

## JDub to Close

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Responding for **e-Jewish Philanthropy** to the **news** that **JDub Records** will wind down, **Ruthie Warshenbrot asks:**

Was arts & culture programming actually a good entry-point to Jewish life, especially for young adults? Many studies emerged just as JDub was gaining popularity that supported its mission, almost verbatim and JDub's own numbers in its departure press release are fairly significant – 150,000 participants over 9 years. Is there now a niche to be filled in the Jewish community of young, culturally-engaged adults with no way to get their fix of Jewish music, media, and cultural events?

Prompted by Ruthie's questions (and **her entire response** is insightful), here are a few questions of my own:

- When we talk about Jewish arts as an "entry-point to Jewish life", what do we mean? Do we hope that young Jews will be so smitten with innovative Jewish arts that they reconnect to Judaism and then join traditional institutions? (JDub as a *bridge to shul* and **Hadassah**?) Or do we mean that these new ways of connecting to Judaism will **completely constitute** the way a certain (large) segment of Jewry "does Jewish"? (JDub as a *replacement for shul* and Hadassah?)
- Is it more desirable for Jewish artists to create specifically Jewish spaces to integrate Jewish culture and new artistic expression? Or does that send a message that Jewishness doesn't deserve to be part of the "mainstream" artistic world? (In other words, was it good or bad for the Jews when Matisyahu left JDub?)
- JDub founder Aaron Bisman **laid out his vision for the company in Sh'ma** last November. Tackling the sticky question of what makes music Jewish, Bisman wrote: "For us, 'Jewish' was in the intention of the creator." (A digression: a handful of generations ago, most Jews might have completely agreed with Bisman's 2010 definition, if he had only capitalized the C in "creator".) Expanding the issue beyond music, and beyond art, and addressing the whole concept of young Jews redefining Judaism for themselves, I have to wonder: can such an open definition avoid becoming a boundary so wide that it is meaningless?

I don't know if any of these issues have anything to do with JDub's decision to close, but they are at the heart of the discourse JDub created during its lifetime. Whatever JDub's legacy turns out to be, the organization is to be thanked for sparking discussion of these issues.

