

Sofi & the Baladis from ISRAEL

About the Artists

Music is an important part of Israel’s national identity as a homeland for Jewish immigrants from around the world. Sofi & the Baladis, a five-member ensemble led by singer Sofi Tsedaka, features soulful and richly textured performances of an array of musical traditions which lie at the heart of Israel’s diverse and historic cultures.

The group’s multi-lingual concerts present new interpretations of songs from the ancient Samaritan community, as well as compelling vocal and instrumental work from mid-20th century Arabic composers, transcend genres, and move easily from being deeply spiritual to an upbeat and rhythmic style that captivates and will bring audiences to their feet.

The commentary Sofi provides throughout the concert tells the moving and powerful story of the Samaritan Tsedaka family’s—and Sofi’s—search for balance, understanding, faith, and belonging as they navigate the pathway between their Jewish and Arab identities.

Members

Sofi Tsedaka	Vocals and oud
Yosef Bronfman	Qanun
Yshai Afterman	Percussion
Jonathan Dror	Woodwinds
Yaniv Taichman	Oud
Mark Umansky	Sound Engineer

About Sofi

As is often the case, at the heart of Sofi Tsedaka’s artistic journey is her remarkable personal story. Born into Israel’s ancient Samaritan community, Sofi was raised speaking both Hebrew and Arabic, and her family home was filled not only with the chants of ancient Samaritan-Hebrew prayers, but also popular music from the nightclubs and cafes of Cairo, Beirut, and more. Sofi converted to Judaism at age 18 and left her family’s home, performed her national service, and became for all appearances, a “modern Israeli girl.” And yet her Samaritan roots have continued to nurture and guide her work as an artist and performer.

With Israeli director and producer Barak Heymann, Sofi created “The Lone Samaritan”, a documentary film chronicling the challenges and estrangement her family faced as she and her sisters all left the sect and converted to Judaism. This powerful and moving film, released in 2009, has since been featured in festivals throughout the world and received numerous awards, including the Creative Documentary Award at the Paris Human Right Film Festival in 2011.

While working on “The Lone Samaritan”, Sofi became acquainted with a musicologist who had done extensive research on the traditions and origins of Samaritan sacred music. His studies led him to believe that the prayers and chants still being sung within the contemporary Samaritan community were identical to those prayed by the people of Israel in the ancient Temple. Fascinated with this idea, and entranced by the songs themselves, Sofi began to explore additional ways of performing the music and bringing it to new and wider audiences.

This led her to form the ensemble Sofi & the Baladis, which focuses on the performance of those musical traditions which she carries deep in her soul: the sacred songs of the ancient Samaritan community, and the compelling vocal work of mid-20th century Arabic composers.



The members of Sofi & the Baladis: Sofi Tsedaka (center), Jonathan Dror (top right), Yosef Bronfman (lower right), Yshai Afterman (lower left), Yaniv Taichman (top left).
Photo by Reuven Kapuchinski.

Video

Check out videos on Sofi’s website:
<http://sofitedaka.com>

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Oud

Pronounced ooh-d, like “food.” The *oud* is a pear-shaped stringed instrument that is believed to be an ancestor of the guitar. It is played by picking the strings with a *risha*, which is longer than a traditional guitar pick and is held with the whole hand. The *oud* has a characteristic bend at the end of the neck and does not have frets.

[Click here](#) to hear the *oud* played.



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Shofar

Pronounced show-FAR. The *shofar* is an instrument made of a ram’s horn and used in Jewish religious ceremonies. It has remained relatively unchanged since its references in the Talmud, or Old Testament. According to Hebrew law, the *shofar* can only be blown by a qualified person or Tokea, which literally means “blaster.” But the *shofar* has recently gained popularity in non-ceremonial musical contexts.



Photo by Patricio.lorente (CC BY 3.0)

Riq

The *riq* is a frame drum, originally Persian or Kurdish, and is the ancestor of the western Tambourine. It has a large frame covered with goat-skin, with metal rings or chains adding a jingling effect. When the *riq* is tilted forward, the rings can touch the skin to make a buzzing sound. Snapping the fingers against the head and shaking the frame creates additional rhythms.

[Click here](#) to hear the *riq* played.



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Ney

The *ney* (or *nai*, *nye*, *nay*) is a simple, long, end-blown flute that is the main wind instrument of Middle Eastern music and the only wind instrument in classical Arabic music. It has been played continuously for 5,000 years, making it one of the oldest musical instruments still in use. The *ney* is made of a piece of hollow cane or reed with five or six finger holes.

[Click here](#) to hear the *ney* played.



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Qanun

The *qanun* is derived from the ancient Egyptian harp and has been used in Arab music since the tenth century. Its Arabic name means ‘rule’ or ‘law.’ The *qanun* consists of a trapezoid-shaped flat board with 81 strings, stretched in groups of three to produce 24 chords. The strings are plucked with fingers or with two plectra, one on each pointer finger. The modern *qanun* has two to five levers for every string (in triples). Intervals can be adjusted by turning the levers, which control the tension of the strings. The right hand plays in the treble clef and the left in the bass.

[Click here](#) to hear the *qanun* played.



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