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# Klezmer — Jewish Music's 'New Wave'

By Jim Steinblatt

Followers of rock music know that the . the past five years has brought that music back to am glad to report that contemporary Jewish music is experiencing its own "New Wave." It is a harkening back to a very old style — *Klezmer* (traditional Yiddish folk music).

Klezmer has elements of cantorial music, the Yiddish theater tradition, East European marching music and, in its American form, Dixieland Jazz.

In the early 1960s, young Jewish enthusiasts were int the forefront of the American folk and blues revivals then taking place. The early 1980s have seen a parallel movement toward dusting off the forgotten music of our own people.

What these musicologists have dug up is now on record for the rest of us to enjoy. During the past few months, three albums of new recordings of Klezmer music were released. In addition, a documentary album of old Klezmer recordings has also been reissued.

Surprisingly, all of these records reveal how fresh and powerful the sound of Klezmer music remains. Certainly, nostalgia is an element of the pleasure—after all, this is the music of the *shtetl* and immigration. However, for those in search of a Jewish music they

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# West Side story: Chassidim come to Reform Temple, and everyone joins in song, prayer, dance

More than 500 members and friends of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue sang and danced their way through a joyous weekend encounter with Chassidim this month.

"For most of them," Rabbi Balfour Brickner, senior rabbi of the 75-year-old Reform congregation, said, "it was their first experience with traditional Judaism and with the way Chassidim uniquely expresses that tradition. Instead of being turned off, they were turned on—because it gave them an opportunity to express their faith in emotional terms rather than in rational terms. Prayers should be sung and danced," Rabbi Brickner stressed, "not spoken. Spoken words destroy prayer. They lead to boredom."

"We discovered this weekend," Rabbi Brickner added, "that even the oldest, most austere Reformed Jew wants to be and can be brought closer to God in this way. I am delighted that our congregation was so receptive. We have a long-standing tradition of experiment at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue. Maybe next time we can try an approach through the Kabbalah and mysticism."

The Chassidic program at Stephen Wise began Friday evening, February 5, with a Shabbat family dinner. During the services, Rabbi Shur, director of the Hillel Foundation at Queens College, lectured on the "Ba'al Shem Tov," the founder of the Chassidic movement who taught his followers to worship with joy.

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Mr. Maclean's specific purpose was to report on a formal meeting of the Israeli ambassador with the Conference of Presidents held recently in New York. It is no secret that the Zionist Organization created and subsidized the Presidents Conference, shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel. Consequently, the Presidents Conference is an integral force in the Zionist movement and may be presumed to be involved in trying to formulate a Zionist-oriented national policy for the State of Israel.

But not all U.S. Jews are collectively behind this political bloc. The Presidents Conference does not include many Jews who for religious and other reasons are irreconcilably hostile to participation in a Zionist program... The presidents who lead the "34 Jewish organizations" were not empowered to speak for this multitude of Jews. Journalists should be precise in distinguishing between the political power of Zionism and the religious faith of Judaism.

Zionism is a modern phenomenon in the world of politics. Judaism is an ancient religion that has outlived many political placebos.

If an overview is taken of this small-scale effort to educate and influence readers of the peninsula press, it appears encouraging. Enough to serve as a spur for readers in all parts of the country to seize the opportunity, whenever it presents itself locally, to send to a favorite newspaper that most democratic of instruments: a Letter to the Editor. ■

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The American Council for Judaism also publishes **Special Interest Report,** a monthly news digest which examines and interprets problems created by political Zionism in the structure of Jewish life in America.

## Clarification

In the Winter/Spring 1982 **Issues,** a biographical sketch of Kansas City rabbi Edward Paul Cohn, of The New Reform Temple, made mention of his description in the *Baltimore Jewish Times* as a Classical Reform rabbi.

Rabbi Cohn telephoned to clarify that that description by the *Times* was in error.

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