

Miranda Crowdus

## **Jewish Music Pedagogies and Cultural Sustainability: Case Studies from Lower Saxony and Quebec**

## Abstract

*This article applies the concept of cultural sustainability to Jewish music pedagogies through a comparative analysis of case studies originating in Germany and Canada. Using an interdisciplinary approach grounded in participation-observation ethnographic fieldwork, I propose new methods to gauge the potential for cultural sustainability afforded by Jewish or Jewish oriented pedagogical practices. The examination of these musical pedagogical initiatives arguably has wider implications concerning how Jewish educational rubrics can be developed with flexibility and futures-oriented goals in mind.*

## Résumé

*Cet article applique le concept de soutenabilité culturelle aux pédagogies musicales juives à travers une analyse comparative d'études de cas originaires d'Allemagne et du Canada. En utilisant une approche interdisciplinaire ancrée sur un travail ethnographique d'observation participante, de nouvelles méthodes sont proposées pour évaluer le potentiel de soutenabilité culturelle offert par les pratiques pédagogiques juives ou portant sur la judéité. L'examen de ces initiatives pédagogiques musicales a des implications plus larges quant à la manière dont les programmes éducatifs juifs peuvent être développés dans un esprit de flexibilité et d'orientation vers l'avenir.*

This article explores the potential for cultural sustainability in Jewish music pedagogies through the analysis of two case studies originating in Germany and Canada. The original German term for “sustainability,” *Nachhaltigkeit*, was coined in 1713 by Hanns Carl von Carlowitz in reference to sustainable forestry methods—what today we would consider an ecological and economic application. However, recent German usage of the term has far more of a rapprochement with the English term “sustainability,” which, since the 1980s was no longer restricted to the fields of ecology and conservation but began to be understood according to three pillars: environment, economy, and society.

Cultural sustainability designates the conservation of cultural products, and its application began to define the safeguarding and perpetuation of traditions in recent times. In this article, cultural sustainability is not defined as indefinite continuity, but rather as a framework that allows something to be continued for a reasonable amount of time beyond the present. This framework is used here, rather than focusing on Jewish identity, to reflect Jewish concerns at the forefront of many Jewish education initiatives, namely, that of the continuity of living Judaism. These concerns are often ignored in state-sanctioned educational initiatives, particularly in Europe. The framework of cultural sustainability therefore opens new community-focused

ways of looking at educational initiatives that reflect major concerns. Overall, a small-scale, grassroots pedagogical focus in Jewish education contexts not only adds nuance to the discussion of the term but opens the possibility of applying cultural sustainability to a broad variety of lived pedagogical initiatives. This will be useful to the discussion of education in Jewish music studies and applies more broadly to many fields of educational practice.

Cultural sustainability is a key concern for many Jewish communities around the globe. In the field of Canadian Jewish studies, this concern intersects with and at times overlaps with Jewish education. However, it is perhaps most visible in academic publications involving the systematic analysis of census data, and the census itself, relating to Jewish populations or overarching historical approaches to Jewish populations in Canada over time. Such important studies are often used as key methods for bolstering historiographic accounts or investigations of socioeconomic changes in the Canadian Jewish communities.<sup>1</sup> Within this overarching interest in Jewish demography and historical approaches, the history of Jewish education figures to some extent.<sup>2</sup> However, there have been very few in-depth studies of current Jewish or Jewish-related pedagogical practices in terms of their potential (or not) for sustainability. This lack of scholarship is particularly noticeable as it relates to interactions involving the transmission of intangible cultural heritage, such as musical practices, in the context of pedagogical initiatives. This lack is surprising given the breadth of Jewish musicking and pedagogical potentials in Canada, in both religious and secular contexts, whether formal or informal, across a diversity of linguistic and denominational orientations.

In Germany, much of the Jewish (re)population is constituted of emigres of the 1990s from the former Soviet Union. Cultural sustainability is a key concern for the small Jewish communities, which reside primarily in the larger cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich. This concern has yet to be fully reflected in academic scholarship. Even as an interest in all things Jewish flourishes, scholarly initiatives are often limited to representing a Jewishness of the past, often symbolically manifested in tangible objects, such as synagogues or other Jewish-artefacts. The Jewishness here arguably contributes not to Jewish sustainability, but to the construction of a non-Jewish liberal identity: “Jews as well as their cultural heritage, play a key role in the creation of a new German/European self-understanding, which is seen as tolerant, pluralistic and multicultural...[This] renaissance of Jewish life has become an essential moment in...[the] search for a new German, as well as European, identity.”<sup>3</sup> The Jewishness under scholarly investigation tends to be a symbolic or historically constructed Jewishness of the past; “Jewish life and its basic needs for subsistence and sustainability is not of primary relevance in this process.”<sup>4</sup>

This backward-looking pedagogical and heritage-oriented tendency is reflected in the history of Jewish music initiatives in Germany: non-Jewish composers and performers occasionally embraced and incorporated elements of Jewish culture into their music despite living in a world that was largely absent of Jews. Jewish music initiatives in Germany by non-Jews acquired poignant social and moral significance and contention. In the 1980s, along with the klezmer revival in Germany, drawing on Jewish music in both performance and composition became common practice.<sup>5</sup> Despite this proliferation of Jewish music, interactions with living Jewish communities by non-Jewish musical performers of Jewish music remained rare. This situation has persisted until this day: “critical handling with music as a contemporary reflection of local Jewish experiences is almost completely absent from national educational programs of cultural education—at least within the German context.”<sup>6</sup> Much critical scholarship has engaged with the klezmer revival in particular: such initiatives have been characterized as painting “pictures of a scene haunted by the absence of once-present Jews.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, investigating the processes through which cultural sustainability happens or is *possible* in recent Jewish musical-pedagogical practices proves to be a fertile ground for exploration. Relating cultural sustainability to Jewish music education initiatives is a complicated process, involving a close look at musical practices and performances including the social, religious, and other networks through which music is created, transmitted, maintained and transformed.

### **Cultural Sustainability and Jewish Music: Refining the Application**

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed many attempts to contend with apparent threats to musical diversity around the world. This led to many initiatives, spearheaded by UNESCO, dedicated to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. In Canada, federal funding agencies; such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), made environmental sustainability a primary goal while diverting some funding and calls for research that develops projects that—while not always directly called “cultural sustainability”—are arguably forward-looking initiatives that aim to preserve cultural products and processes. For instance, in the SSHRC initiative “Imagining Canada’s Future: 16 Global Challenges,” three of the challenge groups relate to cultural sustainability and the arts: “The Erosion of Culture and History,” “The Asocial Society” and projects that aim to use art such as “The Arts Transformed.” The rise of such initiatives to promote cultural sustainability sparked animated debates on the role of ethnomusicologists, music practitioners, and others in this process, including critiques of the way in which many safeguarding processes viewed music and its practice:

One of the main issues raised is that music practices are often approached as artifacts that can be placed in a “musical museum” rather than as integral parts of living cultures and thus as parts of a continuously shifting dynamic environment.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the very act of “safeguarding” music, in a relatively musealized form, can be seen as antithetical to the reality of music-making, in which ebb, flow, and change are normal parts of the process, particularly in orally transmitted traditions. As Huib Schippers observes, “[c]hange within certain boundaries is not only allowed but is in fact part of the essence of these traditions; ‘recontextualization is the norm rather than the exception.’”<sup>9</sup>

In order to examine different levels of cultural sustainability in Jewish music pedagogical initiatives, I propose two new alternative applications of cultural sustainability.

The first concerns cultural sustainability categories as evaluative tools. This alternative develops several related vantage points through which cultural sustainability can be considered: these are not fixed and can be modified to suit the research or case study. These categories are not only important to gain a more holistic perspective on the potentials for sustainability but are arguably also vital in combining emic and etic perspectives—and some in between—on sustainability, thereby augmenting the potential of such studies to present a more inclusive evaluation that considers grass-roots- and community-based views on sustainability and what should be sustained.

My second alternative deals with cultural sustainability as a relational concept. When applied to the teaching of Jewish music, cultural sustainability can be understood in a relational sense, in which intersubjectivity allows for the possibility of a variety of “sustainabilities” and “non-sustainabilities.” Rather than viewing cultural sustainability in and of itself as a desired goal, I suggest that we consider the elements (social, religious, musical, and other) involved or intersecting with musical practices on a spectrum, between sustainability and non-sustainability; between hierarchical structures and less hierarchical structures; and in relation to human community and agency as well as and musical traditions. Sustainability need not imply indefinite continuity, but rather can be a framework that allows something to be continued for a reasonable amount of time beyond the present. The following case studies from Germany and Canada will be analysed to provide some suggestions on how to assess small-scale modes of sustainability and non-sustainability present in the practice of Jewish music.

## The Jewish Music Studies Ensemble

My participation–observation fieldwork with the Jewish Music Studies Ensemble (JMSE) in Hanover, Germany, from 2016 to 2018 aptly demonstrates the relational strata of cultural sustainability at play in micro–processes in the teaching of Jewish music, highlighting the importance of sustainability in the musical encounter. I founded the ensemble along with a master’s student, and after one year handed the reins to another university lecturer and became a participant in the ensemble. The ensemble was made up primarily of young, non–Jewish, German students. The goal of the ensemble was to provide music students with the unique opportunity of experiencing Jewish music in performance and learning about its performative aspects. A thematic focus under the umbrella of Jewish music was selected, and then pieces were chosen, rehearsed, and performed, usually in non–formal contexts or settings. The pieces could be intricate choral pieces by the composer Louis Lewandowski taught using sheet music, but most often were lead–sheet–like scores that were then embellished, serving as a springboard for invention and improvisation.

The idea behind the JMSE was to offer an alternative experience to music students that would not only give them a chance to play Jewish music, but also to engage in its “Jewishness” by learning more about the Jewish origins of or influences on the music. I also felt that the impact of historical persecution and trauma should be addressed when appropriate, but that we should avoid equating the practice of Jewish music with the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup> The ensemble revealed many micro–processes of relative sustainability or non–sustainability related to the practice of Jewish music, that consisted of a complex web of identities, purposes, power negotiations and social networks, as the following analysis illustrates.

### Analysis

In the following, I use five main categories of analysis.<sup>11</sup> These categories aptly illustrate several divergent modes of sustainability at play in each example and provide a contained way to view them.<sup>12</sup> This work analyzes aspects of the process of Jewish music practices that occurred consistently in the field encounter. The goal of the analysis is twofold: a) to determine the varying degrees of sustainability of each aspect of the musical process, and b) to determine why some aspects of the musical practice were more sustainable than others. This is not to say that these are the only available categories for analysis; these are simply the ones that stood out as important dynamics of my field encounters.

## Figure 1. Jewish Music Studies Ensemble (JMSE): Evaluative Categories<sup>13</sup>

Relatively Sustainable	Relatively Non-Sustainable
Systems for Learning Music: Acquisition of Musical Competencies	
Transmission of critical musical-cultural knowledge	
	Jewish Social, Religious and Cultural Continuity
	Negotiating Traditional Gender Roles

### *What is sustainable and what has the potential to be sustained?*

#### Systems for Learning Music

Creating a performance framework for the students that expanded their musical competencies was one of the sustainable practices developed by the ensemble, encouraging students to go beyond their comfort zone and to experience new repertoires and techniques. For instance, during our long-lasting engagement with the Hasidic *nigun* (wordless spiritual melody), students had to regularly implement musical arrangement, improvisation, and execution in a way that vastly differed from their musical performance education at the conservatoire-like university where they studied.<sup>14</sup> While in its traditional context the *nigun* would have been only sung a capella, in the ensemble, they were performed with instrumentation, often based on which students were present for the performance. Thus, a *nigun* would sometimes be performed on voices with guitar, sometimes with violin, saxophone, oboe, clarinet and a wide variety of percussion instruments, including a steel *darbukka* (Middle Eastern drum). Even the voices themselves were diverse. Our performance partners included at times individuals of Muslim and Christian Syrian origin who were trained using *maqmat* (modes utilizing quarter tones). In other words, the wordless spiritual melodies were performed on a medley of incongruous forms of instrumentation. Nearly all the participants communicated that there was something about “the freedom” of the ensemble that made them more likely to experiment musically.

The students were regularly confronted with approaches that allowed them to acquire new musical skills that they could then pass on to others (students, audience members). For instance, in December 2016, I was teaching the ensemble new repertoire in preparation for a mini demonstration. Thus, I attempted to teach them a *nigun* using the melody of the “Avinu Malkeinu” prayer. We sat in a circle and, starting with voices alone, I taught them through call and response (Figure 2):

**Figure 2. *Nigun* melody (commas indicate divisions of phrases that were learned through call and response)**



The melody is relatively simple and was taught in small segments. Such a melody should be easy for conservatoire students to imitate. Yet, although students were receptive to try this new approach, there was initial discomfort among the students and inaccurate repetitions, which were surprising, considering that the group usually demonstrated strong musicianship skills. Most of the students found themselves having to learn a new musical educational approach, which was apparently a challenge due to their own inexperience:

You taught us in the first semester musical pieces from the synagogue, *niguns*, ... and you tried to teach us these things orally. And I mean Participant E, he is a jazz person, but all the rest of us, we couldn't do it. So it was a really great experience for me and also for the others...to know how it feels to be taught a piece of religious music orally. It was really hard. (Participant A)

According to Participant A, only Participant E had been trained using oral transmission due to his being a jazz student, so he was totally comfortable with this approach. However, according to Participant E, the oral methods employed in contemporary jazz instruction differ greatly from those involved in the oral transmission of a *nigun*.<sup>15</sup> Participant A found the exposure to Jewish paraliturgical orality both jarring and challenging; however, it was a situation that he appreciated and to which he soon adapted. Being part of the ensemble allowed him to gain skills in the oral transmission of music that he would otherwise not have gained. Both participants confirmed that they would transfer this method to their musical practices: while Participant A described its possible applications to his future students in a German high school, Participant B suggested that the oral approach that she experienced in the JMSE could be usefully applied to her career as a recorder player in an early music ensemble. Overall, participants commented that the experience caused them to 'break



down barriers' that they felt had been imposed during their largely Western art music education in the conservatoire. In the words of one member, "being bolder in terms of what I am allowed to try."

In the JMSE we explored our first genre, the Hasidic *nigun*, in a very different way, in which its Jewish origins and practice in previous Jewish contexts were discussed prior to musical performance. This approach was particularly important given the contexts in which *nigunim* were (and are) religiously performed. A *nigun* is, in the words of Hanoch Avenary, 'a characteristic wordless vocal melody...These *nigunim* are often used as an extension of the existing liturgy, and serve as a prelude or postlude to the traditional prayers; there may even be devotional gatherings during which only these *nigunim* are heard.'<sup>6</sup> Although *nigunim* are still widely sung in relatively segregated orthodox communities (mainly by men), they are rarely performed in other contexts and are all but absent in the Jewish music landscape of present-day Germany, except in very specific orthodox circles. In this *nigun* "workshopping" process with German, non-Jewish students, what was paramount was to first establish the origins and historical and musical particularities of the *nigun*, as well as its personal religious and devotional significance.

David Kaminsky describes practices of musical appropriation that fail to acknowledge provenances as widespread across Europe. By contrast, the JMSE explicitly identified itself not only as performing "Jewish" repertoire, but also as promoting the critical study of Jewish music, including its history and origins. One ensemble member studying to be a secondary school teacher describes his motivations for joining the ensemble:

Until I started your programs, I had never learned anything about Jewish music...I think that teachers are supposed to teach something about Jewish music in their schools because we live in a country where Jewish music is a big deal, I means Jewish persons lived here, we had many famous Jewish people we knew about growing up here in Germany. (Participant D)

This member articulates that critical knowledge regarding Jewish music should be passed on to his students in contrast with what he perceives to be the minimal, uncritical ways in which it is currently taught. He considers that participation in the ensemble allowed him to gain new information and to pass it on to others. Some ensemble members were prompted to engage in independent research as a result of their participation; others were made aware of the diversity and range of musical repertoires under the umbrella of Jewish music:

Honestly, when I first came to the ensemble, I was not very well versed in Jewish music. I knew about klezmer, but pretty much nothing else. And I got this

awareness that there is this giant field of music...I mean, I know that music cultures existed, but playing with the ensemble made me aware of it in practice. Overall it made me more interested in ethnomusicology. (Participant B)

The Jewish religious and cultural content that was transmitted in the ensemble was highly nuanced and applied as well as academic. This was shown in discussions of how the repertoire would be played and what would be left out or included during performance.

The musical-cultural transmission that occurred on the student level was viewed by ensemble members as having an impact outside of the performance context. Participant A assumed a leadership role during the performance and took responsibility for relaying as much of the social-historical content acquired during rehearsals to a receptive audience. These small-scale encounters, along with others in the decision-making and music-making process, suggest that this particular category, "Transmission of critical musical-cultural knowledge," can be seen to fall on the side of "relatively sustainable." The fact that nearly all the participants were training to be music teachers in the public school system in Germany is highly relevant in terms of their ability to transmit and therefore sustain the critical knowledge derived from their experience in the ensemble.

***What is relatively non-sustainable or has little chance of being sustained?***

### **Jewish Social, Religious and Cultural Continuity**

This is arguably the most problematic category when discussing pedagogical initiatives in the current German context, musical or otherwise. Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin have argued that "the European tradition of 'spiritual' Jewishness—that is, of disengaging it from the physical bodies of Jews in order to dispense it to a wider population that can reap its benefits," is a current and long-enduring form of discrimination dating from New Testament sources.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Jewishness is seen as something positive as long as it is transmitted in a way that is disassociated from living Jews and their communities. When seen from the Boyarins' Jewish religious and cultural perspective, the framework for musical production provided by the ensemble was entirely non-sustainable: there was little or no contact with Jewish communities. As with many ensembles in Germany that practice Jewish music today, there was a clear acknowledgement of the Jewish provenance of the music, though there was indeed a disjuncture between its performance and the needs and continuity of Jewish communities in contemporary Germany and in Europe as a whole. In fact, in the few cases where there was interaction with living Jewish communities, tension was created by this possibly unconscious disjuncture. This led to rifts between members of the Jewish community, different Jewish denominations, and the JMSE performers.

## Negotiating Traditional Gender Roles

Although the instruction had a “democratic” structure, little was achieved in terms of sustainable re-negotiation of gender roles. To use an auto-ethnographic example, as a female person of Jewish origin who practices many of the musical traditions making up the ensemble’s repertoire, many of the performances caused me to “rediscover” musical traditions or individual pieces from my past and to discover new ones since in my usual practice, these were traditionally sung by men. Another element relating to gender was sometimes difficult to negotiate. While living in Hanover, I normally attended Chabad services with my family (I grew up in a Modern Orthodox environment in Montreal, Canada, and find that this was the closest to my home environment in Hanover). The Chabad movement in Hanover is particularly welcoming and enterprising. And, as is the case in the Chabad movement and indeed, in most Jewish Orthodox services, women sit separately from men and do not lead the services. However, while I was relatively silent in the synagogue, in this performing of Jewish ritual music, I was not only a woman prayer leader, but a “ritual expert” in the ensemble, an official purveyor or ‘gatekeeper’ of the musical tradition. As a woman, my status in the ensemble was very different from that of my actual, regular practice of Judaism. This led to increasing discomfort on my part, particularly in cases when rehearsals with the ensemble occurred directly before or after visits to the synagogue.<sup>18</sup> My discomfort was caused by a general feeling of almost schizophrenic role-changing in which I had to occupy two contradictory positionalities, both of which were, to a large degree, not entirely my own. In other words, in this context, the ensemble experience caused me to re-negotiate the gender role I typically occupied, but in a non-sustainable, ephemeral way. This auto-ethnographic reflection reveals the importance of including the experiences of Jewish teachers in scholarly accounts of Jewish education. For instance, it might be fruitful to consider pedagogues as bearers of culture and how their lived experience of Jewish practices resonates both inside and outside of the classroom.

Overall, the interactions that took place during the practice of Jewish music in the ensemble demonstrate a gamut of small-scale sustainable and non-sustainable potential. Functioning within the European Centre for Jewish Music’s programs in Jewish music studies, the JMSE ensemble is mainly sustainable, operating efficiently within the system of the greater university infrastructure. From a musical perspective, participants considered that they had grown musically through participation and were now equipped to pass on this new musical knowledge to others (students, family, audience members). Based on interviews and interaction with the ensemble, the same could be said regarding their newly acquired, nuanced knowledge of Jewish music and, by extension, Jewish history and culture. However, from the perspective of the continuity of lived Jewish religious traditions and liturgical practices, the ensemble could be considered largely non-sustainable.

## The KlezKanada Retreat

It can be helpful to apply the categories of sustainability and non-sustainability to another Jewish music pedagogical initiative in the North American context. Ross has noted the marked differences in European and North American approaches to Jewish cultural heritage and cultural sustainability.<sup>19</sup> This example will act as a contrasting example in which different aspects of sustainability are emphasized in the process of the teaching of Jewish music(s).

KlezKanada is an organization founded in 1995 that aims to support, teach, and disseminate Jewish music and Yiddish culture in “an ever-evolving contemporary world.”<sup>20</sup> The following will evaluate the KlezKanada retreat experience using the categories of potential sustainability introduced in this article.<sup>21</sup> This evaluation is based on archival, document, and musical analyses as well as ethnographic fieldwork undertaken under the auspices of ongoing projects of the Research Chair in Canadian Jewish Studies at Concordia University. It should be noted that this analysis does not aim to evaluate the potential of KlezKanada as a whole or the much broader “Yiddishland” networks. This discussion focuses on certain ethnographic fieldwork in 2022–2023 at the annual retreat and in conversation with participants including students and facilitators to develop the two approaches to cultural sustainability in a comparative framework.

**Figure 3. KlezKanada Retreat 2022: Evaluative Categories**

<b>Relatively Sustainable</b>	<b>Relatively Non-Sustainable</b>
Systems for Learning Music: Acquisition of Musical Competencies	
Transmission of critical musical-cultural knowledge	
Jewish Social, Religious and Cultural Continuity—transnational, community focus	Jewish Social, Religious and Cultural Continuity—local Montreal and Quebec focus
Negotiating Traditional Gender Roles	

### **Systems for Learning Music: Acquisition of Musical Competencies**

The KlezKanada retreat arguably provides a flexible and inclusive infrastructure to ensure the acquisition of a wide variety of musical competencies. This framework facilitates the sustainability of Jewish music(s) from a pedagogical perspective. A typical retreat day is characterized by a variety of workshops and lectures catering to different abilities and interests. Many musical competencies are arguably learned

during the retreat, or there is the potential to do so. However, an evaluation of the courses and dissemination of musical technique and musicianship skills reveal that these are “brought to,” the retreat rather than acquired there. What is acquired is not basic musicianship skills, but rather deep engagement with many forms of Klezmer music, whether rudimentary or advanced. Cultural sustainability relating to Klezmer music pedagogies is a key concern of the organizers that manifests itself in practice.

The KlezKanada experience aims to hone and complement each participant or groups’ musical or artistic background. For instance, a beginners’ class in which I participated allowed a group of eight students on various instruments to strengthen their musicianship skills while learning to play three sub-genres of the Klezmer “dance music” repertoires: a *zhok*, *freylekh*, and a *chosidl* (types of Jewish folk dance). The primary approach of the instructor was to teach the material in a way that would enable us to teach it to someone else. I played the French horn in the group, and although I am not a beginner, it was an innovative learning experience. Like my students in the JMSE, we were taught to play by ear and perform the music from memory, something that I had not hitherto tried on my classical instrument. Most participants found the experience “challenging but very rewarding.” The process of playing through aural transmission for the first time by all participants acted as a powerful mnemonic device for the retention of the melodies and the muscle memory to execute them.

### **Transmission of Critical Musical–Cultural Knowledge**

KlezKanada and the annual retreat could be considered an optimal source for the sustainable transmission of musical–cultural knowledge. An administrator commented that the organization is continually searching how to “teach the foundational vocabulary in terms of what Klezmer music is—note by note and mode by mode while developing critical skills that let you carry that vocabulary forward into your own practice.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, from a facilitation perspective, musical skills are seen as directly related to the cultural knowledge in the intentional development of a forward-looking practice. Many participants also described the experience as providing new insights into various topics to do with Jewish musicking and Yiddish culture, as well as adding to pre-existing knowledge and practice in a meaningful way. Both aspects were not described as isolated individual experiences, but ones that would be passed on in a variety of what participants described as “home communities.” That intention was articulated by eight different participants who came from small to medium-sized Jewish communities in Canada and the United States, all of whom were above the age of forty and in some way responsible for maintaining community Jewish music-oriented initiatives.

The acquisition of sustainable musical knowledge was embedded in formal and informal contexts. An example of the latter is the “Backwards March.” A tradition practiced since 2001 to usher in the Jewish Sabbath, the “Backwards March” was implemented by Jenny Romaine, Frank London and the folklorist Itzik Gottesman. Gottesman recounted a story told to him by Aryeh Lash in which all the Jews of his hometown in Romania would gather by the river on Friday night before the Sabbath and then play a lilting melody while walking backwards so as not to turn their backs on the incoming *Shabbes* (Yiddish for Jewish Sabbath) and the Sabbath bride/queen. Jenny, Frank and Itzik revived and re-imagined the “Backwards March” into its current form at KlezKanada.

The goal of such practices at KlezKanada is clearly rooted in cultural and religious sustainability goals, as evidenced by the following citation from their mini-documentary series: “The ‘Backwards March’ is almost the epitome of what we’re trying to do at KlezKanada. By taking our history, and studying it, and making informed choices, and yet creating something new that we internalize that is ours that will live on in the future.”<sup>23</sup> There are arguably multiple such sustainability affordances created by musical-social rituals and engagements at KlezKanada in terms of musical competencies and Shabbat observance. Of particular importance in the case of the “Backwards March” is that this “ritual” combines a location-specific practice and brings it more broadly into the present.

From my perspective as a music-practitioner joining the growing crowd of musicians and other participants, the experience increased musical competencies and served as a precursor for the oncoming Sabbath-time. We walked backwards and therefore rather slowly and carefully. The melody started out quietly on a violin and flute. An accordion came in and then a trumpet and soon the whole throng was playing what became a familiar tune. I had opted for a *darbuka*) and joined in with some drumming patterns from Turkey. Walking backwards ensures that one walks slowly and pays careful attention to many surrounding people. The whole experience was uplifting, and the non-judgmental and improvisational pedagogical environment created a music-initiated rubric through which to disseminate knowledge and build community.

Many of the music-oriented workshops and courses involve the transmission of a wide variety of musical repertoires. For instance, Jordan Hirsch’s instrumental course “Operas, Waltzes and Marches: The Non-Dance Music of the Chasidic Courts” accessed and transmitted rare forms of musicking framed by the religious, historical, and syncretic contexts in which this musical repertoire initially came into being. Another teacher who had been attending for over twenty years described the situation as initially contentious when “the Jewish-Yiddish revival first started.” From his point of view, there was music that risked being lost. However, with the emergence

of what he described as “the next generation,” a solid repository—both tangible and intangible—was fashioned based partly on collection and score transcription, but most importantly on regular performance of the musical repertoire that he deemed “Yiddish,” “Klezmer,” and “Jewish Eastern European.”

## **Jewish Social, Religious and Cultural Continuity**

The potential for contributing to Jewish social, religious and cultural continuity at KlezKanada contrasts with the previous JMSE example. Many participants connected with Judaism in some way or identified as Jewish. They saw Jewish continuity in many possible permutations as being key to their aspirations and embedded in the Klez-Kanada experience. An administrator explained that while participation was fully inclusive, the Jewish-rooted orientation was important to ensure the depth of education and engagement with Yiddish and Klezmer at the root of the KlezKanada experience. For some, KlezKanada was often the first contact point on how Jewish life could be embraced and sustained in ways they considered meaningful and inclusive. Some participants came from Jewish communities in which they felt they could not continue to exist. KlezKanada and by extension the friendship and partnerships formed there offered the possibility for Jewish continuity that would have otherwise not been possible.

KlezKanada creates a physical and discursive space for Jewish social, religious, and cultural continuity, allowing for a variety of positionalities that can explore and sustain Jewish practices on their own terms beyond the ephemeral (but recurring) retreat experience. An administrator commented on this Jewish-inclusive simultaneity stating, “I would never tell people how to be Jewish or how not to be Jewish but instead provide a flexible framework for Jewish continuity.”<sup>24</sup> Musicologist Judah Cohen comments that given Jewish concerns “over the future of Jewish peoplehood and commitment, the arts occupy a complex site for initiatives aimed at reimagining ‘Jewishness.’” He notes that aim as typical in American arts initiatives, seen as sites of capital for the promulgation of Jewish identity and geared toward “young people” rather than toward being financially sustainable.<sup>25</sup> I would argue that one of KlezKanada’s strengths in terms of this category of cultural sustainability is that “reinvention” is only one possibility within a diversity of potential experiences offered. Musicking, lectures, prayer-leading and other avenues created affordances for accessing and continuing lived Jewish practices in many ways.

The “Backwards March” itself, while key in communicating and sustaining “musical-cultural knowledge,” also acted as a potential segue into the holy time of Shabbat for observant participants as well as for those who had never experienced Shabbat before. The innovation provided a comfortable platform, followed by the more formal *Kabbalat Shabbat* (welcoming the Sabbath) ceremony at the prayer cabin for those who wanted to join. It is through the creation of these community-building

but highly flexible spaces that cultural sustainability is possible. If the JMSE provided a judgment-free zone in which musicians and artists could develop skills, this experience took that to a new level. While for some participants, this experience provided a safe space within which they could learn or practice the melody within a flexible and changeable musical formation, for others the sustainability afforded was directly connected to the music as a segue into Sabbath observance (within a variety of denominational affiliations and observances).

The KlezKanada retreat experience permits the creation of what Homi Bhabha calls a “Third Space,” a discursive, interstitial zone with affordances for transformation.<sup>26</sup> In this example, this space allows for the teaching of sustainable practices to do with Jewish musical and cultural continuity. Arguably the only drawback in the creation of this safe space cost is that its transcendent properties often cause it and its “inhabitants” to disengage from or exclude local concerns over sustainability and politics. The pedagogical orientation of the organization prioritizes certain types of identification and positionalities (e.g. left-wing, American, and Ashkenazi), which seemed to be at the forefront of most initiatives; as such, decisions and representation might not always be attuned to local Jewish Montreal- and Quebec-rooted concerns and educational goals.<sup>27</sup>

It might be argued that the Quebec location of KlezKanada is not necessary for its pedagogical success. However, the local musical environments, such as the French Canadian and other local Jewish and non-Jewish practices, past and present, offer invaluable pedagogical affordances waiting to be integrated. Montreal neighbourhoods such as Mile End and Outremont, which bear romantic traces of Montreal’s Jewish past and currently house small but vibrant alternative Jewish movements and a large Hasidic community, arguably figure to some extent, if sometimes symbolically, in the program’s infrastructure. However, Montreal neighbourhoods such as Cote St-Luc, Hampstead, Ville St-Laurent, Notre-Dame-de-Grace, Westmount, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Laval, and others are rich areas of Jewish diversity, where Jewish musicking is embedded and enmeshed in the everyday lives of their inhabitants across denominations, in which living Jewish diversity in all its richness and tensions abounds. Yet the latter areas and their potential for pedagogical innovation and sustainability where Jewish music is concerned seemed to figure very little in the pedagogical approaches and flexible curriculum and remained relatively unacknowledged or unknown to participants from the United States, overseas or from other parts of Canada who had no former connection with Montreal and Quebec.

Despite what might be perceived as lack of focus on the local, given KlezKanada’s structure and open and iterative processes, bringing the concerns of Montreal, Quebec, and other Jewish communities into the picture is a possibility moving forward given the sustainability-oriented iterative processes built into day-to-day opera-



tions. In a conversation that I had with one of the administrators, it was clear that negotiating the different positionalities and the concerns that go along with them was a key concern and a continuous topic of discussion to ensure that “everyone at the table” feels comfortable. Analogies with the community as a family that sits at the same table or the idea of the “shtetl” as a safe space for multiple identities is an on-going theme that helps visualize and create the pluralistic community of KlezKanada.

The experience with KlezKanada reveals something important regarding Jewish music pedagogies and sustainability: namely, the importance not just of safe spaces, but of flexible places for teaching to accommodate the multiple personas inherent in the global Jewish identities. This inclusive and flexible space can act as a model for more traditional Jewish teaching initiatives and institutions, which often suffer from a lack of social and financial support because they cater to very small subsections within an already relatively small Jewish population.

For many, KlezKanada as a source of Jewish sustainability extends beyond the music or artistic focus of the retreat and other activities of the organization. Over the course of the retreat, I began to see that for many participants, KlezKanada provided a safe space in which individuals could freely articulate their notion of Jewishness in a community that accepted them as they were—an acceptance that was not necessarily found in their homes. Many participants attend the event every year and wait with bated breath to experience what they perceive to be a life-changing experience again. The annual retreat was viewed by many participants as a meeting place where they would acquire the necessary and vital energy—*kavannah* (Jewish spiritual energy) some even called it—to sustain the respective communities in which they found themselves a leader. A community leader from Washington, DC, described the experience as such, as did a *chavruta* (community group) leader from Michigan. As such, KlezKanada forms a vital access for sustaining and even reviving Jewish identity and practice in a positive space. In a survey, one participant stated: “When I first get there, my heart is beating with excitement, and I just can’t wait to see and hear my *mishpoche* (family) again.”

At KlezKanada one could argue that “backward-reaching” strategies are employed in a manner similar to typical Jewish musicking initiatives in Germany. However, in this Canadian and transnational context, this turn to the past serves to forge new identities for another Jewish collective, or a collective that is engaged with Jewish futures. This is a far cry from the symbolic use of Jews in forging a multicultural secular German-European identity. The ethical implications are totally different, as the new identities being forged are ones in which (often young) Jewish artistic pioneers can celebrate their own Judaism in a forward-looking way and celebrate the Jews of the past who inspire such change in a nuanced way, rather than reducing them to a symbol that is disconnected from living Judaism.

## **(Re)negotiating Traditional Gender Roles**

Fieldwork reveals that this category in the KlezKanada context is highly sustainable. An entire article or even a book could be written on the potential for the musical-aesthetic transformation of gender roles in the KlezKanada space. This opportunity for transformations is afforded through multiple scenarios. For instance, prayer services during the retreat are characterized by an openness to showcase different voices in Jewish prayer contexts, as well as the inclusion of voices that challenge both traditional Jewish (and secular) binaries relating to gender. KlezKanada provided an extremely flexible and inclusive space within which traditional gender roles in Judaism could be maintained, changed up, transformed or renegotiated. This openness and inclusivity forms part of an ongoing process of discussion and receptiveness on the part of participants, and especially the retreat's organizers. Most importantly perhaps, KlezKanada provides a place for the organic renegotiation of gender roles.

During the KlezKanada retreat, there were multiple opportunities for the musical contribution of women in prayer services, including modern orthodox women. These were both consistent and optional, leaving participants to decide whether and how they wanted to contribute and more significantly perhaps, there was an explicit awareness that this recurring space was different from the "home spaces" of participants where gender roles were concerned. I opted to chant from the Torah using the Romaniote (Judeo Greek) *nusach* (liturgical music style) in one of the services. This experience later prompted me to teach it to my son, enabling the sustainability of a little-practiced Judeo Greek cantillation trope by virtue of providing a comfortable space for the (sometimes temporary) renegotiation of traditional gender roles.

### **Conclusion: Pedagogical Networks, "Fuel for Sustainability"**

Careful qualitative analysis of different sustainability dynamics of these Canadian and German Jewish small-scale music pedagogy initiatives reveals that a relational scope enables flexible cultural sustainability categories to be aptly employed as evaluative tools to determine the effectiveness, impact, and longevity of aspects of the processes connected to Jewish music and musicking. Determining what is considered sustainable is often a political act, with different meanings depending on what aspect is being emphasized: "musical sound; performance tradition; transmission processes; audience; commercial value; social, cultural, aesthetic, or spiritual context; or the musical practice at large."<sup>28</sup> This study demonstrates how these spheres of musical- and Jewish-related interactions are complex and often polyvalent. Sustainable processes should not just be viewed as theoretical ideals, but also practical, applicable frameworks for concrete teaching situations. In the context of the teaching of Jewish music, in the two examples I considered, there were a variety of sustain-

able and non-sustainable processes at play, many occurring simultaneously, many of which can be viewed as more important than musical specificity by the practitioners themselves, particularly when the practitioners can be considered cultural “insiders.” Cultural sustainability should not only apply to musical content or culture, but to the way in which the music works to support Jewish identity and Jewish musical and religious practice. In other words, the frame for cultural sustainability should be consciously determined on a case-by-case basis with careful, critical reflection on the motivations and consequences of its delineation.

In the KlezKanada example, categories of sustainability were often inextricably connected: hence, the acquisition of sustainable musical competencies (1) and musical traditions and repertoires (2) in many ways went hand in hand with the perpetuation of Jewish social and religious identity and community (3). In contrast with the KlezKanada example, the Jewish Music Studies Ensemble, while largely non-sustainable in terms of promoting the continuity of Jewish religious practices, cannot be considered “non-sustainable” in terms of the development and maintenance of musician-ship skills afforded by the engagement with Jewish music practices. Although the sustainable aspects of the ensemble were constrained by very practical limitations, its sustainable, continuous aspects remained related to students’ desire to know more about Jewish music, to explore this knowledge through performance, and to maintain a critical mind and cultural sensitivity while doing so.

The analysis of German and Canadian case studies reveals that the affordance for cultural sustainability in these Jewish music pedagogical initiatives is generated by several key factors: the fact that these are not top-down initiatives, but rather interactive grassroots musical educational initiatives, generated by the participation of people who wanted to learn new skills and broaden their musical performance experiences (1); the formation of a flexible space that caters to a range of Jewish or Jewish-oriented positionalities (2); and an educational space that optimizes key elements of the local context in which it is embedded (3). This article has highlighted some ways in which sustainability can be identified in Jewish education initiatives involving the imperfect, ephemeral reality of musical practice. In this context, small changes in a pre-existing structure are in a constant state of flux, of (re)negotiation that can lead to more sustainable practices.

**Miranda Crowdus** is an assistant professor in the Department of Religions and Cultures at Concordia University, where she also holds the Research Chair in Canadian Jewish Studies. Crowdus’s research interests lie at the intersection of ethnomusicology and Jewish studies. She earned her doctorate at City University London in 2016. She was a research associate at the European Centre for Jewish Music in Hanover, Germany. Her book, *Hip Hop in Urban Borderlands*, was published in 2018. She is currently working on a project, funded by the German

Research Foundation (DFG) from 2022 to 2025, that reorients discussions of Jewish cultural heritage through its musical and sonic emanations.

**1**

Publications of this kind cannot be itemized here in full. Important contributions include Louis Rosenberg and Morton Weinfeld, ed., *Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of Jews in Canada in the 1930s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); and Pierre Anctil, *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* (Montreal: Éditions du Boréal, 2017).

**2**

David Fraser "Honorary Protestants": *The Jewish School Question in Montreal, 1867–1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

**3**

Miranda Crowds and Sarah Ross, "Applied Ethnomusicology and Jewish Music Studies: Negotiating 'Third Mission' Requests in Germany Today," in *Diggin' Up Music: Musikethnologie als Baustelle*, ed. Michael Führ, Kersten Klenke, and Julio Mendivil (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 2020), 131.

**4**

Ibid.

**5**

This process is described by Gruber as "virtual Jewishness" in Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

**6**

Sarah Ross, "Cultural Sustainability as an Applied Research Strategy in Jewish Music Studies" (unpublished manuscript, 2017), conference paper presented at "Jewish Cultural Heritage and Cultural Sustainability," Basel, Switzerland.

**7**

David Kaminsky "'Just Exotic Enough': Swedish Chamber Klezmer as Postnational World Music and Mid-East Proxy," *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 2 (May 2014): 256.

**8**

Ross, "Cultural Sustainability," 1.

**9**

Huib Schippers, *Facing the Music: Shaping Music Education from a Global Perspective* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2009): 335, 343.

**10**

The tendency for Jewish music to act as a symbolic substitute for the Holocaust or as constituting reparations for injustices (*wiedergutmachen*) is aptly described by Tina Frühauf: "the Holocaust ... in relationship to music at times functions as a stand-in for the very idea of Jewish music." See Tina Frühauf, *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1.

**11**

These categories were inspired by the five-domain framework developed by Huib Schippers in "Sound Futures: Exploring the Ecology of Music Sustainability" in *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: An Ecological Perspective*, ed. Huib Schippers and Catherine Grant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 12-13.

**12**

It should be noted that while Schippers refers to the totality of these categorizations, metaphorically perhaps, as an ecosystem, I do not.

**13**

I have not included in this article important categories such as marketing and finances; I may address them in future work.

**14**

*Nigunim* are extremely varied in mood and style, however some uniting characteristics are that: they are sung for spiritual goals, employ lots of repetition, use repeated nonsense syllables rather than words, and in situ, are sung without any instrumental accompaniment.

**15**

Abigail Wood notes the use of Hasidic musical material in non-Hasidic performance practice: "the aesthetic criteria through

which performance is judged may seem on the surface to have little to do with Western conceptions of musicality.” See Abigail Wood, *And We’re All Brothers: Singing in Yiddish in Contemporary North America* (London, U.K.: Routledge, 2013), 146.

**16**

Hanoch Avenary, “The Hasidic Nigun: Ethos and Melos of a Folk Liturgy,” *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 16 (1964): 61–62.

**17**

Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, no.4 (Summer 1993): 693–725, paraphrased in David Kaminsky, “Exotic,” 274.

**18**

This even occurred when rushing from a visit to the Liberal Synagogue to direct the ensemble; however, in this instance, the paradox was not related to gender, but rather to different identities I had assumed: that of a university teacher and that of a member of the Hanover Jewish community.

**19**

Dani Kranz and Sarah Ross “Jüdisches Kulturerbe’ versus ‘Jewish Heritage’: Zum gesellschaftspolitischen Stellenwert von jüdischem Erbe in Deutschland,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, accessed January 8, 2023, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/zeit-kulturgeschichte/juedischesleben/515818/juedisches-kulturerbe-versus-jewish-heritage/>.

**20**

Asa Brunet-Jailly, “The Backwards March at KlezKanada’s Summer Retreat”, KlezKanada, accessed December 2022, <https://klezkanada.org/backwards-march/>.

**21**

It is not possible to evaluate the Yiddish revival movement as a whole. As such, the analysis will be defined by the orientation and affordances of this particular KlezKanadaretreat in 2022.

**22**

Anonymous KlezKanada administrator, conversation with author, March 1, 2023.

**23**

Unknown, “The Backwards March at Klez-

Kanada’s Virtual 2021 Retreat,” KlezKanada, July 18, 2022, YouTube video, 11:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cf7pXo3D-FOY&t=2s>.

**24**

Anonymous KlezKanada administrator, conversation with author, March 1, 2023.

**25**

Judah Cohen, *Jewish Music in Nineteenth-Century America: Restoring the Synagogue Soundtrack* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 201.

**26**

Homi Bhabha and Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space: An Interview with Homi Bhabha,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London, U.K.: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 201– 213.

**27**

I felt this very acutely as a polyglot Jewish Montrealer affiliated with the immediate locale in many ways. Equally apparent was KlezKanada’s extraordinary willingness to create a comfortable space for so many diverse positionalities despite the many challenges involved.

**28**

Schippers, “Sound Futures,” 8.