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Introduction

What is klezmer? It's the celebratory music originating from the **Ashkenazi** Jewish population of Eastern Europe, and we know it today as exotic, thrilling and evocative music. That much is fairly straightforward. However, as a term 'klezmer' is full of multiple meanings, contradictions and misunderstandings. The word klezmer (pronounced *klezz-mer* rather than *kltets-mer*), derives from two Hebrew words: *kley* (vessel or utensil) and *zemer* (music). In the 18th and 19th centuries the term was commonly used to describe not the music, but the musician. A klezmer was a professional wedding musician, loved and scorned in equal measure. Respected and hugely in demand for the excitement and joy that they could bring to a celebration, but frowned upon and shunned for their doubtful morals and shady lifestyle on the periphery of Jewish society.

It wasn't until the 20th century that the term klezmer was used, by the Soviet ethnomusicologist **Beregovski**, to describe the music itself. In America, during klezmer's golden age of the 30s and 40s, the term was barely used at all and was regarded as derogatory.

Only with the revival of the 1970s and 80s did klezmer become a widely used description of a genre of music. Often misused, it became a marketing term and trendy buzz-word which could include almost anything Jewish, middle eastern or exotic.

The Tunes

Of the tunes included, many are well-known classics which will be part of any klezmer repertoire, while some are more obscure numbers chosen to illustrate a particular detail or represent a chapter in klezmer's fascinating history. All the tunes, however, are included because of the strength and playability of the melodies.

The clarity of the situation is not helped by the fact that it has always been a very diverse body of music. At weddings and other celebrations, klezmerim (the plural of klezmer) were expected to play whatever their customers wanted which could be any of the following: religious or secular music, dance or listening music, ancient tunes or modern popular hits. Today, when klezmer bands mix jazz, rock and latin with the old tunes, are they diluting the original music, or simply continuing the tradition of the klezmer who entertained his audience? And if at a Jewish wedding the band plays modern Israeli **Simcha** pop music and not 19th-century European klezmer are they not simply being modern day klezmerim? For many musicians, klezmer is a badge of Jewish identity and is closely related to religion and spirituality, while for others it is 'world music' and entirely secular.

Whatever your outlook on klezmer, this book aims to give you a solid introduction to the history and background of the music, an idea of the range and depth of the repertoire, a feel for the scales and modes which underpin the music and a good understanding of the appropriate style of ornamentation, improvisation and arrangements used in performances.

Written ornamentation is kept to a minimum until chapter 3, where it is explained in detail; thereafter ornaments are written in as suggestions. In most tunes there is the choice of a number of different ornaments, or indeed none. Bowing marks are included throughout and there are occasional fingering annotations, which should also be regarded as suggestions.

Exploring Klezmer Fiddle

Chord symbols have been included. Again, these should be regarded as guides rather than a definitive statement; when in doubt leave it to your accompanist to simplify or elaborate.

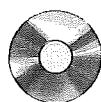
The Recording

All of the tunes in the book also appear on the accompanying CD. Some (mostly the MP3 tracks) are solo violin, with a rhythm fiddle accompaniment. Others are band recordings, with various combinations of instruments.

Accessing the Audio and MP3s

Accessing the CD tracks:

The main tunes in this book have band arrangements which are regular CD audio tracks. If used with *a conventional CD player*, only these tracks are accessible (see below to access the additional MP3 tracks). To play the full band tracks *on a computer*, first open a media player such as iTunes or Windows Media Player. Insert the Exploring Klezmer Fiddle CD – the tracks should appear after a few moments and can either be played or imported, just like any other audio CD.



As with many folk genres, it is common for klezmer tunes to have numerous alternative titles and melodic versions. In some cases I have incorporated elements of several recorded versions.

Most of the tunes are played just once, without intro or outro (though there is a section on how to create these for yourself). A few tracks are longer and more like proper performances.

Accessing the MP3 tracks:

Other tunes and exercises are presented as MP3 tracks. To access them insert the Exploring Klezmer Fiddle CD into a computer, navigate to your CD drive and click open. Find the folder marked 'MP3s'. The MP3s in this folder can be copied to your hard drive, and opened with your computer's media player.



Yiddish And Other Terms

In exploring klezmer music, there are many Yiddish terms and phrases which crop up. Where possible, these are explained within the text, however, some require further explanation are

so are highlighted in **bold** text and explained under the section 'Glossary of Terms' (p. 131).

1: The History Of Klezmer

In the 21st century, klezmer is a vibrant and trendy style of music, equally at home on a concert stage, in a wine bar or on an MP3 player. But without its long and tortuous history the music would be meaningless and soulless. Every aspect of the music – the scales, ornaments, dance forms, melodies and titles – is intimately tied up with the story of the Ashkenazi Jews, the Yiddish-speaking people of central and eastern Europe.

The story of klezmer is one of constant struggle – both against the gentile authorities, who, quite apart from whipping up the occasional pogroms, placed many restrictions on how and where the Jewish musicians could work. But the klezmerim also faced constant disapproval from their own religious authorities.

At the time of **King Solomon's Temple of Jerusalem** (built in 957 BC, destroyed by the Romans in 586 BC), music within the synagogue was a closed shop,

restricted to the tribe of **Levites**. The instruments of the time would have included harps, flutes, psalteries (similar to a zither), percussion and so on.

The power of music in a religious context was recognized and prayers were mostly sung (by a **khasn** or cantor) rather than spoken. Religious services were intended to move the human soul – just as a sound track is indispensable to add emotion, drama and portent to films and TV programmes today – the religious authorities recognized that music could add immeasurably to the emotional impact of their ceremonies.

Music was considered to have almost magical powers over the mind and body, and it was thought to be able to conjure up an ecstatic trance or heal mental ailments. If you need convincing of the power of klezmer music, listen to this Hasidic tune.

Nign



Traditional

