

Francoise Atlan, superb Sephardic-Arabic-Moroccan singer

by Phyllis Chesler



Listen to the enchanting Atlan as she sings a traditional Shabbat song which welcomes the angels to earth. I love Spanish music but I love, even more, Jewish-Spanish, Jewish-Arabic music. Both the sacred and the secular music call out to me as if I knew them, or had once lived in North Africa or in the Arab Middle East many times, a long time ago. As a Jew, perhaps I did. When I listen to Spanish music (so romantic, so dynamic) I also experience a most profound melancholy. I unwillingly remember the Jews who were tortured, set on fire, forced to convert, and expelled from Spain—merely because they were Jews. I also recall that so many of their flights from Spain and Portugal, were financed by Dona Gracia Mendes Ha Nasi, the wealthiest Jewish woman of the Renaissance era, who herself also had to flee Portugal, move to Antwerp, Venice,

Ferrara, and ultimately, to Istanbul. Draw no false conclusions here. To gain even temporary asylum, enormously wealthy Jews were expected to “lend” huge sums of money to the Crowned heads of Christian and Muslim states who rarely paid their debts. What a magnificently storied history my people have had.