

## Extending the Tradition: KlezKanada, Klezmer Tradition and Hybridity

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*Abstract: This paper examines the way in which klezmer revival institutions, particularly KlezKanada, contradict many of the notions that are generally held of revival movements. Both historical klezmer music and its revival have long histories of incorporating musical styles both of other minority groups, as well those of the dominant majority culture. This paper shows how the communities created within the klezmer revival are constantly recreating their “tradition,” and are responsible for an environment in which musical experimentation is not only accepted, but valued.*

*Résumé : Cet article examine la manière par laquelle les institutions de renouveau du klezmer, en particulier KlezKanada, contredisent nombre des idées que l'on se fait en général des mouvements de revival. La musique historique klezmer et son renouveau ont tous deux de longues histoires d'incorporation de styles musicaux, tant des autres groupes minoritaires que de ceux de la culture majoritaire dominante. Cet article montre comment les communautés qui se créent au sein du revival du klezmer recréent constamment leur « tradition » et sont responsables d'un environnement dans lequel l'expérimentation musicale est non seulement acceptée, mais valorisée.*

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In today's international klezmer scene, there has been a wide proliferation of klezmer fusions. These hybrids, which blend an ever-expanding array of musical styles and genres with klezmer, defined here as Eastern-European Jewish instrumental celebratory music, are notable because they are being encouraged by the scene's formal institutions (festivals and workshops). These new interpretations of klezmer exist in a dialectical relationship to the music's own history. My twelve years of research into the klezmer scene has revealed that a new, vibrant Ashkenazic<sup>1</sup> musical tradition is being instituted

in a community created by those with shared interests in the revival and/or continuation of Yiddish cultural forms. At KlezKanada, a 5-6 day workshop held annually at the end of August at Camp B'nai Brith in Lantier, Québec, participants seek a community in which Yiddish culture is created anew through the vivification of cultural forms that have relevance to the present day rather than by simply recreating and reviving a nostalgic world that refers only to the past.

This article will focus on how KlezKanada participants are not merely searching for continuity with the old traditions; they are engaging in a dialectical relationship with klezmer's history of hybridity while creating new musical expressions. Those participating in and travelling to these international workshops go for a living, changing community whose artistic forms are always in flux. Below, I examine how some institutions of the klezmer revival, as represented by KlezKanada, have explicitly encouraged these hybrid forms in the instruction of their workshops. My conclusions will be based on the ongoing fieldwork that I have been conducting since 2006 at klezmer workshops and festivals in North America and Europe, which also include KlezKamp in the northeastern U.S.A., Yiddish Summer Weimar in Germany, and the Jewish Music Institute's klezmer and Yiddish workshops in London, England, research into the KlezKanada archives, and my experiences as a KlezKanada fellow in 2008, co-teaching the workshop *Extending the Tradition and Developing Personal Style* with klezmer revival legend Frank London.<sup>2</sup> My case study from KlezKanada will be contextualized first with a discussion of conceptions of tradition in the academic discourse as well as within klezmer. This section is followed by considerations of hybridity and its historical presence in klezmer and the ways in which conceptions of revival interrelate with all of these ideas.

### "Traditional" vs "Historic"

Klezmer's very name is a prominent indicator of constantly changing styles, repertoires, and contexts that occurred between the days in which it was simply the celebratory music of Ashkenazi Jews and its revival in the mid-1970s. Until this revival, what we now know as "klezmer" did not even have a name; it was simply the music that was played for weddings, and its eclectic repertoire encompassed whatever was popular at the time. Repertoire included dances that could be identified as distinctly Jewish (*freylekhs*, *khusidl*), genres that were adapted from neighbouring cultures and subsequently accepted as Jewish (*bulgar*, *zhok*), dances that were acknowledged as completely foreign to

the Jewish tradition (polka, quadrille), and, in the United States, genres that came from mainstream popular music (foxtrots, light jazz, rock and roll) (on klezmer's eclectic repertoire, see Slobin 1984, Feldman 1994, Rubin 2001, and Beregovski 2001).<sup>3</sup>The process of naming the music (klezmer), and thus reifying its characteristics and elevating its stylistic qualities to the position of (folk) art, took place during klezmer's revival. Because historically there was never a name for klezmer, it could never become a static tradition. Practitioners could not hearken back to some earlier form of klezmer and define it as "authentic" or "traditional" because no such earlier form had ever existed. Klezmer was thus always adapting to suit the needs of the community.

Traditions constantly change and they are also subjective. Burt Feintuch has written with respect to revival contexts that "each revivalist musician identifies a *tradition* . . . [and] locates himself in relationship to it, placing himself inside it" (1993:185; emphasis in original). Feintuch's conception of tradition is, therefore, one that each musician constructs in relation to his own historical and social connection to the music. Feintuch is careful to place the indefinite article "a" before the word *tradition*, indicating that there are multiple possible traditions to which a revivalist musician can orient himself rather than a singular hegemonic notion of tradition. Contemporary klezmer musicians are acutely aware of historical audio recordings from a multitude of historical styles from varying regions and time periods throughout klezmer's history (with recordings dating from approximately 1905 until the early 1950s). Modern musicians are constantly searching for more sources from which to draw their repertoire and the variety of styles considered "traditional" that are produced in today's klezmer scene is quite broad. This wide array of "traditional" styles gives the current klezmer performer numerous choices as to which style to emulate and how she wants to position herself in respect to the multiple traditions klezmer has. This diversity of klezmer traditions allows performers to find a particular personal niche for their own performance styles. In this manner, musicians can explore styles of individual performers (such as artists active in the early twentieth century like Dave Tarras, Naftule Brandwein, or Belf), musical collections and archives (such as music collected by Ukrainian ethnomusicologist Moshe Beregovski), individual instruments (such as instruments with fewer recorded instances like the flute), or particular geographic regions (the band Varetski Pass adds Hungarian and Romanian repertoire to their Jewish tunes) as a way of exploring territory beyond what has become accepted as the standard klezmer repertoire and instrumentation.

While the term "tradition" was used by almost all of my informants to describe a particular stylistic paradigm that has been (re)constructed by the klezmer revivalists in order to maintain continuity with previous generations of

musicians, I prefer to use the term “historical” rather than “traditional” to refer to klezmer styles of the past. This word allows me to discuss musicians and the styles that they have researched and practised (or continue to practise) without implying that these traditions have been invented or constructed for political, social, or financial gain.<sup>4</sup> It also reflects the fact that there is no singular klezmer “tradition,” but a multifaceted array of historically based klezmer styles that proliferate. The multiple historical styles practised in the klezmer scene today reflect the diversity of styles that were performed throughout klezmer’s history.

By identifying these individual historical styles, klezmer experts can distinguish a plurality of styles without subscribing to a hegemonic concept of a singular “tradition.” The qualities and characteristics that are indicative of particular styles and genres, whether they are types of repertoire, recording techniques, instruments, melodic trends, ornamental techniques, or rhythmic tendencies, are learned by researching historical documents (including recordings) and studying with senior masters. The ability to trace particular musical qualities to specific historical sources enables musicians to identify their music and performance style as authentic. By describing the styles as “historical,” one can avoid the simple dichotomy of “traditional” or “not traditional,” which also becomes tied up in notions of what can be determined to be “authentic.” Because of the rupture in klezmer’s original function as Jewish celebratory music (see below for a discussion of this rupture), it is quite simple to define “historical klezmer” as any music that was performed outside of the context of the klezmer revival (and its current manifestation, which I refer to as the contemporary klezmer scene).<sup>5</sup> This definition, then, includes music performed and recorded before the klezmer revival of the mid-1970s, as well as music that continued to be performed for Jewish celebrations through the middle of the twentieth century, particularly some of the music for Hassidic weddings.

Despite the academic debate surrounding the word “tradition,” it remains in use in musical circles. Almost all of my informants use the terms “trad,” “tradition,” and “traditional” without any of the implications of invented or created tradition that appear in academic discourse. My discussions below will use the term “traditional” when citing my informants, but “historical” when presenting the results of my own research.

### Hybridity in Klezmer

One of the challenges of working with concepts of tradition is, as I have already described, the tendency to imagine tradition as static and unchanging

whereas change is constant and inevitable. One approach scholars are using to understand and explain such changes is through the analysis of hybridity. Sarah Weiss's conception of "natural" and "intentional" hybridities can serve as a useful tool to discuss how klezmer has been fused with other types of musics throughout its history (Weiss 2008). Natural hybridity occurs when a genre changes gradually and unconsciously over a long period of time through contact with other styles and genres of music whereas intentional hybridity occurs when musicians deliberately and consciously choose to join elements of different kinds of musics in a single utterance. As I will demonstrate below, in klezmer, natural hybridity is well documented in the years before the revival although instances of intentional hybridity also appear in sound recordings as early as 1919, but are not as frequently discussed in academic discourse.

Many scholars argue that klezmer has always been what many would consider a hybrid genre. Every writer about klezmer music mentions that, as far back as records show, Roma and Jewish musicians were in contact with each other and interacted musically. Additionally, many writers have demonstrated that Jewish musicians, both in Europe and America, have always performed a cosmopolitan repertoire in response to the tastes of their audiences of different religions and ethnicities, resulting in klezmer's "natural" hybridity (Idelsohn 1992 [1929], Feldman 1994, Sapoznik 1999, Beregovski 2001, Rubin 2001, Strom 2002). Walter Zev Feldman (1994) goes further to track the origins of one particular song genre, *bulgar*, demonstrating that "foreign" elements had already been incorporated into the music by the early 1900s. In America throughout the twentieth century, this cosmopolitan repertoire tended to reflect the increasingly assimilationist tastes of the Jewish communities who wanted to become more American and less "ethnic." This process of musical assimilation can be heard when comparing early twentieth-century recordings of American groups such as the Abe Schwartz Orchestra and Kandel's Orchestra with those recorded by V. Belufa's Romanian Orchestra in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Even when listening to different groups from the same geographic region, there is a significant difference over a period of time. New York-based Sam Musiker's recordings from the 1950s are filled with greater influences of jazz and other popular musics than can be found in Abe Schwartz's 1920s recordings from the same city.<sup>7</sup>

"Intentional" hybridity can also be found in the klezmer repertoire as far back as 1919. That year marked the recording of "Yiddishe Blues" by Lt. Joseph Frankel, an original composition that deliberately blended elements of klezmer mode and structure with rhythms and syncopations characteristic of ragtime music. There are other examples of klezmer-ragtime fusions that can be found in publications of print music (Kammen and Kammen 1934). Into

the 1920s, bandleaders began to blend klezmer with other types of popular music, as can be heard in the 1926 recording by Harry Kandel's Orchestra of "Jakie, Jazz 'em Up" (Various Artists 1926).<sup>8</sup> Intentional hybrids continued to be produced through the 1930s with many examples of "Yiddish Swing" (exemplified by the widespread popularity of songs like "Bei Mir Bistu Schoen" and "And the Angels Sing") and can also be seen in a different configuration in music by Dave Tarras and the Musiker Brothers on their album *Tanz!* (2002 [1956]).

David Samuels theorizes that by focusing on the utterance, the study of hybridity "can lend itself more readily and generally to contemporary questions of agency, maneuver, and tactics in the constitution of social reality" (Samuels 1999:466). By focusing on newly created utterance rather than the ways in which genres are transformed, Samuels excludes Weiss's "natural" hybridity from his own definition of the term. To avoid confusion, I use the term "musical assimilation" to describe "natural" hybridity, which, in the case of klezmer in the twentieth century, has tended to transform sounds of individual genres rather than create new ones altogether.

The rest of this article will discuss individual instances (or "utterances," to use Samuels's term) of "intentional hybridity" (to use Weiss's term) within the context of the contemporary klezmer scene. These highly individual musical expressions were created by musicians who are constantly negotiating (and renegotiating) the superimposition of their own understanding of historical klezmer styles onto their personal musical backgrounds. This negotiation is played out on an individual rather than a community level, despite the frequency of klezmer fusions in the contemporary klezmer scene. I will shortly discuss instances of "extending the tradition" that illustrate very different manifestations of hybridity within the context of the contemporary klezmer scene. These musical utterances can be best understood as personal musical expressions that blend historical klezmer sounds with contemporary compositional and improvisational aesthetic trends rather than as the creation of a single, brand new genre that results from the collision of older, established ones. First, I will examine the use of the term "revival" in klezmer and the way in which ideas of revival are related to the previously discussed concept of tradition.

## Revival and Tradition

Tamara Livingston defines a musical revival as "any social movement with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition which is believed

to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past” (1999:68). By reviving klezmer, early revivalists (beginning around 1975) were searching for what could be considered “authentic” musical and cultural expressions of Ashkenazic Jews. Regina Bendix writes that “the quest for authenticity . . . is oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity” (1997:8). While Bendix’s conclusion is that the search for authenticity is a condition of modernity,<sup>9</sup> the notion of recovering a lost essence is what pertains most to this study. These two statements, written regarding two different (yet related) phenomena – authenticity and revivals – display a telling similarity. The goal of revivalism is precisely to retrieve and restore the authentic that is feared to have been lost or in danger of being lost. In klezmer’s case, this fear resulted in the revival of historical musical styles.

As noted above, klezmer has always been in flux. In academic discourse, this notion has been brought to the fore over the past two decades. Peter Niedermüller writes that

culture should be interpreted as the fluid and constantly shifting result of boundless and flexible construction processes. Culture is not an object, not our unchangeable tradition and not something we have to maintain and defend, but rather something we make, use and change in different social situations. (1999:247)

By contrast, the trend in Anglo-American folk revivalism has been to seek out and reify the “purity” within a genre of music, making that music effectively stand still, and then subsequently maintain that newly defined “tradition” (which essentially “invents” the tradition). Niedermüller cites Friedman’s theory of “museumizing” ethnicity through the performance of ethnic culture via world music and festivals, which reveals “the idea of a pure, old, and authentic ethnic culture, which is exotic and strange but at the time excites admiration and is consumable” (Niedermüller 1999:248). While those within the klezmer revival certainly seek to revive historical instrumental styles, it is my contention that the awareness of klezmer’s historically hybrid nature has contributed to the flourishing of a diverse array of fusions that the klezmer revival has spawned because it permits hybridity as an historically “authentic” (or “traditional”) process.

In academic discourse, folk revivals have been characterized as having the power to transform and petrify the culture they seek to restore (see Malm 1993). Rosenberg writes that “folk music” and “folk song” were intellectual constructions within the American folk music revival of the 1950s and 60s, which transformed that which was considered to have a pure, rural origin into

something more fit for the urban stage (Rosenberg 1993:7-8). These musical forms were clearly ideologized and changed for the benefit of their (mostly) middle-class, white audiences. Feintuch also contributes to this discourse, writing that “rather than encourage continuity, musical revivals recast [the] music – and culture – they refer to” into something new (1993:184). This transformation and ideologization of a historical musical style leads to its reification as a new, static, invented tradition. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to Rosenberg’s “named-system revival,” explaining that “*system* in this context signals the shift from tradition to ideology” (2002:139; emphasis in original). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that while klezmer and the klezmer scene may have become a system that supports the historical music as an ideologized repertoire, the creations of contemporary klezmer musicians do not fetishize historical music but use it for a sense of rootedness. In fact, most musicians who are involved in the klezmer revival are keenly aware of the transformed nature of the music and their contexts when early revival performances took place in concert halls rather than catering halls.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett views the Holocaust and subsequent cessation of what is now known as klezmer music in Eastern Europe as a cause of the rupture that divides present musicians from earlier musical contexts (2002). This rupture resulted from the almost complete elimination of the Eastern European communities in which klezmer was originally performed. While klezmer continued to be performed in North America after World War II, two factors contributed to its relegation to the extreme margins of Jewish music. The first was that klezmer became a symbol of the old world – a world in which Jewish communities had (seemingly passively) been brought to the brink of destruction – and, thus, was a symbol of a life that North American Jews wished to leave behind as they assimilated into mainstream life. The second factor contributing to klezmer’s marginalization in the United States was the founding of the State of Israel. For most Jews living outside of Israel, supporting the new state both financially and morally became of the utmost importance. This manifested itself in the promotion of Israeli cultural forms such as songs and dances which did not include klezmer. Upon its revival in the 1970s, klezmer had lost its functional use in Jewish weddings and was being revived for concert stages, which Kirshenblatt-Gimblett characterizes as a rupture of the music’s context.

Because of this change in klezmer’s context (as well as the musicians’ awareness of this change), Kirshenblatt-Gimblett does not consider the klezmer revival to be a heritage movement, following her definition of heritage as “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” (1995:369). While historical klezmer refers to the past, the revival

is very much concerned with contemporary iterations of artistic visions, and is not entirely consumed with preserving a historical style above all else. In works from the contemporary klezmer scene, “old and new are in a perpetually equivocal relationship” (2002:138), and “rather than a bifurcated temporality – before and after the revival – a sense of differentiated historical layers is beginning to emerge” (2002:145). I would also argue that in addition to this “historical layering,” which Slobin refers to in Bakhtinian terminology as a “sonochronotope” (Slobin 2000:73),<sup>10</sup> one is also able to hear a generic layering, seeing as klezmer’s stylistic parameters have never remained static.

Another difference that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes between the klezmer revival and other revivals is that, due to its contextual rupture, there was a delay in klezmer’s revival. This delay, she writes, “spared it from ... ideological attachments” (2002:140). Klezmer was never seen to be a musical heritage of Ashkenazic Jews until after its revival and after it was left abandoned by any politically or religiously oriented Jewish group. She also notes that without these “ideological attachments,” the musicians were approaching this music in purely aesthetic terms. Frank London describes the klezmer revival as “really start[ing] in the middle of nowhere” (quoted in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002:143), again, suggesting that klezmer music was unencumbered by ideological baggage at the time of its revival. This delay can clearly be linked to the Holocaust and the destruction of the Eastern European Jewish communities and subsequent repression of Yiddish cultural forms in North America in favour of Israeli ones. The Jewish musicians coming to klezmer beginning in the mid-1970s were completely free to recontextualize the music for their own purposes as part of a subculture some distance from the Jewish mainstream. This lack of an ideologized version of klezmer, combined with the awareness of multiple historical klezmer styles, has allowed for an openness to a wide diversity of klezmer styles in the revival and beyond. I will now discuss how KlezKanada has addressed these issues in its programming, and how leaders within the klezmer scene, like Frank London (who, in 2011 became the artistic director of KlezKanada), encourage musicians to create and perform a wide variety of klezmer hybrids.

## KlezKanada

Most klezmer workshops dedicate the bulk of their programming to the instruction of a wide variety of historical klezmer styles. KlezKanada, in particular, has extended the reach of its instruction by adding classes dedicated to other styles related to klezmer, such as historically neighbouring musical

styles<sup>11</sup> and hybrid musical styles. As I will demonstrate below, KlezKanada faculty and administration have deliberately developed programming for participants who have a wide variety of musical interests beyond historical klezmer styles.

KlezKanada's importance as a klezmer institution has grown since its inception in 1996 as a "little brother" to the first residential klezmer workshop, KlezKamp, which was founded in 1985 and continues to be held annually in upstate New York.<sup>12</sup> Today, KlezKanada annually welcomes more participants than any other single Klezmer workshop in the world, with as many as 350 participants at its peak around 2007. KlezKanada also maintains a scholarship program which subsidizes between 75 and 120 young, high-calibre musicians, dancers, artists, scholars, and filmmakers, many of whom go on to become KlezKanada Fellows<sup>13</sup> and/or faculty members. Additionally, KlezKanada has deep ties with Toronto's biennial Ashkenaz Festival, one of the biggest and longest-running Jewish music festivals in North America. Because of their proximity both in space and time in those years when the Ashkenaz Festival is held, the two institutions have shared interests in setting up their programs. To contribute to this connection, Ashkenaz Festival Artistic Director, Eric Stein, sits on the KlezKanada Board of Directors. Because of its size, the high quality of instruction, the degree of participation, and its fun, KlezKanada has influenced many klezmer musicians and enthusiasts around the world.<sup>14</sup>

From materials gathered from KlezKanada's sixteen previous years, I have noted a shift from instruction in strictly historical klezmer in KlezKanada's first few years, to the inclusion of a much more diverse curriculum since about 2001. From conversations with Jeff Warschauer, who was, up until 2009, the co-artistic director of KlezKanada with responsibility for assembling the workshop program, I learned that it was the faculty who decided what they would like to teach, with Warschauer ensuring the program was well rounded. In 1996, KlezKanada's first year, the program only lasted one weekend, beginning Thursday night with performances and workshops on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Now, KlezKanada begins on a Monday evening, with official workshops running Tuesday through Friday afternoon, concluding with a massive student concert on the Saturday night. In 1996, the workshops all focused on historical klezmer/Yiddish music performance, or histories of Yiddish folk songs and dances. The only programs with a contemporary focus were Yiddish language classes and Hankus Netsky's lecture on "The Revival of Klezmer." The instrumental workshops were confined to the following instruments: violin, clarinet, guitar/mandolin/tenor banjo, piano/accordion, and *tsimbl*.<sup>15</sup>

While the KlezKanada archives are incomplete, I noted a substantial

change between 2000 and 2001, when KlezKanada began to expand considerably (as Hy Goldman, KlezKanada's founder and director, has told me both in our numerous informal conversations and in a formal interview on 13 March 2010). It was in that year that graduates of their scholarship program, active since 1997, began to teach workshops of their own. In 2001, the "scholarship faculty" (later called "KlezKanada Fellows"), including Josh Dolgin, Eric Stein (leader of Toronto-based *Beyond the Pale*), and Jason Rosenblatt (leader of Montreal-based *Streiml*) began introducing workshops based on their interests in blending klezmer with other musical styles. At the same time, some senior faculty like Alan Bern (director of *Yiddish Summer Weimar* and member of klezmer "super-group" *Brave Old World*) were freed to teach advanced workshops with a focus on more contemporary music.<sup>16</sup> 2001 was also the first year of Lisa Mayer's "Teenagers in Lvov" workshop which encouraged the fusion of Yiddish lyrics and melodies with current and familiar pop songs.

By 2008,<sup>17</sup> workshops addressed both historical styles and the creation of contemporary works in all genres of music, including Yiddish songs, writing for Yiddish theatre, contemporary Yiddish dance, instrumental improvisation, and instrumental composition. Other features included a *Makeover Master Class* for which bands performed and were critiqued by *Varetski Pass* members *Cookie Segelstein*, *Stuart Brotman*, and *Josh Horowitz*. There was also extensive programming for kids and teens, including the ever popular *Teenagers in Lvov*, the results of which have proven to be one of the most enjoyable features of the student concert year in and year out. The instrumental workshops have extended far beyond the five instrumental groups represented at the 1996 edition of *KlezKanada*. In 2008, one could study klezmer harmonica, bass, brass instruments, saxophones, harp, and percussion, as well as take advanced classes in violin, accordion and, of course, the *Electric Meydl-Land* class for electric instruments led by *Vanya Zhuk* of St. Petersburg, Russia. Additionally, on and off since 2001, *Josh Dolgin* (aka *Socalled*) has led a klezmer/hip-hop fusion class. The 2008 edition of *KlezKanada* also featured *Frank London's* class, *Extending the Tradition and Developing Personal Style*.

## Extending the Tradition

Even in klezmer's early revival (from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s), historical klezmer was never considered a holy object to be revered and reified, but a style of music that could be combined with others. This blending of Yiddish sounds and other kinds of compositional and improvisational techniques can be

seen in Frank London's 2008 KlezKanada workshop, *Extending the Tradition and Developing Personal Style*, which I had the privilege of co-teaching as a KlezKanada Fellow. London's description in the brochure is extensive, which, he confessed to me, was designed to scare off those who merely wanted to do a workshop with him because of his reputation:

This class will incorporate playing, composing, arranging and soloing. Students will be taught strategies that extend traditional klezmer material in rigorous ways that get deeper into the source while expressing and developing their own personal musicality and voice. Examples of these strategies include creating themes and variations; extending forms, composing new harmonizations, developing rhythmic settings and composing additional material to tunes; solo, free, group and structured improvisation; motivic and structural development; fully notated and open arranging for ensemble, etc. Note: this class is only open to students who are willing to commit to doing one hour or more a day of homework individually, outside of the class time.

Students will be expected to complete assignments each day. Please come to the first class with one traditional klezmer tune to deal with, and also (optionally) one original composition and/or a solo piece to perform. (KlezKanada 2008)

While starting with over twenty participants, by the end of the week, the class was down to fifteen or sixteen, whereas some of London's instrumental workshops have had upwards of sixty or seventy.<sup>18</sup> While London may have begun the class with the idea of it culminating in an ensemble performance, the focus ended up being much more on individual compositional and performance process, with all students composing a solo work for their own instrument by the end of the workshop. During breakfast on the second day of the class, London approached me with an idea that had struck him the night before. Since KlezKanada has a filmmaking program, run by Montréal filmmaker Garry Beitel, London wanted to create a sonic collage in the woods of all the solo compositions, to be recorded by the video crew.<sup>19</sup> All of the workshop members agreed to this, and on Saturday (when official workshops are idle for *Shabbat*),<sup>20</sup> we headed to the forest, first to record our compositions individually, and then to run through the entire work once, with the order of the overlapping solo compositions already mapped out and three video cameras filming simultaneously. Both London and I participated,

but our contributions were improvised rather than composed. The final fifteen minute performance consisted of various compositions erupting from different parts of the forest at different times with the cameras roaming to discover the sources of the music. The hope of getting a cohesive short film out of the footage has, unfortunately, died. London informed me that Beitel had had members of KlezKanada's film program work on creating a video, but the sound quality was too inconsistent and none of the attempts to edit the footage together had satisfied their artistic demands.

To better explain the individual outcomes from London's "Extending the Tradition" concept, I will describe some of the compositions and composers briefly. Saxophonist Lisa Miller Blajchman holds a Master's degree in composition from York University for which she studied the blending of art music with klezmer. Blajchman's composition is approximately five minutes long and demonstrates a pronounced "classical" approach. Developing themes that recur throughout the work and using a soft, beautiful playing tone, her aesthetic choices reflect the way in which her knowledge of western art music intermingles with the modes and sounds of klezmer. Electric mandolinist Sam Harmet studied at University of Wisconsin in Madison and plays in the klezmer fusion band The Shtetlblasters. Harmet's compositional aesthetic betrays a keen affinity for rock and funk. His driving rhythms as well as the effects-driven sound of the electric mandolin show a different approach to the hybridization of klezmer. He frequently bends pitches and abruptly changes perceived tempos, although a rhythmic drive (derived from popular music styles) remains throughout the entire piece. Harmet's composition certainly goes beyond typical expectations of a mandolin, but, like Miller Blajchman, he uses recurring themes to unify the work. My own alto saxophone improvisation betrayed more of an avant-garde aesthetic, using key clicks, extreme dynamic ranges, juxtaposed registers of the instrument, and no fixed metre, in addition to extended techniques such as circular breathing and multiphonics. Other compositions involved pitched shouting into the woods, plays on the jazz standard "All of Me," chord clusters on keyboard instruments, as well as simple thematic extension of, and the grafting of new material onto, a traditional klezmer song. These descriptions are unfortunately insufficient to convey the sonic possibilities that each musician explored. Even so, it should be clear that, compositionally and artistically, the musicians brought their varied musical backgrounds to their creations and that KlezKanada encouraged their exploration of new ground within the klezmer world.

## Conclusion

What I have shown is that while there are strong emphases on understanding historical klezmer styles in the contemporary klezmer scene, there are equally powerful forces that push the music in new directions. It would be inappropriate and inaccurate to describe the klezmer scene as an “invented tradition” in Hobsbawm’s sense of the word since there is no effort or intention to claim that new klezmer fusions are actually part of an antiquarian and unchanging tradition. Contemporary klezmer musicians also acknowledge the long history of different kinds of hybridity and fusion in klezmer which correspond to Sarah Weiss’s categories of “natural” and “intentional” hybridity. These discourses of “tradition” and hybridity make it difficult to define klezmer either as a “heritage movement” as described by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, or as a revival.

Klezmer revival institutions themselves are constantly balancing their programs between past- and future-oriented philosophies. The organization that runs KlezKamp is called Living Traditions; the name expresses a desire to ensure that traditions do not become petrified and static. KlezKanada writes in their mandate that the camp “fosters Yiddish and Jewish cultural and artistic creativity worldwide as both a heritage and a constantly evolving contemporary culture and identity” (KlezKanada 2009). Additionally, the Ashkenaz Festival makes it known that it “places an equal emphasis on the need for preservation and innovation within this cultural milieu” (Ashkenaz Foundation 2008). It is clear that klezmer revival institutions, such as KlezKanada, not only accept the hybrid genres created by its participants and faculty, but they also promote and encourage these fusions. Along with other klezmer workshops and camps, KlezKanada is encouraging the creation of new cultural forms under the umbrella of the contemporary klezmer scene, as well as adapting to contemporary contexts older forms originally from the rituals of the Jewish wedding.

Folklorist Henry Glassie writes that tradition is the “search for continuity” (2003:177), and I would argue that klezmer musicians are, perhaps unconsciously, searching for such a continuity. While there was a significant rupture in klezmer’s performance contexts, there is evidence to suggest that musicians were creating new, hybrid art forms within the Ashkenazic Jewish instrumental world as early as 1919. Today’s klezmer musicians are finding continuity within this tradition by seeking to create new musical forms that relate to the old while being relevant to the contexts of today. By cultivating and supporting multiple streams of historical musical styles, participants in the klezmer scene use modern historical techniques (i.e., researching

historical documents and recordings) to revive and sustain multiple traditions of performance that refer to the past as well as a tradition of innovation and adaptation that is found throughout klezmer's history.

This dual notion of being able to simultaneously look backwards and forwards is the epitome of what Mark Salber Phillips (2005) hopes to see in the academic discourse: a discussion of the concept of tradition that does not set it in opposition to modernity. He envisions a larger, interdisciplinary conversation that dissolves this simple binary in which modernity is synonymous with innovation and tradition with stagnation. Once "the problem of tradition ceases to be defined as a resistance to modernity, tradition becomes again a means of raising essential questions about the ways in which we pass on the life of cultures" (2005:25). I argue that, in the klezmer scene, these ideas are not in opposition. The klezmer scene is populated by musicians who are extremely well versed in the historical klezmer musical styles and choose to express themselves artistically through musical fusions. The inclusivity of the scene and its institutions towards musical innovators indicates that tradition is not seen as the opposing force of innovation, and these two ideas can exist within the same context, and indeed even within the same musical utterance. Practitioners today understand that klezmer has historically been a music of hybridity, assimilation, and acculturation as well as a music of both tradition and innovation. ❁

## Notes

1. There are generally considered to be two ethnic streams of Judaism: Ashkenazic and Sephardic. Ashkenaz is the geographic area of central and eastern Europe, where Yiddish was the Jewish vernacular language. Klezmer comes from this region and has no historical connection to Sephardic Jewry.

2. London has been involved in the klezmer revival, the wider contemporary Jewish music scene, and the downtown New York improvisation scene since the early 1980s. He was an original member of the Klezmer Conservatory Band and a co-founder of the Grammy-award-winning, New York-based group The Klezmatics. He has led other projects including Hasidic New Wave, and Frank London's Klezmer Brass All-Stars.

3. This information comes from a wide variety of sources, including Slobin (1984), Feldman (1994), Rubin (2001), and Beregovski (2001). In klezmer, this idea of repertoire eclecticism is almost considered general knowledge.

4. By using the term "historical" rather than "traditional," I seek to avoid the academic and ideological burden that the term "traditional" has come to bear.

Defining “tradition” has long been challenged and debated in the academic literature (see, for example, Bascom 1958, Eisenstadt 1973 and 1974, Shils 1981, Nettl 1982). However, Hobsbawm and Ranger’s watershed publication on “invented tradition” (1983), appearing at about the same time that Handler and Linnekin published their important critique of academic understandings of tradition (1984) and that Harker published his book on *Fakesong* (1985), has been particularly influential on subsequent academic analyses of the term. During the 1990s and into the 2000s, scholars have developed more nuanced understandings of tradition in response to these studies while critiquing the pejorative attitude towards “invented traditions” implied by Hobsbawm and Ranger. See, for example, Finnegan (1991), Coplan (1993), Malm (1993), Glassie (2003), McDonald (1996), and Phillips (2004).

5. See my forthcoming PhD dissertation, “Musical Hybridities and the Klezmer Revival” for a thorough discussion of the contemporary klezmer scene.

6. V. Belufa is also referred to as “Belf.” See Wollock (1997) and Feldman (2003) for more information on Belf.

7. Selections by all of these groups can be heard on *Klezmer Pioneers 1905-1952* (Various Artists 1993). Also, the aesthetics of the *Klezmer Plus!* recording (Beckerman and Leess 1992), led by Pete Sokolow, the self-proclaimed “youngest of the old guys,” also tend towards a later American klezmer sound. Sokolow, an active multi-instrumentalist who began performing professionally in the 1950s, was schooled by the musicians considered to be the masters of American klezmer. He has been heavily involved in the performance and teaching in the klezmer revival since he met Henry Sapoznik in the 1970s (Sapoznik 1999).

8. The 1919 recording of “Yiddishe Blues” by Lt. Joseph Frankel and the 1926 recording of “Jakie, Jazz ’em Up” by Harry Kandel’s Orchestra are available on Apple iTunes from compilations from Global Village Music that are currently out of print in physical form.

9. Allan Moore agrees with Bendix’s postulation that modernity is the cause of the search for authenticity, writing that the “social alienation produced under modernity” is the underlying cause of this search (Moore 2002:210). Svetlana Boym’s (2001) conception of nostalgia is also of interest when examining “authenticity” and nostalgia as products of modernity.

10. A “chronotope” in the Bakhtinian sense describes the ways in which multiple, layered times and spaces can be read within a work, particularly in literature. Slobin extends this to the “sonochronotope” to describe how sounds of different times and spaces can be expressed in a single musical utterance.

11. Several prominent klezmer musicians have engaged in projects in which neighbouring musical styles are featured. Alan Bern’s *Other Europeans* project focuses on the relationships between the music of some of Europe’s most marginalized ethnic groups, Roma and Jews. Christian Dawid’s *Konsonans Retro* is a Ukrainian brass band whose repertoire shows similarities to Jewish repertoire. Both of these ensembles have been in residence at KlezKanada and members have

taught workshops on their repertoire and style.

12. I define a “residential” workshop as being one where most participants and faculty stay in a single location where all workshops, classes, meals, and sleeping accommodations are centralized. KlezKanada, held at a summer camp north of Montréal and KlezKamp, held at a resort hotel in the Catskill mountains, both fit this definition. Other large workshops like KlezFest in London, England and Yiddish Summer Weimar in Weimar, Germany, feature separate accommodation and workshop locations and participants must make their own arrangements for accommodation. Therefore, the latter two would not be considered residential workshops under this definition.

13. KlezKanada Fellows are not paid for their teaching, but do not pay registration fees either. Usually a KlezKanada Fellow will teach or assist in one or two workshops. I was a Fellow in 2008 and 2011, and my workload in 2008 consisted of teaching a beginner’s band class and co-teaching a workshop with Frank London, and in 2011 consisted of teaching a beginner-intermediate band class and presenting a lecture on my research.

14. The international contingent at KlezKanada appears to be growing, with perhaps 5 per cent of 2011 participants coming from European countries, including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, France, and the UK.

15. *Tsimbl* is the Jewish hammered dulcimer, usually somewhat smaller than the cimbalom. While evidence has been found for using just about any instrument in klezmer music, these five instrument types are considered to be the most consistent with historical performance.

16. In 2001, for example, Alan Bern taught a workshop entitled “New Jewish Music,” which was an “analysis of major works and styles of new Jewish music, from the klezmer revival and elsewhere” (KlezKanada 2001).

17. I use 2008 as the year of comparison since that was the year I co-taught the workshop with Frank London discussed below.

18. Numbers of participants in most multi-day workshops tend to fluctuate throughout the week. Some participants prefer to sample as many different classes as they can, but most will change workshops after deciding that one or another is better suited to their needs after trying it out for a day.

19. This idea was very much in the spirit of some of R. Murray Schafer’s compositions, although when I mentioned Schafer to London, he had not heard of him.

20. Shabbat is the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday until sundown. In the orthodox Jewish tradition, playing of musical instruments is forbidden on Shabbat, and, therefore, official instrumental workshops are not scheduled for Saturday. Unofficially, however, many ensembles schedule additional rehearsals while jam sessions pop up all over the camp.

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