

Ko-opting Klezmer
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Klezmer music developed from the 16th to the late 19th Century primarily as wedding music. Yet since the advent of the Yiddish Theater in Romania in the 1870s to its present day incarnations, klezmer music has increasingly served purposes other than the life cycle celebration. The conscious process of adapting music to serve an ideology can first be observed in the Hassidic edict of “mekadesh seyn a nign” (making a song holy) - the sanctification of non-Jewish music by virtue of using it for Jewish purposes. Later, secular "insiders looking out" molded the music and promotion for the Iasi Yiddish Theater in attempts to galvanize a Yiddish identity in the 1870s. This was followed by the attempts of practitioners of klezmer music to "jazz it up" for integration into the American popular music landscape in the 20th Century. "Outsiders looking in" have used klezmer music to present their take on exoticism. In the present day this can be observed in Germany where Jewish music is used as a symbol of rebellion, an ersatz religion and a stand-in for their indigenous folk music that became ideologically tainted by nationalism. In Poland we witness klezmer music co-opted for the “invention of history”. Here the symbolically archaic and the avant-garde are presented side-by-side in order to create a new image of the country rooted in the destroyed past, yet looking toward the future. In Hungary we can observe the Táncház scene attempting to create conjectural rural versions of klezmer music in order to expand its own identity, repertoire and fan base. In America since the 1970s, klezmer music has been used as a vehicle for a week-long Yiddish culture camp which has served as an international model for an alternative, secularly-oriented community. Since the the 1990s klezmer music has been used as a vehicle for Gay Pride and a banner for the multi-cultural. Recently printed klezmer music collections reveal publishers’ motivations to be “the first” “the ultimate” or the most "complete". Transformations of the technical terms used to describe klezmer music and the inclusion of religious prayers in the repertoire indicate a growing trend to spiritualize the music, while on the other hand it is used as Identity Art by musicians presenting their creations as a mirror of their non-religious beliefs and to portray their personal images.

Keywords: Klezmer Music, ideology, Life Cycle, sanctification, insiders, outsiders, exoticism, co-opt, ersatz religion, nationalism, avant-garde, Táncház, archaic, identity, gay pride, multi-cultural, identity art, alternative.