LIBRARY COPYRIGHT NOTICE

www.huc.edu/libraries

Regulated Warning

See Code of Federal Regulations, Title 37, Volume 1, Section 201.14:

The copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

CINCINNATI JERUSALEM LOS ANGELES NEW YORK

WHO WE ARE BEYOND THE *MAT'BEAH*: THE PARALITURGICAL MUSIC OF THE AMERICAN REFORM MOVEMENT FROM THE 1960s TO TODAY

JORDAN GOLDSTEIN

Senior Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Cantorial Ordination and Master of Sacred Music Degree

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
New York, New York

Due date: March 2, 2023
Written Project Advisor: Rabbi Dr. Lisa Grant

Abstract

This thesis seeks to define and analyze the category of paraliturgical music in the American Reform movement, starting in the 1960s and continuing into the present moment. Paraliturgical Jewish music is a term defined in this context as "music that is labeled by its composer as Jewish and/or directly pulls from Jewish text or themes without being liturgy, meaning to act as liturgy, or creatively reinterpret liturgy." The core argument presented here claims that paraliturgical music is a modern tradition that first developed within the Reform movement and remains an integral part of American Reform culture. The 1960s is explored as the catalyst for the development of the American Reform Jewish sound that is so well known today, which is why it is used as the starting point for this thesis's analysis.

Paraliturgical Jewish musical analysis is connected to historical context through the themes of identity, socio-political response, and theology that recur in this music time and time again. Each of these themes is explored in a dedicated chapter where the role of paraliturgical Jewish music in the Reform movement is described through the use of primary and secondary accounts of American and Jewish history, interviews and quotes directly from composers, and close readings of the lyrics.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Rabbi Dr. Lisa Grant for supporting me through the many evolutions of this thesis. Her guidance helped me bring together so many parts of the Jewish musical world that I deeply care about into one topic, while pushing me to think beyond the music as to why it all matters. Thank you for your kindness, encouragement, and flexibility through this process.

The reason I wanted to write about paraliturgical music in the first place is due to its impact on my life. I had the realization that I wanted to dedicate my life to Jewish music making while leading a full Kutz Camp dining hall in a rendition of "Kehillah Kedoshah" by Dan Nichols in 2012, and I have yet to look back due to the incredible teachers and mentors I've had who taught me the Reform movement's history through song. Many thanks to Dan Nichols, Alan Goodis, Cantor Rosalie Will, Cantor Jeff Klepper, Merri Arian, Deb Winter, Rabbi Max Chaiken, Rabbi Noah Diamondstein, and many others who have taken time to invest in me and change my life.

Cantor Josh Breitzer, you have defined my experience at HUC and who I hope to be as a cantor. I am forever grateful for your care and support. I will never have enough words. The DFSSM class of 2023, thank you for being an endless source of inspiration and joy. Mom and dad — thank you for letting me drag you to services and then run off to summer camp year after year. Love you to the ends of the world and back.

Table of Contents

Abstract …………………………………………………………………………..1

Acknowledgements……………………………………………………………………2

Introduction: *The Voice of American Reform Judaism* …………………………………5

Chapter 1: *Paraliturgical Music as Music of Identity* ……………………………………10

Why Music of Identity Matters ……………………………………………………10

Reform Jewish Identity ……………………………………………………………11

A Jewish American or an American Jew? …………………………………………12

The Americanization of the Reform Jewish Sound ……………………………..16

Intersectional Identity ……………………………………………………………. 22

Feminism in Reform Judaism ……………………………………………………..23

Queerness in Judaism …………………………………………………………….. 25

Underrepresented Identities ………………………………………………………..29

Music of Identity in Practice ………………………………………………………33

Chapter 2: *Paraliturgical Music as Music of Socio-Political Response* ……………….37

Music as a Vehicle of Socio-Political Response ………………………………..37

Reform Judaism's History with Protest and the Prophetic Voice ………………38

The American Reform Relationship with Israel ………………………………..45

Responses to Antisemitism ………………………………………………………..48

Lyrical Engagement with American Social Issues ……………………………..50

Music of Socio-Political Response in Practice …………………………………55

Chapter 3: *Paralíturgical Music as Music of Theology* ……………………………..58

Paraliturgical Music as a Vehicle for Exploring Theology ..……………………58

The Impact of Exploring Belief Through Music ………………………………..61

Jewish Literacy and the Complexity of Paraliturgical Themes …………………65

Music of Theological Exploration in Practice ………..…………………………73

Conclusion: *A Modern Tradition* ..…………………………………………………75

Bibliography ……………………………………………………………………77

Introduction: *The Voice of American Reform Judaism*

Explicitly paraliturgical Jewish music — defined in this thesis as music that is labeled by its composer as Jewish and/or directly pulls from Jewish text or themes without being liturgy, meaning to act as liturgy, or creatively reinterpret liturgy — is a fascinating phenomenon throughout all of Jewish history.

Shirah, or song, is an important part of Jewish culture and worship, used again and again in Torah and Tanach, so it would only make sense that the Jewish people would continue to use the medium to explore themselves, their ideas, and emotions that expand upon the more standardized set of prayers when warranted. The Song of Songs has acted as a gateway to poetic liturgical expansion and development, as the text itself requires interpretation and close reading to understand beyond its plain meaning.[1] Its more explicit passages and descriptions of love blends the line between sacred and secular, though such distinctions may not have been so defined at the time of its composition.[2] The *payyetanim* (poets of late Palestinian antiquity) and medieval poets that would follow would draw inspiration from this text to write their own love poetry and eventually their own commentaries on Judaism and belief through this art form.[3] The biblical poetry in Psalms was followed by the *hodayot* of the Dead Sea Scrolls, new texts mimicking the same poetic structures; these would in turn lead to the *piyyutim* (liturgical poetry) of the

---

[1] Lieber, Laura Suzanne, "A Garden Enclosed': The Song of Songs as a Gateway to Synagogue Poetry," *A Vocabulary of Desire: The Song of Songs in the Early Synagogue,* Brill, 2014.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

fourth century and beyond.[4] Some of these piyyutim, like the texts of the Rosh Hashanah shofar service and the texts added to the High Holy Day Amidah — including Unetaneh Tokef — became so popular and well known that they found their way into the regularly expected liturgy.[5]

Musical innovations that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s had a profound impact on worship in Reform Jewish settings. The compositions, stylings, and aesthetics of composers and religious leaders like Jeff Klepper, Dan Freelander, and Debbie Friedman that initially were controversial and boundary breaking have become standards that even some Orthodox communities may label as "Mi Sinai."[6] Characterized by an American folk style, the use of English translation alongside Hebrew, and acoustic guitars as the instrument of choice, this era of music bubbling up from strong-willed youth continues to make a lasting impact on Jewish music, especially in the American Reform Movement. In terms of a new generation trying to reinvent the landscape of Jewish music with their own tastes, they were not the first and they will not be the last. Why did this era so fundamentally shift the way American Reform Jews sing their music?

Many factors came into play during this time period. Among the most significant were 1) the coming of age of the first generation of American Jews where the majority were born

---

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Cohen, Judah M, "Musical Alternatives: Debbie Friedman in Houston, 1978-1984," *Journal of Jewish Education,* vol. 88, no. 1, 2022, p. 75–94.

in America,[7] 2) the political climate and upheaval in which this generation came of age, and 3) the ways in which American Reform Judaism further defined its movement and religious education. The identity shift of American Jews seeing themselves as full citizens with an investment in the country's freedoms meant that many were blending together American and Jewish identity. This is reflected clearly in the music sung by Reform Jews in these decades; both Americana standards brought into Jewish singing communities as well as music written by and for American Reform Jews (what we can define as American Reform Music) shared very similar song, harmonic, and melodic structures.

The American social-political events of this time period add more context and explain more of the folk and protest music influence felt in the Reform movement. The Civil Rights movement put rabbis visibly at the front of social justice work, and marked Reform Judaism and organizations like the RAC as active participants in such work in the eyes of the Jewish community and the country at large. The concept of Tikkun Olam found purchase in this generation and became a rallying cry for the rising leaders supporting many causes beyond the Civil Rights movement through music, while the mobility of the acoustic guitar would allow this music and these values to be spread far beyond the synagogue. The Feminist movement, the aftermath of the Six Day War in

[7] Kligman, Mark, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," *American Jewish Year Book,* 2001.

Israel,[8] and the anti-Vietnam War efforts[9] all influenced the aesthetics and values youth resonated with as authentic expressions of justice, and these ideals made their way into musical styles and lyrics. These demographic and socio-political changes had a profound impact on the level of Jewish literacy and at the beginning of the 1960s, a growing number of American Jews had little to no understanding of Hebrew and the meaning of Jewish prayer.[10] Music with comforting and exciting folk elements, like easily singable melodies and acoustic guitars, helped create Jewish music that felt uniquely American and contemporary. Concurrently, women were finding new power and voice here too, as part of forming a new tradition.[11]

One particular setting where American Jewish identity flourished was in Jewish summer camp. Music was at the center of camp experience and was used by rising leaders to build this identity by teaching about Judaism through songs that spoke directly to the youth in attendance through the styles and languages most familiar to them. By examining the context of this period, it almost becomes too obvious why such shifts in musical style and content would resonate and become popular. Not only did liturgical music and prayer shift in this way (particularly by using English alongside Hebrew), but much music telling the story of the Jewish people through a modern lens would become fundamental

---

[8] Schiller, Benjie-Ellen, "The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues." *Sacred Sound and Social Change,* 1994, p. 187–212.

[9] Kligman, Mark, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," *American Jewish Year Book,* 2001.

[10] Cohen, Judah M, "Reform Jewish Songleading and the Flexible Practices of Jewish-American Youth," *Oxford Handbooks Online,* 2012.

[11] Ross, Sarah. M, "The Musical Conception of Feminist Jewish Songwriting," *A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States,* 2016.

parts of American Jewish culture and catalog. Beyond classic and classical explorations of Jewish identity, values, and theology, accessible pieces of music (like Debbie Friedman's "Miriam's Song" and Jeff Klepper's "Rabbi Ben Bag Bag")[12] engaged and taught a new generation of Jews about the history of their own religion and people.

This phenomenon that began in the early 1970s continues to this very day within the American Jewish community in general and the American Reform Jewish in particular. Reform Judaism has a long history and complex relationship of responding and adapting to the dominant culture through intentional acculturation practices. As the identity of the American Jew evolves over time, so does the music they produce and consume. This is seen nowhere so clearly as this category of paraliturgical music, so heavily used to explore such complex aspects of what it means to be a contemporary American Jew.

---

[12] Ross, Sarah. M, "The Musical Conception of Feminist Jewish Songwriting," A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States, 2016.

Chapter 1: *Paraliturgical Music as Music of Identity*

Why Music of Identity Matters

Paraliturgical music often explores themes of identity, as well as specific kinds of intersecting identities. Art, as a form of expression, comes from the perspectives of artists and creators; the artist (or here, composer) cannot untangle their own identity from the ways in which they view the world, and therefore the pieces they create. In the case of this music, those identity-based personal perspectives are important and valuable as forms of representation. Paraliturgical music creates room for such composers to bring their own words and stories into the growing Jewish canon directly, rather than through the more limited vehicle of liturgy. Because of this, paraliturgical music can bring all kinds of Jewish people together and bring out diversity and range within the community. The more that historically marginalized Jews can see themselves and their experiences represented, the more they can feel part of the larger collective — with the added bonus of exposing other Jews to experiences different from their own and normalizing a wider variety of ways to be Jewish. Studies show that the Reform Movement will only become more diverse over time, as an estimated ten percent or more of North American Jews identify as LGBTQIA+ and more than fourteen percent of American Jews currently identify as people of color.[13] This validation and visibility (through music, an art form central to Jewish tradition, practice, and history) has the ability to create space for all

---

[13] Theodore, Lauren, "Union for Reform Judaism Invests in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Leadership Development," *Union for Reform Judaism*, 2019.

kinds of Reform Jews, a step towards developing a sense of safety and security that allows individuals to explore and discover their own relationships with Judaism.

Identity in paraliturgical music creates room for more people to see themselves represented in Jewish life in a multitude of ways that fit into two major categories: identity as a way of connecting into larger community (like Jewish peoplehood or the American Reform experience), and the celebration of the intersections of Jewish identity with others like gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and more. By examining both forms over the last sixty years, we can track the growth in diversity, recognize the ways in which such identities and labels have evolved, and find artistic representation of major changes over time that can inform how we approach such issues of diversity, inclusion, and self-definition moving forward.

Reform Jewish Identity

What does it mean to be an American Reform Jew? It's a complicated relationship between complimentary and contrasting identities. Jewish identity alone is already layered and nuanced, as the aspects of individual and collective identity (ie. the personal relationship to Judaism and the relationship to Jewish peoplehood) are intrinsically linked. Having a strong personal connection to Judaism requires a connection to the notion of Jewish peoplehood, and the collective notion of peoplehood depends on the conviction of the individual's connection to Jewishness.[14]

---

[14] Kent, Evan, "So Much More than Kumbaya: Music at Jewish Summer Camps and the Formation of Jewish Identity," Boston University, 2014.

Jewishness as shared group identity becomes more specific when adding the boundary of Reform Judaism, though defining what it means to call oneself a Reform Jew has been evasive since its conception. As *halakha*, Jewish laws of observance and ritual, is not used to define the practices and actions of Reform Jews, other unifying factors must be used, like beliefs and values. However, those beliefs and values are purposely vague and open ended in efforts to be inclusive to many practices and beliefs, leaving the label and identity of Reform to be just as vague. This movement, founded on the idea of modernizing and evolving Judaism to allow Jews to better interact with contemporary society, has tried to define its identity many times over its history. Beginning with Rabbi Abraham Geiger's break from Germanic norms in 1810, many platforms adopted in the United States continued to evolve the definitions of Reform Judaism further: the controversial Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, the first Zionist shifts in the 1937 Columbus Platform, the 1976 San Francisco Platform reflecting on the movement's history, the Miami platform of 1997, and the Statement of Principles adopted in 1999 in hopes of unifying some central tenants (God, Torah, and Israel) of the movement.[15] Due to all these factors, understanding what it means to identify as a Reform Jew can be just as complex as understanding how the Reform Movement defines itself.

A Jewish American or an American Jew?

Location and national identity cannot be separated from the larger process of defining the contemporary Reform Movement in North America, and more centrally the United States

[15] "History of the Reform Movement," *Union for Reform Judaism.*

of America. Initially in the early 1800s, German Reformers settled in the United States and started the American stream of Reform Judaism.[16] Reform Jews heavily identified as immigrants, a group of outsiders finding the opportunity to be themselves and both socially and economically rise up in "the land of the free." Such a relationship with nationhood can be observed in the music of the period, even through the 1950s. Up to this point, music that is considered Jewish holds a distinctly separate sound from American "secular" music (or music leaning into popular American styles in aesthetics, content, and intention).[17] The Reform Movement's Germanic roots during this time are clear in its musical soundscape, using music from the likes of Solomon Sulzer, Louis Lewandowski, and Max Janowski and relying on formal choirs and organs.

Another popular composer of this pre-1960s shift was Max Helfman (1901-1963), who immigrated from Poland at the age of eight.[18] Having spent much of his career as an organist, choirmaster, and composer in a multitude of American Jewish communities, Helfman's music and influence had a broad and expansive impact on the sound of American Jewry.[19] His native relationship to Judaism as compared to his acquired American citizenship came through in distinct ways. Two major themes throughout his career, Yiddish music of the working class and the development of a new sound for Palestine during the early Zionist movement.[20] both rely on a relationship with Judaism

---

[16] Ibid.
[17] Such a distinction between "Jewish" and "secular" music at this time is important, as paraliturgical music would actively blend the lines between these boundaries later on.
[18] Levin, Neil W, "Helfman, Max," *Milken Archive of Jewish Music.*
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

that connects to places other than America, whether it be the European roots of the past found in Yiddish or the striving to move from diaspora to Jewish homeland in Zionist philosophy. However, nothing exemplifies Helfman's relationship with his immigrant identity (and that of his generation) as an immigrant as much as his setting of Emma Lazarus's poem, "The New Colossus." Helfman's musical take, "The Lady with the Lamp," written in 1950, highlights the poem's last quotation, attributed to the character of the statue[21]:

> "Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Full of patriotic vigor, Helfman even quotes "America the Beautiful," by Samuel Ward in the piece's penultimate measures.[22] The style of this choral setting at first appears to fit the dominant overarching aesthetic of classical Western choral music, even opening on simple, hummed chords in a manner evocative of church hymns. However, his harmonizations and continuous droning bass lines are reminiscent of chazzanut in how the melody line is supported. While the piece can sound to the listener as if it is regularly changing harmony, the bass voice holds on the tonic or dominant of the key for nearly the entire piece. The three treble voices change pitches regularly, though they do consistently

[21] Helfman, Max, "The Lady with the Lamp," JMP Publishing, 1950.
[22] "A Spotlight on a Primary Source by Katharine Lee Bates," *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, 2012.

shape the same chords over measures, merely exchanging the same notes back and forth in many sections. Helfman's Jewish musical background is given away by the melody initially supported by the tonic and the fourth, the following measures' reliance on the parallel minor, and the regular occurrence of the minor second in the place of where Western tradition would call for a dominant instead. It is clear that Helfman's instincts and impulses are of the Jewish tradition, and the American influences used in this piece, though well done, are the ones he had to work harder to incorporate.

In contrast, more recent pieces of paraliturgical music exploring the dynamics of American-Jewish identity tend to come from a stronger inherent relationship with the American aspect and having to more actively work in the Jewish piece. In the 1960s, for the first time, a majority of American (ie. United States) Jews were native-born citizens, as opposed to foreign-born immigrants.[23] This shift was major, especially as Jews enjoyed a new level of status, equal rights, and opportunities in the United States (as opposed to other nations where they had dwelled for generations).[24] The generation of Jews coming of age during the coming decades of the 1960s and 1970s would identify as American as much as Jewish, if not more so.[25] Particularly in the Reform movement that so emphasized integration and assimilation into contemporary society's culture, young Jews of the 1960s and 1970s were inspired to make Jewish life more relevant to their

---

[23] Kligman, Mark, "Recent Trends in New American Jewish Music," *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism,* 2005, p. 363–380.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Cohen, Judah M, "Debbie Friedman: A Life Transcribed," *Musica Judaica,* vol. 20, 2013, p. 257–262.

experiences of the world.[26] By the 1970s, this generation found themselves as leaders caught between the trauma of the Holocaust and the new reality of choosing diaspora living when the State of Israel now exists.[27] Eager to distinguish themselves from their parents' immigrant, "Old World" Judaism and to create a form of Judaism that resonated more deeply with their lives, American Reform Jews turned to music to best express their reinvention.[28]

The Americanization of the Reform Jewish Sound

Dr. Jack Gottlieb uses a four "A" framework in his work, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish*, to break down all the ways Jewish and Yiddish music can be heard influencing early to mid-twentieth century American music.[29] His categories of adaptation, adoption, absorption, and acculturation,[30] can be applied when speaking of the inverse — this American influence and effect on Jewish music in the later twentieth century and onward. These avenues for integration move from the most obvious uses of outside material to the most nuanced and subtle ways of using such influences. Adaptation sees one culture fully taking a piece of music from another and restyling it with its own features and idioms. Some examples of this are the contemporary usage of the African American protest anthem, "We Shall Overcome," translated into Hebrew as "אנו נתגבר" (Anu Nitgabeir),

---

[26] Schiller, Benjie-Ellen, "The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues." *Sacred Sound and Social Change,* 1994, p. 187–212.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Kligman, Mark, "Recent Trends in New American Jewish Music," *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism,* 2005, p. 363–380.
[29] Gottlieb, Jack, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood,* 2004, p. 54.
[30] Ibid.

and Daniel Kahn's 2021 adaptation of Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land," into Yiddish which acts as a reclamation of the piece's American political nature through a diasporic Jewish lens.[31] Adoption uses musical quotations from the borrowed culture and is defined by Gottlieb as, "utiliz[ing] material not naturally one's own, but put into practice as if it were."[32] For example, whether intentionally or not, the melody of Noah Aronson's "Am I Awake,"[33] (his setting of the Barechu) directly pulls from the opening riff of Bruce Hornsby and the Range's 1980s hit, "The Way It Is."[34] Absorption further obscures the main source material by employing variations that hide where it originated from. Acculturation is the most subtle of all, taking idioms, musical ideas, and artistic stylings of one culture and using them in another. For the purposes of understanding the influence of American music and culture on the development of American Reform paraliturgical music, absorption and acculturation will be the most prevalently seen.

Such a reimagining of culture and music in the 1960s and 1970s led to many shifts and changes that reflect Gottlieb's four frames. Artists and composers like Debbie Friedman brought in English translation alongside Hebrew to make Jewish text more accessible during a time when Jewish literacy was decreasing, a prime example of acculturation's effects. This inherently brought a degree of modern interpretation to these texts as well, as translation into any language requires interpretation and Friedman often created her

[31] Kutzik, Jordan, "The Forverts Premieres Yiddish Version of Woody Guthrie's Classic, 'This Land Is Your Land'," *The Forward,* 2022.
[32] Gottlieb, Jack, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood,* 2004, p. 67.
[33] Aronson, Noah. "Am I Awake," *Am I Awake,* 2015.
[34] Hornsby, Bruce. "The Way It Is," *The Way It Is,* 1986.

own lyrical translations. Many of her works have been understood as examples of modern Midrash,[35] carrying on the ancient rabbinic practice of diving into the Tanakh and bringing depth and detail to its stories. Other songwriters of this time, like the duo Kol B'Seder (made up of Jeff Klepper and Dan Freelander),[36] used idioms of the popular American music of their time (ie. absorption) when composing classic Jewish texts. Their "Lo Alecha," a setting of some verses from Pirkei Avot, uses a popular four-chord harmonic progression (the major one chord or tonic, followed by a minor two, a major four, and a major five or dominant chord) that borrows from folk and rock music.[37]

Even more defining of the period of musical development was the literal instrumental shift to the acoustic guitar, a major part of the acculturation of American musical features. A necessary part of the 1960s folk revival movement and a mainstay of rock, the guitar first became popular in the Reform Movement's summer camps and soon entered the synagogue. While older melodies were being played on these strings, many more would be written for them moving forward, as the mobility of the instrument increased its usability and popularity to fully take off. While these groundbreaking musical leaders continued to compose and develop this Jewish-American style, many others would be inspired to contribute to the repertoire with their own blends of Jewish and American musical tradition in both the grassroots lay-led songleading movement and the professionalized cantorial realm. In the coming decades, composers like Michael Isaacson, Jack Gottlieb, and Ben Steinberg would play with the harmonizations and

[35] Kent, Evan, "Musical Midrash," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas,* 2011.
[36] Cohen, Judah M, "History," *Kol B'seder*.
[37] Klepper, Jeff and Dan Freelander, "Lo Alecha," *Shireinu*, 1974.

motifs of American formal, classical music, which would pull from the post-tonal movement and jazz-like piano accompaniment.

However, once this musical shift had swept the American Reform movement such that the works of Friedman and her contemporaries became mainstays, new developments took root, as every generation expressed their own version of American Jewish identity through music. The popular musical styles in America of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century further varied and introduced more instruments and sound production, and so the music of the Reform Movement adapted accordingly. Synagogue bands, including bass players, electric guitars, and drum kits, paralleled Christian worship bands and grew in popularity through the 2000s. Artists like Dan Nichols and Josh Nelson not only toured with these ensembles, but wrote paraliturgical music that could be mistaken for songs on the radio, using pop-rock formatting with hooks and bridges for songs that exclusively used English. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Reform seminary, even began requiring guitar proficiency for its cantorial program graduates, even though a guitar in the synagogue was a shock only a few decades ago.[38] As American musical taste has become more deeply varied in recent decades, so has the music of the Reform movement. Some composers of Jewish paraliturgical music actively write in specific American genres, like Saul Kaye and his experimentation in Soul and Rhythm and Blues,[39] Joe Buchanan and his strong country roots,[40] and Nefesh Mountain,

---

[38] Cohen, Judah M, "Reform Jewish Songleading and the Flexible Practices of Jewish-American Youth," 2012.
[39] "Saul Kaye," *Jewish Rock Radio,* 2021.
[40] "Joe Buchanan," *Jewish Rock Radio*, 2021.

an award winning bluegrass ensemble that just so happens to be making their music explicitly Jewish too.[41] Others pull from many sources to create their own Jewish-American sound, like Rabbi Noah Diamondstein identifying folk, pop, and even punk music as references and influences in his music collection, "My Whole Heart."[42]

Jacob Spike Kraus's song, "Proud 2 B," which was released in 2017, is a prime example of this long term acculturation of American idioms that began back in the 1960s, as well as how the dominance of Jewish identity over American in Helfman's time has since completely flipped. Kraus grew up attending much of the youth programming of the Reform Movement, including North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) events and URJ Camp Eisner.[43] Billing himself as a singer-songwriter,[44] much of his musical styling and formatting follows the forms of contemporary American pop music: verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus. This piece is no different. Kraus wrote "Proud 2 B" in response to a request from a friend for an anthem of Jewish pride.[45] Using plenty of jazz and seventh chords borrowed from American genres (such as jazz), Kraus uses harmonic and melodic repetition to set apart the clear sections of his song. Rhythmic syncopation (especially present in the verses) and a lack of melisma brings out the clear first-person perspective of the text that is also common in contemporary American pop[46].

---

[41] Vaillancourt, Cory, "'Jewgrass': Nefesh Mountain Brings a Different Perspective to Bluegrass Music," *Smoky Mountain News,* 2022.
[42] Temple Sinai, "Friday, November 4 My Whole Heart Concert," *Vimeo*, 2022.
[43] Kraus, Jacob Spike, "Bio."
[44] Ibid.
[45] Kraus, Jacob Spike, "Proud 2 B," *Cornerstones*, 2017.
[46] Ibid.

Lyrically, he highlights the experiences of modern Jewish-American identity in the Reform movement in a multitude of ways. Some lines in particular bring out the ways in which Jewish identity has become secondary for many, alluding to the ways in which many Reform Jews have strayed away from Jewish self-identification. Early on, we get the line, "And though we're all interconnected, we still find those so disaffected,"[47] explicitly acknowledging the American Jews who do not feel connected to the Jewishness or larger Jewish peoplehood that Kraus speaks of throughout the song.

The struggle with Jewish pride is laid clear in the song's refrain, stating, "I am not afraid, I've never been one to run from what's in my way."[48] A layered line, starting this chorus with "I am not afraid," seems to refer to "Al Tira," the paragraph of verses davened after Aleinu in traditional prayer spaces, or even Psalm 3:7,[49] which begins with "Lo ira…" This connection to the Tanakh brings weight to Kraus's words and his willingness to stick with his Jewish identity proudly, having "never been one to run." The second verse begins with a line that could be taken as a call out of those who have left their Jewish identity behind: "I'm not sure, but it seems to me that five thousand years of history's a legacy that's begging, 'please, I'm something to be proud of."[50] Kraus appeals to heritage as the main reason for his pride both here and in the repeated line, "I tell you I'm proud to

---

[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] This text was set by Dan Nichols a few years prior on his album, "I Will Not Fear," named after this verse.
[50] Kraus, Jacob Spike, "Proud 2 B," Cornerstones, 2017.

be part of this family (tree),"[51] which is an interesting reflection on what he expects to be a relatable reason for other American Jews to be proud of their identity. Rather than a focus on values, ritual, or any other aspects of religiosity, Kraus's Jewishness is rooted in shared identity and culture, like "a pair of lights on a Friday night."[52] However, one line in particular is the most telling of what connects Reform Jews of the current age to their Jewish identity. Meaning Debbie Friedman's Havdallah setting, Kraus sings, "A melody's connecting me to my global community."[53] Here, he reminds us how impactful music is on Jewish identity, and how the very early shifts in developing an American Jewish sound are now central to what it means to be a Jew for so many people.

Intersectional Identity

Beyond the overlapping identities of being American and Jewish, Reform Jews hold many other identities at the same time, and paraliturgical music allows for the nuances of how those identities intersect to be explored in exciting ways. Such music brings different, varying life experiences to the attention of a wider Reform audience through its messaging, and therefore has the power to elevate members of minority populations within the moment to more prominent, visible leadership roles – especially those songwriters who write music about their own identities. While intersectional paraliturgical music often reflects shifting perceptions of minority identities in the Reform movement (as such music becomes popular and widespread when Reform Jews appreciate, consume, and sing it), the very existence of music that explores

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

underrepresented intersections can in of itself normalize other identities that exist in the movement over time.

Feminism in Reform Judaism

As feminism was taking off in the American mainstream, the 1960s and 1970s saw similar values of women's empowerment enter the music of the Reform movement. As second wave feminism arose, the Reform movement started to more regularly include the *Imahot* in the liturgy, the four widely recognized matriarchs of the Torah.[54] The inclusion of guitars and the developing songleading tradition into the synagogue and larger Jewish community was led by just as many women as men, like Julie Silver, Cantor Ellen Dreskin, Merri Arian, and the pioneering Debbie Friedman. Increasingly, Jewish women could see themselves in leadership roles and traditional texts more so during this time than ever before, and this was all due to the grassroots or "ground-up" effort of women claiming space for themselves in Jewish life and lyrics.[55]

A trailblazer who fundamentally changed the music of the American Jewry and the Reform movement in particular, Friedman studied the stories of female role models in Jewish text and applied her own interpretations of the Hebrew and the stories in a manner many today would call "musical midrash,"[56] a commentary and expansion of these women's stories through Friedman's music. These retellings fall neatly into this

---

[54] Ross, Sarah M., "Feminist Voices in the Lyricists' Choice: A Content Analysis," *A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States,* 2016.

[55] Ross, Sarah M., "The Musical Conception of Feminist Jewish Songwriting," *A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States,* 2016.

[56] Cohen, Judah M, "Debbie Friedman: A Life Transcribed," *Musica Judaica,* vol. 20, 2013, p. 257–262.

paraliturgical category, and though they may not have obvious and explicit usage, they became part of the American Reform canon. Three of her most famous examples are "The Water in the Well" (which highlights the importance women hold in the Tanakh as water-bringers), "Miriam's Song" (which creates parity between Miriam the prophet and Elijah[57]), and "Devorah's Song." The last one held a special place in Friedman's heart, as she said, "Devorah [the prophetess] came to be after not having written for a year and a half. She was an inspiration to me. She was a strong character who was peace-loving and whose values, integrity and leadership skills were particularly important examples to us."[58] Some of the special points of interpretation within this song go back to how Friedman translates the Hebrew source, Judges 5:1-31.[59] Sarah Ross notes in her work, "A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States," that Friedman takes the phrase *eshet lappidot* and flips its translation. While many male commentators had interpreted the line to mean a "woman of Lappidot," which would be a reference to Devorah's marital status, Friedman looked at the word *lappidot* as an attribute, calling Devorah, "a woman of fire" in her lyrics. This translation both defines Devorah as more than her relationship to men while also supporting why she would be chosen as a prophetess and woman of power in the first place.[60] It is nuances like this that allowed Friedman to elevate women in her work over and over again.

---

[57] Ross, Sarah M., "The Musical Conception of Feminist Jewish Songwriting," *A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States,* 2016.

[58] Ross, Sarah M., "Feminist Voices in the Lyricists' Choice: A Content Analysis," *A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States,* 2016.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

Friedman's legacy of representation, both in her music and as a powerful female presence in Jewish leadership, led to many more women making their own impact on the movement through their music and feminist values. Mentees of Friedman's, like Julie Silver and Shira Kline, took her influential work and lessons to heart in developing their own career paths: Silver has said, "[Friedman's] music included me, so I wanted to write music that included other people, music that included women, music on different themes."[61] Both of them write and lead music that uses Jewish values and vocabulary to include others, and they both credit Friedman as a pioneer in the work of centering marginalized peoples.[62] Moving forward in time, Jewish artists like Joanie Leeds, who won a Grammy in 2021 for her children's music album, "All the Ladies," have made this messaging more explicit in their lyrics and make room for more women in Jewish music as well; Leeds particularly marks a shift to encouraging young girls early on to be leaders in their own right, a type of normalization of gender equality that is still relatively new in the feminist movement.[63] Even more so, we see women in the world of Reform music now embracing the ways their identities intersect with others, like queerness.

Queerness in Reform Jewish Music

While the American feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s began to include queer women in its community, trailblazer Debbie Friedman had a complicated relationship with being out about her sexuality. In her words, "*hamayvin yaavin* [those who know,

---

[61] Eanet, Lindsay, "A Weaver of Unique Variety: The Magic and Legacy of Debbie Friedman," 2019.
[62] Ibid.
[63] "Joanie Leeds," Recording Academy.

know].”[64] Having dealt with Jewish professionals who would not work with her or use her music because she was gay, Friedman didn’t want to make her sexuality the focus of her work and avoided making her queerness well known beyond her personal circles.[65] Still, her very presence paved the way for other queer creators in the Reform movement and she encouraged her queer students to bring their full selves to their work. In more recent years, many queer women have grown to great prominence being out and proud in Reform songwriting communities, including Elana Arian, the daughter of one of Friedman's close friends and colleagues, Merri Arian.

As an out proud queer woman Elana Arian expresses her related values and perspectives into her music. Her piece, “I Have a Voice,” which falls into the paraliturgical category, riffs on one of the daily morning blessings (*nisim b’chol yom)* to create greater inclusion and encourage activism on behalf of all. In the bridge of the piece, Arian adjusts the Hebrew of one blessing to say, “*she’asanu b’tzelem Elohim,”* as opposed to *she’asani*, meaning that God made us (not just the individual, me) in the image of God.[66] By shifting the blessing from the individual to the collective, Arian subtly supports the song’s message of communal responsibility and that we all must stand up for each other. While not explicitly queer, the inclusiveness and activist values Arian espouses very much line up with her identity and even more so in the way she and others often use this piece – at Pride celebrations and protests. Other composers like Cantor Juval Porat also take inspiration from their own queer experience. Lyrics like “I don’t know why I feel this

[64] Eanet, Lindsay, “A Weaver of Unique Variety: The Magic and Legacy of Debbie Friedman,” 2019.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Arian, Elana, “I Have a Voice,” 2019.

way inside. I'm just taking it in, for all that it is," and "I don't ever wanna lie in my deathbed and realize I've waited too long to be happy," from Porat's first album, *Theology*, reference Porat's struggles with sexuality in an explicitly Jewish context.[67]

Interestingly, some Jewish composers have written paraliturgical music representing queer identities that they do not themselves hold. Cantor Jonathan Comisar, who is a proud gay, cis man, composed an adaptation of Rabbi Ruben Zellman's "Twilight People," called "Both, Neither, and All" for an Hebrew Union College cantorial practicum designing a wedding ceremony including a nonbinary person in 2020.[68] A piece often used since its release at Pride services and tefillot since its publication, Dan Nichols reimagined the blessing for seeing a rainbow into the queer anthem, "Love is Love is Love."[69] The piece, beyond the use of rainbows and the common phrase in the refrain, has been interpreted by some to include trans identity based on the opening and closing line: "Whatever you are, whatever I am, we are more than woman or man."[70] These composers have leveraged their own privileges to uplift and give voice to marginalized identities through songs such as these. While the precedent of raising up the voices of those more privileged over members of said minority communities could become dangerous, the visibility and conversations these examples have led to when queer Jews, especially transgender and nonbinary Jews, are struggling to be seen in the larger Reform movement appear to be valuable.

---

[67] Porat, Juval, *Theology*, 2018.

[68] Hoolihan, Emily, "Wedding Practicum," Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion's Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, 2020.

[69] Nichols, Dan, "Love is Love is Love," 2017.

[70] Ibid.

Though there is much work to be done in the Reform movement's inclusion of different forms of queerness, musical representation of transgender and nonbinary identities is slowly growing. Cantorial student Ze'evi Tovlev will be completing a thesis on the adaptation of the Nonbinary Hebrew Project not only into existing rituals and liturgy to differently represent God, but also new rituals and prayers specifically meant for the transgender community – some of which were presented in their Senior Recital November 28, 2022.[71] Their adaptation of the Priestly Benediction into gender expansive Hebrew, "Y'varech'che," has been published by the Reform movement's main music publisher, Transcontinental Music, in "Mikraei Kodesh Volume I: Music for Lifecycle and Sacred Moments,"[72] a major move from institutions of the movement. Beyond bringing in new music of representation, older paraliturgical pieces are being adjusted to include the full gender spectrum. While most adjustments come from communities themselves deciding to change binary language, some composers have actively changed their own compositions for the sake of inclusivity. For example, in his piece "Heal Us Now,"Cantor Leon Sher published a change to the lyric, "every child, every woman, every man," to canonize and encourage others to use the words "everyone who needs a helping hand."[73] All of these efforts show that the Reform movement is beginning to embrace trans and nonbinary Jews in a big way – through music.

---

[71] Tovlev, Ze'evi, "Nonbinary Liturgy: Gender-Expansiveness in God and Ourselves," Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion's Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, 2022.

[72] Ed. Joel Eglash, *Mikraei Kodesh Volume I: Music for Lifecycle and Sacred Moments,* 2022.

[73] Sher, Leon, "Heal Us Now: NEW LYRICS 8/2/2021," 2021.

Underrepresented Identities

Great strides have been taken since the 1960s and 1970s to make Reform Judaism in the United States more inclusive and open, but there can always be more improvements. Other identities that intersect with Reform Jewish identity include race and disability, two major categories when discussing peoples marginalized by our society at large and reflectively by the movement.

Conversations around Jews and race have been difficult and complicated for much of history, and especially so in American history. Jews and other ethnicities, like those of Mediterranean nations, were excluded from the larger "white" community during the twentieth century, with antisemitism being most prominent in America during the 1920s and 1930s.[74] Linked with anti-immigrant sentiments, Jews found themselves aligning and relating to other marginalized communities. World War II led to Nazi propaganda and hate that defined Jews as a separate ethnorace to discriminate and systemically annihilate. t In the aftermath of WWII, America went through a process of "whitening" ethnicities that were once discriminated against. Whether or not those of southern and eastern European origin gained upward mobility due to being perceived as white or rather they were perceived as white as they economically rose to the middle class is still up for debate, but racial perception and economic class were clearly linked.[75] As the definition of whiteness expanded, Jews felt safetr and more secure in America, though antisemitism

[74] Brodkin, Karen, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America,* 2010.
[75] Ibid.

never fully disappeared.[76] Jewish involvement in issues like the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s helped not only the African American community but also themselves when it came to protection against prejudice and racial hatred. While largely perceived of as white,, the Jewish people are no monolith, and there are Jews of all colors and races, especially in the Reform movement. Percentages of Jews of Color (JOC) have been rising in recent years,[77] and the Pew Research study found that in 2022, 15% of Jews under the age of 30 identified as “non-white.”[78] With rising access to interracial adoption in the 90s and early 2000s in the United States, such demographic shifts make sense, and this trend is only continuing to grow and bring more racial and ethnic diversity into Jewish communities.[79] While presence of JOC in Reform Judaism is recognized by programs like the JewV’nation Fellowship, created in 2017 to support and develop Jewish leaders of more diverse racial backgrounds,[80] the makeup of Jewish composers and musical leadership promoted in the movement is still almost exclusively white. Leaders like Cantor David Fair, whose cantorial thesis, “Tsiporah's Children: The Music and Lived Experience of Jewish Black Americans,” are doing groundbreaking work to bring such conversations to light in academic writing.[81] There are in fact many Jewish, Black, American composers who are writing liturgical and paraliturgical music from the vantage point of their intersecting identities. These include Joshua Nelson, Rabbi Sandra

---

[76] Ibid.
[77] Mitchell, Travis, “Jewish Americans in 2020,” *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project,* 2022.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Zill, Nicholas, “The Changing Face of Adoption in the United States,” 2017.
[80] Frank, Laura, “URJ Continues to Invest in Jews of Color for Leadership Development,” 2022.
[81] Fair, David, and Joshua Breitzer. “Tsiporah's Children: The Music and Lived Experience of Jewish Black Americans,” 2020.

Lawson, Y-Love, Nissim Black, and many others, but none of them identify as Reform Jews or have had their music embraced by the Reform movement.[82] A long history of folk music being used in the movement since before the 1960s also means that many African-American spirituals, pieces of such cultural significance have been used without much thought towards cultural appropriation; due to this, some singing communities have limited or eliminated this form of representation from their repertoires, while others have restructured the usage of these pieces to include respectful framing and context.[83]

Another marginalized identity in America and within the Reform movement, are Jews with various disabilities. The conversation on how to include disabled Jews in congregational and Jewish life has been going on for a long time, though more work needs to be done.. In a recent Faith Inclusion survey conducted by the URJ, most disabled individuals felt that finding a Jewish community that would accommodate them and make them feel welcome was either near impossible or very hit and miss, with many stories of bad experiences and more only feeling comfortable in spaces organized for them.[84]

Amidst this growing awareness and work towards making Jewish communal spaces more accessible, a few musicians are gaining ground by writing about their experiences of being disabled Jews, and by building programming and projects to spread awareness. Nick May, a songwriter, song leader, and educator, grew up attending and working at

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] "2021 Faith Inclusion Survey Responses - Jews," *RespectAbility*, 2022.

many Jewish summer camps.[85] He found more confidence while songleading and singing in his youth due to having a stutter. He uses his experience of learning to overcome and live with a stutter in his work with kids, running a program called "Being Heard," that encourages them to be themselves through his personal story and Jewish values.[86] His album and title single, "Be Heard," also explore his particular experience through a paraliturgical lens. Another leader in disability advocacy in Jewish space is Charlie Kramer, who interestingly made a name for himself in Jewish music before bringing his disability further into his work.[87] Another camp song leader, Kramer spent many years leading the music program at Camp Hess Kramer and Temple Israel of Hollywood, while also touring and teaching throughout the Reform movement.[88] His most recent album released in 2021, "Blind," shows a more personal approach to songwriting than Kramer's earlier works, which were strictly liturgical[89] The title track takes one of the morning blessings that thanks God for opening the eyes of the blind and explores the translation, which he says is more accurately, "Blessed are You, Ruler of the Universe, who opens the *eyelids* of the blind."[90] His exploration of gratitude and what it may mean to be blind in a more metaphorical sense begins to transform what this one blessing can mean, especially for those for whom opening their eyes in the morning may not lead to traditional sight.

---

85 May, Nick, "About," *Nick May*, 2020.
86 May, Nick, "Being Heard," *Nick May*, 2020.
87 Kramer, Charlie, "My Journey to Loving All of Myself," 2021.
88 "Charlie Kramer." *Kosher Style Records,* 2021.
89 Kramer, Charlie, "My Journey to Loving All of Myself," 2021.
90 Ibid.

Music of Identity in Practice

Paraliturgical music, focused on themes of identity, finds purchase and impact when being engaged by Jews and used in Jewish communities. The visual (and audible) presence of underrepresented or minority identities is a powerful tool in creating communities that don't just tolerate but rather fully include diverse people. Many rituals and new traditions that uplift voices and build inclusion have come about due to music being written that can accommodate such representative traditions.

Debbie Friedman's music pioneered this approach by supporting the feminist movement within Reform Judaism in multiple ways. The 1970s saw the first feminist seders and haggadot written.[91] As the concept and centralization of Miriam within the recontextualized ritual became more widespread in the following decades, Friedman's "Miriam's Song," (celebrating Miriam's presence and leadership in the Passover story) has been incorporated into *maggid*, the retelling of the story.[92] Some haggadot, like Jill Thornton's influential *A Women's Seder*[93] have included this piece with the reimagining of opening the door for Elijah into welcoming in Miriam. Others like *The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah* include many more of Friedman's liturgical and paraliturgical songs, including "The Journey Song," which also highlights Miriam's musical leadership: "Stepping into the unknown, / Hear the echoes of Miriam's song, / We awaken, retelling

---

[91] Dunn, Emily E, "Telling and Retelling: The Women's Seder & Ritual Innovation," 2010.

[92] Ibid. "Chapter 4: Midrash and Maggid: Miriam and the Women"

[93] Thornton, Jill Shapiro. *A Women's Seder: Our Spiritual Passage to Freedom*. J.S. Thornton, 1996. p. 64-65.

our stories / As we go along on our journey."[94] Another popular piece of Friedman's, "Devorah's Song," has made its way into variations of *brit milah,* the ceremony around circumcision for boys, that parallel the uses of "Miriam's Song" in feminist reinventions of the Passover seder. The concept of a naming ceremony for baby girls as an equivalent to brit milah also began gaining popularity in the 1970s amongst the feminist movement.[95] The particular ritual of designating a chair for Elijah has been adapted by some to embrace a prophetess in Elijah's place to reflect the child's gender. After Friedman's death, Rabbi James Greene published a version of this ritual embracing Devorah as the prophetic substitution while referencing both Friedman's composition and her very name.[96]

Similar to the phenomenon of women's seders and *brit bat,* girls' naming ceremonies, the celebration of queer identity through a Pride Shabbat has become a regular practice of many Reform communities in the month of June. Often celebrated through elevating LGBTQIA+ speakers, sermons on inclusion, and using liturgical music written by LGBTQIA+ composers, the element of paraliturgical music can again make such representation more explicit and create room for the innovation of ritual. The aforementioned piece, "Love is Love is Love," by Dan Nichols, can best exemplify this. As stated above, Nichols' piece turns the blessing for seeing a rainbow into a celebration of queer identity. Since its release in 2018, the ritual of adding this blessing to the Pride

---

[94] Friedman, Debbie, "The Journey Continues: Ma'yan Passover Haggadah in Song," 1997. p. 11-12.
[95] "Simchat Bat," *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly,* 2001.
[96] Greene, James, "Simkhat Bat: A Welcoming Ceremony for a New Daughter," 2022.

Shabbat service, either at opening of the service or alongside other prayers centered on the theme of love, has only grown.[97]

Thematic services and singing experiences meant to raise up the perspectives of different identities within the Jewish community are another way paraliturgical music is used without a focus on ritual or even worship. Like the use of non-ritual or liturgy based anthems on Pride Shabbat (such as the earlier referenced "I Have a Voice" by Elana Arian), the Reform movement is making room for paraliturgical music of identity in a variety of settings in order to support progress in inclusion. Sermon anthems, summer camp song sessions, and various concerts or kumsitz-like sing-alongs are all ways Reform leaders utilize this music for educational and developmental purposes. Some, especially in the world of disability advocacy, have designed programming around their music for this very reason. Charlie Kramer's program, "Singing in the Dark," has invited others to step into his shoes as a visually impaired person both through the experience of singing without seeing since 2019.[98] In a similar vein, Nick May has been incorporating his music into talks on his experience with stuttering and the values of perseverance and inclusion since 2018.[99]

Whether in a synagogue, a summer camp, a concert hall, or any other space, paraliturgical music of identity is being used in the Reform movement to build community. Through music celebrating similarities in the American Reform experience

---

[97] Nichols, Dan, "Love Is Love Is Love," *Dan Nichols & Eighteen,* 2018.
[98] Hartog, Kelly, "Musician Charlie Kramer Hosts Virtual 'Singing in the Dark'," 2021.
[99] May, Nick, "Being Heard," *Nick May,* 2020.

as well as music that exposes these Jews to perspectives different from their own, this music both reflects and influences the efforts of the movement to develop a collective identity as well as room for people of all kinds to feel welcomed.

Chapter 2: *Paraliturgical Music as Music of Socio-Political Response*

Music as a Vehicle of Socio-Political Response

Music has always been a tool for humans to respond to the surrounding world and to amplify the voices of the oppressed. In Judaism, the Israelites' respond to being freed from slavery with singing, and the Song of the Sea is a central part of Jewish tradition still today. In America, music as a tool in the socio-political context also has a long history, particularly in the African American community. Slave songs and spirituals not only functioned as emotional outlets, but also as way to disseminate important information and instructions. The music of the Civil Rights movement, in which African Americans and Jewish Americans worked together to make change, used and was influenced by the music of abolition and freedom from both communities.

Change makers and musicians who participated in justice work were major influences for the Reform Jewish songwriters of the 1960s[100]; Pete Seeger, known as "the father of American folk music," and the work of the leftist group People's Songs were major inspirations.[101] Building upon the left-wing folk movement of the 1930s and 1940s, Seeger and his contemporaries organized for labor, civil liberties, and peace, with music as their tool and weapon throughout the 1940s and early 1950s.[102] By going out into

[100] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.
[101] Lieberman, Robbie, *My Song Is My Weapon: People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950*, 1954.
[102] Ibid.

America in public places like hootenannies and summer camps,[103] Seeger and the musicians that carried on the 1960s folk revival made activism through communal singing familiar and cool, exciting future leaders like Debbie Friedman, Cantor Jeff Klepper, and many more.[104]

Reform Judaism's History with Protest and the Prophetic Voice

Since its very formation, American Reform Judaism has made social justice and social action a main part of its platform. One of the earliest documents to properly define the movement in 1875, the Pittsburgh Platform, states a commitment to the issue: "…we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."[105] The 1937 Columbus Platform built on this notion further, declaring, "Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings… It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice… It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish."[106] By the 1960s, the Reform Movement was highly invested in the causes of the time in a variety of ways. The Religious Action Center (the RAC) was founded in 1959 and settled

---

[103] Ibid.

[104] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.

[105] Feldman, Marla J, "Why Advocacy Is Central to Reform Judaism," *Union for Reform Judaism*.

[106] Ibid.

into a building by 1962, just in time to be the central location for Jewish leaders to draft major pieces of legislation like the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act in partnership with African American and other civil rights trailblazers of the time.[107] Major institutions like the then Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the original name of the Union of Reform Judaism) and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (the CCAR) would go on to publicly oppose the Vietnam War in 1968, and the RAC would be a major center for strategizing around protests.[108] The movement had clearly built a history of activism and social justice work in the name of Jewish values by this point in American history.

A Jewish scholar and leader heavily involved in this work was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Known for marching alongside Revered Martin Luther King Jr. and other clergy at Selma, he is also often credited as the one who coined the phrase "praying with our feet": "For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying."[109] Heschel also wrote many works on Jewish philosophy, though one stands out in the context of defining what social action and justice means in the Jewish context. His book, *The Prophets,* published in 1962, characterized and established a textual backing for a Judaism built on the moral imperative of bettering the world through justice work.[110] By

---

[107] "RAC Timeline," *Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.*
[108] Ibid.
[109] Collins, Kate, "Jewish Voices from the Selma-to-Montgomery March," Duke University Libraries, 2015.
[110] Heschel, Joshua, *The Prophets,* 1962.

rooting social action in the tradition of prophetic vision, Heschel inspired the Reform movement's commitment to center *tikkun olam,* repairing the world, even though he was not a Reform rabbi himself. In line with the early German-Jewish reformers who emphasized the universalist ethics of the prophets, the moral call to action was branded as Jewish.[111]

Such themes and values were reflected in the popular music of the times that was used in a paraliturgical way. The early sixties saw classics of protest and Civil Rights music pop up heavily in the Jewish summer camp world, like "We Shall Overcome" and "We Shall Not Be Moved."[112] The music of the major folk musicians of the day, who were also political activists who brought their views into their music, could be heard literally and in echoes of the music being composed at camp. Many camp song leaders of the time credit the legacies of Woody Guthrie, Tom Paxton, Bob Dylan, and Pete Seeger as important influences both as musicians and as community leaders.[113]

The political activism of the 1960s waned in the 1970s and 1980s.. There was less consensus across the movement about major social issues of the time, which was also reflected in the music. At the same time, the Six Day War in Israel contributed to a deepening commitment to Israel and the Jewish people. The CCAR's "A Centenary Perspective," released in 1976, provides insight into the rising issue at hand: "Until the

[111] Englander, Lawrence A, "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead: In Search of Belonging."
[112] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.
[113] Ibid.

recent past our obligations to the Jewish people and to all humanity seemed congruent. At times now these two imperatives appear to conflict. We know of no simple way to resolve such tensions. We must, however, confront them without abandoning either of our commitments. A universal concern for humanity unaccompanied by a devotion to our particular people is self-destructive; a passion for our people without involvement in humankind contradicts what the prophets have meant to us. Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations."[114] TheVietnam War was a divisive issue; while many Jewish leaders like Heschel chose to act and speak up, far from all Reform Jews agreed with the stance. Such strong moral stances became viewed as "risky," especially for clergy and established Jewish leaders who felt that they could lose their congregants and communities this way, and this wariness ran through the next two decades. The tension between American issues and Jewish issues caused stress and worry — with so many injustices to face, shouldn't Jewish issues be the first priority? Ruth Messinger says of her time working on issues of justice in elected office,

> "Sadly though, I rarely got rabbis to stand with me. Many of them suggested that these were 'other people's' problems, not core to their congregants and therefore ones on which they were reluctant to stick their necks out, although they knew the moral issues and the Torah teaching involved. There have been changes and improvements in this regard in the last few decades, with some great examples of Jewish leaders, Jewish communities, and distinguished newer Jewish organizations stepping out for the other, doing not only service but advocacy,

---

[114] Feldman, Marla J, "Why Advocacy Is Central to Reform Judaism," *Union for Reform Judaism.*

> taking risks to be leaders in fights for justice. Still, there is a long way to go, and too much debate in the Jewish community about social justice work being too political and not being quintessentially Jewish."[115]

Some could say the same issues in Jewish leadership exist today, as American politics have become more and more divided.

These same shifts were quickly reflected in the youth movements, which are generally on the forefront of trends and shifts. Rabbi David Nelson recalls the musical differences between his older sister's camp experience and his own:

> "… when she came home from camp in the mid-'60s, she was singing 'Dreamer', 'They're Rioting in Africa', 'Wasn't That a Time'; a lot of save-the-world English folk songs. When I came to camp as a high schooler from 1968-71, I saw a huge changeover to an Israel-centered culture. We began to sing mostly Hebrew songs from the Hassidic Song Festival in Israel -- 'Y'varceh'cha', 'Sisu Et Y'rushalayim', 'Y'did Nefesh', 'Al Sh'losha D'varim'."[116]

This shift to more "Jewish" — Hebrew based and/or Israel centric — music grew from the camps to the synagogues and reflected a shift in not only identity but also values and priorities.[117] Between the Israeli Six Day War and this new tension between serving the Jewish community and greater humanity (when it comes to social action), the Reform

---

[115] Messinger, Ruth. *From Amos to Heschel and Beyond: A Personal Reflection On Social Justice As an Inherent Part of Judaism Past, Present and Future,* 2018.

[116] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.

[117] Ibid.

repertoire moved to more Hebrew and Israeli songs, and fewer universalist or protest melodies.[118]

Following this change, most music responding to socio-political issues of the time for the next few decades would purposely be less controversial, as cantors and song leaders were concerned with appealing to the largest populations possible. Songs about peace, kindness, and unity are less time or cause specific, and therefore get more play. While the RAC continues to be a major organization for organizing, more cause-specific groups like Keshet, T'ruah, and more have come into play in recent decades so Reform Jews can pick and choose the causes that they are able and willing with which to engage. Even some of the music that was used in the context of socio-political response in the earlier decades of the Reform movement has been called into question since then, as the use of African-American spirituals and protest music can be seen as cultural appropriation when used without acknowledgment of where the music originated.[119]

Still, this has not discouraged all songwriters from creating and composing with specific justice issues in mind. In fact, encouragement of writing such music comes as the RAC partnered with Transcontinental Music Publications, the Reform Movement's main music publishing resource, to compile and release *Tzedek Tirdof: The Social Action Songbook*

---

[118] Kligman, Mark, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," *American Jewish Year Book,* 2001.

[119] Fair, David, and Joshua Breitzer. "Tsiporah's Children: The Music and Lived Experience of Jewish Black Americans," 2020.

in 2010.[120] The partnership between Cantors Rosalie Will and Tanya Greenblatt of the American Conference of Cantors with Rabbi David Saperstein of the RAC marks a decision to bring out the relationship between justice work and music in a highly intentional way.[121] While the publication contains creative interpretations of liturgy and blessings for social justice, the majority of the works are paraliturgical by their very nature, formally launching the genre of explicitly Jewish justice music. The pieces range in age from having been released in the 1980s to those composed for the songbook itself, representing a short, recent history.[122] The RAC has since commissioned musicians to write music for different causes and events, growing opportunities for artists to write about the causes they believe in from the Jewish, prophetic lens, and even partnered with Transcontinental Music again to create a newer songbook in 2018 called *Chazak V'ematz: Jewish Songs of Protest & Hope*.[123] Moving from 13 songs to 33, this newest collection is almost exclusively music that fits the paraliturgical definition.[124] Some pieces, like Jack Gottlieb's "Duet of Hope" and Noah Aronson's "More Love in This Land," reference and include justice music of the past (the folk melody of "Wayfaring Stranger" and Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land," respectively). Others address rising contemporary issues, like climate change and feminist strength. Some are meant for voice and guitar, while others have full choral arrangements or harmonies and piano realizations.[125] The diversity of the contents allows for such variety in usage and will

---

[120] Rodovsky, Jayson, and Michael Boxer, editors, *Tzedek Tirdof: The Social Action Songbook,* 2010.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Eglash, Joel, editor, *Chazak V'Ematz: Jewish Songs of Protest and Hope*, 2010.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

hopefully continue to be a great resource for those looking to bring music to justice work or justice to their musical work.

The American Reform Relationship with Israel

The Reform movement has had a vast and varying relationship with Zionism over the years. While initially wary of the concept, American Reform Jews began to embrace Zionism far more post-Holocaust, as they were reminded that no matter how integrated into the main culture they had become, there would always be a chance for them to be othered.[126] While Israel and Zionist ideas were included in the 1937 Columbus Platform only after a very close vote, the Six Day War in 1967 led to a quick embrace of Israel by the Reform movement reflected heavily in the music being sung.[127] Rabbi Daniel Freelander, the Director of Programs for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations at the time, described the switch to Hebrew as swift and dramatic.[128] Rather than using much of the home grown American and Reform music of the 1960s, the 1970s saw the importation of many Israeli and Haredi melodies into Reform songbooks to support the Zionist vision in the American diaspora.[129]

American Reform compositions and a balance between English and Hebrew returned in the 1980s and 1990s, after the failure of the Camp David Accords and the beginning of

---

[126] Kaplan, Dana Evan, "The New Reform Judaism," 2013.
[127] Berman, Howard A, "Classical Reform Judaism: What Is It?" 2021.
[128] Kligman, Mark, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," *American Jewish Year Book,* 2001.
[129] Ibid.

the Second Intifada in the early 2000s.[130] Instead of reaching for Israeli music or the Hebrew that most Reform Jews of the day could not understand, Transcontinental Music adjusted their *Ruach* series (publishing popular contemporary Jewish music in a special collection every two years) to be themed, "Songs About Israel."[131] With a mix of Hebrew music written by Israelis about creating peace, liturgical interpretations in Hebrew and English, and paraliturgical pieces by American composers describing their own relationships to Israel, the songbook is a thorough and comprehensive snapshot of differing and complex connections to Israel that had developed in the movement over the past four decades. Two of the most popular and well used pieces from this collection are in fact paraliturgical settings that explore being an American Jew in relation to Israel. Dan Nichols' "My Heart Is in the East," takes its title and refrain from the poetry of Y'hudah HaLevi, which describes the ache of a Jew "living in two worlds"; Nichols details a great love for Israel without ever having set foot there in the lyrics.[132] Said to have been written by Nichols on his first flight to the country, he alludes to the nervousness and tension in the opening lyrics:

> "As I watch the sun start to rise from my seat five miles in the sky
> I stare into a brand new day, for you it's already fading away…
> It's kind of funny how I adore someone I've never met before."[133]

Nichols emphasizes the importance of Israel in his Judaism and life in the bridge of the song. He continues to refer to Israel in the second person, like a modern love song, while

---

[130] Eglash, Joel, "Preface," *Ruach 5765: New Jewish Tunes Israel Songbook*, Transcontinental Music Publications, 2005.
[131]Ibid.
[132] Ibid, Dan Nichols, "My Heart Is in the East."
[133]Ibid.

specifically acknowledging the realization of the State, a strong indicator of Zionist ideology:

> "I wouldn't be the man I am without you,
>
> I couldn't see the world the same if you hadn't come true."[134]

Rick Recht's "The Hope" plays on the Israeli national anthem "HaTikvah" by using its translation as title and theme. Like Nichols, Recht's take on his relationship with Israel is in line with Zionist ideas and fully in support of Israel, which is reflective of the Reform movement's stance at the time. Recht proclaims what this unifying hope is right in the opening lines:

> "This is the hope
>
> The hope is still real
>
> A Jewish home
>
> In Israel"[135]

Recht takes a broader approach to describing the relationship with Israel. While Nichols' piece is personal and intimate in both music style and lyrics, Recht takes a bombastic approach with room for call and response and an often-mentioned "us," or "our," bringing the listener into his thesis, the chorus's declarative statement:

> "This is the hope that holds us together,
>
> HaTikvah, the hope that will last forever."[136]

It is interesting to note how these two pieces, especially Recht's, have been part of the regular Reform cannon for decades now, while few others in this songbook have gained

---

[134]Ibid, Rick Recht, "The Hope."
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

such notoriety and familiarity. Both textually support an unwavering love of Israel without any inclusion of the country's complexities and issues. Both came about alongside the politics of the time, including the launch of Birthright, the program providing free trips to Israel for Jewish young adults. The correlation between the music published by the movement and the push to embrace Israel — especially in religious schools and youth programming — during the 2000s is an interesting one that cannot be overlooked.

Response to Antisemitism

While Jews have generally experienced safety and comfort in the United States since the 1960s, antisemitism has been known to rear its head and cause American Jews pain and strife. Rising antisemitic sentiments have been growing in right-wing circles since the 1980s, where the involvement of some Jews in white collar and financial crimes brought back hateful stereotypes.[137] The personal antisemitic views of past presidents like Richard Nixon and George H. W. Bush leaked into their administrations and continued to reinforce the idea of the Protestant elite in America.[138] Such sentiments have only grown and even escalated, especially following the election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency in 2016.[139] Emboldened by the growing acceptance of this bigotry, many right-wing believers have turned to violence. In 2017, a "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, saw crowds of white nationalists with lit torches chanting "Jews

---

[137] Brodkin, Karen, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America,* 1998.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Wright, G., S. Volodarsky, S. Hecht, et al. *Trends in Jewish Young Adult Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism in America from 2017 to 2019*, 2021.

will not replace us!"[140] In 2018, a gunman fatally shot 11 members of the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on an antisemitic tirade. In 2019, another shooter attacked a Chabad in California.[141] Antisemitism has risen on the left as well, as it became conflated with anti-Zionism; while far less violent, college campuses in particular have seen students dealing with the effects of this kind of hate.[142]

Since the antisemitism of the contemporary era is so tied to politics, it can be difficult to decide how to best respond. The Tree of Life synagogue shooting, however, hit a nerve with many American Reform Jews that went beyond affiliations, and multiple Jewish artists found the aftermath to be a moment in need of song. Nefesh Mountain, a group that exemplifies American Jewishness by living in bluegrass (a genre of music native to the United States), and Jewish themes and text, wrote a piece of comfort that went viral online shortly after the tragedy. Titled "Tree of Life," the song is an active acknowledgment of the emotional pain and recovery needed after the incident, inviting the listener to rest, listen, and dry their eyes.[143] The closing line of each verse begins with, "but I [we] sing nonetheless…"[144] bringing Jewish resilience into the song's message. It is a paraliturgical piece in that it is not trying to be or replace existing liturgy in Jewish tradition, but the words are indeed a prayer, a wish directed towards a vague idea of God or something bigger than the individual for the community to be able to recover and move on.

---

[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Lindberg, Eric and Doni Zasloff, "Tree of Life," 2018.
[144] Ibid.

Lyrical Engagement with American Social Issues

Many composers of American Reform music have used the medium of music to respond to and apply Jewish values to events and causes. Some are direct, some are vague; some are more connected to the current issue, while some are more tied to Jewish references. All of the paraliturgical music of this category embraces the values of tikkun olam and the prophetic voice.

Doug Mishkin, a major voice in the summer camp songleading movement of the 1970s,[145] wrote "Make Those Waters Part," tying the experiences of oppressed minority groups and the need to fight for their rights to the Jewish Exodus story of escaping slavery.[146] Mishkin directly compares the two and brings in a personal association in the lyrics: "Once we were slaves in Egypt," followed by later, "Once we were slaves in America, " and finally in the last verse, "Now we are slaves in our own time."[147] Mishkin's retelling twists the Exodus story from passive to active, and not only with this perspective change. By stating that Moses and Martin Luther King Jr. didn't wait for change but rather "made those waters part," he puts the power in our hands to take on the prophetic tradition and urges the listener to take the same action.[148] Mishkin also wrote "Reading Names" later in 2008, in response to the lives being lost in the war in

---

[145] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.
[146] Mishkin, Doug, "Make Those Waters Part," *NFTY's Fifty Songbook*, 1989.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

Afghanistan.[149] While this piece doesn't directly bring Jewish text or story into its lyrics, Mishkin points out the hypocrisy of war, where people promise to remember those who were lost only for the pattern of young people dying in battle to repeat itself. Mishkin's direct calling out of this pattern echoes the teachings of Heschel to be like the prophets and speak out:

> "Again, we're reading names
> Of losers in wars' games
> Whose biographies became
> Footnotes to human shame…
> Didn't we bow back then
> Not to read names again?"[150]

Jack Gottlieb wrote "Jeremiah" as part of his series of pieces on the prophets in 1976, and then further adapted the piece after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.[151] A classically trained musician who wrote music of the classical genre, this paraliturgical piece varies from many of the others that are in the folk, singer-songwriter style. With piano and timpani, Gottlieb uses an atonal style with many crashes, leaps, tempo changes, and dissonant chords to get his passionate anger across — though the words he chooses do that plenty on their own.[152] Beginning with quotations of Jeremiah I:1-2, Gottlieb personifies the United States in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks:

---

[149] Mishkin, Doug, "Reading Names," *Tzedek Tirdof: The Social Action Songbook,* 2008, 2010.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Gottlieb, Jack, "Jeremiah on 9/11," 1976, 2004.
[152] Ibid.

"She remembers the full splendor of soaring towers

Gone the sun to warm her sons and daughters,

Only deep bone chilling misery!"[153]

After this intense opening sequence, Gottlieb goes on to parody many patriotic songs in a cutting and sarcastic manner, starting with "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and including "America the Beautiful," "Yankee Doodle Dandy," and even "The Star Spangled Banner."[154] Poking fun at American exceptionalism, he points out the issues in the United States government and the hypocrisy revealed in such. No-fly lists and xenophobic sentiments are targeted with the line, "Open door, but no more if you're down on a list — a Statute of Liberty!"[155] Gottlieb is even more exacting at the height of the piece:

"Your leaders are mocking democracy

And the two parties lack accountability.

The Donkey is impotent and up a tree,

And the Elephant, alas

Is also an Ass!"[156]

Gottlieb's cutting wordplay is hard to miss, especially with the word "Ass" being held for multiple measures. His anger is placed in a righteous context, by aligning his political stance with that of the prophets — he continues the mission to speak truth to power.

---

[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

Chava Mirel stands out with her piece, “Stand Up,” as it acts as a modern day piece of protest music for an underrepresented cause — climate change.[157] With simple, repeated lyrics, Mirel creates plenty of space for call and repeat sections that would make this piece easy to use in large protest situations. She evokes both the imagery of Earth as a mother and our origins in the Garden of Eden with lines like, “We were put in this paradise, it’s our job to guard her life.”[158] She goes back to Genesis once more to quote chapter 2, verse 15: “*L’ov’dah ul’shomrah*,” translated to “Till it and tend it.”[159]

“Get to Work,” another piece by Dan Nichols, may be the most directly critical piece mentioned in this thesis other than Gottlieb’s, but it also follows in the tradition of the protest music of the 1960s. Written in response to the presidential election results of 2016, Nichols uses a simple, repetitive refrain that carries urgency in calling the listener to action:

> “(Get to work) get close, get uncomfortable
>
> (Get to work) tell a new story and hold onto hope”[160]

The verses are structured in a way that the listener can easily join in with the repeated line, “It’s time to get to work,” at the end of each couplet, a technique and style that borrows directly from the likes of Woody Guthrie. Provocative lyrics like, “When the leader of the free world grabs women by the crotch, and the women who voted for him feel no need for this to stop,” and “When a man running for President is endorsed by the

---

[157] Mirel, Chava, “Stand Up,” 2017.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Nichols, Dan, “Get to Work,” *Dan Nichols & Eighteen,* 2016, 2020.

KKK, and we show up to the voting booth and elect him anyway," highlight the discomfort Nichols refers to in the refrain.[161] Other lines highlight high rates of police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement, reproductive rights, and economic disparity, all hot topics during the election and the years to follow.[162] Similar to Guthrie's usage of "This Land is Your Land," Nichols wrote new, additional verses in 2020 and encouraged others to add their own, sharing the newest version by saying, "Sing out your anger. Sing out your hope. Singing builds emotional muscle tone. We're gonna need it."[163]

This tradition of paraliturgical protest music continues into the Covid-19 pandemic, with works like Eric Hunker's "Hold the Line," released in 2020.[164] This piece, about interconnectedness and holding strong to one's beliefs and morals, was written before the pandemic hit, but as Hunker stated, "With a new world comes new ears. I hear this song so differently now. It's an anthem for communal responsibility - Holding the Line (flattening the curve). It's a song about depending on each other."[165] The second verse calls on the shared experience of isolation and connection through screens and digital media to rally the listener to his cause:

> "So the time is nigh, the clock, it just struck midnight
>
> Time to see beyond the colors on the screen

---

[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Hunker, Eric, "Hold the Line," *Facebook*, 2020.
[165] Ibid.

And all the talking heads, we'll drown them out with all our song."[166]

Hunker uses a repetitive structure, like Mirel and Nichols, that makes the song structure easy to follow, but by beginning every line of the chorus with, "We need your __," Hunker puts the impetus on the listener to participate in the action in a far gentler, less demanding way than other pieces included in this list.[167] This approach to music of action as soft and encouraging supports his intention of developing collective, not individual action.

Music of Socio-Political Response in Practice

The ways paraliturgical music written as socio-political response can be used are many. Often, it is written in a response to a current event — so the immediate opportunity to use it is clear. For example, it would make sense to use the Dan Nichols piece mentioned above, "Get to Work," in the aftermath of the election that inspired it to process those results, protest the political issues mentioned in it, or to drive others to take action. However, if the one usage of this music was only around the socio-political events that inspire it, this music wouldn't be so embedded in the American Reform cannon, as it would be sung only in limited circumstances. Music of protest and social justice is well-loved in the Reform movement, so there must be more opportunities to sing it. While some of the music in this category holds broad messages and themes, like speaking up for causes or making peace in general, the music that dives into detailed responses to the world we live in deserves to be part of larger Reform repertoire.

[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

Applying Jewish values, text, and tradition to the current times is a major part of what Reform Judaism aims to do, and this music does so directly and in line with the moral imperatives embraced by prophetic Judaism.[168] Music of socio-political response lives in American Reform Judaism so well because the lived practice of the movement is focused on that socio-political response. The Reform movement has embraced not only bringing Jewish traditions into activism, but also bringing activism into Jewish traditions. Themed Shabbat services centered on certain issues, like Reproductive Rights Shabbat, Pride Shabbat, and MLK Jr. Weekend Shabbat have all become popular in the past couple decades.[169] Congregants come to these services looking for Jewish wisdom on the current issues that affect them and the people they care about not only through sermons but through music. While not acting as liturgy, this music can enrich a prayer service addressing such themes at any point in time. When major tragedies occur, being able to comfort a community with relevant music is a powerful tool, and this category of music has the music that can do just that.

Beyond worship and protest, paraliturgical music of socio-political response holds much of the Reform movement's history and involvement in American events and politics, which makes it a great resource for teaching children about the prophetic voice and Reform values. Both in the religious school setting and youth programming like summer camps and NFTY, this music has found purchase as an educational mechanism and a way

[168] Feldman, Marla J, "Why Advocacy Is Central to Reform Judaism," *Union for Reform Judaism.*

[169] "Resources for Rabbis," *Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.*

of establishing the movement's values in the next generation. Pieces like Debbie Friedman's "Not By Might" became anthems of such in camps and NFTY in the 1970s, and the trend continues to this day;[170] the winners of the 2019 NFTY Anselm Rothschild Memorial Song Competition, Jordan Schmidt and Jacob Fishman, won with a setting of the popular justice-related verse Pirkei Avot 2:16 called, "Lo Alecha (Build it Up!)"[171]

---

[170] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.

[171] "Lo Alecha (Build It up!) - NFTY-STR Duo Wins Anselm Rothschild Memorial Song Competition," *NFTY*, 2019.

Chapter 3: *Paraliturgical Music as Music of Theology*

Paraliturgical Music as a Vehicle for Exploring Theology

The canonization of most of the liturgy in common use today occurred between the eighth and eleventh centuries.[172] This leaves ample room for growth and expansion when it comes to exploring how Jews relate to God and prayer since those early centuries.

American Reform Judaism, building upon the logic-based and scientific styles of the German reformers before them, included the idea of religious "progressive development" early in its existence. This inclusion of science alongside God and "the essential spirit of religion" has affected how American Reform Jews interact with and understand prayer and the liturgy since the CCAR's Columbus Platform of 1937.[173] A less literal approach to Judaism eschewing *halacha* (Jewish law) and ritual observance in favor of prophetic ideals of justice, peace, and freedom defined pre-World War II Reform Judaism in the United States. Jewish pride rose afterward, from the 1960s through the 1980s, which triggered a return to traditions and rituals in a new context.[174] Feminism would bring more women into leadership positions both on and off the bimah, which led to new interpretations of liturgy. Likewise, the inclusion of interfaith families, LGBTQIA+ Jews, and those of patrilineal descent led to further liturgical changes.[175] Universalist values in

---

[172] Hoffman, Lawrence A, "The Canonization of the Synagogue Service," *Studies in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity,* 1979.
[173] "The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism," CCAR Press, 1937.
[174] Englander, Lawrence A, "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead: In Search of Belonging."
[175] Ibid.

prayer and worship opened up the Reform movement to include many under its big tent. However, this approach came with vague language around God and god-concepts along with a lack of Hebrew language fluency. Due to this, young Jews starting in the 1990s haven't been able to find what makes Reform Judaism stand out theologically from other moral belief systems that don't include religion.[176] While some Reform Jewish leaders may fear getting into the particulars of Jewish theology and God (as many hold very different ideas in the same movement), paraliturgical music allows us to explore our relationship to God, liturgy, and Jewish belief from outside the structure of worship without having to upend the tradition.

For many, paraliturgical music and exploration of theology helps create room for the many emotions and feelings towards God and belief that the regular liturgy cannot address as well, like doubt and anger. Some examples include music supporting the vision of Heschel's prophetic Judaism, like that in the previous chapter; songs about the moral imperative to enact social change are in fact theological in this way. With the number of Reform Jews who identify as agnostic, atheistic, or otherwise divided from religious observance on the rise, paraliturgical music is an opportunity to explore how such Jews can still find their way and place in the movement.[177] Dan Nichols' piece "I Believe," from the 2013 album of the same title, gives voice to such a Jewish experience, with a refrain repeating, "I don't know if I believe in a God above, but I believe in you

---

[176] Ibid.

[177] Mitchell, Travis, "Jewish Americans in 2020," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project,* 2022.

and me, and I believe in love."[178] Even for those who are secure in believing in a singular God, what that means can now vary greatly among individuals. Composers writing about these different possibilities for exploring God can open up dialogue on the subject and create opportunities for god-concept exploration in the highly accessible form of music. Eliana Light fully embraced this idea with her album, *S*ngs Ab-ut G?d*, which uses liturgical interpretation and paraliturgical writing to unpack "g?d-baggage" in a playful manner.[179] Pieces like "Skyman," with lyrics like, "I close my eyes and imagine a dude in the sky," describe a childlike, literal understanding of God — a man in the clouds who knows all and looks down on creation from above.[180] Others reference more nuanced and varied understandings of a divine being, like the description in "I Rise," alluding to a Spinoza-like interpretation:

> "I rise in the presence of the Infinite,
> I rise, one with all the earth."[181]

Paraliturgical music brings these conversations from the background to the forefront and directly to American Reform Jews' ears. When discussing a topic as personal and complex as faith, the intimacy of an artist's personal experience through the emotion-laden medium of music can resonate in ways few other devices can.

---

[178] Nichols, Dan, "Dan Nichols & Eighteen Behind the Music: I Believe," *YouTube*, 2016.
[179] Light, Eliana, *S*ngs Ab-ut G?d*, 2020.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

The Impact of Exploring Belief Through Music

When pieces that explore and expand on Reform theology and values become popular amongst leadership and congregants alike, such music can change and shift the movement at large. Compositions that become mainstream because something about them resonates with large swaths of the movement's population can teach us about trends in Reform theology over time. Essentially, paraliturgical music that addresses theology can have a major impact on the uniformity of American Reform Judaism and the shaping of beliefs held by those who identify as Reform Jews. Some compositions have become so important that they've gone full circle and become part of the Reform liturgy, while others have made certain interpretations of Jewish text and traditions ubiquitous with the movement and what it teaches.

While Debbie Friedman's "Mi Shebeirach" is considered part of regular liturgy and is even included fully in the Reform movement's prayerbook, *Mishkan Tefillah*, this wasn't always the case.[182] The origins of the Mi Shebeirach prayer are varied and inconsistent, with many different versions existing and recited for a variety of occasions.[183] This formula for a healing blessing is thought to have begun as "…a purely theological response in a vein similar to the prayer for rain in a drought: "The One who caused rain will surely be able to bring rain upon....' (Mishnah Ta'anit)."[184] This direct line to God and cause-and-effect theology behind the blessing hasn't been reflective of Reform

---

[182] Cutter, William, "A Prayer for Healing: The Misheberach," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas,* 2011. p. 4-5.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid.

principles of faith for many decades, so this practice lived far more in other, more textually literal denominations of Judaism.[185] Different Mi Shebeirach prayers existed for many different communities and needs, including people who refrain from gossip and people who maintain responsible business ethics.[186] Friedman and her collaborator, Drorah Setel, took the format and concept of these Mi Shebeirach blessings, which relied on a theology of directly influencing God's actions, and reinterpreted it for the needs of the American Reform community.[187] This is why I am able to place this piece in the paraliturgical category; rather than reinvigorating or reinventing a Reform liturgical tradition, Friedman sought to create something new building upon the idea of the older Mi Shebeirach blessings — something that did not have a defined place in the *mat'beah* at the point of its composition. Friedman embraced a different theological relationship with God in the case of healing than the blessings that came before, using lyrics that ask for the strength to get through illness and suffering rather than asking God to intervene directly:

> "May the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us
> Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing."[188]

She embraced an important distinction in healing prayers that expresses a progressive, Reform perspective based in scientific understanding: "the well-considered distinction between 'curing' (what doctors do) and 'healing' (what we all have to do) emerges as

---

[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Friedman, Deborah Lynn, and Drorah Setel, "Mi Shebeirach," *Shireinu*, 1988.

more important through her creative hand."[189] The feminist lens also enters her lyrics by including *avoteinu* (our fathers) and *imoteinu* (our mothers) in the Hebrew of the blessing.[190] All of these factors, plus the powerful opportunity this setting provides communities to make the Mi Shebeirach a communal moment, led to Friedman's 1988 composition sweeping through the American Reform movement.[191] Like piyyutim (poems that became liturgy, including Unetaneh Tokef and Yedid Nefesh), the words of Friedman's Mi Shebeirach were so impactful that the Reform mat'beah changed to include them; over the next decade, the piece was such a regular part of services in the movement that the decision to include the text from her setting in the Reform prayer book made perfect sense.

"B'tzelem Elohim," Dan Nichols' 1999 composition written with Rabbi Mike Moskowitz, has been a highly popular song in URJ summer camps and youth programming like NFTY since its release.[192] Its catchy chorus, upbeat electric guitar backing, and layered, building bridge pull from many of the alternative rock stylings that were popular in its time, which allowed the lyrics' message to spread across the country. The composition builds on the phrase *b'tzelem Elohim*, most commonly associated with the daily morning blessing that thanks Adonai for making the individual "in the image of God."[193] Rather than leaving it as a descriptor of a singular person — "Blessed are You,

---

[189] Cutter, William, "A Prayer for Healing: The Misheberach," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas,* 2011. p. 4-5.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Friedman, Deborah Lynn, and Drorah Setel, "Mi Shebeirach," *Shireinu*, 1988.
[192] Nichols, Dan, and Mike Moskowitz, "B'tzelem Elohim," 1999.
[193] Ibid.

Adonai our God, who made me in the image of God" — the song focuses on what it means for every individual to be made in this holy image, and what values we can impart with that interpretation. The song implies that treating others as equals in this Divine image is what in fact makes each of us b'tzelem Elohim in the chorus:

> "When I reach out to you and you to me,
> We become b'tzelem Elohim
> When we share our hopes and our dreams
> Each one of us, b'tzelem Elohim."[194]

Since this song has become so well known for generations of young Jews, this collective sanctity is the association they have and the meaning that they ascribe to the phrase *b'tzelem Elohim*. The ability to share the Hebrew phrase as a shorthand for this theological concept that all humans are created equally can be credited to the pervasiveness of Nichols' song. This effect on Reform thinking continues to influence the movement and other songwriters touching on theological themes. Nearly two decades later, Elana Arian collaborated with teens at the URJ Kutz camp to write another anthem uplifting the holiness of every individual, titled "I Have a Voice."[195] The bridge of Arian's piece contains the morning blessing that *b'tzelem Elohim* comes from, with one small adjustment that aligns with Nichols' lyrical conviction. Arian changes the world "she'asani" to "she'asanu," changing the meaning of the blessing to, "Blessed are You,

---

[194] Ibid.
[195] Arian, Elana. "I Have a Voice," 2019.

Adonai our God, who made <u>us</u> in the image of God," re-emphasizing the idea that all are made in the Divine image and therefore requiring us to value all human lives.[196]

<u>Jewish Literacy and the Complexity of Paraliturgical Themes</u>

Paraliturgical music exploring Jewish theology requires a certain level of Jewish literacy in order to understand what the composer is commenting on or building. However, the average level of knowledge and education in the American Reform community has fluctuated throughout the years. Participation in Jewish education has gone through highs and lows due to factors inside and outside of the movement, so the popular paraliturgical music of each era reflects the levels of musical theological commentary the average American Reform Jew can understand. By placing these musical and educational trends side by side, we can start to recognize patterns and correlation between the depth of this music and the depth of Jewish literacy.

The 1960s saw a growing boom in Jewish education as the field became professionalized.[197] Religious schools and movement-affiliated summer camps flourished, building up youth participation and learning.[198] Works like *The Jewish Catalog* helped Reform Jews connect to their heritage through rituals like tying tzitzit.[199] While full of enthusiasm, there was a long way to go, as Hebrew only gained in popularity after the Six Day War in Israel, bringing more Hebrew songs from Jewish

---

[196] Ibid.
[197] Englander, Lawrence A, "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead: In Search of Belonging."
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.

tradition and Israeli popular culture.[200] Though Reform Jews felt a hunger for cultural learning, many were familiar and well versed in the prophetic values of justice and freedom and based their Jewish lives on those values. Most paraliturgical music of this decade was borrowed from other places, especially the folk revival and protest music of the Civil Rights movement.[201] Pieces like "We Shall Overcome," "The Hammer Song," by Pete Seeger, "Dreamer," by Lorre Wyatt, and "Peace Will Come," by Tom Paxton were all popular choices for American Reform youth, and this reflects the social justice oriented Reform Judaism of the decade.[202]

With the 1970s came an influx of Hebrew-based learning and music, both in response to growing Zionist leanings and the adoption of more traditionally Jewish practices.[203] Israeli pop music was brought into the repertoire of the youth, while leading innovative composers like Cantor Jeff Klepper, Michael Isaacson, Debbie Friedman, and Doug Mishkin started recording and using their music.[204] Song leaders paid attention to knowing the translations of the prayers and music they were singing (and writing), and transliteration on lyric sheets helped make Hebrew singing more accessible to youth.[205] These trends would continue into the early 1980s, when more of the summer camp

---

[200] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Lieberman, Robbie, *My Song Is My Weapon: People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950,* 1954.

[203] Englander, Lawrence A, "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead: In Search of Belonging."

[204] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.

[205] Ibid.

melodies found their way into synagogue worship[206] and rabbinical students went straight to summer camp after their first year of study in Israel to be resources on Jewish texts.[207] Simple Hebrew settings, like "Heiveinu Shalom Aleichem," by David Feingold, and "Af, Peh, Ozen," by Jeff Klepper, reflected the growing warmth towards singing in Hebrew beyond the standard liturgy. Other pieces stretched listeners' familiarity with Judaism with texts of the Tanakh, like Steven Sher's "Dodi Li" and Gordon Lustig's "Hinei Tov M'od."[208] With the rise of many great songwriters and song leaders, the 1980s would also see the professionalization of the song leader even amongst the teens, through programming like that at the NFTY leadership academy and the Kutz Camp.[209]

The latter half of the 1980s and the early 1990s, while full of ritual innovation to include women, interfaith families, and many more in Reform Judaism,[210] saw a drop in religious school attendance.[211] Young Jews started turning away from synagogues, as universalist values made it harder to want to choose Judaism and its baggage — Wouldn't it be easier to assimilate and still hold on to these values?[212] The rock and roll aesthetics of popular American music entered the Jewish world, and artists like Josh Nelson and Dan Nichols

---

[206] Englander, Lawrence A, "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead: In Search of Belonging."
[207] Ibid.
[208] Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry, "The Music of Reform Youth," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Englander, Lawrence A, "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead: In Search of Belonging."
[211] Alexander, H.A. and Elon Sunshine, Michelle Sullum, "Education and Jewish Continuity," *AVAR ve'ATID: A Journal of Jewish Education, Culture and Discourse,* 1997.
[212] Ibid.

would embrace playing with electric guitars, drum kits, and bass guitars in full band set ups. The success of Nichols' music in the late 1990s, heading into the 2000s, was proof that while young Jews were questioning their relationship to Judaism, they had enough knowledge and background to think critically and relate to paraliturgical music that is theological in nature. "Always There," from Nichols' first album, describes a relationship with God that exists, but is complicated and includes doubt:

> "My heart's filled with questions that my head can't answer,
> Still, with my reservations I find You're always there.
> When I'm tip toeing backwards like a faithless dancer,
> Without hesitation, I find You're always there."[213]

Nichols continued to be a dominant force in Reform Jewish music (and paraliturgical music) through the 2000s and beyond, as Jewish education in the Reform movement shifted to recover some of what was lost in previous decades. Reform Jews craved a return to spirituality, ritual, and religious tradition that had been cast away in favor of an identity centered on morals social action, and Jewish education initiatives like Synagogue 2000 rose to the occasion.[214] Synagogue 2000 focused on Jewish learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom and actively involved music and worship in that learning.[215] Even the pioneer Debbie Friedman connected with this trend, releasing the

---

[213] Nichols, Dan and Mason Cooper, "Always There," 1996.
[214] "Reform Jews Look for Renewal at Synagogue 2000 Conference," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* 2015.
[215] Ibid.

album “Renewal of the Spirit,” which focused on healing and spirituality.[216] Transcontinental Music Publishing started the Ruach Songbook series, which curated and highlighted contemporary music rising in popularity every two years, like a Reform Billboard chart. Pieces like Beth Shafer’s “A Way to Say ‘Ah” addressed the spirituality being embraced at this time through noticing small miracles:

> “A miracle happened today. Was I aware?
> A miracle happened today. Did I even care?
> A miracle happened today, and did I pause enough
> To find a way to say ‘ah,’ a way to say ‘mmm,’
> A way to say, ‘Oh thank God I’ve arrived.”[217]

Other pieces like Nichols’ “B’tzelem Elohim,” referenced earlier, and “Kehillah Kedoshah,” took Hebrew phrases and developed them with lyrics centered on themes of morality and unity. As the decade went on, Jewish literacy would be rising higher than they had been before, and the popular songs sung by the youth started to include layers of Jewish meaning that required wider understandings of Jewish tradition as well as musicians acting as educators when gathering them to sing. Nichols’ “Sweet As Honey,” a setting of the blessing for studying Torah, includes the refrain “sweet as honey on our tongues,” a reference to the ancient tradition of young children being given a taste of honey or something sweet when first learning Hebrew as a way to associate studying the Torah with sweetness; the lyrics also imply a strong love of studying Torah to consider it

---

[216] Cohen, Debra Nussbaum, “Does Folksinger Debbie Friedman Have the Cure for Our Spiritual Blues?” *Synagogue Studies Institute*, 1996.
[217] Schafer, Beth, “A Way to Say ‘Ah,” *Ruach 5761 and 5763 Songbook*, 2000, 2002.

so sweet.[218] Max Chaiken, now a rabbi, wrote an interpretation of "Eliyahu HaNavi," a text regularly sung at the end of havdalah as a wish for the Messiah to come and be brought by Elijah.[219] Chaiken's setting takes a progressive, reforming lens to the text and describes something more in line with a Messianic age. The verses of the song spell out the kind of world to forward to, without hunger, war, and disease, but the last verse brings out Chaiken's vision and message:

> "So we will not wait a minute more
>
> To build the world we're waiting for
>
> The building starts with you and me
>
> And Eliyahu… Eliyahu HaNavi!"[220]

A complex concept here, the responsibility of bringing the Messianic age is shared between the prophet and the people in this piece. This song requires an understanding of the more literal conception of the Messiah in Jewish tradition, who Elijah is in the context of the Messiah, and familiarity with how all of this is reinterpreted in the Reform movement to include its long-lasting themes of seeking justice and fixing the world. That requires a Jewish population that is well-educated, and the success that this piece has found in the Reform movement revealed that the kids are keeping up.

The trajectory of paraliturgical music and Jewish literacy diving deeper hand in hand continued into the 2010s. Works of questioning and struggle, like Nichols' album "I

---

[218] Nichols, Dan, "Sweet As Honey," *Ruach 5771: New Jewish Tunes Social Action Songbook*, 2009, 2011.

[219] Chaiken, Max, "Eliyahu HaNavi," *Ruach 5771: New Jewish Tunes Social Action Songbook*, 2006, 2009, 2011.

[220] Ibid.

Believe," pushed the bounds of paraliturgical music that existed so far. Artists like Jacob Spike Kraus took the idea of theological commentary through music a step further with pieces like "Job"; rather than quoting Hebrew text from Job's story or even using his name in the song, Kraus writes from Job's perspective to illuminate the story's emotional struggle and lessons to be learned.[221] Kraus asks big questions to challenge the listener from Job's perspective:

> "So, do you believe in salvation
>
> And do you think your God would mind?
>
> Oh, 'cause I'm in need of second chances
>
> And the answers to explain the light in the darkness of my life."[222]

At the start of the 2020s, artists are pushing the boundaries of Jewish paraliturgical music even farther. Eliana Lights' *S*ngs Ab-ut G?d* came out as a great experiment at the decade's opening, and already releases of music like Rabbi Noah Diamondstein's "The Sun Will Rise Again," (written with Eric Hunker), have drawn attention from Jewishly literate song leaders and clergy.[223] Diamondstein and Hunker took inspiration from Avodah Zara 8, which describes Adam's terror at watching the first sunset, unsure the light would ever return, as well as his great joy at seeing the sun again in the morning. The pair ask directly what that would be like:

> "If you weren't sure the sun would rise again,
>
> Would you holler out your troubles to the Eastern wind?

---

[221] Kraus, Jacob Spike, "Job," *Shake Off the Dust,* 2015.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Diamondstein, Noah and Eric Hunker, "The Sun Will Rise Again," 2022.

Would you think about the people that you love

As you watch your first and last dawn turn to dust?"[224]

The situation is made more relatable as the question is reframed as, "What if, when you fall asleep, you weren't sure you'd wake?"[225] A possible reality at some point for many, the artists tackle the existential crisis of mortality through this Jewish lens. Diamondstein and Hunker give in to knowing that our lives will end and find comfort in surrendering to "You," an undefined God-like presence:

"If I lay me down to sleep, I pray don't let the dark find me

Keep me hidden in the light of You

And if I die before I wake, I pray the darkness might yet break

And we might gaze upon the sight of You."[226]

While many who work and teach in Jewish music find excitement in music like Diamondstein's, the average congregant is not so familiar with music like his. The Covid-19 pandemic not only slowed and harmed standard education across the United States, it affected Jewish education and Jewish literacy all over, too. Educators bemoan the lost time over Zoom with their students, and many are arriving at the start of the bar/bat/b'nai mitzvah process with minimal Hebrew decoding skills, liturgical familiarity, and Jewish text knowledge. We have yet to see the full effects of this shift on the world of Jewish music and the usability of paraliturgical music, but it is clear that a generation of American Reform Jews are growing up with stunted Jewish learning.

---

[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

Paraliturgical Music of Theology in Practice

Paraliturgical music that explores theology is a bit trickier to understand in practice than that of identity or socio-political response. Contrary to what one may assume, this category of music is less commonly used than that of the previous two chapters, even though this chapter discusses a subsection of Jewish music that examines Judaism itself as a faith system. This music of theology has the opportunity to alienate Reform Jews, as the American Reform movement has developed over time to be able to hold many different kinds of beliefs around God and Jewish traditions. Therefore, engaging with music that takes a stance one way or another on theology can exclude the beliefs of large swaths of Reform Jews if not done in a thoughtful way.

The ways in which this kind of music lives in Reform Jewish practice reflects this challenge. Most commonly, it is found in the exploratory and wide-ranging musical experience of song sessions in summer camps and youth groups, as well as to a lesser extent in programs designed to educate youth and help them develop their own theologies. Educational spaces provide the right space and leaders to contextualize this paraliturgical music and teach those singing it about the references and larger ideas in play.

In some cases, like Debbie Friedman's "Mi Shebeirach," paraliturgical music of theology can make the shift to becoming part of the *mat'beah* of Reform liturgy. Some pieces, after gaining traction and popularity, have made it into the movement's prayer books, like

Mishkan Tefillah's left side of the page selections and index of additional songs.[227] Musicians have also taken a reverse approach, setting some of the paraliturgical readings and poetry in the contemporary prayer book to music, like Noah Aronson's album, "The Left Side of the Page: Siddur Mishkan Tefillah in Song."

Still, plenty of the more inventive music in this chapter — while revealing in movement trends and bold in their development of Jewish philosophy — is not being regularly sung. Jewish musicians, educators, and clergy are struggling to integrate this facet of American Reform musical culture into the movement's existing places for singing, like worship and lessons. Brought into communities mostly through concerts and special sermon anthems, the use of music exploring belief and God in contemporary ways is still limited. The question of how to involve and connect the average American Reform Jew to the process of developing theology is a large one, and while the music that can catalyze such discussions and growth is already being written, Reform leadership is still working on how to implement it. Addressing this problem productively will only serve to benefit the movement and the people who identify as Reform Jews.

[227] Frishman, Elyse D, editor, *Mishkan T'Fillah,* 2006.

Conclusion: *A Modern Tradition*

At the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, Hebrew Union College professors and faculty often remind students, as developing cantors, part of their role is to remember and keep alive the history and culture of Judaism most especially through music. Studying paraliturgical music for this thesis has acted as a microcosm of this idea, as much of the history and culture of the American Reform movement lives in its lyrics. It is important to dissect, analyze, and learn about this music, yes, but it's also important to sing it with this historical understanding in order to keep the modern tradition alive and justified.

The three categories of paraliturgical music highlighted in this thesis — identity, socio-political response, and theology — are not separate silos of repertoire but rather three lenses in which to view and understand the influence and influences of the music. Each of the categories overlap and inform each other. Identity is informed by how one responds to and is perceived by the world, as well as what one believes in. How we respond to social and political events around us is affected by the identities we carry and the beliefs we hold sacred. Likewise, our theology and beliefs are always influenced by our understanding of ourselves as individuals and in interaction with the larger breadth of humanity. None stand without the others, which is why these three themes are so prominent in paraliturgical composition. Therefore, it stands to reason that every piece of music used as an example in each of these chapters can be analyzed again in the context of the two other lenses to learn more about its place in American Reform Judaism.

The phenomenon of paraliturgical music doesn't exist solely in Reform Judaism is part of a larger musical trend in the broaderAmerican Jewish world. Existing across genre and style over many decades, musical paraliturgy arguably can be placed right alongside the systems of nusach and chazzanut or the craft and art of song leading. Such lyrical commentary is already discussed academically as musical Midrash,[228] carrying the mantle of rabbinic commentary and adding to the lexicon of Jewish philosophical writings. There is power in what is said through song beyond our texts of worship. The Reform movement has enough room to maintain the liturgy passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years while also accruing innovations in how we sing about Judaism and our relationship to it, and it is stronger for it.

[228] Kent, Evan, "Musical Midrash," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas,* 2011.

Bibliography

"2021 Faith Inclusion Survey Responses - Jews." *RespectAbility*, 2022, https://www.respectability.org/faith-inclusion/2021-faith-survey-jewish/#open-ended- jpwd.

"A Spotlight on a Primary Source by Katharine Lee Bates." *"America the Beautiful,"* The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2012. https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/america-beautiful-1893.

Alexander, H.A., Elon Sunshine, Michelle Sullum." Education and Jewish Continuity." *AVAR ve'ATID: A Journal of Jewish Education, Culture and Discourse.* Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), 1997. p. 101-108. https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/13629.

Arian, Elana. "I Have a Voice." Ironic Sneakers Music (ASCAP), 2019.

Aronson, Noah. "Am I Awake," *Am I Awake*, 2015.

Berman, Howard A. "Classical Reform Judaism: What Is It?" *18Doors*, 2021, https://18doors.org/classical_judaism_a_concise_profile/.

Brodkin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America.*Rutgers University Press, 2010.

Chaiken, Max, "Eliyahu HaNavi," *Ruach 5771: New Jewish Tunes Social Action Songbook*, Transcontinental Music Publications, 2006, 2009, 2011.

"Charlie Kramer." Kosher Style Records, 2021. https://kosherstylerecords.com/charlie-kramer.

Cohen, Debra Nussbaum. "Does Folksinger Debbie Friedman Have the Cure for Our Spiritual Blues?" *Synagogue Studies Institute,* Moment, 1996. https://www.synagoguestudies.org/crossover-dreams/.

Cohen, Judah M. "Debbie Friedman: A Life Transcribed." *Musica Judaica,* vol. 20, 2013. p. 257–262.

Cohen, Judah M. "History." *Kol B'seder*, http://www.kolbseder.com/history.html.

Cohen, Judah M. "Musical Alternatives: Debbie Friedman in Houston, 1978-1984." *Journal of Jewish Education,* vol. 88, no. 1, 2022. p. 75–94. doi:10.1080/15244113.2021.1974802.

Cohen, Judah M. "Reform Jewish Songleading and the Flexible Practices of Jewish-American Youth." Oxford Handbooks Online, 2012, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199737635.013.0004.

Collins, Kate. "Jewish Voices from the Selma-to-Montgomery March." *The Devil's Tale,* Duke University Libraries, 2015. https://blogs.library.duke.edu/rubenstein/2015/01/14/jewish-voices-selma-montgomery-march/.

Cutter, William. "A Prayer for Healing: The Misheberach." *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas,* 2011. p. 4-5. https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/11710.

Diamondstein, Noah and Eric Hunker, "The Sun Will Rise Again," 2022.

Dunn, Emily E. "Telling and Retelling: The Women's Seder & Ritual Innovation." *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion,* Cincinnati, 2010.

Eanet, Lindsay. "A Weaver of Unique Variety: The Magic and Legacy of Debbie Friedman." *Autostraddle*, 2019. https://www.autostraddle.com/a-weaver-of-unique-variety-the-magic-and-legacy-of-debbie-friedman-2/.

Eglash, Joel, editor. *Chazak V'Ematz: Jewish Songs of Protest and Hope.* Transcontinental Music Publications, 2017.

Eglash, Joel, editor. *Mikraei Kodesh Volume I: Music for Lifecycle and Sacred Moments.* Transcontinental Music Publications, 2022.

Eglash, Joel. "Preface." *Ruach 5765: New Jewish Tunes Israel Songbook.* Transcontinental Music Publications, 2005.

Englander, Lawrence A, "History of Reform Judaism and a Look Ahead: In Search of Belonging," https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/what-reform-judaism/history-reform-judaism-and-look-ahead-search-belonging.

Fair, David, and Joshua Breitzer. "Tsiporah's Children: The Music and Lived Experience of Jewish Black Americans." *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion,* New York, 2020.

Feldman, Marla J. "Why Advocacy Is Central to Reform Judaism." *Union for Reform Judaism,* https://urj.org/what-we-do/social-justice/why-advocacy-is-central-to-reform-judaism.

Frank, Laura. "URJ Continues to Invest in Jews of Color for Leadership Development." *Union for Reform Judaism,* 2022. https://urj.org/press-room/urj-continues-invest-jews-color-leadership-development.

Friedman, Debbie. "The Journey Continues: Ma'yan Passover Haggadah in Song." *Sounds Write Productions,* 1997.

Friedman, Deborah Lynn, and Drorah Setel. "Mi Shebeirach." *Shireinu*, Sounds Write Productions, 1988.

Frishman, Elyse D, editor. *Mishkan T'Fillah.* CCAR Press, 2006.

Gottlieb, Jack. *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood.* State University of New York in Association with the Library of Congress, 2004.

Gottlieb, Jack. "Jeremiah on 9/11." Theophilous Music Inc, 1976, 2004.

Greene, James. "Simkhat Bat: A Welcoming Ceremony for a New Daughter." *Ritualwell*, 2022. https://ritualwell.org/ritual/simkhat-bat-welcoming-ceremony-new-daughter/.

Hartog, Kelly. "Musician Charlie Kramer Hosts Virtual 'Singing in the Dark'." *The Jerusalem Post,* 2021. https://www.jpost.com/j-spot/musician-charlie-kramer-hosts-virtual-singing- in-the-dark-655933.

Helfman, Max. "The Lady with the Lamp." JMP Publishing, 1950.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Prophets.* Hendricks Publishers Inc, 1962.

"History of the Reform Movement." *Union for Reform Judaism,* https://urj.org/who-we-are/history.

Hoffman, Lawrence A. "The Canonization of the Synagogue Service." *Studies in Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity.* Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Hoolihan, Emily. "Wedding Practicum." Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, 2020.

Hornsby, Bruce. "The Way It Is," *The Way It Is,* 1986.

Hunker, Eric. “Hold the Line.” *Facebook*, Eric Hunker Music, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/erichunkermusic/videos/507302659940227/?extid=NS-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=2Rb1fB.

“Joanie Leeds.” *Recording Academy*, https://www.grammy.com/artists/joanie-leeds/287361.

“Joe Buchanan.” *Jewish Rock Radio, Jewish Rock Radio*, 2021. https://www.jewishrockradio.com/artist/joe-buchanan/.

Kaplan, Dana Evan, “The New Reform Judaism,” University of Nebraska Press, 2013.

Kent, Evan. “Musical Midrash.” *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas*. The Sh'ma Institute Josh Rolnick, 2011. p. 6. https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/11711.

Kent, Evan. “So Much More than Kumbaya: Music at Jewish Summer Camps and the Formation of Jewish Identity.” *Boston University*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2014.

Klepper, Jeff and Dan Freelander. “Lo Alecha.” *Shireinu*, 1974.

Kligman, Mark. “Contemporary Jewish Music in America.” *American Jewish Year Book.* American Jewish Committee (AJC), Jewish Publication Society (JPS), 2001. p. 88-144. https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/14722.

Kligman, Mark. “Recent Trends in New American Jewish Music.” *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism,* 2005, pp. 363–380. https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521822041.022.

Kramarz, Benjamin Max. “The Culture and Music of American-Jewish Summer Camp.” *University of California, Berkeley*, 2014.

Kramer, Charlie. “My Journey to Loving All of Myself.” *RespectAbility*, 2021. https://www.respectability.org/2021/06/charlie-kramer-journey/.

Kraus, Jacob Spike. “Bio.” http://www.jacobspikekraus.com/bio.

Kraus, Jacob Spike. “Job.” *Shake Off the Dust,* The House of Sher, 2015.

Kraus, Jacob Spike. “Proud 2 B.” *Cornerstones*, The House of Sher, 2017.

Kutzik, Jordan. “The Forverts Premieres Yiddish Version of Woody Guthrie's Classic, 'This Land Is Your Land'.” *The Forward,* 2022, https://forward.com/forverts-in-english/464504/watch-the-forverts-premieres-yiddish-version-of-woody-guthries-classic/.

Levin, Neil W. “Helfman, Max.” *Milken Archive of Jewish Music*, https://www.milkenarchive.org/artists/view/max-helfman/.

Lieber, Laura Suzanne. “A Garden Enclosed’: The Song of Songs as a Gateway to Synagogue Poetry.” *A Vocabulary of Desire: The Song of Songs in the Early Synagogue*. Brill, 2014.

Lieberman, Robbie. *My Song Is My Weapon: People’s Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950.* University of Illinois Press, 1954.

Light, Eliana. *S*ngs Ab-ut G?d.* 2020. https://elianalight.com/music.

Lindberg, Eric and Doni Zasloff. “Tree of Life.” Nefesh Mountain, 2018.

“Lo Alecha (Build It up!) - NFTY-STR Duo Wins Anselm Rothschild Memorial Song Competition.” *NFTY*, 2019. https://nfty.org/2019/02/22/lo-alecha-build-it-up-nfty-str-duo-wins-anselm-rothschild-memorial-song-competition/.

May, Nick. “About.” *Nick May*, 2020. https://nickmay-music.com/about.

May, Nick. “Being Heard.” *Nick May,* 2020. https://nickmay-music.com/being-heard.

Messinger, Ruth. *From Amos to Heschel and Beyond: A Personal Reflection On Social Justice As an Inherent Part of Judaism Past, Present and Future.* Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2018, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.13469761.0028.001.

Mirel, Chava. "Stand Up." *Chazak V'Ematz: Jewish Songs of Protest and Hope,* Transcontinental Music Publications, 2017.

Mishkin, Doug. "Make Those Waters Part." *NFTY's Fifty Songbook,* Transcontinental Music Publications, 1989.

Mishkin, Doug, "Reading Names," *Tzedek Tirdof: The Social Action Songbook*, Transcontinental Music Publications, 2008, 2010.

Mitchell, Travis. "Jewish Americans in 2020." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project,* Pew Research Center, 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/.

Nichols, Dan, director. "Dan Nichols & Eighteen Behind the Music: I Believe." *YouTube*, YouTube, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m36nPnnn8EM.

Nichols, Dan. "Get to Work." *Dan Nichols & Eighteen*, Dan Nichols & Eighteen, 2020. https://www.dannicholsmusic.com/news-feed/2020/9/22/get-to-work.

Nichols, Dan. "Love is Love is Love." *I Will Not Fear*, Dan Nichols, 2017.

Nichols, Dan. "Love Is Love Is Love." *Dan Nichols & Eighteen*, Dan Nichols & Eighteen, 2018. https://www.dannicholsmusic.com/news-feed/2018/5/21/love-is-love-is-love.

Nichols, Dan. "Sweet As Honey." *Ruach 5771: New Jewish Tunes Social Action Songbook*, Transcontinental Music Publications, 2009, 2011.

Nichols, Dan and Mason Cooper, “Always There,” *Little Nanny Dichols Music,* 1996.

Nichols, Dan, and Mike Moskowitz, “B’tzelem Elohim,” *Be Strong,* 1999. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/50550cd6c4aad0824d1ea95f/t/5066625ac4aa71efcf502062/1348887130697/B%27tzelem+Elohim+Chord+Sheet+1.pdf

Porat, Juval. *Theology*, 2018. http://www.juval-online.com/theology/.

“RAC Timeline.” *Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism*, https://rac.org/about-rac/history-of-the-rac/rac-timeline.

“Reform Jews Look for Renewal at Synagogue 2000 Conference.” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 2015. https://www.jta.org/archive/reform-jews-look-for-renewal-at-synagogue-2000-conference.

“Resources for Rabbis.” *Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism,* https://rac.org/take-action/congregations-communities/resources-rabbis.

Rodovsky, Jayson, and Michael Boxer, editors. *Tzedek Tirdof: The Social Action Songbook.* Transcontinental Music Publications, 2010.

Ross, Sarah M. *A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States*. Brandeis University Press, 2016.

“Saul Kaye.” *Jewish Rock Radio,* Jewish Rock Radio, 2021. https://www.jewishrockradio.com/artist/saul-kaye/.

Schachet-Briskin, Paul Henry. “The Music of Reform Youth.” Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Brookdale Center, 1996.

Schafer, Beth, “A Way to Say ‘Ah,” *Ruach 5761 and 5763 New Jewish Tunes Songbook,* Transcontinental Music Publications, 2000, 2002.

Schiller, Benjie-Ellen. “The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues.” *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 1994. p. 187–212. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpg852z.12.

Sher, Leon. “Heal Us Now: NEW LYRICS 8/2/2021.” 2021. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mGT3HOH21cP_3_tFz6r7TrmLLW7gf9ub/view?fbclid =IwAR3WWfOVF7_dlewFk6JC1F9TaaPRAREGQBToLvalJnr2racNoI_W8ukjMk.

“Simchat Bat.” *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly,* Public Broadcasting Service, 2001. https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2001/06/22/june-22-2001-simchat-bat/12912/.

Summit, Jeffrey A. “Meaning and Melody: Choice in Jewish Music.” *The Lord's Song in A Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship.* Oxford University Press, 2009.

Temple Sinai. “Friday, November 4 My Whole Heart Concert.” *Vimeo*, Temple Sinai, 2022. https://vimeo.com/768627173.

“The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism.” *Central Conference of American Rabbis,* 1937, 2019. https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-guiding-principles-reform-judaism/.

Theodore, Lauren. “Union for Reform Judaism Invests in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Leadership Development.” *Union for Reform Judaism,* 2019. https://urj.org/press-room/union-reform-judaism-invests-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei-leadership-development.

Thornton, Jill Shapiro. *A Women's Seder: Our Spiritual Passage to Freedom.* J.S. Thornton, 1996.

Tovlev, Ze'evi. "Nonbinary Liturgy: Gender-Expansiveness in God and Ourselves." Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, 2022.

Vaillancourt, Cory. "'Jewgrass': Nefesh Mountain Brings a Different Perspective to Bluegrass Music." *Smoky Mountain News,* Smoky Mountain News, 2022. https://smokymountainnews.com/archives/item/33227-jewgrass-nefesh-mountain-brings- a-different-perspective-to-bluegrass-music.

Wright, G., S. Volodarsky, S. Hecht, et al. "Trends in Jewish Young Adult Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism in America from 2017 to 2019." *Cont Jewry 41,* 2021. https://doi-org.huc.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s12397-021-09354-6.

Zill, Nicholas. "The Changing Face of Adoption in the United States." *Institute for Family Studies,* 2017. https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-changing-face-of-adoption-in-the-united-states.