

## Educator's Guide

# Mizrahi Music

Join Chloé Valdary in her many personas as she takes us through the fascinating story of Mizrahi music in Israel. When Mizrahi Jews first flooded to Israel in the 1950s, their culture was often suppressed in favor of the more dominant Ashkenazi culture that pervaded the young country. In the 1970s and 1980s, Mizrahi music finally made it into the Israeli mainstream with the help of homemade cassettes and stars like Zohar Argov. Since then, Mizrahi music has been extremely popular in Israel, helping to develop a remarkably diverse music scene and has even had political influence in the country. Watch this video and use the prompts below to learn more.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/hLNwYYAp6S8>

## Further Reading

1. Unpacked for Educators, "The Yemenite Children's Affair"  
<https://unpacked.education/to-teach-or-not-the-yemenite-children-affair/>
2. Matti Friedman, "To Understand Israel, listen to its pop music"  
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-to-understand-israel-listen-to-its-pop-music/>
3. Israel Story podcast, "Mixtape Part III: Eastward Bound,"  
<https://israelstory.org/episode/38-mixtape-part-iii-eastward-bound/>
4. The Tikva Fund podcast, "Matti Friedman on Israel, the Mizrahi Nation"  
<https://tikvahfund.org/library/podcast-matti-friedman-on-israel-the-mizrahi-nation/>
5. Peter Beaumont, "Israel's sidelined Mizrahi musicians and artists reclaim centre stage"  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/17/israels-sidelined-mizrahi-musicians-and-artists-reclaim-centre-stage>
6. Matti Friedman, "Israel's Happiness Revolution"  
<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/music/193162/israels-happiness-revolution>



## **Review – Did the students understand the material?**

- 1.** Where did Israel's Mizrahi Jews come from?
  - a.** East Asia
  - b.** West Africa
  - c.** Europe
  - d.** North Africa and the Middle East
  
- 2.** Which prime minister was the first to invest in the Mizrahi community?
  - a.** David Ben-Gurion
  - b.** Levi Eshkol
  - c.** Golda Meir
  - d.** Menachem Begin
  
- 3.** Name one Mizrahi Israeli singer.
  
- 4.** In what way is the rise of Mizrahi music similar to the rise of hip hop music in the U.S. in the 1990s?
  
- 5.** Which one of these famous Israeli singers is of Mizrahi descent?
  - a.** Zohar Argov
  - b.** Naomi Shemer
  - c.** Ilanit
  - d.** Arik Einstein

## **Discussion Questions and Learning Activities**

- 1.** In Israel's early years, there was sometimes a conscious effort to embrace European culture and suppress Mizrahi culture. Since then, Israel has become much more of a mosaic of culture. Recently, Cultural Minister Miri Regev has taken steps to help facilitate Mizrahi music's rise in Israeli society, including pushing for an Arab-Israeli singer, Nasreen Qadri, to headline Israel's Independence Day celebrations. In contrast to North America, Europe, South Africa and Australia, when people think of Judaism in Israel, they typically don't think of Jews from the Middle East. What do you think are some ways to create



more exposure for Mizrahi Jews in North America, Europe, South Africa and Australia in both the Jewish communities there and those areas in general?

- 2.** Jews of all races and ethnicities have amalgamated in modern Israel. Ultimately, what is stronger: the shared Jewish roots or specific cultures that each group arrived with?
- 3.** What are some practical steps the Israeli government and Israeli society can do to help integrate different groups within Israeli society? Click [here](#) to see what the president of Israel had to say about the different tribes within Israeli society. Put your students in pairs and have them come up with three ideas each.
- 4.** Mizrahi music is distinct from Ashkenazi music in many ways. After watching the video listed above, can you think of some ways the music of the Middle East is different from Yiddish or [Hasidic music](#), an Ashkenazi staple? How are they similar?
- 5.** Split your class into small groups of 2-3, assigning each group a different Mizrahi artist. Click [here](#) for [some examples](#). Have each group present their artist and their favorite song belonging to that artist. If you decide to teach some of the songs in class, you can always play "[Don't Forget The Lyrics!](#)"
- 6.** Show your students one of the classic Israeli films focusing on the integration of Mizrahi Jews into Israeli society: "Kazablan" (the Israeli "West Side Story") or "Sallah Shabati" (the struggles of Mizrahi immigration to a young state of Israel). Have your students write a movie review to share what they learned from the film as well as how it made them feel.

## Reflection Questions

- 1.** Have you noticed any trends in your life that began as counterculture and then became mainstream? What were they? Split your class into pairs for a [Think-Pair-Share](#).
- 2.** Do you prefer to follow the mainstream or the counterculture (think music, books, fashion, etc.)? Explain. Designate one wall to represent following mainstream culture and the opposite wall representing following counterculture. Have your students stand along the spectrum of where they feel they fit, then have them



discuss their thoughts with whoever they are standing by and then share out loud for the class.

- 3.** Have you ever felt pushed to the outskirts by another dominant group? What was that experience like? Have your students journal their responses.
- 4.** If you are Jewish, are you of Ashkenazi or Mizrahi descent? How does this shape who you are, if at all? Set up a sharing circle to hear from your students.
- 5.** After learning about Mizrahi music, one sees the remarkable diversity of music in Israel, which points to diversity in demographics as well. Does this surprise you about Israel? Discuss this with your class.