University of Michigan Press

Chapter Title: Klezmer in the New Germany: History, Identity, and Memory
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Book Title: Three-Way Street
Book Subtitle: Jews, Germans, and the Transnational
Book Editor(s): JAY HOWARD GELLER, LESLIE MORRIS
Published by: University of Michigan Press. (2016)
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9221214.17

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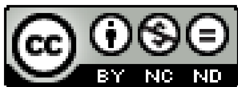

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CHAPTER 13

Klezmer in the New Germany: History, Identity, and Memory

RAYSH WEISS

The sound of traditional Klezmer music popularly evokes images of sage-looking, bearded men in long, dark coats; babushka-clad women; decrepit little houses dotting winding, narrow roads; and a host of other iconic trappings of a bygone era in eastern Europe. For many, Marc Chagall's *The Fiddler,* perhaps *the* classic portrait of the *klezmor*—the itinerant Jewish musician—seeking spiritual refuge in his instrument, has become the singular nostalgic image of European Klezmer[1] and the quaintly exotic and long-lost culture with which it is associated.

Paradoxically, however, while the culture from which Klezmer sprang has been largely eradicated, leaving only meager nostalgic traces, the music itself lives on, but remarkably, in significant measure, it does so in the hands of people with no historical connection to that culture.[2] Some of today's most ardent proponents of traditional Klezmer music have not only never set foot in the small, exclusively Jewish settlements of eastern Europe, which were referred to by the term "*shtetl*," they are not even Jewish. The performance of Klezmer music in postwar Germany offers a fascinating case study of how a certain cultural expression can be relocated, both spatially and temporally, and adopted by new practitioners as a means of engaging with a complicated past to offer a new interpretation of the present. This paper will examine how Klezmer music traveled from the quaint ethnic marketplaces of European Jewry to the political arena of a healing antifascist postwar Germany, and finally made its way to the capitalist global marketplace as a form of world music.[3] In attempting to understand this multilayered musical phenomenon, questions of memory, authenticity, and identity will help to structure and define both Klezmer music and those who perform the increasingly elusive genre.

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The very genesis of Klezmer music is difficult, if not impossible, to trace. Due to the overwhelming number of European Klezmer musicians who perished in the Holocaust and the scarcity of both sound recordings and written notation, the material available for analysis is quite limited. Pioneering Soviet Jewish musicologist Moshe Beregovski is responsible for preserving arguably the most important collection of Klezmer music to survive World War II. But Beregovski's work is, nevertheless, limited in scope, since it dates back only to the nineteenth century and centers on Soviet Jewish music.

However, emerging research is gradually offering a new picture of German Klezmer music. Musicologist Yale Strom's findings reveal not only a pre-Enlightenment, small-town Germany, in which Jewish communities would habitually play Klezmer music at local *simkhes* (joyous occasions), but also an interesting overlap of Klezmer with the dawn of the Enlightenment.[4]

For example, in 1690, Rabbi Khayim Yair of Hesse formally forbade those in his community to hire *klezmorim* for their celebrations. A few years later in Fürth in 1707, Rabbi Elkhanan Kirchen compiled a book of Yiddish songs in which he refers to the Jewish musician as a *klezmer*.[5] In neighboring Prague, we find several references to Klezmer throughout the eighteenth century.[6] Geographic reconception—specifically a new picture of prewar, pre-Enlightenment Klezmer beyond merely the Pale of Settlement—already challenges the presiding notion that Klezmer remains trapped in a historically determined glass museum box, never to be touched again.

Although Klezmer music seems to have been part of the small-town Jewish landscape in the area that would come to be called "Germany" beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Klezmer musicians of that period constantly met with opposition, both externally, on the state level, and also internally, on the communal level. While on the one hand state officials banned the employment of Jewish musicians,[7] on the other, Rabbis within the community itself habitually reprimanded community members who engaged in mixed-gender dancing and the playing of "frivolous" music, a situation that would, understandably, have discouraged widespread performance of Klezmer music.[8] However, the real catalyst for the decline and almost virtual disappearance of German Klezmer music was the European Enlightenment's overwhelmingly anti-*shtetl* attitude. In post-Enlightenment Germany, Jewish communal leaders were hopeful to replace the image of the downtrodden, folksy peasant Jew, humbly eking out a living against the backdrop of dusty merchant wagons and cramped *Yeshivot,* or study halls (the type of Jew who would stereotypically be associated with the Klezmer music of the *shtetl*) with the model of a sophisticated, worldly, and most of all heavily-assimilated cos-

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mopolitan Jew. This tension was especially present when, beginning in 1880, a wave of *Ostjuden* (Jews from eastern Europe) poured into Germany.[9] The *Ostjuden*, generally scorned for their "outdated" dress and traditions by their culturally German, bourgeois fellow Jews, ultimately accounted for 20 percent of the overall Berlin Jewish population by 1910.[10] (The majority of these *Ostjuden* resided in the Scheunenviertel, a poor section of the city, which interestingly and perhaps predictably was later transformed into a hip bastion of radical subculture during the 1990s Klezmer boom.)[11] As the number of *Ostjuden* grew, so did the desperately self-conscious efforts of the "native" German Jews to assert their enlightened sophistication and to reject all elements of *shtetl* Jewishness, including Klezmer music.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, these efforts of the proponents of the Enlightenment to render all staples of *shtetl* Jewry, such as Klezmer music, obsolete and undesirable were largely successful. Already by the nineteenth century, when opportunities for both secular education and work steadily increased for German Jewry, Klezmer music had virtually disappeared from the German-Jewish community. Yiddish, the vernacular of the *Ostjuden* but an undesired reminder of a marginalized past to the "native" Berlin Jews, likewise receded from German-Jewish daily life.[12] Several sporadic attempts were made to merge Klezmer with more "legitimate" classical forms,[13] but even these few attempts did not surface until the late nineteenth century,[14] and they were marked by very limited success.

However, although Klezmer was effectively dead by the beginning of the nineteenth century in Germany, it was not entirely forgotten. The stereotype of the quintessential *shtetl*[15] Jew fueled the sadistic imagination of prominent anti-Semites throughout Europe long after the existence of small-town Jewish life in Germany had disappeared. These stereotypical racist images became especially prominent a century and a half later, during the Nazi era, when, in the process of deporting Jews from eastern Europe to the concentration camps, SS guards in their zeal to devastate and humiliate the imprisoned Jews frequently forced imprisoned musicians to perform Klezmer music as their fellow inmates were marched to their deaths.[16] For their part, the native German Jews—even when facing the horrific specter of Nazi antisemitism—tended not to associate with their East European brethren who, much to their chagrin, seemed fully to embody the much denigrated image of the *shtetl*, or "country bumpkin," Jew.[17]

Only after the Nazis were defeated and the camp prisoners were liberated were the sounds of Klezmer finally heard once again on German soil in an entirely nonironic context. Many of the concentration camp survivors lived

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temporarily in displaced person (DP) camps. There, in a bittersweet struggle for cultural preservation and ethnic rebirth, the survivors established a remarkable number of cultural organizations, including theater troupes, bands, and a Yiddish newspaper. Already beginning in 1948, with the establishment of the state of Israel, the DP camps began to close, and the already decimated Jewish population of Germany experienced an even further decline that would continue for the next few years.[18] During this postwar period, European Jewish culture in its various shades and temperaments was, in the main, relocated to new lands, primarily to the Americas and Israel.

Yet remarkably, despite the paucity of Jews in postwar Germany and the death blow that both Jewish culture and institutions had suffered, a tiny remnant of the prewar Jewish population did remain, and small shoots of Jewish life gradually began to sprout throughout Germany in the years following Hitler's defeat. Immediately after the close of the war, Germany was actually the safest and most accessible place for Jews to live in Europe, even if temporarily.[19] However, post-World War II Germany was clearly not a monolith. The country had been divided between East and West, and, accordingly, what was left of German-Jewish life also developed along markedly different paths in the two postwar German states.

In East Germany, because of the need to emphasize the music's antifascist content and political potential to arouse social solidarity in order to garner the approval of the Communist authorities, Jewish music was almost exclusively lyric-oriented. Among the greatest icons of this special brand of politically charged Yiddish folk music was Communist and Yiddish singer-songwriter guru Lin Jaldati, herself a Dutch survivor of the Holocaust.[20] Jaldati, along with Perry Friedman, a Canadian-born Communist banjoist, cofounded Oktoberklub, a haven for young people to gather in East Berlin and hear subterranean, cutting edge, politically charged music, thus inaugurating the German hootenanny "Woodstock" movement. Already beginning in the 1960s, young, politically progressive Germans in the East sought refuge in music by reclaiming the form of the folk song as a vehicle for peace. This development was particularly noteworthy, since until this moment the German folk song had been inexorably tied to expressions of German nationalism, reaching its jingoistic peak with the ascendency of Nazism, when such folk songs became the anthems for the Hitler youth groups nationwide. Notions of *Volk* (people) were indelibly inscribed in German folk music, in which, together with loaded allusions to the *Heimat* (homeland), images of "the people" (and not just any people, the *German* people) had stoked the fires of a pronounced racialized national identity that, in some respects, has yet to die.

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With the rise of this new German Woodstock movement, the performance of Yiddish songs became especially popular in the emerging East German leftist folk scene, where German folk music's politics changed radically.[21] By assuming ownership of the old Yiddish folk songs—the music most immediately associated with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust—this new generation of disenchanted youth boldly declared its commitment to tolerance and cultural understanding while rejecting the ways and values of their parents.

Understanding the political potency of folk music to create a better world, Jaldati mentored countless Yiddish folk music enthusiasts, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Many of the more well-established contemporary German Klezmer performers, including singers Karsten Troyke and Hardy Reich of the Klezmer band Aufwind, both of whom lived in East Germany prior to reunification, were her disciples. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, Jaldati was not invited to East Germany's 1978 *Festival des Politischen Liedes* (Political Song Festival). Jalda Rebling, a contemporary German-Jewish singer and daughter of Lin Jaldati, attributes this to the GDR's post-1967 antisemitism.[22]

Another significant contribution to the proliferation of East Berlin Klezmer activity and interest was Rebling's founding of the *Tage jiddischer Kultur* (Days of Yiddish Culture) in East Berlin in 1987 with the help of esteemed Yiddishists such as Jürgen Rennert.[23] This initial three-day festival ultimately grew into a weeklong event that eventually assumed new leadership and direction and continued annually until 1997. In its early days, the festival represented the very heart of a unified Jewish cultural and intellectual renaissance that seemed impossible. Each year, the festival focused on a past geographic center of Yiddish culture. However, already within just a few years, a split developed between the scholarly "Yiddishists," who were the driving force behind the gathering, and the more spectacle-oriented, internationally disposed "Klezmer revivalists" in Germany. While definite overlap existed between the Yiddish song connoisseurs and scholars and the ever-burgeoning German Klezmer scene, the increasing slickness and popularity of the Klezmer activity fomented a mild resentment among Yiddish culture purists.[24] For example, when the Berlin Klezmer Society (*Klezmergesellschaft*), founded in 1990, organized its "Klezmer against Forgetting"[25] concert in 1997 concurrently with the festival that year, Andreas Nachama, former festival coorganizer and esteemed historian and head of the Berlin Jewish community, remarked, "I'm not in competition with the so-called Klezmer scene. The so-called Klezmer scene in my opinion has no Jewish contexts at all."[26] This statement reflected the steadily widening rift between the festival's original

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scholarly oriented Yiddishist purists and the ever-expanding faction of "Klezmer as emotional healing." Eventually, however, as the Klezmer faction clearly emerged as the dominant cultural force, the organizers who have headed the continuing *Jüdische Kulturtage* since 1998 have come to terms with this reality and have targeted a more general audience, using most of their generous state-supported budget to hire and engage acclaimed Klezmer soloists and ensembles from around the world. These high-profile groups often correspond to the artists most sought after by recording labels and include many major international (but mostly European) Klezmer bands, as well as a significant number of Israeli performers. Interestingly, although the overwhelming majority of the groups and solo artists invited to perform at the festival are Jewish, the festival concerts do not garner audiences from across the broad spectrum of the German-Jewish population. With the possible exception of the more recent Soviet Jewish immigrants to Germany, most nonreligious German Jews (who constitute the majority of the German-Jewish population) do not frequent the local Klezmer concerts and other festival events. Instead, the majority of the attendees of the *Jüdische Kulturtage* festival include more religiously observant, actively identifying German Jews, some non-Jewish Germans, and a handful of Jewishly oriented tourists.[27]

Toward the end of the German Democratic Republic, Aufwind, the first major non-Jewish German Klezmer band, came into being. The emergence of Aufwind onto the Jewish folk music/Klezmer scene heralded an unprecedented era of non-Jewish involvement in Klezmer music that persists in contemporary Europe and internationally. The members of Aufwind sought to internalize a deep understanding of the music they would perform; they fully immersed themselves in Yiddish culture and history, studying the language with Holocaust survivors and listening to old recordings.[28] Interestingly, in 1990 Aufwind was invited as the first foreign Klezmer band to perform at the internationally renowned annual Klezmer Festival in the town of Safed (Tzfat) in Israel. On the whole, the Yiddish/Klezmer scene, wrapped up in its seductively rogue image as counterculture music, reached a peak in the East in the 1990s, and this momentum continued until unification irrevocably reshaped the direction of both Klezmer music and how it was understood and received.

If Klezmer in East Germany was marked by pride, ownership, and mutual affirmation of a new generation of Jews and gentiles, Klezmer in West Germany carried the onerous baggage of residual shame and reconciliation.[29] The audience for Klezmer music in the West was chiefly older and predominantly Jewish, and until the mid-1960s most of the performers were also Jewish. It

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should be noted, however, that many of the young listeners in the West were young, non-Jewish Germans who sought recourse in the fresh, distinctly non-German beats of other ethnic music. [30]

Beginning in the mid-1960s, non-Jewish performers of Yiddish and Klezmer music began to emerge. Among the more typical but fascinating examples of the emerging groups of non-Jewish performers of Yiddish music in West Germany was the Polish-German duo Belina and Jens Brenke, who released a collection of Jewish jokes and songs entitled *Wenn die Jidden Lachen* (When the Jews Laugh), an album precariously trafficking in a confluence of conflicting images and motivations: expressions of exuberant philosemitism and antisemitic caricature dancing dangerously close to one another. As Rita Ottens observed, the album's cover was especially evocative of the classic prewar depiction of the deplored "Eternal Jew," but in this new context, in the 1960s, these figures represented something a bit more nuanced: figures not necessarily to be laughed *at* but, rather, *with* whom young postwar Germans sought to laugh.[31] Another noteworthy figure who emerged during this period was Peter "Pitter" Rohland, who was the first non-Jewish German to perform an entire repertoire of Yiddish songs. In 1963, Rohland's *Jiddische Volkslieder und Chansons* met with great acclaim in Berlin and elsewhere in the West.[32] At the age of thirty-three, Rohland died, leaving an already impressive legacy of Yiddish folk music in West Germany. His *Lieder der Ostjuden I and II* were released posthumously in 1968 and 1971, respectively.[33]

While support and interest in all manner of things Jewish, including of course Jewish music, had been nearly unqualified in West Berlin as far back as the 1950s, Klezmer and Yiddish folk music spread like wildfire among the '68er generation, with its distinctly progressive tinge. Perhaps best known during this period was the inimitable German folk band Zupfgeigenhansel, whose influential recordings included the seminal *Chob Gehert Sogn* ("I've Heard It Said") album which sold thirty-five thousand copies upon its 1979 release and earned the group an invitation to perform in East Berlin.[34] The "Zupfis," as they were called, heralded a second wave of Yiddish folklore in West Germany.[35] Other major groups, such as espe and the Hai and Topsy Frankel duo, also emerged at this time. An explosion of philosemitism undergirded by the competing forces of curiosity, empathy, guilt, commercialism, desire for reconciliation, and the definition of a new generation took hold throughout Germany, on both sides of the wall.

By the 1980s, signs of a slowly depoliticized Klezmer began to emerge. American Klezmer bands performed in West Berlin beginning in the mid-eighties, creating new crises in the authority and direction of Klezmer "as an

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institution" for their German counterparts.[36] These touring American Klezmer bands garnered wide acclaim and attracted very large audiences. At this time, many American bands, such as Brave Old World, began to offer Klezmer workshops in West Germany.[37] As Klezmer musician Heiko Lehmann (formerly of Aufwind) notes, Klezmer workshops became a formidable phenomenon in Berlin by the mid-1990s.[38]

Also during this period, in 1984, Klezmer achieved new cultural status in West Berlin with the presentation of Josh Sobol's new play *Ghetto*, featuring clarinetist Giora Feidman as both an actor and musician.[39] Feidman, a native of Buenos Aires and former bass clarinetist of the Israel Philharmonic, quickly became synonymous with Klezmer in Germany, as he began to churn out a series of books and recordings and offer lectures, workshops, and countless performances. The influence of Feidman's classical training was apparent in all of his recordings. The sound is polished and the affect is high. But what exemplified Feidman's distinct style was not his meticulous attention to the faithful reproduction of traditional Klezmer melodies but rather the branding of his affect. Perhaps most appealing to Germans aspiring to become Klezmer musicians was how accessible Feidman made the music. Feidman was the ideal messenger of the music for the new Germany: a Jew, but neither a German Jew himself nor the descendent of German-Jewish ancestry; born during the war, but not born in the war; a performer of Klezmer music, but a classical musician by trade. Feidman offered the cultural goods without bartering in the painful symbolic and emotional weight of the meaning. As Feidman rose to prominence in the German Klezmer scene, UNESCO, the United Nations organization involved in promoting international collaboration through the advancement of science and the preservation of world cultures, officially recognized Klezmer as a legitimate and official ethnic music.[40]

To appreciate Feidman's coveted position in the German Klezmer world one need only examine how he was characterized in the popular media. In Caroline Link's 1996 film *Jenseits der Stille* (Beyond the Silence), Feidman makes a cameo appearance in which he prepares for a concert, standing before a video projection of Chagall's fiddler. Feidman explains to the protagonist, a young German clarinetist named Lara, that Chagall understood that you need the

> "*mundo* as music" (curiously, he speaks to her only in English—a reminder of the commodified, cosmopolitan status that was to color Klezmer from this period onward).
>
> "You want to know the truth of music?" asks Feidman
>
> "Yes. I want to learn," Lara replies meekly

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"Learn?! You don't have to learn. You don't need it. You have it *inside*. Listen to the song *inside*."

This scene is a particularly remarkable one, as Lara is thereafter seen in reverse shot, transfixed by Feidman's performance of Klezmer music, followed by a montage of sentimental flashbacks of Lara frolicking with her now-dead mother. Klezmer is hence the catch-all receptacle for emotional suffering onto which anyone can transcribe her/his personal anguish and project personal fantasies of otherness. Those who have studied with Feidman speak of his raw intensity, the passion of his performance, his ability to sketch out what is the *essence* of Klezmer through notions of universalism. Such themes of universalism were echoed by Feidman's many protégés who helped fuel the 1990s Klezmer boom. According to Berlin resident and Klezmer Gesellschaft e.V. (Klezmer Society) member Cecille Kossmann, Klezmer "speaks about the most important themes of life—love, death, and sadness—but also dancing and enjoyment."[41] Explains prominent Berlin Klezmer clarinetist Harry Timmermann, "Feidman spoke a lot about the meaning of Klezmer for one's life, personally and politically. He emphasized working with the emotions as well as religious, political, and personal aspects. It's all play."[42]

In the spring of 2007, I experienced first-hand the Feidman phenomenon while attending one of his performances at the Berliner Dom: there is something almost eerily ritualistic as Feidman slowly strides down the vast cathedral's central aisle, playing to a sold-out audience (in more ways than one), carefully acknowledging the youngest and/or most visibly disabled listeners by anointing them, as it were, with the directional nod of his wandering clarinet. Beyond the immediate religious associations of the magnificent building itself, the cathedral is also home to the corpses of many members of the Hohenzollern royal family and other Prussian royals, who are buried in its crypt.

Above all, Feidman, with a not so modestly sized Star of David dangling importantly from his neck, is performing a grand act of cultural transubstantiation. Inside the Berliner Dom, a cathedral that is not Catholic but, for political reasons, Protestant, appears a Jew, performing as officiant. Like a Catholic priest, he is transubstantiating the inanimate dead (namely the lifeless corpse of a tradition long gone) and bringing it back to life and substance. Feidman re-creates not only the music of destroyed European Jewry but also the entire memory of its cultural past, breathing life into it, in front of his audience that is waiting to be saved. In such over-sentimentalized, nostalgia-smogged representations, Jewish culture is understood to have been crucified on the cross of the Third Reich. Hyped by decades of German obsession, Feidman's perfor-

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mance only reinforces preexisting paradigms of the caricaturized Jew and his fetishized suffering. During this heavily dramatized performance, my eyes could not help but drift upward, if only for visual respite from the mass spectacle of sanctified *kitsch* below. Inscribed within the interior of the impressive dome were the words,

> *Sieg Sind Die Da Leid Tragen*
> *Sieg sind die Barmherzigkeit*
>
> [Victory is those who bear suffering; Victory is Mercy]

In this particular context, these ennobling, lofty words somehow rang hollow, or perhaps more accurately, ironic.

Feidman's Klezmer is based more on the mysticism of the Kabbalah than it is on the authority of the inherited music texts.[43] The real voice, according to Feidman, sings inside the heart: "Indeed, it is more than just a melody, it is a language of the innermost soul—true universal communication which possesses the strength to liberate human emotion. . . ."[44] "Klezmer is not Jewish music," Feidman has boldly asserted, insisting upon the universal qualities of Klezmer music, much to the annoyance of many revivalists and historicizing neo-Klezmorim. Explains Feidman, "God gave us an instrument of song, our bodies. This is Klezmer." The Hebraic roots of the word *Klezmer* (*Kli* = vessel and *zemer* = song) offers such an image of the "animated soul." The notion of man as an animated musical instrument can, indeed, be found in connection with the music of the eastern European Jews beginning in the sixteenth century and is notably presented by famed Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem in his novel *Stempenyu* (1888), where he writes of this "animated musical instrument" amidst emotion and liberating sobbing: "Every heart, especially a Jewish heart, is a fiddle: You squeeze the strings and you draw forth all kinds of songs, mostly sad and gloomy songs." But Feidman chose to universalize this concept, stressing the potential of every human, regardless of background, to realize her/his inner instrument.

As a result of Feidman's burgeoning popularity, as well as the expanding influence of American Klezmer bands that performed widely in West Germany beginning in the 1980s, Klezmer music suddenly rang out across the German soundscape, and particularly in West Berlin.[45] As Feidman helped create a distinct "brand" or "school" of Klezmer in Germany, there emerged an increasingly defined Berlin Klezmer style and cannon. This standardization was only further strengthened by the reunification of Berlin in 1989.

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The Berlin Klezmer scene in the 1990s was simply unparalleled. Interesting social formations around Klezmer began to develop in the capitol. A regular Klezmer *Stammtisch* (lit. "regular's table") was formed by local Klezmer musicians (the main one being the monthly Klezmer Stammtisch at Café Oberwasser in Berlin) and, as such, represented a fascinating appropriation of this exclusionary ur-German patriarchic, lederhosen-wearing, beer-swilling tradition into a fundamentally democratic environment reveling in an age-, gender-, and ethnicity-defying *Multikultismus*. Of central importance to the development of Klezmer was the opening of the Hackeshes-Hoftheater as a venue committed to featuring regular Klezmer performances, hence rendering it the center of Berlin Klezmer. Workshops continued to flourish and Klezmer festivals were a staple of the Berlin cultural landscape.

Around the time of German unification, as Klezmer became more readily audible throughout Germany, a number of prominent American-born Klezmer musicians began to assume residence in Berlin.[46] After touring extensively throughout Europe and finally in reunited Germany, American musicians such as accordionist and composer Alan Bern, trumpeter and composer Paul Brody, percussionist Alex Jacobowitz, and clarinetist Joel Rubin were attracted to the thriving multicultural cosmopolitanism of Germany's capitol and sought to make their distinct mark on the rapidly evolving landscape of the Berlin Klezmer scene. While most of these musicians pursued solo careers in Berlin and remained major international figures, continuing to tour extensively, each carved out a particular site-specific performance niche in the German Klezmer world. American Klezmer violinist Michael Alpert's song "Berlin 1990," composed shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, perhaps best expresses American-Jewish artists' mix of conflicted affective responses to performing in the New Germany. "*Nun sing, meine Fiedel, Spiel, meine Fiedel . . . und spiel mir ein schönes Diaspora-Lied vor . . .*" (Sing, my fiddle, and play a beautiful song of the Diaspora.)[47]

Alan Bern, a founding member of the groundbreaking Klezmer ensemble Brave Old World, which offered defining workshops at the dawn of the "golden era" of German Klezmer, continues to this day to offer workshops, now on his own, through his biannual EU and state-sponsored Weimar Klezmer Institute. Bern's institute is the first and only of its kind in Germany, and Bern hopes that one day he can expand the institute into a school for different musics of the world.[48]

Bern's aspiration to expand his institute into the realm of world music reflects both a contemporary decline in popular interest in Klezmer per se (i.e., "Klezmer as trendy novelty") and its shift from the realm of a specific, ethnic

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(namely Jewish/Yiddish) music into the realm of so-called world music, where it has, in the past decade, become one among many ethnic music varieties.[49] It should be noted, however, that Bern's project remains in a class of its own, both on the level of form—it incorporates the European master-class model with the more American "camp" model—and orientation: instead of reducing Klezmer to a cliché, the Weimar institution actively encourages lively scholarly debate and serious exploration of the music.

By the start of the third millennium, Klezmer, which had earned its perch in the ever-expanding realm of so-called world music due to its unprecedented success in the 1990s, had begun to cede its singular role as the favored "other people's" music to allied genres, such as Romanian and Balkan dance music, which began to soar in popularity, especially among Berlin youth. While these other forms of ethnic music share many stylistic elements with Klezmer, they do not carry the same emotional baggage. Even many Berlin-based groups and musicians that made their mark playing Klezmer music in the 1980s and 1990s have made a formal turn away from Klezmer as well. For example, the group Grine Kusine started out as a Yiddish song band, but now they rarely perform any Yiddish material, playing instead mostly Hungarian music. Likewise, Jalda Rebling, founder of the East Berlin *Jüdische Kulturtage* (established in 1987), has decided to move away from Klezmer: "Today Klezmer music is not my main interest. Since the beginning of the 90s, it became commercial. My first message, with Yiddish music, was that *Jews were never strangers, but neighbors*. The next challenge is to teach people the treasure of traditional *davening* (praying), to make our synagogues living places."[50] Rebling has since become an Aleph-ordained cantor and leads Berlin's only Renewal Synagogue, Ohel Hachidusch, which she cofounded in 2007.

Indeed, Rebling's original goal had been to integrate Klezmer into the European landscape and teach people that this music is just as much a part of the European musical heritage as any other, and it would seem that Rebling has, indeed, succeeded—perhaps even too well. As Ottens argues, contemporary Klezmer music in Germany lacks the essential historical, religious, and cultural continuity, dooming it to lapse into "kitschy *Heimatsgeschichte* that is performed for its own lack of *Heimat*."[51] Klezmer today is not quite a "music with no meaning" (to invoke architect Peter Eisenman's original name for the massive memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, later to be named "The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe") but, because of its familiarity, its power as a political statement has clearly been eviscerated, at least in contemporary Germany. Contemporary Klezmer music provides the imagined portal to an imagined memory. These sounds Leslie Morris aptly characterizes

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as "not simply Jewish sounds re-membered in the present, but rather 'un-remembered' sound that is produced and fabricated as a simulacrum of a re-membered elegiac sound."[52]

In a stretch of only two decades, Klezmer has traveled a long way from political rallying music to a profit-producing, vaguely Orientalist object of interest with high cultural cachet. Perhaps, then, it is no small coincidence that Hai and Topsy Frankel's 1962 album *Wacht oif! Jiddischer Arbeiter und Widerstandlieder* (Rise Up! Yiddish Workers and Resistance Songs) was rereleased in the 1990s under the conspicuously nonpolitical title *Jiddische Lieder* (Yiddish Songs).[53] Postwar German Klezmer's radical but quiet shift from a countercultural music to a noncritical, easy bourgeois form of overpriced multiculturalism illustrates the boundless potential of a micromusic's[54] capacity to evolve and transform, even within such a narrow window of history. In a sense, Klezmer's journey corresponds to the broader tendency of globalization as Perry Anderson describes: "This expansion of the bounds of capital inevitably dilutes its stocks of inherited culture. The result is a characteristic drop in 'level with the postmodern.'"[55]

An essential definition or understanding of Klezmer remains both a semantic and conceptual impossibility. Rather, Klezmer can be viewed as the active battleground upon which culture wars are fought. Both in postwar Germany and beyond, Klezmer has provided a fruitful, if contentious, forum for asserting and affirming identity. As a projection onto which fantasies of authenticity and belonging are projected, Klezmer offers a litmus test of sorts, in determining how self and Other are defined. In the case of New Germany, where the implied Other often remains buried in the historical past tense, Klezmer music itself becomes the living fiction that holds the mixed potential to create a nonfiction.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that the designation of "Klezmer music" is not, in fact, a monolithic construct, as the above description might seem to suggest. As this paper demonstrates, many different musical streams converge under the broader category of "Klezmer." Even the cultural memory of Klezmer music inhabits many distinct worlds and intermodalities, spanning a rich range of emotional registers, continents, and a wealth of Jewish musical forms and practices; cf. Walter Salmen, "Das Bild vom Klezmer in Liedern und Erzählungen," in *Dona Folkloristica, Festgabe für Lutz Röhrich zu seiner Emeritierung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990). As Max Peter Baumann explains, just as is the case with other so-called world music genres, what is classified under "Klezmer music" (e.g., at record stores, in the media) represents a formidably

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wide range of various *klezmorim* (Klezmer musicians) and groups, different styles, times, and epochs. For a discussion of Klezmer music in the age of globalization, see Baumann's "Klezmermusik und Klezmorim im Zeitalter der Globalisierung," in *Musik und Kultur im jüdischen Leben der Gegenwart*, ed. Max Peter Baumann, Tim Becker, and Raphael Woebs (Berlin: Frank & Timme GmbH, 2006), 121–46.

2. It is also important to emphasize that this musical tradition evokes the image of a very particular form of earlier Jewish life and can all too easily become a metonym for "Jewishness" writ large—heightening difference while ignoring Germany's rapidly evolving Jewish community, which is the fastest-growing Jewish community in the world outside of Israel. Michael Birnbaum writes of the dangerous consequences of such symbolic conflation: "By retroactively orientalising and caricaturing the murdered population, German Klezmer diminishes the shock of the Holocaust and distances the country from its victims, and precludes a meaningful dialogue with the Jews who continue to inhabit Germany." Michael Birnbaum, "Jewish Music, German Musicians: Cultural Appropriation and the Representation of a Minority in the German Klezmer Scene," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* (2009): 298.

3. German Klezmer scholar Aaron Eckstaedt has identified four related stages of postwar German Klezmer's development and its broader meaning: (1) the emergence of Yiddish song in pre-1989 German as a means of poetic *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, (2) Klezmer in unified Germany as both an ameliorative agent of understand and also as a developing folk expression, (3) Klezmer as world music, and (4) Klezmer as a means of exploring and negotiating Jewish identity in New Germany. Aaron Eckstaedt, "Yiddish Folk Music as a Marker of Identity in Post-War Germany," *European Judaism* 43, no. 1 (2010): 38. In her analysis of postunification Klezmer in Germany, Elizabeth Loentz classifies three categories: Jewish roots music, Klezmer as personal or public reconciliation with the past, and Klezmer as world music. Elizabeth Loentz, "Yiddish, Kanak Sprak, Klezmer, and Hip Hop: Ethnolect, Minority Culture, Multiculturalism, and Stereotype in Germany," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 25, no. 1 (2006): 52–53.

4. See account of pre-Enlightenment small-town Jewish life in Yale Strom, *The Book of Klezmer. The History, the Music, the Folklore from the 14th Century to the 21st* (Chicago: A Capella Books, 2002), 5–34. As part of her initial historical survey of Klezmer music, Susi Hudak likewise refers to the earlier usages of the term "Klezmer," explaining that it already emerged as a surname, denoting families of musicians in seventeenth-century Bohemia and Moravia. Susi Hudak, "Klezmorim und Klezmermusik: Traditionelle Instrumentalmusik der Juden Osteuropas" (MA thesis, Universität Hamburg, 1997), 5.

5. Ibid., 20.

6. Ibid., 41–42.

7. Note, for instance, the Strasbourg police's 1547 edict against Jewish musicians (trans.): "those Jews who receive permission to marry their children, the wedding music must be provided by Christians." Through the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, the Hagenau prefect banned Jewish weddings on a Friday or Saturday. Ironically, these orders were fully backed by the Hagenau Jewish council who considered these enforced measures as safeguards against assimilation. Ibid., 17.

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8. One such instance occurred in Germany in 1190, where the Jews of Augsburg built a "Tanzhaus" (dance hall) in response to the rabbis' prohibition against instrumental music in the synagogue.

9. See Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982). Interestingly, this internal tension between the German Jews and the *Ostjuden* resurfaced in the later twentieth century with the influx of Jewish former Soviets into Germany. While this later wave of eastern European Jewish migration into Germany was not marked by clashes in religious observance and belief, many cultural differences created the grounds for tension between the two Jewish communities in Germany. As Jack Wertheimer notes at the outset of *Unwelcome Strangers,* the term *Ostjuden* did not emerge until World War I. I deploy the term here as per the conventional shorthand for a later-developed cultural caricature.

10. Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 201.

11. Indeed, the Hackesches-Hoftheater was located in that neighborhood. Above the theater courtyard, a sign proudly proclaimed, "Jiddisch Musik am Historischen Ort"—"Yiddish music in a historic place."

12. It should be noted that a number of younger German Zionists, including Gershom Scholem, turned both their scholarly and cultural attention to Yiddish at this time. See Jeffrey Grossman's *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany: From Enlightenment to the Second Empire* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 216.

13. For example, Jewish German-born composer Jacques Offenbach.

14. In most cases, these attempts consisted of setting Yiddish songs to classical arrangements. (*East Jews in Berlin*, 1880–1929). Also of note is Fritz Mordechai Kaufmann's Jüdischer Verlag's seminal publication of these so-called east songs: *Die schönsten Lieder der Ostjuden* (1920).

15. Small town.

16. Strom, *The Book of Klezmer,* 137–39.

17. The perception of the eastern European Jews as problematic in Germany was further fueled by the German government; and already at the turn of the twentieth century, the German-Jewish press, coming to recognize the negative impact of such stereotypes for the Jewish community in general, discarded such derogatory portrayals of the Jews from the East. Indeed, despite the externally imposed cultural tension that existed between German Jews and East European Jews, the two groups interacted with each other, sometimes even supportively. See Trude Mauer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Hamburg: Christians, 1986); Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

18. See Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945–1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69 and CJH/YIVO, RG 347.7.1, Box 33, final report by William Haber. By 1952, there were only about twelve thousand Jews left in Germany, as many of the DPs were re-locating. See Harry Maor, "Über den Wiederaufbau der jüdischen Gemeinden seit 1945" (PhD diss., University of Mainz, 1961), 24.

19. Ruth Gay explains this intriguing twist of events in her study of postwar

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German-Jewish life, *Safe Among Germans: Liberated Jews after World War II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); for a discussion of the intricacies of later Jewish settlement and identity within the context of the emerging "New Germany" in postwar Europe, see Dan Diner's (263–72), Andrei Markovits's (243–62), and Moishe Postone's (273–80) respective contributions in Michal Y. Bodemann, ed., *Jews, Germans, Memory: Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 243–79. Contrary to the common misconception that Jewish life understood itself as a temporary presence in postwar Germany—see for example Magdalena Waligórska's *Klezmer's Afterlife: An Ethnography of the Jewish Music Revival in Poland and Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99—during this time Jews from other neighboring countries even moved to Germany, where they established roots and helped rebuild communities that remain vibrant and continue to enjoy dynamic growth to date. Contemporary Germany remains among the fastest-growing international Jewish communities as noted in Jeffrey M. Peck, *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 41.

20. Jaldati's daughter, Yalda Rebling, inherited the mantle of this musical tradition and continues to teach and perform Yiddish music to this day in Berlin and around the world.

21. This phenomenon accords with what Owe Ronström describes as the broader shift from a "tradition" (*viz.* localized and nationalist in character) mindset to a "heritage" (globalized) framework in the folk music of northwestern Europe. Owe Ronström, "Traditional Music, Heritage Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival,* ed. Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 54.

22. Interview with Jalda Rebling by the author, Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood of Berlin, May 24, 2007.

23. The West Berlin Jewish community soon followed suit, establishing their own annual festival, the *Jüdische Kulturtage* (Jewish Culture Days), that same year. The West Berlin festival still takes place annually and attracts highly billed international acts as part of its performance lineup, drawing especially heavily upon Israeli talent in more recent years. Indeed, as the name suggests, the *Jüdische Kulturtage* has replaced the "Yiddish" focus of its East Berlin predecessor with a more broadly defined emphasis on contemporary, international Jewish identity.

24. Indeed, this distinction is not always so clear-cut. Briefly glossed allusions to the Klezmer scene, in this context, refer primarily to the more instrumentally oriented bands that were forming and performing at this time. In contrast to the related Yiddish folk song tradition, with its emphasis on the lone singer strumming her/his guitar, the Klezmer bands were almost always composed of at least several musicians.

25. The central preoccupation of this group is its atonement for the Holocaust through the performance of Klezmer music. Just days before the group's much-touted Klezmer concert, members of the society, instruments in hand, made a special pilgrimage to the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp, almost due north of West Berlin's Westend. There, they spread out, each occupying a different corner of the camp, and played for seven hours. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, the concert name was actually in English, as it appears above.

26. Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*, 220.

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27. According to a 2002 survey of the Berlin Jewish community in which the responders were asked whether they would like to enforce "Klezmer-free zones," two-thirds responded that they were indifferent. Of the remaining third, 66 percent voiced interest in Klezmer, while 33 percent were opposed to more Klezmer. Those who responded affirmatively (in favor of Klezmer) were largely from the former Soviet Union, older, or religiously observant Orthodox Jews. Those opposed were primarily "German" Jews or Jews from other lands, and several atheists or more religiously liberal Reform Jews. See Wiltrud Apfeld, *Hejmisch und Hip*: *Musik als kulturelle Ausdrucksform im Wandel der Zeit: Dokumentation zur Ausstellung* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2004), 67.

The response to this survey seems to indicate that Jews who cling most strongly to their separate, Jewish identity support and enjoy Klezmer, while those whose identity embraces more elements of the surrounding culture are not favorably disposed toward Klezmer. While Klezmer may be enjoyed as a novelty even by many non-Jews, to the more assimilated German Jews Klezmer is, at best, yet another genre; at worst, it is a staple of cultural ghettoization, necro-nostalgia, cultural imperialism, or a little bit of each. Some German Jews in East Germany avoided direct engagement with the music for fear of further marginalization.

Because of its virtual rejection by their more assimilated brethren, support for Klezmer in the Jewish community is now found mainly among more traditionally oriented Jews, resulting in a new attitude about Klezmer and what it should represent. Originally the ever-assimilating Jews sought to cast off any remaining shred of the much-dreaded "shtetl identity" and to embrace a more cosmopolitan, international cultural identity, but now the community that supports Klezmer has significantly changed, and among the more actively identified Jews there is a certain suspicion regarding the "intrusion of outsiders" into what they deem should be the orb of Jewish culture—in our case, non-Jews playing Klezmer music. Some, such as Berlin-based American expatriate percussion virtuoso Alex Jacobowitz, do not object to non-Jews playing Klezmer but maintain that Klezmer has a special significance when played by Jews. Jacobowitz maintains that Klezmer, for the Jewish musician, signals a call for self-betterment. Jacobowitz challenges Jews by explaining, "People putting their heart into their instrument mustn't confuse their instrument for their heart. It's ok when non-Jewish musicians play because there's no pretense for authenticity. It's like God's House being a house for all nations. I call for Jews to not only play Jewish Music, Klezmer, but to live it."

28. Aaron Eckstaedt, *Klaus mit der Feidel, Heike mit dem Bass . . . Jiddische Musik in Deutschland* (Berlin: Philo, 2003), 40.

29. Although East Germany produced a generous sprinkling of Yiddish song and Klezmer icons, it should be noted that the East German government's anti-Zionist stance created undeniable tensions with any openly Jewish performer.

30. Here, I refer to the "Germanness" that predates the war: the era of bold, rhythmically regular marches that affirm the tonic key and oompah-intensive German folk music.

31. Rita Ottens and Joel E. Rubin, "'The Sounds of the Vanishing World': The German Klezmer Movement as a Racial Discourse," in *Sounds of Two Worlds: Music as a*

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Mirror of Migration to and from Germany (Madison: Max Kade Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), 16.

32. Eckstaedt, *Klaus mit der Fiedel, Heike mit dem Bass,* 20.

33. Apfeld, *Hejmisch und Hip*, 27.

34. This was possible only because Pläne, Zupfgeigenhansel's record label, was owned by the West German Communist Party.

35. As Eckstaedt notes, with the resultant explosion of interest in Jewish folk music and the philosemitism it both fed and fueled, Yiddish song became the musical hallmark of Holocaust commemoration ceremonies. Both Zupfgeigenhansel and espe refused to partake in such reductive gestures. Eckstaedt, *Klaus mit der Fiedel*, 40.

36. It should be duly noted that such resistance/fear was never formally articulated by the German Klezmer scene—in fact the (almost entirely Jewish) American bands were greeted with considerable enthusiasm and hype. I refer only to the invisible consequence of their visits on the German's sense of authenticity and legitimacy.

37. Brave Old World promoted a scholarly, context-driven approach to the music, encouraging their workshop participants to listen carefully to old recordings and delve deep into the music's many stylistic and formal components. Brave Old World's approach is not simply a preservationist one—in their own original work, the group has daringly experimented with new sounds and embraced a sophisticated vision of new Jewish music.

38. Heiko Lehmann, "Klezmer in Germany? Germans and Klezmer: Reparations or Contribution," Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, October 19, 2006.

39. *Ghetto* generated no small amount of controversy in its indirect implication of the Jews as accomplices to the Nazis. In the play, the Vilnius Ghetto's Jewish Council must decide which Jews will be sent off to the camps and which will be saved. In this way, the crimes of the Nazis and the forced actions of the council are almost equated in a highly disturbing calculus of human guilt and error. Elie Wiesel accordingly decried *Ghetto* in the *New York Times* as a "*Hilul Hashem*—blasphemy or profanation, an act that strikes at all that is sacred." Elie Wiesel, "Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory," *New York Times*, June 11, 1989.

40. This accomplishment is all the more impressive, considering UNESCO's predisposition toward cultural expressions that affirm the nation-state. See John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 70–72.

41. Quoted in Gruber's *Virtually Jewish*, 200.

42. Interview with Harry Timmermann by the author, Kreuzberg neighborhood of Berlin, March 9, 2007.

43. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots*, ed. Mark Slobin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 162.

44. Interview with Giora Feidman by the author, Safed, Israel, August 20, 2009.

45. As Leslie Morris notes, Klezmer offers the possibility of hyper-real travel, by combining the perfunctory soundtrack of German WWII memorial culture with the imagined sounds of Jewish *shtetl* life. See Leslie Morris, "The Sound of Memory," *The German Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (fall 2001): 368–78.

46. American pioneer Klezmer revivalist, musician, and scholar Joel Rubin has

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noted how before unification he would be invited to perform primarily for Jewish organizations and events in Germany, whereas after unification, non-Jewish audiences proliferated considerably.

47. Michael Alpert, *Berlin 1990*. Brave Old World.

48. Interview with Alan Bern by the author, Weimar, February 8, 2007.

49. For a compelling discussion of the problems of the designation "world music," see Timothy Brennan's "World Music Does Not Exist," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 23, no. 1 ("Imperial Disclosures II") (winter 2001): 44–62.

50. Interview with Jalda Rebling by the author, Berlin, May 24, 2007.

51. Ottens and Rubin, *The Sounds of the Vanishing World*, 42.

52. Leslie Morris, "The Sound of Memory," *The German Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (fall 2001): 374.

53. Eckstaedt, *Klaus mit der Fiedel, Heike mit dem Bass*, 55.

54. To borrow ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin's term.

55. Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), 63.

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