

Jewish Music in the Age of Revival

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For many years I have refused to admit to myself, much less acknowledge publicly in print or performance, that I am, in fact, a revivalist. My research on Jewish music has long made revival possible, as have my activities as a performer for over a decade, not only as the artistic director of a Jewish cabaret ensemble, the New Budapest Orpheum Society, but also in my attempts to bring musical works from the Holocaust to performance. These activities make it impossible to rebuff those who claim that I, too, am a revivalist.¹ It is not that I did not want to revive Jewish music, or that I felt revivalists were bad company. Quite the contrary, I have taught students in the klezmer revival (e.g., Deborah Strauss, who plays with a number of fine klezmer groups, as well as frequently with her husband, Jeff Warschauer) and supplied repertory to European musicians in search of Jewish music (e.g., Béla Kiss and Kati Szvorak).² The truth is, however, that many of my collaborators also did not want to be considered revivalists. I remember well the autumn day in 2001 in Berne, Switzerland, when a young klezmer player passionately responded to a talk I gave on the klezmer revival by imploring, “How can I be a klezmer revivalist, when I haven’t even died yet?”³ Perhaps I can be forgiven if I’ve only just confessed to being a revivalist myself.

The picture that appears in figure 1 on the accompanying CD ultimately led to the self-confession upon which I expand in this essay. Usually labeled something like “klezmer musicians in Austria” in photos sprinkled through books on klezmer or in CD liner notes,⁴ this picture had become the icon of the klezmer revival by the mid-1990s. As documentation of the klezmer past, the photo seemed to be unassailably authentic. There they were, a four-member string band, with the correct Eastern European instrumentation: two violins, a viola, and a bass violin.⁵ They stood before what appears to be the entrance to a synagogue in the Judengasse of Eisenstadt, Austria; that is, in Asch, the Jewish quarter of the multiethnic Hungarian provincial city, across the street from the Esterházy palace in which Franz Joseph Haydn was employed during the second half of the eighteenth century. In accompanying photos in the provincial archives of the Burgenländisches Landesmuseum in Eisenstadt are a bride and groom accompanied by this string ensemble; this allows us to add one more layer of authenticity, in other words, of klezmer as “Jewish wedding music.” A snapshot of klezmer music and klezmerim as they really were! What more could the klezmer revival want? And here it was, emblazoned on the cover of one of my own books, chosen by the publisher and book designer as if it perfectly represented the contents of a book that, in fact, is not about klezmer music.

By 2005, when this image and imagination of authenticity appeared on the cover of my *Jüdische Volksmusik*,⁶ these Austrian klezmer musicians had become free-floating signifiers, moving from one site of revival to the next, giving their blessing to what one was about to read or hear. My own book would now also bear witness to the act of authentication through revival, its diverse subject matter notwithstanding. I can admit that I did not actually object to the design, even though the book was not about klezmer, because I was one of the few people in the world who knew that these were, in fact, not klezmer musicians, but rather a band that plied eastern Austria, playing urban light-classical music, mixtures of Strauss waltzes and vernacular popular dance styles called “Weana Tanz.” I knew this because I’d researched the life and music of the second violinist, Maurus Knapp. He had indeed grown up in the “Shevah kehillot,” the “Seven Holy Cities” of Burgenland (he was born in the same house as Joseph Joachim in Kittsee), made a career in Austria, mainly in the outskirts of Vienna as a dance musician, and then immigrated in

the 1930s to Chicago, where he continued to perform in the large central European community.⁷ I also have worked my way through many of the thousands of compositions he wrote in Chicago, now held by his nephew, Alexander Knapp, emeritus professor of Jewish Music at the School for Oriental and African Studies, University of London.⁸ I know from this mass of material that Maurus Knapp almost never played or created anything “Jewish,” authentic or inauthentic (see fig. 2, the manuscript copy of three of Maurus Knapp’s compositions). His role in the history of the Jewish experience in the twentieth century is simply that of a symbol of revival.

The iconography of the Austrian klezmer musicians who were not klezmer musicians participates in processes of retrieving the past and reviving it as the present that Ruth Ellen Gruber has called “virtually Jewish.”⁹ In her book of the same title, Gruber in fact devotes the chapters of the second half to klezmer music in Europe, specifically to its revival in places in which it had little or no presence prior to the Holocaust, for example, Germany.¹⁰ With Gruber’s provocative portrayal of klezmer revival as a context from the history of the present, I should like to propose that two notions of revival dominate the historiography of Jewish music. First, for the critics of everything from Reform Judaism to the adaptation of musical instruments for the synagogue, the present always has the capacity of becoming virtually Jewish. In contrast, forming what Jewish historians call “counterhistory,” the discourse history of Jewish music unfolds as the search for authenticity, the belief that the past can be reinstated in the present. Neither concept of revival is for me fully satisfying, and in this essay, by seeking a possible middle ground, I ask why. I attempt to rethink revival itself from the perspectives of sacred music, moving away from a simple dichotomy of life and death, and then return to life. I hope to create a framework for thinking about Jewish music today, not as something wrenched from the past, but rather living and changing in the present.

Survival, Revival, and the Telos of Jewish Music History

Be-reshit, “in the beginning,” the ontology of Jewish music is about sacrifice and revival. The nature of Jewish sacrifice itself is contested throughout the Torah, and music retains its associations with sacrifice. Ontological questions about music and sacrifice arise in one of the crucial origin myths of Judaism, the “Akedah,” or the “Binding of Isaac,” told in the First Book of Moses (Genesis 22). Several fundamental issues about music, and all three aesthetic conditions of revival, arise already in this origin text of Genesis, in which Abraham substituted a ram for the sacrifice of his son, Isaac, after demonstrating his unflagging willingness to follow God’s command. First of all, the human sacrifice did not happen because animal sacrifice (the ram) had sufficed in the eyes of God. Second, the symbol of sacrifice became what was left after the ram’s sacrifice, its horn, the physical vessel of the shofar, the only instrument allowed in the synagogue. Third, the “musicality”—the signified meaning—of the shofar is one of marking endings and beginnings (e.g., of Rosh Ha-Shanah, the “New Year,” and, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement). Fourth, the broader signification of the Akedah has been one of marking the transition from myth to history, and the borders between the two continue to represent the borders between what is and is not music.¹¹

The *ontology* of Jewish music, from the beginning, is inseparable from sacrifice and loss, thus making it about the narrative recovery of the past through music. The nature of that ontology—of Jewish music, or music that provides meaning to Jewish history—is necessarily always bound together with *eschatology* and *soteriology*. Indeed, this order of concepts is crucial to revival’s metaphorical and metaphysical representation of life, death, and rebirth. Ontology, in the first

order, is concerned with the nature of being. The music of revival comes into being in specific ways. Its ontology exhibits pastness, which is realized in concrete ways, for the music of revival must be concrete enough to be lost and to be saved from being lost. The revival of music also has collective structures, which in turn invest it with performativity and social agency. In revival, music revives more than just itself. It revives the social meaning and cultural identities that music represents through performance.

Eschatology is a set of beliefs and doctrines that describe the relation of the human to death, and beyond death to the places in which life continues as afterlife. Eschatological notions about music in revival occupy the realm between ontology and soteriology. In this realm music “dies” in order that it may be revived. The aesthetics of eschatology are very complex in music, but they are nonetheless concrete and realizable rather than simply abstract. We witness the aesthetics of eschatology most clearly in the rituals of death. The organic metaphors with which musicologists construct music history, moreover, generate notions about the course of music’s life and its eventual death. Revival, obviously, relies on eschatology.

Revival crucially depends on and generates *soteriology*, the theological and aesthetic understanding of the transformations occurring in death; in other words, the passage of life to afterlife. In the strictest sense, revival is aesthetically equivalent to the transformations that occur once death has occurred. Though linked to ontology and eschatology, soteriology is really the crucial process of transformation accruing to music through revival. For those seeking revival it is particularly important that soteriology realizes the connections between the secular and the sacred in revival music. Revivalists believe that music restores life.

The soteriology of revival music reveals itself in the music itself, and it does so in many world religions, not only in the Abrahamic faiths. Basic religious texts—the Torah, the Bible, the Qu’ran, Vedic chant and the *Ramayana*, the teachings of the Buddha—are constantly given new life through performance. The performativity embedded in all these sacred texts, however, exists in a process of constant revival. Liturgy revives music through weekly cycles and the return of holidays. Basic texts, such as the Five Books of Moses, employ annual cycles, which as epics embody the life of a human being, returning to the beginning of that life after its end has been reached. The cycles of life and death, revived soteriologically through performance, are evident in all aspects of revival music; for example, through narrative structure in music. The rituals that accompany daily and life passages, too, are fundamentally processes of revival. Ritual transforms, and, accordingly, it revives.

It is crucial to remember that the revival the three aesthetic principles make possible is not simply a replication of what previously existed. Whereas a certain degree of cyclicity is present in the concepts, the soteriological moment differs from the ontological. The new takes the place of the old, and it does so by emulating the previous life. Revived music, though similarly meant to emulate the music of a previous life, receives its lease on life because it is new. The soteriological, thus, improves on the ontological, but it does so because revival is possible through the transformative and performative power that accrues to music when passing through the eschatological phase. Musical revival, in short, makes the world new and better, and it transforms the individual into a vessel for sacred music.

In Jewish music the interrelations among ontology, eschatology, and soteriology are so fluid that revival itself—as a primary rather than secondary condition—is embedded in what we understand Jewish music to be. Identifying music as Jewish may even require that one engage a

process of revival. This dependent relation, moreover, determines the nature of other aspects of reviving Jewish music. If we assume that loss has occurred, then authenticity does not exist in any contemporary form, orally transmitted or otherwise. Authentic Jewish music, for some, will be the music of the Temple, but because the Temple has not existed for two millennia (the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem took place in 70 c.e.), authentic music, too, has not existed for two millennia.¹² Jewish music, moreover, is defined by moments of great loss—destruction, dispersion, pogrom, holocaust—and characteristic of those moments is that great loss occurred. Loss is, however, not primarily a manifestation of some sort of finality or irretrievability. As a counterargument or counterhistory we might consider Jewish practices of saving the past from destruction. From the Dead Sea Scrolls to the medieval *genizot*—the *geniza* is a storage room for a Jewish synagogue or community where writings, documents, and artifacts are kept in lieu of being discarded—Jewish traditions are stored in order to prevent loss from occurring.¹³ In my own ethnomusicological study of Jewish music in Eastern Europe I witnessed in the Romanian city of Oradea one of the most striking cases of endeavors to forestall loss. There, in 1996, about seven hundred remaining members of a Jewish community that had numbered more than seventy thousand prior to the Holocaust were burying their prayer- and songbooks in the grounds behind the synagogue in order to preserve them against destruction. The Jews of modern Oradea buried their books consciously, endowing them with the capacity to be revived in the future.

Opposing loss and eschatological finality are survival and the soteriological hold on life *until it can be revived*. The *geniza* and the Holocaust museum, both designed to hold on to life, are about both loss and survival. This dual role is crucial to the ways in which music is ontologically present in them. Music, therefore, acquires a narrative power to cling to the past, marking loss, but also to signify the future, remaining always open to revival. That narrative power is embedded in the complex relation between oral and written tradition in Jewish music. Performance cannot abandon what music has accumulated through oral transmission. To identify Jewish music too completely through written tradition would only hasten the loss that oral transmission seeks to forestall.

The complexity of musical revival as a process shared and generated by Jewish concepts of ontology, eschatology, and soteriology is emblematic of the problem of Jewish music's very identity. Virtually no one, therefore, will make claims for what Jewish music *really* is; there is no satisfactory definition of Jewish music. The problem of Jewish music's identity, on the contrary, is tied up with what it was and what it no longer can be. The limits of revival are so hard to determine precisely because they are constantly changing as the precise borders between past and future are constantly and radically shifting.

Jewish Music and the Renewal of Jewish Worship and the Arts

The motivation that unifies and provides a network for Jewish symbols of past and present is the restoration of history. In the modern era, and in the modern Jewish experience, the greatest anxiety arises from the sense that history has been lost. History, of course, is a highly politicized means of ascribing identity in modernity. History justifies laying claim to the present, indeed, in all its temporal and geographical realities. The power of music to narrate history, and thus use it as a bridge between the past and present, makes Jewish music revival so crucial.

Reclaiming the historical *longue durée* for Jewish modernity pairs revival with another concept

tenaciously attributed to Jewish history: survival. It would be even more to the point to claim that the real dualism yielding revival is that of “sacrifice and survival.” The notion of sacrifice examined above generates the need for survival. Survival, thus, results from the pogroms and destruction, from the conditional connection between assimilation and Holocaust that for many define the modern Jewish experience. One does not have to look far to recognize how powerfully the trope of survival underlies the narration of Jewish history. Any Jewish museum—one in an Eastern European synagogue, or the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.—displays its contents as artifacts that have managed to survive. The surviving artifacts, moreover, serve as substitutes for all that has not survived, in other words the loss of human lives.¹⁴ Jewish museums are frequently located in cities where survival was not possible. They couple survival with memorial, and in this sense they generate a particularly Jewish possibility for revival. Revival, arguably, does not so much give new life as represent survival at the moment it was threatened. The emphasis shifts from the soteriological to the eschatological, or rather to a sort of liminal state between them.

Survival becomes further complicated as a condition of Jewish revival because of the many ways it creates alternative conditions for performing the past as present. Survival provides a way of accounting for what cannot entirely be revived; in other words, responding to the plaguing questions about “all that we cannot know about early Jewish music.” Instruments have disappeared. Repertories have disappeared because of oral tradition. The musicians have disappeared into pogroms and the Holocaust. Contexts for performance—ghettos, synagogues, and dance halls—no longer exist. Music acquires symbolic importance because, if the culture did not survive completely, there is a belief, or claim, that “at least the music survives.” In this way music gives life to the past when musicians perform its fragments and imagine its wholeness in the present.

Abraham Zvi Idelsohn and the Great Revival of Jewish Music

As with religious revival, the revival of music is recurrent, unfolding through the many historical moments to which music and musicians respond. I turn now to the first of several seminal moments of Jewish music revival in the twentieth century, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn’s fieldwork in Jerusalem from 1911 to 1913, which produced the *Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz*. These ten volumes of Jewish music from the diaspora, published from 1914 to 1932, are known in English as the *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies*.¹⁵ No single publication has so profoundly shaped the sound of Jewish music in its many genres and practices as has the *Thesaurus*. It musically mapped two and a half millennia of diaspora, and it musically charted the course of Jewish music history in the twentieth century. It was a font of melodies for Israeli composers and klezmer musicians alike. It bore witness to musical contact between Jewish communities across centuries and continents. The *Thesaurus* produced nothing short of a Great Revival.

When Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1882–1938) employed a wax-disc recorder from the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Phonogramm-Archiv as a means for recording Jewish music in and around Jerusalem in 1911, he believed that he would encounter Jewish music in its most authentic, canonic forms.¹⁶ Idelsohn left his cantorial post in Johannesburg in search of an absent center, the Jewish music that had not survived centuries of diaspora in the Ashkenazic world in which European Jews lived. His motivation to encounter the authentic was personal and professional—Idelsohn grew up in an observant Latvian family and studied the cantorate, in which profession

he had secured a position in Regensburg before accepting a call to Johannesburg—but his journey in search of the real Jewish music was also a product of his time. Idelsohn was an intellectual and a cosmopolitan, whose grasp of Jewish music crossed denominational and regional boundaries, and whose understanding of European music history and theory was expansive. He had studied *hazzanut* with Boruch Schor in Berlin and Emanuel Kirschner in Munich, and he counted Heinrich Zöllner and Hermann Kretschmar among his professors in music at Leipzig. Ironically, it was his broad understanding of both European and Jewish music on the common ground of German liberalism that led him to rebel. Idelsohn knew exactly what he did not want Jewish music to become and to be.

Idelsohn imagined that he would have to make an historicist and revivalist move, searching for Jewish music prior to what he called its “Germanization.” The conditions of authentic Jewish music that he imagined at the beginning of his three years in Jerusalem comprised the following:

1. Jerusalem was the historical and geographical center of Jewish music.
2. The synagogue was the institution in which Jewish music was practiced.
3. Jewish music was fundamentally vocal, and the texts that generated it were connected to liturgy, ritual, and prayer.
4. In this pure form, Jewish music remained intact through oral transmission.
5. Jewish music was old.
6. The Jewish communities of Palestine had survived several millennia of Diaspora because they were tenaciously isolated.
7. The shape of melody and the form of individual songs were uniquely Jewish, thus permitted no exchange with non-Jewish traditions.
8. Jewish music encoded and expressed aspects of ethnic/national identity.

Taken as a whole, these conditions left little conceptual space for the in-betweenness brought about by modernity. Each condition was predicated on the ways in which it excluded otherness, the conditions of which also resulted from what it was not rather than what it was. Precisely because the distinction between the Jewish and the non-Jewish would be so clear in the Yishuv, the modern Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, there could also be no space for the encroachment of cosmopolitanism. Idelsohn also adopted methodologies that would assist him and assure him in his search for authentic Jewish music. His approach was to be linguistic in several important respects.

First of all, from the conditions above we realize that language and text—the verbal constituents of song—were inseparable from his project. In two ways these provided him with humanistic approaches from the distant and recent past. The exegetic concern for language was fundamentally Jewish (e.g., from medieval traditions of Jewish learning), and the philological concern for text was an extension of Enlightenment humanism.

Second, Idelsohn’s linguistic agenda was supported by technology, namely the latest advances in recording practices, developed and employed by the Imperial Academy of Sciences. Idelsohn found a way of representing everything that could be music, which is to say, he denied the possibility that a hybrid music could inhabit a domain beyond representation.¹⁷ His modes and melodies were located through transcriptional methods that triangulated them and located them in a space that is reducible to the measurements of physical vibrations. The employment of free-rhythm notation—the absence of meter and barlines—also serves as a tactic of filling in

the temporal spaces that might be perceived as culturally hybrid. The conditions of authenticity would seem to be tautological, so tightly devised that he, Idelsohn, as fieldworker, was bound to find abundant evidence of the Jewish music he sought.¹⁸

The music that Idelsohn encountered, recorded, and published resisted the authentic, which is to say that it came almost paradigmatically to demonstrate the conditions of in-betweenness. For the historiography of Jewish music Idelsohn de facto generated new categories and concepts, and he devoted the remaining twenty-five years of his life to locating Jewish music in the border areas separating and shared by Jewish communities in the diaspora. The conditions of in-betweenness that dominate the history of Jewish music research include the following:

1. Musical difference fills in the spaces of an historical and geographical map of diaspora.
2. The boundaries between sacred and secular blur.
3. Musical change is normative, thus removing the special privilege afforded to the old.
4. Individual performers, from religious to musical specialists (*hazzanim* to *klezmerim*, that is cantors and klezmer musicians) leave their imprint on Jewish music, pushing it ineluctably toward stylistic borders.

Although he had mastered the methods and tools that ensured authenticity, Idelsohn reformulated their use. Rather than confirming the theories he brought to the field, the methods and tools untethered his imagination. Just as his transcriptions and publications rendered notation exactly, he gathered his transcriptions and published them with steady recourse to comparison. Difference began with pronunciation and accentuation (*Aussprache*), and his charts therefore made it clear that the sound of song texts shifted away from the core (see fig. 3). When he constructed comparative melodic charts, he determined a middle path, allowing for similarity and difference, opening the conceptual borders for individual creativity and religio-cultural exchange (see fig. 4). Jewish music in Idelsohn's publications, above all the *Thesaurus*—which grew from the field recordings, at least in the early volumes—articulated and occupied complex spaces of in-betweenness.

Idelsohn's research and the *Thesaurus* unleashed revival in successive waves. By reimagining the diaspora with temporal-geographical fluidity, the *Thesaurus* multiplied the sheer number of repertoires, practices, and sites for Jewish music. What was meant to be authentic became real, living in oral tradition, and inscribed through written tradition. Revivalist thought and action were rerouted from the search for authenticity to the realization of a multidimensional past in a changing present.

Klezmer, Cabaret, and Other Performances of the Virtual Sacred

The revival unleashed by Abraham Zvi Idelsohn and the *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies* depended on modernity to give form and substance to the authentic. In contrast, the revivals of Jewish music in a postmodern age engage the past in entirely different ways, realizing the virtual and giving it entirely different form and substance. I turn now to several moments and processes of postmodern revival, allowing myself a disjunct shift in tone, texture, and methodology. The shift is disjunct not only because it contrasts the beginning of one century of Jewish-music revival with another—the twentieth with the twenty-first—but because it also recognizes a moment of disjuncture between these century beginnings, the Holocaust, whose impact on revival has been profound.

In this essay, therefore, I attempt to assemble evidence to support my claim that revival

stretches across the entire soundscape of what we today call Jewish music, recognizing that this term itself signals modernity. The presence of revival is all the more sweeping because Jewish music can claim one of the most explicit revival movements, klezmer, which itself has come to dominate the identity of Jewish music itself.¹⁹

The issues of survival and history are, of course, obvious in klezmer. The klezmer revival depends on surviving the Holocaust. Klezmer musicians bill themselves as bearers of a tradition that has reached its final purveyors, the “last klezmer musicians” of many recordings;²⁰ today they learn from survivors, but even more, they seek out old recordings and treat them as a precious *Urtext*.²¹ The revival depends on surviving in places that escaped assimilation and destruction. Museums, memorials, and festivals all provide postmodern performance sites, enoiced and multiplied by each new ensemble. It depends on performance in places and contexts that never knew klezmer before the historical moments that klezmer survived. Klezmer thrives in Berlin, where it had no ontology prior to the Holocaust.

The klezmer revival recontextualizes survival and the relation between eschatology and soteriology in other ways. In particular, I want to suggest that ritual and the ritualization of history have become crucial to the discourse and meaning of the klezmer revival. We witness this most clearly in the ways in which the loose definition of klezmer as “Jewish wedding music” has generated a discursive core for the klezmer revival. This association was deliberate in the choice of Maurus Knapp and his fellow string players to serve as the cover illustration shown in figure 1.²²

Through klezmer music the ritualization of history becomes a discourse about survival and revival. The metaphors about reproducing the past through musical performance could not be clearer, which is perhaps why klezmer revivalists make them more explicit all the time. Indeed, musicians step into—or are drafted as members of—the klezmer revival because of the invitation to play at weddings and bar mitzvahs. Ask anyone who has played klezmer even once and they’ll tell you they’ve played at a wedding.

We must not overlook the obvious, namely that a concept such as the “ritualization of history”—blurring the boundaries between ritual and historical narration of time—is fundamentally a contradiction. Does this mean by extension that revival draws out the contradictions in history by further blurring the boundary between ritual and performance? Does ritual negate history by generating, through performance, repetition and repeatability? Does the past enter the present only to recycle back to the past, which then depends on realization in the present?

Before proceeding much farther, I need to respond to a question that has probably been taking shape as many readers think about the turn to klezmer in this essay: Isn’t klezmer really secular? Even as wedding music, do not its processes of ritualization actually lead to secularization? The answer to the question is an equivocal “yes” and “no.” Of course, klezmer occupies the public sphere outside the synagogue, or, for that matter, the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. Still, it depends on a tension with the synagogue and other ritual spaces. In the age of revival, that space is increasingly occupied by the Jewish chorus, and its agency is increasingly the product of Jewish choralism. First of all, Jewish choralism is expanding rapidly across the New Europe—Europe in transition since the fall of socialist state governments in eastern Europe—metaphorically and virtually reviving the destroyed Jewish communities of central and eastern

Europe. Second, the Jewish chorus provides the counterpart for the klezmer ensemble, together sacralizing the public spaces in which they perform. Through performance, the chorus no less than the klezmer band revives the collective of the Jewish community.

The Ethnographic Moment as Site of Jewish Music Revival

The modern Jewish history that I trace in this essay becomes increasingly familiar as I enter the history of the present, the period and site of my research as an ethnomusicologist studying sacred world music today, prominently, of course, Jewish music. I turn thus to a series of ethnographic moments in which the memory of Jewish culture and history in Germany returned through sacred and secular ritual. I do this as an ethnomusicologist and a musician, especially as one who actively combines historical and ethnographic approaches. I do this also as an ethnographer and scholar of ritual working with history. In recent years during frequent fieldwork trips to central and eastern Europe, I have assembled a series of ethnographic snapshots to piece together the moments of revival that underlie the process of healing Europe after the fissures of the twentieth century. What follows, drawing me toward the conclusion that signifies the present, are several of those snapshots of revival.

On the evening of 8 July 2005, soon after worshipers at the twenty-first-century icon of Jewish Berlin, the Oranienburgerstraße Synagoge—the “New Synagogue” as it is now known—had departed after Sabbath evening services, a street band arrived to ply the restaurants that flank the synagogue. The band comprised three Roma musicians from Romania: a trumpeter, an accordion player, and a *darbukka*, or goblet drum, player. An aficionado, even fan, of street musicians, I paused to listen as these Roma, whom I had been noticing elsewhere in Berlin, played to the diners on the street in front of the several restaurants that made vague and not-so-vague gestures toward Jewish cuisine (see fig. 5).²³

It was hardly surprising, I realized soon, that the skillful band regaled the diners on this Sabbath evening with Jewish music, with a pseudo-klezmer sound at first, but a sound that itself warmed up as the diners and the musicians increasingly interacted. Neither diners nor musicians at this epicenter of public Jewishness in Berlin were Jewish, but the music was, and the ritual and historical moments were. The Roma klezmer sound was the emblem of reform, and why not? In the New Synagogue Louis Lewandowski (1821–1894) developed the Jewish Reform liturgy in the nineteenth century, and Berlin’s first woman cantor, Avital Gerstetter (born in 1972), performs a different liturgical reform—from Jewish singer-songwriters such as Debbie Friedman in the United States—in the twenty-first.²⁴

On the same evening of 8 July 2005, perhaps two kilometers away, the German equivalent of the Academy Awards was just getting underway. Within only moments it became clear that the big winner of the Deutscher Filmpreis, staged at the Berlin Philharmonic along the border between the former East and West Berlins, was going to be the film *Alles auf Zucker* (*Go for Zucker* in the English version of the title). Filmed by the rising star of German cinema, the Jewish director Dani Levy, *Alles auf Zucker* is a marvelous revival of Yiddish theater in Berlin, which had thrived a century before in the Scheunenviertel, right behind the Oranienburgerstraße Synagogue, where a mass migration of eastern European Jews had carved out a new neighborhood. All the themes of the pre-Holocaust Yiddish theater and musical were there: East vs. West; observant vs. secular Judaism; the crass pursuit of questionably-gained wealth vs. the economy of piety. The main character, Jaeckie Zuckermann, was a gambler, who had fallen out with his brother, an orthodox Jew in Frankfurt am Main; the film and its music were about being

Jewish in Berlin in the era of emancipation and in the post-Holocaust Era. One did not have to think too hard to imagine a revival of the collaborations of Bertolt Brecht with Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler; even more deliberate was the debt owed to the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), with the conflicted Al Jolson (also called Jakie) in the title role. Many Germans celebrated—and congratulated themselves—when the film that was overtly German *and* Jewish took home six German film prizes.

Ritual and history converged in these events taking place in the same moment on a single Sabbath evening in Berlin. Klezmer and Yiddish theater were retrieved from the past and revived to signal reconciliation in the present. For sixty years exactly, Germany had struggled to resolve to some measure its destruction of Europe's Jews. Only two months earlier, on land halfway between the New Synagogue and the hall of the Berlin Philharmonic, Germany had dedicated the "Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas" ("Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe"; see fig. 6), where music was also performed as a moment of virtual Jewishness, with the chorus of the "White Stork Synagogue" in Wrocław, Poland. There is, in fact, no viable community at this synagogue, much less a synagogue chorus. The Chorus of the White Stork Synagogue does exist, but entirely outside the life of the synagogue that gives the chorus its name. Throughout Berlin in 2005—and beyond, throughout much of Europe on this sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II—Jewish music was being remembered in fragmentary and virtual forms, only to be revived to respond to the pressing need for reconciliation in the present. Klezmer bands and choruses were joining Yiddish theaters and cabaret troupes, not just to remember the past, but to give it new life, to revive it, as the future.

Jewish Music beyond the Authentic and the Virtual

I close this essay with an ethnographic moment that, at the time I am writing, has yet to take place, but will leave its trace in the history of Jewish music revival by the time the essay appears. On 2 February 2009, the New Budapest Orpheum Society (see fig. 7) performs in Clärchens Ballhaus, a well-known restaurant/club/theater on Auguststraße, immediately behind the New Synagogue, in the heart of Berlin's old and new Jewish neighborhood. Near the end of a tour through the cosmopolitan heartland of Jewish cabaret, Vienna and Berlin, this evening requires that we shape our program carefully, appealing, on one hand, to youthful Berliners who now occupy the old Jewish neighborhoods and, on the other, to the substantial presence of colleagues in musicology and Jewish studies in Berlin, with whom we have worked for many years. There will be those who wish to hear standards from Yiddish stage and film, and there will be those eager to hear our new arrangements of Hanns Eisler and Kurt Tucholsky songs. Eisler, after all, lived in this neighborhood during the final fifteen years of his life, when he was the leading composer of the German Democratic Republic, and the next street over bears Tucholsky's name.

The program we intend to perform on February 2 should respond to all these conflicting juxtapositions of Jewish identity in this neighborhood of virtual postmodern Jewish culture in the twenty-first century. What we shall play, in effect, only makes sense in the virtual present that we are able to realize musically. My fellow musicians and I know well that, if we heighten the sense of revival, the evening will be more exotic, more Jewish, and more redemptive. We prefer that this not be the case, but as performers we are aware that our performances of an unknown collaboration between Edmund Nick and Erich Kästner, *Die möblierte Moral* (*The Well-Furnished Morals*, 1930–1931), and a set of *Three Yiddish Songs* (*B̄rezulinka*), op. 53 (1944),

composed by Viktor Ullmann in the last year of his life in the concentration camp at Terezín, will attract even greater attention because they are revivals. They frame the eschatological moment of the Holocaust.²⁵

Jewish music thrives at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, enjoying a presence and diversity in sacred and secular practice unlike any time in its past. Its globalization has, in some ways, been natural in a postmodern sense, if not because it offered itself in such vastly different forms. We may wonder why it is possible to make such statements as these, which are nothing if not paradoxical after a century in which the loss of Jewish lives and music was unimaginable. It was that loss, the seeming eschatological void, nonetheless, that gave such urgent motivation and shape to revival.

Not without a certain sense of personal irony, I conclude this essay by saying that it may no longer be provocative to claim that “we are all revivalists.” In the age of revival, Jewish music no longer forces us to choose between the authentic or the virtual. Rather, revival is an underlying force of the present, realizing Jewish music in such ways that it connects worship to the arts, replacing the anxiety over death and survival with the celebration of life through revival.

ENDNOTES

1. The New Budapest Orpheum Society is an Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Chicago. Established in 2000, we perform historical traditions from central and eastern Europe at synagogues and in Jewish community centers, at universities and cultural institutions (e.g., the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum), at clubs and cabarets in Chicago and on Broadway, and on smaller and larger tours (e.g., in Vienna and Berlin during January and February 2009). The ensemble has released three CDs: *Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano: Jewish Cabaret, Popular and Political Songs 1900–1945* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 65, 2002); *Jewish Cabaret in Exile* (Cedille Records 90000 110, 2009); and the accompanying CD to Philip V. Bohlman, ed., *Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). The ensemble draws upon repertoires of folk, popular, and art song from my research. Whether it revives or reimagines Jewish political and cabaret song remains a question of perspective.
2. For example, the CD, Odessa Klezmer Band, *Izsák Száraz Fája – Isaac’s Dry Tree* (ERCD 022).
3. I later revised and published that talk as Philip V. Bohlman, “Historisierung als Ideologie: Die ‘Klesmerisierung’ der jüdischen Musik,” in *Jüdischen Musik? Fremdbilder – Eigenbilder*, ed. Eckhard John and Heidy Zimmermann (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2004) 241–55.
4. For example, *Klezmer Music: A Marriage of Heaven and Earth*. 1996. Ellipsis Arts 4090.
5. The clarinet and other wind sounds in contemporary klezmer bands were added through American influence in the first part of the twentieth century. The string ensemble is far more common in eastern Europe, not only in ethnic folk music but also in the music of Roma.
6. Philip V. Bohlman, *Jüdische Volksmusik – Eine mitteleuropäische Geistesgeschichte* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2005).
7. For a recent collections of essays on Jewish music in Burgenland see Gerhard Winkler, ed.,

Musik der Juden im Burgenland (Eisenstadt: Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten aus dem Burgenland, 2006). Not by coincidence, the publisher used the same photograph of Maurus Knapp for the cover.

8. Alex Knapp, Rudolf Pietsch (Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien), and I have begun a collaborative study of Maurus Knapp and his contributions to Austrian, American, and Jewish music.

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

10. Klezmer appeared in the German-speaking vernacular culture of central Europe prior to the Holocaust only as a rare case of Eastern exoticism, the Jewish Other rather than a Self.

11. I survey the broad historical range of metaphysical questions about meaning and Jewish music in the Prologue to Philip V. Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) xv–xxxiii.

12. Simon Goldhill, nonetheless, argues that the historical consciousness and meaningfulness survived its destruction; see Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

13. The most famous *geniza* was that of Cairo; its contents were revived for storage and analysis at Cambridge University where one can actually visit the *geniza* in a special library wing. See S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Story: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–1993).

14. In May 2003, for example, the New Budapest Orpheum Society opened the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum's exhibit commemorating the Nazi book burning in May 1933 with a performance of songs mobilizing resistance to censorship and fascist measures against artists and musicians. Value accrues to music, thus, because it survives destruction.

15. A. Z. Idelsohn, *Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz*, 10 vols. (Berlin et al.: Benjamin Harz et al., 1914–1932).

16. To hear the field recordings for the first five volumes in a modern (revived) and digitized format see Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed., *The Collection of Abraham Zvi Idelsohn* (1911–1913), 3 CDs and a CD-ROM, and the accompanying book with essays by Philip V. Bohlman and Edwin Seroussi (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2005).

17. He published these during World War I as A. Z. Idelsohn, *Phonographierte Gesänge und Aussprachproben des Hebräischen der jemenitischen, persischen und syrischen Juden* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1917). The seminal study of technologies of representation is Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. by Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

18. That the opposite was true is a matter of historical record generated by the *Thesaurus* and now the set of CDs digitally documenting his fieldwork. These add another layer of revival (see note 17).

19. I have observed that when I say that I work on Jewish music I am greeted with the response, "Oh, you mean klezmer"; see Bohlman, "Historisierung als Ideologie."

20. See, e.g., Leopold Kozlowski, *The Last Klezmer* (Global Village CD 168).

21. See, e.g., *Yikhes: Frühe Klezmer-Aufnahmen von 1907–1939* (Trikont US-0179, 1991).

22. Cf., e.g., the title of one of the most widely distributed klezmer compilations, *Klezmer Music: A Marriage of Heaven and Earth* (Ellipsis Arts 4090, 1996).

23. For a study of street music in Germany see Philip V. Bohlman, "Music, Modernity, and the Foreign in the New Germany," *Modernism/Modernity* 1/1 (1993) 121–52.

24. The Oranienburgerstraße Synagogue and its chief cantor, Estrongo Nachama, produce and market CDs of its own liturgy, past and present; for example, Estrongo Nachama, *Es tönt von der Erde zum Himmel empor: Deutsche Kedescha* (GEMA CD 66.21187), which is exclusively devoted to performances of liturgical works by Louis Lewandowski.

25. Both sets appear on New Budapest Orpheum Society, *Jewish Cabaret in Exile*.

ADDITIONAL READING

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