

## Seven Centuries of Silence: Andalusian Women's Orchestras

Academic paper presentation with audio visuals  
Julia Banzi, Ph.D. Ethnomusicology  
Duration: 45-60 minutes

While the historical record is rich with mention of women Andalusian musicians of the 9th-13th centuries CE, there is a notable scholarly void documenting the existence and significance of Andalusian women's ensembles during the seven centuries that followed. What became of these female musicians and their traditions?

The classical Andalusian musical repertoire is thought to have descended directly from the courtly music of Islamic Spain (711-1492 AD). It is considered by many scholars to be one of the longest continuous traditions of art music in the world. With few exceptions scholarly literature on Andalusian music focuses exclusively on the male version of the tradition. And yet, women musicians are connected to the very "origins" of Andalusian music, the search for which has been the central concern of much of the scholarship related to Andalusian music. Did they cease to exist? Were they collectively forgotten or simply deemed unworthy of remembrance?

This presentation explores how both recent and older Iberian memories continue to influence the dynamics of collective assembly; in this case gender-separated women's Andalusian events involving music. It documents the phenomenon of female ensembles and explores factors that have contributed to their persistence over the centuries. Based on historical and ethnographic fieldwork in Morocco that included interviews with dozens of ensemble musicians, I explore the special status that independent women's ensembles hold in Moroccan society, the intersections of gender and music tradition, and what the presence of these ensembles suggests about broader socio-political and religious arrangements in Islamic Morocco. I contend that the existence of women's musical traditions, previously undocumented by Arab and Western scholars, should lead us to reconceptualize intersections of history, memory, music, religion, gender and identity.

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Julia Banzi is an Ethnomusicologist (Ph.D. University of California at Santa Barbara) especially interested in constructing historical ethnographies—that is seeking ways in understanding how the long past influences and shapes present musical changes.

The two main geographic areas she explores are North Africa and Spain. Her special interest is the melding of varied cultures and religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) converging in Al-Andalus (711-1492). In Morocco, her focus is on women's Andalusian ensembles. In Spain, she focuses on the flamenco guitar tradition and the processes of when, why, and how performance traditions become obsolete.

Co-artistic director of the international performance ensemble Al-Andalus ([www.Andalus.com](http://www.Andalus.com)), artist, composer and one of a very few female flamenco guitarists worldwide, her work reflects her over twenty years of living, studying and performing in North Africa and Spain. Julia is a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar who teaches at Reed College and Lewis & Clark College. She is passionate about her work and honored and excited to share her experiences with you!

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