

## Introduction

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The cover of this essay collection displays an illuminated initial-word panel that opens the book of Ecclesiastes in a Hebrew Bible created in Germany during the early fourteenth century. The gilt Hebrew letters, surrounded by medallions containing a menagerie of animals, spell *divrei*, meaning “words of.” In the upper portion of the illumination, set within a Gothic-style architectural space, is the image of a robed King David playing the harp, flanked by a lion and stag, a pairing of animals common in Jewish iconography.<sup>1</sup> The story of David’s harp playing is one of the earliest recorded accounts of music in Jewish history. According to the biblical description, David was so skilled a musician on the harp that the sound of his instrument was able to soothe and refresh his father-in-law and predecessor King Saul when he was troubled by an evil spirit sent by God. When this cover image, with its representation of Jewish music making and gold-leaf text, is read in the manner of a simple rebus (which is not the way it was meant to be interpreted, but is tempting, nonetheless), it offers an apt description of this volume: words about Jewish music. The book you are reading features a set of essays contributed by sixteen leading scholars of music in Jewish history and culture. In addition to comprising words about Jewish music, this collection is also a study about the *words* “Jewish music,” which, as the following chapters will show, have conveyed multiple disparate meanings for different people across hundreds of years and around the globe.

The inherent ambiguity of the term “Jewish music,” which so many authors of the essays collected here address in their studies of music in various times and places of Jewish religious and secular history, becomes evident when we begin to look more closely even at specific pieces that might seem at face value to be clear and unassailable instances of Jewish music. An example is provided by “Hatikvah” (The Hope), which has been the official national anthem of the State of Israel since 2004, but which served as an important Zionist anthem since the late nineteenth century and then as the *de facto*, if disputed, national anthem since Israel’s founding in 1948.<sup>2</sup> The two stanzas of “Hatikvah” stem from what was originally a nine-stanza poem called “Tikvatenu” (Our Hope) from 1878, written in Hebrew by the Galician poet Naftali Hertz Imber (1856–1909) in the city of Iași, Romania. The lyrics describe a “Jewish spirit [that] yearns deep in the heart” and expresses the “hope of two millennia/ To be a free people in our

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land,/ The land of Zion and Jerusalem.” These unambiguously Jewish and nationalistic lyrics are set to a mournful melody – with a rising gesture in the second half that seems to reach upward toward hope amid sadness. It is a tune that in itself, for many listeners, might seem immediately identifiable as “Jewish.”

But in fact this melody traveled a surprisingly circuitous route to this Jewish and national context. The music was arranged in Palestine in the 1880s by a Zionist immigrant pioneer, Samuel Cohen, who based the tune on a Moldavian folk song called “*Carul cu Boi*” (Cart and Oxen). In the previous decade, the same melody had been a source of quotation for the Czech composer Bedřich Smetana, who incorporated it into his set of symphonic poems in the form of a Czech national epic, *Má Vlast* (My Life), in a section called *Die Moldau* (1874) that represented the Vltava river. Reaching still further back in the history of this melody, musicologists have linked its contour to a typical pattern of tones at the core of numerous folk songs found outside of the Jewish tradition across Europe, from Sweden to Italy, including the French song “Ah! vous dirai-je, maman,” the model for “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” Ultimately, then, the seeming Jewishness of this anthem’s music first arose only partway through the melody’s history, in its pairing with Imber’s Hebrew text and its association at various points across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with Zionist, anti-fascist, and Israeli national politics. This sort of inquiry does not challenge the Jewish meanings the melody communicates for many listeners, or the important role it has played in Zionist history and identity; but it does begin to illuminate the fascinating ambiguities that emerge in the study of Jewish music’s long and varied history.

The first four chapters of this Cambridge Companion explore various ways “Jewish music” has been defined and conceived, and the historical, social, cultural, and technological influences that have helped shape these often conflicting understandings. In Chapter 1, Philip V. Bohlman considers Jewish music from the perspective of ontology, the area of thought that treats questions relating to the nature of being and existence. He views multiple ways and reasons that people have proposed varying definitions of “Jewish music” at particular moments in history, examining these in relation to a set of five frequently converging conditions: religion, language, embodiment, geography, and identity. Recognizing that Jewish communities have frequently responded to the surrounding world through musical means, Bohlman argues that Jewish music’s various ontologies and definitions have played a vital role throughout the course of Jewish history.

Among his case studies, Bohlman considers issues relating to diaspora, a subject that commonly arises in studies of Jewish music, and that serves as the focus of Edwin Seroussi’s chapter that follows. Seroussi considers how

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the term “diaspora” has been used inside and outside the academy in discussions of Jewish music. His essay asks whether diaspora remains a useful term in this context, outlining the values and shortcomings of the concept in the mapping of historical and contemporary Jewish musical cultures. The third chapter, by Judah M. Cohen, continues to survey the ways people have conceived of “Jewish music,” by examining the roles of institutions in the development of the concept. Cohen describes how organizations and educational bodies devoted to varying religious, educational, philanthropic, and other concerns have supported the study and creation of genres, styles, and canons of Jewish music in order to promote particular claims about Jewish culture and identity. Through his study, Cohen shows multiple impacts of socioeconomic concerns and financial support on the very ways Jewish music has been defined.

Chapter 4 addresses another key source of influence on concepts and practices of Jewish music in the twentieth century: sound reproduction technologies. From the wax cylinder phonograph to the MP3 player, devices for sound recording and playback have been used for ethnographic research in Jewish communities, for the development of performers’ and composers’ careers, and for the creation of new musical genres and styles. Sound recording devices have also permitted listeners access to a growing body of music that could be heard in radio broadcasts, purchased as discs, downloaded as digital files, or streamed on electronic devices. This chapter shows that, far from being neutral modes of sound reproduction incorporated into existing structures of musical performance, composition, and listening, these technologies have triggered substantial changes in the ways Jewish music has been created, consumed, and defined.

The four chapters that follow explore music in selected Jewish religious, folk, and popular traditions, focusing in particular on music in the Bible, liturgy, Judeo-Spanish song, and klezmer music. In Chapter 5, Theodore W. Burgh introduces the music of biblical Palestine during the Iron Age. He presents evidence of musical practices that survive in the form of instruments and iconography, as well as in descriptions of musicians and music making in the Hebrew Bible. Although most details about the sounds and the purposes of music during this period remain lost to history, archaeomusicologists continue to uncover details of the kinds of instruments used and the settings and contexts in which people sang and played these instruments. In Chapter 6, Mark Kligman addresses the long history of music in Jewish religious, liturgical, and paraliturgical contexts. This chapter describes the various sources that provide details about the early Jewish musical traditions, and presents an overview of music in the Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible, and the Temple service. Discussions of biblical cantillation, *nusah* (psalms), and liturgical chant are followed by detailed and comparative

studies of Ashkenazic and Sephardic liturgical practices. Finally, the chapter concludes with an exploration of new music written for synagogue worship, particularly in American Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox synagogues.

The following chapter explores the performance tradition associated with Judeo-Spanish song, both in its historical settings and in the present day. Introducing examples of three major generic categories, the *romance*, *copla*, and *cantiga*, Susana Weich-Shahak discusses the traditional social context of these songs, considering questions of who sang them – men or women, solo performers or groups, with or without instrumental accompaniment – and where and when they were performed. Having introduced historical performance practices from various regions occupied by the Sephardic diaspora, Weich-Shahak then turns to the question of contemporary performance of the repertoire, addressing where it often fails to reproduce traditional modes of singing as well as the ways some musicians have incorporated ethnographic research into their more successfully imitative performance techniques.

Chapter 8 provides a history of klezmer music and musicians. Joel Rubin explores the various repertoires and styles associated with klezmer and overlapping genres across several centuries and up to the present day. His chapter examines the history of this instrumental repertoire, beginning with its centuries-old European roots, continuing through its performance by immigrant musicians in the United States in the early twentieth century, and finally viewing the popularity it has achieved in recent decades, since the start of what is known as the “klezmer revival” in the 1970s.

The subsequent chapters in this volume chart a generally chronological course through the history of a variety of genres, places, languages, and styles of Jewish music. In Chapter 9, Joshua R. Jacobson takes us to Renaissance Italy, to introduce Salamone Rossi, an important and innovative figure, as one of the few Jewish musicians to compose music for Jewish worship before the Jewish Enlightenment – the *Haskalah* – beginning in the late eighteenth century. Little is known about this Mantuan, who lived at the turn of the seventeenth century, and whose collection of polyphonic motets in Hebrew was a landmark accomplishment in the history of Jewish music. Jacobson examines Rossi’s career and his compositions to view the role music played in his navigation of a complex dual identity, as an employee of the Catholic Mantuan court and a resident of the Jewish ghetto. In Chapter 10, we move forward to the mid-eighteenth century to view the rise of Jewish participation in European classical music. David Conway explores the social contexts in which Jews entered the mainstream of the musical profession during this period, and the role of the Jewish Enlightenment in supporting this rise in participation, as well as the anti-Semitic judgments

and accusations such composers faced. The chapter views this history up to 1850, the year of the publication of Richard Wagner's influential essay "Das Judentum in der Musik" (Jewry in Music) in the periodical *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, in which Wagner proposed his own derisive definition of the term "Jewish music."

The following chapter, by James Loeffler, describes how the story of Jewish involvement in art music continued in the period after Wagner's screed, between 1850 and 1925. During this era, increasing numbers of Jewish musicians studied in European conservatories, and many composers began to pursue novel methods of representing Jewish identities in their music. Such musicians and their listeners and critics continued to engage in efforts to define the notion of modern Jewish art music, debating how it should reflect particular geographic and historical roots and religious and cultural values. In his chapter, Loeffler views the principal figures and debates in the field of Jewish music in this period, and considers how conceptions of Jewish music differed from place to place and over time.

Chapter 12, by Tina Frühauf, focuses on the synagogue music of the Jewish Reform movement. The chapter begins by examining the origins of Reform in the early nineteenth century, and describes the role and music of the cantor, a figure who in this context succeeded the traditional *hazzan*. Frühauf also describes the way the organ was introduced into the Reform liturgy, as part of the influence of church music on the music of Reform, as well as the controversies inspired by this new practice. The chapter introduces major cantors and composers involved in the movement, and the new religious musical repertoires they produced.

In Chapter 13, Lily E. Hirsch examines Jewish musical activities and the various ways Jewish musicians and listeners conceived of Jewish music between 1925 and 1945. This was an era in which conditions of war, internment, exile, and immigration influenced notions of Jewish music and its role in Jewish culture in a variety of ways, while Jewish musicians were forced to respond to increasingly restrictive Nazi and Soviet policies about Jewish participation in the arts and the content of their works. Hirsch's chapter examines such issues during this period in three particular contexts: immediately before the Nazi era, in the work of the Jewish Culture League during the Third Reich, and during the Holocaust, among composers living in captivity and in exile.

Mark Slobin writes in Chapter 14 about another genre that developed during the periods explored in the previous several chapters: the music of Yiddish theater and cinema of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Yiddish theater and cinema were highly musical multi-media cultural forms that quickly reached audiences on multiple continents, and that frequently addressed, in scenarios, scores, and song lyrics, the subjects

of Jewish displacement, assimilation, cultural maintenance, and the meeting of tradition and modernity. Many of the Yiddish songs popularly known as folk songs today originated in the works of musical theater and cinema. Slobin views this repertoire in relation to theatrical and musical precedents in Jewish culture of prior eras, as well as in the context of other contemporary modes of cultural expression in Europe and America, and discusses Yiddish theater and film scores' regional character and transnational circulation.

In Chapter 15, Jehoash Hirshberg directs our attention to the music of the Yishuv – the Jewish community in Palestine under the British mandate – and the state of Israel. This chapter describes a rare scenario in the history of music, in which a national musical culture was created almost entirely by immigrant musicians, in many cases refugees. Hirshberg shows the important role of amateur choirs in the establishment of Hebrew as the dominant language, and describes the establishment of music academies on the central European model. Considering a range of compositions by Israeli composers from across the decades since the nation was founded, he explores the development of musical idioms that, through various means and for different audiences, evoke a sense of locality and cultural belonging in the region. In the final chapter, Amy Lynn Wlodarski treats the representation of Jewish subject matter in art music after 1945. The arts of this period are often said to exhibit a character of postmodernism, a term that can be difficult to define, but that Wlodarski shows to be helpful in discussions of what “Jewish art music” has meant since the end of World War II. To explore this topic, Wlodarski focuses on a series of case studies, three musical works that take on the difficult task of responding to and memorializing the Holocaust, by the composers Arnold Schoenberg, George Rochberg, and Steve Reich.

The *Cambridge Companion to Jewish Music* is intended as a collection of detailed studies, a useful reference resource, and a research starting point for readers interested in the history of the music of Jewish cultures and traditions around the world. As the chapters in this book demonstrate, the term “Jewish music” is a deceptively simple way to describe a subject that is in fact extremely diverse, comprising, among other genres, folk songs in multiple languages, dance music played by ensembles of instrumentalists, forms of religious music developed in the synagogue and the home in far-flung communities, methods of chanting the text of the Hebrew Bible, classical music written for the concert hall, and commercial popular music disseminated in sound recordings, on the radio, and in venues from Borscht Belt clubs to vast performance arenas. Like a friendly, knowledgeable companion, this book, as it accompanies you along your journey through the study of Jewish music, will tell stories about people and places, answer multiple questions while raising others, and offer new points of view for future discussion.

**Notes**

1 In Jewish folk art, the image of the lion referred to the words “Judah is a lion’s whelp,” from Genesis 49:9. The stag might refer to the line “Naphtali is a hind let loose,” in Genesis 49:21. Naphtali is indirectly associated with music, as Deborah, a member of Naphtali’s tribe, is called upon to “awake, awake, utter a song,” in Judges 5:12. See Klára Móricz, *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianism in Twentieth-Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 27.

2 On “Hatikvah,” see Philip V. Bohlman, “Before Hebrew Song,” in Michael Berkowitz (ed.), *Nationalism, Zionism and Ethnic Mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 25–59 (37–42); James Loeffler, “Hatikvah: The Colorful History of the Israeli National Anthem,” *My Jewish Learning*, [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/culture/2/Music/Israeli\\_Music/Folk\\_Music/hatikvah.shtml?p=1](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/culture/2/Music/Israeli_Music/Folk_Music/hatikvah.shtml?p=1) (accessed February 20, 2015).

