sciendo

Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics 19 (1): 207–234
DOI: 10.2478/jef-2025-0010

COLLECTIVE SINGING IN THE JEWISH *SHTETL*

MICHAEL LUKIN
Associate Researcher
Jewish Music Research Centre, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Yitzhak Rabin Building, Room 2111, Mount Scopus
Jerusalem 9190501, Israel
e-mail: michael.lukin@mail.huji.ac.il
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7349-0173

ABSTRACT
Traditional collective singing among Eastern Yiddish speakers – a heretofore unexplored phenomenon – is discussed as part of the European-Jewish musical polysystem, which evolved in small towns (called a *shtetl* in Yiddish) from early modernity to the Holocaust (1933–1945). In the absence of living informants in Eastern Europe, the only applicable methodology is historical ethnomusicology, employing a comparative analysis of late documentation, in light of premodern literary sources, with the goal of reconstructing and describing musical semiotics. It reveals that the main types of collective singing were marked by an interaction from the idiom of instrumental music – (*klezmer*) *intonatsia*, apparently due to the latter's symbolism as representing the communal experience of a wedding. Liturgical refrains, folk-theatre choruses, wedding songs, paraliturgical domestic chants, and Hasidic wordless tunes shared specific musical patterns and overall aesthetic principles – a preference for asymmetry and a combination of old Ashkenazi and Slavic features. Although not central to the traditional music by Yiddish speakers, these collective songs comprised a significant constituent of the European soundscape.

KEYWORDS: Jewish music • Yiddish • *nigunim* • folk theatre

The current study discusses the heretofore unexplored phenomenon of collective singing in the musical tradition of Eastern Yiddish speakers, or Eastern Ashkenazim, a population of Central and Eastern European Jews that numbered approximately ten million in the 1930s, on the eve of the Holocaust.[1] The time period of the emergence and flourishing of this tradition spans from early modernity to the post-Holocaust decades, in which the old Jewish communities of *shtetl*s, small market towns situated within the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, ceased to exist.[2] Most types of the collective singing that developed in this realm, although they did not incorporate instrumental accompaniment, embodied an encounter between vocal and instrumental music; the discussion of their interaction as part of the European-Jewish musical polysystem is the main goal of this study.[3]

ISSN 1736-6518 (print), ISSN 2228-0987 (online)

In accordance with the religious forbiddance of using musical instruments on Sabbath and holidays, most of the musical repertoires that developed in this cultural realm were vocal: liturgical, paraliturgical, mystical, and domestic secular singing, as well as folk theatre that was entirely sung. Along with these vocal genres, Eastern Ashkenazim also developed a tradition of instrumental, or *klezmer*, music performed by *klezmorim*, i.e., semi-professional instrumentalists, usually acting as members of their own Jewish guilds (Feldman 2016). The main scene of this music was the wedding, and, according to the extant evidence, klezmer music was usually not accompanied by singing (ibid.: 57). Consequently, most of the musical repertoires by Eastern Yiddish speakers were either purely vocal or purely instrumental.

In what follows, the key types of collective singing by adults of both genders among the traditional shtetl communities will be analysed in a historical perspective and in broad regional contexts, and their dialogues with the klezmer repertoires will be introduced. The enquiry follows the historical ethnomusicological approach: late modern musical documentation is examined in order to identify various historical layers reflected in it, mainly by using the verbal evidence from earlier times and a comparative method. The methodological choice is dictated by the absence of living Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe, coupled with the scarcity of musical documentation from earlier periods: Eastern Ashkenazi musical traditions were primarily transmitted orally and were documented mainly in the first half of the 20th century. Notwithstanding these barriers, reconstruction of the main forms of the collective singing seems more feasible in the current information era than it was in the period following the Holocaust.

COMMUNAL AND INDIVIDUAL MUSICAL EXPERIENCES

As emphasised by Moisey Beregovskiy (1892–1961), the prominent scholar of Yiddish-speaking communities' music, most types of their vocal music were performed solo (cited in Slobin 2000 [1982]: 292). This is true not only for the songs comprising the background of everyday life of the non-elitist Yiddish-speaking society, but also for the other, no less prominent repertoire – liturgical singing (Feldman 2016: 39–42). In both cases, the most salient voice heard in the Eastern Ashkenazi soundscape was the individual voice. This can perhaps be largely explained by Jewish society's disconnection from collective agricultural work, as an outcome of the official ban on Jews owning land and residing in villages. Although the predominant forms of communal vocalisation among Eastern Slavs extended beyond the fields, they were firmly rooted in peasant culture and intrinsically tied to the agrarian lifestyle (Goshovskiy 1971: 11–14, 41, 82–85). Shtetl inhabitants, remaining apart from this culture, were also largely separate from its songs. Another significant factor in the scarcity of collective singing was the ongoing rabbinical opposition to publicly acknowledged music-making during the weekdays, due to the tradition of mourning the destruction of the Temple, along with a fear of immodest behaviour (Shiloah 1992: 73–76).

Consequently, loud collective singing was perceived in the Eastern Ashkenazi soundscape as an alien phenomenon. Thus, Moshe Hayim Efrayim[4] (2011 [1810]: 142) recalls in his book of sermons: "As I heard from my grandfather… the nations of the world

singing 'lider' ['songs'] – in all of them is concealed an aspect of awe and love, spreading from the higher to the lower spheres."[5] Although this mystical teaching aimed first and foremost to emphasise the so-called "divine sparks", that is, beauty concealed in everyday practices, at the same time it offers a glimpse into a significant ethnomusicological phenomenon, by making clear that the beautiful folk songs, *lider*, do not belong to the Jewish realm. The original Hebrew text uses the vernacular word *lider* and not its Hebrew equivalent, likely intending to emphasise the folkish nature of the songs. Since this saying addressed the collective experience of the Jewish audience, in all probability the type of songs referred to is loud Ukrainian collective singing, heard from a distance and thus familiar to everyone. Indeed, if it were referring primarily to the solo singing of Ukrainian lyrical songs inside people's homes, the teaching would become meaningless, since Jews also had the same practice, and therefore it would be illogical to mention "the nations of the world".

In a similar vein, one of the most popular bards of the mid-19th century, Velvl Zbarzher-Ehrenkranz (below Zbarzher; 1826–1883),[6] acknowledged that collective loud joyful singing in a vernacular language belongs solely to the Jews' neighbours and is unknown among Jews. In 1869 he brought this observation to explain his motivation to publish his own songs, which could fill the gap and provide the Jewish communities with the missing songs that could be sung collectively (Ehrenkranz 1869: 6–7, cited in Lukin 2020: 87). While mentioning that both Hebrew/Aramaic domestic paraliturgical chants and non-Jewish songs are hard to comprehend due to the lingual barriers, Zbarzher testifies that even without fully understanding the lyrics, Galician Jews of the 19th century would sing them, lacking a suitable repertoire in Yiddish. Yet, even if less prominent than the solo genres, some forms of collective singing, which exceeded the boundaries outlined by Zbarzher, did exist in this society.

Various performance contexts of the genres that developed in the traditional shtetl introduce a distinction between collective singing and a passive communal musical experience: although repertoires requiring active collective participation were limited, numerous other communal practices involved intentional listening or occasional hearing. These included: hearing the study of Talmud[7] at home or at *bes-medresh* (Yiddish: 'a study hall'; Idelsohn 1932 vol 8: 70–71; Kahan-Newman 2000); listening to the musical recitation of songs from printed pamphlets in Yiddish (Turniansky 1989); singing while working in small groups (Lukin 2020; 2022); listening to non-Jewish songs in taverns and elsewhere outside the home, as noted above; and participation in various rituals of the life cycle such as listening to loud chanting of Psalms at the bed of a woman in labour or an ill person, a public circumcision ceremony, a funeral, or lamenting at a cemetery (Deutsch 2011: 103–315).

The following discussion of the forms of active collective participation is arranged in accordance with performance contexts: liturgical refrains; folk-theatre choral interludes; Yiddish songs, functionally revolving around wedding rituals; paraliturgical domestic singing (i.e., those Hebrew/Aramaic domestic paraliturgical chants whose performance in the 19th century was mentioned by Zbarzher; see Ehrenkranz 1869: 6–7 cited in Lukin 2020: 87); and mystical singing of Hasidic chants. Their family resemblances will be identified, and reasons for examining them as parts of one overarching phenomenon will be outlined.

NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

An exhaustive discussion of the entire musical polysystem, which developed over hundreds of years among such a large population, is impossible within the limits of a journal article. However, the existence and multiplicity of affinities between various types of collective singing and other constituents of this polysystem cannot be ignored. As an exception to the norm, collective singing invites a discussion of specific aspects of the Eastern European Jewish musical tradition, thus serving as a particular case that illustrates the whole.

The choice of a historical ethnomusicological methodology, along with the selection of musical documentation (i.e., notation and audio recordings), is dictated by four factors: the lack of opportunity to interview living informants in Eastern Europe; the significant transformation of their traditions in the musical activities of their descendants; the dearth of documentation for specific genres and partial geographical coverage; and, as a result of these factors, the scarcity of scholarship on many aspects of the European Jewish musical landscape. The absence of conceptualisation of collective singing in the shtetl, and the corresponding lack of research on this phenomenon, is another consequence of the annihilation of informants, scholars, and archives during the Holocaust and other upheavals of the 20th century (Feldman and Lukin 2017). The present study therefore relies on the benefits of the information age: wide panoramic overviews that were previously impossible partially compensate for these information gaps. Although incomplete, the surviving documentation that became available in the 21st century allows for the reconstruction of significant parts of the musical polysystem and provides a framework for future investigation into collective singing among Eastern Yiddish speakers, a phenomenon that, despite apparent similarities across its various manifestations, has yet to be fully assessed.

The scope of available sources and studies is described in each of the sections below. While the Hasidic chants represent the most fully documented and researched type of collective singing, folk theatre choruses are notated only minimally and are not represented in the audio documentation. A key feature, bridging between these various types of collective singing is a particular *intonatsia.* The Russian musicologist Boris Asaf'yev developed this term within the broader framework of music theory, and especially as a theoretical model for the study of folk music, to designate a musical motif associated with a specific category of similar motifs that share both musical and semantic features (see Asaf'yev 1987; Zemtsovsky 1997: 189–192; in the European Jewish context: Feldman 2022: 7–9; Lukin 2022: 113, 127, 133). Identifying the intonatsia of instrumental music in vocal genres sheds light on the historical development of various forms of collective singing as well as their semiotics.

COLLECTIVE SINGING WITHIN SYNAGOGAL LITURGY

Since the crystallisation of the musical arrangement of the Eastern Ashkenazi liturgy and its departure from the older Western European style – in all probability in the 17th century – its most salient feature was solo recitation and solo singing. The community's participation was largely limited to individual private silent prayers, listening to a cantor or leader, responding with short phrases such as 'amen', and at times singing in unison short rhythmic melodies, especially as refrains within the long liturgical poems intoned on holidays (Goldberg 2019: 43–45, 73–75). These melodies will be discussed in this section, along with an additional type of collective monophonic singing in the synagogue, the 'priestly blessing'. As will be elaborated, the extramusical functions fulfilled by the melodies of the two types, and consequently their melodic contours, differed. At the same time, both resembled klezmer tunes.

The traditional setting of synagogal music was either a leading lay person or a semi-professional cantor accompanied by a few choristers, the latter quite often being just two: a bass singer and a boy singing in higher registers. The main role of the choristers was to support the cantor, sing short refrains, or temporarily take his place to allow him to rest, all while adding colour to the music. Additionally, the surviving musical notation suggests a limited repertoire of communal singing, where choristers possibly sang together with the congregation.

This documentation displays a number of simple rhythmic tunes, differing stylistically from other excerpts performed by the choristers.[8] Although I know of no verbal evidence testifying that premodern Eastern European congregations did indeed take part in singing these refrains, the musical features of these tunes apparently encouraged such participation, aiming to increase participants' emotional involvement in the service. Therefore, these melodies themselves might serve as musical testimonies that compensate for the lack of the verbal ones.

Here are two examples, one from 1744 and the second from the beginning of the 19th century, both written down by Western European cantors, and yet stylistically disclosing their Eastern European origins; indeed, the second example is marked as 'Polish' by its original transcriber (Figures 1 and 2). The cantors might have incorporated them to please Eastern European immigrants by performing music familiar to them, or just out of personal choice. Both examples bear the titles of Autumn Holidays liturgical poems that are sung collectively in our days, in Ashkenazi congregations around the globe, to numerous tunes. The extensive dissemination and popularity suggest an enduring tradition of collective performance, to which both mid-18th-century examples might potentially belong. Such refrains introduced a peculiar style into liturgical music, resembling klezmer pieces. Their most salient features were: 1) modality, 2) rhythmic diversity, and 3) a certain preference for an elaborate musical form, though avoiding excess complication and thus probably aiming to keep it simple enough to invite communal participation.[9]

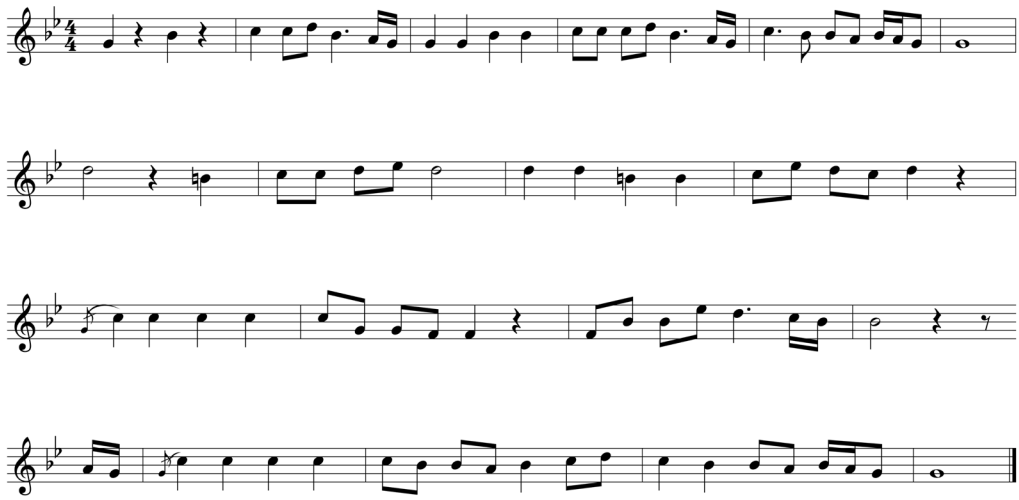

Figure 1. Liturgical refrain, approximately from 1744 (Lukin 2020: 107).[10]

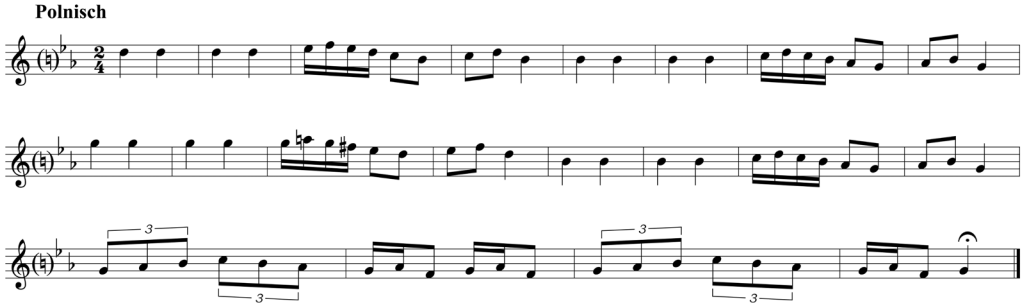

Figure 2. Liturgical refrain, early 1800s (Idelsohn 1932 vol 6: No. 39).

My identification of the resemblances to the klezmer repertoire, here and henceforth, is based on the representation of klezmer music by recent scholarship (Slobin 2014 [2001]; Netsky 2015; Feldman 2016; for the fuller bibliography see Feldman and Lukin 2017) along with my examination of the extant documentation (Slobin 2014 [2001]; Horowitz 2001 [1916]).[11] These resemblances relate to rhythmic patterns, motifs, modes, and the logic of the melodic structures, such as openings, tools used for the extension of a melodic line, and particular cadences. A combination of all these stylistic features in some vocal melodies, or of part of them in the others, corresponds to klezmer intonatsia, although no direct borrowings or citations from the klezmer repertoire have been identified so far. Considering this deep research on the klezmer repertoire, I take the very existence of such intonatsia as a departure point – following the accepted methodology of exploring intonatsias in Eastern European ethnomusicology – and refrain from providing specific examples.

In addition to congregational singing, festive synagogal services included the priests' blessing ceremony, a ritual that obliged all those men and boys in the synagogue who

were traditionally considered descendants of the priests in the ancient Temple (Yiddish *kohanim*, i.e., those persons whose family names were Kogan, Kaganovski, and the like) to stand in front of the congregation and recite specific biblical verses, while performing special bodily movements (Schleifer 2002). This ceremony incorporated heterophonic recitations by the kohanim, as well as responsorial chanting of rhythmical tunes by the cantor and the kohanim. Eliyahu Schleifer (ibid.: 233–237) emphasises that both the custom and its attachment to some musical arrangement have been preserved from biblical times to our days, notwithstanding numerous changes in its various details, including the melodies. He then cites Eastern European rabbinical references to the musical arrangement of this ceremony, the earliest one by Moses Isserles of Kraków (1530–1572), who permitted the relatively prolonged collective singing by the kohanim. Schleifer (ibid.: 237) also mentions that the unclear etymology of the Yiddish term *dukhenen* designating the priests' blessing may be inspired by both the Slavic word *dukh* (spirit) and the Hebrew *dukhan* (the synagogue podium on which the kohanim stand). This double meaning of the term points to the association of the ritual with 'spirits' in the Eastern Ashkenazi realm. It aligned with the apparition of men chanting special tunes, covering their faces and arms with prayer shawls and moving actively; and it was reinforced by the custom to silently pronounce prayers related to bad dreams during this ritual.

Since all kohanim are obliged to participate in the blessing, unrelated to their musical talents, and since, on the other hand, they belong to all parts of Jewish society, in most Eastern Ashkenazi communities the tunes that they were required to perform were made to suit average people, not necessarily those with musical training. In the late modern period, cantors began to use these culminating moments of the liturgy to introduce new tunes, in an attempt to embellish and enrich the expressive power of the service (ibid.: 272, footnote 77, 273–274). In the period of documentation, that is, since the last decades of the 19th century, two types of prolonged melody for the priestly blessing in Eastern Ashkenazi congregations were registered: rather complex compositions made to impress passive listeners, and older, formulaic, although prolonged, tunes. Schleifer cites the great Lithuanian cantor Abraham Moshe Bernstein (1866–1932), who, while criticising various tunes used for this ceremony in his time, acknowledged the special beauty and "carrying the flavor of old ages" (Bernstein 1958 [1927] in Schleifer 2002: 268) in the following two, which he documented; Schleifer (ibid.) points out their modality and formal asymmetry. In these features, both melodies (Figures 3 and 4) resemble the congregational refrains mentioned above.

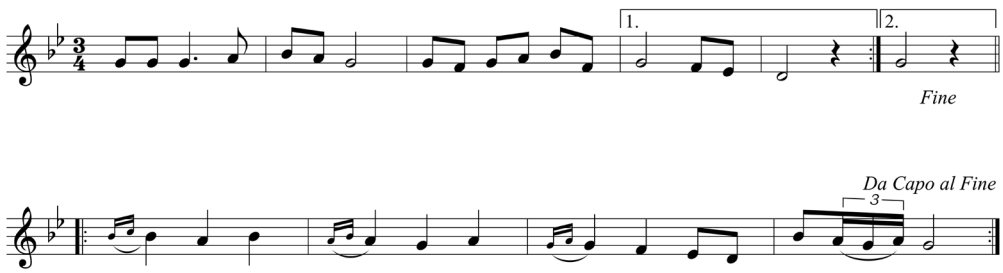

Figure 3. Priests' blessing, Shatsk, Poland (Bernstein 1958 [1927]: No. 185).

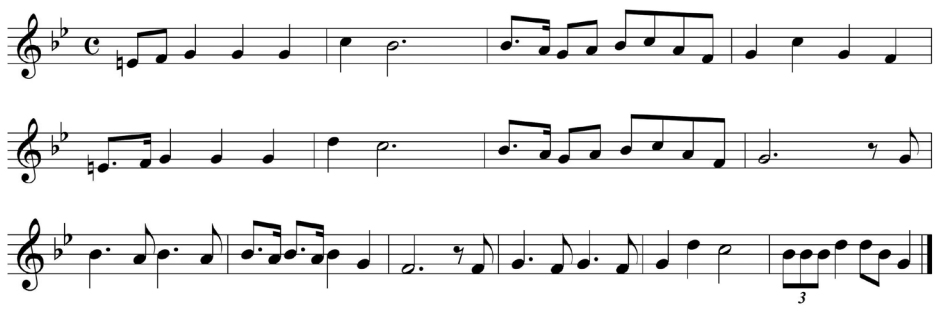

Figure 4. Priests' blessing, Amdur, Lithuania (Bernstein 1958 [1927]: No. 190).

These modest tunes revolving around a descending minor third B♭–G represent a particular musical semiotics: they might exemplify the connection with the ancient tradition, mystical restraint, immediacy and simplicity, thus echoing the words of the priestly blessing: "May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace". Although I was not able to identify any written evidence, other than Bernstein's, that this represents the contemporary evaluation, the fact that these tunes signify an ancient tradition seems apparent when they are compared to those marked as 'archaic' by Geoffrey Goldberg (2019: 230, 370–371), as well as from the tunes' musical proximity to Eastern Ashkenazi cantillation, also marked by the combination of modality and restraint (Malin 2016: 9–14, 19).

Tunes such as these resemble the klezmer repertoire, although not in the same way as the congregational refrains. The priestly blessings illuminate the liturgical inspiration of the klezmer repertoire, a feature studied by Walter Zev Feldman (2016: 55–58; 246–255). Indeed, rhythmic patterns, cadences, melodic formulas and the aesthetic ideal of asymmetry appear to be borrowed consciously by klezmorim from several parts of the liturgy. Without a doubt, the priestly blessing is one of its peaks, marked by a clearly pronounced public character and performative features such as the abovementioned bodily movements, the priests' covering themselves with prayer shawls, and responsorial singing, as well as the prohibition on the congregation to look at the kohanim during the ceremony out of respect for the special holiness that is believed to dwell on them. All these turn the musical background of this ceremony into a metonymy of sacred music, and klezmorim echoed this in their musical choices, along with other types of liturgical music that inspired them. At the same time, this dialogue between the klezmer music and priests' blessing appears to be reciprocal: kohanim and the leading cantor, in their search for simple, meaningful, and expressive tunes, might borrow from the stock of klezmer-like motifs. The example in Figure 5 supports this suggestion: published in 1901 with reference to its originating in the 17th century, it shares modality, rhythmic and formal asymmetry with the aforementioned tunes, as well as musical gestures resembling instrumental music.

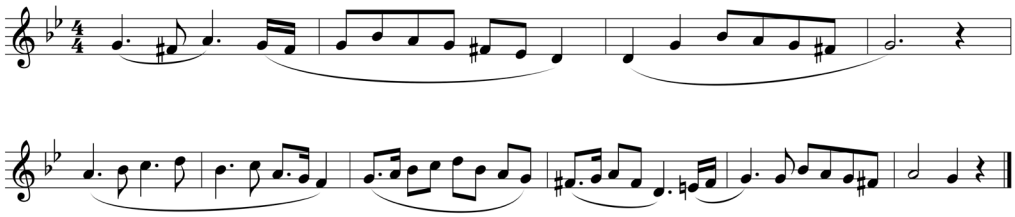

Figure 5. The priests' blessing response chanted by kohanim, 17th century (Schleifer 2002: 268).

To sum up the communal aural experience within the walls of the Eastern European synagogue: apparently, most of it was contemplative rather than actively participatory. However, at times, collectively performed monophonic short refrains took place. According to extant documentation, in the shtetls' synagogues these moments involved klezmer-like melodies. Apparently, this link emerged thanks to the shared context of making music publicly: melodic types familiar to the congregation from instrumental wedding music became acknowledged for public performance in the synagogue as well, when using instruments is forbidden.

Unlike the refrains, the chants for the priestly blessing were performed only by a small part of the community, the kohanim. Those priests' blessing tunes that belonged to the older layers also displayed a certain resemblance to klezmer repertoires, although here the inspiration was most likely reciprocal.

In the mid-19th century, newly modernised synagogues (called 'choral synagogues') began to gain popularity, and their musical styles soon spread to small towns in Eastern Europe (Levin 2020). This diffusion introduced, inter alia, rhythmic melodies of such great Western Reform composers as the Viennese cantor Salomon Sulzer (1804–1890), the Berliner Louis Lewandowski (1821–1894), the Odessa cantor Betzalel Schulsinger (1790–1873), and others. Their melodies became part of the popular urban repertoire and were sung collectively during the service, as refrains and as responses of the kohanim, replacing the older tunes or co-existing with them.

FOLK THEATRE

Choral refrains were incorporated into the music arrangement of *purim-shpiln* (plural of the Yiddish *purim-shpil* 'Purim play'), the traditional comic folk plays on biblical stories and motifs. Folk theatre was permitted only one day a year, during the carnivalesque holiday of Purim,[12] requiring oral preservation through memorisation of roles, likely assisted by singing. These folk plays were indeed entirely sung. With stable formulas in their lyrics resembling those of premodern German folk theatre, they indicated significant German influence on the genre before Ashkenazi migrations to Eastern Europe, underscoring its relative antiquity. Yet, taking advantage of the atmosphere of general laughter, these plays also served as a prime opportunity for satirical reflection on reality, including internal communal conflicts and political troubles, which encouraged the incorporation of contemporary musical styles. The folk theatre choruses stylistically resembled those heard in synagogue, similarly echoing klezmer rhythmic tunes. Beregovskiy (2001: 88), the only scholar who studied the music of the Eastern European

purim-shpil, outlines its different types, emphasising the de facto connection between klezmer interludes and purim-shpil choruses "It [the music of these folk plays] is comprised of recitations, arioso, songs, solo and choral numbers. … Instrumental numbers were mostly performed by a choir while staged at private homes, and not by an instrumental ensemble." Considering the lack of the 'fourth wall' in this folk-theatre, it is reasonable to suggest that the audience would join the actors in these choruses, especially when they repeated the same melody several times (Figure 6).

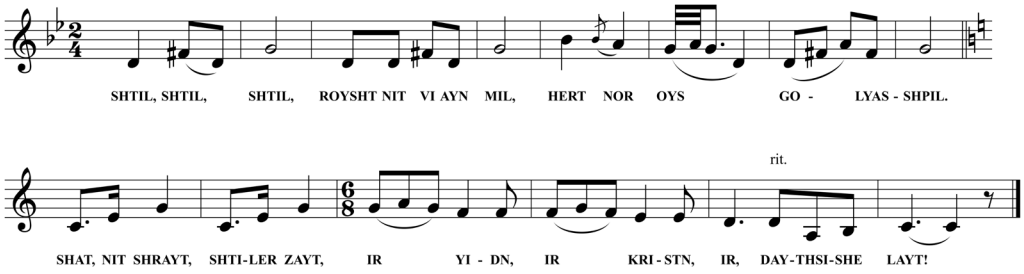

*Figure 6. Prologue from a folk-theatre "Goliath play" (*Golyes shpil*): "Be quiet, don't make noise like a mill, listen to the Goliath play. Silence, don't cry, be quiet, you, Jews, you, Christians, you, German people!" (Beregovskiy 2001: 428)*[13]

Analysis of verbal formulas like those in Figure 6 led Beregovskiy to conclude that they testify to centuries-long preservation of the old Ashkenazi heritage in Eastern Europe. Indeed, neither 'Christians' nor 'German people' attended the Yiddish folk plays in Ukrainian shtetls; the address to them was preserved only as a traditional German formula. The melody, however, belongs to old Jewish layers rather than German ones. With other exemplars of Eastern Ashkenazi collective singing, it shares modality and rhythmic and formal asymmetry. A dialogue with the klezmer repertoire is especially evident in the typical switch from minor to its fourth degree major (from G minor to C major in Figure 6).

These resemblances can be explained by considering the idiosyncrasy of the Eastern Ashkenazi musical polysystem, in which similar musical constructs are shared by different repertoires. Purim-shpil belonged to the carnivalesque layer of shtetl culture, with its imagery aimed at ridiculing the norms of the elite and laughing at the holiest biblical heroes, while allowing rudeness and cancelling almost all taboos. Nevertheless, its setting echoed that of the synagogue service, which in most other features represented the opposite: held on all days of the year, serious, and controlled by the elites. Notwithstanding the oppositions between the two settings, they shared the following features: both were performed by men only, but applied to both sexes and all social layers and ages; neither included any non-musical recitation, but only various types of singing; and both shared the same musical modes, common also in other traditional repertoires of all Ashkenazi Jews, i.e. natural and harmonic minor, major, and particular alterations of the Dorian, Phrygian and Mixolydian modes. Moreover, both the service and the folk theatre creatively reinterpreted the old Germanic Ashkenazi musical heritage, adapting it to the Slavic cultural realm. Therefore, the correspondence between the two types of the collectively sung refrain, and especially the klezmer inspi-

ration characteristic of both, stemmed not only from the purim-shpil parodic intentions, but also from these inherent ties.

SECULAR YIDDISH WEDDING SONGS

Secular Yiddish songs revolving around wedding festivities comprised an additional repertoire, sharing not only the same historical background but also the same musical modes with other repertoires of the Eastern Ashkenazi musical polysystem. This repertoire was recently analysed in detail by Lyudmila Sholokhova (2022), who brought literary testimonies from 19th-century Eastern European memoires and proposed linking the songs mentioned in them to the earlier Western Yiddish printed songs, arguing that they belonged on a continuum. Her research provides a framework to which more details can now be added. Early modern historical evidence and analysis of the melodies documented at the beginning of the 20th century suggest that this Eastern Yiddish repertoire was performed collectively in the 17th and 18th centuries in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, Sholokhova's (ibid.: 89) statement that "the genre of Yiddish wedding songs as such did not exist in the Jewish music tradition and the wedding songs could be only identified by content, but not by function", can be now refined.

Polish Rabbi Isaiah ben Avraham Ha-Levi (?–1723) noted in 1708 the existence of non-religious songs associated with the wedding ritual in the 17th and 18th centuries (see Karo 1708: 201b, Section 560, Ha-Levi's Comment 6). He permitted their performance within this framework, despite the general recommendation to refrain from singing joyful songs as inappropriate behaviour, unless they are religious chants suitable for a Sabbath meal. Although this publicly acknowledged practice of wedding songs ceased to exist in the 19th century, numerous variants of international ballads whose lyrics relate to courtship and matchmaking, mentioned in 19th-century verbal testimonies and documented in the early 20th century, might be supposed to represent its remnants.

These are ballads about riddles, impossible tasks, and the choice of a husband according to profession. The Jewish Soviet musicologist Sof'ya Magid (1893–1954), well acquainted with Slavic traditional songs, attested in 1938 that the Yiddish folk songs of this type are much closer to early Western European ballads than to Eastern Slavic ones (for a summary of her research, and a review of the vast scholarship on the Yiddish folk ballad, see Lukin 2022). She also pointed out how numerous variants of Western ballads were adapted poetically and musically to the Jewish cultural realm; while preserving Western European narrative, structural and prosodic patterns, they incorporated Jewish motifs, such as "What is deeper than a sea? – Studying the Torah! What water has no sand? – The water of the *mikve* [Jewish ritual bath]!, etc." (Magid 1938: 40–64) Magid therefore concluded that numerous ballads, documented by her or her contemporaries, preserve centuries-long Jewish traditions. This statement was supported by a number of other scholars, especially by the American scholar of Yiddish folk songs Chana Mlotek (1922–2013), who pointed to numerous traces of old ballads in non-balladic Yiddish folk songs (Mlotek 1965).

In addition to the poetic ties to the premodern songs' repertoire, the melodies of Yiddish marriage-related ballads also appear to preserve such ties. This repertoire includes

a large group of tunes sharing the mazurka-like rhythmic pattern, that is, comprising simple rhythmic patterns in triple meter with a subdivided first beat. Since this feature is rather rare in other Yiddish songs, it may indicate either preservation of an older song style, characteristic of this repertoire, or singing while dancing, or both. The idiosyncrasy of the marriage-related ballads was rooted in the fact that rhythmic and melodic outlines of Yiddish folk songs of other types were much more elaborate and therefore apparently did not encourage collective singing, as Beregovskiy acknowledged.[14] On the contrary, in the songs of the type exemplified in Figures 7 and 8, a combination of narrative tension with clear-cut rhythms and simple melodic structures makes them suitable for singing collectively, while at the same time making them less suitable for singing for oneself alone.[15]

To sum up, based on these musical and poetic features, we can assume that the marriage-related ballads are remnants of the tradition referred to by the Polish-Lithuanian rabbis of the 17th and 18th centuries: their melodies suit collective singing; they differ from other types of Yiddish folk songs; their rhythmic features suit dancing; their lyrics connote the presence of a group, due to their narrative tension, such as that of a riddle; and finally, these are songs rooted in poetic and musical patterns that crystallised during the early modern period.

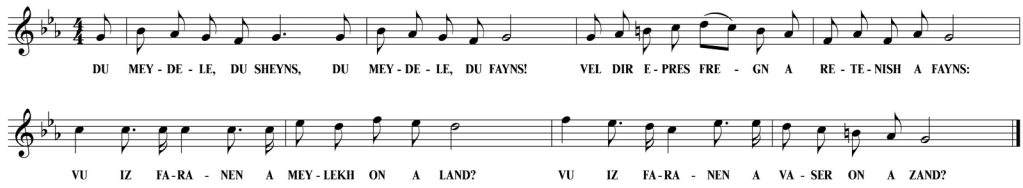

Figure 7. Riddle ballad: "You, nice girl, you pretty girl! I want to ask you a good riddle: Where is a king without land? Where is water without sand?" (Adapted from Nadel 1905: 589–590.)

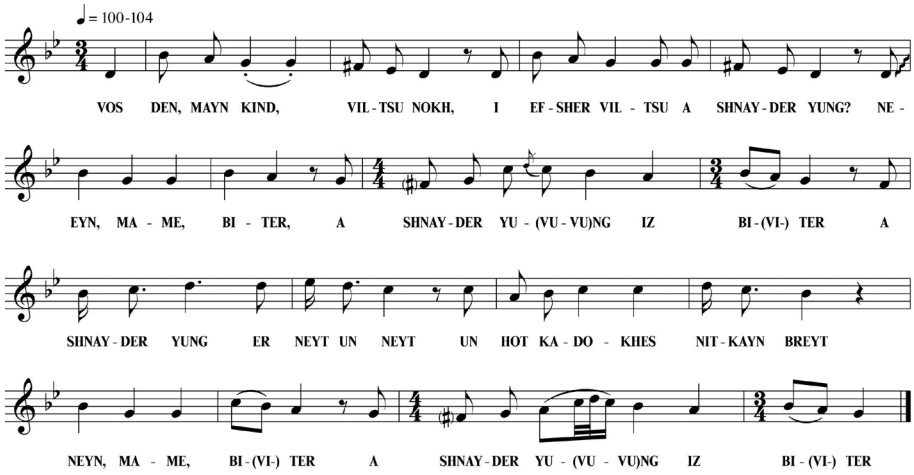

Figure 8. Choice of husband ballad: "What do you want, my child? Perhaps you want a tailor-boy? – No, mama, bitter, a tailor-boy is bitter, mama, bitter. He sews all the time, and instead of bread, he has only fever. No, mama, bitter – a tailor-boy is bitter." (Slobin 2000 [1982]: 143)

PARALITURGICAL DOMESTIC SINGING

The most prominent type of collective singing in Eastern Ashkenazi communities since the 16th century, if not earlier, has been the performance of Hebrew/Aramaic *zmires* (Yiddish for paraliturgical chants, from the Hebrew *zemirot* 'songs'), sung at the family table during Sabbath and holiday meals. The most significant and well-known were those sung at the end of the festive Passover meal. The earliest reference to this custom in Eastern Europe that I know of is from the 13th century, when the Jewish communities in the Slavic countries were small and considered peripheral by Jews of other diasporas. Moses ben Yitskhak of Vienna (ca. 1180–ca. 1250) writes in his book *Sown Light*:

> On the custom of our settlement in the Czech land, that we pronounce liturgical poems of Eliyahu of blessed memory at the end of Sabbath, if it is a *kosher* [legitimate] custom or not, he responded that the custom is definitely kosher, that Sabbath should be honoured on its parting, as if people would honour the king … and he said that he found … a parable about a bride that is accompanied by zmires [songs] and chants, and the Sabbath is called queen and bride. (Yitskhak 1862 Part 2: 49, No. 95)

Later on, in the period of flourishing Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe, this practice is attested again by rabbinical references to the repertoire (Taubes 2015: 93), as well as numerous prints of zmires in Prague, Lublin, Krakow and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. Discussion of this repertoire should take into consideration two subdivisions: one is stylistic, i.e. rhythmically chanted zmires versus those performed as a free-rhythm recitative; the second is historical, i.e. melodies preceding the emergence of Hasidism versus those introduced by this mystical movement. According to several testimonies, zmires pronounced as a recitative were performed solo and, therefore, they will be not examined in this study. As for the zmires sung collectively, this musical innovation brought in by Hasidism will be discussed separately, while the melodic types preceding this innovation are the main focus in this section.

Zmires stand in the interim between synagogal collective singing and the secular genres. On the one hand their lyrics belong to the religious sphere, and like liturgical texts are written in Hebrew/Aramaic rather than Yiddish, as outlined in the above excerpt by Zbarzher (cited in Lukin 2020: 87). On the other hand, some of them were sung to rhythmic melodies and followed strophic structures. It could very well be that their melodies sounded similar to those of wedding ballads, thus making the two types of song comparable: this is why, in all probability, they were mentioned by Isaiah ben Avraham Ha-Levi (Karo 1708: 201b, Section 560, Ha-Levi's Comment 6) in conjunction with secular ritual songs.

Alongside the general likeness of these secular and paraliturgical songs, their prosodic features were also quite similar. Numerous Hebrew liturgical poems sung as zmires followed the early-mediaeval system of versification, according to which the number of syllables varies between the verses. The Yiddish ballads also featured accentual verse, common to Germanic traditions, which counts only the stressed syllables and disregards the number of unstressed ones. Both these types of text allowed an unstable number of syllables in each poetic-musical line and maintained a strophic structure. Thus, the varying number of syllables led to a prominent rhythmic diversity: the same

musical phrase might have been sung to just six or seven syllables in one strophe and to ten or eleven syllables in the next strophe. Such diversity was unusual in co-territorial contexts, since many versification systems of the neighbouring ethnic groups, especially in Polish areas, followed syllabic principles, i.e., strict control of the same number of syllables in each verse. It might very well be that this rhythmic irregularity was perceived by the Yiddish speakers' neighbours as grotesque or lacking aesthetic taste. For example, James Loeffler (2010: 115) cites such an evaluation by the Russian mezzo-soprano Maria Olenina-d'Alheim (1869–1970), who recalls Modest Mussorgsky's (1839–1881) interest in this music. Songs referred to in her quotation are zmires, and Mussorgsky's transcription of two of them is one of the earliest documentations of this repertoire.[16] It is not known whether Olenina-d'Alheim heard zmires herself or based her evaluations on testimonies, but apparently her words reflected common agreement.

Frederic Chopin (1810–1849) expressed a similar attitude toward Eastern Ashkenazi music, with a reference to the most widespread table song "How Glamorous" (Hebrew *Ma Yufis*) is his private letter from 1831, writing about a recital by a Jewish violinist (Niecks 1973 [1902]: 183).[17] Indeed the term *mayufis* designated in Polish a parody on Jewish music, while the term *mayufisnik* meant a Jew who would agree to be humiliated by the Polish elite by executing grotesque dances for them to the tunes of this table song. Chopin knew this music well – as a child he was able to play a "How Glamorous" tune for some Jews, who acknowledged the perfection of his performance (ibid.: 48–49). Popularity of the melody of this table chant as a tune for a particular Jewish dance performed for the nobility was testified as early as 1763 (Shmeruk 1997: 274, cited by Werb 2020: 63). The painful antisemitic association caused its abandonment by Eastern Ashkenazi society in the second half of the 19th century (ibid.); therefore, very few traditional Eastern European chants attached to this text survived, and most of the documentation of possible melodies belongs to the Western Ashkenazi realm or to the klezmer pieces bearing this title.

The following prosodic schema in Figure 9 demonstrates the difficulty in adapting this 13th-century poem to any symmetric melody which would suit either elite or non-elite musical tastes of the Slavs in 18th- and 19th-century Polish soundscapes.

*ma **Yu**fis uma **Nu**amt **A**havu besaa**Nu**gim*	(4/15)	How lovely you are, beloved and bright,
***At Sha**bus me**Soys Nu**gim*	(4/7)	O Sabbath, you stir the downcast with light,
*le**Khu Bu**sur ve**Gam Du**gim*	(4/8)	With dishes of fish and of meat you invite,
*ne**Khoy**nim **Mi**beoyd **Yoym**.*	(4/6)	Made ready the day before.
*me**Ey**rev ad **Ey**rev **Leyv Khu**dim*	(4/9)	From evening to evening our pulses race,
*be**Voy I**tekh **Eys Doy**dim*	(4/7)	The hour of longing, of love, takes its place,
***Gil** ve**Su**soyn laye**Hu**dim*	(3/7)	For Jews, it is joy, a meal full of grace,
***Lim**tsoy **Fid**yoym.*	(2/4)	A rest we've been yearning for.

Figure 9. Popular song lyrics, the poem "How Glamorous" from the 13th century.[18] The stressed syllables are in bold and emphasised by an uppercase first letter; the number of accents and syllables per verse are in brackets.

The remaining 22 stanzas (equaling the number of Hebrew letters in the name of the poet, Mordekhay bar Yitskhak, followed by a traditional closing "Khazak" – 'strong') introduce even more rhythmic diversity. These prosodic features pose a musical challenge. The rhyming patterns define the poetic-musical stanza size: in each stanza the three first verses rhyme, with the fourth verses rhyming between the stanzas. While numerous tunes would suit each individual stanza, it is almost impossible to establish one repeating tune that would suit them all. The only possible solution would be a prolongation of some sounds and the addition of meaningless syllables, such as "bim-bom", to fill the gaps in the verses with few syllables, combined with shortening syllables in the long verses. Such an asymmetrical combination, unexpected by non-Yiddish speakers, might have been perceived as comic. A similar challenge posed by many zmires texts was resolved in the Western Ashkenazi realm through two solutions: either aforementioned free-rhythm individual recitation or changing the melody from stanza to stanza. The first case was discussed by Naomi Cohn Zentner (2020) in relation to the chant "Everyone Who Sanctifies the Seventh Day", whose tune she was able to trace to a 15th-century German origin; the second solution was discussed by Avery Gosfield (2017), who studied the earliest extant documentation of a musical notation of a table song from the 16th-century Western Ashkenazi realm. The Eastern Ashkenazim applied both solutions for some zmires; for others, however, as the late documentation demonstrates, numerous rhythmic tunes were adopted and sung without a change to all the stanzas. Since the vast majority of these tunes display rhythmic and formal asymmetry, this solution may be taken as the outcome of an attempt to match the ancient Hebrew prosody of poems, created in a style that emerged far from Central and Eastern Europe, to tunes that fit into its soundscapes. Figure 10 provides an example for such a tune: it is a melody, attributed to Itsele of Volozhin (1780–1849), for the Passover chant "May the Almighty Build His House", whose earliest appearance is traced to the 14th century (Tabory 2008: 63).

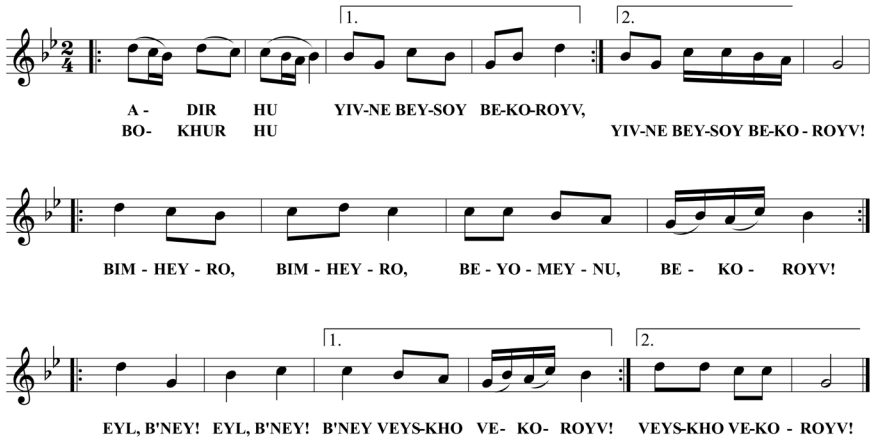

Figure 10. Passover chant "May the Almighty Build His House" (Hebrew Adir hu*): "May the Almighty build His House soon! May the Chosen build His House soon! Speedily, speedily, in our times, soon! Lord, build; Lord, build; build Your house soon!" (Idelsohn 1932 vol 9: No. 88)*

Yet another common pattern of communal paraliturgical singing is represented by additional Passover zmires and those for the End of Sabbath: a responsorial performance by the soloist and the group. The ritual Passover meal is the only paraliturgical context in which collective singing is encouraged, if not obliged, by rabbinic law (Tabory 2008: 58–60). All Eastern Ashkenazi Passover chants are serial: either cumulative (i.e., all the strophes are arranged according to one and the same syntactic pattern, and each new strophe repeats all the preceding ones) or non-cumulative (i.e., all the strophes are arranged according to one syntactic pattern, and maintain an additional axis, such as the alphabet).

This poetic structure probably dictated the musical one: most of the tunes of this type of song incorporate solo free/flexible rhythm segments for the opening parts of the series, and refrains that are sung collectively. The refrains in these chants, whether of the cumulative or non-cumulative type, are of two different musical types, the first of which repeats rhythmic and motific patterns introduced in the solo segment, while the second type introduces a new rhythmic pattern – in relation to the preceding solo material – and confirms an established tonic. These latter's melodic contours, rhythms and formal symmetry often resemble klezmer dance-like tunes in moderate or fast tempo, which are traditionally associated with communal festivities. Thus, the overall musical form of the serial zmires introduces the following schema of repeating stanzas: Solo (opening) – Collective Refrain (prolongation-conclusion). The example in Figure 11 from the mid-19th century represents this structure.

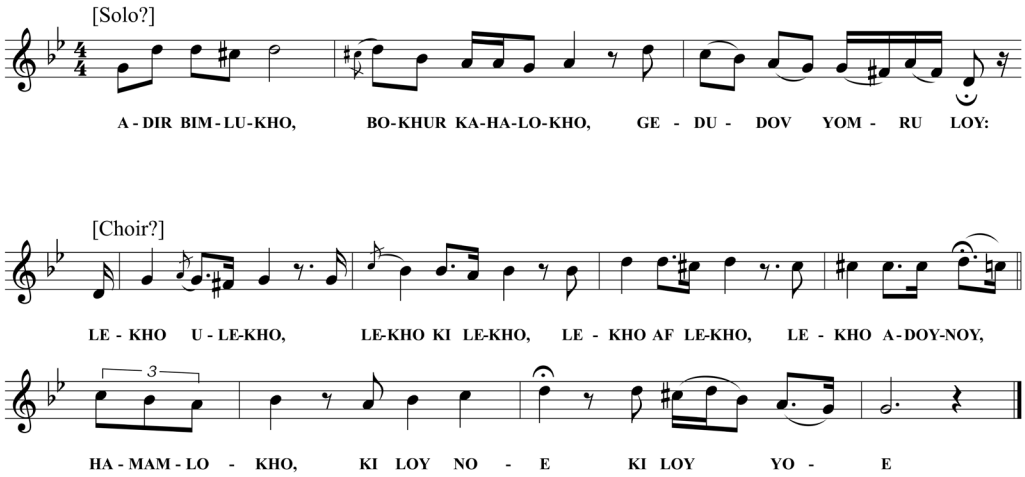

Figure 11. Passover chant "For to Him is it Fitting" (Hebrew Addir bimluchoh*). Polish rite: "Powerful in kingdom, properly chosen, His legions say to Him: To You and to You, to You for to You, to You even to You, to You, Lord, is the kingdom, For to Him is it fitting, for to Him is it suitable." (Translation from Tabory 2008: 128; adapted from Schönfeld 2010 [1884]: 26, No. 22.)*

To sum up: serial (cumulative and non-cumulative) as well as non-serial strophic collectively performed zmires reveal a preference for modal thinking and structural complexity. The latter aligns with the formal features of the lyrics – accentual verse in most of them and serial patterns in some – but appears to align at the same time with the aesthetic ideals introduced by instrumental klezmer rhythmic dance-like tunes. An attempt to adapt ancient Hebrew text to later rhythmic tunes links this repertoire to liturgical refrains, also sharing some features with Yiddish wedding ballads.

HASIDIC *NIGUNIM*

Nigunim are mystical paraliturgical songs, generally without words, performed in unison, and, within ritual contexts, by men. The Yiddish term nigunim (plural; singular *nign*, from the Hebrew *niggun* 'melody') means 'tunes' and distinguishes these chants from others, such as chants performed with words, as well as those unrelated to the musical repertoires of the Hasidic movement. The term Hasidic designates a religious movement in Judaism that emerged in the middle of the 18th century in the territories of contemporary Ukraine and still exists in our days. Although this type of music is the most researched of all repertoires of Eastern Yiddish speakers, the initial stages of its emergence remain beyond the pale of discussion, mainly due to the lack of early musical documentation. The methodological tools employed to study the repertoires discussed so far have the potential to shed light on the historical-musical background to the processes of crystallisation of this repertoire as well. These reveal historical ties to the klezmer repertoire, that extend beyond the typological ones.

Two testimonies to the practice of ecstatic prolonged collective singing and dancing on the festival of Simchat Tora[19] are found in the book *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* (Ben-Amos and Mintz 1993: 80, 222), hagiography of the aforementioned founder of the

Hasidic movement, Yisroel ben Eliezer, der Besht (an acronym for the Hebrew-Yiddish *Bal-shem-tov* 'The Owner of the Good Name').[20] Both introduce this practice as innovative; in both, a female member of this leader's family watches the dance from outside; and both narratives emphasise that God's presence, *Shekhina*, was seen as flames of fire accompanying the dance. Finally, in both, the dance contradicts the normal order of life, the rules of etiquette, and other stable foundations of religious conduct, yet nobody can stop it. An ethnomusicological reading of these testimonies raises a question: what was the music to which prolonged circle dances were performed? There is no evidence for such a practice in the Eastern Ashkenazi realm in earlier periods, and, since the dance took place on a religious holiday, when playing musical instruments is forbidden, the legend implies unaccompanied singing. It is also clear that to make the dancing prolonged and ecstatic, this group of the Besht's young disciples must have possessed an acknowledged repertoire of rhythmic, fast, relatively simple tunes that allowed for effortless repetition.

Three musical alternatives might serve this goal: songs inspired by the music of Orthodox Christian confraternities (*bratstva*), in accordance with the aforementioned quotation of the Besht's words testifying to early Hasidim's acquaintance with Ukrainian music ("the nations of the world singing 'lider'"); tunes borrowed from the repertoire of Ukrainian folk circle dances, also echoing that same quotation; and/or intrinsic traditions of dance music. Indeed, the choral singing of the confraternities has been considered a means of resistance to the Catholic Church, just as the new Hasidic practice expressed a resistance to the then accepted rabbinical religious service and to the Jewish establishment. Moreover, a certain typological resemblance between the social structure of the Hassidic courts and that of the *bratstva* was identified (Tourov 2004, with reference to Rosman 1996: 56–62). Yet, the likelihood of a significant interchange between these two musical traditions is low, mainly owing to the reserved disposition of the confraternities, and to the core disparity between the polyphonic structure of the Christian repertoire and the strictly monophonic nature of the Hassidic nign.

As for Ukrainian peasant dances, this supposed inspiration seems misleading as well. First, a comparative analysis of Ukrainian dance music, alongside the extant documentation of Hasidic dance nigunim, demonstrates that except for musical modes, some motifs, and rhythmical patterns, the Ukrainian tunes differ significantly from nigunim.[21] The differences are identified both in the general melodic contours and in particular melodic patterns, as well as in musical forms, the attitude to modality, the range, and the Hasidic preference for diversification and formal, rhythmic and melodic asymmetry.

Second, as the spiritual potential of the Ukrainian tunes was acknowledged by the Besht himself (in the above quotation of his words by his grandson), if a borrowing from this repertoire did take place, it would have been mentioned in this hagiographic legend. Third, most Ukrainian dance melodies were performed vocally, with or without instrumental accompaniment, to Ukrainian lyrics, the versification being the main factor dictating the musical arrangement. If these chants were sung during the Jewish ritual to the original Ukrainian words, that would have been an extremely radical innovation, which could never have been ignored by those recounting the hagiographic legends. Alternatively, if the Ukrainian songs underwent such a significant change as an adaptation to singing to wordless syllables, this transformation would have introduced

a considerable cognitive challenge, and consequently, a strenuous effort to meet such a challenge also could not have gone unnoticed. Such adaptations did take place as a particular mystical practice, always acknowledging the Ukrainian source, and according to the extant documentation they are extremely limited in number.[22] The mystical meaning and the very essence of such a contrafact was the emphasis on the gap between it and its source, which, by the rule of the genre, cannot be ignored. The musical discrepancies between nigunim and Ukrainian and Polish melodies were acknowledged by Joel Engel in 1915 (see Engel' and Saminskiy 2001 [1915]). The only Ukrainian inspiration appears to be the form of performance, which was loud, prolonged, collective singing not attested in the Eastern Ashkenazi realm in the earlier periods.

Therefore, if melodies chanted by the Besht's disciples while dancing were not Ukrainian songs, the vocal performance of klezmer tunes seems the only remaining possibility. It appears to be applicable particularly considering the existence of klezmer-like refrains in the synagogue service referred to above. The following nign, documented in numerous regions of contemporary Ukraine, Galicia and Lithuania, in all probability stylistically echoes the practice referred to in these hagiographical legends (Figure 12).[23]

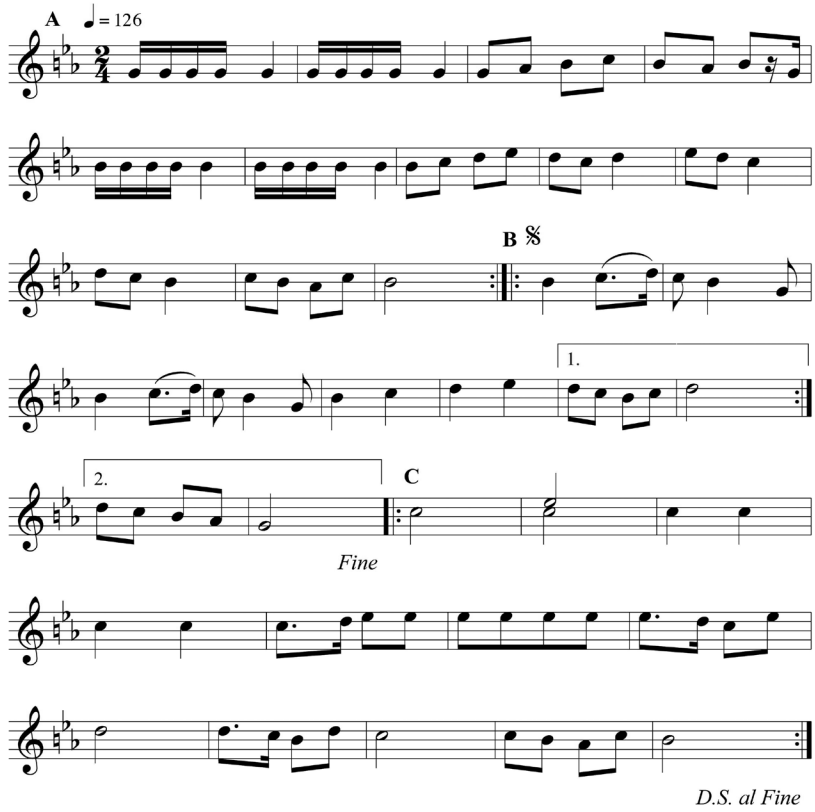

Figure 12. Nign from Bratslav, Podolia (Beregovskiy 1999: No. 103).

The characteristic features of such nigunim are: modality; multi-part musical form (ABCB); steadily ascending melodic development from G to B in the A-section, then from B to d′ in the B-section, and then, achieving a new peak, c′, in the C-section; rhythmic diversity; and abundance of repeated tones, recalling mystical restraint. The formal pattern ABCB is interpreted in the oral Hasidic tradition as a symbol of the Tetragrammaton, the Holy Name of God comprised of four letters Y-H-W-H, of which, as in the musical form, the last one repeats the second one (Mazor and Seroussi 1990: 136). As these features are shared by hundreds of nigunim, of all Hasidic dynasties, from distant areas of Central and Eastern Europe, it can be assumed that the style already existed in its consolidated form in the mid-19th century, if not earlier (Lukin 2023).

Nigunim sharing some or all of these features were also collectively performed by Hasidim together with lyrics as zmires, thus suggesting a new solution to the challenge outlined above, a coordination between accentual uneven verses and rhythmic tunes suitable for the Eastern European soundscape. According to this new solution, the lyrics of the liturgical poems should be implied, while their actual musical performance should be done in a wordless manner. For instance, the words of the poem "How Glamorous" may now only be imagined, while the nign bearing this title may be sung to the syllables "ay-di-day". Figure 13 presents an example for such a wordless table song.

Klezmer inspiration of both dance nigunim and nigunim for paraliturgical songs, zmires, as well as its socio-historical and ethnomusicological contexts, were acknowledged by several scholars (Slobin 2000 [1982]: 299; Feldman 2016: 235–237). Numerous references to playing the violin, tuning musical instruments, the artistic persona of a klezmer, affects caused by instrumental wedding music, as well as its structural aspects, are discussed in Hasidic teachings (Mazor and Seroussi 1990). Both the mystical interpretations of the art and repertoire of klezmer, and the specific musical Hasidic-klezmer dialogues, appear to be part of a wider phenomenon outlined in this study, especially when turning to the klezmer repertoire in the moments of communal singing in the traditional Jewish society of Central and Eastern Europe.

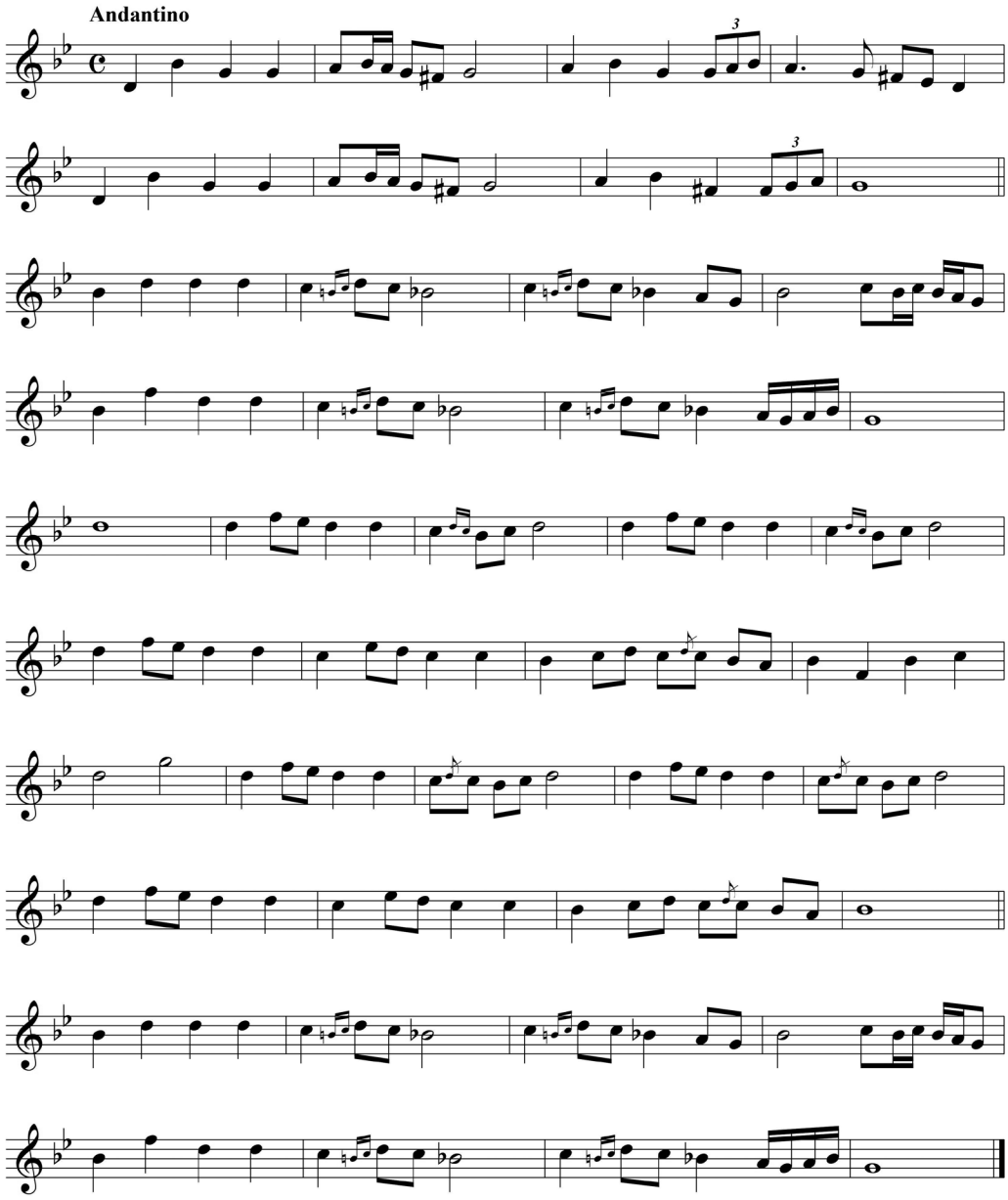

Figure 13. Nign from Koydanov, Belarus (Bernstein 1958 [1927]: No. 63).[24]

CONCLUSION

The information era enables the construction of a frame of reference for describing the Eastern European Jewish musical polysystem. Despite the annihilation of this culture and its bearers and scholars in the Holocaust, bringing together musical, historical and literary primary sources and studies enables a historical ethnomusicological analysis of this music as a whole. Moreover, even with the significant shifts in Jewish and non-Jewish cultures of the 20th century – including mass migration, urbanisation, secularisation, abandonment of traditional ways of life, and lingual assimilation – some semiotic aspects of this polysystem can be revealed. With these premises, a phenomenon of collective singing in the traditional Yiddish-speaking society, hitherto unexplored, has been conceptualised. In the shtetl soundscapes, the leading solo voice of numerous Jewish repertoires coexisted with choral singing and with both active and passive communal musical experiences.

As a significant exception to the prevailing preference for solo singing, collective forms offer insight into several aspects of the traditional music of shtetl dwellers. These include mutual affinities between vocal and instrumental repertoires; preservation of archaic Western European elements; interethnic musical dialogues; musical rendition of prosodic features of Yiddish and Hebrew/Aramaic texts; musical links between liturgical and secular spheres, mysticism and music; and gender and music. Although differing from each other, the repertoires of collective singing resemble klezmer intonatsia: congregational refrains performed by male participants of the synagogue congregation, and the priestly blessing performed by particular men in the liturgical framework; folk theatre choruses, performed by traditional actors, probably involving the participation of the audience; secular weddings ballads, most likely performed by friends of the groom and bride; paraliturgical chants unrelated to the Hasidic movement, sung by the whole family; and finally, the vast repertoire of Hasidic nigunim, sung within ritual contexts, by male members of the Hasidic community.

An explanation for this resemblance could lie in the symbolism of klezmer music. This instrumental repertoire embodied the wedding, a symbol of the most prominent collective celebration of the Eastern Ashkenazi realm, embracing all parts of the shtetl community. Therefore, making music collectively might bring up, first and foremost, an association with this symbol.

This association also draws from the idiosyncrasy of the whole polysystem of various musical repertoires of Yiddish speakers. Despite their generic diversity, and the differences – in performance contexts, performers' gender, language (Yiddish versus Hebrew/Aramaic versus non-lingual music), length of musical pieces, and musical semantic meanings – these genres shared similar modes and attitudes towards some overall aesthetic principles, such as a preference for asymmetry and colouration, as well as the preservation of old Ashkenazi musical features, alongside their combination with Slavic features and with gestures inspired by the music of the Ottoman realm. Therefore, an association with the klezmer intonatsia is easy to evoke: it is brought by a combination of melodic patterns characteristic of instrumental music, clearly established, repetitive rhythms, and modes shared by all types of traditional Yiddish speakers' music.

Although not central to the traditional music of the shtetl, collective chants belonging to all the repertoires referred to in the current study comprised a significant constituent of the European soundscape. Further research may benefit from the detailed examination of unexplored manuscripts, clarifying geographical peculiarities and historical development, as well as possible differences between various types of collective singing, regarding their allusions to the klezmer traditions and other mutual affinities. The musical dialogues with the co-territorial non-Jewish parallel practices, especially in the fields of folk theatre and wedding riddle ballads await historical ethnomusicological collaboration between scholars of Yiddish speakers' music and neighbouring traditions.

NOTES

1 The term 'tradition' follows the definition by Dorothy Noyes (2016: 143), and designates repertoires acknowledged as transmitted from generation to generation within the Yiddish cultural realm, and as representing communally agreed-upon values and formal norms. For an annotated bibliography of its documentation and scholarship, see Feldman and Lukin 2017. For the purposes of the current study, the term 'Central and Eastern Europe' denotes areas of the Jewish settlement in the territories of contemporary Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Czechia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova. The term Holocaust refers to the genocide of catastrophic annihilation of 6,000,000 Jews by the Nazi German government and its allies between 1933 and 1945.

2 Yiddish *shtetl* (plural *shtetlekh*) 'small town'; the plural form *shtetl*s is a hybrid of Yiddish and English. For the characterisation of the *shtetl* as a specific cultural realm, see Estraikh and Krutikov 2000. For the justification of discussion of a prolonged time period within this cultural realm as a continuum, see Feldman 2016: 36–38.

3 For the advantages of the *polysystem* conceptualisation of the Eastern Ashkenazi cultural realm, see Rosman 2007: 82–110. Moshe Rosman (ibid.: 93) explains the term polysystem as a conglomerate of "open, dynamic, heterogeneous cultural systems". As will be elaborated below, the term appears to be useful in the analysis of the complex of Eastern Ashkenazi musical genres.

4 Moshe Hayim Efrayim (1748–1800) was the grandson of the founder of the Hasidic movement Yisroel ben Eliezer (ca. 1700–1760).

5 The quotations are translated by the article's author, if not otherwise stated.

6 Different sources provide slightly varying information about the years of life; in this case, the source was YIVO 2025.

7 Talmud is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law. Talmud study was a central, obligatory, and honorable task for East Ashkenazi men, extending beyond compulsory frameworks throughout their lives. Talmudic texts were always chanted using traditional formulas.

8 See Baer 1877: No. 1336, 1337, 1355, 1357, 1363, all marked as belonging to the Polish rite; Idelsohn 1932 vol 6: 215; vol 8: 130, No. 274, 275 – tunes from a manuscript by the cantor Hirsch Weintraub (1817–1881), who was exposed, inter alia, to the tradition of his father, the Ukrainian cantor Solomon Weintraub-Kashtan (1781–1829; ibid.: 8). More tunes from Weintraub's heritage and by other Eastern European cantors are part of the Eduard Birnbaum Music Collection (2025; see also Planer 1997; Feldman 2016: 239–256).

9 The terms *modality*, *rhythmic diversity/asymmetry*, and *musical form* are used frequently in this study. Whereas certain scholarly agreement marks the meaning of the latter two, definitions of the first one often differ. In this study, modality is used as a synonym for "modal usage" or "modal framework", that is, a preference for basing the melodic line on modes rather than on chordal thinking. I follow Yonatan Malin's (2016: 1) definition of "mode" as "a combination of

a scale and characteristic motives, pitch relationships, affects, and associations of a given repertoire." Shared modal usage within traditional Eastern European Jewish music is extensively discussed by Walter Zev Feldman (2016: 375–383).

10 See there for the musicological remarks and the manuscript provenance. Henceforth, all musical examples are transposed to the tonic G, and the graphical representation of some melodies has been adjusted to clarify their structure.

11 The Klezmer Institute (2020) provided online access to numerous manuscripts of this repertoire, held by the National Library of Kiev.

12 *Purim* is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the saving of the Jewish people from annihilation in the Achaemenid Empire. It is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, the second month of the Hebrew calendar. Purim falls in February or March on the Gregorian calendar.

13 Standard YIVO spelling is applied here and throughout for Yiddish text.

14 See above the reference to Beregovskiy, as cited in Slobin 2000 [1982]: 292. For the musical features of the most prominent genre in this society, the lyrical songs, see Lukin 2020.

15 In European balladic traditions in general, and in the Yiddish ballads in particular, incorporation of a narrative suggests the presence of listeners, thus differentiating this genre from the lyrical one, the latter being marked by frequent singing to oneself. See Lukin 2022.

16 On these unpublished manuscripts, see Khazdan 2009.

17 For the bibliography of scholarship on the Polish "How Glamorous" case, see Werb 2020. The prosodic idiosyncrasy of this and other zmires remained unnoticed in this scholarship, as well as the possible connection of this idiosyncrasy to the Polish perception of the chant as grotesque.

18 For the Hebrew text see Ben-Menachem 1949: 26–30; translation is done by the author. The transliteration follows the Middle Eastern Ashkenazic Hebrew pronunciation, as suggested by Katz 1993: 56–59; 67–68, although in a slightly simplified form (special linguistic symbols such as ɛ or ɔ are replaced here with standard Latin letters).

19 A Jewish holiday that celebrates the conclusion of the annual cycle of public Tora readings, occurring in the month of Tishrei, i.e. in September or October on the Gregorian calendar.

20 See Endnote 4.

21 The sources for this analysis are: the compilation by Zinovii Lysko (1964–1996), comprised of 11,447 melodies, based on the vast documentation of Ukrainian folk music, the earliest of which belongs to the 18th century; and the recently established database of Hasidic nigunim, an ongoing project, currently representing 2,000 Hasidic nigunim (Lukin 2023). These questions were also examined in the frame of the bilateral Israeli–Ukrainian research project (Lukin et al. 2021).

22 As in the recording from the years 1913–1914: "A tune of the Stolin Hasidim adopted from the Ukrainian song 'Tchoomak was riding'" (IIR n.d.: CD 4, No. 14). Often this mystical intention, however, caused changes to be made in the original non-Jewish source, adapting it to the aesthetic norms of the Jewish society that acquired the tune. Thus, several Ukrainian experts could not recognise the actual Ukrainian version of this song, which was allegedly used as a contrafact to the nign.

23 For the 1913–1914 audio-recording, see IIR n.d.: CD 4, No. 13; for additional versions see Lukin 2023: No 429.

24 For additional versions from Ukraine, see Lukin 2023: No 99.

SOURCES

Department of Manuscripts at the Russian National Library:

Magid, Sof'ya. 1938. = *Ballada v yevreyskom fol'klore*. Otdel rukopisey Rossiyskoy Natsional'noy Biblioteki. [Магид, Софья. 1938. Баллада в еврейском фольклоре. Отдел рукописей Российской Национальной Библиотеки.] OR RNB.F.1000.1978.9.

Hebrew Union College Library: Eduard Birnbaum Music Collection. 2025. https://huc.edu/libraries/special-collections/eduard-birnbaum-music-collection (accessed March 10, 2025).

Institute for Information Recording and Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine:

IIR n.d. = Historical Collection of Jewish Musical Folklore 1912–1947. https://www.audio.ipri.kiev.ua (accessed March 10, 2025).

REFERENCES

Asaf'yev, Boris. 1987. *O narodnoy muzyke*, edited by Izaliy Zemtsovskiy and Alma Kunanbayeva. Leningrad: Muzyka. [Асафьев, Борис. 1987. *О народной музыке*, ред. Изалий Земцовский and Алма Кунанбаева. *Л*енинград: Музыка.]

Baer, Abraham. 1877. *Baal T'fillah oder "Der practische Vorbeter"*. Göthenburg: Abraham Baer.

Ben-Amos, Dan and Jerome R. Mintz, eds. 1993. *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov (Shivhei Ha-Besht): The Earliest Collection of Legends about the Founder of Hasidism*. Northvale: Jason Aronson.

Ben-Menachem, Naftali. 1949. *Zemirot shel Shabat*. Jerusalem: ha-Ṿa'adah le-Torah ṿe-sifrut shel ha-Mo'etsah le-ma'an ha-Shabat.

Beregovskiy, Moisey. 1999. *Yevreyskiye narodnyye napevy bez slov*. Moskva: Kompozitor. [Береговский, Моисей. 1999. *Еврейские народные напевы без слов*. Москва: Композитор.]

Beregovskiy, Moisey. 2001. *Yevreyskiye narodnyye muzykal'no-teatral'nyye predstavleniya*. Kiyev: Dukh i litera. [Береговский, Моисей. 2001. *Еврейские народные музыкально-театральные представления*. Киев: *Д*ух і л*і*тера.]

Bernstein, Abraham Moshe, ed. 1958 [1927]. *Musikalisher Pinkas: A Collection of Zemirot and Folk Melodies*. New York: The Cantors Assembly of America.

Cohn Zentner, Naomi. 2020. Kol Mekadesh Shevi'i: Resounding Synagogue and Home in Early Modern Ashkenaz. – *Report of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies 2019–2020*. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 30–32. https://www.ochjs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ochjs-2019-20-final-small.pdf (accessed March 10, 2025).

Deutsch, Nathaniel. 2011. *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674062641.

Ehrenkranz, Wolf. 1869. *Makel-Noam: Volkslieder in polnisch-jüdischer Mundart mit hebräischer Übersetzung* 1. Lemberg: Berl Lorje. https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990018015260205171/NLI (accessed April 17, 2025).

Engel', Yuliy and Lazar' Saminskiy. 2001 [1915]. "Spor o tsennosti bytovoy yevreyskoy melodii", publikatsiya Leonida Gural'nika. – *Iz istorii yevreyskoy muzyki v Rossii* 1, compiled by Leonid Yu. Gural'nik; edited by Aleksander S. Frenkel. Sankt-Peterburg: Yevreyskiy obshchinnyy tsentr Sankt-Peterburga, 125–164. [Энгель, Юлий; Лазарь Саминский. 2001 [1915]. "Спор о ценности бытовой еврейской мелодии," публикация Леонида Гуральника. – *Из истории еврейской музыки в России* 1, сост. Леонид Ю. Гуральник; общ. редакция Александер С.

Френкеля. Санкт-Петербург: Еврейский общинный центр Санкт-Петербурга, 125–164.]
Estraikh, Gennady and Mikhail Krutikov, eds. 2000. *The Shtetl: Image and Reality. Papers of the Second Mendel Friedman International Conference on Yiddish. Studies in Yiddish* 2. Oxford: University of Oxford; Legenda. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351198394.
Feldman, Walter Zev. 2016. *Klezmer: Music, History and Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190244514.001.0001.
Feldman, Walter Zev. 2022. Ethnogenesis and the Interrelationship of Musical Repertoires Among the Jews of Eastern Europe. – *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (2): 1–12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2022.0020.
Feldman, Walter Zev and Michael Lukin. 2017. East European Jewish Folk Music. Bibliography. – *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Jewish Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199840731-0155.
Goldberg, Geoffrey. 2019. *Between Tradition and Modernity: The High Holy Day Melodies of Minhag Ashkenaz According to Ḥazzan Maier Levi of Esslingen*. Jerusalem: Jewish Music Research Centre, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. https://urli.info/-UJt (accessed April 1, 2025).
Gosfield, Avery. 2017. Gratias post mensam in diebus festiuis cum cantico העבריים: A New Look at an Early Sixteenth-Century Tzur Mishelo. – *Revealing the Secrets of the Jews: Johannes Pfefferkorn and Christian Writings about Jewish Life and Literature in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß. Berlin; Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 275–296. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110524345-021.
Goshovskiy, Vladimir. 1971. *U istokov narodnoy muzyki slavyan: ocherki po muzykal'nomu slavyanovedeniyu*. Moskva: Vsesoyuznoye izdatel'stvo Sovetskiy kompozitor. [Гошовский, Владимир. 1971. *У истоков народной музыки славян: очерки по музыкальному славяноведению*. Москва: Всесоюзное издательство Советский композитор.]
Horowitz, Joshua, ed. 2001 [1916]. *The Ultimate Klezmer: Piano, Vocal and Guitar*. [First edn.: *International Hebrew Wedding Music*.] Owings Mills, MD: Tara.
Idelsohn, Abraham Zebi. 1932. *Hebräisch-Orientalischer Melodienschatz. Volume 6: Der Synagogengesang der Deutschen Juden im 18. Jahrhundert. Volume 8: Der Synagogengesang der Osteuropäischen Juden. Volume 9: Der Volkgesang der Osteuropäischen Juden*. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel.
Kahan-Newman, Zelda. 2000. The Jewish Sound of Speech: Talmudic Chant, Yiddish Intonation and the Origins of Early Ashkenaz. – *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 90 (3/4): 293–336. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1454758.
Karo, Yosef. 1708. *Shulhan arukh metur orah hayim… veim baer heytev… hibro Harav Yeshayahu behamanoah… Avraham*. Amsterdam: Moshe ben Yitskhak Dias. https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990020698360205171/NLI (accessed April 1, 2025).
Katz, Dovid. 1993. The Phonology of Ashkenazic. – *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile*, edited by Lewis Glinert. New York: Oxford University Press, 46–87.
Khazdan, Yevgeniya. 2009. Yevreyskaya muzyka v vospriyatii russkogo kompozitora (po pis'mam i avtografam M. P. Musorgskogo). – *Ot Biblii do postmoderna: stat'i po istorii yevreyskoy kul'tury*, edited by Viktoriya Mochalova. Moskva: Knizhniki, 472–491. [Хаздан, Евгения. 2009. Еврейская музыка в восприятии русского композитора (по письмам и автографам М. П. Мусоргского). – *От Библии до постмодерна: статьи по истории еврейской культуры*, отв. ред. Виктория Мочалова. Москва: Книжники, 472–491.]
Klezmer Institute. 2020. The Klezmer Institute's official webpage. https://klezmerinstitute.org/kmdmp (accessed September 1, 2023).
Levin, Vladimir 2020. Reform or Consensus? Choral Synagogues in the Russian Empire. – *Arts* 9

(72): 1–49. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020072.
Loeffler, James. 2010. *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the Late Russian Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300162943.
Lukin, Michael. 2020. Servant Romances: Eighteenth-Century Yiddish Lyric and Narrative Folk Songs. – *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 32: 83–107. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3828/polin.2020.32.83.
Lukin, Michael. 2022. At the Crossroads: The Early Modern Yiddish Folk Ballad. – *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (2): 105–142. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2022.0025.
Lukin, Michael. 2023. Nigunim Bim Bom. https://nigunimbimbom.org (accessed March 17, 2025).
Lukin, Michael et al. 2021 = Lukin, Mikhael; Yakov Mazor, Edvin Serussi and Olha Kolomyiets. 2021. „Tish-nigun № 3" iz zbirky „Ievreiski narodni melodii bez sliv". Moiseia Berehovskoho: vstup do vyvchennia khasydskoi muzyky v ukrainskomu konteksti. – *Etnomuzika* 16: 141–157. [Міхаель Лукін, Яков Мазор, Едвін Серуссі, Ольга Коломиєць. 2021. „Тіш-нігун № 3" із збірки „Єврейські народні мелодії без слів". Мойсея Береговського: вступ до вивчення хасидської музики в українському контексті. – *Етномузика* 16: 141–157.] DOI: https://doi.org/10.33398/2523-4846-2020-16-1-141–157.
Lysko, Zinovii, ed. 1964–1996. *Ukrainian Folk Songs* 1–10. New York: M. P. Kots.
Malin, Yonatan. 2016. Eastern Ashkenazi Biblical Cantillation: An Interpretive Musical Analysis. – *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre* 10. https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/yuval/22542 (accessed March 10, 2025).
Mazor, Yaakov and Edwin Seroussi. 1990. Towards a Hasidic Lexicon of Music. – *Orbis Musicae* 10: 118–143.
Mlotek, Chane. 1965. Traces of Ballad Motifs in Yiddish Folk Song. – *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Folklore, and Literature*. Second Collection, edited by Uriel Weinreich. Hague: Mouton, 232–253.
Moshe Hayim Efrayim. 2011 [1810]. *Degel machaneh efrayim*. Jerusalem: Makhon Daat Yosef.
Nadel, Arno, arranger. 1905. Du Meidele, du scheins (Jüdisches Volkslied.) – *Ost und West: illustrierte Monatsschrift für das gesamte Judentum* 9: 589–590. https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/cm/periodical/titleinfo/2583940 (accessed March 10, 2025).
Netsky, Hankus. 2015. *Klezmer: Music and Community in Twentieth-Century Jewish Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
Niecks, Frederick. 1973 [1902]. *Frederic Chopin as a Man and Musician*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers.
Noyes, Dorothy. 2016. *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zxz0bs.
Planer, John. 1997. *The Birnbaum Collection: A Working Index to the Musical Portions of the Collection*. North Manchester, IN: John H. Planer.
Rosman, Moshe. 1996. *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Baal Shem Tov. Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society* 5. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520916760.
Rosman, Moshe. 2007. *How Jewish Is Jewish History? The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization*. Oxford; Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.
Schleifer, Eliyahu. 2002. The Priestly Blessing in the Ashkenazi Synagogue: Ritual and Chant. – *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre (Special Issue: Studies in Honor of Israel Adler)* 7: 233–298. https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/en/yuval/22851 (accessed March 10, 2025).
Schönfeld, Adolph. 2010 [1884]. *Recitative Und Gesänge Lob- Und Danklieder zum Vortrage am ersten und zweiten Abende des Ueberschreitungsfestes. Die Urmelodien sind nach der Reihenfolge unserer Hagadah revidiert, arrangirt und theilweise mehrstimmig harmonisirt mit Hinzufügung neuer Gesänge von Adolph Schönfeld*. Posen; Leipzig: Röder. https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/freimann/content/titleinfo/1363193 (accessed March

15, 2025).
Shiloah, Amnon. 1992. *Jewish Musical Traditions. Jewish Folklore and Anthropology Series*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
Shmeruk, Chone. 1997. Mayufes : A Window on Polish–Jewish Relations. – *Polin* 10: 273–286. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3828/polin.1997.10.273.
Sholokhova, Lyudmila. 2022. The Yiddish Wedding Folk Songs of East European Jews: Function, Ethnography, Sociology, Texts, and Music. – *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (2): 89–104. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2022.0024.
Slobin, Mark, ed. and transl. 2000 [1982]. *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski. Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music, and Art*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
Slobin, Mark, ed. 2014 [2001]. *Jewish Instrumental Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski*, translated by Michael Alpert, Robert Rothstein, revised by Kurt Bjorling. Evanston, IL: Kurt Bjorling.
Tabory, Joseph. 2008. *The JPS Commentary on the Haggadah: Historical Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society.
Taubes, Michael. 2015. Zemirot on Shabbat: Halakhic Origins and Sources. – *From Within the Tent: The Shabbat Prayers. Essays on the Shabbat Prayers by the Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University*, edited by Daniel Z. Feldman and Stuart W. Halpern. New York: The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of Yeshiva University Press, 87–102.
Tourov, Igor. 2004. Hasidism and Christianity of the Eastern Territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Possible of Contacts and Mutual Influences. – *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 10: 73–105.
Turniansky, Chava. 1989. Yiddish 'Historical' Songs as Sources for the History of the Jews in Pre-Partition Poland. – *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 4: 42–52. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3828/polin.1989.4.42.
Werb, Bret. 2020. Musical Afterthoughts on Shmeruk's 'Mayufes.' – *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 32: 63–82. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3828/polin.2020.32.63.
Yitskhak, ben Moshe. 1862. *Or Zarua*. Zhitomir.
YIVO 2025. *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/ (accessed June 1, 2025).
Zemtsovsky, Izaly. 1997. An Attempt at a Synthetic Paradigm. – *Ethnomusicology* 41 (2): 185–205. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/852602.