

# Building Interdisciplinary Bridges Across Cultures (Cambridge, 2016)

(Homerton College, Cambridge, 30<sup>th</sup> July – 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2016)

## **“Klezmer returns to college”: intercultural experience and social engagement through musical performance**

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# Discussion of ....

1. Klezmer – brief history
2. Klezmer and Otherness
3. *“Klezmer returns to college”*
4. Cultural Politics – appropriation and/or translation?
5. *The Michael Kahan Kapelye* (university klezmer ensemble)
6. Interdisciplinarity – ethnomusicology and Interculturality
7. Social Engagement ...
8. Learning through klezmer performance
9. Applied ethnomusicology and criticality (resonances with education, applied linguistics, intercultural communication)

# Klezmer

from the Jewish shtetls of eastern Europe, via the melting pot of the New World, to the 1980/90s Revival, and World Music commodification



## A condensed history

- *'zlei zemer'* (vessel of sound)
- Middle Ages onwards
- Wedding music of the Ashkenazi (Yiddish-speaking) Jewish (eastern European) communities
- Cantorial singing .... also co-territorial and other influences
- Discrimination, Pogroms, Migration, and the Holocaust
- New World (recordings .... decline/melting pot assimilation)
- 1970s Revival
- World Music commodification (fusions) / transglobal
- Cultural politics ... heritage, love it or hate it

Listen .... old and new

# Klezmer and Otherness

- Each year's students learn to perform klezmer, a musical 'Other' for them, often for audiences significantly Jewish in make-up (another cultural 'Other' for our students).



At 40,000 and with a history dating back 200 years, Manchester's Jewish community is the second biggest community in Britain and, perhaps, the fastest-growing in Europe.

Cheetham Hill is dubbed as having Britain's most diverse street in the 2011 census and is one of the most multicultural hubs in the world.

Over 2 square miles over 30 languages are spoken, and a mix of Mosques, Sikh Gurdwaras, Churches and Synagogues cater for a diverse and vibrant community.





# “Klezmer returns to college” - The Michael Kahan Kapelye

- 2011 voluntary ensemble – Michael Kahan remembered
- 2012-16 assessed ensemble – roles of the co-presenters



## Some Cultural Politics

- *“there is a widespread notion that ethnic music is really ‘owned’ by one group of people and cannot ‘belong’ to others”* (Waligorska, 2013: 59).
- Given that “in this revival of Jewish music ... most of the creators and consumers were not Jews and the spaces used for performance were indelibly linked to the Holocaust”, the revival might be seen “not just as *theft* but as a form of *cultural necrophilia*” [Cultural appropriation]
- *Klezmer performed by non-Jews today does not have the same form, significance, or function as klezmer played by Jewish musicians in pre-Holocaust Europe. But instead of interpreting this as a misrepresentation of the ‘original’, the klezmer being played today should also be acknowledged as a catalyst of new forms, functions, and meanings, all of which make up the significance of this music in contemporary Polish and German society ...* (Waligorska, 2013: 8). [Cultural translation]

The cultural politics of klezmer played by Manchester students in the Manchester Jewish Museum and beyond?

# The Michael Kahan Kapelye

- MusB degree programme – place of ethnomusicology
- A musico-cultural ‘other’ + Manchester Jewish communities
- Ensemble Objectives:
  - ensemble performance competence
  - intercultural musical awareness
  - klezmer understanding
  - (Jewish) cultural awareness
  - social engagement ... “giving something back”
- *“... learning klezmer as a means to learn and facilitate musical creativity and musical identity for students who are rooted in the conventions of classical training ... ” (Ros)*



# Methodological interdisciplinarity – Ethnomusicology and Interculturality

- Performing Ethnomusicology (Ted Solis)
- World Music Ensemble Teaching
  - musical awareness through other cultures
  - cultural awareness through other musics
- Ensemble methodology - *A (nine-element) Methodological Framework for Teaching Klezmer* (in a Music Department in the UK)
  - i) Intercultural awareness – global musical awareness
  - ii) Experiential learning dimensions
  - iii) Cultural learning strategies
  - iv) Mono-/multi-perspectivity
  - v) Understandings of culture
  - vi) Performance contexts
  - vii) Static-fluid understandings of (klezmer) musical culture(s)
  - viii) Aural-notation transmission
  - ix) Holistic-atomistic transmission

# Ros' Perspective on Ensemble Methodology

- *“developing ensemble awareness, leader/ accompaniment role, understanding and flexibility, etc - are all bi-products of the intercultural learning process ”*
- *“confidence in new musicianship skills is cultivated through the creative, contextually-sensitive learning of a new musical model. ”*
- *“In approaching the learning of music through a culturally-aware model, rather than one purely oriented towards musical performance, music students can extend existing boundaries of performance practice and creative ownership. ”*

# Learning through klezmer performance

- *The Emergence and Development of L'chaim Kapelye* (Ellie)
- *"I thought they might judge us, and I think they still do a little bit. I think that the audience know the music, kind of like Ros and Richard, and it's part of their lives and it's involved in weddings and celebrations, so the pressure of getting it right was there, and I also worry that we might not do it right and they'll get upset."* (Pippa)
- *"They can see that we are really enjoying it and we're putting a lot of effort into it and that's more important than if we perform perfectly."* (Jemima)
- *"... as we've branched out to the Jewish community more in Manchester, we've had direct contact with Jewish people and that's been a learning experience. We have more of a responsibility to know what we're doing because we're playing a music that is associated with a particular culture"* (Dan)

# Social Engagement

- “Social responsibility is one of our three core strategic goals in our Manchester 2020 strategy, sitting equally alongside our commitments to world-class research, and outstanding learning and student experience.”
- “Social responsibility describes the way we are making a difference to the social and economic well-being of our communities through our teaching, research, and public events and activities”.
- e.g. 1: Heathlands Residential Home (“giving something back”)
- e.g. 2: Yeshurun Synagogue (“doing more for anti-semitism”)
- e.g. 3: Manchester Jewish Museum (“it’s good to remember”)

# Social Engagement

- <https://stream.manchester.ac.uk/Play.aspx?VideoId=29325>
- <http://www.klezmer.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>



# Applied Ethnomusicology - criticality

*The Society for Ethnomusicology's (SEM) .... Applied Ethnomusicology (AE) section seeks to put "music to use in a variety of contexts, academic and otherwise, including Education, Cultural Policy, Conflict Resolution, Medicine, Arts Programming and Community Music".*

- *"we are a group of ethnomusicologists with a strong desire to make the world a better place through our work";*
- *"if music is culture, and culture is a product of society, then we must realize how the study of music and those involved in it can benefit the world";*
- *"what distinguishes applied work is the advocacy and social justice aspect of it";*
- *"we see music and musicians and ourselves as profoundly involved in social transformations".*

# Concluding Remarks

1. Musical awareness broadened through klezmer
2. Cultural awareness broadened through klezmer
3. Social engagement opportunities through klezmer
4. Engagement with cultural politics through klezmer
5. Interdisciplinarity (music, intercultural communication ....)
6. Criticality .... engagement with key concerns of our time (e.g. anti-semitism)
7. Cultural translations, methodological resonances (interdisciplinarity), and personal transformations



## Initial Comments re 'Culture'

- *Whilst the concept of 'culture' has been and remains under critical scrutiny within the field of intercultural communication, the concept features prominently, and often uncritically, in many popular and academic discourses including Ethnomusicology and heritage processes such as folk museums.*
- e.g. 1 culture discourse re migration to 'Christian' Europe
- e.g. 2 culture discourse re Chinese students in UK HE
- e.g. 3 culture discourse re Manchester Jewish Museum

identity politics / essentialism / preservationism / heritage-ism