

7 The Language of the Heart

Music in Lubavitcher Life

I was asked to write this article for a book examining contemporary Hasidic culture in the United States. This collection, *New World Hasidim: Ethnographic Studies of Hasidic Jews in America*, edited by Janet S. Belcove-Shalin, appeared in 1995 and contained perhaps the first collection of articles about Hasidic culture based on the ethnographic method of fieldwork. My article was the only one addressing music and its role in Hasidic ritual and spiritual life, and it was perhaps the first published discussion of Hasidic musical culture that integrated women's musical practices with those of men.

This volume strove to move the previous historical study of Hasidic culture in two new directions: toward the anthropology of religion and toward feminist theory. Also to appear in this volume were two articles, one by Debra Kaufman, "Engendering Orthodoxy: Newly Orthodox Women and Hasidism," and the other by Bonnie Morris, "Agents or Victims of Religious Ideology: Approaches to Locating Hasidic Women in Feminist Studies," both of which used recent feminist anthropological theories surrounding individual agency and autonomy to argue that within the constraints of orthodoxy, women were actively and successfully negotiating new positions of social and ritual power. Some of the material presented here was used later in my book *Music in Lubavitcher Life* (2001).

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As a small child growing up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the late 1940s, I was often drawn to the sounds I heard when, on my way to school each day, I passed the Lubavitcher yeshiva (school) at my corner. I was struck by the spirit and intensity both of the singing and of the radiant faces of the men and

boys I could see through the window on Hobart Street. I would often stop to listen, attracted by the sense of purpose that the singing seemed to have and by the sometimes joyful, sometimes yearning, quality of the music. Coming from a secular Jewish family where I was expected to become a classical musician, I could not fully understand the relationship these people had to Judaism or to their music. Later, as an ethnomusicologist—a trained outside observer—I came not only to better understand this relationship, but also to develop a high regard for the musicianship and musical creativity of the men and women with whom I worked.

This article examines the traditional music of Lubavitcher Hasidism (*nigun*), its meaning and use in Lubavitcher life, and its role in the ongoing negotiation between traditional Lubavitcher values and those of the U.S. urban mainstream. I regard *nigun* as a musical expression of essential Lubavitcher religious and philosophical beliefs and its performance as an articulation of these beliefs within the realm of social and musical action. “Making a *nigun*” is not simply a joyous activity for Lubavitchers; it is a religious act, carrying with it the same awesome responsibility as prayer.

The Contemporary Setting

The contemporary Lubavitcher court, led by the late rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–94), is the largest of the modern Hasidic courts, its members numbering around 250,000 worldwide. The Brooklyn community of Crown Heights (approximately 100,000), according to Lis Harris, encompasses an area “whose borders are loosely defined by their synagogue [770 Eastern Parkway], schools, kosher shops, and the last Hasidic family on a block” (1985, 13).

Contemporary Lubavitchers in Brooklyn live in many ways much as their eastern European counterparts did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Strictly adhering to the laws of Orthodox Judaism, wearing specific garments of piety that mark their identity, and joyously, often loudly, participating in frequent gatherings (*farbrengens*) with their rebbe (religious leader), Lubavitchers seem anachronistic to their New York neighbors. Moreover, their activities are often a point of curiosity, sometimes ridicule, for fellow less observant Jews from Manhattan and elsewhere.

Although they may resemble their eastern European ancestors, contemporary Lubavitchers do recognize considerable differences in class and economic opportunity in America that would have been impossible in Europe. For example, some hold jobs outside the community, many live quite comfortably on the tree-lined streets of residential Brooklyn, and some women

even continue to work, most often within the community as teachers, after children begin to arrive. Lubavitchers feel that this increase in social and economic access is primarily the result of an unprecedented tolerance of Jews in today's America. Such tolerance, though, also represents a potential threat—the lure of the secular, with its life of spiritual impoverishment. For women, especially, the threat of the secular presents a special challenge. As one woman states:

Years ago, the role of the woman was to sit at home and to learn within her home all that she needed to know to prepare her for a later life as a wife and mother. . . . But, in this day and age, when we are such a part of our society, there is no such thing as living in your home anymore. By way of the media, the neighborhood, where you walk, where you move, what you hear, what you read, you are by your very nature so affected by the world you live in. . . . The Jewish woman must, if anything, prepare herself even more so, by going out. It has become the thing to work, for economical or emotional reasons. . . . I would say that the trend is so strong now, I hardly know of any of my contemporaries who just stay at home—very few. (Rosenblum 1975)

In spite of the ever-present dangers of contamination and assimilation, one of the most interesting features of contemporary Lubavitcher society is its willingness (and its administrative ability) to forge links with the surrounding modern, urban, non-Hasidic society. For example, Lubavitchers run an extensive outreach program that reaches local, often non-Jewish communities and educational institutions, where Lubavitcher “mitzvah mobiles”—large vans, often wired with loudspeakers blaring music—seek out less observant Jews and invite them to learn more about their *Yiddishkeit*. Men are encouraged to don yarmulkes (skullcaps) and tefillin (phylacteries) and women to light Sabbath candles.

Over the past twenty years or so, these activities have resulted in a heavy influx of new, predominantly American-born, non-Orthodox Jews who wished to return to Orthodoxy, the Ba'alei Teshuvah (newly Orthodox, returnees). The contemporary community now counts more Ba'alei Teshuvah among its members than those who have been observant from birth.¹ Ba'alei Teshuvah often describe themselves as being on a perpetual journey toward spirituality. This journey takes years of study and contemplation and parallels, if on a different plane, the spiritual journey of Lubavitchers who have been Orthodox from birth. Many Ba'alei Teshuvah, however, are regarded as slightly suspect by their lifetime counterparts, as their roots are in the mundane world of contemporary U.S. culture. It is usually with marriage (often to another Ba'al Teshuvah) and the birth of children that they are truly accepted.²

Lubavitcher Spiritual Heritage

Like all modern Hasidim, Lubavitchers trace their spiritual lineage to the great seventeenth-century *Zaddiq* (holy man) Israel ben Eliezer, the Ba'al Shem Tov (d. 1760), and like other groups, their philosophy borrows heavily from the Lurianic kabbalist tradition, the Zohar, and other mystical and halachic (Jewish legal) works. Unlike other Hasidim, though, Lubavitchers adhere to a philosophy developed by their founder, Rabbi Schneur Zalman (1745–1813) of Liadi, a philosophy known as Habad, an acronym based on three Hebrew words: *hochma* (conceptualization, where an idea is first conceived), *binah* (the cognitive faculty, where an idea is analyzed), and *da'at* (the final state in which an idea attains comprehension) (Mindel 1969, 33).

Schneur Zalman codified his essential philosophy in the *Tanya*, a four-volume collection of writings and commentaries upon Talmudic and mystical texts. At the core of Habad is the concept of the *benoni*, or the “intermediate” man—a category of Jew who stands between two opposing souls, expressed metaphorically as the animal and divine souls. The *benoni* status is within the grasp of any person who succeeds in living his or her life without intentionally committing an evil act. This can be accomplished if the Hasid strives continuously to achieve *devekut*, or adhesion to God (i.e., “oneness,” or unity with the divine). *Devekut* is brought about by adhering to the laws of Orthodox Judaism and by living all aspects of one’s life with the proper intention (*kavannah*). *Kavannah* is often activated by the expression of two essential emotional states: *simhah* (joy) and *hitlahavut* (enthusiasm).

The process of achieving *devekut* is described as moving from the animal to the divine soul, so that when the divine soul is reached, the animal “falls away.” The animal, or mundane, soul is conceptualized as neutral, yet potentially out of control, often needing restricting laws or codes, whereas the divine soul is seen as being ordered, or having the capability of ordering. One’s spiritual quest for *devekut*, then, is regarded as a movement away from disorder toward order. Lubavitchers thus speak at once of the binary polarizations of animal and divine souls, of the ongoing process of moving from animal to divine, and of the difficulties of accomplishing this process in everyday life.

Achieving *devekut* is conceived, though, not as a onetime goal, but rather as an ongoing process, one that is repeated daily throughout one’s life. The divine and earthly realms, often referred to metaphorically as the head (associated directionally with the right) and the heel (associated with the left), are to be in constant communication through the heart (central and inward), which is the seat of emotion. It is precisely the energetic repetition of religious precepts and rituals—that is, the endless, intensely felt reinforcement of the bond between God, who is always pure, and human, who is daily tainted

by impure influences—that promotes *devekut*. Thus, Lubavitchers conceive their religious philosophy somewhat as a three-dimensional, fluid model, endlessly moving in both an upward-downward and an inward-outward movement through a centralized node of emotion.

The Role of Music in Lubavitcher Life

Lubavitchers often refer to their music as the language of the heart. Words, they say, are from the brain—they express the mundanities of life; they are connected to the material, everyday, “on-the-surface” aspects of existence. But music, especially a *nigun*, is able to go far beyond that—it expresses the essence of the godly soul that lies in the heart of every Jew. Music, unlike words, can carry one to the highest spiritual levels, can bring forth the spirit of a longed-for ancestor, or can directly communicate with the divine.

Lubavitchers regard their melodies, or *nigunim*, as essential vehicles for expressing *simhah* and *hitlahavut*, as *nigunim* are believed to hold traces of these properties, or “sparks,” that are “freed” through active performance. Music is thus a primary link to the divine realm, and the performance of *nigunim* is regarded as an essential activity of Lubavitcher life. Further, Lubavitchers make a distinction between texts, even those taken from biblical sources or prayers, and pure music. Musical sound itself exists at a higher and deeper spiritual level than words; it can communicate more directly and more powerfully with one’s own godly soul and with the divine. Thus, many Lubavitcher *nigunim* are performed using vocables, or syllables without referents in spoken language.

Musically, *nigunim* resemble other Jewish and non-Jewish eastern European folk songs, marches, or dance tunes. Although Lubavitchers themselves categorize *nigunim* into many different groupings according to their use (e.g., Sabbath *nigunim*, High Holiday *nigunim*, dance tunes, and so on), I will broadly define two categories based on musical style: *nigunim simhah* (happy tunes) and *nigunim devekut* (yearning songs). Generally, *nigunim simhah* are those tunes with a regularly recurring duple meter (often highly emphasized in performance), without extensive ornamentation, occasionally in the major mode, and most often performed by large groups, especially in the context of a rebbe’s *farbrengen*, a gathering of the entire community where the rebbe speaks and there is much singing throughout the night.

Figure 1, “Nigun Rikud,” is a dance tune performed frequently at *farbrengens* and other gatherings. Before death, the rebbe came to favor *simhah* over *nigunim devekut*, as he wished to infuse the souls of his following with enthusiasm, not to bring them down into despair in the face of their difficult task of Jewish redemption in the modern world. It is an excellent example

$J = 96 \text{ MM}$

Yam ya di di di yam bam ya di di di yam bam bam bam ya di di di ya di di di

yam ya di di di yam bam ya di di di yam bam bam bam bam

Oh ----- di di yam ba-----m ya di di di da da da yam ba-----m

Oh ----- di di ai a yai ya ya a yam bam

Ai ye ye yai ye ye yai ye ye yam bam ai ye ye yai ye ye yai ye ye yam bam

a a ya ya a----- a----- a----- a----- ai yai yai yai ya.

Figure 1: “Nigun Rikud,” performed by Habad Choir on Nichoach, 1969.
Transcription by the author.

of a *nigun simhah* and is often performed with much stamping, clapping, and increase of tempo. Its scale employs a lowered second and raised sixth degree, giving it the quality of a southern European or Arab musical mode.

Figure 2 is a *nigun devekut*, “Nigun Shalosh Tenuot” (“Nigun of the Three Parts”), part 1 of which is attributed to the Ba’al Shem Tov; part 2 to the Maggid of Mezeritch, his disciple; and part 3 to Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the Maggid’s disciple and founder of Habad. This particular *nigun* is greatly revered among Lubavitchers, as its three composers, linked together, form a musical chain of holiness.

Senza Misura



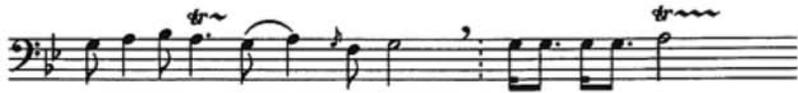
Yi ya -- ma ma ----- ya -- ma ma a ma ma ma ya -- ma ma ----



A - ma a - ma ma ---- ya-ma ma ma ma a --- yim ma ma ma ---- a -----



yoi ma ma ma mam. Ya ma ma mam ya yin na na --a nam,



a na na na ya ----- yin na nam a ma ma ma ma -----



ya ma ma ma mam a yin na na ma ----- ya oi yi-- ma mam.



Ti ya ma ma ma ----- ya --- yi-na na ---- a ma ma ma ma



ya -- yi na nam a ma ma ma yoi ya ma ma ma moi



a a-yin na na na ----- i ---- a ye ai yi ----- nai nam.

Figure 2: "Nigun Shalosh Tenuot," performed by R. Ephraim Rosenblum, April 1976. Transcription by author.

Lubavitcher Social Structure and Music Performance

We have seen now how *nigun* acts to communicate with the divine realm. But the performance of *nigunim* also acts to delineate internal social divisions within Lubavitcher society itself.

The Hierarchy of Spiritual Lineage

Observing the seating pattern at the late rebbe's *farbrengen* beautifully underscores the social and musical hierarchy that exists within Lubavitcher society. The men and women are, of course, separated, with the women above in their own gallery and the men below near the Torah scrolls and the rebbe. Seated at the rebbe's table are his closest associates—his secretary, perhaps a visiting dignitary, and others who will assist him during the course of the hours-long event. Radiating outward from the rebbe in row after row of bleacher-style seats are the rest of the men, arranged in almost perfect correspondence to their relationship to the rebbe and to Lubavitch. The most recent Ba'alei Teshuvah are found, most often, in the last, highest bleacher row, at the same level as the Plexiglas screen, shielding the women from view.

Close to the rebbe, in addition to his associates, are various men who act as the rebbe's "musical assistants," starting specific *nigunim* or urging their fellows during a performance. In a sense, they are extensions of the rebbe, and they carry the responsibility of choosing the appropriate *nigun*—one that corresponds to the basic theme of the *sicha* (the rebbe's talk)—and of making sure that its performance is spirited, energetic, and effective. The musical assistants sit close to the rebbe, either at his table with the others or in the front rows of the large synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway.

These men are also responsible for another important musical task—choosing an appropriate *nigun* for the rebbe's birthday. Each year, as the rebbe's birthday approaches, various Lubavitcher composers begin setting the words to the psalm that corresponds to the rebbe's new year. A committee, made up of the same musical assistants who help the rebbe at a *farbrengen*, chooses the best song. The winning song is introduced at the *farbrengen* held closest to the rebbe's birthday and is immediately learned by the entire community, spreading quickly throughout Crown Heights.

Who are these men? How have they been chosen to carry out these musical responsibilities? At first, I assumed that they were chosen on the basis of their musical ability—yet not all of them were musically active or had what we might consider "beautiful" voices. Perhaps they had been selected on the basis of age—yet not all were elderly. Later, I came to realize that the main criterion was one of spiritual lineage; all of the rebbe's close associates were

Lubavitchers from birth, who learned the *nigun* repertoire from their fathers and, most important, could trace their lineage back through many, if not all, of the seven generations from the present rebbe to Schneur Zalman, the founder of Lubavitch. Thus, it was their connection to the holy men and holy music of the past, ultimately validating their own spirituality, that accounted for their special musical status.

Gender

Various Orthodox Jewish laws prohibit men and women from praying, singing, or otherwise engaging in social activities together where there is a danger of unacceptable sexual behavior between them or when unwarranted sexual stimulation (*ervah*) might occur between people who are, for various reasons, prohibited from marrying. Eschewing the values of contemporary feminists and the exhortations of other Orthodox Jewish women who have begun to fight for more equality—especially in areas of public ritual observance—Lubavitcher women adhere strictly to such laws, even though they clearly separate them from the domain of men, stating, “The Torah’s restrictions are the Jewish woman’s safeguard. For where the Torah restricts, it does not demean—it protects and sanctifies. . . . Any hint of inferior status [is] not a result of Torah law, but a reflection of the times and culture” (Lubavitch Foundation of Great Britain 1970, 219).³

The voice of a woman (*kol isha*) has long been seen as a source of male sexual stimulation, and various prohibitions have developed, limiting men’s interactions with singing, and at times speaking, women.⁴ Briefly, the question of *kol isha* centers on the many interpretations of a small passage in the Bible from the Song of Songs (2:14), “Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely.” The first to comment on this passage was the sixth-century Talmudic scholar Samuel, whose interpretation first linked women’s voices to prohibited sexuality. Samuel proclaimed, “*Kol b’isha ervah*” (The voice of a woman is a sexual incitement) (Cherney 1985, 24a: 57).

Later, the great philosopher Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides, 1135–1204) added a refinement. He saw the word *ervah* as referring to the woman and to the performance context, not specifically to the woman’s voice. He preceded the word *ervah* by the definite article *ha*, or *the*. The original commentary by Samuel now read, “*Kol b’isha ha-ervah*,” or “The voice of an illicit woman is prohibited.”⁵ Maimonides, in effect, shifted the emphasis from the inherent sexuality of women and their voices to the context of a potential illicit relationship between a man and a prohibited woman. Sexual stimulation, in itself, was not prohibited; rather, it was the potential to create a context of sexual stimulation between a Jewish male and a forbidden partner, especially a “public

woman” (i.e., a non-Jewish courtesan, or prostitute, who sang and danced in the context of clubs or other public meeting places), that was restricted.

Although *kol isha* prohibits men from hearing women sing, it does not prevent women from singing. Thus, women, when not in the presence of males, freely engage in many of the same musical activities as their male counterparts. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear women singing *nigunim* in the home while lighting Sabbath candles. One particular event, the *forshpil*—a party given for a young woman on the Sabbath before her wedding—rivals the musical and spiritual intensity of the predominantly male *farbrengen*.

More recently, women have begun to form their own choirs and to hold their own *farbrengen* complete with storytelling, personal reminiscences, and much spirited singing. In addition to traditional *nigunim*, one particular song, “Dvorah Leah’s Song” (figure 3), is frequently sung at women’s *farbrengens*.

Words: Miriam Bela Nadoff Music: "Har Ha-Gilboa"

$\text{♩} = 88 \text{ MM}$

The song we sing be - gins with tears, but tears are not al-ways sad. Some

times we give and then we find we've gained more than all ----- we had. D -

vor-- ah Le ---ah's song -----. The song on-- ly wo-men can sing. Who

know the pain that part-ing brings but still in Ha-Shem they trust. Who

know the joy that lov-ing brings, but still they do what they must.

Figure 3: “Dvorah Leah’s Song,” performed by Leah Namdar, December 1990. Transcription by author.

Based on a contemporary Israeli tune, “Har Ha-Gilboa,” the text, composed by Miriam Bela Nadoff,⁶ tells the story of Dvorah Leah, the daughter of Schneur Zalman, who, fearing that her father’s imprisonment on charges of treason and his resulting depression would kill him, sacrifices her life so that his teachings can continue. She leaves behind her small son, whom she gives to her father to raise. That virtually every woman I interviewed knew this song attests not only to its popularity but also to its salient and idealized message of women’s sacrificial love.

Traditional Uses of *Nigun*

Central to the expression of Lubavitcher philosophical and religious beliefs, *nigun* holds a special status within Lubavitcher life, acting in many ways to articulate these values. First, *nigun* is a supreme vehicle of communication. In performance, the individual comes to “know himself,” to transcend himself, and, ultimately, to enter the realm where divine communication is possible. Thus, *nigun* provides the Lubavitcher with a key to self and divine knowledge. Second, the performance of *nigun* validates and reinforces Hasidic beliefs and thus acts not only to ease divine communication but also to bind people together in this effort. Finally, *nigun* acts as a group signifier, defining the boundaries of the Lubavitcher worldview, and is thus used as a primary means of communicating Lubavitcher values to other Hasidim and of negotiating Hasidic values with other, non-Hasidic, groups.

Many stories attest to the power of music in performance, especially as a vehicle for self-knowledge. For example, a story is told of Menachem Mendel (the Zemach Zeddik), who came questioning his grandfather Schneur Zalman as to the essence of the Jew:

When the Zemach Zeddik was still a child, he asked his grandfather, “What is a Jew?” His grandfather answered that a Jew is a person who can reveal the root of his soul. A Hasid must know himself and do something good for himself. But he may study Torah and the ideas of Hasidism and still not be complete. It is the responsibility of the Hasid to know himself—and he can only do this with a *nigun*. A *nigun* shows him who he is, where he has to be, and where he can be. A *nigun* is a gate through which he must pass in order to know what he is to be. A *nigun* is not only a melody—it is a melody of yourself. (Zalmanoff 1948, 41)

Another story shows the power of *nigun* to achieve a spiritual union with holy men of previous generations, who are said to live at a higher spiritual level, closer to the divine “head.” Here, *nigun* becomes the agent through which the singer and those present achieve *devekut* and are thus bound to each other and united with earlier, more holy, Zaddiqim:

Everyone stood up and joined the singing. When they got to the place, where the words are “Happy are they who will not forget Thee,” everyone became ecstatic—so much so that their faces became inflamed and on their cheeks tears began to flow. You could see that these people were reliving [a] holy moment. There was no shadow of a doubt that everyone there knew and felt that he [Menachem Mendel, the Zemach Zeddik] was standing near the Rebbe and was seeing and hearing how the Rebbe prayed. (Zalmanoff 1950, 25)

Another important use of music is expressed in this story of Schneur Zalman and an old man who had come to him to study Torah. Here, a *nigun* communicated where words failed:

The Ladier [Schneur Zalman] noticed an old man among his listeners who obviously did not understand the meaning of his discourse. He summoned him to his side and said: “I perceive that my sermon is unclear to you. Listen to this melody, and it will teach you how to cleave unto the Lord.” The Ladier began to sing a song without words. It was a song of Torah, of trust in God, of longing for the Lord, and of love for Him. “I understand now what you wish to teach,” exclaimed the old man. “I feel an intense longing to be united with the Lord.” (Newman 1944, 283)

Although Lubavitchers compose some of their own music, the majority of *nigunim* are either older melodies that have been retexted (or have had their texts removed and vocables added), tunes whose texts have been reinterpreted, or those that have been borrowed from other, often secular, sources, such as Russian drinking songs or, today, musical comedies or television commercials. Indeed, according to the Zohar, the sparks of godliness resulting from the breaking of the *kelipot*, or holy vessels at the time of Creation, are deeply hidden, often in the most mundane places, and only a person with the proper holiness and intention can free the sparks from their bondage. The following story of the organ grinder clearly illustrates this spiritual need to rescue the holy sparks perceived as trapped in a simple peasant tune:

Rabbi Schneur Zalman once heard an organ grinder sing a song which he thought was beautiful, and he asked him to sing the song again. He paid him a couple of coins and he asked him to sing it again until he learned it. And after the Alter Rebbe [Schneur Zalman] learned it, he asked the organ grinder to play it again, but he wasn't able to. He had forgotten it completely. It seems that there are profound songs which are somewhere else, too . . . like one can speak of a lost soul, one can also speak of a lost piece of music. So, the Hasidim have adapted and adopted it because they feel there's something in it. (Rosenblum 1975)

This story also illustrates a traditional strategy used by Lubavitchers to negotiate with the non-Hasidic environment. In redeeming the holy spark

within the (originally non-Hasidic) tune, it was transformed into a *nigun*. The (non-Hasidic) organ grinder was also transformed—he forgot the tune, that is, he no longer had the power to use the tune toward an unholy end (i.e., as mere entertainment). Thus, the borrowing and transformation of the tune effectively neutralized the power both of the mundane, earthly music and of its user, the organ grinder.

Music as Emissary

Over the past two decades, as various music technologies, such as digital recordings, synthesizers, and computers, have become more and more sophisticated in mainstream society, so, too, have the means by which Lubavitchers have preserved and disseminated their music. When I first began visiting the Crown Heights community in 1973, for example, one of the local stores, Drimmer's, carried a few LP recordings produced by the Nichoach Society, a music publishing house established in the 1940s by the previous Lubavitcher rebbe, Joseph Isaac Schneersohn (1880–1950). Now a visit to Drimmer's includes sampling a variety of audio and videocassettes, CDs, and movies aimed at both adults and children for home use. The rebbe has recently stated that the new technology is not, in itself, harmful to an observant life—if it transmits a divine message. Thus, today's Lubavitcher home may include a radio, VCR, and an occasional synthesizer, in addition to the more standard piano or accordion.

Because of music's importance as a vehicle for self-knowledge and spiritual attainment, Lubavitchers have begun to use a variety of musics as “emissaries” to attract new adherents to the group as pedagogical tools to introduce Habadic concepts to those just entering the community. Performed frequently at Lubavitcher-run schools, camps, small home gatherings, and other meeting places, both in and outside the Crown Heights community, these tunes not only enliven and inspire a gathering, but also, in the Lubavitcher view, reach the heart of even the most stubbornly nonobservant Jew. The popular Jewish song “Ufaratzto” (see figure 4) has become, in recent years, somewhat of a rallying cry for Lubavitchers in that its text, taken from Genesis 28:14, enthusiastically urges one to “go forth” and spread *Hasidut* to the West, East, North, and South. It is frequently sung at camps, school, and other gatherings for the Ba'alei Teshuvah.

Although Lubavitchers who have been Orthodox from birth, especially the younger, unmarried ones, often participate in musical activities, it is the Ba'alei Teshuvah who excel as teachers of new members. Older Lubavitchers say that the Ba'alei Teshuvah still have the drive and energy to accomplish the

♩ = 120 MM

U-fa-ratz-to, u--fa-ratz--to, u- fa-ratz-to, u--fa-ratz-to ya-ma v'kayd-ma tza-

1. fay-na ve-neg--bah ----- 2. fay-na va--neg--bah. U ----- fa-ratz-to

ya-ma v' kayd-ma, u ----- fa-ratz-to tza fay--na ve-neg--bah. 1.

2. *fine* fay-na ve-neg-bah. Ah - a ---- ah--a---- U -- fa--ratz- to, u-fa-ratz-to, u-fa-ratz-to,

u-fa-ratz-to, u- fa-ratz-to ya-ma ve- kayd-ma, tza - fay- na ve -- neg -- bah,

ya-ma ve-kayd-ma tza- fay-na ve-neg-bah. U ----- fa-ratz - to

ya-ma ve-kayd-ma, u ----- fa-ratz-to tza --- fay- na ve-neg--bah. *da capo al fine*

Figure 4: "Ufaratzto," performed by the Habad Choir on Nichoach, 1969. Transcription by author.

difficult task of translating Habadic concepts to those unfamiliar with such ideas and that they are especially well suited to the task because their own transformation is still occurring. After all, a Ba'al Teshuvah understands, perhaps better than a lifetime Lubavitcher, how much of the mundane, modern world one must give up to lead a truly observant life. That is why, in fact, they have been given the honorific title Ba'al Teshuvah—every Jew does Teshuvah, but only one who has given up everything to do so is truly a master.

Many of the Ba'alei Teshuvah who have recently entered the community have had considerable experience with music. As is true for most of the American white middle class, many Ba'alei Teshuvah have had piano or other instrumental lessons, either privately or in public school. Some, such as Chaim Burston or Moshe Antelis, were professional rock musicians in their youth and now perform both standard *nigunim* and newer songs, based on rock models, for a variety of audiences. Another Ba'alat Teshuvah, Ruth Dvorah Shatkin, a conservatory-trained classical musician, uses her talents as a composer and arranger of *nigunim* for various women's gatherings.

Thus, a new repertoire of music, never officially sanctioned by the rebbe but used as a means of reaching a contemporary Jewish audience, has developed, often bearing a striking resemblance to rock, heavy metal, classical, and other forms of historical and contemporary music. Two examples will suffice to illustrate how new concepts and uses of music, combined with new musical forms and technologies, have produced music that is at once accessible to a wide range of Jewish audiences and still adheres to basic tenets of Jewish orthodox life.

The first example is Yisroel Lamm's "Philharmonic Experience," typical of a growing number of recordings of Hasidic medleys performed by classical symphony orchestras. The accompanying cassette literature states: "The emanations of the symphony orchestra affect the heart and the mind. From euphoria to melancholia. From ecstasy to misery. The intrinsic value of music is profound. . . . Music is understanding. Music is unity" (Lamm 1988). The tape includes various arrangements of Hasidic *nigunim*, including "Carlebach Medley," arranged by Lamm from *nigunim* composed by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, a man considered by some Lubavitchers to have "fallen away" from Hasidic beliefs and by others to have followed in the footsteps of the great Ba'al Shem Tov by creating a new Hasidic court in California. The music is performed by members of the Jerusalem Symphony and has the quality of any superbly produced classical music recording.

The second example is a recording known as *Radical Rappin' Rebbes*, arranged by Moshe Antelis from raps composed and performed by three skilled Lubavitcher rock musicians, Solomon Bitton, Michael Herman, and Yosef Kilimick. Some of the selections include "Aleph Beis," "Funky Dreidle," "Being

Jewish,” “Radical Rappin’ Rebbe Rap,” and an arrangement of Sam Kinison’s extraordinarily erotic “Wild Thing,” called “Shabbes Thing,” performed with undulating synthesized guitar and bass. Below is the text of the opening verse:

Let’s do it!
 Shabbes thing—I like to do the Shabbes thing.
 Shabbes thing—I like to do the Shabbes thing.
 Shabbes thing—I like to do the Shabbes thing.
 (Words unclear) Workin’ all week six days for my dough
 So when Shabbes comes, I can go take it slow.
 I can’t do no work, because it’s the day of rest.
 We take a shower, all dress up, and try to look our best.
 Do it every Friday night, when the sun don’t shine.
 The ladies do the candles and the guys do the wine.
 After we pray to God, we come home, eat and sing—
 And welcome the Shabbes Queen (if you know what I mean),
 And we call it the Shabbes thing.
 Shabbes thing—let me do the Shabbes thing. (Antelis 1990)

Although most of the older, lifetime Lubavitchers regard this sort of thing as highly suspect, they do recognize its effectiveness in attracting otherwise unapproachable Jews to Hasidic life. Indeed, it was in the house of the renowned Lubavitcher musician Rabbi and Cantor Eli Lipsker that I first heard about *Radical Rappin’ Rebbes*. His son, who was watching the interview, confessed that he had recently purchased the tape, more or less as a joke. His father shrugged this off with some embarrassment, reassuring me that this was *not* Lubavitcher music—although if it reached a Jewish soul, it would have accomplished its purpose (Lipsker 1990).

Conclusion

Music, especially *nigun*, functions in Lubavitcher society as a sound expression of essential beliefs and values. Its use as a vehicle for self and divine knowledge, as a channel connecting the heel of the foot with the divine head, and as a tool for spreading and teaching Hasidic values to others cannot be underestimated, for it is precisely the performance of *nigun* that ensures, like prayer, that the constant dialogue between God and man will continue. And although local communities change, incorporating new members and adjusting to new social environments, the basic tenets and values of Lubavitcher life do not.

To Lubavitchers of past generations, the performance of music has always been regarded as a profoundly effective means of connecting the inherent

godly soul of every Jew with its divine source. In today's America, with its many lures, both attractive and dangerous, music still functions not only as an essential expression of Hasidic beliefs, but also as a statement of positive social values. The captive, holy sparks of both the secular, nonobservant Jew and the mundane ditty can still be freed to perform their divine service through the performance of a heartfelt *nigun*, and its beauty and spirituality can bring even the most unlikely people together. As Rabbi Lipsker remarked to me—with considerable ironic amusement—“What *else* would have ever brought *us* together, but a *nigun*?”