

From *Folksmentsshn* to Creative Individuals: Klezmer Transmission in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract: During the mid-1970s, American Jewish musicians active in a variety of musical genres took an interest in eastern European Jewish roots music. This efflorescent enthusiasm for it came to be known as the klezmer revival. In 1985 Henry Sapoznik founded the first klezmer institute. Since then, numerous institutes have sprung up across North America and Europe. Despite their emergence as one of the most popular formats for the enactment of community and for learning Yiddish cultural expressions, klezmer transmission has rarely been the focus of scholarly attention. This article contends that revivalists and subsequent generations have created an ethos for a music culture through transmission processes, demonstrating veneration both for an “authentic” Jewish cultural heritage and for individualized cultural expressions.

Résumé : Au milieu des années 1970, les musiciens juifs américains pratiquant divers genres musicaux commencèrent à s'intéresser aux racines musicales des Juifs d'Europe de l'Est. Cet enthousiasme bourgeonnant envers celles-ci en vint à être connu sous le nom de renouveau du klezmer. En 1985, Henry Sapoznik fonda le premier institut klezmer. Depuis lors, de nombreux instituts ont fleuri à travers toute l'Amérique du Nord et l'Europe. Bien qu'elle soit apparue comme l'une des formes les plus populaires de représentation communautaire et d'apprentissage des expressions culturelles yiddish, la transmission du klezmer a rarement fait l'objet de l'attention des chercheurs. Cet article soutient que les acteurs du renouveau et les générations suivantes ont créé un éthos de la culture musicale par le biais de processus de transmission qui fait montre d'une vénération à la fois pour un patrimoine culturel juif « authentique » et pour des expressions culturelles individualisées.

Inside the gymnasium of Camp B'nai Brith at KlezKanada,¹ clarinetist Michael Winograd's sonorities resound off the structure's metal frame and cement floor while dance teachers Michael Alpert² and Steve Weintraub lead

the nearly 100 students through the chorus figures of a *sher*.³ Couples 1, 2, 3, and 4 circle counter clockwise, clockwise, and promenade. Then, couples 1 and 3 advance, retire, and switch places, followed by couples 2 and 4 advancing, retiring, and switching places. Finally, couples 1 and 3 advance, retire, and return home, followed by couples 2 and 4 advancing, retiring, and returning home; this concludes the *sher*'s chorus. Next comes *aroy's firn zikh* [leading out or shining]. Dancers solo in the centre of the square, then partner with each of the other dancers in the square in an order that Alpert has playfully declared "a very *yiddishlekh* [in a Jewish manner] turn – this is the Talmudic part – whereas the order of the men that dance [i]s 1, 2, 3, 4, the order of the women who dance is 1, 4, 3, 2" (author's field notes, 24 August 2006). I recall a similar instance at Yiddish Summer Weimar (Germany): my fellow dance students and I bobbed ebulliently around and across the square for the chorus, bungling only when it came time for the *aroy's firn zikh*. In an attempt to improve our retention, Alpert asserted that this dance served as a metaphor for *yiddishkayt* [Jewishness]: its figures require navigation through the dance individually as well as collectively within our own square and with all other squares.⁴

Alpert's teaching moment indelibly remained with me each time I danced the *sher*. Yet the longer I came to live with this dance, the more I began to consider critically my interpretative strategies for his contention. When dancing the *sher*'s collective figures, *yiddishkayt* – "the essential quality of homespun Jewishness" (Slobin 2000:21-22) – was not difficult to imagine. Yet Alpert's simultaneous attention to the soloing body did not always neatly align with this schema. In my experiences teaching the *sher* to Wesleyan University and Hampshire College students, for example, *aroy's firn zikh* frequently elicited choreography evocative of popular, contemporary (North American) dance, such as the jerk, the dougie, and other African American-derived moves. The problems with defining *yiddishkayt* are not new. Slobin has called attention to the term's meaning as a source of ongoing dispute:

The nature of Jewishness has been furiously debated over the centuries, accelerating in the twentieth century to the point of obsession.... [In] the 200 years since modernity came to the Jewish world, neither outsiders nor insiders have agreed on the nature of the Jewish nation/race/religion/ethnic group/minority. (2000:21-22, 25)

I find Slobin's invitation to further consider the meanings of *yiddishkayt* apropos in interpreting Alpert's teaching of the *sher*.

In this article I engage Alpert's assertion that the *sher* serves as a

metaphor for yiddishkayt to unveil a polyvalent ethos of contemporary klezmer transmission.⁵ Klezmer teachers and institutional leaders simultaneously value notions of old-world *shtetlakh* [plural of *shtetl*; predominately Jewish market town] and “homespun Jewishness” as well as individual creativity. Alpert’s figurative explanation of the *sher*, I suggest, illuminates a largely unquestioned paradox in the world of klezmer transmission today, instilling “authentic”⁶ cultural heritage alongside individualism, thus constructing a uniquely contemporary ethos. His demonstration of the *sher* as an embodied practice of the undergirding values of klezmer transmission – by virtue of its combination of communal and individual elements – and his presentation of this viewpoint as “natural” and free of contradiction serve as the intellectual provocation for the problem explored in this article.

I argue that klezmer transmission harbours two modes of transmission stemming from two musical practices. The first favours the transmission of “authentic” musical practice through the teachings of *folksmentshn* (discussed below). This mode of transmission arose out of the first generation of revivalists’ own methodologies for learning Yiddish musics in the 1970s and early 1980s. The second endorses the veneration of individualism and creative expression: it stems, at least in part, from many klezmer musicians’ practices of African American jazz and improvised-composed musics. Such veneration is readily observable among the klezmer musicians trained or associated with the New England Conservatory of Music’s (NEC) Third Stream (TS)⁷ and, later, the Contemporary Improvisation Departments (CI) who went on to become klezmer innovators and institute faculty members. In their roles as professional klezmer musicians and teachers, they’ve retained and transmitted some of the values central to African American jazz and improvised-composed musics. Throughout this article, I critically examine transmission within several contexts, encompassing instances of formal instruction at klezmer camps and workshops, as well as modelling in the practice of communities (see Lave and Wenger 1991).⁸

Klezmer, “Revival,” and the Formation of Klezmer Institutes

The Yiddish term *klezmer* (plural, *klezmerim*) – derived from the Hebrew *kle* and *zemer* (literally, vessel of song) – originally referred to Jewish, itinerant, and dynastic musicians of eastern and central Europe who performed for Jewish and non-Jewish weddings and celebratory functions. The great waves of immigration of European Jews from 1881 to 1924 brought many *klezmerim* to North American urban areas. While some first-generation *klezmerim*

found work performing at weddings and other social functions within “New World” Jewish communities, others entered new vocations as factory workers or shopkeepers (Loeffler 1997). The ritual role of klezmerim diminished as Jewish weddings moved from the outdoors of Europe to the catering halls of New York and Philadelphia (Loeffler 1997; Netsky 2004b). By the second generation, New York klezmerim had adapted their skills to work in popular, classical, or club date musics, if they had not left the music profession altogether (Loeffler 1997). Further, the Immigration Act of 1924,⁹ the transitional nature of Yiddish immigrant culture, assimilation in America, near complete destruction of European Jewry in the Shoah, anti-Semitic campaigns of Stalin, and post-war Zionist hegemony left Yiddish instrumental music and its cultural base greatly decimated in the post-war era.

In the mid-1970s, a handful of young American Jewish musicians active in jazz, American folk, Balkan, old-time, and Western classical musics took an interest in learning, performing, and transmitting eastern European Jewish instrumental music and Yiddish song traditions.¹⁰ Henry Sapoznik, an eminent member of the revivalist generation, was initially motivated to investigate his own heritage music¹¹ at the insistence of his old-time banjo mentor. This efflorescent enthusiasm for Yiddish music came to be known as the klezmer revival,¹² renaissance, or revitalization,¹³ and the term *klezmer* shifted in meaning, from referring to its performers to referring to the newly emergent musical genre and subculture (Slobin 1984, 2000; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002).¹⁴

In 1975, NEC TS student and later faculty member (1979-present), Hankus Netsky, began sharing his newly assimilated knowledge of klezmer with fellow conservatory and Boston-based musicians (Netsky 2004a). Shortly after convincing his Uncle Sam to teach him about klezmer, he “went forth to spread [his] scant knowledge as best [he] could” (Netsky 2004a:191). After several years of hosting informal jam sessions, Netsky staged the first concert of what would later become the Klezmer Conservatory Band in 1980.¹⁵ The concert was met with considerable success, and Netsky consequently approached NEC administrators about teaching a formal course on Jewish music. Although his idea “was rejected on the spot” (Netsky 2004a:193), the rejection did not last: within three years NEC had added Yiddish Music Performance Styles to its official curriculum.¹⁶

After nearly a decade of immersion in klezmer, Sapoznik founded KlezKamp (officially known as the Yiddish Folk Arts Program). Inspired by Jay Ungar’s (Balkan) Fiddle and Dance Camp and his Jewish fiddle mentor, Leon Schwartz, Sapoznik sought an atmosphere in which students would “learn, exchange, and create Yiddish music in an enthusiastic and challenging

intergenerational environment” (Sapoznik 2002:178-80). In its first year, 120 individuals gathered in the dilapidated Paramount Hotel in the Catskills on December 22, 1985 (Sapoznik 2002:180). Since this initial meeting, KlezKamp has run annually for over 25 years.

Not even Sapoznik could have fathomed just how widespread the transmission of Yiddish music and culture would become as a result of klezmer institutes. KlezKamp is extraordinary for the multiple institutes that it has inspired (e.g., KlezKanada, KlezFest London, Yiddish Summer Weimar, Klezmer Paris, and KlezFest St. Petersburg),¹⁷ as well as for its emphasis on music instruction situated alongside the transmission of cultural history, Yiddish language, literature, culinary arts, dance, film, visual arts, and theatre. Klezmer trombonist Daniel Blacksberg shared with me the advice he was given by an NEC classmate, which pithily summarizes the essential place it holds among practitioners: “if you really want to learn klezmer music you gotta go to KlezKamp” (interview, 22 February 2011). Yet, despite the klezmer institute’s emergence as one of the most popular formats for the performance and enactment of community (see Wood 2007a) and for learning Yiddish cultural expressions,¹⁸ the practice of klezmer transmission has seldom been the focus of scholarly attention.¹⁹

Constructing a Klezmer Ethos: The *Folksmentsh* as Master Teacher

As revivalists were eager to learn about the cultural context of Jewish musical practices that during their early years either were nonexistent, veiled, or not part of mainstream 1950s and 1960s American Jewish culture, they sought out older Jewish community members with whom they formed close relationships and under whom they studied. They privileged interactions with “those rare *folksmentshn* (sing. *folksmentsh*), people born and raised in eastern Europe who actively retained crystal-clear access to that lost world and could transmit it to a new generation”²⁰ (Sapoznik 2002:181). Michael Alpert conveyed to me that his best informants, teachers, and collaborators were *folksmentshn*:

Folksmentshn, they were culture bearers.... [They] tended to be ... people who could sing, or people who knew about music.... [They] tended to also know and do the whole spectrum, or something about the whole spectrum of what we would from the outside define as the Yiddish cultural arts.... They [many Soviet Jews] were kind of like ... our relatives that never left. And they were in many ways for songs, for music, for Yiddish, for dancing

as well, like a time capsule of Yiddish culture ... like one of my main informants ... and friends was Bronya Sakina. She was first and foremost a wonderful treasure chest of old-time Yiddish songs. But again, she was a *folksmentsh*.... Bronya was someone who remembered dances very, very consciously ... to her, the Yiddish dances were second nature. (Interview, 26 August 2006)

His application of the term *folksmentsh* refers to the individuals with whom he has worked throughout his more than 30 years of intensive historical, ethnographic, and musical study of Yiddish culture.²¹ In addition to referencing a cache of images of an “authentic” Yiddish-culture bearer, the term *folksmentsh* articulates an imagined “authentic” cultural heritage that became central to the values and practices of transmission. I invoke the *folksmentsh* as a concept that reflects some of the qualities desirable in the transmission of klezmer: engagement in cultural expressions as part of a greater Yiddish cultural milieu to adroitness in multiple artistic and creative skills and day-to-day cultural practices, particularly singing, instrumental performance, dance, and fluency in Yiddish or other eastern European languages. Through lived experience and knowledge, *folksmentshn* allegedly embody practices of “authentic” Jewish culture prior to WW II. For many klezmer revivalists and subsequent generations, the *folksmentsh* carries, transmits, and distributes cultural goods, but, more importantly, they represent an embodiment of “authentic” Yiddish culture.²²

Art and vernacular musical traditions throughout the world have relied upon the expertise and knowledge of master teachers to transmit musical and cultural materials and values to students. Ethnomusicologists Kingsbury (1988), Berliner (1994), Rice (1994), Nettl (1995), T. Viswanathan and Allen (2003), and Hahn (2007), among others, have detailed the transmission of music and dance cultures from master teacher to student – or guru to disciple – in the areas of Western classical, jazz, Bulgarian, Karnatak, and *nihon buyo* [Japanese classical dance] musics and dances. Similarly, the master teacher is neither unique nor new to Yiddish instrumental musics. In his work *Jewish Instrumental Folk Music*, Moshe Beregovskii (2001) chronicles the training of a klezmer fiddler born in 1872 in Kiev province:

Avram Yehoshua himself began studying the violin at age seven with his father while playing the tambourine in his father’s band.... When he got older, his father sent him to study for two years with Arn-Moyshe Sirotovich, a fiddler in Malin, Kiev province, who played better than his father. (Beregovskii

2001:30)

Although he does not state explicitly that the young violinist was sent to a master teacher, we might infer that since his father was a klezmer, he likely sent his son to an authoritative teacher for training beyond his own abilities.

Nearly 100 years later, many revivalists learned and practised klezmer by studying a canon of recorded materials and folios of transcribed tunes and by relying upon older masters to learn style, repertoire, cultural practices, and history (Slobin 2002). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has convincingly argued that the klezmer revival was presaged during the 1950s and 1960s by folk singer Theodore Bikel and instrumentalist-comedian Mickey Katz, “mark[ing] out a place for Jewish music within an international folk music scene, a place that would later be filled by klezmer music” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002:157). However, members of the revivalist generation did not always express interest in studying these crossover styles.²³ Following the Klezmer Conservatory Band’s first concert, Netsky noted that “[he] also became aware of a hunger that existed in the community for older and less homogenized forms of Jewish expression” (Netsky 2004a:193).

The revivalist generation’s search for “purer” forms of Yiddish cultural expression frequently led them to study with European-born klezmerim. More than a few musicians who started playing klezmer in the 1970s and 1980s studied with Dave Tarras. Born in Ternovka, Ukraine into a musical family, he first learned the balalaika, mandolin, and flute before turning to the clarinet. KlezKamp founder Sapoznik characterizes Tarras’s home metaphorically: “In the early 1980s Tarras’ home, in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, had become a klezmer Mecca” (Sapoznik 1999:240). In addition to studying with Tarras, Sapoznik also formed a mentor-mentee relationship with fiddler Leon Schwartz. Born in the Bukovina, Schwartz learned the violin first by ear and later through classical lessons, and he performed with a string ensemble until 1921, the year he immigrated to America (Sapoznik 1999:188). Sapoznik recalled his teacher’s violin playing upon meeting him in 1979:

When Leon raised fiddle to chin, even the vanilla notes of a simple major scale exploded with the flavourful essence of Yiddish music, marking him as one of the great interpreters of klezmer music.

Slightly amazed that anyone would be interested in studying klezmer music, Leon Schwartz agreed to teach me some at the

conclusion of our lessons, provided I had successfully run the gauntlet of classical exercises. (Sapoznik 1999:188-89)

While Schwartz privileges classical technique over klezmer in his pedagogy, Sapoznik portrays his teacher's rendition of a major scale as an essentialized embodiment of Yiddish music.

In constructing the first klezmer institute, Sapoznik's learning methods guided his decision to foreground the teachings of *folksmentshn*:

Missing in traditional music camps [e.g. American old-time and Balkan] in general was a sense of transmission within a community context. They were almost all exclusively peer-driven, a vast departure from the way music and culture typically gets passed on.... I wanted younger players to get the same experience I had had: learning from senior musicians, so they would get an accurate take on what this music was about. This was music played by living, breathing people. (Sapoznik 2002:177-78)

Prior to his study of klezmer with older, European-born practitioners, Sapoznik had spent years travelling to North Carolina to study old-time music with Tommy Jarrell and Fred Cockerham. His impression of Jarrell and Cockerham parallels the ways he has envisioned the *folksmentshn* with whom he has studied. Of them he recalls, "They were generous, demonstrative, accessible, and endlessly authentic" (Sapoznik 1999:180). His penchant for learning from practitioners over recordings guided his choices when constructing KlezKamp's curriculum.

When the first klezmer institute was established in 1985, the revivalist generation applied its rubric for learning Yiddish musical and cultural expressions to the institute curricula. The first KlezKamp enlisted veterans Ruth Rubin, Max Epstein, Leon Schwartz, Bronya Sakina, and younger players like Michael Alpert, Lauren Brody, and Hankus Netsky to serve as its staff. As master teachers, *folksmentshn* have played a foundational role in the transmission of klezmer at institutes over the years. Many of the individuals who mentored members of the revivalist generation, in addition to those mentioned above, also taught at its institutes: Dave Tarras, Leon Schwartz, Ben Bayzler, Sammy and Ray Musiker, Sid Beckerman, Howie Leess, the Epstein Brothers, German Goldenshteyn, Elaine Hoffmann-Watts, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman, Marvin Katz, Marty Levitt, and Pete Sokolow.

Constructing a Klezmer Ethos: The Creative Individual as Model

While fidelity to an “authentic” tradition transmitted by *folksmentshn* maintains a formidable position within klezmer institute curricula, the veneration of creativity and individualism has also asserted itself as a guiding value. In her study of the inclusion of Yiddish song in the klezmer revival, Abigail Wood has asserted that

[The] contemporary Yiddish music scene’s affiliation to a wider world of Yiddish cultural institutions and history binds it to a sense of cultural context, which consistently inspires its practitioners to step beyond heritage and revival towards community and creativity. (Wood 2004:239)

She has also explored Yiddish song’s “important forum for creativity in contemporary klezmer,” in the work of Michael Alpert, Adrienne Cooper, and Lorin Sklamberg (Wood 2007b). While Wood’s research has provided an important first step for the study of creativity in klezmer, its position as a foundational value remains unexplored in klezmer scholarship.

Today, individual interests, tastes, and creative skills are as central to the curriculum as the transmission of “authentic” style. Their inclusion begins with the selection of institute leadership. Jeff Warschauer and Frank London, KlezKanada’s only two artistic directors to date, are NEC graduates. Warschauer, who served as its artistic director from 2004 to 2010,²⁴ details the process of the appointment of instructors:

I’ll usually hire people to staff the ... instrumental classes and then invite them to make proposals for the hands-on workshops ... and invite them to be creative or to think about working together in teams or individually, however they choose. And they’ll make proposals and we’ll say, “Sorry, somebody is already doing that, or whatever.”... We get a lot of interesting proposals and really creative proposals, and I think things are very diverse. You’ve got things that would be considered pretty avant-garde on one hand and things that are considered pretty strictly traditional, and then everything in between. I think that’s really healthy and that’s how we want to do it. (Interview, 12 September 2006)

Ultimately, by selecting staff and deciding which class proposals are adopted, artistic directors have considerable influence in shaping not only what is taught, but also what is held in high regard. Faculty are frequently hired for

the range of interests they represent:

At KlezKanada the last few years we have actually in a sense, and this is just my opinion, but I think our theme actually is diversity, cultural diversity in a sense within Ashkenazic culture. So, let me think ... we try to hire faculty in terms of the lectures and the discussions; we try to have a diversity of subject area, of discipline. (Warschauer, interview, 12 September 2006)

Warschauer's commitment to diversified programming extends to all aspects of transmission, from direct instruction in classrooms to informal nightly jam sessions to faculty concerts.

Along with artistic directors, faculty members also have considerable authority in the development of the materials and cultural resources they transmit. After teacher and administrator agree upon a course proposal, teachers are then free to fashion its content as they see fit. The professional klezmer practitioners serving as faculty at camps and institutes frequently centre their pedagogy on their own artistic interests and affiliations. At Carnegie Hall's 2008 Professional Training Workshop, "The David Krakauer Workshop: Exploring Klezmer," musicians were selected based on audition tapes in one of three areas: individuals, laptop sampling artists, and preformed chamber ensembles. Josh Dolgin (aka Socalled), one of the workshop's instructors and an artist who has emerged as a star in the klezmer world for his amalgamation of hip hop, klezmer, funk, and other traditions, taught workshops on sampling. He lectured on the technical aspects and inspirations that informed the creation of his popular hit "You are Never Alone."²⁵ Similarly, Dolgin has taught workshops on sampling at KlezKanada since 2001 (Wood 2007a).

The range of courses offered at KlezKanada reflects klezmer's inclusive nature (Slobin 2000; Ankiewicz in this issue). Courses that exemplify its "diverse" programming that extend beyond the "pretty strictly traditional" have included: The Development of a Cross-Genre Project, Electric Zaidyland, Funky Groove Band, Hip-Hopkele, Intercontinental Electric Klezmer Experience, Meron Mish-Mosh, Di Shereray/Barbershop Yiddish Close Harmony, Klezmer & Beyond: Improv Strategies, and New Modern Post-klezmer Something.²⁶ These eclectic courses frequently overlap with African American musical practices, such as funk, hip-hop, and improvisation.²⁷ There is not, for example, a course that melds klezmer and gamelan, or klezmer and Sacred Harp song traditions. It is also not by chance that the ends of the continuum defined by Warschauer were "avant-garde" and "pretty strictly

traditional” (interview, 12 September 2006).

While a history of individualism in the West is a topic beyond the scope of this article, I offer at least a partial explanation of the emergence of creativity and individualism as a common practice and value within klezmer transmission. It is not surprising that the klezmer revival would take individualism as a guiding value, a value pervasive within its greater cultural context. That, however, at least part of its adoption stems directly from the influence and practice of African American musical idioms is as yet an under-examined area within klezmer. The methodologies and guiding values of NEC’s TS and CI figure significantly in the adoption of these ideals in klezmer transmission.²⁸

As early as 1975, Hankus Netsky had begun sharing his newly discovered klezmer materials with NEC and local Boston musicians. Although he has written that he “modeled [his] klezmer jam sessions on the popular Celtic music sessions [he] had attended at the Philadelphia home of performer-folklorist Mick Maloney” (Netsky 2004a:200), our interviews revealed a far more formal approach than the term *session* implies:

Amanda Scherbenske: What were they [the jam sessions] like?

Hankus Netsky: They were like classes. They were like these really nerdy ceilidhs because we were Third Streamers. We were like, “let’s sing everything together; let’s now sing the chords, and now let’s listen again.” And everybody’s like, “I think there’s a note there that we didn’t get.” We would listen to these recordings very, very carefully.

AS: But the way you describe it doesn’t sound that much like jamming.

HN: The first one was nerdy as hell.

AS: Who was running the *Revenge of the Nerds*²⁹ at the first one?

HN: Me! It was also Frank [London], Don [Byron], Abby [Rabinowitz]. They all were like, “wait a minute – we have to get this right.” Because they were taught that if you were going to sing Billie Holiday, “*Lover Man*,” you better go [*sings opening phrase to “Lover Man”*] [with] every weird rhythm that you couldn’t possibly notate, so you better internalize it. And they’re listening to klezmer and they’ve got that hat on, “we are going to do this right.” So it wasn’t the kind of thing where you’d go through fifteen tunes in a half hour, you’d go through three tunes in an hour. But that was our way of life. I was already on the faculty in ’79 ... so I had a responsibility to be very – this kind of rigorous

methodology was important to it. I guess I was running it but people understood that that's how it had to be. It's like the whole idea, you might have expected that something like this could be, I write out a bunch of tunes, give them out, everybody reads them. That would be one model. We never do that. We would just assume that that would be useless because everybody would just play it coming from whatever background that they came from and they wouldn't learn anything about the music because you can't notate it. There was this tacit recognition that everything had to be done by ear and that you had to learn it thoroughly.... Rigorous methodology is a huge part of this revival because it's originating at the [New England] Conservatory. So in other words, the conservatory has this methodology ... that we would call the "Third Stream methodology" ... there's this pretty serious emphasis on ear-training beyond what's institutionalized anywhere else because of Ran [Blake]. You memorize all these melodies; you have to sing them; you have to be able to go to your instrument and play them ... and that methodology is a huge influence on this movement because what it does is it ... makes all these people who are interesting. They have to *find their own voice* also.... They get Ran their first semester and it's scary as hell. When I was a student we had to memorize 30 very hard melodies and then he'd come in and change key all the time and you'd have to figure out where he was. It was this real trial-by-fire thing. The only thing you could really compare it to and in fact it's coming out of this, out of a couple things – real jazz methodology – and that is Lennie Tristano – the teachers, the people who were like –

AS: Do this and then do it in every key?

HN: It's that stuff. It's not "I'll teach you the short cuts." It's like, "go crazy, this is going to kill you." It's [Thelonious] Monk ... it's Dizzy Gillespie. It's coming out of that world.

(Interview, 23 July 2009)

Netsky implies that he, along with Byron, London, and Rabinowitz, assumed that their approach to learning klezmer style should be guided by an attention to the stylistic details. Their "rigorous methodology" was borne of the jazz pedagogical approaches espoused by Ran Blake, a leading pedagogue of NEC's TS and CI. Moreover, this process was in service to "find[ing] [one's] own voice" (interview, 23 July 2009).

The first Klezmer Conservatory Band, consisting mostly of NEC's TS students and instructor, Hankus Netsky, largely comprised disciplined practitioners of African American musics (particularly jazz and improvised-composed musics). Creativity, individuality, and finding one's own voice are well-established ideals within jazz practices and pedagogies (see, for example, Berliner 1994; Monson 1996; Jackson 2000). Many of the musicians who took part in these African American musical idioms retained these values in their practice and transmission of klezmer. They consequently emerged as a "natural" aspect of klezmer transmission. Netsky points out that in the context of NEC's TS and CI departments, learning klezmer was frequently a means to a greater artistic goal:

At the New England Conservatory of Music . . . the emphasis was on individual expression. Students were encouraged to develop their own musical personalities. In the process, their search often led them to consider world music, although at the time there was very little Jewish music in the world music canon. As far as our faculty was concerned, any musical style was available for anyone to learn, and if no living performers could be found, recordings would do. (Netsky 2004a:191-92)

The New England Conservatory of Music's TS and CI's cultivation of students' "own musical personalities" and "individual expression" has supported its underlying principle of individualism. Many musicians who either graduated from or have been associated with NEC have become successful performers and, in some cases, served as klezmer institute pedagogues and directors: Alan Bern,³⁰ Daniel Blacksberg, Paul Brody, Don Byron, Anthony Coleman, Glenn Dickson, Marty Ehrlich, Dave Harris, Frank London, Abby Rabinowitz, Mimi Rabson, Jamie Saft, Greg Selker, Greg Wall, Jeff Warschauer, and Michael Winograd, among others.

In the following sections I examine two case studies that demonstrate the values present in contemporary klezmer transmission. In the first case study, I focus on the teachings of the uncle-nephew pair, Marvin Katz and Hankus Netsky.³¹ In the second case study, I feature trombonist and improviser Daniel Blacksberg, a graduate of NEC and former klezmer camper who has gone on to become a sought-after professional and regular institute faculty member.

Marvin Katz – “Folksmentsh” and Philadelphia Club Date Musician

Marvin Katz and Hankus Netsky, his nephew, teach Klezmer Philadelphia almost every year at KlezKanada. They concentrate on the instrumental Jewish musical repertoire and style of mid-twentieth century Philadelphia.³² Stemming from a dynastic klezmer family, trumpeter Marvin Katz is the son of the Jewish bandleader Kol Katz. Marvin played Jewish club dates from the mid-1940s to the late 1960s (Katz and Netsky 2006b):

I obviously was [born in the U.S.]. My father was born in Russia, and my whole family is musical – was musical – because they just were. My father insisted we learn an instrument. He was a drummer in the [19]20s; he had his own [klezmer] band and orchestra. Anyway, that’s how it worked.... I had to be a musician. My brother, who is – was – eight years older than me, was a fantastic piano player ... by the time he was thirteen he had a trio on the radio.... Then ... they used big bands on radio stations and they used trios. He had a half hour trio ... [playing] American music, completely! He played in Carnegie Hall with his teacher – he was, like, twelve. (Katz and Netsky 2006b)

Learning an instrument and becoming a professional musician were second nature in Katz’s family. However, Katz quit music as a profession in 1969 because “[he] had a woman who wouldn’t marry [him] if [he] played music [for a living]” (Katz and Netsky 2006b). It was not until twenty years later, upon his nephew’s goading, that he began to play klezmer again.

I was aware of Katz’s well-respected status as a klezmer club date musician and consequently was delighted to get to know him personally. A kind and humble older gentleman with a sharp sense of humour, he exhibits a great deal of caring towards his students and enjoys his renewed place in Jewish music:

That person and this person were in the class – they were married then too and they learned these tunes. And they made a CD with their band in California – and a good band. I was just *thrilled* because, yeah, they had *slight* changes, very slight changes, but the tunes were there and they were good. It was such a pleasure hearing the whole group there and [hearing] them play it. Just to hear that tune! (Katz and Netsky 2006a)

Katz takes pride in his students' re-creation of his teachings by producing an album of tunes that he taught them. His position as a KlezKanada faculty member has granted him a newly conceived ownership in a musical world cultivated during his youth.

While he appreciates certain aspects of his role at KlezKanada, disjuncture between his and his nephew's generations also surfaces.³³ Following the class Klezmer Philadelphia, Katz and I frequently walked to the dining hall together. On one occasion he revealed to me, with tears in his eyes, "I live in the past. You know Hankus and I just give each other a hard time. He wants to nail down the melody, but it's not like that – you just play" (author's field notes, 21 August 2006). This disclosure unveiled the nostalgia he felt for the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the considerable divide between his and his nephew's classroom expectations.

In the following excerpts from the Klezmer Philadelphia class, the dissonances between generations unfurl. Netsky and a number of the students work assiduously to uncover discrete musicological nuances of Katz's playing, treating many of his actions like unearthed archaeological discoveries. Meanwhile, Katz appears relatively uncomfortable with his position as an "expert" informant.

Hankus Netsky: So let's try it [the tune] Marvin's style. Let's see – so play us the first phrase. [*Sings Figure 1, m. 1*]

Marvin Katz: Oh, I know that way. [*Plays Figure 1*]³⁴



Figure 1

MK: Yeah, that's twice but I...

HN: Yeah the thing, by the way, that is always twice. [*Sings Figure 1 mm. 1-2*] So listen to Marvin play it once and then we'll try.... Okay, here we go –

MK: [*Plays Figure 1*]

HN: That's it. That was right.

MK: Yeah.

HN: Now notice first thing, by the way – notice the gliss[ando] up to the first note. [*Sings Figure 2*]



Figure 2

HN: Set that up. [*Sings Figure 3*]



Figure 3

HN: – And there’s doodles on all of them. [*Sings and plays Figure 4*]

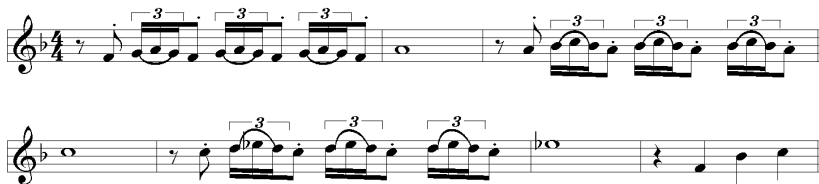


Figure 4

HN: So let’s just go up to there. Okay, first part. [*All play Figure 5*]



Figure 5

HN: So this is where it gets different, right? So you’ve got: [*Sings Figure 6*].



Figure 6

HN: Right. You got to play this lead up. No. Everybody got that?

[Plays Figure 6]

MK: One thing I just really want to make clear –

HN: Yes, go ahead, go ahead –

MK: The melody straight is: [Plays Figure 7].



Figure 7

MK: I mean everything else that I play in there is just *habit*.

HN: Well that's okay.

Student: Ornamentation.

MK: It's ornamentation, that's all it is.

HN: Well I think I heard it wrong, so let me hear what you actually do there.

MK: [Plays Figure 8]



Figure 8

HN: I'm sorry, in fact, [sings] that is the first place of difference.

[Sings Figure 6]

MK: No, I don't know. [Plays Figure 9]



Figure 9

MK: But I threw in the F. [*Plays Figure 10*]



Figure 10

HN: Yeah, but everybody throws in the F. Joe always played the F.

MK: Oh, okay.

HN: Absolutely. [*Sings and plays Figure 11*]



Figure 11

HN: Isn't that right? So slowly let's get that, because this is the big point of difference here. [*All sing and play Figure 11*] Listen one more time. [*Sings and plays Figure 11*] Am I right Marv?

MK: Well, I've always thought that that was just an ornamentation. I've never *seen* the music.

HN: But, it's right. It's the way you play it.

(Katz and Netsky 2006a)

Katz does not employ the term *ornamentation* until a student suggests it, revealing a difference in discourse between generations. As a boy he learned largely through observation on the bandstand. Based on his own learning experiences as a youth, he almost always teaches through demonstration, rarely deliberating over musical selection or explication of materials:

When I started, my father dragged me to the catering halls. You know: "listen to this trumpet player, listen to this trumpet player." That's how I learned how to play – no music. . . . In other words, you learned a tune, and you bought a book with about seven *freylekhs* [dance tunes],³⁵ enough to get you hired when it was a

busy night; if you did good you learned another two on the job.
(Katz and Netsky 2006b)

Netsky's practise of "rigorous methodology" is far removed from Katz's background in "on the job" training. Netsky points out musical details that, when applied appropriately, form the building blocks of musical style. Trained as an ethnomusicologist, he often refers to these microelements as signifiers, assuming that multiple signifiers based in a particular style constitute the style itself: "notice the gliss[ando] up to the first note," C4 to F4. He first sings an extraction of the phrase (the pickup to the downbeat) with a slide as in Figure 2, and then contextualizes the pickup by singing the succeeding notes (Figure 3). Before asking students to imitate this, he draws attention to the recurring sixteenth-note triplets in Figure 4. After emphasizing these stylistic details, he has the class perform the phrase in Figure 5 mm. 3-9, along with that which precedes and succeeds it (Figure 5 mm. 1-2 and mm. 9-12, respectively). When students have difficulty learning the modulation by ear (Figure 5 mm. 9-10), Netsky repeats it at a slower tempo (Figure 6) to ensure that students learn it. Netsky's mode of transmission for musical style reflects his investment in the "rigorous methodology" modelled by Ran Blake at NEC.

Following this, Katz intercedes to assist students who are having difficulty learning the recurring sixteenth-note triplets (Figure 4) by demonstrating the phrase's structural notes (Figure 7). After simplifying it, Netsky asks him to repeat it. This time, Katz offers yet another melodic rendition of the phrase (Figure 8 mm. 2 and 6). Aware that not all students have learned the modulation (Figure 6), Netsky again demonstrates it for them. Meanwhile, Katz continues to attempt to divest his playing of ornaments (Figure 9), but in doing so realizes that the phrase is incomplete without the cadential skip from C5 to F5 (Figure 10). Netsky understands this skip to the tonic as a practice local to Philadelphia and, therefore, wants to make sure that students grasp this point before moving forward.

Katz himself finds humour in Netsky's deliberations and microanalysis of his playing and speech, provoking Netsky to poke fun at his own endeavour:

Hankus Netsky: Marvin's never done that. He plays: [*Plays Marvin's part*].

Marvin Katz: I'm like a monkey or a mouse in a cage [*Laughter*].
I don't know, I swear –

HN: [*In a faux British accent*] Our specimen has not done that –

Student A: [*Laughing*] our specimen!

HN: [*still in a faux British accent*] He did not come about that

particular manoeuvre [*laughter throughout*] –

Student A: The subject has not done that! [*Laughter continues*]

Student B: This is learned behaviour.

MK: You know it's like, yeah right, it's weird!

(Katz and Netsky 2006a)

Couched in Katz's jocular sentiment lies an expressed discomfort with his role as "specimen," subject to hyper-analysis in real-time. Though much of his playing reveals his adeptness at extemporizing melody, countermelody, and harmony, he does not consider himself an omnipresent master of "the tradition." Instead, he views his knowledge and skills as situated in a specific place and time in the past; they are subject to personal error and should not serve as an *Urtext* for contemporary practitioners, but as an instantiation. Occasionally resulting in a good-humoured friction between Katz and Netsky, his cognizance of the special skills he brings to the classroom allays his tension.

Katz is appreciated for his facility in extemporization and his knowledge of repertoire based in oral tradition (Katz and Netsky 2006a). As most of the repertoire Katz taught was considered an alternate version, here students enthusiastically engage in his unique B section of the popular Yiddish song "*Vu iz dos gesele*".³⁶

Hankus Netsky: It wasn't in any of the books, right? Well that's okay, if you think of it... Then where might you go?

Marvin Katz: You go back to the beginning.

HN: Do it, do it, do it. He just remembered.

MK: I don't know.

HN: Check this out.

MK: I know I always played it and you said it was a waltz.

HN: Okay, go ahead.

MK: [*Plays Figure 12 mm. 1-4*]

HN: Oh [*Sings and plays Figure 12*]. Is there a second part?

MK: Well, I played it –

HN: Go ahead.

MK: After the – [*MK and HN play Figures 12 and 13 consecutively*].

HN: Yes.

MK: [*Plays Figure 13*]

MK: Or something like that. It's from way back there. I don't know what it is, but that's one.

HN: Yes.

MK: Because, I don't know.

The musical score for Figure 12, labeled 'A', is written in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a boxed 'A' above the first measure. The melody is primarily composed of quarter and eighth notes. The fourth staff features a first ending (marked '1.') and a second ending (marked '2.'). The first ending leads back to the beginning of the section, while the second ending concludes with a final cadence.

Figure 12 “Vu iz dos gesele” [Where is the Little Street], standard A section

The musical score for Figure 13, labeled 'B', is written in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a boxed 'B' above the first measure. The melody is primarily composed of quarter and eighth notes, with some longer note values. The fourth staff features a first ending (marked '1.') and a second ending (marked '2.'). The first ending leads back to the beginning of the section, while the second ending concludes with a final cadence.

Figure 13 “Vu iz dos gesele,” Katz’s B section

HN: It's another Russian waltz... Does anybody know that second section of "Vu iz dos gesele"? I don't think so, right? So let's learn it... "Vu iz dos gesele" and you'll teach us that second part; is that okay?

MK: Somebody will tell you, some *scholar* – and I mean this very seriously – will tell you that that [B section] doesn't belong there, but in Philadelphia it belonged there.

HN: That's right. I haven't heard it anywhere else... What did you play? You have it?

MK: It is *not* on paper, Hankus. I don't want to argue with you. It's not there.

HN: Okay, I thought I saw it in this book a second ago.

MK: No! There're lots of American waltzes, but that's not there. And the second part is definitely not there and neither is the first part.

HN: I know the second part isn't there – I've never heard it. Okay, let's go. [*Begins playing the tune*]

MK: See we played it a bit faster; this is too slow [*Plays tune while Netsky and his students accompany him and try to figure out the tune at the same time*].

HN: Nice!

(Katz and Netsky 2006a)

When his nephew insists that he perform *his* version of the B section, Katz expresses ambivalence about his contribution to the class. On one hand he repeatedly downplays his knowledge by saying, "I don't know," while on the other he claims that his materials are not in any of Netsky's books, i.e., they're original.³⁷ At the heart of his ambivalence lies a perspectival difference between them. Initially Katz does not conceive of his B section of "*Vu iz dos gesele*" as anything but ordinary. However, Netsky's keen attention to it as an original localized version seems to legitimize its uniqueness for Katz.

For Netsky and other members of the revivalist generation, there is a great deal at stake in learning from older generations and folkshentshn. Klezmer, although known and practiced by his dynastic musical family, was not a tradition that was passed on to him:

When I was growing up, klezmer music was a vague concept, visible to me only through a thick haze ... despite my pestering, none of them [my uncles] seemed interested in sharing it with me.... When I reached my late teens, my curiosity peaked. By

this time I was studying classical oboe and composition and various forms of Jewish religious music; performing regularly as a jazz saxophonist, pianist, and oboist; and dabbling in the worlds of gospel, blues, and Greek ethnic music. Despite these diverse musical outlets, I felt that something was missing, and I longed to know more about the music of my own ancestors. . . . It wasn't just another musical style; it was a basic cultural building block that my family had denied me, and I wouldn't be content until I had mastered it and passed it on. (Netsky 2004a:191-92)

This quotation illustrates Netsky's investment in learning and disseminating Yiddish musical traditions that he understood as "denied" to him. Despite his performance of multiple musical styles, his sense that "something was missing" guided his immersive study of and long-term investment in "the music of [his] own ancestors." In the process, Netsky has completed a doctorate in ethnomusicology that focuses not on klezmer generally, but on the localized klezmer practices of his hometown, Philadelphia. He has spent countless hours working with older Jewish community members to delve deeper into, preserve, and transmit Yiddish music. Among many such projects, he apprenticed and performed with Ben Gailing – a central figure of Boston's Yiddish theater scene and host to a weekly Yiddish radio program – during the final fifteen years of Gailing's life. Such concentrated investment is belied by simple characterizations of heritage or a search for "authenticity."

Daniel Blacksberg – Creative Improviser and Klezmer

Trombonist and improviser Daniel Blacksberg's (b. 1983) life in music demonstrates how the pedagogy of klezmer institutes and NEC's TS, Jazz, and CI Departments have informed present-day approaches to the transmission of klezmer. Further, it suggests that creativity and individualism within klezmer frequently take the form of musical fusions and engagement with African American improvised musical traditions. Beyond direct instruction, KlezKanada faculty also transmit style and performance practice by modelling their unique artistry at faculty concerts. Blacksberg and klezmer clarinetist Michael Winograd, a close friend and frequent collaborator, displayed a personalized creative approach at KlezKanada's 2006 faculty concert by intoning a familiar klezmer tune, improvising on its melodic content in a non-klezmer-idiom and deconstructing its form, melody, and metre.

At a klezmer concert and workshop at Wesleyan University several years

later, Blacksberg again performed with Winograd, this time augmenting their line-up with drummer-composer Tyshawn Sorey, an acclaimed figure of New York City's improvised music scene, and a recent klezmer convert. Similar in approach to the KlezKanada concert, the trio sewed strands of canonical klezmer repertoire to African American improvisational practices. For their first selection, they performed "Sher 199," a tune transcribed by G. Barkagan and printed in Moshe Beregovskii's *Jewish Instrumental Folk Music* (2001). Following conventions of the traditional klezmer dance repertoire, "Sher 199" employs an AABBC form, harmonic minor and relative major modes, and 2/4 metre. Blacksberg, Sorey, and Winograd performed stylistic elements common among contemporary klezmer dance bands: the tempos were steady but for some occasional *rubato*; the clarinet held the melody throughout; and the trombone played bass lines, countermelodies, and occasionally doubled the melody.

Following one time through sections AABBC, the trio began to deconstruct the form, melody, and metre using improvisational strategies based in African American musical practices. After keeping time for the first eight bars of the A section, Sorey then sustained rhythmic fragments over increasingly longer durations, and later performed free rhythmic improvisations.³⁸ Winograd and Blacksberg implemented bits of melodic, ornamental, and harmonic content from the tune as improvisational building blocks. Next, Winograd ascended chromatically to the tonic, leading the trio back into the second half of the standard B section and following the form through the section's end.

Approaching the repeat of the B section, Sorey gradually decelerated over the course of its first eight bars. Simultaneously Winograd continued to extemporize on melodic and harmonic material from the original tune, while Blacksberg's improvisations left behind mode altogether, implying atonality more than tonality. As the section progressed, Sorey delved into his far-reaching vocabulary of extended percussion techniques, utilizing cymbal scrapes and chokes, sharp attacks on the bass and snare drums, press rolls, hi-hat splashes, and vocal activations of the snare. Winograd followed this by leading the band through the last eight bars of the B section and the beginning of the C section. At this point the trio transitioned into another improvisatory episode: they repeatedly performed fragments of the C section melody in rhythmic unison; with each repetition, the fragments decreased into tidbits, evocative of sampling or a skipping record. The piece concluded as Blacksberg sounded a familiar klezmer cadential figure and Sorey bowed the ride cymbal with a drumstick.

Blacksberg's long-standing musical interests rooted in multiple musical

styles inform his values and approach to creativity and individualism in the above musical analysis. Playing trombone in the school orchestra, concert band and jazz band since age ten, his education in jazz and improvised-composed musics – and later klezmer – stressed the importance of individualism. His formative music teachers emphasized “do[ing] things your own way.” They encouraged him to “do unusual things and sort of do whatever the heck you want, and not the normal things” (interview, 25 November 2009). As a high school student, he resolved to become a professional musician, deciding to pursue jazz at the collegiate level. Upon learning of his post-secondary goal, one of his mentors at the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for the Arts advised him that “there’s only two good jazz schools worth going to: Oberlin and NEC, and you should only go to one of those” (interview, 25 November 2009).

After passing NEC’s jazz entrance audition, he started coursework there in the fall of 2002. He took classes with Ran Blake, Joe Maneri, Hankus Netsky, Joe Morris, and Bob Brookmeyer. His experiences at the conservatory reiterated the teachings of his earlier pedagogues:

For me [study at NEC] continued the trajectory of what I had always been doing, which was: people who were doing things their own way; people who were doing things that not everybody else was doing; people who were really confident about doing that. So that was sort of like something I’d been used to already, in a way. (Interview, 25 November 2009)

Here, Blacksberg articulates the value of individualism manifest in “doing things [one’s] own way,” and through alterity. These principles were emphasized in his study of African American musical idioms:

This never happened to me, but for grad students who were coming in from other schools ... studying with [Brookmeyer]: they would play over a standard, and he would stop them every time he heard them play a lick that he felt they had learned from ... a page or from some other musician. And then he would stop them immediately and make them start over. And this would happen for ... four or five months until you stopped doing this. It didn’t mean that you would abandon that vocabulary, but it would mean that you would have to develop it to the point where it *sounded like you*, and not you quoting Charlie Parker.... But being with Joe Morris ... he had a lot of insight how to approach these different kinds of music – free jazz music – like Ornette

[Coleman] and Albert Ayler and [Anthony] Braxton and Cecil Taylor's music.... It's like if you're playing a [Thelonious] Monk tune, it was not important playing a good bebop solo over the changes as it might be in another ensemble – what was important was preserving the character of the tune and playing over it in a *different* way. (Interview, 25 November 2009)

Again, Blacksberg refers to the importance of developing an original musical voice, in part rooted in the performance of difference.

Also while at NEC he worked to develop as a klezmer trombonist, taking part in Netsky's Jewish Music Ensemble for all but one semester. He attended KlezKamp for the first time during the winter of his second year at the conservatory. Blacksberg noted the common approach to transmission at both the conservatory and klezmer camps:

Daniel Blacksberg: Instead of teaching what you're supposed to know, they [the NEC faculty] just taught themselves. They just were themselves and you learned from their examples, much more like a mentor relationship, than sort of an abstract teacher.... Even though they always had methods and they always had ways of communicating that were generalized, it was just really, completely their experience. And I like that. I still respond to that very well ... and that was also what I experienced at KlezKamp and KlezKanada ... just learning things that they want to teach you. Just learning things that they think are important, not the information that *you are supposed to know*.

Amanda Scherbenske: Who would've been one of your klezmer teachers whom you consider pretty significant?

DB: At the time I was definitely enamoured with Frank London, but who isn't? (Interview, 25 November 2009)

He had initially taken an interest in klezmer as a senior in high school: "I came in through the Klezmatics, which is a band that's trying to forge their own path. They're not interested in playing traditionally, they're interested in playing the Klezmatics' sound" (interview, 22 February 2011). Frank London significantly informed Blacksberg's initiation to both the klezmer genre and its didactic practices, as he states in the above quotation. As a primary leader and founding member of the Klezmatics, London's work with the band was situated in creative exploration and the musical melding of styles. As previously noted, he took part in the klezmer sessions at NEC in the late 1970s and was

a member of the Klezmer Conservatory Band. Although his graduation from NEC's TS took place decades ago, he acknowledges Ran Blake's continued influence on his musical practice:

Majoring in African American trumpet at the New England Conservatory of Music, I was part of a larger scene loosely centred around Ran Blake's Third Stream Music Department. We studied a mixture of classical and jazz, as well as lots of other stuff – pop, folk, and ethnic musics – while developing a practical philosophy that still guides my own musical life and that of many of my peers. The idea is that one can study and assimilate the elements of *any* musical style, form, or tradition by ear. (London 2002:206)

Blacksberg's early experiences listening to and learning klezmer were partially shaped by London's own approach: klezmer is a musical style among many other styles that may serve as a building block for creative exploration.

Following his first year as a KlezKamp student, Blacksberg expeditiously proceeded from student to professional klezmer musician to faculty member. During his second year at the Catskills resort, he began performing with veteran staff member Pete Sokolow: "Oh! I remember I had a great time at KlezKamp because I really impressed Pete Sokolow ... he loved me because I could read his charts and I could play a little on the chord changes" (interview, 25 November 2009). Blacksberg's statement suggests that at least part of his swift ascent to the higher professional klezmer echelons was rooted in his ability to "play changes," a skill cultivated through his study of jazz. Several years later Michael Alpert asked him to perform at the Jewish Culture Festival in Cracow, one of the most prestigious festivals on the European klezmer circuit:

A huge break was in March of 2006, a couple months before I graduated [from NEC].... I got a call from Michael Alpert inviting me to the Cracow Festival.... I was now going to play in a band with Frank London, and Alan Bern, and Michael Alpert – and all these people I'd been learning from. (Interview, 25 November 2009)

From there, Blacksberg has gone on to be one of the most sought-after trombonists on the professional klezmer circuit and has served as a regular faculty member at KlezKamp and KlezKanada and taught at Klezmer Festival Fürth and Yiddish Summer Weimar. His combination of klezmer and African

American musical practices as evidenced in the musical example above and in his biography demonstrate how the methodologies present at klezmer institutes and NEC serve to inform the musical practice of a third-generation revival klezmer musician. Blacksberg models individualism through a personalized amalgamation of Yiddish and African American musical practices.

While it has not been the focus of this section, I wish to note that Blacksberg's klezmer performance is equally committed to and "informed by incredibly traditional standards of playing ... we're not fusing things in the sense that – the klezmer music that we play is as klezmer music-ish as we can make it, and the other things just grow out of the fact that we all have diverse musical experiences" (interview, 22 February 2011). The "other things" he references are his and his colleagues' (Winograd and Sorey) fusion of klezmer and African American improvisational practices. Still, even Blacksberg's performance of "traditional standards of playing" refers back to a belief in individualism through alterity:

Daniel Blacksberg: [My involvement] in the klezmer thing was like a great way to deal with all this Jewishness.

Amanda Scherbenske: Why?

DB: Because it was the same thing as always: it wasn't what everybody else was doing ... and it had a music that really spoke to me from the first time I paid attention to it. The first time I went to KlezKamp I said, "this music really makes sense to me," and I could play it. (Interview, 25 November 2009)

His motivations for performing klezmer (at least initially) served as a way to negotiate his Jewishness, but its performance was in part funneled through the lens of African American musical values. The values of individualism, alterity, and creativity, espoused by his jazz, free jazz, and improvised-composed music teachers, ultimately inform the way he negotiates his musical identity.

Following their Wesleyan performance, Blacksberg, Winograd, and Sorey engaged students in the audience in a discussion of their work. When asked about their fusion of musical styles to create a music that spoke to them as performer-improvisers, Blacksberg and Winograd were quick to point out that their approach rests on the revivalist generation's "establishment" of klezmer as a visible music culture:

What's nice, at least for Daniel and I – we find ourselves in a generation – I guess we are after the generation of revivalists and so we don't really need to – we don't find ourselves clinging

to a certain label to try to establish something. So because the revivalists had a responsibility that we don't have – to create and establish something that either is not considered enough in the forefront or does not exist to enough people – where for us it already exists so we can sort of bounce between things without a certain perceived responsibility, that's necessary, maybe. (Interview, 22 February 2011)

They do not take for granted that the work of previous generations has allowed for their own musical explorations within klezmer. Because of this, they feel free to perform klezmer “informed by incredibly traditional standards of playing” (interview, 22 February 2011) as much as they do to perform musical fusions of klezmer and African American improvisatory practices.

Conclusion

The generation of revivalists who established the klezmer institute created not only a new space for the transmission and dissemination of klezmer and the Yiddish cultural arts, but also a guiding ethos. My ethnographic work within the culture of klezmer transmission that began nearly twenty years after the founding of the first institute has shown considerable veneration for both an “authentic” Jewish cultural heritage and individualized expressions. While ostensibly paradoxical, these ideals have already weathered many years together within klezmer transmission. Both emerged in the context of the revival. As members of the revivalist generation learned klezmer, they sought out older community members who practised or embodied *folksmentshn*-like characteristics. The teachings of “*folksmentshn*” later became central to the first klezmer institute curriculum and to curricula that have followed.

Yet one of the primary proponents of learning from *folksmentshn*, Hankus Netsky, has also been a champion of creativity and individual expression. While his own motivations for learning and disseminating klezmer are rooted in a personal search for a music culture that was initially denied to him, he has frequently performed with and mentored musicians who did not share his motivations. Many of the klezmer performers centred around NEC's TS in the late 1970s and 1980s were already immersed in African American jazz and improvised-composed music traditions. They followed Ran Blake's “rigorous methodology” as a step toward finding their own voice and expressing themselves as individuals. Later, they applied these principles to their practice of klezmer too. As many Third Streamers garnered considerable

visibility as klezmer performers and teachers, these values became absorbed into its transmission either through direct instruction or modelled through creative expressions in performance.

As the case studies presented here demonstrate, however, these foundational values do not exist without wrinkles. In our examination of Katz and Netsky's Klezmer Philadelphia course, we witnessed interactions that at times exposed disjuncture between generations. Katz, the trumpeter who learned klezmer through observation and on the bandstand, challenged his nephew's insistence on exactitude of musical microelements and alternate versions of tunes. In effect, he ultimately poses a challenge to his own position as an "authentic" disseminator of klezmer. Netsky, who has largely situated his life's work within several institutions, may not be considered a stranger to the problematics of the search for "authenticity." Just as his transmission of African American, Jewish, and other musical styles at NEC was frequently in service of the realization of individuality and creativity of personal expression, so too his pursuit and dissemination of klezmer has followed a similar ideal. Ultimately, he does this because it is personally meaningful to him. The particular ways he has practised and continues to practise Yiddish musics are not only suggestive of an individual's musical story, but are an expression of individualism.

Blacksberg's initial motivation to pursue klezmer was itself rooted in a personal belief that it served as an expression of his individualism through alterity. While the fusion of Jewish and African American musical practices makes up one part of his artistic profile, he is just as adept performing klezmer that is "informed by incredibly traditional standards of playing" (interview, 22 February 2011). His performance of the "traditional," he contends, is one part of a greater personal investment in individuality.

This brings me to a greater point about individualism as an undergirding value within klezmer transmission: individualism itself is negotiated through multiple expressions. Adherence to and pursuit of "traditional" and "authentic" forms of musical practice are as much a part of the pursuit of this ideal as the expression of creativity and voicing one's own sound. While individualism may be sounded through the new or innovative, it is equally sounded through the reclamation of the past in new ways. In light of a history that is both tangled and overwhelming, it is remarkable that the purveyors of klezmer transmission have not only called for re-creational cultural practices, but have welcomed the inclusion of individual expressions, ultimately writing a new history for itself. 🌿

Notes

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1. KlezKanada is a klezmer camp established by Hy and Sandy Goldman in 1996 (Arnold 2006). During its first instantiation, nearly 300 participants descended upon Camp B'nai Brith in Lantier (north of Montréal). Since then it has grown in scope and numbers, and now boasts one of the largest contexts for klezmer transmission throughout the calendar year. In 2006, KlezKanada hosted its maximum capacity of 480 participants (Arnold 2006). The author conducted multi-sited fieldwork at klezmer camps and institutes (primarily at KlezKanada, KlezFest London, and Yiddish Summer Weimar), as well as at private lessons, small group classes at the Workmen's Circle (NYC), the YIVO Summer Yiddish Program, the New England Conservatory of Music, Wesleyan University, the Yiddish Book Center, and the Weil Institute Professional Training Workshop at Carnegie Hall.

2. Michael Alpert, a leading figure of the klezmer revival, has spent decades conducting ethnographic fieldwork with American and European-born klezmer musicians.

3. The *sher* is a figure dance choreographically similar to other figure dances of European origin, such as the quadrille or square dance. Feldman asserts that musically it forms a part of klezmer's core repertoire (Feldman 2002).

4. Depending on the version of the *sher* danced, *aroyt firn zikh* (shining) may last as long or longer than the chorus figure.

5. For a study offering considerable parallels to the present narrative, see Juniper Hill's case study of Finnish Contemporary Folk Music (2009).

6. Authenticity's range of meanings in writings on klezmer (Slobin 2000; Svirgals 2002; Wood 2007a) closely mirrors its treatment in the scholarly debates of the early music revival (Kenyon 1988; Taruskin 1988; Shelemay 2001). Within early music revival discourse, authenticity's definitions have occupied a continuum from fidelity to the recreation of historical practices and the imagination thereof, to postmodern "endeavors [to] construct and transform the past in the present" (Shelemay 2001:6).

7. Third Stream is a concept that was coined by Gunther Schuller in the late 1950s. It called for the combining of Western classical and jazz traditions. As president of NEC from 1967 to 1977, Gunther Schuller created the Third Stream Department and appointed Ran Blake as its chair in 1971 (Berkman 1999). Ethnomusicologist Franya Berkman has argued that the Third Stream Department was created "as an institutional vision of musical hybridity sustained at NEC

between 1973 and 1992” (Berkman 1999:10) that encompassed “an eclectic and individualistic philosophy of musical creativity as well as a unique pedagogical system” (Berkman 1999:11).

8. While Lave and Wenger (1991) may see the examination of transmission within these two contexts at odds, I follow Judah Cohen’s recent work on transmission, in which he has asserted that

Scholarly discussions of institutionalization tend to imply artificiality, conservation, or Eric Hobsbawm’s often-referenced idea of “invented tradition” (1983). Yet a closer look at the meaning of institutionalization in this context suggests such a characterization to be premature.... I argue that ... the very act of institutionalization may serve an important role in understanding the nature of musical transmission – serving as a sometimes uncomfortable companion for negotiating sonic norms and identities under particular societal discourses of modern rupture. (Cohen 2009:322)

9. Also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, which restricted immigration from southern and eastern Europe.

10. Historically, klezmer did not include Yiddish song, but as Abigail Wood has convincingly argued (2004; 2007b), it became central to performance practice in the context of the revival.

11. For further reading see Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1995 and Slobin 2000. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has defined heritage as “a new mode of cultural production that has recourse to the past” (1995:369-70).

12. See Slobin 1984, 2000, and 2002, Sapoznik 1999, and Wood 2004, 2007a, 2007b, and 2007c for studies that have focused on the klezmer revival.

13. Michael Alpert is credited with substituting the term *revitalization* for revival, since the latter implied to him that the music culture needed to be brought back to life.

14. Some of the earliest bands and recordings of this period demonstrate the multivalent nature of the term, such as the bands The Klezmerim and The Klezmer Conservatory Band or Feldman, Statman, and Confurius’s album *Jewish Klezmer Music* (1979). For a study theorizing musical subcultures, see Slobin 1993.

15. The Klezmer Conservatory Band released their first album, *Yiddishe Renaissance*, in 1981.

16. This course is still offered by Netsky every fourth semester (Netsky 2004).

17. These examples represent institutes primarily concerned with didactic aspects of klezmer and Yiddish culture. Many other festivals throughout North America and Europe are devoted to the presentation of Jewish cultural and performance traditions. While each institute’s particular organizational structure, setting, size, faculty, and participant roster varies from year to year, their overlap of faculty members through the years has helped to create consistency in desired ethos

and pedagogy from institute to institute.

18. Within the past several years, KlezKanada has expanded its curriculum to include some Sephardic cultural arts.

19. A notable exception is Netsky's own account of the incorporation of klezmer into the curriculum at NEC (2004).

20. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that the term *folksmentsh* is a part of the "richness of Yiddish terminology for folklore and its study" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1985:332).

21. The imagery of the *folksmentsh* and that of "the fiddler," as employed by Slobin in his study of klezmer (2000), do share similarities. Both fantastic icons are personified and given shape within the imagination. But in contrast to the fiddler, the *folksmentsh* as presented here assumes a more holistic conversance with the cultural context and expressive culture. If the image of the fiddler assumes fiddle and bow in hand, then the image of the *folksmentsh* carries a cultural valise in hand: within this case may be a volume of poetry, a *tsimbl*, and leather-soled shoes (for dancing), as well as first-hand knowledge of the context of this music culture. It is less an image penned by a nineteenth-century writer of comedy, later transformed for Jewish and non-Jewish Americans into the major motion-picture imaginings of life in the *shtetl*, than one articulated by a prominent teacher, performer, and ethnographer of the klezmer revitalization. It is a term used and transmitted by an insider of the very scene under scrutiny.

22. My analytical move, teetering between historical observance and current adaptation, is indebted to David Roskies' reformulation of Dan Miron's "creative betrayal." Roskies argues that traditions of "folk" culture are preserved in tandem with ascription to "modern sensibilities" whereby the past is "reinvent[ed]," not "reinterpreted[ed]" (Roskies 1996):

The Jews who occupy that middle ground, seeking to synthesize old and new, form the subject of my book. Their attempt to address contemporary concerns in the language(s) of tradition I will call "creative betrayal." (Roskies 1996:4-5)

Roskies distinguishes creative betrayal from the "more felicitous" "creative anachronism," whereby subjects, "read back into the past what they thought was already there," instead of "engag[ing] in an act of subversion" (4-5). Creative betrayal exists in "the knowledge that we live 'after the tradition'" (4-5). The *folksmentsh*, as both real-life culture bearer and teacher, as well as cultural metaphor for the ethos of klezmer transmission, shares a similarity in motivation with the subjects of Roskies' study, that of recovery of loss of history, tradition, and cultural practices.

23. There are exceptions to this. Don Byron, an African American clarinetist from the Bronx, was fascinated by the liminal position of Mickey Katz's music, about which he writes and performs in his album *Don Byron Plays the Music of Mickey Katz* (1993).

24. Warschauer's position as Artistic Director came about informally:

When I first started at KlezKanada, it was really run by Hy and Sandy [Goldman] almost entirely for the first few years and I wasn't involved in the running of the camp, although, pretty early on, I was kind of drawn into the family of people that would coordinate it, to one extent or another. And the experience has been great; it's really exciting. We've had many, many – we've had eleven years now of really amazing camps. It's been getting bigger and bigger and more and more complex, and at the same time, we've been trying to be more professionalized as a structure. It started out very informally, but as it grows and as the demands on the program become greater and greater, we've had to really get our act together in terms of a whole lot of things. Getting a real board of directors, developing a fund-raising apparatus, professionalizing how the camp is structured, so for example now we have a number of coordinators for different areas because you know Hy and Michael and I just can't possibly keep our eyes on every aspect of what's going on all the time. (Interview, 12 September 2006)

25. For a detailed examination of So-called's work see Wood 2007a.

26. These courses were offered at KlezKanada 2006 and 2012; they represent the curriculum under artistic directors Jeff Warschauer and Frank London.

27. While not apparent from the course title, the types of improvisation taught are generally rooted in African American musical traditions.

28. Such ideals were also prevalent in the practices of the Radical Jewish Cultural idea (see Barzel 2004).

29. *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984) is a Twentieth Century Fox Film directed by Jeff Kanew. My reference was intended to be comedic and not substantive.

30. Alan Bern did not formally attend NEC, but lived in Boston from the end of the seventies through the early eighties, had many connections with NEC students and faculty, and even taught Bulgarian music there for a period. He held weekly musical sessions in his loft, which was across the street from NEC. After he received a Jazz Studies Grant from the National Endowment for Arts to study with Ran Blake, "I supposedly studied with Ran Blake, although that was not a successful student-teacher relationship. But that brought me close to Third Stream" (interview, 19 August 2008).

31. Classes that feature folksmentsshn as master teachers typically unfold in the following manner: the folksmentsshn presents a tune or a song in its entirety or in large sections. Students then learn the music by rote. Meanwhile, a mediator, who is usually a music professional of the revivalist generation, intercedes to ensure that students understand, interpret, and emulate the work of folksmentsshn in the manner that they deem appropriate. This may include undertaking any of the following tasks: dissecting the master teacher's stylistic microelements, rephrasing

the older master's speech, language translation, employing an alternative teaching method.

32. For an in-depth study of "Klezmer: Music and Community in 20th Century Jewish Philadelphia," see Netsky 2004b.

33. In the class Talking with Older Klezmerim, percussionist Elaine Hoffman-Watts also discussed how "playing Jewish" reminded her of her father, classical percussionist and klezmer Jake Hoffman.

34. All transcriptions are the author's.

35. For a study of klezmer genres see Feldman 2002.

36. Mlotek et al. (1990) have published the lyrics and a prescriptive transcription of "Vu iz dos gesele."

37. Although I write a great deal about Katz as a fountainhead of information and knowledge, it is important to note that he is not valued within the klezmer scene solely for his musical knowledge. Even though I only worked with Katz while attending KlezKanada, I felt a special bond with him as my teacher and as an elder. Other students in Klezmer Philadelphia demonstrated similar sentiments: a band of students from California dined almost exclusively with Katz for each meal in the more-than-400 person communal dining hall.

38. See Bailey 1993 [1980] for an examination of idiomatic versus non-idiomatic approaches to improvisation.

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