

## **The Lexicon of Klezmer Terminology Project**

Klezmer music, traditional East European Jewish instrumental music, is one of the most important avenues of the modern Jewish musical repertoire and folk culture of Ashkenazi Jewry. Klezmer music and musicians formed a ubiquitous and highly significant symbolic and physical presence at weddings, community celebrations and in the minds of both Jewish and non-Jewish Central and East Europeans at least from the early seventeenth century until the early twentieth century. This music also played a highly significant part in the formation of a pan-European Yiddish culture. In terms of the larger scale of European musical history, scholars are only now beginning to explore the history of klezmer musicians as a principal factor in the creation of modern national art musics of Central and East Europe.

An obstacle facing klezmer researchers today is the lack of comprehensive studies of the repertoire and social function of the music in its original context of pre-World War II European Jewish society. Very little in the way of documentary efforts were carried out while the music and musicians still flourished *in situ*. At present, recovery efforts are carried out in the United States, Europe, and Israel, primarily through the documentation of surviving musicians and intensive scouring of academic archives and research collections for forgotten and previously inaccessible materials. Also, extensive work has been undertaken in the last two decades with the limited corpus of commercial klezmer recordings. Yet the loss of the traditional Eastern European Jewish context effectively doubles the methodological challenges facing contemporary researchers. The majority of current academic efforts suffer from a lack of familiarity with the original sociocultural context and internal world of the klezmer musicians and their musical repertoire. As with

other traditional musics, ethnomusicological examination of the place of music in culture—and the embeddedness of culture in music—is a necessary starting point for rigorous scholarly studies.

In an attempt to advance the cause of klezmer studies Professor James Loeffler, then a graduate student working in Israel, began the *Lexicon of Klezmer Terminology* (hereafter LKT) in 1996 under the auspices of the Jewish Music Research Centre of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As initially stated, the project's goal was to compile a wide array of source materials that shed light on the historical and contemporary state of knowledge about klezmer music. It sought to address the needs of scholars pursuing a systematic classification or typology of the various modes and genres within traditional klezmer music. In addition, the source collection was designed to provide extensive material on the history of Ashkenazic Jewish dance, Yiddish musical vocabulary, and medieval and modern Ashkenazic Jewish wedding rituals. Ultimately, the LKT was intended to provide grist for the theoretical mill on a variety of questions regarding the relationship between music, genre, ritual, dance, and social function in Ashkenazic Jewish Europe.

Trained in ethnomusicology, history, and Yiddish linguistics at Harvard University, Loeffler proposed and conducted the project in conjunction with a team of Hebrew University ethnomusicologists who were then in the process of examining the newly acquired Moshe Beregovski collection which contains original unpublished writings, manuscripts, and field recordings by the legendary Soviet Jewish ethnomusicologist. The result was a 116-page document with 30-page formal index, included published and unpublished materials, assembled and cross-referenced by genre

name, with abbreviations indicating the time and place in question, and whether musical notation or sound recordings are included.

Loeffler continued this work while pursuing a master's degree and Ph.D. in Jewish history at Columbia University. With the continued enthusiastic support of Professors Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (Columbia University), Michael Stanislawski (Columbia University), Edwin Seroussi (Hebrew University), Israel Adler (Hebrew University), Mark Slobin (Wesleyan University), and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (New York University), Loeffler expanded the lexicon considerably based on additional work using print sources in the libraries of American academic institutions such as Harvard and Columbia University Libraries, the New York Public Library Dorot Jewish Division, the Jewish Theological Seminary and Hebrew Union College Libraries, and the collections of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

Loeffler ceased formal work on the LKT around 2001. At that time, he began to conduct archival work with Jewish musical manuscript collections in the former Soviet Union. Plans were also formulated to integrate the oral history materials of Professor Walter Zev Feldman, a pioneering researcher and theoretician in the field of klezmer studies, into this corpus. Since that time, various professional and technical considerations have necessitated a pause to the planned expansion of the LKT. In particular, the explosion of digitization generated a tremendous new universe of available texts in multiple languages relevant for a comprehensive historical taxonomy of klezmer music.

Even as these new sources beckon for inclusion, it has become evident that even in its embryonic form, the LKT represents a valuable resource for scholars around the

world. Yet, this treasury of information remained concealed from most of its potential beneficiaries. With the launching of version 4 of the JMRC website in 2013 it was decided, with the permission of Professor Loeffler, to transform the LKT into a database embedded within the *Thesaurus of Jewish Music* of the JMRC website.

### **Methodology**

The principal methodology for the original LKT was the collection and redaction of all obtainable written source materials, dating from ca. 1600 to ca. 1960 which contain references to either the musical genres of klezmer music (*freylekhs, khosidl, sher*), functional genres (*bazetsns di kale, opshil far di mekhutonim, doine*), or related nomenclature (instrument's names, musical terms). The bulk of these sources fall in the period 1800-1914. Sources vary in specificity and usefulness depending on their point and place of origin. Hence the main dimensions of this study are the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of Jewish life in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires and the Romanian monarchy. Sources consulted also vary from published studies from the disciplines of ethnomusicology, folklore and ethnography, to medieval and modern Jewish literature in a variety of languages (primarily Hebrew, Yiddish, and English, but some also in German, French, and Russian), rabbinic legal literature, unpublished musical manuscripts and commercial sound recordings. Internal Jewish sources from Yiddish folk and memoir literature tend to be the richest source of description of the role of music in communal celebrations and the connection between music, ritual and dance at Jewish weddings. Oral histories by surviving musicians reveal the subtleties and surprises of Yiddish nomenclature when it comes to identifying musical genres and technical

terms. Academic and external non-Jewish sources often provide the most systematic analyses of the structure of klezmer music but beg larger questions about the source base for these comparisons.

With the gradual digitization of the LKT we hope to expand this database by adding materials that were not available at the time to Loeffler and his associates. At the same time, benefitting from the full range of Internet capabilities, the LKT has all its complex bibliographical apparatus as hyperlinks for easy referral (thus saving from the reader the hardship of deciphering the abbreviations of sources used in the original version of the LKT). At the same time, we hope to enrich each entry with visual (including transcriptions) and, more important, recorded musical examples.

Comments, additions and amendments to the LKT are welcome. Please refer them to [jmrc\\_inf@savion.huji.ac.il](mailto:jmrc_inf@savion.huji.ac.il).