

Contemporary Jewish Music in America

BY MARK KLIGMAN

JEWISH MUSIC IN AMERICA has become a growth industry over the past few decades. Over 2,000 recordings of Jewish music are currently available, with close to 250 new releases produced each year. And although most listeners and consumers are aware of only a few performers, more than 400 artists and groups are engaged in creating and performing this music.¹

Beyond the impressive numbers, the Jewish music being created, performed, preserved, and disseminated today in America not only reflects the vast changes that have taken place in American Jewish life, but represents a quintessentially American Jewish phenomenon.

The scope of contemporary Jewish music encompasses a wide range of genres and styles, including music for the synagogue, folk and popular music on religious themes, Yiddish songs, klezmer music, Israeli music, and art music by serious composers. Every sector of the Jewish community—from the most right-wing Orthodox to the most secular—participates in the Jewish music endeavor, creating, performing, and listening to the particular music that meets its taste and needs. Jewish music is sung and performed in synagogues of all sizes and types, in schools, community centers, and summer camps, at organizational conclaves, and in college campus auditoriums or in concert halls as august as Carnegie Hall. Ironically, at a time when Jewish commitment is declining,² Jewish musical self-expression is on the upswing.

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¹This number is based on data in the *Mostly Music Catalogue* (1996–1997) and interviews with Izzy Taubenfeld of Sameach Music, July 27, 1998, and Velvel Pasternak of Tara Publications, Sept. 14, 1998.

²Jack Werthheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (New York, 1993), pp. 43–65.

To be sure, the creation of Jewish music in America is not a new phenomenon. The period between 1880 and 1940—the golden age of the cantors and the heyday of Yiddish theater and cinema—was a fertile period for Jewish music. But as the children of the last immigrant generation came of age during and after World War II, and Yiddish no longer served as their primary language, a distinctively new Jewish music gradually evolved, a process significantly accelerated by changes in the community after the Six-Day War of 1967.³ Contemporary Jewish music—which developed at about the same time across the entire spectrum of American Judaism—makes use primarily of English and Hebrew (especially liturgical texts for life-cycle events), not Yiddish. And while Eastern European motifs have not totally disappeared, today's Jewish music employs many elements of popular American music. Thus, members of the postwar generation have developed an American Jewish music, a vehicle that distinguishes themselves from their parents, a new, positive expression of their Jewishness.

Since Jewish music is so diverse, and there is no producer, distributor, or retailer who services the musical needs of the entire community, it is not easy to assess the Jewish musical tastes of American Jewry as a whole. One effort to do so was a poll of listeners' favorite Jewish music artists, conducted in the fall of 1997 by Tara Publications and *Moment* magazine. The poll came up with the following top ten artists, in order of their popularity: Debbie Friedman, Safam, Itzhak Perlman, Klezmer Conservatory Band, Klezmatics, Judy Frankel, Shlomo Carlebach, Kol B'Seder, Craig Taubman, Rebbesoul.⁴ This listing certainly reflected the diversity of the Jewish community. Debbie Friedman and Kol B'Seder are active in the Reform movement; Safam and Craig Taubman in the Conservative movement; Shlomo Carlebach—an Orthodox rabbi—is known in a wide variety of settings; Klezmer Conservatory Band and Klezmatics play in concert or community settings, and usually not in a religious context; Itzhak Perlman has been prominent in classical and now klezmer concerts; and Judy Frankel performs Sephardic music.⁵ Yet even the broad spectrum represented in this poll is misleading since *Moment* has very few

³Ibid., pp. 30–31; see also J. J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Reading, Mass., 1996), pp. 133–40.

⁴“Readers Choice: Jewish Music Poll Results,” *Moment*, Feb. 1998, p. 78. While popularity of artists may not necessarily reflect sales figures, there is no question that, in the non-Orthodox market, the top five artists in this poll sell more recordings than do the others.

⁵All artists believe that their music is for the entire Jewish community, not just for a specific group. Nevertheless, as will be discussed in detail below, different groups expect a particular type of musical style, texts, and other qualities in the music they listen to. The association of artists or groups with a community is based upon the type of setting where they most commonly perform.

Orthodox readers, and thus solo performers such as Mordechai Ben David and Avraham Fried, and groups such as D'veykus and the Miami Boys Choir, all popular in the Orthodox community, are not represented. Nevertheless, the music of the ten artists and groups at the top of the *Moment* poll, plus several from the Orthodox community, do represent, more or less, the core of contemporary Jewish music.⁶ While there are many other noteworthy up-and-coming performers, the present article focuses on the major established artists and groups.

Pertinent concerns for the investigation of contemporary Jewish music that this essay addresses are: the nature of the music; the degree to which older European styles are retained and innovations made; how traditional motifs are made into something "new"; the identity of the new music's creators; the function it plays in Jewish life; and the reasons why it has become a growth industry.

DEFINITIONS

No attempt is made here to define Jewish music. Jewish music is, always has been, and will be, in many different styles, reflecting particular historic periods and geographic locations. Music written by and for Jews in Central or Eastern Europe during the 19th century differs from that of American or Israeli Jews in the 20th century, each being influenced by the music of its environs. Musical style is informed by aesthetic taste, and since this never remains constant, "Jewish" music continually changes and develops. While there may be a set of descriptive musical traits (modes, forms, and styles) that define Hassidic, cantorial, or klezmer music, this applies only for a particular period of time. Today, a wealth of Jewish musical styles allows American Jews to choose the music that expresses a particular dimension of Judaism—be it religious or secular or a combination of both.

The term "community" will often be used in this study to denote a segment of American Jewry that has one or another taste in Jewish music. While there is considerable documentation on the nuances and concerns of each of the main religious streams,⁷ there is no comparable literature on those who do not affiliate religiously, that is secular or cultural Jews, Yiddishists, and so on. Furthermore, since Jewish identity is complex, the

⁶This study focuses primarily on music in Ashkenazi communities. For a recent study on Sephardi music, see Edwin Seroussi, "New Directions in the Music of the Sephardic Jews," in Ezra Mendelsohn, ed., *Modern Jews and Their Musical Agendas*, Studies in Contemporary Jewry 9 (London and New York, 1993), pp. 61–77.

⁷Wertheimer, *A People Divided*, pp. 95–169.

boundaries between these segments are by no means clear-cut. People who listen to Yiddish and klezmer music, for example, may be religious or secular, while the performers and artists of this music generally do not identify religiously. The characterization of communities throughout this study, then, should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as expressing the traits most commonly found in the music and the artists of a particular group.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Several genres of Jewish music were brought over from Europe in the 1880–1920 period, when over two million East European Jews migrated to the United States:⁸

1. Cantorial music⁹ is based on *nusach*, a Hebrew term denoting melodic phrases traditionally used for leading synagogue worship, in which specific prayers in the liturgy are sung in a particular mode or scale.¹⁰ A cantorial virtuoso not only performs the *nusach* accurately, but is also capable of improvisation and of vocal embellishments that have specific vocal “effects,” such as a *drei* (turn) or *kvetch* (cry).

2. Yiddish music might derive from either a religious or secular context, with much of the latter coming from the Yiddish theater. Such music reflected the desire of many American Jews to hold on to the Yiddish culture of their birthplaces without any sort of religious commitment.

⁸Studies focusing broadly on pre-1950s Jewish music are few. Two useful treatments are Irene Heskes, “Three Hundred Years of Jewish Music in America,” in her book *Passport to Jewish Music: Its History, Traditions, and Culture* (Wesport, Conn., 1994), pp. 177–226; and Joseph Levine, *Synagogue Song in America* (Crown Point, Ind., 1989). Valuable studies that focus on specific areas are Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs: The Popular Music of the Jewish Immigrants* (Urbana, Ill., 1982); *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Urbana, Ill., 1989); and Jeffrey A. Summit, *The Lord’s Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (London and New York, 2000). For comparison with the Christian experience see Lawrence Hoffman and Janet Walton, eds., *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience* (South Bend, Ind., 1992).

⁹See Irene Heskes’s introduction to Velvel Pasternak and Noah Schall, *The Golden Age of Cantors: Musical Masterpieces of the Synagogue* (Cedarhurst, N.Y., 1991), which also appears under the title “The Golden Age of the Cantorial Art,” in Heskes, *Passport to Jewish Music*, pp. 56–68.

¹⁰The Jewish prayer mode system uses three primary modes: *Adoshem Malach*, a major scale with a lowered seventh and flatted tenth; *Magen Avot*, equivalent to the Western minor scale; and *Ahavah Rabbah*, a scale with a lowered second and a raised third producing an augmented-second interval typically avoided in Western classical music. For a further discussion see Baruch J. Cohon, “Structure of the Synagogue Prayer Chant,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 3 (1950), pp. 17–32; and Hanoch Avenary, “The Concept of Mode in European Synagogue Chant: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre,” *Yuval* 2 (1971), pp. 11–21.

3. Klezmer (derived from *k'lei zemer*, literally “vessels of song,” the Hebrew term for musical instruments) denotes the music heard at Jewish weddings, bar mitzvahs, and other life-cycle events, as well as the instrumental accompaniment to Yiddish songs in the theater. Much of it was derived from non-Jewish folk traditions of Eastern Europe.

4. Hassidic music, both vocal and instrumental, was produced in the courts of the dynasties of rebbes (charismatic leaders) of the Hassidic movement, which originated in the Ukraine in the late 18th century and subsequently spread throughout Eastern Europe. Joyous and fervent singing characterize the *niggun*, the wordless song sung in the synagogue and at a *tisch* (literally “table,” referring to a gathering with the rebbe).

5. Art music is that which is heard in the concert hall, such as, in Europe, the works produced by the members of the Society for Jewish Folk Music in St. Petersburg. Composers such as Joel Engel (1868–1927), Joseph Achron (1886–1943), and Moses Milner (1886–1953) wrote symphonies, chamber works, and art songs based upon folk melodies and incorporating aspects of the traditional Jewish modal system.¹¹

Obviously, sharp lines cannot be drawn between these five genres. Cantors not only sang for the synagogue, they also performed Yiddish songs. Conversely, some of the Yiddish songs depict a *hazzan* (cantor), and may even parody the emotional nature of his singing. In a klezmer performance, the aesthetic of the clarinet player often mimics the *geshray* (wail) of the cantor. The very fabric of the music itself proves the interrelationship: cantorial *nusach* is incorporated into Yiddish songs, klezmer, Hassidic tunes, and art music. When new songs were composed for each genre, more often than not they were written in the traditional modes of Jewish prayer. The clearest way to distinguish these genres, then, is through their use or context: cantorial music—the synagogue; Yiddish songs—folk or theater; klezmer—life-cycle events; Hassidic music—liturgical and paraliturgical occasions; art music—the concert hall.

Yet a sixth musical genre evolved over the first half of the 20th century—Zionist songs in Hebrew, English, and a variety of other languages that focused on the dream of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Popularized in schools, synagogues, summer camps, and at social events, such music took on much greater significance with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and even more so after the Six-Day War of 1967.

¹¹For further discussion see Albert Weisser, *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music* (New York, 1954). A noted composer for the concert hall who based some works on Jewish melodies was Ravel; he wrote a setting of the kaddish for voice and orchestra, *Deux Mélodies Hébraïques* (1915).

The Immigrant Generation

The cultural conflict between Jews of Central European origin, who came to the United States in the middle of the 19th century, and the Eastern Europeans, who started coming in large numbers in the 1880s, was expressed in music as well. Beginning in early-19th-century Germany, Central European cantors sought to incorporate a more orderly style of worship modeled on the Protestant church. When Jews from this area came to America, they brought with them the liturgical innovations of composers Solomon Sulzer (1804–1890), Louis Lewandowski (1821–1894), and Samuel Naumbourg (1815–1880).¹² As the Central European immigrants Americanized and became largely identified with the Reform movement, new hymnals and new compositions provided a rich array of music for their synagogues.¹³ Abraham W. Binder (1895–1966), along with Isadore Freed (1900–1960) and Herbert Fromm (1905–1995), formulated an American Reform style of music for cantor, choir, and organ in which the choir took a prominent role. In addition, the music of the cantorial line was written out in musical notation¹⁴ and did not consist solely of the traditional *nusach* passages or rely on the cantor's expertise in *nusach*.¹⁵ Thus a trained cantor was no longer needed in a Reform temple, only a musician who could read the music.

The newcomers, Eastern European Jews, tended to perpetuate the more emotional sound of their synagogue music, and in their traditional synagogues—all the Orthodox and many of the Conservative—the organ was not employed. Nevertheless, traditional congregations that sought to innovate used the choral music of David Nowakowsky (1848–1921), Eliezer Gerovitsch (1844–1914), and others, which was influenced by the German synagogue composers. The many recordings and surviving radio broadcasts of the great cantors made during the early part of the 20th century have frozen the sound of this musical style in time.

¹²The music of these three composers defined the bulk of the repertoire for many Ashkenazi Jews during the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century both in Europe and America. For a clear understanding of their contributions see Geoffrey Goldberg, "Jewish Liturgical Music in the Wake of Nineteenth Century Reform," in Hoffman and Walton, eds., *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, pp. 59–83.

¹³Benjie Ellen Schiller, "The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues," *ibid.*, pp. 187–212.

¹⁴In some synagogue contexts, including traditional synagogues where musical instruments were used without restriction, the cantor would improvise based on *nusach*; in most instances the accompaniment was also improvised.

¹⁵Some synagogue composers who immigrated to America and based their music on the European tradition were Heinrich Schalit (1886–1976), Frederick Piket (1903–1974), Max Janowski (1912–1991), and Max Helfman (1901–1963).

For the immigrants from Eastern Europe, the synagogue and its classrooms could also be the place to hear Yiddish songs and Zionist songs. At home, families sang all of these as well as *zemirot* (Sabbath table songs) and holiday songs, such as those for the Passover seder.

Yiddish songs and klezmer music were a vital part of Jewish life for these immigrants. New music created for the Yiddish theater, which was at its height in the 1930s, and for Yiddish cinema, which began in 1930, was the basis of an industry that included recorded music on 78-rpm records, live concerts, and the publication of sheet music. Yiddish theater music could be heard not only on the Lower East Side of Manhattan but also in neighborhood theaters in Brooklyn and the Bronx, and in cities across the United States.¹⁶

Yiddish theater and its music expressed the struggles of adjusting to American life combined with a hopeful message. The music provided a way to cope, and singing the songs made one feel part of a community of people all undergoing the same ordeal of acculturation. In cinema and theater, the songs expressed the full range of Jewish life. Tragedies such as the sinking of the Titanic and the Triangle Fire of 1913 were the topics of popular Yiddish songs. Song texts portrayed life in “the old country” in romanticized and idyllic form, while also conveying the horror and pain of pogroms and hunger.¹⁷ Musically, composers for the Yiddish theater employed the wide range of styles available to them. Composers such as Sholom Secunda (1894–1974) and Abraham Ellstein (1907–1963), both of whom grew up singing in synagogue choirs, incorporated the music of the synagogue together with popular American styles.

Ultimately, the lure of writing or performing for mainstream audiences led to the decline of the Yiddish theater and its music, relegating klezmer musicians to performing at *simchas* (happy occasions such as weddings and bar mitzvahs), banquets, and social and political functions. During their early years as immigrants, klezmer musicians formed unions; these unions, however, dissolved when the desire to work in mainstream settings became more attractive.¹⁸ In the 1920s klezmer ensembles adapted to American ways with the introduction of American rhythms and with changes in instrumentation: the clarinet became the lead instrument, and the *tsimble* (hammer dulcimer) and *harmonica* (small accordion) fell out of use. By the 1930s klezmer music began to decline, and the very term

¹⁶Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (Syracuse, 1977; reprint 1996), p. 251.

¹⁷Slobin, *Tenement Songs*, pp. 6–7.

¹⁸James Loeffler, “Di Ruishe Progresiv Muzikal Yunyon No. 1 Fun Amerike: The First Klezmer Union in America,” *Judaism* 47, Winter 1998, p. 35.

"klezmer" came to have a derogatory connotation, referring to musicians who could not adapt to the American music scene.¹⁹ Those who did adapt assimilated into the musical mainstream, paralleling the assimilation of the immigrant generation in other areas. Parents, now, sought to educate their children in classical music rather than klezmer music. Musicians sought out formal music education, many at elite institutions; thereafter they joined symphonies, played for Broadway theater, and joined American musicians' unions, not Jewish unions.²⁰

After World War II

The vacuum left by the decline of Yiddish and klezmer music in the 1940s was filled, first, by music from Israel. In the 1940s and 1950s there were songs of the *Yishuv*, the prestate Jewish community in Palestine, such as "V'ulai," and songs of the War of Independence of 1948, such as "Hafin-jan" and "Shir Hapalmach." The repertoire later came to include army-trope songs, the music of professional performers, and the songs of Naomi Shemer and other composers.²¹ The practice of singing Israeli songs in American synagogues, camps, and at social gatherings, which spread in the 1950s, accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s as young American Jews looked to Israel as a positive model for Jewish identity, and the songs' popularity also served as a Jewishly unifying factor.²² Israeli songs popular in the United States—such as "Bashana Haba'a," "Erev Shel Shoshanim," and Naomi Shemer's "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav" and "Al Kol Ayleh"—exuded yearning for the land and commitment to it, appreciation for the beauty of life in Israel, and the longing for peace.²³ Several song festivals and performing troupes aided in the spread of Israeli folk music. The flow of new musical repertoire from Israel slowed consider-

¹⁹Hankus Netsky, "An Overview of Klezmer Music and Its Development in the U. S.," *ibid.*, pp. 6, 8.

²⁰For a portrayal of an immigrant family whose members joined a variety of musical institutions see Andy Logan, "Profiles: Five Generations," *New Yorker*, Oct. 29, 1949, pp. 32–51. On the desire of Jews to become part of the musical mainstream see Heskes, *Passport to Jewish Music*, pp. 220–21; and on actors in the Yiddish theater. Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, p. 292.

²¹These categories are based on the work of Moshe Shokeid, who studied Israelis living in New York City and attended sessions of group singing in the borough of Queens. See Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances: Israeli Emigrants in New York* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), pp. 104–25.

²²New Israeli songs particularly influenced summer camps. The Conservative movement's Ramah camps typically sang only Hebrew songs (interview with Marsha Edelman, July 29, 1998), and the Reform camps started doing so in the 1970s (interview with Dan Freeland, Mar. 27, 1998). This is discussed in more detail below.

²³Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances*, pp. 107–09.

ably in the late 1970s and thereafter, undoubtedly reflecting the process of distancing between Israel and American Jewry that was taking place.²⁴

The vibrant folk-song revival of the 1950s had a major impact on American culture and subsequently on American Jewish culture. In discussing this period, folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes the efforts of entertainer Theodore Bikel and other Jews involved in folk music: "Bikel quickly became a part of the revival scene. While Jewish repertoire may not have been central to the folk song revival, Jews certainly were. They owned and managed clubs and record companies. They were composers, performers, agents, and managers. They were writers and critics."²⁵ Bikel produced his first recording devoted to Jewish songs, *Folksongs of Israel*, in 1955. On the record he sang Jewish melodies to Hebrew and Yiddish texts, in a performance style that was polished and professional.²⁶ (Shlomo Carlebach, who began his career under folk-music influence around this time but whose focus was on a spiritual Jewish message, is discussed in more detail below.) The polish of Bikel stands in marked contrast to the insider Yiddish humor of Mickey Katz's clever musical parodies, which grew out of the frenetic dance music of wedding bands and were widely disseminated in radio broadcasts, recordings, and performances.²⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett views these musical parodies as the forerunners of the witty "shtick" of klezmer performers of the '80s and '90s.²⁸ Other entertainers, like Allan Sherman, whose popular *My Son, the Folk Singer* (1962) sold over one million recordings, were able to appeal more broadly to popular American culture.²⁹ The musical *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), based on a story by the great Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem (Shalom Rabinovitz, 1859–1916), was enormously popular and its music appeared on many recordings thereafter.³⁰

Music of the concert hall was also prominent in American Jewish life from the 1940s on. To Jews who valued high culture, the musical expres-

²⁴Steven T. Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences? The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair With Israel* (Hanover and London, 2001), pp. 42–60.

²⁵Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sounds of Sensibility," *Judaism* 47, Winter 1998, p. 66.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 69–71.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁹Sherman's more general appeal was due to his limited use of Yiddish and his avoidance of insider vocabulary or detailed Jewish references, though the names of characters in the songs, *Zelda*, for example, are typically Jewish, and the dialect rhymes retain a Jewish flavor. Jeffrey Shandler, who has analyzed Sherman's work, kindly allowed me to use his unpublished paper, "'My Son the Folksinger': The Folkloristics of Allan Sherman's Anti-folklore," which he delivered at the American Folklore Society, Philadelphia, 1989.

³⁰Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sounds of Sensibility," p. 71.

sion of Jewishness in this form was more praiseworthy than the traditional forms of Jewish music, which they deemed second-rate. In fact, the acceptance of Jewish composers and noted performers in the concert hall paralleled the Jews' own growing sense of being comfortably at home in America. The compositions of Ernest Bloch (1880–1959), such as *Schelomo* (1916) and *Avodath Hakodesh* (1933), were regularly performed by American orchestras. Wide critical acclaim greeted symphonic works by Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)—*Jeremiah Symphony* (1943) and *Symphony No. 3 “Kaddish”* (1963)—which consciously made use of Jewish musical themes taken from the traditional Jewish biblical chant, as well as his *Chichester Psalms* (1965), which used the Hebrew text of biblical psalms.³¹ Opera singers Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker, both cantors, achieved worldwide recognition. Against a background of the growing cultural assimilation of American Jewry, Jews prominent in artistic settings, even if they did not focus on specifically “Jewish” music, were embraced as exemplary Jews and role models.

Changes in the institutions of Jewish life had a direct affect on the development of contemporary Jewish music. In the synagogue sphere, the 1950s accelerated the decline of the cantor as musical virtuoso, a trend that had begun earlier in the Reform movement.³² The era of star performing cantors, such as Yosele Rosenblatt, Samuel Vigoda, and Moshe and David Koussevitzky, came to an end, as the cantor was increasingly seen as a synagogue “professional,” with responsibilities as prayer leader, musical expert, music teacher, educator, pastoral counselor, and administrator.³³ In the 1940s and 1950s cantorial schools and professional societies were established for each denomination; these aided the growth of music in synagogues.³⁴ Jewish music was disseminated more widely with

³¹For a discussion of Jewish elements in Bernstein see Jack Gottlieb, “Symbols of Faith in the Music of Leonard Bernstein,” *Musical Quarterly* 66, 1980, pp. 287–95; and Geoffrey Fine, “The Vocal Music of Leonard Bernstein: Jewish Applications and Interpretations,” Master’s thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (hereafter HUC-JIR), 1998.

³²Max Wohlberg, “Some Thoughts on the Hazzanic Recitative,” *Journal of Synagogue Music* 9, 1979, pp. 82–86.

³³Slobin, *Chosen Voices*, pp. 135–91.

³⁴The first American cantorial school was the School of Sacred Music at HUC-JIR, founded in 1948; its graduates primarily serve the Reform movement. The Cantor’s Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary, established in 1952, provides cantors for Conservative congregations, and Yeshiva University’s Cantorial Training Institute, opened in 1964, trains cantors for Orthodox synagogues. Each denomination also has its own professional cantorial organization (Reform: American Conference of Cantors; Conservative: Cantors Assembly; Orthodox: Cantorial Council of America), but some cantors belong to more than one organization. The Reform movement invested women as cantors in 1976 and the Conservative movement followed suit in 1987.

the publication of volumes of melodies traditionally sung in synagogues, schools, and at home.³⁵

Thus varieties of Jewish music with roots in European traditions, modified by accommodations to American tastes, were well established by the mid-1960s. But a movement of new Jewish music was about to transform the scene.

Hassidic Goes Mainstream

A pivotal development in the 1950s and early 1960s was the recording of noncantorial Jewish music. This began with Benzion Shenker's recording of the music of the Modzitz Hassidic sect, *Modzitzer Melaveh Malka Melodies*, in 1950. Born in 1925 and raised in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Shenker was a talented singer who, from an early age, performed with some of the great cantors—in 1937, at the age of 12, he appeared in concert with David Roitman, Adolph Katchko, and Eliahu Kretchman.³⁶ In 1940 the Modzitzer Rebbe, Shaul Taub, came to America. Shenker developed a personal relationship with the rabbi, one that had a deep impact on him and that lasted a lifetime. Twelve other recordings followed the first, and they included many original songs by Shenker, as well as traditional Modzitz melodies. Two of Shenker's 450 original compositions are regularly sung in many homes on the Sabbath: "Mizmor Le-David" (Psalm 23) and "Aishes Chayil" ("A Woman of Valor"—Proverbs 31:10–31). Both appeared on his *Joy of the Shabbath* album of 1960. In the early 1960s and through the 1970s, David Werdyger, a cantor, also recorded Hassidic melodies. His recordings through the 1970s featured the music of the Gerer, Melitzer, Skulener, Bobover, Boyaner, and Rodomsker dynasties.³⁷ Recordings of the music of other dynasties, such as Lubavitch and Munkacs, by a variety of other artists, followed.

The original Hassidic melodies that Shenker and Werdyger recorded exemplify the two styles of Hassidic song: a *stam niggun*, a melody with a

³⁵Two important liturgical publications are the *Out of Print Classics* series, published by HUC-JIR in the 1950s, which includes the works of Baer, Birnbaum, Dunajewsky, Gerovitsch, Lewandowski, Naumbourg, Nowakowsky, Sulzer, Weintraub, and others; and Gershon Ephros, *The Cantorial Anthology: Traditional and Modern Synagogue Music*, 6 vols. (New York, 1929–1975), which also includes works by various composers. Harry Cooper-smith, *Favorite Songs of the Jewish People* (New York, 1939) is primarily for home use.

³⁶Rochelle Maruch Miller, "Benzion Shenker: An Exclusive Interview with the Master of Jewish Music," *Country Yossi Family Magazine*, Jan./Feb. 1995, p. 51.

³⁷Werdyger states that he knew the rebbes of each of these dynasties, was impressed by all of them, and considered it a high honor to lead prayers at their synagogues. David Werdyger as told to Avraham Yaakov Finkel, *Songs of Hope, the Holocaust Diaries* (New York, 1993), pp. 308–14.

regular rhythm used for group singing; and a *deveykus niggun*, a melody that is rhythmically free, most typically sung by one individual, with the goal of achieving a state of spiritual ecstasy.³⁸ In traditional contexts—such as *seudah shelishit* (the third Sabbath meal, late on Saturday afternoon), *yahrtzeit* (yearly commemoration of a death), or *tisch* (gathering at the rabbi's table)—both musical styles are used: first a *deveykus niggun* to express feelings of longing, followed by a *stam niggun* to express joy. The Hassidic recordings of Shenker and the others, like the recordings of other types of folk music, generally presented the music in appropriate, unsophisticated folk-style arrangements, but sometimes the orchestral accompaniment and choral arrangements followed a more “classical” musical style.³⁹

Another development was the inception of the Hassidic Song Festival in Israel in 1969, a phenomenon that lasted more than a decade. Devoted to the creation of new Jewish music based on liturgical texts, it was actually a contest, consisting of an evening presentation of newly created Hassidic-style songs performed by well-known singers who were not Hassidim. Entries were judged and prizes were awarded. Memorable songs among the winners include: Nurit Hirsh's “Ose Shalom,” Tsvika Pick's “Sh'ma Yisrael,” Shlomo Carlebach's “Od Yishama” and “V'haer Enenu,” and David Weinkranz's “Y'vearech'cha.” Annual recordings and multiple performances by the Hassidic Song Festival troupe in the U.S. helped popularize these songs.⁴⁰ Although the music performed was certainly not Hassidic in the traditional sense, the fact that the festival gave prominence to new Jewish music based on liturgy demonstrated that music in popular and folk styles based on Jewish sources could convey an authentic Jewish message.

Carlebach

Jewish musical artists of today consider Shlomo Carlebach (1925–1994) the father of contemporary Jewish music. Combining the participatory ease of folk music, the energy of the newly created music from Israel, and the religious fervor of the Hassidic *niggun*, he succeeded in moving liturgical music out of the synagogue and into a wide range of

³⁸A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York, 1929), pp. 411–34; Velvel Pasternak, *Songs of the Chassidim* (Cedarhurst, N.Y., 1968); Ellen Koskoff, “Contemporary Nigun Composition in an American Hasidic Community,” *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology* 3, 1978, pp. 153–74.

³⁹Velvel Pasternak interview.

⁴⁰Velvel Pasternak's unpaginated foreword to *The Best of the Chassidic Song Festivals* (Cedarhurst, N.Y., 1989). This book has the sheet music for these and other songs.

other settings, including concert halls and night clubs, and used his music to educate and inspire Jews to renew their Jewish identity and discover the beauty of Jewish life. A charismatic and controversial figure, he remained active for over 30 years, until his passing in 1994.⁴¹

Shlomo Carlebach was born in Berlin, the son of Rabbi Naftali Hartwig Carlebach (1889–1968), a well-known rabbi. The family moved to Vienna and, when the Nazis took over Austria in 1938, they fled to Lithuania and then the United States, settling in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. He studied in a number of yeshivahs and received rabbinical ordination in 1953. During his student years he developed ties with a number of Hassidic groups and came under the influence of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), who succeeded his father-in-law as Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1951. Carlebach, in fact, at Schneerson's behest, spent two years spreading the message of Judaism on college campuses (Carlebach subsequently severed his ties with Lubavitch, and rarely spoke about this part of his life). In the mid-1950s, feeling unfulfilled as a yeshivah teacher and part-time congregational rabbi in New Jersey, Carlebach began his musical career. Although he had always loved music, Carlebach's yeshivah teachers, considering it a waste of time, discouraged him from pursuing it. He could not read music and had no formal technical training.⁴² In his own words:

I saw someone playing guitar, and I started learning. I got a teacher, and one day while she was on the phone I started making up a melody and she heard it, said it sounded beautiful, and she wrote it down. Then she said, "Whenever you have a new song, call me and I'll write it down." So a few days later I had a new melody for the wedding song "Od Yishama" and I called her up and she wrote it down. And that's how my career began.⁴³

His first record album, in 1959, *Haneshomoh Loch*—known in English as *Songs of My Soul*—was followed in 1960 by *Borchi Nafshi*. The lyrics were liturgical texts, psalms, and other passages from the Bible, and the melodies were folk-like in their straightforward and easy-to-sing stepwise design. Carlebach, in fact, explained that the melodies came to him first, and only then did he scan the prayer book or the Bible to find the words

⁴¹Ari L. Goldman, "Shlomo Carlebach, 69, a Rabbi and Songwriter," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1994 p. 11; "Obituaries: Shlomo Carlebach," *Jewish Chronicle* (London), Oct. 28, 1994; "The Pied Piper of Judaism," *Jerusalem Report*, Nov. 1994, p. 45. All appear in M. Brandwine, *Reb Shlomele: The Life and World of Shlomo Carlebach*, trans. Gabriel A. Sivan (Efrat, Israel, 1997). Besides obituaries this book includes biographical material about Carlebach—not all of which is reliable—newspaper articles about him, and memorial tributes.

⁴²Eric Offenbacher, "Interview with a Jewish Minstrel," *Jewish Life*, Aug. 1959, pp. 53–57.

⁴³Michael Lerner, "Practical Wisdom from Shlomo Carlebach," *Tikkun* 12, Sept./Oct. 1997, p. 54.

to fit them. "Some call me a balladeer, some call me a revivalist—maybe I'm both," he told an interviewer after his first album appeared. The songs were immediately popular and were adopted by Jews of all denominations. Carlebach himself estimated that 90 percent of those who came to hear him perform were not Orthodox.⁴⁴ Other recordings followed, including some on the well-known Vanguard folk-music label: *Shlomo Carlebach at the Village Gate*, recorded live, in 1963, and *Shlomo Carlebach in the Palace of the King* in 1965. About his own sudden popularity, Carlebach explained: "After the Second World War, nothing happened in [the] Jewish religious music market. So every *niggun* [melody] I made up, right away hundreds of people were singing it, because nothing else was happening. It was a major breakthrough."⁴⁵ Over the course of his career Carlebach recorded over 25 albums. Some estimate that he wrote close to 1,000 melodies, many of which other singers have performed on hundreds of recordings.⁴⁶

In 1967, together with his twin brother Eli Chaim, Shlomo Carlebach took over the direction of his deceased father's congregation, Kehillath Jacob, on Manhattan's West Side, popularly known as the Carlebach Shul. But he seemed to be forever on the move, performing at folk festivals around the country and appearing on stage with Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, setting up a House of Love and Prayer in the San Francisco area in the late-1960s to reach out to "hippies," and traveling around the world. His first trip to the Soviet Union was in 1970, and there too he inspired many Jews to seek out their heritage. Carlebach performed for many Jewish organizations and before a broad spectrum of Jewish audiences, equally at home in all settings. He was well known in Israel, where he frequently performed for the Israel Defense Force, notably during the wars of 1967 and 1973. Because he lived so much of his life on the road, the image many people have of Carlebach is that of the rabbi with a suitcase of books in one hand and a guitar in the other.⁴⁷

From the standpoint of the development of Jewish music in America, Carlebach's most striking innovation was the blending of Hassidic song

⁴⁴Offenbacher, "Interview with a Jewish Minstrel," p. 53.

⁴⁵Brandwine, *Reb Shlomele*, p. 9.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 37. Others estimate that he wrote some 5,000 melodies, only a relatively small number of which were recorded. See Gitta Schreiber, "Shlomo Carlebach: An Exclusive Interview," *Country Yossi Family Magazine*, Nov. 1989, p. 30. The last recording released during his lifetime was *Shabbos with Shlomo*, recorded in 1993; the recording previous to this was ten years earlier. Shortly after he died a recording entitled *Shabbos in Shomayim* was released. Collections of songs were published prior to his death and after. A recent collection, *The Best of Shlomo Carlebach 1960–1990*, includes 90 songs and 24 stories. These and other recent Carlebach recordings are produced by Jerusalem Star Productions.

⁴⁷Brandwine, *Reb Shlomele*, p. 29.

with folk music. As noted above, Hassidic music is typically written either to a religious text or is wordless—a *niggun*. In Hassidic music, individual sections are repeated one or more times. Also, sometimes the musical modes of different sections of the same song, and their respective rhythms, too, may be quite distinct from each other, thus giving a unique character to each.⁴⁸ The major characteristics of folk songs, on the other hand, are easy-to-sing lyrics, regular rhythms, and simple harmonies. Carlebach's music encompasses both genres. A typical Carlebach song has two related sections, each having a different character, with the lyrics coming from a religious text. The songs are easy to sing and to remember—the melody is instantly familiar, as if the listener has heard it before. Carlebach frequently began a song by quietly whistling the melody. Whistling is not part of any Jewish musical style, but Carlebach made it work.⁴⁹ The accompaniment would grow stronger, and then he sang the text. The consistent, steady beat—perhaps reminiscent of the march-like Modzitz melodies that he had absorbed growing up in Williamsburg—along with the warmth and a certain pathos, inevitably induced the audience to join in the singing. In concert, Carlebach's appeal came not only from the music but also from his charm and magnetic personality. He would intersperse the music with stories, Jewish legends, accounts of his experiences with people, and insights into the Jewish tradition. Communal involvement was essential for him, he said:

I'm never satisfied with my singing. I don't think I have a good voice. I think my voice is just good enough to inspire people to sing with me. If I would have a *gevald* [incredible] voice like, let's say, Moshe Koussevitzky, then nobody would want to sing with me, because then they'll think they don't want to miss my voice, but my voice is just good enough to make them sing.⁵⁰

Many of Carlebach's songs have become standard fare in synagogues, at weddings, and at other Jewish gatherings. So quickly and completely did his music penetrate the Jewish world that many who hear or sing the tunes assume that they are traditional melodies; they have no idea that Carlebach created them. Among the best known are "Am Yisrael Hai," "Yerushalayim," "Esa Einai," "Od Yishama," "Va Ha'er Eyneynu," "Ki Mi-Tsiyon," "U-va'u Ha-Ovdim," and "Le-Ma'an Achai Ve-Re'ai."

Shlomo Carlebach's legacy was profound. As noted above, though he was an Orthodox rabbi he was among the top ten musical artists in the *Moment* magazine poll, a great majority of whose respondents were un-

⁴⁸On form in Hassidic music see Andre Hajdu and Yaakov Mazur, "Hasidism: The Musical Tradition of Hasidism," *Encyclopædia Judaica* 7, 1972, pp. 1421–32; and Uri Sharvit, *Chassidic Tunes from Galicia* (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. xxxi–xxxiii.

⁴⁹Interview with Nachum Segal, July 19, 1998.

⁵⁰Brandwine, *Reb Shlomele*, p. 9.

doubtedly not Orthodox Jews. Considering that his main contributions were in the 1960s and 1970s, his continuing popularity in the late 1990s is noteworthy. Within the Orthodox world, he was viewed with some skepticism during his lifetime because of his apparent affinity with the “hippie” lifestyle. But Carlebach’s popularity among the Orthodox rose considerably after his passing in 1994. The Carlebach Shul in Manhattan, which used to have trouble getting a minyan (prayer quorum), is now packed every Shabbat, and many “Carlebach minyanim” or Carlebach-style synagogues have sprung up in Jewish communities throughout the United States and in Israel.⁵¹

According to Velvel Pasternak, a publisher and scholar of Jewish music, the key to the Carlebach mystique was his unconventional persona. Although Carlebach was a rabbi, notes Pasternak, had he worn traditional East European rabbinical hat and long black coat, no one would have been interested. “People responded to his melodies and his personality, he had charisma. Melodies as simple as they were became hypnotic. People wanted something different, people didn’t want Eastern European music.”⁵² Jewish radio-show personality Nachum Segal, in contrast, stresses Carlebach’s message, remarking that what made him unique was that “Carlebach was there to infuse Jews with Jewish pride.”⁵³

Carlebach’s music and message provided a model for younger artists, particularly those in the religious denominations—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Robbie Solomon, cantor, songwriter, and performer in the group Safam; Jeff Klepper, cantor and performer in Kol B’Seder; and Avraham Fried, performer in the Orthodox and Hassidic communities, all sang his music in the 1960s and 1970s and then went on to create their own. Today it is taken for granted that Jewish music is an effective vehicle to connect Jews to Judaism, but it is all-too-often forgotten that Carlebach was the first to envision the concept and carry it out. For those who are critical of the commercialized aspects of the Jewish music industry today, another positive Carlebach legacy was that he seemed less interested in making money—he was slipshod about copyrighting his tunes and they were often “stolen”—than in seeking to touch and change

⁵¹The term “Carlebach minyan” or “happy minyan” refers to a prayer group or synagogue that uses Carlebach melodies and a spirited prayer style for Sabbath services. See Gary Rosenblatt, “The Sound of Prayer,” *New York Jewish Week*, July 17, 1998, p. 7, which sees attempts to incorporate Carlebach melodies as an expression of the quest for spirituality in the 1990s. Cantor Sherwood Goffin, commenting on Rosenblatt’s column, pointed out that though Carlebach was innovative, he always kept to the *nusach*. “Not Just Tunes,” *ibid.*, July 31, 1998, p. 7.

⁵²Pasternak interview.

⁵³Segal interview.

the lives of people, a quality ever more in demand today as American Jewry worries about Jewish continuity. In these ways, the Carlebach legacy lives on.

THE "NEW" JEWISH MUSIC

The Jewish music that came into being in the 1960s and 1970s consciously moved away from Eastern European musical modes, styles, and aesthetics to appeal to the tastes of the younger generation. But the shift was gradual and hardly clear-cut. A comment by folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett about the klezmer revival of the 1970s applies to all forms of the new music: "There is no smooth continuity from yesterday's *klezmerim* to today's klezmers. There is no dramatic rupture, no simple sequence of life, death, and rebirth, as the term revival would imply. Instead, old and new are in a perpetually equivocal relationship."⁵⁴

As already noted in relation to Shlomo Carlebach, one distinguishing feature of the new music is its new purpose—performance. Previously, American Jewish music was sung or played for particular occasions as part of the fabric of Jewish life in synagogues or for other liturgical and life-cycle events. Even the music that was recorded—cantorial, Yiddish, klezmer, Hassidic—was produced as created for its particular context. The new Jewish music, in contrast, provided performances and recordings in a variety of concert venues. These contexts shaped a type of music that was complex and diverse, and which contributed to the formation of a new kind of American Jewish culture.

Developments in Jewish music, as in other areas of Jewish life, responded to political events as well as changes in American culture. The Israeli military victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 engendered great Jewish pride, inspiring many young Jews to look more closely into the Jewish tradition. America, at the time, was a hospitable place for the recovery of one's cultural roots since the older melting-pot model of acculturation had been replaced by emphasis on ethnic pride, largely as a result of the black-power movement and the rising consciousness of white ethnic groups.

It was in the religious sphere—in all three of the major streams of American Judaism—that a new generation of artists began to introduce new styles and contexts, with the aim, modeled on Carlebach, of cultivating a connection with Judaism through music. The most evident in-

⁵⁴Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sounds of Sensibility," p. 55.

novation across the board was the use of English lyrics, either alone or together with Hebrew texts. The new Orthodox music grew out of weddings and other quasi-religious contexts such as the *melave malke* (Saturday night post-Sabbath gathering); Reform and Conservative music grew out of camp and synagogue use. Each context had its own imperatives that shaped the creation and development of its music.

Orthodox

The Orthodox world in the 1960s faced a significant challenge: a post-World-War-II generation of Jews—many of them, refugees from Hitler's Europe, relative newcomers—sought to maintain an Orthodox Jewish life but also wanted to be “modern” and not live in the past. These people were caught between two cultures, and, from a musical standpoint, there was a vacuum. In his memoirs, cantor and Hassidic singer David Werdyger describes the situation at the time from the perspective of Hassidic Jews:

Until the advent of recorded *hassidic* music and popular *frum* [Orthodox] singers, the only records available to the Jewish public were those of the great *chazzanim* [cantors]. Popular entertainment was provided by recordings of the syrupy songs of the Yiddish theater, which flourished on Second Avenue at that time. Often these songs were sung by female ensembles, and in some instances, there was even a women “*chazzante*.” At *frum* weddings, “Here Comes the Bride” was invariably played instead of the traditional *chasunah niggunim* [wedding melodies]. Through music, the spirit of looseness and laxity that was prevalent among the assimilated Jewish youngsters in America was worming its way into the most observant homes.⁵⁵

Note the disdain for and fear of Yiddish theater, perceived as antireligious, and of American wedding practices, such as the use of “Here Comes the Bride.” There was, then, a strong motivation to create music that would strengthen a commitment to the Orthodox way of life. Werdyger explains how new Jewish music accomplished this aim:

An entirely new panorama of Jewish song was opening up. Yeshivah students and young *hassidim* eagerly picked up the new tunes, singing them at home and at bar mitzvahs, engagements and weddings. The Wagnerian wedding march was left by the wayside and replaced by meaningful Jewish songs that were chosen by the *chossan* [groom] and *kallah* [bride].⁵⁶

⁵⁵Werdyger, *Songs of Hope*, p. 278.

⁵⁶Ibid. The two most popular melodies played at traditional weddings today are tunes to “Od Yishama,” one of them by Carlebach; both can be found in Velvel Pasternak, *The International Jewish Songbook* (Owings Mills, Md., 1994), pp. 232–33.

This new Orthodox Jewish music was never intended for use in the synagogue, where traditional liturgical melodies have continued to hold sway. But, as singer Avraham Fried pointed out, there is no longer a market for recordings of cantorial music—what people want are good dance songs and ballads.⁵⁷

The sheer quantity of contemporary Orthodox Jewish music is staggering, representing at least half of all the Jewish music that is available. The Orthodox music industry, based predominantly in Brooklyn, New York, encompassing performers, songwriters, arrangers, and distributors, has grown significantly over the past 25 years. While few Reform and klezmer, and no Conservative, popular artists are able to make a living from their music, about ten Orthodox musicians support themselves entirely through the creation and performance of new music.⁵⁸

The simple explanation for this growth is the rising number of right-wing yeshivah and Hassidic Jews who do not listen to popular American music.⁵⁹ And since activities such as watching television or attending the theater or a movie are also discouraged, their own music is virtually the sole means of entertainment. They listen to it at home, in the car, in the buses and vans that transport groups to school or work, and, for women, while tending the children and preparing meals. Live performances of this music are social events (men and women sitting separately). In short, Orthodox popular music is to Orthodox Jewish life as popular music is to American life, and one has the sense that as American popular music has become increasingly influenced by the drug culture, the counter-message of Orthodoxy's traditional values has become ever more pointed in Orthodox music.

The growing popularity of the new music has not been accepted without reservation, as the entire phenomenon raises serious issues for the Orthodox community, and there are no historical precedents. Should limits be placed on the use of "non-Jewish" musical styles? Should the goal of the artist be to make money or to inspire people in their Jewish commitment? What can music do for those who are searching to connect to Judaism? Do rabbis have any responsibility to monitor this music? Might

⁵⁷Interview with Avraham Fried, July 6, 1998.

⁵⁸This estimate refers to popular artists, not to professionals employed as cantors, song leaders, and wedding-band musicians. While Orthodox synagogues in America support fewer than 25 full-time cantors, there are well over 500 professionally employed cantors working at Reform and Conservative synagogues. See Slobin, *Chosen Voices*, p. xxiii.

⁵⁹Mark Kligman, "On the Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music in Brooklyn, New York," *YIVO Annual* 23, 1996, pp. 259–93. The term "yeshivah" refers to non-Hassidic, strictly Orthodox Jews. Of course the decision to listen to a particular form of music is ultimately an individual matter, and thus the characterizations in the text are no more than useful generalizations.

there not be dangers in allowing performers who are not rabbis to serve as charismatic role models for Orthodox youth?⁶⁰ Clearly, a new dimension has been added to Orthodox Jewish life.

In terms of musical style, the new Orthodox music, while rooted in the past, has modernized way beyond Carlebach to incorporate pop, rock, easy listening, blues, country, and other musical styles. Historian Haym Soloveitchik described the situation:

Rock music sung with “kosher” lyrics was heard at the weddings of the most religious. There had been no “kosher” jazz or “kosher” swing, for music is evocative, and what was elicited by the contemporary beat was felt by the previous generation to be alien to a “Jewish rejoicing” (*yiddishe simche*). This was no longer the case. The body syncopated to the beat of rock, and the emotional receptivities that the contemporary rhythm engendered were now felt to be consonant with the spirit of “Jewish rejoicing.” Indeed, “Hassidic” rock concerts, though decried, were not unheard of.⁶¹

The rejection of Eastern European musical elements was deliberate, reflecting a broader rejection of what was perceived as outmoded Jewish nostalgia. Here is Yossi Green, composer of over 320 songs recorded on 40 albums by the most successful Orthodox performers, on the subject of klezmer music:

Klezmer music is more of a caricature of what Jewish music used to be. Of course it's very effective, apparently. An instrumentalist can then go ahead and show off his instrument, show off his ability to play. And that really has nothing to do with where Jewish music is today. That's my opinion. I'm in the center—I'm writing most of this music for years. . . . New Hassidic music [his term for new Orthodox music] has definitely replaced klezmer. If klezmer was the downtrodden, stepped-on poor little shtetl Jew's music then this is the music of today for the young, wealthier, more educated, forward thinking Jewish mind. . . . Klezmer is totally Jewish when ours is influenced by Elton John. You listen to “Tanyeh” or “Didoh Bei”⁶² and you tell me how beautiful these songs are. It is fresh, it is new. It is the young Jewish person saying, “I'm here, it's the '90s, I'm proud of my Judaism, I'm learning a lot but I'm also having fun—it's allowed and its okay, my kids are having fun, we're relaxing and enjoying ourselves, we're Jewish and we're proud of it.”⁶³

And, commenting on the use of the *Ahavah Rabbah* prayer mode, which is based on a scale not used in Western music:

⁶⁰See, for example, Dovid Sears, “Who Took the ‘Jewish’ Out of Jewish Music?” *Jewish Observer*, Jan. 1997, pp. 12–16.

⁶¹Haym Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 28, Summer 1994, p. 75.

⁶²The lyrics of these two songs, among the most popular composed by Yossi Green and performed by Avraham Fried, are from the Babylonian Talmud. “Tanya” appears on *Avraham Fried: We Are Ready!* (1988), the text taken from Tractate B'rachot, p. 7a. “Didoh Bei” appears on *Avraham Fried: Chazak!* (1997), the text taken from Tractate Nedarim, p. 41a.

⁶³Interview with Yossi Green, July 1, 1998.

[This] is a mode where you have to be very careful while using it in the modern music. It's a throwback to a time where people don't want to be. People don't want to live on the East Side with the pickle jars and the tenement buildings. That's what they associated with the old Art Raymond, 20–40 years ago. They don't associate with that, it is not a pleasant memory, it's a memory when things were very bad, when people were very poor and they didn't have things. Music today is about the new, a new spirit.⁶⁴

The heavy reliance of the Orthodox on rock and pop music for entertainment—forms different from the Eastern European musical traditions conventionally regarded as “Jewish”—is clearly rooted in sociological factors. Barred by ever-intensifying religious inhibitions from participating in the world of non-Jewish culture, the Orthodox Jew appropriates and makes Jewish the music of that culture as a way to feel “modern” without going outside the community.

INFLUENTIAL ORTHODOX FIGURES

Young Orthodox musical groups began to appear in the early 1960s, among them The Rabbi's Sons, Mark III, Ruach, and Simchatone. Over time, members of these and other groups moved to new groups or became solo artists. Perhaps the most popular was The Rabbi's Sons (each member of the group in fact was the son of a rabbi), which recorded its first album in 1967 and three others thereafter. Clearly influenced by the music of Shlomo Carlebach, the group was noted for its lyric vocal lines in a late-1960s folk idiom, accompanied by mostly acoustic instruments, often in a fast tempo. The group was described as “the Peter, Paul, and Mary of Jewish music in the type of songs they sang and the harmonies.”⁶⁵ Although The Rabbi's Sons did not last through the 1970s, their influence continued. The group's leader, Rabbi Baruch Chait, formed a new group called *Kol Solonika*, which incorporated a similar folk style but added a Greek sound and the use of the stringed Greek bouzouki.⁶⁶

This period also saw the rise of several boys' choirs, such as Pirchei and London Pirchei—now known as the London School of Jewish Song. A performer who began singing in the 1960s and is still active today is Jo Amar. His music encompasses a variety of Sephardic styles, Moroccan and Arabic, including both folk songs and cantorial melodies. Amar has produced numerous recordings that remain popular, and he performs frequently in concerts all over the world.

⁶⁴Ibid. Art Raymond was the well-known host of New York radio station WEVD.

⁶⁵Interview with Sheya Mendlowitz, July 22, 1998.

⁶⁶Its first recording, *Kol Solonika: The New Greek Hassidic Sound* (1972), was followed by five others.

In the 1970s a group called D'veykus ("clinging" [to God]) had a significant influence. Its composer, Abie Rotenberg, following Carlebach, wrote songs with liturgical texts that were easy to sing, memorable, and pleasant.⁶⁷ Many admirers describe the music as soulful and contemplative. The group's melodious tunes secured a place in Orthodox life at weddings, in the synagogue, and as *zemirot* sung at home. Some of the best-known D'veykus melodies are "Lev Tahor" and "Hiney Yomim" (vol. 1), "Kol Dodi" and "Gam Kee Aylech" (vol. 2), "V'Lee Yerushalayim" and "Na'ar Hayiti" (vol. 3), and "Hamalach" (vol. 4).⁶⁸ This group did not perform live concerts, but only recorded its music in the studio, marking an important transition whereby recording music became an end in itself, rather than just a means of preserving and disseminating music written for live performance.

Another group that had a significant impact beginning in the late 1970s and through the early 1980s was the Diaspora Yeshiva Band, the name taken from the yeshivah in Jerusalem where members of the group studied. Their contribution was using American folk styles such as rock and blue grass as settings for religious texts. Most members of the band, like the other students at the Diaspora Yeshiva, were *ba'alei teshuvah*, newly observant Jews, who were steeped in secular American culture and had received their musical training in the United States before adopting Orthodoxy. Their music provided a gateway for other *ba'alei teshuvah*, as well as for those raised as Orthodox, to experience a contemporary Jewish American music. The melodies were often complex, and the arrangements included virtuoso instrumental playing.

If one person had to be chosen as the most influential figure in contemporary Orthodox music, it would be Mordechai Ben David. The son of David Werdyger (hence the name, Mordechai the son of David), Mordechai began singing at an early age in his father's concerts and on recordings.⁶⁹ With 25 recordings of his own to date, Ben David is one of the most successful solo performers in the field. His first solo album, released in 1974, entitled *Hineni*, had two important innovations, both of which became precedents for his later albums as well. First, the music was arranged professionally and performed by a full orchestra. Second, the title song had an English text, though it centered upon the Hebrew word *hineni*, meaning, "I am here" ready to serve God, the response that the

⁶⁷Another example of the recycling of personnel is D'veykus singer Label Sharfman, who was also a member of The Rabbi's Sons.

⁶⁸The longevity of this group is remarkable. The first three volumes were recorded in the 1970s, volume four in 1990, and volume five in 1995.

⁶⁹Werdyger, *Songs of Hope*, p. 297

patriarch Abraham gave when God called on him.⁷⁰ A quick review of the English-language Jewish spiritual messages embedded at the start of three albums by Ben David follows:

Hineni (1974)

So my brother, put your faith in the Above, say "*hineni*," I am ready, to serve you with love.

I'd Rather Pray and Sing (1977)

I don't want a thing, I'd rather pray and sing. I'd rather tell the story of your holiness and glory.

Just One Shabbos (1981)

Just one Shabbos and we'll all be free, just one Shabbos come and join with me. Let's sing and dance to the sky, with our spirits so high, we'll show them all it's true, let them come and join us too.

The music of these albums is in a 1970s soft-rock ballad style in which the chorus is more energetic than the verses; when they first appeared, the upgraded arranging standards gave the songs a fresh sound, and many other artists and groups continued these innovations. Just as Carlebach forged a link between folk music and Jewish music, Ben David appropriated an American musical style and a secular idiom and adapted them to fit a Jewish message. Despite the English texts of the title numbers, the majority of the songs appearing on Ben David's albums are in Hebrew. Most of them are original songs written either by Ben David or other songwriters; the rest are songs of Carlebach, Benzion Shenker, and Hassidic dynasties, or are well-known Israeli songs.⁷¹ Ben David performs for a wide variety of Orthodox audiences, but his music is geared mainly to its right-wing segment, popularly known as the "Borough Park community," after the name of a heavily Orthodox Brooklyn neighborhood.

Another popular Orthodox singer who began performing in the early 1980s is Avraham Fried. The English title song of his first album, in 1981, *No Jew Will Be Left Behind*, was written by songwriter Yossi Green. Its words, which Fried explains he composed after hearing a discourse by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, state that when the Messiah comes all Jews will go to Israel and no one will be left behind. Fried is indeed a Lubavitcher Hassid living in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and many of his songs incor-

⁷⁰For a more detailed discussion of the text of this song see Kligman, "Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music," pp. 268–71.

⁷¹The *Hineni* album includes an "Od Yishama" of Carlebach and "Shema Yisroel" of Tzvika Pick. Many of Ben David's albums combine folk, popular, and Hassidic music together with original songs. Some from the late 1980s and 1990s focus on a particular theme, such as holidays or weddings.

porate the messianic message of redemption.⁷² Some of the best known are "The Time Is Now" (1982), "We Are Ready" (1988), "Goodbye Golus" (1989), "On Giants' Shoulders" (1993), and "Don't Hide from Me" (1995).⁷³ In much the same way as Ben David, Fried sees the English songs as "a chance to say how I'm feeling at that moment, in my own words, not based on a verse or taken out of psalms."⁷⁴

Although Fried and Ben David also sing and record songs based on liturgical texts, their English-message songs may well be the most favored by their listeners. At the end of the 1980s Fried introduced songs with a message rather than a traditional text in languages other than English—Aramaic, Yiddish, and Hebrew. The song "Tanyeh," appearing on *We Are Ready* (1988), is taken from a passage in the Talmud (B'rachot 7a) relating how Rabbi Yishmael entered the holiest area of the Temple and saw a vision of God. "Aderaba" ("on the contrary"), from a 1991 album by the same name, is based on a prayer written by Rabbi Elimelech, who says, "Let's see the good points of our neighbors and overlook their shortcomings." "Shtar Hatnoim," recorded in 1993 on an album by the same name, compares the wedding contract of the title to the contract between God and the Jewish people. The composer of these three songs, Yossi Green, has taken the format of the English-language message songs and applied it to non-English texts, creating deeply expressive stories or images. The music combines cantorial *nusach*, Hassidic *niggun*, and passages with a soothing melodic line, all tied together by an orchestral accompaniment. "Tiher," on the album *Chazak!* (1997), recorded by Fried, has been called the most developed example of this song type.⁷⁵

An indicator that Orthodox popular music had entered the mainstream was a concert in January 1988 at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall, a benefit for the Hebrew Academy for Special Children (HASC), featuring Mordechai Ben David, Avraham Fried, and the Sephardi singer Yoel Sharabi. While similar performances had been held at Brooklyn College and Queens College, this was the first concert of Orthodox popular music to take place in Manhattan.⁷⁶ Since then, similar benefits featuring Orthodox popular music, for this and other causes, have taken place at

⁷²Fried interview. See also Calev Ben-David, "Music with a Soul," *Jerusalem Report*. Feb. 23, 1995, p. 42.

⁷³The first three songs come from recordings of the same name; the last two are from *Shtar Hatnoim* (1993) and *Brocha V' Hatzlocha* (1995).

⁷⁴Fried interview.

⁷⁵Green interview.

⁷⁶Of course there had been many previous performances of cantorial and Yiddish music in New York City and elsewhere, but they had not been specifically identified with the Orthodox community.

Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall, the Paramount Theater of Madison Square Garden, Nassau Coliseum, Westbury Music Fair, and the Metropolitan Opera House. Outside of New York, such music is performed throughout North America as well as in Europe and Israel, at synagogues, schools, and other locations large enough to hold an audience of several hundred people. Top performers play between 30 and 50 concerts a year. According to producer Sheya Mendlowitz, "There are masses out there that are interested now and it is growing. The younger generation is very much into Jewish music, the market is growing. I don't even think we've touched the tip of the iceberg yet."⁷⁷

While Orthodox Jews in their 30s and older have grown up with the music of Mordechai Ben David and Avraham Fried, a younger generation is being reached by new performers in their mid-to-late 20s: Shloime Dachs, Sandy Shmuely, Mendy Wald, Yisroel Williger, and Yehuda. Two other performers whose popularity has grown over the last decade are Michael Streicher, with more than ten recordings since 1989, and Dedi, who has recorded four albums since 1993. Kol Solonika and D'veykus remain popular, their music recently transferred to the CD format. Other popular groups include Regesh, which began performing in 1983 and has issued ten albums;⁷⁸ the Miami Boys Choir, with close to 20 recordings, active since 1979;⁷⁹ and Journeys, a group that has recorded three albums since 1984—a majority of the songs, written in English, are by Abie Rotenberg, who was the composer for D'veykus.⁸⁰ Instrumental music has become more common, especially recordings of wedding music such as

⁷⁷Mendlowitz interview.

⁷⁸Regesh's "Shalom Aleichem" from *Shabbos*, vol. 3 (1985), is well known and frequently sung on Friday nights before the Sabbath meal. For a further discussion of Regesh and this song see Kligman, "Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music," pp. 277–79.

⁷⁹A well-known English song, "Besiyta Dishamaya" ("with the help of heaven"), was recorded by the group in 1984. Emulating Mordechai Ben David's "Hineni," "Besiyta Dishamaya" is the only non-English phrase in the song, but that Hebrew title encapsulates its message. Another English song, "We Need You" (1988), addresses the problem of talking during synagogue services. "Meherah," a frequently heard original song in Hebrew composed by choir director Yerachmiel Begun, appears on the album *Klal Yisroel Together* (1987).

⁸⁰Many of the 28 songs that appear on the three albums are well known, such as "The Place Where I Belong," vol. 1 (1984), about a Torah scroll that travels from Europe to America; "Teardrop," vol. 2 (1989), the story of an old woman who lights candles on the Sabbath in grief and despair but is transformed by the magic of the experience; and "Who Am I," vol. 3 (1992), written for the Hebrew Academy for Special Children's annual concert, which conveys the message that children with special needs are like everyone else. The acceptance of this song, by the way, marked a milestone in American Orthodoxy's public acknowledgement of the phenomenon of children with handicaps. Abie Rotenberg also made two recordings with the group Lev V'Nefesh, the first in 1990 and the second in 1998, both consisting primarily of original songs by Rotenberg to Hebrew texts.

Dance with Neginah, *Neshoma Orchestra*, and *What a Wedding*. Groups that record instrumental versions of well-known songs are Teva and Project X. Children's music is also popular, and there are numerous groups that record stories and songs with Jewish messages and themes: Uncle Moishy, Country Yossi, 613 Torah Avenue, Mitzvah Tree, Rabbi Shmuel Kunda, and Torah Tots, to name a few.

Modern Orthodox Jews, who do not avoid secular culture and attend concerts and other forms of general American entertainment, do not have the same need to listen only to Jewish music. They are not frequent buyers of Jewish music and there are no groups or artists specifically catering to them.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the group called Shlock Rock would seem to be closer to modern Orthodoxy than to any other group, and its performers come from that community. It has been successful in reaching modern Orthodox audiences—mostly Jewish day schools and National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) conventions—but it also performs in Reform and Conservative venues as well as at Jewish community centers. The writer and director of the group, Lenny Solomon, has completed 20 recordings since 1986.

Shlock Rock is best known for songs that educate and entertain through parody. As anthropologist Elliott Oring has noted, modern Orthodoxy, which more than any other Jewish subgroup seeks seriously to balance the world of strict halakhic tradition with that of secular modernity, is apt to cope with the tension by creating parodies of it.⁸² Some examples of Shlock Rock are "Old Time Torah Scroll," which parodies "Old Time Rock and Roll," from the album *Learning Is Good* (1986); "Under the Huppah," which parodies "Under the Boardwalk," from the album *Purim Torah* (1987); "Every Bite You Take," reminding one to say a blessing after a meal, which parodies "Every Breath You Take," from the album *To Unite All Jews* (1989); "All Night Long," which is about staying up the night of the Shavuot holiday to study Torah and parodies Lionel Richie's "All Night Long," also from *To Unite All Jews*; and "We've Got a Strong Desire," which recounts all of Jewish history in 42 lines and parodies Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire," from the album *Sgt. Shlocker's Magical History Tour* (1991). Lenny Solomon has also written original songs based upon recent events in Israel and New York, such

⁸¹For further discussion of the distinction between modern Orthodoxy and the yeshivah community see Kligman, "Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music"; and Mark Kligman, "The Media and the Message: The Recorded Music of Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn, N.Y.," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review: Special Issue on Media* 16, 1994, pp. 9–11.

⁸²Elliott Oring, "Rechnitzer Rejects: A Humor of Modern Orthodoxy," in Jack Kugelmass, ed., *Between Two Worlds: Ethnographic Essays on American Jewry* (Ithaca and London, 1988), pp. 148–61.

as “Keep on Giving,” which focuses on charity and helping the homeless and was written for a joint African American-Jewish rally after the 1991 Crown Heights riots. It appears on the album *Manual for the Moral Minded* (1994). Shlock Rock’s primary audience was originally children and teenagers, but this has changed. According to Solomon, “My age group is more of a family audience now. The listeners are still varied, from unaffiliated to Haredi, but the age group is 3 to 13 and their parents and grandparents.”⁸³

Other modern Orthodox groups have appeared more recently with distinctive musical styles. Kol Achai (“voice of my brothers”), which has recorded three albums since 1990, consists of three Israeli brothers whose music combines folk and popular styles. Beat’achon (a play on the English “beat” and the Hebrew word for “faith”)—three recordings since 1993—is an all-male a cappella group whose music ranges from 1950s doo-wop to jazz and rhythm and blues. Jordan Gorfinkel, a singer for the six-man Beat’achon and its manager, notes that the group does not adhere to any specific Jewish style; rather, it strives for “the same quality music as heard on the radio, but with Jewish values.”⁸⁴

A noteworthy feature of the new Orthodox music is that it is created and performed chiefly by men—but listened to by both men and women. This is because Halakhah considers the voice of a woman singing to be sexually arousing to men, and therefore prohibits men from hearing it (the reverse is not the case). As a kind of musical subculture, however, the Orthodox world has produced female singers who perform their own original songs, as well as songs written by male performers, at concerts exclusively for women, and make recordings as well. Some of the established female performers are Ruthi Navon, Ashira, Kineret, Rochel Miller, Susan Kates, Dana Mase, and Julia Blum. Groups or ensembles of women include A Taste of Music, in Brooklyn, and Tofa’ah, in Israel. Since modern Orthodox Jews tend to be more lenient on the issue of hearing female singers, there are some performers—Shlomo Carlebach’s daughter, Neshama, is a good example—who will perform either for all-female audiences or for mixed audiences.⁸⁵

Ironically, even in Orthodox circles where women’s singing voices are not supposed to be heard, the women play an important role in popularizing the music, and it is they who often determine which songs or singers are “in.” This is because a primary function of much of the new

⁸³E-mail message from Lenny Solomon to the author, Sept. 18, 1998.

⁸⁴Interview with Jordan Gorfinkel, July 20, 1998.

⁸⁵For a discussion of women’s popular music in general, including both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, see Rahel Musleah, “An Explosion of Jewish Women’s Popular Music,” *Lilith*, Winter 1995, pp. 18–26, 28–29.

Orthodox music is to accompany dancing at weddings, known as *simcha* dancing (men and women dance in separate circles, often separated by a partition). Examples of such music are Mordechai Ben David's Yiddish songs "Yidden" (1986) and "Moshiach, Moshiach, Moshiach" (1992), and Avraham Fried's "Dido Bei" (1997). Women, who seem especially to enjoy the dancing, practice on their own time and choreograph group dances to new songs. Many in the Orthodox music industry say that getting a song onto the dance floor at an Orthodox wedding can significantly increase the sales of recordings.⁸⁶

Finally, despite the proliferation of new music in the Orthodox community and its broad acceptance, there remains an undertone of criticism that the whole enterprise—especially as its musical sophistication takes it ever farther from its simple roots—neglects true spirituality and cares only about making money.⁸⁷ Some performers are sensitive to this criticism. Avraham Fried, for example, who had a close personal relationship with the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, is careful to balance his popular recordings with more traditional works, such as his recordings of the Yiddish songs of Yom Tov Ehrlich as well as Lubavitch and other traditional Hasidic melodies.⁸⁸ However Lenny Solomon of Shlock Rock believes the criticism is misguided:

Jewish music is going in the right direction. Music is the language of the people. If they are listening to your music then you are speaking their language and both the performer and the listener can help bring *moshiach* [the Messiah]—the performer by writing inspired music that helps people get closer to God, and the listener by getting inspired and moving in the right direction. I expect to see Jewish music expand into television, perhaps, at first, music videos here and there, until a station geared to the purpose of reinforcing Jewish identity is established.⁸⁹

Reform

Music in the Reform community, like that among the Orthodox, emerges from the confluence of Judaism and American life, but the response is different. The synagogue is the primary setting for Jewish ex-

⁸⁶Jill Gellerman, "Sources of Jewish Dance: A Select Bibliography," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Newsletter* 5, 1981, pp. 1–2; Gellerman, "Simchas Bais Hasho'eva in Crown Heights: Rehearsing for the Ultimate *Simcha* Among the Lubavitcher Hasidim," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review: Jewish Dance* 20, 2000, pp. 110–22.

⁸⁷Mendlowitz and Segal interviews.

⁸⁸Fried interview. The Yiddish songs appear in two volumes, both under the title *Yiddish Gems* (1992 and 1994), and the Lubavitch and other Hassidic melodies are on *Hupp Cossack* (1996) and *Niggun Habesht* (1998), both of which are updated versions of recordings made by others in the 1950s.

⁸⁹Solomon e-mail.

pression among most Reform Jews, and it is there that musicians have directed their efforts to revitalize older Reform music, which, they felt, was too formal and out of date. Today, Reform popular music has significantly displaced the traditional repertoire, despite ongoing resistance, particularly among Reform cantors.

Before the 1960s music in Reform synagogues consisted chiefly of hymns sung by the congregation and compositions sung by cantor and choir with organ accompaniment, using artistic settings of the liturgy by Binder, Freed, Fromm, and others, discussed above.⁹⁰ The dominant language was English—the *Union Hymnal* contains 284 hymns, 280 in English and four in Hebrew. In Reform summer camps sponsored by the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) communal singing at meals and services consisted of a few Israeli and Carlebach songs and lots of American folk tunes, such as “Puff the Magic Dragon,” “Blowin in the Wind,” and “Leaving on a Jet Plane,” and black spirituals like “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” “This Train Bound for Glory,” and “Go Down Moses.” These English songs had a message that resonated with the political, ethical, and humanitarian issues of the 1960s.

Cantor Jeff Klepper, who first attended summer camp in 1968, describes the lack of a tradition of music for Reform youth:

But what was our Jewish music heritage? Well in shul [synagogue] it was Freed and Binder . . . it was nothing to come away with. That was artistic and professional music. . . . There was nothing for us in the synagogues in the late '60s, nothing. Because to be 13, or 14, or 15, to walk into a shul with long hair and to have a choir and, you know, have a cantor singing quasi-operatic music, that frankly wasn't very good, a style that was totally foreign to us. If there were Jewish melodies in that music we didn't hear them.⁹¹

For Klepper and other young Reform Jews in the 1960s and early 1970s, folk singers Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Tom Paxton, and James Taylor were important influences:

⁹⁰Schiller, “The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues,” looks at the breadth of change in Reform liturgical music during the 20th century. Lawrence Hoffman includes comments about music in his work on changes in liturgy: “Musical Traditions and Tension in the American Synagogue,” in *Music and the Experience of God: Concilium* 222 (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 30–38; and *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only* (Washington, D.C., 1988; 2nd ed. Woodstock, Ver., 1999), pp. 171–200. A study focusing on Reform camps is Wally Schachet-Briskin, “The Music of Reform Youth,” Master's thesis, HUC-JIR, 1996.

⁹¹Interview with Jeff Klepper, June 16, 1998. The introduction (unpaged) to Jeff Klepper and Dan Frelander, *The Kol B'Seder Songbook* (Owings Mills, Md., 1996), describes the lack of congregational involvement in synagogue music and the perceived need to encourage participation.

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Although generally disdainful of European Jewish music, such as Hassidic *niggunim*, these young Reform Jews recognized Shlomo Carlebach as an authentic Jewish folk singer. The fact that he, an Orthodox rabbi, was an innovator may have given them license to create a new Jewish music of their own in a folk style.

By the late 1960s, when ethnic pride was intensifying, American Jews embraced Israeli culture as a vehicle for expressing their Jewish identity. According to Rabbi Daniel Frelander, "This ethnic, pro-ethnic, and pro-Israel stuff, combined with the anti-authority stuff of the late '60s, created the stage for radical change."⁹³ Camp songbooks underwent major revisions. There was an increase in the use of Hebrew, more Israeli songs—including some composed by Naomi Shemer and others from the Hassidic Song Festival—and Shlomo Carlebach tunes. According to Frelander, "Our people wanted to hear Hebrew and they wanted to sing Hebrew, so Hebrew becomes a real crucial piece. This is the change from the 1965 songbook, which is almost entirely in English, only a few Yiddish pieces. Yiddish goes out of fashion in 1967."⁹⁴ And beginning in the 1970s the English repertoire—the American folk tunes and black spirituals—shrank dramatically.

It was in the summer camps that Reform young people, Jewishly invigorated by their camp experience, set off a revolution in liturgical music that would eventually transform Reform synagogue services across America. Jeff Klepper relates what happened:

And then we took Reform war-horse melodies and played them on guitar. That was part of the revolution. Which means we stripped them of their choral music, for instance the [Isadore] Freed Hassidic "Mi Chamocho,"⁹⁵ which was a Hassidic melody, or quasi-Hassidic. . . . We didn't have an organ in the woods, there was no place to plug it in and you couldn't have a piano because a piano was too big to shlep, and you didn't have Casio keyboards. Since services were in the woods, in a little clearing in the woods a guitar was used. It was portable, it was mellifluous, it was rhythmic. Guitar in my mind is the perfect instrument to accompany worship because it can do everything.

⁹²Klepper interview.

⁹³Frelander interview.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Isadore Freed, *Hassidic Service for Sabbath Eve* (New York, 1962). The piece was written in 1954.

So there was a certain percentage of music that was taken and everyone brought their pet tunes. . . . People started writing tunes to fill in the gaps for prayers that we wanted. . . .⁹⁶

Thus, the creation of new liturgy was based on need and on the desire for an aesthetically satisfying musical style that was participatory and playable on guitar. Three new musical services reflecting the camp influence were composed in this period: Ray Smolover's *Edge of Freedom* (1967) and *Gates of Freedom* (1970) services, and Michael Isaacson's *Songs NFTY Sings* (1972), later published as *Avodah Amamit*. Debbie Friedman's first recording was a youth service she wrote for high-school students entitled *Sing Unto God* (1972).⁹⁷

The campers, returning home after the summer, wanted their local cantors to sing the new melodies, but the cantors did not know them. The need to preserve and disseminate the camp melodies became evident. According to Frelander,

In 1972 [the music is] released on albums — record albums. That's a great way of disseminating information because you could mail it all over the country. Notice, it's not written for keyboard; keyboard falls out of favor because organs are the symbols of the Reform they are running away from, the pre-ethnic Reform. Guitar becomes the instrument of choice. . . .⁹⁸

The recordings he refers to are the annual NFTY compilations of melodies popular at camp during a given summer, beginning in 1972. In 1979 Ray Smolover arranged *Songs and Hymns for Gates of Prayer*, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s sheet music helped to spread the popular melodies. In 1987 *Sha'are Shirah* was published, providing at least three versions of liturgical selections for Sabbath services, with the keyboard scoring and chords reflecting the move away from organ-and-choir accompaniment.⁹⁹

Astonishingly, within one decade after Israel's Six-Day War, Hebrew-infused camp music had begun to influence the synagogue liturgy. Choral singing went into decline, and a new Reform prayer book, *Gates*

⁹⁶Klepper interview.

⁹⁷Jeffrey K. Salkin, "The New Trend in Synagogue Music," *Reform Judaism* 9 (Winter 1980), p. 4. The folk-rock service has become popular in the liturgies of other American religions as well. See Virgil C. Funk, *Sung Liturgy: Toward 2000 A.D.* (Washington, D.C., 1991).

⁹⁸Frelander interview.

⁹⁹Two UAHC surveys of Reform synagogues, one in 1987 and the other in 1993, indicated a decline in the use of organ music and greater reliance on electronic keyboard, piano, guitar, and a cappella song. Daniel Frelander, Robin Hirsch, and Sanford Seltzer *Emerging Worship and Music Trends in UAHC Congregations* (New York, 1994), p. 18.

of *Prayer*, published in 1975, reflected the growing desire of Reform congregations throughout the country to sing more of the service in Hebrew. By the 1980s the folk-rock style had become commonplace in Reform worship, except in the oldest, most Classical Reform congregations.

Reaction have ranged from enthusiastic endorsement to disdain. One proponent, Rabbi Frelander, director of programs for the UAHC, argues for the folk-rock style on the basis of its positive effect on the communal experience:

I'm forced to contrast that "high art" [composed synagogue music of the 19th and 20th centuries] with the "popular art" [folk-rock style music] we experience in the large communal song sessions at the conventions of the UAHC, CAJE [Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education], and now even the GA [the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly]. They remind us baby boomers of our youth, singing together at summer camp, on the college campus or at the protest rally. Those were special and spiritual moments these adult communal singing sessions recreate for us. Our souls open up, and we sing familiar sounding melodies and words, and feel comfortably connected once again to our community and our God.¹⁰⁰

Samuel Adler, however, a noted composer and teacher at the Eastman School of Music and Juilliard, is critical of the new synagogue music, which he refers to as "spiritual entertainment." In his view, supporters of communal singing are eager to blame low synagogue attendance on the traditional music rather than seeing that the fault lies in the decline in familiarity with, and affinity to, synagogue ritual life.

The status of liturgical music in the American Reform synagogue today (and I include here also the handful of large Conservative congregations that emphasize composed music as part of the worship experience) is best described as confused, even chaotic, fueled by ignorance, misinformation, and simple neglect. . . . Synagogue music today has thus fallen largely into the hands of the "new traditional composers" who write in a popular style that is pseudo-Jewish, pseudo-pop-American, and pseudo-Israeli. These composers are believed because their style offends no one, challenges no one, and is easy to perform. If this state of affairs continues, the more challenging musical works composed for the synagogue since the 19th century—already rarely heard today—will become museum pieces to be resurrected only for special occasions.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Daniel H. Frelander, "The Role of Jewish Communal Singing," *Sh'ma*, Oct. 4, 1996, p. 6.

¹⁰¹Adler, "Sacred Music in a Secular Age," in Hoffman and Walton, eds., *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, pp. 294, 296–97. Michael Isaacson takes a similarly negative approach, as quoted in David Mermelstein, "Is Popular Culture Defining Synagogue Music?" *Reform Judaism* 24 (Spring 1996), pp. 44, 50.

After noting parallels to conflicts over liturgical music in various Christian denominations, Adler sharply attacks the Hassidic-style or Israeli tunes as “the trademark of the Jewish commercial sacred music norm.”¹⁰² Many cantors in the Reform movement share Adler’s views, as do some Conservative cantors.

In a number of articles and books, Hebrew Union College liturgist Lawrence Hoffman has explored the conflict in historic depth. Here is how he frames the debate:

Worship is seen more and more as belonging to the people, and demanding, therefore, an engaging musical style that evokes their active participation. By contrast, both cantorial music and art music are incomprehensible to all but very sophisticated worshipers. From the perspective of the cantor, the demand for musical “accessibility” threatens both the age-old internally authentic tradition and the relatively new externally authentic art-music tradition too, since the newest sing-along tunes may lack roots in the synagogue’s history and fail the test of refined taste as well.¹⁰³

Since it is the laity that makes decisions in the synagogue, most Reform cantors and composers of music for the synagogue have learned to synthesize the folk and artistic styles and combine them with traditional chants.¹⁰⁴ Reform cantor and composer Benjie-Ellen Schiller describes the situation in the 1980s:

Composers . . . fuse musical aesthetics with the need for effective congregational worship, sometimes by stressing traditional modes, other times by leaning more or less heavily toward the classical Reform choral genre, or by weaving a simple congregational refrain into a richly textured setting for cantor and choir. Diversity of voice is a concern, too, especially given the rising number of female cantors who require music written in a vocal style appropriate for women.¹⁰⁵

Schiller notes that while Reform synagogues run the gamut from large temples that use organ and choir to small congregations that do not even employ professional clergy, one common feature is the increasing desire of congregants to participate in worship. Those involved in the training of cantors have developed new techniques and publications to help advance this goal.¹⁰⁶ Music educator Merri Arian, for example, teaches can-

¹⁰²Adler, “Sacred Music in a Secular Age,” p. 297.

¹⁰³Hoffman, “Musical Traditions and Tension,” p. 35.

¹⁰⁴Adler, “Sacred Music in a Secular Age,” p. 298; Hoffman, “Musical Traditions and Tension,” p. 37; Schiller, “The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues,” pp. 210–11; Mermelstein, “Is Popular Culture Defining Synagogue Music?” p. 44.

¹⁰⁵Schiller, “The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues,” p. 209.

¹⁰⁶Some Reform camps have programs to train song leaders, such as one called Hava Nashira, which disseminates repertoire and teaches techniques in leading group singing.

torial students and song leaders that music needs to be sung with clarity, in a comfortable key, and at a reasonable tempo in order for congregants to join in.¹⁰⁷

INFLUENTIAL REFORM FIGURES

Debbie Friedman is by far the most influential performer and creator of contemporary Reform liturgical music, with congregants frequently asking for her songs to be included in Reform services. In her two-and-a-half decades on the scene Friedman has made a lasting impact on contemporary Jewish music. Alone among the performers of Jewish “religious” music, her recordings are included in the inventory of national retail chains—Tower, HMV, and Virgin—and on Web sites like those of Amazon and CDNOW. Her recordings are among the most widely sold in the Jewish market—even beyond the Reform movement—and her songs are commonly included in song sessions for youth and adults at camps and conventions.

Friedman, who grew up in a Reform family, says that her interest in inspiring others to gain a closer connection to Judaism stems from her own need to reconnect to Jewish practices she lost in childhood. After moving from Utica, New York, to St. Paul, Minnesota, her family dropped various Jewish traditions it had observed when living close to her grandparents. “I missed them,” Friedman explains, “as I did my grandparents, who lived upstairs from us. I know now that some of what I’m doing is to reclaim what was taken away from me.”¹⁰⁸ Friedman got her start as a song leader at Reform summer camps and at educators’ conferences and other adult programs run by the Reform and Conservative movements. Although lacking a cantorial diploma, Friedman served as a cantor in Los Angeles for several years, working extensively with young people in the creation of new prayer services. As her reputation grew, she began performing at concerts around the country.

Like the creators of contemporary music in the Orthodox community, Friedman composes Hebrew songs to traditional liturgical or biblical texts, as well as original English songs. She uses the social-action songs in the folk genre of the 1960s and 1970s as models for her creation of new Jewish songs that communicate a message of engagement with Jewish tradition. Her musical influences are Peter, Paul, and Mary,¹⁰⁹ Joan Baez, Judy Collins, and Melissa Manchester.

¹⁰⁷Interview with Merri Arian, July 22, 1998.

¹⁰⁸Irv Lichtman, “Singer Makes Jewish Music Her Own,” *Billboard*, Mar. 1, 1997, p. 39.

¹⁰⁹Peter Yarrow, who has known Friedman for years, says, “Hers is the music of jubilation and confirmation. It is a call to community and commonality that rages against total

Her first album, *Sing Unto God* (1972), was a youth service, which she described as an effort to make prayer accessible. The album, in her words as quoted on the liner notes, “is a new experience in worship that emphasizes through song the importance of community involvement in worship. This music carries a solid message in a simple, easily understood form. It enables those who are willing to join together as a community in contemporary songs of prayer.” The album’s title song is entirely in English, and the other ten songs are either set to Hebrew liturgical texts or to a combination of Hebrew and English. The melodies are easy to sing and to understand, partly because they are repetitive—characteristics that would continue to mark her style in later years.

Friedman is concerned with making Judaism relevant to modern life. Her third recording, *Ani Ma-Amin* (1976), uses the same type of songs and language as her first, but here the songs focus on the concept of Messiah, one that poses serious theological questions that Reform Judaism has struggled with since its inception almost two centuries ago. For Friedman, the Jewish Messiah is not an individual who emerges as a leader of the Jewish people, and does not connote the resurrection of the dead. Rather, it is through the messianic belief that Judaism offers hope for the future and challenges Jews to struggle to make the dreams and visions of a messianic age come true. Friedman’s message and approach in this recording—as in all her work—are notably optimistic.

Like other musical innovators in the Reform movement and their counterparts in Orthodoxy, Friedman has had to respond to critics who claim that her music is not based on Jewish musical tradition:

Who is my music hurting? I don’t want to compete with anybody. I’m not a great lover of organ music, but I am a great lover of *nusach*. How is writing in our own musical vernacular not an acceptable or legitimate expression of our culture? My music may be uniquely American, but it is rooted in a tradition that is Russian and Hungarian, and influenced by Israel.¹¹⁰

Since—her disclaimer notwithstanding—the style of Friedman’s music is clearly the American folk tradition, her reference to its European “roots” perhaps refers to the sentiments it conveys.

Friedman has a remarkable stage presence, and many of her admirers consider her three performances at Carnegie Hall in 1996, 1997, and 1998 as marking the pinnacle of her career. Always encouraging the audience to participate, she also shares stories and relates her own experiences, skillfully drawing the listeners in. The manner in which she seeks

darkness and spreads light.” Susan Josephs, “Queen of Souls,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, Jan. 19, 1996, p. 47.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 48.

to educate her audiences and engage them in a positive Jewish life has led some to compare her to Shlomo Carlebach. Like him, as well, Friedman's music blurs the boundary between prayer and song by making prayers singable and songs prayerful. A comment she made on stage at Carnegie Hall is revealing: she told the audience, "Thank you for creating *Beth Carnegie*." For Friedman, praying in a synagogue or singing on stage both have the goal of connecting with and uplifting the audience.

Many of her songs have entered the core repertoire of Reform, Conservative, and other Jewish camps. They include the title English songs of the albums *Sing Unto God* (1972), *Not By Might* (1974), and *And the Youth Shall See Visions* (1981), as well as "L'chi Lakh," "Miriam's Song," and "T'filat Haderech,"—a prayer for traveling—all on *And You Shall Be a Blessing* (1989). A number of her Hebrew songs have achieved similar status: "L'Dor Vador" from *Not by Might*, "Im Tirtzu" from *Ani Ma-Amin* (1976), "Im Ein Ani Li" from *If Not Now, When?* (1980), and "Oseh Shalom" from *And the Youth Shall See Visions*. Friedman has also recorded children's albums, and often performs her compositions "The Alef Bet Song" and "The Latke Song" at her concerts.¹¹¹

Friedman has acquired a large and devoted audience and has achieved a rare status in contemporary Jewish life. Aside from her undeniable musical gifts, there are two special factors that have helped propel her career. One is her association with the phenomenon of the "healing service," a liturgical attempt to afford spiritual help to the sick that has become popular both within and outside the Reform movement. Many of the songs on Friedman's album *Renewal of Spirit* (1995), which includes new songs as well as some from her earlier albums, are taken from her healing service. "Mi Shebeirach," based on the traditional prayer for the healing of the sick and first recorded on *And You Shall Be a Blessing*, is probably her song that is most often requested in Reform congregations. The other factor is Friedman's appeal to women, not only as a woman herself but also as a writer and performer of songs that mirror their feelings and concerns. "Miriam's Song," for example, has become a staple at special women's seders at Passover, and not only in the Reform movement.

Daniel Freeland and Jeffrey Klepper have also made important contributions to the revival of Jewish music in the Reform movement. After performing together for several years, the pair began appearing under the name Kol B'Seder in 1975. The influences on their music should by now be familiar—Reform summer camps, Shlomo Carlebach, the Hassidic Song Festival, and Israeli folk music. Their folk influences were Bob

¹¹¹Television character "Barney" recorded "The Alef Bet Song," and used "The Latke Song" in one of his programs.

Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and James Taylor, and the harmonies of the Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, and Peter, Paul, and Mary. In the conviction that “singing empowers the worshiper to own the prayers, to use the melody as a bridge to the sacred,”¹¹² Kol B’Seder has specialized in songs that are Hebrew settings of liturgical passages. Some of their best-known works are: “Shalom Rav,” “Lo Alecha,” and “Modeh Ani” on the album *Shalom Rav* (1981); “Oseh Shalom” on *The Bridge* (1985); and “Mah Tov” on *Sparks of Torah* (1989). They have also written several English songs. Once described as the “Lennon and McCartney” of Jewish music,¹¹³ they perform, at most, 25 concerts a year and have completed four recordings that are notable for their high production standards.

There are several other well-known performers in the Reform community. Doug Cotler has recorded five albums—the most influential are *Listen* and *It’s So Amazing!*—and performs extensively on the concert circuit. Winner of a 1984 Grammy award, he has also served as a cantorial soloist in California. Another is Steve Dropkin, who previously headed Ketzev, a group whose Hebrew and English songs are being increasingly adopted for synagogue use. Julie Silver, like Cotler a cantorial soloist in California, is a relatively new solo performer who writes many English songs. Begeg Kefet, a popular group widely praised for its lush vocal harmonies, is composed of eight men and women, most of whom are Reform cantors and rabbis.

Very recently Jeffrey Klepper of Kol B’Seder, in solo recordings such as *In This Place: Jewish Songs of Time and Space* (1997), has sought to incorporate the free style of Hassidic melodies (*niggunim*) into his music, arguing that it is a more authentic expression of Jewish spirituality than “using musical idioms from the Beatles or from folk music or blues or whatever.”¹¹⁴ Nevertheless the predominant trend in contemporary Reform music remains the folk-pop style that grew out of experimentation in Reform summer camps in the 1970s, matured with the music of Debbie Friedman and Kol B’Seder in the 1980s, and, despite initial cantorial resistance, became the norm for synagogue services.

Conservative

Contemporary Jewish music in the Conservative movement presents yet a different picture. While no particular groups create specifically “Con-

¹¹²“Introduction,” *Kol B’Seder Songbook*, p. [6].

¹¹³Interview with singer-songwriter Josh Zweiback, May 7, 1998.

¹¹⁴Klepper interview.

servative” music, certain performers do perform in predominantly Conservative settings. Safam, an all-male group, has been doing so since 1974, and Craig Taubman, a solo artist, almost as long. Unlike the Reform movement, where the camps constituted the seedbed for new music, the Conservative movement’s network of Ramah summer camps have not had anywhere near the same musical impact. One reason may have been Ramah’s emphasis on the Hebrew language. Music educator Marsha Bryan Edelman describes the 1970s repertoire at Ramah camps as consisting primarily of Israeli and Carlebach Hebrew songs; English songs were not permitted, and thus the creation of new Jewish music in English was virtually ruled out.¹¹⁵

Music for worship in Conservative congregations ranges from solo cantorial artistry to the folk-style singing of a *havurah*, the small, informal fellowship group that developed out of the Jewish youth culture of the 1960s. The traditional style of the golden age of the cantorate is more common in Conservative congregations than it is in Orthodox or Reform, though it is waning there as well. Most Conservative congregations sing “traditional” melodies each Sabbath, the repertoire dating to the first half of the 20th century and composed by Israel Goldfarb (1879–1967), Max Wohlberg (1906–96), and Zavel Zilberts (1881–1949).¹¹⁶ Samuel Rosenbaum has noted that in most Conservative synagogues congregants expect to hear the same old prayers sung with the same old melodies, a familiarity that provides comfort. Inclusion of new music, therefore, is minimal.¹¹⁷

The most significant change in Conservative congregations since the 1960s has been the inclusion of Israeli songs at public gatherings and occasionally during the *kedushah* section of the service—melodies such as “Erev Shel Shoshanim” and “Yerushalayim Shel Zahav” are the most common. Generally, though, as in the case of the Orthodox, new music functions for Conservative Jews as a means of entertainment rather than worship.

According to the *Moment* magazine poll, Safam was the second most popular singing group among American Jews—at least those who read that magazine. Its members—Robbie Solomon, Joel Sussman, Daniel Funk, and Alan Nelson—were inspired by the singing of the Zamir

¹¹⁵Edelman interview.

¹¹⁶Two publications of synagogue melodies are Moshe Nathanson, *Zamru Lo* (New York, 1955–1960; reprint 1974), published by the Cantors Assembly; and Velvel Pasternak, *Siddur in Song: 100 Prayerbook Melodies* (Cedarhurst, N.Y., 1986).

¹¹⁷Samuel Rosenbaum, “Another New Tune?” in the Cantors Assembly publication, *Words About Music* (New York, 1982), p. 11.

Chorale in Boston, the home of all four of them (see below, pp. 135–36). Like their hero, Shlomo Carlebach, Safam sings liturgical songs in Hebrew; unlike him, they use electric guitars and sing in rock-and-roll rather than folk style.¹¹⁸ In their earliest performances, which took place at Jewish organizational functions and youth gatherings, they sang music of Carlebach and the Hassidic Song Festival. After successfully performing some original songs—Solomon and Sussman are the group’s songwriters—they went on to record their first album, *Dreams of Safam*, in 1976. Safam then released nine other recordings at fairly regular intervals: *Safam Encore* (1978), *Sons of Safam* (1980), *Bittersweet* (1982), *Peace by Piece* (1984), *A Brighter Day* (1986), *The Greater Scheme of Things* (1989), *On Track* (1993), *After All These Years* (1995), and *In Spite of It All* (1999), plus four “Greatest Hits” volumes. One component of Safam’s success is the variety of songs they perform and their mix of styles—Jewish elements such as cantorial and Hassidic music stylized in rock, pop, Latin, and reggae rhythms. Today Safam performs some 25 concerts a year in Jewish community centers and synagogues around the country and at events sponsored by federations and by the Conservative movement’s United Synagogue Youth.

Although its repertoire includes both Hebrew liturgical settings and English ballads, Safam is best known for its English songs. The most famous of these is “Leaving Mother Russia,” a song about refuseniks, Russian Jews not allowed to leave for Israel, that appeared on *Safam Encore*. Written at the height of the repression of Soviet Jews, this song became the anthem for the cause (and, as such, was recorded by other artists as well). For three years in a row in the early 1980s Safam sang “Leaving Mother Russia” at mass protest rallies at the United Nations, and since then the group has often sung the song as an encore at its concerts. Other Safam songs with a Jewish political message, geared to issues in Israel and elsewhere, are “Just Another Foreigner” and “Yamit” from *Bittersweet*; “Falasha Nevermore,” from *A Brighter Day*; and “Maranno” from *On Track*. Their song “We Are One,” from *Peace by Piece*, was used on the soundtrack for UJA’s 1991–92 fund-raising video. Safam’s original wedding songs—“My Beloved” from *Bittersweet* and “Dodi Li” from *A Brighter Day*—are widely used for wedding processions and for the newlyweds’ first dance. Their liturgical songs incorporate *nusach*, as in “Yismechu” from *Bittersweet* and “Birkat Hallel” from *Sons of Safam*, while they employ a novel use of barbershop style in “Vene’emar” from *Safam Encore*.

Robbie Solomon, who is critical of contemporary Jewish music that tries to be immediately accessible, describes Safam’s music as “intelligent

¹¹⁸Interview with Robbie Solomon, July 8, 1998.

music for modern intelligent Jews.” The group’s songs and music communicate a synthesis of Jewish and modern values. Musically, there is an affinity to the traditional sounds of *nusach*, which undoubtedly stems from Solomon’s traditional upbringing, but it is framed in a modern style. As his modern songwriting influences Robbie Solomon names Paul Simon, Billy Joel, and Elton John, and the lush harmonies of Crosby, Stills, and Nash. He also admires the Beatles—like Safam, a four-member male group.¹¹⁹

Craig Taubman, who grew up in the Conservative movement and found his first audiences there, now performs in Reform synagogues and other venues as well. A prolific recording artist, he has released 13 albums of Jewish music—two of them for children—as well as ten commercial children’s albums, not on Jewish themes, on the Disney and Rhino labels. He also writes children’s songs for television and manages to give up to 70 concerts a year. Taubman’s songs—often written as responses to events in his life, from the birth of a child to the death of a relative—are in Hebrew, English, or a mixture of both.¹²⁰ Frequently, the English portion of the song is not a translation of the Hebrew but stands alone; examples are “Anim Zmirot” and “Shema B’ni” from *Journey* (1991). Other well-known songs, such as “Shir Chadash” from *Encore* (1989), combine biblical and rabbinic texts, and English-language ballads such as “Where Heaven and Earth Touch”—from a 1993 album of the same name—articulate his thoughts about liturgical and biblical passages. The musical style ranges from rock-and-roll and pop to adult contemporary music. Taubman sees his music strictly as artistic statements intended for performance, not as songs to be incorporated into synagogue services, with the exceptions of two special services he composed and recorded: *Yad B’Yad* (1986) and *Friday Night Live* (1999). Taubman’s recordings for Jewish children, *My Jewish Discovery* (1995) and *My Newish Jewish Discovery* (1997), have sold up to five times better than his adult albums. He somewhat sadly explains this stark contrast as a reflection of the non-Orthodox attitude to Judaism: it’s something you go out of your way to teach your children, but it’s not for you.¹²¹ As further proof of the same point, Paul Zim, a noted cantor and singer in Conservative circles who has released many albums for adults, has recently turned his attention to recording children’s songs.

Clearly, contemporary Jewish music in the Conservative setting is less developed than it is in either Orthodoxy or Reform, in a sense parallel-

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Interview with Craig Taubman, July 23, 1998.

¹²¹Ibid.

ing Conservatism's middle position on the denominational spectrum. While Reform Jews, to the left, seek to incorporate new music within the liturgy, Conservative worship—like the Orthodox—is more-or-less fixed and can accommodate only minimal change. And while Orthodox Jews, on the right, who avoid American popular music, need their new Jewish music as a cultural outlet, Conservative Jews, who seek out all types of entertainment, do not have the same need. Performers like Safam and Craig Taubman appeal to a desire among Conservative Jews to listen to Jewish music that inspires and entertains—but these Jews are satisfied with the occasional listening opportunities they get at religious services and those organizational functions that include concerts. The only other viable market for Conservative Jewish music is children, and so it is widely marketed to schools and young families.

Jewish Renewal

The Jewish Renewal movement is an organized effort to experience a “renewed encounter with God” based on meditation and spiritual awareness. The movement seeks “through prayer, study, and action” to “nurture the rebbe-spark in everyone without fearing its emergence in different ways and degrees at different moments in different people; to nurture communities that dance and wrestle with God, that are intimate, participatory, and egalitarian, and that create a ‘field of rebbetude’; and to assist the spiritual growth and healing of individuals, communities, whole societies, and the planet.”¹²² Rabbi Ya’akov Gabriel has described it as a non-Orthodox Hassidism.¹²³

Renewal has generated a new form of Jewish music. All the participants repeat over and over, in a meditative fashion, simple, easily learned musical phrases. In worship or at concerts, hand-held drums are often beaten to keep the rhythm constant, and the music is coordinated with the bodily movements of dance.

Rabbi Shefa Gold, a Renewal leader, synthesizes a variety of Jewish and non-Jewish elements in her music. While in Israel in 1990 she developed a chanting service that has influenced others—including Debbie Friedman and Jeffrey Klepper—to incorporate melodic and meditative chants in worship.¹²⁴ Among Gold’s best-known recordings are *Chants Encounters*

¹²²“A-Definition-in-Process” by ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, Web site www.aleph.org, accessed June 22, 1999. ALEPH supports a journal, the Elat Chayyim retreat center, a biennial Kallah (conference), and a network of 40 local affiliates throughout the United States and abroad.

¹²³Conversation with Rabbi Ya’akov Gabriel, June 30, 1999. In 1997 Gabriel began writing a regular column, “Sounds of Renewal,” in *Tikkun* magazine.

¹²⁴Interview with Shefa Gold, Apr. 19, 1999.

(1994) and *Chanscendence* (1997). Two of her most popular melodies are “Elohai N’shama” from *Tzuri* (1993) and “Mah Gadlu” from *Chants Encounters*. Other renewal artists are Linda Hirschorn,¹²⁵ Aryeh Hirschfield, Yitz Husbands-Hankin, Michael Shapiro, and Ya’akov Gabriel.

Nonreligious Contexts

Yiddish, klezmer, and Israeli music still provide a rich source of musical pleasure both for Jews affiliated with religious life and for those whose connection to Judaism is primarily cultural.

THE KLEZMER REVIVAL

The klezmer revival began in the late 1970s and spread quickly in the 1980s and thereafter.¹²⁶ Henry Sapoznik, a writer and producer of klezmer, one of the revival’s first proponents, and founder of the group Kapelye, has described his personal journey:

I guess I first thought about it as its own entity around 1975. I had been playing in a bluegrass band, traditional American old-time stuff—everyone in the band was Jewish, of course—and I just had this feeling, why is it that everyone else had their own fiddle music and Jews didn’t?¹²⁷

He also recalls old-time fiddler Tommy Jarrell saying to him, “Don’t your people got none of your own music?” When Sapoznik was introduced to YIVO’s collection of klezmer music on 78-rpm records, he realized that he, the son of a cantor who sang at Catskills hotels, had heard similar music in the Borsht Belt as a youngster, but that by the 1950s and 1960s the music had become “diluted with self-conscious Israeli and Fiddler on the Roof medleys.”¹²⁸ For Sapoznik, then, the discovery of klezmer was a rediscovery.

¹²⁵Linda Hirschorn has recorded three solo albums as well as three with the six-voice female Vocolot.

¹²⁶Compared to the other forms of contemporary Jewish music, klezmer is well documented. See, for example, Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (Oxford, 2000); Seth Rogovoy, *The Essential Klezmer* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Susan Bauer, *Von Der Khupe Zum Klezkamp: Klezmer-Musik in New York* (Berlin, 1999; in German); Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer!: Jewish Music from Old World to Our World* (New York, 1999); Shulamis Lynn Dion, “Klezmer Music in America: Revival and Beyond,” *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Newsletter* 8, 1986, pp. 2–14; Walter Zev Feldman, “Bulgareasca/ Bulgarish/ Bulgar: The Transformation of a Klezmer Dance Genre,” *Ethnomusicology* 38, 1994, pp. 1–35; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Sounds of Sensibility”; Netsky, “Overview of Klezmer Music”; Henry Sapoznik with Pete Sokolow, *The Compleat Klezmer* (Cedarhurst, N.Y., 1987); and Mark Slobin, “Klezmer Music: An American Ethnic Genre,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 16, 1984, pp. 34–41.

¹²⁷Quoted in Dion, “Klezmer Music in America,” p. 4.

¹²⁸Sapoznik, *The Compleat Klezmer*, p. 15.

For others, it was completely new. Frank London was a trumpet player studying in the Third Stream Music Department at the New England Conservatory during the mid-1970s. Klezmer, he recalls, was simply an interesting musical style to learn: "I was already playing Salsa, Balkan, Haitian, and other musics. Why not Jewish?"¹²⁹ He and a few fellow students, picking up klezmer from recordings and by imitation, formed the Klezmer Conservatory Band (he now leads the group The Klezmatics). The band began by playing three songs at a concert; then came other concerts, parties, and eventually recordings and more concerts. London recalls:

I believe that for myself, and many of my peers that I've spoke to, our focus was on trying to play the music, trying to play it well, trying to get better on the nuances, and others were saying, "Oh, that's not why you were trying to do it; you're carrying on your ancestors' legacy, you're reigniting this torch that went out"—they were getting very heavy about this. But no; we were trying to play some music, make some money, and have some fun. Many of the musicians who were doing klezmer music weren't Jewish, so they weren't discovering their roots People ask, "why klezmer?" What many miss is that when I listen to this music, I get aesthetically interested. It cuts through all the shlock, all the shmaltz, all the things about Jewish music that never interested me, all the Israeli music, all the Yiddish theater music, about all that sentimentality. Why klezmer music? Because it's good, just on it's own terms.¹³⁰

Since the klezmer tradition had largely faded away, some revival musicians sought out veteran klezmer performers to study with. The recordings of legendary clarinetists Naftule Brandwein (1884–1963) and Dave Tarras (1897–1989) were models for the musicians of the klezmer revival. Andy Statman, for example, klezmer clarinetist and mandolinist, studied with Tarras.¹³¹ In addition, in an effort to preserve and make available the klezmer style of the early 20th century, Henry Sapoznik undertook a project of reissuing the old 78-rpm recordings of the pre-1920 repertoire, which had become the staple of the klezmer revival.¹³²

The four revival bands of the 1970s were Klezmorim, Kapelye, Klezmer Conservatory Band, and Andy Statman Klezmer Orchestra. The Klezmorim, cofounded by Lev Liberman and David Skuse in Berkeley, California, in 1975, recorded its first album, *East Side Wedding*, in 1977 and stopped performing in 1988. Liberman has described the music of the

¹²⁹Frank London, "An Insider's View: How We Traveled from Obscurity to the Klezmer Establishment in Twenty Years," *Judaism* 47, Winter 1998, p. 40.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 41, 43.

¹³¹Interview with Andy Statman, Aug. 5, 1998.

¹³²*Klezmer Music, 1910–1942* (Smithsonian-Folkways, 1980), *The Compleat Klezmer* (Global Music Village, 1987), *Klezmer Pioneers: 1905–1952* (Rounder, 1993), *Dave Tarras: Yiddish-American Klezmer Music* (Yazoo, 1992), *Naftule Brandwein: King of the Klezmer Clarinet* (Rounder, 1997).

Klezmorim as originating “in our early experiments with tight ensemble playing, improvisation, klezmer/jazz fusions, neo-klezmer composition, street music, world beat, and New Vaudeville.”¹³³ Kapelye, formed in 1979, combined klezmer with a variety of Yiddish vocal styles. Starting with a folk sound, the group eventually evolved into an eclectic ragtime-tinged ensemble. Four recordings have been issued: *Future and Past* (1981), *Levine and His Flying Machine* (1985), *Kapelye’s Chicken* (1987), and *Kapelye On the Air* (1995). The group performs infrequently today, but its original members have gone on to work with other bands. The Klezmer Conservatory Band “uses a full Yiddish theater orchestra instrumentation to showcase a sound that ranges from big-band hybrid to chamber-orchestral.”¹³⁴ It has released eight albums and performs frequently in synagogues, Jewish community centers, colleges, and concert halls.

By the late-1980s klezmer music had moved into the commercial mainstream, with groups employing professional managers and recording on major labels in the United States (such as Rounder and Sony) and Germany. Klezmer was “in,” and music periodicals and major newspapers featured articles about performers and reviews of recordings and performances.¹³⁵ Musically, klezmer changed in the late 1980s as groups moved away from the “revival” approach of mainly performing the traditional repertoire and began creating new music, combining klezmer with pop, jazz, and other styles.¹³⁶

Andy Statman, who has performed and recorded frequently since the mid-1970s, describes his music now not as klezmer but as “an exploration of spiritual music . . . informed by klezmer.”¹³⁷ Statman, a newly observant Jew who is part of the Hassidic world, goes so far as to claim that his teacher Dave Tarras also viewed klezmer as a spiritual form of music, albeit one performed outside of the synagogue. Two of Statman’s

¹³³Lev Liberman, KlezShack, www.well.com. Last revised Oct. 25, 1998.

¹³⁴Netsky, “Overview of Klezmer Music,” p. 11.

¹³⁵In a textbook on multicultural music in America, the editors single out klezmer as having succeeded in revitalizing a musical genre with “overwhelming enthusiasm,” as compared to other, less successful revival efforts. Kip Lornell and Anne K. Rasmussen, eds., *Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities* (New York, 1997), p. 9.

¹³⁶Other groups formed in the U.S. and Europe have adapted klezmer to avant garde, world beat, and roots-music styles. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Sounds of Sensibility,” pp. 51, 57, sees klezmer as a form of music that was ripe for transformation since it had not been picked up previously, and suggests that the variety of its incorporated styles proves its acceptance.

¹³⁷Statman interview. The use of the word “klezmer” is itself an issue, since some performers are more comfortable describing what they perform as “klezmer music” rather than “Jewish music.” For a discussion of this issue, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Sounds of Sensibility,” pp. 50–54. Pete Sokolow and others discuss “klezmer” as a derogatory label for musicians in Dion, “Klezmer Music in America: Revival and Beyond,” p. 3. Slobin, “Klezmer Music: An American Ethnic Genre,” emphasizes klezmer’s American aspect.

most successful recordings—*Songs of Our Fathers* with Dave Grisman (1994) and *The Andy Statman Quartet: Between Heaven and Earth* (1997)—consist of Hassidic *niggunim* “filtered through the impression of jazz,” or “the meeting of Hassidic music and late Coltrane,” a reference to the leading jazz musician who also saw his music as a spiritual pursuit. Statman, in fact, has criticized the popular and rock music that is commonplace in the Orthodox and Hassidic communities because it has replaced and marginalized traditional klezmer. Among his many other musical activities, Statman performs for small Hassidic gatherings in an effort to restore the klezmer tradition to that community.

In the mid-1980s, two new klezmer bands became prominent—Brave Old World and Klezmatics. Michael Alpert, vocalist and violinist of Brave Old World, came from Kapelye, while Frank London, the leader and trumpet player of the Klezmatics, had previously played with the Klezmer Conservatory Band.

The founders of Brave Old World felt that klezmer had become too conventional: “concerts were not to be too ‘serious,’ audiences were encouraged to clap along or dance, and easily accessible musical values such as virtuosity, energy, and individual charisma dominated over stylistic authenticity and ensemble musicianship.”¹³⁸ Therefore Brave Old World chose to create “new Yiddish music, whose language and forms would be consciously created for the concert stage and a listening audience, but still deeply rooted in Yiddish folk materials.”¹³⁹ The group did this through the use of mainly European classical aesthetics. Its three recordings—*Klezmer Music* (1990), *Beyond the Pale* (1993), and *Blood Oranges* (1997)—include both traditional melodies and new Yiddish songs. The latter address contemporary issues: “Chernobyl” on *Klezmer Music*; “Berlin 1990” (about the fall of the Berlin Wall) on *Beyond the Pale*; and “Welcome” on *Blood Oranges*. The group frequently performs in Germany, where it has been able to develop its European style further.

The Klezmatics, who do frequent nightclub performances and reach a broad audience, aim primarily to entertain, but move beyond the playing of nostalgic melodies, weaving together popular and world-music styles, with lyrics on a variety of contemporary social issues.¹⁴⁰ Early recordings—*The Klezmatics: Shvaygn=Toyt* (1988), *Rhythm and Jews* (1992), and *Jews with Horns* (1994)—include their interpretations of the classical klezmer repertoire. An example is their version of Brandwein’s “Der Heyser Bulgar.” While Brandwein’s own recording, on *Naftule*

¹³⁸“From Klezmer to New Jewish Music: The Musical Evolution of Brave Old World,” p. 2, included in the press kit distributed by the group’s manager.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰Interview with Frank London, Jan. 14, 1998.

Brandwein: King of the Klezmer Clarinet, includes several accompanying instruments, the Klezmatics' rendition, on *Rhythm and Jews*, has the clarinetist accompanied only by percussion.¹⁴¹ The group has more recently branched out into a variety of other ventures such as *Possessed* (1997), which is a score for Tony Kushner's adaptation of S. An-ski's *The Dybbuk*, and *The Well* (1998), musical settings for Yiddish poems composed and sung by Israeli singer Chava Alberstein.

Klezmer, which the large commercial stores carry under the "world music" category, is extremely popular among young Jews on the political left who do not identify religiously and do not desire to listen to the music produced by the Hebrew-speaking world of Israel and Zionism. Often part of a broader interest in Yiddish culture, it has given rise to such ongoing music festivals as KlezKamp, Buffalo Gap, Ashkenaz, and others, which attract participants of all ages. Klezmer is the musical embodiment of a Jewishness that enables musicians and listeners to be "cultural Jews . . . being Jewish while still being themselves."¹⁴² Klezmatics violinist Alicia Svigals explains:

So identifying with Israel was a way for American Jews to assimilate and remain Jewish at the same time. In the same way, fashioning a new Jewish culture in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, which is in harmony with hip and progressive young America, can perhaps be seen as yet another Jewish way to be American, complete with a traditional music scene—klezmer—to mirror its American folk music counterpart.¹⁴³

ISRAELI MUSIC

Immigrants to Israel in the first half of the 20th century brought with them the music of their countries of origin while at the same time aspiring to discover or create a uniquely Jewish music in the Jewish homeland. The first model for such an "authentic" Jewish music was that of the Yemenite Jews, which was regarded as having ancient roots. In the 1930s Bracha Zephira, a Yemenite performer, gained wide popularity, collaborating with European-born composers and arrangers in Palestine such as Nachum Nardi (from Russia) and Paul Ben Haim (from Germany) in adapting Yemenite music to folk and artistic styles and then performing and recording these new songs. Other immigrant composers in Palestine, such as Oedoen Partos (Hungary) and Marc Lavry (Latvia), continued

¹⁴¹The Klezmer Conservatory Band includes a more faithful rendition of the piece on *In the Fiddler's House* (1995).

¹⁴²Alicia Svigals, "Why We Do This Anyway: Klezmer As Jewish Youth Subculture," *Judaism* 47, Winter 1998, p. 44.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 47.

to work in this direction, creating what came to be known as a Mediterranean style of Jewish music.¹⁴⁴ This Westernization of Middle Eastern musical features crowded out and marginalized indigenous Middle Eastern music.

Even the huge influx of Middle Eastern and North African immigrants into the new State of Israel after 1948 did not reverse the trend because the dominant Ashkenazi-Labor establishment retained cultural dominance. Things only began to change in the late 1960s with growing Sephardi participation in the political system, culminating in the rise to power in 1977 of the Likud Party, which was heavily supported by Jews of Sephardi background. The legitimacy and encouragement given to Sephardi culture led to a new, integrated musical style, called at first *Musika Mizrachit*, Eastern Music, or *Musikat Ha-Tachana Ha-Merkazit*, Central-Bus-Station Music, referring to its primary location of purchase. It later came to be known as *Musika Yam Tikhonit Yisraelit*, Israeli Mediterranean Music, and indeed it is popular not only in Israel but throughout the Middle East. The core repertoire uses Hebrew texts, but the music integrates a variety of styles: "Hebrew lyrics commingle with Arabic, Persian, Kurdish and Turkish texts, and Eastern European, Greek, Turkish or Arabic tunes feature local aesthetic markers drawing in Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian listeners."¹⁴⁵ A mix of Western and Middle Eastern instruments and musical styles add to this rich hybrid of creative expression. Performers of note include Daklon, Shiri Ben-Moshe, Zohar Argov, and Haim Moshe.¹⁴⁶ Ofra Haza, who came from a Yemenite family and achieved international renown with songs in this genre beginning in the late 1980s, died tragically young in 2000.

American Jews developed an early interest in the music of the Jews in Palestine. A.W. Binder, for example, promoted the singing of folk songs from Palestine in the 1930s, and as Yiddish waned as an active language for Jewish musical expression, Hebrew took its place. A significant repertoire of songs from the 1948 War of Independence and from the subsequent years of building the state became a part of the American Jewish music repertoire. After the Six-Day War of 1967 interest in Israeli music increased, and artists such as Shlomo Artzi, Mati Caspi, Tzvika Pick,

¹⁴⁴Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880–1948: A Social History* (London and New York, 1995).

¹⁴⁵Amy Horowitz, "Performance in Disputed Territory," *Musical Performance* 1, issue title "The Performance of Jewish and Arab Music in Israel Today," 1997, p. 50.

¹⁴⁶See Amnon Shiloah and Erik Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Music in Israel," *Ethnomusicology* 27, 1983, pp. 222–51; and Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi, and Pamela Squires-Kidron, "*Musika Mizrachit*: Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel," *Popular Music* 8, 1989, pp. 131–41.

Yehudit Ravitz, and the group Poogy became well known to American Jews in the 1970s. However since Israeli music of this era moved out of the realm of folk music and was difficult to perform, few new songs were added to the American "Israeli song canon."¹⁴⁷ By the late 1970s American Jews were creating their own music and relying less on Israel for new music, perhaps also reflecting a more general distancing from Israel. One sector of American Jewry where interest has remained constant is the Israeli folk-dancing circuit, which often features new music from Israel.

Musika Yam Tikhonit Yisraelit is not widely known among American Jews, and few American Jewish bookstores carry it except for those located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Israelis. American Jews are much more likely to know the Israeli music of performing troupes like the Hassidic Song Festival and of the veteran popular artists like Shoshana Damari, Yaffa Yarkoni, Yehoram Gaon, and Naomi Shemer, all of whom, even the Sephardim Damari and Gaon, sing in the older style. Chava Alberstein, a performer for over 30 years, with 45 albums recorded by CBS Israel, is well known internationally for her Yiddish and children's songs in addition to her Hebrew repertoire. Dudu Fisher performed the role of Jean Valjean in the musical *Les Misérables* in London and on Broadway, as well as in Tel Aviv, and performs frequently in a range of musical styles throughout the world. David Broza has released four albums in America with English titles since 1989, and in 1995 he was the opening act for Sting. Noa (Achinoam Nini), who was born in Israel and raised in New York, studied music in Israel. She performs internationally and records an eclectic repertoire.

Other Trends

Jewish choral music has been growing in importance. The pioneer in this area is the Zamir Chorale. Zamir (the Hebrew word for nightingale) began in New York in 1960 with a group of enthusiastic young people who had attended Massad, a Zionist and Hebrew-speaking summer camp. The original director was Stanley Sperber. Zamir's repertoire in the 1960s consisted of great synagogue choral works of the 19th century as

¹⁴⁷This determination is based, in part, on an investigation of Israeli songs that appear in Reform (*Shireinu: Our Songs*, 1997), Conservative (*Kol BeRamah*, 1996), Orthodox (*Shiron Hashulchan*, 1993), and Jewish communal (*United Jewish Appeal Book of Songs and Blessings*, 1993) songbooks, and sheet music publications (Pasternak, *The International Jewish Songbook*, 1994; *The Jewish Fake Book*, 1997). Of a total of 140 songs, 41, 30 percent, were common to all. Some of these are settings of the liturgy and are among the best-known Israeli songs. Further research on the transmission and dissemination of Israeli music in America is clearly needed.

well as Zionist and folk songs. Over time its scope expanded to include the liturgical music of the Italian Jewish composer Salomone Rossi (ca.1570–ca.1630), biblical oratorios by George Friedrich Handel (1685–1759), and works by Israeli composer Yehezkiel Braun (b. 1922) and other composers such as Darius Milhaud (1892–1974) and Stefan Wolpe (1902–1972). Choral arrangements of folk, Israeli, and Jewish holiday songs were also featured. Matthew Lazar, who has directed Zamir since the 1970s, recalls that the group's performances in Israel in 1967 and 1970 had a profound effect on his life and on those of many of the singers, inspiring them to devote their lives to Hebrew music.¹⁴⁸

Zamir has had a broad impact. Members of important singing groups mentioned above—Safam, Kol B'Seder, and Begeg Kefet—started out as members of Zamir. A number of Zamir spin-offs in communities outside New York perform regular concerts that have helped train and influence a generation of musicians. The best known is the Zamir Chorale of Boston, which began in 1969 under the direction of Joshua Jacobson. The group gives some 15 concerts each year in concert halls and schools, has 15 recordings to its credit, and has received numerous awards.¹⁴⁹ Zamir, together with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, runs the Jewish Choral Festival each summer, as well as youth programs and a variety of educational and outreach events. The example of Zamir has led to the establishment of Jewish a cappella groups in colleges around the country that perform in a variety of musical styles.¹⁵⁰ Synagogues and Jewish community centers have also started choral groups.

The concert hall continues to be a venue for musical contact between established Western art forms and Jewish music. As noted above, works on Jewish themes by Ernest Bloch and Leonard Bernstein long ago found their place in the serious music repertoire. Since the 1970s, a number of composers—including Sam Adler, Bruce Adolphe, Michael Isaacson, Louis Karchin, David Lefkowitz, Michael Rose, Morris Rosenzweig, and

¹⁴⁸Interview with Matthew Lazar, May 6, 1999. In addition to his work for Zamir, Lazar directs other ensembles and guest-conducts choirs and orchestras throughout the United States. Among his most highly regarded recordings is *Chants Mystiques: Hidden Treasures of a Living Tradition* (1995), featuring Alberto Mizrahi and Chorale Mystique singing Jewish choral music.

¹⁴⁹See www.zamir.org, accessed June 22, 1999. Information also provided by Joshua Jacobson, e-mail communication, June 25, 1999.

¹⁵⁰Judah Cohen, in an e-mail message to the author dated June 24, 1999, lists the most influential Jewish college a cappella groups as: Pizmon (Columbia/JTS); Magevet (Yale University); Shir Appeal (Tufts University); Manginah (Brandeis); Kol HaKavod (University of Michigan); and Kol HaLayla, (Rutgers, New Brunswick campus). The first group listed, Pizmon, was the first, beginning in 1984. Cohen estimates that there are over 25 such groups in existence.

Bruce Roter—have turned to biblical and other Hebrew texts for inspiration, at times using melodic devices such as cantillation (the traditional melody for chanting the Torah in the synagogue) in their music. Steve Reich's *Tehillim* (1981) is based on the Book of Psalms, and Mario Davidovsky's *Scenes from Shir Ha-Shirim* is based on the Song of Songs. Aaron Jay Kernis, who received the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1998 at the age of 38, composed *Death Fugue* for bass-baritone with double bass and percussion (1981) based on Paul Célán's classic poem about the Holocaust, and the piece is frequently performed at concerts. Composer Sam Adler notes the irony that composers for the synagogue have eliminated traditional Jewish musical elements from their compositions at the same time that young composers writing for the concert hall are more willing to make use of them.¹⁵¹

Recognized artists of mainstream classical and popular music have also recorded Jewish music; the name recognition of the artists plus the fact that the albums are sold at commercial chain retail stores generally ensure high sales. Jazz saxophonist Kenny G, together with Cantor Bruce Benson, recorded *The Jazz Service* in 1986. Violinist Itzhak Perlman's 1995 recording, *In the Fiddler's House*, which features him with the four leading klezmer groups—Brave Old World, the Klezmatics, the Andy Statman Klezmer Orchestra, and the Klezmer Conservatory Band—sold over 200,000 copies. Mandy Patinkin recorded *Mamaloshen*, his interpretation of Yiddish songs, in 1997. That same year Barbra Streisand's *Higher Ground* included Max Janowski's well-known liturgical setting for "Avinu Malkeinu."

Sephardic music also has its audience. Performers and groups such as Judy Frankel, Judith Cohen, Voice of the Turtle, and Alhambra perform and record songs in Judeo-Spanish.¹⁵² And just as klezmer revival bands achieved a distinct personality through an amalgam of styles, so too Sephardic artists incorporate a variety of European and Middle Eastern elements to create their own musical identity.¹⁵³

Then there are "crossover" musicians who are hard to categorize. One is Yossi Piamenta, a rock guitarist called the "Sephardic Santana" by *Time* magazine and the "Jewish Hendrix" by the *New York Times*.¹⁵⁴ He plays a blend of rock and Middle Eastern music in a variety of New York

¹⁵¹Personal conversation with Adler, Feb. 19, 1999.

¹⁵²See Seroussi, "New Directions in the Music of the Sephardic Jews."

¹⁵³Gerard Ederly and Michael Ian Elias incorporate Sephardic elements in their music, as do new Israeli bands popular in America, such as Ethnix and Esta.

¹⁵⁴See "Jammin with the Sephardic Santana," *Time*, Aug. 3, 1998, p. 28; and "Rocking All Night, in Hebrew: Hasidic Guitarist Mixes Religion and Heavy Metal," *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1998, p. B4.

clubs and has also issued recordings. For some, his success raises the question of whether music intended for Jewish spiritual purposes loses its power and authenticity if it travels outside the Jewish community. Another example is the Jewish music corner of Avant-Garde Jazz. Primarily a New York phenomenon, the popularity of this music has been growing steadily, perhaps more outside the Jewish community than within it. Klezmatics trumpeter Frank London and saxophonist Greg Wall have released three albums with the Hassidic New Wave group: *Jews and the Abstract Truth* (1997), *Psycho-Semitic* (1998), and *Kabalogy* (1999). In this music Hassidic and klezmer tunes are stylized and put within the new jazz framework, incorporating pop, rock, jazz, blues, and contemporary classical styles within a single piece. Recordings of Hassidic New Wave, which became known initially through its performances at the Knitting Factory in Lower Manhattan, have sold well.¹⁵⁵ John Zorn has moved into this arena as well with his Massada project. The eclectic tastes of such musicians, though, certainly push the limits of Jewish music.

TENDENCIES AND ISSUES

Looking to the future, several emerging trends are worth noting. One is the growing influence of Hassidic *niggunim* and Hassidic lore. This is true among the Orthodox, where the traditional Hassidic goal of cleaving to God through music can now be achieved by listening to a recording without being physically present at a Hassidic *tisch*. In the Reform world, Debbie Friedman has incorporated texts and stories from Hassidic masters in recent songs — “You Are the One,” on her *Renewal of Spirit* (1995) recording, is based on a prayer by Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav — and Jeff Klepper includes *niggunim* in his solo album *In This Place* (1997). Recent Klezmer also owes much to the Hassidic tradition. The Klezmer Conservatory Band includes Hassidic melodies such as “Meron Nign” on the album *Dancing in the Aisles* (1997);¹⁵⁶ Andy Statman’s *Between Heaven and Earth* is exclusively devoted to Hassidic melodies, as is Frank London’s 1998 release, *Niggunim*.

Another significant trend in all the religious streams is the push for participatory prayer, in contrast to the older cantor-listener (or cantor/choir-listener) model of worship. Debbie Friedman, once again, is the prime

¹⁵⁵Interview with Seth Rosner, Aug. 7, 1998. The Knitting Factory started a sub-label of its record line called “JAM,” Jewish Alternative Music; the first release, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (1998), is a sampler of several groups, including Hassidic New Wave.

¹⁵⁶This melody was taken from Andre Hajdu, “Le Niggun Meron,” in *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre* 2, 1971, pp. 109–11 (in French, with recording).

example in the Reform community. The growth of B'nai Jeshurun—a synagogue in New York City with spirited Sabbath services attended by over 1,500 people, most of them young, where full participation by everyone is the norm—has become a model for many other congregations in America. And the proliferation of Carlebach-style prayer services indicates that a similar need exists among the Orthodox. Rabbi Sam Intrator, till recently the rabbi of the Carlebach Shul in New York City, explains:

Our individual voices when offered in an authentic, meaningful and free, spiritual prayer provide us with a far greater hope in keeping our people unified than the voices of our leaders with their proclamations and negotiations. . . . Clearly there is a great hunger for energetic leadership in participatory-based prayer. I mean this literally, in terms of the traditional *chazan* [cantor], but I also offer it as a wake-up call to our policy makers to look more closely at reviving and unifying Judaism.¹⁵⁷

The Jewish establishment has already responded. Synagogue 2000, created jointly by the Reform and Conservative movements in 1999, has been experimenting with new forms of worship services that might attract more Jews to the synagogue. And in 2000, alarmed that many Jews were finding their synagogues spiritually uninviting, three wealthy philanthropists founded STAR (Synagogue Transformation and Renewal) to develop and disseminate innovative ideas to make the synagogue an exciting and inspiring place (see below, p. 229).

The efflorescence of new Jewish music has also generated a number of questions, some practical and others substantive.

Whatever else it is, music is also a business—musicians want to perform and sell their music. Both young and veteran artists worry that they are reaching only that limited portion of the Jewish community that goes into Jewish bookstores, or that sees ads placed by distributors and producers in Jewish periodicals. Commercial outlets, after all, carry Jewish music only by nationally known musicians, some klezmer, and Debbie Friedman. The Reform and Conservative communities have the fewest retail-selling venues and the Orthodox the most, which is why Orthodox music is the largest segment of the Jewish music industry in terms of both production and sales.¹⁵⁸ Since the mid-1990s the Jewish music industry has sought to reach consumers directly through the Internet. Mayer Pasternak, former marketing director for Tara Publications, says that he can provide over 1,600 titles of Jewish music on the Tara Web site, as com-

¹⁵⁷Sam Intrator, "Letters: Power of Prayer," *New York Jewish Week*, Aug. 7, 1998, p. 7.

¹⁵⁸Samuel Heilman, "Jews and Judaica: Who Owns and Buys What?" in Walter P. Zenner, ed., *Persistence and Flexibility: Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience* (Albany, N.Y., 1988), pp. 260–79.

pared to the several hundred titles carried by the average Jewish bookstore. Besides making recordings available, Tara also plays a significant role in the spread of Jewish music through the sale of sheet music, now numbering over 300 items, and books.¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Jewish musicians all across the spectrum fear that they will soon reach the limit of their popularity, under current means of distribution. That is why leading performers—Avraham Fried, Mordechai Ben David, and Miami Boys Choir (Orthodox), Debbie Friedman (Reform), the Klezmatics and Brave Old World (klezmer)—have been actively pursuing new markets, hoping to cross over to other parts of the Jewish community and even beyond.

In terms of substance, the new Jewish music, as noted several times above, has not lacked for critics. In the Reform world, where so-called “camp music” has become the norm, questions are being asked about the appropriateness of “pleasant, catchy tunes,” as Cantor Richard Botton calls them, for conducting solemn prayer.¹⁶⁰ Similarly among the Orthodox, as Dovid Sears has suggested, “rock-and-roll tunes, sutured together with Jewish lyrics, and promoted with a vengeance” might not be the best music the Jewish tradition has to offer.¹⁶¹ Such criticism, however, has so far not limited the growth and popularity of the new music in either denomination.

Contemporary Jewish music reflects American Jewry’s religious and cultural diversity and also shapes it by staking a claim to a synthesized contemporary Jewish identity. The baby-boomer creators of the music accept, reject, and reshape the Eastern European heritage, showing a younger generation different ways of accommodating Jewish life and ideals to current challenges. Through this music the present looks to the past and the past is reinvented in the present, providing guidance and inspiration as young Jews create their own Jewish destiny in America.

¹⁵⁹The following books, edited by Tara Publications founder Velvel Pasternak, include many of the musical selections mentioned in this study: *The International Jewish Songbook* (1994), *The World’s Most Popular Jewish Songs*, 2 vols. (1997), and *The Jewish Fake Book* (1997).

¹⁶⁰Richard Botton, “Letters: Musical Banality,” *Reform Judaism* 9, Jan. 1981, p. 44. Also see Debbie Friedman’s letter, “Not Camp Music,” *ibid*; Mermelstein, “Is Popular Culture Defining Synagogue Music?” p. 44; Lawrence Hoffman, “How to Cure the Synagogue & Satisfy the Soul,” *Reform Judaism* 22, Summer 1994, p. 34; Hoffman, *Art of Public Prayer*, p. 181; and the comments on Hoffman’s views in *CCAR Journal* 38, Summer 1991, pp. 1–22.

¹⁶¹Sears, “Who Took the ‘Jewish’ Out of Jewish Music?” p. 14. In a supportive response to this article, David Altschuler describes a performance on a Los Angeles Chabad telethon in 1995 that “showed a rocking Chassid shoving a microphone down his throat. Several chubby men in yeshiva garb nearby had sweat rolling down their *peyos* [side curls], their hands and hips gyrating in all-too-perfect synchronization.” “A Call for Civilized Enthusiasm at Simchos,” *Jewish Observer*, Apr. 1997, p. 59.

Clearly, more research is needed in a number of areas. Of particular importance is contextualization—relating contemporary Jewish music to popular and folk music trends, to the musical traditions of other ethnic groups, and to the music of other religions in America. Investigations focused internally should assess the musical repertoire found in songbooks for camps, schools, and various Jewish organizations, and analyze the attitudes of the consumers to find out what the experience of listening to the music and seeing it performed means to them. A clear understanding of the relationship between Jewish music and Jewish identity would constitute a major contribution to the current debate over the future of Jewish life in America.