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**SOUNDING JEWISH IN BERLIN:  
KLEZMER MUSICAL PRACTICE, HISTORICAL MEMORY  
AND THE CONTEMPORARY CITY**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2016

Department of Music  
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## **Abstract**

This research offers an original contribution to the study of contemporary klezmer music by analysing it in relation to a particular urban environment. With its origins in a largely destroyed Eastern European Jewish culture, contemporary klezmer is both historically-grounded and paradoxically rootless, cut loose from geographical specificity by the internationalism of its recent revival. Seeking to counteract the music's modern placeless-ness, this dissertation analyses the musical and spatial means by which klezmer has been re-rooted in the distinctive material and symbolic conditions of today's Berlin. The theoretical framework takes in questions of cultural identity, music and place, authenticities of tradition and instrumental practice, to show how this transnational and syncretic music – with few historical ties to Berlin – can be understood in relation to the city's particular post-reunification bricolage aesthetic and subversively creative everyday tactics. Beginning by mapping the criss-crossing networks of musicians and their multiple artistic perspectives, the dissertation proceeds through an exploration of the official and unofficial spaces within which these fluid musical practices operate, leading onto ways that the city of Berlin is made manifest in the music itself – how the city is interpellated sonically and textually. Processes of musical transmission and education are analysed through the filters of tradition and pedagogical ideologies, from which my own instrument, the piano accordion, is used as a lens through which to uncover the balance between personal expression and historically-informed performance. The final chapter looks at the relationship between history, Jewish identity and music in the city. It explores the resonances between the contested discourse of memorial and present-day cultural and musical production, discovering how at times sound and music can act as a living sonic embodiment that speaks against the silence of historical memory.

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### **Note on translation, orthography, interviews and recordings**

Unless indicated, all translations are my own. Exceptions are where lyrics have been reproduced from liner notes for the two Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird albums *Lost Causes* (RIEN 77) and *Bad Old Songs* (RIEN 84). In these cases, English, German and Yiddish text are given in the original form in which they appear in these liner notes.

Yiddish vocabulary has been translated with reference to Weinreich's *Yiddish-English, English-Yiddish Dictionary* (1977), German vocabulary with reference to *Collins German Dictionary* (2005).

Where Yiddish lyrics have been reprinted from another source, I have reproduced exactly that source. In other instances, I have adhered to YIVO Yiddish orthography (Weinreich, 1977). Certain words common to both Hebrew and Yiddish appear in conventional Hebrew transliteration (e.g. *Haskalah, Hanukah*).

German and Yiddish words are italicised, with the exception of song titles (in quotes), band names and the word “klezmer”.

Interview details, including dates of birth and short informal biographies, are given in Appendix 2.

Details of recordings discussed are given in Appendix 3.

*“If the city is a piece of music, it depends on who’s playing it, who’s listening; and you are not the person you were a week ago”* (Ciaran Carson, *Last Night's Fun*)

## **Introduction**

In the city of Berlin, the bent notes, snare drum rolls and offbeat stabs of Jewish klezmer music resonate with meanings beyond their expressive function. At the intersection of cultural identity, musical tradition and personal expression, klezmer’s formal musical elements become part of a debate that takes in continuity, rupture, renewal, ownership, history and memory. My research unpacks some of these fluid meanings and manifestations of klezmer and Yiddish music in the city, framed in relationship to the musical spaces in which they take place and the wider contemporary context of Berlin itself.

Recent work by Waligórska (2013), Kaminsky (2014, 2015b), Rubin (2014, 2015a) and Silverman (2015)<sup>1</sup> has begun to address a notable lack of scholarship in this field outside of the United States. Drawing on similar themes and some of the same performers, I aim to link more directly to the particular urban environment within which this music functions, locating musical practice as both product and producer of the city (Smith, 1997; Johansson & Bell, 2009). The original contribution my study makes to the field of urban ethnomusicology is to offer a specific exploration of the different ways that a transnational genre<sup>2</sup> is rooted in the distinctive practices and meanings of the contemporary city within which it operates: through musical networks, performance space, textual and musical emplacement, educative perspectives, instrumental practice, and as a living sonic embodiment that speaks against the silence of historical memory. In particular, I hope to show that through its engagement with the performative culture of contemporary Berlin, klezmer has moved beyond discourses of revival and cultural ownership (Waligórska, 2013), renewing itself as part of an ongoing multi-layered dialogue. This introduction outlines the topic and my reasons for choosing it, explains my methodology, situates the study within a scholarly context, and lays out the major themes to follow.

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<sup>1</sup> The geographies covered by these scholars are: Poland, Sweden, Germany and the Balkans.

<sup>2</sup> Although its roots are in Eastern Europe (Beregovski, 2000; Rubin, 2001; Feldman, 2002), twentieth century mass migration, genocide, political persecution and modern international musical networks mean that klezmer now exists across national borders, as well as within them. This is discussed at length throughout.

Fulcrum, flashpoint and much contested symbol of twentieth century European history, Berlin is a city in the midst of a continual process of self-examination and reinvention (Elsaesser, 2009). Emerging from the dark legacies of wartime decimation (Beevor, 2002), and extended post-war division (Taylor, 2006), the city barely had time to lick its own wounds before being enthusiastically (and optimistically) recast as symbol and arbiter of a reunited Europe (Leontidou, 2006:261-2).<sup>3</sup> This process of re-creation is not a new one for the city (Chin, 2000; Stangl, 2008). Over the last hundred or so years, Berlin has been cast in a multitude of competing identities and representations, most of which have seen the city's own agency relegated to that of supporting role in a larger geopolitical stand-off. And more recently, a liberated Berlin has spent the last two decades trying on different versions of itself, constructing and reconstructing myriad identities and forms, both real and imagined: "Berlin wird, wird, wird, wird. Nie zu Ende".<sup>4</sup>

Moving in from the grand sweep of historical narrative, this also means that much of the city currently lives day-to-day in a whirl of do-it-yourself energy and creativity (Ladd, 2000:20; Heebles & van Aalst, 2010). The Cold War legacy of subterfuge, concealment and hidden meanings has endowed Berlin with a remnant sense of masquerade and cunning – characteristics which in fact may well have been in place at least since the city's early twentieth century Modernist and subsequently Expressionist outpourings (Jelavich, 1996; Metzger, 2007). It is also a city that has become expert at making-do with whatever comes to hand: economic uncertainty, political polarisation and interrupted histories have on one level engendered a pragmatic, ground-level, bricolage (Levi-Strauss, 1968) approach to cultural production at which the city excels. Musically, this nowadays means a place that is happy to throw many things into a pot to see what comes out. Turkish hip-hop (Elflein, 1998; Rollefson, 2013), Balkan beats (Rigney, 2011; Silverman, 2015), industrial metal (Burns, 2008), Russian Disco (Wickstrom, 2008) and the city's legendary 24-hour techno scene (Rapp, 2012) are just some of the ways in which Berlin noisily manifests its contemporary identity.

And there is also Eastern European Jewish wedding music, popularly known as

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<sup>3</sup> This debate has reached a characteristic ideological stand-off at the time of writing (September 2015) with the growing refugee crisis played out daily across European borders.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous Berlin architect (echoing Scheffler, see Chapter 2) quoted in Cochrane and Passmore (2001:351): "Berlin is always becoming, never complete."

klezmer,<sup>5</sup> which has been a notable part of Berlin's music scene for more than twenty years – building on the cultural currency of its late 1970s American revival<sup>6</sup> and subsequent international take-up (Slobin, 2000). Although the proliferation of performers and spaces has been somewhat curtailed since the heady 'klezmer boom' (Waligórska, 2013; Rubin, 2014) of around 1990 onwards, the music itself continues to develop in dynamic and provocative ways, often moving well beyond the traditionalist bounds of earlier incarnations. Equally important is the two-way dialogue that has seen the sound of klezmer seep into the city's wider world music environment – as both live and recorded musical resource – while parts of the klezmer discourse have become increasingly inflected with external influences both sympathetic and radical. Berlin has long hosted a significant number of internationally-known immigrant North American klezmer musicians,<sup>7</sup> but these days it is also home to increasing numbers of younger artists from the former Eastern Bloc, making the city a central node in an international musical conversation. Indeed, the contemporary internationalism of the city itself lends a particular semiotic and cultural trajectory to the material that follows. In the early 1990s, singer and fiddle player Michael Alpert noted with irony that Germany was one of the few places where a klezmer musician might actually make a living.<sup>8</sup> Whilst this may no longer be the case, I will argue that through active engagement with its distinctive urban environment, klezmer in Berlin continues to transform and transgress – in ways that would not be possible were it propelled solely by revival (Livingston, 1999) or mimesis. It is precisely because of its relationship with the city that the music has developed the diversity that now warrants closer analysis.

Berlin has an ambiguous attitude to its own history (Huysen, 1997; Till, 2005). The city continues to struggle under its historical weight<sup>9</sup> whilst also enjoying a certain post-Cold War weightlessness.<sup>10</sup> Berlin is thus both over-determined by history and yet free to remake itself after so many years as the strategic pawn in a bigger global game

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview of klezmer's Eastern European roots, early twentieth century migration to America, and 1970s-onwards revival, see Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> As in many cases, the term *revival* is itself a contested one. Many of the musicians discussed in this thesis are at best ambivalent about the word. Rubin argues that it is also problematic to implicitly group multiple geographies and histories under a single banner ('*the klezmer revival*'): "perhaps it would make more sense to look at the klezmer revival as a set of mini-revivals" (Rubin, 2005:154). This will be explored in greater detail throughout.

<sup>7</sup> These days one might cite Alan Bern, Daniel Kahn and Paul Brody, amongst others.

<sup>8</sup> Liner notes to 1993 Brave Old World CD *Beyond the Pale*, Pinorrek Records CD 5013.

<sup>9</sup> Silberman (2011:3): "New beginnings never wipe the slate clean."

<sup>10</sup> Novelist and *Wissenschaftskolleg* Fellow Claire Messud (2012-49) writes: "In Berlin, a sense of becoming trumps a sense of belatedness, and this makes it exciting."

(Schneider, 2014). Similarly, klezmer carries the imagination and memories of a part of Jewish life all but wiped out by the Holocaust, but it is also a *reinvented* music: cut loose from an unbroken symbolic thread and free to adopt multiple – even conflicting – guises and incarnations (cf. Slobin, 2002). Paradoxically, a city like Berlin approaches a music like klezmer with the heaviest of baggage but also the cleanest of slates. Klezmer is a meaningful match with Berlin’s contemporary mobile place-ness – the city is a powerful magnet for personal reinvention precisely because it is itself such an ambiguous place:

Berlin remains impossible to grasp or keep in focus [...] a city of multiple temporalities and of diverse modalities: virtual and actual, divided and united, built and destroyed, repaired and rebuilt, living in a perpetual *mise en scène* of its own history, a history it both needs and fears, both invents and disowns. A city of superimpositions and erasures (Elsaesser (2009:37)).

It is this tension between historical weight and contemporary playfulness which I will argue is central to a narrative of klezmer music in Berlin, offering its own particular take on the familiar discourse of tradition and revival (Noyes, 2009).

Significant scholarship over the past few decades has been concerned with music’s role in the construction of personal or social identity (Stokes, 1994; Frith, 1996). It will be my aim here to take this further in order to explore how music illuminates and articulates a certain aspect of urban life (Krimm, 2007), but equally to understand how a city can play an active part in the creation and maintenance of a certain musical discourse.<sup>11</sup> I will seek to understand how Berlin’s particular klezmer musical make-up acts as one of the elements that transforms and structures the space of the city itself (Stokes, 1994:4), through the mediation of social relationships, the channelling of musical communities, the renegotiation of public space, and the development of music as a symbolic language that takes the ever-changing city as its discursive subject. My task is therefore to unpack the processes that characterise and make possible these particular transformations, but also to understand any symbiotic movement back the other way: what specifically does the ‘Berlin’ part bring to the narrative of ‘Berlin klezmer’? At the heart of this study is the analysis of points of intersection between music as a signifying practice (Hebdige, 1979) and the urban environment itself, the overlapping spaces where music somehow ‘speaks’ the city.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Lloyd Bradley’s brilliant survey of 100 years of black music in London (2013).

### **Engaging with the ‘German klezmer’ debate**

Several narratives have characterised the discussion of German klezmer since the 1980s: appropriation (Waligórska, 2013), reparation (Ottens & Rubin, 2004) and guilt (Gruber, 2002) amongst them.<sup>12</sup> The substance of some of these criticisms will be discussed at various points throughout. However, in many of my interviews I became aware of a strong sense of resentment on the part of my interlocutors that the music they have chosen to take time and effort to learn continues occasionally to be framed in terms of a binary and antagonistic German/Jewish paradigm. Whilst I am not simply discounting these debates in favour of an ahistorical celebratory narrative (Feld, 2000), it is not my aim to rehash old arguments. Therefore, although I intend to engage at some level with the troubled concept of ‘German klezmer’,<sup>13</sup> I am deliberately locating my contribution in terms of where things stand now rather than where they have come from – in what ways they have moved on from these criticisms to forge new creative paths and ask different cultural questions. The guilt/appropriation<sup>14</sup> dialectic that the music has faced over the past twenty years is not the substance of my dissertation. Recent work by Joel Rubin (2014) points to a less accusatory, more ethnomusicological approach, and it is within this paradigm that I situate my own work, adding to it the important context of the contemporary city itself. I therefore intend to dwell less on the ideological troubles of German klezmer, but rather on how its contemporary manifestations form part of a twenty-first century Berlin cultural politics of internationalism and bottom-up creativity. How, in essence, things have moved on from ‘revival’ to a continued *reinvention*.

### **Methodology and theoretical orientation**

My family and I lived in Berlin from September 2013 to September 2014, a year of fieldwork that combined diverse forms of participant observation (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002), critical cultural analysis and the more nebulous – but equally valuable – osmotic process of getting under the city’s skin. We spent the first six months in Friedrichshain, watching as the autumn colours of Volkspark turned gradually to winter snow, and six

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that these are by no means the *only* terms within which these writers approach German klezmer. Their wider contributions are discussed throughout.

<sup>13</sup> Occasionally also perceived by some of my interviewees as either strait-laced (Hampus Melin), opportunistic (Jossif Gofenberg) or exoticised (Jalda Rebling).

<sup>14</sup> On literary representations of Germans’ search for their “Jewish alterity”, see Schorsch (2003).

months near the canal in Kreuzberg, enjoying growing hours of sunshine whilst strolling through the increasingly bustling Turkish market. During my time in Berlin I attended concerts and festivals, participated in jam sessions and dance workshops, played gigs, went busking, and took lessons. In August 2014 I participated in a week-long instrumental workshop at Yiddish Summer Weimar. Me, my partner and our son<sup>15</sup> were regular audiences at Berlin's ongoing street music life, from the weekly free-for-all Mauerpark musical extravaganza to impromptu street-corner gigs at Boxhagener Platz flea-market, Warschauerstraße station, Alexanderplatz and many more. I also spent a large amount of time simply walking (de Certeau, 1984) around the city – not exactly a paid-up *flaneur*,<sup>16</sup> but often with no clear destination – in order to get to know better the daily rhythms (Lefebvre, 1996), sounds and spaces that make up today's Berlin. And of course, history is never far away in this city, so some of my time involved an exploration of the many monuments and commemorative spaces that mark out their own – in this case unique – urban topography and historiography (Ladd, 2000; Till, 2005). Although my attendance, participation and observation were all largely dependent upon what was going on at the time, I endeavoured to be systematic enough to cover a wide contextual spread. In this way, I aim to present a multi-layered and engaged picture of the music and its surrounding discourses, meanings and taken-for-granted assumptions.

I also conducted thirty face-to-face interviews, mostly with musicians but also journalists, record producers, event organisers, academics and audience members.<sup>17</sup> The majority of the conversations were in English, four in German, and one in an animated English-German-Yiddish composite.<sup>18</sup> About half of these contacts were made through musical situations, the rest solicited via email or telephone. Some I had met before, sharing festival or concert stages. In all cases, I found people ready and willing to talk extensively about what they did and its relationship to the wider cultural context. I was, in fact, surprised by just how much people wanted to talk – until one singer made the point that this is rarely a music where people accidentally 'find' themselves, and consequently they are likely to have a lot to say. Although I usually arrived with pre-

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<sup>15</sup> Although conducting fieldwork whilst living in Berlin with my family inevitably brought its own responsibilities, I also found it a very grounding force: having a daily life in the city gave me a solid feeling of existence, balancing the 'weightlessness' of being a researcher (cf. Tilton, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> cf., for example, Walter Benjamin in Berlin (1999) and Guy Debord in Paris (1994).

<sup>17</sup> My research is also informed by many more informal conversations, some of whom are listed in Appendix 2.

<sup>18</sup> This was with German-Jewish singer Tania Alon: Steglitz, Berlin, June 16th, 2014.



arranged questions, I frequently found it more interesting and fruitful not to try to lead the discussion, instead interjecting occasional routing points where it seemed helpful.<sup>19</sup> All my interviewees were extremely generous with their time, knowledge and opinions, and many have become good friends. Dates of birth and informal biographical details are given in Appendix 2.

It is important to stress that whilst I believe these interviews offer a wealth of rich data (and I have used them as such), I do not consider them comprehensive. The musicians who interest me – and who speak most directly to my argument – belong largely to what might be termed Yiddish music’s ‘transnational’ community (Rubin, 2014:34; Ankiewicz, 2011). These artists, by and large, have worked hard to ground their music in a wider sense of cultural practice. They are passionate about what they do, but they also understand their work within a historical context of tradition and traditional praxis, avoiding an over-reliance on the nebulous musical trope of ‘soul’. This means that I have not oriented my interview material towards the “klezmer as feeling” (Rubin, 2014:42) disciples of Israeli-Argentinian clarinettist Giora Feidman, a strong early influence on klezmer in Germany.<sup>20</sup> I feel that the self-conscious *ahistoricism* of their work does not offer so much to a study based in the material and symbolic existence of the city. In other words, it is as a case study in the functions of urban folk music<sup>21</sup> that I have structured my data gathering.<sup>22</sup>

In my theoretical orientation, I am mindful of Ruth Stone’s (2008:21) observation: “Alignment of theory with method and technique is critical to the process of inquiry.” Not all theory is suitable for all research, or indeed all researchers. My own academic origins are within cultural studies (although I have been a working musician for the past twenty years), and therefore the work of French thinkers such as Roland Barthes (1977, 1988, 1982) and Claude Levi-Strauss (1968) are an important additional background to my arguments, as well as the British cultural studies school of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Another pointed out that many of my interlocutors had been interviewed at some stage before and therefore were in some senses accustomed to giving opinions on this music. Avoiding asking anyone to simply repeat what they had already told previous researchers was another reason for letting them largely determine the flow of conversation.

<sup>20</sup> Feidman’s influence is, however, examined in Chapter 4. See Rubin (2015a) for a detailed analysis of Feidman’s music, philosophy and legacy. Also Gruber (2002), Birnbaum (2009).

<sup>21</sup> cf. Bohlman (1988:53): “folk music requires a vital social basis for its continued practice”.

<sup>22</sup> Other omissions are addressed towards the end of this chapter.

<sup>23</sup> Including, but not limited to, Raymond Williams (1977), Dick Hebdige (1979) and Stuart Hall (1980, 1988).

In that this dissertation is a single-sited study of a single genre, it can be clearly understood as a piece of ethnomusicological research. However, both the site and the genre are subject to multiple interpretations and offer multiple routes and connections. What follows, therefore, differs from ethnomusicological studies based within ethnically- or geographically-bounded communities<sup>24</sup> in that it deals instead with the heterogeneous discourses and shifting multi-level networks of the contemporary internationalised city (Reyes Schramm, 1982; Stock, 2008). The field in my case offers different entry points and degrees/processes of affiliation for its participants, or even for the same participant at different points in time.<sup>25</sup> This is also true of my own researcher subject position. In relation to my own knowledge and experience, this field is neither fully foreign nor completely known: it is an extension of my own musical practice,<sup>26</sup> but in a different city and set of discourses.<sup>27</sup>

For these reasons, my work and the analysis of data is grounded liberally across a range of theories, chiefly musicology, cultural studies and particularly urban studies. In parts of my analysis I draw also on semiotic theory,<sup>28</sup> but as one in a range of techniques to get behind taken-for-granted norms and assumptions. Likewise, the musical examples that appear throughout the thesis – both as transcriptions and textual descriptions – are used in different ways in order to explore different ideas. Sometimes they form the basis for specific analysis (musicological or structural), at other times they are understood as part of a performance event and it is therefore their place within a larger developing narrative that is paramount.<sup>29</sup> My transcription strategy can also be understood within this framework. Most transcriptions are prescriptive, the purpose being to visualise and better understand particular structural or meaningful elements referred to in the text, rather than to facilitate detailed analysis of a specific performance. An exception is the more descriptive accordion transcriptions of Chapter 5, included in order to break down specific aspects of the approaches of two musicians discussed at length in the chapter.

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<sup>24</sup> Good examples would be Anthony Seeger's classic work with the Suyá of Brazil (1987), or Feld's work on Kaluli music and social identity (1988, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> "identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (Hall, 1996:4).

<sup>26</sup> As, amongst other things, a long-time klezmer musician, both within traditional repertoire (with Gregori Schechter in London) and through the work of my own (klezmer-influenced though far from 'traditional') band Moische's Bagel.

<sup>27</sup> Although these are not completely 'unknown' either: Berlin is a large European city and I grew up in another large European city (London).

<sup>28</sup> Drawing on the 1916 writings of Ferdinand de Saussure (1992), semiotics in music particularly informs the work of Nattiez (1990) and Turino (1999, 2012) (following the work of C.S. Peirce (1955)).

<sup>29</sup> cf. Nettle (2005, chapters 7 & 8).

I have also incorporated significant amounts of my own fieldnotes into the text. These are frequently impressionistic and episodic, usually subjective and occasionally journalistic. I do not make any claims for objectivity or critical distance on the part of these notes. In fact, the reverse: my own reactions and emotions are included as a form of unmediated data/auto-ethnography. This is not reflexivity for the sake of it, but in order to locate my own thoughts and feelings (about music that I, too, love) within the overall argument.<sup>30</sup> This freely symbolic interpretation of fieldnotes shows the influence of cultural studies (e.g. Barthes, 2000), and my aim is for a balance of the evocative and the critical. In other words, I am looking less for patterned behaviour and ethnographic data (although this is important) and more for the unexpected sparks and critical connections that musical events ignite. These fieldnotes were mostly written directly after the event that they describe, and so I also feel that they have value as an immediate response to the stimulus of a musical event. Whilst they are embedded in analysis (or occasionally form part of it), their substantial unedited inclusion I hope validates their contribution as “thick description” (Geertz, 1973:10):

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of ‘construct a reading of’) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior (*ibid.*).

It is also necessary to address what this study does *not* cover. My concern is contemporary practice in a particular European city, my area of study the music, its surrounding spaces, and the thoughts of the musicians who occupy them. As a result, although history forms an essential underpinning narrative, I am in no sense attempting to offer a ‘history’. I am also aware that certain issues other researchers might make more central, particularly those of gender and economics, are not addressed here. This is not to say that I consider these issues peripheral. It is rather to acknowledge the necessity of theoretical limits, in order to produce something that goes beyond simply reproducing existing material.

Finally, it is important to note the difficulty of defining ‘klezmer’ in the first place (Rubin, 2001:21-5). This discussion is taken up fully in Appendix 1, but it is essential to

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<sup>30</sup> cf. Barz (2008:209): “Fieldnotes often act as ongoing and changeable scripts for the mediation between experience and interpretation/analyses”. Also Kisliuk (2008:183): “When we begin to participate in music and dance our very being merges with the “field” through our bodies and voices, and another Self–Other boundary is dissolved.” See also Beaudry (2008).

note that I am nowhere aiming to arrive at a precise definition of the term. Again, I have not avoided the problems of definition because I do not believe them important. My approach in this case is functional rather than analytical. In a deliberately broad sweep of musicians and musical discourse, my field of analysis takes in music that is clearly some way from traditional klezmer, but is played by people who associate themselves directly with the klezmer scene in Berlin.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, this also includes Yiddish song,<sup>32</sup> and to this end I frequently refer to “klezmer and Yiddish music”<sup>33</sup> in order to reinforce this contemporary connection.<sup>34</sup> Unless specified otherwise, klezmer and Yiddish song, within the context of contemporary Berlin, are often treated in my analysis as one culturally meaningful ‘unit’.<sup>35</sup> My study also includes musicians who include klezmer as one of several musics they play<sup>36</sup> – in a sense, I have taken my cue from these musicians themselves. Whilst it would present an intriguing area of research to unpack these definitions a little more, that is not my goal here.

### **This study in context**

The majority of scholarship that informs my study is addressed directly throughout the body of the thesis itself. This section is therefore designed to situate my work within the wider field of which it forms a part, in order to highlight the original contribution it makes to both klezmer scholarship and urban ethnomusicology. Rather than a comprehensive literature review, I frame my own work within a set of intersecting influences. The first scholar to undertake detailed research on klezmer was the Ukrainian-born Moshe Beregovski (1892-1961), whose wax cylinder field recordings –

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<sup>31</sup> This does not include several ‘party’ bands who include klezmer alongside (usually) ska, punk, gypsy (e.g. Skazka Orchestra) – a mix bassist Carsten Wegener describes as a “cooking recipe” (personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin, May 2nd, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Despite springing from the same cultural milieu, klezmer and Yiddish song are not natural historical bedfellows. Klezmer is instrumental music, with its origins largely in ritual function (see Appendix 1). Yiddish song, on the other hand, embraces themes of family, work, love, childhood, politics, war and more (Beregovski, 2000), and historically was often sung without instrumental accompaniment (Ruth Rubin, 2000). However, the presence of talented Yiddish singers (e.g. Michael Alpert, Adrienne Cooper, Lorin Sklamberg) at the forefront of the klezmer revival, alongside klezmer’s move to concert and club stage, has frequently brought the two into shared compositional and performance space, also allowing performers to address extramusical issues (Wood, 2007b). Notwithstanding formal and social differences, this nowadays means frequent overlaps – outside of traditional wedding music – in the social and cultural space they occupy. For these reasons, I have included Yiddish song (which also now largely exists as ‘performance’ music) in my field of analysis throughout. See Appendix 1; also Slobin (2002:8) for an alternative articulation of this dilemma.

<sup>33</sup> The term “Yiddish music” (including klezmer) has been advocated by Alan Bern (1988) and Michael Alpert (2015), among others.

<sup>34</sup> Where the thesis makes reference to “klezmer” (without the “Yiddish music”), this is a stylistic, rather than formal decision.

<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding formal differences, of course. i.e. I do not at any point refer to a “klezmer song”.

<sup>36</sup> Despite the breadth of their musical interests, all the musicians discussed have taken time to research and learn about what they do, through personal investigation and also workshops such as Yiddish Summer Weimar (see Chapter 4). Almost all of them are now teachers at similar workshops.

made in Ukraine between 1929 and 1947 for Kiev's Archives for Jewish Folk Music<sup>37</sup> – resulted in transcriptions of 271 instrumental pieces and “our chief corpus of accurately notated songs in Yiddish from oral tradition” (Slobin, 2000:2). Although the majority of Beregovski's material is focused on songs, their social function and musical classification (1934, 1962), he also published shorter essays on the social history of klezmer music (1937), Ukrainian-Jewish musical connections (1935) and the “semantic characteristics” of the altered dorian scale (1946) – all more recently translated and made more widely available by Slobin (Beregovksi, 2000; 2001<sup>38</sup>). Beregovski also saw a newly creative role for his research as part of the collective enterprise of “our new Soviet folk art” (Beregovski, 2000:531) and although it is difficult – given the 1930s Stalinist environment – to satisfactorily contextualise these polemics (Slobin, 1986), they remain an important, and for its time radical, counter to nineteenth-century Tolstoy-esque folk-pastoral idealism.<sup>39</sup> As late as 1937 Beregovski was advocating filling the marked gap in ethnomusicological knowledge – “we know scarcely anything!”, (Beregovski, 2000:530) – and his corpus of notated klezmer melodies (2001) now forms a fundamental part of the canon. But what the Holocaust missed, Stalin did not. Imprisoned until 1955, he died in 1961, much of his work still unpublished.<sup>40</sup> Although more a background to than direct influence upon my own, Beregovski's research – as well as the resources of his extensive transcriptions – inevitably inform any project concerned with klezmer and Yiddish music.

More recently, several American scholars have added significant contributions to the field. Building on long-standing relationships with older klezmer musicians<sup>41</sup> and his extensive experience as a leading contemporary practitioner, Joel Rubin's 2001 PhD thesis addresses the specific context of 1920s America through the work of perhaps the two best-known klezmer musicians of the time, clarinetists Dave Tarras (1897-1989) and Naftule Brandwein (1889-1963). Through extensive interviews and musical analysis, Rubin explores the possibilities of defining a distinct musical-structural aesthetic, with detailed reference to motivic development, compositional procedure and

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<sup>37</sup> See Sholokhova (2010).

<sup>38</sup> This represents part of an ongoing project to disseminate material remaining unpublished during Beregovski's lifetime. See Slobin *et al* (2001:xvii-xviii).

<sup>39</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>40</sup> See Sholokhova (sic) (2001).

<sup>41</sup> For example, clarinetists Sid Beckerman (ca.1919-2007), Max Epstein (1912-2000), amongst many others. See Rubin (2001:17).

playing style. He also offers a valuable synthesis of the changing social context and cultural attitudes that surrounded klezmer in its transition from the old world of Eastern Europe to the new shores of America. In a more recent essay (Rubin, 2009), this influence is placed in the context of 21st century klezmer playing, through interviews with contemporary American musicians. Rubin also covers the contemporary German klezmer environment, through the influence of clarinettist Giora Feidman (2015) and in the parallel musical context of the “Jewish Fringe” (2014). His work provides an important critical startpoint for my own and will appear throughout what follows. What I hope to add is the particular interactive processes of the city and its music – how Berlin’s musical spaces and daily cultural existence directly impact upon klezmer and Yiddish music, and vice versa.

Mark Slobin’s *Fiddler on the Move* (2000) looks at klezmer music in its contemporary cultural environment. Building on his previous theorising of the interlocking and overlapping processes of “micromusics” (1993), Slobin explores late 1990s American klezmer through four analytical filters: heritage, urge, community and a detailed comparison of different stylistic approaches. As a fluid intersection of complex – but surprisingly compatible – subject positions, musical research and performance become a vehicle for dialogues around history, tradition, style, nation and cultural identity. Slobin’s edited volume *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots* (2002) is a collection of essays that looks at the American field firstly from a historical (“roots”) perspective, followed by a selection of the music’s revival “offshoots”. Alongside short pieces on *klezmer-loshn* argot (Rothstein), early Jewish music unions (Loeffler) and the life of drummer Ben Bazylar (Alpert), Hankus Netsky (2002b) provides an important counterpart to the better-known New York story, whilst also being a valuable personal case study of a young musician's efforts and strategies to re-evaluate klezmer music (as worthy of research and revival) in the eyes of a jaded older generation. Elsewhere, Netsky (2008a) illustrates how despite the incorporation of American influence, Philadelphia's characteristic Russian *sher* dance retained its significance for the city's immigrant population, highlighting a local articulation of a cross-cultural musicological process. In a similar but more detailed way, Walter Zev Feldman (2002, updated from 1994) traces the evolution and development of a musical style from Eastern European origins to American re-creation, a transition largely under the aegis of the influential

Dave Tarras and his desire to ‘Bessarabianise’ klezmer repertoire. Feldman argues that where the Bessarabian origins of the “transitional” *bulgar* represented a dangerous level of secularity and freedom in the ‘old’ world, it was precisely these same associations that gave the genre relevance and sophistication once it crossed the Atlantic. This old/new world dialectic will be central to my project, highlighting the tension between Berlin klezmer's idealised symbolism and its recontextualised modernity.

The second half of *American Klezmer* is dominated by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's influential “Sounds of Sensibility” (2002), in which she argues that it is the experience of rupture and disjuncture as much as continuity and connection that frames the American klezmer revival.<sup>42</sup> This is followed by several pieces discussing the work of revival-era musicians, through overlapping themes of practice (Sapoznik, London), identity (Jacobson) and Yiddishist politics (Svigals). These essays illuminate different paradigms, but they are also highly specific to a North American context. European Jewish culture was, of course, subject to a more lasting and tragic historical rupture, and has consequently offered up a very different version of revival. This is addressed to a certain extent by the wide-ranging and more populist compass of Yale Strom's *The Book of Klezmer* (2002), in which Strom synthesises his role as musician and academic to historically, musically and folklorically frame the day-to-day klezmer musician and their social function across differing temporalities and geographies.<sup>43</sup>

Structurally and thematically, Strom stresses links and continuities. To track threads of consistency spanning centuries and migrations is an alluring aim, but I will go on to question the notion of continuity as it applies to klezmer in Berlin. Two recent articles focusing on the European context question cultural readings of continuity in very different ways. Saxonberg and Waligórska's 2006 analysis of the performance and discourse of klezmer in Krakow is a thoughtful counter to the criticism levelled at the “virtual” (Gruber, 2002) Jewish tourist industry of the last few decades. However, it is undermined somewhat by the quasi-mystical framing of the regeneration of Krakow's Jewish quarter Kazimierz, nicely summed up by the Cracow Klezmer Band's Jaroslaw Bester: “What we play is the direct picture of the inner soul [...] this combination of

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>43</sup> Strom is a non-academic. However, I feel that his extensive fieldwork and musical documentation validate his inclusion as a source within this study.

crying, longing for something” (Saxonberg and Waligórska, 2006:441). To deconstruct this discourse is to reveal some of the more ideologically slippery elements of the Polish klezmer scene: the less comfortable implications of playing Jewish music in a city almost devoid of Jews and a coach ride away from Auschwitz, and a spiritual-musical gloss on a centuries-old image of the lamenting Jew.<sup>44</sup>

An apolitical, naturalised historical continuity at the expense of more critical social comment is directly critiqued by Ottens and Rubin in their 2004 discussion of “The German Klezmer Movement as a Racial Discourse”. Seeking to explore the meanings (for Germans) of the proliferation of klezmer music in the country, Ottens and Rubin reference long-standing histories of antisemitism as seen in pamphlets, language and taken-for-granted meanings, and through close analysis present more recent philosemitism in this same light, showing how contemporary imagery and iconography in fact retains significant continuities with pre-war Nazi propaganda. This is an important problematising of both the specific and the general in the performance of klezmer in Germany and Eastern Europe. For the writers, the klezmer musician in Germany has come to be culturally endowed with a healing power both positive and “residual” (40),<sup>45</sup> a ‘Fiddler on the Roof’ of a formerly divided and hateful house bringing apparent redemption through the humanity and plaintiveness of instrumental song. This sophisticated deconstruction begins to ruffle the ideological surface of the Polish musicians above. However, Ottens and Rubin also risk falling into their own essentialising trap: “[Germans] ignore the fact that the continuous musical reinterpretation of the Jews is a reflection of the reinterpretation of the Torah” (42) – undoubtedly true for some Jewish music, but risky to apply to all.

In an update to his 2003 book, Aaron Eckstaedt discusses “Yiddish Folk Music as a Marker of Identity in Post-War Germany” (2010), arguing that it has now entered a paradigm of world music. What is interesting in this essay is the final direction in which it points, where at the turn of the millennium “Klezmer became a Jewish thing again” (45). Whilst Eckstaedt does not explore this idea in any great depth, it indicates a renewed trajectory for my project. In exploring the ongoing dialogue between history, memory and modernity in Jewish folk music, Abigail Wood (2013, chapter 4) addresses

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Sander Gilman (2013) on the Jewish voice (13) and the Jewish “essence” (197).

<sup>45</sup> cf. Radano and Bohlman (2004).



some of this ambiguity through the perceptions of visiting American musicians. What she finds initially is a Germany still in the grip of certain cultural tropes: Jews as Other, American Jews as ‘authentic’, and yet a paradoxical closeness due to the similarity between Yiddish and German. The second part of this chapter analyses in detail Michael Alpert’s “Sing, my fiddle”,<sup>46</sup> in which Wood finds a bitter response to initial idealism, a text that remains “accusatory” (125) – this time to today’s Germans. Nevertheless, Wood argues that with increased dialogue between North America and Europe, “binary constructions of identity and authenticity” (131) are beginning to be challenged, and Central and Eastern Europe, previously the site of “an unbroachable cultural rift” (Wood, 2004:190) is now transforming into “a site of Yiddish authenticity” (Wood, 2013:132). It is this continuing transformation which is explored in my work, and also how the increasing presence of an international community of Jewish klezmer musicians in Berlin both addresses and problematises this rift.

Magdalena Waligórska’s 2013 monograph is a detailed ethnography of musicians and cultural actors in Poland and Germany. Through extensive interviews, she unpacks the motivations and cultural meanings of the performance of klezmer for non-Jews and occasionally Jews, outlining a narrative that moves between appropriation and a more positive cultural empathy.<sup>47</sup> Waligórska’s extensive ethnography covers cultural exchange, mediation (and “standing in”<sup>48</sup>), perceptions of ethnic identity and memory, but significantly missing is any specifically musicological discussion or analysis. This makes her study more anthropological than ethnomusicological, and also denies it a certain aspect of cultural materiality. It offers a clear point of departure for my own study, in that I am examining the tangible musical results – in terms of practice, spaces and musical analysis.<sup>49</sup>

From the contemporary meanings of klezmer and its specifically German articulation, I now want to turn to the complementary part of my study: the city. From Alan Merriam (1964) to Tim Rice (1987), an integrated conception of music-place-culture is one of the ways ethnomusicology has historically subverted classical Western musicology’s

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<sup>46</sup> Brave Old World, *Beyond the Pale*, Pinorrek Records CD 5013. Wood also analyses Josh Waletzky’s “Ikh heyb mayn fus” (I lift my foot).

<sup>47</sup> At times, perhaps, a little over-positive. See Loeffler (2014).

<sup>48</sup> Non-Jews for Jews (chapter 6).

<sup>49</sup> Aided by the fact of my own participation in many of these spaces and events, another point of difference from Waligórska.

privileging of textual analysis.<sup>50</sup> Rooted in classic anthropological models (Malinowski, 1961; Turner, 1964), ethnomusicological place has frequently signified difference: culturally, socially – often visually – foreign and constituting a field to which a researcher must physically travel for a necessary period of immersion. Such seminal studies (Seeger and the Suyá, 1987; Feld and the Kaluli, 1990; Blacking and the Venda, 1967) have helped radically redefine the meanings and practices of musical research and mounted credible challenges to Western musicological hegemony. Notions of music and place, however, are problematised by the increase in movement of people from place to place (and regularly *between* places) (Dueck, 2011) and by the continual dissolution and reformation of ideas of place themselves in the digital age (Wood, 2008a). These changes in turn foreground the potential for emergent ethnomusicological interest in the musical practice of urban (Western) environments, cities being the principle hubs and agents of this newer fluidity. This is particularly important in the study of contemporary klezmer music anywhere in the world, which is almost exclusively an urban practice.<sup>51</sup>

Cities create and subsequently blur the lines between professional and amateur musical contexts (Finnegan, 1989), and are a field where musical participation is often likely to be at one and the same time more anonymous, more occasional, more varied and more formal (Stock, 2008:201). As Adelaida Reyes Schramm suggests, in an urban environment “the study object becomes more a construct than a given” (1982:1) – particularly salient in the multiple overlapping cultural territories and unpredictable points of intersection of world music in Berlin. Three examples of how musical practice has been addressed within the specific context of a UK city can be found in the work of Stephen Cottrell in London (2004), Sara Cohen in Liverpool (1991, 1995, 2012) and Ruth Finnegan in Milton Keynes (1989). Cottrell presents a broad diachronic survey of attitudes and working practices across the professional classical music community in London, grounded in the social anthropology characteristic of the ‘out-in-the-field’ texts above. However, there is little specific about London itself – Cottrell himself notes that the study could also be undertaken in New York or Berlin (2004:103). In her wide-sweeping early 1980s survey of the amateur music-making activities of Milton Keynes,

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<sup>50</sup> Challenged more recently from within by Taruskin (1995), McClary (1991) and others.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix 1.

Ruth Finnegan reveals a “varied and structured interplay of differing and interacting worlds” (1989:7), and her concentration on “process rather than products” (8) translates well to practices of kinship, socialisation and self-actualisation. Applied back to my field, a conception of interacting worlds is a productive place to start, in that many of the participants themselves populate different and intersecting musical environments.

Cohen begins her study of rock culture in Liverpool with an evocative look at Liverpoolian self-perception (1991:9-10). Such a world view might interestingly contextualise what follows (much like an urban version of Feld or Blacking). However, Cohen only uses this material as background, and in fact goes on to make the point that the situation for Liverpool rock bands was not “particularly unusual” (19). She relates much more directly to some of the themes of this dissertation in several later essays. In particular, the relationship between music, the city of Liverpool and memory (both personal and cultural) are powerfully conveyed in her discussion of 88 year-old Jack Levy (Cohen, 1995), who opens up for Cohen “a world of music through which places are produced and reproduced” (Cohen, 1995:435). The very human side of musical interaction is balanced by a close analysis of the means by which music produces communities and social relations (in this case, those of pre- and post-war Liverpoolian Jews). Through Jack’s own testimony, Cohen not only shows the role of music in the production of place, but also how this process of production remains contested and dynamic. More recently (2012), Cohen has worked with Liverpool-based rock and hip-hop musicians in the creation of musical maps of the city, combining biography, social relations and cultural meanings in a way that resonates strongly with my own approach. Exploring the “micro-topographies” of music-making, Cohen and her musician interviewees show how material city spaces are conceptualised by these musicians, but also directly experienced: “Material urban places and venues are thus sites of musical memory, mythology and imagination, as well as of music-making and social interaction” (Cohen, 2012:146). A similarly potent mixture of mythology and interaction will prove important in any discussion of present-day Jewish musical identity in Berlin.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Arguably, this sort of personal cartography is especially meaningful in Berlin, a city which was from 1946 until 1989 subject to a particularly brutal version of mapped segregation (Taylor, 2006).

In his exploration of *mangue bit* in Brazil, Philip Galinsky (2002) looks at how the specifically regional identity of the city of Recife in Northern Brazil was used by protagonists of this avowedly internationalist music to sidestep hegemonic Brazilian signifiers of *bossa nova* and *samba* and connect instead to a wider global musical process. By contrast, Raul Romero (2002) attributes the popularity of *huayno* in Lima to the vast increase in urban immigration in the latter part of the twentieth century, resulting in “the breaking down of local singularities, in favour of a supra-regional identification process” (222). My analysis will help illuminate the relative proportions of this local/global dialectic in terms of Berlin and klezmer music.

Alex Perullo (2011) paints an impressively broad picture of “music as both a work and a commodity” (xi) in Dar es Salaam. Conversely, Lila Ellen Gray (2013) evocatively documents amateur fado in Lisbon, powerfully linking the music with its surrounding social and cultural environment, including the “promiscuous indexicality” (108) of the stories that fado tells of its city. Gray’s linking of the urban, the experiential and the musical is compellingly embedded in the text. The difference with my study, however, is that fado is unquestionably both *from* and *of* the city of Lisbon, whereas klezmer and Yiddish music, as a significant cultural force, is a relative newcomer to Berlin, and its accompanying musical community is notable most of all for its internationalism and wide spread of affiliation.

Stepping back from ethnomusicological scholarship, the city itself offers creative ideas of interactivity, subversion and everyday improvisation. Amin and Thrift (2002) see the city as a site for engineered encounters and passions, a “meshwork” that relies on fluidity and flow as much as on planning and order (78). What marks out this “mechanosphere” is not a grand structural principle, but the everyday, the improvisatory: “Fine grain is still the chief grain of the city” (87). I will go on to explore the possibility that the embedded ‘everydayness’ of music in Berlin acts as a necessary counterpart to the weight of the city’s grand historical narrative. If music is arguably one of the means of articulating daily life (DeNora, 2000), it also provides a context and means of escape within the city, spaces of fantasy, metaphor and reversal that allow subjects to “unfold in unexpected ways” (Amin & Thrift, 2002:119). The interaction of klezmer music, both physically and symbolically, with these spaces of the imagination is an important link with Berlin’s twentieth century musical history – from

the political subversion and performance excess of Weimar cabaret (Jelavich, 1996), through David Bowie's Kreuzberg escape and subsequent self-renewal (Seabrook, 2008), to the dedicated hedonism of 21st century techno (Rapp, 2012).

Marxist Henri Lefebvre's concept of rhythmanalysis (1996) offers an intriguing urban paradigm. Overlooking central Paris from his window several floors up, Lefebvre notes the different rhythmic interplay of city life: the footsteps, traffic, lights and city sounds that move at varying speeds through the same space (223). Although, like a true French philosopher, Lefebvre is stylishly quixotic about exactly how these rhythms might be grasped or utilised, his conceptualising of the process nevertheless has strong perceptual echoes of the inside/outside journeys of Walter Benjamin and fellow *flaneurs* (219).<sup>53</sup> For twentieth century Modernists like Benjamin (1999) (and nineteenth century pre-Modernists like Dickens<sup>54</sup>), the city was best understood – and best theorised – by walking it. At ground level the city is interactive, contemplative, accidental, organic, unstructured and fractal. Seen and lived in encounters and moments, rather than conceived and ordered from above, city life becomes creative and open-ended (Benjamin, 1999:598).

We can see something of this in Ciaran Carson's (1997) *Ulysses*-esque journey through various spaces and places of music-making in Belfast, Dublin, Cork and elsewhere. An accidental ethnographer, Carson's anecdotal, free and folkloric style offers neither empirical documentation nor scholarly ethnography, but through the fry-ups, roll-ups and pints of Guinness that mark time and place in the narrative, music is nevertheless absolutely emplaced in various bars, towns, villages and memories – part of a larger story of styles, players, methods of attack and ornamentation (150). Something of the same fluidity and vitality can be seen in the work of Bernard Lortat-Jacob (1994) and even Tim Rice (1994), and the subjectivity and personality that it imparts brings something new to scholarly attempts to capture the determinedly non-linguistic musical effects of feeling, memory and spontaneous connection.

For Michel de Certeau the act of walking (1984) in an ever-changing and unpredictable urban textual present offers a symbolic and physical re-reading of “a manifold story that

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<sup>53</sup> Discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>54</sup> See Ackroyd (2000:451-2).

has neither author nor spectator” (93). Most useful here is the distinction between *strategies*, the functionalist organisational discourse that constructs space “on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties” (94) and *tactics*. Where strategy seeks to exclude or incorporate difference and deviance, tactics represent a “theory of everyday practices, of lived space”, a set of diachronic and implicitly oppositional responses that “far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy” (96). Taking this on, one might position Berlin’s narrative of history and memory as a top-down strategy, a particular way of telling the ‘big story’, whereas the on-the-ground mixing of styles, traditions, personnel, language and representation uncovered in everyday musical life represents a series of tactics. These latter are characterised by practice over theory, non-linear, phatic and playful discourse, appropriation and acting-out of space and language: “shadows and ambiguities” that do not conform to the “proper meaning” of the city, but are not foreign to them either (100).

For de Certeau, histories themselves can only hold so much: “The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning” (107). Indeed, such “sieve-order” (*ibid.*) has been a part of Berlin's story at least since the 1920s. Rainer Metzger (2007) shows how interwar Berlin was in many ways responsible for the invention of the modern city itself, attaining for Berlin a global centrality and sense of self that it would forever seek to regain, while Janet Ward (2001) examines the spectacle of modernity as a “celebration of surface culture” (10). The historical legacy of Berlin cabaret is chronicled extensively by Jelavich (1996). Most relevant is cabaret’s consistent and ruthless subversion of norms: most famously those of gender and sexual mores (103), but also political satire (119) as well as a persistent lampooning of taste and fashion. This carnivalesque reversal and topsy-turvy was matched by a straight-talking, almost coarse, tone of voice which lent cabaret a recognisably Berlin accent, despite the undoubted internationalism of its scene (stylishly documented by Christopher Isherwood<sup>55</sup> and subsequently Kander and Ebb<sup>56</sup>). Although

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<sup>55</sup> See Isherwood's Berlin novels *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Mr Norris Changes Trains*.

<sup>56</sup> Kander & Ebb's musical *Cabaret* was based on John Van Druten's 1951 play *I Am a Camera*, which in turn was based on Isherwood's pre-war Berlin chronicles (Jackson, 1977:71).

the excesses of Weimar cabaret gave way to a very different sort of extremism,<sup>57</sup> the subversive and political dimension of musical performance in the city will remain central to my discussion.

Berlin's history, therefore, marks it as a city which performs subversion and difference. Within this performativity (Butler, 1990) I hope to show how music is used as both negotiating device and site of cultural struggle (Hall, 1998) – a material, aural and symbolic agent in Berlin's ongoing dialogue with its past and present. Two paradigms emerge: the dialectic between a monumental historical perspective and an everyday cultural vernacular, and – echoing the Modernist legacy – the concept of Berlin as a city constantly in flux (Schneider, 2014; Maclean, 2014). Related here is an analysis of the city's recent history in terms of boundaries and their transgression, seen especially in the work of Janet Ward (2011a), Karen E. Till (2005, 2010), and Marc Silberman (2012, with Ward & Till). Music as a border marker and also the means by which these borders are crossed or redrawn (Stokes, 1994:20) is a fundamental part of any klezmer debate, a debate taken up fully in chapter 2. In Berlin this is well contextualised, of course, by the history of the most glaring symbol (and continued absent-presence) of the city's partitioned history (Taylor, 2006; Silberman, 2011).

Brian Ladd (2000) looks at how Berlin's memorial sites interact with the urban environment – whether these sites attire the city in “sackcloth and ashes” or in fact add to its allure: “the aura of unresolved history” which “gives it its intellectual charge” (all 20). Ladd probes this tension between a historical paradigm of division and future optimistic togetherness, a past-present-future dialogue at play in Berlin's ever-changing and politically-charged cityscape: “The sandy soil of the German capital conceals the traces of a history so fiercely contested that no site – however vacant – is safe from controversy” (1997:234). Klezmer music's own negotiated and ambiguous position as one of the sites of Berlin's everyday/historical dialectic (Stangl, 2000:249) is something that will characterise my discussion of its perceived meanings. As an easily accessed symbol of “Jewishness” (Gilman, 2006), klezmer highlights a semiotic slippage whereby a Jewish presence can be made to stand as both metonym for a *multikulti*<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> It is important to note at this point that in a project such as this the scar of the Holocaust is unavoidable, but it is my aim to treat it as an important historical context rather than a foreground effecting device.

<sup>58</sup> Media-friendly German for “multiculturalism”, the term oscillates between a genuine plea for mutual understanding and an ironic signifier of the distance still to travel (cf. Meng, 2011:224).

society and ambiguous metaphor for inclusion, tolerance and perhaps forgiveness (Waligórska, 2013).

Berlin as a constantly evolving symbolic context (Cochrane and Passmore, 2001) is therefore crucial and positions this particular city as a singular subject for an urban ethnomusicology of this type. On the dynamics of recent Jewish life and identity in the city, Karin Weiss (2004) analyses the problems that continue to face Russian Jewish immigrants to the city over the last few decades, while Cohn (1994) frames the unique cultural and social role that German Jews have played since the Second World War.<sup>59</sup> Multiple expressions of contemporary Jewishness in the city are taken on by Michael Meng in the last chapter of his book exploring the rediscovery, reconstruction and reconstituted meanings of Jewish sites in Germany and Poland (2011). Meng recognises that although Jewish memorial tours present a sense of Jewishness as past and Other, the critique that they efface 'real' Judaism "does exactly what [it] critiques by assuming a reified, singular understanding of Jewishness" (225). This probing of Jewishness and 'Jewish space' in the context of contemporary Berlin is central to my analysis. In discussing the notion of "redemptive cosmopolitanism" (251). Meng uses the example of Daniel Liebeskind's Jewish Museum as narrating a "yardstick of national recovery that one can measure through monuments, speeches, memorials, and the building of new synagogues" (250).

Or even the performance of klezmer music (Radano & Bohlman, 2004:41). The first writer to look extensively at Europe's "virtual" Jewish spaces was traveller and scholar Ruth Ellen Gruber, whose 2002 book devotes a chapter to klezmer music in Germany. Gruber analyses the hugely popular music of clarinettist Giora Feidman, couched in non-sectarian humanist spirituality and expressed through a comfortably dominant code of Jewish emotion and 'depth' (212). Against this Gruber cites the efforts of American musicians such as Alan Bern and Yiddishist Michael Wex to ensure that klezmer and Yiddish culture be understood as existential and temporally rooted: "a living phenomenon that [...] occasionally has to eat or burp or get into a fight" (Wex in Gruber, 2002:231).<sup>60</sup> Gruber's work is important and makes some long overdue points. It is also temporally specific, and risks falling victim to its own critique of essentialising

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<sup>59</sup> Discussed in Chapter 6. See also Peck, Ash & Lemke (1997).

<sup>60</sup> These two perspectives are discussed at length in Chapter 4.



Jewishness as a concept to which one is either faithful or unfaithful. In her follow-up 2009 article, Gruber acknowledges that whilst it may lack historical fidelity, the ‘Jewish tourism’ that surrounds Krakow nevertheless presents a new sort of “real imaginary” and “new authenticity” (492-3). And of klezmer in Germany nowadays, she concedes: “The attraction is deep and springs from many sources, partly, of course, but only partly (and less so as time moves on), from an underlying guilty legacy” (503). In a similar vein, Larry Ray writes of the possibility of “complex and polyvalent” klezmer performances opening up space for “a new aesthetics of memory” (2010:2), or as ethnographer Jeffrey Peck (2006) suggests, the question of being a Jew living in Germany has now moved from “why” to “how”. Perhaps most interestingly of all, Gruber quotes long-term *immigré* Alan Bern’s contention that “there is no such thing as culture per se, but rather cultural interactions” (2009:504), a point of departure that may prove ideal for an on-the-ground study of klezmer in Berlin.

This review locates several overlapping contexts for my work: klezmer musical practice, ambiguous meanings of Jewishness, and the city itself. The original contribution to the field of klezmer study I make is therefore an urban ethnomusicological one, the central question being: in what ways do the city of Berlin and its meanings overlap with klezmer and Yiddish music, and what are the musical effects? How might rooting the music in its contemporary urban environment probe and question the interactions, practices and artistic outcomes of folk music in the city?

### **Structure**

In seeking to answer the questions raised above, I have organised my study along the following lines: musical networks; spaces and places of music; the city in the music; transmission and education; instrumental practice; music and Jewish identity. Each chapter sets out the theoretical ground upon which it is based and then goes on to develop this in a series of case studies, frequently illustrated and expanded through my own fieldnotes and pertinent musical examples. In chapter one I lay out the criss-crossing networks of musicians that structure the different ways in which klezmer and Yiddish music is approached in the city. In order to explore these I have divided up the musicians with whom I spoke into several different categories, taking Mark Slobin’s theory of micromusics (1993) as a creative starting-point for this ‘stateless’ music. The

second chapter analyses in detail the particular spaces and places within which klezmer and Yiddish musical practice operates within the city. Using a range of cultural theory approaches, I unpack the different ways that the music both produces and is produced by the space that surrounds it, frequently exploiting the gaps between official and ‘unofficial’ public space. This chapter also foregrounds Berlin’s bricolage approach to cultural production, a central theme of my thesis.

Chapter three analyses in detail the ways that the city of Berlin is made manifest in the music itself – how the city is interpellated (Althusser, 1992) sonically and textually in the work of several different artists. Particularly useful here is Adam Krims’ (2007) theoretical concept of the *urban ethos*, which concerns the range of possible urban representations produced within culture at any given point. Chapter four explores musical transmission and education, underpinned by the complex and ambiguous meanings of tradition and the development of certain stylistic approaches and performance paradigms. The second half of this chapter is given over to a detailed discussion of one of klezmer and Yiddish music’s most important learning centres, Yiddish Summer Weimar. As a participant in 2014, I frame my own experiences within the wider context of the relationship between contemporary living musical transmission and historical cultural knowledge. In chapter five I look in detail at klezmer instrumental practice in the city through the focus of my own instrument, the piano accordion. Despite its ambiguous status historically (Horowitz, 2012), the accordion is now firmly and centrally integrated into the European klezmer scene, and several of Berlin’s most important klezmer musicians are accordion players. In particular, I explore the balance between personal expression and being ‘in the tradition’, the relationship between music and dance, and different concepts of ensemble playing amongst my musician friends.

The final chapter looks at the relationship between history, memory, Jewish identity and music. It begins with a deliberately subjective exploration of the role of silence and sound in the production of memory and commemoration in the city, focusing on several memorial sites and events. This discussion of the ways in which we culturally ‘hear’ the past in the present provides a context for two case studies, exploring different aspects of German-Jewish musical identity. First is the fascinating Smer Label Reloaded project, which reproduces the output of a 1930s Berlin Jewish record label for a modern concert

audience, in the process creating unmistakable resonances between pre-war history and present-day cultural and musical identity. Lastly I discuss singer Tania Alon, a German Jew for whom the past is never far from her work.

Appendix 1 offers a brief overview of the history and formal make-up of klezmer music. I have placed this outside the main thesis as whilst it offers useful information, it contains no new scholarship, but rather synthesises several pre-existing sources to offer a background to readers unfamiliar with the topic.

To get things started, I want to first turn to an event that has nothing to do with klezmer, but much to do with Berlin. It is a sort of introductory case study and I offer it as a lively street-level articulation of some of the themes that structure the piece as a whole.

### **Performing Berlin: The Night of the Singing Balconies**

On a chilly Saturday evening in early November 2013, hundreds of people gathered under thirty-six different balconies in the East Berlin district of Friedrichshain to listen to a series of performances by singers, poets, musicians and actors. Organised by neighbourhood collective pollyandbob.com, *die Nacht der Singenden Balkone*<sup>61</sup> was an event in many ways typical of contemporary Berlin culture – constituted by a grass-roots inclusivity, a firm belief in the power of enthusiasm over the necessity of talent, and a structural and ideological integration into the fabric of the city itself. Here are some of my fieldnotes from the night:

At Warschauerstraße 78 there is no sign of anything other than the usual Saturday night crowd. Closer inspection reveals an open door leading into an inner courtyard where a few people mill around waiting. A man appears on Warschauerstraße holding the Polly and Bob balloon with a good 150 people following and, soon after, the yard is full. From the top window appear two figures – possibly a man and a woman, but it is deliberately difficult to tell. Their get-up is somewhere between am-dram Mikado and Moulin Rouge excess, and one smokes an extravagantly long cigarette. The window below is lit with a deep green light and from this window appears our singer Ines. She gestures to the crowd to shush and we are fully silent within ten seconds. And then she begins... three of the most sublime arias one could reasonably expect to hear on a Friedrichshain Saturday night. Her voice carries perfectly and we listen in stunned silence. The symbolic power of the solo soprano is enhanced here tenfold by the romance and incongruity of the situation. We sense ourselves communing, indirectly – through her singing, the composers' music, and the fact that we have all made the effort to be here, in

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<sup>61</sup> "The Night of the Singing Balconies".

this courtyard, tonight. We have hung around, we have stuck it out with our bottles of cold beer, and this is surely our reward.

The next performance is billed as “ostPost mit Russischer Musik”. Here there is no balcony, but a shuttered ground floor window of a local post office. We block the street and pavement fully and wait. Shortly, the dark brown metal shutters of the post office roll up and through the open window climbs a tall man with wild orange hair, saying nothing, barely acknowledging us. The crowd goes wild. The man plays a few overblown notes on his wooden flute and launches into *Ochi Chornye*, accompanying himself on guitar. He is not great, he has pitched the songs too low, and we can't really hear the guitar. But it doesn't matter – his wit, his weirdness and the brilliance of performing from a post office window (does he work there? has he broken in?) carries the whole thing. His last song over, he disappears to one side of the window, the shutters roll back down (to great laughter) and we disperse.

We exit the courtyard for the final performance of the night: toga-clad Nina Hynes and the Budapest Choir. This time the balcony is outside on the main street, facing the bustle of Warschauerstr. Stopping traffic is not a possibility here, so we pack in underneath the balcony itself and across the road and tramlines, on the middle boulevard walkway. For the third and final number, Nina first teaches the crowd the chorus and outro. She waves hello to the cars and the passing trams, begins to sing, and we join in for the choruses. As we near the end, Nina begins to loop the simple refrain and we stay with her. The accompaniment gradually drops away, she picks up a megaphone for intermittent ad libs and encourages us to sing louder, which we do. It is a mini-festival, we are singing to the accompaniment of the street, the trams and cars, to the sounds of the city at night – we are together in the sound of our voices but also in the fact of the event itself. This is not a paid gig, it exists only because we have all taken the chance and turned up. Implicitly we realise this, and sing louder and longer because of it.

This night could not have taken the form that it did without the presence of a particular urban architectural ubiquity: the Berlin balcony. The city's five-story tenement blocks – centred around an inner courtyard – make for ready-made zones of performance and encounter, although in practice the major use of the yards nowadays is to offer spaces for bike-parking and recycling bins. On the Night of the Singing Balconies, however, these very functional public spaces became reimagined as collective areas of cultural exchange, the musical transaction explicitly reframed as a social event, communal and semi-accidental (or at least unpredictable). The everyday courtyard space offered a moment of improvised street culture, foregrounding a deliberately fluid and temporary community created out of the collision of often very different participants. Hence the wonderful incongruity and yet absolute rightness of opera from a third-floor window, while Friedrichshain bar-hoppers did their usual Saturday night run just outside the courtyard.

This, then, is the first theme that I wish to draw out: the recontextualisation and subversion of space. Throughout my study, I will argue centrally for the role of music in



Figure 1. Nina Hynes and the Budapest Choir, *The Night of the Singing Balconies*. Warschauerstraße, November 2013.

defining and interrogating the urban space. I will also point to music's particular combination of emotional immediacy and metaphorical ambiguity as a singular medium for this process. Important here is the overlap between public and private arenas that this one night relied upon and indeed exploited: the spectators were infringing (ever-so-slightly and by invitation) on the performers' home space, or at least entering into an ambiguously liminal transactional zone.<sup>62</sup> Disassociated from specific structural or ritual function, music often migrates freely between official and unofficial discourse, echoing and reinforcing the necessary spill between the two which characterises urban life more generally (Amin & Thrift, 2002). But musical sound is not just a powerfully affective marker of this cultural flow, it is also one of its producers: music's ability to jump over walls and sneak under doors makes it a uniquely ambivalent and subversive force.<sup>63</sup> The singing balconies, therefore, were not simply making use of city spaces, but creatively exploiting the unavoidable collision of public and private zones, playing in the gaps to frame each performance as a distinctly urban musical encounter.

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<sup>62</sup> This is something that was played up by several of the performers, reframing their everyday homes as exaggeratedly burlesqued stages.

<sup>63</sup> See Abigail Wood's fine illustration across Jerusalem's Wailing Wall (2015).

Klezmer in Berlin occasionally intersects with this kind of street theatre. Klezmer bands busk in the Mauerpark<sup>64</sup> on a Sunday afternoon, they appear at the *Karnival der Kulturen* and *Fete de la Musique*, or at Treptower Park's Victory Day events. More generally, this slippage of public and private space is fundamental to any study of Jewish folk music in the city. Often decoded<sup>65</sup> as a vehicle of memorial and cultural reparation (Radano & Bohlman, 2004; Gruber, 2002; Morris, 2001), klezmer and Yiddish musicians in Berlin have, over the last few years, begun to integrate their artistic work firmly into the city's bottom-up creative ethos. I will argue that this dialogue with the spaces and meanings of the city is the essential ingredient in moving klezmer in Berlin forward from the discourses of revival and appropriation, *encoding* the music as both a product of and comment upon historical circumstance. In this way, klezmer and Yiddish music has moved in recent times to occupy a more ambiguous symbolic function, one which accepts the contradictions of playing Jewish music in the former nerve-centre of National Socialism and uses the musical material and the performance space as a way of probing and subverting them.

History makes Berlin a unique arena for this process. Nowadays, it is also fertile ground for the performative (Butler, 1988). The streets are canvasses for all sorts of varied artistic imaginings, and a strong bricolage aesthetic links much of the city's ground-level semiotics.<sup>66</sup> This, too, is a central plank of my analysis. In Berlin's case, the notion of using whatever materials come to hand has graduated to its own sort of glorious revelling in surprise visual and aural juxtapositions. The unpredictable narrative of urban life becomes not simply something to be dealt with, but creative fodder to be explored, utilised and celebrated. Seen in this context, the Singing Balconies are a one-night cross-section of the enthusiasm, diversity and egalitarian discourse that characterises Berlin street music in general. Its privileging of the everyday (both artistic and architectural) resonates well with Berlin's performative immediacy, where hanging out and sharing a musical moment for its own sake has evolved many and various spaces and contact zones.<sup>67</sup> It is an attitude that privileges detail and moment over structure and clarity. Paradigm over syntagm, signifier over signified (Saussure, 1992;

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<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>65</sup> On encoding/decoding, see Hall (1980).

<sup>66</sup> Discussed in full in Chapter 2.

<sup>67</sup> As well as the aforementioned Mauerpark, we might note Warschauerstr U-Bahn station, the canalside strip Maybacher Ufer and the eastern city's central meeting-place, Alexanderplatz.





Figure 2. Buskers and crowd. Warschauerstraße U-Bahn, June 2014.

Barthes, 1988) and tactics over strategy (de Certeau, 1984). This becomes all the more pertinent when set against the over-determined weight of the city's top-down historical narrative, against which perhaps the most appropriate response is indeed a healthily unjudgemental chaotic profusion: enthusiastically patchworked artistic responses become meaningful articulations of daily life (DeNora, 2000).

Bricolage, performative egalitarianism, joyfully chaotic profusion... none of these would seem to be particularly front-of-mind when listening or dancing to the *freylekhs*, *terkishes* and *zhoks* of klezmer. However, it will be my aim throughout what follows to argue that, far from existing as a separate, reified and disjointed artistic endeavour, klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin – the best of it at least – is indeed fully grounded in and connected to the urban environment within which it operates. To begin with, let us look at the groupings and networks of musicians that characterise this fluidly creative scene.

## 1. The Music in Berlin: Musical Networks

*PA: Do you think there's a klezmer community?*

*Ilya: Yeah. I mean, there's probably more than one. Or less than one.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

Does the music come first, or the musician? One might argue that a certain collective possibility of pitches, rhythms, articulations, textural combinations and stylistic choices exists – at least hypothetically – before any one person puts them together on an instrument or with their voice. But at the same time, the precise means and methods by which these potential constellations ultimately gain cultural and material form are dependent upon particular musicians and the environment within which they create their music. Through the different processes of klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin in the latter part of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first, this personal, musicianly stamp is foregrounded by the fact that the artists in the pages that follow have all assumed different degrees of responsibility for recreating and re-energising this particular tradition. They are doing more than simply following on. Working with the raw musical materials at their disposal, each person or group has used these resources to create their own modernised version of this traditional Jewish wedding music,<sup>2</sup> with engagingly varied results. The different musical collaborations and projects outlined below each tell a part of the same story, but from significantly different viewpoints. If they do not stem from an overtly ideological stance, they at least imply a certain cultural perspective.

This first chapter, then, is an exploration of the musical networks at play in the diverse and vibrant world of Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music. The context of networks and connections is crucial. Music-making is a real-time activity: its production and consumption constitute communicative acts, framed by shared or differing cultural codes and discourses, age cohorts, national identities, gender perspectives and social classes.<sup>3</sup> Musical interactions – forming the texts of analysis – are participative

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<sup>1</sup> Ilya Shneyveys, klezmer accordionist and keyboard-player. Personal interview, Neukölln, Berlin. December 17th, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that although the wedding is klezmer's traditional home, very few of the musicians here play regularly for weddings. The re-creation of klezmer in Germany has also moved it squarely onto the concert or nightclub stage.

This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, this is not an exhaustive list.



moments of cultural agreement or disagreement (Small, 1998:13; Turino, 2008b). More than this, musical practice itself forms part of a network of relations that takes in musicians, performance, musical texts, venues, and the city itself:

social agents are never located in bodies and bodies alone [...] an actor is a patterned network of heterogeneous relations, or an effect produced by such a network [...] Hence the term, actor-network – an actor is also, always, a network (Law, 1992:384).

But musicians and audiences rarely sit still, and are fully able to exist simultaneously across numerous spaces, times, styles and allegiances. Consequently, any useful understanding of a musical ‘scene’ (Straw, 1991) must also seek to understand that scene as a network (or several networks) of connections: moments and loci of fusion and collision given shape, form and meaning through the music that frames them and of which they are a part. In his analysis of Israeli and Palestinian musicians, Benjamin Brinner maps out the specific nodes, hubs and dynamic relationships at play within both interband networks and the wider ethnic music scene. Whilst my approach is less scientific, it is worth noting some of his conclusions:

networks are rarely static. They expand or contract as new members join and links are formed or people leave or break off connections. Networks change not only due to these internal dynamics, but also in relation to their sociocultural environments (Brinner, 2009:206).

Although musicians may rarely describe or view what they do in terms of network theory (Law, 1992; Latour, 2005), their everyday musical practice is frequently grounded in the processes at work in their particular creative network, both within a given ensemble and the ways in which that grouping interacts with – and affects – its wider musical and sociocultural relations. Brinner (2009:207) points to the degree of connectivity as a direct effect upon these network dynamics:

High connectivity manifests in the prevalence of guest appearances, ad hoc formations, and shifts in band memberships [...] the ease with which musicians can find like-minded partners for special projects or new ensembles.

Within the discourse of Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music, this connectivity reveals both artistic and (occasionally) ideological implications. The processes of continuity, revival and transformation all have their effect upon the resulting music, but they are also underpinned by particular political and social perspectives, either implicit or

explicit. This chapter – and indeed my thesis as a whole – views the changing configurations of personnel and projects discussed below as an ongoing and fluid discussion around the possibilities of what klezmer is and can be: an open but by no means formless debate. I will argue that the contemporary Berlin scene is looking two ways at once: backwards to a deeply-informed historical re-discovery and forwards to a more radical, often politically-charged perspective.

To help explore these different routes, I have found Mark Slobin's theory of micromusics useful in its laying-out of subcultural, intercultural and supercultural connections. As a subcultural music (in a city built on subculture<sup>4</sup>), klezmer has nevertheless benefitted significantly from supercultural post-reunification support for 'things Jewish' (Pinto, 1996). At the same time, the increasingly international conversation between musicians, singers, poets and writers around Yiddish culture points to the foundation of a sound yet flexible interculture, centred simultaneously around the poles of diaspora and affinity (Slobin, 1993:64-8).

In lived experience, of course, people don't necessarily divide up their musical lives into such groupings, but often enough, when asked to articulate or defend tastes or activities, people point to linkages, subordinations, import-export traffic, and other factors that implicitly support the notion of a -cultural musical life (Slobin, 1993:12).

There are several ways of approaching these -cultural networks. Over the course of a year spent meeting and playing with musicians, I discovered an urban subculture, a musical scene that is lively, exciting and bottom-up. But although local, it is also internationally connected – an interculture linked diasporically through Yiddish festivals and events, populated also by affinity groups often formed at workshops or jam sessions that remain connected, frequently with no claim of an ethnic relationship to the music. This chapter is therefore a parallel exploration of cultural identity and an exercise in ever-changing fluidity, a dynamic illustration that as soon as things seem like they are settling down, something else happens to shake them up. Just like Berlin in general. Here is American émigré Paul Brody:

Pride can be crippling. Period. [laughs] And Berlin doesn't really have that kind of pride [...] Berlin is more of an inclusive city than an exclusive city. And that is

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<sup>4</sup> cf. Sheridan's (2007) investigation of the cultural and social effects of Berlin's "indeterminate urban areas". On subculture, see Hebdige (1979).

probably because what makes the city interesting is not this or that historic building – we don't have a Notre Dame, you know what I mean? We don't have the ruins of Rome. I think Berlin's pride comes in what goes through Berlin, in what is decaying or transforming in Berlin. So in that sense you can't hold on to a tradition. The tradition is not holding on.<sup>5</sup>

The tradition of “not holding on” is a powerfully motivating one. It is at the heart of the most interesting movements of the last thirty years, a witty variation on the old mantra that to name a scene is to condemn it. In this chapter I will argue that rather than a coherent narrative progression, Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music is in fact a continually renewing dialogue, an artistic discussion around tradition and transgression, musical transformation and cultural interrogation.<sup>6</sup> I hope to outline a multi-layered and self-referential discourse that takes in early satellite pioneers, well-schooled younger musicians, imaginative fantasy and aggressive politics. What began as a blank slate, wiped uncomfortably clean by the Second World War, has now opened up a collection of overlapping and occasionally contradictory possibilities. This chapter, then, is not an imposition of definite categories, but an analysis of the fluidity and transformative processes at work.

In order to understand the multi-level links between the various performers considered here, I have imposed my own classification system. Whilst the musicians involved may recognise my thought processes, these taxonomies are purely my own, invented for the purposes of obtaining a useful overview. At this early stage it is important to point out that, as in so many local and even international musical environments, the relationships between projects, personnel, performers, commissioners and programmers are very free ones. All the musicians that I spoke with in Berlin overlapped easily and frequently. Similarly, musical and social references, events and histories are shared, making for a rich and multi-layered collective experience. Speaking reflectively, this also helped me feel that I was indeed looking at a ‘scene’:<sup>7</sup> a heterogeneous yet connected network of creative people and engaged audiences, rather than a disconnected and disparate group of performers accidentally doing the same sort of thing (Titon, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> Personal interview, Schöneberg, Berlin. September 2nd, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Much like the city itself, in fact. Here is film-maker and writer Rory Maclean: “In this fractured capital, every citizen – whether perfectionist or revolutionary, collaborator or dissident, resident or visitor – can dare to imagine a place which no one else has ever seen. Its poets, scientists, performers, politicians and digital natives conjure up visions as potent as its actuality” (2014:394).

<sup>7</sup> The concept and implications of ‘scene’ are discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

A final piece of theory should be included here. Whilst it is always tempting to ascribe well-developed socio-cultural reasons as to why particular people play particular music, we must also bear in mind that musical groupings are fluid not just in their personnel, but also in their degrees of affiliation (Straw, 2001; Driver & Bennett, 2014). What begins as a loose collection of actors will begin to understand themselves as a group *through the act of making-music* (Frith, 1996). In other words, it is more helpful to look at the categories that follow not simply as groups of like-minded individuals who came together because they all independently felt the same way, but who came to understand their ways of feeling (about klezmer music, at least) through the lived experience of playing it. This is particularly important given the overlapping nature of the musical and social networks within which they operate.

Inevitably, all of my different informants have their own take on klezmer music's history, development and practice in the city and the wider musical intercultural, but what connects them is the relentless fluidity that characterises their various groupings and contact zones. All these musicians share the same musical spaces: jam sessions, gigs, workshops. But they also all share the space of Berlin. The city's particular bottom-up blend of creative bricolage, enthusiasm, affordable space and counter-cultural legacy makes it a fundamental part of the network. This is, of course, in marked contrast to the dangerously sharp and deathly clear lines with which post-war powers attempted to divide and rule the city (Taylor, 2006; Fulbrook, 2009):

It's like people come to Berlin now to re-enact their idea of the twenties. Before the bad stuff. Sex, smoking, booze, artistic freedom, you know? Different people from all over the place, artists, musicians.<sup>8</sup>

Before discussing my analytical categories in detail, it is necessary to map out some theoretical territory concerning networks, including an exploration of the elements which constitute them.

### **Klezmer networks**

The majority of this chapter concentrates on musical style: repertoire choices, arrangements, instrumentation and more nebulous notions of 'mood'. But before getting

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<sup>8</sup> Hampus Melin, klezmer drummer. Personal Interview, Kreuzberg, Berlin. July 21st, 2014.

into these details I want to lay out some of the social and network relations that characterise the music under discussion. Although it is important to make clear that this dissertation does not attempt to offer a rigorous structural analysis of the kind found in more formalised sociological studies,<sup>9</sup> it will be helpful to spend some time mapping out relevant elements and actors. I aim to relate these theories to the material that follows, linking network roles to certain musicians, venues and other variables. To do this, I will be drawing upon the work of Mark Granovetter (1973, 1983), Benjamin Brinner (2009), and Howard Becker (1982).

In his discussion of “art worlds”, Becker theorises the processes involved in the production of a work of art as extending far wider than the central contribution of the artist/s themselves.

Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art [...] The same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works, so that we can think of an art world as an established network of cooperative links among participants. (Becker, 1982:34-35)

Standing behind any individual piece or collection of art (in this case music)<sup>10</sup> is a network of cooperation – a patterned group of actors, materials, processes and links. In its simplest form, we might define a network as constituted by a collection of nodes and the links between them. It is the particular nature of these nodes and links in any given network that structure the operations within (Brinner, 2009:165-8). In what follows, an analysis of the different aspects of these “established network[s] of cooperative links” (Becker, 1982:35) will reveal certain actors as more dominant than others, certain connections and conventions more established. Becker’s work is largely concerned with the particular people, or groups of people, who make up such art worlds, but non-human objects and spaces may also play significant roles. Within these networks, information may flow in both directions or one-way only. The various nodes (both human and non-human) in a network may be mutually inter-connected across the whole network, or conversely may be almost exclusively connected to a central hub (although this is less common in the groupings that follow). To relate this to my own study: a band playing

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Freeman’s history of social network analysis (2004), or the International Network for Social Network Analysis (<https://www.insna.org>. Accessed September 7th, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Although klezmer has its origins as functional professional music for ritual events (see Appendix 1), I would argue that its revived life as music for the concert stage and the dancefloor justifies its definition as ‘art’.

klezmer music, consisting of a small number of individuals all connected equally to each other and forming a close-knit and mostly egalitarian group (Chapter 1), will inevitably function differently to a large, loosely-connected jam session centred around one or two ‘leaders’ (Chapter 2). This in turn will operate in a different way to a formalised education environment such as Yiddish Summer Weimar (discussed in Chapter 4).

To begin with, we might ask what are the materials which make up these particular networks. Clearly musicians are fundamental, but their roles differ considerably. In the pages that follow, some musicians will be seen to possess a greater number of connections and links than others. Brinner refers to this property as *centrality*: “In a network with high centrality a few nodes have far more connections than the rest. They are commonly known as *hubs*” (Brinner, 2009:172-3). Musicians such as Dan Kahn (Chapter 3) and Alan Bern (Chapter 4) are such hubs, and their centrality has clear effects on the ongoing development and processes at work within their given networks. For example, Bern’s directorship of the Yiddish Summer Weimar workshop series endows him with what we might call maximum centrality: programming and logistical decisions flow through him, and his on-the-ground presence as coordinator and instructor makes him the central point of contact for students, performers and venues.<sup>11</sup> But more than this, Bern’s widespread connections to Yiddish musicians around the world (Michael Alpert, Zev Feldman, Joel Rubin, Ethel Raim and many more) vastly enrich that network, offering students at Weimar access to sources of new musical knowledge and material. This, of course, is information that these students can internalise and input into their own local network. Similarly, Dan Kahn’s international presence as a performer not only increases his own profile and influence as an artist, but also creates new trans-national networks, for example in his three-way collaboration with Russia’s Psoy Korolenko and Israel’s Oy Division.

Venues in Berlin (Chapter 2) also present themselves as hubs – centralised nodes from which emanate a significant amount of connections. These hubs are important in that they offer the chance for previously *unconnected* elements to meet, exchange knowledge and develop new networks and groupings. These elements might be people

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<sup>11</sup> Yiddish Summer Weimar students play in nightly jam sessions at various venues around the town. See Chapter 4.

(musicians, audiences, promoters and other intermediaries), but also non-human materials such as recordings or printed music. Historically, the Hackesches Hoftheater in the former Jewish Scheunenviertel district in Mitte acted as a hub for both musicians and audiences. In a city with little historical connection to klezmer and Yiddish music, the Hackesches Hoftheater provided a centralised physical space around which the early klezmer scene of the 1990s was able to coalesce (Waligórska, 2013:47). This is discussed further towards the end of this chapter. More recently, the three jam sessions discussed in Chapter 2 serve a similar function, each session responsible for a slightly different articulation of a wider scene (or perhaps a ‘sub-scene’).<sup>12</sup> A musician such as Ilya Shneyveys is currently an important hub in the Berlin scene, acting across several different networks. As the driving force in the Bar Oblomov jam sessions (Chapter 2), Ilya is at the centre of this particular network – he is the point of contact for neophytes, but also the *de facto* leader of the sessions themselves. At the same time, his extensive involvement in Yiddish Summer Weimar facilitates a new connection for Oblomov participants, in that their experience of the Oblomov sessions sometimes leads them directly on to Weimar.<sup>13</sup>

In the above cases we should note the importance of *weak ties*. This is a concept developed by sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973, 1983), highlighting the importance of contacts outside individuals’ immediate social or work circle. Whilst the idea has a wealth of implications, it is well summed up by Granovetter here:

those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive. (Granovetter, 1973:1371)

In other words, whilst close-knit circles may constitute important social identities, they are also more likely to reinforce similar information, opinions and contacts. This reinforcement is of course an important social function for those individuals involved, and is a function of the strong ties within any particular network. Weak ties – loose-knit and outside of any immediate circle – on the other hand, offer access to entirely new groups of people, information and sub-networks. A weak tie promotes the possibility of communication outside of an immediate network, and at the same time opens up

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of *scene* as it applies here is taken up fully in Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> See singer Sveta Kundish’s comments in Chapter 4.

connections to other groupings and their associated strong (and perhaps weak) ties. The Saytham's Lounge jam sessions discussed in Chapter 2 provide a useful example. Convened by violinist Matthias Groh, these sessions are organised via an online Doodle poll. Whilst many of the musicians may already know each other through other musical contacts, the sessions also offer the possibility of multiple weak ties, in that players signing up for a session often have little or no connection to Matthias' closer musical circle. His role is therefore also something of a gatekeeper (Brinner, 2009:175), albeit a fairly soft one. By coordinating disparate collections of musicians into *ad hoc* groups for each session, Matthias utilises a series of weak ties to create an ongoing network of performers.<sup>14</sup> Added to this, Groh provides an online database of sheet music, accessible via a password. This music forms an important part of the network, both not only as a resource for session participants, but also in that it is freely addable to: connections that musicians make via physical participation in the session can then be used to augment this online resource, which in turn feeds back into the available repertoire of other session players.

We might also argue that instruments form a part of the networks under discussion. Chapter 5 takes up this discussion in relation to the accordion's role in klezmer music in Berlin. The relationship between performer, instrument and music constitutes a network of its own, in that the player's strong tie to their instrument is often the starting point for – and means to – a deeper investigation of the music itself, as seen in the example of many of the accordionists interviewed here. The “social life” (Appadurai, 1988; Bates, 2012) of musical instruments means that any given instrument contains a variety of social attitudes, expectations and ways-of-being. In this sense, an instrument at times becomes the centre of a particular network. Whilst the accordion has historically been peripheral to klezmer music, I will argue that in the Berlin klezmer scene it has gained increasing prominence, to the point at which it begins to sound the city in a particular – and unique – way.

Within the networks of Berlin klezmer certain elements act as *intermediaries*, or *gatekeepers*, regulating access to wider spheres of exposure. An example would be

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<sup>14</sup> This was the case with my own involvement: before taking part in my first session, the only contact that had taken place between myself and Matthias was a couple of email exchanges. Playing in the session, however, I met two musicians whom I subsequently played with regularly, thus initiating our own (small) network.



record companies, in this case particularly the Berlin-based labels Oriente Musik, Piranha, and Raumer Records. However, the network relationships here also involve a great deal of two-way dialogue, as in Oriente Musik's Till Schumann's close friendship with several artists on his label (Karsten Troyke, Dan Kahn, Hampus Melin). Schumann is a frequent and enthusiastic audience member at Kaffee Burger concerts and Oblomov jam sessions, which inevitably affects his 'official' gatekeeper role. Similarly, Dan Kahn's personal involvement in the design and promotion of his albums on Oriente<sup>15</sup> has an explicit counter-mediating effect on this particular network relationship. An equivalent, more equilateral network relationship can also be seen by Piranha producer Ben Mandelson's comments on the recent Semer Label Reloaded album:

I can't take too much credit, I just sit around with a biscuit and a cup of tea at the back. Pencil & notebook where necessary. But the performances are all theirs, and they had really prepared well, with tailored arrangements.<sup>16</sup>

We should also note the increased importance of self-released recordings, such as Forshpil's album (discussed later), further blurring gatekeeper power relations.

Similarly, venue owners exert some control over musicians' chances of performing their music. However, in this context the relationship is also more ambiguous. Several promoters, such as Kaffee Burger's Karl-Heinz Heymann and Fuchs & Elster's Dorle Martinek, Julian Nelken and Robin Schellenberg maintain a close relationship with performers such as drummer Hampus Melin,<sup>17</sup> to the extent that conventional promoter-musician power relations are often blurred. The same is true of the close ties between jam session convenors<sup>18</sup> and the bar owners who host them (in particular Franka Lampe and Ursula Weigert at the *Klezmerstammtisch*, Matthias Groh and Torsten Resag at Saytham's Lounge). Several of the concerts discussed in later chapters in this thesis took place at the Gorki Studio Я, curated (as gatekeeper) by Daniel Kahn – once again obscuring the network relations between promoter, musician and venue (frequently to the benefit of the musicians concerned). Also worth noting is the more clear-cut gatekeeping role played by larger venues such as the Berlin Philharmonie and the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*. Whilst these venues have promoted klezmer music – and

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<sup>15</sup> Schumann told me how closely Kahn works with Oriente on all these extra-musical details, but also how much Kahn has been influential in boosting Oriente's own online social network presence. Personal interview, Steglitz, Berlin. July 22nd, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Personal email communication, May 12th, 2016. Semer Label Reloaded is discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Berlin klezmer jam sessions are discussed at length in Chapter 2.

continue to do so – these concerts form part of a much more official cultural network of events, including classical music and art exhibitions.

To sum up in relation to what follows. This study concentrates on a large but specific network made up of musicians, venues, source materials, instruments and instrumental practice. Within this network exist multiple smaller networks: particular bands, larger one-off projects, individual venues, workshops such as Yiddish Summer Weimar, and human-musical instrument interfaces. Each of the following chapters, therefore, aims to explore particular parts of this network, uncovering smaller groupings within and looking in detail at the music produced. An important context for these networks, however, is the historical framework within which they have developed, taking into account Berlin's particular historical and social upheavals of the last few decades.

### **The historical context**

Whilst my main focus is not a historical one, it is helpful to outline some of the trajectories that have characterised the growth of klezmer and Yiddish music in post-war Germany. I will also aim to highlight any significant differences between the developments in East and West Germany, and Berlin in particular. Before we start, it is important to note that prior to the 1980s, the narrative that follows is almost exclusively focused on Yiddish song, rather than instrumental klezmer music. This can be linked to a wider international cultural submergence of klezmer post war due to assimilation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002) and the devastation of Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe, meaning an almost total (pre-revival) absence of klezmer musicians outside of America.<sup>19,20</sup> I would also argue that it is a result of processes of collection, dissemination and performance: it is more straightforward for an artist to take a group of songs and incorporate them into a wider repertoire (as in the case of the West German artists below) than it is to research and reconstruct an entire set of instrumental techniques and approaches. Songs are arguably more malleable, less constrained by stylistic concerns.<sup>21</sup> As such, they were more easily absorbed into a pre-existing ethos:

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<sup>19</sup> See Rubin (1998b) on the small but significant Meron tradition in Israel.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 1 for a fuller discussion of klezmer history.

<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that singers of traditional repertoire do *not* concern themselves with stylistic and technical issues. Many, of course, spend a great deal of time doing just that. However, I would argue that it is easier to pick up a song as a 'found object' and reproduce it with less reference to historical practice than to learn a new instrumental idiom.

folk and protest song in the West (Holler, 2007) and official ‘art music’ culture in the East (Shneer, 2015; Ottens, 2008). It was not until the klezmer revival gained prominence in America and began to spread to Europe in the 1980s (Slobin, 2000) that instrumental music would feature as a significant part of the story.

It is important to understand not only the musical differences between the post-war treatment of Yiddish music in East and West Germany, but also the ideological work to which the music was put. Whilst the central narrative of West German Yiddish music was characterised by a complex combination of post-war philosemitism (Stern, 1992), uneasy historical silence and a contrapuntal will on the part of certain artists and audiences to break that silence, in the East the cultural context for Yiddish music must be understood as part of a predominant anti-fascist narrative (Shneer, 2015; Ottens, 2008). In this respect, the differing historical development of Yiddish music has clear parallels with the wider social processes and political trajectories of the two countries.

In 1963, West German folk singer Peter Rohland's programme of Yiddish songs *Un as der Rebbe singt: Jiddische Lieder* had “met head on with the latent will among the student youth and the intelligentsia to make amends for the crimes of the Nazis. He became the first German singer to break through the heavy postwar silence” (Holler, 2007:102).<sup>22</sup> Rohland’s exploration of Yiddish material formed part of an ongoing exploration of folk music from around the world,<sup>23</sup> but his choice of Yiddish song also reflected a conscious political will to directly address German post-war identity (Robb & John, 2011). However, despite the inclusion of Hanno Botsch’s violin, Rohland’s approach to the material is markedly similar to, for example, his treatment of songs of the 1848 revolution, performed at Burg-Waldeck one year later.<sup>24</sup> In both cases, Rohland’s rich baritone and accompanying guitar are more characteristic of a protest singer’s direct and unadorned delivery, rather than anything recognisably or idiomatically ‘Yiddish’. And if there was an implicit left-wing politics to this movement, it was not the main focus.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> According to her daughter Jalda Rebling, the first *non*-German singer to do so was Lin Jaldati (discussed below). Personal interview, Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. June 26th, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> This tied in closely with Rohland’s 1964 & 1965 involvement in the annual Burg-Waldeck Festivals (1964-69), Germany’s first open-air festival and one that swiftly became a forum for West German interest in and response to the 1960s European and American *chanson* and protest song movements. See Holler (2007).

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.peter-rohland-stiftung.de/index.php/peter-rohland/waldeckfestivals>. Accessed August 30th, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Ottens (2008:228) quotes Lin Jaldati and Eberhard Rebling’s comments on their 1965 visit to Burg-Waldeck: “The opinion that singing should not have anything to do with politics was dominant”.

Rohland's interest was followed in the 1970s by the Southern German folk duo Zupfgeigenhansel's *Jiddische Lieder*<sup>26</sup> (Eckstaedt, 2010:39). Whilst this popular recording offered many Germans their first exposure to well-known Yiddish songs such as *Di grine kusine*<sup>27</sup> and *Sog nischt keynmol*,<sup>28</sup> again we see little aesthetic or stylistic differentiation from, for example, Zupfgeigenhansel's earlier *Volkslieder* albums, which aimed to bring a renewed sense of discovery and pride to historical German folk song. Also notable is the distinctly German pronunciation of parts of the Yiddish texts.<sup>29</sup> Significant, too, is the ambiguous imagery that accompanied the recording, from the slightly grotesque smiling fiddler of the cover (who is playing while a building burns far in the background) to the uncontextualised (though clearly 'wartime') photographs of Jewish suffering. As Birnbaum (2009:305) notes, the implicit subtext of these pictures is in fact at odds with the majority of the songs, which are largely cheerful and come from before the war.

These artists, then, can be said to have offered 'Germanised' versions of Yiddish material (Wurbs, 2010), placing the songs in a wider folksinger-collector ethos of discovery and preservation. We might also include German-Jewish Hai Frankl and his Swedish wife Topsy, who performed Yiddish songs in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Their 1981 compilation *Jiddische Lieder* included a booklet of music, chords and transliterated lyrics, pointing to a more participatory aesthetic. Birnbaum, however (2009:302), notes similar ambiguities between the visual imagery and the musical material itself, with the result that the: "caricatured representations [...] make only passing reference to the songs they are supposed to represent".

Zupfgeigenhansel's *Jiddische Lieder* was released in 1979. Earlier that same year, West German TV audiences had been presented with the first significant mass media treatment of wartime history via the screening of US mini-series *Holocaust*. Birnbaum (2009:303) points out that whilst US response to the show had been mixed, in West

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<sup>26</sup> Released in 1979 on pläne (88141).

<sup>27</sup> The exact authorship of this tune is unclear, although it was copyrighted by Abe Schwartz. See <http://www.milkenarchive.org/works/view/582>. Accessed 31st August, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Hirsh Glik's 1942 famous Jewish partisan song "Never say". The spelling on the back cover of the Zupfgeigenhansel album is a Germanised one, the Yiddish transliteration would be *zog nit keynmol*.

<sup>29</sup> For example, in their rendition of Hirsh Glik's *Shtil, di nakht iz oysheshternt*, one hears a German "ich" rather than a Yiddish "ikh", and the occasional 'Germanising' of the letter s, where for example "sametenem" (velvety) becomes "zametenem".

<sup>30</sup> Hai Frankl had escaped to Sweden at the outbreak of the war. He never moved back to Germany permanently (Eckstadt, 2003:26).

Germany it was dramatic, sparking “a national discussion about the Holocaust in a way nothing previously had done. For days before and after the series was shown in late January 1979, West German media covered the Holocaust and little else.”

If *Holocaust* represented the first widespread representation of an unspoken history, the first implications of popular cultural accusation, 1984 would see its German response, in the form of the long-running *Heimat* series.<sup>31</sup> That same year, with clarinetist Giora Feidman's appearance in Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*, klezmer ‘arrived’ in Germany (Rubin, 2015a). As well as providing almost all West Germans’ first exposure to klezmer music and initiating what would develop into an important network of workshops, concerts and ensembles (see Chapter 4), Feidman’s particular brand of non-denominational spirituality<sup>32</sup> offered an easily-accessed and potent combination of remorse and redemption,<sup>33</sup> framed through a universalist-humanist musical discourse (Gruber, 2002). In contrast to the identity politics and directed rediscovery of Eastern European Jewish roots that characterised the American klezmer revival (Slobin, 2000, 2002), then, klezmer in Western Germany “was weighted with a direct link to the Holocaust and German memory politics from the very beginning” (Rubin, 2015a:208).

Interestingly, we could posit the arrival of klezmer into both East and West Germany at around the same time. 1983 saw the founding of the East German band Aufwind, initially coming together to sing Yiddish anti-war songs and subsequently incorporating instrumental music into their programmes (Ottens, 2008:230). Yiddish song, however, has a much longer history in East Germany, a history which itself teases out some of the ambiguities in the cultural politics of both the socialist state and the music itself. Where West German involvement with Yiddish song had formed part of a historical coming-to-terms, in the East the redemptive possibilities of Yiddish music were less important than its ideological potential: its implicit antifascist stance (given the treatment of Jews at the hands of fascists), but also as a mediating force against claims of antisemitism directed at the GDR (Ottens, 2008).<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Yiddish song managed to find a middle ground within the East German cultural radar. Whilst a socialist state would not endorse

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<sup>31</sup> On *Heimat* and its significance for German-Jewish dialogue, see Rubin, (2015a: 208).

<sup>32</sup> See Rubin (2015a) for a full discussion of Feidman, in particular the contradictions between his universalist claims and his locating of klezmer music as distinctly Jewish.

<sup>33</sup> Feidman’s role and significance is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

<sup>34</sup> Ottens (2008:217) also notes a wider ideological move within the GDR (following the USSR) to recast Communists as the central victims of National Socialism, “leading to the phasing out of the Jews as victims”.

cultural production marked by ethnic or religious origins, Yiddish music's counter-cultural status and non-Western roots meant that it was given some leeway within which to develop, and Yiddish song was frequently put to symbolic use: "A paradoxical situation emerged: the State, which suppressed Jewish life, needed Yiddish song as a proof of its antifascist identity" (Eckstaedt: 2010:41).<sup>35</sup>

Several Jewish artists who would go on to incorporate Yiddish song in their repertoire returned or immigrated to the GDR in the decades following WWII. These included Wolf Biermann from Hamburg, Perry Friedman from Canada, Sara Bialas-Tenenberg from Poland, and the parents of singers Karsten Troyke and Bettina Wegner. Ottens (2008:220) notes that "Jews who moved to the GDR did so because of their identification with the goals of the young state: they went as Communists, not as Jews". In her discussion of the singers Hans Lässig, Salomea Genin and Margrit Falck, Ottens (*ibid.*:218) points to the importance of Yiddish song for these artists in militating against the "erasure" of the Holocaust in public memory. The artist who would do most in the GDR to address this erasure was the Dutch-born Rebekka Brilleslijper (1912-88), whose stage name was Lin Jaldati.

Like most post-war Yiddish music performers, Yiddish was not Jaldati's native language. She had begun performing Yiddish art shows in her native Holland in the late 1930s (Shneer, 2015:4), and after the war Jaldati and Rebling performed for displaced persons (DP) camps and Jewish Workers Committees, but also Communist organisations in Prague and Berlin (Shneer, 2015:6). In 1952 Rebling accepted the East German *Verband Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler's*<sup>36</sup> offer to become editor of their newly-launched journal and the couple moved with their two daughters to East Berlin. At a time when political diplomacy was all but moribund with the West (lasting until West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's ending of the country's Hallstein Doctrine in 1972, which had refused diplomatic relations with any country that recognised the GDR), cultural diplomacy took on a significant ideological importance. Jaldati, encouraged and guided by Rebling, became one such cultural diplomat "and the state's most visible Jew" (Shneer, 2015:3). At the same time, Jaldati's own story as a

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<sup>35</sup> See also Shneer (2015:4) "the SED leadership made Yiddish a part of its Cold War diplomacy both out of its commitment to folk music as a defining feature of East German society and as a way to deflect accusations of antisemitism away from itself and onto its arch nemesis, 'fascist' West Germany".

<sup>36</sup> 'Union of German Composers and Musicologists'.

survivor of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, her and Rebling's commitment to Communism, and her close friendship with Anne and Margot Frank symbolically served to reject accusations of antisemitism frequently levelled at the East German State: "Who better to become a spokesperson for East Germany's anti-West German campaign than a Yiddish-singing Holocaust survivor?" (*ibid.*:13).<sup>37</sup>

Rebling's central role in East German classical music, the couple's close contacts with musicians such as Hans Eisler, and the socialist state's own aesthetic tendencies meant that Jaldati and Rebling's music retained a recognisable art music approach and sound.<sup>38</sup> This is a notable difference to the later work of Karsten Troyke and Aufwind,<sup>39</sup> who instead show more influence of the folk revival, cabaret, and singer-songwriters such as Wolf Biermann (Ottens, 2006:224). The difference can also be seen in the larger forces behind, for example, Jaldati's rendition of Dovid Edelstadt's "In Kamf",<sup>40</sup> where the marching rhythms and strident brass bear more connection to a composer such as Kurt Weill than anything more idiomatically 'Yiddish'. This, however, has little bearing on Jaldati's post-war influence. As Shneer (2015:28) summarises: "She commemorated the Holocaust and the loss of her entire extended family in a way that made sense to her, and she inserted Yiddish song and eastern European Jewish culture into postwar antifascist music". This legacy would be taken up by her daughter Jalda Rebling (Ostow, 1989), whose involvement in the East Berlin *Tage der jiddischen Kultur*<sup>41</sup> and the reunified city's Hackesches Hoftheater will be discussed later in this chapter.

Ottens (2008:234) argues that the positioning of Yiddish music as an "act of resistance" against the socialist state is largely a result of recent popular journalism. She quotes Karsten Troyke's more nuanced reading: "On the contrary, for me the occupation with Yiddish was rather a way to demand the antifascist attitude which was evoked so much and with so much hollowness" (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, Ottens also points out that the extensive international opportunities afforded Jaldati and Rebling were very much the

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<sup>37</sup> Ottens (2008:220): "Jaldati's position meant a careful balancing act between politics, ideology, and the dissemination of Yiddish song and music, which she regarded as her mission after her own experience and the annihilation of her family and people".

<sup>38</sup> Seen, for example, in Rebling's piano accompaniment to Mordechai Gebirtig's (1938) "S'Brent" ('It's Burning'), which Shneer (2015:26) refers to as Jaldati's "totemic" song. Jaldati and Rebling recorded this song for Eterna in 1955, along with Hirsh Glik's "Zog nisht keynmol".

<sup>39</sup> Both Troyke and Aufwind are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>40</sup> Yiddish: "In Struggle", written by Edelstadt in 1889. Jaldati's recording dates from 1982. She is accompanied by the Martin Hoffmann Orchestra.

<sup>41</sup> This event ran from 1987-1996 (Ottens, 2006:225).

exception (*ibid.*:237), suggesting that the performance of Yiddish song in the GDR indeed represented some sort of subcultural or counter-cultural activity. In this sense, perhaps, we see a historical politics that the more recent klezmer ‘boom’ would not concern itself so much with.<sup>42</sup> It would take a singer such as Dan Kahn to explicitly renew Yiddish music in Berlin’s political engagement (see later in this chapter and Chapter 3).

The more recent development of klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin will be explored later in this chapter, but it is worth making some general observations at this point about the cultural and discursive work to which the music was put. Heiko Lehmann, former bassist with East Berlin klezmer band Aufwind, spoke to me at length about his early travels within Jewish music in Germany, and in particular the difference between East/West reactions and expectations. Lehmann told me that where East Berlin audiences frequently asked questions and made suggestions, West Berliners generally “applauded everything”<sup>43</sup> – what they heard was Jewish and therefore unquestionably valuable, worthy of serious and uncritical attention.<sup>44</sup> Whilst this dichotomy is perhaps a little simplistic, it nevertheless points to the double-life that Yiddish music has since led in the city. Following on from the work of Jaldati and others, in the 1980s and 90s a neat piece of semiotic transference saw klezmer begin to function as a musical symbol of a renewed German-Jewish dialogue.<sup>45</sup> Despite the continued ambiguities of actual Jewish life in the country (Peck, Ash & Lemke, 1997:96-8), on the metaphorical level this is a compelling narrative: the resurrection of a near-destroyed cultural expression, in the city at the heart of this destruction, symbolically offering a deepened empathy and perhaps even transfer of identity (Waligórska, 2013). Klezmer simultaneously became a melodious signifier of Jewishness (Morris, 2001), its annihilation (Birnbbaum, 2009:297), and its redemption (Rubin, 2015a). As already noted, it is not my aim to re-analyse this process, although it is essential to be aware of it.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The klezmer boom, especially its non-Jewish element, did indeed often find itself at the centre of ideological arguments, as noted earlier. However, many of the musicians themselves stayed clear of these debates.

<sup>43</sup> Personal interview, Weißensee, Berlin. November 26th, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> On post-war German philosemitism, see Stern (1992) and Peck, Ash & Lemke (1997:74).

<sup>45</sup> Musical inclusion here acting as a metonym for wider dialogue. Gilman (2006:3): “‘Klezmer’ was the litmus test for the nostalgia for and reappropriation of Eastern European musical culture, initially by European non-Jewish musicians.” Also Radano and Bohlman’s (2000:41) description of the “omnipresence” of Berlin klezmer as a “metonym for Europe’s millennial transit”.

<sup>46</sup> See Ottens & Rubin (2004), Radano & Bohlman (2000), Saxonberg & Waligórska (2006), Morris (2001), Birnbbaum (2009).



As an easily accessed symbol of reparation,<sup>47</sup> supercultural endorsement has included commemorative events<sup>48</sup> and the long-running *Jüdische Kulturtage*,<sup>49</sup> in which many of my interviewees have over the years taken part. This keen German embrace of Jewish cultural production has performed an ambiguous role (Meng, 2008:343), making manifest a process of historical reconciliation that ironically does much to contribute to Europe's virtual Jewish space (Pinto, 1997; Gruber, 2002).<sup>50</sup> It also clouds history somewhat: klezmer did not come from Germany<sup>51</sup> and would not have been unambiguously favoured by assimilated German Jews.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, and contextualised by the fragility of the remaining Jewish community (Cohn, 1994), a mythologised and distanced image of Eastern European Judaism, expressed through klezmer music (Ottens & Rubin, 2004), has at times functioned as an overarching metonym for 'Jewish' in Germany – partially obscuring the closer, and therefore more problematic, Westernised German Jewish presence (Slobin, 2000:23). A parallel exoticising and 'primitivising' tendency has often been an issue for folk music in general, often belying an ideological aim (Harker, 1985).<sup>53</sup> In the case of klezmer in Germany, this has at times created uncomfortable tensions, especially when explicitly countered by musicians. Singer Sveta Kundish, for example, told me of some audience's initial discomfort at the suggestion of possible links between German and Yiddish folk music explored in her Voices of Ashkenaz project.<sup>54</sup>

Arguably, klezmer and Yiddish song also served a social need for folk music (Bohlman, 1988), offering an alternative subcultural vernacular.<sup>55</sup> If the taint of history made

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<sup>47</sup> For example, in 1998 *San Francisco Chronicle* journalist Steve Kettmann, referring to Berlin's Festival of Jewish Culture for that year, was moved to write: "If klezmer, once thought to be nearing extinction, can thrive and reinvent itself, it almost makes you buy some of the giddier hopes of Berlin's Jewish community leaders, struggling to provide good news at a time when the legacies of the Holocaust remain so painfully unresolved in German public life." (<http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/In-Today-s-Berlin-It-s-Hip-to-Be-Klezmer-The-2972412.php>. Accessed September 10th, 2015). The problems hinted at by statements like this will be explored further.

<sup>48</sup> Featuring in particular Giora Feidman. See Rubin (2015a:224).

<sup>49</sup> Berlin's annual 'Days of Jewish Culture' festival, launched in 1987.

<sup>50</sup> Rebling, for example, told me that she was the sole Jew to be involved in organising the first *Tage der jiddischen Kultur*, an East Berlin event that ran from 1987-1996, as distinct from the reunited city's *Jüdische Kulturtage*. Interview, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>52</sup> Yiddish scholar Janina Wurbis writes: "Still in the 1920s, the attitude of German Jewry toward the East was ambivalent, and could be described as one of disrespect mixed with a certain fascination" (2010:89). See also Nemtsov (2009). On Orientalism and Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, see Mendes-Flohr (1984). On modern Jewish identity, see Meyer (1990:10-32).

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>54</sup> In other words, they wanted their Yiddish musicians palpably *distanced* from German culture. Personal interview, Neukölln, Berlin. September 5th, 2014. Voices of Ashkenaz brings together Ukrainian-Israeli Kundish, American Deborah Strauss, and Germans Andreas Schmitges and Thomas Fritze.

<sup>55</sup> As seen in the work of Kasbek, discussed below.

German folk music problematic,<sup>56</sup> klezmer and Yiddish music offers an enticing combination of linguistic proximity (Yiddish sounds like German<sup>57</sup>) and musical distance. Into this culturally-materialist mix we must therefore throw the many musicians, who whilst they may be deeply aware of political and ideological implications, are in fact into the music for the sake of the music. This is not to be taken lightly. Klezmer is an exciting and challenging music to play. It offers a stylishly appealing balance of wit and heart-on-sleeve emotion (Slobin, 2000:8), matching the conviviality of communal music-making with the requirements and rewards of a high level of technique (London, 2002:207-8). For musicians familiar with a Western classical vocabulary, the musical language of klezmer re-presents these materials in an apparently new and intriguing manner. Scales internalised as pedagogical exercises, now beginning on a different scale degree, become modal bases<sup>58</sup> for a sound that is familiar and yet Other.<sup>59</sup> And, in contrast to classical training, performer embodiment (as in jazz) is foregrounded and privileged in klezmer music: slides, sobs and other ornamentation – the spaces between the notes – become integral to stylistic competence (Turino, 2008b:43).

This brief historical context outlines certain key themes: disparate beginnings, strong musical affiliation and ambiguous historical symbolism. It is these elements that the following categories have, in different ways, picked up on. Whilst the music itself has changed over recent decades, equally important is the development and diversification of the meanings behind it – these transformations too are explored in what follows. A final part of the mix is the vibrant ‘Balkan party’ scene in the city. Thanks to the efforts of a group of DJs and musicians (Shantel, Robert Soko), a huge market for Balkan Beats developed in Berlin from the late 1990s onwards. The demographic is that of the dancefloor, which knows what it likes and doesn’t like to draw lines: klezmer, Russian and Eastern European folk music is incorporated into this soundworld.<sup>60</sup> This is allied to a rapid influx into the city of Russians, Poles and people from the Balkans and former

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<sup>56</sup> For example, bassist Carsten Wegener told me: “In Germany we don’t have really a tradition, it was all murdered by the Second World War and everything which was connected with it.” (Personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin. May 2nd, 2014.)

<sup>57</sup> cf. Wood (2013, chapter 4).

<sup>58</sup> On klezmer modes and ornamentation, see Appendix 1.

<sup>59</sup> The complex social and cultural functions to which this musical ‘Otherness’ are put to are analysed by David Kaminsky in his discussions of the Swedish klezmer movement (2014 & 2015).

<sup>60</sup> The ambivalent cultural implications of this ‘absorption’ and displacement are analysed in full by Carol Silverman (2015). See also Dimova (2007).

Soviet republics, who now mix with the Berlin partygoers (native, tourist and Western incomers) to create a ready-made audience for good-time *boom-cha* party music. Some Berlin klezmer exists in this world, especially in venues where the styles overlap, and occasionally this world plays back into the klezmer subculture. As a related though more sedate sideline, we might also point to Berlin's growing *bal-folk* scene, a loose network of folk dancers and musicians playing French, Balkan, Israeli, Swedish and Central European repertoire, with which some klezmer music is a natural partner. Here is promoter, DJ and Eastbloc Records founder Armin Siebert outlining what he sees as some popular perceptions:

This is a general feature of music from Eastern Europe, that it's more lively, more energetic, more wild, more crazy. Which is something maybe we Western people like a little bit, because we are more controlled, more organised, more northern, which means more reserved, more distance [...] And then there are the melodies. Which, on one hand are very exotic for us. On the other, they are very melodic, so they touch some sort of, you know, human thing there inside. So it's very attractive. And then you have also a mixture of instruments which are familiar and exotic at the same time, as you have clarinet, accordion, violin. So this makes this mixture of melodies, of exotic, of folk, which means tradition. But on top, you can dance to it!<sup>61</sup>

The categories that follow were arrived upon quite early during my fieldwork. They began as a methodological tool, a sketch of the musical styles of different artists that I was starting to meet and hear. The more I thought about these categories, the more I realised that their value was not so much as an epistemological cross-section of musical life, but as a way of theorising different elements of an ongoing discussion around tradition, innovation, musical function and cultural identity. The categories are partly defined by musical style, partly by political or philosophical orientation, and occasionally by chronology. The goal of this first chapter, then, is to explore elements and relationships of musical style as it currently exists within the Berlin klezmer scene under discussion, and also to understand the structural elements and operations that make up some of the different networks at play. In a sense, each of the bands or artists discussed could be viewed as operating at the centre of their own particular network, but my aim is also to locate their links and positions within the wider Berlin scene. Several of the categories share markedly similar network relations, but overall the scene is too fluid to impose a single network on any of these categories. Instead, I will endeavour to

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<sup>61</sup> Personal interview, Mitte, Berlin. June 24th, 2014.

highlight significant connections and important relations, alongside a close reading of specific musical detail. I am not attempting to tell a comprehensive story of Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music. Rather, the four categories are a launchpad from which to examine the different ways that klezmer functions as a focal point of particular musical and social elements. As usual, Mark Slobin (1993:12) puts it much better:

I do not mean to offer closed categories, but rather to stress the importance of overlapping and intersecting planes and perspectives. I have coined some new terms and used some old ones in new ways to refresh the intellectual palate, and I will not be free of my own paradoxes and contradictions. Above all, *I do not mean to present a model, nor will I come up with one-sentence definitions of terms.* For me, terms are creatures of discourse, somewhere between stalking-horses and red-herrings [italics in original].

### **German pioneers<sup>62</sup> and outsiders**

Raised in East Germany by a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, singer Karsten Troyke has been a tireless advocate for Jewish music and song for over thirty years. Troyke's father, Josh Selhorn, was a jazz concert promoter and artist manager. A devoted communist, he nevertheless struggled with the day-to-day *realpolitik* of the East German system and was frequently in trouble for his support of jazz music. His arguments for its role as the voice of an oppressed minority went some way to convincing the authorities, and despite censorship and working difficulties, Selhorn was permitted an unusual amount of travel to the West, from where he would frequently return with records unavailable in the East.<sup>63</sup> Alongside regular jazz concerts and listening evenings, Selhorn organised 'Jewish evenings'. These events presented German translations of Yiddish literature and recordings of Yiddish song. As a young man, Karsten gravitated naturally towards the music that his father was promoting:

[PA: *How did you find your material?*]

That came from old records and old people. And even before I was born, my father who was a cultural manager – it was not called like this in East Germany – he supported and organised jazz evenings, and one of those was called "Jewish evening". And later I replaced simply the records with me singing with a guitar.

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<sup>62</sup> This term in no way discounts the pioneering work of Lin Jaldati and others, mentioned above. My analysis, however, focuses upon musicians who remain active today in the city's Yiddish and klezmer music scene.

<sup>63</sup> From <http://www.karsten-troyke.de/josh.html>: "Against work prohibition (as publisher's reader) and censorship (of his jazz projects), over the years he created for himself a niche as free agent and 'jazz pope' of the GDR." Accessed September 12th, 2015.

[PA: Presumably there was lots of music. What drew you to the Yiddish?]

No idea. Actually, I wanted to see myself as a singer-songwriter, as you would say today. And I started writing songs, and I included some of the Yiddish songs I knew in my concerts and people never asked any questions about my songs! Only the Yiddish stuff, they said ‘that’s interesting’. And so I was pushed into that, and I always loved it.<sup>64</sup>

A small subcultural particle, then, linked interculturally through his father’s work to forgotten repertoire and hidden tradition and pushing frequently against the constraints of the superculture. The above quote also points to the occasionally disconnected (Ottens, 2008:225) and at times accidental groupings of musical pioneers in any given subculture: individuals or small groups who, faced with limited resources or guidance, work hard to find their own version of a music that fascinates them.<sup>65</sup> This is in contrast to, or perhaps preceding, Tamara Livingston’s (1999:66) chronology of music revivals as stemming from an “overt cultural and political agenda”. However, even if music is the attraction, such ideologically resonant music as Yiddish song in Germany can never be completely free of implications and associations:

What we used to have in Germany, some sort of *schlechtes Gewissen*. Bad feelings about the past. In the audience and even with the musicians sometimes. It’s gone now, I think. And so I remember concerts in the early 90s where it was not important how good was that onstage, it was only good to be at a Jewish concert: ‘Look, I’m here, I’m one of the goodies’.<sup>66</sup>

Though he is still only 55, Troyke’s hard-earned reputation, boyishly craggy face and superbly gravelly voice mean that he is now approaching elder statesman status, although the twinkle in his eye and disarmingly friendly manner rapidly dispel any sense of self-importance. Troyke has done much to keep alive a core repertoire of Yiddish song in the city, as well as acting as a teaching ambassador for the material in Paris, London and the USA.<sup>67</sup> He also presents introductory and explanatory *Shabbat* evenings and Jewish festival events around Germany, frequently in partnership with writers or poets. Through persistence (and talent) Troyke has turned his early, individualised fascination into an active and ongoing network, which links him through performance to concert series such as Burkhardt Seidemann’s Klezmerfest<sup>68</sup> and venues

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<sup>64</sup> All Karsten’s comments come from a personal interview, Mitte, Berlin. July 20th, 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Scottish musician and academic Stuart Eydmann (forthcoming) theorises a similar movement in the Scottish folk revival of the 1970s.

<sup>66</sup> Karsten Troyke, interview, 2014.

<sup>67</sup> At *Medem Bibliothek*, SOAS, and Northfield College, Minnesota, among others

<sup>68</sup> See later in this chapter.

such as Dancehouse WABE and Panda Theater, academically to lecture events and research networks,<sup>69</sup> and collaboratively to a wide range of musicians.<sup>70</sup> His early connections to the *Tage der jiddischen Kultur* and subsequently the Hackesches Hoftheater, his tireless concertising inside and outside the city, and his ongoing recording relationship with Oriente Musik make him a centralised figure in the contemporary scene.

However, none of this is presented in a heavy-handed or overly didactic way. Troyke is a master of inclusivity, and during my time in Berlin I had the chance to see him transform the driest of halls – and audiences – into lively, smiling, singing participants. He is also not afraid to take liberties with the tradition he upholds. One of the songs in his repertoire is the Yiddish classic “Margaritkelech” (to reappear in a later chapter), which conventionally ends with a young girl deserted by her faithless lover. At one of the concerts I attended, Karsten asked the audience whether they wouldn’t prefer a happy ending. He then proceeded to re-write the last verse on the spot, reuniting the two lovers, notching up the tempo to cabaret polka speed and enlisting the entire audience in a far more joyful wordless singalong to round off the number. This sort of playfulness points to an artist completely at ease with his material and secure in his own interpretative perspective. Such ability to seamlessly cross cultural boundaries and adapt materials at hand is at the heart of Troyke’s performance aesthetic. It is an approach deeply-rooted in a knowledge of tradition and heritage, whilst at the same time free enough to endow the music with a modernity and flexibility. Traditional music, in this way, is framed as a malleable resource, able to exist with relevance and significance in the contemporary context.

Karsten’s style is warm and witty. His performances are designed to instil in his audiences a love for the music that has been such a central part of his life. He tends to work with small ensembles and is loyal in his collaborations: he has worked with the same pianist, Götz Lindenberg, for 25 years, and has long-standing associations with singer Suzanna and the Russian Trio Scho. This creates a symbiotic mutual understanding that allows Troyke to treat his performances flexibly, stretching phrases

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<sup>69</sup> For example, Troyke performed traditional and original songs as part of Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung’s *Wilna - Wilno - Vilnius. Das jiddische Vilne*, a lecture series exploring the history and cultural significance of Vilna in Jewish history, in October 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Troyke performs regularly around the country with singer Bettina Wegner, clarinetist Jan Hermerschmidt, violinist Daniel Weltlinger, and many more.

*ad lib*, confident in his accompanists' ability to follow. The ensemble sonority that he prefers is a conventional one, with fiddle, accordion, piano, bass and guitar the prominent voices. It is a polished, acoustic, cabaret-esque soundworld which connotes a certain intimacy in performance. The instrumental and stylistic choices, therefore, can be framed within a dominant code of Yiddish song – no electric guitars, hip-hop loops or squealing saxophones here.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, the repertoire that Troyke explores is often a well-trodden path: “der Rebbe Elimelekh”, “Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn”, “Friling”.<sup>72</sup> But by no means exclusively so – in 1997 he recorded an album of *Jüdische Vergessene Lieder*<sup>73</sup> (forgotten Jewish songs), consisting of material collected from his Yiddish teacher-mentor Sara Bialas-Tenenberg (Waligórska, 2013:122-3). Karsten also performs songs from the Vilna ghetto and has made several excellent Yiddish translation versions of more contemporary material, such as Leonard Cohen’s “Dance Me to the End of Time”.

Troyke, then, has established a large repertoire base that allows him to adapt his performance to different circumstances, balancing historical enquiry, cabaret entertainment and Jewish memory in varying degrees. Where his interpretations come into their own, however, is in their linguistic fluidity and playfulness. A native German who is also fluent in English and Yiddish, Karsten is well-placed to exploit inevitable linguistic overlaps when performing works that deal with an international, migratory, multi-linguistic experience. One of the finest examples is in his treatment of the song “Bulbes”,<sup>74</sup> a comic song detailing the unchanging diet of a hard-up family:

<i>Zuntig bulbes, montig bulbes,</i>	Sunday spuds, Monday spuds,
<i>Dinstig un mitwoch – bulbes,</i>	Tuesday and Wednesday – spuds,
<i>Donnershtig un fraytig – bulbes,</i>	Thursday and Friday – spuds,
<i>Shabes in a novine a bulbe kigele!</i>	On the Sabbath, a special treat – a potato pudding!
<i>Zuntig – vayter bulbes!</i>	Sunday – potatoes again! <sup>75</sup>

In his rendition, Troyke uses the song’s repetitive structure to his advantage, singing each chorus in a different language: from “*bulbes*” to “*Kartoffeln*” to “*taters*”. Not only this, but within the verses he skips freely between the three languages line by line,

<sup>71</sup> Unlike, for example, some of New York’s “Radical Jewish Music” (Barzel, 2011, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> This last choice also points up Karsten’s musical empathy with the world of Yiddish tango (see Czackis, 2003, 2009), of which he has released two CDs: RIEN 59 (2006), RIEN 82 (2012).

<sup>73</sup> Raumer Records: RR 12097.

<sup>74</sup> Yiddish: potatoes.

<sup>75</sup> Rubin (2000:279).

exchanging the repeated words for their translated versions upon their next appearance. It is a linguistic tour-de-force, executed with skill and a smile. This fluidity is something that younger singer Daniel Kahn has learnt from a great deal, although, as we shall see, he frequently employs the technique much more subversively. It also links Troyke's music to the contemporary city, locating it within the multilingual norm that is a fundamental part of today's Berlin, discussed in depth later.

Whilst Karsten may appear lightly offhand about his musical research, he has in fact worked extremely hard to build up the knowledge and technique that underpins such appealingly artless musical style. Detailed investigation is of course a feature of music revivals in general (Livingston, 1999). The difference between my German interviewees and their American revival counterparts is the lack of available resources. In the 1980s, Germany had no YIVO<sup>76</sup> equivalent, no elder statesmen of klezmer to seek out,<sup>77</sup> and very few spaces receptive to a rediscovery of Jewish music – a notable absence of functional networks.<sup>78</sup> Before the arrival of a more general guiding aesthetic in the form of Brave Old World or Giora Feidman (discussed in detail later), earlier practitioners were very much discovering things for themselves, with whatever they could find. The result of this is a variety of approaches to the musical material, depending on the different discoveries and experiences of the protagonists. One of Karsten's frequent musical partners, long-time Aufwind clarinettist Jan Hermerschmidt, sets it out like this:

Yiddish was important because it was a part of the East and yet one learnt nothing about it in school. Jews had been killed but nothing was said about who they actually were. What sort of culture they had had in Germany, and what was the difference between that and the culture of Eastern Europe. In the beginning we knew nothing about this [...] There was a collector of Yiddish and klezmer records of all types in Bremen. There were no concerts yet, so we had to seek out recordings anywhere that anyone had them.<sup>79</sup>

For Aufwind, the break came with the realisation that there may be resources closer to home:

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<sup>76</sup> *Yiddisher Visnshaftlecher Institut* (Institute for Jewish Research), founded in Vilna in 1925 and relocated to New York in 1940. See [www.yivo.org](http://www.yivo.org), accessed November 10th, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> For example, Feldman and Statman's "alliance" with Dave Tarras (Slobin, 2000:3).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Ottens' (2008:225) discussion of Karsten Troyke: "Because of its small and marginal quality and the diversity of the individual performers and activists, Troyke was careful to point out that these few individuals and groups did not constitute a music scene at that time: 'We were such a small group that one can't speak of a Yiddish music scene. We also came from very different corners and only got together through the Days of Yiddish Culture.'"

<sup>79</sup> Jan Hermerschmidt, personal interview, Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. May 19th, 2014.



We travelled to Warsaw, to the Yiddish Theatre in Bucharest. We just carried sleeping bags, clarinets under our arms. A producer from the Bucharest Theatre asked us what we were doing there, why had we travelled all the way to Romania when there was a good Yiddish translator in Prenzlauer Berg? Didn't we know him? No, we didn't know him. So we contacted him. And at first he saw us as German *goyim*.<sup>80</sup> We had to convince him we wanted to do Yiddish music.<sup>81</sup>

The band was successful in their efforts and in November 2014, Aufwind celebrated their 30th birthday with a concert at Berlin dancehouse WABE. As both Jan and Heiko Lehmann told me, Aufwind also had to work hard to be accepted as a credible klezmer band on the international stage. As early, non-Jewish, ambassadors for German klezmer, these artists faced inevitable questions about their intentions, especially from American audiences and musicians, and both men spoke of the difficult conversations they had encountered upon their first trips to KlezKamp.<sup>82</sup> We can see this as a characteristic of their pioneer position, blazing something of a trail that others were to follow over the next decade. Accordionist Franka Lampe sums up this development nicely:

The first year was Heiko Lehmann, the second year was Heiko's band Aufwind, and the third year was La'om, my band. Heiko and Aufwind, they had a lot to do there as Germans in KlezKamp. La'om had to do a lot too, but not so much. Now it's starting to be 'oh, a German band again!'<sup>83</sup>

A parallel pioneer characteristic can be seen in the piecing together of a musical style from the limited resources at hand, with the result that this music still possesses a distinct soundworld and artistic aesthetic. Aufwind's sound is in fact one that is heard less and less within klezmer music in Berlin. It is characterised by a lightness and folkiness that has largely been replaced by heavier, more driven and dance-oriented performance practice (discussed in depth later). There are several elements at play here. Hardy Reich's mandolin and banjo chords and counterlines, whilst rhythmically tight and strong, are lighter, more 'tinkly' sonorities than the forceful piano or accordion accompaniments characteristic of more recent klezmer dance bands discussed below.<sup>84</sup> And instead of accordion, the band features Andreas Rohde's bandoneon. This unusual and richly-textured instrument is nevertheless one that references the subtler sound of the German bandoneon tradition more than the brasher counter-rhythms of, for example,

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<sup>80</sup> Yiddish term for non-Jews (sing. *goy*) (Weinreich, 1977).

<sup>81</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Annual Yiddish culture festival founded by Henry Sapoznik and Adrienne Cooper. KlezKamp ran for 30 years until its final 2014 meeting. See Sapoznik (2002).

<sup>83</sup> Personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin. March 4th, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> The accordion's role in klezmer music is the subject of Chapter 5.

Knoblauch Klezmer Band or You Shouldn't Know From It (both covered in subsequent sections). Singing duties are principally taken by Reich and fiddler Claudia Koch, but are also shared between the whole band, again adding to the ensemble's folkier sound.

Aufwind share similar early network connections to Berlin's *Tage der jiddischen Kultur* and the Hackesches Hoftheater. They have performed in Israel, Argentina, the USA and throughout Europe, as well as appearing at the 2009 Berliner Philharmonie's Klezmer Festival and klezmer festivals in Magdeburg, Bremen and Bamberg. Like Troyke, the band take their responsibilities seriously: their website hosts links to YIVO, the Freedman digital Jewish Sound Archive, Paris' Yiddish culture centre (Medem Bibliotheque) and Iosif Vaisman's "Virtual Shtetl" resource.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, they also performed in a 1990s Gorki Theater production of Sobol's *Ghetto*. Although both Troyke and Aufwind have a busy concert schedule and are well-respected within the musical community, they retain a paradoxical outsider status in the contemporary scene. Their pre-dating of the workshop hegemony which underpinned the 1990s klezmer boom in the city means that they have retained their own, occasionally idiosyncratic, approach. Aufwind are in some ways a bridge between Zupfgeigenhansel's guitar-folk sound of and the more gleeful profusion of the past couple of decades – their distinctive aesthetic forged from the particularly local set of constraints under which they developed their sound in the years before reunification. Nowadays, this places them in a curious relationship to the city's scene, both an intrinsic and fundamental part of it, and yet somewhat distanced from the buzz of activity:

Exactly. Apart. For us was always the question: we've been here since the early times, but we're not so integrated. We don't play a role in the sorts of things that others do, things like Klezmer Lounge,<sup>86</sup> for example. The others find us uninteresting. We prefer to play our own arrangements, in different keys. I'd be interested to go to Weimar<sup>87</sup>, but I can't go there as a student, that would be a step backwards. And as a teacher, I'd have to do something which is not me. And so, as you say, Aufwind is a little 'outside'.<sup>88</sup>

Sharing similar outsider status but raised in West Berlin, Kasbek have almost twenty years on Aufwind. In the early 1960s, the trio of Andreas Karpen (balalaika and domra),

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<sup>85</sup> Although some links are now out-of-date. See <http://www.aufwindmusik.de/index-eng.htm>. Accessed July 6th, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>87</sup> Yiddish Summer Weimar: a four-week-long series of workshops and concerts curated by Alan Bern. Discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

<sup>88</sup> Jan Hermerschmidt, interview, 2014.

Frieder Breikreutz (violin) and Christian Müller (contrabass balalaika) formed themselves into a street band purveying Russian songs and folklore, pitting themselves explicitly against the tide of American and English pop music and implicitly against the partition of their city: “To the audience of the divided city, [Kasbek] must have seemed like creatures from another star.”<sup>89</sup> The addition of guitarist Uwe Sauerwein in 1984 and his repertoire of Yiddish song and stories pushed the band strongly in a more klezmer-oriented direction, and these days their performances include klezmer, Yiddish song, Russian folk tunes and songs, Macedonian music and even former Yugoslavian film tunes. Kasbek have always made a point of collaborating and appearing with a wide range of musicians, including Turkish, Arabic, Russian and Greek musicians either based in the city or passing through.<sup>90</sup> In concert and also to talk to, Kasbek are unpretentious and unshowy. Although their standard is high, music is not their income.<sup>91</sup> They still perform regularly, often in small venues such as Mitte’s Cafe Oberwasser or Moabit’s Kapitel 21, and largely for their own enjoyment. Like Troyke and Aufwind, the band has developed its own distinct sound and style. Lacking a star performer or dramatic stage presence, Kasbek continue to be respected as a quiet and persistent force in the city – the first pioneers.

The work of Karsten Troyke, Aufwind and Kasbek was essential in creating and maintaining an early space for klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin. What followed them – what musicians in the city now refer to with a wry smile as the ‘klezmer boom’ – would open up the possibilities of what klezmer music could be. Jan Hermerschmidt outlines the progression nicely:

It has to do with German history. This is a music which is very danceable, lively, improvisational. Germans heard it and found it very exciting. And then it was also music with a Jewish background, which is a big topic in Germany. So when the boom came it was like a release. This is also normal music, that you can dance to. Music to drink to, to be happy to, even bad or evil people can enjoy it. Party music. For us it was always much more serious. A search for closeness to this culture. We have no claim – we are outsiders, guests, we are not Jews [...] the boom educated people about this music, but it also made it fun.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> <http://www.kasbek-ensemble.de/geschichte.html>. Accessed September 5th, 2015.

<sup>90</sup> In the late 1980s, they also for a time included a young Alan Bern in their line-up.

<sup>91</sup> They are, in fact, a journalist, a clergyman, an architect and a doctor.

<sup>92</sup> Interview, 2014.

This is not to say that the music of Aufwind, Kasbek or Troyke is not ‘fun’. What it points to, however, is a broadening demographic – a period in Berlin from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s that saw a mushrooming of bands, performance spaces<sup>93</sup> (Waligórska, 2013) and workshops,<sup>94</sup> physical hubs around which the subculture could coalesce. Similarly, with the increasing arrival of international musicians into the city (discussed below), the affinity interculture began to widen, part of Berlin’s growing twenty-first century transnational identity.<sup>95</sup> We can see some of the musical changes that mark this shift by looking at two versions of the much-played klezmer standard “Odessa Bulgarish”.<sup>96</sup> Kasbek’s recording, from 1996,<sup>97</sup> is characterised by a steady rhythm, regular bassline, and subtle guitar countermelody and harmony line. It is played at about 170bpm, giving the music a strong forward momentum whilst remaining steady and in control. The tune begins with a half-time violin pick-up, and thereafter the band plays head-down all the way through to the end. Statement of the melody is shared between violin and guitar, with mandolin either providing strong and repetitive offbeat chords or high ostinati quavers to build tension and excitement (figure 3).

The group Grinstein’s Mischpoche<sup>98</sup> was formed in the late 1990s, comprising musicians who are still very much active in the city’s musical life. Their performance of the same tune shows clearly the musical processes underpinning this newer good-time sound. Gone are the string textures of Kasbek or Aufwind, replaced with the harder edges of Detlef Pegelow’s tuba and Thomas Schudack’s tenor horn. Darabouka, frame drum and full kit combine with fast accordion and electric guitar stabs to impel a more driving, dancefloor-oriented aesthetic. The band’s live recording<sup>99</sup> of “Odessa Bulgar”, nearly a decade after Kasbek’s, is now 10bpm faster. It begins with a long clarinet improvisation, replete with shrieks, growls<sup>100</sup> and squeals. The first statement of the melody is slow and drawn-out, each note interspersed with heavy *sforzando* hits from the rest of the band. This gradually accelerates up to speed through the first four bars,

<sup>93</sup> Discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>94</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>95</sup> e.g. Till (2005:5): “This cosmopolitan city of the twenty-first century is also an international cultural center, ranked above London in a recent *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine for its numerous symphonic orchestras, opera houses, choirs, galleries and museums, theaters, alternative art scene, and buildings designed by internationally famous architects.”

<sup>96</sup> On the inconsistencies and unreliability of klezmer titles, see Netsky (2002a:16). Ciaran Carson (1997:10), in his brilliantly meandering discussion of Irish music, comprehensively and convincingly undermines any consistent or verifiable connection between tune names and the places to which they refer. Here, however, I am referring to the tune as documented in Sapoznik & Sokolow (1987:39).

<sup>97</sup> On *Klezmer à la Russe*, INEDIT W 260066.

<sup>98</sup> Yiddish word for family, though here in a Germanised spelling.

<sup>99</sup> [http://www.mischpoche.de/musik/live/Odessa\\_Bulgarish.mp3](http://www.mischpoche.de/musik/live/Odessa_Bulgarish.mp3). Accessed January 28th, 2016.

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter 4.

by which time a fast ‘boom-cha’ groove has been established. The transcription below is from the first-part repeat, melody this time taken by trumpet. Instead of Kasbek’s steady offbeat patterns, here we see electric guitar giving a spikier and sparser accompaniment, tuba moving with more freedom through the harmony, and the music’s deliberately dancey, ‘party’ aesthetic underscored and reinforced by Attila Wiegand’s fast percussion patterns (figure 4).

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the piece "Odessa Bulgar" by Kasbek (1996). Each system consists of four staves: Violin (Vln.), Acoustic Guitar (Guit.), Mandolin (Mdn.), and Bass Balalaika (B. Bal.). The music is written in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first system shows the initial entry of the instruments. The second system continues the piece, with the Violin staff including accents (^^) over certain notes. The third system shows further development of the instrumental textures, with the Mandolin and Bass Balalaika parts maintaining their respective rhythmic patterns.

Figure 3. Kasbek, “Odessa Bulgar”, 1996.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Odessa Bulgarian" by Grinstein's Mischpoche, recorded in 2003. The score is presented in three systems, each containing five staves for different instruments: Bb Trumpet, Electric Guitar, Accordion, Tuba, and Frame Drum. The music is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The Bb Trumpet part features a melodic line with some grace notes and slurs. The Electric Guitar and Accordion parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The Tuba part has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Frame Drum part consists of a steady, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 4. Grinstein's Mischpoche, "Odessa Bulgarian", 2003.

Whilst the so-called boom opened the doors for new bands, recordings and performance spaces, it was not without its problems. An increase in numbers brought an initial drop in musical standards, as a small pool of conscientious and respectful advocates expanded into a happy, noisy group of party-seekers. As newer home-grown bands began to settle and develop, this would soon reflect a refining of quality, but it also

began to foreground the ideological stickiness of so many non-Jewish Germans playing Jewish folk music:

This was disturbing in those days. And it only changed when the musicians became better and did know what they were actually doing. And the space, I think the space just came because there was an audience [...] after some years, people who come not honestly to such concerts would skip it later. And the people who stay – and there are still enough today – they get the feeling and you have a sort of community like this.<sup>101</sup>

Karsten's "progression of quality"<sup>102</sup> is the second effect. As many interviewees told me, the boom brought in its wake a large amount of amateurs who brought enthusiasm and numbers to the scene but not much else. Whilst some have dropped by the wayside or gone on to follow other musical paths,<sup>103</sup> what remains is a distilled pool of world-class players, ranging in age from mid-20s to late-40s, significantly augmented by newer arrivals such as Americans Michael Tuttle and Daniel Kahn, Eli Fabrikant (Israel), Marina Bondas (Ukraine) or Latvians Sasha Lurje and Ilya Shneyveys, some of whom figure prominently in this thesis. The network relations of these musicians are multiple. Aside from the musical groupings outlined in this chapter, many of these musicians are regular instructors at national and international festivals and workshops such as Yiddish Summer Weimar, KlezKanada and St Petersburg's Klezfest. This allows the forging of new links between musicians, but also boosts the profile of these instructors in terms of their audiences. Several maintain strong ties to record labels such as Oriente and Piranha, and most are connected (via performance or the promotion of their own ensembles) to a greater or lesser extent to venues around the city.<sup>104</sup> As stated earlier in this chapter, several musicians act as hubs in their roles as jam session coordinators (offering weakly-tied participants access to new musical contacts and repertoire) or leaders of projects such as Alpen Klezmer or Semer Label Reloaded – both discussed later in the thesis.

### **Modernists**

The continual refining of performance and repertoire is particularly evident in my next category, a group of performers who share what we might call a particularly

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<sup>101</sup> Karsten Troyke, interview, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Grinstein's Mischpoche, for example, are now the Bakshish Brass Band.

<sup>104</sup> Discussed in Chapter 2.

‘musicianly’ approach. In choosing the name modernist, I am not making a connection to the Modernist movement, and I doubt this is a term that the players here would ascribe to themselves. I am using the word to suggest a sense of artistic clarity, single-mindedness, and an express aim to rediscover and make relevant little-known historical material. The transformation of the early and dispersed Yiddish-interest subculture into a more coherent ‘scene’<sup>105</sup> also brought with it an increased consistency of approach and ideology. In the 1990s, this was largely achieved through a series of workshops held throughout Germany and grouped around two distinct poles: on the one hand the loose humanism of Argentinian-Israeli clarinettist Giora Feidman, and on the other the more rigorous, historically-informed work of members of the American band Brave Old World<sup>106</sup> (Gruber, 2002:228-30).<sup>107</sup> The attractiveness of Feidman’s non-sectarian, togetherness-through-music appeal to a German audience just beginning to uncover and come to terms with Holocaust history (Rubin, 2015a:208) is clear, whilst its jettisoning of context simultaneously raises problematic questions of cultural amnesia.<sup>108</sup> Nowadays, Feidman is decidedly less popular amongst the Berlin musicians whom I interviewed, his easy-going spirituality and inclusiveness deconstructed as heavy on guru-like platitudes but lacking in musical substance.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, the effect of his huge pre-millennial popularity is undeniable (Rubin, 2015a), and several musicians whom I met at Yiddish Summer Weimar had been part of trips that Feidman organised for young German musicians to play at Israel’s Tsfat klezmer festival, an experience that had left them with a lifelong love of the music.

Chapter four explores in depth the alternative – existential and temporally rooted – approach of Brave Old World and others, but it is important to point out that the musicians in this section all acknowledge this strong influence. Nevertheless, fluidity once again characterises what follows. Several of the protagonists here also play roles in subsequent categories: these taxonomies are intended as a flexible means to explore different musical approaches, not as a rigid delineation of personnel or band names.

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<sup>105</sup> The discussion of scenes is taken up further in Chapter 2, with reference to the work of Straw (1991, 2001, 2004, 2015), Shank (1994) and Hesmondhalgh (2005).

<sup>106</sup> Accordionist and pianist Alan Bern, clarinettist Kurt Björling, singer and violinist Michael Alpert and bassist Stuart Brotman. Clarinettist Joel Rubin was a founder member (playing with the band until 1992), but the workshops to which my interviewees referred all took place once Björling had joined.

<sup>107</sup> cf. Rubin (2014:48).

<sup>108</sup> This discussion is taken up fully in Chapter four.

<sup>109</sup> At Yiddish Summer Weimar 2014, for example, Feidman’s name was, occasionally, subtly invoked as a shorthand for shallow and clichéd musical thought.



Musically, the modernists are all highly-trained musicians. They have all benefitted from a consistent klezmer pedagogy of KlezKamp or Weimar, and many now act as teachers at these same workshops. They are some of the most in-demand musicians on the international stage and collaborate frequently with American counterparts such as trumpeter Frank London, clarinettist Michael Winograd and trombonist Dan Blacksberg. The musicians in this category include, for example, clarinettist Christian Dawid, accordionists Franka Lampe and Sanne Möricke, singer Andrea Pancur, and violinist Mark Kohnatsky. Some of their ensembles are Sher on a Shier, Schikker wi Lot, Khupe,<sup>110</sup> Modern Klezmer Quartet, and You Shouldn't Know From It.

The modernists don't wear waistcoats and neckerchiefs.<sup>111</sup> Although Yiddish will often feature in their band names, these names are unlikely to be puns, 'Yiddishisms', or any kind of 'klez-' neologism.<sup>112</sup> Unlike the pioneers, modernist musical researches and resources are not starting from nowhere. Building on the work done by older musicians, modernist interest frequently falls on exploring lesser-known repertoire or genre areas. Accordion player Franka Lampe<sup>113</sup> is a good example, standing as she does at a distinct set of musical-cultural interstices. Taught by Alan Bern, Franka was a founder member of young East German klezmer band La'om in the early nineties, who cut their teeth playing a range of traditional and reasonably well-known klezmer repertoire. Since then, she has gone on to be a part of Modern Klezmer Quartet, one of whose recent projects included an uncovering of the folk music roots of Dmitri Shostakovich's song cycle "From Jewish Folk Poetry". Franka also has a long-standing collaboration with German singer and fluent Yiddish-speaker Fabian Schnedler. Their programme includes re-harmonised versions from Shmuel Lehmann's 1928 collection of *Ganovim Lider*.<sup>114</sup> This sort of repertoire expansion typifies one side of the modernist aesthetic, namely the utilisation of a solid technical and musical understanding of the language of klezmer in order to shed new light on areas so far bypassed by the European revival.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Yiddish: dance without an end, as drunk as Lot, wedding canopy.

<sup>111</sup> At a workshop once with British clarinettist Merlin Shepherd, he ironically dubbed this "the klezmer uniform".

<sup>112</sup> See Chapter 3 for examples.

<sup>113</sup> Whilst completing this thesis, I learnt the sad news that Franka had finally lost an ongoing battle with cancer. She passed away on the evening of January 6th, 2016. I have kept my original text as she is a friend that I prefer to remember in the present, rather than past, tense.

<sup>114</sup> Yiddish: thieves songs.

<sup>115</sup> Franka also boasts a weird and wonderfully twisted major key version of Naftule Brandwein's "Firn di Mekhutanim Aheyim" (Leading the In-laws Home).

One version of the modernist approach is clean-cut and professional, occasionally at the expense of more overt passion. Here are some fieldnotes written after a Sher on a Shier<sup>116</sup> concert in Mitte's Kaffee Burger:

A good quartet with some fine and tight arrangements. The repertoire is consciously 19th/early 20th century – the idea being to transport us back to the dance halls of that time. To this end, they also play acoustically. This is quite radical, and they use the space accordingly – players moving in and out as they come into the limelight, the quartet breaking off into two duos/trio plus one. This is an eye-opener – it makes one listen to the music in a different way, and allows them to explore it differently as well. The tunes run from semi-obscure to fairly well-known (after two months in Berlin I had already heard most of them at least once, somewhere). They play with joy and obvious love for the music, but the overall impression is quite straight, almost classical. If the aim with the acoustic decision is to recreate an earlier era of joyful and unbridled klezmer dancing, it feels more studied than that. A smaller acoustic club might suit them better.

They do do one particularly lovely thing – performing “Shnirele Perele”,<sup>117</sup> the quartet end with an acoustically-created echo: each instrument playing the same phrase just slightly behind the last one, giving a four-way stuttering reverb. Powerful and mesmerising effect. All the arrangements are very creative and very tight – a high level of skill but ordered and controlled. The bass player at times reminds me of Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot*, before Society Sue tells him to put a little heat under it. One can't help feeling that a 19th century dance band might have been a bit more raucous, let go a bit more. This is all about musicianship and arrangements and repertoire, and less about *koyekh*<sup>118</sup>. Modernist clarity?

If this example shows klezmer framed within what we might call a chamber music aesthetic, drummer Hampus Melin's outfit comes from the other direction. You Shouldn't Know From It is a klezmer dance band with members from France, Sweden, Holland and America<sup>119</sup> – reflecting the internationalism of the city and the klezmer practice within it. Their expressed aim is to play “traditional Jewish dance music [...] it's not pretentious, it's music like it is”.<sup>120</sup> As part of Daniel Kahn's Painted Bird, Melin worked for several years in the house jam session band at Krakow Festival of Jewish Culture,<sup>121</sup> building up a solid and unshowy technique alongside a love of the music's core functional dance role. Melin has internalised the 3-3-2 patterns, press rolls and subtle forward-momentum of older klezmer drummers such as Philadelphian Elaine Hoffman Watts. You Shouldn't Know From It is a conscious and clearheaded attempt to take that same spirit to the bars and clubs of Berlin and beyond, making no musical

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<sup>116</sup> Johannes Paul Gräßer (violin), Sabine Döll (double bass), Anja Günther (clarinet), Franka Lampe (accordion).

<sup>117</sup> A Hasidic, or perhaps Hasidic-style, song (here performed instrumentally): “A String of Pearls”.

<sup>118</sup> Yiddish: strength, power (or in this case, ‘oomph’).

<sup>119</sup> Samuel Maquin (clarinet), Hampus Melin (drums), Sanne Möricke (accordion), Michael Tuttle (bass). Latvian Sasha Lurje guests on vocals.

<sup>120</sup> See [www.knowfromit.com](http://www.knowfromit.com). Accessed 20th August, 2015.

<sup>121</sup> On this festival, see Waligórska (2013).

concessions along the way. In the context of the large number of bands who include klezmer as one ingredient among many in a self-consciously eclectic folk/jazz/ska/gypsy mix,<sup>122</sup> the avowed traditionalism of a band such as this in fact becomes quite radical. And in contrast to Sher on a Shier, You Shouldn't Know From It's gigs are lively, dancey and highly-charged affairs. They manage to tread the line between tradition and excitement a little more lightly, with arrangements less foregrounded, technique worn less heavily and greater emphasis placed on collectivity:

Well, I come from a jazz background, where in a jam session or in any kind of concert situation, you've got to be prepared somehow. You've gotta have your shit together and you'll be judged from it. And with klezmer I don't feel it's working like that. Sure, when you can be a leader you can lead, but that's still something different.<sup>123</sup>

Accordianist Sanne Möricke and clarinettist Samuel Maquin's frequent appearances on the international stage give them a wide-ranging experience of approaches to traditional repertoire, whilst all the quartet's experience playing across a variety of ensembles lends their music an attractively free and loose aesthetic. Here is Hampus again:

One of the things is that everyone can play at the same time. It's not like we go through the melody and there's a bunch of solos. The whole band makes up for the machinery somehow, everyone plays together. Sure. The melody will be the same, but it will be played differently [...] It's not a straight through German classical music kind of scenario.<sup>124</sup>

Magdalena Waligórska (2013) notes that several ensembles who came together in the early years of this century as klezmer bands have since widened their musical horizons, taking in Balkan, Turkish and Greek music and at times changing their names to reflect this. You Shouldn't Know From It are unapologetic in their return to a commitment to straightahead klezmer music. Their 2015 debut album is entitled 'It's Klezmer!',<sup>125</sup> expressing both an artistic intention and simultaneously (via the exclamation mark) a certain ironic detachment. The album cover features a hand-painted green and yellow image – a map stripped of national borders or city names, its broad brushstrokes blurring distinctions between land and sea.<sup>126</sup> The album's title is pieced together from

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<sup>122</sup> For example, the Russian-German party band Skazka Orchestra. See <http://skazka.syncopation.de>. Accessed November 15th, 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Hampus Melin, interview, 2014.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Oriente Musik, DANZ107.

<sup>126</sup> The picture was painted by a 4 year-old friend of the band, Luci Cataldo.



Figure 5. You Shouldn't Know From It, *It's Klezmer!*, 2015 (reproduced with permission).

newsprint, kidnapper-style, a visual reference to the heterogeneity of the group's background and sound which also retains a nice amount of self-deprecating humour. The result manages to be both honest and self-aware, fresh but not naïve.

In their treatment of musical material, the modernists occupy an interesting space. They play almost exclusively traditional repertoire, gleaned from intercultural transmission networks (workshops, jam sessions, CD and mp3 swaps), recordings and written sources such as Beregovski (2001) and Kostakowsky (2001).<sup>127</sup> A consciousness of musical legacy is therefore fundamental. As students of Weimar and KlezKamp, these are the musicians most likely to be well-versed in what has by now become the accepted 'traditional' klezmer vocabulary and repertoire,<sup>128</sup> taking their musical cues from the recorded works of Dave Tarras, Naftule Brandwein, Belf's Romanian Orchestra and others.<sup>129</sup> However, because of the performers' level of skill and the ease with which they speak this klezmer language, the traditional soundworld that the modernists occupy in fact comes to sound surprisingly radical. In some ways, more radical and more

<sup>127</sup> See Chapter 4 and Appendix 1.

<sup>128</sup> See Appendix 1 for musical detail of this vocabulary.

<sup>129</sup> This is, of course, only one version of 'tradition', which will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

inventive than the raucous party sound of a band such as Grinstein’s Mischpoche, or the folksy freshness of the pioneers discussed above. As an example, here are 16 bars of a *hora* as played by You Shouldn’t Know From It. This is a piece from the 1916 Kostakowsky collection, as seen in figure 6.



Figure 6. “Rumanian Hora” (excerpt). Kostakowsky (2001:6).

A simple, pretty tune, characterised by a repeated rising sixth phrase that moves from E minor in the first section to G major in the fourth part, from where this excerpt is taken. What we find in Sanne Möricke and Samuel Maquin’s interpretation, however, is only the barest echo of this original melody. Instead, the material is used as a basis for spontaneous recomposition, resulting in a melodic line clearly related to the Kostakowsky above, but nevertheless firmly establishes its own fluid identity. The performance is rhythmically secure and yet manages to ‘float’ around a sense of pulse rather than stating it explicitly. Sanne is also much freer with her left hand statements of beats 1 and 3 than this transcription suggests, at times verging on a subdivision of five equal parts (with the chords/bass notes falling on quaver beats 1 and 4). Sections from the Kostakowsky are hinted at, phrases transposed, stretched and contracted, and often heavily decorated with characteristic klezmer *krekhtsn*, trills and slides.<sup>130</sup> Also notable, and clearly visible, is the degree of melodic interplay between the two instruments: building on the heterophonic ensemble playing of their early twentieth century klezmer models and influences, these two musicians enact a complex and contrapuntal musical dialogue (figure 7).

<sup>130</sup> See Appendix 1.



*Zwischen Welten*.<sup>131</sup> The highly subjective beginning is important, as it leads directly onto the substance of my argument.

Björn is an excellent singer but his style here feels a little overcooked. Roman, by contrast, plays very minimally – a lovely, classical *bajan* sound from a clearly schooled player. But also very clean, as if he has found this material in a book without any historical or idiomatic reference point (perhaps that's exactly what *is* happening). The contrast between the two of them is what really stands out. Björn is a little like a Bee Gee – tall, elegant, longish fair hair. Roman looks like Vladimir Putin, and gives about as much away.

When talking to the audience, Björn is polite, slightly shy, careful and well-spoken. When he starts to sing, his eyes half-close, his face twists into a half-grimace/half-smile. It is as if he has gone into a trance. His long thin arms float out to either side, or he holds his fingertips up and closed as if meditating. He makes circular rabbinical gestures with his hands, visualising the *ya-ba-boy* of the music.

To me this feels affected. But it gets me thinking...

'Yiddish-land'. A place where you can go when you sing this material. A place of the imagination, full of young maidens courting, wise rabbis dancing, sadness and memory but also joy and life. Daily problems, political pressure, social divisions... Sholem Aleichem territory. But what is interesting is that it comes with an instant set of ways of behaving and cultural assumptions, accessed through the language but most of all through the music. It is as if all you need to do is sing a Yiddish song and immediately you can change into a magic-Yiddish-person. The transformation with Björn is striking, which is perhaps why it rings a little false. Perhaps the most believable performers are those who need to do the least obvious 'transforming'.

How would it have been if Björn had walked on with a big smile and a big spliff, leaning back and saying (in bad Jamaican accent), "Yeah *mannn*" before launching into 'Redemption Song'? Or if he'd bounced on with his mandolin and a green hat, wishing everyone top o' the mornin'? This is all taken quite seriously here tonight – Yiddish-land has been turned into art music and yet the whole thing is also verging on cliché. It is as if the texts and songs have been discovered four hundred years later, along with a few pointers about how they were performed (perhaps they had an old copy of *Fiddler on the Roof*). And from this has been reconstructed an 'authentic' performance practice that is now uncritically high art.

Over the course of several concerts from various artists, I came to recognise this symbolic entering into 'Yiddish-land' – an imaginary and largely stereotypical construct, built on a standard hegemonic trope of 'Jewish' ways of being.<sup>132</sup> I began to question this particular version of performative Jewishness more and more. It seemed affected almost to the point of parody, reminding me of Peter Ackroyd's tale of a future society's attempts to reconstruct contemporary Western civilisation on the basis of a few

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<sup>131</sup> "Between worlds". The concert took place in Zimmer 16 in Pankow, performed by German singer Björn Carel Klein and Ukrainian accordionist Roman Yusipey.

<sup>132</sup> Madgalena Waligórska analyses contemporary Polish representations of the "romanticised, magical Jew on the klezmer scene [who] is both familiar and otherworldly", both "vividly recognizable" and "miraculous" (2008:128).

found fragments.<sup>133</sup> I would argue that in the sorts of events described above, Yiddishness is being made to function as iconic of certain behavioural and belief-systems, but in the signifying process what is revealed is their constructed nature. Yiddish-land is posited as a sublimation of self, but in fact it references a wholly *conventional* hegemonic discourse, an exoticising philosemitism of the Eastern European Hasid as unknowable Other.<sup>134</sup> Apparent spirituality deconstructs itself through cliché and kitsch.

Of course, the concept of communing with an imagined past is not new for Yiddish culture (Pinchuk, 2001). Indeed, an ambiguous and uncertain relationship to history characterises much of the music under discussion here. What is interesting about my next category, the fantasists, is that they have chosen to take this idea to its (il)logical extreme, in order to enact a musical dialogue between the diversity of today's Berlin and the language of tradition. Instead of attempting to magically recapture an imagined historical 'reality', these musicians utilise the jumping-off point of the imaginary *shtetl*<sup>135</sup> to construct bizarre and yet curiously coherent parallel worlds.<sup>136</sup> These worlds are marked by a degree of musical and linguistic exploration and a large amount of visual play – both elements characteristic of their city environment. The two bands that I concentrate on briefly here are ?Shmaltz! and Knoblauch Klezmer Band. The first is made up of Berlin natives, the second is a younger and far more international outfit. The philosophies and associated imagined communities/geographies of both groups are discussed extensively in Chapter 3, so here I will make do with outlining what it is about their *musical* approach that merits them a category of their own.

Whilst their music remains within a soundworld of acoustic instruments and klezmer musical language<sup>137</sup> (though not exclusively), the fantasists have learned from the promotional tactics of pop music. Band images tend to feature costumes and poses: pirate hats, shiny waistcoats, extreme camera angles and inscrutable expressions (figure 10). This is klezmer music at its most fun, its most self-consciously oddball. In contrast

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<sup>133</sup> *The Plato Papers*, 1999, a story set far in the future that reimagines the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through archaeological snippets: E A Poe becomes reinterpreted as "Eminent American Poet" and no-one can understand why late twentieth-century America felt constantly trapped in a "web" that seemed to span the globe.

<sup>134</sup> This was reinforced by *Zwischen Welten*'s finale, "Hasidic Suite", which consisted of recomposed versions of Hasidic songs.

<sup>135</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4. See also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), Slobin (1982).

<sup>136</sup> Explored in depth in relation to Berlin in Chapter 3.

<sup>137</sup> See Appendix 1.



to the ‘classical’ modernists, fantasist klezmer takes its visual cues from the lush and exaggerated cabaret semiotics (Jelavich, 1996) that are still so much a part of Berlin cultural life. The post-hippy musical community with which these bands implicitly align themselves has echoes in cities such as San Francisco, Brighton (UK) and Barcelona, and in this respect it is far from unique to Berlin. But the city’s recent internationalism, high proportion of artists/musicians, low living costs and post-reunification multi-coloured stylistic palette<sup>138</sup> are a particularly good fit for the fantasists. In terms of musical networks, this sort of post-cabaret image finds its performance space in clubs such as *Badehaus Szimpla* and *Kaffee Burger* (the subject of the next chapter). These bands are also regular features at the city’s outdoor festivals such as *Fête de la Musique*, *Karneval der Kulturen* and local summer community events, where their brand of comfortable zaniness provides instantly accessible yet musically interesting (and crowd-pleasing) entertainment. It is little surprise that the fantasists share most cultural, musical and performance space with the city’s Balkan Beats scene,<sup>139</sup> frequently appearing at the same venues and festivals, and with similarly lively onstage dancing, leaping around and general crowd-related antics.<sup>140</sup>

Musically, these groups mix up influences from klezmer, Balkan music, German folk and pop music, Turkish and Greek elements, and occasional nods to South America in the form of *cumbia* or *milonga*. For the fantasists, heterogeneous musical influence is not a barrier to clarity of musical intention. What ties these groups together is not simply eclecticism, but a self-conscious playfulness with regards to the tradition of which they are (at times tangentially) a part. This playfulness is manifest in the fantasised origin myths that these groups exploit. In ‘Shmaltz!’’s case this involves the creation of an entire country, a language, and a collection of suitably idiosyncratic characters.<sup>141</sup> Knoblauch Klezmer Band, on the other hand are content with a looser, and more obscure biography.<sup>142</sup> For violinist Eli Fabrikant, however, this apparent lack of seriousness has an important counterpart:

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<sup>138</sup> Discussed in more detail and with reference to the concept of *bricolage* in Chapter 2.

<sup>139</sup> Bands such as *Il Civetto* and *Gankino Circus* (both of whom share a similar dress sense), club nights like *Balkan Beats* and *Balkanarama*. See Silverman (2015) for some of the ideological issues around this scene.

<sup>140</sup> Discussed fully in Chapter 2.

<sup>141</sup> Discussed at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>142</sup> On the band’s website, for example, their accordionist Chris Lyons is named only as “mystery man”, and represented by an image of a cow in a field.

But I would say, something very dadaistic, a lot of surrealism, not taking ourselves seriously in the sense of ‘playing klezmer, or playing such music’, but on the other hand taking us very seriously, like ‘ok, we’re clowns but we’re giving one hell of a show’. So trying to hold both.<sup>143</sup>

The fantasists, therefore, occupy an interestingly ambiguous territory, aligning themselves directly with the city’s colourfully eclectic contemporary visual and fashion codes, whilst at the same time expressing an avowed thoughtfulness in their musical intentions. This eclectic/serious mix extends to their instrumental choices too, in particular those with strange and unusual connotations. Here is ?Shmaltz!’s Carsten Wegener talking through the beautiful and haunting ballad that finishes off their recording *Gran Bufet*.<sup>144</sup>

This is “es iz shoy n shpayt”,<sup>145</sup> which you might know, in a different arrangement. That’s a saw. So here for me the thing which made the song special was the idea of this banjo lick with the toy piano, this is the fundament of the song. And that was the point we said, ok we have the parts. Sounds beautiful whatever you play it on, but this is what made it special. And the violin, she’s a baroque violinist, she has this beautiful sound. And it’s not klezmer, it’s new. And in the background comes an instrument, a baroque instrument but a bit like a saxophone: a dulcian, sounds like a mixture of an oboe and saxophone.<sup>146</sup>

?Shmaltz!’s version of this song is revealing on several levels. The song is from the repertoire of Ukrainian-born Bronya Sakina<sup>147</sup> and was also recorded by Michael Alpert on the 1997 Brave Old World album *Blood Oranges*<sup>148</sup> under the title “Daybreak”. Already, then, networks of old and new, near and far are making themselves felt. In fact, it would not be a stretch to position this song itself as a fundamental network node: connecting historical performers and their repertoire, revival-era musicians and the contemporary Berlin scene. In this case, it is the particular and multiple connections of Alpert, channelled through the musical material, that articulate the network relations. Alpert’s connection with Bronya Sakina (Wood, 2016), his own reworking of the song with Brave Old World, and his central place in present-day networks of dissemination such as Yiddish Summer Weimar act as a bridge between the song’s historical roots and its contemporary existence.

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<sup>143</sup> Personal interview, Kreuzberg, Berlin. June 9th, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> AYCE02 (2011).

<sup>145</sup> Yiddish: “it’s already late”. ?Shmaltz! have given the song a new title: “Levunesca”.

<sup>146</sup> Personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin. May 2nd, 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Sakina’s repertoire also included the well-known Yiddish ballad “di Sapozhkelekh” (the Little Shoes), subsequently recorded by The Klezmatics, Forshpil and many others. On Sakina and Alpert, see Wood (2016).

<sup>148</sup> Pinorrek Records: PRC03 3405027. It is this arrangement that Wegener is referring to above.

In a nod to Brave Old World’s cimbalom opening, ?Shmaltz!’s recording begins with a creeping 4/4 banjo line, outlining a stepwise harmonic movement. It is accompanied by ghostly toy piano minims, to which Detlef Pegelow adds his growling vocal. Pegelow’s delivery is free with timing and pitch, almost spoken at times; his ‘old-man’s’ voice treads a fine line between knowing cliché and the impression of not simply having lived through this night, but a whole life. The feeling is other-worldly, sparse in its sound but rich in a certain sort of stripped-back nostalgia (figure 8).

Toy Piano

Banjo

Voice

mm

Toy Pno.

Bj.

Vo.

es iz shoyn shpe - yt, fir mikh up a - ha - ym, o

Toy Pno.

Bj.

Vo.

fir-mikh up a - hay - m, az key-ner zol mir zey - n.

Figure 8. “Levunesca” (opening bars), from *Gran Bufet* (?Shmaltz!, 2011).

This curiously yearning mood is augmented by the appearance of musical saw and then violin, which adds discreet counterlines before stating the tune itself. For the first half of the recording, the whole arrangement remains in this state of quiet intensity. With the reappearance of the vocal, banjo and toy piano drop out, the banjo’s lilting attack now replaced by long string chords whose overlapping notes cloud the harmonic movement and meter. The banjo returns, this time with accordion and bowed bass, but as it does,

the time signature changes to a slow and dark 3/4, the rhythm marked with heavy chords on beats 1 and 3. At the end of Detlef’s wordless refrain, a raspy dulcian begins an extravagant solo, matched by contrapuntal string lines. The mood has shifted, subtly but dramatically, to a full and rich klezmer *hora*, revealing a loping pulse and a new level of emotional and textural density, a sort of Tom Waits romanticism matched now by a more powerful and committed vocalese (figure 9).

The musical score for "Levunesca" is presented in three systems. Each system contains six staves: Violin, Dulcian, Voice, Banjo, Accordion, and Acoustic Bass. The time signature is 3/4. The first system includes lyrics "who-pa" under the voice staff. The second system includes lyrics "(ya-ba-boy vocalese)" under the voice staff. The score features various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and a "sim." (susto) marking on the Banjo staff.

Figure 9. “Levunesca” (instrumental), from *Gran Bufet* (?Shmaltz!, 2011).

The musical impression achieved through the overlap from 4/4 ballad to 3/4 *hora* creates a sense that this level of intensity was in fact latent right from the opening banjo

line, but it required the whole journey thus far in order to gather enough momentum to be convincing (and develop the necessary emotional punch). The sonic movement from the other-world texture of the banjo/toy piano/saw opening to the lolloping, ponderous and yet deeply moving full-band *hora* is powerful and affective – a sort of simultaneous past/future longing. Rooted in Berlin’s musical eclecticism, the “shoyn spayt” of the title becomes the emotion of a whole life, lived both joyfully and harshly.

As we can see, this is more than just dressing-up and throwing lots of instruments at a piece of music. For the fantasists discussed here, such playful tactics often belie a deeper artistic intention. Knoblauch Klezmer Band’s violinist Eli Fabrikant, a Riga-born Israeli citizen who has made Berlin his home for the past four years, has worked hard to develop a personal relationship to the music that he discovered since moving to the city:

Honestly saying, I don’t want to lie at all, this is really real for me. I’ve been playing gypsy and Balkan music for nine, ten years now. But specifically klezmer and also really going into depth, listening, transcribing, slowing down and understanding exactly, how did he do this *krekhits* – this is really recent years. And so I’m not an expert and I don’t want to feel as an expert, but I think that I define myself as an enthusiast and someone that really cares. I don’t care that they do this particular ornament instead of this one, but I do care that they understand the difference between them.<sup>149</sup>

Equally important to all the fantasist bands is the diversity of their musical make-up. Musicians will frequently point out the breadth of experience and sound this brings to the ensemble. Ukrainian violinist Marina Bondas, whose band Di Meschugeles includes musicians from Skazka Orchestra, was at pains to explain how each member understands their role within the ensemble in more than purely instrumental terms:

Somehow everybody from the band has different backgrounds. Accordion had also classical education but he plays a lot of swing, Balkan, he has another band Skazka. And our saxophone/clarinet, he’s a jazzer. When he came to us he didn’t know nothing about klezmer, but he brings this modern jazz [...] But the one thing that we take care very much about is the sound of klezmer. This is especially my homework!<sup>150</sup>

As the quote above implies, a level of fantasy seems to also open up a level of personal connection. It is as if a lighthearted and deliberately playful aesthetic in fact makes more room for an explicit and deep emotional link, the childlike ludic dimension more

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<sup>149</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>150</sup> Personal interview, Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. August 18th, 2014.



Figure 10. Knoblauch Klezmer Band in stage gear, flyposted onto their city environment. Kreuzberg, June 2014.

successfully eliciting an honest and uncluttered ‘soulful’ response. For some, to dress up and explore an explicitly fantastical world is in fact to liberate a depth of feeling perceived as absent from the perceived clichés of ‘traditional’ klezmer semiotics. Eli refers this directly back to the city itself:<sup>151</sup>

But saying, ok, it’s Berlin, those guys have nothing to do with Jewish culture or klezmer *per se*, but they love the vibe and this is how they express it. And also, seeing what happens in performances, and slowly understanding the Knoblauch meaning of the Knoblauch Klezmer Band, and we’re still defining it...And I think the bottom line, it’s so much fun. When you play onstage with a drummer who wears a tiger costume and I’m wearing this ridiculous hat, it just frees something, it’s so much more fun to play.<sup>152</sup>

Instead of musical or performative conclusions, these groups are happy to live with incongruity and contradiction – in Eli’s words, “trying to hold both”. Their freedom is a deliberately ambiguous one. It fits well with the wider ambiguity and in-the-moment aesthetic of Berlin,<sup>153</sup> and is also one of the reasons why these bands overlap a great deal with the city’s Balkan and Latin music club scene. This is also a musical response

<sup>151</sup> We might also note a link to the topsy-turvy stage costumes of historical *Purimshpilers* (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1980:6).

<sup>152</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>153</sup> The particularity of Berlin as a performative space is examined in the next chapter.

that deliberately opens up a space for questioning, and it is here that the fantasists overlap most closely with my next category.

### **Post-modernists**

This final category explores a complex set of paradigms, centred more directly around Jewish identity and its implicit social and political context. All the musicians that make up this category are Jewish, most have come from somewhere else, and almost all make at least some part of their artistic mission the self-aware deconstruction of conventional oppositions: between here and there, between Jewish and non-Jewish, and between history and modernity.

This group shares the fantasists' playful approach and their aesthetic of mixing styles, genres and languages, but they differ in the musical result. Where the fantasists remain within a recognisable 'folk' aesthetic, the post-modernists could equally be classified under rock, jazz, pop or singer-songwriter genres. And where the fantasists embrace the bizarre and the mythical with an aim of ultimately achieving an honest and pure musical connection, the post-modernists use fluidity and ambiguity (Kramer, 2002) in a frequently more aggressive and politically-charged way. As with the modernist category, it is important to stress that I am not invoking a pre-existing set of ideas when using the term post-modern.<sup>154</sup> My intention is to imply that this most diverse and unpredictable group could only have developed out of the sense of purpose and consistency of thought that characterises the modernists above (and by implication, from the original work of the pioneers). Whilst a deliberate playfulness and fluidity is integral, the musicians here are also nevertheless marked by a self-conscious depth of purpose. Where their artistic methods may frequently nod towards the post-modern (formal juxtaposition, stylistic and linguistic interplay), these methods are often underpinned by a political ideology:<sup>155</sup>

I think on a superficial level when you're making mediocre klezmer or Yiddish music, yeah, it relies heavily on a lot of un-deconstructed clichés, a lot of stereotypes and stuff. But the same is true of any mediocre music, you can either go deep or not. And I don't think that all kitsch is bad, I think we can play with the kitsch. We can play with levels of irony and levels of recontextualisation, you

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<sup>154</sup> Almost impossible for postmodernism in the first place: "postmodernism suffers from a certain *semantic* instability... embracing continuity and discontinuity, diachrony and synchrony." (Hassan, 1993:148-150).

<sup>155</sup> On politics and ideology in postmodernism, see Jameson (1993:84-8).

know. Free exchange of signs and signifiers. I don't know, sure there are clichés with klezmer, but I try to own them as much as I fight them.<sup>156</sup>

The speaker above appears throughout my thesis, so in this section I am going to concentrate on two other artists. Trumpeter Paul Brody was born in California but has been a Berliner for over twenty years. A jazz musician by training (with a degree in classical music), he has taught klezmer in Berlin and Germany and written music for radio and the stage. His bands include Tango Toy and Sadawi and feature, amongst others, clarinetist Christian Dawid.<sup>157</sup> Several things go into Brody's creative pot: relentless improvisation, a network of collaborators each with a strongly individual voice, a connection to a sense of Jewishness, and a reluctance to stay still:

Playing klezmer music in a band under my name feels funny when I don't transform the music into something else. I have a tick. I have to play it in some other way. When I'm with a group of klezmer musicians playing traditional, I enjoy that thoroughly, and I enjoy listening. But there's a thing about me being on stage with those melodies that makes me do something with those melodies.<sup>158</sup>

This is a characteristic shared by the other post-modernists, the urge to transform. It is what marks out this category: where fantasists frequently mix different influences and genres, the post-modernists actively seek to transform their material into something else. In Brody's case this often means a strong connection to the freer end of jazz improvisation in performance, allied with some of jazz's formal structures in much of his compositional output. What is interesting here is that through this transformative process, surprising connections to tradition can be made. As with the fantasists, the innovation in fact reinforces a deeper link:

So I would play these concerts and the band would be booked as a klezmer band [...] many of the audience would want to hear some semblance of klezmer music and even traditional. So here's the second part. In order to bring those people into the music, I found stories to talk about the music, to bring them into the music. I found when I told people stories, their ears opened up to my style of music. It was very interesting. That's sort of a human nature thing: if you get to know somebody, you're more likely to tolerate their bullshit [laughs].<sup>159</sup>

The musicians in this category do indeed lead something of a double musical life. Most are deeply involved with the performance and dissemination of klezmer and Yiddish

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<sup>156</sup> Dan Kahn, personal interview, Neukölln, Berlin. Dec 6th, 2013.

<sup>157</sup> Christian was a long-time half of the duo Khupe, and nowadays plays with a huge range of musicians across Europe and North America.

<sup>158</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*



music in its traditional form, whether in Weimar, KlezCanada or Krakow. But all are also creative drivers in pushing forward new projects that deliberately take this repertoire in radically new directions. Riga-born singer Sasha Lurje and accordionist Ilya Shneyveys will feature throughout much of this thesis, but here I want to look briefly at their Yiddish rock band Forshpil, founded over ten years ago, based in Berlin but comprising Russian and Latvian musicians. Forshpil play traditional klezmer melodies and sing traditional Yiddish songs, but they accompany them with synthesisers, electric guitar and drum patterns that bear more resemblance to Jon Bonham than Ben Bazylar.<sup>160</sup> Ilya plays a range of electronic keyboards, utilising both his klezmer accordion technique (discussed in chapter 5) and his love of modal jazz progressions. Singer Sasha has spent, and continues to spend, a long time researching Yiddish song and hasidic *nigunim*,<sup>161</sup> and for her this knowledge and experience is fully transferable to a rock band context:

There is a combination of knowledge and gut [laughs]. With Forshpil it's a very interesting thing, because I believe that I have developed a certain vocal style for Forshpil, a lot of it is very close to this unaccompanied ballad style [...] but I don't want to sound like old folk, and of course I take something from this and I take something from that, and later I started to develop an understanding of this style in general. When you copy everything one to one, then more and more you kind of have an understanding of what it all could be. And then I started adding to it what I felt is appropriate, and that's how the Forshpil style developed. Also, when you have a rock band going DJ-DJ-DJ-DAA-DAA, you can't go 'ah, dee-dli-dee'! You have to find this in that energy.<sup>162</sup>

A nice example of Forshpil's "knowledge and gut", and of their urge to transform, comes in the form of their recording of "Volekhl".<sup>163</sup> This is a piece from Beregovski & Fefer's 1938 *Yidische folks-lider* collection, made popular in klezmer circles through clarinettist Joel Rubin's 1997 recording<sup>164</sup> (where former Forshpil guitarist Sasha Aleksandrov learnt the tune<sup>165</sup>). In Rubin's version the *volekhl* is a gentle and lyrical 3/4 D minor melody, accompanied subtly by cimbalom and accordion. Rubin's interpretation is a freely personal one that nevertheless keeps track of the melodic line,

<sup>160</sup> Jon Bonham was the drummer with Led Zeppelin, Ben Bazylar was a klezmer drummer born in 1922 (see Alpert, 2002).

<sup>161</sup> Sung melodies (with or without texts), based in communal Hasidic music-making practice (singular *nigun*). On Hasidic music's influence upon klezmer, see Wood (2007a), Rubin, (2015:121) and Beregovski (2000:299).

<sup>162</sup> Sasha Lurje, personal interview, Kreuzberg, Berlin. January 21st, 2014.

<sup>163</sup> *Forshpil* (CD Baby: 887516009440, 2012).

<sup>164</sup> Joel Rubin Jewish Music Ensemble. *Beregovski's Khasene (Beregovski's Wedding): Forgotten Instrumental Treasures from the Ukraine*, Schott Wergo.

<sup>165</sup> Joel Rubin, email communication. 26th October, 2015. Again we can see a piece of music and its subsequent recording structuring a set of network connection between historical repertoire and present-day performance.



Figure 11. Forshpil's Sasha Lurje and Sasha Aleksandrov, Gorki Theater, February 2014.

stretching and contracting note durations subtly and expressively. In Forshpil's recording, however, we see a dramatic change in the sonic texture. Acoustic cimbalom and accordion give way to synth bass and Fender Rhodes, and legato clarinet is replaced by the edgier sound of Aleksandrov's electric guitar. But the group do more than simply alter instrumentation. Here the stately 3/4 has been turned into a bubbling 6/8, notched up several bpm in the process. The recording begins with a distorted electronic glissando which settles rapidly into an ostinato bassline. In a clear nod to the Doors' "Riders on the Storm", cymbal fills, sparse Rhodes chords and guitar atmospherics set up a dark and brooding groove, over which the guitar picks out the *volekhl* melody tightly and without ornamentation. Treading an ambiguous rhythmic pulse, the 6/8 backbeat is only made explicit in the tune's third section, at which point the lighter Rhodes chords and counterlines join with the guitar to shore up the melodic line. The

tune is stated just once straight through before giving way to an extended improvised middle section twice as long as the melodic statement itself – once again highly reminiscent of Ray Manzarek and Robby Krieger's<sup>166</sup> fluid combination of motivic repetition and atmospheric 'noise'. As things settle down, the *volekhl* tune snakes its way back in for one complete reprise, this time voiced by Ilya Shneyveys on a sinewy melodica.

The post-modern klezmer aesthetic, as we can see, is one of constant questioning, a series of 'what-ifs' applied to traditional music. It is an aesthetics of hybridity (Bhabha, 1996), a juxtaposition of modernity and history: another of Forshpil's tracks, "Fraytig", superimposes a 1920s *doina*<sup>167</sup> by violinist Abe Schwartz over the contemporary (self-consciously retro) sound of the band's Hendrix-esque backing. This sort of relentless probing and fluid approach may in fact reveal the possibilities for a deeper musical understanding: for the post-modernists, to continually innovate is in fact to be true to the music's roots. To repeat Paul Brody, the tradition is very much "not holding on".

[Forshpil] is another way of dealing with what this repertoire can be. For many people what we do will sound not 'traditional', but when we played this to Itzik Gottesman,<sup>168</sup> who, you know, I was kind of like a little – he comes across as such a traditionalist – that I had even a little bit of a fear. He loved it! Because he could hear that it's traditional, just played with different instruments, you know, and that's what is important, we're imagining – it's like this fantasy, this is what we can do with it. We can fantasise, what would have happened if? If history was different? Or, you know, if we hadn't, I don't want to say lost it, but had this downfall. And what if we were playing this music with these instruments, what if Pink Floyd was playing this music?<sup>169</sup>

Clearly, then, this also includes a level of fantasy, or at least a confrontation of history. For this group, history and location are rarely neutral: the continued presence of Yiddish music and klezmer in Berlin inevitably has an ideological dimension. This is reinforced by geography, in that the post-modernists that I have identified here all originate from somewhere else – America, Russia, Latvia. Consequently, at least part of what underpins their art is a discussion of what it means to be making Jewish music in

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<sup>166</sup> The Doors' keyboard and guitar player, both notable for their layered accompaniment and solo patterns which gave the band its characteristically dark sound.

<sup>167</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>168</sup> Former music editor of the long-running Yiddish newspaper *Forverts*. Notwithstanding Sasha's apprehensions, Gottesman has often been a champion of new Yiddish music. In his review of Forshpil's eponymous album (January 11th, 2013), he writes: "The Riga group 'Forshpil' has decided to fit old Yiddish songs to the new sounds of world music and rock'n'roll. The group is not the first to go in this direction. But, in my opinion, they are the best of the crop of recent years." <http://yiddish2.forward.com/node/4893>. Accessed 10th December, 2015.

<sup>169</sup> Interview, 2014.

Germany. This takes in questions of nation, identity, belonging and estrangement. Paul Brody's 2010 Sadawi recording was ironically titled *Far from Moldova*, a reference to his time spent working with Roma musicians as part of Alan Bern's Other Europeans project (and feeling "awkward and out of place in the group"<sup>170</sup>). Here is Brody talking about his latest CD, a series of pieces set to the poems of Rosa Ausländer:<sup>171</sup>

I made a CD in German, as part of a dedication to living in Berlin, and to working with the German language, although my German needs improvement. And it also has something to do with my own family history, because my grandfather from my father's side is from Kiev in the Ukraine, and I also like Rosa Ausländer, her Viennese roots, and Romanian roots [...] In addition, her poems spoke to me with a sense of questioning place. Do I belong here, or do I belong somewhere else? Is this the language that I'm speaking? That's what she asks in her poetry, often. And actually, my home is in my words, my home is in the sound of my breath, it's all I have.<sup>172</sup>

Here the context of modern Berlin strikingly overlaps with musical practice. The recent internationalism of the city and its longer twentieth-century cultural sediment of under-the-surface outsider status endow the city with a particular urban ethos.<sup>173</sup> Contemporary Berlin is both a welcoming city and yet a place that retains a certain strangeness – a sense of secrets to be uncovered, stories to be unlocked:

This city-text has been written, erased, and rewritten throughout this violent century [...] The goal is nothing less than to create the capital of the twenty-first century, but this vision finds itself persistently haunted by the past (Huysen, 1997:59-60).

This makes the city a unique node on the klezmer intercultural network, a home to subcultural innovation backed up by a complex and ambiguous national and international history. This is particularly relevant when we consider that the majority of the post-modern musicians are Jews. Alongside an avowed and progressive internationalism, an exploration of Jewishness is more important to the post-modern project than any of the other categories. This lends their work a distinctively political edge, although with significantly varied articulations. Where Forshpil posit an ongoing hypothetical trajectory of Yiddish music, Paul Brody addresses his own liminal sense of insider/outsider in a more oblique way. And Daniel Kahn, as Chapter 3 illustrates,

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<sup>170</sup> Liner notes to the CD (ML7001).

<sup>171</sup> *Hinten Allen Worten/Behind All Worlds*: ENJA 7737 (2013).

<sup>172</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>173</sup> This concept, from sociologist Adam Krims (2007), is explored in depth in Chapter 3.



Figure 12. Californian Berliner Paul Brody in his local Schöneberg bar, September 2014.

mounts a far more direct and provocative attack on his identity as a Jewish musician in Germany.

Deliberately eschewing any sort of Jewish essentialism, this is a contingent and cosmopolitan search, self-consciously embracing an inevitable hybridity and sense of the in-between:

For me it's not exactly that way. I feel a belonging to Latvia, obviously – I was born in the country, I'm a citizen of Latvia. But I'm a citizen of it also by chance – my mother didn't get citizenship when Latvia became independent again in the early 90s, because her family wasn't from Latvia – my father's family was. My first language was Russian, so even though I spoke Latvian quite well, I still had an accent, I could never completely belong. But I wasn't always completely Russian, because I was also a little bit Jewish. And I also wasn't enough Jewish, because my mother isn't Jewish. You know, I always was, like, on some level, not belonging completely to a certain group, and I always thought it shouldn't be that

important [...] it's a relief to be in a place where I don't have to be any of these things.<sup>174</sup>

Where she has frequently been a part of various *Klezmertage* and *Kulturtage* performances, Sasha's occasional lack of access to certain grants because of her non-*halakhic*<sup>175</sup> Jewish status also point to the interference of supercultural restrictions on artistic practice. Nevertheless, the intercultural connections of these post-modernist musicians continue to throw up surprising combinations. And as the following fieldnote (from a concert of Sasha and Daniel Kahn) shows, the subculture is still all their own – straddling the familiar and the strange: “Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory” (Bhabha, 1996:58).

Dan looks like a 1960s Brooklyn hustler: pork pie hat, waistcoat over (expanding) belly, full beard and quick eyes. One original song solo, two Yiddish ones with Sasha (one workers' song, one *Ganef*<sup>176</sup> love song). It is curious to see younger people performing Yiddish material unselfconsciously. They are at home with the language and the idiom, and yet there is still something foreign about it, perhaps because they are not singing to a community of Yiddish speakers (or at least not native ones). It is both familiar (a youngish couple singing folky songs with a guitar) and unfamiliar: a language in which they are at home even though it is not their own or part of their immediate circle. Perhaps this canny/uncanny is part of the point – alienation.<sup>177</sup> What is interesting is that they are very hip. Sasha looks modern and funky, Daniel looks like he should be in The Strokes. There is no sense of Yiddish kitsch, but also no sense of classical ‘properness’. More trendy East Village duo than heritage performance. Moves Yiddish music into alt-folk. And it fits. Their singing style too is modern folky: not too much hand-wringing, not too many jokes to camera. But also enough Yiddishisms to keep it feeling credible, and cool.

### **Berlin in relation to the wider scene**

This study takes as its central focus klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin. It is therefore bounded by both geography and musical genre. It is also to a large extent time-bounded, stemming as it does from fieldwork conducted between September 2013 and September 2014. Recognising that music does not appear from thin air, I have addressed in previous sections the development of earlier klezmer and Yiddish song scenes in Berlin. However, it is also essential – albeit briefly – to locate this scene in relation to

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<sup>174</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>175</sup> In all forms of orthodox Judaism, lineage is passed down through the maternal line.

<sup>176</sup> Yiddish: thief.

<sup>177</sup> See Chapter 3.

neighbouring and international klezmer scenes. The first point to make here is that many of the musicians interviewed and discussed are very much part of a wider transnational network – structured by international workshops, artistic collaborations, recording projects and festival appearances. Daniel Kahn is a regular collaborator with musicians around the world, including Americans Michael Winograd, Jake Shulman-Ment, Michael Alpert, Moscow’s Psoy Korolenko and Vanya Zhuk, and Israel’s Oy Division. His Painted Bird band has at times included guest clarinetists Merlin Shepherd (UK) and Joel Rubin (USA). Kahn has shared stages with Yiddish singers such as Theodore Bikel and Adrienne Cooper, led workshops in Oxford and New York, and recently appeared as Biff in the New Yiddish Rep’s production of *Toyt fun a seylsman*.<sup>178</sup> It might be more useful to locate an artist such as Kahn as a part of a fully internationalised Yiddish network, one which includes musical performers, composers, actors, poets and playwrights, scholars and researchers, journalists and teachers. Arguably, this sort of intercultural network finds its resonances in pre-war Yiddish cultural production (Katz, 2004), although inevitably today’s digital and travel networks make such communication significantly easier and faster. Also, given the now almost complete absence of a ‘native’ Yiddish constituency (outside of ultra-Orthodox communities and a few small pockets of Yiddishists)<sup>179</sup>, this international network assumes an ever greater cultural and social value.

Other artists are correspondingly wide-reaching in their musical networks. Ilya Shneyveys appears frequently with St Petersburg’s Dobranotch and has taught at workshops such as London’s Klezfest and KlezKanada. And the involvement of the Klezmatics’ Lorin Sklamberg in the Semer Label Reloaded project (Chapter 6) is likewise testament to the scene’s international connectivity. Trumpeter Paul Brody’s work includes theatre music, radio programmes and occasional poetry – and arguably it is as a jazz musician that he would principally define himself. In other words, Brody is an important side-figure in the Berlin klezmer scene, but his musical and artistic networks reach far beyond it. Similarly, Karsten Troyke’s creative output extends beyond Yiddish song to chanson, ‘Sinti Swing’ and mixed programmes of readings with music. He also collaborates regularly with Australian violinist Daniel Weltlinger (now

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<sup>178</sup> Actor Luba Kadison’s Yiddish language version of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*.

<sup>179</sup> Such as the Bronx’s Schaechter-Gottesmans discussed in Chapter 2. On Yiddish’s growing non-native constituency, see Kahn (2016). Also Shandler’s (2006) discussion of “postvernacular” Yiddish.



based largely in Berlin),<sup>180</sup> a partnership which also points up the flexibility of my Chapter 1 categories. As will become clear in subsequent chapters, a musician such as Alan Bern operates across the whole German and international scene, often at the centre of several overlapping networks (Yiddish Summer Weimar, Semer Label Reloaded, the klezmer accordion, and historically Brave Old World and their workshops in Germany).

Ever since the 1980s, Germany has been developing an extensive network of klezmer workshops<sup>181</sup> and festivals,<sup>182</sup> often featuring many of the performers covered in this thesis. Aside from an important income stream, these events facilitate connections between musicians – both national and international, some of which develop into ongoing ensembles.<sup>183</sup> An example of the country-wide reach of many of Germany's klezmer and Yiddish musicians can be seen in singer Andrea Pancur and Ilya Shneyveys' Alpen Klezmer project, a recording and concert programme based loosely in Munich (Pancur's home city) that brings together Bavarian musicians with many of the finest klezmer players on the German scene, as well as international performers such as London-based drummer Guy Schalom and Americans Lorin Sklamberg and Joel Rubin. This project is a good illustration of network processes at play. Pancur and Shneyveys' ongoing Yiddish music connections – established largely through their participation in workshops, festivals and concerts – are brought together with the very different network of Bavarian musicians from Pancur's own local scene. By combining different networks in one project, Shneyveys and Pancur function as the central hubs for the Alpen Klezmer programme, whilst also being its musical drivers.

Most of the musicians discussed here do not make their living from performing in Berlin. In fact, Berlin is nowadays a notoriously difficult city in which to make a living as a musician of any sort, let alone a klezmer musician.<sup>184</sup> Creativity, social-artistic networks and enthusiasm run high in Berlin, and for a European capital city it is still a cheap place to live – hence the continuing high proportion of artistic residents and new arrivals. Actual performance fees, however, are largely low (or non-existent).

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<sup>180</sup> See <http://www.karsten-troyke.de/program.html>. Accessed September 2nd, 2016.

<sup>181</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>182</sup> Fürth's biennial Klezmer Festival (founded 1988), Insul's Open Klezmer Scales, and Yiddish Summer Weimar, for example. Also important here are international festivals such as London's KlezFest, Krakow's Jewish Culture Festival, KlezKanada and, until 2014, KlezKamp.

<sup>183</sup> Sher on a Shier, for example, includes musicians from Berlin, Erfurt, Bad Endbach and Würzburg.

<sup>184</sup> Rubin (2014:37) relates this change directly to the closing of the Hackesches Hoftheater in 2006, depriving the city of "the heart of the klezmer scene".



Consequently, most Berlin-based musicians earn their keep from performances and teaching<sup>185</sup> outside the city, often involving a large amount of travel.<sup>186</sup> Accordionist Sanne Möricke, for example, plays with Bremen-based band KlezGoyim, while her ex-partner, clarinetist Christian Dawid, plays with the Bremen Clarinet Quartet (although both Sanne and Christian still live in Berlin). Both are also regular international participants at Krakow's Jewish Culture Festival, along with many of the musicians covered here.

Regular long-distance travel is of course a fact of life for many musicians around the world. However, what marks out the Berlin scene is a parallel lack of paying gigs in their hometown. We might then ask, what are the musical effects of this economic reality? Ilya Shneyveys pithily observes:

So, yeah, I mean the musicians who are playing klezmer now, they don't perform so much in Berlin, because there is this paradox or something, you know there is no money really in Berlin. So nobody performs here for money, which is, you know, like, you might as well play a concert or do a session, it can be pretty much the same.<sup>187</sup>

In other words, non- or poorly-earning musical events in Berlin arguably assume a greater significance, as they represent the major opportunity for musicians to actually play in their hometown. This might go some way to explaining the increased musical and social importance of the city's three klezmer jam sessions discussed in Chapter 2.

As a related aside, we might also note here a semantic (and perhaps cultural) shift from the historical klezmer's original role as a professional musician, to the generally-accepted definition of contemporary klezmer as *folk* music.<sup>188</sup> It is possible to argue that this linguistic movement parallels a similar economic one: klezmer's transition from established profession to a more socially-oriented (less job-based) identity, manifested in jam sessions, workshops and perhaps philosophical approach. Whilst it will become clear that klezmer in Berlin (and elsewhere) often fits within a more communal, less professional, structure, I would argue that this is not an inevitable consequence of

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<sup>185</sup> Sasha Lurje, Ilya Shneyveys, Sanne Möricke and Franka Lampe all made this point in interviews (interviews, 2013 & 2014).

<sup>186</sup> See Sanne Möricke's comments in Rubin (2014:38).

<sup>187</sup> Interview, 2013.

<sup>188</sup> This extends beyond vernacular and popular usage (i.e. liner notes and journalism). The back cover of Mark Slobin's 2002 edited volume *American Klezmer: its Roots and Offshoots* describes klezmer as "the Yiddish word for folk instrumental musician", and the English language editions of Beregovski's collected work (2000, 2001) refer repeatedly to klezmer as "folk music".

becoming a ‘folk musician’. If the distinction between ‘professional’ and ‘folk’ (i.e. amateur) has historically been invoked by folk revivalists to signify a purer, less materialistic approach to music-making,<sup>189</sup> these lines by now have become far more blurred. One might think, for example, of the many Scottish and Irish self-defined folk musicians who make a healthy professional living teaching in schools and conservatories during the week and playing ceilidhs every weekend.

Contemporary klezmer is an international and transnational phenomenon (Slobin, 2000; Rubin, 2014). The spaces of performance and community of musicians outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 have their equivalents in other major cities, perhaps most notably New York City. The New York Klezmer Series, for example, is a season of concerts, workshops and jam sessions curated by drummer Aaron Alexander. In autumn 2016 the series will be held at Brooklyn’s Jalopy Theatre, featuring artists such as the Klezmatics’ Frank London and Kharkov’s Zhenya Lopatnik, but also Berlin-based Latvians Ilya Shneyveys and Sasha Lurje. Aside from the crossover of personnel with the Berlin scene, this type of multi-platform event, with a strong participative emphasis, has distinct resonances with much of the material discussed in this thesis. The smallish back room of Brooklyn’s Barbès bar hosts, among its diverse programme, regular klezmer concerts, including the occasional ‘Semi-Annual Purely Coincidental Night of Klezmer’,<sup>190</sup> hosted by trumpeter Ben Holmes and accordionist Patrick Farrell. Several differences between Berlin and New York are worth noting, however. Whilst New York is a much more expensive place to live, there also exists within the city considerable economic opportunity for klezmer musicians, in the form of weddings and other functions for the city’s large (orthodox and non-orthodox) Jewish community – an opportunity which is far smaller for Berlin’s klezmer players. An equally notable difference in the New York scene is the significant presence of official Jewish coordinating bodies – most importantly the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which acts as a central hub of Yiddish scholarship, performance and education. Whilst the *Zentralrat* in Germany regularly organises concerts in Jewish communities throughout the country, it neither hosts performances nor holds a central position in the German klezmer and Yiddish music network.

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<sup>189</sup> See West, 2012 and Harker (1985).

<sup>190</sup> Aesthetically, this sort of playful unpredictability has clear links with the Berlin scene. It is arguable, however, whether an event in Berlin would label itself in such a self-consciously arch way.

The context for this difference is, of course, clear. As noted by saxophonist and composer John Zorn in his programme notes for 1992's Festival for Radical New Jewish Culture in Munich:

Ashkenazi Yiddish culture was decimated in the 1940s. Israeli culture is barely 40 years old. But Jewish musicians and artists have been thriving in New York for over 200 years, making it the oldest uninterrupted centre of Jewish culture in the Western world.<sup>191</sup>

Consequently, New York's Jewish cultural network is possessed of a sense of coherence and continuity that contemporary Berlin largely lacks. As I hope this dissertation shows, Berlin's klezmer and Yiddish community is in the ongoing process of building just such a sense of coherence, but with less direct influence from any official bodies.<sup>192</sup> Perhaps inevitably, Berlin's scene is characterised by a significant degree of ground-level entrepreneurship, often stemming from musicians themselves. This is helped by the particularly fluid and transient nature of much of Berlin's bar culture, endowing the whole scene with a particular DIY ethos.<sup>193</sup>

Returning to Berlin, we should also reiterate the fluidity of more local musical groupings. Whilst networks may be patterned by strong and weak ties (between both musicians and audiences), hubs (centralised musicians, venues, workshops) and intermediaries (promoters, record labels, educators, repertoire 'leaders'<sup>194</sup>), musicians themselves are able to operate across different networks and roles. Viewing each of the ensembles discussed earlier as a discrete, small-scale, network inevitably entails the possibility of links between them – links that structure a wider inter-band network, facilitated by shared performance spaces and mutual information exchange.<sup>195</sup> Whilst an individual band may be characterised by a set of strong ties, each musician within the band makes up their own personal musical network, consisting of a mixture of strong and weak ties to multiple other musicians, ensembles and venues. Fundamental therefore is a recognition of musicians' ability to migrate across multiple musical contexts simultaneously. In the categories outlined above, for example, singer Sasha

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<sup>191</sup> Zorn & Ribot in *JMB: Jüdisches Museum Berlin Journal* (2011).

<sup>192</sup> Although it is also important to note the involvement of civic forces, especially in the 1990s, as discussed earlier in this chapter, seen in events such as the annual Days of Jewish Culture festival, and the inclusion of klezmer in Holocaust memorial events.

<sup>193</sup> Berlin's *bricolage* culture is discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>194</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>195</sup> The operations of these spaces of network exchange will become clearer with the discussion of musical spaces in Chapter 2.

Lurje is both modernist (You Shouldn't Know From It, hereafter YSKFI) and post-modernist (Forshpil), as is drummer Hampus Melin (YSKFI and Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird). We might also view this in terms of agency, in that Lurje is a recent addition to YSKFI, but very much the kernel – along with Ilya Shneyveys – of Forshpil. And Melin is a founder member of YSKFI, whereas Kahn is the distinctive creative force (and network hub) behind the Painted Bird.

### **Other elements**

The categories outlined earlier offer an analysis of musical style and social networks at play within the Berlin klezmer scene. They lay out material which is explored further in subsequent chapters. I have chosen to concentrate on these musicians and their various groupings because they are the artists whose work links most clearly with contemporary Berlin. Whilst many of them are originally from elsewhere, Chapters 2 and 3 will illustrate ways in which their music sounds the city, explicitly linking with Berlin's contemporary identity. Most importantly, the music of the artists above has something new to offer the development of klezmer, adding significantly to the music's ongoing narrative. The picture is, however, not complete. In this short section I will aim to cover the components that are so far missing, and where relevant to clarify why I have largely excluded them from my analysis. I would argue that the artists which follow have less to offer a study that aims to 'hear' articulations of contemporary Berlin through klezmer and Yiddish music. They also stand some way outside of the networks discussed above (and the scenes discussed in Chapter 2).

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, Berlin has hosted significant numbers of Russian Jewish immigrants (Ottens, 2006:79). Refugees from pogroms of the early twentieth century made a new home in Berlin's Scheunenviertel, and in the 1920s the Charlottenburg district in the west of the city earned the nickname "Charlottengrad" due to the high proportion of Russian Jews who had settled there. This migration was to see another significant wave with the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the same year, the German federal government approved refugee status to Jews from the former Soviet Union and in the years that followed, the Jewish community of Berlin found

itself transformed by the arrival of Jews from the former Soviet Union,<sup>196</sup> many of whom had little or no religious or cultural ties to notions of a Jewish community or identity (Weiss, 2004).

Largely as a result of these migrations, there remains in Berlin a significant subgroup of musicians from the former Soviet Union.<sup>197</sup> These musicians are an important part of official Jewish community life in the city, the hub of which is the *Jüdisches Gemeindehaus*. As discussed in Chapter 2, accordionist and musical director Jossif Gofenberg leads a choir, a small klezmer ensemble and children's music groups from the *Gemeindehaus*. Of his regular collaborators in the band Klezmer Chidesch, clarinetist Igor Sverdlov and percussion and cimbalom player Pan Marek both emigrated from Belarus in the 1990s, and bassist Eugen Miller from Kazakhstan in 2002. What is important about Gofenberg is less his musical style, which although well-executed is indistinguishable from 'Jewish party music' ensembles around the world, and more his place within the ongoing musical life of the city's Jewish community. This is explored in more depth in Chapter 2.

A far more glitzy version of klezmer music can be seen in the work of another group of musicians from the former Soviet Union, the Ginzburg Dynasty's Jiddisch Swing Orchestra. The family originates from Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine and emigrated to Israel in 1980, subsequently to Berlin.<sup>198</sup> Smartly attired in black suits and white shirts, Igor Ginzburg and his three sons, augmented by piano and guitar, deliver a jazzy mix of klezmer and Yiddish standards ("Sem' Sorok", "der Heyser Bulgar", "Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn", "Bublitchki") and Israeli melodies. They are a regular feature of the Berliner Philharmonie's annual Klezmer Festival series. The band makes much of their provenance as the latest line-up in a long-standing klezmer dynasty, although – whilst

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<sup>196</sup> Although figures are debated, in 2006 Jeffrey Peck wrote: "In 1989 there were 20,000 to 30,000 Jews in the Federal Republic (West Germany), 6,000 in Berlin, and about 500 Jews in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), 200 in East Berlin. Most were elderly and their numbers were diminishing. Then came the opening of the borders, followed by the disintegration of the Soviet empire. Those decisive years, 1989–1990, marked the beginning of a flood of immigration. Few Americans seem to be aware how this population shift has, in fact, saved the Jewish community in Germany from certain extinction and made it the third largest in Europe, the ninth largest and fastest growing in the world [...] Today the German Jewish Community proudly announces a membership of more than 100,000 (estimated most recently at 108,000), with 12,000 in Berlin [...] 85 percent of the Jewish population in Germany is from the former Soviet Union and since 1989, over 190,000 Jews have emigrated from that dissolved empire and its successor states, primarily from Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. (Peck, 2006:40)

<sup>197</sup> For a full discussion of the historical relationship between Russian and former Soviet Union musicians and the city of Berlin, see Ottens (2006).

<sup>198</sup> Although I did initiate email contact with the Ginzburgs with a view to scheduling an interview, this only amounted to one exchange before the connection unexpectedly dried up. Hence biographical information comes from their website: <http://www.klezmer-musik-berlin.de/klezmer/home/>. Accessed September 1st, 2016.

we should note its overall polish and showbiz sheen – musically there is again little to mark out the Ginzburg’s style as particularly idiomatic.<sup>199</sup> As a representation of Yiddish music to those with little or no knowledge of the subject, it is clear that their shows offer an easily-accessed appeal. However, I would contend that a performance such as this has little to do with the city of Berlin, and could just as easily take place in similar large cities across Europe.

Singer and actor Mark Aizikovitch (1946-2013) emigrated from Poltava (Ukraine), where he had been a successful folk-rock singer, to Berlin in 1990. Although he had heard Yiddish songs in his youth (Kurlansky, 1995:380), it was not until his arrival in Berlin that Aizikovitch began to perform Yiddish material. Aizikovitch was a regular part of concerts and theatre productions at Mitte’s Hackesches Hoftheater, working frequently with singer Jalda Rebling and actor-director Burkhardt Seidemann (1944-2016)<sup>200</sup> and specialising in ‘gypsy’ songs (Ottens, 2006:103). Journalist Mark Kurlansky (1995:380) positions Aizikovitch as an appealing and imposing presence in this early scene, his “wild black eyes” in striking contrast to the “young Germans with long blond hair” (*ibid.*) strumming guitars. Rita Ottens (2006:380), however, is somewhat more critical of Aizikovitch’s transformation of his birthplace into an imaginary *shtetl*: “The incapability of filling and enriching [the repertoire] with his own experience and feeling testified to the end of the Yiddish tradition and a transfer to parody.”

Aizikovitch aside, the Hackesches Hoftheater, which opened in 1992, performed an important role as a network hub in the Berlin klezmer scene of the 1990s. The Hackesches Hoftheater’s website, which remains online, offers the following synopsis of the theatre’s activities:

not only Yiddish Theatre, including repeat performances by travelling troupes, but also since 1993 at least three concerts per week of Yiddish music, also the “Days

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<sup>199</sup> Interestingly, this transition from klezmer dynasty to a more mainstream aesthetic parallels earlier historical developments in the Soviet Union. Rubin (2004, quoted in Rubin 2007:15) notes that the 1917 Revolution essentially brought an end to the klezmer profession, and suggests that “surviving members of klezmer families [...] went into classical or mainstream entertainment music”. After Stalin’s death, the Jewish orchestras that reappeared (and were unlikely to have been from klezmer families) included in their repertoire “traditional klezmer tunes, as well as popular Yiddish folk, thieves’ and theater songs, Israeli tunes, and American popular songs and dances (Charleston, etc.). Many of the specific klezmer stylistic elements [from the pre-Soviet period] were forgotten, however.” (*ibid.*)

<sup>200</sup> Seidemann was one of the theatre’s founders. Following its closure in 2006, he continued to produce a successful twice-yearly “Klezmerfest” series in the fairly unforgiving surroundings of CEDIO Point conference centre in Storkower Bogen. This series, which ran from 2006 until Seidemann’s death in 2016, included many previous Hackesches Hoftheater artists, as well as Jossif Gofenberg’s Klezmer Chidesch.

of Yiddish Music” at the beginning of every year, as well as the nearly two month-long Yiddish Music Summer. With almost 200 klezmer concerts and programmes of Yiddish song per year, the Hackesches Hoftheater was unequalled in Europe.<sup>201</sup>

Most of the older musicians covered in this thesis performed regularly there,<sup>202</sup> and Waligórska (2013:47) notes that two years after the theatre’s closure in 2006, the number of klezmer concerts in the city had dropped by more than 50 percent. As a physical space, the theatre offered itself as a contact zone between musicians and interested audiences, a recognisable meeting-point<sup>203</sup> around which the development of an ongoing scene could coalesce (Waligórska, *ibid.*). This sort of physical network hub is especially important when we consider the disparate nature of klezmer and Yiddish music’s development in the city.<sup>204</sup>

A similar, earlier, network hub was the East German *Tage der jiddischen Kultur* (Yiddish Culture Days), which was organised by – among others – Jalda Rebling. This ran from 1987-1996 and involved the participation of performers from the Soviet Union (Ottens, 2006:225).<sup>205</sup> As noted by Karsten Troyke earlier in this chapter, this event was one of the few recognisable spaces offering the beginnings of a connected network of Yiddish music performers in East Berlin. The work of the pioneers and their contemporaries such as Aizikovitch, through network hubs such as the Hackesches Hoftheater and the *Tage der jiddischen Kultur*, would lay the groundwork for the more established klezmer scene of the 1990s onwards. To this we must also add the early presence of American klezmer musicians in the city, in particular Joel Rubin (Berlin resident from 1989-2003), Alan Bern (from 1987 onwards), and Michael Alpert, who was a regular visitor to the city. These musicians brought a coherent cultural narrative and also initiated workshops and performance networks, both discussed in Chapter 4.

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<sup>201</sup> <http://www.hackesches-hoftheater.de/index2.htm>. Accessed September 7th, 2016.

<sup>202</sup> e.g. Karsten Troyke, Sanne Mörcke, Christian Dawid, Franka Lampe, Fabian Schnedler, Carsten Wegener, Aufwind and Kasbek.

<sup>203</sup> Helped by the theatre’s location in the Scheunenviertel district, pre-war home to large numbers of Eastern European Jews (Helas, 2010; Wurbs, 2010). This link between historical provenance and modern reinvention proved important in the venue’s own communications. See <http://www.hackesches-hoftheater.de/index2.htm?kuenstler.htm>. Accessed September 2nd, 2016.

<sup>204</sup> See the “pioneers” section earlier in this chapter.

<sup>205</sup> Jalda Rebling (interview, 2014), spoke of the culture clashes of expectation this sometimes caused between Soviet-raised Jews and non-Jewish Germans: “And then in January 1995, we invited from Kiev Mila Polyakovska [...] And she came onstage with a beautiful skirt and the band started to play, and German klezmer musicians left the hall and said this is not Jewish music.” The German musicians’ objection, as related by Rebling, is that Polyakovska was singing art music arrangements of Yiddish songs (and presenting herself as a concert artist), and was therefore ‘unauthentic’. She continued: “There is a fight between some of the German musicians and those who came from the former Soviet Union, because these were Jews who had a Jewish story and a Jewish history, but only a low knowledge. So the moment they got their knowledge back, here in Germany, it was like getting back an arm [...] and then we have till today many klezmer musicians who are putting on a hat and telling a non-Jewish audience how Jews are.”

Finally, it is important to include some discussion of the students and disciples of Argentinian-Israeli clarinetist and musical-spiritual ambassador Giora Feidman. Rubin (2015a) and Gruber (2002) have both written extensively about Feidman and his influence, and this is taken up at length in Chapter 4. Although Feidman's musical legacy in Germany is still felt, critical opinion has frequently been negative. Michael Birnbaum (2009:308), for example, suggests that "Feidman adherents certainly appear to be destroying the Jewish origins of the music." Although I do not wish to enter deeply into these debates, my stance in this dissertation is that the ahistoricism of Feidman and his followers offers little to a study based largely on artists whose music explicitly interacts with the city of which it is a part – they do not speak to this same material and symbolic relationship. Therefore, although I do not consider Feidman's followers at any length throughout this dissertation, here I will note who they are and point up some features of their musical approaches.

Currently the most successful of these artists is the clarinetist Dawid Orlowsky (b. 1981), an artist who Feidman himself dubbed the 'next Giora Feidman' (Rubin, 2015a: 218). Klezmer music makes up only a part of Orlowsky's output, which includes chamber music collaborations, jazz and world music. His klezmer work has been undertaken with his trio (Jens-Uwe Popp – guitar and Florian Dohrmann – bass), and includes a large number of original compositions influenced by Balkan meters, jazz and contemporary art music (Rubin, 2015a:219). The trio's most recent recording<sup>206</sup> is a tribute to the work of Brandwein, Tarras and others, although Orlowsky's playing shows more of Feidman's influence than anything else (*ibid.*).<sup>207</sup> As a musician, Orlowsky stands apart from the scene under discussion in this thesis, and it is useful to examine what this might tell us, both aesthetically and in terms of the network connections discussed earlier. Orlowsky's booking agency, Opus 3, includes in its roster chamber ensembles and conductors, as well as a large number of successful world music projects such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, banjo player Bela Fleck and guitar duo Sérgio and Odair Assad. This is clearly a very different performance network from those outlined above and discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Although Orlowsky is based in Berlin, there is little about his music to root him to the city, either in terms of

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<sup>206</sup> *Klezmer Kings: A Tribute* (2014). Sony Classical.

<sup>207</sup> See Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of Feidman's style.



performance space or musical approach, which is some way apart from the careful research of the modernists, the Berlinesque fantasists or the politics of the post-modernists. Orlowsky's non-involvement with the scene discussed throughout this thesis also points up the aesthetic and philosophical split between the Weimar/Brave Old World approach (discussed in detail in Chapter 4) and that of Giora Feidman:

Feidman encouraged musicians not trained in the minutiae of klezmer performance practice to create new compositions and interpretations based on their understanding of his conception of klezmer. Because elements of traditional style were not important to Feidman, his followers felt empowered to each seek their own path with the music. (Rubin, 2015a:220-1)

One interesting network effect, however, is discernible in Feidman's legacy. The *Klezmer-Gesellschaft*<sup>208</sup> e.V was founded in Berlin in 1990 as a union of "amateurs, semiprofessional and professional musicians as well as friends and patrons of mutual cultural and artistic concerns", with the aim of "support[ing] actual and traditional musical styles of different cultures [...] to allow a communication between different cultures and to meet and to become acquainted with each other."<sup>209</sup> The *Gesellschaft* included Feidman himself among its membership and promoted workshops with Feidman, concerts at Berlin's *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, and meetings for information exchange. As both Birnbaum (2009) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002) have pointed out, the *Gesellschaft* took some care to distance itself from the Jewishness of the music that it represented:

These musicians, the Klezmerim, performed at Jewish weddings, Bar-Mitzvahs and other celebrations. They usually were Jewish, but *not necessarily*. They usually played at Jewish celebrations – *but not only* [...] The style of playing and the repertoire are characterized by both the tradition, *vivid modifications* and *new perceptions*. That is exactly, what we now call klezmer music.<sup>210</sup>

Although its website remains online, the *Klezmer-Gesellschaft* is no longer operational as an organisation. Arguably, the scene has now overtaken the need for such formalised structures, developing instead its own more organic internal processes. One of the Society's main figures, clarinetist Helmut Eisel, remains highly active as a performer and composer. Eisel led the *Gesellschaft*'s Klezmer Orchestra and has given workshops throughout Germany. His approach synthesises elements of jazz and klezmer (Rubin,

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<sup>208</sup> "Klezmer Society"

<sup>209</sup> [http://www.ta-detj.de/klezmer/english/dkg\\_e.html](http://www.ta-detj.de/klezmer/english/dkg_e.html). Accessed September 1st, 2016.

<sup>210</sup> [http://www.ta-detj.de/klezmer/english/dkg\\_e.html](http://www.ta-detj.de/klezmer/english/dkg_e.html). Accessed September 1st, 2016. Italics mine.

2015a:218), but his philosophy is explicitly derived from Feidman. In a 2002 online article, Eisel sets his ideological aesthetic directly against the technical/functional definition of a musician such as Aufwind's Heiko Lehmann:

As musicians we are seekers all our lives, and klezmer music can bring us answers that we have not found in our own culture. Seen in this light our definition [of klezmer] might look something like this: "Whoever plays from an inner attitude of passing on music (instead of producing music), whoever sees themselves as a 'vessel of song' (= Kli Zemer), is a Klezmer".<sup>211</sup>

The separation of klezmer from Jewishness is what connects all Feidman's disciples, with its associated musical distancing from any functional roots of the music (though not from Feidman's own idiosyncratic clarinet style). A slightly different example is clarinetist Harry Timmermann (born 1952). Timmermann has been playing klezmer since the early 1990s, including regular private functions (Waligórska, 2013:130). Whilst Timmermann is German, his fluid band Harry's Freilach is in fact notable for its international make-up: accordion players from the former Soviet Union, guitarists from Greece and France, a bassist born in Zagreb and raised in Canada, and a Syrian oud and percussion player. Timmermann's many public concerts around Germany often take place in small churches in towns and cities, although he was also a frequent performer at the Hackesches Hoftheater and the subsequent CEDIO Point Klezmerfests. In concert, Timmermann references Feidman regularly, explicitly acknowledging his influence on Timmermann's own playing style and in explanation of his choice of repertoire.<sup>212</sup> Timmermann is a likeable figure in performance, his frequent smiles and occasional mugging working well to break down any sense of taking himself too seriously. But whilst his band make-up speaks to the internationalism of the city and his appealing performance persona makes a comfortable route into the music, musically Timmermann is very much a follower rather than an innovator. As a German ambassador for an immediately accessible version of Yiddish culture, Timmermann fulfils a clear but limited role.

These musicians, then, position themselves outside of the scene I explore in this thesis. This is not in any sense to discount their music, but it is to recognise that this music (and its associated scenes) do not engage in the same sort of dynamic dialogue with the

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<sup>211</sup> [http://www.klezmer.de/D\\_Klezmer/D\\_aufsatz/Eisel.html](http://www.klezmer.de/D_Klezmer/D_aufsatz/Eisel.html). Accessed September 1st, 2016.

<sup>212</sup> Harry's Freilach live 1998 recording from the Hackesches Hoftheater consists mostly of tunes composed or popularised by Feidman, such as "The Sounds of Safed", "Ballade for a Klezmer" and "The Blessing Nigun".

city as the artists who make up the bulk of the dissertation. As I hope to show, the music and spaces of Chapters 2 and 3 are not simply a product of their city; through an engagement with material space and symbolic representation, they are instrumental in actively producing an understanding of the city of Berlin.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst overlap, ambiguity and development characterise much of the music under discussion, this chapter has nevertheless highlighted several distinct positions, points on a map which form part of a discussion about what klezmer music is and can be. For pioneers, the impulse has been to follow an urge (Slobin, 2000), a musical journey ignited by cultural concerns and often struggling with limited and hard-to-access resources. Modernists are expressly about the music, their performance practice informed by what we might call a modern authenticity, with differing musical results. The fantasist project takes the performance experience to the extremes of friendly weirdness. This often has the knock-on effect of an increased personal connection with the meanings and significance of the music, whilst linking clearly with Berlin's contemporary and historical cabaret semiotics. Where fantasists are on the edge of political, post-modernists are avowedly so. Central to their musical aesthetic is a sense of transformation, an engagement with ideological ambiguity and a complex discussion of contemporary Jewishness.

None of these typologies makes an exclusive claim on 'correct' klezmer practice. Instead, all are prisms through which to explore and discuss the diverse and occasionally contradictory ways that one might understand the concept of Jewish folk music in the city of Berlin. These four categories also work as a way of thinking through the different analytical possibilities of micro-musical units. What began as a disparate subculture has, over recent decades, formed itself into various intercultural networks, framed by (occasionally limiting) endorsement from the superculture. Nowadays, the flexible intercultural networks that have coalesced around Yiddish culture in the city draw musicians into ever more changeable and dynamic subcultural groupings. This is all contextualised by a city that thrives on subcultural activity and specialises in the sort of making-do spaces integral to ongoing creative innovation. The next chapter will look in depth at the musical space of the city – its performance zones

in the form of clubs, bars, concert halls and jam sessions, and also how the city's particular post-reunification creative buzz encourages and makes possible these continued explorations.

## 2. The Music in Berlin: Spaces and Places

*I'm just now in a period where I'm really thankful to live in the city. There's one thing, maybe this can explain what I mean. Studio R concert, Psoy Korolenko, Daniel and Marina. And they have this wonderful, funny and delightful concert. And their aim was to sing the songs in as many languages as possible. And during this evening I had a flash – Berlin in the 20s of the twentieth century [...] And then on the other hand, Neukölln klezmer sessions. It's not only Neukölln klezmer, also Maison Courage. It's just the music, for everybody, for the people who play there, who come there to dance, to listen also. And I feel it as a privilege, to do something and to be part of it, of course, but also that it exists. It can only exist in a city like Berlin now, I think (Till Schumann, Oriente Musik).<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

Chapter one looked at the criss-crossing networks of musicians and bands that characterise the Berlin klezmer scene, shifting and overlapping categories of a music recontextualised away from its original function.<sup>2</sup> But musical configurations do not happen in vacuums: music is both constrained and freed by the spaces within which it operates. This chapter, therefore, presents a complementary perspective, that of the physical and social arenas which create and sustain these musical dialogues. It is an analysis of the ways in which particular spaces work to root an internationalised music within the particular context of a city, and also how that music in turn offers a certain spatial ideology. Fluidity is paramount, but it is a bounded fluidity. The music forms an accepted cultural canon across all its contexts, but its operations within different environments reveal different assumptions and social processes. What is exploratory in one arena may turn out to be controlled in another; where one space initiates a discussion, another subtly closes it down. Even as we start, it is important to point out that this process is iterative. As musical vernaculars and sonic groupings take ever more complex form and shape, they in turn exert different degrees of influence upon the spaces in which they resound. And in response to such liberative or limiting effects,

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<sup>1</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Much has been made of the discrepancy between klezmer's Eastern European roots and Berlin's largely assimilated and progressive Jewish history (Morris, 2001; Birnbaum, 2009). Philip Bohlman pithily describes the phenomenon as "the din of klezmer that has filled Berlin since the destruction of the Wall, anachronistically evoking a Jewish past that never was." (2008:172). The debate is, however, not conclusive: the output of Hirsch Lewin's pre-war *Semer* record label (see Chapter 6) testifies to a market for Yiddish song, whilst Wurbs (2010) and Nemtsov (2009) point to performances of Yiddish music that found popularity with Berlin audiences between 1902 and 1919. We should nevertheless note that the context for such events was the concert hall, rather than community life.

music can act back as a transformative mechanism upon its surroundings, delineating edges and altering perceptions:

music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them [...] Music does not simply provide a marker in a prestructured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed (Stokes, 1994:4).

There are two important and related ideas here – those of boundary and transformation. In the dynamic and ever-shifting context of contemporary Berlin, these two themes run central to the city's recent history (Ward, 2011a), making this particular urban context crucial to the different ways that klezmer music either reinforces or transgresses certain social and ideological borders. Post-war, we see a city that has exploited and been exploited by the extremes of space and spatial control – from the grotesque imaginings of Hitler and Speer's Germania through the East/West frontier of a failed Soviet dream, and – on the other side of the border – the Western bubble of consumer culture, an enforced freedom paradoxically hemmed-in on all sides (Sheridan, 2007). These days, the city continues to explore the possibilities of space and spatial transgression, and to argue very publicly about how the future space of the city should look and for whom (Stangl, 2000; Cochrane & Passmore, 2001). Alongside the 'big talk' of social policy, this debate is also regularly and imaginatively enacted within a more unofficial subjective space, itself subject to continual and contested transformation (Till, 2005). Berlin's particular twentieth century legacy has over recent years given rise to a creative and occasionally subversive politics of space which we have already met in the recontextualisation of public space, transitory community and bricolage tactics of The Night of the Singing Balconies. Some of this tension informs what follows.

My focus therefore is on the material and discursive contributions klezmer and Yiddish music makes to these relationships. How does the city root the music, and how does the music reinforce or transform social relationships within the city? These questions are particularly pertinent to klezmer's contemporary manifestation. Over the past forty years, what was once a functional music grounded in Eastern European Jewish weddings and dynastic family *kapelyes* (Rubin, 2001; Strom, 2002) has been re-imagined on the world stage as music for concerts, jam sessions, street performance and club nights. Divorced from its functional mechanisms by historical circumstance and

altered demographics, other social and cultural meanings have had to be created in other spaces. With klezmer, we will also see how the music has been used to both delineate (or transgress) certain ‘Jewish’ practices – paralleling the city’s ongoing dialogue with its historical and contemporary Jewish identity (Peck, Ash & Lemke, 1997). The discussion that follows, therefore, takes in ideas of official and unofficial space (Weimann, 1978), performance vs participation (Turino, 2008b), notions of ‘Jewish space’ (Pinto, 1996) and also the wider ideological and cultural space of Berlin itself – how the city’s particular contemporary semiotics and bricolage culture interact with this traditional Jewish folk music, and the effects upon both.

This is especially interesting in Berlin, a city that lays no claim to an ‘authentic’ klezmer history. The *freylekhs*, *horas* and *bulgars* played in the city today were not born there, but a few hundred miles further east and south, chiefly in what became known as the Pale of Settlement.<sup>3</sup> And although Berlin’s Scheunenviertel district developed a vibrant Yiddish culture from the late nineteenth-century onwards (Helas, 2010; Wurbs, 2010),<sup>4</sup> the strong Jewish influence upon the city most celebrated today is that of Moses Mendelssohn and the *Haskalah*, the poetry of Heinrich Heine and the medical research of Paul Ehrlich.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the spaces that characterise the performance and consumption of klezmer music today are newly-ascribed in this role, making them something of a blank canvas for the music’s possible meanings. This is in marked contrast to certain other sites of Jewish renewal, in particular the weighty symbolic presence documented by Saxonberg and Waligórska (2006:436) in the Polish city of Krakow.

Which is not to say that playing Jewish music in Berlin comes ideology-free. For a city at the epicentre of the Nazi vision and subsequently poised at the fulcrum of Cold War tension,<sup>6</sup> history is inevitably never very far away. The monuments, plaques and

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<sup>3</sup> Subject to multiple geographical revisions, the Pale of Settlement is the name given to the territories of the Russian Empire in which Jews were allowed permanent settlement. Between 1791 and its formal abolishment in 1917, the Pale included parts of current-day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Romania, Ukraine and Moldova (perhaps most importantly Bessarabia, which retained a powerfully romantic cultural symbolism for émigré Jews (on this see Feldman, 2002)). On the Pale itself see Klier (2010). On klezmer in the Pale see Strom (2002:83-5) and Rubin (2001:52-9).

<sup>4</sup> On tensions (and their over-representation) between Western intellectuals and the *Ostjuden*, see Tilo Alt (1991), Wertheimer (1987).

<sup>5</sup> In the city’s Jewish Museum, for example, the Eastern Hasidic cultural presence within the city is notably glossed (in an eponymous 2012 exhibition and publication) as *Berlin Transit*, in reference to the city as staging-post between the old world and the new.

<sup>6</sup> For example, here is Nikita Khrushchev speaking in 1963: “Berlin is the testicle of the West. When I want the West to scream, I squeeze on Berlin” (Taylor, 2006:103).

*Denkmals* that dot the city<sup>7</sup> are a constant reminder of a past with which Berlin is still coming to terms (Ladd, 2000), physical sites of continually contested historiographies. But it is important to stress that within the most interesting current Berlin klezmer music, this history plays less and less as a symbolic presence to be addressed.<sup>8</sup> Arguably, it has become a *residual code*,<sup>9</sup> and what was once a heavily contested Jewish space (Gruber, 2002) has now opened up into a fluid and dynamic discussion, retaken by a younger group of international musicians who are more interested in engaging with the city's bottom-up, materials-to-hand creative aesthetic.<sup>10</sup> Here is singer Daniel Kahn explicitly addressing these issues:

And that's an important point, that I constantly have to make, which is: I'm not into this music for all of this intellectual acrobatics that it puts you through, I'm into it because it's *good*. Like, because when it's good, it's *really* good. It's an amazing music, it's funky, you can dance to it, the songs are full of great stories, there's an emotional world that the songs evoke that is foreign and not-foreign but inherently interesting and beautiful.<sup>11</sup>

These “intellectual acrobatics” have dogged the German klezmer discourse for the last twenty years, but they are not my focus here. Instead I hope to show how this musical practice might be understood through its relationship to the modern city – from the carnivalesque to the confrontational, the traditional to the fluid (“foreign and not-foreign”). The musical spaces of this chapter move beyond memorial (Meng, 2011), heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002:136-9) or simulacra (Gruber, 2009), into the unpredictable and living wider cultural processes of the city itself. Consequently, their analysis has something new to offer an understanding of musical practice.

Where much ethnomusicology carefully and convincingly links geography, history and music in meaningful ways (e.g. Rice, 1994; Bithell, 2007; Gray, 2013), the role of place is slightly different here. In my analysis, the city space and the music it creates are indeed co-dependent, but the relationship is perhaps a more subtle and nuanced one than any direct connection to ‘the music of a place’. Ambiguously tied to multiple historical

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<sup>7</sup> Many U-Bahn stations (such as Frankfurter Tor) and thoroughfares (such as nearby Karl Marx Allee) also function as sites of historical narrative, told through pre- and post-war photographs, murals and information points.

<sup>8</sup> With the notable exception of Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird. Dan's refusal to ‘move on’ and its creative results are discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> Here I am using Raymond Williams' concept of *dominant*, *residual* and *emergent* elements of cultural practice. It is important to distinguish, as Williams does (1977:122), between the residual and the ‘archaic’: “The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present.”

<sup>10</sup> Joel Rubin (2014) analyses the ways in which this relationship has developed and changed since the 1990s.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, 2013.



roots (Morris, 2001), klezmer's international musical praxis also means it remains paradoxically *rootless*. The material and cultural links forged with Berlin are therefore crucial, providing the local urban counterpart to klezmer's international dialogue, and grounding the music in a way that its transnational discourse cannot. By interacting with the specific spaces of the city itself, klezmer music becomes a part of Berlin cultural production. As a result, these forms link indexically<sup>12</sup> with ways of 'being-in-the-world' which are new for klezmer. This has a two-way effect: the music becomes part of the city's subcultural meanings, and some city spaces become to an extent Jewish, at least temporarily (Brauch *et al*, 2008).

Berlin is fertile ground for past-present links; the city is rich in its exploitation of contemporary fluidity in contrast to historical stasis, and the tension over the continual redrawing of these borders (Silberman, 2011) characterises the creative energy of the city:<sup>13</sup>

While Scheffler<sup>14</sup> may have identified Berlin's genetic code, he vastly underestimated its advantages. Imperfection, incompleteness – not to say ugliness – afford a sense of freedom that compact beauty never can (Schneider, 2014:8).

Once again, my approach is engaged and exploratory rather than simply descriptive. The first part of this chapter examines some ideas around the relationship of music and space, with detailed reference to existing literature. Next, I will explore the slippery and open-ended concept of European 'Jewish space'. The chapter then looks in detail at some of the presentational and participatory (Turino, 2008b) spaces of klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin: venues, bars, cafés and dance halls. Finally, the chapter explores the degrees of liminality between official and unofficial musical structure and practice as seen in the city's three jam sessions, which form points along a historical and social continuum.

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<sup>12</sup> Here I am referencing Turino's treatment of Peircean semiotics: "As indexical connections *become* habitual, they come to be perceived as natural – part of one's common sense conceptions of reality. When deeply grounded in habit, this 'reality function' of indexical signs often creates particularly *direct*, un-reflected upon, effects at a variety of levels of focal awareness." (Turino, 2012:n.pag. italics in original).

<sup>13</sup> This ongoing tension is also becoming a part of academic debate, see for example Holm (2014).

<sup>14</sup> In 1910, writer Karl Scheffler memorably wrote in *Berlin, ein Stadtschicksal* that the city was "condemned forever to becoming and never to being".

## Music, space and bricolage culture

Poised at the junction of anthropology and musicology, ethnomusicological analysis foregrounds the role of place as central to the social and cultural conditions of music-making. This works to ground the musical act in the physicality of its environment – contextualising performance in a sense of external social ‘reality’<sup>15</sup> and locating music *within* culture (Merriam, 1964:15). In the field of cultural geography, Susan Smith (1997) and Leyshon, Matless and Revill (1998) have all argued in connected ways for the increased inclusion of music as a distinct filter through which to understand the ways that notions of place and the social relationships formed therein are constructed. Of particular importance is the (in)appropriateness of certain behaviour as expressed through sound: “Sound, like other senses, forms a part of environment’s ‘moral geography’, whereby certain forms of conduct belong and others do not” (Leyshon *et al*, 1998:23). In the analysis of specific spaces, this sense of appropriate or inappropriate ways of being is crucial: klezmer music can either connect with the city’s sites of controlled transgression or it can reinforce a certain more entrenched sense of spatial order. More recently, Johansson and Bell (2009:2) have theorised music as:

a cultural form that actively produces geographic discourses and can be used to understand broader social relations and trends, including identity, ethnicity, attachment to place, cultural economies, social activism, and politics.

Music, these writers suggest, is at times able to articulate and make audible that which the visual or verbal cannot: “Once in its place, music is a very public way of articulating things that cannot easily, or safely, or effectively be said. It can therefore evoke the subtleties of existence, its unspoken spaces” (Smith, 1997).<sup>16</sup> In the case studies that follow, I will explore the specific means by which music acts as a transformative power upon certain Berlin spaces to undermine or subvert more established behaviour.

This potential for local resistance is particularly important in a city like Berlin. Bombed, divided, stuck back together, perpetually ‘becoming’, Berlin is a city of bricolage,<sup>17</sup> its residents experts at adapting materials to hand. Not so surprising, perhaps, for a city that

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps better to say that it positions music as a meaningful component within the social *construction* of reality. Here we should note the work of Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann (1991), Claude Levi-Strauss (1968), Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Anthony Giddens (1984) as key theoretical contexts.

<sup>16</sup> cf. Wood and the contested soundscape of Jerusalem’s Western Wall (2015).

<sup>17</sup> Although this concept has by now gained widespread use, I am here adapting Claude Levi-Strauss’ original formulation from *The Savage Mind* (1968:17), which discusses the way that myth-making societies build cultural meaning from the bric-a-brac of discourse available to them at any particular point, in contrast to a top-down, all-encompassing grand narrative.

has moved from global *realpolitik* to post-reunification fragmentation within a few short decades. Berlin's love of flea-markets, pop-up bars, reclaimed industrial space (Till, 2011) and transient community street culture<sup>18</sup> all speak to this particular characteristic, evincing an appealingly inventive and witty commitment to patching-together from what is available rather than starting with the 'correct' materials for the job.

Meaning-making bricoleurs (inversely to engineers) do not approach knowledge-production activities with concrete plans, methods, tools, or checklists of criterion. Rather, their processes are much more flexible, fluid, and open-ended (Rogers, 2012:3).

The concept of bricolage is a multi-layered one. Terence Hawkes (1977) emphasises fleet-footed, real-time creativity when he talks of "structures, improvised or made up as *ad hoc* responses to an environment", whilst John Clarke (1976) relates the process back to its syntagmatic and paradigmatic possibilities: "when the bricoleur relocates the significant object in a different position within that discourse [...] or when that object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted." In his seminal study of post-war youth subcultures in Britain, Dick Hebdige (1979) theorises certain acts of bricolage (the punk safety-pin, the mod sharp suit) as inherently subcultural. He argues that the appropriation of symbols from mainstream culture and their relocation as part of a chain of deliberately ambiguous signifying practices constitute a type of counter-discourse, one which overturns dominant ideological ways of thinking in favour of the playful joy of signification itself, thereby subverting conventional narratives of order and meaning.

We might take a moment to apply these ideas to one of Berlin's now famously counter-cultural spaces.<sup>19</sup> Built on the former Wall death strip in the north of the city, Mauerpark is for the most part a bleak, flat, dirty rectangle of scrub and grass. Bottle tops and broken glass take the place of flowers, the sole respite a well-used rainbow-hued playground at the park's northern edge. This drab space, however, is also the venue for

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the city's plethora of single-interest festivals (occultofest, punk film fest), Kreuzberg's Markthalle Neun's "Street food Thursday", and Hans-Georg Lindenau's 'revolutionary' thrift store and swap shop in Mateuffelstraße, which in January 2016 brought out over 1000 people to protest against its removal – indicating simultaneously the city's changing personality and also significant resistance to this change. See <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/reportage/szeneladen-m99-in-kreuzberg-ein-ueberbleibsel-eines-wilden-berlins/12812980.html>. Accessed January 25th, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Plenty of historical examples from the city of Berlin would also present themselves: trans-gender cabaret of the late Weimar/early National Socialist era (Jelavich, 1996), Kreuzberg in the 70s and 80s (Sheridan, 2007), or Prenzlauer Berg in the 1990s (Smiers, 2000). Although it is by now also a tourist draw (and therefore arguably somewhat less subversive) I have chosen Mauerpark because it is a space I came to know well, and because its subcultural meanings are intimately connected to its musical processes. See also Ward (2011a:128).

one of Berlin's most colourful, diverse and fluid musical happenings, a particular combination of urban space, contemporary demographics and historical narrative. Every Sunday, weather permitting, Mauerpark transforms into a mini-festival. The graffiti-covered amphitheatre plays host to Joe Ichiban's infamous bearpit karaoke, whilst a twenty-yard stroll in any direction takes in solo ukulele hopefuls, digital dub reggae duos and loop-patterned ambient noise-merchants. People dance to three- or four-piece Latin percussion sections, or sit on the steps flanking the cobbled path to listen to a regularly rotating crop of singer songwriters.<sup>20</sup> An aural kaleidoscope of Berlin's cash-poor/ideas-rich creative aesthetic, the music brought here every week does more than simply transform the physical space of the park: it becomes the vehicle for a noisily public dialogue.

The musical takeover of this uninspiringly bleak historical reminder is a joyful undermining of bordered spatial practice, an improvised aesthetics of mix-and-match that encourages juxtaposition, meandering and temporariness.<sup>21</sup> The same musical events laid on in the city's decorous and historic Tiergarten or one of the landscaped *Volksparks* would have a very different, far more 'official' resonance. Mauerpark's lack of determining 'features' is precisely what allows its functional space to act with such dynamism: the park becomes a heterogeneous, carnivalesque contact zone within which the profusion of competing and temporary musical encounters triumphs over any one cultural or spatial narrative. There is no quality control and there is no selection panel, other than the public itself. The sonic responses to this particular environment are indeed *ad hoc* and improvised, just as the relocation of conventional performer-audience relations into a gleefully chaotic noise constitutes a new and vibrant discourse, subverting the park's negative historical weight (as former death strip) and lack of conventional visual appeal.

Mauerpark is thus the lively meeting-point of several characteristically 'Berlin' urban threads: an influx of enthusiasm and creativity, a latent anarchy (diminishing and over-hyped, but nevertheless still there), a surfeit of post-*Wende* 'dead space',<sup>22</sup> and a social

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<sup>20</sup> A genre for which Berlin has now become famous. Whilst on the U-Bahn, my son one day pointed out a guitar belonging to the man sitting opposite us. The instrument's owner smiled at Sammy and said, "You'll see a lot of people with guitars in this city."

<sup>21</sup> Much like de Certeau's walking (1984, chapter 7), as discussed in the Introduction.

<sup>22</sup> Agata Anna Lisiak (2010, chapters 6 & 7) offers insightful examples of post-1989 literary and filmic representations of this "void".









Figures 13-15. Three colourful examples from Mauerpark’s weekly mini-festival, August 2014.

desire to symbolically overcome history. This last is important, as it points to a more playfully covert agenda than that of previous generations. Karen E. Till, writing about the city’s empty spaces and their takeover by artist collectives, articulates this difference in the generation born in the 1960s and 70s:

this younger generation of artist-activists approaches the ‘emptiness’ of space in the city less in terms of uncovering evidence of the ‘forgetfulness’ of a nation and its leaders [...] They distinguish themselves from their predecessors in their critique of neoliberal planning and development strategies that *fill in* these so-called empty spaces, when in fact they see them as vibrant, alive, already full (Till, 2011:116).

Less well-known, we might also point to the Friday night Mauerpark *Folkwiese*, a gathering of twenty or more people who meet regularly to play and dance to folk music from around the world – part of Europe’s burgeoning *bal-folk*<sup>23</sup> scene, but a part which chooses to set itself in one of Berlin’s least idyllic locations (almost any other Berlin park would be prettier and more conducive). Once again, we can see the re-location of paradigmatic elements as constitutive of a new set of syntagmatic meanings: in its

<sup>23</sup> *Bal-folk* is a folk dance movement that has gained increased popularity in Northern Europe over the past few decades. It covers a wide variety of traditional dance forms and varies considerably in terms of structure and expertise. Distinct from more formal, heritage-based exhibitions of traditional dance, *bal-folk* tends to place emphasis on transnational inclusivity, rarely allying itself with traditional dress, for example. Festivals notable for their development of the *bal-folk* scene include Rudolstadt’s *Tanz und Folk Fest* (Germany) and St. Chartier’s long-running festival of instrument makers, *Rencontres de Luthiers et Maitres Sonneurs*.

choice of grubby venue, the *bal-folk* itself becomes ‘urbanised’, whilst the space of Mauerpark is re-energised with a new set of contemporary ‘folky’ meanings.

Although Mauerpark is one of the city’s most visible manifestations of bricolage-in-process, it is by no means the only one. The disused space of Kreuzberg’s Cuvrystraße on the south side of the Spree river was, until recently, home to a self-sufficient community of yurts and improvised living shacks, complete with children’s sandpit and a stylishly mismatched open-air bar (see figure 16).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Friedrichshain squatter art collectives still hold out against increasing gentrification,<sup>25</sup> while Berlin’s DIY e-music scene (Flood, 2015) and Neukölln bar culture continues to explore the aesthetics of montage and bric-a-brac. All this may seem some way from Eastern European Jewish wedding music. But I will go on to suggest that many of Berlin’s klezmer spaces, in their lack of proscribed behaviour, fluidity of process and musical practice, do indeed connect this music with the city’s characteristic approach to cultural production. Through repeated situation within certain spaces, klezmer becomes indexically linked (Turino, 2012) with a certain set of assumptions about the role and function of music in social life. Not only this, but the improvised structures and repositionings of certain music spaces also offer up the possibility of new cultural discourses and musical responses – new versions of ‘Jewish music’ and ‘Jewish space’. Each of my case studies is therefore understood in terms of a music-space dynamic that is either controlling or transgressive, radical or traditional, presentational or participatory, and often several of these at the same time.

I want to put forward one other useful analytical tool, a concept that nuances the visual through the embodiment of physical space. In his discussion of the physical Elizabethan stage, East German scholar Robert Weimann (1978) distinguishes between *locus*, a raised scaffold area from which kings and Gods speak, and *platea*, a generalised acting-space at the front or edge of the stage-area, closer to the audience and from which lower-ranking dramatic characters would interact more freely with the crowd, at times subverting pronouncements from the *loca* above: “The Latin word *platea* (Ital. *piazza*) originally indicated the open space between houses – a street or a public place at ground

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<sup>24</sup> At the time of writing (November 2015), Cuvrystraße had been cleared and its fate remained unknown. There still exist, however, similar smaller riverside communities further east into Mitte, and also along the Landwehrkanal.

<sup>25</sup> Although Berliners continually mourn the decline of these and other spaces, they still proliferate in comparison to other European capital cities.





Figure 16. Berlin bricolage. Clockwise from top left: Cuvrystraße community bar; miniature crook, Reichenberger Straße; culture-clash on Ohlauer Straße; alternative living at the former Bethanien hospital; diminutively defiant mannequin on Wiener Straße; M99 thrift store, Mateuffelstraße. All photos taken May 2014.

level” (Weimann, 1978:79). We can see, then, two distinct transactional positions: one a high-up and formalised speaking space of Gods, rulers and ‘big talk’ grand narrative, the other intermingling with the audience in their own communal space, speaking their language “at ground level”. In short, *official* and *unofficial* space.<sup>26</sup> This dual concept will be important in the discussion that follows. In particular, and following the

<sup>26</sup> Semiotician Ginny Valentine (1993, 2002) adapted Weimann’s ideas for more practical use within social and market research contexts and it is her reframing of the concepts as *official* and *unofficial* space that I will use here. I also have a declarable interest in including Ginny’s work in my own – she was my mother.



arguments of Smith, Stokes and others, I hope to make clear that music not only reflects official-unofficial dichotomies in cultural and physical space, but is instrumental in the transition from one to the other. A city develops layers, sediment, associations and embodied ways of being: street theatre, bar culture, public vs private space are all contested and implicated in this transaction.<sup>27</sup> Shortly, I will begin to apply some of these ideas to specific spaces in Berlin. First, however, it is important to address the elusive notion of *Jewish space*.

### **Jewish space**

After decades of repression, marginalisation and historical revision (Haumann, 2002), post-communist Europe (particularly Eastern Europe) saw a rapid growth of what historian Diana Pinto in 1996 characterised as “Jewish Space”. Reconstructed synagogues (Meng, 2011), heritage tours, university course units, interdisciplinary artistic celebrations, museums (Young, 2000) and hotly-contested memorials (Stangl, 2008; Ladd, 2000) coalesced in local, national and international combinations to create a context of interaction, exploration and dialogue around myriad manifestations of European Jewishness, regardless of whether or not these zones were populated by actual Jews (Gruber, 2002). If this rapid growth of interest was making up for lost time (and lost numbers), it was also to initiate a process of intense self-questioning about the place and possible function of a Jewish culture in reunified Europe. For Pinto, this newly-identified and developing space took two parts, beginning with the incorporation of the Holocaust back into national histories (Gilman & Katz, 1991:3; Gantner, 2014:28). From this, she argued, followed the more problematic corollary of “positive Judaism”, including civic, social and cultural promotion of ‘things Jewish’.

It is important to stress that a rich ‘Jewish space’, containing a multitude of ‘things Jewish’, is not dependent on the size or even presence of a living Jewish community [...] Germany – where the Jewish community is small by pre-war standards, and is not composed of descendants of the old German Jewish community – has without doubt the most impressive ‘Jewish space’ in Europe (Pinto, 1996:7).

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<sup>27</sup> Writing about Berlin’s “indeterminate spaces”, Dougal Sheridan (2007:112) argues: “Social relations and processes are primarily understood by individuals through the structures in which they are represented to those individuals. This is particularly the case in buildings, where ‘implicit ideological assumptions are literally structured into the architecture’ (Hebdige (1979:12))”.

This impressiveness raised troubling questions. The inescapable contradictions, ambiguity and irony of what Ruth Ellen Gruber (2002) has famously theorised as “virtual” Jewishness invoked overlapping spectres of antisemitism, philosemitism, Orientalism,<sup>28</sup> fetishism, reparation, appropriation and more. How to respond to a cultural and civic turn apparently modelled around unity and optimism, yet which still appeared to have a gaping aporia at its centre? For Pinto, the breaching of this gap through the development of a strong and credible European Jewish identity would not only strengthen the European Jewish space, but also “help to bring about the end of this paternalistic *matryoshka*.<sup>29</sup> [European Jews] should no longer be considered the weakened remnant, the potential defectors” (Pinto, 1996:15).

Pinto concludes on the upbeat note that “Europe is not Australia [...] It is up to us, as Europeans and Jews, to turn Europe into the third pillar of a world Jewish identity”.<sup>30</sup> Compelling though this vision is, history has not been so kind to its optimism. The growth of far-right nationalism in Europe and Russia (Gitelman, 2013), the collapse of the Oslo peace process, anti-Israeli discourse and its knock-on effect of wider antisemitism (Harrison, 2013; Yakira, 2013), and the problems of integration faced by Russian Jews in their adopted European homes (Weiss, 2004) have problematised both the real social conditions of Jewish life in Europe and also the conceptual focus of ‘Jewish space’. In an attempt to take account of a more flexible version of Jewishness, Brauch, Lipphardt, and Nocke's 2008 Jewish “topographies” turned the focus back onto spaces that, instead of framing a more fixed idea of Jewish history or textual representation, focused on “‘doing Jewish space’ or ‘lived Jewish spaces’, on Jewish spatial practices and experiences” (2008:2). This important turn also includes an idea of temporariness, a more plastic and less proscribed alternative to the officialdom of synagogues, memorial and civic initiatives. In this context, spaces are no longer dependent upon sanctification, consecration or textual emplacement, but rather can become Jewish for the time that Jewish activities occur within them: “Jewish spaces are understood as spatial environments in which Jewish things happen, where Jewish activities are performed, and which in turn are shaped and defined by those Jewish

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<sup>28</sup> Although Said's (1978) concept refers to the Arab-Islamic Middle East, I am here referring to Western European exoticising attitudes to Eastern European Jews (*Ostjuden*). See Mendes-Flohr (1984).

<sup>29</sup> Pinto's neat Russian doll analogy of Jewish cultural visibility, where the tiny European Jewish doll sits within the British Jewish doll, the British within the French, the French within the American, and all are concealed from view by the “gigantic, triumphant Israeli *matryoshka*.” (Pinto, 1996:15)

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

activities” (Brauch *et al.*, 2008:4). This dialogic process is crucial in the case studies which follow, a shifting real-time adaptation of spaces which don’t ‘look Jewish’ (or in our case perhaps, *sound* Jewish).

In Berlin, one of the ongoing sites of this discussion has been the city’s enthusiastic take-up of klezmer and Yiddish music, until recently by an overwhelming majority of non-Jews (Eckstaedt, 2010). The discursive and ideological ambiguities were not lost on players at the time. La’om, for example, a largely East Berlin band which brought together several musicians still active on the scene today, stated succinctly in the liner-notes to their 1998 album *Riffkele*: “We don’t see it as a sign of perfectly normalized German-Jewish relations that many Germans are playing klezmer music [...] As a means of dealing with German history klezmer music is simply inappropriate.”<sup>31</sup> Moving forward from this, Magdalena Waligórska (2013) points to the music as a zone of contact and learning between cultures, a subtle form of mediation that is neither appropriation nor surrender, but more an uneven dialogue. Touring American musicians at times felt a little less mutually-inclined. Here’s Judy Bressler of the Boston Klezmer Conservatory Band, interviewed by Mark Slobin in the late 90s:

I don’t like being in Germany, and the sooner we leave, the better. Every person on the street that’s elderly, I think where were they, and what were they doing [...] how much blood is on your hands? (Slobin, 2000:57).

This is an articulation of German-Jewish space as inherently problematic: an uneasy ideological site of concealment and locus of unresolved conflict. Whilst this historical context cannot be ignored, there is amongst musicians active in Berlin now a strong sense that these arguments have been talked out – if not conclusively decided, then at least part of a debate that has moved on (Rubin, 2014: 47, 49-50).<sup>32</sup> In contrast to these paradigms of cultural conflict or symbolic redemption (Meng, 2011), I hope to show that nowadays many of Berlin’s klezmer musical spaces have become naturalised and normalised to an extent where explicit ‘Jewishness’ is only one reading amongst several, their lack of specifically Jewish performativity (Butler, 1988) yielding little to

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<sup>31</sup> Raumer Records: RR13299.

<sup>32</sup> Singer Fabian Schnedler, for example, began our interview with the specific request that I didn’t ask him about non-Jews playing klezmer (“we’ve had that discussion”). Dan Kahn told me: “Listen, this issue has been put to bed and there is plenty of literature to read about it. Those battles have been fought, and we have won, and we don’t need to talk about them any more.” And Kasbek’s Uwe Sauerwein bemoaned the fact that previous interviewers had been almost exclusively concerned with his ideological motivation, rather than his music (personal interview, Schöneberg, Berlin. September 2nd, 2014).

the topographies of Brauch *et al.* Others, conversely, confidently explore ambiguous Jewish identity through music, initiating a discussion rather than reaching a conclusion. At times, the sublimation of overt markers of Jewishness points to a process of inclusivity for klezmer music into the wider urban musical fabric. At others, the presence of these markers foregrounds a separation of music and ethnic cultural context that reinforces historical ideas of Jewish ‘Otherness’ (Mendes-Flohr, 1984). Here is Riga-born keyboardist and accordionist Ilya Shneyveys<sup>33</sup> pointing up some of these discrepancies:

It’s interesting, I don’t feel very much connected to the Jewish culture [...] I don’t want to be part of this community. I want to be part of a community of my musician friends. Because they’re mostly young and sane, and they’re fun to hang out with. You know, I like religious music, I really like cantorial music and I really like *nigunim*. But for, you know, non-religious purposes. I mean, it does elevate me spiritually. So I just want to keep that part.<sup>34</sup>

As an important contemporary figure in Berlin’s klezmer scene, Ilya does not erase the Jewishness of the music that he plays, but is nevertheless able to translate what he sees as a restrictive ethnic connection into an open-ended musical one. The emphasis on community here is important, foregrounding the possibilities of musicking itself as constitutive of its construction:

What I want to suggest, in other words, is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities [...] but that they only get to know themselves *as groups* (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) *through* cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement. Making music isn’t a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them (Frith, 1996:111, emphasis in original).

What follows, therefore, moves forward to where and how new ‘klezmer communities’ have been created, in what ways participation (Turino, 2008b) grounds the material practice of klezmer music in the city as a functional space of social and cultural exchange. We might also turn this onto musical space itself: it is the process of music that makes these spaces ‘mean’ in particular ways, not as mechanically marked borders, but as nodes along a developing discussion (Stokes, 1994:20). Once again, it is important to consider the network relations at play here. In particular, I am to bring out

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<sup>33</sup> Ilya is Jewish, but was raised in a secular Soviet and post-Soviet environment. His connections to the Riga Jewish community came about as he began to play Jewish music as a teenager (interview, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Interview, 2013.

the function of certain performance spaces as instrumental in cohering a particular network – of musicians, audiences, participants and repertoire. It will also become apparent that several musicians (with an inevitably high degree of centrality) play fundamental network roles: strongly tied to venues, weakly and strongly tied to a range of musicians and participants, and frequently mediating performance opportunities, audience connections and repertoire choices.

### **The Klezmer Bund: Kaffee Burger and Gorki Theater**

A few years ago, American Yiddish singer Daniel Kahn and German klezmer accordionist Franka Lampe founded a loose promotional vehicle for the music they play and love: the Klezmer Bund. In 2011 Kahn and Muscovites Psoy Korolenko and Vanya Zhuk had imagined this same organisation as ironic fodder for a glorious Yiddish march, in the style of Mordechai Gebirtig:<sup>35</sup>

<i>far yedn yid vos shpilt dem bas s'iz vi kedin un vi kedas, u nas? dray hundert bucks</i>	[for every Jew who plays the bass: \$300]
<i>un far a goy vos shpilt dem poyk s'iz vi me'darf un vi es toyg, a tax?</i>	
<i>eyn hundert bucks - tsvey hundert bucks</i>	
<i>vot tak, un ot azey</i>	[for a Goy on poyk: \$100 \$200]
<i>a klezmer far der khasene deserves a decent pay</i>	[that's the way, that's the way]
<i>oy vey, zayt undzer kund</i>	[...for the wedding...]
<i>lebn zol der klezmer bund</i>	[oh, be our client]
	[long live the Klezmer Bund] <sup>36</sup>

Containing spirited contributions from Michael Alpert, Adrienne Cooper, Lorin Sklamberg and Pete Sokolow,<sup>37</sup> Kahn's recording is truly a Bund<sup>38</sup> in its own right. Joyful, co-operative, stirring and slightly drunken in equal measure, the tune is both a call to arms and a self-mocking subversion of the intricacies of trade union shenanigans. Musically, the song pays homage to a witty mix of Broadway musical,<sup>39</sup> Russian

<sup>35</sup> Gebirtig (1877-1942) was a Krakow-born Yiddish poet and songwriter. On the same album (*Lost Causes*), Kahn offers a contemporary version of Gebirtig's "March of the Jobless Corps" (Oriente Musik, 2011, RIEN 77).

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R77\\_KLEZMER\\_BUND.pdf](http://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R77_KLEZMER_BUND.pdf). Accessed September 13th, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Alpert is a founding member of Brave Old World and one of Yiddish song's leading contemporary exponents, Cooper was co-founder of KlezKamp and held positions at YIVO and the Workmen's Circle, Sklamberg is lead vocalist with The Klezmatics, and Sokolow is one of the last surviving 'old guys' of New York klezmer music (<http://forward.com/the-assimilator/213091/pete-sokolow-is-the-youngest-old-guy-of-klezmer/>). Accessed November 26th, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Bundism was a left-wing, pro-Yiddish, Jewish social movement with its roots in pre-revolutionary Russia. Post-war, it became the New York-based International Jewish Labour Bund. Although Bundism is no longer an effective political entity, its symbolic legacy as a touchstone of secular Jewish political thought survives. On the Bund's origins, see Tobias (1972), on the post-war Bund, see Slucki (2012).

<sup>39</sup> Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls* ("Follow the Fold") and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* ("Grand Old Ivy") in particular come to mind.

marches and Yiddish workers anthems. Each verse is sung call-and-response, backed up by a virtuosic yet deliberately free-sounding klezmer ensemble. The effect is of a gang one would like to join, a noisy and friendly group who believe in what they do yet avoid taking themselves too seriously. The song’s chorus acts as the musical high-point for this appealing ideology, its rising melody and block chord movement self-consciously anthemic, yet delivered in a loosely collective, heterophonic<sup>40</sup> voice. Figure 17 shows this chorus in piano reduction.

The musical score for the chorus of "The Klezmer Bund" is presented in piano reduction. It consists of three systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The tempo starts at  $\text{♩} = 100$ , marked *molto rit.*, and then returns to *a tempo*. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 2/4. The piano accompaniment features block chords and rhythmic patterns, including triplets. The lyrics are: "vot tak un ot a - zey a klez - mer far - der kha-se - ne de - serves an e - qual pay oy vey zayt und - zer kund leb - n zol der klez - mer bund".

Figure 17. “The Klezmer Bund” (chorus, piano reduction), from *Lost Causes* (Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, 2011).

In his 1934 study “Jewish folk music”, Moshe Beregovski notes that revolutionary hymns and marches represented the arrival of material from outside the traditional Yiddish song framework: “In the heroic genre of song-hymns, we meet for the first time (in Jewish secular folklore) a lively rhythm and the confident stride of the

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 4.

masses” (Beregovski, 2000:34-5). Kahn’s song is therefore a knowing part of Yiddish tradition and yet simultaneously references a historical political awakening and new musical openness. The Klezmer Bund as expressed through this song is a space of the imagination, a comic yet heartfelt appeal to musical solidarity, described by Kahn thus: “this kind of union, or organisation, I don't know what you’d call it, mutual aid, association, free association of klezmer musicians”.<sup>41</sup> It is reinforced by the Bund’s logo, which creatively migrates between several layers of allegiance. Designed by Kahn and distributed as stickers or pinned on the wall behind Klezmer Bund concerts, the logo features a quasi-masonic triangle of fiddle, clarinet and trumpet that encloses the Hebrew characters *kof* and *bet*. Set in front of the inverse triangle of an open-bellowed accordion, the four instruments make up a Star of David (the logo’s monochrome, however, makes this symbol significantly devoid of any Israeli blue), the whole encased within a bass drum.<sup>42</sup> The Jewishness of the enterprise is present, therefore, but indirectly so: a symbol of a symbol. Cultural allegiance in this case is a witty allusion rather than an essential fact, inscribed through the materiality of musical production itself.



Figure 18. Klezmer Bund logo, designed by Daniel Kahn (reproduced with permission).

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<sup>41</sup> Interview, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> At the time of writing, one more 'Klezmer Bund' currently exists: the Austiner Klezmer Bund. See: <https://www.facebook.com/austinklezmer/>. Accessed 25th November, 2015.

As a physical space, Klezmer Bund concerts began at Mitte's Kaffee Burger Tanzwirtschaft<sup>43</sup> at the beginning of 2012 with Kahn's Painted Bird and a duo of Lampe and clarinetist Anja Günther. Since then, Klezmer Bund in Kaffee Burger (dubbed "KB in KB") has hosted many of the musicians covered in this thesis, as well as visiting artists from Russia, North America and across Europe. As a venue, Kaffee Burger fits nicely into the faded *alt-Berliner* chic one might imagine as characteristic of a large number of slightly seedy, once subversive twentieth-century East European cabaret bars: tatty dark velvet drapes, retained Gothic signage, slightly peeling deep red paint on the walls and low-level yellow globe lighting all offer a particular shabby charm. In Kaffee Burger's case, this appeal is well-deserved, the *Lokale's* history encapsulating and reflecting that of the city itself.<sup>44</sup> Beginning as a restaurant at the end of the nineteenth century, the premises were taken over by the Burger family in 1936. During the *Stasi*-era, the empty upstairs floors were used as an observation post for nearby Schönhauser Tor. In the 1970s, the bar began to develop a reputation as a *Szene-Kneipe*,<sup>45</sup> attracting actors, musicians and writers from the *Volksbühne* down the road, and by the end of the decade it had established itself as a meeting point for political dissidents and East German malcontents. Shortly afterwards, however, the subversives had moved on, north to nearby Prenzlauer Berg (which would remain a hotbed of cultural and political agitation well into reunification). In 1999 the bar was taken over by two writers and a local restaurateur. The velvet wallpaper and Muschebubu lights were restored, and Kaffee Burger Tanzwirtschaft was reopened under the banner "Prenzlauer Berg is also now in Mitte".<sup>46</sup> Since reopening, the bar's cultural programme has included a huge variety of music, some poetry, and perhaps most famously Wladimir Kaminer and Yuriy Gurzhy's long-running *Russendisko* club night.<sup>47</sup>

The Kaffee Burger stage is small, a tight squeeze for any more than five musicians plus drumkit. It is only a couple of feet off the ground and leads straight onto the dancefloor. When performing here, bands are up close and personal with their fans, who are likely to be as close to the singer as he or she is to their fellow musicians – very much in the

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<sup>43</sup> The name is a combination of two German words and translates as 'dance pub'.

<sup>44</sup> The following detail comes from the venue's website: <http://kaffeeburger.de/club-kaffee-burger-die-geschichte>. Accessed September 13th, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> "Scene pub".

<sup>46</sup> This urban geographical aspect to the Berlin music scene will prove important later in the chapter, in the discussion of the different jam session locations: specifically the split between a now-gentrified Prenzlauer Berg and the heterogeneous, arty but largely Turkish working-class Neukölln.

<sup>47</sup> On *Russendisko* and Berlin, see Wickström (2008).



unofficial space. The stage lighting is basic and spills easily into the crowd, further undermining any sense of separation between performer and audience. To reach the toilets, it is necessary to walk along the side of the stage, often bumping into musicians drinking, smoking or just hanging out in the cramped side-room just behind the stage's rear. The effect of all of this is to erode any sense of distance: between artist and listener, between professional and amateur, and between performance and participation – especially given the enthusiastic dancing/shouting/group-hugging that is a regular feature of the small sweaty dancefloor. And the fact that Kaffee Burger makes little staging concession to musical 'difference' (all bands get pretty much the same lighting and decor) has the parallel effect of collapsing taken-for-granted stylistic or genre assumptions. As a result, klezmer music becomes firmly embedded within Berlin's 'world' music scene – its appearance at this venue naturalises and normalises the music's legitimate presence within the city's wider musical environment. Consequently, klezmer, Balkan and Russian bands will often share concerts: what is privileged and valued in this context is musical convening and enjoyment.

During my time in Berlin, I saw several Kaffee Burger klezmer performances: Sher on a Shier, Knoblauch Klezmer Band, New Orleans Klezmer All Stars Duo and You Shouldn't Know From It. One of the things that stood out repeatedly was the degree of dialogue between band and audience, the conscious physical and performative overlap across this assumed boundary. When Knoblauch Klezmer Band's drummer Max had to leave the stage halfway through their set to answer a call of nature, the rest of the band encouraged the audience to count how many seconds it took him to reappear (Max, of course, could hear all this, as the toilets are right next to the stage). New Orleans accordionist Glenn Hartman, feeling that the performer/crowd space had not been adequately breached, jumped down from the stage for an impromptu acoustic solo accordion spot in the middle of the dancefloor. And during You Shouldn't Know From It's gig, singer Sasha Lurje repeatedly migrated between stage and audience to lead the dancing whilst the remaining onstage band played *bulgars* to keep them going. This kind of conscious interactivity and fluidity is not simply an enjoyable add-on, but a fundamental part of the venue's spatial aesthetics. It is one of the means by which klezmer music is rooted in contemporary urban social relationships, and through which the music takes its place in a paradigm of 'world' music consumption in Berlin.



Figure 19. Kaffee Burger stage, awaiting the arrival of Knoblauch Klezmer Band. Note violinist Eli Fabrikant's feather-edged tricorn. November 2013.

We might question, at this point, a relationship to 'Jewish space'. Clearly, there are few overt or conventional markers of Jewish spatial practice: the only iconography is that of Kahn's Klezmer Bund poster, and dancing is often loose-limbed on-the-spot bouncing as opposed to a choreographed Romanian *hora*. This kind of interactivity points to a transformation of notions of Jewish space, effected and maintained through the music itself. Although the music played and danced to here is often Jewish music, and played by Jews at least some of the time, its Jewishness is not what is foregrounded – any more than the venue becomes 'Russian' or 'Balkan' space when that is the music on offer. Dan Kahn, who was a member of *Russendisko* founder Yuriy Gurzhy's German-Hungarian band Rotfront, summed up this relaxed integration of Jewish cultural production in his usual direct manner:

If anything, being in a group like Rotfront taught me that, on a popular level, and guys like Shantel<sup>48</sup> and things like that, they have in a way normalised, there's a certain kind of presence of Jewishness, that isn't laden with all of this neurotic, historical, all this politics, all this weight. And it's a European folk music and so it

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<sup>48</sup> Along with fellow DJs Robert Soko and Vienna's Dunkelbunt, Shantel has been a driving force in the incorporation of Balkan and Roma sounds into dancefloor and club music. For a critical analysis, see Silverman (2015:169-171). Also Dimova (2007).

can sort of be freely used in a pop sense, and people just sort of accept. Their ears are used to it, and it doesn't sound only like some sort of exotic quoting, it's just, like, funky.<sup>49</sup>

Normalised into an accepted “funky” vernacular, klezmer here is liberated from any perceived weight and neurosis. Kaminsky and Silverman (both 2015) have argued that this loosening of historical and ethnic ties may not be quite as ideologically free as it seems. Kaminsky shows how ethnic Swedish band Räfven’s use of klezmer musical language is “characteristic of New Old Europe’s typical blurring of ethnic specificity”. This “dissipation of proprietorship” conceals the fact that the “dark irony behind these practices is that both the attractiveness and the accessibility of much of their cultural source material are a direct result of the persecution and genocide of the people who originally produced it” (Kaminsky, 2015b:182-3). This kind of analysis is an important counter to world music’s more self-congratulatory “celebratory narratives” (Feld, 2000:151-4). However, it progresses from a standpoint of ‘white ethnic’ appropriation of klezmer music, whereas in Berlin we need to note the active presence of Jews at the heart of these spaces,<sup>50</sup> and also – as seen in chapter 1 and further explored in chapter 4 – a conscious process of cultural rooting (via performance practice) that often underlies even the zaniest music. This is, in effect, klezmer music being both proudly Jewish and wholly contemporary.

Referring back to Chapter 1, we can usefully position the Klezmer Bund in network terms, the principal ties being between those bands who perform at KB concerts and the centralised figures of Dan Kahn and/or Franka Lampe. Without these musicians and their active participation, the Klezmer Bund is no more than Khan’s original imaginary presence. It is these musician links – largely to Kahn and Lampe, but also amongst themselves<sup>51</sup> – that give coherence and structure to the KB network. As programmers and curators, Kahn and Lampe are both hubs and gatekeepers of this well-connected network, mediating between musicians, venue and audience.<sup>52</sup> Connected by a series of far weaker ties are the audiences who attend these concerts. Such audiences’ connections to klezmer music may frequently be non-existent, but a weak tie to the KB

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<sup>49</sup> Interview, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Dan Kahn, Ilya Shneyveys, Sasha Lurje, Alan Bern and Eli Fabrikant, for example.

<sup>51</sup> The ties can be strong (such as YSKFI, where all members are well-connected to many other musicians in the scene) or weaker (of the Knoblauch Klezmer Band, only violinist Eli is tied to other musicians discussed here). Also, of course, a musician’s link to Kahn or Lampe allows for possible weak ties to other new musical networks.

<sup>52</sup> Explicitly so, in Kahn’s case, as he is also the MC for KB concerts.

network (rather than simply an individual concert) allows them access to a range of bands and musical style. And here again, the ‘stamp of approval’ from Kahn or Lampe acts as a gatekeeping mechanism for audiences who may be aware of the work of the two KB instigators, but unaware of the music of the bands that they programme.

We must of course also include the physical spaces as part of these networks. Audiences with no prior knowledge of klezmer music may still be connected to Kaffee Burger through ties either strong or weak. Again, the venue’s influence is also a mediating one, lending both a sense of legitimacy and a set of expectations (of the kind outlined in the previous discussion) to musicians and bands who are part of the Klezmer Bund network. The performance space, in this way, acts as the connecting point of these different networks – of venue, Klezmer Bund, musicians and audience.

Since the end of 2013, however, the Klezmer Bund has had a second home, one more directly concerned with probing cultural resonances and ambiguities. South from Torstraße (Kaffee Burger is at number 60), heading towards Unter den Linden, is the Maxim Gorki Theater. Opened in 1952, the theatre has acted as a provocative and socially-minded commentator on the city ever since:

The Gorki is for the whole city, and that includes everyone who has arrived in the city in the last few decades, whether in search of asylum, whether in exile, whether they be immigrants or simply people who grew up in Berlin. We invite you all to a public space in which today’s human condition and our conflict of identity will be reflected through the art of making theatre and watching theatre [...] In short: who is ‘we’?<sup>53</sup>

My locating of the Gorki Theater as an unofficial space deserves some explanation. Historically tied to the GDR administration as a home for Russian and Soviet social realist theatre, the Gorki’s ideological role as part of the socialist state’s cultural apparatus puts it within an ‘official’ space. With this background, we may question its unofficial positioning here. However, East German theatre, backed by large state subsidies, has also historically functioned as a perhaps surprising arena for public debate. David Hughes (2007:134) notes:

the tension between a state that was eager to invest in theatre for ideological reasons (using socialist realism to promote its communist goals) and playwrights who, paradoxically, increasingly used the stage as a place to criticize the regime

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<sup>53</sup> <http://english.gorki.de/the-theatre/>. Accessed September 10th, 2015.

[...] “The institution of theatre in the GDR provided from its earliest years a crucial venue for social critique or for alternative forms of public sphere” (Kruger 1994:492).

Dramatic 1990s-onwards funding cuts have seen the Gorki, through a wide-ranging and radical theatrical offering, open itself up more directly to the ambiguous identities of contemporary Berlin. In this sense, the theatre is a bridge between the East German state’s historical top-down cultural processes and the far more ground-level, self-questioning and multiple identities at play in the twenty-first century city. Such liminality is very much in keeping with an unofficial space, and in notable contrast to other, more ‘official’ spaces of cultural production in the city that have historically played host to klezmer music, such as the Berliner Philharmonie’s annual Klezmer Festival series or the 1992 *Klezmer-Gesellschaft*’s concert series at *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*.<sup>54</sup>

In the flexible sparse black zone of the theatre’s Studio Я, Kahn has (along with the Studio’s Moscow-born curator Marianna Salzmann) mounted a series of concerts and events that use klezmer and Yiddish music to explore some of these issues – who is the “we” who plays, listens and dances to Jewish music in today’s Berlin? These have included: Kahn and Lurje’s *Strange Love Songs*; Psoy Korolenko’s *Unternationale: a post-dialectical cabaret*; an evening dedicated to the memory of New York Yiddish songwriter, poet, artist and matriarch Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman;<sup>55</sup> trumpeter Paul Brody’s setting of texts by Viennese Jewish poet Rosa Ausländer; and Alan Bern and Fabian Schnedler’s *Semer Label Reloaded*, a project that brings to life the forgotten output of a Berlin-based Jewish record label of the 1930s.<sup>56</sup>

This is a very different agenda to the anything-goes dance party happening up the road in Kaffee Burger, addressing ideas of Jewish identity and Jewish space in a much more direct and provocative way. Unlike the easy overlap of bar/stage/smoking room that characterises Kaffee Burger, Gorki Studio Я is marked as a distinct performance space, away from the pleasantly noisy and sociable foyer bar that acts as its entrance and interval hangout. Where the bar is lighted and cosy, the Studio is dark: black floors and

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<sup>54</sup> With the exception of the Philharmonie, very little klezmer still takes place in these more official spaces. As this chapter demonstrates, the scene now operates at a much more grassroots level.

<sup>55</sup> On Beyle’s work and influence, see Wurbs (2010).

<sup>56</sup> Most of these are discussed at other points throughout the thesis.

walls, a raked series of benches covered in black fabric. But the effect is neither censorious nor Spartan: its lack of overt ‘décor’ opens it up as a fluid space of the imagination. Where Kaffee Burger conforms stylishly to the charming yet predictable semiotics of a faded-glory cabaret bar, Studio Я is an uncarved block. Its simplicity and unformed-ness allow performer and audience alike to use the space as an experimental zone, an area of creative dialogue. Like Kaffee Burger, Gorki’s spatial dynamics work to include audience and performer as part of the same journey, although in a very different way. Many concerts here eschew a stage altogether in favour of a loose middle performance area against the longer wall, allowing both sides of the communicative act to bleed into each other. And Kahn is a fan of Powerpoint presentation accompaniments, offering surtitles (Yiddish into German into English into Russian), cartoons and short film excerpts that both illustrate and comment upon the musical action. More than sideshow props, these staging devices in fact mirror the diverse and multi-layered levels of performer-audience interaction, reflecting an ideological commitment to a discourse of diversity and a conscious rejection of cultural essentialism:

To quote from one of my Yiddish teachers Avrom Lichtenbaum, he said “*Ez iz nit tolka eyn yidishe kultur, es zenen nor do yidishe kulturn.*”<sup>57</sup> There is no such thing as Jewish culture, the idea that there is one Jewish culture is a myth and it’s a politicised myth, it didn’t just happen, it’s not an accidental myth. It was a fabricated myth, and it’s utilised for various ideologies. Often by non-Jews, and often by Jews.<sup>58</sup>

This probing of the different meanings of Jewish culture is a fundamental part of the Gorki Studio performances. Jewishness becomes a text to be ‘read’, analysed and debated – by performer, audience, and the space itself. A good example is the evening dedicated to the work of Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman: *Tsulib Beylen*,<sup>59</sup> on April 12th, 2014. Here are my fieldnotes from that concert:

Organised by Janina Wurbs<sup>60</sup>, this event brings together most of Berlin’s younger (international) Yiddish musicians along with guests from Holland, Paris, Hamburg, Munich, Toronto... Each singer sings one or two songs, and all performers sit in the front row of the audience, so the travel between stage and seats is easy and comfortable.

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<sup>57</sup> “There is not just one Jewish culture, there are only Jewish *cultures*” (my emphasis, based on the way Dan himself phrased the quote). On this same idea for culture in general, see Friedman (1994:73) and his discussion of Geertz (1984).

<sup>58</sup> Daniel Kahn, interview, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Yiddish: “because of Beyle”.

<sup>60</sup> Wurbs is a Yiddish scholar who over the past few years has also been a regular part of the Berlin klezmer scene.



Figure 20. Daniel Kahn, Gorki Theater. April 2014.

The night is many things: celebration, memorial, tribute, appraisal, collective gathering. All performers have personal memories of Beyle and share them easily. This brings everyone else in – the concert as a collective and communal event. From a core of fifteen or so performers, at least as many different groupings are created, the whole cast coming together at the finale of each half. The songs are interspersed with excerpts from Josh Waletzky's documentary, featuring interviews and historical footage.

Thoughts that come to me at various points: family, generosity, warmth, migration, sadness, a poet's irony and distance, integrity, neighbourhood (much mention made of the Schaechter-Gottesman's Bainbridge Avenue Yiddish community). There is also a strong sense of an international network present here, celebrating one of their heroes, but also someone who taught each of them a great deal.

Beyle's son<sup>61</sup> and granddaughter are in the audience, front and centre, although they do not appear on stage. The material is almost all Beyle's own (or songs that she made known and passed on to others). The performance of "Harbstlid"<sup>62</sup> is striking. It begins with Beyle singing on film (in Yiddish). Gradually Ilya joins in live with Debussy-like piano figures and, as the film fades out, Andrea Pancur takes over the song in German (with Ilya continuing to play). After a full run-through from Andrea (with Alan Bern adding melodica), Dan Kahn takes over on guitar and harmonica with his Tom Waits-y/Nick Cave-y English version.

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<sup>61</sup> Itzik Gottesman, folklorist, former associate editor of Yiddish newspaper *forverts* and now lecturer at the University of Texas.

<sup>62</sup> "Autumn song", perhaps Beyle's best-known song (Wurbs, 2010:92).

The screen above the performers shows German translations of the lyrics along with Beyle's own drawings and paintings, plus photos (many of which include tonight's participants). The semiotics are of continuity, integrity and multi-dimensional creativity – a world where painting, poetry, song and music blend with family, friends and generations. Many of the singers join in from the audience with Beyle onscreen as she reminisces about singing the song "Bletter"<sup>63</sup> with groups of children.

For the finale, Alan Bern sits alone. He makes reference to recent personal sadness and to the warmth and friendship he felt as he returned to Berlin. He then plays "Azoy Lang",<sup>64</sup> beautifully. He plays simply and sparsely, singing quietly and occasionally rather than fully and clearly. Sporadic accordion flourishes dot the performance, but the overall mood is intimate and reflective, impressionistic rather than 'performed'. As he finishes, the entire cast stand up slowly and approach the stage, singing as they go. They line up to perform the full song in a *cappella* choral arrangement, conducted by Sasha. Alan's meditative, *pointalist* rendition has become an elegy, but the inclusivity and gradualness of the transformation keeps the whole audience included.

Paramount in the structuring of this concert is a deliberate sense of flux, a refusal to draw lines or agree borders. This is achieved across multiple levels: physically in the continual migration of performers between their places in the audience and the stage area; textually in the interplay of music, poetry, painting and film; linguistically in the programme's easy slippage between English, German and Yiddish; generationally in the implicit three-way dialogue between Beyle, her roots and her legacy; formally in the media overlap between stage and screen and the regrouping of ensembles; ethnically in the diversity of performers. This liminality is of a very different kind to the carnivalesque space of Kaffee Burger. Studio Я's space of alternative fluidity is also an intellectual space of discussion and debate, deliberately open in its conclusions. We might argue that where Kaffee Burger breaches conventional audience-performer boundaries, Studio Я deconstructs<sup>65</sup> ideas of Jewishness themselves.<sup>66</sup> Jewish space is self-consciously reframed as a *writerly* text,<sup>67</sup> available for a multiplicity of meanings. We might make a further parallel with literary theory and the work of Saussure:

*Langue* is the social aspect of language: it is the shared system which we (unconsciously) draw on as speakers. *Parole* is the individual realisation of the system in actual instances of language (Selden, 1989:52).

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<sup>63</sup> "Leaves".

<sup>64</sup> "So Long". See Wurbs (2010:93) for full lyrics.

<sup>65</sup> Spivak (1997:lxvii), in her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, writes of deconstruction as "a desire to reappropriate the text actively through mastery, to show the text what it 'does not know.'"

<sup>66</sup> This idea is even more evident in Kahn & Psorolenko's *Unternational: a post-dialectical cabaret*.

<sup>67</sup> "the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds... we gain access to it by several entrances" (Barthes, 2002:5).



In their stylish merging of layers of musical experience, concerts such as *Tsulib Beylen* foreground “individual realisation”s of Jewishness, over and above the system itself: there is no ‘one’ Jewish culture (*langue*) but rather multiple expressions (*paroles*) of Jewishness. And the multiple levels across which these expressions take place (musical, visual, physical, linguistic) make them simultaneously available in different ways to different musicians and audience members.<sup>68</sup>

Although they share performers, audiences, the relentless efforts of Dan Kahn, and the Klezmer Bund name, these two venues frame musical praxis in markedly different ways; klezmer becomes the vehicle for two complementary yet distinct dialogues. Kaffee Burger’s cheerful dancey inclusivity is paralleled by several of the city’s other venues,<sup>69</sup> spaces that specialise in a comfortably non-threatening sort of carnival.<sup>70</sup> Although not the fully subversive topsy-turvy Lord of Misrule, these party spaces nevertheless enable a collective gathering where external norms of behaviour and propriety can be easily suspended in favour of temporary wildness: both a gentle challenge to the status quo and a paradoxically simultaneous reinforcement of wider social norms.<sup>71</sup> The two types of venue therefore link klezmer music into this dynamic: the one revelling in klezmer’s functional and expressive role as collective vehicle of social engagement, sensuality and personal freedom (Amin & Thrift, 2002:119); the other making the performance of Jewish folk music in the contemporary urban context into an ongoing dialogue around questions of ethnicity, identity and cultural production. One offers fast, small-scale transgression, the other a more complex and unpredictable grappling with some deliberately big ideas. These complementary themes will be explored further in the following sections as we look at the performance and participation of Jewish folk music in the contexts of community dance, ‘Jewish’ evenings, and jam sessions.

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<sup>68</sup> This multi-level exploration of cultural identity is of course not limited to Jewishness. Contemporary and historical articulations of Russian, Turkish and often pan-European identities are also frequently the basis for Studio Я performances and events. See, for example, November and December 2014’s *Voicing Resistance* festival: <http://www.gorki.de/spielplan/themen/voicing-resistance/>. Accessed 14th November 2015.

<sup>69</sup> e.g. Badehaus Szimpla (located in the heavily-graffitied, multi-use former railroad site of Friedrichshain’s RAW-Gelände), the basement collective Fuchs & Elster, or the post-industrial chic of Hangar 49.

<sup>70</sup> I am using carnival in the Bakhtinian sense, as a subversive privileging of the low, the bawdy and the excessive: “Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” (Bakhtin, 1984:26).

<sup>71</sup> Bakhtin (1984:7): “During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom”.

### ***Tants in Gartn Eydn: klezmer in the village dancehall***

I think in about 2000 we made this project, called *Tants in Gartn Eydn*. Because what I didn't understand was that this music is party music, mostly, and in all the shows people were sitting and just watching. And so we have to bring the aspect of party back into the performance. It's much more communicative, if people dance.<sup>72</sup>

In the pretty village of Lübars, where the very northern edge of Berlin meets Brandenburg, people have been dancing to klezmer music for fifteen years. A little more structured than Carsten's originally-envisioned klezmer commune, the event nevertheless retains an easy-going informality and friendliness. Here is how *Tants in Gartn Eydn* (which is both the band name and the colloquial name for the "klezmer Schwof"<sup>73</sup> dance evening) describe what they do:

The dance master introduces the dances, the band plays a good klezmer tune, the singer attacks the public's heart. Everybody dances how he/she feels – in perfect klezmer-style or more contemporary [...] old and young, dancer and non-dancer are dancing together! And it's fun!<sup>74</sup>

It is a half hour's drive straight north from the Mitte of Kaffee Burger and Gorki Theater, or double this if you take the S-Bahn and bus. Although still in Berlin, a visit to Lübars feels like one is going somewhere else – the Labsaal dance hall sits in the middle of a genteel village square, facing green fields and an old church. The band's clarinet player Martin Borbonus told me that while the Wall was still up, west Berliners would bring their children to Lübars in order to experience something as close to countryside life as possible. Whether apocryphal or not, the sense of being attached to and yet outside the city is palpable. Once inside the large hall, the feeling of distance and difference remains, though not in an unpleasant way. The band play on a high stage at one end of the hall, the dancers dance below. All is well-lit and well-ordered, small tables with bowls of crisps and slices of apple lining the walls. The format for the evening is simple and effective: dance master Thomas Römer calls the name of each dance, the band plays a short excerpt, the steps are explained and then we dance for between five and ten minutes, before the whole process repeats itself. Set dances are also occasionally interspersed with instrumental showpiece numbers, during which there is the chance to freestyle on the dancefloor.

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<sup>72</sup> Carsten Wegener, personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin. May 2nd, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> "Klezmer-hop".

<sup>74</sup> [http://www.gartn-eydn.de/Download/Gartn-Eydn-Info\\_eng.pdf](http://www.gartn-eydn.de/Download/Gartn-Eydn-Info_eng.pdf). Accessed September 7th, 2015.

The klezmer *Schwof* forms part of a growing network of *bal-folk* events and evenings in the city. I stood in for accordionist Franka Lampe at a similar night of Balkan dancing in Prenzlauer Berg, and also played several times in the grubby but atmospheric open space of Mauerpark, where accordionist Bodo Schiefke and dancer Ralf Müller organise weekly Friday night open-air dances. At all these events, I found the atmosphere to be always easy-going and inclusive, a group of like-minded enthusiasts who take care to privilege enjoyment over competence, collectivity and communion over personal flair and precision. Thomas Turino describes the process thus:

*Participatory music* is defined here as a particular type of music making in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants [...] the practices and style of the music are oriented toward inspiring maximum participation. Participatory music is for *doing* rather than *listening*” (Turino, 2008a:21, emphasis in original).

The “doing” in this case includes dancing as much as playing, and so the participatory rationale of *Tants in Gartn Eydn* frames klezmer clearly as social dance music: the reason for being there is to be directly involved (as a dancer). And yet it is also functional music wholly removed from its original context:<sup>75</sup> no brides are dancing; no in-laws acting out their rivalries through ritual steps.<sup>76</sup> The effect is therefore of a paradoxically simultaneous intimacy and distance. Through the joyful physicality and emotional sociability of communal dance, klezmer music becomes fully rooted in the immediate pleasure of participation, and yet the need for detailed explanation (plus the fact that almost all participants have to make a lengthy journey to reach it) foregrounds the constructed nature of the entire enterprise. The musical context here does not reinforce broader community structures or values, rather it *is* the community, brought together for the few hours that the dance takes place, and then dispersed until the next time. It is therefore on the one hand a grounded social phenomenon, culturally connected and intimate, and on the other separated and distanced – an enjoyable curio, a hobby.

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<sup>75</sup> This is also of course the case in the Klezmer Bund concerts discussed earlier. I would argue, however, that their inclusion as part of Berlin’s nightlife has created a new functional role, whereas the dancing discussed here is maintained as a separate space.

<sup>76</sup> Historically, these rituals (and many more) were clearly marked by music: *mitsve tants* (Rubin, 2001:71) and *broyges tants* (Strom, 2002:94). Cantors still sing specific melodies for the *sheva brokhes* (seven blessings) under the *khupe* (wedding canopy). It is also common to play particular tunes for the seven circles the bride makes around her groom, although these days (in the UK, at least) these are as likely to be *Sunrise*, *Sunset* or *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* as anything more ‘traditional’.



Figure 21. Klezmer “Schwof” *Tants in Gartn Eydn*, Lübars. June 2014.

It has also been carefully-framed and highly-organised, which acts to maintain a certain intellectual distance. Fundamental here is what Turino, following the ideas of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, identifies as “flow”.

*Flow* refers to a state of heightened concentration, when one is so intent on the activity at hand that all other thoughts, concerns, and distractions disappear and the actor is fully in the present (Turino, 2008b:4).

In interview, the feeling that Carsten Wegener spoke of in his aspirations for *Tants in Gartn Eydn* was strongly reminiscent of this notion of flow: a spontaneously free and joyful collective state that involves a certain necessary sublimation of self. However, his acknowledgement that “people just have too much business in their lives”<sup>77</sup> is also an implicit recognition of the inevitable infringement of the mundane and the everyday. For in practice, the “how he/she feels”, “more contemporary” dancing options proposed by the band’s website rarely happen – the dancers are too well-behaved, the dance instruction too strong a mediating force. If the initial dream of *Tants in Gartn Eydn* was to create a space for impulsive and spontaneous physical response, an intuitive reaction unfettered by correct dance practice, in reality the evening has brought the

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<sup>77</sup> Interview, 2014.

unpredictability of embodied emotional connectedness under well-choreographed control. This is important if we look at the Klezmer *Schwof* within the context of ‘Jewish space’. As with the party zone of Kaffee Burger concerts, I would argue that the idea of klezmer music (traditional Jewish wedding music) has in this context been largely divorced from any specific Jewish meanings. But whereas in Kaffee Burger these ritual community meanings have been replaced with an unaffected and pseudo-hedonistic bar/club culture, with *Tants in Gartn Eydn* the aspect of ‘community’ results in a wholesale removal into a controlled context of ‘elsewhere’. That is not to say that it does not have Jewish associations or relevance, or even that Jews and non-Jews may react and respond differently.<sup>78</sup> But it is to acknowledge that in the process of formalisation and reinvention, certain residues and sediments will inevitably be shaken off in newer formations – as no longer relevant or necessary: “what makes [these spaces] Jewish is no longer unambiguous. What is ‘Jewish’ about them, and who determines what qualifies as Jewish?” (Gantner & Oppenheim, 2014:3).

The difference between Kaffee Burger’s version of klezmer as dance music and *Tants in Gartn Eydn* is therefore one of explicit mediation. Where one incorporates klezmer music into the city’s contemporary bottom-up bar/club paradigm, the other reinforces it as a separate, ordered space: at a distance both physically and ideologically from the messy discourses of the city. This version of space roots the music as participatory and egalitarian, yet formalised. It marks out klezmer as a found object of community music: functional in one sense and yet simultaneously ‘outside’ community life.

### **A night at the kosher café**

Of all the spaces and places discussed here, the one most clearly delineated as unambiguously Jewish is Bleibergs kosher café, long-established just off the main shopping artery of the Kurfürstendamm in West Berlin’s Charlottenburg district. This location is not accidental: the café is close to the city’s *Jüdisches Gemeindehaus*<sup>79</sup> and also the large and busy orthodox synagogue, in the middle of Berlin’s older post-war Jewish community. By day, Bleibergs is a quiet and friendly kosher and vegetarian eatery. For one night, more or less every month, the small, brightly-lit, two-roomed

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<sup>78</sup> A German participant with whom I spoke, for example, told me that the dancing offered her a chance to connect – in a secular and voluntary way – with childhood memories of Jewish family gatherings and parties.

<sup>79</sup> The city’s central Jewish community and religious administrative centre.

space transforms into a noisy, lively and joyful *simkhe*<sup>80</sup> – what on first impressions one might reasonably describe as a Jewish wedding minus the *khosn* or *kale*.<sup>81</sup>

At the centre of the action sits accordion and keyboard player Jossif Gofenberg. Jossif grew up in Chernowitz, a city that has played an important role in Jewish and Yiddish history (Katz, 2004), but has lived and raised a Jewish family in Berlin for the last forty years. He is heavily involved with the Jewish community centre in the area, running an adult choir from the *Gemeindehaus* and offering group and individual music tuition (Waligórska, 2013:118-9). He also runs a “Klezmer Center” at the Fanny Hensel music school in Mitte.<sup>82</sup> For Jossif, the space of the *Gemeindehaus* is fundamentally connected to his music: “the whole atmosphere, when you come into the *Gemeinde*, you have the feeling that you are at home – for me as a Jew [...] you feel at home, amongst friends.”<sup>83</sup> A singer, pianist, accordionist, musical arranger, and cheerful advocate for the soulful power of Jewish music, this self-styled “Klezmer King of Berlin” has featured in a Tele-Aviv documentary (as has Bleibergs itself)<sup>84</sup> and with his band Klezmer Chidesch works regularly around Germany, performing for both Jewish and non-Jewish functions and audiences.<sup>85</sup>

Through his ties to the *Gemeindehaus*, his immediate circle of musicians and his wider circle of students, and the space of Bleibergs itself, Gofenberg is located at the centre of several overlapping networks. The *Gemeindehaus* and “Klezmer Centre” ensure an ongoing supply of new students, some of whom will come to hear Klezmer Chidesch in concert at Bleibergs, thus helping to maintain the venue’s network of customers but also this particular scene’s network of audience-participants. The repertoire of Jossif and his musicians as performed in Bleibergs is what one might describe as Jewish party music. Klezmer standards (“Araber Tants”, “Shtiler Bulgar”), Yiddish favourites (“Papirossen”, “Di Grine Kuzine”), songs from *Fiddler on the Roof*, childhood songs (“Rozhinkes mit Mandeln”) all figure, along with occasional liturgical borrowings (“O Se Shalom”). At least some of the audience is usually made up of members of Yossif’s adult choir – the majority of whom are non-Jews – and so the atmosphere is always helped along by

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<sup>80</sup> Yiddish: party.

<sup>81</sup> Yiddish: groom and bride.

<sup>82</sup> As well as placing Gofenberg at the centre of these particular networks, they also make him a mediating force, acting for his students as their first (and perhaps only) introduction to klezmer and Yiddish song.

<sup>83</sup> All Jossif’s comments come from an interview at the *Gemeindehaus* on August 27th, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> See: <http://www.teleaviv.com/?section=7>. Accessed September 7th, 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, Jossif told me that he gets booked for more non-Jewish than Jewish functions (interview, 2014).

enthusiastic singalongs from the floor. Although the café is primarily taken up with tables and chairs, the crowd willingly adapts itself to the space in order to dance. This kind of spontaneous, uncoordinated and personal response makes an interesting contrast to the orderliness and planning of the Lübars Klezmer *Schwof*, and arguably gets closer to the “flow” of which Turino and Csikszentmihalyi speak. Where one represents the wider community’s keen yet well-behaved take-up of Jewish folk music for its own aims, Bleibergs is the world coming into Jewish culture, which happily opens its doors to receive allcomers, initiated or not.

Jossif is a warm and friendly, avuncular figure. He advocates the need for an internal ‘felt’-ness of playing klezmer, but unlike Giora Feidman, he is insistent that *not* everything is klezmer,<sup>86</sup> and also that this ‘felt’ dimension is not available to everyone. He is also critical of the recent appropriation of this feeling:

Yesterday he was an antisemite, and today he plays klezmer music. There are some people who use it as a business, because they know that everyone asks for klezmer music [...] They buy a CD, they hear how Giora Feidman plays, or how I play or how another plays. They play a bit like it, make sure it’s high and loud [laughs].

Gofenberg also makes an important physical distinction between the spaces of klezmer that he, his audience, students and fellow musicians populate and those of the wider world:

Sure you can hear groups out in the streets playing it, but most of them are not klezmer groups, they are folk groups who play different music. I call it a borsht, you know what borsht is? The groups out there, they play some Yiddish music, some Romanian music, some Bulgarian, Yugoslavian, Ukrainian, Russian [...] Borsht music! [laughs]

Defined and demarcated, not “in the streets” or “out there”, an evening at Bleibergs is Jewish space reinforced. It is not reimagined, subverted, ironised or questioned, but rather celebrated and enjoyed: tradition as rooted continuity, existing within the contemporary urban environment but making few concessions to it. The raised arms and audience “oy-oy-oy”s signify a benchmark, a bedrock-end of an idea of Jewish culture, Jewish (secular) practice and Jewish space. Bleibergs’ self-definition as a kosher cafe,

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<sup>86</sup> Gruber (2002:212): “Feidman, in fact, goes so far as to reject a use of the term *klezmer* to indicate music with specific historical Jewish roots or repertoire or specific musical language... For Feidman, even the songs that mothers sing to their babies are klezmer.”





Figure 22. Dancing at Charlottenburg's Café Bleibergs, music courtesy of Jossif Gofenberg and Igor Sverdlov. October 2013.

its use of Israeli and Jewish iconography, and the programming of Jewish calendrical events<sup>87</sup> mark its Jewishness as fixed, rather than temporary or contingent. Consequently, this establishment and framing of Jewish space works to root the music in a similar way – something that is reinforced by Jossif's own comments:

You can't say that klezmer is a music just for Jews. It's a music for everyone, first and foremost. [But] I don't believe that the melodies sound the same when a musician is Jewish than when they're not Jewish. You must have a feeling inside, you understand? Above all with songs. How can a non-Jew sing "My Yiddishe Mama" when they have no Yiddishe mama? What sort of feeling can they have?<sup>88</sup>

In my visits to Bleibergs, I compared it mentally to similar overtly performative 'Jewish' spaces that I know in London – cafés in Golders Green or Hendon in which I have played music. My own – admittedly anecdotal – experience would lead me to expect an almost totally Jewish clientele at similar London venues, which is not the case here. Nevertheless, Bleibergs klezmer nights are by no means a virtual or theme park experience (Gruber 2009, Strom, 2002:242). The space is a very different one from, for

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<sup>87</sup> At the time of writing, for example, Jossif's Klezmer Chidesh were booked to appear as part of Hanukkah celebrations on Dec 10th, 2015. The cafe also hosts *Shabbat* and *lag b'omer* (a Jewish holiday occurring on the 33rd day between Passover and Shavuot) evenings.

<sup>88</sup> Jossif also wryly noted that similar comments to these ended up "on the cutting-room floor" of Waligórska's (2013) book.



example, Krakow's Jewish-themed restaurants discussed by Waligórska (2013).<sup>89</sup> Although the musical material is well-worn, there is nothing artificial or constructed about the atmosphere or the audience response. And whilst visitors will include tourists and one-off diners, the café also supports a local community, within which it is firmly integrated. This version of Jewish culture, however, offers no surprises or ambiguities. Loud and messy though it may be, it speaks from an accepted, taken-for-granted, official narrative of "laughter through tears" Jewish celebration. Fun but not carnivalesque, smiling but not boundary-pushing, this articulation of Jewish music maintains wider cultural relations firmly intact.

### **Klezmer scene(s) – some theoretical background**

Having spent some time in Chapter 1 with the concept of networks, I want now to turn to the looser, yet perhaps more evocative, idea of *scene*. The term provides a helpful counterpart: where patterned networks describe and facilitate particular structural routes and connections (Brinner, 2009), scenes are fluid and flexible, based on local (and trans-local) allegiances and shifting musical-social connections. The first useful theorisation of the concept of 'scene' came from Will Straw (1991), who suggested that where a "musical community" depends on a link between "contemporary musical practices" and "musical heritage", scenes instead gain momentum through "the building of musical alliances and the drawing of musical boundaries" (Straw, 1991:373). In other words, scenes contain an active sense of allegiance, of deliberate agency on the part of the individuals of which they are comprised. As the previous chapter and this one have shown, alliances and boundaries are important features of the musical scenes and networks under discussion here – in the absence of a clear historical "musical heritage", they develop an increased significance. Thus the scene around Klezmer Bund and Kaffee Burger represents a very different sense of belonging to that of *Tants in Gartn Eydn*, even though some musicians may migrate freely between the two.

So whilst we might speak of the Berlin klezmer scene in general, it is clear that there are several levels operating within. Different sub-scenes coalesce around different physical locations (venues and jam sessions), as well as around individual musicians. It is also

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<sup>89</sup> What Slobin (2000:85) describes as "chimeric communities".

important to bear in mind the transnational connections within certain scenes (Straw, *ibid.*), as evidenced in the discussion of the Bar Oblomov sessions later in this chapter and in the links between Berlin klezmer and Yiddish Summer Weimar covered in Chapter 4.

Three years after Straw's initial approach, Barry Shank, in his study of Austin rock'n'roll, offered an alternative, more intense, expression of cultural production.

A scene itself can be defined as an overproductive signifying community: that is, far more semiotic information is produced than can be rationally parsed. Such scenes remain a necessary condition for the production of exciting rock'n'roll music capable of moving past the mere expression of locally significant cultural values and generic development – that is, beyond stylistic permutation – toward an interrogation of dominant structures of identification, and potential cultural transformation. (Shank, 1994:122)

For Shank, the processes at work within a scene offer up a more radical possibility of personal and social identification, reminiscent at times of Hebdige's (1979) effervescent reading of punk's subcultural signifying practices,<sup>90</sup> but perhaps without the rigid emphasis on class that characterised much early CCCS work on subculture (Hesmondhalgh, 2005:25). Some of Knoblauch Klezmer Band violinist Eli Fabrikant's comments in Chapter 1 (and indeed the "overproductive signifying" of fantasist klezmer in general) resonate strongly here, as does the work of Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird, explored in Chapter 3.

The widespread usage of the term in both journalism and popular music scholarship, and the resulting semantic and theoretical indeterminacy, have brought the concept of scene under fire since Straw's and Shank's initial formulations. Hesmondhalgh notes the implicit dangers of this kind of malleability, where 'scene' is ultimately reduced to:

merely [denoting] the musical practices in any genre within a particular town or city. Such local musical practices are no doubt worth studying, but sometimes the term scene is used to make studies of particular locales sound more theoretically innovative than they really are. Meanwhile, other writers are using the term to denote a cultural space that transcends locality. (Hesmondhalgh, 2005:29)

In more recent elaborations, however, Straw suggests that this looseness has theoretical value, in that it allows the term to cover a great deal of conceptual ground: "'Scene' is

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<sup>90</sup> See also Hebdige's subsequent (1987) exploration of the UK's reggae and MC scene.

usefully flexible and anti-essentializing [...] able to evoke both the cozy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life” (Straw, 2001:248). The general (at times generic) use of ‘scene’ is a pitfall worth noting, but it does not make the term redundant. It does, however, suggest a need to lay down some theoretical boundaries. I use the word throughout this thesis as a shorthand for ‘local musical practice’, but within this I take the concept to denote a particular spatial approach and in some senses an associated (although loose) ideology. Also – where relevant – I use the term to imply the connection of these local practices to wider global circulations. Whilst I recognise that this opens me up to Hesmondhalgh’s critique, I aim to add weight to these theoretical ambiguities through ethnographic observation and interview material.

One of the ways of mediating the anti-essentialising, catch-all nature of ‘scene’, therefore, is through the theorising of the specific use of space (as opposed to simply the sharing of a locality).<sup>91</sup> Some of this can be seen in the discussion around the *Klezmerstammtisch* and Maison Courage sessions that follow, where the spaces themselves come to represent particular ways of musically being-in-the-world. The scene(s) described in this chapter, then, are more than simply musical practices operating within a geographically-bounded area; the role of the space itself is fundamental (Stokes, 1994). Physically, these venues delineate boundaries within which given musical activities operate, but more than this, the particular ways that the space is produced – through the music and musical practices themselves – serve to either reinforce or challenge certain expectations and social relationships. This has been the case with the venues discussed so far,<sup>92</sup> and will become clearer as we go on to explore the city’s three jam sessions.

To return to the discussion of Chapter 1, we can say that the different spaces analysed here offer a range of possible *network* connections: between musicians, musical material, performance practice and physical space, as well as the venues’ own (non-klezmer) networks of customers and audiences. In particular, the jam sessions discussed below act as centralised network hubs – both physical and social. It is this set of *network* connections that creates the conditions around which particular *scenes* can

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<sup>91</sup> Straw (2015:476): “The spatiality implicit in the idea of scene has inoculated it from the risk that it simply become one more label (like subculture or fandom) for the groupings of people which take shape around cultural objects or activities.”

<sup>92</sup> For example the very different articulations of Jewishness on offer at Gorki Theater and Cafe Bleibergs.

coalesce and cohere. Where networks offer structural possibilities (physical space for playing, promotional links, weak ties to customers, weak and strong ties between musicians), it is the sense of allegiance and continued involvement that creates the ‘scene’.

In the case of an internationalised music such as klezmer (not tied to any ‘native’ scene), we need also to understand certain scenes as a particular local articulation of transnational musical practice. The session discussed at Bar Oblomov later in this chapter evidences an international network of musicians playing a now transnational music, but it is the links made with the world of Berlin bar culture (encompassing physical space, performance fluidity and audience response) which mark this scene out as specific and local. And more than this, the international connections between musicians at this session form a bridge between this local, Berlin-centric, articulation and wider global musical circulations:

scenes perform the often invisible labour of pulling together cultural phenomena in ways which heighten their visibility and facilitate their circulation to other places. (Straw, 2015:478)

### **Jam sessions, from official *Stammtisch* to unofficial *Lounge***

But yeah, I mean, most of them or many of them they used to live in Prenzlauer Berg, I think they still live in Prenzlauer Berg – it’s just that the context has changed. Because back then it was what this part is now [...] you know there is no money really in Berlin. So nobody performs here for money, which is, you know, like, you might as well play a concert or do a session, it can be pretty much the same.<sup>93</sup>

Placing the unofficial space of Studio Я and Kaffee Burger at one end of a continuum and the avowedly participative (yet ironically ‘official’) *Tants in Gartn Eydn* at the other, in between exist several variations on an analytically fruitful theme: the jam session. Berlin currently boasts three klezmer jam sessions, each one exploring a different balance of official vs unofficial practice, propriety vs carnival, and planning vs improvisation. The next two sections will talk at length about these different sessions and their relationships to Jewish music, German and Jewish identity, drawing on interviews I conducted last year with various participants and organisers. Sessions are useful musical spaces to explore precisely because of their liminality – far from

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<sup>93</sup> Ilya Shneyveys, interview, 2013.

polished performance but more than rehearsal, spanning both public and private space, pleasantly loose in organisation but never randomly free, and ostensibly inclusive yet often pervaded by hidden rules. In his discussion of the English session scene, Niall Mackinnon (1993) uses the concept of “structured informality” to allude to the often subtle power relations at play between session participants, particularly between established and newer players.<sup>94</sup> My three sessions here have all found different ways around these dynamics, as illustrated below.

More than simply tapping into pre-existing connections, these three sessions have become points around which new musical networks – and their associated scenes – can cohere. As we shall see, jam sessions’ liminality and fluidity is fundamental in the reconfiguring of existing network elements into the creation of these new scenes (or sub-scenes). Physical space, session leaders (hubs), disseminated musical material, and the semiotics of the wider city all work together in different ways for each session, as explored below. Session leaders’ centrality is often responsible for maintaining relations with the venue (strong ties), negotiating with other session players (strong and weak ties) and drumming up an audience (weak ties). And for session novices, these musicians will frequently act as first point of contact, therefore fulfilling also a mediating (though not always gatekeeping)<sup>95</sup> role. The scenes that operate through these networks are the material that makes up the remainder of this chapter.

It is not only the liminality of sessions that are of value to a researcher – such encounters may also point to new ways of thinking about music itself. In her work on Irish sessions in Galway, social geographer Frances Morton emphasises the value of performance research in finding ways around conventional theory/practice oppositions, particularly in the fluid environment of the jam session. For Morton, the immediacy of the session context opens up a particular in-the-moment interface of experience, expression and embodiment, albeit a fleeting one:

By addressing the sense of the now, and the liveness and richness of real time, it is possible to negotiate access to the spaces which are created in the ‘now’—for example, embodied and expressive ways of knowing, being and communicating *in situ* [...] Although we cannot hold such spaces in our hands, nor is it possible to

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<sup>94</sup> cf. Stock & Chiener (2008:144) and their search for “clues as to the limits of acceptable performance style” in sessions.

<sup>95</sup> Different session leaders exert differing degrees of control over session participants, as we shall see.

capture or represent them in their entirety, this does not make this methodological venture a futile one; in fact it makes it quite the opposite (Morton, 2005:662-4).

Jam sessions are one of the longest-established features of the Berlin klezmer scene. The most enduring – the *Klezmerstammtisch*,<sup>96</sup> founded by accordionist Jenny Wieneke, and fiddlers Petra Kirstein and Matthias Groh<sup>97</sup> – recently celebrated its nineteenth birthday. More recently, fiddle player Matthias Groh has inaugurated a changing roster of loosely performative sessions at Maison Courage in Prenzlauer Berg, where his list of irregularly rotating participants reads like a ‘who’s who’ of klezmer music in the city. Finally, the newest and most dynamic gathering is the two-year-old Neukölln Klezmer Sessions, in the arty/working-class district south of the canal. I will go on to argue that these three gatherings offer quite radically different interpretations of the potential and possibilities of MacKinnon’s “structured informality” and also of Morton’s “embodied and expressive ways of knowing”.

For almost all of its existence, *Klezmerstammtisch* has taken place on the 15th of the month in Café Oberwasser in Mitte. Oberwasser is a fine and characteristic example of a Berlin neighbourhood *Kneipe*: wood-panelled walls, solid oak tables, a lively bar in the centre of the room and a well-prepared and generous menu. A large part of the bar’s appeal is the warm and friendly presence of its owner, Ursula Weigert. Ursula also oversees the food and is responsible for the bar’s enthusiastic support of musical events, frequently with an Eastern European or Russian flavour. A friend to musicians across the city, Ursula always ensures that two or three tables are kept clear on the 15th of every month to provide space for as many participants of the *Stammtisch* as wish to attend. Although these days numbers are down to an average of five or six, the monthly get-togethers have in the past boasted upwards of ten or fifteen musicians, singers, dancers and general klezmerphiles. Pretty much anyone who has ever played klezmer and visited Berlin, famous or unknown, has at some point shown their face at Oberwasser. If the night is a slow one, Ursula is also happy to sit down and chat with musicians, eager to put them at their ease before they begin to play.

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<sup>96</sup> Boyer (2006:327) defines a *Stammtisch* as a “regulars’ table”, an “intimate fraternal space” of social exchange (often at a bar or restaurant).

<sup>97</sup> With help from his La’om colleagues Franka Lampe and Stefan Litsche.

During my year in Berlin, I attended five or six sessions at Oberwasser. Some sported only a handful of players, others were much more lively, full-blown affairs. Below are a few (deliberately episodic and impressionistic) fieldnotes from the second session I attended, in late 2013:

Nice evening-long illustration of how music can spread across a whole space. Starts small, just with three or four at the corner table. Gradually this table expands. Then the next table along suddenly reveal themselves as musicians – they are a community band called Frau Winkelmann and they are here to play but also to recruit. At one point Sybil and Susi start a song at the other end of the bar, Susi plonking away at the piano. We join in from our end – the entire room linked by music. Polite at first, but as the evening progresses barriers break down more and more. People shift places, create small narrative groups – tunes begin and are broken off or flow into other larger sounds. You don't know where a tune will start next, or who will join in (or how they'll do so). The whole room is responsible for sound, but not all at the same time, or in the same way.

Friendly and open session, if occasionally restrained. Pretty much anything goes as long as it's sort-of klezmer. On the Facebook page there is a suggestion that other stuff can happen, but only past midnight. Balkan and Greek tunes make an appearance in the small hours, and I try out an air and reel. Sheet music is allowed but not really used. Tonight, though, the Frau Winkelmann people have carefully arranged their music and stands.

What I found in Oberwasser, on the good nights, was a strong sense of musical community, an unpretentious group of happy people keen to chat, play, sing and renew friendships. The sessions do, however, have their boundaries, as hinted at above. It can at times be hard to get past a sense of politeness between the players, the particular self-conscious silence that crops up at the end of every tune, revealing perhaps that social norms have not quite been breached in the way one might have thought. In terms of repertoire, the *Stammtisch* is also well-bordered: well-worn klezmer standards are the almost exclusive norm.<sup>98</sup> Each piece will tend to be played through two or three times and then relinquished; it is rare to find a song or tune transformed in any way through the particular interpretation given it that night at Café Oberwasser. Whilst these observations are not intended as value judgements, they nevertheless point to a certain propriety and order lurking at the margins of the *Klezmerstammtisch*.<sup>99</sup> As we shall see, in contrast to the city's other two sessions, it is as if this particular evening relies on a sense of orderliness and correct practice in order to maintain its identity: to break this down would threaten the basis upon which the *Stammtisch* operates. For some

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<sup>98</sup> In fact, this lack of variety in the material is one of the chief complaints about the session from some of Berlin's more established musicians.

<sup>99</sup> Mackinnon (1993:107) makes a similar point with some English sessions, finding himself "inadvertently breaking the mores of the event."

musicians, behind these hidden assumptions lie a particularly ‘German’<sup>100</sup> approach to communal music-making, and perhaps one which at times sits uneasily with the looser collectivity of klezmer. Fiddle player Eli from the Knoblauch Klezmer Band puts it like this:

I stopped going because it’s just, on one hand it was great because they were playing so many great tunes, but on the other hand sometimes I was sitting around this table and just feeling very very, it’s very hard for me to put it into words, but [pause] maybe I’ll be direct about it [...] Well, I keep meeting Germans that have a fascination with Israel-slash-Jewish culture. And it ranges from ‘oh, klezmer, I LOVE klezmer music! I have all the CDs of Giora Feidman at my house!’, which you meet a lot, to, like just in life: ‘Oh, you’re Jewish, you come from Israel? I love Giora Feidman’. Well, thank you very much. I mean, seriously, it’s like ‘Oh, you’re American? I love Madonna!’<sup>101</sup>

These comments (and they were not the only ones) are interesting. For some musicians, the sense that the *Stammtisch* was providing a controlled and somewhat anaesthetised environment within which to ‘sample’ Jewish music was an official, delineating voice, at odds with the perceived joyful overspill of klezmer and Yiddish music. Similarly, the treatment of the music itself pointed to a limiting perception of the structural mechanics and social possibilities of folk music. Partly as a reaction to these issues, two alternative models have developed, to which I now turn.

One of the *Klezmerstammtisch*’s founders, violinist Matthias Groh, has these days moved his operations a few streets east and north into the now-gentrified Prenzlauer Berg, to bar-restaurant Maison Courage on Senefelderplatz. In the back alcove of this large room (or outside in the summertime), Matthias hosts a fortnightly meeting of klezmer musicians under the banner “Saytham’s Lounge”.<sup>102</sup> It is not quite an open jam session in that the players are all arranged and invited beforehand, but neither is it exclusive, as anyone can join Matthias’ list and sign up for a session. And in the flow of the afternoon itself, the Lounge – as it is known – retains an appealing sense of looseness and informality.

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<sup>100</sup> Here and in what follows I’m using this distinction as a formal rather than ethnic differentiator – just as Jewish space doesn’t need Jews, so ‘German’ klezmer doesn’t have to be played by Germans .

<sup>101</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> After five years at Maison Courage, Saytham’s moved at the beginning of 2016 to Cafe Butter in Pappelallee.



Here are my notes from a chilly November Sunday in 2013:

Saytham's is a loose grouping of about 40 musicians, most of whom have been involved with klezmer music in the city for several years. The gigs take place every other Sunday (roughly) at 5pm in the back of Maison Courage. They involve about 5 people, typically fiddle, clarinet, bass, accordion and percussion, but this varies according to who's available. Repertoire is standard klezmer, but with several structural features that make the event different.

- no rehearsal
- no set list
- no pre-arrangements
- a jam session ethos
- an audience that embraces all the above

The result is a freewheeling afternoon within which the boundaries between audience and performer overlap considerably. The tunes are well-known (they have to be), but the looseness of the performance allows them to grow, with plenty of open sections in between. New medleys are created (and dropped), tunes are mixed and matched, sections swapped over. It's the first time that I have heard klezmer music treated as such a malleable form – there are set melodies that everyone knows, but the performers are playing klezmer music in general as much as specific tunes. The fluidity is physical too – players stand and move in and out of centre stage, audiences spill into the performers' space and vice versa. The looseness is reflected in the audience: friends and family, tourists, fellow musicians, Sunday afternoon groups – a wide spread of age and background. And because it is not a 'gig' as such, there is a free movement in and out of the space. Hat passed around at the end, as usual.

How 'Jewish' is this afternoon's music? There is one Jew playing, and Georg and his friends are busy with their Yiddish-isms and Jewish dancing.<sup>103</sup> But the overriding theme is communality, friendship and relaxed musical enjoyment, rather than affiliation or generic behaviour/expectation. Is this the klezmer musician in wider society, or wider society coming to the klezmer musician? This could easily happen with other sorts of folk music, but in this instance klezmer is the form that can provide a big enough base of musicians and material. It could be that klezmer here carries just the right amount of folkie-ness *without* so many of the issues (surprisingly!). Here today it's more a music of open possibilities than of closed definition.

In organising each Lounge session, Matthias sends out a Doodle link for the upcoming two months and interested musicians input their availability. From this, he assembles different line-ups, loosely themed around things like "Funky old-time klezmer" and "Romanian and Macedonian music" – careful planning which then allows the accidental and the improvisatory to develop. In its use of online organisation and real-time embodiment, Maison Courage straddles the local and the virtual (Peterson & Bennett 2004), producing a set of possibilities and variables with broadly the same outcome but never the same thing twice. It's a session but with some gatekeeping control at work: an

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<sup>103</sup> Georg Potzies is an observant Jew and a huge music fan. His is a demonstrative and highly performative Jewish presence at many of the city's klezmer events (Maison Courage, Oblomov and Bleibergs, for example).



Figure 23. Outdoors summer session at Saytham's Lounge, Senefelderplatz. Matthias Groh (fiddle), Stefan Litsche (clarinet), Phil Alexander (accordion), Detlef Pegelow (tuba), Hampus Melin (percussion). May 2014.

acknowledgement that not 'anything' is allowed, an explicit recognition that not 'everything' is good.

The Maison Courage sessions present an interesting network model: established online, centralised around Matthias and consisting of a combination of strongly- and weakly-tied musicians and a shared general repertoire. As noted earlier, Matthias' online music resource also offers weakly-tied session players access to a large range of repertoire which can then be fed back into their own other local networks (or added to). Groh also organises occasional Saythams refugee benefits, providing a further link to wider social networks, whilst also once again positioning the Lounge and its activities directly within the contemporary city. This bridging of scene and musical community is explored in terms of local articulation and globalised cultural practice by Driver and Bennett (2014). For a reinvented, international music like klezmer, which nevertheless has managed to develop clear local relevance in a city like Berlin, this is an appealing theoretical hook:

Rather than reading musical communities – as earlier writers did – as locked into a particular cultural aesthetic, the aim here is to develop a sense in which shifting aesthetic orientations are made relevant by a locally-specific relational positionality within a globalized field of cultural consumption (2014:6).

With the link made between the aesthetic and the social, the work of Driver and Bennett also links the three sessions under discussion here. If we take Oberwasser as indeed "locked into a particular cultural aesthetic" (of friendly but bordered musical practice),

then we can see that Maison Courage's 'scene'-ness begins to move this into a locally-specific articulation of a global musical vocabulary and a looser idiomatic awareness. Based specifically on the players that live and work in Berlin, the liberal inclusivity of the Lounge positions it as a musical meeting-ground, whilst the easy-going nature of the event itself creates the necessary "shifting aesthetic orientations". The journey along this continuum is an interesting one for Jewish space, moving as it does from official to unofficial, from bounded structure to informal praxis, and clearly-defined musical terms to a more general idiomatic vernacular. This newer and more ambiguous articulation of Jewish musical space resounds most dramatically in the third of the city's jam sessions, discussed in the next section.

### **Bar Oblomov and new klezmer space**

Away from the leafy streets and restored façades of Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte, a group of younger international musicians have over the last two years actively created a new space for klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin. This is the roughly three-weekly klezmer sessions at Bar Oblomov, south of the Landwehrkanal in Neukölln. I want to look at how this new session is understood by its participants as a more liminal, nuanced and emotionally unpredictable site, one that takes in an avowed commitment to new Yiddish music, but also to contemporary Berlin. As always – and as an important caveat against any sense of musical or cultural essentialism – it is essential to remember that all the musicians within this small network of past and present are well-connected with each other, although some more than others. These three musical spaces detail points along a continuum, rather than seismic shifts in the urban sonic landscape.

Bar Oblomov is on the corner of Lenaustraße and Holbrechtstraße, running south parallel to the busy Kottbusser Damm. Where Kottbusser Damm overflows with Turkish supermarkets, bargain stores, falafel joints and clothes shops, every Holbrechtstraße block sports two or three bars or restaurants that buzz pleasantly with a mix of locals and visitors. Oblomov is run by a sociable young Italian called Mario and is decked out in the stylish mismatch that characterises the more relaxed side of Berlin's bar culture. Of the bar's two large spaces, it is in the darker, red-hued, candle-lit side room that the jam session takes place. Where other jam sessions in the city operate within the main

space of a single large-roomed bar, the separateness of Oblomov's space puts it somewhere at the intersection of gig, jam session, club night and social get-together.

As before, here are some fieldnotes to set the scene. These are an amalgam of the first and second sessions (December 2013 and January 2014).

A wailing clarinet, rolling snare drum and chugging accordion spill out onto the cold street and it sounds good. It fits. Like hearing the strains of Charlie Parker coming up from a 52nd St cellar sometime around the late 1940s. Except this is not jazz, or punk, or reggae. It is klezmer music, traditional dance music for Jewish weddings. And it is not a re-worked, modernised klezmer either: beats, loops and cross-genre mash-ups are only noticeable by their absence. Yet it sounds like it means business.

The musicians are mostly arranged at one end of the room, but there is no clear border or stage. Players spill into the audience, boundaries overlap and are continually redrawn as people move around the room, or in and out of the music-makers to say hello or join in. Several singers and players have opted to stay within the bulk of the crowd, and by the end of the evening we will all have become performers in a lusty *gute nakht* singalong. Musicians come and go from the 'stage' end, slipping into the bar to buy drinks, into the audience to chat to friends. Places change, fiddle players stand and their seats are taken by accordionists, a *darbuka* player moves into the middle of the room, a trumpeter shyly appears on the couch to the left. The leader Ilya stands, sits, jigs around, whilst playing. And as people join in, they mostly do so from their audience position: along the walls, at tables, strolling with a guitar... plus we are all singing and dancing, at least some of the time.

At half time we congregate in the noisy, smoky and lighter main bar. Hugs and handshakes, quick chats and catch-ups, drinks ordered and cigarettes smoked. Then everyone messily heads back to the dark red room next door.

There are now many more people, and the second half begins with an introduction from Ilya and Hampus. A manifesto about bringing klezmer to where younger musicians now live (someone cheers "first we take Neukölln!"). A little awkward, a little self-conscious, but its sentiment and intention are active and inclusive. This night reminds me of what so many people have told me, that most people who are into the klezmer scene here are also participants. Here there are singers, musicians, Weimar alumni, and the line between performer and audience is impossible to draw. Every other conversation is about how great this first night has turned out.

Sasha and Dan sing a couple of songs from their upcoming Gorki Theater gig – a concert performance around a bar table. They sing "Yesli U Vas"<sup>104</sup> – a Soviet New Year favourite<sup>105</sup> sung in Russian and Yiddish by a 30-something Latvian and American to a bunch of Berlin musicians, 20 years after the fall of Communism. Olaf and Tania follow with "Ikh vel aykh gebn tsu derklern"<sup>106</sup> and we all join in with the "ya-ba-boys". There is dancing, clapping, glasses banged on tables, lots of shouting. It is a noisy and happy party of new and old friends.

It is also very very cool! Not sunglasses, casinos and celebs cool, but relaxed – enjoyment over image. A crowd of youngish, hip (but not achingly so) Berliners all singing and dancing to

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<sup>104</sup> Russian: "If you have".

<sup>105</sup> From the 1975 film *The Irony of Fate (or Enjoy Your Bath!)*. See Fedina (2013).

<sup>106</sup> Yiddish: "I will explain to you". See Mlotek & Slobin (2007:96).

klezmer and Yiddish music, without a trace of self-consciousness or awkwardness, or ‘learnt’ behaviour. At one point I step outside for some fresh air. Looking through the steamed-up window, I realise that if I couldn’t hear, perhaps the last thing that I would expect the soundtrack to be is early twentieth-century Yiddish folk music.

The Oblomov sessions are the brainchild of accordionist Ilya Shneyveys, clarinetist Emil Goldshmidt, and drummer Hampus Melin. Ilya has recently begun to make his home in Neukölln, most of the time. Highly active in the worldwide klezmer education network, he also jointly leads Yiddish rock band Forshpil<sup>107</sup> and has recently won a Rudolstadt Festival Ruth Prize for his star-studded *Alpen Klezmer* project.<sup>108</sup> Emil (b. 1983)<sup>109</sup> is from Copenhagen and currently migrates between the two cities. When in Denmark, he is frontman for klezmer 6-piece Mames Babegenush. By contrast, Malmö-born Hampus is a Berlin veteran with eight years’ Neukölln residency under his belt. Much of this time he has spent on the road with Daniel Kahn and his band The Painted Bird, as well as various other Berlin cabaret ensembles.

This, then, is the first point of difference between Oblomov and older sessions. Its three leaders do not come from the city, or even the country, and two have only just made it their home. This international provenance speaks to a contemporary coming-and-going, a flow in and out of the city of short-term visitors (frequently artists or musicians) that chimes well with the creative energy and DIY aesthetic of post-reunification culture. In interviews, both Hampus Melin and Oriente Records’ Till Schumann paralleled this incarnation with that of the 1920s, a historical reference that for them positioned Berlin for the first time in a long time as driver of its own cosmopolitan internationalism (Jelavich, 1996; Ward, 2001). It also foregrounds Berlin’s current place as a central node in the international dialogue of klezmer and Yiddish music. Daniel Kahn puts it this way: “most of what concerns us, I think, as creative people, has to do with contributing to a conversation between generations and between artists.”<sup>110</sup> In Bar Oblomov, this conversation can be traced across temporal and geographical axes, as the network connections (forged at workshops, festivals and through transnational ties) of the three main protagonists ensure an ongoing and changing supply of international guests.

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<sup>107</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>108</sup> Brought together by Munich-based singer Andrea Pancur, this project features an international array of Yiddish and Bavarian musicians (Globalistas, 2013 GMV052).

<sup>109</sup> Birth dates for the other musicians discussed are given in Appendix 2.

<sup>110</sup> Interview, 2014.

Jewish musical space here is free to migrate between the local and the international, often in the course of the same night.

These sessions were set up in direct relation to the city's other klezmer music spaces, both musically and geographically. In the 1990s, the eastern district of Prenzlauer Berg offered cheap bohemian living for a vibrant young community of artists, musicians and writers (Smiers, 2000). Thanks to the city's fixed-rents, many long-time klezmer musicians are still based here.<sup>111</sup> But Prenzlauer Berg's rampant gentrification<sup>112</sup> has long since pushed up prices and pushed out newer artistic arrivals<sup>113</sup> – often southwards to Neukölln, which, whilst by no means safe from the gentrifying Sword of Damocles, still also offers relatively cheap accommodation. A working-class area with a large Turkish population and thriving outdoor street culture, this part of Berlin is also of late the most politically-charged district, the inheritor of Kreuzberg's 70s and 80s squatter scene ethos and the site of heated debates around ownership of urban space (Holm, 2014).<sup>114</sup>

In the background to this jam session, then, we have a meeting of several related elements spanning geography, history, musical discourse and practice. A group of young, innovative international musicians at the centre of the European klezmer scene, an explicit aim to bring klezmer music to their part of town, a proliferation of rapidly-changing bar/performance spaces, an environment of transformation with traces of radicalism, and an enthusiastic and surprisingly hip audience. Locating these sessions within this unofficial, street-level cultural and physical space has implications for the Jewish music played within, and offers a nicely contingent and nuanced version of Jewish topography: Jewish music is being created here, but the Jewish identity at play is a shifting and temporary one.

I want now to look at some participant responses to the sessions, focusing in particular on the physical and musical fluidity of the Oblomov nights, read by participants as a

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<sup>111</sup> Clarinetists Jan Hermerschmidt, Stefan Litsche and Christian Dawid, and accordionist Franka Lampe, for example.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, "Die Mutter vom Kollwitzplatz", a *Berliner Zeitung* strip cartoon that chronicles the armies of well-to-do young families who now populate these former spaces of resistance.

<sup>113</sup> This issue is currently a highly-charged one all over the city. See for example <http://www.bizim-kiez.de/map-of-displacement-in-so36-en/>. Accessed January 27th, 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Berliners are proud of and loyal to their *kiez* (neighbourhood). It is an important part of self-identification: shops make "kiez" part of a compound name, products use "kiez" as a local descriptor and *kiez* festivals are common. I even saw a Neukölln poster protesting the hipster influx of "kiez killers". Although the term has been in existence since the Middle Ages, it has only been in wide use since reunification, contextualised by the rapid social changes at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one. See Huyssen (1997:68).

conscious rejection of the straight-edged ‘properness’ of older klezmer sessions. For Sasha Lurje, the 18 year-old *Klezmerstammtich* at Café Oberwasser had lately been “dying on its feet”, in fact echoing a view told to me by one of the *Stammtisch*’s founders, (who wryly added “although it has been dead before”).<sup>115</sup> Oblomov, conversely, pointed to the potential play of multiple subjectivities: “through that [cultural freedom] we can actually be more free to develop a certain one culture [...] because we’re not forced to be certain things – we choose to be, and also we see reflections of this one thing, which makes us understand it so much better.”<sup>116</sup>

Coming at the same argument from the other direction, Knoblauch Klezmer Band fiddler Eli – born in Riga, raised in Israel and living in Berlin for the last three years – found that the openness of the Oblomov sessions militated specifically against a distinct and visceral unease he still felt in the differing expectations of longer-running, ‘German’-led sessions. Here he is talking about his own affective response to the two contexts, and the reactions he felt it provoked:

[In Oberwasser] we played one or two tunes, and we kind of forced some improvisation inside. And then we stood up and we started dancing, and I felt that was foreign, something like ‘Oh, it’s a little bit too much! We want to sing emotional songs in Yiddish, but why are you doing this mess now?’ And this mess is exactly what I found in Oblomov and I loved it from the first second.<sup>117</sup>

A highly politicised and thoughtful musician, Eli’s refusal to be neutral is both provocative and revealing. By characterising his response as “foreign” (from the point of view of the *Stammtisch*), Eli positions both the German-ness of the older session and his own place outside of it. Similarly, the proscribed emotional performativity of singing moving Yiddish songs is acceptable in the more formal and established space of Café Oberwasser, whereas an instantaneous (and hence unpredictable) physical emotional connection is frowned upon, but actively encouraged in Oblomov. And for Eli this capacity for embodied, messy release is intimately bound up with affective responses to the music, illuminating implicit borders and also the possibilities of their transgression:

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<sup>115</sup> Franka Lampe, interview, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Sasha Lurje, interview, 2014. cf. Bohlman (1988:57): “In settings where cultural contact is pervasive the assertion of cultural boundaries is often a matter of choice, making them flexible”.

<sup>117</sup> Interview, 2014.

enclosures and façades serve to define both a *scene* (where something takes place) and an *obscene* area to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated (Lefebvre, 1991:36).

The decision to incorporate unpredictability, emotion and fluidity as a structural feature in Bar Oblomov is an acknowledgement of the multiple voices at play in an urban musical context, an implicit acceptance of the flaws in narrative control. It is hard not to think of de Certeau's *tactics* here, the on-the-ground effect of “Things extra and other, [which] insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order” (1984:107). Here is drummer Hampus talking about the set-up of the room at Oblomov:

We talked about the effect of having a stage, or not having a stage [...] And of course, as soon as you step up onto a stage, you're ‘on’ in a different way. And maybe that’s something that we weren’t really going for. But that it would be something where you could kind of melt in, and it would be ‘is that person playing? Does it matter? Maybe a little bit?’<sup>118</sup>

Such ‘melting’ is especially important when we place it against some earlier discourses that have framed klezmer in the city.<sup>119</sup> It moves this particular Jewish musical space into robust and malleable part of the everyday urban fabric. It also relocates the Berlin discourse of borders and division (Till, 2005; Ward 2011a) into the unofficial space between performance and participation, a more carnivalesque zone operating within the darker and more ambiguous world of bar culture and dancing bodies.<sup>120</sup> To return to our earlier discussion:

*Scene* is one way of speaking of the theatricality of the city – of the city’s capacity to generate images of people occupying public space in attractive ways [...] Scenes emerge from the excesses of sociability that surround the pursuit of interests, or which fuel ongoing innovation and experimentation within the cultural life of cities [...] Scenes are one of the city’s infrastructures for exchange, interaction and instruction. (Straw, 2004:412-3)

The multi-level participatory possibilities of “exchange, interaction and instruction” find a resonance in the musical progress through the night. Rather than the conventional ‘tune-chat-tune’ rubric that structures most jam sessions (Mackinnon, 1993), in Oblomov everything happens at once. People applaud at the end of tunes, but they also clap, whoop and talk during them. Although the repertoire is largely traditional, a *hora*

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<sup>118</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>119</sup> For example: Radano & Bohlman (2000:41); Ottens & Rubin (2004); Morris (2001).

<sup>120</sup> On music scenes and the body, see Driver and Bennett (2014).





Figures 24-6. Neukölln Klezmer Sessions in Bar Oblomov. Top: singers Sasha Lurje and Sveta Kundish celebrate. Middle: Emil Goldschmidt (clarinet) and Ilya Shneyveys (accordion). Bottom: audience/ participants show their appreciation. All January 2014.

or *freylekhs* will be stretched *ad hoc* through different keys, time signatures and instrumentations, morphing in and out of other pieces along the way. But this is no endless D-minor noodling: in discussion, Ilya, Hampus and Emil all acknowledge that as a strong trio they have the capacity to move the music along wherever necessary, neatly avoiding the pitfalls of the ‘groove’ jam session. Ilya is also not afraid to MD things, his on-the-spot arrangements keeping everyone involved in a continual and surprising unfolding musical statement that includes even the most timid of participants. Although there is often explicit virtuosity at play, its manifestation is frequently collaborative and collective rather than soloistic. And the fact that two thirds of the house band can form a powerhouse rhythm section eliminates the lurking session fear of starting a tune that no-one joins in with. Eli characterised the musical fluidity like this:

It's like, yes we're playing Jewish music, but this is not a 'Jewish event' with all the symbolism [...] Sasha is singing a lot of Yiddish, but she and Sveta were singing Russian folk songs, and suddenly you know the *terkische* is turning into a Romanian *sirba*. Everybody knows the tune and everybody's 'ok, cool'. It's still very very much klezmer, but I don't think that's because it's 'supposed to be'.<sup>121</sup>

Oriente Musik's Till Schumann<sup>122</sup> made this point more explicitly:

one time, one of these guys, he stood up and said it's a special day because it's [Yom Ha'atzmaut].<sup>123</sup> And I'm sure that some people in the audience feel not so comfortable with it, let's say. But, this is part of it, and this gives me a lot of hope, that there is a different, diverse audience [...] it can hold that, because it's not a political event. It's just music.<sup>124</sup>

Fluid, unofficial, playful, carnivalesque, embodied and real-time – the space and scene of Bar Oblomov is, in the context of Jewish folk music, a radical one. What, then, might this jam session contribute to an idea of ‘Jewish space’? Firstly, it is here by extension: all the leading players in this session are heavily involved in ongoing education, performance and advocacy of what has come to be called New Yiddish Music.<sup>125</sup> They are at the European centre of a global network, and by implication so is Oblomov.<sup>126</sup> The musical content of the night is also explicitly Jewish, taking in Hasidic *nigunim* and folk dance, but importantly the conscious liminality of the Oblomov jam session merges

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<sup>121</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>122</sup> Oriente's roster includes Karsten Troyke's Yiddish tango recordings, Daniel Kahn's four Painted Bird albums and the Polish group Kroke.

<sup>123</sup> Israeli Independence Day, marking the establishment of the modern state in 1948.

<sup>124</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>125</sup> By Yiddish Summer Weimar, for example. See Chapter 4.

<sup>126</sup> Just as jazz musician and fervent carnivore Anthony Braxton once said: "If I write an opera, then of course it's a jazz opera. If I go have a hamburger, it's a jazz hamburger" (in Bivins: 2015:261).

klezmer with a modern, subcultural urban space – a temporary zone that is as much part of a paradigm of ‘nights out’ in Berlin as it is of ‘things Jewish’. The Oblomov sessions, in their lack of proscribed behaviour, fluidity of process and musical practice, geography and diversity, locate this music and its associated ways of being firmly *within* the wider DIY culture that is such an intrinsic and appealing part of creative life in the city. And alongside its physical fluidity and ‘messy’ embodiment, the open-endedness of the musical process itself highlights the contingency here of Jewish space, capable of multiple cultural resonances and interactions. This, in fact, was extended over the summer by moving the session to an outdoor “Klezmer Picnic” on the former airfield at Tempelhof, one of Berlin’s famously freeform open spaces and itself a site of much recent civic debate.<sup>127</sup>

Caroline Bithell (2006:4) suggests that “performance does not constitute a simple revisiting of the music of the past [...] In the moment of resounding it is fully and incontrovertibly part of the present”. The noisy spontaneity and self-conscious boundary-blurring of the Neukölln sessions are surely this, but more than this their fluidity also collapses the spheres of performance and participation, powerfully subverting what some musicians see as an overly ‘proper’ (and hence historically *unconnected*) approach to klezmer music in the city. In its combination of modern internationalism, unofficial *platea*, bricolage culture and rooted commitment to contemporary Yiddish Music, the Oblomov sessions may be one of the first pieces of radical Jewish space in Berlin klezmer.

## Conclusion

Berlin is a city of memories (Huysen, 1997; Till, 2005), but the *sound* of memory is very different to memorial silence.<sup>128</sup> Where memorial uses silence to evoke an inwardness and sense of reflection, sounded memory summons up the past through engagement with aural metaphor and metonymy – music as a way of signifying history but also of ‘feeling’ the past. This complex and iterative relationship is enacted most

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<sup>127</sup> Tempelhof, the historic site of the 1948-9 allied airlifts, finally ceased operations in 2008. In a referendum in summer 2014, Berliners voted to block new (and expensive) housing and development plans and instead keep the huge open space as a 100% free-for-all public site of barbecues, kite-flying, guerrilla gardening and all manner of outdoor leisure activity. See for example: <http://www.thelocal.de/20140526/berliners-hail-tempelhof-referendum-win>. Accessed September 7th, 2015.

<sup>128</sup> This dialogue is taken further in the first half of Chapter 6.

powerfully through active engagement with the actual physical spaces in which music happens. The Jewish Museum's Holocaust Tower or Platform 17 at Grunewald station<sup>129</sup> are powerful and disturbing *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989) precisely through their silence, by the way they force us into our own thoughts and internal processes. Conversely, the proliferation of sound (the *different* sounds of Jewish folk music, clapping, lively chatter) in Oblomov, Oberwasser, Maison Courage, Kaffee Burger, Bleibergs and the other spaces discussed here force a living link between past and present. This link can be controlled and careful, perhaps delicately respectful at the expense of overly emotional, or it can be messy, unpredictable and heterogeneous. It can reinforce official and taken-for-granted ways of being, or it can question them in irreverent or unsettling ways. In Berlin, the musical spaces of the city have opened themselves up to many varied faces of this ongoing dialogue. And in the process, the city itself and its characteristic creative aesthetic enact an ongoing relationship with the music played, heard and danced to.

Thanks to a powerful mix of dynamic musicians and historical circumstance, klezmer music has become grounded in Berlin. Although it may not be historically from the city, it is authentically *of* the contemporary urban environment. But it is not static. Where an older generation of largely German-born musicians continue to use the music as an important participative tool of group cohesion and exchange, a younger generation of international musicians has recently embedded the music within a very contemporary Berlin paradigm, one that taps directly into the fluid subcultural semiotics of the city. In this way, klezmer music is both reflective and constitutive of the city's changing musical personae. Through the extra-musical contexts as much as the music itself, and the emotional and cultural resonances they generate, Jewish space in the city acquires a more contingent, relative and thoroughly modern identity. The next chapter will explore the ways in which the city of Berlin is embedded within the sounds and texts of the music itself – the particular musical strategies and responses of certain artists that root their work in the city of its production, by locating the city directly within the music.

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<sup>129</sup> See Chapters 3 and 6.



### 3. Berlin in the Music: Sonic and Textual Emplacement

*You know we had this klezmer revival about twenty years ago and that was quite traditional. It was usually instrumental, Eastern European tunes, the same fifteen tunes played all over again. Usually violin, clarinet, some accordion maybe. Then Yiddish vocals came into it, Karsten Troyke for instance. That was new. You also had some Eastern European immigrants singing in Russian or Ukrainian. Some klezmer tunes. Then you had Daniel Kahn coming over, singing in English, and also trying Yiddish and German, and putting the political point into it, which was very new, because up to that it was all, you know, sad, romantic, melancholy, whatever, all freylekh dancing joy. And Daniel put this Trotsky, Marxist and, you know, 'you have killed the Jews, I'm here now in Germany and I like you, but I don't like you' thing into it. So that was new, yeah!*

(Armin Siebert, Eastbloc Musik)<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Where chapter two explored the relationship of physical space to klezmer and Yiddish musical practice in contemporary Berlin, this chapter uncovers some of the ways that Berlin exists symbolically in the music under discussion. My focus therefore moves at this point from how the city grounds the music, to how the music makes manifest the city. My aim is to show that whilst there is no particularly distinctive historical relationship between klezmer and Yiddish music and Berlin itself,<sup>2</sup> in more recent years the city has begun to appear within the musical text as a significant part of the story. As the music has developed its own tone of voice, so Berlin has begun to be understood as offering both a meaningful socio-cultural context and a characteristic historical point of view. I will argue that this has promoted a musical dialogue, a creative channel through which Berlin can be understood and re-presented – as site of ideological struggle, place of escape or nagging reminder of insurmountable history.

In order to probe these meanings, it is helpful to first consider some wider ideas around music as a signifier of place. Classic ethnomusicological theory has inevitably been closely linked to an idea of place, indeed attention to this relationship and its accompanying social structures is one of the factors that has marked it out from traditional musicology's focus on the musical text as stand-alone source of meaning and

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<sup>1</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to cities further east, such as Lodz (Poland), Kishinev (Chişinău, Moldova) or Chernowitz (Chernivitsi, Ukraine). See Strom, 2002:134.

artistic intent.<sup>3</sup> This kind of socially-rooted music analysis, from Merriam's (1964:32) tripartite model on, illustrates powerfully how the particular interaction of social and geographical context is made meaningful through the aesthetic and ritual function of a society's music (Seeger, 1987; Feld, 1988). Whilst the direct linking of social geography to cultural production promises a tantalisingly intact and coherent circle of meaning and worldview, studies such as these inevitably lean on assumptions of a manageably homogenous social identity, or at least an agreed set of relationships. The multiplicity of viewpoints, experiences and interactions that characterise a city render this kind of approach less useful. Even for distinct ethnic groups within a city, the complex web of cultural meshing (or lack of it) means that to search for a unified musical understanding can be problematic:

An urban ethnomusicology [...] will have to cope with the heterogeneity of the city, where multiple, overlapping musical communities are intermingled, and musical networks criss-cross one another temporally, socially, physically and electronically (Stock, 2008:201).

This is significant when we consider contemporary klezmer's revived and recreated nature, and the wide variety of cultural backgrounds, musical experiences and political standpoints from which its contemporary practitioners come. If, however, we take such heterogeneity as a starting-point, what presents itself is a chance to explore musical production less as a force for social cohesion, and more as a response to and exploration of the clashes and contradictions of the idea of the city itself. A city, as the material and social environment within which musical experience takes place, can also function – within music itself – as the locus of emotions, ideas and relationships that characterise it: “a mutant, undisciplined creativity that is worked out through the properties of existence” (Amin & Thrift, 2002:94-5).

Often, musics become so geographically, temporally and discursively linked to a city that they begin to act as autonomous signifiers of that place. We might think of Kingston and rocksteady, tango in Buenos Aires, Bulat Okudzhava's Moscow, or even the Proclaimers' Edinburgh. Culturally-rooted music criticism<sup>4</sup> and canny tourist

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Stone (2008:49) on the discipline's development: “As ethnomusicology embraced this interconnection between music and other aspects of life, it took the rather radical step of acknowledging the connection to, rather than separation from, social life. Music was not just so many sounds but was now anchored to politics, kinship, religion and economics.”

<sup>4</sup> In UK music journalism, Simon Frith (UK rock), Jan Fairley (Cuban music) and Lloyd Bradley (reggae) are good examples.

discourse<sup>5</sup> helps keep these connections in circulation, but things are clearly more complex. Afrika Bambaataa and George Gershwin both mean ‘New York’, but the New Yorks that they mean share little more than a subway system: one born out of a distinctly African-American subcultural alterity, the other adopted as a global icon for early twentieth-century Empire State glamour and sophistication.<sup>6</sup> And did South African jazzers Dudu Pukwana and the other Blue Notes belong musically to the Cape Town of their birth or to the London of their exile (Bradley, 2013)? As within culture as a whole, the meanings of a city within music reveal points of view, perspectives and power relations. It is some of these perspectives and relations that I hope to highlight here, through close analysis of a small group of musical examples.

Accepting the multiplicity and subjectivity that surrounds both musical style and the city it signifies, we might also begin to unpack precisely *what* it is that we hear when we ‘hear’ a city. What is there in the music itself that deepens these long-standing cultural connections? On a denotative level, Edith Piaf conjures up Parisian courtyards, but connotatively Piaf’s vocal power and rawness of delivery make audible her resolve and sexual empowerment, whilst knowledge of the world from which she sprang combines with a 1930s French big band sound to underscore a particular interwar Parisian combination of seediness and glamour. The Stone Roses are undeniably Mancunian. But it is the combination of layered production, trippy guitar solos, iconoclastic yet understated lyrics and late 1980s dance music drumming that also locate the band’s meanings in the world of drug culture, warehouse parties and the point where post-industrial Northwestern blokeish swagger met the second summer of love (Halfacree, Kitchin & Kitchen, 1996:50-2).

### **Klezmer, *vu bistu?*<sup>7</sup>**

The examples above are given in order to understand possible contexts for the complex two-way dialogue of sound and city, the relationship of music to its surrounding urban environment. In the case of klezmer music, however, this relationship is multiple and clouded – by early twentieth century migration (Rubin, 2001); by the gaping cultural,

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<sup>5</sup> e.g. <http://www.tangotoursba.com>, which offers the chance to “Discover the insider secrets of Buenos Aires through tango”. Accessed August 17th, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> The opening scene from Woody Allen’s *Manhattan* (1979) being just one of many examples.

<sup>7</sup> Yiddish: “where are you?”

personal and epistemological hole of the Holocaust; and also by a historiography occasionally subject to revision<sup>8</sup> or omission.<sup>9,10</sup> Just as Yiddish developed different versions and dialects defined through patterns of migration and local linguistic interaction (Katz, 2004; Weinreich, 1949), so klezmer in its geographical spread has come to speak with accents more or less influenced by the surrounding musical environment.<sup>11</sup> And in the same way as Yiddish has developed what Jeffrey Shandler (2006) calls a “postvernacular” identity,<sup>12</sup> the separation of klezmer music from the particularities of origin and function, in one sense at least, opens up other possibilities – what we might call a ‘post-*shtetl*’ identity.<sup>13</sup> Klezmer, faced with a historically-ruptured geography (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002), must find other ways of making place significant. Through musical discourse, a symbolic, intangible ‘home’ is created: the music becomes instrumental in constituting an imagined (although nevertheless ‘real’) relationship to a certain form of Jewishness.

This symbolic imaginary frequently highlights certain paradigmatic repetitions, (the *Fiddler*-esque<sup>14</sup> *shtetl* or a liminally ‘wandering’ *kapelye*,<sup>15</sup> for example). And indeed, the more hackneyed, residual (Williams, 1977:122) images that continue to inform some promotion and presentation of the music have frequently been a site of criticism (Ottens & Rubin, 2004).<sup>16</sup> But, whilst often subject to cliché (Slobin, 2000:23), registers and modalities of representation, humour, ‘authenticity’ and fantasy can also point to

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Rubin’s critique (2005:157) of Henry Sapoznik’s “unfortunate revisionism [...] which leads the reader to believe that his personal quest led to *klezmer* music becoming an international movement”.

<sup>9</sup> In a study of 492 pages, Avraham Zvi Idelsohn (1944:455-60) devotes just 6 pages to klezmer, the thrust of which is to show how it has informed subsequent developments in Western art music.

<sup>10</sup> Problems of provenance are of course attendant upon many folk musics, often marked by a tension between a search for origin myths and an acknowledgment of the syncretic, additive nature of musical development. cf. Harker’s (1985) analysis of the constructed (“fakesong”) nature of the English folksong revival. Also Bohlman (1988).

<sup>11</sup> See Feldman’s (2002) classification of repertoire into *core*, *transitional*, *co-territorial* and *cosmopolitan*. Also Wood’s “multiple voices” (2007b).

<sup>12</sup> Referring to an engagement with the Yiddish language not based primarily on linguistic competence, Shandler (2006:4) explains his term thus: “In semiotic terms, the language’s primary level of signification—that is, its instrumental value as a vehicle for communicating information, opinions, feelings, ideas—is narrowing in scope. At the same time its secondary, or meta-level of signification—the symbolic value invested in the language [...] is expanding. This privileging of the secondary level of signification of Yiddish over its primary level constitutes a distinctive mode of engagement with the language that I term *postvernacular*.”

<sup>13</sup> I am here invoking the concept of *shtetl* somewhat ironically. Klezmer has always located itself wider than the mythical *shtetl* (Slobin, 2000). It is cultural as much as historical memory to which I am alluding. Discussed fully in Chapter 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Fiddler on the Roof* stands in a curious relationship to the Yiddish imaginary. An acknowledged invention (in the tales of Sholem Aleichem), it is nevertheless an ironically knowing source of folk memory for UK and American Jews. See Chapter 4 and also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Alongside the wandering Jew as antisemitic trope (Anderson, 1965), it has also been invoked ironically by musicians: Gregori Shechter and The Wandering Few (ARC Music), or Gilad Atzmon’s ‘The Wandering Who?’ (2011). Rubin & Ottens (2004:296) point out that European *klezmerim* were “by and large sedentary”, noting that they travelled “out of economic necessity, just like today’s musicians and singers go on tour” (Ottens & Rubin, 2001:29, cited in Rubin & Ottens, 2004:296).

<sup>16</sup> See also violinist Eli Fabrikant’s comments later in this chapter.



negotiated and sometimes oppositional readings. These can be playful (The Klezmerim), phantasmagoric (Michael Winograd), self-consciously contemporary (Paul Brody), polemic (The Klezematics), pastoral (Khevrisa) and more.<sup>17</sup>

Klezmer music, then, offers one way in which different versions of a collective ‘Yiddish-land’ imaginary are articulated and discussed: the means by which a post-assimilation culture reclaims its history (Livingston, 1999), and also the filters through which a dominant culture views its minorities (Waligórska, 2010). Nowadays, however, we might equally examine how the music becomes one of the ways that contemporary places can imagine aspects of themselves, a site within which to explore contradictions and ambiguities of their own place-ness. In contemporary Berlin, there is perhaps more artistic and cultural mileage to be gained from where the music might go, rather than where it came from, even if a sense of history is never too far away. And because this is largely an act of imagination, it can also be freer than some other music/place dialogues. To put it another way, it is almost impossible for a reggae band to avoid some sort of relationship – be it close, distant, explicit, opaque, ironic or uncritical – to Jamaica, even if none of its members have any direct connection with the island. A contemporary klezmer band, however, need not exist specifically in relation to anywhere (not anywhere that still exists, at least). This liberates the music to act as a free-floating signifier of the place itself (Berlin, New York, Odessa...). Klezmer and Roma share this untethered semiotic evocation: the ambiguity of home nation means that place and desire frequently enter the imaginary.<sup>18</sup>

This absence of geographical specificity is perhaps a reason for the proliferation of actual locations (frequently a band’s hometown) in the names of klezmer ensembles: Budapester Klezmer Band, Pressburger Klezmer Band, Kroke (Yiddish for Krakow), Kharkov Klezmer Band, Kasbek Ensemble, Hamburg Klezmer Band, Odessa Klezmer Band, Veretski Pass, Maxwell St Klezmer Band, Vienna Klezmer Band, Alaska Klezmer Band, Shtetl Band Amsterdam, London Klezmer Quartet... Klezmer’s cultural homelessness makes it nominally up-for-grabs – anyone, anywhere, can ‘have’ a

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<sup>17</sup> The examples in parentheses refer to specific klezmer albums of the last forty years: The Klezmerim’s *East Side Wedding* (1977), Michael Winograd’s *Storm Game* (2013), Paul Brody’s *Far From Moldova* (2010), The Klezematics’ *Shvaygn = Toyt* (Silence = Death, 1988), and Khevrisa’s *European Klezmer Music* (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Although, as Silverman notes, this relationship has taken on a radically different dynamic in the two groups: “Whereas Jews are over-determined in the realm of the Holocaust, Roma are over-determined in the realm of music [...] Jews are thus positioned as Europe’s historical ‘Other’ and Roma as Europe’s current ‘Other’” (Silverman, 2015:162-3).

klezmer band, through the qualifier of a known place, or perhaps an (often jokey) Jewish sounding name.<sup>19</sup>

The musical embedding of place becomes especially fluid when we remember that klezmer is a transnational, syncretic and occasionally slippery musical genre,<sup>20</sup> imported, or re-imported, in almost all of its contemporary manifestations. This lack of specificity, this absence of inherent place-ness, means that in the ambiguous context of Berlin, the city must be *inserted* into the music if it is to have meaning or resonance. What I therefore want to focus on is the way that the particular place-ness of Berlin has begun to function as a significant unit of musical meaning: how the city has been emplaced within the music, and what kinds of interpretations this opens up. The central plank of theory from which I have drawn here is Adam Krims' concept of *urban ethos*. This is a complex and robust idea encompassing the range of ways the city is imagined through and in dialogue with expressive culture:

It is the scope of that range of urban representations and their possible modalities, in any given time span, that I call the *urban ethos*. The urban ethos is thus not a particular representation but rather a distribution of possibilities, always having discernible limits as well as common practices. It is not a picture of how life is in any particular city. Instead, it distills publicly disseminated notions of how cities are generally (Krims, 2007:7).

Krims' scope is broad. I will narrow it down somewhat, by looking at the particularities of the urban ethos as seen in this one small corner of Berlin musical production. The widespread presence of klezmer music itself in Berlin has much to say about the city's changing urban ethos over the past twenty-five years, but my focus is on several specific responses in the work of three bands. One group locates the city's urban ethos as a site of fantastic escape, another sees a Berlin that cannot avoid the dark shadows of history, while the third engages with the city's multilingual persona.

At this point, we might look at the various ideological resources that Berlin offers, the materials out of which an emplacement of the city might be made. Certain themes coalesce around an idea of 'Berlin' that prove especially fertile in this context. Those on which I want to concentrate can be usefully contained within a conceptual umbrella of

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<sup>19</sup> The panoply of punning band names is broad, at times inventive and occasionally excruciating. It encompasses the witty (Isle of Klezbos), the political (Klezgoyim), the vernacular (Klezmer Local 42), the extra-terrestrial (KlingonKlez) and frequently the gastronomic (Hot Pstromi, Mames Babegenush, Monsieur Camembert), amongst many others.

<sup>20</sup> See Rubin (2001:22-5) on the problems of definition.

dual-identity, of looking two ways at once. The ways that this manifests itself in the discussion below include ideas of escape, below-surface history (literal and metaphorical), and linguistic fluidity. That such duality might be a fundamental aspect of Berlin's urban ethos is perhaps not so surprising. Even before the city's physical thirty-year split (the starkest embodiment of two simultaneous worlds), it had long straddled a cultural and geographical East-West fault-line.<sup>21</sup> In the Cold War East, subterfuge and concealment became a way of life for both official and unofficial relationships (Funder, 2003; Taylor, 2006), while West Berlin's bubble of subsidised freedom also inevitably represented a world where everything might not have been quite as it seemed. Post-reunification, the city's coming-to-terms with history (an ongoing and hotly debated process) continues to produce a multiplicity of conflicting demands, expectations and revelations, "ghosts" that Brian Ladd (1997:234) uncovers in the city's very landscape. A striking pre-reunification artistic representation of this duality can be found in Wim Wender's *Wings of Desire*, a film that makes manifest the co-existing parallel worlds of the city.

### **Berlin as gateway: ?Shmaltz!'s Malwonia**

In what ways, then, might such an urban ethos inform and be informed by music? To explore some of the possibilities, I will look first in detail at the contrasting presence of Berlin as a significant and distinctive concept in the music of a Berlin-based American, Daniel Kahn, and a native Berlin ensemble, ?Shmaltz!. Kahn is a Michigan-born singer, composer and instrumentalist who has lived in Neukölln in Berlin for the past nine years. In that time he has become a fluent Yiddish and German speaker and released four albums with his band The Painted Bird.<sup>22</sup> He is a regular teacher and performer at klezmer and Yiddish workshops in Europe and beyond, including a long-running association with Alan Bern's Yiddish Summer Weimar, and Painted Bird alumni number several central younger figures of the international klezmer scene.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, the twin creative forces behind ?Shmaltz!<sup>24</sup> are born-and-bred Berliners. Detlef Pegelow raised in the underground East Berlin art rock scene, Carsten Wegener in the Americana

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<sup>21</sup> For analysis of Berlin's pre-war border-zone identity, see Ward (2011a).

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 2 for Kahn's "Klezmer Bund" programmes at Kaffee Burger and Gorki Studio F.

<sup>23</sup> Most notably clarinetist Michael Winograd and violinist Jake Shulman-Ment.

<sup>24</sup> Bassist Carsten Wegener described the band name's curious use of punctuation as representing a question followed by an emphatic answer (i.e. 'what is Shmaltz? This is Shmaltz!'). Interestingly, he was unaware of the word's Yiddish meaning (chicken fat). Interview, 2014.

of the West. Both are relentless instrument collectors and builders; both have played central roles in Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music ever since the early 90s, with bands like Tants in Gartn Eydn, Yardniks Kapelye and Grinstein's Mischpoche. Carsten was also a long-term member of Berlin's joyfully freewheeling 17 Hippies, whose loose multilingual folk/jazz/palm court mix he has carried across into this project.

It is important to note that neither Kahn nor ?Shmaltz! describe what they do as exclusively klezmer, although the word figures as one of several descriptors used by both. Mike Anklewicz (2012) has shown how contemporary klezmer musicians negotiate hybridity as its own form of authenticity,<sup>25</sup> and this fits well with these two examples. Avoiding the perceived over-use of klezmer as a signifier within Germany (Bohlman, 2008; Morris, 2001), they place it as one influence among several, thus also sidestepping the semiotic 'party music' short-cut widely prevalent amongst countless 'gypsy, punk, ska, Balkan, klezmer' outfits.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, both bands incorporate large doses of klezmer repertoire and idioms in their music, and both also use Yiddish as one language among several that they slip between easily, more of which later. Likewise, members of both bands are centrally-located in the klezmer and Yiddish educative network that has grown up across Germany over the last twenty years.<sup>27</sup>

Although they share friends, venues and the continuum of a scene,<sup>28</sup> the musics that these two bands produce are markedly different. Where The Painted Bird migrates between a traditional klezmer repertoire and a mid-twentieth century American folksinger ethos, both informed by a radical Yiddishist socialist politics, ?Shmaltz! stirs up the diverse musical backgrounds of its members into an acknowledged yet coherent invention, rooted in a Central European soundworld. It is the music of ?Shmaltz! that I want to look at first. Here is bassist and singer Carsten:

The sound that fits in the repertoire of ?Shmaltz! has to have another dimension. So it has to be a link to the modern times, because I'm living in this century, not

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<sup>25</sup> cf. Tkachenko (2013).

<sup>26</sup> Brooklyn's Luminescent Orchestrïi, Scotland's Orquestra del Sol, and Amsterdam Klezmer Band, for example. Without reference to specific bands, Wegener described this process as a "cooking recipe" (interview, 2014). cf. Silverman (2015).

<sup>27</sup> Fürth's biennial Klezmer Festival (founded 1988), Insul's Open Klezmer Scales, and Yiddish Summer Weimar, for example. See: <http://www.klezmer-festival.de>, <http://www.openklezmerscales.de/index.php?page=home>, <http://www.yiddishsummer.eu>. All accessed November 27th, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Painted Bird drummer Hampus Melin is a regular at the Maison Courage sessions, as is ?Shmaltz!'s Detlef Pegelow. The sessions were set up by Wegener's first klezmer collaborator (along with accordionist Jenny Wieneke) Matthias Groh. Sanne Mörcke (accordionist in YSKFI) occasionally deps for ?Shmaltz!'s Paula Sell, and musicians from both bands have appeared as performers and instructors at Insel's Open Klezmer Scales Festival.

another [...] one of my favourite songs is “Yolanda”, which starts with a slide guitar for the ocean – it’s a song about a female pirate – and then comes a klezmer Greek theme, but with a more laid-back beat, it’s not traditional, and then comes the words, which sounds like Brecht/Weill. But I hope and I think it’s not only here [touches his head], it becomes something organic, which is a must for me – I don’t want to construct things.<sup>29</sup>

There are several strategies ?Shmaltz! use to embed the city of Berlin in their music. Perhaps most noticeably, they often sing in Berlinerisch, Berlin’s clipped, edgier-sounding local dialect, where, “Wass ist das?” becomes “Wat iss’n dit?” and “eine kleine Klavier” is sharpened into “‘ne kleenet Klavier”. But this is employed selectively, an artistic choice that roots a certain part of their sound in a good-timey, Weimar-era, anything-goes version of Berlin (Jelavich, 1993). This particular Berlin is also located by the band’s sound, which artfully combines the sound of a medium-size cabaret band with plenty of imaginative steampunk style – in the form of musical saws, toy pianos (“kleenet Klavier”), horn-violins and more than a nod to the circus. Stylistically, the band glides between polka, waltz and torch song, incorporating elements of klezmer, *cumbia*, Balkan and Turkish music *en route*. Detlef’s guttural ringmaster growl, Carsten’s laid-back drawl and accordionist Paula’s clear and unadorned delivery again reference a particular pre-war Berlin soundworld, a music of winks and gestures delivered in an exaggeratedly un-prettified style.<sup>30</sup> Below are the opening lines of “Gran Bufet”, the first number from their 2011 album of the same name, and figure 27 shows a transcription of the descending circus-like opening theme:<sup>31</sup>

<p><i>Komm, schnapp dir ‘ne Limonade 'n Hurki Purki oder 'n Bier, Manche fragen, wat iss'n dit? Dit is so 'n kleenet Klavier. Klingt doch knorke und macht och jut' Laune,  und allet schwofst gleich ran. Rosi schiebt ihr 'n Menne hin, wo man richtig jut essen kann.</i><sup>32</sup></p>	<p>Come on, grab a lemonade a Hurki Purki or a beer, Someone asks, wassat? It’s a toy piano. Sounds cool and makes you feel good, and everyone’s getting down. Rosi shoves her fella in, where you can eat real good.</p>
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These examples set out the band’s store well. A knowingly comic, well-constructed

<sup>29</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Jelavich’s discussion of early 20th century cabaret singer Clare Waldoff and her “harsh, guttural voice” (1993:102-3).

<sup>31</sup> Accordion only. The recording has the tune doubled on glockenspiel and accompanied by bass (in 2) and drums.

<sup>32</sup> German lyrics from liner notes (AYCE02, 2011).



Figure 27. “Gran Bufet” (opening theme, accordion), from *Gran Bufet* (?Shmaltz!, 2011).

musical line, a self-confessed delight in the playful and the sensory, framed by a Berlinerisch tone of voice and a selectively eclectic soundworld. Thus far, ?Shmaltz! would be best understood as a retro cabaret outfit. A party band, perhaps, of fedoras and feather boas, post-modernly mining a modernist seam, not uncommon in Berlin.<sup>33</sup> What marks ?Shmaltz! out, however, is the part of the music that is *not* Berlin, although it relies upon an implicit relationship to the city. The appealing *mise en scène* of Berlin itself is also a gateway, a launchpad for a fabricated yet strangely coherent parallel world, the imaginary land of Malwonia – enacted through song titles and lyrics, album graphics, website mythology and a cast of fairy-tale extras. A richly-imaginative creation of the band (specifically Carsten and Detlef), Malwonia is the fantasy alternative locus of their musical visions and aspirations. Set against the exaggerated reality of Berlin, Malwonia is a country of pirate brides and weeping angels, where taxi drivers sing love songs to donkeys. The band have created a language (Malwonian)<sup>34</sup> and an implied, if playfully ambiguous, geography. An early ?Shmaltz! song, “Yorgi Ba”, describes (in Malwonian) the journey of taxi driver Yorgi, who leaves Greece for unknown reasons and heads north. Along the way he picks up an elderly lady with a basket of chickens and a large bearded man. Further along, the chickens escape and one of the tyres bursts. Yorgi gets out and finds himself in the land of Malwonia, where his adventure begins.<sup>35</sup> Of course, without a native speaker on hand to translate, the actual meanings of the story are somewhat up for grabs – this is part of the point (and the joke). But the creation of Malwonia also plays out a musical philosophy:

<sup>33</sup> Current incarnations include Goodnight Circus: [http://www.goodnightcircus.com/Goodnight\\_Circus/home.html](http://www.goodnightcircus.com/Goodnight_Circus/home.html) and Skazka Orchestra: <http://skazka.syncopation.de>. Both accessed September 10th, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Here, for example, are some of the band’s instruments, given in Malwonian in their liner notes: *Vajolena* (violin), *Bradzbudjamon* (accordion), *Bubosh* (bass), *Quitosh Bum* (banjo) and *Dubobat* (trombone).

<sup>35</sup> As narrated to me by Carsten (interview, 2014).

The idea came that what we're doing is exactly what klezmer musicians were doing. They have their own point of view, and then they collect music – wherever they are, they put this view on the tunes. In a way, Malwonia is trying to define a tradition and place, our own. And the tradition is a mixture of all the influences that I've collected. The way we are working is like the Yiddish language. It's creole, it mixes words from its own particular language and from the environment. And the music as well. So we thought, “why don't we develop our own language, our own shtetl, our own world?”<sup>36</sup>

Berlin, then is the starting point. It's where the band members grew up, where they accumulated their influences, where they live. But Berlin is also the anchor for a dialectical relationship with the open-ended imaginary space of Malwonia. Without the symbolic ‘leaving’ of Berlin, Malwonia would itself be rootless. And without the creatively subversive presence of Malwonia, the band's relationship to Berlin would be far less dynamic and fluid. Through musical gesture and linguistic slippage, the band create a historical narrative loop running from old Berlin to new Malwonia. This connection is reinforced by album art and website graphics, offering Berlin and Malwonia as beginning and ending destinations on an imaginary train journey. The dialectic is beautifully brought to life in another *Gran Bufet* song, “Viva la Malwonia”, which Carsten describes as a Malwonian *Schlager*, a particularly German genre of light pop song. In ‘Shmaltz!’'s case, however, a quasi-Symbolist dream-like text implores us:

<i>Vergiss die welken Rosen,</i>	Forget the dying roses,
<i>die Zeit ist reif für Neues.</i>	time is ripe for the new.
<i>Bald sind wieder Blüten da.</i>	Soon blooms will return.
<i>Und selbst im tiefsten Winter,</i>	And even in deepest winter,
<i>schläft die Saat im Boden,</i>	seeds sleep in the ground,
<i>Viva la Malwonia!</i>	Viva la Malwonia!



Figure 28. “Viva la Malwonia!” (chorus), from *Gran Bufet* (?Shmaltz!, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Carsten Wegener, interview, 2014.

Part anthem to freedom, part love song, set within a consciously Germanic polka-esque aesthetic (exoticised with flattened second and occasional flattened sixth), the song is an ode to an imagined land, heard through a familiar Berlin soundworld. ?Shmaltz!’s parallel worlds are united through the artful combination of lyrics, musical style, instrumentation and *Schlager* melody.

In his discussion of the Swedish band Räfven, David Kaminsky deconstructs the expressed radicalism of their one-world philosophy to reveal a parallel erasure of klezmer’s Jewish ethnicity, enabling “the possibility of white northwestern Europeans to actually become the Other [...] by colonising the racially and culturally porous edges of whiteness and of Europe, represented geographically by the continent’s east” (Kaminsky, 2015b:201). At first glance, one might level a similar criticism at ?Shmaltz!. I would argue, however, that Carsten, Detlef and colleagues operate in a subtly different way. Firstly, they never seek to deny the ethnicity of any of their musical sources: klezmer is numbered as one influence among others, but it is also understood as stemming from a particular set of historical circumstances. Secondly, the rootedness of Berlin stops Malwoniam becoming a way of avoiding cultural and material history. In other words, they remain a *Berlin* band, despite – or perhaps as a result of – their other-world craziness.

### **“My lover, my murderer’s daughter”: Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird**

The urban ethos of city as escape, as gateway to freedom is very much part of contemporary Berlin *zeitgeist* (Ward, 2011a; Schneider, 2014). Hardly surprising in a city that for much of the last eighty years has been a piece in everyone else’s global chess game. It is, however, a very different urban ethos from that of Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird. To return to Krims: “The urban ethos thus poses a set of basic stances concerning the relationship of subjects to their urban setting: Who can go where? Who is constrained by the city, and who is freed by it?” (2007:13).

Where ?Shmaltz!, the native Berliners, are liberated adventurers, starting from the musical and linguistic vernacular of their own city, Daniel Kahn, the American Jewish incomer, finds the constraints of the city insurmountable, echoing all around him. For Kahn, Berlin is a site of unresolved questions, of disturbing historical resonances. This



is not to say that Kahn's music is artistically bounded, nor his imagination. It is specifically that he chooses a vision of Berlin that never allows us to forget history.

Helpful here is Catherine Belsey's (1980:92) concept of interrogative texts:

The interrogative text invites an answer or answers to the questions it poses [...] it also tends to employ devices to undermine the illusion, to draw attention to its own textuality. The reader is distanced, at least from time to time.

Kahn's self-dubbed *Verfremdungsklezmer* ("alienation klezmer")<sup>37</sup> demands that we actively avoid closure and continuity as ideological constructs. His distancing strategies are multiple.<sup>38</sup> The band frequently wear bird masks and sing through megaphones, effects that render them anonymous whilst simultaneously drawing attention to the materiality of voice and face by the very act of disguising them.<sup>39</sup> Kahn will slip from Yiddish to German to English, often in the course of a couple of verses. This linguistic ambiguity self-consciously erases any sense of narrative hegemony, highlighting textual construction and artifice whilst also comically distancing different listeners at different points – in a multilingual city, no two audience members are likely to 'get' exactly the same thing.

It is an instance of historical ambiguity and geographical specificity on which I now want to concentrate, the very un-klezmer song "Görlitzer Park". Görlitzer Park is a broad strip of open space running west from the canal in Kreuzberg. A popular hangout, it is known for Mayday massed groups, funky musical gatherings and widespread dope smoking. From this liveliest of Berlin spaces, however, Kahn conjures a symbolic wasteland, a scene of tragic love, but more importantly a space that, far from transcending Berlin's history, in fact symbolically catapults us right back into it. The site of the park was originally Görlitzer Bahnhof, a mainline terminus. Badly hit by wartime bombing, it was eventually all but demolished by the 1970s. Languishing unused during the rest of the Cold War, the site has, within the last few years, become one of Kreuzberg's well-known 'do what you like' spaces, as well as a site of refugee

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<sup>37</sup> A 'klezmerised' version of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect): "[an] intention to show the action in the process of being made: that is to say, to confront an audience with a performance [...] a continual and explicit contrast with all those means to a suspension of disbelief before an illusion of reality" (Williams, 1968:279).

<sup>38</sup> Waligórska (2010:120-1) notes that by placing *Verfremdungsklezmer* in "spaces of entertainment" [such as Kaffee Burger, see Chapter 2], the band "introduce a dissonance between the function of the spaces they play at and the contents of their songs, alienating the spectator".

<sup>39</sup> Bakhtin (1984:40): "The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames."

protest.<sup>40</sup> This contemporary manifestation figures little, however, in Kahn's treatment, which instead uses the park as a spatial embodiment of wartime and post-war unease:

in the garden of frozen desire  
on the derelict couch we sat down  
wie die Stadt hier wir brauchten ein Feuer [like this town we needed fire]  
um uns aufzuwecken vom Traum [to wake us from our dream]  
und du mit den blutigen Haaren [and you with your bloody hair]  
ich seh' deine Augen sind zu [I see that your eyes are closed]  
so I'll be the Wilhelmine Baron & you can be the ewiger Jew [...eternal Jew]<sup>41</sup>

The city is emphatically placed in the song text: Grunewald station, the Treptower Soviet war memorial, the famous Fernsehturm and the more recent *Stolpersteine*. But none of these placements is mere atmosphere – they all relate directly to the city-in-war and post-war, and mostly evoke a specifically Jewish history.<sup>42</sup> The similes and metaphors that dot the text create a semiotic slippage between subject, object, time, and Berlin itself, a back and forth of perspective and identity that finds its echo in the disinterested and endless journey of the trains below (see figures 29-31).

Musically, the song is unadorned, a steady three-four ballad set to ukulele, bass, strings and toy piano – an interesting echo of ?Shmaltz!'s other-worldly sound. The melodic compass of the verse is small, the harmonic progression subtle and unshowy, underscoring the song's pathos rather than playing-up its lurid drama (figure 29).

The rising major seventh then minor sixth of the chorus vocal line open things up a little, offering a high melodic point from which the tune descends to an octave below (figure 30). That this most dramatic musical moment so far should accompany the monotony of the trains running in darkness below adds an extra poignancy.

This expansion, however, is quickly reined in with the second half of the chorus, returning to its familiar four-note range. Where the song steps out musically is in the middle eight. The lyrical D major becomes an angry D minor, and a series of minor 1-5 cadences ratchets up the harmonic rhythm. This is intensified by a more strident violin

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/kreuzberg-berlin-s-hip-district-becomes-a-battleground-between-dealers-and-gentrification-9909118.html>. Accessed February 4th, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> For the full text, see: [http://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R77\\_GOERLITZER\\_PARK.pdf](http://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/R77_GOERLITZER_PARK.pdf). Accessed August 23rd, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Grunewald S-Bahn station lies next to the infamous Gleis 17, the platform from which trains departed for Auschwitz and Theresienstadt. The *Stolpersteine* ("stumble stones") found all over Berlin are small gold-coloured plaques embedded in the pavement marking the names and former residences of victims of Nazi deportations (see Chapter 6).

Ukulele  $\text{♩} = 120$

Voice

Die Ru - in-en vom Gör - litz-er Park were

Uk.

Vo.

cold as a stone in the ground a - ber

Uk.

Vo.

Stei - ne sind e - ben - so stark as the

Uk.

Vo.

rub - ble hid un - der the mound and your

Detailed description: This figure shows the first verse of the song 'Görlitzer Park'. It consists of four systems of music. Each system includes a Ukulele (Uk.) part in the treble clef and a Voice part in the bass clef. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: 'Die Ru - in-en vom Gör - litz-er Park were cold as a stone in the ground a - ber Stei - ne sind e - ben - so stark as the rub - ble hid un - der the mound and your'.

Figure 29. “Görlitzer Park” (first verse) from *Lost Causes* (Daniel Kahn, 2011).

Toy Piano

Ukulele

Violin

Voice

Acoustic Bass

and the trains of Ber - lin they run her und hin

Toy Pno.

Uk.

Vln.

Vo.

through tunnels be - low in the dark though the

Bass

Detailed description: This figure shows the first half of the chorus of 'Görlitzer Park'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system includes Toy Piano, Ukulele (Uk.), Violin (Vln.), Voice, and Acoustic Bass. The second system includes Toy Piano (Toy Pno.), Ukulele (Uk.), Violin (Vln.), Voice, and Bass. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: 'and the trains of Ber - lin they run her und hin through tunnels be - low in the dark though the'.

Figure 30. “Görlitzer Park” (first half of chorus) from *Lost Causes* (Daniel Kahn, 2011).

Toy Piano

Violin

Voice

Acoustic Bass

Drumset

where the sun is as gold as the names on the ground

*arco*

Toy Pno.

Vln.

Vo.

Bass

Drs.

and the walls grow up o - ver the trees and the

*sim*

Toy Pno.

Vln.

Vo.

Bass

Drs.

to-wer an - te-nna is haunt - ing the town and the

Toy Pno.

Vln.

Vo.

Bass

Drs.

past is a qui - et dis - ease

Figure 31. "Görlitzer Park" (middle 8) from *Lost Causes* (Daniel Kahn, 2011).

part, the bass switching to *arco*, and the first entrance of Hampus Melin's unforgiving drums, played heavily and ruthlessly on the first beat of each bar. Fittingly, here the lyrics are most accusatory, the references to National Socialist and Cold War legacy most pointed, explicitly named and implicated, along with the city's silence (figure 31).

Textually, the song is structured around a sense of debasement and reversal. This is a world where walls grow higher than trees, where lovers are murderers and identities are transient. It is a place marked by silence, subterfuge, borders and transgressions. In short, Berlin as it once was. And indeed most interesting in this song is its wilful refusal to 'move on', its avowed recognition that everyone is, in some senses, implicated. The "ruins" that Kahn sings of are nowadays a vibrant Sunday hangout. Children visit the urban farm, couples laze on the rocks, sound systems vie with *djembes* for sonic domination in the large grass-covered crater that was once a linking tunnel under the railway. But Kahn forces us to reexamine the site, pointedly reminding us that one thing cannot exist without the other, that *all* our dark pasts are never far from the surface. Even the most tender of lover's gazes, framed by Berlin's most sociable of spaces, has to confront the murderer's daughter who lies behind:

where the air is filled up with sparrows when once it was clouded with crows  
& the Sleepwalker shot his last arrow then he buried himself with his bow  
oh my lover, my murderer's daughter accomplice to all of my sins  
our city of love & of slaughter  
wird immer noch heißen Berlin. . . . [will always be called Berlin]

In talking with Dan last year, he told me, "I embrace Jewishness as a historical identity, but I like to choose what history I am engaging with".<sup>43</sup> This historical choice seems to be at the heart of the song, confronting not only a relationship to Jewishness, but also the role of history in a Jew's present-day relationship to his adopted Berlin. Kahn's urban ethos is one which must acknowledge the worst parts of the city's history as fundamental to his place in the city, as well as the city's place in his music. A similar dual-viewpoint can be seen in the more recent (2012) song "Good Old Bad Old Days".<sup>44</sup> Part *Bierkeller* waltz, part Russian singalong, intricately balanced between romantic *Ostalgie* (Bartmanski, 2011) and an acute historical reality, the song is both a recognition of the absurdity of normalised Wall-era life (Moran, 2004:218) and an

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<sup>43</sup> Interview, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> *Bad Old Songs*. Oriente Musik, RIEN 84.

ironic yearning for its return in the light of the shortcomings of reunification. Kahn's lolloping accordion and Paul Brody's bar-room trumpet nod clearly to a bygone soundworld, whilst their paralleling of the wandering duos heard frequently on today's Berlin streets<sup>45</sup> also acts as a contemporary reference to post-Communist migration. Kahn's vocal delivery moves gradually from cabaret crooner to impassioned and angry soapbox, nicely echoing the song's ironic lyrical transformation from clandestine love song to enraged and deserted ideologue:

all the streetlights were waltzing together, crimson & green  
& your dress was as gray as the weather, oh what a dream  
we built up a city of whispers & classified war dossiers  
I gave you control of my papers & soul  
in the good old bad old days

ah yes wasn't it miserable, wasn't it grand?  
when the world had an iron divide  
& people could take a political stand  
just by singing a song for the opposite side  
now nobody cares who you are anymore & nobody cares what you say  
it's liberty's curse, but was it really much worse  
in the good old bad old days?<sup>46</sup>

### **The many languages of Yiddish**

From the beginnings of its revival in Germany, klezmer and Yiddish music has often spoken with an international accent. In the 1980s and 1990s, Giora Feidman and American musicians led workshops in the country, and the effects of their teaching are still keenly felt today.<sup>47</sup> At the time, however, this was largely a unidirectional transaction: international musicians 'teaching' Germans how to play klezmer, with more (Brave Old World) or less (Feidman) emphasis on the music's cultural roots. Since then, the traffic has increasingly flowed both ways, and the renewed internationalism of the city itself has begun to make itself felt in its music and musical networks. Of the thirty-odd musicians who I interviewed in depth, Germans made up less than half. Other nationalities included American, Latvian, Swedish, Dutch, Ukrainian, Russian, Israeli and Australian, all resident in the city and fully involved in its musical life. To find a

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<sup>45</sup> Frequently, though not exclusively, Roma musicians from Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia.

<sup>46</sup> For the song's full lyrics (and the rest of the album), see: [http://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/RIEN84\\_Booklet.pdf](http://www.paintedbird.de/images/stories/kahn/pdf/RIEN84_Booklet.pdf). Accessed August 23rd, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> In particular, the influence of Brave Old World was acknowledged by bassists Heiko Lehmann and Carsten Wegener, clarinetist Jan Hermerschmidt, and accordionists Sanne Möricke and Franka Lampe (interviews, 2013 & 2014).

multinational group of musicians in any large capital city is of course not unusual, but what I want to highlight is the effect of this multinationalism on the music itself, and in particular how this has begun to promote a distinctive poly-linguality within the city's klezmer and Yiddish music scene. In other words, how Berlin's international make-up is given musical presence and substance, in what ways the music marks this particular Berlin discourse. Once again, an idea of Berlin as something of a blank canvas for the music is important here: in the absence of an unbroken link, contemporary klezmer practitioners in the city are in some senses free to (re)create their tradition in whatever ways they see fit, bricolaging language, style and sonority. Again, however, this is not simply mere postmodern genre-crossing.<sup>48</sup> Rather, I would argue, it is an appropriate musical and linguistic response to the cosmopolitanism of contemporary European Yiddish identity.<sup>49</sup> Here is Forshpil singer and Yiddish song teacher Sasha Lurje talking about the resonances of the city's open-ended internationality for her:

this place where it's quite easy to find your place. Just humanly [...] You can do certain things, but you don't have to *be*. Like you can choose to be Russian, Jewish, Turkish, American, whatever. But you don't *have* to. And it makes life much easier, compared to other places where, whatever you do there's a kind of stamp on your forehead. And I think that creates a lot of space for people to try things and to be here, you know?<sup>50</sup>

As a way of exploring this, I want to look at two examples of emplacement of this ambiguously free-floating 'Berlin-ness' within Jewish music-making in the city. The first is playful, the second problematic. Knoblauch Klezmer Band is a five-piece that has been playing klezmer in and around Berlin for the last three years. The personnel typify the current internationalism of the city's music scene, consisting of an Israeli fiddle player, a French clarinetist, a Scottish accordion player, and a Berlin-born bassist and drummer. Knoblauch began by playing well-known klezmer tunes,<sup>51</sup> supplemented by *coceks* and *rebetiko*, but more recently original compositions (strongly influenced by klezmer and Balkan melody and harmony) have begun to play a more prominent role, largely under the influence of their ambitious and dynamic accordionist Chris Lyons.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Frith (1996:114) makes the point that postmodern musical fluidity in fact frequently ensures that genre and high/low divisions remain intact.

<sup>49</sup> An admittedly slippery concept, yet one that, for example, Alan Bern's Yiddish Summer Weimar continues to explore.

<sup>50</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Naftule Brandwein's "der Heyser Bulgar" and "Firn di Mekhutonim Aheym" and Shloimke Beckermann's "Ot Azoi", all of which can be found in Sapoznik and Sokolow (1987).

<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, I knew Chris a little when he was a young jazz pianist in Edinburgh. Since then, he has graduated in piano and composition from the Royal Academy and relocated to the suburban Berlin neighbourhood of Wedding.

Of the band members, only fiddle player Eli Fabrikant is tied in any significant sense to other musicians and networks discussed in this thesis – he is a regular participant at Bar Oblomov and in 2014 attended Yiddish Summer Weimar’s instrumental workshop week. This is significant, as Fabrikant is also, by his own admission, the musician in the band who has taken most time and effort to explore and internalise an idiomatic klezmer vocabulary.

There are two aspects that make Knoblauch an interesting topic for discussion and distinctly locate the city in their music. The first of these is an extra-musical aspect: their onstage outfits. Where the band’s soundworld rarely departs far from a conventional klezmer aesthetic,<sup>53</sup> beefed-up with heavier drums and plenty of onstage testosterone, their visual impact is anything but: tricorn hats, sequined waistcoats, pink feather boas, purple veils, skin-tight PVC trousers and universally bare feet are common fare. As mentioned before, wardrobes like this are not unusual on the Berlin stage. What is perhaps different with Knoblauch is the apparent disjuncture between the traditional sound and roots of their music and the fantastical performance attire. For violinist Eli, this juxtaposition also describes a transformation in his own perception of what the band is doing, and their relationship to the place in which they are doing it:

I found myself in the beginning really trying to break this and saying ‘guys, it’s really easy to dress up funny and play funny circus music, but we know a hundred bands that are doing that.’ But the moment that I realised, wait, wait, wait, it’s not instead of making good music, it’s in *addition* to making clever, beautiful interesting music. And I said, yeah! you can go crazy and not be like the traditional German klezmer, all buttoned-up, wearing what they think *klezmerim* wore, trying to produce something that states it out loud. But saying, ok, it’s Berlin, those guys have nothing to do with Jewish culture or klezmer per se, but they love the vibe and this is how they express it.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, what began for Eli as an almost accidental collision of Berlin cabaret codes and Jewish folk music has come to embody a particular response and approach to this same music. It locates the band’s intentions within the contemporary world of Berlin performance, consciously distanced from the perceived artificiality and cliché of ‘recreated’ klezmer semiotics. And more than this, the band’s visual statement in fact articulates what for them is in fact a closer, more authentic relationship to their musical forebears:

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<sup>53</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, 2014.



I don't know, I was always thinking about at least some descriptions of *klezmerim*. Not everybody agrees what was exactly going on there. But one of the descriptions that I read about was really about this, a little bit outcasts. It wasn't the respected members of the community, they were always like the troublemakers and so on [...] So for me, I said, ok, this is how I feel klezmer, actually.<sup>55</sup>

From the more bordered structures of the German klezmer revival, Knoblauch's inclusive zaniness offers an alternative functional reading, one that opens up the music's counter-cultural meanings in a non-confrontational, distinctly Berlin-rooted way. A good illustration is their cover of German electronic pioneers Kraftwerk's famous "Das Modell" [The Model]. Introduced at gigs by clarinetist Arnaud Duvoux, in heavily-pastiched East European accent, as "an old song from the women of the *shtetl*", the tune is a smart and witty reworking of 70s electronica into an acoustic dance anthem, complete with Moldovan-esque instrumental break.<sup>56</sup> Structurally, Knoblauch's version is surprisingly faithful, the opening motif here turned by Lyons into an accordion left hand pattern, while his right hand becomes an acoustic drum machine (figure 32).



Figure 32. "Das Modell" (opening) from *Fruit of Life* EP (Knoblauch Klezmer Band, 2013).

As part of the 'klezmerising' process, fiddle player Eli offers counterlines to the vocal melody, moved up a minor third and altered to fit the sharpened fourth of the *misheberakh*<sup>57</sup> mode (figure 33).



Figure 33. "Das Modell" (verse excerpt) from *Fruit of Life* EP (Knoblauch Klezmer Band, 2013).

As a final *tour de force*, the band transforms the iconic arpeggiated synth line of the original into a boisterous wordless singalong (figure 34), a quasi-*nigun* beginning

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> In fact, an original tune written by accordionist Lyons.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 1.

slowly and accelerating back up to speed, with plenty of tongue-in-cheek shouts and ad libs in the process. Part bottle dance, part football chant, it is a nicely irreverent nod both to Jewish wedding musical traditions and the pogoing tendencies of their dancefloor demographic – a piece of motivic and stylistic elision that bridges the German techno scene<sup>58</sup> and the Berlin klezmer discourse.

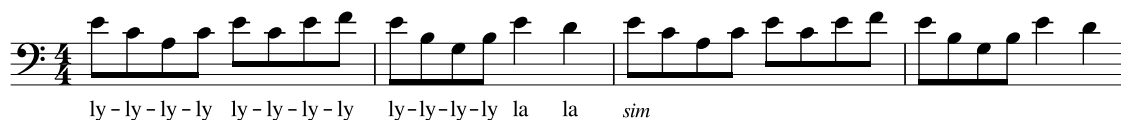


Figure 34. “Das Modell” (chorus) from *Fruit of Life* EP (Knoblauch Klezmer Band, 2013).

### Fantasiaist geography and the New Old Europe Sound

Chapter 1 explored the notion of a fantasiaist klezmer aesthetic. The musicians in this category (?Shmaltz!, Knoblauch Klezmer Band, Di Meschugeles<sup>59</sup>) are marked by a large degree of playfulness in their presentation, which in turn frames a particularly personal engagement with klezmer musical identity. They have taken historical romanticising of the *shtetl*<sup>60</sup> to its semi-absurd conclusion. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the elements that make up ?Shmaltz!’s weirdly coherent imaginary land of Malwonia, and also Knoblauch’s re-creation of the roots of German electronic dance music as a deconstructed version of Yiddish tradition. We might probe this fantasiaist tendency a little more – examining geography, Kaminsky’s (2015a) ‘New Old Europe Sound’, and how this might be theorised back into the contemporary city.

The fantasiaists’ playful version of provenance taps directly into the paradigm of Berlin’s *bricolage* approach to cultural production discussed in Chapter 2. In a city that has spent the last few decades reinventing itself,<sup>61</sup> such self-conscious parallel klezmer worlds are a good fit. Emplaced within networks of performers, venues and recordings, these imaginary territories gain a material foothold in the day-to-day cultural operations of the city itself. But there is also an inevitable sense of escapism in these creations, a less specific sense of ‘elsewhere’. Amin and Thrift (2002:119) suggest that the city

<sup>58</sup> Of which Kraftwerk are acknowledged pioneers.

<sup>59</sup> Although I have not discussed the band Di Meschugeles at any length in this thesis, their adoption of playful origin myths, musical eclecticism and ‘post-hippy’ stage gear show clear links to the other fantasiaists.

<sup>60</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>61</sup> Schneider (2014:8), for example, writes of “Cinderella Berlin”. See also Elsaesser (2009).

offers “spaces of escape”, which allow subjects to “unfold in various ways”. These are spaces of the imagination, but the network operations of a city give them form:

cities and regions come with no automatic promise of territorial or systemic integrity, since they are made through the spatiality of flow, juxtaposition, porosity and relational connectivity [...] ‘hauntings’ of things (Amin, 2004:34).

In other words, we might read the deliberately ambiguous territoriality of these bands as a direct response to the city itself, a set of musical and contextual juxtapositions to set against the absence of “territorial or systemic integrity”. In this way, the worlds of fantasist klezmer become less concerned with specific geographic imaginaries and more with articulating the spatial fluidity and indeterminacy of the city itself. Whilst they might not all be fantasising about the same thing, a positioning of their music as an imagined geographic response points up interesting similarities.

Tajbakhsh (2001:83) suggests that the “promise of the city” lies in “the freedom to glimpse our own hybridity, our own contingency”. The gleeful profusion of competing identities and creative probing of hybridity is, of course, hardly specific to klezmer. But in the context of the debates that have surrounded klezmer music in the last two decades,<sup>62</sup> it is important to ask if we can also detect a specific ideological layer at work here. In his theorising of the ‘New Old Europe Sound’, Kaminsky (2015a:144) suggests that the erasure of specific ethnic origins of certain musics allows contemporary practitioners, often with no ethnic ties, to claim this East European musical “bricolage” (*ibid.*:143), at the same time denying Roma, Jewish and Balkan identity further agency in their music.

How much can we apply this critique to the music of the fantasists? ?Shmaltz!’s Carsten Wegener is quick to point up the traditional roots of the music he plays, but identifies his own musical journey as a continuously developing journey.

I was always interested in traditional styles, this is a big thing for me [...] pretty soon, I found what I need in music for myself is some root, and in the beginning it was American roots, because all this world music was just not on the market, you couldn’t really find it. And then, I was almost searching for styles – I like cajun and zydeco, I like the roughness. And it’s the same with *cumbia* [...] Later I went on to explore other territories, like playing a hora with a musical saw or with blues

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<sup>62</sup> Ottens and Rubin (2004), Morris (2001), Gruber (2002) and others.

harmonica, but in the beginning it was very traditional, I just wanted to learn the traditions.<sup>63</sup>

Whilst ?Shmaltz! cover a wide range of styles in their music, Wegener – as noted earlier – is careful not to erase the origins of these musics, whilst at the same time defending in creative terms his right as a musician to adapt it. And although ?Shmaltz! exhibit clear “blurring” of sonic markers (Kaminsky, 2015a:144), Wegener’s strong network ties to the city’s klezmer scene<sup>64</sup> also place him in a much more direct relation to klezmer as (originally) Jewish music.

In dealing with questions of appropriation, however, we must also engage with the musicians’ sense of their own ethnic identity, although – as the comments many of the musicians in this thesis demonstrate – a musician’s Jewishness does not give them any more or less ‘right’ *per se* to klezmer music than anyone else. Nevertheless, both Knoblauch’s Eli Fabrikant and Di Meschugeles’ Marina Bondas draw explicit links between their own constantly-evolving Jewish identity and the music they play. By his own admission, Eli sees his musical role (in good-natured conflict with the rest of the band) as continuing to define the ‘klezmer’ part of Knoblauch Klezmer Band – in contrast to other forces in the band who are happy to blur the lines more readily. For Eli, this dialectic is intimately connected to his life as an Israeli in Berlin:

I define myself by Zionism, but I also placed myself against all the Jewish culture that I knew. And I think that coming here really mixed up everything, because suddenly I was not a majority [...] And then I started asking myself, am I a Jew? What does it mean, actually to be a Jew. Because in Israel it’s a default, it was just kind of external rules. *Here suddenly I felt it really strong.* And I started asking myself also what it means, what my parents and my grandparents went through, what Jewish identity meant to them. And it was also strange, because my parents were not listening to klezmer music, and they did not know Yiddish, they barely knew anything about Jewish culture [...] what is this tag, what does it mean, and why do I feel it so strongly?<sup>65</sup>

In other words, it is the city of Berlin which has prompted these questions for Eli, and the musical processes of klezmer and his band that allows him to explore them further. As his comments in Chapter 1 illustrate, the fantasist indeterminacy of Knoblauch Klezmer Band offers an effectively fluid environment within which to do this. We might

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<sup>63</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Through his participation in jam sessions, Germany-wide workshops, and as an early member of German klezmer bands such as Yardniks.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, 2014, my italics.

usefully understand Eli's keenly-felt yet ambiguous self-discovery as a series of *tactics* – de Certeau's (1984:100) “shadows and ambiguities” (in the form of musical and personal responses) to set against the grander historical narrative of Jewish identity.

Marina Bondas, a Kiev-born Jew who has lived in Berlin since she was a teenager, sees her mediating of Di Meschugeles' eclecticism in specific instrumental terms:

I'm responsible for this original klezmer sound, because if you put for example violin and another instrument, another instrument can play in a completely different style but when there is a klezmer violin, it makes something [...] And yeah actually in the band everybody is important and has their role. It's not like I'm the boss and they are just – no no, it's just when we are talking about klezmer, the real klezmer, this is my job.<sup>66</sup>

Both of these musicians, then, understand their roles, at least partially, as ‘anchors’ – their musical approach (informed by issues of personal identity) acts to place some boundaries around the fantasist enterprise and to a certain degree ground it. This function, I would argue, offers a more nuanced reading of the ‘New Old Europe’ paradigm, acting as a bridge between the rootless tendencies critiqued by Kaminsky and a more considered approach to musical tradition. This is explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

### **Berlin as Borderland**

A final and powerful example of the tying of music to place, or specifically to musically-emplaced heritage, comes again from Daniel Kahn, this time in collaboration with singer Sasha Lurje. For their performance at the Gorki Theater in January 2014, the duo put together a programme of *Strangelovesongs – fremde Liebe, fremde Lieder, fremde Sprachen*.<sup>67</sup> In an evening that leapt gleefully between German, English, Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew, one of the most striking moments came with the pair's rendition of the Yiddish chestnut *Margaritkelech*.<sup>68</sup> The song tells the story of Chavele, a young girl who heads dreamily into the forest to pick daisies. There she meets a man with whom she has falls (briefly) in love. The setting sun finds the man gone and Chavele once again alone in the woods. Conventional interpretations of the song play it

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<sup>66</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>67</sup> “strange love, strange songs, strange languages”.

<sup>68</sup> Originally a 1909 poem by Zalman Shneour, the song was published in Menachem Kipnis' 1918 *folkslider* collection and has been recorded by Theodore Bikel and Chava Alberstein, amongst many others.

as a coy coming-of-age fairytale, the gently comic commingling of the man's black hair and flaming eyes with Chavele's ("the prettiest daisy of all") blond curls, lost in a dream and far away from her elderly mother's beady eye, underscored by the gentle 3/4 lilt of the music. Kahn and Lurje's version, however, found a much darker heart to the song, foregrounded by a closer inspection of the lyrics:

<p>–O, loz mikh, men tor nit;  <i>di mame zogt m'tor nit</i>  <i>Mayn mame iz alt un iz beyz.</i>  –Vu mame? vos mame?  <i>do zaynen nor beymer,</i>  <i>Nor beymelekh, tra-la-la-la.</i>  –Du libst mikh? –Ikh lib dikh!  –Du shemst dikh?  –Ikh shem mikh!  –O lib mikh un shem dikh un shvayg.</p> <p><i>Un ze vi es mishn zikh pekh-shvartse kroyzn</i>  <i>Mit goldene... tra-la-la-la.</i><sup>69</sup></p>	<p>–O, let me go, I mustn't;  mama said I mustn't  My mama is old and wicked.  –Where's mama? What mama?  There's only trees here,  only young trees, tra-la-la-la.  –Do you love me? –I love you!  –Are you ashamed?  –I'm ashamed!  –O love me and be ashamed  and keep quiet.  And see how pitch black curls mix  With golden ones... tra-la-la-la.</p>
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In order to further push the point home, Kahn and Lurje's rendition arrested the musical accompaniment (up to this point motoring along jollily) at "Vu mame?" above. Kahn spat out his questions with menace, Lurje answered them with eyes averted, in a whisper. The music again halted at "shvayg", delivered now as a venomous shout. That the sweet pastoral had turned sourly into sexual abuse was clear, but this is not all that the pair found in the song. This particular rendition was smoothly spliced with Heinrich Werner's setting of Goethe's *Röslein auf der Heiden*, a well-known German song telling a similar tale:

<p><i>Und der wilde Knabe brach</i>  <i>'s Röslein auf der Heiden;</i>  <i>Röslein wehrte sich und stach,</i>  <i>Half ihr doch kein Weh und Ach,</i>  <i>Mußt' es eben leiden.</i>  <i>Röslein, Röslein, Röslein rot,</i>  <i>Röslein auf der Heiden.</i><sup>70</sup></p>	<p>And the savage boy picked  the little rose on the heath;  The little Rose fought and pricked,  Still no pain or cry could help her,  She had to suffer all the same.  Little rose, little red rose,  Little rose on the heath.</p>
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Just in case anyone that evening might have missed the significance of re-framing a much-loved German song (with words by one of Germany's favourite poets) as a

<sup>69</sup> Mlotek (1987:40).

<sup>70</sup> Goethe (1882:12).

metaphor for rape and abuse, the duo stopped their performance part-way through for this brief commentary from Kahn:

Ok, this is a fucked-up song [*Margaritkelech*, at this point]. I really hate this song and actually I wanted to somehow create an entire programme in which I could sing this song that I fucking *hate*. And I hate “Röslein auf der Heide” too. And you shouldn’t ever sing it [laughter]. It’s not pretty. And look, yeah, ok, *a bokher, a shvartse*,<sup>71</sup> it doesn’t mean that he’s dark, it means that he has black hair. Which is also fucked-up too! It’s a cliché and it’s racist and it’s sexist and it’s *gewalttätig* [violent].

That folklore can be dark and revealing is not a radical concept (Propp, 1968). Folk songs and folk tales are frequently read as a way of establishing (and challenging) cultural ground rules of sexuality and deviance (Levi Strauss, 1968; Foucault, 1978). But to bookend a Goethe poem with a Yiddish folksong and to implicate both in a chilling tale of rape and subjugation is to take things to a different plane, a refusal to close the semiotic gap:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable (Lyotard, 1993:46).

And given the context of an evening of “strange love songs”, music of alterity and difference, the historical association of German-Jewish power relations is also unavoidable here. Especially interesting, however, is how Lurje and Kahn upset the norms of this power dialectic: both sides are collusive, the parochial Yiddish lullaby as guilty as the nineteenth-century German pastoral. Once again, the particularly Berlin urban ethos foregrounded here is one where border lines are impossible to draw, and sides are never clear: frontiers are porous, ambiguous and unreliable.<sup>72</sup> Somewhere between Yiddish song tradition and radical singer-songwriter politics, Berlin is emphatically (re)framed as a *borderland*:

A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants [...] those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’ (Anzaldúa, 1987:3-4).

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<sup>71</sup> The description of the man who Chavele meets in the forest. In this case it means “a guy with black hair”.

<sup>72</sup> cf. Silberman, Till & Ward (2012:5): “boundaries are far from fixed, static entities [...] they offer possibilities of survival and adaptation and the hope of self-transformation. They may be also understood as activist markers”.

## Conclusion

John Shepherd (1991:214) suggests that, existing within the “cracks and margins”, beyond “what passes for ‘reality’”, music can act as mediator between “the acceptable and the unacceptable, that which is powerful and that which is dangerous.” Perhaps best placed, then, to articulate all possible dimensions of the urban ethos. Through the twentieth and into the twenty first century, Berlin has been cosmopolitan hotspot, National Socialist epicentre, cold war frontier, beacon of new Europeanism and Europe’s coolest “poor, but sexy”<sup>73</sup> city. That its sound world should reflect this is not surprising – the various historical manifestations of Berlin are inseparable from the city’s cultural production. They become points of reference in the city’s urban ethos. For the majority of klezmer and Yiddish musicians in Berlin, the city that is central to their day to day lives figures only peripherally in their musical meanings. For the few who do take it on, the multiple dimensions uncovered within offer versions of musical emplacement that continue to open up creatively ongoing dialogues with the city in which they live and breathe. The next chapter will take one step back from these very specific methods of emplacement, focusing on the various ways that the music is transmitted and taught within and without the city.



Figure 35. Neukölln graffiti. Rumours of the band’s demise were premature. On Halloween 2014, they appeared (“undead”) at Gorki Theater. Photo March 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Mayor Klaus Wowereit’s famous characterisation of Berlin as “arm, aber sexy”, now reproduced on tourist t-shirts and postcards, has by now arguably become something of a millstone around the city’s neck.



## 4. Curating the Tradition: Repertoire, Dissemination and Learning

### Introduction

So far I have discussed the people, places and musical material involved in the various constructions of Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music. I have argued that the networks of musicians create a fluid and ongoing narrative of different musical meanings and that the spaces within which these explorations happen in turn place different emphases on certain parts of the dialogue. The previous chapter showed how the historical and frequently contradictory meanings of the city of Berlin itself are now beginning to insert themselves into this dialogue. Underlying these different discourses are the conflicting, creative and occasionally frustrating dimensions of musical tradition: its meanings, relevance and diverse interpretations in the contemporary urban context.

The city space offers the possibility of riding the rough tides of the moment while at the same time creating those new spaces for diverse communities to unfurl their senses of leisure, fantasy, and to experiment with new forms of competing identities in a context defined by heterogeneity that by its very nature redefines meanings of belonging and traditional markers of culture and identity (Ogude, 2012:151).

Much like the continued debate that seems to dog a suitable definition for ethnomusicology,<sup>1</sup> folklore writers have covered many pages discussing and questioning the precise meanings of “tradition” and “traditional” (cf. Blank & Howard, 2013). So much so that Dorothy Noyes talks of “a tradition of talking about tradition: not so much a progression of ideas as a continual reworking of base meanings” (2009:234). With reference to klezmer music, Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett (2002) and Mark Slobin (2000) both problematise the relationship between tradition and heritage, and in a similar way polymath musicologist David McGuinness (forthcoming) cites “The Problem with ‘Traditional’” in the Scottish context. Nevertheless, for all its ambiguities – or perhaps in order to probe them – ‘tradition’ is a term I will use freely in this chapter, whilst remaining fully aware of the pitfalls of definition. To better understand the heterogeneous discourses at play, I will look at processes of transmission, dissemination and education. Drawing widely on a range of material, each

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<sup>1</sup> Here is Bruno Nettl (2005:4) memorably summarising the problem: “It is difficult to find a single, simple definition, to which most people in this field would subscribe, and thus ethnomusicologists have been perhaps excessively concerned with defining themselves [...] There are various types of definitions: Some tell what each ethnomusicologist must do or be in order to merit the title, and some synthesize what the entire group does. Others focus on what has transpired in terms of research activity, or on what should in fact have been done, or what must eventually be done.”

section explores a particular ‘take’ on tradition and its processes – whether revitalising, uncovering, curating, or living within it.

A discussion about ‘spreading the tradition’ as it applies to Berlin today offers a chance to look at how theories of musical revival stack up with the scene under analysis, but also an opportunity to look at how an idea of ‘the tradition’ has been re-established in the first place. My argument necessarily incorporates both product and process: “The telling is the tale; therefore the narrator, his story, and his audience are all related to each other as components of a single continuum” (Ben-Amos, 1971:10). And as Livingston (1999), Noyes (2009) and others have noted, it is within the field of revival that questions of ownership, control, democracy and power come to the fore:

The paradoxes of heritage are well understood: it recuperates a dead tradition of the lifeworld (or even kills off a living one) in order to bring it to a second life in print, in the museum, or onstage. There the tradition no longer serves ordinary social purposes but is an object of veneration in its own right, a monument of cultural identity; its form, “protected” from decay or corruption, becomes frozen in time (Noyes, 2009:246-7).

In the North American klezmer revival, these “paradoxes of heritage” emerged from a context of post-1960s identity politics (Netsky, 2002b; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002; Sapoznik, 1987). In Germany, however, the music offered a very different form of identification, in that this was Jewish music that was – initially – rarely played by Jews. Germans were neither playing klezmer in order to reconnect with lost roots nor to re-identify with their own submerged culture:

With the change of the repertoire from guitar-orientated Yiddish song, mostly connected to the Holocaust, to clarinet-oriented Klezmer style, musicians’ motivation for performing Yiddish music changed. The younger generation, born roughly between 1960 and 1980, were looking for a musical identity in the context of folklore and world music. They stressed the cheerful aspect of Klezmer, most of them freeing themselves from a classical music training [...] Their love of the sound of Yiddish music was their first motivation for their musical activity, but they nevertheless asked themselves about the unconscious function Jewish music had for them as young Germans (Eckstaedt, 2010:42).

That the culture being revived<sup>2</sup> had been destroyed as a result of Germany’s own actions inevitably brought about its own questions of identity and motivation (Gruber, 2002;

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that the term ‘revival’ has relatively few adherents amongst Berlin’s klezmer and Yiddish musical fraternity and is usually invoked ironically or in imaginary quote marks. Most feel that a revival signifies a complete prior absence (not the case), and also that anything as flimsy as a revival would have died out again by now.

Ottens & Rubin, 2004; Birnbaum, 2009). But as the scene has swelled over the last twenty years, more and more Jewish musicians have entered this discussion who are using the music to explore their own Jewish cultural identity, or indeed the idea of Jewish cultural identity in the first place. In the previous chapters we have seen how this begins to problematise associated notions of belonging, ownership and cultural heritage. This chapter looks at how the raw materials for this debate are informed to a greater or lesser extent by choices of repertoire, processes of dissemination and frameworks of education. In other words, who is in charge of the ‘tradition’?

### **Tradition?**

And how do we keep our balance?

That I can tell you in a word.

Tradition!

Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years...

(Jerry Bock & Sheldon Harnick, *Fiddler on the Roof*)<sup>3</sup>

Tevye’s charming monologue is included here for more than simply kitsch value. Sheldon Harnick’s 1964 lyrics were written from a Jewish-American musical perspective that had dominated the sound of Broadway for several decades (Everett & Laird, 2011:38), but they are also playfully reflective of a persistent nostalgic hegemony: the security of an assimilated Jewish-American identity allowing a cushion of distance from and affection for the ‘Old Country’.<sup>4</sup> Tradition through this filter is neither fully pastoral nor idealistically aspirational, although it takes in both. It is self-referential and self-mocking, complacent yet indulgent – an unbending and occasionally incomprehensible series of rules of uncertain provenance that we follow in order to “keep our balance”.<sup>5</sup> For the put-upon and beleaguered residents of Anatevka,<sup>6</sup> tradition is something to hold onto in a changing and increasingly out-of-control world. For a knowing twentieth and twenty first century audience, it is something to be nostalgically indulged: a wistful and ironic memory of simpler times yet also a cultural straitjacket from which we collectively position ourselves as having moved on.

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<sup>3</sup> Limelight Editions (1964:2).

<sup>4</sup> On the “Americanization” of Tevye see Wolitz (1988).

<sup>5</sup> Ellen Koskoff (2000:74,171-2) notes how *Fiddler* is used in American Lubavitcher communities as a basis for group singing. Now *there’s* an irony...

<sup>6</sup> Kasrilevke in Sholem Aleichem’s original *Tevye the Milkman* tales (1987).

Whilst *Fiddler's shtetl* may be iconic, it is also of course a somewhat whitewashed version of history. But as a powerful encapsulation of the problems with 'tradition', it is worth taking the time to unpack a little. Slobin (1982), Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995) and others convincingly deconstruct such conventional yet pervasively hegemonic images, illustrating their basis in Zborowski and Herzog's 1962 *Life is with People*. Based on interviews with immigrants and the children of immigrants, Zborowski's and Herzog's is "a shtetl without history and geography [...] a literary construction [...] determined by the people who abandoned it and did not care to ask what precisely happened in the small towns they had left behind" (Pinchuk, 2001:173-6).<sup>7</sup> Ewa Morawska (1993:309) notes that this idealising tendency was in fact in place before the Holocaust: "Stylized and beautified, the emerging picture was one of 'a sweetness amidst fear and oppression'", representing "American needs, not Old World reality" (Pinchuk, 2001:172).

In other words, history is never objective.<sup>8</sup> Klezmer music has, over the past thirty years, frequently found itself a part of the perpetuation of this particular 'traditional' blend of irony and nostalgia, even whilst wider social consciousness may have advanced (Slobin, 2000:23). What singer Fabian Schnedler calls "*shtetl kitsch*"<sup>9</sup> formed – arguably still forms<sup>10</sup> – a dominant, mainstreamed concept of Old World Jewish identity, against which stand other possible formulations of tradition through the work of klezmer musicians in America and subsequently Germany. Analysing this process, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002) argues that in order to become available for re-reading as a contemporary cultural form, it was necessary for klezmer music to undergo a period of exclusion from the Jewish-American popular imagination.<sup>11</sup> She traces the historical context for this cultural submergence in several directions: Jewish assimilation, the 'mainstreaming' of Jewish music (especially wedding music, klezmer's traditional home) and the well-meaning rise and subverted fall of the politically-minded Jewish folksinger, a parodied victim of his/her own sincerity.<sup>12</sup> Located across overlapping cultural spaces, this highly unmotivated combination of cultural invisibility and over-determined heritage was what allowed klezmer to be re-taken, re-motivated

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<sup>7</sup> On a counter-process within the American Haredi community, see Finkelman (2009:59).

<sup>8</sup> On different historical "realities", see Schlör (2007:5).

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>10</sup> "nurtured by Broadway and sustained by the emergence of vest- and cap-wearing bands" (Slobin, 2000:23).

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1 on klezmer's transition from the old world to the new.

<sup>12</sup> *Allan Sherman's mother presents "My Son, the Folk Singer"* being perhaps the nicest example.

and re-invested with meaning by a newly lean and aesthetically clear-headed musical generation.<sup>13</sup> Paradoxically, then, the flourishing of a continuously shifting twentieth century Jewish American identity is responsible both for the near-disappearance of US klezmer (a victim of assimilation) and its subsequent revival (a post-assimilation response) (Livingston, 1999:68).

In Central and Eastern Europe, the story was of course different. Significantly more than cultural discontinuity, Jewish life itself was subject to widespread destruction. Within this more profound and disturbing experience of dislocation, we have seen how some musicians have addressed these different meanings of ‘Jewishness’ and Jewish musical tradition. Nowadays, it is arguably in the field of Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music that these two versions of rupture (plus a third) meet, in the particular American, German and post-Soviet influences upon the music now at play within Berlin’s contemporary internationalism. A singer such as Daniel Kahn is therefore ideally placed to problematise all angles of this ‘tradition’, just as others are well-poised to exploit its multiple musical languages and temporalities.

More generally, the role of folk music in the recreation of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) remains a contested one. For English folk-song collectors like Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles, traditional musical and dance material had an expressed pedagogic and social mission: the ‘educating’ of the lower classes away from the degenerative effects of their own (frequently urban and working-class) popular culture (Sharp, 1936; Karpeles, 1987). If historical truth and ideological proselytising are conveniently overlooked in this trajectory, it nevertheless retains a surprising foothold in the popular imagination (West, 2012). Cultural critics such as Boyes (1993) and Harker (1985) have viewed these kinds of revivals through a more politicised Marxist lens, arguing that emphasis on the supposed purity, rurality and naturalness of folksong helps “deny the primacy of class” and keep discontent and revolution at bay (Harker, 1985:xi).<sup>14</sup> This effacing of historical context has frequently also been an issue for klezmer music, often framed through an ahistorical lens of Jewish ‘soul’.<sup>15</sup> Later in this chapter, I will argue that it has been one of the missions of Yiddish Summer Weimar to

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<sup>13</sup> cf. the second half of Slobin (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Though both Harker and Boyes have come under criticism themselves. See Bearman (2002) & Yates (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Alongside the work of Giora Feidman (Rubin, 2015a), this remains one of the dominant – or residual, in Williams’ (1997) formulation – codes of representing Yiddish music, as seen in a large number of contemporary album covers. As a counter example, we might note the American rock band Yiddish Princess.

unmask the cultural clouding effects of this sort of ethnic essentialism and ‘unlearnability’,<sup>16</sup> making knowledge available through an open and deliberately demystifying approach to traditional wisdom and learning.

This somewhat static version of ‘tradition’ – a comfortably mythical version of an imaginary past – creates precisely the distance that ensures its loss of contemporary relevance. A more dynamic interpretation might include greater emphasis on both continuity and flexibility. Scottish poet and folklorist Hamish Henderson talks of tradition as a carrying stream,<sup>17</sup> a flowing movement of human experience and cultural production in which we may choose to swim, but which maintains a momentum of its own. Henry Glassie (1995:396) evokes a similarly appealing continuity:

If tradition is a people's creation out of their own past, its character is not stasis but continuity [...] Oppressed people are made to do what others will them to do. They become slaves in the ceramic factories of their masters. Acting traditionally, by contrast, they use their own resources – their own tradition, one might say – to create their own future, to do what they will themselves to do. They make their own pots.

Tradition as ownership is an empowering idea. Historically, the retaking of suppressed ways of being and doing has offered the chance of meaningful cultural resistance (Hebdige, 1987) – an increased African influence on 1960s free jazz, for example, signifying a renewed discourse of blackness in wider society (Kofsky, 1970; Wilmer, 1987). However, this is a kind of tradition that is still assumed to exist, albeit under the surface, just as klezmer was discovered to be doing in 1970s America (Sapoznik, 2002:176). The ceramic factories of Central and Eastern Europe’s temporary masters did more than force their slaves to make different pots, and Glassie (1995:395) admits: “tradition is the opposite of only one kind of change: that in which disruption is so complete that the new cannot be read as an innovative adaptation of the old.”<sup>18</sup> In Germany and further east, the process of re-building Yiddish musical culture (away from its original context) has in turn opened up different interpretations: musical tradition becoming the locus of competing ideological perspectives. The next sections

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<sup>16</sup> The perceived ‘unlearnability’ of certain musical feelings is the basis for Lila Ellen Gray’s superb 2013 study of Lisbon’s amateur fado scene.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poets/hamish-henderson>. Accessed September 5th, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Fittingly, Berlin’s 2012-13 commemorative series of the years 1933-38 was entitled “Diversity Destroyed” (Zerstörte Vielfalt). See <http://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/zerstoerte-vielfalt/>. Accessed September 10th, 2015.

explore the different contexts and interpretations at play in this dialogue, the different versions of authenticity and creativity as related to the materials of musical tradition.

### **Curating the tradition: processes of dissemination**

In actuality the commodification of the revivalist tradition begins well before an industry emerges. It begins with the initial objectification of a musical tradition which transforms it into a “thing” which can be “restored”, and the process is furthered each time the practice is distilled into words and printed music, fixed in time and space (Livingston, 1999:79).

To track the influence of anthologies and collections upon today’s international klezmer community would present a worthwhile task, although one out of the scope of this project. But it is worth noting here that dissemination processes and materials in contemporary Berlin are, if anything, distinctly conventional: there is little that marks them out as uniquely connected to the city. Many of the musicians with whom I spoke migrate freely between well-established published collections, in particular Beregovski (2001), Kostakowsky (2001)<sup>19</sup> and Sapoznik & Sokolow (1987), although from these several hundred tunes only a limited number are played with any frequency.<sup>20</sup> Rubin & Ottens’ three recorded compilations of traditional music,<sup>21</sup> early recordings of Tarras and Brandwein (frequently accessed online), and more recently the output of Brave Old World and early Klezematics<sup>22</sup> also form fundamental parts of the contemporary canon. Jam sessions and workshops remain an important site of exchange and canon reinforcement (Mackinnon, 1993:100). Online, Matthias Groh’s Saytham’s resource is an interactive archive, accessible to and addable to by all, and Ari Davidow’s long-established [www.klezmershack.com](http://www.klezmershack.com)<sup>23</sup> is occasionally consulted. What this points to, by and large, is Berlin as part of an international process of dissemination, but possessing little to mark it out. To return to Becker’s “art worlds” of Chapter 1, we might at this point usefully observe the importance of the above collections in the work of the

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<sup>19</sup> Originally published in 1916 as *International Hebrew Wedding Music* and now available as *The Ultimate Klezmer* (ed. Horowitz, 2001). In 2001 this collection still represented the largest commercial publication of klezmer music to date.

<sup>20</sup> In reviewing my fieldnotes and recordings, I arrived at a *core* of less than 100 tunes, almost all drawn from these sources, along with the Living Traditions recordings of German Goldenshteyn repertoire (LTD 1803), discussed below.

<sup>21</sup> *Doyres/(Generations): Traditional Klezmer Recordings 1979 - 1994*. Trikont, 1995. US-0206.

*Yikhes (Lineage): Early Klezmer Recordings 1911-1939*. Trikont, 1996.

*Oytsres (Treasures): Klezmer Music 1908-1996*. Schott Wergo, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Since the early 2000s, The Klezematics’ recordings have often extended far beyond traditional repertoire, making them less of a resource for klezmer tunes.

<sup>23</sup> See Wood (2008a). The online dimension of folk music is a significant area of contemporary ethnomusicological interest, as evidenced by projects such as [www.digitalfolk.org](http://www.digitalfolk.org) and [www.bassculture.info](http://www.bassculture.info). (both accessed Feb 7th, 2016). Arguably, collections of klezmer music have yet to develop an online presence that is significantly distinct from printed sources (i.e. it still consists largely of digitised versions of printed music or recordings of transcriptions).

particular artists discussed here. In other words, behind the performances of these artists lie, amongst other things, the anthologising efforts of Sapoznik, Kostakowsky and others.

However, as accordionist Patrick Farrell notes, there are occasional discrepancies between American and European canons, although these are constantly in flux:

Back in the 80s and 90s people coming over to Berlin were like Kurt [Björling] and Joel Rubin, well, and Alan. That was at a time in the revival of klezmer when they were more interested in playing more traditional [...] In the teaching of things, they were looking farther and farther back, and so the rep that they were bringing over and teaching a lot of people around here was more and more traditional. And now everybody's got a handle on that, totally. Like, there's tons of people here who have repertoire that's like 'where did you find that tune? I've never heard that before!' Like great stuff they've got their hands on. But the American stuff hasn't transferred over yet, but maybe that'll change. Tastes change, people have different ideas about what they want to play.<sup>24</sup>

As this quote implies, repertoire has fashions, and during my year in Berlin the repertoire of German Goldenshteyn was certainly 'in', representing perhaps the first significant new resource of the last decade. Born in 1934, the Moldavian clarinetist "played thousands of simchas"<sup>25</sup> between the 1950s and his arrival in America in 1994. Quick to learn a tune, he was also quick to forget them, and so wrote down almost every melody he learned. The resulting collection of over 800 pieces has been published in part<sup>26</sup> and recorded on two CDs by Goldenshteyn and KlezKamp faculty members.<sup>27</sup> Bridging the Cold War gap, Goldenshteyn's repertoire is a historical window onto the life of klezmer as it persisted in Eastern Europe after the war, filling an important gap missing from the work of musicians who had by this time settled in America. As Rubin (2007:15) notes, Goldenshteyn's repertoire also comments upon the process of canon formation, calling into question: "monolithic or essentialist definitions of klezmer music and repertoire". Paradoxically, the gap that it fills highlights a certain lack of repertoire travel between Eastern Europe and America in the latter half of the twentieth century,

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<sup>24</sup> Personal interview, Neukölln, Berlin. March 22nd, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.livingtraditions.org/docs/germancd.htm>. Accessed September 4th, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> In four separate books, ranging from 52 to 100 tunes. See: [http://www.swingklezmer.de/content/e\\_shop.htm](http://www.swingklezmer.de/content/e_shop.htm). Accessed January 26th, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Recorded at KlezKamp in 2005, the first CD (*German Goldenshteyn: a Living Tradition*) was released in May 2006, shortly before Goldenshteyn's death. The second (*The German Goldenshteyn Memorial Ensemble: Tradition Lives: Yiddish-Moldavian Music of German Goldenshteyn*, 2010) included some music from the first recording (with Goldenshteyn on clarinet), plus other material from Goldenshteyn's repertoire. At the time of writing, these recordings are only available as downloads.



whilst the widespread take-up of his tune collections in the early part of the twenty-first points up the renewed transnationalism of contemporary processes of dissemination.<sup>28</sup>

From the first KlezKamp (2006) recording, it is possible to highlight both similarities and differences with klezmer of the pre-war period. Track 8, “Khosidl”, with its small melodic compass, repeated-note semiquavers and I to IV transition in the B section are all characteristics found regularly in Kostakowsky (2001) and Beregovski (2001).<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the 3/8 lilt and dotted quaver-three semiquaver<sup>30</sup> melodic rhythm of “Jewish Hora” (track 5) would not be out of place in the repertoire of any historical (or contemporary) klezmer band. On the other hand, the more expansive melodic range and circle of fifths harmony of Emil Kroitor’s “Wedding Hora” (track 13) point up some clear differences, as do the triplet melody set against a steady 2/4 backing and flexible use of accidentals in “Hora” (track 2). One might argue that the enthusiasm for the newness of Goldenshteyn’s repertoire also allowed more leeway for the inclusion of certain pieces some way outside of a klezmer idiom. The arpeggiated major-key melody of “Polka” (track 12),<sup>31</sup> for example, or “Russian Medley”’s slower-moving melodic line (track 15) exhibit little harmonic or melodic connection to klezmer music. Ilya Shneyveys points up some of the ambiguities in this process:

It’s interesting, you know, the music of German Goldenshteyn is, I think, Soviet Moldovan music played by a Jewish clarinetist. And it’s funny, because many of his signature tunes which became popular ‘hits’, they’re also hits in Romania, in Moldova. But they’re played faster and more precise.<sup>32</sup>

More generally, it would be hard to draw any clear lines between the historical repertoire performed by contemporary Berlin musicians and that of klezmer musicians elsewhere. This is partly due to the internationalism of the networks within which these musicians operate, meaning that musical material is freely – and rapidly – shared across trans-national connections. Within this, network hubs such as Yiddish Summer Weimar (discussed later in this chapter) facilitate the dissemination of a reasonably well-defined

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<sup>28</sup> Aided, of course, in no small part by the internet. Arguably, though, this has had less effect upon klezmer music’s (notated) repertoire than it has, for example, upon Irish music, through sites such as [thesession.org](http://thesession.org). (accessed Feb 7th, 2016). See Knowlton, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>30</sup> i.e. e. jiq – a common melodic-rhythmic motif of the klezmer *hora*.

Accordionist and composer Kroitor was born in Moldova in 1947. He emigrated to Israel in 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Similar arpeggiated lines are found in the four “Kozatshke”s in Beregovski (2001:215-6) and the ten “Polish Polka”s in Kostakowsky (2001:135-143), although the small number of these pieces in these collections points up their difference from the bulk of the material.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, 2013.

range of repertoire: disparate (weakly-tied) musicians come together around the Weimar hub and then take this repertoire away with them for transmission within their own more local networks. In Berlin, this is reinforced by the connections between Weimar and sessions such as Oblomov, resulting in the continued popularity of certain tunes.<sup>33</sup> One might, however, tentatively point to some differences of emphasis, guided to some extent by geography. Christian Dawid's work with the Ukrainian band Konsonans Retro<sup>34</sup> and Alan Bern's Other Europeans group<sup>35</sup> are both projects that explore a particular geographical and historical repertoire. Conversely, New Yorker Michael Winograd has recently begun to delve more deeply into the 'local' work of clarinetist Dave Tarras.<sup>36</sup> We might also note a slightly stronger adherence to traditional (as opposed to newly-composed) repertoire in Berlin.<sup>37</sup>

As repositories of Henderson's carrying stream, collections – whether printed or recorded – are not culturally neutral. Halting their distinctive carrying stream in mid-flow, they mark a moment of concretising that will influence the stream's future direction. To acknowledge this selection and framing is to recognise the impossibility of standing 'outside' tradition. At the intersection of a particular set of cultural and historical circumstances, collecting and curating always involves a subjective speaking position. Notated anthologies also illustrate that the transcription process itself involves decisions about what to include as 'proper' or 'basic' and what to leave out as individual variation. In other words, how the tradition is *curated* in any particular instance. And despite the breadth of material testified to by these collections, klezmer repertoire in Berlin nowadays is frequently drawn from a reasonably fixed pool. From the 250-plus Beregovski tunes, for example, I might point to less than twenty that have established

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<sup>33</sup> In the Oblomov sessions that I attended, alongside well-established klezmer standards such as those found in Sapoznik & Sokolow (1987), there was also a notable bias towards the Goldenshteyn repertoire as recorded on the first KlezKamp CD ("Hora", "Betuta Din Yaloveny", "Zhokul Rezeshilor" and "Moldavian Freylakhs", for example).

<sup>34</sup> Konsonans Retro are a brass band largely comprised of the Baranovsky family from Kodyma, Ukraine. Onstage they are augmented by Dawid (clarinet & saxophone) and Guy Schalom (percussion).

<sup>35</sup> Initiated in 2008-9, this is an ongoing project exploring "the repertoires and styles performed by ethnically mixed ensembles of professional, urban musicians active in pre-WWII Bessarabia (in today's Republic of Moldova). In these ensembles, musical heritages represented by two different traditional groups of professional musicians met and mixed – the klezmer profession, of Yiddish origin, and the lautar profession, of Roma origin [...] The goal is to recreate and reinhabit a shared klezmer/lautar musical culture" (Liner notes to *Splendor* (Kikiyon, 2011): [http://www.theothereuropeans.eu/files/splendor\\_liner\\_notes.pdf](http://www.theothereuropeans.eu/files/splendor_liner_notes.pdf). Accessed September 5th, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Tarras was from Ternovka in Ukraine, but made his musical career in New York (see Rubin, 2001). Winograd's Tarras Band "presents an authentic (but never stodgy) take on the classic American Jewish music sound of the 1920s-50s" (<http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/tarrasband>. Accessed September 5th, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Of the bands covered in detail in this thesis, only Knoblauch Klezmer band and ?Shmaltz! are regularly recording new instrumental tunes. Paul Brody's material is largely original, but the majority of this crosses over into jazz. The repertoire of the sessions discussed is almost exclusively traditional. By contrast, for example, Michael Winograd's 2013 *Storm Game* consists largely of original material.

themselves as contemporary repertoire, perhaps even fewer for Kostakowsky. Similarly, the Goldenshteyn tunes that have achieved wider circulation in the city are almost exclusively drawn from the KlezKamp recordings. What this suggests is the continued need for and reliance upon what we might call repertoire opinion-leaders – musicians who act as first-stage filters and who continue to seek out lesser-known material or make unusual musical connections.<sup>38</sup> We might tie this back into the network operations discussed in Chapter 1, in that it is the weak ties that many musicians have to repertoire opinion leaders (forged and maintained at Weimar, at jam sessions, via recordings and online circulation) which allow access to a new network of musical material. Historically, this has also meant the influence of visiting American and Israeli musicians, as discussed in the next section.

### **The klezmer workshop in Germany – whose tradition?**

Revivalist stylistic parameters and aesthetics are based on what is believed to be the stylistic common denominator of individual informants and/or source recordings [...] The balance between individual innovation and adherence to stylistic norms of the tradition are a basic point of tension within revivals (Livingston, 1999:71).

The shifting balance between innovation and fidelity to an assumed norm has been a central feature of klezmer music in Berlin, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2. However, this “basic point of tension” has itself been subject to another dialectic, that of the ideological difference between two major influences on German klezmer music in the 1990s: Argentinian-Israeli clarinetist Giora Feidman and the cohort of Brave Old World<sup>39</sup> (Loentz, 2006; Gruber, 2002). As we shall see, Feidman’s own ‘social balm’ rhetoric has been somewhat responsible for the development of his quasi-guru status, building on a rapid rise to popularity (especially in Germany) in the 1980s. Perhaps because of this, some critics occasionally reveal a somewhat partisan lack of

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<sup>38</sup> With reference to the artists in this thesis, the recent international group The Brothers Nazarov (Dan Kahn, Michael Alpert, Bob Cohen, Psoy Korolenko, Jake Shulman-Ment) have unearthed the work of little-known 1950s singer Nathan “Prince” Nazarov (Smithsonian Folkways 40571). In Berlin, Andrea Pancur and Ilya Shneyveys’ *Alpen Klezmer* (Globalistas) and Fabian Schnedler’s exploration of Shmuel Lehman’s *Ganovim Lider* are both indicative of this sort of musical questing.

<sup>39</sup> Pianist and accordionist Alan Bern, clarinetists Joel Rubin (until 1992) and subsequently Kurt Björling, singer and fiddle player Michael Alpert, bassist and percussionist Stuart Brotman. Both Bern and Rubin settled in Germany (Rubin from 1989-2003, Bern from 1987 to the present day).

objectivity.<sup>40</sup> Joel Rubin (2015a) has recently contributed a more balanced assessment of Feidman's influence, from which I will draw here.

It is important to reiterate that post-war Germany was not without Yiddish music before the klezmer revival – an assumption that crops up occasionally as the result of a much-reduced Jewish population allied to the rapid growth and interest in klezmer in the 1990s. As seen in chapter 1, Yiddish singers Lin Jaldati (Shneer, 2014, 2015) and her daughter Jalda Rebling (Ostow, 1989), Yiddishist and singer Karsten Troyke (Ottens, 2008), folksingers Peter Rohland and Zupfgeigenhansel (Eckstaedt, 2010), bands Aufwind and Kasbek were all active well before Feidman or anyone else appeared on the scene. However, as discussed in chapter 1, the isolated 'pioneer' context for these artists meant that as a group they lacked any sort of coherent cultural narrative or network. Feidman and Brave Old World (and subsequently Yiddish Summer Weimar) would give it that narrative.

To effectively set the scene for these two schools of thought, here first is an excerpt of a 2005 German interview with Giora Feidman.

*AJ: I've read that your music has the ability to cross boundaries. What sort of boundaries?*

GF: It's not 'my music', or 'your music'. You said 'your music' – there's no such thing, music is music. There's no such thing as my air or your air. No, there is air, there is water, there is music. This body [indicating his body] is a pipe and through this pipe comes a language: music. People don't play music, they speak it. And so first, it's not *my* music, it's music. That's all.

*AJ: And so music is your language?*

GF: Not my language. It's the language of people. To speak with the trees, with the animals, it's a language. Music is dance, and dance is also a language. There is not only spoken language. All these are languages to communicate. Not between us, to communicate with the higher forces. What we call art is not from here, it comes from another dimension.<sup>41</sup>

And here is Alan Bern writing in 1998 about the musical background of Brave Old World:

many of us had gone deeply enough into Yiddish music and culture to recognize that the standard mish-mash of repertoire and styles had sacrificed both cultural

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<sup>40</sup> Birnbaum's (2009) rhetorical use of Feidman disciple Harry Timmerman as representative of the whole German klezmer movement is revealing: Timmerman is not one of German klezmer's most important figures, nor does his clarinet playing warrant special notice (other than in its heavy reliance on Feidman's own).

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Alexandra Janizewski. September 29th, 2005, for Salve TV, Weimar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiGebpj2j8w>. Accessed September 9th, 2015.

integrity and musical depth in favor of easy accessibility [...] All of us were also performers and teachers of non-Jewish traditional musics that had been co-territorial with Yiddish music, such as Polish, Rumanian, Ukrainian and Russian musics, and as a result we perceived and were able to bring out the specifically European strata of the klezmer repertoire. Eventually, we articulated the goal of developing a new Yiddish music, whose language and forms would be consciously created for the concert stage and a listening audience, but still deeply rooted in Yiddish folk materials.<sup>42</sup>

The difference is hard to miss. Feidman's is what we might call a universal humanist approach, supported by liberal doses of non-specific, non-denominational spirituality.<sup>43</sup> The trope of music as a universal language was of course not invented by Giora Feidman, and there is little wrong with it on its own terms. Where its romantic inclusivity falters, however, is through its conscious erasing of cultural difference – a little close to the bone when set against a culture that was itself the victim of a *planned* erasure. On the other side, we see a cultural and political commitment to “folk materials” and their rooting in “a specifically European strata”. The former looks towards a future that erases difference (and perhaps tradition) through personal expression, the latter towards a pragmatic multiculturalism that admits artistic variation and individual voice, and locates them within a social and historical (and ‘traditional’) framework.

Leaving aside the undeniable effects of individual musical personalities, perhaps the opposition between the two camps should not surprise us too much. Born in Buenos Aires to Bessarabian parents, Giora Feidman emigrated to Israel in 1957 to play with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. It was in the 1970s that he began his journey into klezmer music, and since this time Feidman has toured all over the world, with particular success in Germany following his first appearance there in a 1984 production of Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*.<sup>44</sup> His ‘one-nation’ speechifying fits well with the early State of Israel's discourses of citizenship (Shafir & Peled, 2002), notwithstanding that these have been severely compromised over the state's short history:

a cultural kaleidoscope of the most diversified colors, languages, traditions and sounds, which would now blend together in this young Israel [...] [Feidman] soaked up all of this with vigor – and therein finds an image of himself.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/bern.new.html>. Accessed September 10th, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> It is in fact largely based on Hindu philosophy with elements of Kaballah mysticism (Rubin, 2015a:211).

<sup>44</sup> On the particular sociocultural guilt/denial dialectic framing Feidman's arrival in Germany, see Rubin (2015a:207-8).

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.giorafeidman-online.com/en/biography>. Accessed September 10th, 2015.

On the other hand, American musicians coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s were faced with a very different local articulation of Jewish identity, one firmly assimilated within the American aspirational mainstream.<sup>46</sup> Here is Yiddishist Michael Wex (2015:7-8) situating things musically:

The trauma of World War II and the fragile triumph of our assimilation meant that Yiddish, when allowed into public at all, was supposed to be a nod to where we had come from, rather than a picture of where we were. The standard non-Yiddishist song repertoire thus leaned heavily on the late 19th-century ambience of such lullabies as “Afn Pripetshik” [...] which had long since turned into elegies [...] and the occasional anti-elegy like the ghetto fighters’ “Partisans’ Hymn”. It was no competition for “Hava Nagila”.

An immigrant son of immigrant parents, Feidman’s language of pan-ethnic humanity and musical brotherhood preaches new beginnings in a new land. Conversely, second- and third-generation Jewish Americans have used Yiddish identity as a means of offering up an alternative version of living Jewish culture (Svigals, 2000), one that expresses a marked distance and self-conscious alterity<sup>47</sup> to post-war Jewish-American identity.<sup>48</sup>

It is not a massive intellectual stretch, as many have done (Gruber, 2002; Birnbaum, 2009), to read Feidman’s humility as something of a back-handed exercise in self-promotion, the work of a self-appointed musical Dalai Lama who claims to be nothing special whilst at the same time spending a suspicious amount of time at the secular pulpit.<sup>49</sup> On the other side, however, some have viewed the American historicism as potentially restrictive in its scope.<sup>50</sup> Berlin-based academic and musician Jascha Nemtsov, for example, questions the benefits of this type of musical praxis:

I know that some [musicians] even just hear old recordings and try to imitate them. I’m not sure that it is a very good perspective in dealing with this music this way, because I think the old klezmer and the old Yiddish songs existed in different

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<sup>46</sup> Alan Bern, for example, spoke (in a Yiddish Summer Weimar workshop) of a Bloomington childhood based more around baseball and small-town Americana than anything ‘Jewish’, and Michael Alpert tells of a sense of “difference and marginality” in his upbringing that led him to late 60s counterculture (Wood, 2007b:376).

<sup>47</sup> Adam Rovner (2006:314) makes the same point about recent American Jewish literature: “Quite simply, our loss of manifest difference – religious, ethnic, linguistic, and geographic – has entailed a concomitant desire to assert some difference in our cultural artifacts”.

<sup>48</sup> Several strains of American Jewish aspirations are brilliantly and poignantly captured by the work of Philip Roth (*Goodbye, Columbus*; *Portnoy’s Complaint*; *The Plot Against America*; *The Facts*). In frustration with the assumed binary between orthodoxy and modernity, the secular protagonist of *Eli, the Hero* (*Goodbye, Columbus*) ends up donning the frock-coat and hat of his Hasidic counterpart.

<sup>49</sup> Here, for example, are two characteristic Feidman aphorisms: “The clarinet is the microphone of the soul” and “I pick up the clarinet to share a message with mankind”. Both from <http://www.giorafeidman-online.com/en/>. Accessed November 21st, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> We might note Caroline Bithell’s observation that “there is nothing homogenous about the past” (Bithell, 2006:5).

surroundings, under different conditions, which don't exist anymore [...] what I hear from this pure ethnology is actually not the same, not the same as the recordings anyway, and I think it is never the same expression.<sup>51</sup>

Needless to say, there is a great deal more to the process than mere imitation, as I hope to demonstrate in the second half of this chapter. Nevertheless, Nemtsov's critique is illuminating both as one of the few voices speaking in contrast to the Brave Old World/Weimar hegemony, but more so in its revelation of an assumption that to listen attentively and absorb historical style is tantamount to simple mimesis.

We might also question how much this ideological split was actually felt by younger musicians coming under the influence of both camps. Some of my older informants, along with participants at Yiddish Summer Weimar, pointed to both Feidman and Brave Old World as spurs in their early enthusiasm for the music. Joel Rubin argues that Feidman's celebratory (Feld, 2000) world music narrative inclusivity means that to "the average German [...] Feidman's style is definitive of klezmer" (Rubin, 2015:220). I would add, however, that to the average Berlin *klezmer musician* (lurking, perhaps, in the types of contemporary urban spaces outlined in chapter 2), the alternative influence of Brave Old World, Yiddish Summer Weimar and their renewal of tradition and traditional praxis is both more influential and more indicative of a felt musical, personal and emotional connection. Here, for example, are two interview responses:

All of Brave Old World, they are so generous with their knowledge. I think that's amazing and so very very special [...] They're generous freaks, that's what they are.<sup>52</sup>

I decided to go to a workshop in Bad Pyrmont, from Brave Old World. I think it was the first one in Germany,<sup>53</sup> before there was only Giora Feidman. And there I met some musicians that I am playing together with still [...] from 95 I am playing constantly klezmer music.<sup>54</sup>

The second half of this chapter explores the Yiddish Summer Weimar approach in detail, so here I will look briefly at how some of Feidman's ideology translates to musical decisions.

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<sup>51</sup> Personal interview, Charlottenburg, Berlin. July 21st, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Sanne Möricke, accordionist. Personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin. December 9th, 2013.

<sup>53</sup> In fact, Brave Old World's workshops began in 1989-90, taking place in cities such as Berlin, Munich and Hamburg. Bad Pyrmont was perhaps the first intensive residential workshop in Germany. See: <http://www.jta.org/1995/11/08/archive/klezmer-musicians-aficionados-converge-on-home-of-pied-piper>. Accessed September 7th, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Carsten Wegener, interview, 2014.

Rubin (2014:42) suggests that Feidman's musical aesthetic, with its emphasis on inclusivity and a distinct lack of sonic confrontation or ambiguity, is perhaps more appealing to Germans less interested in developing alternative listening habits, such as the unusual and 'foreign' idiomatic details of klezmer. In a similar way, Waligórska & Wagenhofer (2010:6) note: "A domesticated text is easy to read, smoothed out and devoid of alien-sounding idioms and incomprehensible metaphors." The idea of an Argentinian-Israeli domesticating Eastern European Jewish folk music for a German audience is an intriguing one. It forms an interesting counterpart to the less top-down, local adaptation of global musical networks discussed in Chapter 2. Arguably, Feidman's explicit mediation of klezmer music – his smoothing out of its sonic 'difficulties' – can be understood as a (very subjective) 'universalising' of the particularities of the music. This stands in direct contrast to the more fluid interactions between Berlin bar culture and Yiddish music seen in, for example, the scene at Bar Oblomov, which conversely can be read as the contemporary *localising* process of a now transnational music.

It is worth exploring how these processes make themselves felt on the musical ground. Feidman and his followers (especially Helmut Eisler, David Orlowsky and Harry Timmermann) promote a sound that is highly soloistic, privileging individual instrumental voices (notably, of course, clarinet). Their music takes in popular jazz, classical and tango idioms, as well as an easy slippage between Eastern European, Israeli and American repertoire.<sup>55</sup> Feidman's own playing is full of sobs, sighs and glissandi – the ornamental armoury of the klezmer musician stretched to its full (possibly over-full) capacity. Rubin (2015a) also points to two Feidman 'innovations', neither of which have a basis in traditional historical performance practice, but both of which have been popularised by Feidman to the extent that they are frequently assumed to be an integral part of klezmer clarinet style. The first of these is a frequent *pianissimo*, a musical device that overtly plays up 'emotional' content. Secondly, Feidman often incorporates a growling sound learnt from jazz clarinetists such as Benny Goodman (whom Feidman acknowledges as an influence and whose music he performs). Both of these strategies work to foreground the solo voice, acting as markers of an iconic individualism, as opposed to the more heterophonic, collective sound of

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<sup>55</sup> Timmermann includes selections from *Fiddler on the Roof* in his concert programme.



traditional klezmer *kapelyes* (Rubin, 2015a). Similarly, Feidman favours accompaniment textures that contrast with but do not overshadow the clarinet sound – guitar, organ, percussion. In line with his pan-musical philosophy, he frequently stretches far out from the klezmer heartlands, embracing Piazzolla tangos, Gershwin and symphonic etudes, collaborations with the Arditti quartet and the Berliner Symphoniker.

This is a musical politics that sidelines tradition in favour of ‘soul’, in the process promoting a paradoxically parallel egoism. In its universal humanism lies both its appeal and – through deconstruction of Feidman’s guru<sup>56</sup> persona – its downfall. Feidman still performs regularly and very successfully in Germany, but he has long since stopped organising workshops or cross-cultural projects in the country.<sup>57</sup> Conversely, the “Yiddish folk materials” of Alan Bern *et al*, set within an inclusivity in marked contrast to Feidman’s individualism, are still very much in evidence in the long-running annual workshop and concert series in one of Germany’s historical heartlands, Yiddish Summer Weimar.

### **Yiddish Summer Weimar: tradition in process**

“Upstairs is shpilndik, tantsndik, redndik un schlofndik.  
Kum arayn, kinder, kum arayn.”<sup>58</sup>

In 2015, Yiddish Summer Weimar [YSW] celebrated its fifteenth year of existence. What began as a weekend music course has now become a four-week celebration of Yiddish song, traditional and newly-composed instrumental music, and historical and contemporary Yiddish culture. Aside from the instrumental and vocal workshops that make up the backbone of the programme, YSW offers courses in Yiddish language, dance, storytelling, cookery, a series of children’s classes, and a “Festival Week” of concerts featuring international artists, many of whom also serve on the faculty as instructors. Unlike the hotel/retreat atmosphere of KlezKamp and KlezCanada, YSW is well integrated into its surrounding civic and social environment: the festival began as a

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly Jalda Rebling levelled a similar ‘guru’ criticism at Alan Bern, who she felt was claiming to bring “*Yiddishkayt* back to Germany” (interview, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> As we shall see, within the context of Yiddish Summer Weimar, Feidman is something of a *bête noire*, occasionally invoked to reinforce one’s own musical authenticity.

<sup>58</sup> “Upstairs is playing, dancing, talking and sleeping. Come inside, children, come inside.” Alan Bern calling in smokers and fresh-air seekers from the sun-drenched steps outside Yiddish Summer Weimar’s home base, the Musikschule Ottmar Gerster at number 1, Karl-Liebnecht-Straße.

part of the Weimar Bauhaus University's Summer Academy and in 2009 the mayor of Weimar agreed to rent othermusic e.V. (YSW's administrative body) a former school premises for the nominal fee of €1 per year. This building now serves as café, informal venue, symbolic hub and occasional crash-pad for YSW staff and participants. I attended 2014's Yiddish Instrumental Music workshop, and much of what follows is informed by a week spent surrounded by good music, supportive teachers and wonderful company. To lift my discussion above happy reminiscing, I aim to situate YSW and its ideology within the wider context of musical tradition that is the focus of this chapter. I will argue that YSW largely reframes an often-invoked binary as something more akin to continuity *through* change (Glassie, 1995).

Although YSW is not Berlin, it links directly with the city, both through the musicians who teach there, and also those who attend. Here is Ukrainian-Israeli singer and cantor Sveta Kundish making an explicit network connection between the Bar Oblomov sessions of chapter 2 and YSW:

people come [to Oblomov] without any knowledge or experience of klezmer music, get inspired in the sessions, play along, try things out. And then they come to Weimar to learn the style!<sup>59</sup>

In other words, musicians' weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) to Oblomov engender a direct link to the more formalised network of the Weimar workshops. And implicitly, this then reflects back upon the Berlin scene, as players who have attended YSW return to the city to add their new-found knowledge into the city's klezmer sessions and gigs.

Central to YSW's aims and creative trajectory is the benignly powerful influence of Alan Bern. Bern's has been a major force on the international klezmer and Yiddish music scene since the 1980s, through his work with the band Brave Old World, his musical directorship of projects such as The Other Europeans and Semer Label Reloaded,<sup>60</sup> his influential accordion playing<sup>61</sup> and his involvement in international musical education networks (at Weimar and also in North America and the UK). There are two particular inputs to YSW that I want to draw out: an integrated concept of musical transmission that takes learning by ear as its basis, and a musical approach

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<sup>59</sup> Personal interview, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> The subject of Chapter six.

<sup>61</sup> Discussed extensively in the next chapter.

which is context-based and historically-informed. For Bern and for the many musicians who have come under his influence, it is these two processes above all that help YSW maintain a sense of living and developing, non-dogmatic, musical cultural tradition. Dorothy Noyes (2009:248) offers a similar solution to the “paradoxes of heritage”:

Let us agree that what is being transferred through the object is not in the first instance authority, which fetishizes the giver, nor property, which fetishizes the object while eventually debasing it into a commodity. Rather, the transfer is of responsibility.

In discussion with musicians over the preceding year, it had often not taken long for Weimar to crop up. Many of my informants (Sasha Lurje, Ilya Schneyveys, Dan Kahn, Franka Lampe, Paul Brody, Sanne Möricke) have been both students and staff there, many maintain an important musical and friendship connection with Alan Bern, and the influence of YSW on their careers and musical philosophy is readily acknowledged. In what follows, I want to sketch out certain key themes that presented themselves over the course of that week, certain ways that Noyes’ “responsibility” is shared and transferred. These themes inform a particular approach to Yiddish music, locating historical and cultural resources within a contemporary and malleable framework. They are also rooted in the heterophony of the music itself, a process that incorporates multiple (often conflicting) voices and a general creative direction, rather than a top-down single artistic vision.

I have divided the lynchpins of the YSW pedagogical philosophy into four key points:<sup>62</sup> looseness of structure and process; continuity between music and physical movement; organic connection between all stages of music-making; integration into the city and community. Bern is a keen advocate of connectedness, of integrated ways of knowing, and there is often an element of his teaching that self-consciously forays into ‘spiritual’ terrain. Importantly, however, this is consistently brought back onto more solid useable ground. Here is Abigail Wood pointing to the same process in a 2002 Weimar Hasidic *nigun* workshop:

Like Frigyesi, Dresdner<sup>63</sup> explicitly links religious practices with musical points, implying that even if the goal of singing is not a religious one, understanding the religious context of this repertory will help musicians to make appropriate

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<sup>62</sup> I have not tried these out on Bern or anyone else involved with YSW, but my gut feeling is that they wouldn't be viewed as too far off-the-mark.

<sup>63</sup> Musicology professor Judit Frigyesi and klezmer and Hasidic music teacher Sruli Dresdner.

performance choices – especially in a context like this workshop, where self-consciousness and habit meant that students were reluctant to loosen up physically and move while singing (Wood, 2007a:227).

### **Heterophony as critical practice**

Each year, YSW is loosely built around a particular topic. In the past, these have included: The Bridges of Ashkenaz, exploring the links between German and Yiddish music; New Yiddish Music and Culture (for two years running); *Yiddishkayt*<sup>64</sup> and *Yiddishkayt* revisited. These themes to some extent determine the choice of tutors and also give a framework for the Festival Week concerts. But whilst the presence of a pre-determined theme inevitably suggests a certain amount of forethought, in the case of Yiddish Summer Weimar it mostly signifies the beginning of a discussion rather than a fixed and fully-formed presentation of ideas. Deliberately eschewing any sense of unified perspective, the day-to-day Weimar methodology is characterised by a self-consciously organic sense of democracy and group decision-making. In practice, this means that time is given each morning to general discussion about the day's structure, with plans subject to change and modification depending on the group mood and individual agendas and preferences. Presentations and lectures are given panel-style, with groups of musicians freely interjecting viewpoints, clarifications and differences of opinion. In general, this was felt by my participants to offer a feeling of inclusivity and ownership – a sense of dialogue perhaps absent from more conventional pedagogical environments:

Maybe that we were working very freely, that there were actual creative processes going on, whose aims were quite undefined at the beginning, which is very different from the creative process for example happening in an orchestra project.<sup>65</sup>

There was no sense of hierarchical, teacher/student dynamic which also helped. It seemed that the tutors were also on a journey of learning and developing, just perhaps further on up the road than others.

However, for some workshop attendees this lack of overt structure hinted at a deeper lack of direction:

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<sup>64</sup> Yiddish: "Jewishness". Although perhaps, given the diversity of Jewish life, better understood as 'Yiddish-ness'.

<sup>65</sup> These different responses came from different participants at 2014's instrumental workshop, delivered to me via an email questionnaire. By general request, I have kept their comments anonymous.

I was surprised at how unstructured the course was [...] I was bored at times and thought the teachers were winging it [...] Something I already knew is that great musicians are not necessarily good teachers.

In other words, we might say that YSW is less concerned with a single ‘author’, but a plurality of readers (Belsey, 1980:109). My aim is not to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, rather to situate it within the ongoing international musical dialogue discussed in earlier chapters. And here I would argue that there is a strong musical connection, namely that of *heterophony* – multiple voices speaking at once. To understand this better, we need to delve a little into the aesthetics of klezmer performance and the particular narratives surrounding it. In its definition of heterophony, The New Grove gives the following:

In modern times the term is frequently used, particularly in ethnomusicology, to describe simultaneous variation, accidental or deliberate, of what is identified as the same melody (2001:465).

Amongst what Joel Rubin (2014:34) describes as the “transnational klezmer revival”, the privileging of heterophonic playing is now a taken-for-granted performance practice, foregrounding the particular texture created when several instrumental voices all play the same melody, but rarely in exactly the same way (i.e. with differences of ornamentation, line and cadence). Uncovered from detailed analysis of early recordings such as Belf’s Romanian Orchestra,<sup>66</sup> heterophony is also often understood to have a much deeper root in Jewish life,<sup>67</sup> as exemplified here by the comments of two klezmer musicians and teachers:<sup>68</sup>

The same prayer was recited or sung to the same melody but with different tempi, vocal timbres, rhythms, and accents, which created this heterophonic sound. Subsequently, what the klezmer violinist heard and did in the confines of the synagogue, he repeated through his instrument (Strom, 2012:99).

when Jews pray they don't do it in unison, but heterophonically. They tend to catch up and/or wait at the end of certain key phrases [...] I personally am a great,

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<sup>66</sup> See <http://www.belfology.com/notes/SirenaStory.html>. Accessed February 5th, 2016.

<sup>67</sup> It is important to note that whilst this section looks at heterophony in klezmer music, heterophony itself is by no means an exclusively klezmer (or Jewish) trait. The New Grove (2001:465) refers to heterophony in accompanied vocal music of the Middle East and Asia (between voice and instrument), gamelan music of Southeast Asia and unaccompanied Hebridean psalms. To this list we might add the traditional musical cultures of parts of North Africa (Langlois, 2016:214) and Southeast Europe (Samson, 2013), some Middle Eastern instrumental music (Nettl, 2016:62) and Shanghai’s *Jiangnan Sizhu* (Wong, 2016:105), along with several other traditional musics and some contemporary classical works.

<sup>68</sup> See also Wood (2007a:223).

great fan of heterophony. It saddens me slightly that it's gone so out of fashion (Merlin Shepherd).<sup>69</sup>

This last sentence is revealing, hinting at a philosophical stance behind the aesthetic choice. We might characterise this through ideas of togetherness in difference or individuality within a common idiom, but in a contemporary musical context it also foregrounds a self-conscious opposition to – and implicit subversion of – normative classical performance that overtly values musical ‘tightness’ and carefully-matched unison playing (also reinforced in some modern folk and jazz music). Figure 36 shows a partial transcription from Michael Winograd’s new klezmer repertoire class at Weimar 2014 (discussed in depth later in this chapter). Although the class numbered ten students, for the purposes of illustration I have here only included four melody instruments (two clarinets, accordion and violin). The excerpt shows the last four bars of the A part and the first four bars of the B part of Isaac Ohring’s *freylekhs*. In particular, the transcription highlights the individual players’ differing rhythmic treatment of semiquaver patterns, syncopated melody notes and end of phrase cadences and gaps. The transcription is largely prescriptive,<sup>70</sup> the aim being to visualise a basic and in some senses abstracted notion of heterophony, rather than to analyse in detail this particular example. The dynamic is a fairly even *forte* throughout.

The musical score is written for four instruments: two Clarinets, an Accordion, and a Violin. It is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of ♩ = c.100. The score is divided into two parts: the A part (last four bars) and the B part (first four bars). The instruments play semiquaver patterns with varying rhythmic treatments, syncopated melody notes, and end of phrase cadences and gaps. The transcription is largely prescriptive, with the aim of visualising a basic and in some senses abstracted notion of heterophony. The dynamic is a fairly even *forte* throughout.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.gtc-music1.com/forum/index.php?topic=737.40>. Accessed September 10th, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Inevitably there is a great deal more information that could be conveyed here (exact phrasing, dynamic variation, small discrepancies in note length etc). I have omitted this information in order to reinforce an overall point, rather than get stuck in an overabundance of detail.



Figure 36. Heterophony as seen in a simplified transcription of Isaac Ohring’s *freylekhs*. Played by Michael Winograd’s new klezmer repertoire class, Yiddish Summer Weimar, August 2014.

Alongside historical recordings and cultural basis in Jewish prayer, I noticed that Weimar advocates of heterophony also stylishly invoked more naturalistic and ‘human’ similes. Alan Bern described the imagined weirdness of a flock of birds where every bird takes off and lands in exactly the same way at exactly the same time, in contrast to the collective yet differentiated flight of each individual bird that culturally signifies ‘flock’. Clarinetist Michael Winograd<sup>71</sup> (as we shall see) readily draws on foodie metaphors, and in a quasi-parallel to Steven Feld’s (1988) discussion of *dulugu ganalan*, musician and researcher Josh Horowitz says: “Klezmer music is like a Jewish

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix 2.

conversation – everybody talks at the same time. The difference is that we listen to each other and are essentially saying the same thing. That is heterophony.”<sup>72</sup>

A commitment to heterophony therefore also underlines a certain way of thinking about music, one that privileges democracy of voices and the unpredictability of thicker melodic textures. This is in marked contrast to the idea of a dominant solo voice (*à la* Feidman), but also to classical music’s phrasing, mirrored articulation, rhythmic consonance and precise tuning. This is not to say that heterophonic klezmer musicians do not take care to match what they are doing to each other, but in a notably different way to a ‘trained’ Western school of thought. Here we tie into earlier discussions around music revivals:

the continued currency of supposedly ‘old’ or ‘earlier’ styles [...] can represent an alternative world-view to that predicated on a linear view of history driven by progress and betterment [...] Musical performance offers itself as an ideal site for the deconstruction of the too easy opposition of past and present, old and new, traditional and modern (Bithell, 2006:9).

In other words, the uncovering of older, neglected performance practices in fact serves several functions – offering a sophisticated dialogue with history whilst also opening up more innovative musical pathways. Alan Bern (1998):

Traditionally, Yiddish instrumental music had been highly heterophonic, with several instruments simultaneously playing the melody in differently ornamented versions. Heterophonic ensemble playing requires a deep understanding of a melodic language [...] Heterophony would later turn out to be the road to much more extended improvisations in BOW, but at the time of (KM)<sup>73</sup> it represented an innovation simply by virtue of reviving a neglected traditional practice.

Invoked as metonymic of traditional practice, heterophony in fact comes to stand metaphorically for a looser, more modern way of musically being in the world, much as the ‘traditionalism’ of chapter one’s modernist musicians achieves a surprising freshness. In a similar way, the physical embodiment of musical space through the connection between music and dance is a central feature of the Weimar aesthetic, and the subject of the next section.

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<sup>72</sup> [http://www.nu-klezmer.de/klezmer\\_en.html](http://www.nu-klezmer.de/klezmer_en.html). Accessed September 10th, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> *Klezmer Music*, Brave Old World’s first album (1990, Flying Fish Records: FLY 560).



## Dance music – music for dancing

Joel Rubin (2105:214) describes an arrangement technique popularised by Giora Feidman that evens out a *bulgar*'s inherent syncopated/unsyncopated rhythmic tension into an ostinato 3-3-2 rhythm.<sup>74</sup> Played as an ensemble *tutti*, Rubin argues that “the simplifying of the bulgar rhythm domesticates it for a predominantly classical, seated audience, foregrounding the vocal aspect of the melody played by the clarinet and downplaying the dance aspect.”<sup>75</sup> Conversely, at Weimar the reinforcing of an embodied, dance aspect to the music is treated as fundamental. Even for musicians not directly involved with playing for dancing (through dance orchestra workshops), the connection between playing dance music and the physical act of dancing is underscored at every level. Each afternoon session begins with a half-hour dance session, including *bulgars*, *freylekhs* and *horas*, during which time all players have the chance to both dance and accompany others dancing.<sup>76</sup> The relevance of locating dance music within actual dance practice was clear to all my interviewees, but I would argue that this emphasis also does something else, reinforcing a more general connection between the physicality of playing – the embodiment of musical time and space – and the music itself. Once again, this works to subvert classical norms of distance between performer and audience. It also further collapses static boundaries between stillness and movement: a conventionally static audience becomes a living, moving, dancing being, just as the bordered, seated performance space spills out onto the dancefloor. Ultimately, too, it roots the music back into a functional role, as described later in this section.

In a similar way, *nigun* singing (every morning) is used as a way of renegotiating space. As well as a more conventional circular seated arrangement, *nigunim* were sung in a massed huddle seated on the floor,<sup>77</sup> or standing up with elbows touching in a close-packed and continually moving group. This struck me as an excellent illustration of music's role in defining and creating space. To feel part of a fluid group, such foregrounded physical closeness was essential – we got close *because* we were singing.

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<sup>74</sup> The figure looks like this: ♩ ♪ ♪ ♪

Listening to klezmer recordings of the early twentieth century, one hears this rhythm frequently, but it is usually played against a steady crotchet bass pattern – creating a more complex rhythmic interplay – and often less explicitly stated than in Feidman's work.

<sup>75</sup> Although I have no evidence for this, it is also possible that Feidman adapted this ensemble rhythmic statement from the *nuevo tango* of Astor Piazzolla and his quintet, in whose music it features prominently (Feidman was born in Buenos Aires and has recorded an album of Piazzolla's music (2003, Warner)). Ironically, Piazzolla himself maintained that he took this rhythm from the Jewish Lower East Side of his youth (Azzi & Collier, 2000:6).

<sup>76</sup> On traditional dancing, see Lapson (1963), Feldman (2010a,b). Also Beregovski (2000:533-535)

<sup>77</sup> What one participant described as a “*nigun* bubble”.



Figure 37. After-lunch dance session at Yiddish Summer Weimar. The band includes Patrick Farrell (accordion), trumpeter Paul Brody and fiddle player Eli Fabrikant (standing, foreground). August 2014.

At times, the extra-musical implications of this closeness were explicitly mentioned, but through praxis rather than theory: the act of singing created the physical proximity, which in turn engendered a more ‘spiritual’ connection. In a (very Jewish<sup>78</sup>) emphasis on practice over dogma, it was the musical sound-event that gave rise to everything that followed. Once again, here is Abigail Wood (2007a:222-3) noticing a similar effect in her 2002 workshop sessions:

The physical involvement of the participants in the performance of nigunim also changed over the course of the week, from initially sitting on chairs in a circle and concentrating on vocal performance, to the formation of a dense group around a table or on stage, within which all participants constantly moved, swaying, banging on the table or stamping on the stage to mark the pulse.

It is important to note that the knowledge of dance steps and forms does not spring from nowhere, nor is it yet embedded (through tradition or instruction) in either the musical or cultural networks under discussion.<sup>79</sup> In the transmission of dances, the involvement of dance teachers and dance leaders is therefore fundamental. Philadelphia’s Steve Weintraub and London’s Guy Schalom both appear regularly at international workshops (YSW, KlezKanada, London’s KlezFest, Toronto’s Ashkenaz Festival) to lead dancing and to teach dance steps. At Weimar, Walter Zev Feldman and Michael Alpert have both been strong and embodied advocates for dancing to klezmer music. More recently,

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<sup>78</sup> On practice over dogma in Jewish religious thought, see Keller (2009:145): “Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism all emphasize, each in its own way, practice over dogma, and even Reform Judaism [...] basically appears to operate within the same framework.”

<sup>79</sup> Unlike, for example, the recognisable and readily understood cultural space that ceilidhs have now achieved in the UK.

Sayumi Yoshida has led dance workshops and afternoon dancing sessions there, often aided by Sasha Lurje.

The majority of dissemination in Germany, then, has most recently taken place within loosely formalised networks such as Weimar. In line with the Weimar ethos, dances are transmitted through participation rather than printed or visual materials – they are learnt by doing (much as the music is learnt by playing, rather than reading). With the exception of *Tants in Gartn Eydn* – whose participants rarely overlap with other scenes – none of the Berlin venues discussed in Chapter 2 operate as formalised dance environments, although more formalised dancing does sometimes occur. In Klezmer Bund concerts that I attended at Kaffee Burger and Gorki Studio Я, I noted occasional dancefloor choreography, sometimes taking in most of the audience, sometimes overshadowed by the looser individualistic movements of the majority.<sup>80</sup> It is worth noting that most concert audiences do not have access to these established networks of knowledge – i.e. there is no culturally absorbed ‘tradition’. So whilst enthusiasm may be high, there is a reduced capacity for spontaneous engagement in structured group dancing. Consequently, such dancing *outside* of the formalised structures of workshops or festivals relies heavily on the active involvement of one or two individuals to make it happen – there is little collective sense of ‘what to do’. However, the arrival of the *Tantshoys* nights in Berlin may well herald a change here (see Conclusion).

The importance of an explicit music/dance connection was brought to the fore in a masterclass session, in which a Leipzig-based trio offered their arrangement of a Dave Tarras *bulgar* for constructive criticism. The playing was fast, fluid and well-executed and the arrangement took in a slower, jazz-influenced section before returning to the original uptempo feel. This fast tempo was the first point to be analysed, by clarinettist Michael Winograd. Winograd suggested that the trio think about playing the piece at an appropriate speed for dancing a bulgar, enlisting several members of the workshop to dance while the band played again, this time at a slightly slower speed. The reasons given for this were to situate the music in a functional context (Winograd in fact

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<sup>80</sup> It is also important to separate the music under discussion here – and its associated dancing – from more explicit ‘dancefloor’ music such as Yuriy Gurzhy’s Shtetl Superstars band, or the klezmer-beats remixes of Amsterdam Klezmer Band. I would argue that this music is better understood as part of an international dance scene which uses Eastern European sonic markers as a semiotic reference-point for excitement and difference, rather than as an articulation of the specifics of the Berlin klezmer scene. Related elements here would be Robert Soko’s Balkan Beats nights and record releases, and the work of Hamburg-born Dunkelbunt (cf. Silverman (2015). See also DJ/producer Armin Siebert’s comments in Chapter 1).

referred to this new tempo as its “functional speed”): “Either being creative or working on presenting a traditional tune in concert, I like to be as comfortable with it as I can in its original context”. He also encouraged the trio to be looser with their carefully-planned arrangement, in order to feel freer to interpret the melody and rhythm differently with each repeat, reacting to the relationship between players and dancers.

The second point to be critiqued was the arrangement itself, and it is here that the Weimar/Feidman split was most explicitly marked. The masterclass instructors read the group’s slower, jazzier middle section as a clear reference to Giora Feidman’s musical lexicon<sup>81</sup> (although never directly stated), prompting questions in relation to the music’s idiomatic roots:

For me, as the listener, I’m tuning in to what matters in the language that you’re using. And then all of a sudden the scale changes and completely different things matter [...] And if I’m constantly getting pushed out by different languages, it’s kind of a strange experience for me (Alan Bern).<sup>82</sup>

In other words, to stretch this dance music so far from its structural functional underpinnings was to risk losing its moorings, a show of genre juxtaposition that broke dangerously away from the purpose of the musical statement.

### **“First the territory, then the map”**

This quote comes from the “Philosophy” page of YSW’s website. It is used to underline an avowed commitment to learning by ear rather than from the printed page. This is more than pragmatism as, in practice, almost all workshop participants have high levels of musical literacy. Rather, and as with much of YSW, it is a consciously ideological stance: “In the case of music, the representation is the written score and the thing it represents is sound – music [...] our approach is always to start with music as sound”.<sup>83</sup>

This commitment to a ‘natural’ way of learning and transmitting music goes further. It is part of an attempt to reintegrate traditional material into a contemporary context, or perhaps adapt a contemporary context to fit the needs of traditional material and transmission. In this way, tradition becomes a practical resource, combining process and

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<sup>81</sup> A sudden break in tempo followed by a slower, quasi-‘jazz’ section is a characteristic Feidman device, as seen in pieces such as “The Klezmer’s Freilach” (*Klassik Klezmer*, 1998: pläne 88748).

<sup>82</sup> Masterclass, Yiddish Summer Weimar, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.yiddishsummer.eu/585-0-Philosophy.html>. Accessed September 10th, 2015.

content in a way that directly militates against any fetishising of the musical text, or separation from a living discourse:

Within modernity, isolated traditions can be identified as relics or survivals signaling the distance of the present from a lost lifeworld. Neither traditions nor their bearers are admitted to coevalness with the modern subject [...] traditional process was not allowed visibly to disrupt access to traditional content (Noyes, 2009:240-1).

It is precisely this coevalness that is at the heart of the Weimar aesthetic. For Bern and others, traditional process and traditional content – at least as far as transmission within the comfortable context of YSW is concerned – are co-dependent. Of utmost importance, therefore, is to re-establish an integrated cultural praxis of learning, participation, performance and dancing. An accrual of cultural affect matched by a general gap in knowledge make this particular tradition meaningful and yet open to constant reinterpretation. Translated to international modern-day praxis, *Yiddishkayt* is both culturally specific and yet no longer ‘owned’ by anyone: a range of questions rather than a set of instructions. It is for this reason that Alan Bern describes the YSW process thus:

Teams work together. And at the middle of Yiddish Summer Weimar is a question. That question is: what is *Yiddishkayt*? This is the question, the theme, and no one lecturer has the answer. And so it’s really a theme which is explored together, all throughout the day, amongst all participants.<sup>84</sup>

This lack of cultural hierarchy is also the basis behind the liberal doses of Hasidic wisdom, nuggets of popular philosophical and psychological thought, and anthropological anecdotes that pepper many of the instruction sessions at Weimar. At all levels, the pedagogical structure and process is largely determined by and through the particular attitudes and skill-sets of the faculty instructors,<sup>85</sup> be that Paul Brody’s freely improvised free association, Michael Winograd’s New York Jewish wit, or Sasha Lurje’s commitment to unity through song.<sup>86</sup> Accepting that to explore Yiddish culture

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<sup>84</sup> Interview, Deutschland Radokultur, July 20th 2015. [http://ondemand-mp3.dradio.de/file/dradio/2015/07/20/drk\\_20150720\\_0907\\_b980efe4.mp3](http://ondemand-mp3.dradio.de/file/dradio/2015/07/20/drk_20150720_0907_b980efe4.mp3). Accessed September 4th, 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Singer Sveta Kundish put it thus: “Alan takes a lot of care to bring people who do not necessarily attract a lot of students, but who are amazing teachers.” Interview, 2014.

<sup>86</sup> These are examples from my own week’s attendance, but the list of instructors over the years includes a very impressive range of expertise: Zev Feldman, Joel Rubin, Petar Ralchev, Deborah Strauss & Jeff Warschauer, Efim Chorny, Ethel Raim, Arkady Gendler and many many more.

is necessarily in some senses to recreate it, YSW works hard to fight against the inevitable contradictions this process of reconstruction raises.<sup>87</sup>

The importance of these multi-level connections elicited different opinions from my workshop colleagues. For some, an expressed link between music and cultural background was essential in order to play the music at all:

I think that understanding the cultural background and context of the music very much improves my playing, thus the background in general is important although this presumably would also be the case if it was non-Jewish music.<sup>88</sup>

I think it extremely important to know what you're dealing with when you take on anything with an 'identity', especially if it's not your own. In my opinion, when handled thoughtlessly (hippies and didgeridoos, for example) cultural appropriation is almost a form of colonialism. In order to respect and nurture what is being 'appropriated', the cultural, emotional and historical baggage has to be understood.

For me it's not possible to play music from a certain culture without knowing about and being a little part of it.

However, whilst all agreed that history and background was interesting and important, opinions differed as to their musical value:

learning the 'Klezmer language', i.e. what ornaments etc to use is really important. Interesting to have some background of Klezmer music, but going into lots of detail about the history doesn't help me play any better, I think.

For me it was very interesting, although I'm not immediately interested in the music as a cultural artefact. I've always played the music as a vehicle for personal expression, not as a source of group identity. Still, it's good to know where the music came from when you study it I think...

A lot of the workshops seem to be about talk. Get over it and play some music!<sup>89</sup>

These oppositional responses from my fellow musicians reflect an interesting dichotomy. On the one side, a feeling that to play without a clear knowledge of tradition is to miss the musical and interpretative point, but on the other an underlying feeling that too much emphasis on history and tradition can in fact relegate living music to the status of "cultural artefact". Arguably, the fact that YSW is able to hold these

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<sup>87</sup> Ray (2010:6): "Once detached from its place in cycles of cultural life, performance becomes a self-conscious allusion to something absent."

<sup>88</sup> Again, these are different responses to my email questionnaire.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

contradictory views within a functional group context is one of its strengths, whilst also demonstrating that an emphasis on tradition in musical transmission can be an ambiguous process.

### **Weimar in action**

During my week at Weimar, I attended two specialist classes: Michael Winograd's new klezmer repertoire and Paul Brody's improvisation class. The two were a good counterpart to each other, one focusing in detail on four modern pieces of music, the other taking a much wider and looser philosophical approach to the process of improvisation, particularly in the context of Yiddish music. Both were geared towards a final concert performance at the end of the week, although where one (Winograd's) was planned and to some degree arranged, Brody's was open-ended and unpredictable, the only certain thing being one short riff that acted as a cue for the musicians to move from section to section.

Winograd's teaching technique is deceptively simple: he plays, we repeat, he talks and then we all play together. But he doesn't talk about the music, at least not directly. He talks about Italian food ("What about a pasta restaurant up top, with a klezmer nightclub on the bottom? It would close in three days"<sup>90</sup>), or Irving Fields, the 97-year-old composer of "Miami Rumba" who still plays in a downtown New York bar five nights a week. Or he suggests an arrangement idea as a joke, a dream that will never happen: "Wouldn't it be great if there was an accordion hit on that beat? Ah, if only that could be...". Musical points are couched within the familiar, the self-mocking: "You need to fall *up*. I know that's not really possible to fall up, in most situations. But in klezmer it is! Remember when you used to fall up the stairs as a kid?" As we learn the tunes, arrangement points suggest themselves, but are never imposed. Musical structures and processes arise out of the act of playing, and the sound and physical feeling of group communication becomes more important than specific detail. This doesn't mean that closeness and concentration is not important. The opposite, in fact, is true, but it is through the bringing together of our multiple voices that we learn to manage the closeness. The classes almost have the feel of a jam session, though one with a clear

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<sup>90</sup> All the following quotes come from the week-long 'new repertoire' class that Winograd ran at Yiddish Summer Weimar, August 2014.

leader. Michael's instant familiarity, his trousers with holes in the knees, his apparent lack of seriousness<sup>91</sup> contrasts powerfully with his total commitment to the music. It draws us in, and as we learn the tunes we also learn to be with each other. Although geared to a final performance, this version of klezmer transmission is fully participative (Turino, 2008b) in both form and function.

The four pieces that Winograd brings all explore a different side of klezmer repertoire and performance. Merlin Shepherd's "The Tongue" is a driving, *honga*-like melody built around the transition between the *mischeberakh* and *ahava raba*<sup>92</sup> modes. It is a straight-ahead groover of a tune and we treat it as such, digging into the repeated phrases and stretching the quavers into more idiomatic jagged rhythms. The (then) eighteen-year-old Isaac Ohring's *freylekhs* is a joyful dance piece. Parts one and three are marked by percussive stops and hits in the melody, parts two (repeated as part four) are more fluid major-key excursions, characterised by large melodic leaps giving way to descending phrase patterns. This is the first tune that we learn and the least 'arranged' of the four. Michael encourages us to fill holes at the ends of phrases and sections with material that bridges the gaps and maintains the energy: "you don't want those parts to stand on their own without feeling connected [...] take some risks, take some chances, try to fill up the spaces." By contrast, violinist Mark Kohnatsky's "Tsecheydung [parting] nigun" is a plaintive minor-key piece, a wordless song that recalls Mendelssohn as much as klezmer. We play this piece without chords, bass or rhythm accompaniment, trying to breathe with each other. The pulse itself becomes fluid – stretched in places, contracted in others as each phrase recalls and comments upon its predecessor. The fourth piece we learn is a *terkische*,<sup>93</sup> one of Winograd's own. This is the most overtly sophisticated, skipping ambiguously between E minor and E major, with a nod to choral harmony in its third part. This is also the only piece to generate any extended discussion about arrangement, precipitating an interesting and eventually creative friction between different musicians' expectations of the needs and requirements of musical pre-planning.

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<sup>91</sup> And anti-iconoclasm: "I am overturning tradition and radicalising Jewish culture by removing two notes and the bom biddy bom."

<sup>92</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>93</sup> See Appendix 1.





Figure 38. Clarinetist Michael Winograd in good company. Yiddish Summer Weimar, August 2014.

Winograd is respectful and subversive in equal measure. He makes no claims to Hasidic knowledge, although he has played plenty of Hasidic weddings, and in fact any sense of ‘the spiritual’ is swiftly undermined:

MW: We should do it again, and this time really concentrate on making one voice, you know? I don’t really have any tips on how to do that. Just listen, listen carefully. And if you’re not together with the person next to you, get together with the person next to you! We could all sit on the floor like we did in the morning, I don’t know if that’s going to help [laughs]. Gonna make it a little tough for the cello. And everyone, for that matter – yeah, it’s a bad idea.

Cultural tropes are freely invoked and then cheerfully subverted:

I think what makes this music great is when everyone is doing different stuff but it all sort of comes together, like spaghetti. Right? [pause] Spaghetti? [long pause] It’s a ridiculous analogy to use, spaghetti, no-one’s telling me that’s a ridiculous analogy? Ok, let’s try it [counts in tune], like *pe-nne* [clicks fingers], *gno-cchi* [hums first part of tune], *ma-ca-ro-ni* [all play].

Nor is family, that other Jewish staple, safe:

I feel like, along with feeling the tempo of the tune, feeling where the downbeat it, also sort of feel the sway of it. You know, it’s like a very – it falls into it. It falls

down the stairs. But, like, gently and lovingly. It's like if your brother pushed you down the stairs, but from a place of love. That's what he always told me, at least [laughter, pause]. Jerk.

And not only is family gleefully undermined, but along with it the oftentimes quasi-sacred revivalist dogma of the wisdom of elders:

Yeah, get that *eeurgh*. It's more ay-ay-ay-ay-*yaa*. Think of that sound. *Aaah!* Everyone sing that [all sing]. Not so clean, everyone! *AAAAH!* This is the sound that my grandfather used to make. This is how my grandfather used to sing, just like this [pause]. He was not a good singer.

In contrast to Winograd's repertoire class, Paul Brody's improvisation sessions have no set repertoire and no overt schema, but the result is equally musical and delves just as deeply into klezmer performance. We begin by playing just one note, trading the sound from person to person. Brody encourages us to strip our thoughts down to the barest minimum: "find the amazing expression within not even a half-step, really get into your sound".<sup>94</sup> The next step is to add a semitone, variety achieved through tone, volume, attack and decay. We move around the room, playing with different formations, close together and further apart, facing each other or playing into the corners of the room. For Brody, to improvise with other musicians (or alone) is to enter a deep space of listening and communication. This space can take time to reach, so Paul's suggestion is that we each give ourselves a word – a synecdoche for this feeling of concentration to enable us to reach our deeper musical state rapidly. The combination of looseness and focus is important for Brody: "we'll practise being loose, but playing tight". He works hard to convey a sense of improvisation as an extension of the ease of conversation, making us bounce our instruments up and down in the air until they no longer feel like something extra, but instead part of our physical presence. Before we begin each performance, Brody tells us, gently, that "our instruments are light in our hands".

Gradually, an idea for a piece takes shape:

Whatever the group before us does, we will steal that material and that will be the basis for our improvisation. It tells something to the audience and it bashes boundaries about how we make music. And I think stealing ideas is very important in improvisation. Shamelessly taking and using for yourself.

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<sup>94</sup> All of Brody's quotes come from his week-long improvising class at Yiddish Summer Weimar, August 2014.

We practise this covertly, creeping into the neighbouring room on a flimsy pretext in order to hear what another group is playing, then returning to our room to use this stolen material, picking up phrases and motifs but separating them from their original musical context. Small groups of notes become found objects, to be explored, traded or discarded at will. This is the first half of the piece. The end of this section is signalled by a classic klezmer cadence (figure 39).<sup>95</sup>



Figure 39. One of several traditional klezmer cadences, part of Paul Brody’s workshop piece.

And this cadence, in turn, becomes the material for the second half of our improvisation, built around a texture that gains speed, energy and complexity in each of its three repetitions. Each time, the cadence acts as a call-and-response marker for section change. The last of these leaves the final resolving notes ambiguously absent (figure 40).

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Bb Trumpet, Accordion, Bb Clarinet, Alto Saxophone, and Violin. The Bb Trumpet part is a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The other four instruments are grouped together with a brace on the left and each has its own staff with a treble clef. The score consists of two measures. In the first measure, the Bb Trumpet plays the cadence melody, while the other instruments are silent. In the second measure, all five instruments play the cadence melody together. The Bb Trumpet part ends with a final quarter note D, while the other four instruments end with a final quarter note D and a fermata.

Figure 40. The same cadence as played by the whole group.

It is a simple yet radical idea to take the least interesting part of the klezmer repertoire (a stock cadence) and make this the focal point. The conventionally phatic, the expected, the heard-before, is turned into the only stable element in the whole piece. This is how Paul describes his thinking:

<sup>95</sup> There is a joke amongst musicians about this cadence. To the tune of the cadence itself, one sings the words “now you know this is a Jewish song”.

one of the main cornerstones – a Jewish cadence. So we are saying, forget the melody, we'll play the cadence and let's get on with the improvisation. Which is very cool. It's playful, it's a statement, and it gives us a little brick to hold on to.

It also, ironically, marks the boundaries of what we play as idiomatic. Whatever goes on between these cadential signifiers, however atonal and arhythmic it gets, is framed by self-consciously 'Jewish' brackets. Writing of folkloric forms and structures, Dan Ben-Amos (1971:10) makes the point thus: "The opening and closing formulas designate the events enclosed between them as a distinct category of narration, not to be confused with reality."

Brody's ethos is to pare things down to their smallest constituent parts, to chip away at an idea until its kernel of creative possibility is uncovered. In the case of klezmer music this becomes gesture, a short phrase, an ornamental 'noise': the whole revealed through the amalgamation of small detail. And like the cadence, these details provide a tangible element to hold onto: the music remains rooted, albeit tenuously, in specific material, and is thus marked as distinct from the pure abstraction of free improvisation. Once again, we are playing heterophonically, our sound the result of all voices in conversation. In fact, Brody repeatedly uses the analogy of conversation when describing his musical practice, encouraging us to move – physically as well as musically – in and out of the conversational space between instruments and players. He also includes the audience in this conversation: "If we go quiet for long enough, the audience will completely start being noisy."

Michael Winograd and Paul Brody are both secure in their knowledge of, and facility with, the resources of tradition as a musical language. Winograd earned his stripes as a teenager at KlezKamp; Brody – finding himself in Berlin teaching klezmer music – worked hard on his own to immerse himself in both the musical idiom and also Hasidic culture. But neither musician is fenced in by their traditional allegiances. Both are free, within the context of YSW and also in their daily musical lives, to disrupt and question this tradition, to pull at its seams and expose its workings. They subvert as much as they reinforce, and in doing so in fact sustain a vision of Yiddish music and culture as robust, malleable, and creatively multi-dimensional. They also maintain tradition as an international dialogue, reminiscent of Paul Gilroy's (1993:199) analysis of African diasporic cultural communication, where he suggests: "it may make sense to try and

reserve the idea of tradition for the nameless, evasive, minimal qualities that make these diaspora conversations possible.” The responses to their methods and results prove that many YSW students are also happy with this knowing and sophisticated interpretation of transmission and discovery. As a way of rounding things up, I want to look at how YSW situates itself and its ‘traditional’ discourse in relation to the surrounding urban context.

### **Weimar and tradition**

The adopted home of Goethe and Schiller, centre of post-WWI German politics and original location of the Bauhaus school, the city of Weimar is well aware of its place in German cultural and historical tradition. And as previously mentioned, YSW works hard to locate itself as part of its host city, rather than a separate, retreat-style learning environment. Every evening sees large public jam sessions at different locations throughout the town centre, and in 2013 dance workshop participants staged a series of flashmob performances in the central square (overlooked by the large statue of Schiller and Goethe themselves). Festival week concert audiences are largely made up of the general public, and the final workshop concert is also a public one (and always sold out). Friday night of YSW’s workshop week sees an event known as *a shtim fun harts*.<sup>96</sup> This is also a public event, but one designed around the familiar intimacy of a Friday night Sabbath table. Here is Alan Bern outlining the thinking behind the event, and its links to the wider city:

We are not a religious organisation, but the spirit of that, of having a day where people just connect to themselves [...] we invite people from the outside to come, there’s wine on the tables and songbooks. We sing songs together, for us it’s ok to play instruments [...] It’s not a performance, you can stand up or sit down, tell a joke, sing a song, tell a story, tell something true about your life, play a piece, whatever it is that you like to share. I think of it as an event like if you had your own home and you were inviting friends and maybe you found out, oh there’s some interesting people in the city and I haven’t met them but they’re supposed to be cool so let’s invite them over.<sup>97</sup>

Even the name Yiddish Summer Weimar itself is a clearly-stated link to its external environment. The setting of these three words together connotes more than language,

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<sup>96</sup> Yiddish: “a voice from the heart”.

<sup>97</sup> Alan Bern, Yiddish Summer Weimar, August 2015.

time and place. By piling these three powerful signifiers on top of each other (without the help of a conjunction or preposition), their meanings are free to overlap and also become interdependent. Yiddishness and Weimar become intertwined, historically-emplaced and sensorially-rooted. This is in marked contrast to the musical specificity and geographic generality of many other similar klezmer/Yiddish workshops: KlezCamp, KlezCanada, KlezFest.

This expressed link between city and culture is also not afraid to confront history. 2013 saw the 75th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, commemorated by large-scale events in Berlin and around Germany. Bern was commissioned by the City of Weimar to create *Weimar klingt!* (Weimar resounds!), an evening-long sound installation, culminating in a concert of Nazi-banned composers. Beginning with handbell ringing at *Stolpersteine*<sup>98</sup> locations, Weimar residents were then invited to throw open their windows, “flooding the streets with sounds of music forbidden in the Nazi era”.<sup>99</sup> Churches and the City Hall added their larger bells to “the joyful cloud of sound [...] all of Weimar joins together in a simultaneous sound celebration.”<sup>100</sup> As one of the crucibles of early National Socialism, this integration of sound, remembrance and German/Jewish relations is a powerful encapsulation of how musical process can comment – sonically and in real time – upon history.

## Conclusion

The absence of a post-Holocaust core Yiddish constituency in Europe has made a revival of klezmer and Yiddish music in Berlin subject to inescapable ideological tussling: without a clear ‘history’ to turn to, the multiple communities have been inevitably, to some degree, imaginary (Anderson, 2006). But imaginary communities can also interact with a real and tangible scene. This chapter has outlined some of the networks of dissemination and education that work to set conceptual (such as heterophony and dance-driven approaches) and material (repertoire and performance practice) boundaries. Whilst these processes often take place within the limited and well-defined spaces of workshops such as Yiddish Summer Weimar, their network

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<sup>98</sup> “Stumbling stones”. Plaques in the pavement outside houses of those taken by the Nazis. See Chapter 6.

<sup>99</sup> Jewish composers, of course, but also American jazz, atonal music, and national music of countries considered enemies of the third Reich. See Haas (2013).

<sup>100</sup> [http://www.weimarklingt.de/e\\_wk.html](http://www.weimarklingt.de/e_wk.html). Accessed September 8th, 2015.

effects are directly discernible in the ongoing operations of the Berlin klezmer scene: what is learnt and discussed at Weimar is feeds into the on-the-ground musical life of the city,<sup>101</sup> taking its place within a “theory of everyday practices, of lived space” (de Certeau, 1984:96), which implicitly refuse over-regulation (*ibid.*).

The links between Weimar and Berlin, then, are crucial, adding the element of lived practice and in effect connecting the bounded imagined<sup>102</sup> klezmer community and the unpredictable city: “a set of constantly evolving systems or networks [...] with the boundaries of meaning and practice between the categories always shifting” (Amin & Thrift, 2002:78). In this way, elastic but useable borders are drawn: a loosely-felt transnational connection assumes a tangible presence in terms of repertoire, performance practice, theoretical approach and instrumental embodiment.

Within this, the meanings of tradition have been contested and interpreted in different ways, with perhaps the only regular consensus being ambiguity. This chapter has explored how the various possibilities of tradition have been led in different conceptual and cultural directions by two major influences. One of these consciously sidesteps notions of cultural difference, while the other looks deeply into a nearly-obliterated history. YSW presents a particularly resonant version of tradition, based as it is in rooted performance and historical specificity rather than vague impression: something that can be taken hold of and taught, rather than loosely and mysteriously ‘felt’. For without a sense of musical differentiation, the reason to play one sort of music over another all but evaporates, and to admit to a difference in affect and context is not to sign up to a complete set of beliefs. In the next chapter, some of these possibilities will be discussed further through the lens of instrumental practice in the city. In particular, the various ideologies and interpretative processes underway when different musicians pick up an accordion to play klezmer music.

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<sup>101</sup> In the spaces of venues and jam sessions discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>102</sup> The international klezmer scene meets Anderson’s (2006:6-7) definition, albeit loosely: *imaginary* because all members will never meet, a *community* through a (vague) sense of comradeship, and *limited* in the sense of having borders, however elastic. At the same time, it is very *different* to the imagined communities of nationality discussed by Anderson.





Figures 41-42. YSW fluidity in action. Top: Alan Bern, Chitoshi Hinoue, Kim Kamilla and others playing and dancing at a jam session at othermusic e.V.'s OMA Café. Bottom: participants find alternative ways of absorbing the afternoon lecture. Both August 2014.



## 5. “It’s not a specific klezmer thing, it’s a specific me thing”: Tradition, Personal Expression and Instrumental Embodiment in Berlin’s Klezmer Accordion Community

*But all the bands where I was most fascinated were with front singers: women with accordions [laughs]. But I think the influence to be connected to the music was already there before I went to these concerts, it started with Balkan accordion. I remember that I loved the movie Arizona Dream, and this woman in the movie was playing accordion. For me it was a whole lifestyle, a feeling of being free and playing accordion. And so it was really like a big feeling in my heart – I want this feeling in my life, I want this way.*

(Paula Sell, accordion player)<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Where the majority of this thesis looks at klezmer and Yiddish music from a perspective of the music’s relationship with wider urban culture and recent history, this chapter is a chance to delve into details of instrumental practice in the city and the viewpoints around which different practitioners coalesce. Whilst this chapter is the least overtly connected to Berlin, it aims to unpack some of the shared assumptions surrounding klezmer music, particularly those that relate to perceived gaps between classical and ‘folk’ musical practice, between aesthetic abstraction and social function, and the dialogue between personal expression and musical tradition and heritage. My focus here is on my own instrument, the piano accordion. Over my year in Berlin, I gradually discovered that my explorations in the klezmer world were underscored by the developing narrative of my own accordion playing, and the relationships (musical and social) generated therein. Arguing for an understanding of this “social life” of instruments, Eliot Bates (2012:364) makes a similar point:

Much of the power, mystique, and allure of musical instruments, I argue, is inextricable from the myriad situations where instruments are entangled in webs of complex relationships—between humans and objects, between humans and humans, and between objects and other objects. Even the same instrument, in different sociohistorical contexts, may be implicated in categorically different kinds of relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin. June 24th, 2014.

My own instrumental journey, therefore, led to a desire to investigate deeper the role, significance and visibility or invisibility of the accordion in general, and in klezmer music specifically. There are, however, several other good reasons for choosing this instrument as an analytical filter. Firstly, it plays a significant role in the current Berlin scene. Three of the most dynamic forces for Jewish folk music in the city – Alan Bern, Ilya Shneyveys and Daniel Kahn – are piano accordionists.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, whilst the accordion is a standard part of most klezmer ensembles, it arguably still lacks its own idiomatic style within the genre – unlike, for example, Bulgarian or Scottish music, where we might think of the virtuosic Petar Ralchev or perhaps the quietly legendary Jimmy Shand. The few ‘how-to’ manuals<sup>3</sup> tend to offer accompaniment ideas generic to other rhythm section instruments (piano, guitar, bass) and ornaments adapted from other melody voices (violin, clarinet, trumpet). This means that to study the accordion in klezmer music is also to unearth a cross-section of instrumental approaches and idioms – the accordion’s versatility and range allows access to several different ensemble functions.

Finally, although the accordion is undeniably widespread across the world’s musics,<sup>4</sup> it has frequently found itself sidelined as a subject of serious academic or musicological study. The varied reasons for this highlight deeper structural power relations within national and international musical establishments: an implicit value scale (with ‘serious’ Western art music at the top); and an ongoing tension between folk music as an expression of pastoral authenticity and a historically-informed understanding of ‘the folk’ in relation to rural-urban migration and twentieth-century industrialisation (Boyes, 1993). As an instrument that straddles hand-made craftsmanship and large-scale industrial production and marketing (Jacobson, 2012), ethnic musical traditions and the Western classical canon, the accordion is uniquely poised at the interstices of these competing cultural forces. This makes it a rich and polysemous starting point for an analysis of the relationship of material instrumental culture and the musical-social environment within which it functions. Going even closer, the piano accordion’s uneasy relationship to both classical *and* folk traditions offers a particular form of multi-

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<sup>2</sup> All three are in fact multi-instrumentalists: Bern plays piano and melodica, Shneyveys plays various electronic keyboards, and Kahn plays guitar, harmonica, ukulele, and sings in several languages.

<sup>3</sup> Those of Sapoznik & Sokolow (1987) and Strom (2012), for example.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, ellipsis arts’ 1995 3-CD compilation *Planet Squeezebox* (CD 3470).

modality, one rarely without attendant social challenges. Here, for example, is flute player and poet Ciaran Carson (1997:122-3) in uncharacteristically uncharitable mode:

Some systems, however, have more drawbacks than most, and the piano-accordion is in a class of its own [...] However, there is no accounting for taste, and piano-box drivers abound, delighting in its multiplicity of basses, its inescapable relationship with the piano, its ability to fill a hall with noise.

This chapter is therefore also a chance to help fill this ethnomusicological gap and contribute something to the important but slim body of squeezebox scholarship.<sup>5</sup> To help in this endeavour, I will be drawing on the work of virtuoso accordionist and klezmer scholar Josh Horowitz (2012) for essential historical context, and – for cultural insight and depth – Marion Jacobson’s (2012) wide-ranging survey of the piano accordion’s American journey. Jacobson’s engaging combination of grounded scholarship and enthusiast’s devotion is one I share fully. The details and subtleties of contemporary klezmer accordion practice are given form, resonance and nuance by the hugely important contributions of my accordionist friends in Berlin, all of whom I interviewed at length and had the good fortune to play with regularly throughout my fieldwork year, benefitting greatly from their generosity of musical spirit and infectious love for the music.

In the only existing English language monograph on the subject, Marion Jacobson argues that the piano accordion has been at the heart of a cultural betterment debate ever since its introduction to the United States by Italian Guido Deiro at the Alaskan-Yukon-Pacific Exhibition of 1909, and Deiro and his brother Pietro’s subsequent rise to vaudeville stardom. For Jacobson, the tireless attempts of the American Accordion Association and others to promote a degree of respectability for the so-called ‘stomach Steinway’ have consistently struggled against classical establishment disdain on the one hand, and the dogged determination of so many amateur and professional folk musicians to retain the accordion at the centre of their musical aesthetic on the other. The accordion is a culturally-charged instrument, caught between a desire for establishment legitimacy, and a sound that to many speaks to a memory and a yearning that locate its ingenious mechanics firmly within a vernacular, familiar and treasured

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<sup>5</sup> As well as those cited, we should note the work of concertina player Stuart Eydmann (1999, 2001), the classical music resources of the free-reed journal (<http://www.ksanti.net/free-reed/essays.html>) and the tireless advocacy of William Schimmel ([www.billschimmel.com](http://www.billschimmel.com)). Both accessed February 5th, 2016.

‘folk’ semiotics.<sup>6</sup> The accordion signifies, even as the processes of signification remain obscure: “People are drawn to the accordion because it strikes a chord inside; it triggers remembrance even though there may be no actual accordion experiences to which to relate” (Jacobson, 2012:2).

Informed by debates such as these (including Simonett, 2012), I use the accordion as a lens through which to view a variety of klezmer musical practices and approaches. Here we encounter both some nice similarities with the arguments of Jacobson and Simonett, and some important differences. Firstly, klezmer music itself stands in an ambiguous relationship to the classical establishment. Whilst understood and functioning as folk music, klezmer musicians are nowadays often highly-trained and musically-literate. This means that the musical space between high and low – as expressed through klezmer – is often blurred, with practitioners moving freely in and out of both contexts. For violinists and clarinetists such fluidity is a well-travelled path, these two instruments existing happily within both spheres. For the accordion – having neither full endorsement as a classical instrument nor an established klezmer tradition – this can on occasion provoke a need to justify its place at all: as Horowitz (2012) puts it, “An Outsider Among Outsiders”. Where other, more fleet-footed, frontline instruments represent and even revel in klezmer music’s ambiguous cultural currency, the lumbering accordion has often found itself struggling for legitimacy – at least until anyone actually pays attention. Here is revivalist and KlezKamp founder Henry Sapoznik talking about the early days of *Kapelye*:

Lauren [Brody] was the first accordionist, and I hired her despite the fact that I hated the accordion (I wanted a cello). Shortly after, however, I found out how wrong I was, as she singlehandedly (ok, she used both hands to play) made me change my mind about the instrument (quoted in Horowitz, 2012:191).

Whilst the accordion’s place within a klezmer ensemble these days arguably feels natural and organic,<sup>7</sup> its historical relationship to the music is therefore difficult to disentangle. The accordion has never been symbolic of klezmer music, a position held

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<sup>6</sup> Consider, for example, the weary yet valiant accordionist’s soliloquy from John Berger’s *Once in Europa* stories: “Perhaps they are right, those who pretend there are harps in heaven. Maybe flutes and violins too. But I’m sure there are no accordions, just as I’m sure there’s no green cowshit that smells of wild garlic. The accordion was made for life on this earth, the left hand marking the bass and the heartbeats, the arms and shoulders labouring to make breath, and the right hand fingering for hopes!” (Berger, 1989:35-6).

<sup>7</sup> A very brief, non-systematic overview of successful and long-running klezmer bands of the last twenty years might include: Kroke, Klezmatiks, Brave Old World, Giora Feidman. The first three include accordion, Feidman works with a variety of backing musicians.

unassailably by the fiddle and – since the noisy twentieth century – the clarinet. Unlike the button accordion in *merengue* (Hutchinson, 2012), the bandoneon in tango (Azzi & Collier, 2000), or the piano accordion in the German and Slavic communities of the American Midwest (Leary, 2012), the accordion’s incorporation into klezmer music has been characterised by stealth and perseverance rather than flash and heroics. Yiddish poet Itzik Manger tells of “*Yidl mitn fidl*”<sup>8</sup> and “*Arye mitn bas*”, but sadly not *Gorden mitn akordyen*. No legendary squeezeboxers appear in Sholem Aleichem’s tales.<sup>9</sup> In his eponymous song the *Rebbe Elimelekh* calls for his *fidl*, *poyk* and *tsimbl*, but never his *garmoshke*,<sup>10</sup> and Marc Chagall painted no accordionists on his roofs.<sup>11</sup>

But this cultural invisibility has useful side-effects. Liberated from pre-ordained constraints, the klezmer accordion has been able to pick and choose its musical meanings, drawing freely on other instrumental practice and technique where necessary. And at the same time, having gained some ground, the accordion has not had to fight particularly hard for continued inclusion in klezmer. For functional dance music in need of a reliable, portable and audible accompaniment, the accordion, with its built-in *boom-cha* left hand, durability and aural brashness, fits the bill nicely, with the added benefit of a loosely generic ‘folkie’ semiotics (in contrast to its rival the electric keyboard or even the acoustic piano). Wary of left-hand/right-hand accordion analogies, we might say that the instrument occupies a curious double-role within klezmer music. Its sound, versatility, ubiquity and mechanics have made it both an integral part of the klezmer sound, and yet one that noticeably lacks a clearly delineated ‘tradition’.

Before getting into detail, it is worth pointing out that my intention in this chapter is not to provide a ‘how to play klezmer on the accordion’ guide. Nor is it an analysis of how anybody *does*, in fact, play klezmer on the accordion. Which is not to say that such a book does not deserve to be written. As with previous chapters, my aim is towards further and continued exploration of the possibilities of what contemporary klezmer music is and can be – in this case, how we might understand klezmer’s possibilities through specific instrumental practice. In particular, how relationships to tradition,

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<sup>8</sup> Made famous by Yiddish actress Molly Picon in the 1936 film of the same name.

<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the famous violinist Stempenyu in Sholem Aleichem’s 1888 novel (Strom, 2002:116-7).

<sup>10</sup> Fiddle, drums, cimbalom and accordion respectively (Mlotek, 1987:168).

<sup>11</sup> This absence of course has much to do with the instrument’s relatively late arrival into klezmer music (Rubin 2001:108). However, I would argue that it also has the effect of perpetuating an ambiguous cultural role for the accordion in klezmer.

innovation, performance fluidity and personal voice are expressed through the much-loved and frequently ridiculed piano accordion. As I hope to show, this rhinestone-clad ‘asthmatic worm’,<sup>12</sup> despite the best efforts of the classical accordion fraternity, doggedly refuses to shed its folk music associations, and for many has acted as a gateway to a new world of sound – bordering on obsession<sup>13</sup> – that has often appeared to offer a more direct emotional and physical connection to music-making.

### **The social accordion**

Whilst the majority of this chapter is based on interview material, it is worth spending a little time exploring some theoretical background that might help provide a framework for what follows. As noted above, there does not exist what one might call an abundance of accordion scholarship. There are, however, several useful starting points, some of which directly address the accordion, while others deal more generally with instruments and the social relationships generated around them. In particular, recent work in the field of critical organology (Roda, 2007; Sonevytsky, 2008, Waksman, 2003) has sought to enrich Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs’ system of instrument classification (1914) to include an understanding of the dynamic and varied relations that come into play once those instruments begin to operate within a social and/or musical environment:

by studying the intimacy of their sonic relationships, the physical experience of bodies interacting, and the cultural and intellectual knowledge that musical instruments embody and transfer; the musical instrument–human relationship could be a unique realm of analysis for a new organology that both draws from and contributes to an interdisciplinary approach to the human/non-human relationship. (Roda, 2007:n.pag.)

In a similar way, accordion and Ukrainian music scholar Maria Sonevytsky has argued:

Musical instruments, the musician’s extra-corporeal “voice” that produces sound in time, mediate the act of sound-making between the musician and the music, and therefore constitute a unique category of “things” to submit to the question: how does an inanimate object express its “social life”? Through their morphological, metaphorical, and historical contexts, musical instruments index a variety of socially prescribed attributes. (Sonevytsky, 2008:102)

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<sup>12</sup> The name of a 2002 electronic music compilation featuring the accordion (mobcd1).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example: <https://uk.pinterest.com/jkdecker123/i-love-to-play-my-accordion/>. Accessed July 12th, 2015.

The use of the word “unique” in both the above quotes is telling. It suggests that the particular dialogue between musician, instrument and music produces a set of conditions through which material and social relationships (involving both people and ‘things’) can be worked out and articulated in a way that does not present itself in any other situations. Sonevytsky (2008:104), for example, theorises the accordion in North America as emblematic of “immigrant striving and pre-rock and roll 1950s optimism”, an iconic relationship which was to lead to the instrument’s symbolic – and ultimately negative – stereotypical embodiment of “ethnic whiteness” (*ibid.*). Whilst my analysis does not include such clear-cut cultural typologies, part of my project here will be to understand some of the particular sets of social relationships invoked through the accordion’s involvement in the contemporary Berlin klezmer scene. This means an analysis of the accordion’s (and accordionists’) position within the various klezmer networks, but also an attempt to discover in what ways the instrument itself might specifically be said to sound the city.

Central to this argument is a consideration of the relationship between musician and their particular instrument.

Performers do not think merely in and through sound, but in and through the instrument-cum-sound. The general tendency, in performance studies, to speak of ‘the performer’ in the abstract obscures the fact that in reality different kinds of musical instruments involve different expressive means, engender different phenomenologies of performance making and generate different kinds of performer identities. (Doğantan-Dack, 2015:172-3)

In other words, different instruments will generate different kinds of performer-instrument relationships. In what follows, I am to unpack some of the particularities of contemporary Berlin klezmer accordionists in order to explore the specific “phenomenologies of performance” at play.

In looking at the accordion and accordion players within the city’s klezmer scene, it is also helpful to tie this back to our earlier discussions of networks. Chapter 4 provided some thoughts on the education and dissemination networks at play within Yiddish Summer Weimar, and the relationship of weakly- or strongly-tied participants to the centralised hubs of instructors and repertoire sources. It is worth noting that four of the accordionists with whom I spoke might be said to be acting as central figures within their particular networks. Their connections to venues, jam sessions, workshops and

record labels frequently place them in the position of intermediaries as well as social hubs. As seen in the previous chapter, Alan Bern's directorship of Yiddish Summer Weimar, his work with Brave Old World, his regular media interviews<sup>14</sup> and his central involvement in projects such as Semer Label Reloaded (including connections to the Piranha label) and The Other Europeans make him a hub and in some senses gatekeeper across several important networks. Bern is frequently the intermediary between Weimar students and jam session venues around the town – his strong ties to these networks of performance give rise to a large number of weak ties that act as a gathering point and playing/learning opportunity for students and other faculty members.

It is worth asking how much these musicians' accordion playing relates to their central network positions. In other words, is it as an accordionist that they function in this way? The answer is to be found in the way that musicians operate across parallel networks simultaneously. Bern, for example, sits at the centre of an *accordion* network in Berlin and throughout the wider klezmer intercultural – this is explored later in this chapter. Whilst this does not account for all of his musical activities, it is a fundamental part of the Berlin scene, and has had a direct effect on the music and network relationships of his students Sanne Möricke and Franka Lampe. Similarly, Ilya Shneyveys' role as Forshpil MD has little to do with his life as an accordion player, but in his function as centralised hub of the Oblomov sessions, Shneyveys' accordion playing is important in a number of ways. Along with drummer Hampus Melin, he acts as intermediary between the venue and its participants, and along with clarinetist Emil Goldschmidt he is responsible for disseminating information (via email and social networks) about upcoming events. More directly, his own playing is perhaps the main on-the-spot musical driver of the sessions. But even more than this, Ilya's physical embodiment of space (the dancing-like way that he moves through the material space of the session with his accordion) is perhaps unique amongst the other accordionists here,<sup>15</sup> and provides one of the cohering effects of the sessions.

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<sup>14</sup> Bern has been interviewed on German radio stations such as Deutschlandradio Kultur, speaking about Yiddish Summer Weimar, Semer Label Reloaded, Weimar Klingt! and more.

<sup>15</sup> To explain this a little more: in performance Shneyveys is without doubt the most *mobile* of Berlin's accordion players. This is not a value judgement, and has little to do with the actual music made (Sanne Möricke, Franka Lampe and Alan Bern all produce equally impressive klezmer). But in the fluid and vibrant atmosphere of the Oblomov sessions, Shneyveys' continual wandering – his embodiment of the music – acts as a tangibly inclusive device, making all players in the session feel part of the action.



In a related example, accordionist Jossif Gofenberg is at the centre of his particular network – centred around the *Jüdisches Gemeindehaus* and Café Bleibergs and comprised largely of musicians from the former Soviet Union and Gofenberg’s own students and choir members. Gofenberg, in other words, provides a crucial network link between his ensembles, certain venues, and their audiences. Physically, Gofenberg’s embodied presence is the opposite of Shneyveys’. A thick-set and heavy man, Gofenberg sits in the middle of his band, rooted to his seat, his accordion strapped tightly to his chest. In contrast to Shneyveys’ fluid travel through the musical space, Gofenberg acts as a solid, semi-static hub, from which the entire musical event emanates. His centrality within his particular musical network, therefore, is reinforced by his physical centrality in ensemble performance.

The network positions of two other accordionists in the city are also worth considering. Franka Lampe is a musician who worked across a variety of musical environments: performer, teacher, musical arranger. In all these networks, Lampe’s role as accordionist was central: musical director in her duo partnerships with singers Fabian Schnedler and Jalda Rebling, researcher and arranger (along with violinist Johannes Paul Gräßer) for Sher on a Shier. Lampe also retained strong connections with the city’s Balkan music scene, as the only professional musician in the ensemble Ljuti Hora.<sup>16</sup> Lampe’s long-established ties with Berlin venues such as Kaffee Burger and the Hackesches Hoftheater (with her band La’Om she was part of the scene from the mid-1990s onwards) gave her a high degree of centrality within Berlin’s klezmer networks.

Sanne Möricke, an equally in-demand accordionist, functions in a slightly different way. Möricke, by her own admission,<sup>17</sup> does not consider herself either an innovator or a front-line player. As we shall see later in this chapter, this has made her an accompanist *par excellence*. This parallels Sanne’s network position, in that she can be understood as a musician with a large number of strong ties to other musicians, but rarely at the centre of a particular network. In other words, it is as a facilitator that she functions most effectively, rather than as a driving-force for new klezmer music. Whilst Sanne is a notably well-connected musician<sup>18</sup> – with a distinctive groove, a unique sound, and a

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<sup>16</sup> Franka’s position as both klezmer and Balkan accordionist is explored later in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Like her ex-partner (in life and music) Christian Dawid, Möricke has at some point played with many of the musicians on the international klezmer scene.

huge amount of performance experience – she rarely chooses to activate these connections to further her own musical projects.<sup>19</sup>

### **The historical klezmer accordion**

It is helpful to add a little history to the discussion. To accurately document the instrument's presence in early twentieth century European klezmer music is a difficult task, and musicological opinion is divided as to the instrument's presence in historical klezmer practice.<sup>20</sup> Josh Horowitz, however, has worked hard to refute claims that the accordion's inclusion in klezmer is a revival-based phenomenon:

Even a cursory survey of the recordings and performance documents from the era of early 78 rpm through the modern revival show that the accordion, far from being a peripheral outsider to the klezmer genre, as it is sometimes portrayed in the literature, has been an integral member (Horowitz, 2012:179).

Horowitz's detailed study is well-supported by recorded evidence and musical analysis. He breaks down pre-war klezmer accordion practice into distinct eras, largely defined according to specific performers such as Belarusian concert artist Grigori Matusewitch (1886-1939), the subtle vocal-influenced style of New Yorker Max Yankowitz,<sup>21</sup> and Ukrainian Misha Tsiganoff's (1889-1967) assured rhythmic drive. Whilst thorough in its musicology, a performer-driven chronology such as this tells us little about the role of accordion players in working (but non-recording) klezmer ensembles: the everyday wedding musicians as opposed to gramophone, radio and concert platform 'stars'.<sup>22</sup> As Beregovski noted in 1937: "The most talented klezmerim grew up among a mass of klezmerim and absorbed what was best and most beautiful of klezmer music" (2000:536). According to Horowitz and Serbian accordionist Peter Stan (in Strom, 2012), it is possible that accordions were at least a peripheral part of this world from the end of the nineteenth century onwards,<sup>23</sup> but if so it is impossible to draw any hard and fast conclusions about their role and stylistic approach within an ensemble. An occasional accordion or *bayan* appears in photos of early klezmer *kapelyes*, but such incursions are consistently and heavily outnumbered by strings and brass. In Yale

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<sup>19</sup> An exception was the long-running duo *Khufe*, with Christian Dawid.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Horowitz's (2012:179) difference of opinion with Ottens & Rubin.

<sup>21</sup> Yankowitz's dates are unknown. His playing career can be documented between 1913-1937 (Horowitz, 2012:184).

<sup>22</sup> Rubin (2001:409) makes a similar point in reference to the recordings of clarinetists Dave Tarras (1895-1989) and Naftule Brandwein (1884-1963).

<sup>23</sup> Though Rubin (2001:108) puts their arrival into klezmer music later: as a solo instrument in 1906 (according to available recordings) and as an ensemble instrument in the 1920s or perhaps even 1930s.

Strom's (2002) detailed survey of musical references in *yizker bicher*,<sup>24</sup> violins feature countless times, trumpets and clarinets regularly, drums and bass occasionally, flute and tin whistle once or twice, but the sole mention of an accordion is in the town of Mikulince (Mykulyntsi in present-day Ukraine), where:

The *kapelye* was made up of all family members except for the clarinetist, drummer, another violinist and a Pole who played accordion. Outsiders were never considered as equal partners (quoted in Strom, 2002:292).

In this context, our Polish accordionist is clearly one of the "outsiders", not only apart from the family *kapelye*, but not even considered equal to his Jewish musical colleagues. This lack of an accordion presence in cultural memory may signify an actual gap in the soundworld, but it may also point to the absence of an accepted cultural role for the instrument, a form of small-scale cultural invisibility.

So whilst the fairly substantial presence of accordions on early 78s<sup>25</sup> attests to the development of a growing klezmer accordion aesthetic, the instrument itself seems largely missing from daily klezmer discourse. We can speculate at a few reasons why the squeezebox, which by the early twentieth century was making deep and lasting inroads into co-territorial musics such as those of Bohemia (Leary, 2012), Germany (Wagner, 1993) and Russia (Neely, 2008:157), seems absent from Eastern European Jewish folk music. The violin's historical primacy (Beregovski, 2001:28) within the hierarchical structure of most klezmer *kapelyes* may have set certain limits on band instrumentation. Similarly, although few *klezmerim* were institutionally-schooled or could read music (*ibid.*:30-1), their high level of training may have been at odds with an instrument still struggling to develop a consistent and credible pedagogy. The increased dialogue between klezmer dynasty and classical artist<sup>26</sup> places klezmer music in a different relationship to the more common 'high' classical/'low' folk musical dichotomy, possibly influencing attitudes towards the accordion's ambiguous status.<sup>27</sup> It is also possible that accordion players in fact struggled to adapt the apparently unbending, even-tempered regularity of their instrument to a music characterised by

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<sup>24</sup> Yiddish: "memorial books". Part of an ongoing collection of American- and Israeli-based personal histories (written mostly by Holocaust survivors) documenting pre-Holocaust life.

<sup>25</sup> Horowitz (2012) finds at least 69 sides between 1906 and 1930.

<sup>26</sup> Mischa Elman and Jascha Heifetz being perhaps the best known, but also the concert careers of artists such as Mikhoel-Yosef Guzikov (1806-37). See Rubin (2001:67-8); Beregovski (2000:537).

<sup>27</sup> On the accordion's ambiguous and shifting relationship to the classical establishment, see Jacobson (2012, chapter 2).

*krekhitsn*, glissandi and bent notes.<sup>28</sup> These specific stylistic issues will be explored later in the chapter.

Inevitably, perhaps, it was in the less structured environment of early twentieth century America<sup>29</sup> that accordion players began to cross these cultural boundaries. In an environment where established cultural traditions would become reframed as ‘immigrant’ ways of life (Slobin, 1982), it is not surprising that musical hierarchies might struggle to sustain themselves in the same way.<sup>30</sup> Brandwein worked regularly with accordionists (Rubin, 2001:137), and Tarras performed and recorded with accordionist Sam Beckerman from the 1940s until his death in 1989. Beckerman’s role was largely as accompanist,<sup>31</sup> and the accordionistic straddling of musical foreground and background is fundamental in what follows. The star performers documented above by Horowitz<sup>32</sup> form the stylistic bases upon which contemporary klezmer accordion players have modelled their playing, but only in part. Virtuosi such as Tsiganoff and Yankowitz<sup>33</sup> speak to a solo or frontline accordion aesthetic, one where the instrument is the main melodic vehicle. Important though these recordings are, they offer a more rarefied context for klezmer accordion playing, the majority of which takes place within an ensemble framework. For the accordionists with whom I spoke in Berlin, the development of an integrated and coherent way of playing klezmer on their instrument involved not only an understanding of performers in the spotlight, but also the subtle ways in which their musical role operates within the bounds of a group sound. Explored in the next sections, this takes in issues of ornamentation, dynamics, phrasing and balance, but also a more general conception of a klezmer *sound*, and in particular the relationship between functional dance music and a more abstracted concertising environment.

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<sup>28</sup> On klezmer ornamentation, see Appendix 1.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>30</sup> See Rubin (2001: chapter 4) for these “Changing meanings”.

<sup>31</sup> In this role, accordionists Patrick Farrell and Sanne Möricke both acknowledged Beckerman’s influence (interviews, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Horowitz has little to say about Tarras’ longtime accompanist Sam Beckerman, for example.

<sup>33</sup> Almost nothing is known of the life of Max Yankowitz. Misha Tsiganoff (1889-1967) was born in Odessa and made his recording and broadcasting career in New York. Although from he spoke fluent Yiddish (Horowitz, 2012).

### **Approaching klezmer accordion style**

Lack of clear ‘tradition’ and an ambiguous multi-functional ensemble role puts the accordion in a sort of musical middle ground. As such, I would argue that it can speak for a certain klezmer approach in general, encompassing melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and the relationship between musical foreground and background. The conscious adaptation by contemporary players of techniques from other instruments and from the human voice has created a multi-layered school of klezmer accordion playing. The rest of this chapter is an attempt to explore these layers, to unpack their musical structures and the relationships of these structures to a wider musical and cultural environment – one that incorporates discourses around musical ‘truths’, emotional attachment, traditional legacies and the aesthetics and ethics of ensemble playing.

Musical instruments are sources of knowledge, the material embodiment of musical theory and technique. They are cultural resources that can be used to transmit long-held traditions or to enact far-flung innovations. (Waksman, 2003:252)

Over the course of a year in Berlin, I interviewed eight accordionists, a bias that far outweighed other instruments. This was not simply because I wanted to chat with fellow squeezebox players; it is testament to the central role of accordionists in today’s klezmer scene in the city. The instrument, in fact, is an interesting way of exploring some significant network connections. Dan Kahn, who features throughout this project in his role as Yiddish *agent provocateur* and political straight-talker, is most often seen performing with his small red Hohner piano accordion strapped high on his chest. The most interesting and dynamic klezmer session in the city, in Neukölln’s Bar Oblomov, is driven at its root by the on-the-spot MD-ing of Ilya Shneyveys, implemented by his hugely resourceful accordion playing.<sup>34</sup> The musician most intimately connected with Berlin’s official Jewish community, centred around the *Jüdisches Gemeindehaus*, is accordionist Jossif Gofenberg, frequently found playing his shiny blue Weltmeister as he leads regular lively Jewish song and dance evenings in Charlottenburg’s kosher café Bleibergs.<sup>35</sup> And perhaps the most forceful and motivating personality of klezmer music in Berlin for the last twenty or so years, Dr Alan Bern, founder of Yiddish Summer Weimar,<sup>36</sup> musical director of several *Jüdische Kulturtage* events, bandleader of the

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<sup>34</sup> This session is explored in context in Chapter 2.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 4.

Semer Reloaded project<sup>37</sup> and founder member of Brave Old World, is first and foremost a piano accordionist. Two of Bern's former students, Franka Lampe and Sanne Möricke, are now central players in the city's (and wider Europe's) klezmer music scene.<sup>38</sup> Their thoughts and approaches form much of the musicological substance of this chapter. To add further weight to the networks discussed in chapter one, one of Franka's students is now a significant musician in her own right: Paula Sell, accordionist with ?Shmaltz!, a group whose multi-dimensional and fantasist musical approach has forced Paula to think carefully about her musical role within the group in general and the specifics of her instrument in particular. In addition, New York-based Yiddish Art Trio's Patrick Farrell regularly drops by Berlin when he is on the road, collaborating frequently with some of Berlin's most dynamic klezmer and Yiddish musicians<sup>39</sup> – his thoughts give a usefully contrapuntal American drive and swagger to the discussion.

In almost all cases, the accordionists I spoke to had learned their instrument through learning klezmer. In other words, their lives as accordionists and as klezmer musicians began at roughly the same time. They did not have to adapt a previously-learned style to a new instrument, nor did they have to learn a new style of music on an instrument on which they were already proficient. This is important, as it points to the development of a discernible klezmer accordion aesthetic, rather than an adapted method of interpretation (relearning piano riffs on the accordion, for example). A player is not simply learning a 'style', but learning how to play their instrument: the musical idiom *is* the playing, in much the same way as Timothy Rice (1994:66) describes the difference between his own academically-influenced approach to the Bulgarian *gaida* and that of his teacher's grandson:

After a few trials, I managed to play a hesitant, clumsy version of the melody absolutely devoid of any ornamentation or much rhythm. Suddenly *Bai* Dimitur stopped, pointed at me, and shouted enthusiastically at his grandson, "*That* is what you should be playing. See what a good musician he is."

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>38</sup> Franka Lampe was a founder of the first klezmer session in the city, *Klezmerstammtisch*. Until her recent early death, she was playing with several progressive ensembles: Schikker wi Lot, Modern Klezmer Quartet and Sher on a Shier. Sanne Möricke was a founder member of the first pan-European klezmer band Sukke (with Merlin Shepherd and Heiko Lehmann), half of the long-running duo Khupe (with clarinetist Christian Dawid), and is nowadays in demand with Frank London, Michael Winograd, Klezgoyim and many more.

<sup>39</sup> For example, Dan Kahn, Sasha Lurje and Ukrainian-born Israeli singer Sveta Kundish.

This parallel development of instrumental technique and musical vocabulary is in contrast to many other musicians with whom I spoke, who had found the need to ‘unlearn’ previous ways of playing and modes of being:

Then he explained about technique, how you have to feel your left and your right. First he told me ‘I know you are a violinist, you have a very good schooling, but now you have to forget everything, you have to try be to like you have never played a violin and somebody just gave it to you.’ And actually, I needed two or three years to find it and then combine, so now I can combine it – I don’t feel pain playing like this!

(*Di Meschugeles* violinist Marina Bondas on her first klezmer lessons)<sup>40</sup>

Although most of my interviewees had initially begun their musical training on another instrument – usually the piano – they had not yet attained the level of Marina above, who by the time of her first klezmer encounter was already playing with the Berlin *Rundfunk* Symphony Orchestra. And so although they had a grounding in basic keyboard harmony and technique, the absence of pre-learnt stylistic *klezmer* constraints meant that all found themselves free to develop their own klezmer-accordion sound, whether through financial and physical necessity:

So I got a little accordion in Budapest, 12 bass, little thing, and came back from Budapest and it just sat in the corner for a month or two, and I never picked it up. And then I finally picked it up and I said, like OH, my god, wow, this is cool. It was immediate, immediate love. So then I moved a lot of places. I lived in San Francisco, I lived in New Orleans, I played more and more accordion. When I first moved to New Orleans I didn’t have a piano. I only had the accordion and so that was all that I could practice. So I really practiced the accordion there and that was when I started making a living as a musician for the first time, finding that I was playing in a band and playing the accordion (Patrick Farrell).<sup>41</sup>

through the fanaticism of the convert:

It [klezmer accordion style] developed at the same time because I picked up the accordion relatively late. I was nineteen and as soon as I had seen that documentary about klezmer music, this [accordion] appeared. And I was really like this, fanatically like this, I was only playing klezmer music. And up till today I am mostly playing klezmer music (Sanne Möricke).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Interview, 2013.

or complete and happy accident:

At a certain point, August 2003, I got an accordion from a friend. We were supposed to do an acoustic gig with my punk rock band, so I decided I should learn an acoustic instrument, instead of keyboard<sup>43</sup> [...] basically I came to [my friend] and I said ‘I want to play some music’, and she said ‘Ok, let’s play klezmer music’. And at first I didn't really like it, but then we played some and then we did some shows, we played some things for Jewish Theatre in Riga, and then we got the band together and we called it Forshpil. Then in 2004 in the summer I went to Klezfest in St. Petersburg – the original Klezfest.<sup>44</sup> And it was very exciting, people playing music all the time, and you know, drinking and playing. And there was never really so much music in my life in such a short period of time. Basically that changed a lot in my life. I came back home, I played every day and in one month I learned more than in the last couple of years (Ilya Shneyveys).<sup>45</sup>

In all these cases, the arrival of the accordion into their musical lives was fundamental in the beginnings of a long-lasting engagement with klezmer music. The fact that all my interviewees came to klezmer and accordion at roughly the same time also means that their accordion playing is conceptually and functionally integrated with their understanding of klezmer music, and specifically klezmer music as rooted dance music. This is the context within which they have learnt to play the music, at workshops, jam sessions and gigs.<sup>46</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the more virtuosic, chiefly Russian, *bayan* players in the city: trained in the Russian classical tradition but who nowadays include klezmer repertoire in their playing. Skazka Orchestra’s Valentin Butt, for example, plays klezmer music in the Russian/German band Di Meschugeles. His impressive playing takes in classical accordion technique and jazz influence, but it would be hard to point to much that is specifically ‘klezmer’ in his style. Against this is an accordion player like Jenny Wieneke, a native Berliner who has been a quiet and persistent part of the klezmer scene for twenty-five years.<sup>47</sup>

I consider myself a traditional klezmer player. What is important to me is the same things which have always been important in klezmer music. I don’t invent

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<sup>43</sup> This parallels my own experience. Having never picked up an accordion before, I was asked by clarinetist Gregori Schechter to walk onstage at London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall playing one, in order to give the band a more ‘folky’ appearance (as opposed to being seated at a Steinway).

<sup>44</sup> Here Shneyveys is referring to the fact that the St. Petersburg festival was the first to use this name (subsequently adopted by London’s Klezfest). The first St. Petersburg Klezfest was in 1997. Thanks to Joel Rubin for this clarification.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> For example in Berlin, Krakow’s annual Festival of Jewish Culture, Weimar and North America.

<sup>47</sup> A founder member (with ?Shmaltz!’s Carsten Wegener) of the Yardniks, Jenny is also a founder member of Berlin’s long-running klezmer dance band Tants in Gartn Eydin (see Chapter 2).



new harmonies, I don't write strange arrangements, and what I like best is to play for dancing.<sup>48</sup>

This is not to say that bands like Di Meschugeles do not play dance music. Indeed, their gigs are frequently late-night, sweaty, club-like events in the funky surroundings of Kaffee Burger and Badehaus Szimpla.<sup>49</sup> But what I would argue differentiates the accordionists interviewed here is that they have chosen to root their playing in a holistic notion of klezmer music that privileges its role as communal dance facilitator, often over and above a more abstracted concert music discourse. This is something that informs their overall approach to melody, rhythm and ornamentation: specifically, it underpins a belief in a necessary fluidity and adaptability of melody and rhythm (depending on context), and the importance of integrating ornamentation within an overall concept of phrasing and melodic contour. It has also meant some careful thinking about the role of their instrument in an ensemble context, and in particular the accordion's ambiguous ability to slip between lead and support. Perhaps, in fact, the single thing marking out my accordion players here is the amount of time they have devoted to understanding not just the expressive and melodic capabilities of their instrument, but its multi-layered accompaniment possibilities also. In dealing with this ambiguity, they have frequently chosen to model their playing on that of other instruments with a more clearly defined ensemble function. Here is Sanne Möricke talking about three such instruments:

To me, this [right hand] is my other fiddle player, sometimes it's also my trombone player, depending on the genre or sometimes also on the tune I will play. I mean, I will not, like a hundred percent decide for one or the other – I can of course swap, change roles. But I really like to play what I call trombone style with my right hand, also I will take a deeper register or single reed and play the triads and the different passing notes, slip into second voicing, maybe even join a little bit in the melody – because it's so, I think the word is versatile? [...] Also, for example, with my right hand trying to – well, it's just my version – sort of imitate the *tsimbl*<sup>50</sup> with my right hand.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Personal interview, Wilmersdorf, Berlin. May 19th, 2014. Jenny's personal views on the function of the instrument within an ensemble overlap significantly with the mission statement of the band and its dance evenings, as discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> Yiddish: cimbalom.

<sup>51</sup> Personal interview, Friedrichshain, Berlin. March 10th, 2014.

This kind of detail is underpinned by a wealth of knowledge and understanding about the variety of instrumental roles within a klezmer ensemble. It is knowledge from which accordion players may be uniquely poised to benefit.

### **The accordion and the sound of Berlin**

Musical instruments, it might be said, represent the first points at which sound moves from being a strictly material acoustic phenomenon to an organized medium of social and cultural expression that, in turn, has implications for the ways that individuals relate to one another or for the broader organization of social relationships [...] Such a critical move, in turn, entails looking carefully not only at the techniques used by the musician, but at the techniques embedded in a given instrument and the particular sonic possibilities that an instrument contains. (Waksman, 2003:253-4).

Throughout this study, I have shown how an analysis of klezmer and Yiddish music allows us in some senses to hear the city of Berlin. In this brief section, I will attempt to tie this in more directly with the piano accordion, by examining possible links between the instrument's cultural baggage and the social operations of klezmer music in the city.

We might begin with a consideration of the instrument's *sociability*. Tresch and Dolan (2013:291) suggest that a new organology would explore:

related formulations of instruments' modes of mediation, examining the prevailing understandings and evaluations of instruments' degree of agency in a given period and field.

Historically an instrument of low status (Simonett, 2012), the accordion's "degree of agency" has often been marked a tension between its role as group facilitator and solo 'star' (Jacobson, 2012). Notwithstanding its increasing status as a solo and concerto classical instrument (Doktorski, 1998), the piano accordion remains a persistently social instrument, often found working in the middle of a group rather than in the limelight. In the performance spaces and scenes of Chapter 2, one of the notable commonalities is a similar sense of sociability. Despite the presence of influential and centralised figures within these networks, the prevailing ethos is frequently of communality and participation – as seen in the jam sessions, dance nights and Klezmer Bund concerts discussed. Perhaps, then, it is not so surprising that we should find the humble piano accordion at the centre of these circles, engendering an aesthetics of collectivity more than individuality. American accordionist and educator Bill Schimmel puts it like this:

Leadership can sometimes take the form of a “back-seat driver” that functions much like Jiminy Cricket did for Pinocchio – a conscience. In my messy/vital/American/democratic/diverse way, I work for the accordion and its continuing evolution. I stumble, I fall, I succeed, but I continue to learn.<sup>52</sup>

We might tentatively tie in this diminished performer-instrument ego with the klezmer accordion’s disproportionate popularity in Berlin. Or more specifically, with the disproportionate number of world-class klezmer accordionists who either live in the city or are a regular part of its musical life (Möricke, Lampe, Bern, Shneyveys and Farrell). There are a couple of related connections at which we might speculate here. As noted earlier in this chapter, the accordion’s historical role in klezmer music is difficult to pin down. In the same way, Berlin boasts few historical links to klezmer. Is it possible that an instrument with an ambiguous historical relationship to the music will find a particularly welcoming home in a city with little historical relationship to that same music? In the same way, whilst Berlin can lay claim to a world-class collection of musicians, part of the international klezmer network, the city’s particular historical skill has been less as a centre of innovative instrumental technique, and more in absorbing influences from elsewhere and reproducing them through its distinctive filter.<sup>53</sup> Would it be stretching the argument to make a claim for a connection between this mediating tendency and the multi-instrument approach to accordion playing outlined by Sanne Möricke above? In other words, does a manufactured, ambiguously industrial instrument with little clear klezmer ‘tradition’ fit neatly into the scene of a city which has for the past few decades taken as its guiding aesthetic a tendency to reproduce the innovation of elsewhere in its own unique accent? With reference to the accordion in contemporary America, Bill Schimmel makes the same point:

In America, we have the tradition of non-tradition. In a sense we have an advantage. Much like Shintos we can adopt any tradition, worship any ancestor at any time or any place. We can deconstruct and reconstruct our temples to suit our immediate or long range goals. Too often we turn to other cultures for a tradition to inherit, which is okay provided that we don't make that tradition the ultimate end. Perhaps the tradition of non-tradition is the truest tradition of all.<sup>54</sup>

We might relate this embryonic argument back to Sonevitsky’s “morphological, metaphorical, and historical contexts” and the way in which they “index a variety of

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.billschimmel.com/article3.htm>. Accessed September 6th, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> As seen in the work of the modernists and fantasists of Chapter 1, perhaps.

<sup>54</sup> From one of Schimmel’s epigrammatic online articles. <http://www.billschimmel.com/article9.htm>. Accessed September 3rd, 2016.

socially prescribed attributes” (Sonevytsky, 2008:102). To pick up an accordion in France, Italy or Scotland is to immediately tap into a long-established tradition, to connect through the very instrument to pre-existing networks of repertoire, function and performance practice. To pick up an accordion and play klezmer in Berlin, whilst the music may have on occasion been laden with historical weight, invokes no such direct instrumental link. In this sense we might well argue that the very lack of “historical context” is in fact a powerful match for an equivalent lack of “socially prescribed attributes”.

This is not to say, however, that klezmer accordion playing in Berlin has not established itself. Indeed, the absence of pre-conceived patterns of performance is increasingly being addressed, to which the testimonies of the accordionists in this chapter testifies. At this point we must take especial account of the seminal influence of Alan Bern, who has been largely responsible for (re)creating a tradition (and subsequent network) of klezmer accordion playing, initially through trial and error<sup>55</sup> and more recently through detailed research.

### **Embodying the accordion, embodying other instruments**

As a pianist, Alan Bern studied classical piano with Leonard Shure, jazz with Karl Berger and contemporary composition with Frederic Rzewski, but on the accordion his style and training is all his own. By his own admission, Bern made a clear ideological decision to learn the accordion in a consciously different way to his classical piano training, focusing instead on becoming what he calls an “ear musician”, whilst also embracing the physicality of the instrument as an emotional and embodied connection rather than something to be battled and subdued.<sup>56</sup> For Bern, an explicit connection to Yiddish cultural tradition – built up from detailed listening – informs much of his music, and this connection is most effectively made through an understanding of complementary vocal and instrumental practices. His left-hand accompaniment patterns and rhythmic drive are drawn frequently from cimbalom models, his right hand melodic phrasing from Yiddish song and *nigunim*.

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<sup>55</sup> This, at least, was one of Bern’s claims at Yiddish Summer Weimar accordion workshops. Specifically: “Joel Rubin was happy to play the tune while I fooled around in the background.”

<sup>56</sup> Workshop, Yiddish Summer Weimar, 2014.

In klezmer music, Bern is also responsible for a significant lightening of the conventional root-chord-fifth-chord rhythmic accompaniment that characterises much accordion playing.<sup>57</sup> In particular, he insists that fellow musicians think carefully about their accompaniment patterns: varying and adapting them in relation to melodic contour and expressive potential, in contrast to the simple, idiomatic and relentless root-fifth left hand norm. Based in cimbalom technique, Bern's easily-grasped but deceptively rich approach includes varying between two bass notes in a bar (on beats one and three) and just one (on beat one), depending on the melody above and the player's desire to either parallel that melody<sup>58</sup> or contrast it:

For me, the melody itself has a phrasing. And in older style klezmer music, the rhythm is derived from the phrasing of the melody, not the other way around. The rhythm and the flow and the ebb of the melody is what is giving you the rhythmic structure underneath it.<sup>59</sup>

These are developments that his pupils have incorporated into their own playing, frequently aligning their accompaniment patterns with a variety of other instruments simultaneously. This not only adds contour and depth to the sound, but foregrounds an artistic intent, as illustrated by Dutch-born, Berlin-based Sanne Möricke:

I try to have a clearer pronunciation. Or maybe dividing it, like this is my bass player and this is my *sekund*<sup>60</sup> player [shows fingers two and four of left hand]. What I hear with a lot of people is that they have this '*mmwhan-mmwhan*' [heavy accordion LH imitation], and it's just exhausting to listen to! It must be exhausting to play too. And it's just much more fun to have some depth in there, to give the bass thing a little bit of extra input, and I always try to tell people 'try to see the bass player', you know 'hm-hm-hm' [mimes bowing], and the *sekund* player. And just play that left hand and listen to what is going on and really feel the contour.<sup>61</sup>

This almost ego-free sublimation of proud accordionistic technique self-consciously undermines any idea of a unified or standardised klezmer accordion pedagogy in favour of a strong faith in musical heterogeneity.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to a 'school' of klezmer accordion playing or a classically-informed individuality, practitioners instead

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<sup>57</sup> The circle-of-fifths *stradella* left-hand system of the piano accordion is designed in such a way that this effective yet restrictive method of backing tends to function as a default for a large proportion of piano accordion players the world over. cf. Tresch and Dolan (2013:289): "How much does the instrument control the user, and vice versa?"

<sup>58</sup> Bern called this "one-to-one" accompaniment.

<sup>59</sup> Alan Bern, accordion class, Yiddish Summer Weimar, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> *Sekund* players are the second-line fiddlers of a klezmer *kapelye*. Their role is to support the solo line with rhythmic chordal accompaniment. See Strom (2012:103-7).

<sup>61</sup> Interview, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> An important part of the Yiddish Summer Weimar aesthetic, as discussed in Chapter 4.



Figure 43. Jam session in Weimar's Marktstraße. From left to right: Michael Winograd (mostly out of view), Paul Brody, Emil Goldschmidt, Patrick Farrell, Alan Bern. August 2014.

frequently choose to base their interpretation on that of related instruments or voices. In Bern's teaching at Yiddish Summer Weimar and elsewhere, this is also allied to a practice that places greater emphasis on ensemble communication and musical danceability, a performance ethic that values a perceived honesty and depth of expression over explicit technique. This will be explored later in the chapter. In his workshop sessions,<sup>63</sup> Bern's continual stresses on the importance of connecting with other instrumental techniques and approaches is more revolutionary than it may sound. Conventional piano accordion pedagogy, developed principally in the United States<sup>64</sup> (Jacobson, 2012), has tended to emphasise right-hand dexterity, left-hand dependability and regular, even bellows control.<sup>65</sup> Rarely if ever is the idea of adapting techniques from other instruments mentioned – in fact, this would arguably threaten the reliability of a transferable accordion-centric teaching method. In folk musics where the accordion is a prominent voice (Scottish or Bulgarian, for example), there exists a shared vocabulary between boxes, fiddles, whistles and pipes (Eydmann, 1999). But to consciously find ways of linking the piano accordion directly with the practice and aesthetics of other instruments is still a rare thing in the free-reed world, and arguably not seen in klezmer since the days of Bern's model Max Yankowitz:

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<sup>63</sup> Discussed extensively in Chapter 4. Here I am concentrating more specifically on Bern's accordion approach.

<sup>64</sup> Several other countries – notably France and Russia – have developed formidable accordion schools, but these have tended to be button-accordion based.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Willard Palmer and Bill Hughes' successful and influential ten-part piano accordion course (first published 1952 and still in print); also Pietro Deiro's accordion arrangements (1951) of Czerny's *School of Velocity* studies.

So this [bellows control] is a place where accordion really connects in its expression with violin and with voices and with wind instruments. It is a wind instrument [...] this is often overlooked. Very often accordion players just play [plays mechanically], like there's only one thing that it's sounding like. But in fact, if you listen to, for example, the old Jewish accordion player Yankowitz, you hear sounds like this [plays slowly, legato, overlapping notes, ghost octaves]. Those kinds of things, ok? And that's really working with the bellows the way the violin would or the way that a wind instrument or the voice would. And interestingly enough Misha Tsiganoff, who is really the model for most accordion players, almost never does that. He's all about [plays, fast and even]. Which is fun, and very accordionistic. But there are some ornaments that you just can't do without that bellows control.<sup>66</sup>

Figure 44 shows a transcription of Bern's short improvised passage quoted above (YSW accordion class August, 2014). It illustrates the use of 'hidden' octaves (which only appear as air pressure increases – marked as 'b'), *krekhits* (marked as 'a') and subtle bellows shifts in the quest for greater expressive emphasis. Stylistically, it acknowledges the strong influence of Max Yankowitz and is a good example of the 'borrowing' of other instrumental techniques discussed throughout this chapter. Crotchet is c.50 and the overall feel is a loose expressive *rubato*.

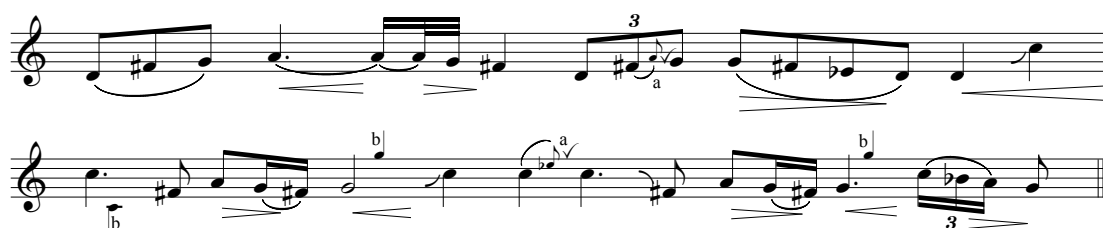


Figure 44. Alan Bern, accordion passage.

This is a much more idiosyncratic approach to piano accordion playing, one that rejects the smoothness and facility of a Myron Floren (Jacobson, 2012) in favour of the irregularities and expressive possibilities of the klezmer fiddle or clarinet. It views the accordion bellows less as a pump and more as a pair of singer's lungs, the keys and buttons as subtle means to unlock their inherent emotional potential. In contrast to a historical classical tendency to efface the performer in favour of compositional 'truth' (Feldman, 2000:61-2), this is a discourse of embodiment that locates the physical performer and the particularities of their instrument at the centre of the soundworld: "If instruments are frequently accused of making humans act mechanically, why should we

<sup>66</sup> Alan Bern, Yiddish Summer Weimar accordion class, 2014.

not take seriously instruments' oft-noted lifelike capacities?" (Tresch & Dolan, 2013:285)

It is also a discourse that accepts the implicit changeability and unpredictability of performance:

Every time we make music like this, improvised within a certain style, it depends on everyone where the music is going to go. Not just the melody player. If suddenly you do this [heavy bass note], you change the music, and the soloist will follow you. Then the soloist will have something and you follow them. So it's very much like a conversation. A little detail can change a lot.<sup>67</sup>

This last quote also points up the accordion's particular functional ambiguity. Unlike many of the styles and genres described in detail in Simonett (2012), the accordion – although at home in klezmer music – is neither emblematic of nor central to its sound. In fact, it is arguably only since the 1970s (revival-era onwards) that its yearning wheezy tone has been heard and understood as a usual part of the klezmer line-up. The reasons for this are allied to the instrument's take-up in the 1980s and beyond as a symbol of alternative, local and community musicking, away from the more individualistic rock or jazz model (Jacobson, 2012). This lack of marked historical precedent allows contemporary accordion players to exploit the squeezebox's potential to swap roles and overlap function. Without a clearly determined and defined place, the best musicians will roam freely between several:

So [laughs], it's interesting because once I was rehearsing with Vanessa and Georg as a trio.<sup>68</sup> Vanessa on her violin, she also likes to accompany. And at some point we were sort of like 'hmm-ah-hmm' with each other because we felt like we were also exactly in each other's range. So, you know, I changed my register and stuff, but it was like we were both having so much fun just accompanying! (Sanne Möricke).<sup>69</sup>

An understanding and acceptance of the fluidity of the accordion's ensemble role is also a point of difference from historical accordion pedagogy, which frequently either positioned the instrument as a quasi-pianistic solo vehicle, or else as part of an accordion ensemble (Jacobson, 2012). In both of these cases, consistency of technique, clarity of musical intention and fidelity to existing models were highly valued precepts.

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<sup>67</sup> Ilya Shneyveys, *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Australian-Dutch violinist Vanessa Vromans and German clarinetist Georg Brinkmann.

<sup>69</sup> Interview, Berlin 2013.



Unsurprisingly, contemporary folk accordion players, klezmer musicians amongst them, have often tended to reject this orthodoxy:

I learned this from Tziganoff – but also Fats Waller and all the great stride pianists did this too, if every three or four bars you play one really nice juicy bass, the ear will believe that it's there all the rest of the time. [Plays with occasional big bass]. Now, I don't think that that's less danceable than if I go [big bass all the time], where I'm really whacking away and putting the basses all the way down [...] It gives you different expressive means. I've read a lot of accordion books, there's a kind of standard pedagogy, and the pedagogy says you have to keep your bellows moving smoothly in and out, which you can't play this music if you do that, and you have to play the buttons all the way to the bottom, and you're really giving yourself a disadvantage if you do that. So this is kind of anti-pedagogy, what I'm doing right now.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Balkan accordion and the Klezmer Police**

Important though they are, early klezmer musicians and Alan Bern are not the only influence on contemporary klezmer accordionists. For whilst a klezmer accordion 'tradition' may be debatable, the various schools of Balkan accordion playing have been gaining currency amongst Western musicians and audiences for the last thirty or so years, following in the wake of celebrated musicians like clarinettist Ivo Papasov (Silverman, 2012). Most of the accordion players with whom I spoke in Berlin have also been influenced, to greater and lesser extents, by the virtuosic thrills and technical challenges of these accordion-playing traditions.<sup>71</sup> In fact, for several, this was their initial route into klezmer. Here is German accordionist Franka Lampe:

How I come to klezmer? I came to klezmer because I wanted to play Bulgarian music. I found Alan Bern, who was giving one of the first klezmer workshops in about 91 or 92. And I asked him if he was playing East European music as well, Bulgarian etc. and where he is living and if I can have *Unterricht* [tuition]. And I remember the day, where I asked him – because it was all Serbish, Bulgarish, klezmer piece, something else, again a klezmer piece. And I asked him, 'ok, would you like me to learn klezmer?' [laughs] So, and afterwards, I didn't ask the question any more. Because it was too late. I was involved!<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Alan Bern, Yiddish Summer Weimar accordion class.

<sup>71</sup> As exemplified nowadays by musicians such as Petar Ralchev, who appears as part of Alan Bern's *Other Europeans* project.

<sup>72</sup> Interview, 2014.

Indeed, klezmer is frequently lumped together with ‘Balkan music’<sup>73</sup> as part of a band portfolio of influences and styles.<sup>74</sup> Shared scale choices, similar (though far from identical) ornamentation and perceived historical co-territoriality often lead Western accordionists, clarinetists and violinists to explore both Balkan and klezmer repertoire. Interestingly, apparent similarities between the musics frequently reveal themselves to be less secure than previously thought, and upon closer inspection can in fact highlight a deeper distinction of musical aesthetic. The accordion is a useful route into understanding some of these differences – differences that often present themselves in technical terms:

I think that that’s the thing that drew me to klezmer versus something like Balkan or Macedonian music, you know? Because in Macedonian music there’s so many damn notes there’s hardly any room for variation or for improvisation. Until you get to the solo section.<sup>75</sup>

But then reveal a deeper intent:

And I’m honestly kind of sick of music that has ‘the solo section’. And the solo section here sounds pretty much like the tune anyway! It’s like, there’s another solo, there’s another solo – it gets really old for me. But with klezmer it’s like there’s this constant room for improvisation, you know? Never play the same melody the same way twice.<sup>76</sup> Never. Even on the repeat of it, it needs to sound different. Always. Always, always, always.<sup>77</sup>

For some, then, klezmer offers a perceived freedom of interpretation that Balkan accordion music, with its plethora of notes and constant ornamentation, lacks. Klezmer retains sufficient technical challenges and melodic interest, without limiting musicality and over-determining performance choices. However, this increased breathing-space, this room for improvisation and interpretation, also brings its own responsibilities:

The point that every time I’m fighting a little bit, is the point to mix too much Bulgarian and klezmer style. Because there are a lot of similarities, but often not. That’s hard. I’m trying to keep it separate. Bulgarian music is for me a pure *Abholung*, collecting. If I want to make a trill, I make a trill. With klezmer music you have to think about it! Because of the singing melody, serving the melody, or not. If it doesn’t serve the melody or further the melody, you don’t do it in klezmer. In Bulgarian music, I don’t care, just put it anywhere! Ja, it’s too much not caring sometimes [...] I love the players who are virtuosos without destroying

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<sup>73</sup> Silverman (2015) unpacks some of the ideological issues behind this “New Old Europe” sound.

<sup>74</sup> Franka, for example, also played with Berlin Balkan dance band *Ljuti Hora*.

<sup>75</sup> Patrick Farrell, interview, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Here Farrell is echoing clarinetist Max Epstein (Slobin, 2000:95).

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

the melody. And my favourite trill, every time I come back to it, I have to think ‘No! Think about it!’<sup>78</sup>

In other words, that klezmer is less of an ornamentation free-for-all means that the perceived significance and weight of each decorative choice is that much greater. This places ornamentation in a much more subservient role, allied strongly to interpretation and serving the melodic line. Its function, as seen by musicians like Franka above, is to highlight melodic contour and foreground rhythmic flexibility – over and above decorative colour or virtuosity. This clearly thoughtful approach to phrasing and interpretation, however, can occasionally become a philosophical straitjacket:

It’s not that I’m not interested in klezmer – but in me I was more in this direction of roots of Bulgarian things and not the whole Yiddish tradition klezmer world, and why this and why that, and is it ok to play it or not. I was a bit afraid. I heard some discussions of Franka and sometimes I heard words like ‘klezmer police’ and people [...] I don’t like to be stressed and I stress myself about being alright or good enough. And if there’s something like klezmer police, it was for me an alarm. It’s not good for me to make something where I always think it could be wrong.<sup>79</sup>

The quotes above, and this last one in particular from ?Shmaltz! accordionist and singer Paula Sell, point to a paradoxical territory that klezmer is frequently perceived to straddle. On the one hand the freer melodies and ambiguous harmony of klezmer music – in contrast to the machine-gun fireworks of Bulgarian accordion playing – are seen as offering a greater potential for personal interpretation and expression, with more chance to pull and push phrases, subvert harmonic resolution and improvise in the gaps. But at the same time, all of my interviewees made ironic reference to the widely-held belief that the klezmer police were never too far away, keeping a watchful eye that things don’t stray too far from a perceived line of correctness. Bearing in mind that I was speaking to the top-flight of klezmer accordion players in the city, it is hard to imagine exactly what legitimacy the klezmer police might be able to claim. And indeed, their presence was in fact generally understood as symbolic rather than actual:

But the interesting thing is, actually, I don’t know who the klezmer police are. If I think of actual people, I haven’t heard names or something. But I know that people are afraid of the klezmer police.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Franka Lampe, interview, 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Paula Sell, interview, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Sanne Möricke, interview, 2014.

If the klezmer police are an imaginary rather than a real phenomenon, we must then ask who has brought them into being? I would argue that in one way they are a residual effect of the workshops and teaching networks set up in the revival's earlier stages.<sup>81</sup> As a collection of willing but inexperienced Germans turned into proficient klezmer musicians through the 1990s, it is perhaps inevitable that a certain amount of 'correct practice' would emerge. We might think, therefore, of the klezmer police as a network effect – an imaginary yet powerfully-constructed symbolic gatekeeping presence between new arrivals to klezmer music and the need to guard a sense of established performance practice. In this sense, it represents the process of this particular network maintaining its performative borders. Networks, however, are not impregnable. More recently, confronted by the significantly more easy-going attitudes of newer arrivals (Dan Kahn and Ilya Shneyveys among them), these early needs for clear guidelines have morphed into an ironic shadowy presence – with the result that the 'klezmer police' is a phrase that now signifies a particular rule-bound and unimaginative musical approach. Once again, we see the network adjusting its borders, taking account of a newer malleability that now places the klezmer police on the *outside* of the network. In other words, to refer to the klezmer police is in fact also a way of subtly signifying one's own musical freedom and (gently) iconoclastic style. An implicit embrace of the "proliferating illegitimacy" of *tactics*, perhaps, in the face of a "stable, isolatable" *strategy* (de Certeau, 1984:94-6).

**“It’s not a specific klezmer thing, it’s a specific me thing”:<sup>82</sup> personal expression vs being in the tradition**

Whilst the klezmer police may be invoked as a rear-guard warning against the dangers of blind musical obedience, my interviewees were universal in their need for two related things: an understanding of tradition and a conscious belief in the musical choices made. This relationship to tradition is a powerfully motivating one and simultaneously hard to pin down. Writing of Finnish, Italian and Czech accordionists in America, Marion Jacobson (2012:144) suggests:

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>82</sup> This distinction is from Sanne Mörické during our discussion of approaches to ornamentation (interview, 2014).

in all three cases, the accordion was the touchstone both of culture's authentic roots and its destination. The piano accordion was the key to perceiving one's distinct cultural identity, to energizing one's motivation as tradition bearer, and to preservation and rejuvenation.

Although I and my fellow accordionists would no doubt welcome the unwieldy piano accordion's ascendancy to tradition bearer, the question arises in this case: what precisely is the nature of the tradition being upheld, which aspects are in need of preservation and which are ripe for rejuvenation? And how might this "distinct cultural identity" translate to actual instrumental practice? Here is Patrick Farrell:

Ok, so I spent a lot of time thinking about the hallmarks of the klezmer style. And now it's just, hopefully, integrated into my own style. I would be the last person to claim that what I do is a traditional klezmer thing. But I do know about that stuff, and I can teach other people [...] So I don't spend a lot of time worrying about the traditional aspects of it while I'm actually doing it, but I also insist that people spend a lot of time thinking about it in their lives, and then trying to forget it.<sup>83</sup>

Interestingly, all of the accordionists I spoke to were quick to deny that they were any sort of spokesperson for 'correct' klezmer practice. And yet they are amongst the most admired (and busiest) musicians playing this music today: rooted in traditional knowledge, yet simultaneously unafraid to push their playing well outside this tradition, towards – in Sanne's words – "a specific me thing". Perhaps the maverick individualist klezmer detective, rather than the monolithic klezmer police, or to echo Paul Brody from chapter 1, "the tradition is not holding on".

Is it possible, then, to find other commonalities linking the approaches of the different musicians here? One that I found is an express desire to pull and push, to shift things around, to create melodic or rhythmic tension whilst retaining a clear sense of musical line. For a player like Sanne, steeped in the vocabulary of accompaniment and counter-melody, this frequently takes the form of delaying endings and resolutions in order to build upon a traditional tension-release structure. The transcription in Figure 45 shows Möricke demonstrating her love of making subtle shifts in melodic rhythm and phrasing in order to build tension, prolong resolution and keep things lively. The piece in question is a *honga*, a medium-tempo dance (here crotchet is c.110) that relies on a contrast between a steady and repetitive rhythmic accompaniment and a jittery, small-compass melody on top. Here is how Sanne herself describes what is going on:

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<sup>83</sup> Interview, 2014.

Development on a certain rhythmic level, I like to play around with that, to make little shifts back and forward, to evoke the impression that I'm pushing something forward when I'm not really doing that. A *honga* is good for this, to make these little shifting things, because it has so many small notes that you can just juggle around, I guess. So what I for example like to do to keep the simmering quality is keep my bass note as steady as possible, not only rhythmically but also tonally. But you notice also maybe in the melody, for example I already like to pull that forwards. So that's away from the original thing, but I do get there, where I want to end up. And that steady bass gives something to push against.<sup>84</sup>

In the transcription, I have marked the places where Sanne's interpretation differs from the 'standard' version, stretching the melody and varying repetition within and across phrases.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'honga' by Sanne Möricke. The score is written in 2/4 time and features a steady bass line in the left hand and a more complex melody in the right hand. Several annotations highlight specific interpretive choices:

- anticipated melody note:** This annotation appears twice, pointing to notes in the right hand that occur slightly before the expected rhythmic position.
- melodic syncopation:** This annotation is located in the third system, pointing to a note in the right hand that is accented and occurs on a weak part of the beat.
- melodic and harmonic variation:** This annotation is located in the sixth system, pointing to a section where the melody and harmony deviate from the standard version, highlighted with a red background.

Other musical markings include trills (tr), triplets (3), and various articulation marks like accents and slurs.

Figure 45. Sanne Möricke, *honga*.

<sup>84</sup> Interview, 2014.

For Franka Lampe, the push and stretch comes from finding new “horizontal” routes through a tune:

What I like, too, is if I meet a klezmer tune I cannot understand. And to get into it, and get an understanding of it, that’s a beautiful point. I like this horizontal<sup>85</sup> way. I met a tune last time, it’s incredible, I don’t know if I’ve got it. Shall I sing it? [sings] So it’s good – it changes from minor to major in a very tiny way, and this destroys all your harmonic understanding!<sup>86</sup>

Paula Sell, the youngest and least explicitly confident of the accordion players with whom I spoke, spent a year in Cuba learning salsa piano, where the *montunos* (or *tumbaos*) that are the keyboards’s language are unambiguously rhythm section domain. For her, this rhythmic knowledge is something directly translatable to klezmer music, and again signifies the chance to exploit accordionistic fluidity:

I play the rhythm almost all the time. But because there is a banjo and the bass and percussion, we have a really big rhythmic section. So I wouldn’t say that I’m the basic solid rhythmic section, but I think that my elements of rhythm are part of an important thing in the rhythm, because it’s like offs [offbeats], or not exactly offs, but between off and on you can influence the rhythm.<sup>87</sup>

All three of these responses point to a delight in ambiguity, an acceptance of difference in playing and interpreting. And much of the interest – particularly in traditional music – comes from holding these different possibilities simultaneously, playing with them and recognising that they are likely to turn out different every time. Having learnt and internalised a particular stylistic vocabulary on their instrument, these musicians are interested in pushing the possibilities of what they do, whilst remaining firmly within a klezmer aesthetic. This is not so much klezmer fused with jazz, or *cumbia*, or anything else, as klezmer pushed to the exciting edges of its own inherent potential. For all my interviewees, the multiple roles of the accordion are central to this movement, and they are roles that must be fully understood and actively probed. Patrick Farrell clearly sets out the unfolding layers at play:

You feel like a lot of accordion players might be very good accordion players, but feel kind of stuck in a role of what they think the accordion is supposed to do, which is basically provide some sort of rhythmic support. And then in a lot of ways they’re also not really doing that with any kind of knowledge, you know? It’s like, well you’ve got rhythmic support but it’s not really grooving in the way

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<sup>85</sup> Here Franka means melodic rather than harmonic narrative.

<sup>86</sup> Interview, 2014

<sup>87</sup> Interview, 2014

that *klezmer* does. But then even if they're a good accordion player and they're grooving with a klezmer rhythmic feel, a lot of times they're just like scared to put in some of those lines or some of the extra stuff, the flashy stuff [...] I think that's probably the other thing that's maybe my own style, you know? Is that I'm not afraid to play the melody right on top of you playing the melody. I'm not afraid to play, like, all kinds of inner lines and different kinds of responses or cross-lines or whatever. And I'm not afraid for it to be a little bit messy.<sup>88</sup>

A little bit messy, destroying harmonic understanding, between off and on... although all the klezmer accordion players with whom I spoke in Berlin were acutely aware of an idea of tradition, their various brands of iconoclasm and individuality guarantee that none would ever set themselves up as tradition bearer. I would argue that the cultural identity at play here, whilst similarly “touchstone and destination” (Jacobson, 2012:144), is a necessarily loose one: a dynamic relationship to a musical heritage, but one that incorporates contemporary and contingent ways of being, ways that look outwards to their modern urban environment as much as inwards to “culture’s authentic roots” (*ibid*). Without doubt a community, but a community of like-minded practitioner-fans (Frith, 1996) rather than an ethnic, religious or national grouping – or even an agreed performance practice.

Within this easy-going Berlin-esque fluidity,<sup>89</sup> a quantifiable concept of traditional style is a hard thing to grasp. One area where this comes to the fore is in the (mine)field of ornamentation. To strike a balance on the one hand between the characteristic *krekhitsn*, chirps, trills and slides<sup>90</sup> considered so central to convincing and expressive klezmer performance, and self-indulgently over-egging the musical pudding on the other, is fraught with pitfalls, and sombre warnings loom over the pedagogic landscape. One of the best-known anthology-manuals has this to say about melodic decoration:

The *dreydlekh* (ornamental turns) decorate the melody, NOT VICE-VERSA. There is always the tendency for the inexperienced player to try to “throw in the kitchen sink” in trying for authenticity, or Nirvana, or whatever; this gives a flashy, shallow performance. Dig into the MUSIC and strive for ARTISTRY.<sup>91</sup>

For the aspiring klezmer musician, this presents a dilemma. How to unlock the magical world of artistry whilst retaining a credible musicality? Slobin (2000:111) points to a

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<sup>88</sup> Interview, 2014

<sup>89</sup> See in particular Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of the Berlin bricolage that permeates my discussion throughout.

<sup>90</sup> See Appendix 1 for a fuller discussion of ornamentation and sources. Also Rubin (2001, chapter 8) for detailed analysis of ornamentation in Brandwein & Tarras.

<sup>91</sup> Sokolow (1987:24), capitals in original.



similar creative tension between ornamental expressivity and a “classicizing”, stripped-back aesthetic. My discussion here explores the way musicians understand the role of ornamentation in the development of a coherent musical voice, and the relationship of this voice to an idea of tradition. All my accordionist friends expressed a combination of wonder and uncertainty upon first being confronted with the world of klezmer ornamentation. Initial exposure to this new language raised the problem of how to learn it in the first place, and then how to actually use it. For all, the goal swiftly became to internalise the stylistic ornamental vocabulary of klezmer music (through long careful practice and repeated detailed listening), and then in a sense forget it. Or at least not think too hard about it. Wary of the impossibility of ‘one right way’, ornamentation is frequently perceived as being a part of the musical armoury that will inevitably develop its own habits and interpretative devices.

I consciously worked at it for a little bit and then not a little bit, for a long time – consciously, where do I want things to sit, how do I want this melody to sound. You know, does it sound good played very straight, or does it sound better if I throw in some of this other stuff? So I used to spend a lot of time doing that, and these days I don’t think about it so much. These days it’s just integrated into my own thing.<sup>92</sup>

But whilst to impose too much prior thought upon the process was seen as dangerous, all agreed that ornamentation also needed a valid musical reason at any time: an underlying intention greater than mere decoration. This intention is understood as a relationship to the melodic line and its expressive potential – perhaps all the more important in the quasi-binary key depressed/key released soundworld of the accordion (as opposed to the many possibilities offered by bow on string or tongue and lips on mouthpiece). For Sanne Möricke, although each ornament has its distinctive character, what is equally important is the focusing effect achieved:

You mean like why is there a *krekh*s<sup>93</sup> there? Yeah, each ornament has a different flavour. It’s funny, because I add a little something, but to me adding a little something creates space for the important melody note to be exposed. So if I play [plays], maybe it doesn’t show in my hands, but if I were to exaggerate that movement what I would do is [comes right off before next note]. I make space and I land, and because of that, in my imagination it has a slightly stronger texture or presence.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Patrick Farrell, interview, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>94</sup> Interview, 2014.

This space and texture is so important that even if a player is unable to execute an ornament successfully, the intention will still be understood:

now a *krekh*ts is so much in my system – it’s too much in my system, probably! But if people are, I explicitly use the word, *confronted* with a *krekh*ts and they think ‘oh my God, how am I going to do this?’, and it’s very new to them and it’s hard to translate into their fingers, I do little exercises with them. And sometimes, well, pretty often, they don’t manage to play the *krekh*ts but they still create the space. So it’s not the actual ornament, I guess, that adds the quality that I want to have at that moment, but it’s the gesture in itself already.<sup>95</sup>

In a similar way, and echoing some of the instrumental overlaps cited earlier in this chapter, Franka Lampe bases her ornamentation and interpretation on what for her is a more primary form of musical expression:

I love the singing way. In my lessons, I tell them if you cannot sing it, don’t do it. Or if you want to know where can I do some phrasings or some trills, then sing the melody. Most of the time you do it by yourself without recognising it. Maybe in a varied way. Little things, tiny things, but they’re still there.<sup>96</sup>



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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Interview, 2014.



Figures 46-47. Accordionists and jam sessions. Previous page: Franka Lampe and Mate Gaal at the *Klezmerstammtisch*, April 2014. Above: Ilya Shneyveys and Sanne Möricke at Bar Oblomov, watched by Hampus Melin and violinist Daniel Weltlinger, January 2014.

To take command of ornamentation in klezmer music, then, is to strike a fine balance. Whilst it necessitates a full awareness of a certain tradition of playing, and requires that this knowledge be internalised, klezmer ornamentation is consistently regarded in the larger context of melodic interpretation and expression.<sup>97</sup> This is a context geared towards serving the melody: using ornamentation and phrasing to explore a tune's different linear and structural possibilities, to view its layers and dimensions in different lights. Far from an end in itself (although the amount of painstaking work put in can make it seem that way), ornamentation is a subset of this musical language, a dialect that the best players work hard to learn and then set free to become a part of their own musical identity. A complementary aspect of that traditional/modern personality is a studied and conscious awareness of klezmer music's primary role as dance music, which is the subject of the final section.

### **Klezmer on the dance floor, klezmer on the concert platform (as seen by accordionists)**

All the accordionists I spoke with perform their music in a variety of contexts: concerts, dances, workshops, jam sessions and lessons. This final section explores the relationship between klezmer as dance music and klezmer as concert music, as seen by my interviewees. For all the accordion players active on Berlin's contemporary scene

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<sup>97</sup> See Slobin (2000:100) on "the evils of overornamentation".

(and most are also heavily involved around Europe and the US), it is essential to understand klezmer's functional dance music roots. This is more than simply a neat origin myth; it informs an entire approach and is at the heart of interpretative and performance choices. It is an ideological standpoint that privileges participative community (Turino, 2008b), whilst also translating into practical musical decisions.

In order to understand the importance of this distinction, we need to consider klezmer music in its original context as opposed to an inevitably more rarefied 'revival' idiom. Notwithstanding the patchiness of ethnographic evidence, there is little doubt that until the early decades of the twentieth century, klezmer music served a clear social function: the provision of music for ritual community occasions, principally weddings (Beregovski, 2001; Rubin, 2001). Here is Beregovski, writing at a point (1937) before these European communities were lost:

We know from available evidence that klezmerim have been part of the Jewish way of life for centuries. We can locate klezmer ensembles over a very long period in nearly all cities with a significant Jewish population. It is literally impossible to imagine a wedding without klezmerim (Beregovski, 2000:531).

Whilst this was characterised by significant ethnic, class and geographical overlap and co-territorial repertoire (Feldman, 2002), and although several prominent players<sup>98</sup> succeeded in taking their playing onto the international concert stage, the majority of the music existed within this functional basis.<sup>99</sup> Jumping forward more than half a century, we find almost all the European communities that were klezmer's heartlands destroyed, whilst in America, assimilation, dispersal and support for the state of Israel<sup>100</sup> have radically diminished its cultural and functional significance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2002; Netsky, 2002b). Inevitably, then, most early klezmer revival musicking was within a concert framework. On the one hand, these early concerts (of Kapelye, the Klezmer Conservatory Band and The Klezmerim, for example) were fundamental in building an audience and a musician constituency for klezmer music. But on the other hand, they initially did little to bridge the separation between catering-hall community function and concert-hall artistic abstraction. In Germany, we must also add the careful

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<sup>98</sup> e.g. Gusikov (Belarus, 1806-37), Pedotser (Ukraine, 1828-1902) and Stempenyu (Ukraine, 1822-79). See Rubin (2015b:122).

<sup>99</sup> Although this section looks at klezmer as *dance* music, Beregovski (2001:11-13) also notes a significant percentage of music for listening.

<sup>100</sup> A state for whom, until recently, nineteenth and early twentieth century Eastern European culture was an occasionally uncomfortable reminder of the Old Country that Zionism had left behind, both physically and ideologically. For a no-holds-barred account, see Segev (1998).

treatment of Jewish culture post-reunification (Gruber, 2002; Meng, 2011)<sup>101</sup> further obscuring the idea of Yiddish culture as rooted in any sort of real experience. In Europe, it was with the arrival of workshops and a growing community (Jews and non-Jews) for the music that klezmer began to consciously reconnect with its social dance routes.<sup>102</sup>

To root the music back into a social function is therefore an ideological decision, a vote for Yiddish culture's continued vibrancy and contemporary relevance alongside its historical importance as concert music.<sup>103</sup> It is also a musical choice, indicative of an approach that chooses to be informed by a 'dance' sensibility as much as a performance one. This directly affects musical and structural factors: tempo, instrumentation, arrangements and ornamentation. It means that the principal driving-forces are frequently rhythmical ones. Once again, the ambiguous and multifunctional accordion is well-placed to articulate these concerns. For my interviewees, this rhythmic primacy frequently corresponded to clear musical pathways, conscious decisions to either do or not do something depending precisely on whether the effect created is more or less likely to make you 'move'. Examples of these include: leaving out bass notes to lift the accompaniment and give the melodic line more movement (Alan Bern), placing accents before the beat to give greater rhythmic drive (Ilya Shneyveys), and layering right-hand cross-rhythmic patterns to build up tension (Sanne Möricke). Here is Alan Bern talking about the impulse to dance, based solely on an accordion left-hand *boom-cha*<sup>104</sup> pattern:

Right, now, already this feeling, there's a whole range of ways of playing it. This is something that one should already care about, how this sounds. You can dance to this. Like Ilya said the other day, one instrument should be enough to make you want to dance. If I'm doing this [plays boringly and with bad timing], no-one wants to dance to that. It just doesn't make you want to dance. If I do something with is very consistent, like [plays evenly], that might make you want to. This might [plays with heavy bass]. It might even make you want to dance if you can hear a changing pattern that makes sense [plays two bars legato, two bars staccato]. Right? You can hear a kind of an impulse, towards dancing. It means that as accordion players we have to pay attention to what this sounds like. It sounds funny to have to say that, but it very often happens that accordion players are very worried about what they're doing in the right hand, a lot of attention there, and the left hand is just supposed to be automatic.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>102</sup> Seen nowadays in the *Tants in Gartn Eydn* sessions in Lübars, the Bar Oblomov jam sessions (both Chapter 2) and its spin-off *Tantshoys* (see Conclusion), and Yiddish Summer Weimar (Chapter 4).

<sup>103</sup> Both these approaches can be seen in the work of the modernists, as discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>104</sup> Alternating root-chord accompaniment, without any melody on top.

<sup>105</sup> Accordion class, Yiddish Summer Weimar, 2014.

For Forshpil keyboardist and Neukölln Klezmer Sessions accordionist Ilya Shneyveys, providing an accompaniment that adequately matches the changing emotional and structural parameters of both melody and interpretation is intimately linked to a danced response, whether the dancers are actually there or not:

[There are] different emotional characters in different parts of a tune. One bit more danceable and rhythmic, and then it's like a different topic, a different aspect. I see dancers often when I play, I see a dancer going from this into something else [plays and sings]. It's changing all the time and we have to be sensitive to what's happening. We hear the melody played in a different way, we accompany it differently.<sup>106</sup>

In fact, for Ilya this relationship goes even further, translating directly into a very personal and particular version of instrumental embodiment:

I kind of think of the accordion as a dancer. This [bass buttons] would be the feet and this [piano keys] would be the upper part of the body. And they might be independent in certain ways. It's like he's going somewhere [figure 48].



Figure 48. Ilya's dancing accordion demonstration (feet). Yiddish Summer Weimar, August 2014.

And then he adds his hands [figure 49].



Figure 49. Now plus hands (dancer's and accordionist's right).

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

And then maybe he's together [figure 50].<sup>107</sup>



Figure 50. Ilya's dancing accordion, conclusion.

The danceability of any given interpretation, therefore, is foregrounded as a conceptual choice, a statement of musical intent that consciously leapfrogs any sense of separation between audience and performer. More than this, the relationship between dancer and musician is central to a holistic and satisfying understanding of the music, and to jeopardise that relationship is to risk falling into a sort of musical grey area, one implicitly over-concerned with personal artistry at the expense of group communication. At Yiddish Summer Weimar, all afternoon sessions begin with a lengthy dance session where participants get the chance to dance *horas*, *freylekhs* and *bulgars*, but also to work as a large ensemble responsible for the musical accompaniment to these energetic and emotional moments. Here is Bern discussing the importance of this relationship:<sup>108</sup>

You can follow the dancer, or the dancer will follow you if you're giving this to him or her. If you don't give this, or if it's random, then they're just going to start doing steps, they consciously or unconsciously disassociate from what the music is doing. And the thing is that the simplest dance tune, if you connect to these things, you'll have so much more fun, because then what goes on between music and the dancer is a real communication [...] Like you're dancing together, but you're doing it by playing the instrument.

Given that all the musicians interviewed here play for both dancing and concerts (often with considerable overlap during the course of a performance), I was particularly interested in the relationship between the two – in what could be transferred from one context to the other. Patrick Farrell, whose Yiddish Art Trio<sup>109</sup> is in demand for both weddings and recitals, was illuminating on the topic. For Patrick, the energy and groove of a dance gig is primary:

I think at least for the three of us, playing for the dancing, we've got a really clear concept of how we want to mix the push and pull, and exactly how to lay it down, and yeah, a certain amount of aggression, like get up there and get sweaty, just do

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.* In fact, Alan was expounding these views whilst dancing.

<sup>109</sup> The other two-thirds being clarinetist Michael Winograd and bassist Benjy Fox-Rosen.



it, you know? And that can transfer over as far as in a concert, like even if you're not playing dance repertoire, you're doing something with confidence. And we're really not afraid to take things to whatever extremes they need to be, and I think that probably comes from playing a lot of dances.<sup>110</sup>

And equally, a certain musical adventurousness that comes from the concert platform – the opportunity to make more esoteric decisions without the imperative to keep people dancing – is an element that can be moved back into the functional world. Such adventure opens up a more experimental vocabulary, but is always explicitly underpinned by a commitment to keeping the groove:

And doing the concert stuff, we've developed our own language with that, which involves a lot of dissonance. Especially the way that Michael and I play melodies together, which I think is one of the special things we do that nobody else really does. So that transfers over to the dance stuff, like we'll play for dancing and get really dissonant and really weird and there's all kinds of crazy stuff going on, and our melodies are tangling up around each other all the time, and that's how we play – that's how we do it and how we like klezmer to sound [...] But, you know, with the focus on the groove – it doesn't make sense to do all this dissonant shit if it's not grooving.<sup>111</sup>

## Conclusion

Patrick Farrell's confident swagger is at one end of the accordion continuum. Perhaps the quiet traditionalism of Jenny Wieneke, quoted earlier, is at the other. What links them and all the other musicians here is a relationship to musical tradition as expressed through their instrument, a personal balance between an awareness of historical lineage and an artistic need for freedom of expression. This relationship is articulated along several overlapping vertices: ornamentation, phrasing, rhythmic approaches and a dedication to klezmer as dance music among them. The balance of these elements is what marks out the different sounds of the players interviewed here, and by extension the different possibilities that make up contemporary klezmer practice in Berlin.

The piano accordion's troubled relationship to the classical establishment (Jacobson, 2012) is important in this discovery. Klezmer itself, spanning both classical music's technical training and folk music's delight in idiosyncrasy, occupies a fluid and changeable middle ground. Consequently, the instrument is a useful place to unpack

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<sup>110</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*





Figure 51. Accordionist Jenny Wieneke, Lübars. Martin Borbonus (clarinet), Michael Tuttle (bass). June 2014.

some of these liminal zones. Although there have been and continue to be a handful of klezmer accordion stars (some of whom are represented in this chapter), the instrument itself has not historically inspired the sort of legendary status achieved by clarinetists like Dave Tarras (Rubin, 2007) or violinists such as Leon Schwartz (Slobin, 2000). Consequently, the piano accordion's quiet rise to centrality has frequently meant a degree of ego-sublimation, often in the form of stylistic borrowings from other instruments. The necessary adaptation of alternative instrumental techniques means that to study the piano accordion's role in klezmer music is in fact to study a fluid dynamic that takes in means of expression, the relationship between musical foreground and background, accompaniment-melodic balance and the different levels of instrumental embodiment. The accordion's flexibility and current popularity proves fertile ground for the various ways these elements can be combined and deconstructed. At the same time, the instrument's ambiguous relationship to virtuosity (often played down in favour of producing successful dance music) arguably leads to a more holistic – less *soloistic* – viewpoint: one which connects directly with the sociability of the Berlin scene.

My final chapter will look in depth at the particular contingencies of contemporary Jewish identity in relation to klezmer and Yiddish music in the city. By way of a link and a lead-in, I want to leave the last word on accordions to one of the main artistic and ideological motivating forces in the current Berlin klezmer scene. Here is Dr Alan Bern

talking about the pragmatic limits of deep-level klezmer understanding, but also its redemptive possibilities:

The last thing I want to say is, if you come all educated and cool and ready to do this to 95 percent of klezmer jam sessions, it won't matter. The people won't notice that you're doing this, they won't care that you're doing it, they won't respond to the fact that you're doing it and you'll sit there thinking why am I doing that? And the reason is because in five or ten years, when the Messiah comes, everyone will be playing klezmer phrasing the way they should, and it'll be beautiful, and then people will listen to the accordion!<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Yiddish Summer Weimar accordion class, 2014.

## 6. Sounding Jewish in Berlin: Historical Silence and the Sound of the City

*“No. Something new. I don’t know what, but new. All of this gone.” He waved his arm, as if clearing the rubble outside. “You know what I saw today? They leveled the Chancellery. The whole building. And I asked one of the men, what happens to the stone? Marble some of it, nice. And he said the best goes to the Soviet memorial in Treptow and the rest to a U-Bahn station. Like what happened in Rome – you take the good stone and build something else, a new city right on top of the old one. It’s interesting to think about Berlin that way, no? One city on top of the other.”*

*“And what happens to the people in the old one?” Irene said.*

(Joseph Kanon, *Leaving Berlin*)

### Introduction

A number of texts with Berlin at their centre, both scholarly and popular, make good rhetorical use of the multiple temporalities at play within the fabric of the contemporary city (Till, 2005; Ward, 2011; Maclean, 2014). This final chapter aims to add something to these back-and-forth perspectives, by framing them through the role of sound in the process of memorial and remembering. In a city where memory is both ubiquitous and strongly contested (Huysen, 1997:60; Ladd, 2000), the relative lack of a scholarly consideration of sound is perhaps surprising. Indeed, if we look at attention given to the relationship of music and ways of remembering more generally we can note an equivalent gap, in that the memory/music axis is almost always framed in terms of its role in personal or cultural experience (Cohen, 1995; Shelemay, 2006a; Bithell, 2006) or through its discursive extra-musical formations (Morris, 2001). In other words, attention is either focussed upon how people use and perceive music to situate themselves in personal and cultural memory, or how sound and memory are themselves mediated through cultural discourse, how they are linguistically or textually located. There is, however, another direction, that of the role of sound itself in activating and problematising memory: how the medium of sound works to create what we might call a ‘state of memory’ (or memorial), rather than how music is used to conjure up *specific* memories. This is the focus of the first half of this chapter, and in order to explore it I have used my own responses and reactions as a starting point. Whilst this is far from

systematic auto-ethnography, I do aim to break down my deliberately subjective and personal reactions in order to probe the *role* of sound in foregrounding memory and memorial. In order to do this, I engage with the metaphorical and metonymic relationships created, as well as analysing the iconic, indexical and symbolic processes at play (Turino, 1999).

In Berlin, memorial is rarely neutral (Ladd, 1997): it is tightly caught in webs of social history, personal memory and cultural selection (Stangl, 2008). Two pillars of Berlin's twentieth century history – the Holocaust and the Cold War – are inextricably bound up in the process, present either explicitly or implicitly in many of the city's controversial memorial sites and contested discourses (Fulbrook, 2009). This chapter problematises these relationships through the filter of sonic experience, by theorising how sound and its counterpart silence are employed to interpellate (Althusser, 1992) participants at memorial places and events. The aim is to initiate – rather than conclude – an exploratory journey of the bearing of the sound (and silence) of memory on certain constructions of Jewish identity in today's city. In particular, some of the different ways that German-Jewish history can be 'heard' – from the subjective and affective (in my analysis of some of the city's memorial sites), to the specific and grounded (my musical case studies). This is not, therefore, a chapter about memorials. Rather, my approach uses memorial space interrogatively, raising questions about *how* we hear the past. Running throughout my discussion is a continual seam of where and how the past and present bump noisily – or silently – into each other:

It is a city where temporalities collide in unexpected ways through the actions of individuals [...] In the process, people evoke ghosts, bump into past remnants of other Berlins, dig through social and material landscapes, and debate how the past should be remembered for whom, where, and in what form (Till, 2005:196).

### **Klezmer as Jewish memory**

As a sometime default signifier of Jewishness (Radano & Bohlman, 2004; Waligórska, 2013), klezmer and Yiddish music has, over the last twenty years, often been invoked in the context of these "past and future lives and presences" (Till, 2005:196). This has at times been as much about the needs of the commemorators as of those being remembered, leading to criticism, suspicion and occasionally outright anger. Rubin, for

example, points to “a fictional tirade against German klezmer musicians” in Charles Lewinsky’s *Ein ganz gewöhnlicher Jude* [A completely ordinary Jew], where: “any old band is standing on stage, the All-Star-Klezmer-Thingamajigs or whatever they call themselves, and not a single one of them is a Jew.”<sup>1</sup> Available on one level for this level of parody, klezmer music is clearly no longer an exotic voice in Berlin. If it has lost its novel dynamism as a metonym for ‘things Jewish’,<sup>2</sup> its imposed exoticism has also been the subject of criticism:

By retroactively orientalisating 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 (Birnbaum, 2009:298).

Or else it has been subject to the sublimation of any specifically *musical* function in favour of a symbolic evocation that, paradoxically, fills a physical lack with an imagined (and therefore still absent) presence:

Thus the simulacrum of sound in German culture today is marked, perhaps, by a nostalgic desire for Jewish sound. Or, to pose the question in a somewhat different way [...] If certain sounds evoke for Germans what they think of as Jewish spaces, do these sounds – evoking a fabricated presence – then automatically carry with them the very absence of Jewishness? (Morris, 2001:374).

Throughout this thesis, I have avoided rehashing the above debates. I have shown how, in order to maintain relevance and cultural charge, some of the multiple meanings of klezmer music have shifted, moving to occupy a more dynamic, liminal and temporal space of contemporary Jewish culture and identity (Gantner & Kovács, 2014). Culturally and historically playful, this has involved the reinterpretation of traditional community processes (dance, music, theatre, debate) through a more fluid contemporary urban context, thereby relocating the music within the material and ideological spaces of the city itself. Stepping further back, this points to a discourse of Jewishness unafraid to confront the dark history of the long twentieth century, but also a refusal to be defined by it. It is also a Jewishness that, ironically, includes the Israeli diaspora – a large, youthful and vocal part of which is increasingly making its presence felt in Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rubin (2014:45). The passage discussed is from Lewinsky (2005:94).

<sup>2</sup> Arguably, its over-representation has divested the music of some of this signifying power (Silverman, 2015:162-3).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: <https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/lit/20400529.html>,

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/so-long-israel-hello-berlin>. Both accessed February 6th, 2016.

Contemporary though they may be in their practice, the past is in no way absent from these musical environments, but as a dynamic and shifting dialogue rather than a monolithic memory to be symbolically overcome. The particular relationship of the past to this present-day musical identity is explored in the second half of the chapter through several case studies. The Semer Label Reloaded project is useful for several reasons. Firstly, it brings together many of the musicians discussed throughout the thesis. Secondly, it bridges historical Berlin Jewish culture and contemporary Jewish music-making in the city, often in unpredictable ways. Thirdly, it is a direct comment on the complex relationship between Jews and the city, acknowledging the multi-dimensional cultural context of Jewish life: religious, secular, traditional, progressive, multilingual, distinct and yet connected to the wider social environment.<sup>4</sup> A second case study is the honest and direct testimony of singer Tania Alon. Tania is a Berlin Jew whose parents survived the Holocaust. For Tania, the singing and playing of Jewish music in Berlin has a much more personal, less playful meaning. Tania talks about the meanings of the *Stolpersteine* ceremonies at which she sings, and the particular way that they situate the Jewish-German discourse firmly within the physical and symbolic context of Berlin itself.

Firstly, however, I want to examine at some length the shifting relationship between sound, silence and memory. I hope to foreground sound's particular ability to act and affect emotionally: through its combination of symbolic subjectivity, physical immediacy and semiotic ambiguity, sound can offer ways of being and knowing that are significantly different in function and affect to other signifying practices.<sup>5</sup>

[Music's] 'inherent characteristics', its use of the iconic and non-denotative potentials of sounds, provides it with a special capacity to exercise power in a direct and concrete fashion. It can speak directly, concretely *and with precision* to the states of awareness which constitute our subjectivity, our very being (Shepherd & Wicke, 1997:213, italics in original).

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<sup>4</sup> A heritage that, as Gantner (2014:38) notes, is often smoothed out in memorial architecture in the city, which instead: "communicates a very homogeneous picture of the local Jewish culture, reflecting elements selected at the discretion of these actors, and not reflecting the possible diversity of self-understandings that comprise the existing urban Jewish culture".

<sup>5</sup> Most notably, of course, language. But also relevant here are architecture and the visual (Smith, 1997).

## The sound of the city

Away from the stag weekends, all-night clubs and *arm, aber sexy*<sup>6</sup> media-cool, Berlin is still a quiet city, compared at least to Barcelona, New York, Dakar or Mumbai. Traffic – vehicle and pedestrian – is for the most part orderly, kindergarten children walk in well-behaved lines to the playgrounds that spring up on so many street corners, heavily-pierced and well-tattooed anarchists still wait patiently for the red *Ampelman* to turn green even when the road is clear,<sup>7</sup> and cyclists ride smoothly and politely along bespoke lanes by the sides of main roads (unlike Amsterdam's ruthless and bell-happy brigade). The sound of a raised voice on the U-Bahn is unusual – more often than not belonging to a tourist – and red-faced street drinkers mostly keep their own unintrusive company. It is easy to hear church bells all over the city on a Sunday. A part of *typisch Deutsch* propriety, this unobtrusiveness may also be a Cold War legacy: subterfuge, suspicion and concealment being necessary facets of everyday (East) Berlin life (Taylor, 2006; Funder, 2003).

But there is also music. Lots of it, everywhere. Some days it can seem as if every second person on the street has an acoustic guitar strapped to their back, every third street appearing to offer a wandering Roma accordion/trumpet duo. Chapter 2 discussed the transformation of Mauerpark's weekday bleakness into a humming mini-festival. This kind of creative free-for-all is one of the things Berlin has now become famous for, a simultaneously real and symbolic expression of new-found liberty.<sup>8</sup> And in a city that has hosted so many competing ideologies – often at the same time – over the last hundred years, music has frequently doubled as a social pressure-valve. Weimar cabarets offered a gaudy, sexualised, underground excess while the roots of National Socialism grew above (Jelavich, 1996), and during the Nazi era itself jazz was a symbolic and real medium of dissent (Jerram, 2011). During the latter part of the city's partition, bands like Einstürzende Neubaten created worlds of industrial noise that both sprang from and subverted the *ennui* of everyday late Cold War life (Moran, 2004:218), where “Tremendously noise-intensive, rhythmically ritual anti-pop was offered as an

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<sup>6</sup> Mayor Klaus Wowereit's infamous “poor, but sexy” 2004 description of his city's 21st century appeal.

<sup>7</sup> Rory MacLean (2014:385) recalls how, as a teenager in West Berlin, he breached this unspoken rule: “On the opposite pavement, another small crowd of pedestrians were also waiting. As I approached them they closed ranks and blocked my path [...] Simply put, I was within seconds of being run over for non-conformity.”

<sup>8</sup> *Lonely Planet* author Andrea Schulte-Peevers, for example: “I simply love the energy of the place, its ability to reinvent itself time and again” (2013:5).

antidote for the frightened, paralyzed and media-sedated masses.”<sup>9</sup> And in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Berlin electronica became the metonymic soundtrack of the city's unrivalled club culture, but also the metaphorical expression of a new unity and open-ended possibility (Rapp, 2012).

Whether noise-intensive anti-pop, calculatedly obscene excess or hypnotic electronic thud, all require their sonic counterpart: silence. In between the domestic quiet and the joyful international noise, deliberate and conscious silence is often the province of memorial and commemoration: a site of control, respect and distance. If the city's endless street performance<sup>10</sup> is a manifestation of on-the-ground *tactics*, memorial space is the domain of top-down *strategy* (de Certeau, 1984:94-6). Silence is produced by these city memorial spaces, but in dialogue it also produces them – their silence signifies their function. This uncomfortable and ambiguous clash between public remembrance and personal grief is frequently at the heart of memorial space in Berlin. What follows explores the particular way that sound and silence effect different ways of remembering. In the first two sections below, I examine my own responses to these processes.

### **The silence of memory – Eisenman's *Denkmal***

There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot (Cage, 1968:8).

Silence is not a natural accompaniment to sorrow and loss. Initial responses to death and tragedy are anything but silent, and even many formal commemorative processes are neither noiseless nor solemn.<sup>11</sup> Despite the structural authority and apparent universalism of memorial silences at international gatherings like sports events and remembrance ceremonies, silence in relation to loss remains a performative response, a particular sort of (largely Western) reading and presentation of memorial. Silence is one of the things that turns grief into commemoration, demarcating specific memorial time and space, and simultaneously releasing everyday life from the burden of continual

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<sup>9</sup> <https://neubauten.org/en/biography>. Accessed September 12th, 2015. See also Brown (2009).

<sup>10</sup> For example, the Night of the Singing Balconies discussed in the Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> An Irish wake, for example. Also cf. Tiwary's South Indian "tuneful weeping" of South India (1978), Tolbert on Karelian lament (1990), Urban's "Ritual wailing in Amerindian Brazil" (1988) and Feld's extensive discussion of Bosavi "expressive weeping" (1990).



mourning. Silence is the public presentation of personal sorrow, a paternalistic ordering<sup>12</sup> and subduing of the bereaved mother's wail or the abandoned infant's scream.<sup>13</sup> Silence is not the same as noiselessness. It is the cultural space for inner-directed reflection and also a cultural symbol of that reflection, the assumption of a deeper 'truth' and understanding, over and above the mundane:

Silence is the communion of a conscious soul with itself. If the soul attend for a moment to its own infinity, then and there is silence. She<sup>14</sup> is audible to all men, at all times, in all places (Thoreau, 1929:435).

Silence is a metonym of geographical distance – the further away we are, the harder it is to hear (although perhaps a little less so in a networked world). But it also connotes historical distance: as the present is noisy, so the past is silent. Through the application of this distance, grief turns to memorial. And in the process, silence becomes both indexical and symbolic of a transition to internal, considered action. Memorial silence interpellates (Althusser, 1992:55) its participants as controlled, responsible.

Silence is both product and producer: the ontological sonic border that becomes a symbolic and epistemological presence – at one remove, observable and analysable, silence as a mark of historical respect. But in Berlin, history is slippery. It is raw and partisan (Huysen, 1997).<sup>15</sup> And in these instances, silence can be a much darker, more ambiguous force. It can unsettle, forcing a collision between past and present. Metonymic sonic rupture becomes a metaphor for the physical and social dislocation of the memorial object. The silence acts like a wiggly line in an old television programme, sending us back into the past:

2711 sarcophagi-like concrete stelae (slabs) of equal size but various heights, rising up in sombre silence from undulating ground [...] take time to feel the coolness of the stone and contemplate the interplay of light and shadow, then stumble aimlessly among the narrow passageways and you'll soon connect with a metaphorical sense of disorientation, confusion and claustrophobia (Schulte-Peevers, 2013:29).

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<sup>12</sup> What Turino (2012:n.pag.) might characterise as a movement from the 'empty', pre-semiotic state of Firstness to the symbolically mediated Thirdness, where we "theorize about ourselves-in-the world".

<sup>13</sup> Writing of mourning rituals in Australia's Northern Territory, Fiona Magowan (2007:85) appositely notes: "The indeterminacy of [women's] crying *sounds*, as opposed to the *sense* of crying-songs, renders the act of crying potentially powerful and dangerous and in need of regulation by men."

<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that Thoreau equates silence here with the metaphorical feminine, not the authoritative masculine.

<sup>15</sup> Also Ladd (2000:235): "Berlin faces the impossible task of reconciling the parochial and the cosmopolitan, expressions of pride and of humility, the demand to look forward and the appeal never to forget."

Shared silence within public spaces is fluid, liminal and uncanny – personal journeys through a larger collective space. This process is fundamental to the complex resonances and effects of one of Berlin’s most famous (and inevitably controversial) recent constructions: Peter Eisenman’s *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*, also known as the Holocaust Memorial.<sup>16</sup>

(Here a scholarly disclaimer needs to be made. This site has aroused a great deal of heated debate, both before and after its construction (Ward, 2011a:232-3; 2009:148). Among the criticisms are: its massiveness is something of which even Hitler might have approved; it is arbitrarily dropped into the centre of the city; it contains no void-ness (and therefore undermines its purpose); its excessive scale negates any sense of personal history. That Berliners will continue to argue over the ways by which they have or have not – or still might – come to terms with history is perhaps inescapable, and my own opinion on these criticisms is not the issue here. My aim is to explore the memorial for what it *is*, rather than for what it isn’t, through the medium of sound.<sup>17</sup>)

To step into the *Denkmal* is to feel disturbed, out of sync, perplexed. Cobbled paths refuse to stay level, heights vary radically, and the only constant sightline is directly ahead. The deeper one enters into the maze of mausoleums, the harder it is to see daylight or the way out. Large grey gravestone slabs rise up on all sides, the negative space between them making tracks that traverse the whole space. And crucially, silence increases as one steps further into the stone maze. But this absence of noise is by no means total. It is punctuated by aural collisions: the sound of laughter or children shouting, a gasp of surprise as strangers appear suddenly around corners. The disembodied sound that hits visitors from unpredictable directions and at random times becomes a metonym of dislocation and loss of control, slipping into a metaphor for the dislocation and loss of control of the victims the stone slabs commemorate: “No sound is innocent. Every utterance, rustle and nuance is pregnant with meaning” (Prévost, 1995:33). The perceptible aural sense of accident and uncertainty translates swiftly into an intellectual historical parallel, and in a small but meaningful way one is thrown back seventy-five years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Memorial to Europe’s Murdered Jews’. On the Memorial itself see Åhr (2005); Ward (2011a). On the site and its controversy see Till (2005).

<sup>17</sup> To take a sonic perspective is also a way of getting around the quasi-triumphalist scale of the monument: moving from sight to sound shifts the focus from the grandiose to the episodic.

<sup>18</sup> On German visitor reactions to the memorial, see Dekel (2013).

There is also a quasi-musical dimension to the *Denkmal's* vitality and fluidity. This marks it as sonically different to the utter void (and terror) of the Jewish Museum's Holocaust Tower (Ward, 2005; Libeskind, 2009). In his intriguing, if frustratingly vague, concept of rhythmanalysis, Henri Lefebvre discusses this different rhythm of lengthening shadows, thickening and thinning crowds: "The succession of alternations, of differential repetitions, suggests that somewhere in this present is an order which comes from elsewhere" (1996:223). Wandering through Eisenman's paths, the changing patterns of these rhythms are foregrounded and brought in and out of focus as we move into and out of the stone space. Through our criss-crossing steps, we become increasingly aware of our own moving and varying rhythms in relation to the outside world, now at one remove. We are also connected to Walter Benjamin and the *flaneurs*: one cannot walk in a straight line or even a definite direction. For Benjamin, *flanerie's* art is not simply not to know where one is going, but to undermine the idea of direction itself: "Not to find one's way in a city [...] requires ignorance, nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – this calls for quite a different schooling" (Benjamin, 1999:598). Here in the Holocaust Memorial there are no gates in or out, and the shallow peripheral stones invite a meandering rather than definite entrance – myriad similar-but-different paths, like the stones themselves. Outside in the world, order prevails. Inside this memorial space, one has relinquished control: "There is a certain externality which allows the analytical intellect to function. Yet, to capture a rhythm one needs to have been *captured* by it. One has to *let go*" (Lefebvre, 1996:219, italics in original).

The Holocaust Memorial, like the Sinti-Roma Memorial, stands in the heart of the city, itself an empty space for so long: the official symbolic power of the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate ruptured by these physical reminders of lack and absence. And there are parallels here with yet other Berlin memorials. Inside the partially reconstructed golden-domed synagogue on Oranienburger Straße<sup>19</sup> is a vast courtyard. This open ground was originally the synagogue's main hall. It exists now as an empty space, a symbolic absence at the heart of the building. And of course running through Berlin itself like a seam – or a tear – is the absent presence of the Wall itself (Leuenberger,

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.centrumjudaicum.de/en/>. Accessed September 8th, 2015.

2006).<sup>20</sup> In a similar way, the *Denkmal* is built around a paradigm of hidden space. But hiding-places are fragile, liable to aural and visual interruption at any point from all directions. The quiet that surrounds is more unsettling than Thoreau's meditative and reflective soulful communion, nor is it the companionable quiet of a city park. It is a silence of isolation and absence, of loss and displacement. The sounds that puncture the silent surface slip easily into metaphoric echoes of lack, imagined memories of muted voices. The sound is lost and disembodied, eerie and sharp – an angular, irregular silence punctuated by reminders of an outside world:

You get the feeling that these stones are überdimensionale [sic] grave stones. It can have a 'crush' [...] But it is also a place of silence. The noise of the city and surroundings seemingly disappearing.

You can wander around inside and feel quite alone, it's quiet in there, and then you come out again to the noise of the road and tourists.<sup>21</sup>

This is an accidental, active and slightly threatening silence. It foregrounds dislocation over community. Reappearing at the other side of the confused network of vast stone slabs, it is not uncommon to not know where you are – an unmissable resonance with post-1945's hordes of displaced persons (DPs). Echoes of silence heard around corners become imagined memories of voices, lost and disembodied sound. One step either side and one has disappeared from view, but also looked away, sidestepped responsibility.

By contrast, the silence that pervades another famous Berlin memorial – Kathé Kollwitz's grieving mother in the *Neue Wache*<sup>22</sup> – creates a studied and static distance between onlooker and remembered object. Although the large-scale version of Kollwitz's *pieta* is powerful and moving, the overall result is one of coolness and distance. And in this way, a clear historical separation is maintained between contemporary onlookers and the “victims of war and tyranny” commemorated within. With each step further into Eisenman's *Denkmal*, the spiky and unpredictable

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<sup>20</sup> This palpable absence takes many forms. Peter Schneider (2005) famously talked of a “wall in the head” long after its physical manifestation had gone. The Wall as absent presence is marked by the stone and metal line that runs along its former route, as well as the Bernauer Straße Wall memorial, which seals off a (re-created) section of the Wall, but also recreates a newly porous border along a few hundred yards of ex-Wall space. I also noticed an interesting tendency in memorial exhibitions: standing Wall-like slabs (often made of grey stone) that are used as information posts, but symbolically echo the Wall sections themselves. Examples include the Anne Frank museum, Silent Heroes exhibition, and many of the outdoor information posts exhibited throughout 2012-13's year of commemoration, *Zerstörte Vielfalt* (Diversity Destroyed): <http://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/zerstoerte-vielfalt/>. Accessed December 5th, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Two fairly typical visitor reviews. These from [http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g187323-d617423-r190666020-The\\_Holocaust\\_Memorial\\_Memorial\\_to\\_the\\_Murdered\\_Jews\\_of\\_Europe-Berlin.html](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g187323-d617423-r190666020-The_Holocaust_Memorial_Memorial_to_the_Murdered_Jews_of_Europe-Berlin.html). Accessed September 11th, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> See Ladd (1997:217-224) and Ward (2009:154).

relationship between silence and sound collapses historical distance and our own sense of present-time uncanny becomes recontextualised in the past. Where the silence of the *Neue Wache* is concerned with generalities,<sup>23</sup> the material silence of the *Denkmal* is about detail – the detail that we miss in the interference of everyday noise. Silence is remade as the spaces between sound: an aural version of the spaces between the grey stone slabs and a metaphor for the historical gaps through which so many fell.

But the silence is also unpredictable, at times even playful, and this too bridges historical distance. Walk behind a child through these paths and the journey becomes a game of hide-and-seek, a random and joyful selection of turns, trips, doubling-backs and disappearances. Laughing groups of friends take pictures of each others' heads peeking over the top of the stones. Couples kiss in the liminal private/public space, unexpectedly stumbled upon by groups of tourists. Where the *Neue Wache* and the Sinti/Roma memorial a few hundred yards away engender a more conventional silence of respect and personal reflection, the increasing quiet of the *Denkmal* is “everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order” (de Certeau, 1984:107). Noise comes and goes as one encounters people suddenly, around corners. Sound precedes them and remains after they have disappeared. In fact, sounds are reduced to – or perhaps revealed as – mere echoes and traces, bringing to mind composer Morton Feldman's credo:<sup>24</sup>

The attack of a sound is not its character. Actually, what we hear is the attack and not the sound. Decay, however, this departing landscape, *this* expresses where the sound exists in our hearing – leaving us rather than coming towards us (Feldman, 2000:25, italics in original).

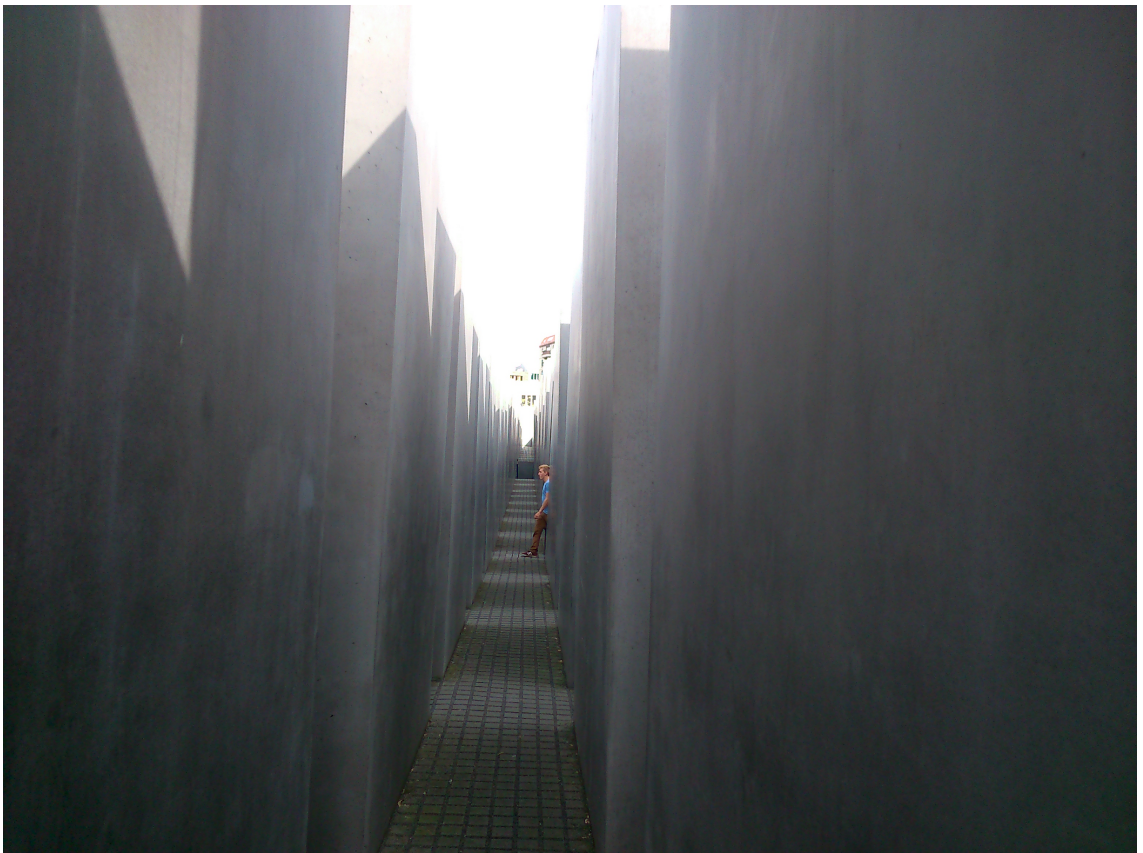
Our own choices as we make our way through the *Denkmal* become our own lived response to this history. In this way, the space offers the possibility of negotiated (Hall, 1980:137) and even subversive readings alongside the dominant (official) code of Holocaust remembrance (Morris, 2001:371). Once again we are in de Certeau's dialectic between the ‘big story’ of strategies and the everyday, ground-level response of tactics. Whilst this memorial and its visitor centre appear to represent History (with a

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<sup>23</sup> This generalising tendency extends in the *Neue Wache* to victims as well, causing no small controversy. Ladd (1997:220): “this personal, seemingly unpolitical understanding of victimhood...equated soldiers fighting for Hitler with Jews herded into gas chambers.”

<sup>24</sup> Fittingly, Feldman's work frequently explored the intricate tensions of near-silent notes, seemingly random sonic collisions and varied repetition.





Figures 52-53. *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*. Top: seen from the southeast. Bottom: accidental encounters within the memorial. Both August 2014.

capital H), its silent spaces offer a possibility for metaphorical traces and traversals that subtly undermine this narrative: “enunciatory operations [...] of an unlimited diversity [which] cannot be reduced to their graphic trail” (de Certeau, 1984:99).

It is this tension between the movement of now and the stillness of the past that I now want to probe further, through two single memorial events.

### **Silent and sounded memorial: *Schweigeweg* (silent path) and the *Gemeindehaus***

Just as shocking as the outrages of the cynical so-called ‘Reichkristallnacht’ [Night of broken glass], was the wide sphere of the population who blithely took part, with such efficiency that no-one raised their voice against it.

75 years after the Reich pogrom night we intend to silently remember the crimes, to commemorate the victims and to be responsible for that which grows out of our own history ([www.gedenkweg2013.de](http://www.gedenkweg2013.de)).<sup>25</sup>

Voices can speak to us from the past, but not at will. History is a contested discourse, and the sound that reaches us is selective and partial. Shelemay (2006a:18) notes that these “narratives about the past [...] are constructed and/or acknowledged by virtue of institutional sanction, scholarly hypothesis or broad-based social acceptance; these same narratives are often revised or reconstructed in the same contexts that validated them in the first place”.

But the voiceless can also be reached the other way around, by making ourselves as silent as they are. Where historical silence – the lack of sound – creates distance, this lack can itself be utilised and commemorated. Silence moves from a tool of remembrance, to become its subject. On November 9th 2013, I took part in a silent walk through Berlin to mark the 75th anniversary of the November pogrom,<sup>26</sup> a night that came to be known as *Kristallnacht*. What follows are my highly personal and emotionally subjective responses, written the next day. I have included them in full in order to throw up some of the, at times, contradictory issues surrounding the positioning of sound and silence in this particular memorial process.

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<sup>25</sup> Accessed September 7th, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> There were several similar events organised around the country on this day, varying in size and length.

A performative paradox: present but silent. Giving voice to the voiceless by being silent oneself.

75 years ago, it was noise that defined the night. *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass. The sound of stones through windows, shouts and threats, living terror. Today we mark our memory by refusing to shout back. We simply offer our presence, our slow careful footsteps along the same roads, the noise now that of buses and Saturday shoppers, the only broken glass belonging to the odd bottle left on the street.

To be silent here is to turn thoughts inwards, but also to symbolically bear witness. Our silence is a response to the violence of the noise of the night seventy-five years ago, speaking (?) across the decades. It neither adjudicates nor complies. Our silence is a reminder of the voiceless, for whom we cannot speak – we are simply silent as they now are. But our silence is also that of those who would not speak at the time. Those who did not speak up. In our lives outside, speech marks our identity. Here it is our silence.

But we do not stand still, or at least only in places. The event has two parts: *Schweige* (silent) and *weg* (path). It has direction. It is fluid, moving, furred around the edges as people come and go, overtake and lag behind. To stand in one place and ‘observe a silence’ has boundaries, frames, a single aim. To walk and be silent is to blur those boundaries, to confuse the edges. Who is a part of the walk, who is simply a passer-by? What noise is allowed (footsteps, coughs) and what do we forego (speech)? And there are children, who will never be silent for very long. There are elderly people who must speak at certain moments to articulate a need. This is human silence, communal and contractual. A disorderly silence (choice), not an imposed one (coercion). Just as our walking has a general direction and loose coalition – we are not marching in step – so our silence is real yet flexible.

The route is an organised one from Marienkirche to Oranienburger Straße synagogue. After speeches from civic and religious leaders, there is a sudden hush as the walk sets off. It is immediately odd, as if an actor has stayed on stage too long after the play is over: something not quite usual. We shuffle out slowly and quietly, except for the odd bit of whispered chat or kids talking (not loudly). There are about 400 people<sup>27</sup>, many of them over 50. We move slowly and deliberately, though not gloomily – the afternoon sun shines and there is a strong sense of calm, or perhaps a calm sense of strength. No chants, no slogans, only one banner at the front, no uniforms or placards. All we are offering up is the open signifier of our gathered silent presence. Mysterious and ambiguous in the centre of the city. Fluid but not playful.

First stop is outside the Berliner Dom cathedral. About ten young people stand on the steps holding placards with names and dates on them. They are dressed in their everyday clothes and they are relaxed but attentive. In the middle of the steps is a microphone, and several of the teenagers walk to it one by one to read out countless names and destinies of those deported. It is powerful at first, obviously, but after about fifteen names, dates, ages and fates, the overwhelming emotion is in fact boredom. I think how even my father<sup>28</sup> would have started to look at his watch and make winding-up motions. But perhaps it's important that we feel *ennui* and dissatisfaction – why should commemoration be comfortable and easy? After about twenty minutes an organiser quietly suggests that the leaders (who have the banner) should move on and the rest will follow. The kids continue to recite names and tragic fates as we file slowly by.

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<sup>27</sup> In fact, according to the *Berliner Zeitung* there were over 1000 people. Maybe it just felt like less. <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik/gedenken-an-novemberpogrome--es-ist-kalt-geworden-in-unserer-gesellschaft-,10808018,24984726.html>. Accessed September 7th, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Himself a young Jewish teenager in Liverpool at the time that these deportations and murders were taking place.





Figure 54. *Schweigeweg*, outside Berliner Dom cathedral. November 9th, 2013.

We walk around the back of the museums and reappear on Unter den Linden, now on the turf of tourists, hawkers, bystanders. But there is a purpose to our movements that marks them as different. And we are loosely bordered-off, even if the barrier is highly porous. People come up to ask what we're doing – the short responses are mostly quiet, almost severe.

The next stop is the Altes Palais on Bebelplatz. I realise that we are standing just next to another silent memorial: the underground library. Another space that seals off history by borders and silence, another ambiguous and multivalent signifier. There is a choir of young people singing, supported by a small brass ensemble behind them. They are singing “Shalom Aleichem” as we arrive. We listen in respectful silence. Next is a Bach cantata, and then “Dona Nobis Pacem” . This is a largely religious crowd, and so many people join in (ironically, very few were able to do so with “Shalom Aleichem”). The singing is pretty and gentle, and yet this is a *Schweigeweg* – silence is the whole point. I wonder what exactly we are listening to, and what for. Is this entertainment along the way? Are we praying? Are we voicing hope for the next generation? Or – because music is one of those things that marks ‘events’ – for no clear reason at all. Like funerals, weddings, parties: it’s an event so we’d better give them some music. Although the performance is good, we don't applaud – it seems wrong.

There is a short silence as we move off and the choir picks up “Shalom Aleichem” again to send us on our way. As we reach the thick of Unter den Linden, we collide more and more with Saturday afternoon visitors and shoppers. In a way this makes us stronger – not there for frills or consumption, we are there to remember, silently. The contrast, in my mind at least, gives a greater purpose to our steps. We move on and I keep going as far as Friedrichstraße. As I leave the walk I am aware of my tread and gait suddenly becoming faster and lighter, independent again. I feel like Verbal Kint as he leaves the police station.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The iconic final scene of the 1995 thriller *The Usual Suspects*, where arch-criminal Roger “Verbal” Kint, who has been pretending to be crippled for the whole film, calmly escapes capture and gradually ‘sheds’ his disability in the process.

An event like this gains its signifying power through the dramatic subversion of expectations: a conventionally noisy thing (a crowd of moving people) becomes a silent mass. Its voice removed, the ‘presence’ of the crowd is oddly foregrounded.<sup>30</sup> And yet this silence, precisely because no one is ‘talking’ about what the crowd is there for, is an ambiguous and open one. Cultural associations and signifying strategies are implicit, rather than stated. The roots here lie in the Quaker practice of bearing witness or again with the non-violent resistance of Henry Thoreau (Nelson, 1962) or even Mohandas Gandhi, and interestingly the idea of silent commemoration strikes me as not a particularly Jewish one.<sup>31</sup> Or at least not an Ashkenazi Jewish one.<sup>32</sup> As noted in chapter four, Jewish prayer tends to be heterophonic and, at times, noisy. Although *kadish*, the prayer for the dead, is chanted quietly and with respect, when it is recited in synagogue by a group of people at different speeds it also tends to have an appealingly ragged, anarchic quality. This is what is behind Heiko Lehmann’s observation – in the early days of the German klezmer revival – of the discrepancy between the joyful and lively (Jewish) music that Aufwind were playing and the polite and carefully respectful (German) audience reaction.<sup>33</sup>

And indeed not all Jewish memorial is silent in this city. There is also sounded memory, especially in Jewish Places (cf. Gantner & Oppenheim, 2014). On the same evening as the *Schweigeweg* (November 9<sup>th</sup>), I attended a memorial service at the Berlin Jewish *Gemeindehaus* – for a long time the hub of the small post-war Jewish community and still its official centre. Here are my notes from that same evening:

The majority of the service is made up of a stage review (readings, songs, enactments, historical recordings) centred around the fates of Jewish Berliners in the first half of the twentieth century. The Holocaust is the inevitable destination of this narrative, but much of the journey is lively and at times surprisingly joyful. The inside part of the evening finishes with a speech from the head of Berlin’s orthodox community, Rabbi Itzhak Ehrenberg. He tells a there-and-back-again story of a German-Israeli friend. The speech over, we file outside for prayers and *kadish*. This is quite something. There is a fire burning next to the memorial wall (the wall has names of all the camps inscribed on it) and we pack tightly around. The cantor intones a prayer that includes the names of the camps – very strange hearing “Buchenwald, Treblinka” sung as if in synagogue (by saying them we defeat them?). The *Gemeindehaus* is very close to the Zoologischer Garten

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<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the Singing Balconies organisers of the Introduction, when denied permission to repeat their wonderful night, responded with a protest in the form of *Die Nacht der Schweigenden Balkone* (The Night of the Silent Balconies) – a walk around Friedrichshain interspersed with stops under balconies where this time the performers stood silent.

<sup>31</sup> Not to say, of course, that large numbers of individual Jews would have any reason *not* to be a significant force in this kind of memorial practice.

<sup>32</sup> One does not have to work too hard to find something comical in the idea of trying to keep 400 modern-day (assimilated) Jews quiet. Just think what Woody Allen or Jackie Mason might have done with it.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, 2013.



Figure 55. Memorial fire next to memorial wall, inscribed with concentration camp names. *Jüdisches Gemeindehaus*, November 9th, 2014.

train station, one of the western city's busiest transport hubs, and on a cold November Saturday evening this is much in evidence. But the cantor's voice is well amplified, lifting over the West Berlin night and mixing with the trains and buses. This lovely urban melee is surely no accident. The convenors of the evening could have chosen to keep us all indoors for the whole event. The memorial wall that we stand beside, the bright fire that has been lit especially for this event, and the strong voice of mourning are all a challenge to the indifference of the city. We are here (still), louder and more present than ever. This is memorial, respectful and important, and far from silent. The visiting Israeli rabbi steps up to recite a psalm, and then Rabbi Ehrenberg says *kadish* (as do we). Very moving. No fancy stuff, no tricks, no identity ambiguity, no clever post-modernism. This is Berlin's Jews mourning their dead, publicly, formally, and with determination and clarity. The rabbi finishes and there is a spontaneous outbreak of "O Se Shalom". It is taken up by about half the people there (non-Jews respectfully silent), with feeling but no huge conviction. In a way, singing at this point would imply something too triumphant. This event is not about celebration, or diversity, or what a great place contemporary Berlin has turned out to be. This is about Jews and murder and survival and renewal and hope in the face of uncertainty.

Both of these events are marked by their dealing with sound – or the lack of it – as a force for remembrance. Their differences (and my different responses) foreground an inherent ambiguity in the memorial process – the rub between the silence of the past and the sound of the present that produces inevitably conflicting and unpredictable subjective affects. I would argue that such ambiguity is perhaps an inescapable part of this particular commemorative subject. Instead of seeking an impossible resolution, rather we are offered an ontological articulation of the dilemma, using the immediacy of

the sonic realm to symbolically produce feelings of lack and loss. Stravinsky (1975:163) famously noted that “music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all”, but that does not mean that it lacks teeth. In fact, the power of sound to force an immediate and felt clash between sensory worlds, between competing subjectivities, is at times an overwhelming one. Upon my visit to yet another memorial site, Gleis 17, I was immediately struck by the contrast between the silence of the tracks and platform and – in the distance – the everyday sound of contemporary public transport life, in the form of the nearby Grunewald S-Bahn station. The daily commuter trains pushed home, in a curious way, the normativity necessary for effective genocide. In an even starker example, here is concentration camp inmate Trude Levi describing the cognitive terror upon finding Mozart performed in a place of death:

Women started to run, all in one direction. I followed and the music was a small women's orchestra playing. I began to cry – such music as this in hell! What torture was this going to bring us? What devilish tricks were they playing on us now?<sup>34</sup>

Having reached the nadir of this particular German-Jewish sound/silence discourse, I now want to look at two specific articulations – distinct viewpoints on the relationship between sound, Jewish memory and cultural identity. They explore different ways of hearing history through the sound of the present, each one managing in the process to produce a particular version of experience that is both directly connected to Jewish music and thoroughly grounded in the city of Berlin. Once again, it is the sensory and physical immediacy and affect of sound coupled with its ability to open up rather than close down meanings that is at the heart of this connection.

### **The sound of pre-war Jewish Berlin: Semer Label Reloaded**

On the night of November 9th, 1938, Hirsch Lewin's business was destroyed. He was not alone, of course – this was the infamous *Kristallnacht*, night of broken glass, when the Nazis laid bare their intentions to wipe out Jews and Jewish life in Germany. Located in Grenadierstraße (now Almstadtstraße), Lewin's Hebrew Bookstore was part of the busy German-Jewish life of the Scheunenviertel district. Now a mass of boutiques, galleries and funky *objets d'art* emporia, this area to the northwest of

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<sup>23</sup> Camp inmate Trude Levi cf. Bade (2012:256)

Alexanderplatz was once the centre of the East European Jewish cultural presence in the city (Wertheimer, 1987; Tilo Alt, 1991), the lively and crowded spot that newly arrived immigrants made for, often as a staging-post towards the *goldene medine*<sup>35</sup>. Lewin<sup>36</sup> stocked religious and historical texts, children's literature, candles and prayer shawls, and also a wide selection of phonograph records. In 1932 he took this one step further and inaugurated his own record label 'Semer'. Between 1932 and 1937, Semer's catalogue grew from re-releases of existing recordings to new self-produced material of artists based in Germany, most notably the young cantor Israel Bakon, originally from Galicia. Lewin's output covered popular Yiddish hits, folk songs, cantorial repertoire, Italian arias and Russian standards, performed in Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Russian and Italian.<sup>37</sup>

The variety of Semer's releases is testament to the diversity of Jewish cultural life in the Scheunenviertel, and in the wider city.<sup>38</sup> Although interned in Sachsenhausen, Lewin reached Palestine before the end of the war, where he began producing records once more.<sup>39</sup> Following Lewin's death in 1958, his son Zev took over the running of the company. The label's demise in Germany would be just another footnote in the systematic destruction of a certain sort of cultural diversity, were it not for a twenty first century project that not only unearths the rich recorded legacy of the Semer label, but reinterprets it for a contemporary audience. Once again this is a story of building the new out of materials scattered by history. In the same way that Lichtenberg's Stasi museum recycles abandoned pieces of everyday Stasi mundanity (scratched office doors, plain metal chairs) into new roles as information points or display cabinets, and

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<sup>35</sup> Yiddish: "Golden Land" (America).

<sup>36</sup> Lewin (1892-1958) himself was one such immigrant. Born in Vilnius, he was taken to Germany as a civilian prisoner in the First World War. After his release, he decided to remain in Germany. See: <http://www.jmberlin.de/berlin-transit/en/orte/lewin.php>. Accessed August 29th, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> It is worth putting the Semer label's output into the wider context of interwar European, Russian and Soviet Jewish music recordings. Aylward (2003) offers a valuable breakdown of recordings from other metropolitan centres of Jewish life. He notes the pre-WWI presence of "a vigorous Jewish music recording industry" (2003:63), centred primarily in Warsaw and Lemberg, and also Vienna, Budapest, St Petersburg, Czernowitz and other cities. The primary output was Yiddish song (predominantly Yiddish theatre songs), but cantorial music also featured strongly, particularly in recordings from Vilna, Warsaw, Budapest, London and Vienna. Aylward (*ibid.*:65) also points to "the overwhelming significance of Lemberg as a recording centre for Yiddish theatre songs". The interwar years saw a decline in recorded Jewish music, which Aylward (*ibid.*:69) attributes to the changing Russian market post-Revolution, the rise of nationalism (and hence lessened enthusiasm for ethnic minority culture) in Eastern European states, a growing taste for Anglo-American music, and also the aggressive marketing of American-Jewish repertoire by American labels Victor and Columbia. At the time of writing (2003), Aylward's database consisted of approximately 5,500 recordings, mostly made before WWI. More recently, Tomasz Lerski's 2004 history of the Warsaw label Syrena Records (1908-1939) shows a large market for Polish popular music, and particularly tango, a genre in which European Jews played a prominent role (see Czacki, 2003, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> The company that Lewin founded in Israel, Hed Arzi, was Israel's oldest record label and the largest of its kind.



the Oranienburger Synagogue creates its exhibition out of the scraps of Jewish life salvaged from the end of the war, so Semer Label Reloaded self-consciously mines this piece of Berlin musical history to forge a new-old cultural artefact, and in the process forces the collision of then and now.

In 2012, singer and museologist Fabian Schnedler was involved in a Jewish Museum special exhibition: “Berlin Transit”, focusing on Jewish Eastern European migrants in the 1920s”, in particular the Scheunenviertel and Charlottenburg (nicknamed ‘Charlottengrad’ at the time). Fabian’s task was to design an exhibition room looking at the internal discourse of the city’s new immigrants, through printed media but also audio sources. Amongst his recorded material was one Semer disc. This caught Fabian’s attention and, after a little digging, he discovered that many more rescued or rediscovered Semer recordings had made it onto the 2002 Bear Family Records 11 CD compilation *Vorbei: Beyond Recall*.<sup>40</sup> Having made contact with Zev Lewin in Israel, Fabian was concerned that any musical material used in his exhibition be given the chance to develop its own relevant voice: “there was the question, if we work with these cultural artefacts, a lot of books etc., how do we deal with music?”<sup>41</sup>

Enlisting the help of Alan Bern and several other prominent Yiddish musicians, the project went on to become Semer Label Reloaded, a concert programme presenting live versions of a variety of Lewin’s original releases. Fabian picks up the story:

The idea was to make it somehow contemporary, because the whole museum was afraid of too much *shtetl* kitsch, and I also felt like, let’s find a nice way. I thought of Socalled,<sup>42</sup> to do some remixes of stuff, and also I asked the guys from *Russendisko*. They all had their ways, but they did not really fit the idea of the museum. So I said, ok, what about Alan Bern? [...] And then, we kind of got the favourites together, the people.

The “favourites” include several of the musicians discussed throughout: Daniel Kahn, Sasha Lurje, Paul Brody, and of course Bern and Schnedler themselves. It is a fluid group, taking in violinists Vanessa Vromans and Mark Kovnatsky, clarinettist Christian Dawid, bassist Martin Lillich and occasionally singer Sveta Kundish. It also features one of klezmer music’s big international names, Klezmatics’ singer Lorin Sklamberg,

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<sup>40</sup> Subtitled *Jewish Musical Life in Nazi Berlin*. The song “Vorbei” itself, a hauntingly beautiful slow 3/4 tango, sung on the Bear Family collection (BCD 16030) by Dora Gerson, is one of the lynchpin songs of the Reloaded project.

<sup>41</sup> All Fabian’s comments come from a personal interview at the Berlin Jewish Museum, August 27th, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> AKA Josh Dolgin: Canadian-born rapper, accordionist and producer who specialises in mixing Yiddish material with DJ and hip-hop techniques.

whose distinctively plaintive high voice adds an unmistakable contemporary quality to the ensemble's sound. From the beginning, the re-presentation of this historical material brought about inevitable questions of re-creation vs re-interpretation. Here is Fabian talking about his own thoughts in approaching the music:

Well, I think Lorin as an artist has such a certain way [...] that he's very much himself right from the beginning. I was a bit shy too, because actually I never sang cantorial music before that, and so I was a bit shy as a non-Jew to sing a sacred Jewish text.

But for Fabian, the project was also already beginning to raise some thoroughly modern questions:

It also opens for me, like, it's kind of strange but I specialised as a Yiddish singer. I sang German songs, but not very often, so it happens that I sing German songs now, in a *Jewish* song project.

The Jewish context of *Semer Label Reloaded*, then, ironically allows for an incursion of greater diversity and cultural heterogeneity. Its provenance as a historical artefact means that the material is liberated from the constraints of restrictive 'Jewish' musical signifiers. This also opens up a more ambiguous cultural space for the music:

It's history, but also it's a contemporary project, it's not like one of these – I always call them *Betroffenheit* [shock] projects, where you tend to have one reaction from the public. This is more open, I think, and it shows how much was there, and actually that's also the emphasis of the museum.

How much was there is indeed showcased in the group's repertoire: love songs, songs of loss and mourning, soldier's songs, drinking songs, religious texts and the odd dose of klezmer. Linguistically, the group covers English, German, Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish with ease, once again foregrounding the particular brand of vernacular internationalism that Berlin does so well. Musically, the songs range from gentle parlour numbers to full-blown comic cabaret pieces. Although many of the arrangements are faithful to the originals, there is neither a hint of parody, nor of cloying over-fidelity. Instead, each number is treated on its own terms, allowed to explore its own musical and cultural world. Leslie Morris (2001:376) suggests that klezmer has often functioned iconically, but she avoids explaining of precisely *what* it is iconic: "it is the iconic function of the sound of Klezmer as sound, not the music per se, that triggers the metonymic link between Jewish 'sound' and Jewish 'experience', however illusory,

fictive, invented, or ‘hyper-real’ that may turn out to be.” I would contend that a project such as *Semer Label Reloaded* directly addresses this by locating that sound specifically and temporally. But more than this, it then allows for the overlaps subsequently created, the back-and-forth play between past and present.

A fine example of the linguistic and cultural intertextuality underlying the whole project is the number shared between Sklamberg and Schnedler, “Kadish (der yidisher soldat)”<sup>43</sup>. This was originally a German song with words by Kurt Robitschek and music by Otto Stransky.<sup>44</sup> A Yiddish version (translator unknown) was recorded by the tenor Pinchus Lavenda for Vocalion records in New York (1929) and later for *Semer* in Berlin. In 1930, German tango singer Otto Fassel recorded the song for Odeon records under the title “Kaddisch: ein Ghetto-Lied”. Already, then, within this song we can see some of the interweaving and overlapping strands of pre-war Berlin musical production. These become richer and more complex when we consider the music and text themselves. The piece is a tango, composed in the slower, heavier style that characterised Eastern European tangos of the 1920s and 1930s (in contrast to their livelier and more dazzling Argentinian forebears). As with Berlin’s musical culture in general, Jews were heavily involved in the development of the European tango sound, and so it is no surprise to find a Jewish narrative here, in both languages.<sup>45</sup> And as is often the case within European tango, the lush, densely romantic sound belies a deeper level: darker themes of death and separation.

The text tells the story of Yankl the blacksmith who leaves his family to go to war, very possibly pressed against his will. Shortly after, his wife receives a visit from the rabbi, telling her that her husband has been killed. The mother takes the child to her breast and tells him:

<i>Mayn kind, zug kadish far dayn tatn.</i>	My child, say kadish for your father.
<i>Bay di soldatn treft im di koyl.</i>	The soldiers’ bullets shot him.
<i>Mayn kind, mayn liber,</i>	My child, my love,
<i>Ayer kind nisht mer vider,</i>	Your child no more,
<i>Dokh groys iz indzer adoynay.</i> <sup>46</sup>	But our Lord is great.

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<sup>43</sup> “Kadish (the Jewish soldier)”.

<sup>44</sup> The two men worked together in Berlin in the 1920s in Robitschek and Paul Morgan’s *Kabarett der Komiker* (Jelavich, 1993:198-202).

<sup>45</sup> See Czackis (2003, 2009) for a full discussion of the small but significant genre of Yiddish tango.

<sup>46</sup> Yiddish lyrics from [http://www.polishjewishcabaret.com/2013\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.polishjewishcabaret.com/2013_01_01_archive.html). Accessed August 29th, 2015.



The theme of grim acceptance of fate (both Yankl and his wife’s) runs through the song, a trope made both meaningful and sinister by our hindsighted viewpoint, incorporating as it does the knowledge of the fate of so many Yankls. But this is not all. The very idea of the Jewish soldier has, post-war, acquired new levels of meaning – from partisan resistance fighters to the modern-day IDF. Whilst these are absent from the song’s original cultural context, they are inescapable to our contemporary ears and minds. This semiotic slippage is reinforced by the song’s musical construction, powerfully conveying the contrast between external narrative and inner emotional world. The two verses, which describe the action, are set to a brooding march rhythm, the text declaimed in short punchy syllables. The chorus (above), which narrates Yankl and his wife’s feelings, is set to a contrastingly lyrical and soaring melody, rising in the first two lines and falling back down for the second two. Longer duration stepwise suspensions mark out certain notes of the chorus: kadish, tatn, soldatn, liber, vider;<sup>47</sup> and a poignant rising minor 6th frames the tragically resigned cadence (figure 56).

Mayn kind, zug ka - dish far da - yn ta - tn. Bay di sol - da - tn  
treft im di koyl. Mayn kind, mayn li - ber, A - yer kind nisht mer  
vi - der, Dokh groys iz ind - zer a - doy - nay.

Figure 56. “Kadish, der Yidisher Soldat” (chorus). Harmony given to indicate suspensions. Semer Label Reloaded.

Inevitably, some of the original Semer material owes much to the cabaret of the 1930s. This was a musical language born of its time that also stamped an indelible mark on the era (Jelavich, 1996). In this sense, the repertoire that the Reloaded project is exploring is as much ‘German’ as ‘Jewish’. However, the inclusion of cantorial repertoire and even a proto-Zionist finale quite clearly frames an overall Jewish perspective, and therefore colours the more German part of the repertoire. Here again we become aware of the effect of listening through historical headphones:

<sup>47</sup> kadish, father, soldier, love, again (in this case part of *nisht mer vider*, meaning ‘no more’).

It's hard for us to hear these songs, or to find a way out from these songs, which doesn't lead to the Holocaust, because the Holocaust stands between us. But in these songs you don't yet hear the Holocaust. It's perhaps the last flowering of this culture before our perceptions were so thoroughly imprinted by the Holocaust.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, we cannot escape hearing history through certain filters, even if these are not present in the original sources. Despite its basis in historical materials, the subsequent fate of those materials (and their makers) means that a project like *Semer Label Reloaded* cannot avoid a contemporary resonance. More complex than mere 'historical performance', the material becomes a way of using the past to explore the present. The catastrophic mid-century break that has rendered cultural continuity impossible makes this kind of reaching-back and rediscovery a necessity, in the process highlighting a time when divisions and categories were different (i.e. before the desire for Jewish 'heritage' music). However, as well as framing the project as a Jewish one, this ambiguous subjectivity also has the reverse effect. One of the numbers is the comic "Im Gasthof zur goldenen Schnecke",<sup>49</sup> recorded for *Semer* by the German-Jewish singer and composer Willy Rosen, one of Weimar cabaret's most successful all-rounders. Rosen's maxim was "above all – no politics",<sup>50</sup> and this tune is no exception. It is a leery waltz describing a pub – "nicht modern" and not even "sehr schön" – that nevertheless retains the dubious appeal of a coin-operated player piano and dancing girls. Harmless and gently saucy, for Fabian the song has a deeper meaning:

We play this one Schlager which is a waltz, and you couldn't – some people don't want to hear it, it's so *German*. Some people feel like you can't clap, and maybe they think of German soldiers in the Second World War. But this is also a Jewish context, yes? There were Jewish performers and Jewish composers involved. I like this, it's somehow – maybe I'm not sure if this goes too far – but maybe it gives back an audience something that they can't assess so easily. And it's not Silbereisen<sup>51</sup> and *Musikantenstadt*<sup>52</sup> like the TV German folk music, it's actually popular music from the 1920s and 30s.

Ironically, then, it is through this Jewish musical vehicle that Germans are given back the legitimacy to own and enjoy their own historical popular genre. Uneasy *Wehrmacht*

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<sup>48</sup> Alan Bern: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Xky4Omql5g>, accessed August 28th, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> "At the Golden Snail Tavern".

<sup>50</sup> Despite this, after fleeing to Holland, Rosen was killed in Auschwitz in 1944: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/western-europe/westerbork/rosenwilly/>. Accessed August 28th, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Florian Silbereisen, singing presenter of the German *Volkstümliche Musik* programme *Feste der Volksmusik*. *Volkstümliche Musik*, a broad, deliberately populist all-singing, all-dancing affair, should be distinguished from ethnic folk music. See, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=858-7ox7NDg>. Accessed August 28th 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Live German-language TV programme and touring show specialising in *Schlager* and *Volkstümliche Musik*.



Figure 57. Paul Brody lets rip at a Semer Label Reloaded performance in the Gorki Theater. To the left is Alan Bern, behind Brody are Dan Kahn and Vanessa Vromans. June 2014.

association are mitigated by the performance's Jewish context, leapfrogging the manufactured world of media-based folk/pop culture and connecting directly with a contemporary (German) audience.<sup>53</sup>

The performative aspect of music makes it an ideal vehicle for this back-and-forth dialogue. Another number covered by the Reloaded band is the satirical song “Leybke fort keyn Amerike”,<sup>54</sup> which tells the story of one man's migration from old world to new. Leaving his pregnant wife Reyzl behind with promises of a ticket soon to come, Leybke becomes a successful tailor in New York. But forgetting his wife and child, he soon hooks up with the glamorous Tsipe. She reminds him of his family back home, and Leybke finally sets about writing Reyzl a letter. Sadly, this letter does not contain the happy tidings Reyzl had hoped for, but instead a divorce, allowing Leybke to wed his New World sweetheart, leaving his *alte heym* family bereft and penniless. Performed in multi-character by Daniel Kahn with stylish cabaret piano accompaniment from Alan Bern, this is a story that would have resonated on both sides of the Atlantic, though perhaps for different reasons. In the context of Semer Label *Reloaded*, it acquires yet another level of historical meaning, performed as it is back in Europe by an American Jew – descendant perhaps of one such Leybke.

This sort of historical cultural playfulness and fluidity resonates through much of Berlin's musical production, as the previous chapters have illustrated. It is symptomatic

<sup>53</sup> Sveta Kundish made this same point in relation to the YSW-initiated project *Voices of Ashkenaz*, which explores the links between Yiddish and German folk song (interview, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> “Leybke travels to America”.

of a sort of musical double-consciousness, an ability to exist culturally in several places at once. Painter RB Kitaj coined the term 'Diasporism' to describe this particular ideological approach, "enacted under peculiar historical and personal freedoms, stresses, dislocation, rupture and momentum. The Diasporist lives [...] in two or more societies at once".<sup>55</sup> A project like *Semer Label Reloaded* explicitly mines this seam, exploiting the multi-linguistic and overlapping cultural competence of both its performers and its audiences.<sup>56</sup> Fittingly, however, such double-consciousness is in this case not the exclusive preserve of diasporic Jews. For Fabian Schnedler, it is precisely this liminal contact zone that brings both problems and satisfaction:

I'm a non-Jew in a Jewish-Yiddish scene, where I feel as an insider because I'm there for some years and I have friends. But also I'm an outsider, you know I have this mostly non-Jewish audience where I'm kind of a translator [...] it's an in-between space. Actually, this is not nice sometimes, but it's also what I want, I think. And I had some time – actually I decided not to talk about this any more, but I still can, it's ok. Because I thought about this so much, like, I call it the *goy* issue – *goy* is the Yiddish term, the insider term, telling that you're an outsider, and that's exactly what I am [...] I'm just discovering in the last years that it is a good place.

### **"That's not *my* problem!" Tania Alon and Berlin Jewish identity**

The tensions between a supposed homogenous people and the many ethnic, religious, and racial groups who are asserting their own identities make Germany a particularly interesting terrain to explore the ambiguities of multiple identities [...] While Jews may well be German citizens and even (although today it is less likely) of German heritage, their stature, while secured politically and legally, remains uncertain, and they often still feel like strangers in their own country.

(Peck, Ash & Lemke, 1997:91)

Tania Alon was born in Berlin. Her parents both survived the war – her father in Berlin and her mother in Dortmund. They met at a post-war Jewish children's festival in Schwarzwald and made the decision to remain in Germany, raising a family there. This is a choice that Tania also found herself making some years later, despite strong family and emotional links to Israel. I met Tania early on at the *Klezmerstammtisch* and our paths crossed frequently during my year in Berlin. I found it surprising that Tania was one of the very few German-born and -raised Jews<sup>57</sup> that I encountered on the klezmer/

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<sup>55</sup> Kitaj's *First Diasporist Manifesto* (1989), quoted in Zemel (2008:181). cf. also Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic* "double consciousness".

<sup>56</sup> Although based in Berlin, it has also played to audiences in Warsaw, Copenhagen and Lviv.

<sup>57</sup> Tania's identification as a *German Jew* is strong – her family has been in Germany for three generations.

Yiddish scene. I wondered how much her own family history and sense of survival would fit with the more recent internationalisation of Jewish music in the city, or whether she perhaps considered herself in some ways different from the majority of musicians and singers with whom she jammed and performed. I would also contend that Tania does not fit easily into any of my Chapter 1 categories. This is partly because she is very much an occasional, amateur performer, her participation limited to jam sessions and her own occasional intimate concerts. But at the same time, as the following pages show, Tania's slight separation from the scene is also a little of her own choosing, stemming from a different personal relationship with the music and her own German-Jewish identity. For this study, I want to focus on the way in which Tania positions herself socially and culturally within and without the Berlin scene, rather than the detail of her music itself.

Tania has been performing Jewish music in some form for most of her life – as she puts it, beginning with the *ma nishtana*<sup>58</sup> when she was three years old. As a child she sang with her musician father for Jewish community events in Berlin, and as a young mother in Hanover she appeared onstage with popular rabbi and singer/composer Shlomo Carlebach<sup>59</sup> when he came to perform for the local Jewish community. For Tania, this was an event that brought together her own history with that of the wider Jewish world:

Wow. It was amazing because he composed so many songs I knew from the community, from my parents, and I didn't know that he was the composer! And it was fun, to make music with him. So and then it started for me to go on stage with my songs. A little later Giora Feidman came to Germany, and told us that what we are doing is 'klezmer' [laughs].<sup>60</sup>

Having met Feidman, Tania and clarinettist Helmut Eisler<sup>61</sup> invited him to Hanover to hold a workshop. Around the same time, she also began to meet American Jewish musicians in Germany, culminating in a trip to KlezKamp where she encountered the influence of Yiddish singer and cultural powerhouse Adrienne Cooper.<sup>62</sup> For Tania, her German-Jewish identity has always placed her in a particular position vis-a-vis klezmer

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<sup>58</sup> The 'four questions' of the Passover *seder*, traditionally asked by the youngest child present.

<sup>59</sup> Carlebach (1925-94) was an iconoclastic and hugely popular rabbi, composer and singer. Born in Berlin, he lived in the USA, Israel and Canada, travelling and performing widely. His particularly melodic brand of devotional song (such as "Od Avinu Chai (Am Yisrael Chai)") remains a staple of Jewish music today, and Carlebach *minyanim* (prayer services) continue to use his music for their liturgical melodies. See Steinhardt (2010).

<sup>60</sup> All Tania's comments come from a personal interview in Steglitz, Berlin, on June 16th, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> On Eisler and the influence of Feidman, see Rubin (2015a).

<sup>62</sup> In Tania's experience, we can see a nice example of the way that many Berlin musicians who came of age in the 80s and 90s made less of a distinction between Feidman and the Americans than is perhaps now the case (see Chapter 4).

and Yiddish music in Germany. Singing at events outside her own Jewish community, and in the 25-piece ‘klezmer orchestra’ she helped to put together in Hanover, Tania frequently felt that her background made of her something between ambassador and museum-piece curio:

[PA: *Were there times when you would have to explain?*]

When I was in the community, no. But *in anderen Orten musste ich immer erklären*.<sup>63</sup> The most Germans, if they hear that you not only do this music, but that you are a Jew, that you are really Jewish, they are very shy and very touched. And they don’t have really the possibility to talk *ehrlich*, real, because they don’t want to hurt me and I don’t want to hurt them, and that’s a big problem. Till now.

Ironically, then, Tania’s ethnic connection to the music she was playing marked her as an outsider,<sup>64</sup> implicitly unable to participate in her fellow Germans’ own historical discourse. Tania noted the gap between her own life as a Jew and the symbolic boundary it erected between her and fellow non-Jewish musicians, the inflection of her Jewishness as something rarefied and ‘special’ becoming a barrier to more honest communication. For Tania, her Jewish identity – as expressed through music – was perceived more as a symbolic benefit to her non-Jewish colleagues than any actual engagement with her own life – part of what Michael Meng (2011:214) describes as “redemptive cosmopolitanism”, in which an ostensibly integrated and socially meaningful Jewish presence acts as a kind of cultural sticking plaster for all other immigrant problems. Tania, however, also sees opportunity in this position:

It’s very different because to feel free to be a Jew here, it’s very different to the feelings my parents and my grandparents had. And I take it as a chance to heal the problems between Jews and Germans, Christians and Jewish people here. And I think it’s important for the whole world. It’s a little part of freedom.

This responsibility is something she feels very strongly, connected as it is to her own family history:

In the beginning sometimes my mother was listening to my concerts. And I know that it’s impossible for her to hear those songs [of the Holocaust]. And we are very close, because she’s the only survivor of the family who is still alive and I’m the only daughter and we are very very close. But – I’ll say this in German – I believe that it is important to show that we are still here now. We are still alive. I am not religious, I am more secular, and in spite of that I feel very Jewish, you know?

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<sup>63</sup> “In other places I always had to explain”.

<sup>64</sup> On being the “real deal” as a London klezmer musician, see Tkachenko (2013).

And I don't need a synagogue in order to feel Jewish. I want to show what is alive, not just the past.<sup>65</sup>

The past in Tania's music, then, is inescapable. On a personal level, in that certain repertoire causes too much distress to those close to her, but also on a wider cultural level, as a presence to be confronted and ultimately quieted by the sound of the lived present. One of the ways that Tania reinforces this connection is through her singing at *Stolpersteine* ceremonies. These small brass plaques, the size of a cobble-stone (their name translates as "stumble stones"), are dotted all over Berlin. Embedded in the pavement outside houses and apartments, they commemorate families or individuals taken by the Nazis from those homes.<sup>66</sup> The inauguration of each new stone is frequently marked by some sort of ceremony, the nature of which is entirely dependent upon the participants, who normally comprise family members of those commemorated and current residents of the premises from which they were taken. Often the laying of the *Stolpersteine* will be accompanied by some sort of recitation or performance. At her most recent ceremony, for a Chilean family with no connection to Yiddish, Tania sang the Hebrew song "Eli Eli".<sup>67</sup> She describes the connection to her own life powerfully:

For me it's a substitute to do it myself for my family. I can't do it, because I have no people to ask. They are dead. And it's very important for me to find people that have some memory of this time, you know? Their stories are sometimes so similar to my story. My grandmother also died on the Transport to Riga. No-one knows where she lies now. So for me it is very important.<sup>68</sup>

The emotional punch of such a link is clear. It relates directly to the first part of this chapter: sounding a voice and a presence for those who can no longer speak, who were in fact silenced by the city. The survivors are also a way for Tania to link to her own murdered family. But this is not just about the past, nor about the missing or dead. What is equally important for Tania is the way that these stones, and the people that they stand for, merge themselves with their contemporary urban environment and its particular historical context:

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<sup>65</sup> The second half of this quote was spoken in German. Tania noted that she always reverted to German or Yiddish when speaking emotionally.

<sup>66</sup> See Hemmerling & Kavčič (2013). For its November 9th, 2013 edition, the daily *Berliner Zeitung* carried the front page headline: "75 years ago Jewish synagogues and houses burned in Berlin. This Berliner Zeitung is a Stolperstein".

<sup>67</sup> "My God, My God", words by Hannah Szenes, music by David Zahavi. Szenes was executed in 1944 in an attempt to rescue Hungarian Jews.

<sup>68</sup> Once again, when speaking of her family history, Tania did so in German.





Figure 58. *Stolpersteine* in Reichenberger Straße, Kreuzberg, marking the Itzig family's deportation to Auschwitz in 1943. May 2014.

Everybody can do it, but in this moment the *Stolpersteine* are lying on the floor, it is *öffentlicher Raum* [public space]. It no longer belongs to the house, nor to the person who initiated it, *sondern es gehört Berlin. Ein teil Berlins* [instead it belongs to Berlin. A part of Berlin].

The personal story that each *Stolperstein* tells overlaps with the public – and deliberately everyday – space within which they physically exist. The stones become a synecdoche, enabling connections wider than their particular individual sphere: connections to other victims of deportation and murder, their families and friends. And more than this, to the wider city of Berlin itself. The new city is indeed built on top of the old one, but the old one quietly takes its place in the public space of the here and now. These humble little plaques, their surprising glints of gold punctuating the grey cobblestones, are both a part of the modern city and a quietly chilling reminder of the historical one. Once again, the idea of *traces* is crucial, situating culture in “spaces that reveal rather than hide the discontinuous, often traumatic evolutions of the city's past” (Ward, 2011b:93).

The juxtaposition of history and modernity is not an uncommon sight in Berlin. On the weekend of November 9th and 10th 2013, in line with the commemorative events described earlier, many shops around the city's eastern hub of Alexanderplatz and



western shopping street Kurfürstendamm affixed large semi-transparent stickers to their main windows. These posters depicted a stylised image of broken glass, in order to reinforce the memory of smashed windows and destroyed lives seventy-five years earlier. The embedding of an iconic and disturbing image in the midst of the sheen and smoothness of weekend consumer culture was a calculatedly powerful move: engaging the material fabric of the city itself in a jarring juxtaposition designed to “remember Berlin merchants and retailers in the pogroms 75 years ago, and thus take a stand against intolerance, racism and anti-Semitism.”<sup>69</sup>

The implication, sadly valid, is that things have moved on, but not enough. Tania herself is open about the difficulties she feels that she faces as a Jew in Germany, seeing antisemitism and the internal squabbles of the Jewish communities as ongoing problems. Karen Weiss (2004) discusses these tensions, noting the dual role of warning and guardianship played by post-war West German Jews. Characterised by “both the highest of hopes and the deepest of fears” (182), this community’s relationship to recent history was a clear, albeit fragile, one, and the small and reasonably coherent group managed to retain a strong sense of Jewishness, both religious and cultural. It is within this environment that Tania feels her Jewishness was nurtured and still lives. This is in contrast to newly-arrived Russians, not the heirs of the Holocaust and not, by and large, seeking fulfilment in a Jewish community (*ibid.*191-2).<sup>70</sup> For Tania, these changes of the last twenty years have been difficult and often marginalising ones. Similarly, her time spent at Yiddish Summer Weimar was on the one hand a full and satisfying musical experience (of the kind outlined in chapter four), but on the other hand she could not help but feel in some way apart from her fellow workshop participants. Her experience and its unusual relevance was, she felt, overlooked in the quest for a more general historical Yiddish experience.

[PA: *were they just not interested?*]

I think it’s not the problem of the interest, it’s the problem of the possibility of empathy. Nobody can imagine how you feel. And in workshops the Germans are not Jews and the others haven’t lived in Germany, or they have just arrived. This meant that my feelings were not understood, they didn’t understand me, why it’s so hard to live here.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.berlin.de/2013/veranstaltungen/9-1011-in-berlin/>. Accessed September 8th, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> See also Becker *et al.* (2004).

The very specific *German-Jewish* identity that Tania feels marks her out is, ironically, absent from this German-Jewish musical context.<sup>71</sup> One could reasonably argue that to tackle over half a century of post-war German-Jewish relations is far beyond the reach of Yiddish Summer Weimar, but again we might turn the argument around and point out that without this complex historical dialectic, it is unlikely that Yiddish Summer Weimar (and its corresponding festivals in Fürth, Insul, Hanover...) would exist in the form that it currently does. For Tania, this dialogue between history and her present-day life is consistently at the heart of what she does:

And then they gave me the question, but why are you living here still, when you don't like it? But that's not my problem! [Laughs]. Life is not easy, and to work with your own story is not easy. But I like things that are not easy. I love it! It's a part of my music.

As the subject of increased and overly-careful attention as an 'authentic' Jew, the particularities of her own German-Jewish experience and identity are, for Tania, often notably missing from the German klezmer discourse.<sup>72</sup> And musically, Tania's primary identification as a Jew and her upbringing within the distinctive life of this community make her hawkish at times about singers whose approach does not convince (importantly, her distinction does not necessarily divide along ethnic lines). For her, some performances stand out as affected, a day-trip into the fantasy imaginary of 'Yiddish-land',<sup>73</sup> a Baudrillardian simulacra (Gruber, 2009) based on received ways of being rather than lived experience. This begins to raise thorny questions of subjectivity, of expectation and of gaze – exactly where might musical 'truth' lie in these circumstances? Whilst any kind of quest for a single notion of authenticity will most likely slip helplessly between the gaps of history and post-modernism, it is testament to the strength of the Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music scene that it can hold such competing ideologies at all – symptomatic, perhaps, of the triumph of a belief in messy life over 'revivalist' dogma (Livingston, 1999). Once again, we are dealing with an interrogative text, with *parole* over *langue*, with identities “constructed through, not outside, difference” (Hall, 1996:4).

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<sup>71</sup> Jalda Rebling raised the same issue more pointedly, suggesting that an emphasis (such as YSW's) on Eastern European Jewish culture maintains an idea of Jewishness as Other, preventing today's German klezmer musicians from realising that Jews may be their Berlin neighbours (interview, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> In which, as a Jew, she is ironically in a minority (although, as we have seen, this is an increasingly fluid demographic).

<sup>73</sup> Noted in Chapter 1.

When does “Jewish” matter? Under what circumstances, historical or conceptual, is the Jewishness of the artist or the work’s subject or style or its contexts of creation or reception relevant? When does Jewishness demand explanation? When is it explanatory? What does it account for? [...] For this reason, we take Jewishness as contingent and contextual rather than definitive and presumptive (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Karp, 2008:3).

## **Conclusion**

Pieced together from subjective responses to memorial situations and events, my aim in the first half of this chapter was to explore the ways that a sound/silence relationship is exploited to frame and occasionally subvert certain memorial processes in Berlin. The shadow of memorial forms an inevitable backdrop to anything ‘Jewish’ that goes on in the city, and as I have shown, many of the musicians that form the bulk of this thesis have done much to either break free from or find ways to own this historical context, rather than remain defined by it. In order to bring this weighty memory up to date I offered two case studies, each of which addresses history – in our case the *sound* of history – in a different way. Like the artefacts and texts on display in Oranienburgerstraße’s *Neue Synagoge*, which piece-by-piece construct a partial vision of pre-war Jewish life in Berlin, the Semer Label Reloaded project has used individual recordings to build up a rich patchwork of the sound of Berlin Jewishness in the years immediately preceding its near-destruction. In the process, it demonstrates not just how much was lost, but also the narrowness of more recent musical Jewish musical iconography, in particular the perceived use of klezmer as shorthand for ‘Jewish’ (Gilman, 2006:3; Bohlman, 2008:172). It also shows how through an avowedly Jewish musical voice, some parts of *German* culture can be re-evaluated and made available once again. For Tania Alon, the relationship between her Jewishness – religiously-informed but ultimately secular – and the music that she makes is paramount. These two are fundamental to her maintenance of a historical awareness, rooted in the city in which she grew up and still lives. At times, this pressure of memory leads to blind spots, aporia in representations of experience. But if these are unavoidable and beyond her control, they are also not to be ignored: they are part of her Jewish and musical life in the city which is her home. Once again, the historical tension that stands in the background becomes the catalyst for meaningful cultural discussion, framed by the urban environment within which it is enacted.

## Conclusion

*Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.*

(Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

*Maybe an excess amount of consciousness can be very counter-productive when you're thinking about yourself. The way you kind of painted the picture of me, being an Israeli, from Jewish heritage, living in Germany, in Berlin, and trying to make music. That would be probably, way too much consciousness to carry around. And I think the approach that I use of being able to just absorb and put out, without thinking too hard about where I come from and what I do, is what makes it possible for me to actually make art, or to actually produce, express, all of those things. Because otherwise, if I had been too conscious about it, I would be too preoccupied with needing and wanting, to express anything.*

(Tom Dayan)<sup>1</sup>

Writing in 1937, Moshe Beregovski argued for a need to continue what he had begun – the detailed study of klezmer music as it existed at the time.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, Joel Rubin concluded his PhD thesis with the suggestion – amongst others – that a further task of ethnomusicology might be to study the music of the klezmer revival “in all of its various forms” (Rubin, 2001:410). My own goal has been to synthesise both of these appeals, but to do so with specific reference to the very particular meanings of contemporary Berlin. In other words, I have approached a small slice of this music as distinctively shaped by its relationship to the urban environment, my goal being to explore some of the provocative and dynamic ways that klezmer and Yiddish music functions within. This has informed both the methodological structure and my theoretical orientation, providing geographical and temporal boundaries and also explicitly scaffolding my analytical perspective – throughout, I have understood this music as *music of a/the city*. I have aimed to avoid imposing analytical boundaries between ‘object’ of study (music) and ‘context’ (the city), and instead show the inextricability of the two.

In this way, I have moved from an analysis of how the city frames musical practice,

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<sup>1</sup> Israeli drummer based in Berlin for the past four years. Personal interview, Wedding, Berlin. August 12th, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Beregovski (2000:538).

towards a critical perspective which sees the music as fundamental in producing a certain version of the city. This has illuminated areas for study distinct from the models of cultural transaction or appropriation that have sometimes framed this field. The heterogeneous, transitory, fragmented yet creative nature of the city offers a bottom-up fluidity and inventiveness that I would contend has benefitted the music immensely, grounding its identity – and that of its participants – in its performative environment. By engaging with the material and symbolic meanings of the city itself, klezmer in Berlin has found alternative musical practices beyond the discourses of ‘revival’.

My first question concerned *who*: the particular networks and evolving combinations of musicians who create and sustain these Berlin musical dialogues. Whilst musicians and ensembles migrate freely between spaces, ensembles and perspectives, my analysis nevertheless highlighted several different enunciatory positions from which klezmer and Yiddish music is addressed. The German pioneers worked with limited resources, forging a particular (and less heard) soundworld. Following in the wake of the 1990s ‘klezmer boom’, the modernists brought a sense of artistic single-mindedness and expansion of repertoire. More recently, fantasists choose to take kitsch-inflected ‘Yiddish-land’ historiographies to their visual and musical extreme, while post-modernists explicitly mine a frequently political seam of contemporary Jewish cultural identity, through a transformative musical aesthetic. Within this discussion, I have highlighted several important ways that these musical and social networks function – noting in particular the centrality of certain musicians, who act as hubs around which networks of performance, repertoire, recording and information exchange coalesce.

My second question was *where*. Whilst it is not historically ‘from’ the city, klezmer is nowadays very much a part of Berlin. The spaces in which it functions root the music in different ways, from the carnivalesque to the self-questioning. My introductory case study, the Night of the Singing Balconies, was indicative of a certain set of spatial practices characteristic of contemporary cultural production in Berlin: the self-conscious overlap between official and unofficial space, high cultural capital placed on the art of bricolage (making do with the materials to hand), and a delight in the possibilities of instant community. The spaces of klezmer and Yiddish music that operate in Berlin are notable for the ways in which they adapt or reject these ways of thinking. Several of the city’s bar/club venues use klezmer as one amongst a number of musics that fulfil a

gently subversive party/dance aesthetic. The visual semiotics of these venues are created out of an artful sort of mix-and-match seen throughout Berlin bar culture. Complementing these more carnivalesque zones of encounter, I also identified several musical spaces that set out explicitly to question and problematise notions of Jewish identity as expressed through klezmer and Yiddish music. These venues use music as a filter through which to explore wider cultural questions, assumptions and oppositions. Still others ally themselves with a more conventional image of Jewish space, while some dispense with ethnic allegiance entirely in favour of formalised participative musical practice. Finally, I suggested that the particular combination of street-level discourse and erasure of performative boundaries mark out Neukölln's Bar Oblomov as a potentially radical Jewish space. In all these cases, I have noted the dialectic relationship between music and space: the music produces the space as much as the space frames the music. All offer a shifting sense of community – a set of sub-scenes within the wider city's scene – and in different ways all tap directly into Berlin's historical processes of border-marking and its contemporary fascination with their transgression. If different spaces and repertoires foreground to different levels the Jewishness of the musical meanings at play, very few spaces are fixed in these meanings – they depend for their ongoing relevance and appeal upon a continually-renewing sense of fluidity and ambiguity. And in this way they also tap directly into their ever-shifting urban environment.

I also discovered that the sonic and lyrical content of the music offers Berlin a chance to view *itself*: the city is textually and musically emplaced as a fundamental part of the narrative. I uncovered sites of imaginative and fantastical escape, loci of dark history (where German and Jewish identities are inextricably linked), and manifestations of contemporary linguistic and cultural fluidity. This again is indicative of the ways in which the music directly sounds the city, a dynamic relationship which marks the urban as an active part of the story and its narrative perspective. Through an engagement with both history and the present, klezmer music offers alternative – frequently contradictory – reflections of the city of which it is a part.

Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music is also not afraid to confront the slippery concept of tradition, and it remains a site within which to struggle over frequently conflicting strands of Jewish identity. In particular, I delved deeply into one of the most prominent

and influential contemporary manifestations of Yiddish musical ‘tradition’ in the form of Yiddish Summer Weimar. In the process, I discovered a richly contextual approach to the music, grounded (philosophically and practically) in the multi-layered concept of heterophony and in an embodied response. I also linked this separated, delineated educative space back to the city of Berlin, through the ongoing network connections of participants in both places. Klezmer is a traditional music that has been separated from its historical function. But that does not make it functionless. One of its contemporary roles, linking several of my themes, is a conscious re-framing of klezmer as social dance music. This has been achieved by the creation of specifically dance-based environments for its performance, but has also been used to inform a particular approach to performance practice, one that takes its aesthetic, rhythmic and structural cues from the ‘danceability’ of any given interpretation. This was particularly evident at Yiddish Summer Weimar, and it also informed clear musical decisions amongst Berlin’s klezmer piano accordion community, where I discovered a flexible multi-instrument influenced approach and a love of pulling things around – grounded in a knowledge of traditional practice but not afraid to stretch this practice to the limits of its expressive and creative potential. Once again, the network roles of certain musicians (and the instrument itself) are fundamental.

I have – in a small-scale auto-ethnography – touched upon the complex relationship between sound and silence as expressed in Berlin’s sphere of memorial. Although this was intended specifically to frame the two case studies which followed, I feel that this has in the process opened up a fruitful area of further exploration: the role of sound in the production of a ‘state’ of memory, as distinct from sound as an activator of specific personal remembrances. The two studies that followed each presented a particular articulation of contemporary Berlin Jewishness, enacted through a lively and polysemous dialogue taking in personal history, material culture, and German-Jewish identities (as seen by both Jews and non-Jews). Both cases were marked by a sense of ambiguity that my interviewees were happy to live with.

In this way, my study has highlighted several changing meanings: of Berlin, of tradition, of instrumental practice, and of Jewishness (as expressed through Yiddish culture). None of these remain fixed, and the small musical sphere of klezmer and Yiddish music as seen in Berlin offers one of the sites within which they can continue to be discussed

and struggled over. As a final question, we might speculate as to where Berlin klezmer and Yiddish music will go from here. Although the ‘boom’ has long since quietened, it remains a recognisable part of the city’s world music landscape, and the continued presence of international musicians alongside long-established German players points to a scene that remains healthy and fertile. The continued integration of the music into the city fabric can be seen in two new projects. Both inaugurated towards the end of 2015, these fall outside the timeframe of my fieldwork (and consequently I have no direct experience of them), but they are worth mentioning briefly as manifestations of further developments. The umbrella organisation *Tanase & Gebirtig* describes itself as “an association for the promotion of eastern and southeastern European music”. Loosely coordinated by Oriente Musik’s Till Schumann, the organisation has so far promoted concerts at Hermannstraße’s Villa Neukölln by violinist Daniel Weltlinger, singer/instrumentalists Michael Alpert & Julian Kystasty, Canada’s “whisky Rabbi” Geoff Berner and St. Petersburg’s Dobranotch. Forthcoming events such as Turkish tango (Olivinn) and Moldovan Efim Chorny’s Quartet testify to an international outlook grounded in a specific musical philosophy. The organisation’s website makes note of the unique combination of minority ethnic influences in the regions formerly part of the historical Ottoman, Hapsburg and Tsarist Russian empires – in particular, the influence of Jews and Roma (*Tanase & Gebirtig* is an elision of Romanian singer Maria Tanase (1913-1963) and Polish Yiddish poet-composer Mordechai Gebirtig (1877-1942)). At the same time, an expressed contemporary relevance is crucial, a concern with “living future development, with renewal and change rather than with museum-like preservation or nostalgic distortion”.<sup>3</sup>

One of the events *Tanase & Gebirtig* promotes is *Tantshoys*,<sup>4</sup> a klezmer dance and music night at the Villa Neukölln. This is in a sense a logical, slightly more formalised, development of the Oblomov sessions discussed in chapter two. It has so far happened twice, and already points to the continued integration of city and music – a sort of *Tants in Gartn Eydn*, but reimagined within the more Berlin-esque Oblomov paradigm. Here is Ilya Shneyveys talking about the night:

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tanasegebirtig.org/index.php/ueber-uns>. Accessed January 12th, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Yiddish: “dance house”.



I feel like the tantshoys and the sessions are bringing klezmer closer to its original function and this way of playing (improvised and connected to the moment, rather than performing set arrangements) only does the music justice. And I guess Berlin is a good place to do all that at the moment, with all the klezmer musicians living and visiting here and a very responsive audience used to attending such events.<sup>5</sup>

In explicit recognition of these musicians as a *community*, we might also point to the recent – sadly early – death of accordionist Franka Lampe on January 6th 2016. A bridge between older, more established, and recent klezmer/Yiddish musical practice in the city, Franka's importance as both musician and friend was recognised by all in a specially dedicated Saytham's Lounge event on January 10th, as well as a concert by her band Ljuti Hora on January 21st. Participants in the Lounge gig spanned all categories, from pioneers to post-modernists, illustrating once again the relentless overlap and creative fluidity of this vibrant scene, and also its self-identification as a heterogeneous yet deeply connected urban community.

For klezmer and Yiddish music in Germany's capital, the increasing connections between the music and the city itself, allied to Berlin's seemingly inexhaustible ability to continually reinvent itself, suggests that there will be a great deal to be uncovered and written about in the future. But whilst my analysis marks an original contribution to the very specific field of klezmer music in Berlin, the process of uncovering music's relationship with its urban environment is of course relevant to other sites and other musics. I believe that the ongoing integration of klezmer and the city will continue to see the music develop in further unexpected ways. One of the next stages of this project, therefore, will be to identify other, less studied, urban sites of klezmer and Yiddish music that appear to offer a musical language bearing the stamp of their own city.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal email, January 21st, 2016.

## **Appendix 1 – a brief overview of klezmer music**

Whilst my study is focused on contemporary practice, I recognise that some basic background information will be useful for many readers. This section is therefore intended as a (necessarily brief) introduction to klezmer music. Although this is not a field notable for a surfeit of scholarship, there are nevertheless several important sources that offer historical material in more or less detail, including (but not limited to): Rubin (2001, 2007, 2015b); Feldman (2002, 2010c); Strom (2002, 2012); Beregovski (2000, 2001); Slobin (2000); Netsky (2002a, 2002b); and Sapoznik & Sokolow (1987). Much of what follows is synthesised from these.

### ***Klezmorim* and their music**

Perhaps the first problem confronting a researcher is that of definition itself. Formed of the Hebrew words *kley* (vessel) and *zemer* (song), the term klezmer initially referred to a musical instrument, subsequently a musician (pl. *klezmorim*), and now widely encompasses a range of musical forms and styles that are to a greater or lesser extent recognisable as stemming from Ashkenazi Jewish culture (see below).<sup>1</sup> Although arguably it is as a musical genre by which the majority of people would nowadays define klezmer, its use in this context is in fact a relatively recent phenomenon, from the 1970s klezmer ‘revival’ onwards.<sup>2</sup> Moshe Beregovski (2000 [orig. 1937], 2001) seems to be the only pre-war source to refer consistently to klezmer as *music*. This etymological ambiguity therefore raises questions as to the paradigms around which one might approach a definition of klezmer music, whether by reference to musicians, repertoire, or musical form and performance practice. Joel Rubin (2001:23) posits five elements, at whose intersection “is klezmer music in the strictest sense”: a largely hereditary social group, a specific ritual function, an urban ensemble, a corpus of repertoire, and a range of performance practices. Each of these is in turn problematised by historical circumstance. In particular, the dissipation of a ‘klezmer caste’ in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, changes in ritual function (Strom, 2002), variation in repertoire (Feldman, 2002), stylistic development and large geographical spread all

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<sup>1</sup> Already here we enter into problematic territory. It might be more helpful to say that these musical forms and styles, linked as they are through history and contemporary practice, are nowadays *indexical* (Turino, 2012) of a certain type (or even memory) of Ashkenazi Jewishness.

<sup>2</sup> This revival, including its own problems of definition, is discussed throughout.

complicate the possibility of arriving at a precise definition.<sup>3</sup>

We might also note here the suggestion of several leading musicians (Brave Old World's Alan Bern and Michael Alpert among them) that rather than "klezmer", we should be speaking of "Yiddish music", or "New Yiddish music" (Bern, 1998; Alpert, 2015), in specific reference to a culturally-rooted historicism.<sup>4</sup> Or conversely, here is trumpeter Frank London with a more functional perspective:

Musician's warning: inclusion of an augmented second interval may lead to your music being labelled *klezmer*. Music that *functions* as klezmer is klezmer. If an eastern European Jewish community needs the lambada at a wedding, then it's klezmer (London, 2002:209, italics in original).<sup>5</sup>

Klezmer music is a folk music of Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews. Weinreich (1977) gives the word *Ashkenaz* as Yiddish for "Medieval Germany", but as a geographical and ethnic descriptor in its broadest sense it refers to Jews from Germany, Northern France, Bohemia, Poland and Russia (Shamir & Shavit, 1986:72). Although there is evidence of klezmer musicians dating back as far as the 16th century (Strom, 2002; Rubin 2001) – the point at which ritual musicians known as *leytsim*<sup>6</sup> began to form themselves into more professional guilds – reliable musical detail begins to take shape in the 19th century (Beregovski, 2001:5). *Klezmorim*<sup>7</sup> in Europe reached their apogee within the Pale of Settlement, the bounded territory of approximately one million square kilometres within which the vast majority of Russia's Jews were restricted from 1791 until its formal abolition with the overthrow of the Tsar in 1917. Between 1820 and 1910, the Jewish population within the Pale quadrupled to over five million, eventually making up more than half of the world's Jews and frequently forming a majority in some cities and many small towns (Klier, 2010). Within this context, musicians formed

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<sup>3</sup> This sort of debate also, of course, accompanies Jewish music more generally. Where Curt Sachs, in 1957, famously posited Jewish music as "by Jews, for Jews, as Jews" (in Werner, 1976) and Idelsohn as "the tonal expression of Jewish life and development over a period of more than two thousand years" (1944:24), Mark Slobin is a little more phlegmatic: "The mirage of Jewish music evaporates as you gaze at it, replaced by the vision of a group of Jews singing whatever they like, from any local source" (Slobin, 1995:222).

<sup>4</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> Both these examples of explicit tying of ideology to naming are strongly reminiscent of the naming debates that accompanied the free jazz of the 1960s, linked as they were to a renewed African-American consciousness: "Whatever jazz is, I call it *mine*, baby" (tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp, quoted in the footnotes to Larkin (eds. Palmer & White, 2004:121). See also Kofsky (1970) and Wilmer (1987).

<sup>6</sup> Yiddish: "buffoons" (Weinreich, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> The plural of *klezmer* (in this case meaning musician rather than music).

hereditary castes, with musical lineage passed down usually from father to son,<sup>8</sup> and each *kapelye* (small orchestra) responsible for a certain repertoire and style (Strom, 2002:84 & 105). By the mid-19th century, small groups of fiddles and cimbalom had frequently given way to larger ensembles – especially in the city – often including transverse flute, brass, cello and *poyk*<sup>9</sup> (Rubin, 2015b:121). Feldman (2002) identifies four categories of klezmer repertoire: *core*, *transitional*, *co-territorial* and *cosmopolitan*, arguing that where non-dance forms probably saw considerable regional variation,<sup>10</sup> the core dance repertoire was largely consistent across most areas of Jewish settlement within the Russian Empire (*ibid.*:84).<sup>11</sup>

The mainstay of the klezmer musician was the wedding, a celebration that in the Pale of Settlement could last up to several days and was structured according to ritual practices and events, many of which required music (Beregovski, 2001:11-13). But weddings alone were unlikely to provide adequate income (Rubin, 2001:23). *Klezmorim*<sup>12</sup> played in taverns, at balls and private homes, for Jews and non-Jews, in towns and cities (Rubin, 2015b:120-1; Feldman, 2010c). They were also called upon to play for Jewish community events such as *Purimshpiln*.<sup>13</sup> Somewhat outside the norms of everyday society,<sup>14</sup> musicians travelled more and came into contact with a wider range of non-Jews than most other Jews.<sup>15</sup> In particular, dialogue between Jewish and Roma *lautari*<sup>16</sup> fomented an ongoing exchange of styles and forms (Feldman, 2002:86), with both groups often dividing up a wide wedding circuit between them.<sup>17</sup> Klezmer musicians

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<sup>8</sup> An excellent illustration is Leopold Koslowski (b.1918), made famous as *The Last Klezmer* of Yale Strom's 1994 documentary. Koslowski's grandfather Pesach Brandwein was the leader of one of Galicia's best-known *kapelyes*, in which his twelve sons played. Pesach and most of his family were murdered in the war, but six of his sons (including the clarinettist Naftule Brandwein) emigrated to the United States. Koslowski himself, having survived a Nazi camp, finally settled in Krakow, where he became a symbolic and material touchstone for the city's klezmer and Yiddish musical revival (Waligórska, 2013:102-3).

<sup>9</sup> The klezmer drum set-up, usually consisting of marching drum with cymbal attached on top, often augmented by woodblock.

<sup>10</sup> On geographical musical differences – including between Central and Eastern Europe, and Jewish majority/non-majority areas – see Feldman (2010c).

<sup>11</sup> The notable exception, which forms the bulk of Feldman's study, is the Bessarabian *bulgarish*.

<sup>12</sup> Rubin (2001:23) notes the "exceptionally wide spectrum of repertoire" demanded of the klezmer musician.

<sup>13</sup> Taking place in the Hebrew month of Adar, Purim is a Jewish festival celebrating the Jews of Persia's deliverance. It incorporates a large amount of performance, drinking (unlike other Jewish festivals) and topsy-turvy. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1980).

<sup>14</sup> See Feldman (2002:88) on social attitudes to *klezmorim*.

<sup>15</sup> Although in contrast to 'wandering Jew' imagery (Anderson, 1965) and *Fiddler on the Roof* mythology, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries the majority of klezmer musicians were more likely to be urban and settled than rural and nomadic. See Rubin & Ottens (2004:296).

<sup>16</sup> Professional musicians.

<sup>17</sup> The actual amount of dialogue between both musical groups is still a source of debate. See, for example, Silverman (2015:163). Feldman (2010c) suggests: "Combined Jewish and Gypsy ensembles became the rule in Ottoman Moldavia and Russian Bessarabia. In Moldavia, however—unlike the situation in Hungary and Bohemia—the Jewish musical element remained strong, often attracting non-Jewish musicians who performed and composed in a 'Jewish' style." These links were also the subject of a recent musical project overseen by Alan Bern, titled *The Other Europeans*: <http://www.theothereuropeans.eu>. Accessed October 27th, 2015.

developed their own professional argot – *klezmer-loshn* (Rothstein, 2002)<sup>18</sup> – and *klezmorim*, *meshoyrim* (cantor’s assistants) and *badkhn*<sup>19</sup> formed their own “subculture” (Gelbart, cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1980:7). As Mark Slobin (2000:68) puts it, *klezmorim* were “city-minded musical ambassadors”, transporting tunes back and forth across a large geographical and cultural network, creatively combining “the cozy, gossipy communality of traditional small-town and emerging big-city Jewish life”.<sup>20</sup>

But cosy though things may have been, conditions within the Pale were for the most part characterised by a harsh economic reality and institutional antisemitism. Under Nicholas I (1825-55), Jews were severely restricted in work, movement and property. The more liberal stance of Alexander II (1855-81) encouraged education for younger Jews, but any emancipating effects were cut short with two waves of violent pogroms in 1881-84 and again in 1903-06, which acted as the catalyst for mass emigration: to Western Europe, to Australia, to Palestine and to South America, but overwhelmingly to the *goldene medine* (golden land) of the United States. From 1881 until the end of an open-door immigration policy in 1924, approximately two and a half million Jews arrived from Eastern Europe.<sup>21</sup> The vast majority settled in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, although Chicago and Philadelphia also absorbed large numbers, becoming the third and fourth largest Jewish communities in the world at the turn of the twentieth century (Brenner, 2010:245).

Uprooted from both *shtetl* and city, forced into cramped slums and sweatshop labour (Riis, 1998:191-3), the new arrivals set about creating communities as best they could. Weddings now took over catering halls, and where *fidl* and *tsimbl* had once dominated the music of the old country (Feldman, 2002:91), the music's new metropolitan home and burgeoning jazz age surroundings were reflected by the rise of clarinet and trumpet as principle melodic (and virtuosic) vehicles,<sup>22</sup> allied to the ‘Westernising’

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<sup>18</sup> Rothstein points to Sholem Aleichem’s 1888 novel *Stempenyu*, based on the eponymous Berdichev violinist – a text that required footnotes translating the musician’s lingo into Yiddish (Rothstein, 2002:24-6).

<sup>19</sup> Rubin (2001:40): “The *badkhn* was a wedding entertainer fulfilling a combination of roles, including master of ceremonies, moraliser and jester.”

<sup>20</sup> Alongside this, we need note the small amount of popular concert performers of klezmer music, such as Gusikov (Belarus, 1806-37), Pedotser (Ukraine, 1828-1902) and Stempenyu (Ukraine, 1822-79). See Rubin (2015b:122).

<sup>21</sup> At the same time, it is important to note that Eastern European Yiddish culture continued to thrive in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Slobin (1982:12), for example: “perhaps the shock of the Holocaust has blurred our vision so the we see an Old World destroyed before its time [...] These men and women carried songs back and forth, enriching the musical environments of two continents, through the peak decades of immigration.”

<sup>22</sup> Rubin (2001:61-3) notes that these instruments, in particular clarinet, were already beginning to achieve prominence in 19th century European *kapelyes*.

encroachment of the jazz rhythm section of piano, bass and drums (Sapoznik & Sokolow, 1987:12). The greater volume and stronger ‘presence’ of winds and brass also fitted a modern, noisier, decidedly urban soundscape,<sup>23</sup> and the increasing influence of the phonograph (Netsky, 2002a:15-16) and subsequently radio (Kelman, 2008). No longer able to rely on fixed geographical markers of communal identity, immigrants banded together to create *lansmanshaftn*, membership societies based on their town of origin (Shamir & Shavit, 1986:130), and Jewish trade unions flourished in an ongoing battle for workers’ rights and acceptable working conditions. Where *lansmanshaftn* largely promoted a continuation of the European repertoire of their origins (Rubin, 2001:96-100), musicians’ involvement in trade unions (including several of their own)<sup>24</sup> gave rise to accompanying musical changes: an increased politicisation of klezmer musicians, new sources of work playing for marches and workers’ parades, and a widening of the repertoire to include Yiddish workers’ songs and Internationalist anthems (Loeffler, 2002). Some of these changes are still in evidence today with contemporary klezmer musicians’ self-conscious adoption of partisan or political songs<sup>25</sup> and the creation of a new Yiddishist musicians’ manifesto (Svigals, 2002).

Although weddings continued to be an important source of income, their shortening from a full day (or even several) to just a few hours, along with the dispensing of many of the accompanying ritual practices (Strom, 2002:149; Beregovski, 2001:12-13), marks a parallel change in the needs and functions of klezmer repertoire. Within an increasingly assimilated environment, the influence of American popular music within klezmer<sup>26</sup> foregrounds a separation between ‘old’ and ‘new’ ways of musicking,<sup>27</sup> specifically the emergence of a younger adaptable, literate musician, able to play in a variety of styles and contexts. Netsky (2002b:57) suggests a changing semantics, between the *klezmer* (musician) as a “vestige of the Old World”, and the newly versatile *muziker*, who “carried on the klezmer music tradition while distancing himself from klezmerim”.

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<sup>23</sup> For example the bigger band recordings of Abe Schwartz, whilst in Philadelphia Harry Kandel’s brassy sound reflected his time spent with John Philip Sousa (Netsky, 2002b:57).

<sup>24</sup> On “The First Klezmer Union in America” see Loeffler (2002).

<sup>25</sup> For example Detroit-born, Berlin-based Daniel Kahn, whose third album is entitled *Partisans and Parasites*, has adapted Mordechai Gerbirtig’s “Arbeitslozer Marsh” (“March of the Jobless Corps”): RIENC77.

<sup>26</sup> This influence went both ways: increased incorporation of American popular music into klezmer repertoire (Rubin, 2001) and occasional incursions of klezmer influence into jazz (Netsky, 2002:17-18). Rubin (2001:88) notes that the “trend of entering the ‘mainstream’” had already begun in 19th and early 20th century Europe.

<sup>27</sup> See Rubin (2001:ch.4).

The appearance of printed sheet music such as Nat Kostakowsky's *International Hebrew Wedding Music* (1916)<sup>28</sup> and Jack and Joseph Kammen's dance and concert folios (beginning in 1924) also point to a transformation of processes of transmission from aural to written. Although dynastic *kapelye* musicians had no need of these books (Rubin, 2001:93), they indicate an increased inclusion of non-klezmer (also non-Jewish) musicians on the bandstand (Netsky, 2002b:56). The ease of moving between musical genres and styles that widespread written music offered marks a change in the klezmer tradition of patrilineal handing-down, just as it equally points to the new Americanised klezmer's more fluid, liminal location on the changing map of popular music, now taking in Yiddish theatre,<sup>29</sup> dance halls, Broadway (Rubin, 2001:134-5) and classical music. This integration can be contextualised with reference to the twin American clarinet colossi of Dave Tarras (1897-1989) and Naftule Brandwein (1889-1963), two of the most important figures of twentieth century klezmer. Both men were from established klezmer families,<sup>30</sup> and both arrived in America as fully-formed musicians. However, where Brandwein's fiery style, heavily influenced by Galician klezmer violinists, remained relatively unchanged throughout his career (Strom, 2002:160), Tarras' smoother urbane approach<sup>31</sup> went on to incorporate Greek, Polish and Russian tunes, the late 1950s series *Freilach in Hi-Fi*, and perhaps the most significant pre-revival jazz/klezmer recording: *Tanz!*,<sup>32</sup> with his son-in-law Sammy Muziker.<sup>33</sup>

Assimilation into the American middle classes, a decline in the Yiddish language (Katz 2004), an increased post-war desire to move away from *alter heyim* ('old country') associations, and a new Jewish focal point of the young state of Israel – with its attendant new folk music<sup>34</sup> – combined from the 1950s onwards to push klezmer music largely beneath the level of everyday Jewish consciousness.<sup>35</sup> Musicians continued to play, but did so increasingly within the confines of the 'borsht belt' Catskill holiday retreats, their music incorporating more and more Israeli pop, American rock or Latin

<sup>28</sup> Reprinted in 2001 (ed. Horowitz) as *The Ultimate Klezmer*.

<sup>29</sup> On Yiddish theatre, see Heskes (1984), Warnke (1994). On Yiddish popular music in America, see Slobin (1982).

<sup>30</sup> Brandwein was from Przemyslany in Galicia; Tarras was from Ternovka (both in present-day Ukraine).

<sup>31</sup> Significantly, perhaps, Tarras could read music, whereas Brandwein could not.

<sup>32</sup> Originally released in 1956 on Epic LN 3219, now available on Sony EK 86320.

<sup>33</sup> See Rubin (2001) for a detailed discussion of the work of Brandwein and Tarras, and Rubin (2007) on their legacy on today's musicians.

<sup>34</sup> On the role of music in the creation of the pre-state New Yishuv, see Hirshberg (1995). On its role post-1948, see Regev & Serroussi (2004, chapters 3, 4 & 5).

<sup>35</sup> See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002). Rubin (2001:399) suggests that in fact the decline had already begun in the 1930s. He also draws a parallel with the gradual decline of the *lansmanshaftn* (*ibid*:400).

lounge in the process (Sapoznik, 1987:14).<sup>36</sup> In the 1970s, however, second-generation American Jewish musicians, contextualised by a post-1960s identity politics and an increased interest in European folk and dance music (Jacobson, 2002; Bern, 1998), would rediscover and re-energise klezmer music.<sup>37</sup> Key pre-war players were sought out and became mentors to younger musicians (London, 2002:209), in line with the growth of a forceful educative network that was to spread the music further and also begin to formalise a range of artistic approaches. Less and less part of Jewish ritual life,<sup>38</sup> klezmer music<sup>39</sup> began to take its place on the world stage, whilst at the same time becoming central to a renewed secular Yiddish awareness.<sup>40</sup> As American artists like The Klezmatics, Kapelye and Brave Old World began to tour Europe,<sup>41</sup> local musical interest was swiftly ignited in the UK (Tkachenko, 2013), France and especially Germany (Waligórska, 2013; Rubin, 2014, 2015a; Eckstaedt, 2003, 2013).<sup>42</sup> At the same time, increased openness to external cultural influences allied with a loosening of anti-Jewish policy in the former Soviet Union<sup>43</sup> began to create a parallel klezmer constituency much closer to the music's original homelands. The klezmer 'revival' has seen a once functional music reimagined across a range of social and cultural contexts, transformed into a music for concerts, street bands, clubs, bars and jam sessions (Waligórska, 2013; Rubin, 2014; Kaminsky, 2015b). It has also been integrated in varying degrees with a distinctly New York downtown sensibility, in the form of its contribution to the city's Radical Jewish Culture movement (Barzel, 2015, 2011). Nevertheless, we might still apply Slobin's (2000:8) definition:

Klezmer is a typical hybrid system combining the diasporic with a number of sources from the dominant culture in a unique way that resonates for both "ethnic" insiders and larger audiences that pick up on its energy and distinctive sound.

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<sup>36</sup> Based on interviews with musicians playing at the time, Rubin (2001:401) notes that the process of increased incorporation of non-klezmer repertoire had in fact begun much earlier, and that by the late 1930s the majority of music played by *klezmerim* consisted of American and international repertoire.

<sup>37</sup> The klezmer revival is discussed in Chapter 4. See also Slobin (2000, 2002 (pt.II)).

<sup>38</sup> Klezmer music also still performs a functional role in some Orthodox communities in America, the UK, and particularly Israel, where it has developed a small but significant "preservationist" (Rubin, 1998b:18) tradition amongst Orthodox Jews (*haredi*). See Rubin (1998b) and Mazor (2000).

<sup>39</sup> Now frequently allied with Yiddish song, as seen in the work of Kapelye, The Klezmerim, The Klezmatics, Brave Old World and others. See Wood (2013, 2007b).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, several of the essays in the second half of Slobin (2002).

<sup>41</sup> We should also note the parallel career and influence of Argentinian-Israeli clarinetist Giora Feidman (b.1936), who has been playing klezmer music since the 1970s. Discussed in Chapter 4, also see Rubin (2015a).

<sup>42</sup> Although as Chapter 1 shows, a handful of dedicated musicians and singers had been keeping the Yiddish music flame alive long before the klezmer revival came on the scene.

<sup>43</sup> On Yiddish music in the Soviet Union, see Rubin & Ottens (2005).



## Form, structure, sound

A syncretic genre with a wide aesthetic reach (Rubin, 2001:23), klezmer is difficult to define musically.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, stylistic and structural features are identifiable. Melodically, klezmer overlaps with elements of cantorial music, Hasidic *nigunim*, Romanian, Moldovan, Ukrainian and Near Eastern folk musics (Feldman, 2010c; Rubin, 2015b:120).<sup>45</sup> Tunes are often formed from one or several synagogue modes, frequently combined within a single tune. Beregovski (2000:294) notes the historical centrality of the natural minor mode in Jewish song melodies, whereas the three main modes that are nowadays cited as characteristic of klezmer music<sup>46</sup> are *ahava raba*<sup>47</sup> (also known amongst klezmer musicians as *freygish*<sup>48</sup>), *misheberakh*<sup>49</sup> and *adonoi molokh*, named according to the first words of the prayers in which they first appear.<sup>50</sup> The first two contain an augmented second interval, the third corresponds to the Western mixolydian (figure 59).

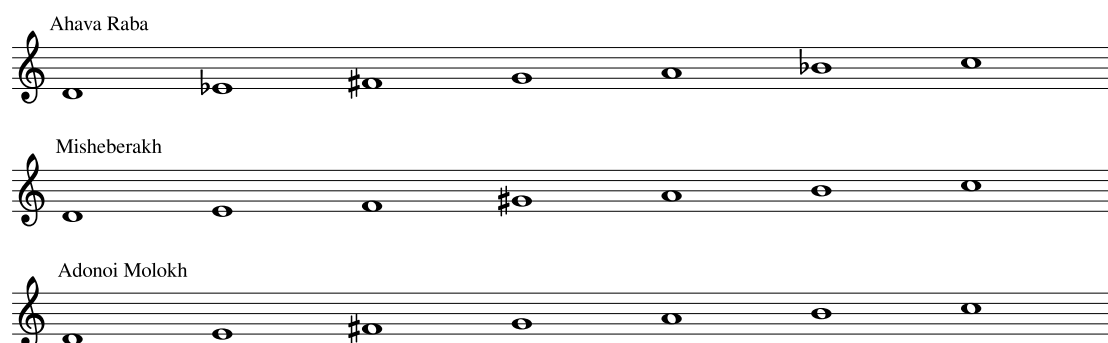


Figure 59. Klezmer modes.

It is important to understand these modes as a resource rather than a prescription. Their use is flexible – each section of a tune may slip between different modes and each treatment of the mode is variable in and of itself, subject to occasional bending and transgression (helped by the fact that klezmer is almost always played on chromatic instruments and thus not restricted to a particular set of notes). For example, the *ahava*

<sup>44</sup> On issues of definition, see Rubin (2001:22-5).

<sup>45</sup> Netsky (2002a:13): “The southern areas of the pale (Molodova, Bessarabia, the Bucovina region of Romania, and the southern Ukraine) were to klezmer almost as New Orleans was to American jazz.”

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Sokolow (1987:20-22), who also includes major and minor (natural and Dorian) modes.

<sup>47</sup> The *komets alef* (א) at the end of these two words is pronounced ‘o’ in Yiddish, meaning that this mode is also frequently known as *Ahavo Rabo*.

<sup>48</sup> Beregovski (2001:15) calls this scale “altered Phrygian”, making reference to the Western Phrygian mode, which also contains a flattened supertonic, though not the characteristic augmented second interval created by the *freygish* major mediant. On the musicological and cultural resonances of the flattened supertonic, see Moore (2014).

<sup>49</sup> Beregovski (2000:549-567) calls this the “altered Dorian”.

<sup>50</sup> Idelsohn (1944:72-91) identified five modes, naming them according to the prayers in which they appear. “By reason of their sources, we should be led to expect that the musical rendition of the prayers was taken over from the Biblical modes, together with the texts” (*ibid.*:73).

*raba* mode will often alter the sixth degree to a major (rather than flattened) tone when it goes below the octave.<sup>51</sup>

These melodic materials form the bases for several distinct dance and listening forms (Beregovski, 2001:10-13). Most common is the *freylekhs*, a lively mid- to uptempo line (or occasionally circle) dance.<sup>52</sup> Within this category, the *bulgar* has developed certain distinctive characteristics, along with a set of dance steps shared with several Balkan forms and the Israeli Hora. Although both are in 4/4 or 2/4 meter, the *freylekhs* as it appears in contemporary repertoire is often characterised by a more regular melodic and rhythmical line, often containing smaller repetitive stepwise fragments (figure 60).



Figure 60. “Boybriker Freylekhs” excerpt (learnt from Ilana Cravitz).

whereas *bulgars* are likely to be made up of larger intervallic leaps and more syncopated phrases, with a greater prominence of triplets and contrasting note durations (figure 61).<sup>53</sup>



Figure 61. “Der Heyser Bulgar” excerpt (Naftule Brandwein).

In rhythmic accompaniment, *bulgars* are notable for their underlying 3-3-2 quaver pulse (figure 62), traditionally set against an unsyncopated four-beat bass pattern to create what Rubin (2015a:214) describes as “interlocking rhythms”.

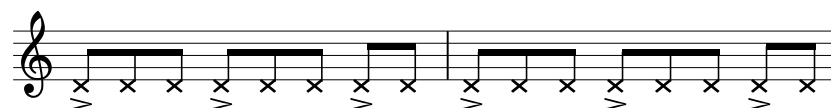


Figure 62. *Bulgar* rhythm.

<sup>51</sup> Two examples given in Sapoznik & Sokolow (1987) are “Ot Azoi” (composer Shloimke Beckerman; Abe Schwartz Orchestra, 1923) and “Baym Rebin’s Sude” (Abe Schwartz Orchestra, 1917).

<sup>52</sup> On klezmer and dance steps, see Helen Winkler (2003). On Jewish Eastern European dance in general, see Lapson (1963) and Feldman (2010a,b). On issues of research, see Beregovski (2000:533-535).

<sup>53</sup> On the *bulgar*’s historical and musical development, and particularly the influence of Dave Tarras, see Feldman (2002).

Two slower duple-meter dances are also common. The *khosidl* is much like a slowed-down *freylekhs*, whereas a *terkische* frequently possesses a more sophisticated and complex melodic line, underscored by a *Habanera* rhythm (figure 63).<sup>54</sup>

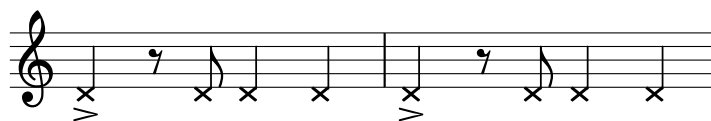


Figure 63. *Terkische* rhythm.

The slow dance known as *zhok* or *hora* is klezmer music's most enduring triple-meter form (usually written in 3/8). Melodically, it can encompass small repetitive motivic development and also more rhapsodic, romantic lines, and its accompaniment is almost always a pronounced emphasis on beats 1 and 3 (figure 64).



Figure 64. *Hora* rhythm.

The *doina* is klezmer's free-meter fantasy, a structured, semi-improvised showcase for melody instruments. With its roots in the older form of *taksim* (Feldman, 2002:94; Beregovski, 2000:539, 2001:12-13), a *doina* is conventionally structured by repeated melodic motifs and subtly developing patterns, often employing a wide range of ornamentation techniques and decoration. It is accompanied by sustained chords that move within a limited harmonic framework according to melodic cues from the soloist (see Beregovski, 2001:19).

Several forms found frequently in klezmer repertoire are defined more by their function than their musical structure: the *sher* is a square dance, and its myriad associated tunes need only to fit the formal group/couple structures of the dance itself, although several pieces exist that have now come to be associated with the dance and have hence adopted the name “sher” somewhere in their title. A *skotshne* is a mid-tempo instrumental display piece, often characterised by complex semiquaver passages and fast runs. This list is by no means exhaustive – we might also note the triplet-heavy *sirba*, the fast

<sup>54</sup> In actuality, no traditional dance exists for the *Terkische* – it is distinguished musically rather than choreographically. I have, however, included it here (with this proviso) as it is frequently played for modern-day dancing. Helen Winkler (2003:21) suggests (following dance leader Steve Weintraub) using the steps to a modern Orthodox men's dance that she calls *Yerushalimer Hora*.

Ukrainian *kolomeyke* dance, and the various lilting *dobry'dens* and *dobranotchs* that traditionally opened and closed celebrations.<sup>55</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, it is worth urging caution when referring to tune names and musical forms. The two largest collections of klezmer music in use nowadays (Kostakowsky, 2001 [1916] and Beregovski (2001)<sup>56</sup>) point up the ambiguities of nomenclature, and early twentieth century recordings in particular illustrate the process by which traditional tunes are frequently renamed (and therefore symbolically copyrighted) by recording artists. For example, a tune which appears in Kostakowsky as “Freilachs” (2001:93) has been recorded as: “Amerikanskaya” (Belf’s Rumanian Orchestra, 1912), “Der Galitsyaner Chosid” (Max Leibowitz, 1920) and “Schweir und Schwiger Tanz” (Abe Schwartz, 1920). In Beregovski’s collection it is labelled “Skotshne” (2001:156), highlighting the contingencies of transmission networks. Similarly, a *bulgar* or *sirba* in Kostakowsky (2001) occasionally reappears as a *skotshne* in Beregovski (2001), and similar differences are also found amongst *freylekhs*, *shers* and *khosidls*. This is of course testament to the particularities of individual musical repertoire, but it is also a useful warning against any sort of stylistic essentialism when evaluating traditional musical forms. The malleability of particular melodies and their free transition across different dance and functional forms reminds us that one of the key characteristics of traditional repertoire is flexibility.

Harmonically, klezmer music often uses chord progressions that ground the melody without overshadowing its functional dance music role, or – in the case of instrumental showpieces – do not obscure the soloist. Underlying harmony frequently reinforces the given tonality of each section of a tune, with chords changing only at cadence points or used in passing to reinforce certain melodic lines (Horowitz, 2001). More recently (in revival times) the use of harmony as tonal colour rather than structural device shows the wider influence of jazz and classical harmonic palettes,<sup>57</sup> although this has also produced something of a ‘traditionalist’ backlash in the form of a return to more static

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<sup>55</sup> See Strom (2002:61-6) for an exhaustive list, synthesised from Beregovski, Kostakowsky and Strom’s own field research.

<sup>56</sup> Edited by Slobin, Rothstein & Alpert from unpublished material, this represents the most comprehensive collection to date of Beregovski’s Jewish instrumental folk music (collected between 1929 and 1947). See also Sholokhova (2010).

<sup>57</sup> Klezmer revival musicians were not, however, the first to explore these possibilities. In 1955, clarinetist Dave Tarras teamed up with his son-in-law Sammy Muziker to record “Tanz!”, which still stands as one of the finest klezmer/jazz crossovers (released 1956 on Epic LN 3219).

harmony, frequently resulting in interesting melodic/harmonic clashes.<sup>58</sup> Klezmer tunes tend to be divided into at least two and frequently three or more sections. It is not uncommon for each of these sections to signal a corresponding harmonic and/or modal change (Beregovski, 2001:19). Movements up or down a third,<sup>59</sup> down a major second, to the subdominant (minor or major), and between minor and major in the same key are all common.<sup>60</sup>

Klezmer performance practice is also rich in melodic ornamentation (Rubin, 1998a:13), known as *dreydlekh*.<sup>61</sup> More than mere decoration, these ornaments are one of the things that gives the music its distinctive voice.<sup>62</sup> Here again we encounter discrepancies in terminology. The Yiddish word *krekhsts* (pl. *krekhstsn*) translates as “moan” or “groan” (Weinreich, 1977). In klezmer music, this word is used by some musicians (Rubin, 1998a) to refer to a general collection of ornaments that imitate a sob, or catch in the voice, borrowed from cantorial tradition. Other musicians, however (e.g. Svigals & Strauss in Slobin: 2000:111), use the term to indicate a specific and characteristically ‘klezmer’ technique: an *echappé* grace note of indeterminate higher pitch, which differs from the classical appoggiatura in that it is attached to the preceding note, frequently marking a short gap between this note and the next (hence the ‘catch’ or ‘sob’ effect).<sup>63</sup> A similarly idiomatic sound is that of the *tschok*,<sup>64</sup> a “‘bent’ note [...] with a laughlike sound that is more cackle than giggle” (Strom, 2012:100). Short slides and very occasionally longer-glissandi are common, either between pitches or leading up to the opening note of a phrase; longer notes are regularly bent downwards (or ‘squashed’ on trumpets) and snapped smartly back up to pitch. Ornamentation techniques are also

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<sup>58</sup> This was an approach favoured – at least some of the time – by Michael Winograd and Alan Bern at Yiddish Summer Weimar (see Chapter 4).

<sup>59</sup> Whilst this suggests a parallel with classical music’s progression to or from relative major, in klezmer music the relationship is not always the same: a movement from the ‘major’ tonality of *ahava raba* to the (similarly) major key a minor third above, for example.

<sup>60</sup> Beregovski (2001:19) describes klezmer modulation as “uncomplicated but consistent”, with modulations (led by the melody) “always heard very distinctly”.

<sup>61</sup> Plural of the Yiddish word *dreydl*, a four-sided spinning top played with during *Hanukah* (*dreydn* means ‘to turn’ in Yiddish).

<sup>62</sup> Rubin also notes a perceptual distinction in the use of ornamentation in klezmer music: “It would appear, then, that virtually all of the terms associated with emotional aspects of the music and, in particular, with ornamentation are expressions of a sad or lamenting quality. Therefore, while a number of the basic ornaments described [...] may not necessarily be different from a technical standpoint from those present in other cultures, the way they are *perceived* from within Yiddish culture appears to be different”. (2001:253, my emphasis).

<sup>63</sup> Slobin (2000:105) also refers to a parallel term *kneytsh* (“wrinkle” or “crease” in Weinreich (1977)). Rubin, however, (1998b:18) discusses this term with reference to Hasidic vocal *nigun* ornamentation.

<sup>64</sup> “lavishness” or “splendour” (Weinreich, 1977).

shared with baroque music, such as rapid trills (between melody note and the scale note above) and mordents.<sup>65</sup>

Today's ensembles (with a few notable exceptions) mostly feature some combination of the following instruments, though rarely all of them: fiddle, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, accordion, piano, guitar/banjo/mandolin, cimbalom, bass/tuba and percussion. Some exceptions to this soundworld (such as electric guitar, electronics, or toy piano) are discussed throughout the thesis. Almost all instruments will perform multiple functions, migrating between melody, high or low counterlines and accompaniment, although inevitably certain instruments will conventionally gravitate more in one direction than another. Bass parts tend to stay close to root-fifth patterns, allowing drummers to explore a more syncopated rhythmic palette.<sup>66</sup> Traditional klezmer playing is also notable for what has come to be known as *heterophony* (Rubin, 1998a:10) – the texture of several related musical voices sounding simultaneously. In other words, a group of melodic instruments all playing the same tune, but not in exactly the same way. Rubin (2001) notes that the assimilation of klezmer music into the American Jewish mainstream was paralleled by a diminishing in the practice of playing heterophonically.<sup>67</sup> This feature and its implications are discussed fully in Chapter 4.

One final point needs to be made. Historically, klezmer music and Yiddish song have not always been natural bedfellows – instrumental klezmer music often functioning in ritual domains such as wedding *kapelyes*, and Yiddish song (frequently unaccompanied) rooted in the family, politics, social and working life, or the theatre (Beregovski, 2000; Ruth Rubin, 2000). However, with klezmer's arrival in the New World and onto American recordings, and with the increased connections between Yiddish theatre and working klezmer musicians, these two musical worlds began increasingly to blur. From the 1970s onwards, often driven by the important efforts of singer/musicians like Michael Alpert (b.1955), Lorin Sklamberg (b.1956) and Adrienne Cooper (1946-2011), klezmer and Yiddish song have met more and more, largely through the concertising

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<sup>65</sup> For an overview of ornamentation, see also Sokolow (1987) and Strom (2012:100-103). For a detailed analysis of historical klezmer ornamentation, see Rubin (2001). On its significance in the playing of four contemporary violinists, see Slobin (2000).

<sup>66</sup> A notable exception is the ensemble sound of Giora Feidman (Rubin, 2015a), discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>67</sup> Also, several klezmer 'stars' – most notably Giora Feidman – have popularised a 'solo-backing' texture that tends to cushion an individual solo melodic instrumental voice within sympathetic but non-intrusive harmony (see Rubin, 2015a: 213).

effect of modern-day performance. At the same time, the use of the Yiddish language served to frame a more distinct cultural agenda and allowed performers to “engage directly with extramusical issues” (Wood, 2007b:374). With both genres somewhat divorced from their functional roots, the social distinctions between these two worlds are now harder to draw – musical and musicianly connections across both are commonplace. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, I often treat klezmer and Yiddish song in Berlin as one cultural ‘unit’. Whilst always being aware of their formal differences, the contemporary socio-cultural arguments made are frequently relevant to both. However, I make no attempt to link klezmer and Yiddish song through specific musical examples.

## **Appendix 2 – interview information**

Below is a list of the interviewees represented in this thesis, as well as the dates and locations of interviews. I have included brief and inform biographical material. All interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Berlin between September 2013 and September 2014. In the body of the text, I have given the location and date of each interview the first time it appears, thereafter simply listed as “Interview” plus the year. Unless otherwise stated, all material for each informant comes from this same meeting.

### Tania Alon (b.1965)

Tania is a Berlin-born Jew – the only one that I encountered as a regular part of the klezmer scene in the city. She is a singer and guitarist, possessed of a gently lyrical style and a quiet self-confidence. Tania was disarmingly honest about her particular inside-outside relationship to Yiddish music in Berlin. We talked at length in the sunshine in a pretty park near Tania’s Steglitz neighbourhood on June 16th, 2014.

### Alan Bern (b.1955)

A relentless dynamo of the German and international klezmer movement for the last thirty years, Bloomington-born Bern remains a hugely influential figure – through his innovative musical projects (Semer Label Reloaded, The Other Europeans), the legendary Brave Old World quartet, and his cheerful stewardship of Yiddish Summer Weimar. Although I had the opportunity to chat to Alan on many occasions, we never got round to scheduling an official interview. His material here (of which there is no shortage) comes from Yiddish Summer Weimar sessions.

### Marina Bondas (b.1979)

Marina is a Ukrainian-born violinist who has been living in Germany since she was a teenager. Alongside her regular orchestra job, she leads klezmer band Di Meschugeles. In possession of a rigorous classical technique, Marina’s description of the difficulties encountered in adapting this learned musical behaviour to the ambiguities of playing klezmer was honest and enlightening. We met at Berlin’s Russian Café Volands on August 18th, 2014, where we talked for several hours over beer and prosecco, accompanied by the gently romantic strains of Soviet film music piped through the restaurant’s music system.



Paul Brody (b.1961)

Born in California, Paul has made Berlin his home for more than twenty years. He is an inventive, eclectic and deceptively thoughtful musician, honest and funny about his ongoing development (musical and Jewish) and continually on the lookout for interesting things in which to get involved, including regular theatre composition and radio production. Paul's enthusiasm for his adopted home is infectious, paradoxically matched by his avowedly American West Coast German accent. We talked for a couple of hours whilst we did a slow bar crawl in his Schöneberg neighbourhood on September 2nd, 2014.

Tom Dayan (b.1984)

Tom is not a klezmer musician, but a jazz drummer. He is an Israeli musician who has made Berlin his home for the past five years. Although he only features tangentially in my study, his opinions on personal authenticity and non-German Jewish identity were instructive and thought-provoking. I met him through his long-term partner, accordionist Paula Sell, and we talked for an hour and a half at his home in Pankow on August 12, 2014.

Eli Fabrikant (b.1982)

Eli was born in Riga, but moved with his family to Jerusalem when he was four years old. He has been in Berlin for the last four years, building up his group Knoblauch Klezmer Band and regularly attending jam sessions and gigs in the city. Avowedly non-Zionist (unlike his family), Eli retains his left-wing political convictions and is deeply honest about the ambiguity he feels in his own Jewish identity. He is similarly frank about his personal connection to klezmer and Yiddish music, increasingly immersed in a traditional vocabulary, and at the same time fully connected to the appealingly anarchic performativity of his current home. We met and talked in the sunshine on the edge of the canal in Kreuzberg on June 9th, 2014.

Patrick Farrell (b.1978)

Patrick is a Michigan-born accordion player who now lives in Brooklyn. He is, however, a frequent visitor to Berlin and often teaches at European klezmer workshops.

He also works regularly with many Berlin-based singers and instrumentalists and is widely-acknowledged as one of the leading klezmer accordionists on the international stage today. Our interview was conducted over bottomless coffees in a cosy Neukölln café bar on March 22nd, 2014. I also benefitted from Patrick's generous tuition and general musical insight for a week at 2014's Yiddish Summer Weimar.

Jossif Gofenberg (b.1949)

Jossif was born in Chernowitz but has lived in Berlin for the past 40 years. He is warm, friendly and a passionate advocate for his music. We met early in the morning of August 27th, 2014, at the Jewish *Gemeindehaus* in Charlottenburg and talked for an hour, during which time it became apparent that Jossif knew every single person who went in and out.

Jan Hermerschmidt (b.1966)

Born and raised in East Germany, Jan is a long-time member of the klezmer band Aufwind. He is also a frequent collaborator with singer Karsten Troyke. Over coffee opposite his studio in Prenzlauer Berg on May 19th, 2014, Jan talked with conviction and honesty about his early travels within klezmer music, and also about his band's curious insider-outside status today.

Daniel Kahn (b.1978)

Born in Michigan, Dan is one of the driving forces of the Berlin – and international – Yiddish music scene. His politics are as sharp as his wit, his capacity for onstage anarchy as compelling as his deep commitment to Yiddish culture. During my time in Berlin, it seemed that Dan was somehow involved in everything I looked at. We had in fact met several years before I arrived in Berlin, sharing a festival stage in the Czech Republic. In Dan's room in Neukölln on December 6th, 2013, amidst a jumble of instruments, sheet music and old gig paraphernalia, Dan paced rapidly and talked passionately. We finished off the interview with a four-handed rendition of Kurt Weill's "Speak Low".

Sveta Kundish (b.1982)

Sveta was born in Ukraine, but moved with her family to Israel in 1995. Raised in a secular family, she went on to train as a cantor, leading services in Germany, whilst at the same time appearing with klezmer and Yiddish musicians across the world. A seeker of new musical pathways, Sveta also puts her classical training to good use in her performance of Yiddish art music with accordionist Patrick Farrell. We met at a bar in Neukölln and talked for a couple of hours on September 5th, 2014.

Franka Lampe (1969-2016)

I first met East German accordionist Franka in London about 8 years ago when we were sharing a bill at the Spitz in Whitechapel. Since then, she has redoubled her efforts as one of the busiest klezmer and Balkan musicians in Berlin. A friendly and generous musician, Franka put me forward for several gigs and jobs during my fieldwork year. Like all the musicians here, she was forthright in her opinions and held to her own musical tone-of-voice with strength and conviction. We met and talked on what felt like the first spring afternoon of the year, March 4th, 2014, in the pretty cafe next to the fountain in Friedrichshain's Volkspark. Franka's early death after a long battle with cancer on January 6th 2016 robbed Berlin's klezmer and Yiddish musicians of a wonderful musician and a good friend.

Heiko Lehmann (b.1963)

Heiko grew up in Saxony. A former member of the band Aufwind, he is a veteran of the German Yiddish and klezmer music world. He was also the first German to attend KlezKamp and maintains a friendship with many American musicians. Highly intelligent, Heiko is great company and never short of an opinion. We met for the first time at a bar near Bornholmer Straße, where we drank late into the night, and a few weeks later (on November 26th, 2013) for a slightly more formal interview at his ex-wife's Weißensee restaurant.

Sasha Lurje (b.1985)

Riga-born Sasha is a wonderful singer and warmly inclusive person. Always ready to sing (or dance), she is one of the Berlin klezmer and Yiddish community's most vibrant forces. I also benefitted from her knowledge and enthusiasm at 2014's Yiddish Summer Weimar, where she manages to be involved and endlessly charming on all levels simultaneously. We met on a snowy afternoon in a Kreuzberg cafe on the 21st of January, 2014.

Hampus Melin (b.1979)

Raised in Malmö but a Berliner for nearly a decade, Hampus is one of the coolest musicians I have ever met. With a straw hat perched permanently on his head and a roll-up lodged almost permanently in the corner of his mouth, he is funny, polemic, charming, bombastic and friendly, usually all at the same time. An extremely groovy drummer (originally jazz, now mostly klezmer), Hampus is also a very political individual – always interested to listen to someone else's views, and equally keen to let rip with his own. We talked for several hours over curry, beer and coffee in Kreuzberg on July 21st, 2014.

Sanne Möricke (b.1971)

Sanne is Dutch and settled in Berlin in her early twenties. She is a great musician and a wonderful host, always apparently happy to share her considerable knowledge and experience with good humour and honesty. She is probably the funkiest klezmer accordion player in the world (perhaps the only *funky* klezmer accordion player in the world?), and is both funny and revealing about the development of her very personal and instantly recognisable groove and style. We met and played music several times throughout 2013 and 2014 at her apartment just off Greifswalder Straße, where a cup of cinnamon coffee seems to be permanently on offer.

Jascha Nemtsov (b.1963)

Jascha was born in Siberia and grew up in Leningrad. He is professor of Jewish Music History at Weimar's Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt. Since 2010 he has also served as academic director of the cantorial school of Abraham Geiger Kolleg in Potsdam. He is also an accomplished pianist, specialising in repertoire from the "New Jewish School". We met at his house in Charlottenburg on July 21st, 2014.

Jalda Rebling (b.1951)

Jalda is a singer, cantor, cultural activist and scholar. She is the daughter of Yiddish singer Lin Jaldati and pianist and musicologist Eberhard Rebling. Jalda has been involved in Jewish music in Germany for much of her life, and was one of the early organisers of Berlin's ongoing Days of Jewish Culture festival. She is highly critical of many recent developments in klezmer and Yiddish music in the city, feeling that they promote an American bias in their historiography and sideline pre-1980s activity. A charming, generous and loquacious interviewee, we talked for an hour and a half at her Prenzlauer Berg apartment on June 26th, 2014.

Fabian Schnedler (b.1973)

Born in Berlin, Fabian studied Jewish and German literature and also trained as an actor. I met him briefly at the same time that I first met Franka, and was immediately impressed by his linguistic dexterity, charm, and obvious intelligence. Since then, he has combined a career in museology at the Jewish Museum with ongoing musical work in some of Berlin's most interesting Yiddish music groups (Schikker wi Lot, Semer Label Reloaded, Fayvish). He snuck me into the Jewish Museum staff café where we talked over lunch on August 27th, 2014.

Till Schumann (b.1949)

Till was Born in Detmold, West Germany. He co-founded Oriente Musik in 1994, specialising in what the company's website calls "world chamber music".<sup>68</sup> In that time, he has put out records by Kroke, Dan Kahn, Sandra Weigl, Geoff Berner, Karsten Troyke and many more. He is a regular supporter of the city's live klezmer music events (he was at Oblomov from the start), and more recently has begun to contribute to them in the form of *Tanase & Gebirtig*. Over tea and orange juice in Oriente's office in Steglitz on July 22nd, 2014, Till revealed that with the release of Daniel Kahn's music on his label, his kids finally approve of what he does.

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.oriente.de/en/about-us>. Accessed February 2nd, 2016.

Paula Sell (b.1985)

Paula was born and raised in Berlin, a young girl when the Wall fell. Well-travelled and in possession of an adventurous spirit, she hides her considerable talent behind a modesty and continual self-questioning. Paula retains a very appealing romanticism about her burgeoning musical career (including an all-female pirate trio), which she admits insulates her from some of her more hard-bitten older musical colleagues. We spoke for a good couple of hours over bottles of beer on the corner of Friedrichshain's much-loved Boxhagener Platz on June 24th, 2014.

Ilya Shneyveys (b.1983)

Ilya comes from Riga and has been calling Berlin home – in a manner of speaking – for the last couple of years. He is a young, energetic and hugely inventive multi-instrumentalist, playing keyboards and acting as MD for his Yiddish rock band Forshpil and leading (from the accordion) the hugely popular and noisily sociable Neukölln Klezmer Sessions. We met at his temporary flat in Neukölln on December 17th, 2013, where he kept me amused, entertained, and stuffed with persimmon fruit from the nearby Turkish market.

Armin Siebert (b.1973)

Armin grew up in East Germany. He initially made contact with me a few years before this project to request a CD of my band, after which we stayed very loosely in touch. Armin is a record producer, band manager, journalist and DJ, with a keen ear for the developing world music tastes of Europe's dancefloors. We met at his office in Mitte, where I got to gape at his record collection, on June 24th, 2014.

Karsten Troyke (b.1960)

Born in East Berlin, Karsten has been a mainstay of European Yiddish music for decades. He is friendly, funny and modest in equal measure. He also possesses a voice and a talent for languages like few others. We spoke at length in his kitchen on July 20th, 2014, while he made omelettes for his band, coffee for me and smoked endless cigarettes.

Carsten Wegener (b.1967)

Carsten was born and raised in West Berlin. He is an extremely self-possessed musician, perhaps helped by the fact that he is also a professional tennis coach. An avid instrument collector and instrument adapter, he has been playing bass in Berlin klezmer bands for twenty years, as well as being a part of iconic Berlin freewheelers 17 Hippies and more recently ?Shmaltz!. We met at his Friedrichshain flat (his own and purely for music – he also has another flat with his family two floors below) on May 2nd, 2014.

Jenny Wieneke (b.1966)

A veteran of the homegrown klezmer scene, Jenny is a quietly persistent presence. More enabler than limelight-seeker, she has been supporting the city’s community of folk and klezmer musicians for twenty-five years and talks knowledgeably and engagingly about the changes she has seen. We talked over beer and popadoms at a local Indian café in her picturesque and friendly Wilmersdorf *kiez* on May 19th, 2014.

Michael Winograd (b.1982)

Born on Long Island, clarinettist and composer Michael Winograd currently lives in Brooklyn. Although we never had an official interview, his musicianship and humour were an integral part of my time at Yiddish Summer Weimar. Much in demand for gigs and weddings with many of America’s finest klezmer musicians, Michael is also one-third of the superb Yiddish Art Trio. He crops up in Berlin on a regular basis, always seemingly eager to play (and talk).

In addition to those listed above, I also carried out lengthy personal interviews with the following. Although material from these interviews is not reproduced here, I am very grateful for the contribution made to my research.

Uwe Sauerwein (singer & guitarist, Kasbek Ensemble)

Daniel Weltlinger (violinist)

Wolfgang König (music journalist)

Sybille Plappert (amateur Yiddish singer)

Frank Klaffs (Piranha Music)

I am also grateful for more informal conversations with (amongst many others): singer Andrea Pancur, accordionist Szylwia Czaranko, pianist Götz Lindenberg, clarinettist Stefan Litsche, violinist Matthias Groh, bar owner Ursula Weigert, clarinettist Emil Goldschmidt, percussionist Olli Goers, clarinettist Christian Dawid, clarinettist Martin Borbonus, regular audience member Georg Potzies, singer Eléonore Biezunski, guitarist Neil Macoll, and bassist Lenz Hüber.



### **Appendix 3 – recorded sources**

Recorded material which features in transcription or extended discussion (listed below) is presented on the accompanying CD. This CD is solely to accompany the written thesis and permission to reproduce the recordings here has been granted by all the artists.

Kasbek Ensemble: “Odessa Bulgar”

Grinstein’s Mischpoche: “Odessa Bulgarish”

You Shouldn’t Know From It: “Hora”

?Shmaltz!: “Levunesca”

Forshpil: “Volekhl”

Forshpil: “Fraytig”

Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird: “The Klezmer Bund”

?Shmaltz!: “Gran Bufet”

?Shmaltz!: “Viva la Malwonia!”

Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird: “Görlitzer Park”

Daniel Kahn and the Painted Bird: “Good Old Bad Old Days”

Knoblauch Klezmer Band: “Das Modell”

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