

MUSIC & CULTURE

# Music, photography from across the Jewish diaspora reach Boston for Hanukkah

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A menorah is seen inside David Hemelekh Synagogue in Casablanca, Morocco. The city boasts several functioning synagogues, as well as a handful of kosher butchers and kosher restaurants.

**Mosa'ab Elshamy / Associated Press**



By **Jennifer Moore**

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Art has the power to bind, even across contentious borders and over long centuries. That power is evident as Boston residents usher in Hanukkah with music and traditions from across the vast Jewish diaspora.

Musician Ira Klein, who grew up in Israel before attending the Berklee College of Music, is sharing a wide variety of Jewish music from Spain, Algeria and Turkey this season. One of his performances is at the annual “Hanukkah: Festival of Lights” held at the Museum of Fine Arts Thursday evening.

“The idea is really: How can we use music as a bridge? A lot of people may think of that as a cliché, but that’s what music does. It brings people together across political lines,” Klein said.

Joining Klein at the MFA is Beth Bahia Cohen, playing violin and yayli tanbur, a fretless Turkish instrument.

Leading up to Hanukkah, Klein shared an excerpt from a 14th century Jewish manuscript from Spain, The Catalan Mahzor, at the Vilna Shul in Beacon Hill last week.

## **Ladino art and culture in Boston**

Becky Behar, a photographer born in Colombia, is a Sephardic Jew who traces her family roots back to the Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal during the 1492 Spanish Inquisition. Her pop-up photography is among the art showcased this year at the MFA's annual event.

Both Behar and Klein are familiar with the significance of the Ladino language, a tongue blending Spanish and Hebrew that artists and historians are working to preserve.

Two years ago, Klein founded the Boston-based ensemble Convivencia to revive and celebrate the Ladino tradition. Much of the Ladino culture harkens back to a time of pluralism and artistry, including between Muslims and Jews, before the Inquisition.

It's that joy and peace that Hanukkah is known to bring each winter.

“I think we in the Jewish community, and broader community, could all really use a moment of connection and beauty and joy,” said Laura Mandell, the executive director of Jewish Arts Collaborative, one of the partners in the MFA event.

Speaking to GBH's *The Culture Show* earlier this week, Mandell said that "Hanukkah is the antidote" to darkness and challenges.

*Note: The "**Hanukkah: Festival of Lights**" event runs from 5- 10 p.m. Thursday at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and is included with general admission.*



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