

## ARTISTS' STATEMENT

We (Larry Lesser and Joel Carrasco) live in El Paso and collectively span and bridge many boundaries, including race, ethnicity, age, and primary artistic medium. Inspired in early summer 2023 by approaching events (the Los Portales Museum exhibit and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies conference), we (including Blanca Carrasco) had a meeting to storyboard a video for the song “Lights Lead Home” from Lesser’s album *Sparks*, a recent finalist for Album of the Year at the New Mexico Music Awards. The song (and video) depicts a composite story of a descendant of Crypto-Jews (also referred to as Anusim, Conversos, or (pejoratively) Marranos) forced by medieval Spain’s Ferdinand and Isabella to flee or forsake (at least outwardly) their Judaism. But then many generations later, over borders of time and space, Jewish identity is often rekindled when a mysterious family recipe or ritual turns out to be spiritual (spi-ritual) – in this case, discreetly lighting two candles on Friday evening was revealed as an act to bring in the Jewish Sabbath, a huge lifeline to Jewish identity and spirituality. This song appeared in a national resource guide (Leon & Mejía, 2010), was featured in the Spring/Summer 2020 issue of *HaLapid* (the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies journal), and has been performed at a dozen conferences to date.

While the song is a successful “three-minute movie” in its own right, I (Joel Carrasco) saw the potential to give it greater life and reach by expanding it into a video with evocative artistic and historical images that included and also went beyond literal details of the song. My inspiration was based on collaboration with the mother and her daughters that appear in the video and ideas shared by my mother (Blanca Carrasco) as a descendant and supporter of crypto-Jews. The room ambience of Bodega Loya (in Socorro, TX), built on the Spanish Colonial frontier with adobe walls and roof supports called *vigas* and *latillas*, plus historical clothing borrowed from the El Paso Mission Trail Association augments authenticity to help the viewer travel in time with a mother’s timeless love towards her ancestors and descendants across the generations.

More than mere “song video,” this piece quickly became a heart-opening journey to let others deeply experience and embrace a story that has played out in many forms for so many in our part of the country, with its often-fluid geographic and other borders. This video reflects our mission to uplift and voice these stories, transforming a history of unspeakable pain and loss and into (as the final scene shows) a present of walking openly with loved ones out into the world. This personal story is ultimately a universal story of spirituality, heritage, discovery, healing, and empathy that our world needs as much as ever.