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A Personal Reflection on the Reception of Jewish Music in
Germany

As far as I can assess, there was not the slightest interest in Jewish music in Germany after 1945. Firstly, no one knew what Jewish music was and secondly, there was only a very vague idea of what it meant to be a Jew. Bedevilled by the National Socialists (Nazis) and defamed in books and the media, the German public had forgotten the role traditionally played by Jews in art and culture. Poems (and songs) by Heinrich Heine*, although an integral part of German culture, were marked as “writer unknown” – for example, *Ich weiß nicht was soll es bedeuten, dass ich so traurig bin* (“The Loreley”²).

Compositions by Gustav Mahler*, although rooted in the German tradition of late-Romantic music, had been forgotten. German-Jewish actors, cabaret stars, and popular composers had been murdered or had fled. Although many people still remembered the songs, hardly anyone knew that Jews had written them – for example, *Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe eingestellt* written by Friedrich Hollaender*, known in the English-speaking world as *Falling in Love Again*. Actually, this is not really Jewish but German culture. The pre-Nazi influence of German-Jewish artists on the art and culture scene in Germany cannot be over-estimated. The situation was similar in literature, science, philosophy, and sociology. Capitalism had raised high hopes among German Jews for chances of equality through assimilation. These hopes were destroyed by the race theories which were at the core of the German version of fascism. People who had grown up under the Nazis – or who adhered to their ideology – believed that somehow Jews were inferior human beings, or, at the very least, did not fit into German culture. This attitude was still widespread in 1945 and even the better educated people had most likely forgotten Alban Berg*, Sigmund Freud* or Rosa Luxemburg*.

But I want to talk about music. Popular music. As most people did not know what Jewish was, Jewish music did not exist for them. American hits came to Germany with the occupation powers and were popular. People liked the

1 *Hava Nagila* (הבה נגילה, in English *Let us rejoice*) is a Jewish traditional folk song in Hebrew. The commonly used text was probably composed by Abraham Zevi (Zvi) Idelsohn in 1918 to celebrate the British victory in Palestine during the First World War, as well as the Balfour Declaration.

2 In 1824 Heinrich Heine wrote the poem *Die Lorelei* (“The Loreley”), which was set to music in 1837 by Friedrich Silcher and is today one of the most famous Rhine songs.

English-language compositions written by Jews, but no one in Germany realised that the ‘strange German’ in the song *Bay mir bistu sheyn*³ was, in fact, Yiddish. Even Zarah Leander*, the star of a number of Nazi films, sang this song in 1950, but with Swedish verses.

Holocaust survivors, who often came from Poland, loved Yiddish hits. They listened to records from Paris, London, or America. Some cantors and musical singers took up these songs and Shellac Records with ghetto songs became available. Soon, people from the DP camps⁴ saw a chance to build a future for themselves in the Netherlands, France, and so forth – and even in Germany. Thus, the songs of East European Jews were brought to Germany. (In the 1920s there was a rich Yiddish migrant culture in Berlin, with theatre, recordings, and books. All this had been destroyed and forgotten by 1945.)

These were the real Jewish songs (for only in Yiddish does this word translate as ‘Jewish’). Very often Yiddish, being so similar to German, was the language used for communication in the Jewish communities being rebuilt in Germany – founded largely by Polish Jews, while at the same time the language was rejected in Israel as the language that belonged to an awful past. Jossy Halland* sang *Heymish Zayn*⁵ (‘To Feel At Home’) in the Amsterdam cabaret *Lilalo*.⁶ In Paris, records were produced with Henry Gerro*, Benzion Witler*, the Malavsky family,* and others.

The first time the German public noticed that there was such a thing as Jewish music was through a recording by Harry Belafonte*. This was *Hava Nagila* which became a world-wide hit in 1955, in Germany also. Later pop singers from Israel such as Camilla Corren* sang Yiddish songs in German. In West Germany Lea-Nina Rodzynek (known as *Belina*)* sang the original Yiddish songs. She originated from Poland, had survived a concentration camp, was able to flee and then

3 *Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn* (Yiddish: בײַ מיר ביסטו שײַן, ‘For Me You’re Beautiful’) is a popular Yiddish song composed by Jacob Jacobs (lyricist) and Sholom Secunda (composer) for a 1932 Yiddish comedy musical, *I Would If I Could* (in Yiddish, מען קען לעבן נאָר מען לאָזט נישט, ‘You could live, but they won’t let you’). In 1937, Sammy Cahn heard a performance of the song, sung in Yiddish by African-American performers in New York. There have been several songs in the Soviet Union that use the tune. In Nazi Germany it was also a hit until its Jewish origins were discovered in 1938, and it was promptly banned.

4 A displaced persons camp or DP camp is a temporary facility for displaced persons forced to migrate. The term is mainly used for camps established after the Second World War in West Germany and in Austria, as well as in the United Kingdom, primarily for refugees from Eastern Europe and for former inmates of the Nazi German concentration camps.

5 *Heymish Zayn* (Yiddish, הײמיש זײַן) is a song with music and lyrics by Jacques Halland. It was performed by him exclusively in almost every program at his cabaret. It deals with nostalgia for a lost home, for the shtetl. It was recorded for his vinyl LP *Lilalo*, Germany, 1984.

6 *Lilalo* was a Yiddish cabaret that operated in Amsterdam (1959–1983).

hide from the Nazis. She gave concerts accompanied by a classical guitarist. She appeared existentialist, much like Juliette Greco*, and sang *Es brent*⁷ by Mordechai Gebirtig* on television in Germany.

East Germany (the GDR) – founded as an anti-fascist state – had Lin Jaldati*, a singer who had survived Auschwitz, knew Yiddish and could perform Yiddish songs. She, too, sang *Es brent*. She was Dutch, had come to East Berlin from the Netherlands with her (Communist) husband and was prepared to use her abilities ‘to help build a better world.’ She, too, sang the old Yiddish songs of poverty and oppression; Paul Robeson*, the famous Afro-American singer from the USA, was her guest when he visited the GDR in 1960. He had the famous Yiddish partisans’ song *Zog nisht keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg*⁸ (‘Never say this is your final road’) in his repertoire.

At this time a folk-song revival began in the USA. Pete Seeger* and his group *The Weavers* became important again; Joan Baez* made *Dona Dona*⁹ world-famous; and the first Newport Folk Festivals¹⁰ took place. Most of the protagonists were Jewish. All of the Left-wing parties and groups in the USA were led by Jewish politicians and the world was in upheaval - despite the Cold War. In the GDR, where I lived, people made private copies from records smuggled in from the West such as those sung by Theodore Bikel*, who sang Yiddish folk and theatre songs, and songs from Israel. People talked of Robert Zimmerman who had just become world-famous as Bob Dylan* – a Jewish lad from Minnesota. It somehow became a good thing to be Jewish.

Havatsalet Ron*, born in Aden (Yemen), was the only Israeli singer who came to the socialist East at the beginning of the 1960s and she, too, sang *Hava nagila*, Yiddish folk-songs, and German hits. She stayed only two years. Later, her tapes were found in the radio archives marked: “Nicht senden!” (‘Not for broadcasting!’)

7 *It is Burning*, (Yiddish: עס ברענט, in reference to a shtetl. The second Yiddish verse says literally *It is Burning*, (Yiddish: אונדזער שטעטל ברענט - our shtetl is burning), *Es brent* is a Yiddish poem-song written in 1938 by Mordechai Gebirtig. The poem was originally written about the pogrom of Przytyk, which took place on March 9, 1936. Cracow’s underground Jewish resistance adopted *Es brent* as its anthem. It is frequently sung in Israel and around the world on Holocaust Remembrance Days.

8 *Zog Nisht Keynmol* (Yiddish: זאָג נישט קיינמאָל; also referred to as *Partizaner Himen*, or the *Partisan Anthem*) is the name of a Yiddish song considered one of the chief anthems of Holocaust survivors and is sung in memorial services around the world. The lyrics of the song were written in 1943 by Hirsh Glick, a young Jewish inmate of the Vilna Ghetto.

9 *Dona Dona* (Yiddish: דאָנא דאָנא, also known as דאָס קעלבל *Dos Kelbl* – *The Calf*) is a Yiddish theater song about a calf being led to slaughter. *Dona Dona* was written for the Aaron Zeitlin stage production *Esterke* (1940–1941) with music composed by Sholem Secunda.

10 The Newport Folk Festival is an annual American folk-oriented music festival held in Newport, Rhode Island, which began in 1959 as a counterpart to the previously established Newport Jazz Festival.

The Soviet Union's support for pan-Arabism and the Ba'ath Party (as a result of Russian arms exports) had prevented diplomatic relations between the GDR and Israel. The Yiddish (not the Hebrew) songs seemed to have fallen out of history and appeared to have nothing to do with Israel. Thus, Yiddish songs, particularly the partisan songs, were sung in Left-wing circles in both East and West Germany. This continued even after 1967 (the Six Day War) when most Left-wing German intellectuals turned against Israel. Esther and Abi Ofarim* became very popular in East and West Germany. Apart from German songs, they performed American and Israeli folk songs and 'Songs of the World.' I think it was their charm, at least in Germany, that helped overcome traditional clichés about Jews. In 1963 a young man in West Berlin became known for singing very old Yiddish folk-songs: Peter Rohland*. He was the first non-Jewish German to delve into the subject of Yiddish songs (beside German folk songs), and he did not remain the only one. Unfortunately, he died in 1966.

There were so few Jews in the Socialist half of Germany that one cannot speak of their political influence. In the West, however, there was at least a verbal alliance with Israel and recognition of Jewish interests. Despite this, no one could really define what 'Jewish culture' was. In West Germany (FRG, or in German BRD) people started lamenting their loss of German-Jewish culture with its assimilationist tradition. At the same time, Jews in Germany were considered responsible for the politics of the Israeli government. In the East (GDR, or in German DDR) the milieu was worse: Newspapers reported *daily* about the 'aggressor Israel.' Under such circumstances, singing a Yiddish song became a political act. I remember the words of a singer in East Berlin in 1982. She said on stage that "singing Yiddish songs has absolutely nothing to do with the aggressive machinations of the State of Israel," then she sang the *Lid fun Sholem*¹¹ ('Song of Peace').

In Christian communities, the simpler Hebrew songs from the pioneer period were then (and still are) very popular: *Hevenu shalom aleichem* and *Shalom chaverim*. This new whiff of brotherhood was probably caused by the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s, when the Pope spoke of the common heritage of Christians and Jews, while in the Protestant Church there was (and still is up to the present day) a special empathy for everything Jewish, or for what they con-

11 דאָס ליד פון שלום, in Yiddish 'The Song of Peace' is the original lyrics added to the song שפּיל זשע מיר אַ לידעלע (*Play a Little Song for Me*) written by the Jewish Soviet poet Yosl Kotliar (1908 in Berdichev–1962 in Vilna). It appeared in his collection of poems אויסגעלייזטע ערד (*Redeemed Land*), that was published in 1948 in Vilna. The music was composed by Henech Kon before the Second World War. During the Holocaust the song was adapted to reflect the experience of ghetto life, and then after the war was adapted again with new lyrics about liberation. Several of Kotliar's poems have been turned into songs, and made famous by many well-known Yiddish singers.

sider to be Jewish. Particularly in the GDR, the Protestant churches were open to all people who were otherwise publicly stigmatised: punks, environmentalists, anyone in opposition, and others.

In the 1980s, many young people in East and West Germany suddenly started singing Yiddish songs. In the United States, young Jews had already started to do so. This later became known as the ‘Klezmer¹² revival.’ In West Germany a folklore group called *Zupfgeigenhansel*¹³ performed at concerts, presenting old German folksongs together with Yiddish ones. At this time German folk songs were freed from the dust of Nazi ideology. Old songs were rediscovered and the slogan became: ‘Let’s sing!’

Hardly anyone from the Jewish community was interested in this new folklore movement. The earlier proclaimed symbiosis of German and Jewish culture had nothing to do with this. Yiddish songs were sung by the *chazan* (cantor) and at the most during Passover at small gatherings. “The *goyim* want to replace us! They don’t understand what they are talking about, let alone singing about!”

Truly, the young Germans actually knew very little about what it meant to be Jewish. Thus, many of those musicians were happy when the Klezmer revivalists came to Europe to give concerts. These Americans were usually the grandchildren of Jews who had arrived in the United States from Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. They had inherited old records from their grandparents, rearranged the songs on them and sometimes co-operated with the great Yiddish singers from the 1940s and 1950s. The Klezmer revivalists became the role models for many young German musicians then and thus the ‘Klezmer boom’ began around 1990.

12 Klezmer (Yiddish: singular קלעזמער or *klezmer*, plural קלעזמאָרים *klezmerim*), from Hebrew: כלי זמר – *klei zemer* or musical instruments) is a musical tradition of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe. Played by professional musicians called *klezmerim*, the genre originally consisted largely of dance tunes and instrumental pieces for weddings and other celebrations. In the United States the genre evolved considerably, as Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who arrived in America between 1880 and 1924 encountered and assimilated American jazz. It was not until the late twentieth century that the word came to identify a musical genre. Early twentieth century recordings and writings most often refer to the style as “Yiddish music,” although it was also sometimes called “Freilech music” (Yiddish, פֿרײלעך literally, Happy music). The first recordings to use the musical term ‘klezmer’ to refer to the music were recorded in the USA in 1977 and 1979.

13 *Zupfgeigenhansel* was a German folk duo, one of the most successful groups to emerge on the German folk scene in the 1970s. It consisted of Erich Schmeckenbecher and Thomas Friz. The group started playing in folk-clubs, mainly in southern Germany, in 1974. They then started appearing on the radio. They released their first album, *Volkslieder I* in 1976, and in 1978 they received the Artists of the Year award from the German Phonoakademie. In 1979 they published an LP of Yiddish songs – *’ch hob gehert sogn*. They disbanded in 1985.

New York groups such as *The Klezmatics*¹⁴ were very successful in Germany, and Klezmer groups sprang up in every German city. The word *Klezmer* now became synonymous with Jewish music. Once, when I announced a concert, I was told: “I hope you have a clarinet in your band, otherwise it’s not really Jewish.”

Giora Feidmann*, who in Germany is “the world’s most famous clarinetist,” was a great success. He held many workshops in which he spoke of the musical energy inherent in everyone. He even went so far as to play Richard Wagner* at Auschwitz – with typical Feidman phrases, *krekhths* and *dreydl* (i.e. sobbing sounds and musical ornamentation).

In the 1990s, thanks to the Americans’ concerts and the ‘Klezmer boom,’ the Jewish communities too began to take note of Klezmer – but for another reason: The collapse of the Soviet Union made it possible for thousands of Russian Jews to leave the country. Many of them settled in Germany. Today, many Jewish publications are issued in two languages: Russian and German. And these former Soviet citizens, as well, often do not know what is Jewish and what is not. Yiddish songs and Klezmer music is one way for them to embrace their new Jewish identity. There are many excellent musicians among them, often with training in classical music.

Today, the word ‘Klezmer’ has become a world music genre, and not only in Germany. It is now mixed with rock, jazz, Balkan music, punk, and classical arrangements, and is no longer just Jewish music. And the boom has gone. The Yiddish cabaret and folk songs have returned to the small off-theatres and the Yiddish languagis understood by fewer and fewer people.

From the 1980s up until the beginning of the 2000s almost every *Kulturklub* (cultural public place), every theatre in Germany held an evening of Yiddish music or literature at least once a year. This is no longer the case. One reason is that culture has become much more commercialised (Yiddish folklore is not something with which one can earn much money); and I see another reason: In Germany – and internationally – the attitude towards Israel is changing for the worse. Many agree with the Nobel Prize laureate Günter Grass* who blames Israel for the threats coming from the Iranian regime. At an event, I saw a German

¹⁴ *The Klezmatics* are a Grammy Award-winning American klezmer music group based in New York City who have achieved fame singing in several languages, most notably mixing older Yiddish tunes with other types of contemporary music of differing origins. The group was formed in New York’s East Village in 1986. They have appeared numerous times on television, including on the PBS *Great Performances* series, with Itzhak Perlman.

The Klezmatics appeared live in June 2003 in collaboration with the Philharmonie of Jena, Germany. They have also participated in cross-cultural collaborations, notably with the Gypsy virtuoso Ferus Mustafov, Israeli singers Chava Alberstein and Ehud Banay, American singer Arlo Guthrie, and Moroccan musicians *The Master Musicians of Jajouka*.

actress whom I once admired, reading out news reports about Israeli attacks on Gaza and the fighting on the Lebanese border, which she interlaced with biblical account of Elijah's battles. When I asked her "Why do you do *that*?"— She replied: "I wanted to show that Jews were like that even back then."

This short chronological history is, of course, by no means complete. I have tried mainly to describe trends and moods. And I, personally, find something else noteworthy: I have sung Yiddish songs around the world. These concerts were almost always organised 'by Jews for Jews.' Only in three countries I did find large non-Jewish audiences. These countries were Sweden, Poland and – Germany.

Short biographies

Joan Baez (born Joan Chandos Báez on January 9, 1941) is an American folk singer, songwriter, musician, and activist. She has displayed a lifelong commitment to political and social activism in the fields of nonviolence, civil rights, human rights, and the environment.

Harold ('Harry') Belafonte, Jr. (born March 1, 1927) is an American singer, songwriter, actor, and social activist. Belafonte was an early supporter of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, and one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s confidants.

Belina (born as **Lea-Nina Rodzynek** in 1925 in Treblinka, Poland–December 12, 2006 in Hamburg) was a Jewish folk singer. She became famous as a singer in many Paris cellar bars where she appeared under the name "the Black Angel from Montparnasse." In 1954 she was engaged at the Yiddish theater in Paris. Her first record also appeared, but with that she was only successful in Germany.

Alban Berg (February 9, 1885–December 24, 1935) was an Austrian composer. He was a member of the Second Viennese School with Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern, and produced compositions that combined Mahlerian Romanticism with a personal adaptation of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. Berg is remembered as one of the most important composers of the twentieth century, and to date is the most widely performed opera composer among the Second Viennese School.

Theodore Meir Bikel (born May 2, 1924) is an Austrian-American actor, folk singer, musician, and composer. Bikel is President of the Associated Actors and Artists of America, and was president of The Actor's Equity in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Carmela Corren (born 1938 in Tel-Aviv) is an Israeli-born singer and actress. Discovered in 1956 during a work venture in Jerusalem by American television producer Ed Sullivan, she came to New York to appear on his show. Later on she starred in several musical films and television productions. Beginning in the 1960s, Carmela Corren became fairly well known in Germany, as well as in Switzerland and Austria.

Bob Dylan (born Robert Allen Zimmerman on May 24, 1941) is an American musician, singer-songwriter, artist, and writer. He has been an influential figure in popular music and culture for more than five decades.

Regina Eichner, known as Jossy Halland (June 9, 1914 in Lübeck–September 14, 1986 in Argelès-sur-Mer) was a singer and comedian. She worked frequently abroad, including with Mistinguette and Edith Piaf. From 1959 she worked in the Lilalo cabaret in Amsterdam, where she created a furor as a singer of Yiddish songs. In the 1960s, she and her husband Jacques Halland appeared regularly on TV performing parts from their cabaret routines.

Giora Feidman (born March 26, 1936) is an Argentine-born Israeli clarinetist who specializes in klezmer music. He comes from a Bessarabian family of klezmer musicians. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather made music for weddings, bar mitzvahs, and holiday celebrations in the shtetls of Eastern Europe. He began playing as principle clarinetist in the Buenos Aires Teatro Colón Symphony Orchestra, and later in the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. In the early 1970s he began his solo career. He has performed with the Berliner Symphoniker, the *Kronos Quartet*, the Polish Chamber Philharmonic, the Munich Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Munich Radio Orchestra.

Sigmund Freud (May 6, 1856–September 23, 1939) was an Austrian neurologist who became known as the founding father of psychoanalysis. Freud qualified as a doctor of medicine at the University of Vienna in 1881. Freud continued to maintain his optimistic underestimation of the growing Nazi threat. He remained determined to stay in Vienna, even following the Nazi German *Anschluss* of Austria, on March 13, 1938, and the outbursts of violent anti-Semitism that ensued. However, he left for London on May 1938.

Mordechai Gebirtig, (born Mordecai Bertig, May 4, 1877 in Kraków, Austria-Hungary–June 4, 1942, Kraków Ghetto, Nazi-occupied Poland) was an influential Yiddish poet and songwriter. He was born in Krakow and lived in its Jewish working-class quarter all his life. He was killed by a Nazi bullet in the Kraków Ghetto on the infamous “Bloody Thursday” of June 4, 1942.

Henry Gerro (August 31, 1919 in Volyn province, now Ukraine–October 17, 1980 in Buenos Aires in Argentina), was an author, songwriter, violinist, singer and actor. In 1972 Gerro was awarded the Medal of the Israeli Defense Ministry.

Günter Wilhelm Grass (October 16, 1927 – April, 13 2015) was a German novelist, poet, playwright, illustrator, graphic artist, and sculptor. The recipient of the 1999 Nobel Prize in Literature, on April 4, 2012, Grass published a poem *Was gesagt werden muss* (“What Must Be Said”) expressing his concern about the hypocrisy of German military support for Israel which might use German-made submarines to launch a nuclear attack against Iran. He demanded “that the governments of both Iran and Israel allow an international authority to freely inspect their nuclear capabilities,” although he blamed Israel for planning a war against Iran, without sufficient evidence. In response, Israel declared him *persona non grata*.

Juliette Gréco (born February 7, 1927), is a French actress and popular chanson singer who became active in the Résistance. She spent the post liberation years frequenting the Saint Germain cafes, immersing herself in political and philosophical Bohemian culture.

Heinrich Heine (December 13, 1797–February 17, 1856) was a German poet, journalist, essayist, and literary critic. He is best known outside Germany for his early lyric poetry, which was set to

music in the form of Lieder (art songs) by composers such as Robert Schumann and Franz Schubert. Heine's later verse and prose are distinguished by their satirical wit and irony. His radical political views led to many of his works being banned by German authorities. Heine spent the last 25 years of his life as an expatriate in Paris.

Friedrich Hollaender (October 18, 1896–January 18, 1976) was a German film composer and author. He was born in London, where his father, operetta composer Victor Hollaender, worked as a musical director at the Barnum & Bailey Circus. He had a solid music and theatre family background. He had to leave Nazi Germany in 1933 because of his Jewish descent, and first moved to Paris. He emigrated to the United States the next year, where he wrote the music for over a hundred films. In 1956 he returned to Germany.

Lin Jaldati (born Rebekka Brilleslijper on December 13, 1912 in Amsterdam–August 31, 1988 in East Berlin) was a Dutch singer, actress, and dancer. In July 1944 she was arrested and interned among others in the Westerbork transit camp, then sent to Auschwitz and to Bergen-Belsen. Back in Amsterdam, she embarked on concert tours in 1946. In 1952 her family moved to the GDR.

Zarah Leander (March 15, 1907–June 23, 1981) was a Swedish actress, singer, and alleged spy. During her lifetime she was accused of being a spy both for Nazi Germany and for the Soviet Union. As a result of her controversial choice to work for the state-owned Ufa in Adolf Hitler's Germany, her films and song lyrics were viewed by some as propaganda for the Nazi cause, although she took no public political position.

Rosa Luxemburg (March 5, 1871–January 15, 1919) was a Marxist theorist, philosopher, economist, and revolutionary socialist of Polish Jewish descent who became a naturalized German citizen. Due to her pointed criticism of both the Marxist-Leninist and more moderate social democrat schools of socialism, Luxemburg became a symbol of heterodoxy among scholars and theorists of the political Left. She was murdered in January 1919, during military suppression of the Spartacist uprising.

Gustav Mahler (July 7, 1860–May 18, 1911) was a late-Romantic Austrian-Jewish composer and one of the leading conductors of his generation. He was born in the village of Kalischt, Bohemia (then part of the Austrian Empire, now Kaliště in the Czech Republic). His family later moved to nearby Iglau (now Jihlava), where Mahler grew up. As a composer, he acted as a bridge between the nineteenth century Austro-German tradition and the modernism of the early twentieth century.

The **Malavsky family** was a Jewish-American family who appeared throughout the Jewish world in concerts of cantorial and Jewish folk music. The family first performed in San Francisco in 1945, and later throughout the United States, performing cantorial music, jazz and Jewish songs both in Hebrew and in Yiddish.

Esther Ofarim (in Hebrew: אסתר עופרים, born June 13, 1941) is an Israeli singer. She was born in Safed to a Syrian Jewish family. She began performing as a child, singing Hebrew and international folk songs. In 1960 Esther landed a small role in the film *Exodus*. In 1961, she won the Song Festival in Tel Aviv. Two years later, she won second place in the 1963 Eurovision Song Contest with *T'en vas pas*, a song representing Switzerland. Together with her husband Abi they became world famous in the 1960. Esther lives in Germany, and still gives sold out concerts in Israel and Europe.

Paul Leroy Robeson (April 9, 1898–January 23, 1976) was an American singer and actor. He was active in the Civil Rights Movement. From the 1930s Robeson included Yiddish songs prominent in his concerts.

Peter Rohland (February 22, 1933 in Berlin–April 5, 1966 in Freiburg im Breisgau) was a German singer, songwriter, and folk song researcher. Influenced by a tape with Yiddish songs of Theodore Bikel, Rohland developed a Yiddish songs program – *The Rebbe*, which premiered in 1963 with a small ensemble in one gallery in Berlin. It was successful in student and academic circles, as well as among German Jewish communities. The songs on the program were recorded for the youth radio in the studio, however, no record company was willing to edit an LP. They claimed “obvious concerns about the authenticity of the songs.” Rohland died of an acute cerebral hemorrhage in the University Hospital of Freiburg at the age of only 33 years.

Havatselet Ron (in Hebrew הבצללת רון, born as Havatselet Damari in Aden in 1936, passed away 2013 in Los Angeles), was a Jewish Yemenite singer who migrated to Israel when she was eight and lived in Kfar Shalem – a poor neighborhood in South East Tel Aviv. In the 1950s she produced an LP with original Yemenite songs in Hebrew, that was a complete failure in Israel. She recorded several songs in German, Yiddish, English, and Hebrew, and used to appear on East German TV 1963/64. At the end of the 1960s she returned to Israel and retired from music.

Peter (‘Pete’) Seeger (May 3, 1919–January 27, 2014) was an American folk singer and activist. Seeger reemerged on the public scene as a prominent singer of protest music in support of international disarmament, civil rights, the counterculture, and environmental causes.

Richard Wagner (May 22, 1813–February 13, 1883) was a German composer, theatre director, polemicist, and conductor who is primarily known for his operas (later known as “music dramas”). Unlike most opera composers, Wagner wrote both the libretto and the music for each of his stage works. Initially considered a romantic composer, Wagner revolutionised opera with his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art), through which he sought to synthesise the poetic, visual, musical and dramatic arts, with music subsidiary to drama. He announced this path in a series of essays written between 1849 and 1852. Wagner’s life was characterised by political exile, turbulent love affairs, poverty, and repeated flight from his creditors. His controversial writings on music, drama, and politics have attracted extensive comment in recent decades, especially since they express harsh antisemitic sentiments. Due to his association with antisemitism as well as the Nazis’ admiration of his work, performance of Wagner’s music in the State of Israel, or in front of Holocaust survivors, has provoked public rejection and sour debates.

Ben-Zion Witle (1907–1961, from Belz, Galicia), was a Jewish singer, actor, coupletist, comedian, and composer. His family moved to Vienna in 1919, and from 1926, he was active in the Vienna theater scene. Starting in 1940, he toured the United States, playing at New York City and Chicago. In 1946 he toured Argentina (Buenos Aires). He performed with Argentinian-born actress Shifra Lerer, who became his wife, appearing in North and South America, Israel, and South Africa through the 1950s.