachi music, you can often find *piyutim* and modern Mizrachi songs on the same album.