

UNINTENTIONAL HISTORY: MUSICAL MOMENTS IN 1930s YIDDISH FILMS

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As Israel Adler has shown in a lifetime of work, the history of Jewish music is really a set of complex, interlocking histories. The researcher has to gather, sift, and problematize an extremely diverse set of source materials to create a portrait of a given Jewish community and time in terms of its musical life. One type of situation, which I call “unintentional history,” arises from music created for a particular moment that suddenly passes due to the turbulence of Jewish life. The commercially-inspired music of the Yiddish-language film of the 1930s in Poland and the United States provides an example of this sort of unintentional history of a vanished age of Jewish music, the short flowering of a vital, transatlantic Jewish cinema culture. Harsh economic and political realities combined with strong ties of family and sentiment produced an expressive system that spanned “the old home” and “the new world,” and that offers us today a tiny window into the crowded landscape of those societies. Not intending to document a soon-to-vanish world, filmmakers and film composers deployed a number of myths, strategies, and repertoires in an attempt to entertain a fickle, modernizing, even assimilating public. The cameraman who filmed the wedding-dance sequence in the Polish town of Kazimierz Dolny (nad Wisa) for *Yidl mitn fidl* in 1938 could not have known that he was producing the only surviving footage of spontaneous pre-Holocaust folk choreography. In the present brief contribution, I will cite just a few musical moments captured on celluloid by filmmakers unaware of our irony in watching those flickering images and sporadic sounds. I’ll concentrate on two types of condensed cultural statement: images of people praying and fiddling.

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I'd like to frame my remarks by citing two instances of fiddling and praying, both from the Yiddish theater around the turn of the century and both involving, of all things, suicide. The first dramatic moment is from Act Four of Jacob Lateiner's 1897 potboiler play, *Dovids fidele* ("David's Violin)," and involves two brothers. Tevye, the foolish, philistine pillar of the shtetl community, has had his money stolen and realizes his friends are false; he is going to hang himself. Along comes his brother David, who left town as a wandering *klezmer* fiddler and who has become a world-famous violin virtuoso. Tevye asks David to play him a tune to hang by. David calls upon the brothers' parents to save this wretched soul, and plays a tune that not only heals Tevye's heart, but causes the thief, hiding in the bushes, to return Tevye's money, leading quickly towards the happy ending. The second moment comes from the 1951 film version of Jacob Gordin's turn-of-the-century drama *Got, mentsh, un tayvl*, (God, Man, and the Devil") a Faust story.

Gordin's foolish hero, a pious Torah-scribe named Hershele Dubrovner, having yielded to the temptations offered by the Devil, has realized the wretchedness of his life and decides to hang himself. As a parting gesture, he plays himself a prayer-tune on his long-neglected fiddle, which used to bring him joy, and then commits suicide to end the film. Gordin's dark vision seems like a way of standing Lateiner's melodramatic happy ending on its head; he might well have been influenced by the earlier play. The suicide scene offers a particularly tight overlapping of prayer and fiddler: first Hershele plays the violin while singing a prayer, then he chants a prayer as the offscreen music emphasizes the violin sound. A cut to his niece, whom he has greedily married, shows us her puzzled look as she says: "You're silent — and the fiddle is silent," again stressing the pairing of voice and violin.

Despite the different outcome of the fiddle's being played in *David's Violin* and *God, Man, and the Devil*, the conjunction of fiddler and prayer in both these early-century stage works — and I use the pun on the word "prayer" deliberately — shows we are dealing with a cultural package. I would like to disentangle the two slightly by showing how they appear in a number of films independently so we can see how just two musical strands form part of a knot of meaning that privileges music as powerful carrier of a message about Jewish identity. I will not nicely wrap up the package, as the very nature of cultural symbols is to be multivalent, offer different values in different contexts of time period, social group, author's perspective, or audience reception. In short, symbols are there

to be played with by artists and interpreted by cultural consumers. Even in the brief period of the flowering of the Yiddish film in the 1930s in both New York and Warsaw, the same images or props can be used to very different effect. Yet they form part of a vocabulary of identity that is very deepseated.

I will begin with prayer, meaning, in my ambiguous use of the word, both the text itself and its embodiment in performance by a *prayer*, a “davener” (as they say in America) or cantor, a person undertaking the obligation to manifest the meaning of a text. This is a crucial fusion in Jewish culture, as this literal embodiment of sacred text is what traditionally makes a community Jewish. Through the visual and sound projection of this process of prayer, the universality of film coincides with the universality of performed sacred text to help structure an ethnic text — the Jewish film — and to create an audience as community.

Yiddish film, along with the counterpart practice of Hollywood’s Jewish-based movies, recognizes two kinds of performed prayer: public and private or, more accurately, public and domestic. Many films, like their forerunners, the Yiddish plays, stop time by offering intensely public displays of performed sacred text as a way of defining community. In this respect, both Yiddish and Hollywood film agree on this easiest marker of identity. The sight of a sea of *tales*¹-clad males, led by an authoritative male cantor, offers an eminently readable sound-and-image symbol for both Jews and non-Jews, what I call a cinematic *topos*. This particular *topos* appears in the 1925 silent European Yiddish film *East and West*, in which the American stage and film star Molly Picon appears as a spoiled, tomboyish American daughter of a rich businessman who has returned to Poland for a family wedding. Molly’s highjinks — in the middle of *kol nidre* she puts a paperback between the pages of her High Holiday prayerbook and eats up the post-Yom Kippur dinner — are starkly juxtaposed to the camera’s reverential treatment of the surrounding pious congregants of the Polish synagogue. Just two years later, the 1927 Hollywood production of *The Jazz Singer*, like the Broadway play from which it came, centers on this same *kol nidre* service as the archetypal Jewish moment. Yosele Rosenblatt, the most famous cantor of his day, was hired to do the prayer which Al Jolson, the pop

1 Yiddish for prayer-shawl (pronounced *tah-les*) plural *taleysim* (*tah-ley-sim*). In Hebrew *tallit* and *tallitot*.

star and cantor's son, also performs as an emotional climax of the film. The camera lovingly details the *taleysim* and beards of the worshippers. To cite just one more example of this familiar scene, the 1937 American Yiddish film *Overture to Glory*, a movie version of the legend of the nineteenth-century cantor known as "The Vilna *balebesl*," offers the same synagogue scene twice, at the beginning and end of the film, of which more below.

The remarkable similarity of the iconography around the image of the public, praying Jew spans three gaps: between the silent and sound film eras, the in-group and mainstream film industries, and the European and American Jewish communities. The particular use of the single prayer *kol nidrê* in several representations shows just how condensed this packaging of identity through music can become, a very tight topos. Yet these scenes offer very different plot functions or cultural messages when we look at their dramatic context. For both the in-group *East and West* and its contemporary *Jazz Singer*, participation in performed sacred prayer is offered as a test of ethnic identity. The use of that archetypal prayer in *The Jazz Singer* is particularly adept, since the film is based on a play by a Jewish writer and stars a major Jewish entertainer for whom the conflict between ethnic affiliation and mainstream success was real enough to make his role convincing, so convincing, in fact, that the film's musical magnetism catapulted the whole film industry into the sound age. In the cinematic version of *The Jazz Singer*, unlike the open ending of the Broadway play, Al Jolson's Jackie Rabinowitz (who has turned himself into Jack Robin to succeed in show business) sings *kol nidrê* as well as becoming a show business star. Just two years earlier, in the in-group world of the silent film *East and West*, *kol nidrê* has a different resonance.

Molly Picon's brash, aggressively American young woman is severely chastened for her disavowal of interest in the ethnic affirmation offered by the Yom Kippur service. A lighthearted performance of ritual, what she thinks is a mock marriage service, binds her to Europe for years and require her to move at least halfway towards ethnic community at the film's end. *Overture to Glory*, set in the nineteenth century, takes this plot move even farther by having the hero, a semi-legendary cantor who has moved to the opera stage and has flirted with a Polish countess, repent and die while singing in his old synagogue as his horrified abandoned wife looks on.

I will refrain from further plot analysis, but I do want to stress the

importance of the sight and sound of prayer as central topos in the depiction of Jewish life on screen in the pre-1939 era, regardless of the different understandings Yiddish cinema and Jewish-dominated Hollywood had about the primacy of prayer in Jewish life. This image fades dramatically thereafter. Even before 1939, Hollywood backed away from intensive ethnicity in film, and this trend only accelerated as the impact of the Holocaust sank in.

By the time Neil Diamond remade *The Jazz Singer* in 1981, prayer figured only briefly, as befits a revised plot line in which Laurence Olivier plays the old cantor and the Al Jolson character leaves his Jewish wife, marries a *shikse*, and names his baby Charlie Parker Rabinowitz. In such a film, the inserted pop music moments outrank the synagogue as central spectacle.

But let me not anticipate. Returning to the 1930s, the topos of prayer as public spectacle stands alongside the private or domestic use of performed sacred text. To this end, the synagogue scene from the 1937 Polish version of An-Ski's classic play, *Der Dibek* ("The Dibbuk") can serve as a bridge. For in that powerful European film the voice of the star cantor and the view of a sea of *taleysim* is tacked onto the original stage drama, and seems quite extraneous to the screenplay's thrust. It appears as part of a long prologue that sets up the fateful arranged marriage between two unborn children made by Hasidic friends. Other than to allow Gershon Sirota, the well-paid cantorial superstar, to grace the film with extra entertainment, the scene has no plot function, telling us just how packaged a particular cinematic musical topos can be. Sirota was an excellent choice, since he was popular on two continents. However time-stopping and plot-irrelevant Sirota's voice seems, the scene does set up the notion of a community of prayers. This becomes a powerfully important image late in the film when we see the *talles*-clad Hasidim rallying in a desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to expel the *dibek*, the spirit of the unquiet dead yeshiva youth that has possessed the body of the heroine. The ultimate failure of that attempt calls into question the strength of the earlier Sirota scene we have seen, just as the other form of prayer I now turn to, the more private variety, also becomes a symbol of communal weakness.

For just as public prayer appears in both the prologue and in the climax of *The Dibbuk*, so at the opening and later in the film a more intimate prayer of the Hasidic variety brackets the action. Indeed, we hear the same tune at the rabbi's table, a *tish-nign* or "table melody," as

a framing device. The scene features heavily stylized performance as the camera pans portentously across the table, focusing eventually on the centrality of the rabbi, symbol of the weakened power of community that fails to effect the necessary healing the plot demands yet withholds. The use of *nign* is a powerful symbol here. Prayer as personal path to transcendence, amplified by collective singing and dancing, became a hallmark of Hasidism and a potent audiovisual shorthand device for filmmakers. But note also the strange appearance of a whole *klezmer* band behind the rabbi's table, again fusing the image of fiddlers and prayers, here in an very different context: a fiddler who is seen but not heard on the soundtrack. This move by the director is clearly at odds with the ethnographic quality of the film, often commented on and to which I will return, since to my knowledge, it was not common for a *klezmer* band to insert itself at such moments. Particularly striking is the long shot of a fiddler playing back-up chords, which we do not hear, rather than the tune, a sure sign of wedding dance-band music rather than the charmed circle of the rabbi's disciples. The director seems very fond of the fiddler-prayer nexus even when our ears do not support his argument.

Despite this appeal to collectivity, in numerous movies, it is through the individual, rather than communal singing and humming of prayer tunes that a sense of ethnic identity is readily evoked. This happens in *The Dibbuk* itself, and is particularly pronounced in the 1939 *Tevye*, Maurice Schwartz's film version of Sholom Aleichem's Tevye stories. In *Tevye*, the main character does what he does in the original tales: talk to God. Yet whereas Sholom Aleichem has his Tevye sing only a couple of times when in an unusually expansive mood, Tevye and his family are more identified with music in Schwartz's film. If they don't sing, the film score's orchestra does it for them. The primacy of this type of tune as a basic identifying topos emerges clearly in that more famous, later version of the same stories, *Fiddler on the Roof*, where the composer Jerry Bock integrates snatches of Hasidic *nign* into the basic Broadway sound of the score to provide authenticity, as in "If I Were a Rich Man's" *yobba-dobba* and *biri-biri-bom*. It is typical of *Fiddler's* period that its creators turned to the then-exotic Hasidic sound (this was around 1960, before the rise of Hasidim as the "authentic" Jews among mainstream Jewish-Americans) as their ethnic point of reference, just as the composer of the film-score for *The Jazz Singer* did back in 1927. In that Hollywood view of the Lower East Side, whenever the neighbor-

hood appears literally or figuratively through the ghetto character Yudelson or his cronies, the film score turns to a Hasidic melody as signature tune, here used comically rather than with the cultural resonance it has in Yiddish film. Yet in the older Yiddish films and in Sholom Aleichem's stories, it is synagogue song that is hummed, not the *nign* straight from the rabbi's table. After all, cantorial music was in the ascendance, and men visited the synagogue for sure, the Hasidic *shtibl* less certainly.

Whatever the tune, in Yiddish films, domestic singing sets the seal on *yidishkayt*, the downhome value of family life and roots. It is shown in *Tevey* when Tevey is at home, as in a scene in which Tevey pulls his cart into the courtyard and washes his hands ceremonially at the well, drawing his grandson into the process.

That this is a conscious, sentimental use of domestic song is underlined by its companion: a short shot of Khave, the renegade daughter, also singing at the well, but performing in a local Ukrainian folk style. Khave's performance at the well echoes the film's opening shots of Ukrainian peasant women working in the fields. The well itself is a heavy metaphor in a Jewish film. Tevey is ritually washing his hands, while Khave is suggesting a reversal of the Bible's pious Rebecca meeting her future husband, Isaac the patriarch, at the well: she is literally tuning in to her future world as a convert to Ukrainian life.

How jarring this is as a depiction of Jewish women's song is made very clear by a counterpointing moment of female song in the same film. Crushed by the news of Khave's leaving the Jewish world, her mother Golde notices it is nevertheless time to mark the separation between the Sabbath and the week by chanting *got fun avrom*, one of the ritualized moments of prayer for women. The old woman turns to this ritual quite mechanically: despite their deep sorrow, the family — and here, the mother as metaphor being always particularly strong, the Jewish tradition itself — must go on despite personal tragedy. The use of Yiddish for prayer, as opposed to men's mastery of Hebrew, makes the scene particularly poignant and *heymish*. This is an evocative moment at the intersection of *yidishkayt* and the *heymish*. This *got fun avrom* scene, it turns out, is actually another topos of the Yiddish film, since it recurs elsewhere. At the end of *The Cantor's Son*, the hero, Moishe Oysher, has given up success on the Yiddish stage and radio and a New York girlfriend for his childhood sweetheart back in Europe and is about to marry her in the shtetl. There is a melodramatic, yet moving scene in

which the American girl, who has followed him all the way to the old country, selflessly gives him up and prepares to leave. This is immediately followed by the old grandmother chanting *got fun avrom*. She asks that evil be removed from the house, an unmistakable reference to the contamination America offers. Again, it is hard not to interpret this as a metaphor for the dangers of deserting *yidishkayt*. Though we do not have an audience profile for these films of the 1930s, I imagine it was only the older generation who could wax nostalgic and enjoy the rather unrealistic triumph of *yidishkayt* that *The Cantor's Son* offers. It is perhaps not accidental that it is in two American-made, rather than the contemporaneous Polish films, that domestic singing, particularly the metaphoric performance by women, has an aura of nostalgia and sentimentality.

To summarize this description of prayers in Jewish film, they seem to come in two types: the formal, synagogue, cantorial variety and the more intimate interior song. Hollywood has used both when interested in trademarking Jewish culture in that easy, brand-name way stereotypes work. On the one hand they make an ethnic audience feel comfortable and on the other they provide mainstream moviegoers with local color. We've already seen the standardized use of *kol nidre*, which used to resonate throughout American culture as a labeling device. For example, when an establishment figure like the crooner of the 1950s such as Perry Como wanted to put out an album of "favorite religious songs," *kol nidre* was the obvious choice to represent the Jews. Though the appeal of *kol nidre* recurs ritually in Neil Diamond's remake of *The Jazz Singer* in 1981, it seems unlikely that a general audience would still notice its cultural relevance, now that depictions of the Hasidim have supplanted images of mainstream Jews as the media image of choice.

All this seems nicely packaged and easy to dissect until you examine those moments in Jewish film when filmmakers test your expectations, when they offer an alternate reading of a cultural text or a cinematic topos. This happens more frequently in the Polish-made films. A remarkable example of the inversion of the seemingly standard values of the prayer occurs in the 1937 Polish-Jewish film *Freylikhe kabtsonim*, "The Jolly Paupers." From the very start, the two foolish antiheroes, Motl and Kopl (played by the famous vaudeville team of Dzigan and Schumacher), are marked by their habit of singing prayers while at work, already undermining the positive resonance of the humming habit. As they make themselves and their whole community ridiculous by

imagining they have discovered oil in their town, everything about them and their environment appears more and more ludicrous. The Polish filmmakers even destroy the stereotyped image of America as a sensible alternative to a hopeless homeland. They offer the spectacle of a visiting rich but foolish American, an echo of the 1925 European-made film, *East and West* cited above. This European refusal to acknowledge America's primacy, also inscribed in Sholom Aleichem's Tevye stories, stands in clear contrast to the usual American viewpoint mentioned earlier. For the Warsaw crowd, the attractive contrast to the silly shtetl is not New York, but the cosmopolitan big city life of Warsaw, symbolized musically by the sight and sound of the Yiddish popular song performed in theaters nightclubs. Early in *The Jolly Paupers*, a daughter of one of the bumbling protagonists is swept off her feet by the handsome star of a visiting Yiddish theater troupe, who is putting on one of the earliest Yiddish shows, Abraham Goldfadn's old national epic *Bar Kokhba*. It is not this shopworn early musical style that wins her heart, but a modern love song, leading her to run off with a visiting troupe of actors. The girl becomes a partner of her boyfriend in the big city, and we see them sing together later in the film. They continue to sing Yiddish pop songs, as contrasted with the New York club scene shown in *The Cantor's Son*, where Moishe Oysher and Florence Weiss's hot duet is a takeoff on the Hasidic nign.

What I am doing here is trying to rub the American- and European-made films against each other to generate some sparks of insight. I am not proposing, however, a binary opposition; Jewish life is too ambiguous and shifting on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1930s to allow for easy reading. All the same, looking just at moments of prayer, there are some scenes from one shore that seem unlikely to have been filmed on the other shore. Perhaps the most challenging use of sacred song in Jewish film is the lunatic asylum scene in the Polish-made *Jolly Paupers* which, I have suggested, takes a rather critical look at small-town Jewish life in the satirical manner of classic Yiddish literature. At one point, the offbeat antics of our antiheroes have temporarily landed them in an insane asylum. They confront a long-term inmate who forces them to sing the prayer of *roš ḥodeš* (the new moon/month) or else, as he says, "I'll bite your head off." Not only do they comply, but Motl and Kopl also replicate the scene when they get back to their hometown at film's end, forcing their compatriots to sing the same prayer. Only the sudden arrival of a symbol of modernity, the ultrarational petroleum

scout, turns the scene — and the town away from the brink of total madness. He tells the rich American and the town worthies that there is no oil to be found in the shtetl.

This savage inversion of public prayer seemingly stands in sharp contrast to the cultural values cited earlier. Yet it does not stand alone, being in some sense merely a reinforcement of the seeds of doubt sown in the *Dibbuk* that we have already seen. In both cases, prayer is futile; in both, madness cowers the normal members of the community. Remember, both films were made in the same year in Poland in a period of extreme anxiety. From this angle, one might reassess the much-appreciated way in which the *Dibbuk* represents traditional east European Jewish smalltown life. Throughout, that film offers a veritable encyclopedia of Yiddish folklore, from *opshprekhn a gut oyg*, warding off the evil eye, through the learning of Torah and the chanting of the *nign*. What does this scrupulous attention to performance detail mean? The most elaborately staged of these presumably authentic scenes is the famous dance of the paupers, choreographed by Judith Berg. Dance is a close ally of music in film representation, and a good place to look for the film artists' approach to culture. The sequence presents a grotesque metamorphosis of vernacular movement, hardly celebratory like the wedding-dance scene from *Yidl mitn fidl* cited at the opening of this article. One can almost see The *Dibbuk's* dances as a counterpart to the lunatic inmate's mad vision of prayer in *The Jolly Paupers*. The effect of this transmutation of tradition in two radically different 1930s Polish-Jewish films, *The Jolly Paupers* and *The Dibbuk*, is to make the traditional smalltown world appear pathetic and of the past, impotent in the face of evil or modernity.

I hope to have demonstrated so far that looking for topoi can be rewarding, but not unambiguous, work. I will conclude by extending the effort to the image of the fiddler. In the spotlighted world of Broadway's *Fiddler on the Roof*, the notion of the folk violinist, the *klezmer* musician, seems a blindingly obvious figure that should be culturally transparent. Yet, as my opening example of the suicide scene from *God, Man, and Devil* has already shown, there can also be a shadow on the strings. The idea of the fiddler as basic metaphor for east European Jewish culture can be found over a century ago in literary works ranging from Sholom Aleichem's novel *Stempenyu* with its *klezmer* atmosphere, to Chekhov's short story "Rothschild's fiddle," in which a brutal Gentile folk musician is humanized by a Jewish fiddler's spirit. Often cited is the great writer

Isaac Leib Perets's line that you can tell how many men live in a Jewish home by how many fiddles hang on the walls. In my own experience, I can cite the anecdote of a family friend. He recalled the scene from his youth. A czarist military doctor was reviewing skinny Jewish boys for recruitment, and asked his orderly how many more *berdichevskie skripki*, "Berdichev fiddles," were still waiting to be inspected. Being brought up to worship the Russian school of violinists, whom I emulated by starting to be a classical fiddler at age four, I can empathize with this close association of Jewishness and the violin.

Yet a closer look reveals ambiguity. No Yiddish film is more famous than *Yidl mitn fidl* ("Yidl with a fiddle"), which has even been turned recently into a musical in New York. Molly Picon's lively cross-dressed street fiddler seems the epitome of oldtime pluck and tradition, particularly in the extensive, really ethnographic footage mentioned earlier of the wedding the film crew staged in the town of Kazimierz Dolny, on location in Poland. Yet we never hear the wedding band live — Ellstein's score provides an unsettling distance between what we see and what we hear. In this case, the violin has moved from the street, where in the opening scene we see Yidl fiddling, to a professional filmscore as the appropriate home for the sound of strings, in the Hollywood tradition. This mediation of the direct sound mirrors the film's odd status as a Joint American-Polish production. For both audiences, the equation of street musician with old-time shtetl life would have rung true. Ultimately, as the plot takes the street musicians to Warsaw, the fiddle confirms this change of location quite literally as the former *klezmer* joins the pit orchestra of a Yiddish vaudeville house. We have already seen this urban popular music ambiance evoked in *Jolly Paupers* as the wave of the Yiddish future. In *Yidl mitn fidl*, Yidl gives up her cross-dressed disguise in front of a packed house in a Warsaw theater. "Enough of Yidl and his violin," she says, as she turns into a successful urban pop performer. For the Molly Picon character, getting her life and her gender straight means casting aside the fiddle as her major form of cultural identity. At film's end, she boards a ship for America, while her former *klezmer* partner, now boyfriend, plays on as a subordinate member of the band. This ascendancy of voice over violin is an accurate account of what happened in America. The recorded traditional dance tunes that we now think of as the core of what we call "*klezmer* music," phased out the fiddle in favor of the more penetrating clarinet, now heard (through dominant figures like Dave Tarras and

Naftule Brandwine) as the more authentic voice of an imagined Old World. In a truly Jewish paradox, it is in the persona of Jack Benny, (born Benny Kubelski) the legendary American comedian, that the violin figured as a central prop, making a very oblique and always comedic reference to the figure of the Jewish fiddler. Taking this representation one step further to point to the rich resources of film music analysis, we can look at the fate of the film vehicle called *Humoresque*. In its original version of the 1920s, it dealt with the life of a clearly Jewish musician. By the time of its 1940 remake, John Garfield, himself a Jewish actor, played a startlingly generic eastern European immigrant, once again uncoupling the connection between the Jew and the fiddle in film.

But a more sinister use of the fiddle occurs in, of all places, Yiddish film itself, in that precursor to *Fiddler on the Roof*, Maurice Schwartz's 1939 film *Tevye*. Here, the fiddler appears in the ranks of the enemy, the Ukrainian oppressors, rather than as the ultimate embodiment of Jewishness. The story of the renegade daughter, Khave, is the centerpiece, and it is told in chilling detail. No contrast could be sharper than the appearance of the fiddler in two films based on the same stories, *Fiddler* and *Tevye*. In *Fiddler*, the movie, the fiddler is given even more work to do than in the stage version. Throughout, he serves as emblem of community, particularly striking in a dance sequence superimposed on *Tevye's* musing about Khave. In a shadowy fantasy sequence, the fiddler implores Khave to stay, but she turns away to run off with the Ukrainian Fedya. By contrast, the 1939 *Tevye* features a Ukrainian fiddler in a drunken, brutal brawl scene as the camp follower of the enemy. Here the fiddle is not Chekhov's gentle voice of the Jews of Broadway's simple metaphor for a whole ethnic group, but rather a rude, rustic nerve-scraper that even the *goyim* can't tolerate. The head Ukrainian tries to silence the fiddler, but the stubborn musician picks up his instrument again as a wrestling match breaks out. This distinctly non-Jewish fiddler serves as an emblem of otherness, rather than in-group coziness.

I have not neat conclusions to this short parade of musical moments form Yiddish film. Rather, I would just like to point out the complexity of the situation from two perspectives: the view across the Atlantic when the human and cultural traffic was heavy among east European Jews and the angle of vision that sees the strongly interactive, even reciprocal response between mainstream culture and subculture expressive forms. In the case of Jews and film, of course, the fact that Hollywood was "invented," or at least managed, by people of the same background as

those creating a subcultural cinema poses the question of interaction in a particularly acute form. Finally, I feel that movie music is not just an accessory to a preconceived narrative-aesthetic structure, but also a major shaping force in the impact and durability of any film, especially in the case of a scattered, questing group like the Jews of eastern Europe at home and in emigration.

Yuval

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