

In 1541, King Henry VIII got word that a number of Jews of Portuguese extraction were living in London. In response, he ordered that all “New Christians,” a term used to refer to Jews who had recently converted to Christianity, be imprisoned. As musicologist B. Glenn Chandler explains in his article “The Lupo Legacy: Agents for Change,” “although Henry had actually encouraged Jews to settle in England, it was still illegal, and on occasion there were waves of anti-Semitism.”

What Henry didn’t realize was that law enforcement would imprison many of his court musicians in this round up. When he found out, he ordered their release, and they were, as Chandler writes, “quietly slipped out of the country until the incident blew over.”

One of the court musicians died in prison. Among the witnesses to his will was his colleague publicly known as Ambrose Lupo. But, as Chandler explains, that’s not the name Ambrose used to sign the will: “Interestingly, the probate record lists the dead man as Anthonii Moyses and Ambrose as Ambrosius deolmaleyex. In the Jewish tradition Anthonii Moyses means Anthony son of Moses, and deolmaleyex is thought to be a clerk’s misinterpretation of de Olmaliach, or de Almaliach, a form of the Sephardic name Elmaleh.”

We’ll never know exactly why Ambrose signed the will using the name that revealed his Jewish identity. However, this discovery is the key piece of evidence surrounding the Lupo family’s heritage. It is important to note that not all scholars believe that the Lupos were Jewish, and that existing evidence about their heritage is circumstantial. However, we believe that Chandler and others make compelling arguments, and we have decided to curate this program in a way that embraces this scholarship.

Ambrose is the first Lupo whose name appears in extant records. Chandler writes that he was “born in Milan around 1505 and is known to have lived in Venice at least five years before going to London in 1540. He was the first of his family to adopt the surname Lupo, which means wolf in Italian. It was a favorite name adopted by many Jews when surnames began to be adopted and was likely inspired by a biblical reference.” Ambrose’s original Iberian surname together with his birthdate in Italy suggests that like many Sephardic Jews, his parents likely migrated from Iberia to a more hospitable northern Italy shortly after the explosion of the Jews from Iberia in 1492.

In the first set of the program, we pay homage to the Lupo family’s Sephardic heritage. This turned out to be a much more challenging task than we anticipated. Sephardic musical traditions are oral traditions, and it turns out that the majority of the tunes that we call Sephardic music today were not actually written down until the 19th and 20th centuries. Since tunes were passed from generation to generation and undoubtedly influenced by local musical cultures, it can be

very difficult to trace their origins. Nevertheless, scholars have made some inroads in this challenging area of study, which is only in its infancy.

To select pieces for this program, we relied heavily on the scholarship of Judith Eisenstein, Judith Etzion, and Susana Weich-Shahak. Eisenstein and her team programmed 6,232 musical motifs from Iberian Christian and Jewish sources and conducted a “statistical study” to identify “concordances” between them that exceed a mere coincidence. We chose to program two of these pairs. The first is “Razos m'adui voler” by the troubadour Guiraut Riquier, which Eisenstein believes is based on the Hebrew chant for Psalm 23. The second pair consists of “Coras quem fezes doler” by the troubadour Peirol and the kinnot (or lament) “Eykh navi shudad,” which Eisenstein believes is a contrafact of the Pierol song.

The other selections in this section of the program are songs from 16th century songbooks in the romance genre. The romance began as a narrative poetic genre. Some of the melodies sung to romance texts were transmitted orally, possibly for centuries, and were first recorded in 16th century songbooks for the Catholic nobility, where composers harmonized them in the courtly musical style of the day. Other tunes were composed in the 16th century to mimic the style of these “old romances.”

In their study, Etzion and Weich-Shahak identify a number of 16th century romances that bear striking textual and musical similarities to romances recorded by 20th century ethnomusicologists who traveled to Sephardic diaspora communities around the world to collect and preserve their music. We intentionally chose not to perform the Sephardic versions of these romances because they have been heavily influenced by global musical styles that we are not trained in.

Whether these popular romance tunes originated in Jewish or Catholic communities in medieval Iberia remains a point of conjecture. We know that romance tunes circulated orally in both communities, and we have historical evidence proving that Sephardic Jews sang Hebrew hymn texts to romance tunes following their expulsion from Iberia. It seems impossible that the musics of two populations that coexisted on the same peninsula for centuries could not have been influenced in both directions. As Eisenstein writes in the conclusion of her article, “the safest comment would be to posit that Jews and Christians shared a vocabulary of musical idioms.”

Next, we follow the Lupos to Italy. While we don't know anything about Ambrose's parents, we do know that it was very common in early modern Europe for sons to take up their father's profession. We also know that when Iberians went to Italy, they brought the viol with them. The viol is believed to have originated in Iberia, where it developed from Arab string instruments that were brought there during the time of Moorish rule. In the 16th century, the Spanish Kingdom of

Aragon included parts of modern-day Italy, and it is believed that this is how the viol made its way to the Italian peninsula.

Once in Italy, modifications were made to the instrument so that it was easier to play one string at a time. This made the viol better suited to the fashionable polyphonic repertoire, which could be played in consort on viols of varying sizes and pitch ranges. The viol appears in the instrument inventories at many northern Italian courts and was also owned by wealthy amateurs, who, with the boom of music printing in 16th century Venice, could purchase books of their favorite polyphonic songs to play at home. While we don't know exactly what or for whom the Lupos played in Italy, this history informed our selection of pieces from the frottola and madrigal genres that were printed in northern Italy during the first decades of the 16th century.

Whatever the Lupos were playing in Italy, they must have played it really well, because in 1539, Ambrose, Alexandro, and Romano, who are believed to be brothers, were all personally recruited to King Henry VIII's court. As Chandler explains, "In 1539 King Henry VIII charged his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, with the task of improving the quality of music in the royal court. . . Cromwell worked through an agent in Venice to recruit the finest musicians available. . . he recruited six viol players, among which were Ambrose, Alexandro and Romano of Milan, Alberto and Vincenzo of Venice, and Juan Maria of Cremona."

Sting players were not the only Jewish musicians that Henry VIII recruited. The Bassano family of instrumentalists was recruited from Italy just before the Lupos. Chandler explains that while being Jewish was technically illegal, King Henry VIII, who following the Reformation was panicked that subjects at court might still be loyal to the pope and stage a rebellion, chose to look the other way. "He began quietly recruiting Jews to England despite the laws prohibiting it, and word spread fast that England was a place of refuge for Jews."

As for the Lupos, Chandler believes that they were willing to take the risk, having been recruited by the King himself and poised to earn much higher wages. While they could not be openly Jewish in England, musicologist Richard Prior believes that they also had difficult choices to make as Jewish musicians in Venice: "Although as Jews they could live freely in the ghetto, the art music of which they were masters was not encouraged there. On the other hand, in gentile society, they could be musicians, but not practicing Jews. So they may have faced an impossible choice-between their art and their religion. Alternatively, they may simply have been excluded from the best positions. . . Whatever the case, they found refuge in England, where they were not segregated and could freely practice their skills, even if they could only worship in secret."

When the situation that led to their imprisonment calmed down, the Lupos, who had been ushered back to Italy, returned to their posts as string players. They remained at the royal court

for the next century until the court ensembles disbanded in 1642 in the absence of a monarch during the English Revolution.

Today, there is no place more strongly associated with the viol consort than England, and as members of Henry VIII's first viol consort, they introduced the viol consort to England and remained at court during the peak of the viol consort's flourishing. In addition to being great string players, several of the Lupos were also composers, and we have selected pieces by Ambrose, Thomas, and Theophilus Lupo for this program. Unfortunately, little music by Ambrose and Theophilus survives. To represent them on this program, we chose to transcribe a composition by Ambrose for solo lute to be played on the viol, and we wrote treble viol lines for treble and bass viol duets by Theophilus Lupo for which only the bass lines survive.

Today, Thomas Lupo is a name known to all viol players. As a composer, he was the most prolific and well known of the Lupos. While he wrote in both sacred and secular vocal styles, he is best known for his contributions to repertoire for instrumental consorts. His viol fantasias, two of which we've programmed, remain his most celebrated works.

Sometimes by coincidence, and sometimes quite directly, it is astonishing how the history of this single family coincides so closely with the evolution of the viol and its repertoire. We're glad to share the story of this little-known yet remarkable family with audiences as an example of how, for all of us, making music is so intertwined with the historical moment we're living.

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