**U of T holds conference on Jewish music**

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* RUTH SCHWEITZER SPECIAL TO THE CJN

Amos Hoffman

A quartet that played exuberant jazz arrangements of Jewish songs from Ladino culture, and from Yemen, Morocco, Kazakhstan, Russia and Israel closed a University of Toronto conference on Jewish music held Feb. 18 and 19.

Guitarist and oudist Amos Hoffman, with pianist Noam Lemish, bassist Justin Gray and drummer Derek Gray, performed a compelling set at Walter Hall in Toronto, fusing the rhythms of the Middle East with jazz.

An Israeli, Hoffman is the recipient of Israel’s Landau Prize for his achievement in jazz. He was discussed in a paper presented at the conference, Music and the Jewish World: Expression Across Real and Imaginary Boundaries. It was hosted by the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies and U of T’s faculty of music.

At the conference, Lemish, a doctoral candidate at U of T, spoke about Hoffman in a paper he gave about “multi-local” musicians – musicians whose repertoire stems from a diverse set of musical traditions.

Hoffman’s music integrates jazz, Israeli popular music, Afro-cuban music and North African and classical Arab music. Lemish said the repertoire of multi-local musicians like Hoffman contains within it a longing for a more inclusive and pluralistic world.

In Israel, Arab music has become the music of the “enemy,” Hoffman has said. Yet many Israelis are Jews from the Mideast, North Africa and Central Asia, who brought their music, “Arab” music, with them. It was repressed by the more “hegemonic Ashkenazi establishment, which sought a new Hebrewist national culture that was rooted around eastern and western Europe,” Lemish said. He added that Hoffman’s music is an “audio-utopia that has implications in the political sphere of the Middle East.

“While Israel continues to be mired in conflict with its neighbours, as a musician, Hoffman embodies a reconciliation of Jewish Ashkenazi roots with a wholehearted embrace of Arab classical music and culture.”

Lemish’s paper was one of 10 presented at the conference by U of T scholars and visiting academics. They gave papers on a variety of topics, including “Jewish Jazz and Jewish Identity,” Soviet Yiddish music, and the creation of Israeli music.

Lily Hirsch, an independent scholar at California State University, Bakersfield, presented a paper on the German-born musicologist Anneliese Landau, who got her PHD from Berlin University in 1930. Landau’s lectures about music were on German radio until 1933, when the Nazis forced broadcasters to cancel their contracts with Jews. She then moved her lectures to the Berlin Jewish Culture League, an organization created by and for Jews in negotiation with the Nazi regime, Hirsch said.

Landau left Germany after Kristallnacht and wound up in New York City in 1940. At the time, musicology in the United States had a “marked history of gender discrimination,” Hirsch said. Landau received rejection letters “in bulk,” from her applications for employment to such institutions as the Eastman School of Music and Barnard College.

Landau eventually found work at the Westside Jewish Community Centre in Los Angeles in 1944. There, in 1945, Landau organized Musicians in the Making, a series of recitals featuring young players. The first performer in the series, which ran for two decades, was 15-year-old pianist Andre Previn. Previn immigrated to the United States with his family from Germany in 1939. Violist Myra Kestenbaum, pianist Daniel Pollock, violinist Arnold Steinhardt and pianist Victor Steinhardt are also alumni of the series.

For a 1945 concert, unrelated to Landau’s work at the JCC, she programmed the music of Jewish composers and met with some of the émigré composers who lived in Los Angeles, among them Ernst Toch, Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Arnold Schoenberg. Her musical mission was in some ways divined by the “music suppressed during the Nazi era,” Hirsch said.