SING A NEW SONG UNTO GOD:
THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF
FOLK AND POP WORSHIP MUSIC IN REFORM SYNAGOGUES

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Introduction

> When you ask young people what's their image of God, they say that it's intimate, it's connected, it's being touched, it's human relationships. Then they go to these [huge sanctuaries] where they're anonymous, where they can't participate, where it's performance oriented . . .[1]

The quote above speaks directly to the heart of why folk and pop worship music has flourished in the Reform movement. Though the quote is from the late 1990s, the themes of participation, connection, and intimacy were just as true for the youth of the 1970s as it is today. Though folk and pop worship music is occasionally denigrated for sounding like music on the radio, that familiarity also makes the music immediately accessible to the congregation. What seemed to an older generation like a radical approach to worship was simply an expression of wanting to "sing and pray and express ourselves in a language we understood."[2] That "language" was more lyrical, more melodic in its approach to worship music. It did not require a professional musician to sing folk music; by its very nature, folk music was meant to be performed by everyone.

The trends that led to folk and pop music's widespread use in worship over the last fifty years have not diminished with time. The desire for personal, individual expression, always present in American society, has impacted synagogues in several ways over the last few decades. It has not dimmed, congregants clamor for participatory music. The Reform movement's newest prayerbook, *Mishkan T'filah*, was designed, in part, "for

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[1] Found in Jeffrey Summit, *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62.

[2] Jeff Klepper, interview by author, December 3, 2010.

a communal experience while allowing for individuality in prayer."[3] Congregants want to feel a sense of ownership over the service, and the simplest way to do that is to sing along. Some of the congregants that Jeffrey Summit interviewed for his book, *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land*, said that they "were not willing to join large, impersonal religious institutions and suffer in silence with a style of worship that felt meaningless or alienating."[4] They wanted services where they felt a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and an opportunity to participate in all aspects of the worship experience.

Proponents of folk and pop worship music have long framed its popularity in terms of participation. Debbie Friedman, responding to Jeffrey Salkin's 1980 article about folk worship music, writes that she was pleased with the article, but disappointed that it failed to mention congregational singing as a motivator for folk music composers. "I began writing music after realizing that I had gone to service after service where there was little or no opportunity for congregational participation."[5] Daniel Freelander wrote in 1996, "Worshippers have become intolerant of worship situations that demand that they sit and listen to someone perform the liturgy. They stay away in droves, voting with their feet."[6] Though Freelander's article was ostensibly about folk and pop music styles, the title reflected the true point: "The role of Jewish communal singing." Folk and pop music

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[3] Lawrence Hoffman, "Prayer Book of the People," *Reform Judaism* 34 (Summer 2006).

[4] Summit, 153.

[5] Debbie Friedman, "Letters to the Editor: Not Camp Music," *Reform Judaism* 9 (Winter 1980): 44.

[6] Daniel Freelander, "The role of Jewish communal singing." *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* 27, (October 4, 1996): 6.

styles have always been and continue to be primarily about communal, participatory worship.

Despite the desire to include folk music in worship, the integration of this repertoire was not without controversy. It was a significant change from the Classical Reform worship that existed for the hundred years prior to folk music's introduction and many cantors and worshippers felt a deep connection to the older style of music. Folk music's success despite this opposition speaks to its ability to communicate the liturgy in a new way. Folk music made worship more accessible allowing worshippers to engage with the Hebrew text of the liturgy.

What is Pop and Folk Music?

The traditional definition of "folk music" began as a 19th Century nationalist invention that sought out authentic music of the "folk," i.e., music "produced by artisan and laboring rural people."[7] The United States Folk Revival began in the 1940s as a way of recording and preserving various American pre-20th Century musical traditions. The commercial success of various early folk musical groups such as The Weavers in turn spawned a vast number of performers who "accompanied themselves on guitar but had little in common with those concerned primarily to bear witness to the tradition."[8] Though these new musicians were also labeled "folk music," the similarity to the early revivalists was minimal. Artists in the 1960s such as Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Joan Baez, wrote original music in a style that was similar to the folk musicians that

[7] *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Folk music."

[8] *Ibid.*, s.v. "Folk music revival."

came before, but were not involved in the preservation of any specific repertoire. The "folk music" label remained, though its original meaning was lost.

In the context of Reform worship, the term "folk music" has more to do with 1960s performers. These performers sought a more accessible approach to Jewish worship. In the Jewish world, as in the commercial music industry, "folk music" has become more generically associated with guitar accompaniment. The distinction between music that was contemporary in the 1970s and that which is on the radio in the 2010s has essentially disappeared under the umbrella term "folk music." Throughout the thesis, I will use "folk music" to describe guitar-accompanied worship.

I make some distinction between "folk music," meaning generally anything accompanied by guitar, and "pop music," which refers to musical styles that are more closely related to rock and roll than the 1960s folk movement. The term "pop music" originated with rock and roll musical styles from the United States and Britain in the second half of the 20th Century,[9] but "pop music" has also come to refer more broadly to any popular musical styles heard on the radio. Reform worship music only rarely reflected styles that could also be heard on the radio: the early 1970s and the late 1990s through early 21st Century. For Reform worship, this "radio sound" in the 1970s I

[9] *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Pop music."

describe as folk music, and the late 1990s sound I refer to as pop music.[10]

The instrumentation of pop and folk music relies heavily on the influence and use of guitars, especially steel-string acoustic and electric guitars. The use of guitar as the accompaniment of choice comes from its portability, flexibility, and its ability to function both rhythmically and melodically. Electric guitars are generally associated with rock music, and their use in synagogue worship is largely reserved for special events that are electrified and amplified for novelty effect. It is the rare worship environment that uses electric guitars regularly.

Another clue that a song is written in the pop or folk styles can be readily seen in the sheet music. Folk and pop songs are generally published as "lead sheets," which contain only the melody line and the chords, written above the staff. This format stands in contradistinction to art music, whose composers generally wrote out every note for every instrument. The use of a lead sheet presupposes that the performer is already familiar with the style of the piece and can craft an appropriate strum pattern (or, in the case of piano, accompanying rhythm). Though this might sound to a layperson as being much more difficult to perform than music that is completely composed, this level of improvisation and flexibility coincides with simpler melodies and chords that are easy to play on guitar. Though the vast majority of Jewish folk music in the 1970s was not

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[10] I either use the term "pop and folk worship music" or just "folk music" when I am referring to the entire body of this music style. I will only use the term "pop worship music" to refer to songs that reflect a contemporary, "radio-friendly" musical style from the 1990s or 2000s. Because this worship music was originally written for a camp audience, it is often called "camp music," even though it has long since made its way into synagogues. I use the term "camp music" in its most accurate meaning, which was music being performed at camp.

published or even transcribed, nearly forty years later there are numerous collections available through major Jewish music publishers.

Other musical indicators are more vague, though helpful nonetheless. Pop and folk pieces tend to have a simple melody and rhythm, with a simple duple or triple meter. The form of the piece can be verse-chorus or strophic (or a modified form), but there is almost always some repetition. The melody will tend to lack ornamentation, and be written in a range that is comfortable for most people.

Folk worship music survived and thrived in the Reform movement because it reflected the needs and interests of the community. As the Reform community--and America's musical styles--developed over the last forty years, composers adapted to those new interests and sounds. In Chapter 1, I will detail the history of folk and pop music, focusing especially on the critical time in the 1980s and 1990s when the genre moved from being a summer camp phenomenon to a part of mainstream Reform synagogue worship. In Chapter 2, I will analyze three pieces that represent various approaches to folk and pop worship music. The three pieces are varied in the era they were written, the compositional and worship goals they reflect, and the aspects of participatory worship they address. In Chapter 3, I will summarize the broad trends in folk and pop worship music discussed throughout my thesis, seen through the lens of the three composers highlighted in Chapter 2, and then present my own vision of the future of Reform worship music.

“The History of Folk and Pop Music in Reform Worship”

Chapter 1

In 2010, it is taken for granted that a Friday night service in a North American Reform synagogue will feature, at some point, a song written in a folk or pop style. Worship in Reform synagogues since the 1970s has increasingly included folk and pop music. Cultural shifts in America during the 1960s and 1970s impacted Jewish music no less than all other areas of American life. When folk music first entered Reform worship it was entirely a countercultural experience. As American society gradually moved towards greater individualism, pride in ethnicity, and social justice, Jewish music changed to reflect these ideals as well.

> Many young Reform Jews in the 1960s and 1970s began a rebellion that reflected [the anti-establishment, anti-authority mood of the 1960s], insisting that the music played during services be conducive to congregational sing-alongs . . . They craved simple music that could be easily understood and sung--music that mirrored the American folk music they heard on the radio.[11]

Reform worship music in the first half of the 20th Century was formal in style and included organ and a professional choir. Modeled after German Protestant worship, the music was intended to be highly decorous, grandiose, and awe-inspiring.[12] Though at first

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[11] Mark Goodman, “The Folk and Folk/Rock Movement of the Sixties and Its Influence on the Contemporary Jewish Worship Service,” in *Perspectives on Jewish Music: Secular and Sacred*, edited by Jonathan L. Friedmann, (New York: Lexington Books, 2009), 49.

[12] Benjie-Ellen Schiller, “The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues,” *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, edited by Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 188.

the intention was to unify congregational participation through hymn singing, the complexity of the music increased through the first half of the Twentieth Century until congregational participation all but disappeared.[13] By contrast, the simplicity of folk music allowed congregants to participate in the worship music once again. Folk melodies tend to be straightforward and pleasant, the harmonies simple and singable, facilitated by an easy rhythm and structure. Folk music provided a new, exciting framework for Reform Jews looking for an alternative to Classical Reform worship.

And It All Began at Summer Camp

Reform Jewish folk music got its start in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' (UAHC) camp system. Summer camps began to flourish in America in the 1920s and 1930s, though the Reform movement did not open its first camp until 1952, when it created the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.[14] The camp was known as OSRUI, or, simply, Union Institute. The idea of group singing in connection with camping was already well established by the time the Union Institute opened in 1952. Folklorist I. Sheldon Posen noted that American camping was "one of North American culture's most prolific settings for both structured and spontaneous group singing by children and adults."[15] Like many American camps of the time, Union

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[13] *Ibid.,* 192.

[14] Judah M. Cohen, "Singing Out For Judaism," in *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping: Essays Honoring the Fiftieth Anniversary of Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute, Union for Reform Judaism, in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin,* edited by Michael M. Lorge and Gary P. Zola, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 177.

[15] Found in *Ibid.,* 175.

Institute incorporated singing into the daily life of the campers, as a way of building communal spirit and having fun. Though a regular part of daily activities, group singing was nonetheless not a high priority for the staff or campers. In the first few years of the camp's existence, the music program was poorly organized, led by amateurs, and not given much attention by the camp directors.[16]

The first step toward creating a dynamic, effective music program began with the hiring of Cantor William Sharlin in 1952. Sharlin was hired to be the songleader for a supplementary camp which met at the same location as OSRUI, but was not part of the regular camp experience. As an HUC-trained cantor, Sharlin brought to the song sessions a significant musical skill, a vast repertoire, and an understanding of how to teach music. His success at the supplementary camp led to the hiring of another trained musician for the main camp, and established a tradition of music as an important, effective educational tool at Union Institute.

One of Sharlin's most important contributions to the craft of songleading was the teaching of new material in a systematic way. He posted chalkboards in the dining hall with transliterated lyrics to help the campers keep their eyes up and their minds engaged in the song session.[17] This helped campers overcome the limitations of their Hebrew vocabulary. Sharlin also made an effort to teach the meaning of the words and to provide a Judaic context for the song. As he explained it,

> Before I would even begin to teach a song, I'd start a conversation with the young campers, trying to get them engaged in some way. I'd read a

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[16] *Ibid.*, 179-180.

[17] *Ibid.*, 182.

> verse from the song and ask if anyone knew what it meant. Then I'd sing a few bars--with my heart and soul--and glide up and down the rows of students, strumming my guitar. . . . After I introduced a song, I'd pose a challenge to the campers, like "What do you think this sounds like?"[18]

Sharlin saw his role, "in concert with the Institute's philosophy, as one of teaching and Judeo-political consciousness-raising."[19] Or, as he put it, "[I] was determined to communicate my love for Judaism and the music; I would not be 'just' a song leader."[20] The campers by and large did not have much Hebrew background and thus the repertoire for Hebrew music was limited largely to some Israeli pioneer songs and some liturgical music. As a cantor, Sharlin could bring his Judaic and Hebrew knowledge to the song sessions. Though Sharlin taught the campers well-known secular children's songs and spirituals (also known as "brotherhood" songs), his talent was for "introducing and leading Hebrew and Israeli songs."[21] This focus on Hebrew music gave later songleaders a firm foundation on which to work.

Sharlin did not go on to work at OSRUI, but he did train his successor, Morris Hershman, who was hired to be the first songleader at the main camp in 1955. Like Sharlin, Hershman took great care with his presentation, "treating his material with reverence."[22] Before teaching the song itself, he would start with a discussion on the

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[18] William Sharlin, "Trust the Process: My Life in Sacred Song," in *Perspectives on Jewish Music: Sacred and Secular*, edited by Jonathan L. Friedmann, (New York: Lexington Books, 2009), 110.

[19] Cohen, "Singing Out For Judaism," 182.

[20] Sharlin, 110.

[21] Cohen, "Singing Out For Judaism," 184.

[22] *Ibid.*, 185.

theme of the song, tying it into the lyrics themselves, to "[capture] their imagination and their attention. They'd learn the song and they gobbled it up."[23] Hershman took Sharlin's selection of "brotherhood" songs and went further, bringing in liberal folk music from musicians such as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger.[24] He also continued to lead and teach Hebrew and Israeli songs.

Additionally, folk music of the 60s focused on issues of social justice that easily tied into the camp philosophy. Camp music was expected to both educate and support positive Jewish values, as defined by the camp director and faculty.[25] Liturgical and Israeli music had an obvious connection to Jewish values, teaching Zionism, prayerbook literacy, and knowledge of Torah and *mitzvot*, but the era also provided a whole repertoire of folk music that connected to the camp curriculum as well. Folk music "touched the souls of a host of young musicians and budding religious leaders, many of whom wanted to express their Judaism in ways that were compatible with the political culture of the sixties."[26]

For example, at camp, the civil rights movement was a Jewish issue "taught under the guise of 'Prophetic Judaism.' "[27] Songs such as "It Could Be a Wonderful World" or "If I Had a Hammer" were readily accepted into the camp repertoire and were even assumed to be "Jewish music" by the campers. "This association between camp songs

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*, 184.

[26] David Mermelstein, "Is Popular Culture Defining Synagogue Music?" *Reform Judaism* 24 (Spring 1996), 49.

[27] Cohen, "Singing Out For Judaism," 184.

and camp experience was so strong that some campers even expressed surprise when they heard recordings of 'The Hammer Song' in a secular setting, with a different chord progression from what they had learned in camp."[28] As one former camper recalled that feeling, "Wait a minute! This was, this is our song! [...] 'The Hammer Song' is Jewish! What're [they] doing singin' the Hammer song?"[29] This intense association between camp repertoire and Judaism helps explain why former campers sought to introduce "their" music into synagogue worship.

Other Folk Influences on Reform Worship

Reform camping was not the only influence on Jewish folk music making its way into the synagogue. In the 1960s, and especially after the Six Day War in 1967, Zionism became ever more common among the American Jewish community. In both summer camps and American synagogue life, "American Jews embraced Israeli culture as a vehicle for expressing their Jewish identity."[30] This could be seen in the shift from Ashkenazic Hebrew pronunciation, associated with European Jewry, to Sephardic Hebrew that was the standard in Israel.[31] As Rabbi Daniel Freelander recalls, "Our people

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[28] *Ibid.,* 185.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Mark Kligman, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," *American Jewish Year Book,* 2001 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2001), 117.

[31] See Schiller, "The Hymnal as an Index," 207 and Cohen, "Singing Out For Judaism," 190.

wanted to hear Hebrew and they wanted to sing Hebrew, so Hebrew becomes a real crucial piece."[32]

In the same spirit, Israeli folk music became immensely popular in the United States. Begun in Israel in 1969, the Hassidic Song Festival spurred the creation of new music written in a folk style. The organizers invited the biggest stars of Israel's music scene to submit new songs that "incorporated or interpreted common liturgical texts."[33] These songs were published in songbooks and released on recordings, enabling them to reach an enthusiastic American audience. Cohen notes that the Israeli counselors who worked at Reform camps brought the music of the Hassidic Song Festivals with them.[34] Freelander and Klepper describe the Hassidic Song Festival as a "major creative force in popular and religious Jewish music."[35] The music from the Festival was seen as secular in Israel, but in the United States they were quickly adopted in worship settings. Freelander and Klepper even went so far as to credit the music of the Festival with "[setting] the stage for American Jews to start singing again in their synagogues."[36] Indeed, many of the settings made famous by the Hassidic Song Festival--for example, Nurit Hirsch's "*Oseh Shalom*," Tzvika Pik's "*Shehecheyanu*," or Shlomo Carlebach's "*V'haeir Eineinu*"--are considered "traditional" today.

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[32] Found in Kligman, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," 117.

[33] Cohen, "Singing Out For Judaism," 194.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] Daniel Freelander and Jeff Klepper. "Jewish rock: music for a new generation," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* 9 (January 20, 1978), 51.

[36] *Ibid.*

The enormous popularity of Shlomo Carlebach, an Orthodox rabbi and songwriter, also significantly impacted the standard repertoire of the Reform movement. His most important contribution to Jewish music was "the blending of Hassidic song with folk music."[37] Freelander and Klepper describe his music as "[owing] as much to American folk music as to the Hassidic heritage into which he was born."[38] Carlebach's melodies sounded authentically Jewish and were easy to sing, making them easy additions to a worship service. In addition to sounding authentically Jewish, Carlebach's music was authentic folk music, making it immediately palatable to the consumers of pop and folk music in the 1960s and 1970s.

Carlebach saw himself as an emissary of traditional Judaism and he actively sought out disenfranchised Jewish youth wherever they might be found, be it in "Buddhist *ashrams*, Hare Krishna temples, churches, [or] New Age retreat centers, armed with his guitar and an arsenal of Jewish music."[39] His constant touring throughout the United States and around the world helped expand his presence beyond the Orthodox community. In addition, though he was an Orthodox Jew, he allowed men and women to sit together at his concerts and permitted women to sing. Both of these actions violated the laws of Orthodox Jewish observance, but he had been "frustrated that unaffiliated Jews were not responding to his outreach efforts when they conformed to Jewish law."[40]

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[37] Kligman, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," 101-2.

[38] Freelander and Klepper, 51.

[39] Dina R. Orron, "Contributions and Controversies: A Study of Shlomo Carlebach's Impact on World Jewry," (Jewish Studies Honors Thesis, Rutgers University, 2005), 10.

[40] *Ibid.*, 15.

This might account for Carlebach's success in influencing Reform worship, as he frequently performed for non-Orthodox audiences.

His influence on Reform worship cannot be understated. *The Jewish Catalog*, in its section on worship music, specifically mentions Carlebach as a source of new and exciting material for use in services.[41] As ethnomusicologist Mark Kligman explains, "So quickly and completely did his music penetrate the Jewish world that many who hear or sing the tunes assume that they are traditional melodies."[42] As Hassidic-style music has increased in popularity in Reform synagogues, Carlebach's body of work remains a significant part of music heard in Reform worship services.

Folk Music in the Synagogue

While folk music fit well with the culture of camp life, it was a significant change from Classical Reform worship. The whole philosophy of folk music was at odds with the musical standards of Reform synagogues in the first half of the 20th Century: austerity, professionalism, and decorum. In contrast, folk music was meant to be democratic, easy to sing and pleasant to listen to. Folk music relied on active participation, informality, and a communal bond. As the songwriter Debbie Friedman wrote in the liner notes to her first album, "[My music] enables those who are willing, to join together as a community in contemporary songs of prayer."[43] There was a practical

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[41] Richard Siegel, et al., *The Jewish Catalog*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1965), 215.

[42] Kligman, "Contemporary Jewish Music in America," 102.

[43] Debbie Friedman, *Sing Unto God*. Liner notes, 1972.

element to the use of folk music as well. As Jeff Klepper explained, “You didn’t have an organ in the woods, there was no place to plug it in. And you couldn’t have a piano because a piano was too big to schlep it and you didn’t have Casio keyboards. A guitar, because your services were in the woods in a little clearing in the woods. So, guitar!”[44]

Several sources note that demands for “camp music” came from congregants and their children, making the use of folk music in Reform synagogues, in essence, a grassroots effort. In late 1980, Jeffrey Salkin wrote an article for *Reform Judaism Magazine* entitled “The New Trend in Synagogue Music,” which addressed the increasing use of folk music in worship services. He stated that “adults visiting UAHC camps often find the enthusiasm in services contagious and want to duplicate that spirit in their synagogues.”[45] Children were often the ones asking clergy to use the melodies with which they were most familiar, and it was usually folk music. “Returning to their home congregations at summer’s end, many young Jews sought out the music they loved.”[46] There was some acceptance of folk music by cantors, even in the 1970s. In 2003, when asked about the role of the cantor in bringing folk music into the synagogue in the 1970s, Cantor Alane Katzew, director of music programming for the UAHC, told *Reform Judaism* that “some cantors welcomed the trend [of using folk music in worship], incorporating popular camp tunes . . . into services. Many cantors encouraged their

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[44] Jeff Klepper, interview with Mark Kligman, June 16, 1998.

[45] Jeffrey Salkin, “The New Trend in Synagogue Music.” *Reform Judaism* 9 (Winter 1980).

[46] Heather Robinson, “The New Cantor.” *Reform Judaism* 31 (Winter 2003), 44.

worshippers to sing along, and even stamp their feet to the beat."[47]

Salkin's article does not point to any statistics regarding the adoption of folk and pop music in Reform synagogues, merely noting that "a number of synagogues" were incorporating popular NFTY tunes into their worship services.[48] There are some statistics available that can illuminate folk music's growing role in the services. In 1984, the Joint Commission on Worship--an effort of the UAHC, CCAR, and American Conference of Cantors (ACC)--published a report two years in the making entitled "Coping With Change: The Reform Synagogue and Trends in Worship." The booklet addressed both the changes that were occurring in Reform synagogues as well as what synagogues can do to address those issues. The authors remarked that

> As part of the move to make services warmer and increase participation, the role of cantors has been enlarged. Liturgical music has been supplemented and in a few cases largely supplanted by folk songs and contemporary Israeli musical selections. Congregational singing is encouraged.[49]

Two important themes are mentioned in that brief quote. First, synagogues were making efforts to increase participation, which was an important factor in the adoption of folk and pop music in the UAHC camp system. Second, the authors remark that folk music and "contemporary Israeli selections" constitute an increasing portion of the music sung on Friday night. Both of these categories of music are core to the repertoire sung at UAHC

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[47] *Ibid.*, 44.

[48] Salkin, "The New Trend in Synagogue Music."

[49] Ronald N. Ashkenas and Todd D. Jick. *Coping With Change: The Reform Synagogue and Trends in Worship,* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1984), 10-11.

camps, pointing to the likelihood that “camp music” was influencing synagogue worship music.

Another indicator of the increasing use of folk and pop music styles in worship is the use of guitar in worship services. The Joint Commission on Synagogue Music, a product of the UAHC-CCAR Commission on Religious Living, surveyed Reform congregations in 1987 and 1993, covering worship and ritual practices. In 1987, three years after *Coping With Change* was published, 26% of synagogues reported using guitar on Shabbat, and 14% used piano.[50] In 1993, the commission found that 34% of synagogues reported using guitar on Shabbat and 39% used either piano or an electric keyboard.[51] Though the use of organ only decreased a small percentage between 1987 and 1993, the use of instruments primarily associated with folk and pop music styles increased significantly. It is interesting to note that electric keyboard was not even an option on the 1987 survey.

Critics of Folk Worship Music

Objections to the use of folk and pop music in worship take many forms. One point of contention is that newer compositions were taking the place of earlier works in the Classical Reform canon. As Salkin notes as early as 1980, “[The inclusion of folk music in worship] has not gone without resistance. Many congregants are uncomfortable

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[50] Joint Commission on Synagogue Music. *1987 Survey of Music Situations in UAHC Congregations.* New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1987.

[51] Daniel Freelander, ed., *Emerging Worship and Music Trends in UAHC Congregations*, (Brookline, MA: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1994), 18.

with camp tunes in the synagogue, preferring the older Reform melodies. This view is shared by some rabbis and cantors who feel that camp music has its own place."[52] The incorporation of folk music underscored the generational shift as the baby boomer generation grew up and began joining synagogues and taking on leadership roles in the community. Just as folk music became primarily a "vehicle of protest in mid-twentieth-century America," so did it function as a protest against the music of the synagogue establishment, i.e., Classical Reform music. As the number of people who grew up hearing Classical Reform worship music diminished, folk and pop melodies were increasingly incorporated into regular Reform worship.

Another argument is that these new pieces were inappropriate for worship. Michael Isaacson wrote in the *CCAR Journal* that "the newer 'guitar songs,' as a sole diet, [are] less artful and less expressive of the liturgy."[53] In that same issue, Adler lambasts pop and folk music in the synagogue, drawing a contrast between the musical quality and spiritual efficacy of art music and folk music.

> Our religious establishment has joyfully embraced the sound and the spirit of popular culture, and the musical sounds pouring forth from our pulpits are either Hasidic ditties, written for people who are musically illiterate, or pop-sounding songs written by musical amateurs to make our congregants feel 'warm' rather than get the spiritual high that would result if they were ever confronted with great music.[54]

An article in *Reform Judaism* in 2003 stated that "the formal music of the past, crafted to inspire awe, is mostly gone, replaced by more accessible tunes with roots in American

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[52] Salkin, "The New Trend."

[53] Michael Isaacson, "A Paradigm Reconsidered," *CCAR Journal* (Winter 2002), 8.

[54] Samuel Adler, "A Composer's View of Temple Music," *CCAR Journal* (Winter 2002), 20.

popular music."[55] It is clear that the author is speaking only of Shabbat worship, as the High Holy Days--and, to some extent, the Three Festivals--still feature the "formal music of the past." The author implies that popular music is neither crafted to nor capable of inspiring awe. This is the point of contention between the two sides of the folk-art music debate.

Isaacson's comment about folk music as a "sole diet" also indicates that he sees the use of folk music in worship as completely displacing more traditional musical elements. As early as 1989, however, Salkin noted that folk music had not entirely displaced either art song or traditional chant in Reform synagogues. "With exceptions, congregations that have incorporated NFTY musical styles have not dispensed with either traditional *chazanut* or art music. In fact, there is more traditional Jewish chanting in our synagogues today than there was ten years ago."[56] Despite some concerns, research clearly showed that folk music was able to coexist alongside both art music and traditional chant in the synagogue. The 1993 UAHC survey on music and worship noted that, "It appears that the use of traditional chant during various portions of the worship service by the Cantor and/or the congregation has become widespread and normative for most Reform congregations."[57] The editors went on to note that eighty percent of congregations reported chanting the Reader's Kaddish regularly, even though that prayer

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[55] Mermelstein, 43.

[56] Jeffrey Salkin, "NFTY at 50: An Assessment," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 36 (Fall 1989), 19.

[57] Freelander, *Emerging Worship and Music Trends*, 13.

did not appear in a Reform prayerbook until 1975.[58] The Reform movement has moved beyond the debate between folk and pop music on the one hand and art music on the other, and are working to incorporate many different styles at once.

Rock Shabbat: The All-Rock Service

Though folk music was gradually growing as a percentage of the overall worship music used in services, it was the rare synagogue that wholly used folk and pop music as a regular approach to their worship music. The most successful example of a synagogue using popular music styles in regular worship services is at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles. Led by the worship team of Rabbi David Wolpe and Craig Taubman, "Friday Night Live" (FNL) began in 1998 to "bring young Jewish professionals together to celebrate Shabbat."[59] Geared towards a 20s and 30s audience, FNL blends participatory pop music, professional musicians and a high quality sound system with the intense spirituality and dynamic speakers. Though a Conservative temple, the FNL service features many non-traditional elements which have been imitated by Reform synagogues around the country.

In many ways, FNL reflects a worship style that stands entirely in contrast to the Classical Reform model of worship. The music is meant to be participatory and informal, and all of the music is in a pop or folk style. The rabbi and *sh'liach tzibur* regularly break the "fourth wall," coming off the *bima* and into the congregation, with the goal of

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[58] *Ibid.*

[59] Laurie Matzkin, *A Path towards Creativity and Excellence: Applying the Principles of Friday Night Live to Prayer Leadership for Everyone,* (Master's thesis, Jewish Theological Seminary, 2009), 3.

engaging the worshippers more fully in the service.[60] Taking the folk style's reliance on guitar and bringing it into the sanctuary, Taubman is backed up by a rock band, with guitar, bass, keyboard, and drums. It should be noted, though, that FNL is only held once a month. Even in its most successful form, an all-pop service has not been adopted for use on a weekly basis in any large Reform synagogue.

Before folk music made significant inroads in synagogue worship, a few composers attempted to write entire services in a rock style. Gershon Kingsley wrote his *Shabbat for Today* in 1968, and only a year later Cantor Raymond Smolover premiered his *Edge of Freedom.* Both works are complete Sabbath services written in a 1960s' rock style. Though rock services were quite a sensation at the time they were written, neither achieved lasting use in synagogue services. In part, this can be attributed to the idea of a composed service, which was also popular among 20th Century art music composers. Such esteemed composers as Max Helfman, Isadore Freed, and Lazar Weiner--among many others--wrote settings of the liturgy that were meant to be performed as a whole in a worship service. Smolover's and Kingsley's rock services are merely a contemporary manifestation of this approach to service music. Wholly composed services have fallen out of favor in synagogues, which probably contributed to a decline in the performance of rock services as well.

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[60] *Ibid.*, 6.

School of Sacred Music

A clear sign that folk music became an integral part of Reform synagogue worship can be seen in its inclusion in the cantorial program at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC). As the primary decision makers in worship music selection in the synagogues where they work, the decision to use folk music is greatly influenced by the cantor's familiarity and comfort with that repertoire. Though founded with the goal of continuing the chain of tradition in *hazzanut*,[61] the School of Sacred Music nevertheless saw the role of the cantor in the Twenty-First Century changing enough to require additional skills.

One reflection of the changing nature of synagogue music can be seen in the hiring of new faculty members with different backgrounds and training. In 1988, Merri Lovinger Arian was invited to join the faculty at Hebrew Union College. A music educator, in her youth Arian worked as a songleader at a number of UAHC camps, and later served as Director of Music for Synagogue 2000, a synagogue transformation initiative. Arian's work has also included serving as Synagogue 3000's consultant on liturgical arts at HUC. In addition to her other teaching responsibilities, she supervises students in their leadership of worship services, and teaches a number of courses relating to music and its role in creating meaningful worship.

Arian's first course as a faculty-member at HUC was a course in music education. Much of the repertoire for the class was drawn from her experience in UAHC camps and folk worship music, but she saw the influence of that class extending beyond the religious

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[61] Schiller, "The Hymnal as an Index," 205.

school classroom, encompassing a new understanding of music and its ability to create sacred community. “I knew that . . . in terms of working with people, and empowering them to sing along, [many of the principles were] the same whether it was a kindergartner, a seventh grader, or an adult in [the] *kahal*.”[62] For Arian, it was not teaching folk music but the goal of enabling congregational participation that was the true purpose of the class. A music education course had been offered at HUC for many years, but Arian brought her learnings from the youth movement and camping world into the classroom.

Teaching cantors how to enable congregational participation became an explicit part of the curriculum in Spring 2004 when Arian, along with Cantor Benjie Schiller, began teaching a course titled “Empowering the Congregational Voice.” A required course upon its introduction into the curriculum, it explicitly addressed issues of participation, such as choosing keys that are comfortable for the average voice, teaching new melodies within a worship service, choosing appropriate repertoire, and creating thoughtful transitions. This was a watershed moment in the history of folk music’s role at Hebrew Union College, as it was the first time that cantors were required to address folk music’s role in synagogue worship.

In 2002, then director Israel Goldstein asked Arian to teach guitar to the cantorial students. She recalls that Goldstein told her he was responding to feedback from congregations that were unhappy that recent graduates were unable to play guitar.[63] Upon

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[62] *Kahal* is Hebrew for “congregation.” Merri Arian, interview by author, December 1, 2010.

[63] *Ibid*.

further consultation with Arian, a two semester requirement was instituted in guitar as an accompanying instrument for all cantorial students. Requiring guitar proficiency indicates that the school believed that "in order to remain relevant, cantors had to take on additional modes of musical expertise to address congregants' needs."[64] In the context of Reform worship music, guitar only functions as accompaniment for folk and pop music. Neither traditional chant nor contemporary art music use guitar in that manner. That guitar would be offered at Hebrew Union College--and more, that it would become a requirement for all cantorial students in the spring of 2002[65]--was clearly a response to pop and folk worship music becoming an essential part of synagogue worship music throughout the Reform movement. This is further supported by data in the 1994 worship study conducted by the UAHC showing that guitar use in Reform services was increasing. Although *hazzanut*, traditional Jewish chant, remained the core of the cantorial program, clearly the school recognized the increasing importance of folk and pop worship music.

Another key faculty appointment was the hiring of Debbie Friedman, the well-known Jewish songwriter, in the fall of 2007. A symbol of the 1970s Jewish folk worship movement, her addition to the faculty "is akin to official sanction of her folk-inspired, sing-along musical style."[66] Prior to her death in January 2011, Friedman taught a course

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[64] Judah M. Cohen, *The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor: Musical Authority, Cultural Investment*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 228.

[65] *Ibid.*, 227.

[66] Sue Fishkoff, "70s Rebel Takes Job at Cantorial School," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, July 13, 2007, http://jta.org/news/article/2007/7/13/103003/friedman (accessed November 30, 2010).

on songwriting for both rabbinical and cantorial students, and she coached cantorial students in the art of songleading. Regarding Friedman's appointment to the faculty, Bruce Ruben, director of the School of Sacred Music, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "My agenda is to modernize cantorial education to reflect the styles and needs of congregations,"[67] an acknowledgement of folk music's incorporation into regular Reform worship.

An Undeniable Success

Looking back on the last forty years of Reform worship music, few trends stand out more than the increasing use of folk and pop music styles in synagogues. Folk music as it is used in Reform worship represents an aesthetic almost antithetical to the Classical Reform worship music that preceded it: performed by congregants instead of professionals; simplicity in construction and form; and informality and closeness instead of majesty and decorum. The switch to folk and pop music was such a stark paradigm shift that it was bound to provoke opposition, and yet its success is undeniable even in the face of that opposition.

The simplicity and informality of folk music enabled worshippers to own the liturgy as well as the music. The use of Hebrew in "*Shalom Rav*," "*Yih'yu L'ratzon*," and the refrain of "*Lamdeini*" shows that folk music can help break down the barrier to the Hebrew liturgy. "*Lamdeini*" is a perfect example: it is not the musically difficult cantorial section that is in Hebrew, but the simpler, participatory section. Folk styles not only make

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[67] *Ibid*.

worship music more accessible, they can also empower the worshippers to engage other aspects of worship more fully.

The incorporation of secular musical styles is not a new trend; in the mid-1800s, the groundbreaking cantor and composer Salomon Sulzer stated his goal to be "to reconstruct [traditional tunes] in accordance with the text and the rules of harmony."[68] Sulzer sought to innovate traditional musical styles in his own way, by taking traditional melodies and "reconstructing" them with four-part harmony and counterpoint. Just as Sulzer's setting of "*Sh'ma*" became the standard in Reform synagogues and the wider Jewish world more than a century later, so too have a few folk songs entered the canon of Reform worship music after nearly forty years.

The history of folk and pop worship music is incomplete without an understanding of the music itself. Contemporary composers have addressed the issues of accessibility and participation in many different ways, each influenced by their respective predecessors and the specific needs of the Reform community at the time they were writing. The challenges facing young Jews in the early 1970s were not the same ones facing aspiring songwriters twenty years later. In Chapter 2, I will analyze three songs that addressed issues of accessibility and participation, in order to better understand the issues involved and to highlight the trends in folk worship music in the last forty years.

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[68] Found in Geoffrey Goldberg, "Jewish Liturgical Music in the Wake of Nineteeth-Century Reform." *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992, 63.

“Highlighting the Trends in Folk Worship Music: An Analysis of Three Songs”

Chapter 2

Though written in very different eras and contexts, the three pieces, analyzed in this chapter, reflect many different approaches to worship music and represent innovation in the use of folk and pop music styles in worship. The pieces, “*Shalom Rav*” by Cantor Jeff Klepper and Rabbi Daniel Freelander, “*Lamdeini*” by Cantor Benjie Schiller, and “*Yih’yu L’ratzon*” by Josh Nelson, each was intended for Reform worship and fits into the folk and pop genre in some way, though they sound very different from each other. It is the distinctions as much as the similarities that illustrate the development of folk and pop Reform worship music over the last forty years.

1. “*Shalom Rav*”[69] - Cantor Jeff Klepper and Rabbi Daniel Freelander

Cantor Jeff Klepper’s and Rabbi Daniel Freelander’s setting of “*Shalom Rav*” is a great example of a folk worship piece from the 1970s. Written for guitar and voice, it features simple chords and a fairly straightforward chord progression. The melody is easy to sing and has a *tessitura*[70] of less than one octave. The text of “*Shalom Rav*” comes from the liturgy, as it is the final benediction of the *Amidah*. A prayer for peace, it asks

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[69] As published in *The Complete Shireinu*, New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 2001. See Appendix 1.

[70] “The particular range that is most consistently exploited” in a song, according to Don Michael Randel, ed, *Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music*, s.v., “tessitura,” (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

God to "bless Your people Israel in every season and moment with Your peace."[71] The peace was especially relevant to the 1960s and 70s counterculture and to the culture of the camp system, as discussed in Chapter 1. Written in 1973, only one year after Debbie Friedman released her groundbreaking album *Sing Unto God*, "*Shalom Rav*" would gain lasting success in the camp movement and later in Reform synagogues around the country.

Though they had only been writing songs together for approximately one year when they wrote "*Shalom Rav*" in 1973, both had been a part of the camp movement for most of their childhoods, attending and later working at Eisner Camp in Great Barrington, MA, and Kutz Camp in Warwick, NY. They were both religious school educators and were often on the faculty together at NFTY events in the New England region. Having led worship services together on occasion, they discovered that their voices blended together beautifully. As Klepper recalls, there was a dearth of folk worship repertoire at the time, and therefore an ideal opportunity for campers who were aspiring songwriters. "As [Debbie Freidman's] songs became the 'new tradition,' a source of spiritual sustenance for young people and a lightning rod for criticism from cantors, everybody tried their hand at composing new prayer melodies."[72] Their partnership rested on complementary skills: Freelander had a polished, higher voice and greater training in liturgy and Hebrew, while Klepper had a lower, untrained voice and played guitar.[73]

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[71] Translation according to *Mishkan Tefilah: A Reform Siddur*, (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007), 178.

[72] Jeff Klepper, interview by author, December 3, 2010.

[73] *Ibid.*

When working on a new piece, Klepper and Freelander often sought out texts that did not already have a popular folk setting, so that they could integrate their new composition into worship services at the religious schools and NFTY events where they worked.

Using the traditional Hebrew text as found in the *Union Prayer Book*, the Reform movement's prayerbook at that time, their setting reflects the rise in Hebrew that began in the 1960s and exploded in the wake of the Six Day War in 1967. It was written with Sephardic pronunciation, as became common in the camp movement as a way of showing support for the State of Israel. The syncopated rhythm of the melody is rooted in 1960s and 70s folk music. Klepper described the earliest version of the guitar part as "a riff you might hear in a song by James Taylor or the Beatles."[74] The simplicity of folk music is evident in the 4-4 time signature, lack of modulations, as well as the ABAC verse-chorus form. The final version of the song ventures into more complex territory in the second verse, featuring a tritone leap on the words "*b'chol eit*" as it uses a borrowed chord from the relative minor. That complexity might explain its continued popularity: an accessible and popular sound, with enough variation to keep it interesting. Klepper specifically notes the complex harmonies and the fact that the two verses have very different melodies and chord progressions.[75] As befits the folk style, "*Shalom Rav*" could be used in many different worship contexts and accompaniments, and is just as effective when sung without accompaniment as with guitar or piano.

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[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*

There are two noteworthy publications of "*Shalom Rav*," one in *Gates of Song*, published in 1987, and one in *The Complete Shireinu*, published in 2001.[76] The editors of these two songbooks took very different approaches to arranging the piece for publication, and a comparison of the two helps highlight the historical trends in the Reform Movement's adoption of folk and pop music in worship. When *Gates of Song* was published in the mid-1980s, folk worship music was popular in Reform synagogues, though not yet broadly accepted by Jewish professionals in the Reform movement. The songbook, a long-awaited companion book to the Reform movement's newest prayerbook *Gates of Prayer*, featured many folk and pop tunes in arrangements that made them more complex than the composers originally intended. The editors of *Gates of Song* wanted to bridge the gap between the Classical Reform musical tradition still prevalent in synagogues and the folk and pop movement that was gaining popularity. The arrangement of "*Shalom Rav*" is no exception, featuring a short introduction and significant substitutions of chords throughout the piece. Also, the chord symbols frequently indicate the bass note, a format that is more suited to piano accompaniment than guitar. In comparison to the setting in *Yehi Shir*,[77] the earliest publication of "*Shalom Rav*," several chords have been added that increase complexity without adding much to the piece itself.

In contrast, when *Shireinu* was published almost fifteen years later, folk and pop worship music was much more widely accepted than it was during the 1980s. No longer needing to make folk music more palatable for cantors and music directors, the editors of

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[76] Full citations for both publications can be found in the Bibliography.

[77] Daniel Freelander, ed., *Yehi Shir*, New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 1981.

Shireinu explicitly sought out the composers of well-known folk and pop worship songs to ensure that the chords and melody reflected the composers' original intentions.[78] The chords are all easily played on guitar and the arrangement has been pared down to its simplest form.

Unlike the two pieces that follow in this chapter, "*Shalom Rav*" has been practically canonized in the repertoire of Reform worship music. Remarkably, this setting of "*Shalom Rav*" has spread well beyond the Reform community. Notably, it is one of the few songs from the folk worship music genre to be included in the *Harvard Hillel Sabbath Songbook*, which largely consists of songs attributed to "Traditional."[79] Written fairly early in the folk worship music era, it was primarily transmitted as an oral tradition within the camp system, though it was also on one of the early *Songs NFTY Sings* albums. Klepper believes that the piece flourished not only on its own merits, but also because it came to be associated with Reform Jews' cherished childhood memories. "The meaning of one's experience (at camp, say) gets wrapped up within the song. Just hearing or singing the song reminds you of last summer at camp -- so the song becomes more than just a song. It's a treasured part of your individual experience as well as symbolic of your group identity."[80] Still, that only explains its popularity with Reform Jews who

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[78] Klepper, interview by author.

[79] *The Harvard Hillel Sabbath Songbook.* Boston: David R. Godine, 1993: 170. Referenced in Benjamin William Dreyfus, "Hear the echos of Miriam's song: American nusach in concert." *Studies in Jewish musical traditions: insights from the Harvard collection of Judaica sound recordings*, edited by Kay Kaufman Shelemay, (Cambridge, MA : Harvard College Library, 2001), 40.

[80] Klepper, interview by author.

attended camp; its success beyond those boundaries likely rests with the song itself and how it expresses the Jewish people's desire for peace.

Jeff Klepper and Daniel Freelander wrote "*Shalom Rav*" for a young audience, intending to use it at NFTY conventions, in religious school, and at summer camps. But the strength of its message and the power of its melody carried it beyond the camps and into the synagogue. Its extraordinary melodic line and engaging harmonies make it both immediately accessible and compelling to a congregation. As an example of early 70s folk worship music, its syncopated rhythms and guitar-ready chords fit the style perfectly. We will see in the next piece that a later composer took a very different approach to incorporating folk and pop elements into worship music.

2. "*Lamdeini*"[81] - Cantor Benjie Schiller

In the twenty years following "*Shalom Rav*," folk music went from being a musical style found mostly in summer camps to being a mainstay in mainstream Reform synagogues. The folk repertoire was well-established by the time Cantor Benjie Schiller--a classically-trained musician and composer--was invested as a cantor in 1987. In composing "*Lamdeini*," a setting of a poem written by the Israeli poet Leah Goldberg, Schiller blended her formal composition training with her desire to empower the congregation's participation with an accessible melody. The piece is a great example of this approach to folk and pop worship music. As Schiller herself explained, "I think the

[81] As published in *R'fuah Shleimah*, Transcontinental Music Publications, 2002. See Appendix 2.

piece straddles the fence between a folky-popular [style] and a more proscribed, classical piece."[82]

"*Lamdeini*" challenges many of the conventions of folk music. The melody is written in a fairly easy *tessitura*, but it lacks the simplicity found in folk pieces. The rhythm is also highly complex, being written in triple meter and with frequently changing time signatures. This enables the melody to support the natural flow of the English text. The piece is through-composed, though the melody in the second stanza is a variation on the melody for the first stanza. The fact that it is neither strophic nor verse-chorus makes it less of a "folk" piece.

And yet, "*Lamdeini*" does contain a chorus with a simple melody at the end of the piece. In the music, Schiller labels the chorus a "refrain," though it is found at the end of the piece rather than in the middle. Typically, a refrain is found in a piece with verses that either follow or precede it, but "*Lamdeini*" does not have any verses. The "refrain" shares some thematic material with the rest of the piece, but otherwise does not connect. Thus, in terms of form, it is not a refrain at all. At the same time, the refrain's simple melody enables the congregation to sing along, which is a refrain's function. The chorus is easy to sing and accessible, which gives the piece, as a whole, a more "folk" sound. Also, unlike the rest of the piece, neither the meter nor the key change. Where the majority of the piece fits the "art music" moniker, the chorus is clearly more akin to folk music than other composed works.

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[82] Cantor Benjie Schiller, interview by author, November 15, 2010.

The sheet music for "*Lamdeini*" does not explicitly indicate instrumentation. The use of a lead sheet format, with only the melody realized and chords placed above the staff is common of folk and pop music, which allow some flexibility in the performance of the piece. It also gives flexibility to the context in which the music could be performed. Schiller recognizes that the lead sheet format gives the perception that her piece is more a part of the folk genre, noting that the lack of instrumentation is "one of the characteristic features of folk music, that it doesn't have to be so proscribed."[83] At the same time, she notes, "I really do see it more [as] art music, [and that having the harmony written out] adds to it without limiting it. But that doesn't mean that I don't think that *'Lamdeini'* could be done on guitar, on keyboard, and improvised in its way and it wouldn't be equally wonderful."[84] Performing the piece on guitar would present its own challenges, as the key chosen and the chords used in the piece are somewhat complex, avoiding the more common key signatures that are easier to play on guitar. The music also does not indicate capo chords,[85] which would simplify the performance of the piece for guitar players.

Though Goldberg's poem is non-liturgical, Schiller wrote the piece for use in a worship service at a Synagogue 2000 think tank convened by Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman in 1994.[86] As Schiller recalls, she and Hoffman knew there were going to be "lots of

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[83] *Ibid.*

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] Capo chords are transpositions of the chords for use with a guitar capo to make the chord shapes easier to play.

[86] Lawrence Hoffman, email to the author, January 16, 2011.

different kinds of Jews and non-Jews" at the think tank, and thus were open to a creative text that expressed the mood they were hoping to create.[87] Schiller suggested Leah Goldberg's poem, and explains, "It was Larry's idea to use the English of the two strophes of the poem and then use the Hebrew of the first line of each strophe as a refrain. It almost wrote itself."[88] This approach allowed for a more formal compositional foundation throughout the piece, but still allow an entry point for congregants to participate in the performance of the song.

> Teach me O God a blessing, a prayer
> On the mystery of a withered leaf, on ripened fruit so fair
> On the freedom to see, to sense, to breathe,
> To know, to hope, to despair.
>
> Teach my lips a blessing, a hymn of praise
> As each morning and night You renew Your days,
> Lest my days be as the one before,
> Lest routine set my ways.[89]

The universal message of Goldberg's poem, combined with Schiller's gentle musical setting, makes the piece useful in several different worship contexts. This liturgical flexibility can best be understood in the light of two recent publications. The first publication is *Mishkan T'filah,* the Reform movement's latest prayerbook, published in 2007. One of the features of *Mishkan T'filah* is that each prayer is offered on a two-page spread, placing the traditional Hebrew text adjacent to both a literal translation and alternative readings on the prayer's theme. In the case of the Leah Goldberg poem, it was

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[87] Schiller, interview by author.

[88] *Ibid*.

[89] "*Lamdeini*" by Leah Goldberg, translated by Pnina Peli.

offered as an alternative reading for the *Chatzi Kaddish* in the Shabbat evening service.[90] The *Chatzi Kaddish*, or "half *Kaddish*," is a liturgical dividing line, a "semi-colon"[91] marking the end of one section of the service with a statement calling for the coming of God's "ultimate reign on earth."[92] Though Goldberg's poem does not explicitly connect to any place in the traditional liturgy, including the *Chatzi Kaddish*, its themes revolve around God, worship, prayer, and the human condition, and it is in that sense that it becomes a beautiful addition to the liturgy. "*Lamdeini*" is a reflective text, placed in the prayerbook at a moment for reflection. Though using a text other than the *Kaddish* for this purpose is an innovation, it fits well with the function of the *Kaddish.*

Though Schiller was not a part of the editorial committee that chose to put "*Lamdeini*" in *Mishkan T'filah*, she thinks it might be because the poem discusses the theme of prayer.[93] In the Sabbath evening service according to *Mishkan T'filah*, the *Chatzi Kaddish* is the last text before the *Bar'chu*, which is the traditional call to prayer. Prior to that point in the service, all of the liturgy "was meant only to introduce what follows,"[94] according to liturgist Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman. Schiller describes the poem

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[90] Frishman, 145.

[91] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Politics, Piety, and Poetry," *Kabbalat Shabbat: My People's Prayer Book, Vol. 8*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 2.

[92] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Concluding Prayers," *My People's Prayer Book, Vol. 6: Tachanun and Concluding Prayers*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 158.

[93] Schiller, interview by author.

[94] Hoffman, "Politics, Piety, and Poetry," 1.

as a "*kavannah*[95] about prayer, for prayer, leading into prayer, reflecting on prayer."[96] In that sense, the poem is a meditation on prayer before the worshippers begin the formal prayer service.

The second publication that explains the liturgical flexibility of "*Lamdeini*" is the songbook *R'fuah Shleimah*, published in 2002 by Transcontinental Music Publications. A collection of music for use in healing services, it features "*Lamdeini*" in the section entitled "Inspired Poetry." Schiller intended and hoped her piece would be used in a healing service.[97] She felt strongly that "the spiritual message [in the poem] is one that could be embraced in a healing context."[98] The text resonates deeply with the human condition and the desire to ask God for understanding. Merri Arian, the editor of *R'fuah Shleimah*, the book of healing service music in which Schiller's setting can found, described how she used "*Lamdeini*" in a service following the attacks on September 11, 2001.

> At a time when we all felt such great despair, we needed for God to "teach" us again "to bless, to praise." It was a reminder that there was so much to be grateful for, *and* that we needed to understand that there was the mystery, the unexplainable. There was "despair" and there would be, yet again, in time, "hope."[99]

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[95] "*Kavannah*" literally means "intention," but in this context might be better translated as a "reflection on prayer."

[96] Schiller, interview by author.

[97] *Ibid.*

[98] *Ibid.*

[99] Merri Arian, email to the author, November 21, 2010.

The text addresses a range of emotions that worshippers in need of healing want to express. When dealing with events that defy explanation, such as the terrorist attacks in New York City in 2001, music can be a source of great comfort and aid in the expression of one's feelings.

"*Lamdeini*" is an innovative blend of folk, pop, and classical elements. The non-traditional text and the multi-faceted musical elements give Schiller's piece a unique place in the spectrum of worship music between folk and art music styles. Schiller was not creating an alternative to Classical Reform worship music the way that Klepper and Freelander were. She wanted to combine the best parts of art music and folk music to create music that both challenged congregants and spoke to their deepest emotions. Though they took very different approaches, Klepper, Freelander and Schiller all wanted to write music in which worshippers could participate. In the next piece, we will see a composer who built on the foundations laid by the songwriters of the 1970s and 1980s, and is part of a whole new paradigm of how to craft Jewish pop worship music.

3. "*Yih'yu L'ratzon*"[100] - Josh Nelson

When Josh Nelson was first hired to be a songleader at an independent Jewish summer camp, the camp director sent him a box of tapes of worship music to learn. Nelson remembers that "from a songwriting perspective it was so useable. There wasn't much from a listenable [perspective]."[101] The folk and pop worship music of the 1970s

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[100] As published in *Josh Nelson Songbook*, New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 2009: 47. See Appendix 3.

[101] Nelson, interview by author, November 24, 2010.

and 1980s was moving, relevant, and perfectly-suited to a camp worship experience, but the recordings those artists made were always of a much lower quality than your average secular pop album. This dichotomy between a song's suitability for worship and its suitability for casual listening would become a key issue for Nelson as he started writing his own worship music in the late 1990s. As the namesake and front man for the Josh Nelson Project, he prides himself on writing worship music that sounds as though it could be played on the radio. As one of the younger stars in the Jewish music world, having turned 30 only a few years ago, he sees himself as part of a trend towards more radio-friendly Jewish music.

Jewish folk worship music in the early 1970s sounded like music on the radio. The style was immediately recognizable to a young audience as being contemporary and relevant to their experience. Forty years later, folk worship music remains a significant part of synagogue music even though its commercial counterpart is no longer on the radio. Though folk music remains popular in Reform worship, Nelson sees an opportunity for musicians to write music in the style that is on the radio now in the 2010s, instead of relying on the styles that have been imitated and rehashed for the last forty years.

"*Yih'yu L'ratzon*," Nelson's piece written around 2001, exemplifies the pop music style in Reform worship in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It is repetitive in its text setting, with a straight-forward and accessible melody. Written in G major and featuring a simple chord progression, it is easy to play on guitar. The sheet music defines the style as "Rock" and it clearly fits into that genre. There is no significant ornamentation, no

traditional word painting, and the published version indicates no dynamics, harmony, or instrumentation. Flexibility in performance is a hallmark of both pop and folk music.

Nelson has worked in music throughout his adult life. Early on, he served as an organist at his home synagogue and also as a songleader at a Jewish summer camp. It was there that he first learned about Jewish folk worship music, when the camp director sent him a box of cassette tapes and told him to learn the music on them. Though he acknowledges that the music of artists like Debbie Friedman and Jeff Klepper was "ground-breaking," the music that influenced them was very different than what he listened to. As he explained, "It was just a different aesthetic [for Friedman and Klepper] . . . I'm as influenced by the Beatles as I am by Miles Davis as I am by Foo Fighters."[102]

It is important to note that Nelson always intended his setting to be used in worship. Nelson composed "*Yih'yu L'ratzon*" around 2001 while working as a worship leader for the Riverway Project,[103] a 20s and 30s program run by Temple Israel of Boston. He was deliberately trying to write in a style that would be accessible to the demographic that attended Riverway events. Nelson wanted the worship music at Riverway Project to reflect more of a contemporary pop style, though he acknowledges

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[102] *Ibid.*

[103] "Named after the location of Temple Israel of Boston, the Riverway Project is a bold, exciting initiative that connects adults in their 20's and 30's to each other, to Judaism and to Temple Israel of Boston. Through our study and ritual experiences, the Riverway Project creates opportunities for reflection and learning. Our goal is for participants to feel comfortable and connected as they explore their Jewish selves." From the Riverway Project's website: http://www.riverwayproject.org/about_us/index.php. Accessed December 12, 2010.

that other Jewish songwriters were still writing in a "folky-pop rock,"[104] which he saw merely as an updated version of the folk music popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Though the distinction is between the two categories is small, it is significant. Folk music most commonly had a square rhythm and emphasis on beats 1 and 3, where Nelson's music features more rock elements such as emphasis on beat 2 and 4 and syncopated rhythms. Nelson wanted his music to be as current as possible, which he says is a "reflection of the music that influenced me and [what] I thought would influence the demographic."[105]

Like Klepper's "*Shalom Rav*," Nelson's setting of "*Yih'yu L'ratzon*" uses the traditional Hebrew text, found in the liturgy at the end of the *Amidah*. Unlike most other contemporary settings of this text, Nelson chose an upbeat tempo and energetic rhythm. Usually considered a reflective text, most settings are slower, calmer, and more introverted.[106] Nelson heard something different in the text, which he described as "almost a cry out, a plea."[107] He wanted the rhythm and the "feel" of the piece to sound the way it would if he were saying the words, with an energy and volume that reflected "crying out."

More so than the composition itself, his recording of the piece reflects a new aural sensibility for worship music. Since the 1970s, Jewish folk and pop worship music

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[104] Nelson, interview.

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] See for example, Marshall Portnoy, "Meditation," *Shabbat Anthology Volume 3*, (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 2005), 77; Benjie Schiller, "May the Words," *Shabbat Anthology Volume 2*, (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 2004), 90; or Hollis Schachner, "*Yih'yu L'ratzon*," arranged by Rachelle Nelson, manuscript.

[107] Nelson, interview.

records were known for their low production quality, reflecting the small budget most Jewish folk musicians were working with. Even though the music effectively worked in worship, and was accepted into the Jewish folk worship music repertoire, the recording was rarely as high-quality as what was heard on the radio. Production costs were prohibitively expensive in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Jewish worship market has never been large enough to justify huge expenditures for recording albums.

In the last twenty years, however, affordable recording equipment and software has brought the ability to make quality recordings to the masses. As Nelson explains, "Everyone basically has the same tools at their disposable. GarageBand,[108] for better or for worse, is fully capable of making a great record."[109] Because recordings are easier and cheaper to make than ever before, one major barrier to high quality production has been overcome. That allows Jewish composers, both established and aspiring songwriters, to focus on crafting a song that can be accepted by a mainstream audience. Nelson's sensibility boils down to one simple idea: "I don't want to release anything that I wouldn't listen to."[110] When asked about his reaction to the idea that someone might listen to his music only on its merits as pop music, he simply replied, "Totally awesome."[111]

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[108] Garage Band is music recording and editing software sold by Apple, Inc., as part of its iLife software package. In 2010, iLife '11 retailed for $79.

[109] Nelson, interview.

[110] *Ibid.*

[111] *Ibid.*

As a composer of Jewish music, Nelson sees himself as one more link in the cantorial chain of tradition. He notes that Jewish composers have always written worship music in the popular styles of the day, though two hundred years later we now think of Salomon Sulzer's music, for example, as "traditional" and "classical" music. As Nelson puts it half-jokingly, "A lot of the music people think comes from [Mt.] Sinai[112] comes from German beer halls."[113] The 3-4 time signatures in Sulzer's now-famous settings of the traditional liturgy, for instance, reflect the waltzes popular in Vienna during his lifetime. Nelson sees no difference between Sulzer's appropriation of 19th Century popular music for worship and his own use of American pop music styles. In both cases, the ultimate goal was creating moving, meaningful worship music.

Josh Nelson's music hearkens back to the earliest days of folk worship music, when original pieces sounded like the music on the radio. That familiarity makes the music accessible to a contemporary audience and the simplicity of his melodies allows the congregation to immediately participate in the worship. Nelson builds on the tradition of the folk songwriters that came before him, focusing on production values in a way that was never possible in the early 1970s. His slick, high-quality recordings make his music

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[112] In Jewish music, there is a concept called *miSinai*, i.e., "from Mt. Sinai," referring to melodies used in traditional chant (*hazzanut*) and in folk melodies that were passed down as part of an oral tradition from before the Enlightenment. Though it is commonly understood that they were not literally "handed down on Mt. Sinai," they have attained a canonical status in Ashkenazi worship music. Nelson's comment conflates *miSinai* melodies with somewhat more modern melodies that were composed in the last two hundred years and have since become widespread in usage. (For example, Sulzer's setting of the "*Sh'ma*" is widely considered "the" melody for that text in non-Orthodox congregations.)

[113] Nelson, interview.

virtually indistinguishable from pop music on the radio, avoiding a potential barrier to acceptance by the savvy consumers of the latest generation.

From the Past to the Future

It is clear that each of these composers, Klepper and Freelander, Schiller and Nelson, saw themselves as writing something distinct from the repertoire that came before. Klepper and Freelander wanted worship music that was more engaging than the Classical Reform standards of the Twentieth Century. Schiller wanted to blend her formal music training with the sense of participatory worship one experiences with folk music. Nelson wanted to bring worship music into the new millennium and create songs that reflected the sound he heard on the radio. Though they each took their own approach to composition and style, they all see themselves as creating music that speaks directly to a modern congregation. Whether it be Hebrew or English, acoustic guitar or electric guitar, liturgical or non-liturgical, they are all responding to what they perceive are the needs and interests of contemporary Reform audiences.

Anything that creates a barrier between the music and the listener needs to be overcome. Similarly, a familiar musical idiom can draw in listeners more quickly than one with which they are unfamiliar. Folk and pop musical styles, by sounding like what people hear on the radio throughout their lives, avoid the need for an “interpreter” to explain what the music is trying to communicate. In addition, folk music allows congregants to engage more deeply in the Hebrew. The familiarity and simplicity of this repertoire encourages participation, even with the added challenge of Hebrew text. It is

clear that the desire for participatory music is still strong in Reform congregations, and that it will continue to adapt as it has throughout the last forty years. In Chapter 3, I will demonstrate how these three pieces reflect the trends that will transform Reform worship music for the next forty years.

“The Future”

Chapter 3

Having traced the history of folk music’s influence on Reform worship, and closely examined three exemplary musical pieces, it is easy to see that Reform worship music has adapted with the times. Though folk music from the early 1970s is still commonly heard in Reform synagogues, Reform composers have continued to push the boundaries of folk and pop music styles. The baby boom generation is beginning to leave their roles in synagogue leadership, making a place for the next generation of cantors, rabbis, and lay leaders to make their mark on Reform worship. It is each generation’s responsibility to craft a worship sound that helps connect each person to God, the Jewish community, and to the world. Though no one can know the music that has yet to be written, Reform Judaism’s strength has been in its ability to address the needs of contemporary worshippers.

Cantor Jeff Klepper’s music, and the era it represents, gave us the foundational principles of participatory worship for the modern era. Reacting to the formality, austerity, and distance of the Classical Reform worship model, the folk songwriters of the early 1970s introduced a very different sensibility. It was a reclamation of the right to participate fully in all aspects of worship, lost to Reform Jews in the era of music directors, organists, and professional choirs. Artists like Jeff Klepper and Debbie Friedman made guitar the instrument of choice for worship, and established folk music as

the best way to reach the latest generation of young Jews. Those young campers in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin and throughout the United States wanted worship music that reflected the music styles they knew and loved. They wanted a sound that reflected both their individual voices and the voice of their generation, rebelling against the authority of their elders. Now, having grown up with folk and pop worship music in synagogues throughout the last thirty years, young Jews are still most familiar with that repertoire. Clearly, songs like "*Shalom Rav*" put Reform worship music on a trajectory whose influence is still felt today.

Cantor Benjie Schiller's "*Lamdeini*" builds on the participatory folk music model while also pushing the boundaries. "*Lamdeini*" is participatory in parts, but allows a signficant role for the cantor. The soaring melody and complex rhythm require a trained voice and solid musicianship skills in a way that hearkens back to the sophistication of Classical Reform worship. But having learned the lessons of the 1970s, Schiller understands that the congregation's voice must be heard and that there should be a place for everyone's voice in worship. That is what makes "*Lamdeini*" such an exquisite piece; the congregation is taken to musical heights by the cantor in the first half, but is given the opportunity to bring their own voices later on in the piece. Schiller's training as a composer puts her squarely in the tradition of the great Classical Reform composers of the Twentieth Century, and she expertly blends musical sophistication with the sincere belief that everyone should be able to participate.

Jewish rock musician Josh Nelson strives to make his musical style as contemporary as possible. In many ways, Nelson brings worship music back to the world

of accessible and participatory worship of the 1970s, but instead of relying on a folk style that might seem dated to a modern music consumer, Nelson crafts a sound that could easily be heard on the radio today. Though he is quick to show respect to the groundbreaking work and timeless beauty of many of the greatest hits of the 1970s, he is not content to mimic someone else's style. Nelson, like Schiller, brings a new sophistication to pop worship music, though his innovation is not necessarily in compositional technique but in production quality. Recording technology has become so affordable in the last twenty years that, in his view, poor production quality has become an unforgivable barrier to accessibility. Nelson takes the immediacy and intimacy of 1970s folk worship music and updates it for the latest generation.

All three of these composers represent moments in time in the arc of pop and folk worship music. Folk and pop worship music remains a relevant, dynamic repertoire that Reform congregations want to hear in their synagogues. At the same time, contemporary music styles will continue to change and develop just as they have between Jeff Klepper and Josh Nelson. The challenge for cantors, and Reform worship in general, is to remain open to the changing needs and interests of Reform Jews.

One important trend that can already be seen is the desire for more traditional modes of worship. Research on independent *minyanim*,[114] which are predominantly

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[114] "*Minyanim*" are also called "emergent sacred communities." According to sociologist Steven M. Cohen, "Emergent communities see themselves as meeting needs not being met elsewhere, by providing experiences and activities that they believe to be unavailable in conventional congregations and other such settings. Many owe their origins and continuity to a single entrepreneurial individual (often a rabbi) or to a small hard-working core group of highly educated and motivated individuals." From Steven M. Cohen, et al., *Emergent Jewish Communities and their Participants: Preliminary Findings from the 2007 National Spiritual Communities Study*, Synagogue 3000, November 2007.

attended by Jews in their 20s and 30s, show that "[m]ost newer independent minyanim are significantly more emotive and traditional in their prayer experiences than are most non-Hasidic synagogues."[115] That same report notes, "People choose to engage with Judaism because they specifically want a millennia-old religion."[116] In terms of music, this might indicate that young Jews are also seeking musical traditions that connect them with the history of the Jewish people. As Jeffrey Summit explained, *hazzanut,* traditional Jewish chant, is seen by many Jews as " traditional Jewish music" and a symbol of "religious authenticity."[117] Pop and folk worship music suffers, occasionally, from a sense that it is too modern, that it does not reflect an "authentic" Jewish sound. Though *hazzanut* has only existed as a codified musical system for the past two hundred years or so, it is often perceived as being a connection to an ancient tradition. *Hazzanut* can act as a counterbalance to folk and pop worship music, giving cantors a chance to blend familiar, accessible melodies with a style of worship that feels authentically, ethnically Jewish.

In my Senior Recital, I will be demonstrating an approach to worship that blends folk and pop worship music with *hazzanut*. This approach takes the best aspects of accessible, intimate, participatory worship and the authentic, cantorial sounds of traditional chant and blends them together in the context of a specific worship text. In the *hazzanut* tradition for *Kabbalat Shabbat,* for example, the cantor would normally only

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[115] Ethan Tucker, "What Independent Minyanim Teach Us About the Next Generation of Jewish Communities," *Zeek* (Spring 2007), 41.

[116] *Ibid.*

[117] Summit, 105.

sing the first line of Psalm 95. In my approach, the cantor might chant the first line of the psalm, and then segue into a contemporary setting of "*L'chu N'ran'na*" for the entire congregation to sing. That allows the cantor to have a moment of solo worship leading, while allowing the congregation to participate meaningfully.

A more complex example can be seen in my treatment of Adolph Katchko's setting of "*Atah Nigleita*."[118] A recitative from the Rosh Hashanah liturgy, *Atah Nigleita* retells the story of God's dramatic revelation on Mt. Sinai, recounting the "clouds of glory," "flaming fire," and "peals of thunder and flashes of lightning."[119] One of my favorite cantorial recitatives, the idea of incorporating participatory elements into it presents an intriguing challenge. As *hazzanut*, this work would normally be presented *a capella*, but accompaniment could be added in order to modify the musical style into a more accessible format. The dramatic descriptions of the fire and thunder lend themselves to a rock band accompaniment, with some combination of electric guitar, electric bass, a drum set, and piano.

Although adding a rock band accompaniment addresses accessibility, there is as yet no opportunity for the congregation to join in the singing. Though it is possible to take a line from the song and repeat it as a refrain, there are no immediately obvious choices in the piece, and no sections with a easily appropriated melody. If there is nothing suitable as a refrain within the text, then we must look for one outside of the text.

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[118] Adolph Katchko, *Thesaurus of Cantorial Liturgy, Vol. 3* (New York: Sacred Music Press), 95.

[119] Rabbi Sidney Greenberg and Rabbi Jonathan D. Levine, *Machzor Hadash* (Bridgeport, CT: Prayer Book Press, 1998), 276.

Immediately following *Atah Nigleita* in the High Holy Day prayerbook is Psalm 150. Found also in both the daily and Sabbath morning liturgy, numerous settings have been written for the text of Psalm 150. Commonly, settings of Psalm 150 use either the first word of the psalm, "*halleluyah*,"[120] or the last line, "*kol han'shamah t'halleil yah*"[121] for a refrain. A refrain using one of those two excerpts could be repeated throughout "*Atah Nigleita*," building up to the singing of the full setting at the conclusion of the recitative. Adding a refrain in that manner would both make the piece more participatory and make what is normally a solo moment into a more cohesive part of the *Shofarot* service.

Through these two changes in the presentation of *Atah Nigleita*, i.e., adding a rock band accompaniment and inserting a refrain, a solo cantorial recitative takes on a whole new form. It blends the best elements of *hazzanut* and folk worship music, allowing the cantor to use his or her musical expertise on a significant, sophisticated solo piece, while also giving the congregation a chance to respond and participate in the Rosh Hashanah service. Like Klepper's music, it allows everyone to participate; like Schiller's it creates a space for cantorial sophistication; and like Nelson's it has a contemporary musical style that is accessible to a modern audience.

This is only one approach to innovation in Reform worship music. In the words of Jeff Klepper:

> Cantors and musicians (and kids) will bring the best of [worship music] into the synagogue and they will experiment, keeping what works, discarding what

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[120] "Praise God."

[121] "Let all that breathes praise God."

> doesn't, and synthesizing from the materials at hand a fresh and innovative sound that will someday become traditional.[122]

There are many different musical styles in use in Reform synagogues today, based in traditions from around the world. *Hazzanut* is not the only answer to folk music's modernity, but it serves as an excellent contrast, broadening the musical outlines of Reform worship. The future of our movement's worship music might just be a blend of old and new, familiar and ancient, connecting us to the past while always looking forward to the future.

[122] Klepper, interview by author.

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