Heyser Bulgar (*The Spirited Bulgar*):
Compositional process in Jewish-American dance music of the 1910s and 1920s

by Joel E. Rubin

This paper was originally going to be about ornamentation in the Yiddish-American dance repertoire currently known as ›klezmer‹ music[1]. While comparing the recorded clarinet solos of Naftule

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[1] The Yiddish word ›klezmer‹ (pl. ›klezmorim‹, ›klezmer‹ or ›klezmers‹) derives from the compound in rabbinical Hebrew of the biblical words ›kle‹ (vessels, instruments; sing. ›kli‹) and ›zemer‹ (song), which, when used together, meant musical instruments. By the sixteenth century, the term ›klezmer‹ had begun to be used by Jews in Eastern Europe to denote the instrumentalists themselves rather than their instruments. More specifically, ›klezmer‹ referred in the Yiddish-speaking world of Jewish Eastern Europe to the professional Jewish folk instrumentalists who performed a ritual and entertainment function at ›khasenes‹ (weddings) and other ›simkhes‹ (festive occasions). The areas in which Yiddish-speaking Jews lived in significant concentrations during most of the nineteenth century and up until the end of World War One included portions of the Russian Empire (Congress Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Western Belorussia, Western Ukraine, and Bessarabia), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Galicia, Bukovina, Máramaros, Slovakia, Subcarpathian Rus), and Romania (Moldavia). Subsequently the term ›klezmer‹ was used in immigrant communities in North America, Israel and elsewhere, although in the United States it had taken on a derogatory connotation amongst the musicians themselves (Max Epstein, interview 17 January 1991).

Nowadays the term ›klezmer music‹ is in common use to describe a portion of the repertoire performed by the ›klezmorim‹ as their performance style. This is, however, a recent development. There is no evidence that the ›klezmorim‹ themselves used this term to describe their music, nor do they seem to have had another standardized name for it. The use of ›klezmer‹ by the scholarly community to describe a repertoire and style of music can be found no earlier than in the works of Moshe Beregovski (e.g. 1932, 1935, 1937, 1941). The term ›klezmer‹ music first

Brandwein (1884-1963) and Dave Tarras (1895-1989), the two leading performers of the 1920s in New York and the main subjects of my research, I began to look at their performances of one tune (*Heyser Bulgar*) and to compare them to other recordings, transcriptions and sheet music of the same and similar tunes from both Jewish and non-Jewish sources[2]. What I found sheds light on several questions regarding ›klezmer‹ music, including: (1) the compositional processes involved in the music; (2) some of the possible origins of the tonal material; and (3) the range of melodic variation, both between recorded and/or print variants as well as within the course of a single performance. In this paper I present my first findings in this regard, addressing the first two issues only, that of compositional process and origins of the melodies.

My main data source has been commercial ›klezmer‹ recordings made in Eastern Europe and, especially, New York from approximately 1908-1929, supplemented by commercial recordings of related, non-Jewish musical traditions, as well as Jewish sheet music collections from the first decades of this century and the transcriptions of Ukrainian-Jewish ethnomusicologist Moshe Beregovski (1892-1961).

In this study I looked at fourteen versions of tunes which had the common element that they shared at least one sentence belonging to

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became popularized during the late 1970s, when it was employed by some of the early protagonists of the contemporary ›klezmer‹ movement (sometimes known as the ›klezmer‹ revival) in both Israel and, especially, the United States.

[2] I am terming this set of melodies *Heyser Bulgar* strictly for point of reference. In the Jewish instrumental ›klezmer‹ tradition, dance tunes rarely bore names. *Heyser Bulgar* is the title of Naftule Brandwein's 1923 recording of the tune.

what I am terming the ›tune group‹[3]. The break-down of the sample is as follows:

- Six were commercial recordings of ›klezmer‹ music. Of those six, five were recorded in New York between 1918-1929 and one was recorded in Eastern Europe in 1912.

- Two were contemporary recordings by non-Jewish performers in New York from 1915 and 1919. One of the two was marketed as Jewish, while the other may have only been designated as Russian.

- Two were contained in commercial publications of Jewish sheet music from New York from 1916 and 1928.

- One was a transcription by Beregovski from the Ukraine in 1935.

- Two were from incidental music to the Yiddish Art Theater production of An-ski's *Dybbuk* from 1921.

- One was a Greek recording from the 1960s in the Constantinopolitan or Smyrnaic style.[4] This particular Greek recording is the key which points to a common and, quite likely, distant origin with the Jewish versions, as shall be seen.

I found in the fourteen versions a total of thirteen basic sentences, which I have labelled ›a‹ through ›m‹. Seven of the sentences, ›a‹

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[3]   I am using the term ›sentence‹ here to refer to a combination of phrases with its own internal cadence, whereas ›tune‹ refers to a string of sentences forming a single compositional unit.

[4]   Martin Schwartz of the University of California at Berkeley shared this recording with me in the 1980s, and it has been his many years of research into the connections between certain categories of Greek-Constantinopolitan music and ›klezmer‹ and other Yiddish genres which peeked my curiosity in this regard. See Schwartz, *Greek-Oriental Rebetica* and *Klezmer Music.*

through ›g‹, are contained in at least two performances, and I have considered these as belonging to the tune group.

My theory is that the ›klezmer‹ repertoire is not based on compositions per se, but is rather largely the result of a process of centonization - or, as Hanoch Avenary would have called it, tesselation -, the piecing together in differing combinations of smaller units from a pre-existing melodic palette[5]. Centonization is a process which is present at every level of ›klezmer‹ music, from the ornamentation of a single tone to the building up of figures into phrases, phrases into sentences, and sentences into tunes. The tune group is a class of associated sentences which contain similar motivic material and ›sounded good together‹ according to the prevailing musical aesthetic of the performer-composers. It is also possible that the sentences in the tune group had belonged previously to known compositions, perhaps even to songs with texts. As Beregovski wrote:

> As soon as such ›freylekhs‹, ›skotshnes‹, etc. were learned and the musicians had made them their own, they became overgrown with idiosyncracies, with favorite gestures and ornaments. So we can explain why it is that variants of the same melody seldom agree. In general, it can be said that we would receive as many variants of a particular work as there would be ›klezmorim‹ documented performing it.[6]

The concept of a tune group seems to be related to, but goes beyond, what James R. Cowdery has termed the ›tune model‹ in his work on traditional Irish music:

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[5] Avenary postulated that the motifs in a ›shteyger‹ (Jewish liturgical mode) »cannot be classified as initial, intermediate and final: only their ›preference for a certain function‹ can be recognized, which does not preclude varying applications [...] Shteyger tunes may be compared to a mosaic work tesselated from the given motive material«. Avenary, *The Concept of Mode*, pp. 14, 17.

[6] Beregovski, »Yidishe klezmer«, p. 415. See also Slobin, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, p. 501. ›Freylekhs‹ and ›skotshne‹ are two terms commonly applied to duple meter dance tunes performed by ›klezmorim‹.

Although the musicians may refer to each melody as ›a tune‹ [...] such a melody does not really appear to be an objective entity; it is clearly something which is subjectively negotiated. I have offered the concept of ›tune model‹ to characterize such an entity: ›a generating pattern in the mind of the individual and, by extension, of the group. Any given rendition is one of an infinite number of possible manifestations of the tune model, which can be studied on the individual level (comparing renditions by one person) or various group levels. On any level, a tune model is a living potential which may unfold slightly differently in different situations, but will always be recognizable as itself [...]‹.[7]

Robert Garfias' comments about tune ›composition‹ in Romanian village dance music are also relevant to this discussion:

The spontaneous nature of Romanian village dances required that village folk musicians be prepared to extend a particular dance should the villagers desire it. This led to an informal practice of stringing together melodies of a common dance type when needed. Because of the method of oral transmission of the repertoire, some of these temporal combinations of dance melodies have, in some instances, come to be indistinguishable from those which were originally discrete melodies.[8]

An additional factor to be considered is that of modality: All of the sentences in this tune group are built upon the same ›gust‹ (mode), a Latin-derived Yiddish word meaning literally ›taste‹[9]. This particular ›gust‹ was known among some ›klezmorim‹ as ›freygish‹[10]. It contains the same basic parent scale — if not the

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7   Cowdery, »Response«, p. 74.

8   Garfias, »Survivals of Turkish Characteristics«, p. 101.

9   ›Gust‹ is »a term once used by the ›hazanim‹ [cantors] in Russia, having the same meaning as ›shteyger‹ [...] in Western Ashkenazic communities« (Avenary, »The Musical Vocabulary«, pp. 190-91). The term ›gust‹ was also used by Beregovski in his Yiddish writings (Beregovski, »Yidishe klezmer«, pp. 436 ff.), which seems to indicate that at least some ›klezmorim‹ also referred to modes with this term.

10   Beregovski, »Yidishe klezmer«, p. 444.

same motifs — as the Jewish liturgical mode ›Ahavoh-rabboh‹ and has similarities to the Turkish ›makam Hümayun‹ as well[11].

The ›klezmorim‹ in Eastern Europe were professional, urban instrumentalists performing within a multi-ethnic context. A complete discussion of the complex interaction between ›klezmorim‹ and other, non-Jewish professional and amateur musicians, as well as between ›klezmorim‹ and their non-Jewish audiences, is beyond the scope of this paper. It is important, however, to touch briefly upon this phenomenon. At least since the first half of the nineteenth century, the predominant non-Jewish musical influence on or interaction with ›klezmer‹ music has been that of certain Greek and Moldavian genres[12]. Much of the music which is today known as ›klezmer‹ seems to have been formed at the confluence of Yiddish, Bessarabian, Greco-Turkish and Bulgarian musical styles. Key points of contact between ›klezmorim‹ and Southeastern European musical culture included:

- Probable contact with Greek and Turkish musicians during the Ottoman rule of Moldavia from the sixteenth century onwards by Fanariot Greeks from Constantinople[13].

- The Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 resulted in its colonization by Yiddish-speaking Jews from the Ukraine. Here they came into contact with Moldavian music, and, most

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[11] See Idelsohn, *Jewish* Music, pp. 84-89 and Signell, *Makam*, p. 35.

[12] Goldin, *On Musical Connections*, pp. 23-28.

[13] In relation to Romanian Gypsy music, Robert Garfias sees this influence as Turkish, not Greek: »In general, one might say that much of the melodic quality of this music draws from the Turkish Makam or modal system. The harmonic system that provides the substructure for these melodies is a unique adaptation of the Western European harmonic system which accomodates the very special requirements of a melodic system heavily influenced by Turkish melodic types« (Garfias, »Dance Among«, p. 86).

importantly, the music of the ›lăutari‹, the professional Moldavian, predominantly Rom, musicians[14].

- At the same time, Bessarabia was also settled by Christian Bulgarians[15].

- The annexation of Bessarabia also allowed for the move of Greco-Moldavian repertoire northwards into the Ukraine and even further, which may have come about through the travels of Bessarabian ›lăutari‹[16], but also from interactions between the various Jewish communities in Bessarabia and those of the Ukraine and parts further northwards.

- Visits of Moldavian and, possibly, other ›klezmorim‹ to Constantinople during the nineteenth century, where they performed for Greeks and Ashkenazic Jews[17]. At the same time, according to a travel report from Ludwig August Frankl (*Nach Jerusalem* I., p. 195[18]), there were 500 professional Jewish musicians living in Constantinople in 1856. How many of these were Ashkenazic ›klezmorim‹ is not known, but it is unlikely there were not any. The professional entertainment musicians in Istanbul were primarily Rom, Jews, Greeks and Armenians[19].

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[14]   Feldman, »Bulgărească«, p. 11.

[15]   Feldman, »Bulgărească«, p. 12.

[16]   Feldman, »Bulgărească«, pp. 9, 11-12.

[17]   »For the 19th century it is known that several Moldavian klezmer troupes (especially from Iasi, but not from Bessarabia) traveled to Istanbul, where they played for Greeks, Ashkenazic Jews, and others (but not for Sephardic Jews)« (Schwartz, *Klezmer Music*, p. 10).

[18]   Cited in: Wolf, »Fahrende Leute bei den Juden«, 12 (1909), p. 53.

[19]   Sonia Tamar Seeman, personal communication, 16 January 1998.

- The coexistence in Odessa under Czarist rule of large Jewish and Greek communities[20].

These close inter-ethnic connections resulted in the formation in areas such as Bessarabia, Western Moldavia and the Bukovina of professional ensembles of mixed ethnicity, comprising primarily Jewish and Rom musicians[21]. Through this interaction a repertoire developed during the nineteenth century which combined some elements of ›klezmer‹ and ›muzică lăutărească‹, among others[22]. A particularly strong influence on ›klezmer‹ melodies was the Greek ›hasapiko‹, as well as the Bessarabian dances ›sirba‹ and ›bulgărească‹, and likely certain Bulgarian genres as well. Greek language and culture appears to have been particularly strong in Romania up until the mid-nineteenth century[23].

Contacts between Greek and Yiddish music were intensified in the United States, particularly in New York, where Jews often performed in Greek vernacular music ensembles and made recordings as early as the 1910s which were marketed simultaneously to both Jewish and Greek audiences[24].

To return to my sample, it appears that there is an implied hierarchy of sentences within the tune group in terms of which sentences belong in certain positions of a tune: at the beginning, in the middle or elsewhere. For example, sentence ›a‹ or ›aᴷ‹ — which occurs in all but one of the fourteen performances — begins the tune in most cases (eleven of the fourteen performances). In one performance, however, it was used as the second sentence of the tune; in one case

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[20]   See Schwartz, *Klezmer Music*, pp. 4, 8, 10-11; Feldman, »Bulgărească«, pp. 9-12; Feldman, *Alicia Svigals*; Ottens and Rubin, *Yikhes*, footnote 93.

[21]   See, for example, Bik, *Klezmorim be-Orgeev*.

[22]   Feldman, »Bulgărească«, p. 12.

[23]   Feldman, *Alicia Svigals*.

[24]   Max Epstein, interviews 29-30 November 1994.

it formed the third sentence; and in one case, it was not present at all. The only other sentence in the tune group which was used to begin a tune besides ›a‹, was sentence ›g‹[25]. Indeed, it may well be that this tune group actually consists of sentences from two or more older tune groups, or even set compositions. Through time they may have gradually collapsed to form one extended group. The five sentences ›b‹ through ›f‹, as well as the variant sentence ›a²‹, seem to play a more flexible role. They appear at different positions within the tune, with the one common element that they do not appear to be able to begin the tune. The six sentences '›h‹ through ›m‹ were found within only four of the fourteen variants and each did not occur in more than a single instance. In the absence of more information, I am considering these to be outside of the tune group. Given a larger pool of variants, it might turn out that they, too, would belong to an even more extended tune group.

The sentences in this tune group probably came from or shared a common Greek or Greco-Moldavian source during the nineteenth century. In six of the eleven commercial recordings, the tunes were referred to as ›bulgar‹ or ›Bulgarian‹ on the labels, pointing towards a non-Jewish source. At the same time, however, it appears that at least sentence 'a' was in the Yiddish repertoire for a long enough time before these recordings were made to have given it strongly Jewish associations. This is evident by its being referred to with the Yiddish titles *Khasene Nigunim* (*Jewish Wedding Melodies*) and *Mekhutonim Tants* (*Dance of the In-Laws*), for instance. Version 10, which does not include sentence ›a‹, is entitled *Der Simkhe Tants* (*The Dance of Celebration*). Sentences ›a‹ through ›c‹ were incorporated by the cellist, Yiddish Theater composer and former ›klezmer‹ Joseph Cherniavsky into his score for the Yiddish Art Theater production of An-Ski's *Dybbuk*, a play which is full of Jewish mystical associations. In addition, sentences from the tune group, in particular sentence ›a‹, were used independently of the

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[25]   In the recording *Der Simche Tanz* by Abe Schwartz's Orchestra (version 10).

other sentences, such as in Beregovski's field recording of the Ukrainian-Jewish clarinetist B. Cherniavsky (version 13). This would tend to indicate that the tune had become so ensconced in the musical vocabulary of Ashkenazic ›klezmorim‹ that they not only performed it as part of tunes constructed from sentences within the tune group, but cited it in other contexts as well.

It is the Greek performance by N. Stefanopoulos which led me to believe that these sentences all belong to one tune group, as it draws together sentences ›a‹ and ›g‹, which were not present together in any of the Jewish performances. The extent of variance between the Greek and the Yiddish sentences — see especially the divergences between sentences ›g‹ and ›g$_1$‹ and ›f‹ and ›f$_2$‹ — seems to indicate that the Greek and Jewish versions of this tune group diverged a very long time ago. The Stefanopoulos recording was made in the 1960s in Athens, but there is no reason to believe that he was aware of either the Belf recording from Eastern Europe or the five Yiddish recordings from New York.

It is hoped that further comparisons of similar such performances may prove or disprove the concept of the tune group as well as shed further light on the compositional processes involved in early 20th century Yiddish instrumental dance music.

Further comments to the musical examples:

All performances have been transposed to a ›tonic‹ of G for comparative purposes.

Sentence ›a‹ exists in three main variants:

(1) as a 24-bar sentence (versions 1-6, 9 & 11, whereby version 11 contains 26 bars)

(2) as a 16-bar sentence (versions 12-14)

(3) as a 16-bar sentence (versions 7-8) at some variance to (2)

Sentences ›b‹ and ›e‹ seem to be substitutions for one another. There was no version with both ›b‹ and ›e‹, pointing to the possibility of them originally having belonged to two different tunes.

Sentences ›c‹, ›d‹ and ›f‹ were applied in varying combinations with each other, as well as with sentence ›a‹ and ›g‹. They seem to constitute motivic ›filler‹, and it would not be surprising to find them — or sentences similar in structure to them — in other tune groups as well.

List of the musical examples and their sentence sequences:

(1)	Heiser Bulgar	Naftule Brandwein's Orch.	aabbccd
(2)	Gelebt und Gelacht	Abe Schwartz's Orch.	aabbcc
(3)	Frailache Yidden	J. and J. Kammen	aabbcc
(4)	Chassene Niginim	Joseph Cherniavsky	aabbcc
(5)	Der Nicolaiver Bulgar	Kandel's Orch.	aaee
(6)	Nikolayever Bulgar	Mishka Ziganoff	aaee
(7)	Der Arbaytsman	Belf's Romanian Orch.	$a^1a^1a^2a^2$ff
(8)	Bulgar No. 6	Wolff Kostakowsky	$a^1a^1a^2a^2$ff
(9)	Molivar Bulgar	I. J. Hochman Orch.	aaeeff
(10)	Der Simcheh Tanz	Abe Schwartz's Orch	$ggcf^1$hhf
(11)	Bulgarian Dance	Melnikoff and Dimitri	aaffd
(12)	Politiko Hasapiko	N. Stefanopoulos	$aaf^2f^2iijjg^1g^1f^2f^2$
(13)	Skocne	B. Cherniavski	kkaakk
(14)	Mechatunim Tanz	Joseph Cherniavsky	llmmaa

Heyser Bulgar Sentences

*) Duration of 1 to 6 bars in length

sentence d (16 to 17 bars)

sentence e (20 bars)

snetnce f (8 bars)

sentence f' (8 bars)

sentence f" (8 bars)

sentence g (16 bars)

sentence g' (16 bars)

Heyser Bulgar

sentence h (16 bars)

sentence i (8 bars)

sentence j (16 bars)

sentence k (16 bars)

sentence l (16 bars)

sentence m (16 bars)

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