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Enchanting Powers

Music in the World's Religions

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Lawrence E. Sullivan

To [illegible], with great thanks for your advice and participation in our efforts to enter the museum world.
Larry
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Mythologies and Realities in the Study of Jewish Music

Kay Kaufman Shelemay

Jewish music, like all topics having to do with Jewish history and culture, is virtually without boundaries in time or space. In time, Jewish music spans a period from biblical days to the present. In terms of space, it stretches from the Middle East in its broadest sense to Europe, the Americas, and parts of Asia and Africa as well. What is remarkable in the face of this extraordinary historical and geographical spread is that a critical core of Jewish literary output, philosophy, and ritual has survived universally and has throughout history been transmitted relatively intact wherever Jews have lived. But can one really anticipate musical continuity as well? Why would one expect that there be a "Jewish music," given the varied history of different communities in the Jewish Diaspora?

Needless to say, I am not the first to stress the wide range of musical practices among Jewish communities. Virtually everyone who has studied Jewish music has been struck by its diversity. First and foremost among these observers was the "father of Jewish music research" (Adler, Bayer, and Schleifer 1986, 11), Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, who was born into an observant Jewish family in Latvia in 1882.[1] Idelsohn was both a cantor and a scholar trained at music conservatories in Berlin and Leipzig. Preoccupied with the idea of

[1] Biographical information about Idelsohn presented here has been taken from Idelsohn's autobiographical article 1986 (1935) and Schleifer 1986. I will not here dwell on inconsistencies in dating, raised by Schleifer, op cit.

studying "Jewish song," Idelsohn went to Jerusalem in 1906 to study Jewish music and was immediately struck by the diversity he encountered: "In Jerusalem I found about 300 synagogues. . . . The various synagogues were conducted according to the customs of the respective countries, and their traditional song varied greatly from one another" (Idelsohn 1986 [1935], 21).

Yet, despite his description of differences in liturgical music among Jewish communities of his period, and his acknowledgment that Jewish song incorporates non-Jewish elements (Idelsohn 1986 [1935], 21), Idelsohn insisted that ". . .the Jewish elements are found in all traditions, and only these are of interest to the scholars" (Idelsohn 1986 [1935], 21). Idelsohn sought to demonstrate, through recordings, transcription, and analysis, that an essential continuity was present.

I begin with the example of Idelsohn and his work because I believe that it demonstrates a central paradox in the understanding of Jewish music initially established by scholars and perpetuated in popular imagination. While Idelsohn perceived and acknowledged diversity as the reality in Jewish musical practice, he spent his entire career seeking to document commonalities that he believed existed within divergent musical traditions.

This paradox or contradiction between mythologies[2] and realities arises first and foremost, it appears, because of the history of scholarship in Jewish studies and, secondarily, because of the background of the individuals who have studied Jewish tradition. Modern studies of all aspects of Jewish religious and cultural tradition date to the 1820s in Berlin, where a group of intellectuals launched a movement called the "science of Judaism" (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*), a field concerned with the analysis of written texts.[3] Scholars were concerned with applying modern research methods and with editing critically the biblical and rabbinic literature (Hoffman 1979, 1).

In addition to their concern with texts, these early scholars of Judaica were united by a shared characteristic: they were almost without exception Jews. Most were first trained in traditional settings in their own communities and then later exposed to academic studies in German universities. Therefore, out of the nineteenth century came an academic study of Judaism which was, on the one hand, explicitly interested in documenting surviving texts in relation to prior tradition, and, on the other, carried out by individuals emotionally committed to that study.[4] Thus, scholarly goals were combined with a strong personal commitment to the tradition studied and a desire to establish beyond all doubt its authenticity and antiquity

These same perspectives are reflected in Idelsohn's work, as well as in many scholarly publications on Jewish music written before the last decade.[5] For example, one writer asserts that "Jewish musical life. . .yields a composite picture of convincing force, showing an unbroken chain" (Sendrey 1970, 23), concluding in a later passage that "just as most of the religious and secular institutions of the Hebrews were of foreign origin, adjusted to suit their own national needs, so their music, though greatly influenced by that of the environment, preserved obvious Jewish traits" (Sendrey 1970, 420).

[2] I use the term mythology in a manner similar to that of historian William McNeill, who writes that mythology and history are "close kin inasmuch as both explain how things got to be the way they are by telling some sort of story" (1986, 3). In this context, mythologies refer to shared truths that grow out of social experience and that have been transmitted over time. I am furthermore interested in the relationship between mythology and reality, that is, in exploring the interaction between what McNeill has called "myth making" and "myth breaking."

[3] For further information on the history of this movement, see "Wissenschaft" 1972.

[4] With a few notable exceptions, the study of Jewish music has continued to be largely an "insider" enterprise, a factor that certainly contributed to the maintenance of the mythology of continuity into scholarship of the mid-twentieth century.

[5] See Adler 1982 and Shiloah 1992, 21–26 for critical discussions of the issues surrounding the preoccupation with a "common source" for Jewish music. Shiloah suggests that Idelsohn's perspective was shaped by the scholarship of Christian researchers "searching for the roots of ancient Christian music" (Shiloah 1992, 26).

These attitudes have resonated outside the academy, resulting in a well-established mythology of a Jewish music tradition made of whole cloth, rather than the patchwork one actually encounters. Thus, the modern ethnomusicologist studying aspects of Jewish musical traditions encounters the same dilemma sketched by historian Yosef Yerushalmi, who describes "a Jewish historiography divorced from Jewish collective memory, and in crucial respects, thoroughly at odds with it" (Yerushalmi 1989 [1982], 93). The historian is expected to "act under a moral pressure to restore a nation's memory. . . ," while in reality memory and modern historiography stand in "radically different relations to the past" (Yerushalmi 1989 [1982], 93–94). The same situation pertains in relation to attitudes toward music in Jewish religious life and practice, where myths of continuity are necessarily disputed by scholarly scrutiny of the reality of change.

Issues in Jewish Music Scholarship: Borrowings and Authenticity

If any characteristic of Jewish secular and liturgical music repertories challenges the myth of continuity in Jewish music, it is the widespread presence of contrafacta, pre-existent melodies borrowed from outside the Jewish cultural orbit.[6] One particularly striking example is that provided by Hasidic tradition, where performance of a song is believed to be one of the most effective vehicles for achieving what is termed *devekuth* (literally, "adhesion" [of the soul to God]), an ecstatic experience through which one receives divine knowledge. The singing of wordless melodies (*nigunim*) is an integral part of Hasidic religious experience: the songs are sung during prayer, at meals, at weddings, gatherings, and holidays. Most of the melodies are borrowed from preexisting songs, since a melody

[6] Borrowings also took place between repertories *within* Jewish tradition, for example, the appropriation of Judeo-Spanish song melodies to set statutory prayers in the liturgy. See Avenary 1960 and Seroussi and Weich-Shahak 1990–91.

of any origin can be borrowed and used, sacralizing it in the process (Koskoff 1978, 157).

In her study of the Lubavitcher Hasidic movement in Brooklyn, New York, ethnomusicologist Ellen Koskoff has documented the usage of a number of colorful contrafacta, including use of a commercial ditty of the Pepsi-Cola Company, "There's a Whole New Way of Livin' " (Koskoff 1978, 173). This Lubavitcher *nigun* provides a fine example of this most common process in the music history of all Jewish communities—borrowing both the general musical styles and even specific melodies of peoples among whom they live. Secondly, it shows how materials that are borrowed can become "traditional" over time and set styles for subsequent generations. In fact, individuals today composing in the Brooklyn Lubavitcher community generally do one of two things: they may compose original melodies which in some way resemble "old" Lubavitcher tradition, or they may borrow melodies or certain stylistic features from current musical traditions of their "host" society (Koskoff 1978, 158). The Lubavitcher example therefore demonstrates the manner in which a Jewish community intentionally draws upon the broader musical world surrounding it and how that music, originally borrowed, can itself become an "authentic" part of Jewish tradition for years to come.

One can look at the music of virtually any Jewish community and find similar examples of borrowing and adaptation of local musical style. To take an example from the Sephardic orbit, Syrian Jews living in Israel and the Americas borrow popular Arabic melodies to set newly composed Hebrew texts for songs (*pizmonim*) sung on a variety of liturgical, paraliturgical, and social occasions (Shelemay and Weiss 1985). The Syrian case tells a story similar to that of the Lubavitcher Hasidic tradition: first, music is borrowed from the environment in which Jews live,[7] reflecting changing influences over time; and second, borrowed music becomes a traditional and fully accepted part of Jewish religious and social life.

[7] Sound recordings also provide a venue through which music can continue to be borrowed from locales in which a community lived in the past. Syrian Jews

Jewish Musical Studies: Some Methodological Considerations

To return to the comparison of the study of Jewish texts with those of Jewish music, the search for authenticity and antiquity was far easier to accomplish with the textual study of Jewish liturgy and literature. The task has been complicated for scholars of Jewish music, who, while working within an intellectual framework and emotional environment that sought to document continuity, were constantly confronting evidence of diversity and change. To explore more fully the methodological implication of this position, it is useful to survey the scholarly study of the Judeo-Spanish ballad.

When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, they left the Iberian peninsula in many directions and established new communities elsewhere in Europe, throughout the Mediterranean, and the Americas. They took very little with them in the way of material possessions. Luckily, song is carried in the memory, not an incidental factor in the powerful survival of song traditions among Sephardic Jews.

In order to discuss the Sephardic musical tradition and its survival in the various countries of relocation, it has generally been the practice to start at the beginning, to recount the departure from Spain in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and to trace the course of a song's history from that point in the past until the present. However, in fact the data suggest the need to do just the opposite: to begin with the present and make excursions backward in time. This approach is necessary both to gain insight into the nature of the musical materials and to correct some of the myths surrounding them.

Although it is certain that ballads were actively sung and

in the Americas, for example, have depended almost exclusively upon recordings of Arabic music to "refresh" their musical repertories since their departure from Syria in the first decades of the twentieth century. Scholarly recordings, including those preserved in archives and published in the last quarter century, have served as sources for repertory performed and re-recorded by professionals.

transmitted within Sephardic families over the course of centuries, little documentary evidence exists concerning their content and performance prior to or following the departure from Spain. Most of the Sephardic song texts and virtually all of their melodies were carried exclusively in the oral tradition; there was little internal motivation or outside interest in committing the songs to writing until the current century.[8] Thus, documentary evidence from the past is painfully thin. What we are able to recount of the history of Sephardic music must be reconstructed almost exclusively from the surviving songs and from the networks of tradition surrounding their transmission by twentieth-century descendants of the Spanish-Jewish exiles.

By the early twentieth century, Spanish literary scholars had become aware that songs no longer extant on the Iberian peninsula itself were perpetuated abroad in the oral traditions of Sephardic Jews.[9] Of particular interest were the narrative ballads, called *romances*, still sung in Judeo-Spanish dialects by Sephardic Jews in the scattered locales in which they lived. Comparisons of these orally transmitted ballad texts with those found in early written Spanish sources show striking degrees of correspondence between the two repertories after more than four hundred years of separation.[10] Thus the initial interest in Sephardic songs was primarily

[8] The situation was somewhat different in relation to sacred song texts in Hebrew, which were written down, sometimes with indications of popular melodies to which they were to be sung. The most notable early example was Israel Najara's "*Zemiroth Yisrael*," a songster first printed in Safed in 1587 (see Seroussi 1990, Yahalom 1982). Judeo-Spanish song tests were not included in such sources, although some of their melodies were borrowed to set the Hebrew hymns (*piyyutim*). In 1922 Yacob Abraham Yona, a Sephardic Jew who lived for most of his life in Salonika, Greece, distributed chapbooks containing texts of popular Judeo-Spanish ballads along with his own original compositions. Yona's ballad collections have been edited and published in Armistead and Silverman 1971.

[9] The major early research in this area was carried out by Ramón Meneñdez Pidal, discussed in Katz (1972, 21–24, 31–34).

[10] The broader issue of concordances between modern orally transmitted ballad texts and medieval Spanish models is a complex one and is discussed at length in Armistead and Silverman 1986.

focused on the texts of the ballads and their relationship to medieval song repertories no longer extant in Spain itself.

These studies raised considerable interest in what had been, before that point, simply an obscure ethnic song tradition little known outside the Sephardic community itself. However, early scholars approached the songs almost exclusively as a residue of the past, largely ignoring the impact of cultural traditions from the countries of relocation as well as the active roles of these songs in everyday life. Secondly, scholarly fascination with the ballad, given the possibility of comparing it with extant Spanish written sources, led to the neglect of other equally important Sephardic song repertories, both in Judeo-Spanish dialects and in Hebrew. But most problematically for our discussion here, it was assumed that the strong Spanish concordances with ballad texts also extended to their melodies. Thus, as early scholars documented the Sephardic song tradition, their work resulted in the popular perception of the Sephardic song tradition as a conservative one, consisting primarily of ballads perpetuating texts and tunes that had changed little since the fifteenth century.

In fact, the scholarly study of Sephardic song during the second half of the twentieth century has gained momentum and has sought to dispel many of the above preconceptions.[11] The availability of portable sound recording equipment provided many new insights, for it made it possible to record systematically the complete song repertories of individual Sephardic Jews where they lived. Editions of Sephardic songs multiplied,[12] serving to document surviving songs and to make possible comparative studies of multiple versions. An unanticipated consequence was the role of the editions in reinvigorating transmission of the songs both within and outside of Sephardic communities, a factor that served to embed mythol-

[11] See, for example, Shiloah and Cohen 1983 and Seroussi 1993.

[12] The first publication of a Sephardic ballad with musical notation dates from the end of the nineteenth century. For a detailed, critical discussion of the numerous editions of Sephardic ballads containing transcriptions from the oral tradition, see Katz 1972, 20–124.

ogies of continuity among both audiences and performers. This issue will be discussed further below.

Other factors, too, shaped reception of the Judeo-Spanish ballad repertories outside of scholarly circles. By the late 1960s, both recording and publication activities had become extremely urgent. European and Balkan Sephardic communities had been largely destroyed during the Holocaust, and their survivors had been forced to relocate yet again, primarily to Israel and to different urban centers in the Americas. The study of Sephardic music in the late twentieth century became in many cases an attempt to document songs whose longtime transmission had been abruptly halted along with the life of whole communities by whom they had been sung. Additionally, Sephardic communities which had for centuries existed in the Arab world had, by the 1960s, been for nearly two decades resettled in Israel, where many different regional Sephardic styles were beginning to meld into a larger, distinctive pan-Sephardic song tradition.

An appreciation of the surviving Sephardic song repertories allows us to understand the extraordinary amount of diversity that actually constituted Sephardic music over the centuries. Were we simply to move outward from fifteenth-century Spain to various countries of relocation, an approach that guided the early scholars of the Sephardic ballad and still shapes the presentation of these repertories in present-day performance, one would be forced to look only for continuities, for that common stream of Spanish-Jewish tradition. Such a perspective has served until the present to privilege scholarship on songs in the Judeo-Spanish language of the fifteenth-century exiles.[13]

From a late-twentieth-century vantage point, the Sephardic world appears less to have maintained its Spanish heritage intact than to have used it as a foundation upon which to construct new and dynamic musical traditions. As Jews dispersed from Spain and established new lives in quite different geographical and cultural locales, they acquired new local languages and customs. While in

[13] Studies of Sephardic song repertories in Hebrew language have been carried out in the last decade. See Seroussi 1989 and Shelemay 1988.

many lands of relocation, Sephardic Jews both perpetuated old songs, including the ballads, and also incorporated new elements into them. This was a process that occurred over time, at different rates of speed in different Sephardic communities, depending upon their accommodation to and acceptance within the new country as well as a variety of other social and economic factors.

Research carried out to date on Sephardic song has been disproportionally weighted toward the ballad. Although they have attracted attention both because of their obvious historical import and their intrinsic beauty, it seems likely that the ballads also provided a convenient unit of analysis because of their consistent adherence to a set literary form. In contrast, the study of two other major categories of Sephardic songs, Judeo-Spanish songs separate from the ballad repertories and paraliturgical hymns in Hebrew, present considerable textual as well as melodic diversity.

Jewish Music Scholarship: Neglected Subjects, Unanswered Questions

Preoccupation with what might be termed the "philological aspects" of the Judeo-Spanish ballad has also left scholars with little time to consider the great promise these materials hold for cultural interpretation. While some ballads sustain images that must have been widely circulated in fifteenth-century Spanish folklore before the Jews' departure, others provide glimpses of the contrasting worlds of Sephardic Jews in the Diaspora. Like the anecdotes or narrations of singular events analyzed by historians to decode the past, Sephardic ballad texts provide a resource on which to base new historical readings (Greenblatt 1990, 3). For example, the texts of many Sephardic ballads contain materials concerning relations between the sexes, often presenting women as either victims or victimizers.[14] These songs hold great promise for expanding our

[14] See Armistead and Silverman (1986, 8–16) for a catalogue of text types found in the author's collection. Henrietta Yurchenco has work in progress on the subject of women and ballad texts.

understanding of gender relations and asymmetries in the communities that sustained them, in different times and different places.

It is also of great importance to acknowledge that, despite their historical relationship to medieval Spanish sources ranging from famous Spanish and French epics, the Sephardic *romances* do not simply replicate their Spanish models. Ballad texts surviving in the twentieth-century Sephardic oral tradition in fact vary widely in content, most existing as hybrids derived from their Spanish precursors, but welded into an aesthetic whole through a "creative incorporation" of postmedieval elements (Greenblatt 1990, 26). In detailed studies of an extensive corpus of Sephardic ballads from the oral tradition, Samuel Armistead and Joseph Silverman have illustrated the problems incurred by ignoring post-Spanish influences, showing, for example, that one Judeo-Spanish ballad perpetuated in Greece, long thought to be of Spanish heritage, was in fact an exact rendering in Judeo-Spanish ballad style, formulas, and motifs, of a widely circulated Greek ballad (Armistead and Silverman 1983–84, 40–41). They cite similar examples from other ballads, as well as from various genres of Sephardic folklore and folk literature, including tales, riddles, proverbs, and poetry (Armistead and Silverman 1983–84, 38–54).

If the *romances* were always distinctive in their textual and musical structure,[15] they were also distinguished by special con-

[15] The textual structure of the Sephardic ballad is consistently a sixteen-syllable verse, divided into two eight-syllable hemistiches. Generally, the second hemistich carries assonant rhyme. The musical settings are almost always quatrains, each musical unit carrying two textual verses (that is, thirty-two syllables, divided into four hemistiches). A recent study of Judeo-Spanish songs among Sephardic Jews of Canada indicated that for 65 percent of the 113 *romances* gathered, the most common musical structure was a quatrain composed of four musical phrases, ABCD, corresponding to the four octosyllabic hemistiches of the text. The melody is then repeated, sometimes with subtle variations, for all subsequent strophes (Cohen 1988). To gain an appreciation of the extraordinary historical, linguistic, and musical complexities involved in adequately representing any one ballad, the reader is referred to the presentations in Armistead and Silverman 1986; particularly instructive are the multiple musical transcriptions for each ballad prepared by Israel J. Katz in that volume. Additional examples can be found in Katz 1972 and 1975.

ventions of performance practice that have survived into the twentieth century: they were traditionally sung by a soloist without instrumental accompaniment. Another striking characteristic of Sephardic *romance* transmission is made clear from observation and recording of songs during the last century: the *romances* were primarily sung by women. Ballads were generally performed in mundane domestic settings for entertainment or to pass the time during daily household tasks. Whatever the content of their texts, ballads were often sung to lull children to sleep. A colorful example of this phenomenon is found on a published recording of Sephardic songs from Morocco, where a young Jewish woman in Tetuan sings ballads about biblical prophets and Spanish royalty while rocking her sick child at the kitchen table (Yurchenco 1983).

Twentieth-century recording technology and ethnographic research has therefore opened windows on what otherwise were inaccessible traditions relating to ballad performance and transmission in a variety of countries after relocation. But if scholarship can identify to an impressive degree of specificity the sources of new elements that accrued to ballad texts over the years, there still remain questions about the provenance of many ballad melodies.[16] The problem is twofold. First, we have no direct evidence concerning the original tunes to which the ballads were sung at the time of the expulsion. Second, we cannot ascertain exactly what changes these tunes underwent over the course of centuries in the countries of relocation (Katz 1972, 128).

Change likely occurred in two main ways, foreshadowed in the discussion above. On the broadest and most general level, it is clear that over the years many *romance* tunes were modified, both unconsciously and intentionally, to render them more similar in style and content to music that Sephardic Jews encountered in their new

[16] For discussion of possible relationships between notated medieval Spanish secular melodies and those of the Judeo-Spanish ballad, see Avenary 1960. Etzion and Weich-Shahak 1988 propose an analytical method for comparing surviving Sephardic ballad melodies with melodies in early Spanish sources.

homelands. The musical environment of a given place and time served as a catalyst for transformation of the Judeo-Spanish repertories into new hybrids.

If we cannot recapture the past directly, we can point to twentieth-century results of this process of musical syncretism, a fine example of which has been documented among the Jews of Sarajevo, Bosnia. Jews lived in multi-ethnic Sarajevo since at least 1565, when they began to come into close contact with the dominant Moslem culture. Ballads still performed by surviving members of the Sarajevo community closely resemble secular Moslem songs known as *sevdalinke*, the latter sung in Serbo-Croatian language. The *sevdalinke* is clearly the source for several aspects of the Bosnian Sephardic *romance* tradition, including its vocal style with heavy vibrato at the end of phrases, subtle ornamentation, and modal organization.[17]

Beyond the absorption of general musical characteristics from surrounding non-Jewish repertories into Sephardic music, the most common way in which whole melodies penetrated the ballads and other Sephardic songs was through the contrafact process discussed above. A popular song, perhaps one heard in the course of everyday life, would be the likeliest subject for borrowing, its own vernacular text discarded, and its melody re-used to set an existing (or newly composed) Jewish text.

As noted before, the contrafact process may involve borrowing from any source, including melodies already in circulation within the Sephardic tradition. The study of Sephardic song melodies is thus complicated by the presence of contrafacta drawn from both external and internal sources (Seroussi and Weich-Shahak 1990–91). For this reason, too, study of the Sephardic ballad alone without reference to other Sephardic song repertories isolates a genre from repertories with which it in fact shares many salient characteristics as well as specific melodies.

[17] See Petrović 1982, 35–48 and 1985, side 1, cuts 3a and 3b.

A Note on the Sephardic Revival

The traditional transmission of Sephardic song diminished during the second half of the twentieth century following the period of forced relocation of many Sephardic communities. However, the performances and circulation of Sephardic song repertories is today more widespread than ever before, exemplifying what must always have been an important characteristic of Sephardic song transmission: an ability to survive extraordinary external changes by absorbing new elements into the old.

Several factors have coincided both to enable and encourage the modern, public performance of Sephardic song, and at the same time, to perpetuate old mythologies. A new sensitivity to the diversity of Jewish tradition, emerging from Israel during the 1960s, aroused, especially in the United States, considerable interest in and potential audiences for Jewish musical traditions outside of the more familiar Central and Eastern European heritage. The existence and relatively easy availability by this period of both scholarly editions of Sephardic songs and field recordings served to bring formerly inaccessible repertories into the hands of singers and, concurrently, into the public eye.

The burgeoning interest in Sephardic song must be contextualized as well within trends affecting the broader musical world. The American folk music revival that began in the 1950s incorporated a cross-cultural repertory. Additionally, around 1960, there began on college campuses an upsurge of intense interest in music of the European Middle Ages and Renaissance. Instrument makers began to reconstruct period instruments and a bumper crop of singers interested in "early music" emerged from music schools and conservatories all over the United States and Europe. Early music ensembles such as the "Waverly Consort" of New York City and the Boston-based "Voice of the Turtle" began to attract a substantial following and soon incorporated Sephardic songs into their concert programs. Hence, just as scholars were beginning to understand better the complexity of its transmission, Sephardic song began to be increasingly associated with its fifteenth-century Spanish roots, both within the Jewish community and to a wider public.

In the late twentieth century, Sephardic songs virtually moribund in private oral transmission have been "revived" in more public, even commercial contexts. In some cases, individuals descended from Sephardic families decided to perform their songs in public. Here the lively career of Flory Jagoda, a Sephardic musician born in Sarajevo, Bosnia, provides an interesting case study: Jagoda both performs the songs she learned from her grandmother as a child in Sarajevo and renews the tradition through composing her own Judeo-Spanish songs in a traditional style.[18] Similarly, the Canadian-based ensemble Gerinaldo, three of whose members are Sephardic Jews of Moroccan descent, combines knowledge derived from longterm personal exposure to Sephardic song traditions with fresh repertory and instrumental skills contributed by a fourth, non-Sephardic singer who is an ethnomusicologist.[19] These new fusions transmit Sephardic song to an increasingly wider public.

Conclusion

The very diversity of Jewish music is in fact the hallmark of a powerful and vital cultural tradition. The preceding discussion has sought to trace the exciting implications, both theoretical and methodological, from acknowledging this reality. Yet while Jewish musical scholarship has moved into the academic mainstream, with recent publications exploring major issues of interest (Mendelsohn 1993), popular perspectives remain largely unchanged. When a scholar suggests in a public lecture that there is no single Jewish music, but that diversity and change have characterized musical expression in Jewish life past and present, she or he is still greeted

[18] In this manner, the relationship between tradition and innovation is fluid and similar to the Hasidic example set forth above. See albums of Sephardic songs published by Jagoda on her own Altarasa Record label (Jagoda n.d. a, b, and c).

[19] Ethnomusicologist Judith Cohen, a member of Gerinaldo, wrote a dissertation on Sephardic musical traditions in Canada (see Cohen 1988).

with ambivalence, characterized as taking a pessimistic or even negative view of the subject.[20] That the myth continues, impervious to scholarly evidence to the contrary, is in fact testimony to its continued strength.

For two millennia, most Jewish communities remained sufficiently connected to a mainstream of Jewish practice to observe what might be characterized as a normative version of liturgy and custom for their respective eras. Yet, if shared sacred texts are seen as being at the heart of the universal Jewish tradition, music must be viewed as its life blood. Music serves to support the text, to prod the memory, and to insure that the word is transmitted to the next generation. However, the precise style of the music is less critical to the maintenance of the tradition than the fact that it be such an integral part of the community's environment that it can sustain the word almost without conscious thought. This is achieved through the emergence of musical traditions that fit each environment, each community. Melodies can only be borrowed when they are already part of the sound world of the singers who would appropriate them.

But music has another role beyond simply sustaining and conveying the sacred—it becomes a symbol of the people who perform and transmit it. Here we approach the genesis, and the continuing power, of the myth of continuity. On a very general level, all Jews understand themselves to have a common ancestry, a shared historical past, and a common belief system. Belief in the existence

[20] One of the most striking instances of this situation in my own career (and the incident that encouraged me to draft this essay) occurred when I (and another colleague in Jewish musical studies) spoke at a major university on the Americanization of Jewish music. We gave several presentations over a three-day period, covering aspects of music in the American synagogue and of various communities of Jewish immigrants. After practically every musical example, we were confronted with the same question: "Is this Jewish music?" It became clear that members of our audience, and particularly the donor who was funding the series, were quite frustrated by our answers in an ethnomusicological mode, stressing diversity. We never did succeed in spanning the distance between the donor's dogged allegiance to mythologies of continuity and our scholarly conceptions of the realities of change.

of a shared musical tradition is implicit to this worldview, despite the presence of ubiquitous heterogeneity.

Some years ago, when asked to define Jewish music, the scholar Curt Sachs answered that it was music "by Jews, for Jews, as Jews."[21] In many ways, Sachs's definition remains the best we have, for it captures the essence of tradition as the quintessential social act. In many ways, the longstanding search for the single source of Jewish music is a circular one—one ends where one started, with individuals of every age having contributed to, and in some cases transformed, what must be acknowledged as a vital, and ever-changing, tradition. Like the historian so eloquently described by Yosef Yerushalmi, the music scholar's "task can no longer be limited to finding continuities. . . ." Rather, the "time has come to look more closely at ruptures, breaches, breaks, to identify them more precisely, to see how Jews endured them. . ." (Yerushalmi 1989 [1982], 101). Only through an acknowledgment of both the mythologies and the realities can we come to understand the role of music in Jewish life as well as a central challenge of its study.

[21] See Bayer (1971–73, 555), quoting Curt Sachs at the First International Congress of Jewish Music, Paris 1957.

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