

Survey of Jewish Music

Religious Music

Music has always been an important part of Jewish religious expression. Music was a way for people in oral tradition to learn to recite essential prayers.

During the times of the First Temple in Jerusalem, musical instruments were played in worship.

In the Post-destruction of the Second Temple period, rabbis forbid the use of instruments in prayer. It was a time of mourning and worship was evolving into a different style from what was practiced in the Temple.

Jewish religious music came to include:

- Cantorial Music: the music of the professional prayer leader;
- Nusah-- the melodies to which traditional prayers are chanted, with different tunes used for different services. Nusah are melodic formulas; Nusah identifies Shabbat, days/week, High Holy Days Cantillation, which is the notes for chanting public readings of the Torah, *haftarah* (selections from Prophets), and other Jewish sacred texts, such as the Scroll of Ecclesiastes on the festival Sukkot;
- *Nigunim*, which are wordless melodies. Nigunim are an important part of Hasidic worship and religious expression and have become part of contemporary non-Orthodox religious expression in the last twenty-thirty years, especially because of the influence of Shlomo Carlbach.

Different Jewish communities throughout history have produced their own distinctive forms of these different Jewish religious expressions.

Over the last couple of hundred years, religious music has changed in many ways, including:

- The Reform Movement in Germany introduces the organ into the synagogue and Reform worship evolves to include choirs who sing part of the liturgy.
- Folk-influenced guitar from the Jewish camping movement in America has become part of Jewish worship in many Reform, Reconstructionist and even Conservative synagogues. One of the most influential Jewish liturgical composers of the last thirty years is the late Debbie Friedman.

Klezmer Music

When many people hear the term “Jewish music,” they think of Klezmer.

Klezmer is a tradition that started in Eastern Europe; klezmer music was played by professional musicians for occasions like weddings.

Klezmer is easily identifiable by its characteristic expressive melodies, reminiscent of the human voice, complete with laughing and weeping.

Klezmer is essentially a kind of folk music. When Klezmer musicians came to the United States during the period of immigration from the 1880s - 1920s, they integrated klezmer music with American jazz.

In the 1970s, a revival of Klezmer music started in the United States and contemporary musicians like the band the Klezmatics have been credited with making Klezmer popular again with Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.

Israeli Music

Israel has created a rich tradition of folk, classical and pop music, influenced by its waves of immigrants from different countries.

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Music played an important role in spread of Zionism in 19th and 20th centuries as songs were written to express common themes and values for this new country.

Composers and musicians integrated the sounds of Europe with the sounds of Middle Eastern music.

The invention of radio then TV helped to spread Israeli folk music through the country.

In contemporary Israel, there is a vibrant music scene including hip hop, alternative rock/pop and classical music.