1 Si La Mar  Turkey
Originally from Spain, the variants of this very popular song are many as are the spelling of its words. “If the sea were made of milk I would become a fisherman fishing for my sorrows with little words of love...Give me your hand, oh dove, so I may climb to your nest. It is a curse that you sleep alone, I come to sleep with you!”

2 Chatanu L’faneca  Jerusalem, Morocco
Sung four times throughout Yom Kippur this “piyyut” (religious poem) is an alphabetic acrostic whose melody originates in the Sephardic community of Jerusalem. “Master of Mercy, we have sinned before you, have mercy upon us.”

3 Tzur Mishelo  Greece
Sung as a prologue to the Grace after Meals on Sabbath and Festivals, this lovely hymn dates back to the 12th century. The melody is borrowed from an old Greek tune that I learned from the famous troubadour, Nikos Gounaris. “Let us bless the Lord whose food we have eaten. Let us thank Him with chanting lips. There is no one holy like our Lord!”

4 Shalom Aleychem  Greece
As a young child in Athens, I heard the opening strains of this tune from Gounari as well. Cross-cultural borrowing, so common with the Hassidim, is something I used to make my favorite singer’s music “Jewish”! The 7/8 rhythm makes this setting of a universally used Sabbath table hymn quite unique. “Peace unto you, o ministering angels from on high, from the Ruler of rulers, the Holy One, blessed is He.”

5 Adio, Querida  Sephardic tradition
This beautiful song about unrequited love has become popular throughout the Sephardic world. The music seems to have been borrowed from Verdi’s “La Traviata”, the aria, “Addio del passato.” “When your mother bore you, she did not give you a heart to love someone else. Goodbye, my dear one, I do not want life, you have embittered it so!”

6 Fel Shara  Egypt
A song sung in Arabic, French, Italian, Ladino and English, this song was a big crossover hit for the famous folk singer, Odetta! I paraphrase the first two stanzas; “The girl with the beautiful eyes and face like the moon that lit up the boulevard would have none of my advances because her father was nearby at the station...”

7 D’ror Yikra  Yemen
A well-known Yemenite setting for this Sabbath Table Song is given a fresh reading by our band, ZAHAV! “He will proclaim freedom to son and daughter and protect them as His beloved... sit and rest on the Sabbath day!”
Maz’l  A. Ellstein
With words by Molly Picon, this beautiful Yiddish theater song is an exquisite example of pathos and longing. “Good fortune comes once in a while for others, will it ever cross my doorway?”

Der Alter Tzigayner  A. Ellstein
This romanticized version of the Gypsy violinist is typical of the Yiddish theater and Ellstein takes it to its most passionate extreme. “There, under the free skies on the mountaintop sits a little hut; and inside, an old Gypsy. From there come the sweetest sounds that cry in minor and then build to a rhythmic Gypsy melody!”

Noches, noches  Turkey
Although there are many version of this song, I find this one most passionate in its simplicity. “Nights, lovely nights are for making love. Oh, what nights that seem to never arrive as I toss in my bed like a fish in the sea.”

Shab’chi Yerushalayim  Avihu Medinah
Composed and sung by the Jerusalemite, Avihu Medinah, this song continues to be sung throughout the Sephardic world. “Acclaim God o Jerusalem, Praise your Lord o Zion!”

Una Matica De Ruda  Turkey
The mother’s dilemma, “A sprig of rue, who gave it to you, my daughter?” She already knew the answer, “It was a young man who fell in love with me.”

Shir Hama’alot  Greece
Taken from a Greek song by Ari San, I have adapted it to this text that can be used at Shabbat, Festival and other happy occasions before the Grace after Meals. “When the Lord returned the captives of Zion we were as in a dream...They that sow in tears shall reap in Joy!”

La Comida, La Manana  Turkey
This song in a fast 7/8 Ushkadara rhythm was translated from the Turkish into Ladino in the 1940’s. “The morning meal, in the afternoon I will bring back so that my mother will know that I wish to marry you!”

Nehawend Taqsim  Armenia
I asked the oud genius, John Bilezikjian, to take a few minutes and improvise something on his instrument that we might put on the album. You are left to your own quite thoughts as you listen to this master do what he was born to do. The name means, “Improvisation in the mode, Nehawend.”
During the extraordinary period during which Christian, Islamic and Jewish cultures coexisted harmoniously in Spain, the cross-cultural borrowing of stories and ideas led to the unique body of literature from which the majority of songs in this album are taken. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 the Sephardic culture continued to develop and took on stories and added language, to form what we now call Ladino, from the countries of diaspora in which the Jew found himself. The richness of modality, complex rhythms and ornamentation of my mother country, Greece and her environs, combined with my voice grounded in both East and West and the magnificent instrumental ensemble, ZAHAV, bring you nearer to “MY WORLD” whose melodies are the fire of my soul.

Alberto Mizrahi

THE CAST: John Bilezikjian, oud / Richie Fudoli, winds / Larry Gray, bass
Fareed Haque, guitar / Lyon Leifer, bansuri / Howard Levy, piano
Kalyan Pathak, percussion / Stuart Rosenberg, mandolin, violin, strings
Miriam Sturm, violin (Maz’l) / Alex Udvary, tsimbal / Paul Wertico, percussion, drums

Recorded by: Roger Heiss at Tone Zone Recording, Chicago, IL
Additional Recording: Stuart Rosenberg at Long Dog, Evanston, IL
Produced by: Alberto Mizrahi and Stuart Rosenberg
Package Design by Michael Cardinal

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"Charismatic and fearless, unabashedly emotional"
- London Times

"A phenomenal solo voice that conveys power and fervor"
- Chicago Tribune

1. Si La Mar  2. Chatanu L'fanecha  3. Tzur Mishelo
4. Shalom Aleychem  5. Adio, Querida  6. Fel Shara
12. Una Matica De Ruda  13. Shir Hama'alot
14. La Comida, La Manana  15. Nehawend Taqsim

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