KLEZMER: MICRO-PERSPECTIVES ON A MACROCOSM

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (2002)
(Music Criticism)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Klezmer: Micro-Perspectives on a Macrocosm

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SUPERVISOR: Professor K. Kinder

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 98

Abstract

Only very recently have scholars embarked on tapping the potentially rich wellspring of Jewish heritage music called klezmer. Since its revitalization starting in the 1970s, klezmer has effectively leaped from obscurity to institutionalization in a transformation of remarkable speed. Its vast appeal now testifies to the significance it bears in a myriad of cultural and social spheres—anything from religion and literature to consumerism and tourism. However, because klezmer remains a relatively new area of study, only the major centers of musical activity have enjoyed the privilege of serious observation and theorization.

This thesis attempts to examine klezmer at a more intimate level, in some of the localities that have been, as yet, unexplored, but which maintain a vital position in the continuity and life of the music and its culture. An overview of klezmer, its revival, its contemporary context, and some of its key theoretical issues is followed by an investigation into the heart of its educational establishments—known colloquially as klezmer camps. These institutions allow for a practical application of the concept of the "hyper-real" proposed by French theorist Jean Baudrillard, since their foundations and structures, which often strive to simulate an older tradition, create instead a new kind of culture with an elusive underpinning. This idea is carried further in the ensuing exploration of klezmer culture in the city of Montreal, Quebec. Through individual interviews and the direct observation of the scene and its participants, recurring conceptions of rootedness and gender in klezmer are probed from theoretical standpoints, revealing highly complex relationships between klezmer enthusiasts and their city, background, language, and even each other. As result, klezmer culture is positioned as the product of influence by various local phenomena as well as by more broad, mythical, and even global developments.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincerest appreciation to a number of people who helped me, in some way or another, to get this work to this final stage:

my advisor, Dr. Keith Kinder for his insightfulness, his understanding, his sound advice, and over all, his enthusiasm;

Dr. James Deaville, a judicious reader and teacher whose infectious thirst for critical analysis both in the classroom and in everyday life is inspiring;

Dr. Susan Fast, who got me started on this project in a reading course, and who provides continued scholarly guidance and counsel;

Dr. William Shaffir, for being a true *mensch* and agreeing to step outside of the sociology department to read this work and sit on the thesis committee;

my family, for supporting me wholeheartedly, and often, gastronomically;

Danielle, a constant and needed fountain of TLC, who has demonstrated an amazing tolerance for hearing me say the word (or the excuse...) "thesis;"

and finally, all of my respondents, who participated in this endeavor eagerly, and completely voluntarily, out of their own good-hearted kindness.

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Introduction: The State of Klezmer

There is a website called "Ari Davidow's Klezmer Shack," in which Davidow, the host, aside from relating news about the klezmer music scene, posting reviews of albums, and listing upcoming events, delivers an annual address he lightheartedly calls "The State of Klezmer" to his loyal Internet community.[1] As the allusion to the U.S.A.'s yearly presidential assessment implies, Davidow sits at the hub of an online nation bound by klezmer, which compels him to share his insights on the course of development of the music he documents. In the 2002 installment of this feature, Davidow writes, "Today, as I have written for years, the klezmer revival is long over."

To doubt Davidow on this issue is to mistrust someone who has been maintaining a thorough and thoughtful chronicle of contemporary klezmer activity for years, on what has been called the online home of klezmer. However, acknowledging the recent arrival of a global barrage of bands, recordings, Internet sites, scholarly articles, books, concerts, festivals, and workshops all devoted to klezmer, a first-timer to Davidow's site might easily disagree with the doomed tone of his comment. This is because his comment is easily misconstrued. The revival is over, not because klezmer interest has fizzled, but quite the opposite, because klezmer has firmly established and embedded itself in a

[1] "State of Klezmer," http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/davidow/2002_stateofklez.html, in Ari Davidow's Klezmer Shack online, posted February 10, 2002.

multiplicity of cultural spheres. Davidow is saying it is time to move on, to begin to understand klezmer's new places, and not to think of it any longer as something dead, and still requiring resuscitation. In other words, the klezmer tradition is alive, so let's get on with it.

To accept and endorse this philosophy, some might say it is important to take a step back and really look at what the klezmer revival is, or was, in order to understand from where it came, where it has been, and where it is going. Some published material to come out in recent years, especially that of ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin and folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, has surveyed the motivations, effects, and even the very terminology of the revival, as well as its techniques and protocols. This has opened up a route for further examinations of klezmer culture in what might be called the aftermath of the revival in North America.

This work attempts to partake in that same academic thread. It also endeavors to explore the diverse phenomena of klezmer culture on a smaller scale, at a local level, with the inclusion of some of my own personal reflections where appropriate, since I am admittedly a product, as it were, of the revival. The re-emergence of klezmer music in the 1980's coincided with my own developing youth, granting me, and others of my generation who were listening, a close relationship with this Jewish heritage music from a relatively young age—something that Jews and the world had not had the opportunity to experience for at least half a century. This thesis provides one way of looking at klezmer culture, illustrating, in many ways, my own process of discovery of this music from the unique perspective I have been fortunate to enjoy.

The material is organized into three chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the contemporary klezmer world, its histories, personalities, styles, philosophies, and problems, while building up a store of questions that challenge the traditional categorization of the music, its makeup and its perception. Chapter Two directs itself more specifically toward discovering what actual klezmer communities look like by examining intense klezmer workshops called klezmer camps, in an effort to inform the processes that occur in the larger world of the revival or post-revival, processes which are either reflected or created at these peculiar gatherings. Chapter Three is rather the "payoff" of this work, combining the background of the first chapter and the theoretical applications of the second to explore some of the ways in which klezmer culture more broadly presents itself in a North-American city, particularly, my birthplace—Montreal, Quebec. The slipperiness of identifying the many forms of contemporary klezmer culture and the theoretical outlooks they inspire is more easily surmounted when working within a relatively contained environment, and since my experience is germane to the focus of the material, Montreal provides a fitting location for this purpose.

The result is definitely not a comprehensive historical, critical, or theoretical chronicle of Montreal's klezmer world. I have only begun here to apply certain models of theoretical reference to some of the detectable klezmer culture of the city. However, the process of discovery and exploration that I delineate is hopefully the most absorbing part of this work, and I propose it as a point of embarkation for much more specific and far-reaching studies than this one. If Davidow is right, and the revival of klezmer is long over, it is high time to look at the life it now lives. So let's get on with it.

Chapter One:

Overture to "Klezmerology"

What is Klezmer?

Klezmer, it seems, is the ultimate postmodern musical style. The more one studies it and learns about it, the more intangible it becomes. The perception of klezmer is always shifting between past and present, art and popular music, western and eastern, Jewish and non-Jewish. Understanding klezmer requires more than a thorough examination of 19th-century East-European Jewry, but also an adeptness in interpreting North-American popular culture and aesthetics, since in the klezmer world, one is inextricably linked to the other.

For me, the very term klezmer conjures up a whirlwind of concepts, images and sounds. When asked, I still have trouble explaining what it is that I study, and I have to think every time I provide an answer to what klezmer "is." Usually I say something like "klezmer is Eastern-European-based Jewish folk music," but then I wish I could tell the inquirer to take that with a sizeable grain of salt. Klezmer is a living thing, less East-European than it is North-American, no longer strictly Jewish, no longer folk music but popular music, world music, delving into countless other categories. Klezmer is so much more than a style of music from a certain locked-in historical time and place; but who

would understand if I explained it is a form of popular North-American music linked as much to contemporary Yiddish culture as it is to pre-war Ashkenazi Jewry, as much to rock and roll and jazz as it is to polka, and as much to the music of the synagogue as it is to hip-hop?

Klezmer scholar Mark Slobin has aptly illustrated the inherent complexities in approaching the study of klezmer music:[2]

> Klezmerology, or, how to study a constantly morphing and expanding musical system with no surviving homeland, as played by insiders with outside mentalities and outsiders with uncanny intuitions about how the music works.

Since, musically and culturally, the klezmer canvas continues to swell, fold, and re-position itself, sketching the location and function of its shapes through any fixed, unwavering approach is elusive. It is impossible to "grasp" the entire gamut of klezmer output at once, but we can try to use systematic methodology in viewing the music from several sometimes-conflicting angles. As Slobin has remarked elsewhere, "only by pretending that things are stable, can we see how they change."[3]

Indeed, klezmer is rooted in a particular historical time and place, but at the same time, in its contemporary form it rarely attempts to simply emulate the past. It always gives the impression of being aware of its own passage of time, while constantly creating its history, trying to consciously write it, incorporating everything with which it comes into contact. "The past," then, is frequently an important element in klezmer culture,

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[2] Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.
[3] Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), xi.

whether in demarcating its beginnings, telling the story of its evolution, or preparing for its future.

Genesis

Starting points and definitions are tricky at best. Like anything else, klezmer was not simply beamed down to earth one day in one unified form. Furthermore, there are at least two original meanings for the term klezmer, and they distinguish themselves along temporal lines: a centuries-old, East-European concept of "musician" and a post-1970's revivalist, American term for a particular "genre." Immediately, then, klezmer throws itself into a descriptive and foundational binary, which is actually a comfortable place to be, since "history" and "origin" imply too much simple linearity and teleology for something as difficult as klezmer. Be that as it may, I cannot avoid outlining a brief account of klezmer's development, even if only to examine how musicians and scholars inscribe this past, and to explore what possible effect "history" has on the culture of the music and musicians. Since histories of klezmer have only begun to emerge since the 1970's, it is important to understand that despite the epoch of the subject matter, any history of klezmer is a modern construction, and is as reflective of contemporary klezmer culture as it is an account of the "old country."

The word klezmer, as is noted by almost every collection and chronicle, comes from Yiddish, and it is a contraction of the Hebrew words *kley*, meaning instrument or tool, and *zemer*, song, making the klezmer an "instrument of song." Originally, the Yiddish usage of "klezmer" connoted a performer of a musical instrument, but not the type of music—one can refer to any player of the style as a klezmer, or klezmorim in plural, but

this is generally understood as old-country terminology.[4] Usually, the klezmer existed wherever Ashkenazi Jewry was found. Ashkenaz is the Jewish name for the Germanic-speaking lands that came to be settled by Jews starting from circa 1000 C.E., which covered an area over Central and Eastern Europe.[5] As a result of Ashkenazi lands experiencing frequent pogroms (violent attacks on Jewish communities), wars, mass emigration of Jews, and finally, the Holocaust, the word Ashkenaz during the 20th century became more associated with a certain culture and lineage, since the actual land that had been represented by the name no longer harboured the people or culture that named it. Therefore, Ashkenazi, by the middle of the 20th century, was mostly a term for populations of Jews that now resided in the Americas, Israel, Europe, and other lands that accepted Jews into their territories.

Before the years of colossal destruction and its resultant emigration, klezmorim in Ashkenaz served a vital function as instrumental performers. Philip Bohlman notes:[6]

> Within the Jewish community, they were essential to the performance of music at rituals and rites of passage. At weddings, they performed for the religious wedding procession and the secular wedding dance. [...] *Klezmorim* also played as specialists outside the Jewish community, where they needed a repertory appropriate to sacred and secular non-Jewish settings.

In the 18th century, the typical band of klezmorim had three to five members, consisting of violins, 'cellos, and sometimes a tsimbl (hammered dulcimer) or a clarinet. By the early 19th century, the clarinet, which had been popular only with some German

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[4] Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer! Jewish Music from Old World to Our World* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999), x.
[5] *The Blackwell Companion to Jewish Culture: from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (1989), s.v. "Yiddish," by Dovid Katz.
[6] *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music, Vol. 8, Europe* (2000), s.v. "Jewish Music in Europe," by Philip V. Bohlman, 259-260.

klezmorim, spread to the outlying Eastern European countries and began to challenge the violin's supremacy.[7] Nearing the end of that century, brass instruments also made their way into klezmer bands, possibly due to the burgeoning amount of army conscripts who marched as military musicians. Eventually, the bands evolved into 12- to 15-piece ensembles, with a unique set of ornamentations and improvisational techniques, inspired in part by some of the surrounding, non-Jewish folk idioms with which klezmorim became familiar and comfortable as performers, as well as by the vocal music of the synagogue.[8] The Jewish klezmer repertoire comprised mainly dance forms: faster varieties like the *bulgar* and *freilech*, and slower ones like the *khosidl*, *hora*, and *doina*.[9]

In the early 20th century, when many Eastern European klezmorim now found themselves in the USA, hundreds of commercial recordings of their music were issued, mostly between 1913 and 1930, in reaction to the demand for the music amongst Jewish immigrants, and in keeping with the general recording boom in the country at the time. Then, owing to a number of factors that included cultural assimilation and the rise of popular music in the USA and its subsequent domination of the recording industry, klezmer performances, recordings, and interest diminished substantially. From the 1930s to the 1970s klezmer was rarely performed, except by a handful of performers from the old country or their students (who were sometimes their children), but they were, for the

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[7] *The Blackwell Companion to Jewish Culture: from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (1989), s.v. "klezmer," by Barry Weinberg.

[8] Ibid.

[9] *Bulgars* and *freilechs* both usually connote a 2- to 4-part dance form with an underlying rhythmic pattern in simple time of "long-short-long-short-long—long-short-long-short-long." *Khosidls* also have multiple parts, with a slower "um-pa" rhythmic pattern. *Horas* are in compound time, with an unhurried pulse, and *doinas* are usually not metered in any fixed rhythm, but ornamented and melismatic, allowing an expression of virtuosity for a solo instrument—they are often followed by a faster form.

most part, aberrations. This was the backdrop against which a new generation of students began rekindling the klezmer flame in the mid-1970s. This was also the beginning of what is often now called the klezmer revival. Some of the first efforts of revivalists were to interest themselves in the history of klezmer music, and to get a picture of where the music came from and what it looked like.

The Pale of Settlement

Ethnomusicologist Walter Zev Feldman, one of the first scholars to bring this music back from obscurity in the 1970s, provides a specific geographical portrait of the early stages of klezmer in the appendix to a collection of klezmer transcriptions by Stacy Phillips:[10]

> It seems that Bessarabia was the most important region when the klezmer genre was formed. [early 19th century]. Maybe that is a bit exaggerated. But it so happens that we don't have a good documentation say, for the klezmer music of Lithuania or other regions. We know a lot more about the Ukraine and Bessarabia. For a variety of reasons having to do with immigration to America, we know more about what was played in those areas. It does seem that Bessarabia had a disproportionate influence, not just on the American version, but altogether.

Feldman's description, however, is more than simply geographical; note how he follows Bessarabia with a "when" rather than a "where." His comments insinuate a specific era. 19th century Bessarabia was the southwestern tip of the area known in Jewish history as the Pale of Settlement (see Fig.1).

[10] Stacy Phillips, *Klezmer Collection for C Instruments* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 1996), 174.

Fig. 1. The Pale of Settlement: Jews in the Russian Empire (1825-1917).[11] Reprinted from "The Pale of Settlement" [map], *Beyond the Pale: An Online Exhibit of The History of Jews in Russia*, http://www.friends-partners.org/partners/beyond-the-pale/eng_captions/29-9.html (June 1, 2002).

From 1791 to1795, a steadily weakening Poland gradually ceded all of its land to surrounding Prussia, Austria, and Russia, and completely dissolved in 1796. Russia, although jovial about winning all this previously independent Polish land, was not so happy about also having inherited about 3 million Jews. Tsarina Catherine II, not entirely

[11] The region of Bessarabia encompasses the area around the city of Kishinev, illustrated in this map at the southwestern edge of the territory of the Pale.

willing to change Russian policy on having Jews within her borders, decided that Jews would be restricted to the land that was just acquired, i.e. they could not settle anywhere else in Russia, and she placed further heavy economic and social restrictions and burdens on them. The borderlines of this land were in a continuous state of flux throughout her reign and that of her successors Tsar Nicholas I, and Tsar Alexander II. With each redrawing of the map came the displacement and loss of many in its territories. Until the 1917 revolution, this broad stretch of land where Jews were allowed to exist became known as the Pale of Settlement. It is generally remembered in Jewish literature and memory as a time and place of harsh cold, hunger and repression, punctuated with regular pogroms on communities from groups within and beyond the Pale, stemming from an anti-Semitism that was part of the public consciousness and of public policy—"pogroms were part of the technique of the government."[12]

Despite this reality, the population flourished, as did literacy, and, as Feldman argues, the music of the klezmer. As one grade-school textbook romantically puts it, the very restrictions placed on them "served to knit the Jews of the Pale more closely together, for they evolved a way of life based on brotherhood, neighborliness and genuine affection for one another."[13] However, this was not enough to prevent the unprecedented emigration towards the Americas and Palestine (Zionism took root in the hopelessness of the Pale)[14] nearing the turn of the 20th century, when opportunity arose to escape the tyranny of the Pale. It is worth noting how Feldman admits that emigration patterns

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[12] Gerard Chaliand, Jean-Pierre Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*, translated by A.M. Barrett (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 39.
[13] Ruth Samuels, *Pathways Through Jewish History* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 273.
[13] Zionism connotes all activities undertaken to establish and maintain a Jewish homeland.

might be responsible for what we may regard as the formation of klezmer. Bessarabian and Ukrainian cultures were some of the first mass Jewish communities to cross over the threshold into North America, which could be why we "know a lot more" about them, and why we might think of them as the "forming" regions. We have little else to go by.

Also—and Feldman is undoubtedly aware of the anachronism as he utters it above—the klezmer "genre" did not exist in 19th-century Bessarabia (only the klezmorim did). In fact, klezmer was not recognized as a genre until the late 20th century, when Feldman and his contemporaries coined the term in the United States. In reading his comments, then, binary terminology rears itself once more, since any modern search for the "formation" of klezmer inevitably reflects back on itself—klezmer is what we call it today, while they did not call it anything, then. "It" did not exist until later generations codified "it" in transcriptions, writings, and recordings, imparting "it" with a certain value not previously possessed. This is the story of the revival, which I will discuss further below. Suffice it to say here that, although klezmer before the 1970s (and after) is bound in a taxonomical dilemma, scholars generally agree that it stems from a repertoire of Yiddish-speaking (Ashkenazi) Jews from roughly the 18th to the early 20th centuries in Eastern Europe.

Yiddish

In musicologist Henry Sapoznik's opinion, as he outlines in his book *Klezmer! Jewish music from Old World to Our World* (1999), the history of klezmer is the history of Yiddish musicians.[15] Yiddish was the common language of the Ashkenazi Jewish communities, spoken across the vast territories of Central and Eastern Europe from the

[15] Sapoznik (1999), x.

Middle Ages through to the 20th- century North-American immigrant generation. The past tense is appropriate here since most of these European Jewish communities were "liquidated" before or during WWII, and assimilation has relegated the use of Yiddish in North America to near phantom-like proportions. Since, as any klezmer music collection book will tell you, "klezmer is an instrumental form,"[16] Sapoznik's imposition of "Yiddish" as an adjective is thrown into question. How can an instrumental style belong to a language?

The answer involves a complicated structure of emblematic strata. On the crust, the most visible and superficial level, Yiddish-speaking musicians from the old country, the klezmorim, played the tunes that have been passed down to us as the klezmer standards. The canon of tunes comprises Yiddish titles, most often alluding to specific ceremonies during a Jewish wedding, for example: *Fun Der Khupe* ("From the Wedding Canopy"), *Kale Bazetsn* ("The Seating of the Bride"), and *Firn Di Mekhutonim Aheym* ("Escorting the In-laws Home"). These are (were) functional tunes. Other sorts of titles indicate names of specific communities with their accompanying dance forms (for example *Odessa Bulgar*, *Bessarabier Khosidl*, *Warshaver Freilach*). Some get as particular as the house of a rabbi, as in *Baym Rebn in Palestina* ("At the Rabbi's House in Palestine"). In other cases the titles are expressions related to everyday Jewish life, such as *Tanz Tanz Yidkelekh* ("Dance Dance Jews") or *Nokh A Glezl Vayn* ("Another Glass of Wine"). Beneath the apparent Yiddish in the titles we start to unearth a more liquid soil, in which dwells a conscious participation in the continuum of Jewish life—important rituals,

[16] Phillips, 4.

fraternal communities, and inspiring leaders. Here, we are getting deeper, towards the core of what Yiddish has to do with this music.

To illustrate a point, let me turn to a different style that is thriving in the here and now. Scandinavian heritage musics have lately experienced a fruitful and enthusiastic resurgence in Minnesota. So acute is this interest, that a recording label there named *NorthSide* has devoted itself fully to the dissemination of this new Scandinavian music and has arranged highly attended music festivals in Minneapolis featuring its Scandinavian-based artists.[17] On its compact discs, *NorthSide* offers its retailers a straight-forward system for filing using text and icons in the form of little flags on the back covers. Instrumental fiddle band *JPP* is to be filed under "Finland;" popular vocal and instrumental band *Chateau Neuf* should be filed under "Norway;" and *Hedningarna*, an ensemble that mixes two popular Finnish and Swedish groups, should be in the more general category of "Scandinavia." It is quite clear that, although the name and address of the American company rests adjacent to (and dwarfs) these verbal and visual codes, these bands are musically representative of their native lands or geographical areas. I can focus on a number of issues here, but for now, let me relate *NorthSide*'s idea of "where to file" to klezmer.

Where do you file klezmer? What instruction do you attach? Which flag do you present? If klezmer comes from Eastern Europe, should we not say, "file under Eastern Europe?" But since pre-wartime, the appearance of klezmer bands in Eastern Europe is a fairly recent event. These European performers do not come from a line of klezmorim

[17] NorthSide's website is http://www.noside.com/ (accessed February, 2002).

from their countries, but are largely non-Jews who model themselves after American klezmer bands. What about the United States then? But you do not usually find a "United States" category, since most popular music in record stores is of American origin and needs no national category, and klezmer is too much of an Other to be included in this mainstream. Then how about the Israeli flag, since it represents the Jewish nation? But klezmer is, with exceptions, by and large ignored in Israel, owing to the general revulsion there to Yiddish culture, with its reference to pre-Israel's Jews' anguish and persecution.[18] There is that word "Yiddish" again. So here, in this filing bin crisis, we see why Sapoznik would imply that Yiddish is so important to klezmer. In the absence of a nation to call its own, the language holds the potential to become the music's home. Slobin makes a similar connection:[19]

> Instead of a homeland as the anchor, some reference to "Jewishness" pervades the production and reception of this music. The word *yiddishkayt*, a Yiddish word for the essential quality of homespun Jewishness, so often appears in the discourse around klezmer...Jews seeking national expression might well turn to klezmer at critical ritual points such as life-cycle events (weddings, bar mitzvahs) or communal celebrations of holidays.

In this commentary, Slobin not only links *yiddishkayt* with klezmer's idea of home, but it seems he even turns the argument on its head to show how klezmer is often the welcoming shelter for *yiddishkayt*.

We should recognize, though, that retailers probably do not place klezmer CDs in any Yiddish bin, since I have never come across any such bin. Instead, I have found most

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[18] See pp. 62-63 for a little more of the history of Yiddish vs. Hebrew and Israel.
[18] Slobin (2000), 22.

klezmer albums in the "world," "international," "folk," and "traditional" sections under Israel (a couple of which were Canadian bands!) and Middle East, in the "Jazz" section listed under performers' names, twice in a "humour" bin, once in a "Jewish" bin, and impressively—once in a large "Klezmer" bin at Sam the Record Man in Montreal. Not only are klezmer consumers constantly following the schizophrenic renaming game of the world of "world music" that Timothy Taylor writes about in *Global Pop*,[20] but they have to use genre-vision goggles to spot activity in any of the surrounding bins into which klezmer might sneak and squat unnoticed. Notice how an instrumental band from Finland can be placed comfortably in the category of Finland, despite its American production house and the absence of Finnish lyrics, while klezmer bands from any country can only find a secure home when placed in a bin representing "klezmer" itself. This symbolizes the relationship nationality has with Yiddish, with klezmer, and perhaps more generally, with music.

Although I have digressed in my discussion of the past, it was to demonstrate the bond between klezmer and Judaism, to show a connection in how we understand the music today with how it might have been absorbed yesterday. Perhaps *B'nai Israel* (the children of Israel), in their continuous diasporic existence, sometimes felt the need to define their homeland in terms of how they lived, not where they lived, a phenomenon that still occurs, and that I will discuss further below.

But first, as in any good post-modernist thread, I have to deconstruct the argument I just proposed. If klezmer and Yiddish were expressions of nationality, then even at their

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[20] Timothy Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

"beginnings" we have to attribute multi-citizenship to their producers and receivers. I will provide Yiddish, here, as an analogue to klezmer. What is Yiddish? I am unaware of anyone who can effectively explain the language in a sentence or two, so forgive my own over-generalization: in plain terms it is a spoken mixture of heavy German dialects (itself featuring many dialects) with interspersed Hebrew and Aramaic (ancient Hebrew) words and expressions, and featuring the use of the written Hebrew alphabet. It also contains words from the countries in which Jews dwelled since the Middle Ages, such as Romania, Turkey, the Pale, and so on. If you only know German, you would be able to understand, orally, most of the Yiddish language. If you only know Hebrew—the language of the Torah—there is no chance. Yiddish, then, was initially a hybrid that took on a life of its own, a culture/language created out of a necessity to survive in the diasporic world while retaining an aspect of something "Jewish," even if on the surface this retention was hidden to outsiders. The same thing can be said of klezmer.

The Outside World

Despite the titles and functionality of the old-time "standards," klezmer owed and belonged as much to its surrounding geography as it did to Judaism. Take some of the common forms as an example. *Bulgars* have roots in Bulgaria, *Rushishe Shers*, *Sirbas*, *Doinas* are named for Russian forms, and *Opshpiels* come out of Germany—this is but a small survey of forms borrowed from the countries in which Yiddish-speaking Jews lived. In many cases, nothing essentially separated Jewish tunes from those of their non-Jewish compatriots. Dozens of tunes attest in title and melody to "Gypsy" influences, such as *Dos Tsigayner* ("The Gypsy Tune") and *Tsiganeshti* ("Gypsy-ness"). Sapoznik

even points out how the "Gypsy" orchestra led by Rozsavölgyi Mark (1787-1848) that inspired Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* was actually a band of disguised Jews, the leader's name being Mordchele Rosenthal.[21] This adds more substance to Julia Brown's assessment of Liszt's stance towards Jewish music, from the composer's "On Gypsies and their Music in Hungary:"[22]

> Liszt included in his study considerable material on Jews for the purpose of drawing distinctions between their music and that of Gypsies, evidently mindful that Jews and Gypsies were virtually interchangeable as racial others in Europe. ...Liszt broadly replicated Wagner's negative critique of Jews, yet gave an extremely glowing, if somewhat idiosyncratic, account of Gypsy music. ...For whereas Wagner alleged that Jews always speak the language of the country they are in as a foreigner, that it is inherently impossible to write "true poetry" in a foreign language, and that Jews engage in "reflected," not "instinctive," expression, Liszt claimed that Gypsies are genuine creators of an authentically Hungarian music. It is as if Liszt adopts this idiosyncratic and possibly even knowingly erroneous position about Gypsies in order to prevent them from being tarred with the same brush.

An important reason why Gypsies and Jews were "interchangeable as racial others," and why a Jewish band could pose as Gypsies, included a concrete musical similarity consisting of modes that featured the same infamous augmented 2nd, identical dance forms, and instruments like the *tsimbl*, not to mention social factors such as a shared itinerant status. Gypsies and Jews arguably drew from a common cultural well, allowing for the confusion in their identification by others. However, this Gypsy-Jewish example is representative of the larger relationship between klezmer and its "national" vernacular contexts. A Hungarian, a Pole, a Gypsy, or a German debatably had the same amount of

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[21] Sapoznik (1999), 6.

[22] Julie Brown, "Bartók, the Gypsies, and Hybridity" in *Western Music and its Others*, edited by Georgina Born and David Hesmonhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 126-127.

culture invested in klezmer music as did a *chazan* (Jewish Cantor), the singer of the Hebrew biblical text.

Another major hole punched in the fabric of klezmer's historically Jewish ownership was its employment at non-Jewish events. In an interview by Henry Sapoznik of the late clarinettist Dave Tarras, who was an "old-country" klezmer before emigrating to the U.S. where he pioneered the recording of the music, the elderly clarinettist recalls:[23]

> We traveled for a hundred miles. Those days landowners, the Poles, Grafs—counts, barons—they used to make every time balls, you already had to play different music: waltzes, mazurkas, and once in a while an overture like [von Suppe's] 'Poet and Peasant.' So my relatives were good musicians, and they were prepared.

Others in Sapoznik's book also testify that, as klezmorim, they received a large portion of their livelihood from non-Jewish gigs. Klezmer's interaction with the current, outside world, then, was not just arbitrarily coincidental, but absolutely necessary. And I think it still is.

The New World

In many ways, contemporary klezmer in America bears a likeness to the soil it left behind in Europe. But there is an added stratum now, built up from whatever blew over klezmer terrain when all but a few inhabitants were forced to desert it. Now that we have supposedly discovered the ruins—old 78's, sheet music, and actual old-world musicians from the early 20th century—we continually tread on the shifting ground of "authenticity" that surrounds them. Yet, the "klezmer revival" of the 1970s and 80s, in whose afterglow we bask today, was not the rebirth of klezmer after a long death, but instead the

[23] Sapoznik (1999), 13.

"reenergizing" of the music from the waning of its popularity.[24] The cultural gap left by emigration, assimilation, and the Holocaust often seems to generate an illusion that klezmer disappeared. But people have been playing klezmer continuously. There were hundreds who, like Dave Tarras, came from their European training to play in America. Then came the "second generation" with musicians like Peter Sokolow and Mickey Katz, born in the USA but trained by the first generation.[25] The next wave of musicians were the ones who spawned the so called revival; clarinettists Andy Statman, Giora Feidman, the Klezmer Conservatory Band, who were instrumental in bringing about an enthusiastic study of klezmer much in the same way the Early Music movement did for classical music. Not surprisingly, some of the same issues apply, especially in the realm of authenticity.

The "a" word in musical discourse opens up a Pandora's Box of bloody conflicts and arguments. I will try to avoid them by delineating a perceived path of authenticity, based on the opinions and actions of a great number of klezmorim, that is not founded on a "pure historical *performance practice*," but instead on the interactive, unstable, morphing *spirit* of the music. I argue this in a similar vein to Richard Taruskin's comments in the context of early classical music:[26]

> A performance simply cannot merely reflect the sketchy state of objective knowledge on a point of performance practice, it must proceed from the conviction that a full working knowledge is in the performers' (subjective) possession.

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[24] Mark Slobin also suggests the words "re-evaluation" or "remembrance" as quoted by Sapoznik, in *Klezmer!* 245.
[25] Henry Sapoznik, "On Klezmer's Beginnings" in *The Compleat Klezmer* (New York: Tara Publications, 1988), 5-18.
[26] Richard Taruskin, "The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past" in *Text & Act: Essays on Music and Performance*, Richard Taruskin (Oxford University Press, 1995), 147.

In other words, musical interpretation is not necessarily a transmission of historical documents and artefacts from the past to the present, rather it is an expression and expansion of history, making it meaningful for today while using some of the tools endowed by the past.

One constant battle in klezmer concerns its understanding as something essentially historical—Eastern European and Jewish that was watered down by jazz and popular music in America in the early 1900s, or as something still growing—that has no essentiality, and sucks in external influences in a way that shapes it as klezmer. At its core, this is a philosophical clash between the view of klezmer as a fixed musical system with particular ornaments and melodies that make it Jewish, or as a musical process that is at its most "Jewish" when it mingles many different influences from outside the tradition and within, in the way that diasporic Jews have been doing for centuries, culturally and linguistically. To expand upon this idea, and to reiterate the problems of summing up Yiddish or klezmer in a breath, is a quotation from Alicia Svigals, violinist from one of the leading "third generation" American klezmer bands, the Klezmatics:[27]

> [Some Yiddish speakers] used to deny that Yiddish was really a language, calling it *dzhargon.* Similarly, journalists and music critics repeatedly emphasize the supposedly hodge-podge nature of klezmer, calling it a mix of everything from polkas to calypso. In fact, neither is true—Yiddish is a language and klezmer is an idiom with its own stylistic unity and integrity. Like any musical language klezmer needs to be studied and absorbed so it can be spoken with a native accent...

[27] Alicia Svigals, "Why Do We Do This Anyway: Klezmer as Jewish Youth Subculture" in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 47, no.1 (Winter 1998), 47.

> A corollary to the idea that this is our music is the notion that having inherited it, we can now do with it whatever we wish. ...Every musical idiom constantly changes and interacts with other musics, and the 1920s were no more "authentic" a period than any other. Rather, I believe in playing "authentically" in the sense of being true to oneself. My hope is that now that we're becoming fluent in our own language, we can go beyond simply reciting a received text to speak spontaneously in our own voices.

Here, the conflict embodies klezmer as purity, Jewishness, and myth, versus klezmer as any "hodgepodge" you want to throw together for it to make sense to you as a performer. The chief engine of this discord could be klezmer's temperamental relationship with Jewishness, which should not be confused with piety—as I once learned through a particular personal experience.

I met my friend Dan in high school in Montreal. We had both switched to a "liberal minded" public school in our graduating year after having spent our lives in separate private Jewish school systems. Dan was a brilliant student and a hipster; he smoked up, played the sax, and had a jazz band. That year, he was introduced to a growing movement among young, hip Jews becoming highly religious, "returning to their roots," observing the kosher laws, keeping the Sabbath, praying many times a day, and studying the Torah with a passion. To show the verve with which he joined this group, right now he is in Israel, about a year away from becoming a rabbi. Before he became involved with them, we used to jam in his basement every so often, with a couple of guitarists, myself on drums, playing anything from klezmer to jazz standards to James Brown. The most fun and productive elements in our sessions came from when we took klezmer tunes, or Israeli folk tunes we learned at school, and added ridiculous rhythms and

harmonies, always changing them into deathly rapid monsters based on alternating semitones in the bass—and this, from rejoiceful, happy titles like *David Melech Israel* ("David King of Israel"). We came up with a few names for ourselves: "Jimmie Shmendrix and the Pogrom Explosion," or my favourite, "Nigguns with Attitude,"[28] and gradually we attracted groupies, a couple dozen at our fullest, coming from Dan's new religious group, making the whole thing literally an underground Jewish cultural event.

Other musicians began playing with us, and non-musicians stood around, interrupting every so often (awkwardly for me) with a prepared commentary about a passage of the Torah, what it means and how we can understand it. There was only the odd violinist intent on dictating what kind of beat I "should" be playing for "this kind" of music; some apparently performed klezmer through a rigid set of rules, and were pleased to perform their instruments in the way they believed klezmorim might have done 150 years ago, and to instruct others to do the same. However, this was rare, and I was generally surprised at how much this crowd embraced our Megadeathly antics applied to our *David Melechs*. The new religious atmosphere helped to turn what was originally a secular form of fun for the original musicians into a workshop of sacred expression for some of the newer, but I thought that they would take offence at our versions of this old Jewish music. Instead they adopted it!

Besides the *yarmulkes* (skullcaps), nobody's outside appearance conveyed a deep sense of religion. Yet, there they were, young men and women giving what amounts to academic papers on particular passages of Torah, making the Hebrew words resonate in

[28] A niggun is a Hasidic meditation melody, or wordless prayer song.

English for their fellow young audience. The point was not to hark back to the days of old, and approach the music or biblical text as artefact, but to make Judaism—here symbolized and created through klezmer and verbal presentation—work for every one living then and there. The attitude seemed to be "everyone knows heavy metal, it's funny when you add it in here, and it *is* a Jewish melody, so why not?"

Tradition? *Yiddishkayt*? Groove?

The constantly recurring question is, "does adding mainstream secular characteristics to klezmer water down the Jewishness, or does it define it?" Bohlman articulates the position that the act of absorbing various styles into the Jewish repertoire contributes to a kind of creativity that is essentially "Jewish:"[29]

> Jewish instrumental repertoires derive a large measure of their creativity from an ability to borrow and assimilate from other music cultures and to create a music that has primary Jewish functions.

Meanwhile, Peter Sokolow warns musicians, in a klezmer-arranging book, about the dangers of "rocking" klezmer:[30]

> Rock music has shown remarkably little tolerance for other forms of music—it eats them up when it comes into contact with them. Since so many of today's musicians are rock-oriented, it's natural to infuse some rock feeling into everything they do. A little caution is in order. Don't throw out the baby with the bath water. Try to keep as much of the endemic nature of klezmer music—its very JEWISHNESS—in the forefront. As recently as 10-15 years ago, Chassidic music was performed in klezmer style. Today, more than half the new tunes in the genre have a disco beat, and those *freilachs* that still exist are punctuated with whining electric guitars, Sanborn alto saxes, "Tower of Power" horn licks, drum kicks, etc.—you don't even hear clarinet any more!! If klez-rock becomes what all other fusions have become, the rock will undoubtedly dominate.

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[29] Bohlman, 260.
[30] Peter Sokolow, *Guide to Klezmer Arranging and Orchestration* (Cedarhurst, NY: Tara Publications, 1991) 18-19.

Sokolow's philosophy is cautious, weary of assimilation, of being "eaten up," of losing the Jewishness—which he does not attempt to define. But this should not be confused with a "religious" stance, as Dan's group shows, and as the Chasidic community demonstrates when its composers add disco beats to their melodies, when they superimpose Hebrew lyrics onto pop music to make it kosher—and successful—for their market.

Some musicians feel it is necessary to change the music with the times to reflect its religious or "traditional" worth. John Zorn's quartet Masada has shaped its klezmer (although they do not call it klezmer) into a sometimes free-jazz, sometimes noise, sometimes sweet-ballad style that personifies the eclectic New York or "downtown" sound , along with the Klezmatics, Hassidic New Wave, and countless other "next generation" *klezmorim.* On the back of Masada's compact disc named *Eight*, is this quotation:[31]

> There is a life of tradition that does not merely consist of conservative preservation, the constant continuation of the spiritual and cultural possessions of a community. There is such a thing as a treasure hunt within tradition which creates a living relationship with tradition and to which much of what is best in current Jewish consciousness is indebted, even where it was—and is—expressed outside the framework of orthodoxy.

Conceptually, the "treasure hunt" allows individuals to choose what they want from Jewish tradition and identify themselves with it, not in "merely conserving," but in creating something new from it.

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[31] Masada, *Eight* (New York: DIW/Disk Union, 1997). A-9750186. Compact disc.

As klezmorim such as these use interactivity with jazz or rock as a process of expanding the Jewish tradition, then others use interactivity simply because different genres are compatible with the dance-style of klezmer. One group—whose name I will save for now—says this about its recent album:

> [This album] is a natural outgrowth of the Klezmer tradition, an ever-evolving form of lively, accessible dance music. Yiddish and Mediterranean melodies are set in original arrangements that dip into zydeco, rockabilly, funk, New Orleans second-line, cumbia, and Balkan brass band surf music. The repertoire includes a few tunes that are standards in these and other genres. ...The unifying idea is that of an irresistible dance groove.

The group then goes on to explain how it chose its name—¡Klezperanto!: "Dr. Ludwig Zamenhoff, a Yiddish-speaking Jew from Bialystok, further expanded this idea with the invention of Esperanto. ...Klezperanto is a new universal language. The one you speak with your feet."[32] It seems this group has a broader agenda than Jewish culture alone. Yet, most of the musicians are graduates of the more "orthodox" Klezmer Conservatory Band, whose leader (Hankus Netsky) endorses them on the back of the disc, exclaiming, "This is the most exciting klezmer fusion ever!" The goal lines, then, are not always so clearly drawn out, and I caution that my delineation of "generational" lines above is definitely not as clear-cut as I make it out to be. There are subtle layers of time and experience that interweave themselves in unpredictable and sometimes anti-gavitational ways.

Another interesting point about this album, whose tracks include "Diddley Shmiddley," "Kosher Kabana," and "Tartar Tanz" is the packaging. Naxos/World resorts to NorthSide tactics, including an icon to show where in "the world" this music is from.

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[32] ¡Klezperanto!, *¡Klezperanto!* (Franklin, TN: Naxos/World, 2000). LC 05537. Compact disc.

What do they show?...In the lower right-hand corner of the front cover is a small map of the United States, with a red dot planted on New York. So it seems someone has figured out that perhaps "world" does not only apply to music outside the USA, and that New York, after all, is part of the "world," and a much more reasonable place to put klezmer repertoire than Israel.

Klezmer as Other

This brings up another interesting question. What places klezmer in the world section when it comes from New York, Winnipeg, or New Orleans in the first place? We've seen how various bands use Western styles and forms in order to carve out a function, be it religion, tradition, dance, or utopic inter-communication. But despite its Western idioms and North-American location, klezmer is still somewhat of an Other, filed in terms of geography and not genre. Lately, reggae has managed to move out of the Jamaica (at least an important location for reggae—unlike klezmer's Israel) bins and into Reggae bins, why not klezmer?

There are several possible explanations for this. Eastern European forms and Middle Eastern-tinged scales are two potentially alienating forces that often present themselves in klezmer. The augmented 2nd, no matter what you do with it, seems forever bound to the dunes of the exotic Near East. Also, despite music publishers' rhetoric about klezmer being an instrumental style, many bands have vocals, either composing them, or singing traditional songs, mostly in Yiddish. Yiddish automatically excludes those who do not understand it, throwing any given album into obscurity. Although klezmer, in theory, features an accessible dance beat, the other musical elements are not as universally

agreeable. Squeeky, awkward, near-avant garde instrumental techniques, fossilized in the recordings of early players like Dave Tarras and clarinettist Naftule Brandwein, and taken as prerequisite devices today, express a kind of sound that while impressive and extremely difficult to master, may require that one develop a taste. And finally, the improvisatory and repetitive nature of much of the music, while keeping with qualities of jazz, is based on melodic material, not harmonic, often requiring that the listener know the actual melody. For example, in ¡Klezperanto!'s Calypso version of *Oyfn Pripetshik* ("At the Fireplace"), I could only follow the melody because I know the Yiddish folk song from which it stems. If I were not an "insider," I would not find the melody, and I think it would make less structural sense.

Despite its alienating features, though, klezmer has on occasion hit mainstream venues, and its appeal goes far beyond that of Jews. In many cities in the U.S. and Canada, a National Hockey League match is never without its token klezmer tune *Hava Nagila* between face-offs, alongside other arena staples such as "I Like to Move it-Move it" and Queen's "We Will Rock You." *Hava Nagila* is such a mainstay in hockey that the makers of the latest video entertainment system games included the tune in the official NHL version, so that you can hear it not only when you attend a match or watch the game on television, but also when you play your friends. The history of *Hava Nagila* would entail a thesis, because it is probably analogous to the history of the augmented 2nd in general, both being somewhat faceless expressions of the East. The disconnection between *Hava Nagila* and Jewish identity was made clearer to me when I gave a lecture

on klezmer to a university class of 50 students months ago.[33] I asked them if they knew what klezmer was, to resounding no's. Then I asked if anybody had ever heard Jewish music, and again, shrugs around the class. Then I played *Hava Nagila*, and the majority of the class not only recognized it, but named it, citing hockey as the source. But this tune was not the first to gain a popularity that outgrew its roots. Sapoznik relates the state of affairs of the mid 1800's:[34]

> Jewish bands frequently played at non-Jewish weddings and festivities, providing cheap employment and occasional comic relief. They were sometimes hired to play and entertain for the amusement of the assembled, with the music and musicians ridiculed and demeaned. Bands that endured this kind of baiting came to be known as *Ma Yofusniks*, a rubric derived from the title of a song that was the Hava Nagila of its time: "Ma Yofus" (How Beautiful, from Solomon's song of songs), later called "Tants, Tants Yiddlekh" and "Reb Dovidl's Nigun."

Both *Hava Nagila* and *Ma Yofus* use the same Ahava Raba mode, and probably served the same token purpose.[35] But what about non-Jewish klezmorim, are they tokenists too?

This is a complicated question, obviously, because anyone else's motives could be as diverse as those expressed by Jews. But now we have to take into account a different kind of exoticism. Klezmer education, where not passed down face-to-face, has come in the form of radio and albums, mostly from the latter. In the form of albums, klezmer is swept up and sold out of the "world music" or "world beat" categories, offering up this music as an exotic dance music, a mystical prayer music, and any-other-kind-of-marketing-phrase music for individuals to consume. Its serious study in the halls of universities, however, is absent, owing to what Slobin calls "its ambiguous status within

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[33] McMaster University (Fall, 2001).
[34] Sapoznik (1999), 6.
[35] Ahava Raba mode is the equivalent of Phrygian with a raised 3rd and 7th.

the exotic-to-heritage spectrum."[36] That is, universities do not know whether to approach klezmer as a "snap shot" music from far away, as in Eastern Europe, or as something that evolved in our own backyards in North America and that still lives. That same confusion exists to an extent within Jewish music circles, but for non-Jewish musicians, who have not enjoyed the same Jewish education, it is too easy just to see klezmer as exotic faraway music, since that is where the source comes from, the "world" bin. Of course, there is always a thin line between appropriation and respect—one that is very slippery and in a constant state of discourse in music—and that line shifts conceptually and perceptively from person to person.

An episode of NBC's Seinfeld comes to mind, when Jerry goes to the dentist. The dentist explains that he just recently converted to Judaism, and then throughout the episode we see him telling borderline anti-semitic jokes to his clients in the chair. Jerry comes to the conclusion that the only reason the dentist converted to Judaism was to tell Jewish jokes. When Jerry is asked if he is offended about this as a Jew, he exclaims, "no, as a comedian!" Purportedly, Jews are allowed to tell Jewish jokes because they have experienced Jewish life, but does the same argument hold up for klezmer? Some of klezmer's most acclaimed champions are non-Jews, such as clarinettist Don Byron who played for some time with the Klezmer Conservatory Band, and Dave Douglas, trumpeter for Masada, who was named musician of the year for Down Beat magazine in 2000. It seems the key is training, as musicologist Rob Walser stated at a recent lecture at McMaster University in Hamilton, "it just goes to show you that culture can be learned."

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[36] Slobin (2000), 17.

Humour

Ironically, when klezmer is used to make fun of Jewish culture, the source is not from its stereotypical employment by non-Jews, but mainly from Jewish klezmer bands or personalities themselves. The role of humour in klezmer is highly important for underlining the idea of self and other, Jews within the North-American context. Since the first quarter of the 20th century, Jews have been parodying themselves in their music. There were entire series composed by Jews about stereotypical characters named Cohen, Levinsky, Goldstein, Einstein, which came to be known as "Jews songs." Sapoznik describes one of these:[37]

> One highly popular series of records was launched...in 1914 with Monroe Silver's "Cohen on the Telephone," a dialect monologue of a Jewish tenant attempting to get his landlord to fix a broken window. The immigrant's inability to communicate, heightened by the novelty of early telephone technology, made for humour that is the audio equivalent of someone slipping on a banana peel.

The humour torch has been passed on to each generation. Mickey Katz, clarinettist and band leader from the 1940s to 1960s, has used humour to poke fun at Jews, non-Jews, and American culture. In his album *Mickey Katz Plays Music for Weddings, Bar Mitvahs & Brisses*, his titles include "Frailach Jamboree," "Yiddish Square Dance," and "The Wedding Samba," allowing for mulitiple cultural offenses.[38] One track is just a couple of minutes of Mickey doing a stand up comedy routine, and his killer is a tale of a Jewish man who decides to convert to Christianity, but gets up and puts on his prayer shawl and begins his morning Jewish prayers the next day, the punch

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[37] Sapoznik (1999), 79.
[38] Mickey Katz, *Simcha Time: Mickey Katz Plays Music for Weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, and Brisses* (Hollywood: Capitol Records, 1994). CDP 724383045327. Compact disc.

line being he forgot the next day because he was thinking like a Gentile. The square dance includes phrases like "Do-see-do, do-see-shmo." The cover has three Mickeys: one is toasting us under the wedding canopy; another is wearing knickers and a prayer shawl singing out of a book (the Bar Mitzvah boy); and the third, in true Baby Herman fashion, is in a diaper in a baby carriage making a sour face with his cigar—about to experience a *briss* (ceremonial circumcision). There is no music at a *briss*. The album is very cartoonish, employing ever-changing textures, exaggerated trombone slides, super-human runs on xylophone, and mixing rich emotional melodies with quick tempo changes, in general allowing the listener the pleasure of a melody, but not permitting too much indulgence before running off with another idea.

Humour often creates the most complicated of relationships between the various "shapeshifting" incarnations of klezmer, acting as pastiche, parody, and juxtaposition, as seen to some degree in Katz's music. But his was only the seed that, today, has bloomed into a more subtle and complex formation. Naftule's Dream is one of the "downtown" bands, whose album *Search for the Golden Dreydl* is produced by John Zorn's label for Jewish Music *Tzadik.*[39] Naftule's Dream employs many of the same pyrotechnics as its contemporaries in its arrangements and compositions—unison runs in lead and bass instruments evocative of heavy metal, distorted guitar, polyrhythmic ambiguity, tunes in odd meters. But their humour comes across in a way that adds serious commentary.

Naftule's Dream mixes emotionally rich, harmonically full but simple passages with avant garde noises, such as "clinking" bottles. At first this does not sound like a recipe

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[39] Naftule's Dream, *Search for the Golden Dreydl* (New York: Tzadik, 1997) TZ 7118. Compact disc.

for comedic ingenuity, but by juxtaposing the "typical" klezmer sound against foreign objects at key moments, Naftule's Dream subverts the gratification of the listener. We are denied the entire experience. They present a tune, but there is the general sense while listening to it that it is really a caricature of a klezmer tune. It is as if, after hundreds of years of klezmer, there is no way to play it straight any more, there is too much history behind it. As John Corbett has described of some of John Zorn's Asian collaborations as both "embodying and disavowing" the stereotype they poke fun at, so too does this band.[40] When klezmer's own performers cannot take their music seriously, that is itself powerful criticism.

Slowly, we are recognizing that klezmer is not an historical object, but a model, a multi-layered complex of interaction—Jewish, North American, geographical, chronological—that, as it lives, breathes, and expands, inevitably informs us more about how we interact with each other. Klezmer, more than anything, is a never-ending discursive process. The dynamic relationship between it and those who occupy themselves with it is worth exploring more in depth, taking into account other avenues barely discussed above. Given the byzantine scope of the cultural implications involved with klezmer and its communities, it is tempting to fantasize about a compact and portable, and therefore readily-observable version of the klezmer world. Happily—at least for the scholar—it might be that such a thing exists…

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[39] John Corbett, "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others" " in *Western Music and its Others*, 182.

Chapter Two:

Checklist—Toothbrush, Sleeping Bag, Yiddishkayt: Klezmer Goes to Camp

For 17 years, upstate New York has hosted an annual five-day sleepover festival and workshop called "KlezKamp." For the modern-day klezmer world, KlezKamp is the first educational institution, in terms of chronology and stature. It began in 1984 in the Catskill Mountains of New York, a region emblematic of working-class Jewish recreation because of its scattering of countless Jewish-friendly resorts, often collectively referred to as the Borscht Belt—Mickey Katz used to call it the "Jewish Alps." Henry Sapoznik, founder and still executive director of KlezKamp, is a music performer and scholar who, since the late 1970's, has been playing a major role in the klezmer revival through the publication of articles, music transcriptions, recordings, reissues, and books.[1] Sapoznik's original intentions for KlezKamp (initially named the Yiddish Folk Arts Institute) were "to offer musicians, singers, and Yiddishists[2] a place to learn, exchange, and create Yiddish music in a challenging intergenerational environment" and to "place the Yiddish music and dance within a larger context."[3] The irony is that, in 17 years, KlezKamp has

[1] See bibliography for a sample of his output.
[2] Yiddishists: a term commonly applied to students and enthusiasts of Yiddish language and literature; it is also frequently a reference to active purveyors of secular Jewish arts.
[3] Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer! Jewish Music from Old World to Our World* (New York: Schirmer, 1999), 228.

been so instrumental in re-introducing klezmer into Jewish and world consciousness that the "context" of klezmer has arguably shifted from a vanished, Eastern-European, *shtetl*-life, to KlezKamp itself.[4] Debatably, it is KlezKamp, in upstate New York—and no longer the "old country"—where klezmer *is*.

Community

Mark Slobin asserts that "KlezKamp is no simulacrum. It's the real thing, making a measurable difference in the crystallization of a type of community," a community that he admits, "never convenes except at the camp."[5] KlezKamp is a community of hundreds of individuals, but it is also a community of communities: musicians from classical, rock, jazz, and folk backgrounds, non-musicians studying Yiddish culture, elderly Yiddish-speaking Jews from the old country, young North-Americans, New Yorkers, folks from other continents, and non-Jews. The fact that this multifarious community never meets "except at KlezKamp," begs the question: does the community create KlezKamp, or has KlezKamp created a community? Broadly we can ask, if KlezKamp is where klezmer and Yiddish *are*, are the organizers of the camp in charge of Yiddish culture? And since dozens of "spin-off" institutions modeled after KlezKamp have popped up all over the world in places like Finland, Poland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Canada, does the staff of New York's KlezKamp exclusively influence the localities of the entire klezmer world?

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[4] *Shtetl* is Yiddish for "small town," connoting the innumerable Ashkenazi settlements of Jewish communities that had a characteristically communal and self-sufficient lifestyle, in mostly rural Eastern Europe.

[5] Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 78.

Note Sapoznik's description of the curricular process of KlezKamp:[6]

> The program changes its emphasis every couple of years. [The] First few years it was music and then our goal became [a] more broad based program, more folklore, more history, more lectures, more Yiddish. Then we saw the emerging children's community—so we started expanding the kids' program and day care and all the other stuff for families. And then the last couple of years we saw that the music was suffering again—so we went back and touched up the music.

On the surface, it seems Sapoznik is simply adapting to his shifting demographic, trying, understandably, to accommodate all the ages and the increasing amount of non-musicians. However, when he states, "we saw the music was suffering again," it is unclear whether he means that the Kampers' abilities had noticeably diminished or that there wasn't enough music being heard. In either case, he clearly made a conscious decision to change the way the learning is structured. The program changes its emphasis every couple of years based on Sapoznik's own assessment of the proper balance of music and context—not necessarily according to the demand of the Kampers.

The focus for KlezKamp 17, as its poster contended, was "Yiddish Media: On the Page, On the Stage, and On the Air," which paid homage to *non*-musical pioneers in Yiddish media and literacy in the United States.[7] There seems to be no "suffering" of the music these days, since Sapoznik, in his introductory address in the event's website, hardly mentions *musical* performance or instruction of any kind.[8] Here, in the homepage of the foremost klezmer establishment, we are greeted primarily with a description of obscure personalities in an esoteric field of a bygone era—and not even directly related to klezmer. Sapoznik has even casually admitted that in disseminating klezmer, his goal has

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[6] Susan Bauer, *Von der Khupe zum Klezkamp: Klezmer Musik in New York*, (Berlin: Piranha, 1999) 143.
[7] http://www.livingtraditions.org/docs/index_kk.htm, homepage for *Living Traditions: KlezKamp*. Accessed on the Internet (October 30, 2001). KlezKamp 17 occurred December 23-28, 2001.
[8] Ibid.

been to hook in unsuspecting fans, who would then be caught in a thick, ever-interesting web of Yiddish culture. This is the philosophy behind KlezKamp:[9]

> The entrée is instrumental music, but the programming surrounding the music is the point. There are classes in history, literature, folklore, crafts, film, theatre, and radio, everything that puts a civilization into a broader cultural context. If you only look at the music, it ends up being a stereotype. If you reduce any culture to one aspect, like if all people know about African-American culture is the blues, you've just negated an entire society that is multi-layered beyond that one form. It's an entrée in, but it's not a cultural be-all and end-all.

In other words, Sapoznik's experience tells him that people will often only grasp the historical, literary context of Yiddish culture—i.e. the boring stuff—if baited with klezmer—the exciting, fun music stuff. One is tempted to speculate, then, about complementary title names to Sapoznik's most recent volume called *Klezmer! From Old World to Our World* (1999)[10], one suitable alternative being, perhaps, *Klezmer! Now that I got Your Attention.* KlezKamp, as confident as it is with the level of klezmer awareness, still needs the accessibility of the klezmer banner to further Sapoznik's broader didactic agenda.

To his credit, Sapoznik realizes precisely the scope of this agenda and of the inherent problematic concerns of his unique position, and he thoughtfully comes to grips with the changing face of the culture and his place in it:[11]

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[9] http://www.thirteen.org/cityarts5/show10/body_uncut.html, transcribed interview, "Henry Sapoznik Uncut," with Local New York television channel Thirteen WNET, City Arts series, Season Five: Episode 10. Originally broadcast January 15, 1999. Accessed on the Internet (March 1, 2002).

[10] See bibliography.

[11] http://www.popmatters.com/music/interviews/sapoznik-henry-020531.shtml, PopMatters magazine online: interview of Henry Sapoznik by Michael Stone, May 31 2002. Accessed on the Internet (July 1, 2002).

> In a way I kind of envy the new generation of klezmer players... They are not burdened with issues of "preservation" or of the urgency of having to "save" the music. They have a kind of easygoing and insouciant attitude about it that keeps them from a frantic self-importance. They have inherited the legacy of the music without any of the doubt about its being an "endangered species," and play the music as if it's been there forever. That is a legacy I'm proud to have a small piece of.

He is also, in turn, greatly appreciated for his efforts: "KlezKamp...is the training grounds for the revival...Henry Sapoznik is incredibly influential 'cause he runs KlezKamp,"[12] notes Alicia Svigals, fiddler for the New York-based band the Klezmatics, arguably the most popular and influential klezmer band in the world. Svigals should know, because she was a Kamper herself, who eventually became faculty. The same is true of fiddler Deborah Strauss from the important Klezmer Conservatory Band out of Boston, and countless other prolific contemporary klezmorim. Almost the entire community of klezmer "revivalists" has either attended or taught at KlezKamp and mark it as a significant part of klezmer upbringing and experience, all thanks to Sapoznik. This translates into a significant amount of the klezmer population that is affected by Sapoznik's actions, especially since the yearly attendance at KlezKamp is on the increase. In fact, it has lately outgrown the old-time charm of the Paramount Hotel in the Catskills, and now takes place at a larger Hilton in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, just outside of Philadelphia. There is also no end in sight to the initiation of more klezmer events modeled after Sapoznik's KlezKamp—two dozen at last count on *Google.com*[13]—employing, by and large, the same staff.

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[12] Bauer, 147.

[13] http://www.google.com, a popular search engine for the Internet. Accessed on March 1, 2002.

However, these other events have a much different promotional vibe. In their websites, KlezFest in London and KlezKanada north of Montreal, to take two examples, are more concerned with publicizing what they are, for instance "[London's] first ever participatory programme in Klezmer music and Yiddish song,"[14] and "Canada's only annual Jewish/Yiddish festival of music and culture."[15] Meanwhile, KlezKamp seems to function on a different level altogether, consciously fashioning the cultural context—picking an historical theme for study over the course of the five-day program as would an academic conference. The differences between Sapoznik's KlezKamp and its "spin-offspring" indicate a less-than hegemonic relationship, illustrating the diversity and unpredictability of the revival movement in general.

Klezmer Camp as Revival

In many ways, Slobin's claim that KlezKamp is no simulacrum is true. It is indeed "the Jewish music world's trade show, where you get seen, where you get gigs,"[16] where the leaders of the movement converge, where the future leaders reveal themselves, where the surrounding culture and community is constructed to endow klezmer with its "purpose." Take the very environment: the Paramount Hotel, the original home of KlezKamp in the Catskills, offered a rustic isolation whose semblance to the old-country *shtetl*, although probably remote in reality, was still an important ingredient that allowed Kampers to "experience" the history. Instead of choosing, as its site, an urban conference

[14] http://www.jmi.org.uk/information/jmi_news4.html, Spring 2001 newsletter for the *Jewish Music Institute* in the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, England. Accessed on the Internet (October 30, 2001).
[15] http://www.klezkanada.com/, homepage for *KlezKanada*, accessed on the Internet (October 30, 2001).
[16] Slobin (2000), 78.

hall, the staff selected a self-contained, rural locale somewhere off in the mountains, bearing a palpable likeness to the romantic notion of the *shtetl.*

Furthermore, since KlezKamp's move to the hardly-rural Hilton, KlezKanada has pushed the environmental element to new levels. Perhaps the only klezmer camp that actually uses a campground, KlezKanada exploits the country space allotted to it by staging participatory historical accounts that take place all over the expanse of the property—something like re-enactments. For example, the organizers of one such excursion at the camp's sixth annual installment (where I attended and observed) took the Yiddish chronicle of one *shtetl*'s Sabbath-welcoming ceremony, and coordinated a mass dramatization of the event.[17] On the Friday evening of the five-day program, all registrants were encouraged to go down to the waterfront of the *B'nai Brith* campgrounds with their instruments.[18] They were then organized into rank and file formation, in preparation for greeting the Sabbath by the lake. At the designated time, the group began playing a traditional tune, and leading the Sabbath towards the cabins by marching—backwards (so as not to turn their backs on the Sabbath). Upon reaching their destination, the participants ended up in a festive circle, with musicians blaring, dancers weaving through the musicians, and onlookers clapping the rhythms. Each kicking up of dust and sand on the dirt road seemed to conjure up a distant, clouded memory of times past for the participants, blurring the forgotten with the present, the faraway with the here.

Here, learning demanded performance. Participants could very well have simply read the account of the *shtetl*'s customs and even discussed it, but KlezKanada implored

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[17] KlezKanada 6 occurred in Launadière, Quebec (August 23-27, 2001), author's notes.
[18] During the peak summer weeks, this property is a sleep-away summer camp for Jewish children.

them to live it with their own bodies. The functional role of klezmer, which had almost disintegrated by the later 20th century, as live music for Jewish festivals and rites of passage, is not only remembered in klezmer camps, but performed, and often—as in the Sabbath-welcoming custom—only performed there in that context. Some registrants of KlezKamp have realized its unique setting for klezmer and *yiddishkayt*, and have decided to celebrate their life-cycle events, such as bar mitzvahs and bat-mitzvahs, there in the campsite. Klezmer camps do not only *prepare* their registrants for the "real world" by teaching klezmer repertoire, technique, and Yiddish culture; instead, they are a sort of end in themselves, providing the only context for a certain socio-historical performance of the music. What you learn and experience there you may only use *there*. Klezmer camps might be the training ground for the global revival of klezmer and Yiddish culture, but just as importantly, they *are* the revival.

For the sake of clarifying the importance of this idea, let's transfer the KlezKamp homology onto something like space camp. In this klezmer-tweaked model, kids at space camp, who would normally be treated to a glorified museum exhibit of sorts in space exploration, would actually be led by working astronauts into a shuttle, instructed on how to work the vessel, and then proceed to launch into outer space. KlezKamp is both the space camp and the "real" outer space of klezmer. But, as "the real," it is still a person-made construction that bases itself on what people think klezmer used to look like. Does this sound like a simulacrum after all?

Rather than space, perhaps "time" better clarifies the issue. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses the idea of multiple temporalities:[19]

> Emphasizing a continuity they have worked hard to achieve in the wake of genocide and cultural obsolescence, pioneers of the klezmer revival repeatedly delineate the chronology of the music they have recuperated, a process that plays memory against history and autobiography against musical reconstruction. While the scene has a relatively short history, less than three decades, telling that story is integral to it.

KlezKamp, originally about disseminating and signifying klezmer—centuries-old Eastern European Jewish instrumental music, is now equally about the revival itself, since the history of klezmer now includes the revival. Since KlezKamp plays a large role in the history of the revival, the logical deduction is: KlezKamp now signifies KlezKamp.

Theorist Jean Baudrillard, whose terminology of simulacra I have been injecting here, identifies this phenomenon:[20]

> Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. [Original italics]

Observe the compatibility of the hyperreal, "the rotting of the territory," with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's subsequent comments:[21]

> The founders of the [klezmer revival] scene have a keen sense of the temporality of the revival. Unlike subsequent generations, which have grown up with neo-klezmer music, the founding cohort lived through the rupture and the recovery, an experience that heightened their historical awareness. Short and fast, the history of the scene is remembered in detail by those directly involved in it.

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[19] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sounds of Sensibility" in *Judaism: A Quarterly of Jewish Life and Thought*, Vol. 47/185 (Winter, 1998), 59.
[20] Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 166.
[21] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 60.

> Long and slow, *the history of the music that inspires it has left spotty evidence.* Those who have made the scene have also had to excavate the music. Their sense of one is infused with their sense of the other. [My italics.]

However, unlike Baudrillard, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett outlines not the disappearance of the "real"—the music from the old country—but its presence among a mix of possible perceived foundations of the current field of production, in what she calls "differentiated historical layers."[22]

Both theorists' observations give us remarkable insight into why the promotional materials (ex. websites) differ between KlezKamp and its clones. KlezKamp, which was part of the revival process, still has a "keen sense" of the revival's temporality and therefore a "heightened awareness" of the history it revived. Its role still involves excavating the culture it is resuscitating to produce a symbolic map. Places like KlezFest and KlezKanada, on the other hand, take KlezKamp's map at face value, and are not as conscious or concerned about the presence of soil beneath. Basically, KlezKamp likes to anchor itself in "history," while the others fasten themselves only to, if anything, "KlezKamp."

Historical Layers

Differentiated historical layers present themselves on a human level as well. Trumpeter Frank London, who has been at the forefront of the klezmer revival since the

[22] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 60.

late 1970's as a traditional and experimental performer, talks about his astonishment at the velocity of the changing aesthetics of klezmer culture:[23]

> A little over twenty years has elapsed since this scene and its first recordings emerged, and now there are dozens if not hundreds of bands playing Yiddish music. "Klezmer" is Jewish music; it has gone from an underused term to being overgeneralized. Now young people come up to me after a concert and say they grew up with klezmer music. This means their parents are basically my age, and listened to our recordings for the last seventeen to twenty years, so they grew up actually listening to klezmer music, a statement that used to apply only to people over sixty whose parents were from the "old country"... Now "growing up with it" refers to collegeage [sic] people who are as familiar with Yiddish music and culture as I am with the rock and roll and hippiedom of my youth.

London accurately places klezmer for the "young people" in the here and now, in "our recordings," whereas his own first contact with klezmer was through archaic recordings, old 78s "whose levels of surface noise made the task of learning parts akin to deciphering hieroglyphics without the Rosetta Stone."[24] London's task involved decoding phantom messages from the past, while today's generation of interpreters has the luxury of dialogue with the living, virtually through modern recordings, but literally through interaction in klezmer camp.

Interestingly, while elaborating on some of the reasons why people are attracted to klezmer, London explains, "[when] you look at klezmer, particularly when you go from contemporary klezmer to the old 78s, you have the beautiful phonographic, photographic view of the pre-modern era."[25] Here is the rift between the generations that produces the historical layers. While London's joy may come from the old 78s and the evocation of

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[23] Frank London, "An Insider's View: How We Traveled from Obscurity to the Klezmer Establishment in Twenty Years" in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, Vol. 47/185 (Winter, 1998) 41.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 42.

the pre-modern, today's generation, which has "grown up" on London's own interpretations and that of his contemporaries of the revival, has instead the beautiful real-life view of London's own generation and the post-modern urban New York from which it comes, with only a faint echo of the old country. I am generalizing here; of course there are many young musician scholars and historians exploring the Eastern-European historical context of klezmer like never before. But the difference is that now, the major concern is not that of bringing the music out from the ground or even of preserving it. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has explained above, that work has already been done.

Case study: it took me years of interest in klezmer and the acquisition of dozens of cassettes and CDs before I developed any fascination with recordings earlier than the 1980's. I understood the post-revival (or neo-klezmer) sound as *the* klezmer sound, and while I wasn't wrong, I also wasn't aware of the discontinuity, the rupture involved with the revival. I had no interest in looking back, nor did I have a strong concept of how the music I was listening to was created. The temporality of the klezmer I knew was "right now, right here," not really small-town Moldavia, 120 years ago.

Slobin attempts to negotiate the forces of time, place and perception by introducing Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope" into the discussion:[26]

> Any occurrence of klezmer creates a chronotope, a cohesive feeling about place and time that tends to assimilate the immediate moment to larger patterns of local knowledge.
>
> Chronotopes can also be transferable, universal, the obvious case here being *Fiddler on the Roof.* Its standardized "shtetl" portrait relies heavily on the atmosphere of music, especially including notions of "tradition" as linked to "the fiddler." This off-the-shelf chronotope is available in every society's household,

[26] Slobin (2000), 73.

> as witnessed by productions of *Fiddler* in Japan, and India [...] While a product like *Fiddler* presents a simple chronotope, today's klezmer world offers many varieties of space-time-sound fusions that almost beg for an extra term—sonochronotope?

One striking visual example that combines the universal chronotope of *Fiddler* with that of the urban New York scene is the cover of a CD titled *Knitting on the Roof*, which features the silhouetted figure of a fiddler on a cottage-rooftop against the backdrop of the Manhattan skyline.[27] Produced by the popular New York club *The Knitting Factory*, the recording is exactly what the cover predicts, modern interpretations of the original *Fiddler* tunes by the proponents of the downtown avant-garde sound. The juxtaposition here reveals something important: today's klezmer community romanticizes urban New York as much as it does the traditional *shtetl.* Pictures and drawings of the city skyline are actually a klezmer recording tradition, as a look at covers from the earliest groups such as Kapelye and Metropolitan Klezmer confirms. However, significantly, in *Knitting on the Roof* not just any part of the skyline is placed in the back, but perhaps the greatest signs of modernity and urbanity, the World Trade Centre towers, whose symbolism, as we know, made them a target for more than innocent wistful romanticism.

New Yorker Alicia Svigals, fiddler for the Klezmatics, is a personality who embodies the young, hip klezmer culture that is associated with the New York downtown sound, and she eloquently explains from where part of it comes:[28]

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[27] *Knitting on the Roof*, produced by Michael Dorf, (New York: Knitting Factory Records, 1999). Compact disc, KFW-260.

[28] Alicia Svigals, "Why We Do This Anyway: Klezmer as Jewish Youth Subculture" in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, Vol. 47/185 (Winter, 1998), 48.

> One of the most interesting developments in the Yiddishist movement and the klezmer revival is a move towards a kind of twenty-something, in-your-face radicalism, which carries the banner of Yiddish culture as a symbol of unapologetic Jewish pride a la "Queer Nation." Among klezmer bands, this approach is represented by the Klezmatics, with our "out" presentation and our tendency to mine the rich socialist Jewish past for songs we can relate to [...] In fact, among progressives of all stripes, gays in particular have found a home in the new secular Yiddishist environment from the start, surprising each other and everyone else with our unexpectedly large numbers at Klezkamp [.]

What New Yorkers like Svigals bring to klezmer and *yiddishkayt* is a sense of "cool," which is basically what the revival was about, the "cool-ization" of klezmer. As such, Svigals and her circle are on par with rock stars in the eyes of the Kampers, and they provide a large portion of the motivation for attending. The most established klezmer camps are clearly the ones who boast the biggest names on their roster.[29]

More importantly, instructional and free times at most camps are designed to promote constant interaction between registrants and faculty. As a participant observer at KlezKanada and KlezFest, I can attest to the success of this interaction, but perhaps not as intended. The bread and butter of the programs consist of instrumental and dancing workshops, historical, literary, and cultural lectures, and "impromptu" jamming sessions, which have now become so common that they are actually scheduled into the timetable. But I believe a large chunk of the allure and success of klezmer camp comes from something else. From breakfast time, when you can split a bagel with a performing legend whom you recognize from your CD shelf, to the midnight hour, when you might trip over half of the Klezmatics who have hunkered down for a smoke on the pathway to your cabin, there is an unmistakeably real and physical exchange. One KlezKamper in a

[29] New Yorkers comprised 25/37 of the faculty at KlezKanada, while Canadians numbered 5 in total.

Yahoo.com KlezKamp group entry even advises future participants to bring earplugs "so you can sleep with the faculty member two doors down who snores like a fog horn." Consider how removed this is from Frank London's early journey of klezmer discovery—sifting through old, distorted recordings of faceless people from foreign countries and trying to emulate a sound he had no clue how to make. Klezmer camp provides a solid reality, enabling its registrants to see, hear, smell, taste and touch klezmer with their own bodies.

In the end, the role of klezmer camps is anything but clear-cut. In one sense they are a locus of intellectual dissemination, a point of entry for the newest educational agenda, "what can we rediscover about our past this year?" In another sense, they mirror the current trends of klezmer culture, encapsulating within their walls the sights and sounds, the chronotopic evocations, and even the very klezmer all-stars that the culture has come to recognize from recordings and concerts. And yet, in another sense, klezmer camps *are* klezmer culture, literally producing a community of otherwise unconnected individuals, delivering into the revival—or out of it—new customs and a dynamic contemporary context with its own time and place, its own purpose. However, if klezmer camps are ultimately only a microscopic version of the klezmer world, then their analyses provide but the starting point on the route towards a broader, macroscopic perspective.

Chapter Three:

Montreal: A World of Klezmer on One Island

In the previous chapter, I probed the phenomenon of klezmer camp because it effectively locates itself in an observable vacuum. Small and isolated by necessity, it is a great deal easier to process mentally and document than something immeasurably endemic. However, even in that small-scale study, the complexities I encountered should be an indicator of the problems involved in exploring something markedly bigger, namely, what happens outside of the vacuum the other 360 days of the year. It is time to look at how klezmer manifests itself in everyday life, in a typical North-American setting.

Throughout the year, klezmer inhabits many cities, amongst the cosmopolitanism of chic nightclubs, outdoor music festivals, wedding banquets, synagogues, churches, fundraisers, and orchestral concert halls. It is found in basement music collections, piled on mantelpieces next to stereo systems. It is broadcasted publicly over national airwaves, and globally over the Internet. Lately it has swelled to occupy large chunks of bookshelves in academic, municipal, and residential libraries. In a relatively short time, it has accessed all channels of media to the point where it envelops many and varied interlocking social functions, anywhere from ritual ceremony to venture tourism. All of

this has happened through a negotiation at the front lines, where that which travels underneath the great umbrella of "klezmer" courts local individuals. Once embraced by these individuals, klezmer expands and adapts to include them.

Klezmer converses with people. It imbues individual psyches in the most personal of ways, creating meanings as diverse as the minds in which they are produced. While it is not my goal here to relate all of psychoanalytic theory pertaining to music and meaning, klezmer's psychological import must be reckoned with at the same time as its more broad socio-cultural attributes, since these murky and expansive categories are interdependent. Klezmer culture is not monolithic and exclusive. The task of pragmatically establishing cultural meaning in any of klezmer's components, even within a single, unified setting, is limited to what can essentially be "known" about individuals and their own personal processes of generating meaning. But culture, which can be the collective, codified compilation of many personal experiences, can in turn influence meaning for individuals. Amid the peculiar motivations for and responses to klezmer, there occur mutual patterns of expressed meaning related to commonalities of language, religion, genealogy, age, class, profession, and so on. All of these arguments will become clearer as the discussion of klezmer culture turns to one particular geographical setting: the city of Montreal, Quebec.

As it stands now—although the situation is changing—a discussion of klezmer does not automatically bring Montreal to mind. In fact, in terms of recorded output and concerts, the scene in Montreal is relatively quiet when weighed against comparable cities like Toronto and Boston. So, why has it been chosen here?

The answer is threefold. First, and as a disclaimer, Montreal is my hometown. I know and can talk about the city like no other, and I admit that it is the easiest and most obvious choice for me. Furthermore, I have been in the thick of the local klezmer scene, having been a performer for a few years with a band that I co-founded. This is somewhat of a problematic position, since I will necessarily be turning inwards and theorizing myself along with my setting, perhaps revealing predispositions and biases in my own process of inquiry. However, I trust the advantages outweigh the dangers, since because of my position, I can boast a stockpile of "-emic" resources; that is to say, I speak the vernacular, I am acquainted with the venues and the personalities, and I can better intuit any of the manifold "vibes" related to contexts, locations, or politics. In short, I am an insider.

Second, Montreal does hold a unique position in North America, in that its political situations are habitually known to most of the continent, and often appear in the news media across the vast territory of Canada and the United States, as well as overseas. The element of "European" and French culture within the city brings in a certain recognition of distinctiveness, not to mention tourism, which promotes Montreal as different, cultured, and "multicultural," if sometimes linguistically tumultuous. Its Jewish history is also quite unique in Canada and the U.S, having been established very early and having conveyed an unprecedented influence on the rest of North-American and world Jewry. Furthermore, as a Canadian city, Montreal provides a fairly marginalized viewpoint for klezmer scholarship, since most published academic material about the music focuses on

the domain of the United States—specifically New York and its surroundings—and sometimes Europe.

Lastly, Montreal has enough in common with the rest of the major cities in North America that its unique atmosphere and political issues may simply act as amplifications of what happens all the time everywhere else under different names and to different degrees. While the ongoing English/French language debates are peculiar to Montreal and Quebec, their implications are not. Language is such a dominant issue because it touches on matters of identity, nationality, class, gender, colonialism, and religion, which are concerns that every geographical community has to deal with at some point. Montreal might have the ability, more easily, to demonstrate how klezmer interacts with these surrounding cultural ingredients because they are so exposed and potent here. Overt categorizations—accurate or otherwise—have been ingrained into the psyche of the city through such politico-linguistic turmoil, allowing for a complicated and sometimes elusive, yet unusually manageable tracing of the city's cultural portrait over that of the klezmer scene, and vice-versa. The Montreal klezmer community, then, because of its modest scale, its observable social surroundings, its marginal yet not unfamiliar milieu, and its often-explicit political implications, provides an ideal vantage point from which to explore all manners of interaction between the music and its environment.

This will not be, in any way, a comprehensive historical study of klezmer music in Montreal, which would be an undertaking of colossal proportions. Instead, I present some of the seminal issues in the contemporary geo-socio-politics of Montreal as a

backdrop of varying significance to some of the perceptible klezmer revival culture of the city. My ethnographic methodology will encompass the analysis of individual accounts and case studies, published material such as criticisms and articles, and performances such as public concerts, club dates, and private functions.

Even with the strongest of methodologies, there is no easy way to begin to chart this klezmer scene, especially since the culture of the music and of the city continue to undergo rapid transformations. Nevertheless, one must begin somewhere, and my own experience is as good a place as any. Since I chose my native Montreal, I feel I must relate what I understand as my own relationship with klezmer. This will establish a framework for my theorization of the accounts of others, and it should also reveal my method of procedure, looking inwards when necessary and outwards whenever possible, permitting a viewable projection of the ways I am connected to the subjects which I discuss, and not simply an "objectivist" chronicle.

The Problem of Rootedness

I cannot remember the first time I heard klezmer music, or the word klezmer itself. It seems as though both have been in my life since time immemorial, but the more I investigate, the more this appears to be untrue. Klezmer's presence in the Jewish community of Montreal today is primarily a result of New York's latter-day influence, and especially that of the seventeen-year-old KlezKamp, where individuals from Montreal began making pilgrimages in its early years and bringing back the bounty of lost musical heritage. For a freshly transplanted genre, it is difficult to understand how I

would have such a deeply rooted concept of klezmer, as though it were around me all of my life.

Emphasizing this incongruity is a conversation I had with clarinetist Rick Goldman, a founding member of what is arguably Montreal's first band to play exclusively under the klezmer placard, the Bagg Street Klezmer Band. Immediately placing a perspective on our interview, the band, the local scene, and myself, Goldman noted the auspicious timing of our conversation, which occurred the week that the band was celebrating its tenth anniversary, having been formed in 1992. Bagg Street, (a.k.a. the "Baggers") billed as the city's first working klezmer band, and certainly the scene's first recording band,[1] is also the first live klezmer band I have ever heard; yet only a decade had even passed since it played its first gig. If the band's minute gestation period dispels conventional notions of rootedness, its near-detachment from the local community accentuates it even more. Goldman admits that outside influences are mostly responsible for the origin of the local ensemble:[2]

> It really came out of KlezKamp, almost completely. I had bought by email—I was going to say over the Internet, but it didn't really exist at that point—a Giora Feidman tune book which, as wonderful a player as he [is], wasn't a particularly good thing to learn from. It didn't explain anything about ornamentation and so on, and I only had one or two recordings. So it was when I went down to KlezKamp [in New York's Catskill Mountains] starting in 1989 that I really started to learn—what does it mean to get up and do a dance set, how are the tunes strung together, what are the different rhythms, and something about the ornamentation. And then, it was pretty much through my bringing back this information—mainly tapes, some transcriptions—and showing it to this small group that formed, that we all learned this stuff... Starting that Christmas of 1992, a few other band members went and then everybody started to get in on this learning process, getting tapes and so on.

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[1] Bagg St. Klezmer Band, *Go Meshuggah!* (Montreal: Bagg Street Productions, 1995), compact disc, BSKB-101CD.

[2] Rick Goldman, interview with the author; tape recorded (February 2002, Montreal, Quebec).

The route of recovery is clear. Goldman is not part of a long line or caste of musicians playing Jewish music in Montreal. He has not been exposed to klezmer since childhood through his family or elders. Klezmer has not been a part of his personal background, and—quite the opposite is true—he has had to go out and explore it elsewhere, at first by sending away for it by email, and then traveling to another country, to a community full of individuals who also seek guidance and information on this music because they too have no local resources. Klezmer did not simply happen upon Goldman, but he had to make some serious decisions and expend a significant amount of effort to learn it and bring it home. Notably, only after four years of KlezKamp could Bagg Street even become a reality.

However, somehow Goldman also experiences this "rooted" feeling about the music, despite its initial absence in his geographical and cultural community and in his own personal upbringing. A highly analytical and contextually conscious personality, Goldman explains his interest in klezmer:

> Part of it, I think, is the return to the roots phenomenon. I don't want to devote my life to it, actually, I think there's something maybe sad or limiting if all you're going to do is study what your grandparents did...but certainly, as a musical outlet, it spoke to me more than jazz.

Expanding on the idea of the music "speaking" to him, yet still with an element of reservation, he discusses a workshop that he attended at KlezKamp which was hosted by pioneering revivalist Andy Statman:

> He was saying, for him, [klezmer] made him feel more Jewish. He was saying he didn't feel an Irish person could have the same connection, and he didn't feel he could have the same connection playing Irish music. A bunch of people said, you know, that's really very closed-minded. Kurt Bjorling [veteran non-Jewish clarinetist and celebrated archivist/compiler for the band Brave Old World] was in the room, and I think people felt bad because Andy was saying this in front of him. And they were saying, you know, look what a wonderful contribution other people are making. So I see something a little bad about saying that in a way, but I guess for me it *was* a return to the roots and it spoke to me in a way that, say, playing jazz didn't...this was somehow much more exciting.

Goldman is careful not to be dismissive of any motivations or connections others might have to the music, and acknowledges that his own band reflects the "new reality" in that half of the current members are not Jewish. Still, his attraction stems from a perceived root of Jewishness that exists in him and in the music, which is reflected in the band's very name. Tiny Bagg St. in Montreal sits at the center of the old Jewish quarter on the plateau of Mount Royal just off the Main (Rue Saint-Laurent), and maintains one of the city's oldest synagogues. The question remains, then, what about the music exudes a feeling of being traditionally rooted in Jewishness, if not the music's actual historical presence in Goldman's Jewish life experiences?

Goldman does struggle with this question, and his answer seems almost linguistically based. Citing a quotation he read from a *New York Times* article featuring the acclaimed clarinetist David Krakauer, he draws on the idea that klezmer sounds like "his grandmother's voice" talking to him. Goldman does not speak Yiddish, but it is his father's first language, and throughout his childhood his parents often communicated in the language: "you know, it's the same old story you hear from everywhere...they spoke it when they didn't want the kids to understand." His grandparents also spoke Yiddish, and he feels that there is an echo from the language that speaks to him in klezmer.

One need not stop at David Krakauer and Rick Goldman to find references of personal connections between the sound of the language and the music. On the first page of the liner notes of the most popular klezmer recording to date, violinist Itzhak Perlman observes, "growing up in Israel, I heard the sounds of klezmer music on the radio. My parents had both come from Poland, and Yiddish was the first language of our home. When I moved to the United States, klezmer music came with me...Klezmer music is in my blood."[3] And the following paragraph, from the liner notes of a 1994 reissued compact disc of Mickey Katz's music from the 1950's, discusses one particular track, connecting the instrumental execution, the human voice, and the Yiddish quality, albeit somewhat enigmatically:[4]

> One of the most evocatively expressive clarinetists ever, Katz is at once soaring and down to earth, and is as thoroughly saturated in "Yiddish soul" as chopped liver is in chicken *schmaltz*. Katz had previously incorporated this "Yiddish Folk Melody" into his 1947 "Yiddish Jam Session" (in Gill's violin part) and also recorded it with a lyric as "I Remember Mama." In these two live readings, Katz compellingly switches between the clarinet's lower subtone register and high-note squawks. Throughout, he plays with such personal intonation and a tone so close to a human voice that he would have felt right at home in Ornette Coleman's "free jazz" quartet of the early '60's.

The Coleman reference is a little mysterious, but in the context, seems to be more about Katz's virtuosity than of the style—in a similar spirit, one might note the author's equation of Katz with Duke Ellington and Tito Puente in later paragraphs. The important but not extraordinary point here is that Katz's playing is likened to the human voice, and specifically, the Yiddish voice.

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[3] Itzhak Perlman, *Itzhak Perlman/In the Fiddler's House*, produced by Steven Paul (New York: Angel Records, 1995), liner notes, p.1. 7243 5 55555 2 6. Compact disk,

[4] Mickey Katz, *Simcha Time: Mickey Katz Plays Music for Weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, and Brisses* (Hollywood: Capitol Records, 1994), liner notes. CDP 724383045327. Compact disc.

The connection between klezmer and the phonetics of Yiddish is an exceptionally interesting topic, because it does provide a possible concrete connection between those who have slight Yiddish backgrounds with their attraction to a kind of music that perhaps emulates many of the language's characteristics. Unfortunately, this subject is one that has not encountered much scholarship, so any solid correlation must await additional research. Suffice it to say that Goldman is not unique in experiencing a deep-seated feeling of nostalgia or recollection when listening to or performing klezmer, even if his only connection to the music might be the spoken voice of his Yiddish-speaking parents or grandparents.

It is also interesting to note that many who claim to hear Yiddish in klezmer (like those above) either play the clarinet, as do Goldman, Krakauer, and Katz, or they describe clarinet music. In fact, when I posed a question to a Jewish music mailing list at *Jewish-Music@Shamash.org* of how people felt about the connections between aural Yiddish and klezmer, one member—a singer—automatically replied with a reference to the instrument:[5]

> The clarinet mimics the voice quite well: Range, tone. I think that pitch bending, on whatever instrument that will allow it is a voice thing. On a vocal point of view, Yiddish is not easy to sing. Too many clusters of consonants... Doesn't seem to have prevented it to be sung though...

Even in standard orchestration books, the clarinet is referred to as "the *nightingale* of the orchestra...a most agile and versatile instrument, equally effective in *lyrical* as well as

[5] To view archives of this list, visit the Internet site http://www.shamash.org on the World Wide Web and select *World Music from a Jewish Slant* from the various mailing lists. This particular comment was posted on May 1, 2002.

active running passages in all registers. [My italics.]" [6] The primacy of clarinet in contemporary klezmer is no secret, and neither is its frequent employment of vocal characteristics. Might these two factors support each other's roles by conjuring up the likeness of a Yiddish voice for the Jewish listener without obliging a working understanding of the language? When Goldman says he hears the voice of his grandmother, how literally should we be taking him?

Theoretically, the klezmer clarinet offers a personally rooted Yiddish connection to Goldman and others who have limited Yiddish backgrounds, but it introduces an important agent of distance from the actual language through its instrumental rather than vocal embodiment. Ironically, this permits a closer relationship to the music and even to the "past" for those who experience alienation from their ineptitude in verbal Yiddish communication—an "outdated" medium. The musical version of the spoken language, as it were, seems more accessible and malleable, and also more contemporarily plausible, while participating in either the language or the music serves to invoke the same chronotope of Eastern European Jewish ancestry. The implications of this speculation certainly contribute to an understanding of the unremitting popularity of klezmer, of the feeling of nostalgia and rootedness expressed by many of its Jewish followers, and perhaps, of the initial and continued prominence of the clarinet in the genre's North-American incarnation.

There is more to this last idea. The standard leading instruments in a contemporary klezmer ensemble are clarinet, violin, and trumpet. All three can employ the same kinds

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[6] Samuel Adler, *The Study of Orchestration* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1989), 194-195.

of ornaments and melodic cells unique to klezmer, and can play the same melodies. The main differences, of course, are timbre and range. In his *Klezmer Arranging and Orchestration* (1991), Peter Sokolow calls the clarinet the "king of klez!" citing its full mid register, brilliant upper register, excellent low register for solo, and its richness of effects including the "chirps," trills, and finger glissandi used in the style.[7] Sure enough, of klezmer's four most prolific pioneering recording artists in the early 20th century, three were clarinetists.[8] Today, compilations of selections from their old 78s are reissued with titles such as "Dave Tarras: Master of Klezmer Music," "Naftule Brandwein: King of Jewish Music," and "Harry Kandel: King of Klezmer." There is no doubt that the clarinet has dominated the genre, and with that domination has come the patriarchal branding of the instrument as "the king," and of the men who popularized it as kings, masters, and as Sokolow puts it, "the founding *Tatehs* (fathers) of this music."[9] All of this descriptive narrative is clearly comprehensible since these pioneering musicians were, after all, men—women, with a handful of exceptions, were absent in the klezmer-recording scene of the 1920's, at least physically.

Gendering Yiddish and Klezmer

It starts to get a little perplexing, however, when reconsidering the remarks of Rick Goldman, whose father's first language is Yiddish, but who hears his grand*mother* speaking to him, as do many others, when listening to these very recordings of kings,

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[7] Peter Sokolow, *Guide to Klezmer Arranging and Orchestration* (Cedarhurst, NY: Tara Publications, 1991), 14-15.
[8] Naftule Brandwein (1889-1963), Harry Kandel (1885-1943), and Dave Tarras (1897-1989). Violinist, composer, and arranger Abe Schwartz was the non-clarinetist; he started with Columbia Records in 1917.
[9] Sokolow, 19.

masters, and *tatehs* playing the king of all instruments. In the extract of Mickey Katz's liner notes above, note how the author mentions that Katz recorded that same Yiddish Folk Melody elsewhere with the lyric "I Remember *Mama*." Somehow, all of this *man*-made Yiddish music has resulted in the rousing of maternal and grandmaternal imagery and reminiscence. There are a number of explanations for this. The shortest is that perhaps the klezmer clarinet really does sound like a grandmother. In their recordings, Dave Tarras and Naftule Brandwein, who created the most influential stylistic watersheds to date, often employed a shrill quality to their instruments—they mostly played the E flat or "piccolo" clarinet—bending notes, chirping, winding up and down the registers in a manner that one might envisage a grandmother, or more particularly and stereotypically, a Jewish Yiddish-speaking grandmother doing in normal conversation.

Like most simplistic explanations, this is problematic. Jewish grandmothers are not all cut from the same monolithic stone, uttering cries of "*oy vei*," plunking profuse amounts of food onto their grandchildren's plates, complaining up and down in piercing tones to aloof husbands about the air conditioning, and so on. As I discussed in some of the Mickey Katz recordings in chapter one, however, Jews themselves are often the most fervent displayers of artistically expressed Jewish stereotypes. Therefore, it is possible that the vision of a grandmother personified in the piercing tones of a klezmer clarinet comes from exactly this Baudrillardian hyperrealist image of "the grating Jewish grandmother," in other words the belief in the myth rather than the observation of one's real grandmother. There is also the possibility that the stereotype is generally accurate. But all of this seems, perhaps, a little too cynical.

Goldman's comments, in both tone and vocabulary, bespeak a deeper and more respectful evocation of his grandmother's voice, not just some television-like persona. Furthermore, the range of emotions available, and indeed expressed, by leading klezmer clarinetists wholly exceeds the "whining and complaining" sentiments often automatically ascribed to the style, and equally to Jewish grandmothers. I, for example, experience a wide-ranging gamut of emotions when listening to the "kings of klez:" glory, loss, ambition, strength, anger, embarrassment, to name a few. While there does seem to be a solid association between klezmer reception and maternal reminiscence, my opinion is that the stereotypical grandmother, if she does factor into this phenomenon, plays only a small role, and is part of a much larger politic.

However, the grandmaternal aura constantly built up around klezmer reception may well be a mythical manifestation. Observing the sexual politics of the Ashkenazi communities within which klezmer was born, one might begin to find a tie to the receptive attitudes towards klezmer by today's descendants. Benjamin Harshav helps here with a linguistic consideration of the 19th century Ashkenazi world:[10]

> Religious education and scholarship were predominantly for men; schools and study-houses were exclusively for men; teachers and preachers were male; boys accompanied their fathers to synagogue and absorbed expressions in Hebrew and Aramaic. The Holy Tongue [i.e. Hebrew] became associated with the male world. Its expressions flowed into Yiddish through this channel. Yiddish books were ostensibly printed for women though read by men as well. Yiddish was the language of home, family events, and intimacy. It was the "mama-language," with all the possible connotations, negative and positive, which this division implied. Subdivisions of a language into social and professional idiolects are a general phenomenon; but here, two differently balanced idiolects—the world of learning and the world of home and trade—met in one family.

[10] Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 23.

Yiddish is easily gendered and classified against its counterpart Hebrew; it is feminine, domestic, and realistic while Hebrew is masculine, holy, and learned.

Naomi Seidman in *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (1997) explores this bilingualism of Ashkenazi Jewry at length.[11] She offers a kind of archeological tracing of sexual identity attached to each language, and provides a remarkable account of the way the Yiddish/feminine-Hebrew/masculine binary played out in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Eastern Europe and Palestine. Among her observations is that Yiddish literature, even from the Middle Ages, was almost exclusively billed as female. Male authors using the *mame loshn* (Yiddish for "mother tongue"—which was Yiddish) wrote everything from romances to ethics parables, and importantly, a 17th-century Yiddish reworking of the Hebrew bible for women, an edition called the *Tsenerene*. In general though, for a long time Hebrew literature comprised the canon of every educated man of society while Yiddish literature was believed to be a genre for women, for men "who are like women," and for the uneducated. The low culture stigma was attached not only to the literature and the audience, but also to authors, and sometimes by the very authors themselves. Seidman translates a quotation from one 19th-century Hebrew author who judged his own dabblings in Yiddish literature by exclaiming, "I degraded the honor of my pen."[12] With the socialist principles that began to take hold in Eastern Europe by the late 19th century, however, came a shift in much of this philosophy, and an interest in, or at least sympathy for, women and the

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[11] Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[12] Ibid., 20.

uneducated. Writers were now turning to Yiddish to become the champions of this underclass of "women and the common people."[13] Yiddish writers—who were still in large part, men—were shattering the stigma coupled with their literature and replacing it with a mark of gallantry. Some did this by claiming Yiddish was no longer a language for women. Others embraced the femininity and flaunted it. Either way, the end result was a conscious repositioning of Yiddish into open public admiraton and the beginning of Yiddishist principles.

Then the advent of Zionism in Eastern Europe resulted in some ugly battles within the Ashkenazi community, not only between those who were for and against the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine, but between those who thought a future Jewish state should speak Hebrew and those who advocated Yiddish, the holy tongue or the mother tongue, the language of King David, or what Hebraists called the "jargon" language of the diaspora. This was not a trivial struggle, and rabbis, writers, artists and philosophers all were forced to pick a side; there could be no compromise. Throughout all of this, in newspapers, pamphlets, and cartoons, Seidman detects a common motif in the characterization of Yiddish as opposed to Hebrew. For instance, Yiddish would often be a female character being oppressed by the male Hebrew. Commonly, Hebrew and Yiddish would both be portrayed as women in a love triangle attached to a specific man (usually a high profile writer), in which case:[14]

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[13] Seidman, 13.
[14] Ibid., 31.

> Hebrew might appear as a woman with idealized features, stylized biblical or classical garb, and a statuesque bearing while Yiddish would be more likely to have characteristics drawn from a realist, "low culture," repertoire—an apron or plump figure, for instance. Similarly, one of Yiddish's many names, *mame-loshn* (or "mama-language," in Harshav's translation), expresses the feminine associations of Yiddish by linking the language with a certain kind of woman, a literalized "figure of speech." While the term "mother tongue"...is a "dead" metaphorical abstraction used with equal ease for whatever one's first language happens to be, "mame-loshn" evokes the specific set of cultural characteristics and stereotypes associated with the Eastern European Jewish mother. Implicit in this identification is the generational dimension: Yiddish is not only the language of women, it is also the language of older rather than younger women.

Assuming the associations between klezmer and Yiddish, Seidman's outlining of the affixations of gender and age to the language are vital to an understanding of the music's continuing grandmaternal impression—the dots connect easily. However, once again, there is a rather large temporal distortion here.

The whole of the Yiddish vs. Hebrew dispute that created the female mythology in question is of another time. As Seidman articulates, the language debate "was prematurely and violently foreclosed," owing to the Nazi destruction of half the Yiddish-speaking population and its entire Eastern European context, Stalin's devastation of Soviet Yiddish life, lives, and culture, and the founding of the state of Israel on top of all of this history.[15] Yiddish was a language of death, not of renewal, so Hebrew absolutely succeeded in what was probably a sad and hollow victory, in consequence of an even sadder forfeiture. Today, Hebrew, besides its position as official language of Israel, is also by far the dominant language of Jewish education and culture in North America. Hebrew is virtually mandatory in North-American Jewish day schools, while Yiddish is a rare and exceptional inclusion in most curricula. Importantly, of this once hot-blooded

[15] Seidman, 135.

relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish, which has cooled and outdated itself, there lingers the historical fallout, which Seidman calls a collective Yiddish amnesia:[16]

> The Jewish language, now, is the one that connects [North-American Jewish students] with the liturgy and texts of their ancestors and with their Israeli cousins, but not, for the most part, with their grandparents.

Seidman's implication is that Yiddish would be the language that connects with one's grandparents. But when Yiddish is not an option—and Seidman is quite thorough in exposing how sparse an option it has become—klezmer, which has enjoyed an immense popularity, might play the role of anti-amnesiac. The connection of klezmer with Yiddish, the music's suggestion of women, the inducing of motherly and grandmotherly imagery, the unique, alternatively non-Hebrew atmosphere, the realistic day-to-day, non-liturgical context of klezmer and Yiddish—all of these factors contribute to an understanding of the rootedness that someone like Rick Goldman might experience only in the world of klezmer, and to his likening of it, either metaphorically or literally, to the voice of his grandmother.

Yiddish Culture in Montreal

It comes as no surprise, then, that "Yiddishly speaking," Goldman's Montreal is a virtual capital—a hotspot for the language in North America. The immigration boom of the early 20th century brought to Montreal enough Eastern-European Jews to form the city's largest pre-World War II immigrant collectivity. Consequently, Yiddish became

[16] Seidman, 135.

the third most widely spoken language in the city after French and English.[17] On the world stage, this meant that Montreal was a cultural counterpart to such Yiddish centers as Warsaw, Odessa, and New York. The editors of one chronicle of Montreal's Yiddish culture explain:[18]

> Thus, within a few short years of settlement the transplanted immigrants had organized a formidable network of schools, newspapers, libraries, literary journals, political organizations, synagogues, adult education institutes, labour unions, lecture series, Zionist movements, old-people's homes, social services, and hospitals, all conducting their activities in the Yiddish language.

Many of these institutions thrived for a long time, sometimes merging into larger organizations, and many continue to this day, still playing as large a role as they once did. The language that began all of this, however, has faced the threat of steady erosion. Hebraism and assimilation, at least initially, seemed to work from different ends to accomplish the same result for the one-time language of all of Ashkenaz. Nevertheless, Yiddish has never disappeared, and has demonstrated a remarkable stamina. For instance, while most of North America was experiencing a rapid depletion of Yiddish culture, Montreal was giving birth to more bilingually Yiddish/Hebrew institutions, some for the express purpose of keeping Yiddish alive. The Folk Shule (People's School) dayschool saw its first graduating class in the bilingual program in 1940,[19] followed by the establishment of the bilingual Jewish Teacher's Seminary in 1946, along with

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[17] Ira Robinson; Pierre Anctil; Mervin Butovsky; editors, *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*, (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1990) 15.
[18] Ibid., 17.
[19] From its founding in 1914, the Folk Shule was designed as a Hebraist vehicle, and was conceived during the Hebrew/Yiddish battles as an alternative to the all-Yiddish National Radicalist Schools—later called the Peretz Schools. Eventually the Folk Shule incorporated Yiddish elements, and decades later, the two rivalling educational institutions united to form the Jewish People's Schools and Peretz Schools, my own alma mater. Robinson, Anctil, and Butovsky include more of this history in the publication noted above.

associated summer camps, and later, a Yiddish theatre troupe in 1956 that still thrives today.[20] In many ways, the North-American Yiddish renaissance in the 1970's and 80's was a celebration of Montreal's continued contributions rather than the revival of a lost heritage. Be that as it may, even accounting for the institutionally preserved route—and understanding that most institutions have long since switched to English and French for daily business—everyday spoken Yiddish has hardly passed on from the first generation immigrants to later generations in Montreal, with the exception of the diverse yet reclusive Hasidic communities whose mother tongue is often still Yiddish. Therefore, Montreal has been as fertile ground for a *Yiddishkayt* revival as anywhere else, and is lucky to still have many of the original harbingers of the language and culture to make it real and valid.

This Yiddish revival and its impact do not only fit in with klezmer because of the historical/theoretical attachment of klezmer to Yiddish, but because of a concrete presence of klezmer at events designed to promote and celebrate Yiddish. Among these is the Yiddish Festival, which has existed annually to some degree for about three decades, and which eventually overlapped with and then fused into what has now become KlezKanada. The festival has been held for many years in the former city of Côte-St-Luc (CSL),[21] on an outdoor stage in a park, flanked by forest on one side and the Samuel

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[20] Zachary M. Baker, "Montreal of Yesterday: A Snapshot of Jewish Life in Montreal During the Era of Mass Migration," in *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*, 32-34.

[21] The controversial Bill 170, passed by Quebec's National Assembly in late December 2000, forced a merger of Montreal municipalities into several boroughs governed by one "mega-city" of Montreal. Côte-St-Luc became part of the larger borough of CSL/Hampstead/Montreal West. In 2001, many former municipalities contested the hasty passing of this bill in court, while CSL's administration angrily protested the bill, citing the detrimental effects it would have on the "Jewish character" of the city (see note 23 below).

Moscovitch Hockey Arena and Beth Israel Synagogue on the other. Home to the largest number of Montreal Jews—22% of the total community—and a third of whom are over the age of 65, CSL is probably the heart of Yiddish Montreal, if not Canada.[22] An important feature of the festival, which parades anything from Yiddish monologues and skits to cabaret-style revues, has always been the showcasing of local Yiddish musicians, many of whom have been klezmorim, including neighboring Hampstead-municipality natives the Rosenblatt Klezmer Ensemble, the all-French Québecois group Raoul, the Baggers, and many others.

However, the fact that there is an all-French, non-Jewish Québecois klezmer group is a tip-off that immersion in and celebration of Yiddish culture is not the only, and perhaps not even the main contributing ingredient to the current-day klezmer world in Montreal. I can affirm this point by mentioning that in all of my ten years of Jewish elementary and high school, in the very school system that boasted (at the time) 80 years of continued Yiddish language education in Montreal, not once do I recall the mention of the word klezmer or of the transmission of any klezmer music, theoretically, historically, audibly, or whatever. In the spirit of Seidman, I would diagnose the Jewish educational system to have a collective musical amnesia. Instead of listening to Dave Tarras or Mickey Katz in our very marginalized, monthly 30 minute music classes, we sang—at closest: post-WWII Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs, and—more often, at furthest: Beatles songs, Hollywood musical numbers from the 1950's and 60's, and assorted folksy Canadiana, all monophonically, all without learning any basic fundamentals of

[22] These statistics appear in *Canadian Jewish News*, February 8, 2001, "Cote St. Luc's Jewish character said threatened by mega-city" by Janice Arnold.

Western music. There was also no performance of any of this before an audience. That was elementary school; in high school there was no music whatsoever.

Klezmer, and for that matter, musical instruction, was something I encountered very much outside my private Jewish schooling. True, the klezmer revival itself was in its infancy throughout these school years, and klezmer was hard to find in any corner of academia, let alone day schools. But the absence of musical education, and especially Jewish musical education in a program whose mandatory courses include subjects like Hebrew, Yiddish, bible interpretation, Jewish history, and Jewish traditions, seems almost conspicuous. What students ended up learning about music, if anything, was its non-importance. In any case, it demonstrates that while klezmer does have a lot to do with Yiddish, and of course Jewish history, and while instructional Yiddish and Jewish history have maintained a continued presence in the city through such lofty channels as the education of school children, klezmer simply has not been floating on that same cultural boat. Its more recent arrival points to a source somewhat outside the development of Yiddish, Yiddish culture, and Jewish culture in the city. Its revival really was a revival, not a celebration of persistence.

Klezmorim in Montreal

I should include a note here about any extensive history of Montreal klezmer and the scope of this chapter. One should not assume that the local klezmer revival followed a complete disappearance of the music after WWII. However, one can imagine that its fading was on a much greater scale than, say, the Yiddish language, which managed to survive pretty well solely from the efforts of local resources. The academic problem here

is that there is not much known about the original klezmorim who migrated to Montreal in the legendary 20th-century migration boom. Undoubtedly there were musicians in the mix of immigrants who certainly would have been playing at weddings and events, but records of what they played and how they sounded, and even who they were, are sparse if existent. The history of these people, probably a very rich one worthy of its own full-scale research pursuits, will not be detailed in these pages since I believe it is unrelated to the history of more recent, post-revival Montreal klezmorim. I have not found any overt associations between the two generations, have not witnessed any sort of performer-to-performer apprenticeship, or come across any reference to the same.

Even in a city as big as New York, there have only been a handful of these kinds of relationships between old masters and younger apprentices. One of these was that of clarinetist Dave Tarras and multi-instrumentalist Andy Statman. Statman, a student and good friend of the late clarinetist, provided the continuity of Tarras's music by performing and recording much of it with his Andy Statman Klezmer Quartet, and also by creating a variety of jazz inspired fusions based on his learning. Today, while Statman's compositions may diverge greatly from those of his tutor, his style and performance technique remain indebted to Tarras, as do those of many clarinetists who learned from Statman and his recordings. The generational link is symbolized by the fact that Statman performs on the very clarinet that belonged to his late mentor. These kinds of relationships, which crafted legends from both teacher and student, spawned an enormous amount of interest and learning in New York. Just like the KlezKamp phenomenon, the interest extended to other corners of the world, but the old teachers—

and still, many of the new—remained part of the mostly New York backdrop. As yet, there is no Montreal counterpart to Dave Tarras, except Tarras himself. In other words, if one digs far enough into any local klezmer scene, including that of Montreal, the strata are likely diverse, fresh, and imported from New York.

With the advent of KlezKanada and the local culture it has created, however, there is now a generation of homegrown klezmorim who have not had to venture outside Montreal to acquire klezmer know-how. In conversation at 2001's sixth annual KlezKanada, I asked Canadian pianist/accordionist/DJ Josh Dolgin when and where he learned to perform klezmer and from where his interest came, to which he replied KlezKanada, on both counts.[23] He had been a participant in every KlezKanada since its inception, and was now a member of the faculty, presenting a daily workshop on composing klezmer hip-hop, using sampling and sequencing devices. Dolgin, a twenty-something, who in the hip-hop world is known as DJ "So-Called," has become one of klezmer's most sought-after personalities because of his cutting edge work, and has collaborated with the most prolific klezmorim such as David Krakauer in New York and many others abroad, several of whom started out as his teachers.

Dolgin released an independent compact disc in 2001 called *The Hip Hop Seder: A Passover Service Composed and Conducted by So-Called,*[24] whose front cover, among other campy images, features a wooden-framed turntable whose needle rests on, instead

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[23] Josh Dolgin, in conversation with the author, August 2001, at KlezKanada in Launadière, Quebec.
[24] Although the cover and back-cover design is very elaborate, this title seems to be so independent that there is no copyright information whatsoever, except the year 2001, scribbled in what looks like magic marker over top the CD-R brand label. I ordered the CD from Dolgin's website: www.gorillacartoons.com.

of a vinyl LP, a round piece of matzo.[25] The individual tracks are composed mostly of samples from decades-old records with songs from the Passover service, inter-spliced with other interpretations of the songs from other records, phrases from other recorded Jewish tunes, samples from non-Jewish recordings such as Old-Testament Christian spirituals, live recordings of individuals, sounds from nature, and basically anything Dolgin can dig up and feed into his sampler. His tracks are at times funny, touching, and provocative. For instance, it would seem that craftily superimposing Moses's repeated plea to Pharaoh "let my people go" in a deep, unknown voice over a funky bass line and accompanying drum groove is inevitably going to spark a bit of laughter. The cheekiness of this track dissipates minutes later, when that same phrase is followed by a deeper and more somber "to the front of the bus," again in an unknown voice, which to me ignites a myriad of cultural and historical recollections and bonds: the mutual themes of slavery and freedom common to the ancient Hebrews and the not-so-ancient African-American past, the black hip-hop origins of Dolgin's style, and his white, Jewish subject matter. He unpretentiously integrates it all by maintaining a night-club-like danceable beat throughout.

Lately, Dolgin's hip-hop klezmer workshop, which is essentially a lesson in how to create experimental tunes like "Let My People Go," has traversed the Atlantic as part of London's KlezFest 2002. This completes what might be KlezKanada's unspoken mandate of generating Canadian-born klezmer talent and proliferating it all over the world, just like KlezKamp originally did with the American-born variety. Montrealer

[25] Matzo is unleavened bread traditionally eaten during the holiday of Passover.

Josh Dolgin, then, is a testament to how a community can be transplanted, as KlezKanada was with its New York staff and structure, and then proceed to produce its own unique creations to be transplanted somewhere else. Montreal has sprung its own roots.

The "Montrealness" of So-Called's handiwork, I should add, is not solely based on the arbitrarily geographical origin of his music. Hip-hop is big in Montreal, as is the young urbanism with which it is associated. Montreal is home to five universities, dozens of colleges, and as a result, a sizeable and visible young student population. The city circulates four citywide alternative weekly newspapers, two in English and two in French, which regularly document the diverse nightlife of the city and often profile the local DJ scene.[26] With a closing time of 3:00 a.m., one of the latest in Canada, clubs and bars also have more of a scene to document. Furthermore, Montreal boasts a certain prominence in the world of competitive "DJ-ing," where turntablists test their skills in high-profile battles. A French-speaking fifteen-year-old from Montreal named A-Trak (Alain Malklovich) shocked the DMC (Disco Mix Club) when he won that premier turntabling institution's World Championship in 1997. The youngest victor ever, he forever earned himself and his city a place in hip-hop lore, and bolstered it in ensuing years by breaking even more competition records, which also encouraged and augmented the DJ-ing community in the city.[27] In touch with a certain young and metropolitan section of what makes Montreal what it is, So-Called and his music seem to be as much a product of the city's cultural environment as they are a consequence of KlezKanada. In a

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[26] The two English weeklies are the *Mirror* and the *Hour*; the two French weeklies are *Voir* and *Ici.* Dolgin writes a regular column in the *Hour.*

[27] For one look at A-Trak's young career, see the Toronto weekly *Eye*, "Turntable Scientist: DJ A-Trak's skills belie his years," by Lizz Mendez Berry (March 23, 2000).

sense, people like Dolgin have converted KlezKanada from a camp that happened to be in Montreal into a camp defined by Montreal.

Away from klezmer camps or apprenticeships, however, there are examples of native Montrealers who are klezmer devotees, unattached to the revival. Mike Litvak, a middle-aged resident of the well-to-do former municipality of Hampstead (co-city of Côte-St-Luc's borough) has never been to any klezmer camp, but he has been collecting Jewish music from as early as he can remember. Comprising an accumulation of early swing music, war-era big band records, as well as Victrola machines, obscure 78's, photos, and books, Litvak's collection has won him regular correspondences with radio broadcasters interested in his stack of resources and anecdotal information.

I had the chance to interview him at his home, where he took me to his basement, the hive of his collection activities. Amidst the shrine of the hundreds of recordings mounted on a specially built wall, is a subdivision devoted expressly to Jewish music that Litvak has separated from the rest. He straightforwardly traces his own history of acquaintance with klezmer through these very recordings, meticulously, as though it were on a written timeline. For example, in 1951, at his cousin's bar mitzvah—Litvak was seven—he remembers a tune the band played called "The Wedding Samba." Latin performer Edmundo Ros popularized a version of this tune in 1949, but Abraham Ellstein, Allan Small, and Joseph Liebowitz had originally written it in Yiddish in 1940. Litvak remembers being intrigued by the melody. In 1955, his grandmother died, and Litvak recollects the records she used to play in her country house in Val Morin (a city north of Montreal—not far from where KlezKanada now takes place), which were mostly

theatre numbers from New York's Second Avenue Yiddish stage, and songs by Molly Picon, icon of Yiddish theatre and film.[28] Bearing witness, again, to the grandmaternal connection, he comments, "Klezmer didn't exist [at this time] other than if you had a grandmother playing this stuff."[29] His father, on the other hand, listened primarily to classical music and Paul Robeson spirituals at home, apparently having small impact on Litvak's vast collection.

The inheritance of his uncle's big band collection in 1958 fed Litvak's fondness for Benny Goodman and other leaders in whose material he could occasionally recognize a Yiddish flavour. In 1962 he tape-recorded a series of airings on the local Anglophone radio station CJAD that presented the complete LPs of Mickey Katz: "It was amazing. The trumpet sound was much different than big band, and the trombones too. All this was focusing in on me. I didn't know what the hell it was." Eventually, the fruits of the revival assisted Litvak when he picked up a cassette of reissued Dave Tarras recordings at the Jewish Public Library in 1991, which began his own research and more collecting of Tarras and his contemporaries. Until that point, klezmer had not been in his vocabulary. In his collection and in his head, however, he had been separating and categorizing the music with Jewish undertones all along, and had been at least aware of its presence around him when the revival had not yet surfaced. For example, today in klezmer culture, Mickey Katz's music is pretty hip; even Dolgin samples Katz LPs in many of his own hip-hop tracks. In Katz's own time, his popularity was generally

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[28] Picon's groundbreaking life (1898-1992) and calling are documented in Lila Perl, *Molly Picon: A Gift of Laughter* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), and in her autobiography, Molly Picon and Jean Bergantini Grillo, *Molly!* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).

[29] Mike Litvak, in interview with author; tape recorded (January, 2002).

limited to those of a ripe age who were in for a little laugh and a bit of nostalgia. His autobiography is full of comical tales about old members of the audience, including this one during the run of *Hello, Solly* on Broadway, when the sound system malfunctioned:[30]

> At which moment a tiny ancient lady in the first row—she couldn't have been over four feet ten inches—stood up to her full height and gave out with a complaint. She said, "Who you yelling on!"
>
> I said, "How are you, darling?"
>
> She said, "Don't darlink me. Your microphone—it's too loud. It's breaking by me the ears." She pointed to a little man sitting alongside her, as ancient and tiny as she was; he looked like Noah without his Ark. She said, "This is my husband. He knows everything about microphones. Tell him what to do Sam."
>
> Sam got up and in a tiny voice said, "Stand a little foider back."
>
> By this time I was open to suggestions. I moved back a few inches and started again: "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen..."
>
> Now a man in the balcony stood up and yelled, "Can't hear a woid!"
>
> This went on during the whole show. People were jumping up all over the theater to voice personal complaints about our unfortunate situation. Believe me, that performance had a cast of a thousand.
>
> But I love these audiences of senior citizens.

It is hard to picture, in this sea of gray hair, a teenaged Mike Litvak, actually listening to Katz and anxiously awaiting radio broadcasts of his Yiddish-American musical satire for a chance to record it off the air. This was decades before the revival retro-popularized Katz's shtick.

Litvak's distinctive consciousness of klezmer at a relatively young age gives him an unusual perspective on the Montreal scene. He lived through the rupture of klezmer music, while mentally documenting the changing musical environment. Off the top of his head, he can drop names of bandleaders in the 1950's and 60's who were playing what he calls bar mitzvah music, "not exactly what you would call klezmer, but very nice. These guys were all trained in the [old-time] style but didn't play it often because

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[30] Mickey Katz, *Papa Play for Me: The Hilarious, Heartwarming Autobiography of Comedian and Bandleader Mickey Katz as told to Hannibal Coons* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 14-15.

tastes were changing. Israeli *hora*s were taking over."[31] Tastes were changing, as they were all over the world in pre-revival times, because of acculturation, and then later, because a new form of Jewish celebration music from Israel had begun its reign.

The Israeli *hora*, not to be confused with the slow, compound-time, waltz-like *hora* in klezmer, is a very upbeat and joyous form that often accompanies a large-scale circle dance at weddings and bar mitzvahs. In my earliest recollections attending such occasions, the *hora*, essentially mandatory in any celebration related to Judaism with music present, had already accumulated a very disco-ized bulgar beat with heavy synthesizer sounds in the rhythm section and often in the lead, and these ingredients have hardly changed. In the everlasting battle between Hebrew and Yiddish culture, the Israeli *hora* has become somewhat of an antithesis to klezmer.

This division was graphically demonstrated for me in London, England, where I participated in a Yiddish dance workshop led by Michael Alpert, violinist of the band Brave Old World, dancer, producer, and one of the principal figures in the revival.[32] Before coaching the workshop participants in any steps, Alpert allowed them to begin dancing on their own to the klezmer bulgars being played by the band. Soon enough they formed a big circle and broke into the typical Israeli folk/*hora* dance, with a constant rotating human circle, hands held all around, feet alternatively crossing each other and the occasional foraying into the center and lifting of the arms. After the tune, Alpert informed them that this form of dance, which was very familiar to them all, was not

[31] Litvak made references to the names Irving Fields, Peter Barry, and Wally Newman, in citing bandleaders.

[32] This workshop was part of London, England's KlezFest 2001 in July 2001, held at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

Yiddish dancing. When coaxed, he agreed to perform what he called "a shameless imitation of Israeli folk dancing." He suddenly ran across the room with his arms flailing, and when reaching the center, he leaped many feet off the ground, arms straight up, and then hurried backwards, crouched and poised only for another giant leap in the center seconds later. His movements were inflated and in the context, humorous, but it was indeed a realistic, unexaggerated imitation of *hora* dancing: manifestly air bound, ecstatic, swift, and climactic. Over the next few days, crash-course style, Alpert and workshop-partner Walter Zev Feldman related the hundreds-year-old Yiddish dancing tradition that preceded this Israeli counterpart. From watching the two guides and by performing in the circle, I came to a few generalizations about the fundamental differences of Yiddish and Israeli dancing, although I caution that I am not a dancer and my experience with this or any kind of dance does not imbue me with any kind of authority. Still, it became immediately obvious to me as a casual participant that on the whole, there are smaller and slower movements in Yiddish dancing. The larger and quicker movements, like complex foot slapping and hopping, are unlike the flailing of the *hora*, and they are sporadic, returning to their original positions almost in an eye-blink. There are no leaps, but instead, a persistent feeling of being earth bound. The shoulders look and feel slightly burdened, but the lumbering only hides a quiet current of energy and flow in the lower body, almost sensual and excited, as though in constant anticipation—pre-climactic as it were. By the end of the workshop sessions, I felt that Yiddish dance was not even in the same world as Israeli dance, yet out of the popularity of the *hora* and its use of quasi klezmer melodies that are inspired from the same Hasidic

melodies, the crowd initially associated one with the other. Since that workshop, I have witnessed this instantaneous *hora*-dancing, as opposed to Yiddish dancing, to klezmer at least a half-dozen times.

It was probably *hora* music that turned me on to klezmer. I remember wedding bands playing *hora*s as a young child, and I remember dancing at an early age in the big circle to melodies that were very similar to the klezmer melodies I would learn later. The rootedness I feel with klezmer, out of all places, most likely originates with the *hora*, as I suspect it does with most people my age, especially when they demonstrate the close connection by dancing the *hora* time and time again upon hearing klezmer. By the time the *hora* blossomed into wide-reaching Jewish festive music, Mike Litvak, on the other hand, was already reminiscing about the older music. His interest in klezmer came from a different and older time and viewpoint; "It's an offshoot for me from swing."[33] Litvak's words, although uttered nostalgically, point the way to an important part of Montreal's contemporary infatuation with klezmer.

Yiddish, Jewish history, Jewish music and the *hora* do not explain the interest and motivation of non-Jews in klezmer, or at least the music's dissemination amongst anyone outside profoundly Jewish circles. Yet, the music has somehow become available to all and sundry of any background, and it would not be surprising if non-Jewish performers outnumbered Jews at this point. There are many ways to figure out how this happened and how klezmer experienced such a flowering, the first angle deriving from Litvak's comment about swing.

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[33] Mike Litvak, interview with author, January 2002.

Jazz and the French Connection

In a city touted for its yearlong string of music, comedy, cultural, film, food, and fringe festivals, the *Festival International de Jazz de Montréal* is one of the most popular events, literally attracting millions of attendants in its series of free outdoor concerts and indoor spectacles.[34] As part of its 15th year of annual festivities and concerts in 1994, the festival programmed a nightly klezmer series on one of the outdoor stages in the heart of downtown. The groundbreaking lineup, designed by 1994's outdoors attractions programmer David Jobin, featured a veritable who's-who of klezmer, including the Klezmatics from New York, Boston-based Shirim Orchestra (whose members also form the core of another group, Naftule's Dream), Toronto's Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band, and Montreal's own Bagg Street Klezmer Band. Jobin, in a French-language daily, explains why he included klezmer in the program:[35]

> Klezmer, Eastern European Jewish folk music, comprises elements of Gypsy music. And for me, Gypsy music forms the basis of white European jazz, just like work songs lie at the source of American jazz. Since its beginnings, jazz has been inspired by other musics. It could very well be klezmer's turn to have an impact on jazz....
>
> [My Translation.]
>
> *La musique klezmer, folklore juif de L'Europe de l'Est, comprend des elements du musique tzigane. Et pour moi, la musique tzigane constitue la bas du jazz blanc européen, tout comme les work songs sont à la source du jazz américain. Depuis le début de son histoire, le jazz s'est inspire de musiques diverses. Ca pourrait bien être au tour de la musique klezmer de nourrir le jazz...*

It is always hard to pinpoint or even find exact moments of cultural creation or growth, but the buzz created by the klezmer series at the 15th *Festival International de*

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[34] See website for Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, http://www.montrealjazzfest.com (accessed on the Internet, May 2002).

[35] *Le Devoir*, "La série Klezmer pour se dégourdir," by Guylaine Maroist (July 11, 1994).

Jazz de Montréal in July of 1994 had a catalyzing effect on the city's klezmer scene. Suddenly, according to Rick Goldman, Bagg Street was working two to three nights a week, and by the next year, was celebrating its first CD launch. Other local bands appeared, such as the Montreal Klezmorim, the Montreal Klezmer Band, Luftmenschn, and Raoul. A doctor named Hy Goldman established KlezKanada. Articles about klezmer found themselves in every daily newspaper in the city, English and French. Ultimately, the genre's shot in the arm was the result of its exhibition in a popular, non-specifically Jewish environment. Jobin's prediction of klezmer feeding jazz inversely came true: jazz nourished klezmer by providing an immediate and fashionable platform available to the masses.

However, as Litvak's wartime collection of self-labeled "Jewish jazz" records attests, klezmer's relationship with jazz did not begin here. Instead, the two were only following the long pattern of resource-sharing delineated by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, here on the topic of performance:[36]

> Many musicians have come to neo-klezmer music with formal training in classical music and jazz, and use what they know to create such new musical fusions as freestyle klezmer. Objections to the term Jewish jazz notwithstanding (Sapoznik quips that if klezmer is Jewish jazz, then jazz must be goyish klezmer), the relationship between the two musics suggests a history of reversals as much as revivals, with musicians moving from klezmer to jazz and back, while keeping both in play and creating new fusions.

A concrete performance example of this transmigration from jazz to klezmer is the group Raoul. Denis "Raoul" Hébert, founder and leader of the all-French Canadian

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[36] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sounds of Sensibility" in *Judaism: A Quarterly of Jewish Life and Thought*, Vol. 47/185 (Winter, 1998), 61.

klezmer institution, started his band in the early 1990's after an established vocation as a jazz pianist. He explains his stylistic move in an article in a French-language daily:[37]

> I wanted to detach myself from jazz, to go and be heard on the streets by a greater number of people...and not only by jazz bar clients from five to seven in the evening. I think it is essential for a music to touch all kinds of people.
>
> [My translation.]
>
> *Je voulais me détacher du jazz, aller dans la rue pour être entendu par beaucoup de monde... et pas seulement par les clients des 5 à 7 dans les bars de jazz. Je trouve essentiel qu'une musique touche toutes sortes de gens.*

Where in the 1994 festival, jazz gave klezmer a more open and accessible medium, Hébert suggests here that it worked the other way around for him. Jazz was limiting and confining, and somehow he imagined klezmer as a vehicle capable of wider avenues. Raoul demonstrated exactly how wide when its 1996 recording called *Coolklez*[38] won Quebec's *Félix* award in the brand new category of World Music (*Musiques du Monde*)—the *Félix* awards represent the province's recognition and celebration of the best homespun talent in the performance industry, similar to and modeled after the Oscars and Grammy awards. *Coolklez* is a mixture of tried and true klezmer standards, some Yiddish swing—perhaps the only of its kind to feature, in the vocals, a French Canadian accent—and original rock, jazz, and world beat-tinged creations. Hébert, ever respectful of his Jewish audiences and of the community, explains how his band's bold arrangements were received:[39]

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[37] *Le Soleil*, "Connaissez-vous la Raoulie?" by Régis Tremblay (April 2, 2002).
[38] Raoul, *Coolklez*, (Montreal: Mosaïque, 1996) MOS2 9605, compact disk.
[39] *Le Soleil* (April 2, 2002).

> Jews are delighted that we interest ourselves in their tradition and that we lend an attentive ear and...a new one!
>
> *Les Juifs sont ravis que l'on s'intéresse à leur folklore et que l'on y prête un oreille attentive et... neuve!*

While attending some of Raoul's shows, I have witnessed and experienced Hébert's words. Years ago at an event organized by the CSL Public Library, whose book stacks rival Montreal's Jewish Public Library in terms of the quantity of Judaic content, Raoul performed a garden concert. The crowd, composed mostly of CSL Jewish families, expressed its affection and interest for the band's music, not only by staying put when the rain began falling in sheets in the middle of a set, but by storming the stage after the concert to chat enthusiastically with the performers.

I remember my own awe in watching a group of non-Jewish, Francophone musicians playing diligently the idioms of a style that belonged to a part of my own distant heritage, but that had never been taught to me—graduate of Jewish schools, grandchild of two fluent Yiddish speakers, and musician. This was the event that pushed me to form a band of my own; if a group of musicians formerly alien to Jewish tradition could do this, I had to also. There were finally enough accumulated resources that anyone could play klezmer. The CSL Public Library, for instance, had already amassed a sizeable collection of Jewish music sources, among which I initially found my first store of klezmer sheet-music, method books, and recordings. I believe that for Montreal, Raoul's naissance embodied the realization and achievement of the North-American klezmer revival. Klezmer was now open for business, and open to all.

The "World" Impact

However, other influences besides the revival were at work as well. Raoul's interest in klezmer as a worldly genre, the inclusion of klezmer in the jazz festival, the sprouting of various new bands, the acquisition of library materials—while not the direct result of Montreal's own Jewish cultural establishments, is neither solely the product of the efforts of New York's klezmer revival headquarters, so to speak. A much larger movement, the global surge in interest in "world music," coincides with these local occurrences of the early 1990's and plays a major role in them. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes how the world music industry has contributed to the market and success of klezmer—she even calls the categorical versatility of klezmer strategic:[40]

> Klezmer has also become a kind of "world music." The Klezmatics describes itself as "the planet's radical Jewish roots band," Klezmos plays "World Klez music," and Rubinchik's Orkestyr features "Old World Beat" (a pun on Old World and world beat). The music of Brave Old World has been described as "world-Jewish." Ben Brussell identifies the format of Klezmania! (San Francisco) as "definitive world music."

In the spirit of the world music boom, it is easy to understand why bands would label themselves in that manner. World is "in," from albums and movie soundtracks to academic books. For example, *The Rough Guide to World Music*, a popular 1994 publication by an organization known mostly for its practical and insightful travel manuals, had to be followed and replaced five years later by a second edition, almost

[40] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 51.

2000 pages long, because of the literally exponential growth in world music awareness. The editors of the newer book explain:[41]

> [The] new edition reflects the huge expansion of the whole World Music market over the past five years. There are more concerts and festivals than ever before—and many would say that there is actually a surfeit of CDs...That's the main reason why this new edition of the *Rough Guide* is not one book, but two...Even with two books, each volume has turned out longer than the entire first edition.

Raoul, in its most recent album *Raoul & les Raoulettes: Musiques & dances de Raoulie* (2001), takes the world element to an extreme, if not musically, then in the packaging.[42] Hébert has concocted a virtual country unto himself, "*la Raoulie*," whose capital is a city he calls "*Montraoul*"—with obvious connections to Montreal. The liner notes even provide a map of this mock country, its flag and a legend, indicating a population roughly the size of Canada, and a socialist republic governmental structure. *Musiques & dances de Raoulie*, with its title and packaging, takes on the air of an ethnomusicological "field" or source recording, demonstrating the extreme lengths to which artists who wish to associate with "world" elements will go, albeit in this case resulting in a sort of self-satire. The most surprising aspects of the album, however, include the addition of a turntabling DJ, extensive sampling, production techniques, and the apparent lack of klezmer. Only one of the thirteen track titles even alludes to the genre, and that track, called "Rasklez," is only related to klezmer by a stretch of the imagination. Clearly, this album is a step away from klezmer, but it is perhaps a sort of fulfillment for Hébert, who has created his own boundless country with its own music,

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[41] *Rough Guide to World Music Volume One: Africa Europe and the Middle East*, Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham and Richard Trillo, eds. (London: Rough Guides, 1999), ix.
[42] Raoul, *Raoul & les Raoulettes: Musiques & dances de Raoulie* (Montreal: Mosaique, 2001), MOS 2 9913, compact disc.

and he is no longer limited by any style known to the rest of the world—not jazz, not klezmer.

Recent Developments

Raoul, the perfect litmus test for the city's klezmer scene, allows additional insight into the contemporary state of klezmer. It is important to note that the group has moved away from klezmer as though the genre has become a limiting or tired force. In general, the scene has calmed quite a bit since the mid-to-late 1990's. Rick Goldman admits that by 1997, he felt the "novelty" of Bagg Street starting to wear off, and the band's engagement schedule began to thin out considerably.[43] Two years into a new millennium, the *Festival International de Jazz de Montréal* still programs a regularly recurring corpus of klezmer groups on its stages, but the specialized klezmer series like that of 1994 has never since been duplicated, nor has the scope of media attention it garnered. Evidently, klezmer's mid-decade honeymoon with Montreal has given way to a new reality.

The post-honeymoon stage is far from dismal, however, and the scene's changing dynamics are as much a sign of the wilting of klezmer's novelty status as it is the ushering in of a new acceptance of klezmer's continued presence and maturity in the city. In an interview with two members of the Montreal klezmer group Mazik, violinist Alex Loeb Kehler and guitarist Charles Gagnon, who have between them musical backgrounds ranging from classical, jazz, rock, and Celtic to early music, world-beat, and Salsa, are quick to point out the differences between playing in and playing outside the city,

[43] Rick Goldman, interview with the author (Montreal, February 2002).

revealing a telling assessment of the city's new attitude.[44] In terms of the enthusiasm for klezmer, Gagnon notes:

> Outside of Montreal, people really go for it. People really eat it up...especially [within the province of] Quebec, I guess, because there's a big folk tradition here and a "two-step" kind of understanding of where it's coming from, with the fiddles and the rhythms and all that... We've played small festivals and concert series, and in general it just seems like outside of the city people are less blasé about it. In the city it's like "ah. Klezmer. Big deal."

To anyone concerned about preserving or conserving klezmer in the city, Gagnon's observation of Montrealers' blasé approach is almost comforting, implying a considerable coziness and familiarity of the city with the music. Montreal has become intimate with music of many and varied genres, locations, and time-periods, and klezmer has simply been accepted, or more significantly, expected, as one ingredient in this large cultural mix. In this sense, the fact that klezmer activity no longer registers as a bleep on the city's cultural radar screen is cause for rejoicing.

Furthermore, while klezmer's mainstream fate settles and finds a comfortable equilibrium within the city's borders, it is concurrently and increasingly edging itself back into a more prominent role within the Jewish/Yiddish cultural establishment from which it experienced near complete detachment generations ago. Some klezmer enthusiasts have proved themselves ready for a new kind of educational vehicle for the music, one that eschews the brevity and ephemerality of one-evening festivals or five-day camps. In the summer of 2003, Montreal is scheduled to inaugurate a new Judaic Conservatory for the Performing Arts (JCPA), whose month-long curriculum will comprise training in and theoretical study of music, voice, dance, theatre, film, video, and

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[44] Alex Kehler and Charles Gagnon, interview with the author; tape recorded (Montreal, February 2002).

storytelling.[45] The program will be housed in the YM-YWHA (Young Men and Young Women's Hebrew Association) located in the center of Montreal's so-called Jewish campus—two city blocks encompassing the Jewish Public Library, the Yiddish theatre's Sayde Bronfman Centre, and the offices of the Allied Jewish Community Services in the area of Snowdon. At the helm of the proposed institution is founder and future president Hy Goldman, a medical doctor whose credentials include the instigation and executive directorship of the now well-established and highly attended KlezKanada, as well as former involvement with the annual staging of CSL's Yiddish Festival.

Dr. Goldman, as quoted in the *Canadian Jewish News*, evaluates his own KlezKanada by noting, "It's a wonderful learning experience, but afterward the feeling is 'now what?'"[46] The news article proceeds to describe the new institution:

> The goal of the JCPA is to go well beyond the klezmer and Eastern European tradition and encompass the broad cultural and stylistic range of Jewish creativity: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Central Asian, Ladino and Russian, from liturgical to popular culture, from historical [to] contemporary.

Dr. Goldman considers the JCPA to be the first of its kind, that is, the first program to offer a longer, more extensive, and a more advanced exploration of Jewish music and creativity, "*well beyond*" the klezmer tradition. Here is where the two worlds—that of the mainstream Montrealers exemplified in Gagnon's account, and that of Yiddishists and "klezmerists" epitomized by Dr. Goldman—converge. For both, the progression of their relationships with klezmer has reached a familiarity and informality level that allows a

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[45] *Canadian Jewish News*, "Performance arts centre slated for Montreal," by Janice Arnold (February 8, 2001).
[46] Ibid.

glance outside the music. In the city bars, klezmer is another kind of world music, contributing to a bigger force that is the multicultural identity of Montreal. In the JCPA, klezmer will be another kind of Jewish music of the world, supplying but a small contingent along with other larger and more diverse traditions. The printed program from the JCPA's 2002 inaugural gala concert even states, "[the JCPA] is committed to excellence in the study of performing arts as a personal and social healing force and as a vehicle for *inter-cultural* creativity and communication. [My italics.]"[47]

It is unclear to what this contextualization of klezmer will lead. Less than a decade has passed since klezmer was locally perceived and fashioned into a camp of its own, figuratively and literally. Now, even among the very individuals who pioneered its enthusiastic revival in the city, klezmer is being celebrated in a new and different, yet humbler way. Much in the same way that, outside the Jewish/Yiddish sphere, klezmer represents a small contribution to a greater recognizable cosmopolitanism of the city, it now occupies—and this is as result of the culture of education it has inspired—a more modest role within a broader framework of Jewish creative traditions. After all, the renaissance of the music is not the only aspect of the revival to be admired, but also the model of historical scholarship and artistic creativity it alone has aroused, which will most likely result in the cultural renewal of countless other traditions outside of klezmer that have remained vastly unexplored or ignored. For example, one third of the JCPA's inaugural concert was devoted to the music of Sephardic Jews, a rich musical tradition of its own that, despite a reasonable amount of academic scholarship, has yet to enjoy the

[47] Program notes from The Conservatory for Judaic Performing Arts' inaugural gala concert, "A Celebration of Jewish Music," at the Théâtre Outremont Theatre in Montreal (January 27, 2002).

following, or more appropriately, the "mania" of klezmer. This could not be more welcome in a city that embraces about 80% of the total Canadian Sephardic population, because of the common official French language of various Sephardic homelands and of Quebec. Moreover, at that same inaugural concert, Michael Alpert and his band Brave Old World delivered a stirring and exciting *badchan* routine, which has been described as "a new form of old-form Jewish rap," recreating "the role of *badchan*, or wedding jester...streaming the day's events and controversies in Yiddish, framing new music for the concert hall as a tangible reminder of whence we came."[48] There is a sense of anticipation in Montreal as the city now awaits but the newest, forthcoming reawakenings to arrive on a route paved by klezmer not so long ago.

[48] Ari Davidow, "State of Klezmer," in Ari Davidow's Klezmer Shack online, http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/davidow/2002_stateofklez.html, posted February 10, 2002.

Conclusion

Klezmer in Montreal, then, is not simply an unequivocal story about a kind of music that was recovered, studied and successfully re-implemented back into society. It is a metaphor and a working blueprint for perpetual cultural regeneration, and a medium through which has entered new passions for old items, and old appreciations for new ideas, be they musical, cultural, commercial, religious, or all of these at once. Its effects manifest themselves individually and socially, pouring into small and contained environments and gatherings, elasticizing to fit breadths of global proportion, and then cross-pollinating among all of this. Klezmer is now many things to many people, and tomorrow it will be yet something else. Nevertheless, klezmer still remains unnoticed by a great many individuals, which is an important point that has been hitherto ignored in these pages. The revival has transpired and transformed itself so quickly that the grand majority of city folk, in day-to-day life, are oblivious to klezmer and its peculiar and complicated world. Acknowledging this reality, it is possible that the biggest challenge facing the klezmer world will forever be how to explain what that world is to the uninitiated. In other words, and returning to the original question: what is klezmer?

When my brother David and I founded our own klezmer band in the late 1990's with some musician friends, we decided to name it Cholent, after an old-country dish our Hungarian grandmother had been serving us every Friday night since childhood in my

grandparents' home in CSL. I suppose at this time, our answer to the question of "what is klezmer" was exactly this, cholent. The symbolic value of cholent, in my eyes, is that it still supplies one of the more convincing replies to this ultimately answerless question, especially in its Montreal context. Cholent is a greasy and sloppy mixed bean and flour dish that involves a number of optional constituents, including chunks of vegetables, potatoes, or different kinds of meats, with all parts running into each other to form a soft, mushy, indiscernible victual mass. Like klezmer, then, it is has an array of incarnations and variants, catering to different tastes and preferences, while its assorted components are not easily traced back to their particular, original form, if there ever was one. Depending on the occasion or time of day, cholent can function as a meal or it can be a side dish among a plate full of other delectable foods, corresponding to klezmer's role as anything from concert hall feature to opening band in a large festival. Cholent is specifically served up by our grandmother, and the Jewish grandmother, as has been duly documented, is the emblematic herald of *Yiddishkayt*, which lies at the traditional roots of klezmer. Because of its source, I recognize my cholent as a Jewish dish. Its name, on the other hand, tells another story.

Cholent lore imparts that the name is French in origin, being a synthesis of the words *chaud* (hot) and *long* (long), illustrating the preparation procedure: it is supposed to be cooked in a warm pot for roughly 24 hours. That the name is neither Hungarian nor Yiddish, but French, is probably a sign that the dish is not solely a Jewish phenomenon, but likely a more broadly eaten platter throughout Europe or the world, enjoyed, like klezmer, in many diverse homes for similar or unique reasons. This linguistic feature

also resettles it nicely from the old country into the new world's francophone Montreal. However, as my best and last cholent allegory declares, despite the effort involved in making the recipe, the frustratingly long period of time it has to cook, and regardless of any questions about its history, origin, social context, or potential commercial value, the future of cholent is guaranteed, in one shape or another, for the simple reason that it is just plain delicious.

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