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FROM THE EDITOR

THE MANY FACES OF YIDDISH SONG

NUTS AND BOLTS

MAIL BOX

REVIEWS

Contrafaction

By Joshua R. Jacobson

Four hundred years ago Samuel Archivolti, a rabbi in Padua, Italy, wrote about the synagogue music of his day:

> There are two categories of song. The first category is a melody which is composed to fit the words in consideration of their ideas. For by melodic changes we are able to distinguish between pause and continuation, a fast tempo and a slow one, between joy and sadness, astonishment and fear, and so forth. And this is the most excellent type of melody in music, for not only does it consider the ear's pleasure, but it also strives to give spirit and soul to the words that are sung. This type of song was used by the Levites [in the *Beit hamikdash*], for it is the only way they could have arranged their music, and it is the proper type to be written for songs in our sacred language.
>
> The second type [of song] is the vulgar sort of tune in which the words [must] fit [the music], and its only concern is for the ear's pleasure. So a single popular melody may be applied to many songs whose subjects are as distant from one another as the West is from the East, so long as they are all written in the same meter and rhyme scheme.[1]

One doesn't have to read between the lines to understand that Archivolti prefers the first category to the second. In fact, Archivolti's classification is nearly identical to that of Italian secular vocal music from the same period. Madrigal composers in Italy were divided into two camps: those who composed in the "first style" and those who composed in the more modern "second style."[2] In 1607 Giulio Cesare Monteverdi wrote in defense of his famous composer brother, Claudio Monteverdi, "The first style… is the one that considers the music [or "the harmony"]… the master[3] of the words… The second style… makes the words the master of the music."[4] The author is saying that composers of the first style accommodated the lyrics to the music, whereas

1 Samuel Archivolti (1515-1611), *Arugat ha-bosem* (Venice, 1602), in *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music in manuscripts and Printed Books from Geonic Times up to 1800,* ed. Israel Adler, (Munich: G. Henle Verlag), 1975: 100. Translations in this article are by the present author.

2 In Italian, *prima prattica* and *seconda prattica.*

3 Literally "mistress," but given the other connotations of the word "mistress," and given the relative paucity of gendered nouns in English, compared to Italian, I think "master" is a better translation.

4 Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History: The Baroque Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 48-49.

composers of the second style made the music fit the lyrics. The second style gave birth to the "recitative," in which the accompaniment took a back seat to the free declamation of the words in their natural rhythms.

In the context of the synagogue, Archivolti's first category refers to the cantillation of the Torah, *haftarot* and *megillot*, as well as traditional nusah davening. As is the case with operatic recitative, a flexible melody fits the flexible rhythm of the text, which is primary. Music makes the text more meaningful.

Archivolti's second category seems to refer to metered tunes that are sung in unison by the congregation. The focus is on the pleasure of singing rather than on the meaning or mood of the text. Whether in the seventeenth or the twenty-first century, congregants love to sing tunes. I am using "tunes" in the sense of songs that have a strong rhythmic pulse, a limited range, a strong tonal (or modal) center, predominantly stepwise motion and syllabic text allocation (i.e. generally no more than one or two pitches per syllable). Tunes must also be simple and easy to learn, characterized by repetition and recurrence of melodic and textual segments. Tunes expanded into extended songs will be strophic in form, and will usually have a refrain (in which lyrics and music recur after each verse). Fondness for this kind of singing seems to be universal. In fact, some anthropologists have speculated that music may have originated as a means of achieving tribal unity—bringing people together and binding them through communal singing.[5]

The texts that are best suited for such treatment will themselves have regular meter and strophic form. In other words, each line has the same number of syllables in a consistent alternation of weak and strong accents, and each verse has the same number of lines.[6] Among the liturgical hymns that best fit this description are *L'kha dodi*, *Adon olam*, *Eil adon*, and *Yigdal*. But even texts such as *V'-Sham'ru,* with its irregular meter and non-strophic structure, have been set to tunes. And in many cases the text has been altered to suit the tune: the wrong syllable is forced to receive metric stress, words are repeated to accommodate the length of the musical phrase, the text is broken in nonsensical phrasing, and one line of text will recur artificially in order to create a refrain. This is exactly what Archivolti was describing—"the vulgar sort of tune in which the words [must] fit [the music]."

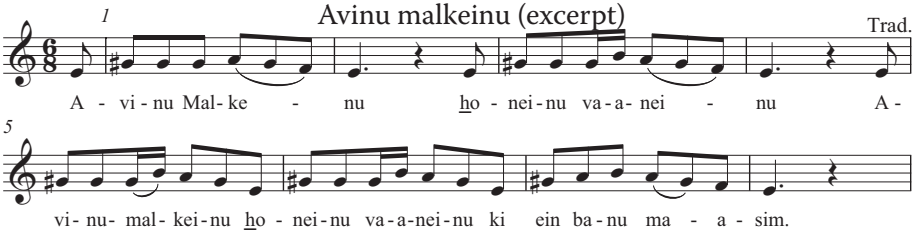
5 Oliver Sachs, *Musicophilia* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 244.

6 Most English poems are qualitative in meter—having a pattern of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. The meter of classical Hebrew poetry is generally quantitative—having a pattern of alternating long and short syllables.

One can further differentiate synagogue tunes into two categories: (1) melodies that have been composed specifically for a liturgical text, and (2) pre-existing melodies that have been adapted for use with various prayers.

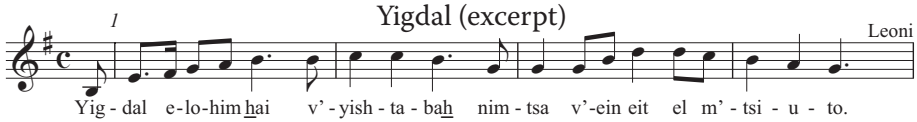
For the most part congregants don't know and don't care who composed the tunes they sing. Some tunes, such as *Avinu malkeinu* (**Example 1.**), are "traditional," that is, they are relatively old, and no one knows who composed them.

Example 1.

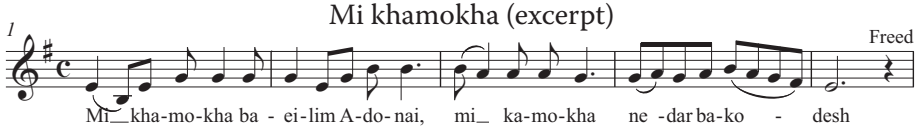


In other cases, while professional musicians may know who composed the tunes, the typical congregant is unaware of their provenance. Included in this list would be Meyer Leon's[7] *Yigdal* (**Example 2.**), Isadore Freed's *Mi khamokha* (**Example 3.**), Julius Freudenthal's *Ein keiloheinu* (**Example 4.**), Israel Goldfarb's *V'hayah Adonai* (**Example 5.**), Jeff Klepper's *Shalom rav* (**Example 6.**), Sol Zim's *L'dor va-dor* (**Example 7.**), Nurit Hirsch's *Oseh shalom* (**Example 8.),** Tanhum Portnoy's *Eits hayyim hi* (**Example 9.),** Moshe Rothblum's *V'sham'ru* (**Example 10.),** and Max Wolhberg's *M'khalkeil hayyim* (**Example 11.),** to cite but a few. Some songwriters however are so popular that their names are associated (at least for now) with their tunes. One speaks, for example, of Debbie Friedman's *Mi she-beirakh* and Debbie Friedman's *Havdalah*.

Example 2.



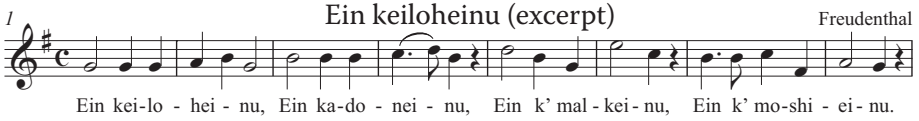
Example 3.



7 A.k.a. Michael Leoni (London, 1751–Jamaica, 1797)

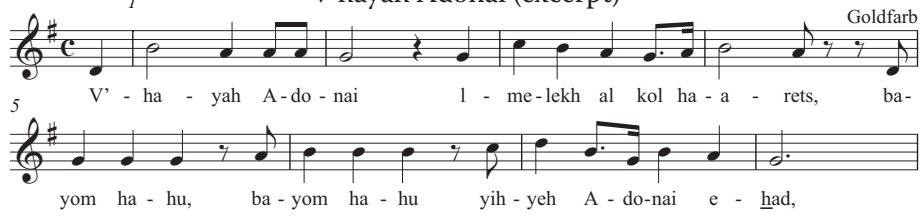
Example 4.

Ein keiloheinu (excerpt)



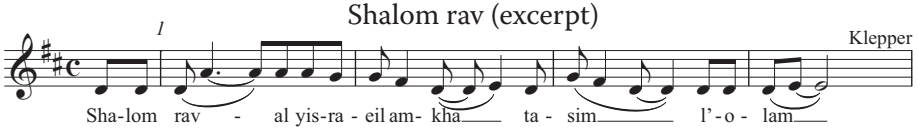
Example 5.

V'hayah Adonai (excerpt)



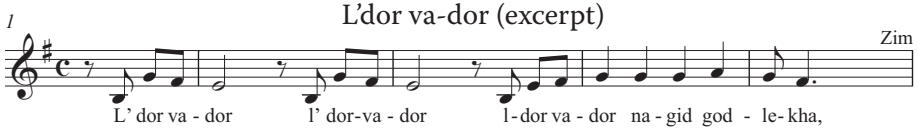
Example 6.

Shalom rav (excerpt)



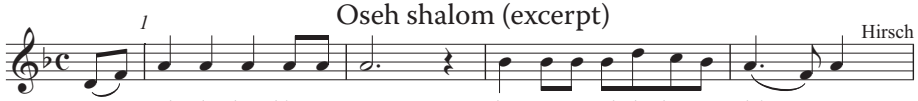
Example 7.

L'dor va-dor (excerpt)



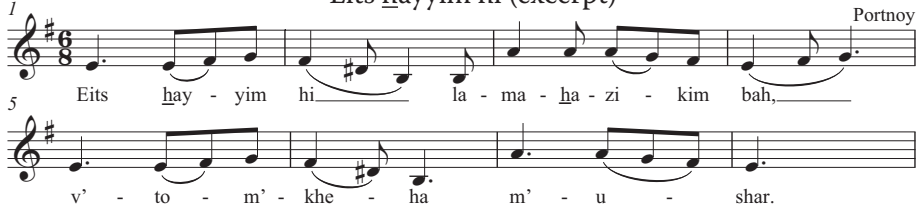
Example 8.

Oseh shalom (excerpt)

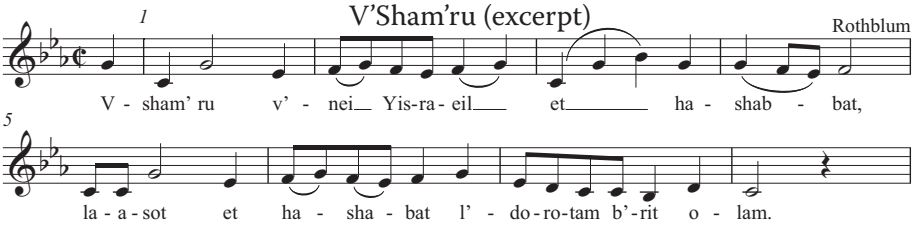


Example 9.

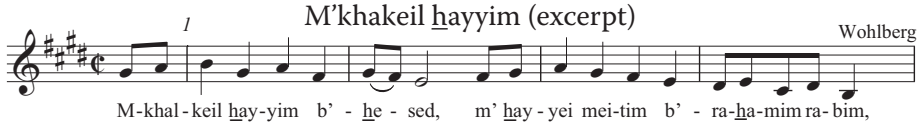
Eits hayyim hi (excerpt)



Example 10.



Example 11.



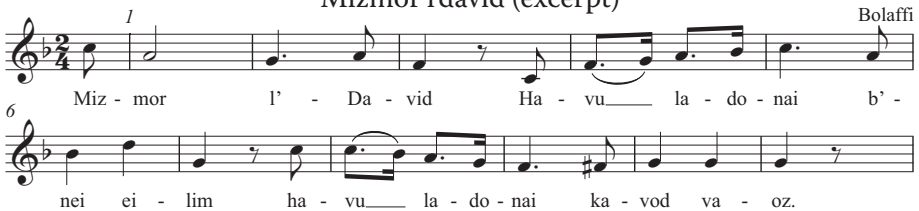
Many of our popular melodies were originally composed for choral performance. The "Sephardic" *Mizmor l'-david* (**Example 12.)** was composed by Michele Bolaffi (1768-1842) in Livorno, Italy in 1826. Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890), the great Viennese hazzan, composed *Ki mi-tsiyon* (**Example13.**) for his renowned choir at the Seitenstettengasse synagogue.[8] And Louis Lewandowksi (1821-1894), who served as chief choirmaster of Berlin in the second half of the nineteenth century, created *Tsaddik ka-tamar yifrah* (**Example 14.).** The "traditional" *Adon olam* (**Example 15.**) was composed by the Russian hazzan, Eliezer Gerowitsch (1844-1914) around the same time.[9] Gershon Ephros (1890-1978) wrote the melody often heard for the Torah service, *L'-Kkha Adonai ha-g'dulah* (**Example16.**). Due to their popularity, these choral compositions were spontaneously adopted by their congregations, transformed into monophonic tunes (based on the soprano part), and then passed through oral tradition to synagogues around the world.

8 Congregations apparently enjoyed singing Sulzer's *Ki Mi-tsiyon* melody so much that they applied it to the subsequent texts of the Torah service, *Barukh shenatan torah* and *Shema yisra'eil*.

9 L. Gerowitsch, *Schirej Simroh: Erster Theil* (n.d., n.p.). *Adon Olom* (p. 28) is marked A.W. (Alte Weise), suggesting that the tune may have already been traditional in Gerowitsch's time. Gerowitsch's setting is not strophic; the familiar tune is found only for the first verse.

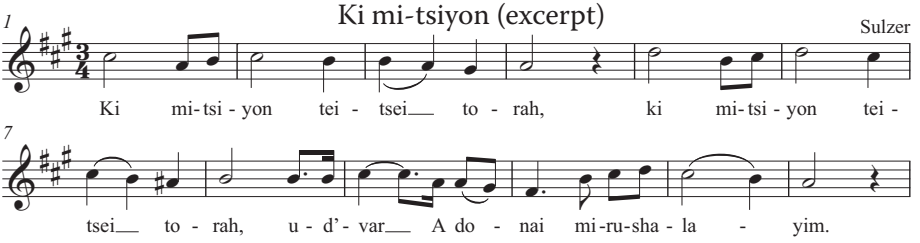
Example 12.

Mizmor l'david (excerpt)



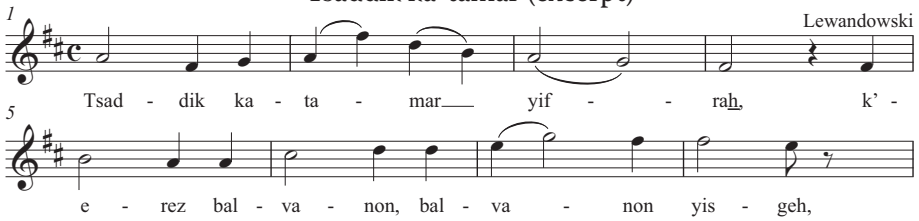
Example 13.

Ki mi-tsiyon (excerpt)



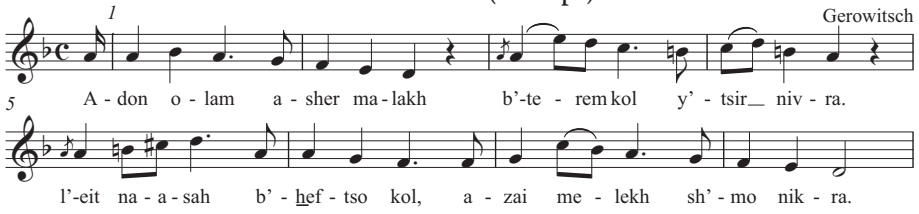
Example 14.

Tsaddik ka-tamar (excerpt)



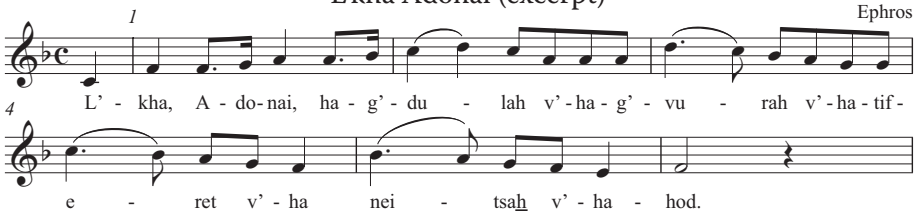
Example 15.

Adon olam (excerpt)



Example 16.

L'kha Adonai (excerpt)



Lewandowski wrote in his memoirs:

> With the introduction of choral music, congregations were prevented *a priori* from direct participation in the services, because of the artistic nature of choral singing. Congregations were now condemned to silence, whereas they had previously been accustomed to shouting. After a short while, out of a desire for equal participation, congregations adopted the melody, or soprano line, singing together with the choir in two, three and four octaves. The other voices [of the choir] were thus overwhelmed [by the congregation], and the artistic form was entirely destroyed.[10]

Now, these are all cases where someone set out to create a melody to fit a specific text. Presumably, if the composer knows and cares about Hebrew vocabulary and grammar, the melody will match the mood and the meter of the words.

But frequently someone is inspired to adapt a tune from one context and apply it to another. Musicologists have a term for this process of retrofitting—"contrafaction." Some listeners, unaware of the original source, will associate the tune only with its new context. For example, in 1814 Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics to "The Star Spangled Banner," intending it to be sung to the tune of "The Anacreontic Song," a popular British drinking song written by John Stafford Smith. And in 1882, Samuel Cohen, a resident of Rishon Letsiyon, suggested that Naftali Herz Imber's poem, "Hatikvah" (or "Tikvateinu") be sung to the tune of "Carul cu boi," a farmer's song he remembered from his native Moldavia.[11]

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10 Louis Lewandowski, *Kol Rinnah U'T'fillah* (Berlin, 1871), in Geoffrey Goldberg, "Neglected Sources for the Historical Study of Synagogue Music: the Prefaces to Louis Lewandowski's *Kol Rinnah U'T'fillah and Todah W'Simrah* — Annotated Translations" *Musica Judaica* XI (1989-1990): 41.

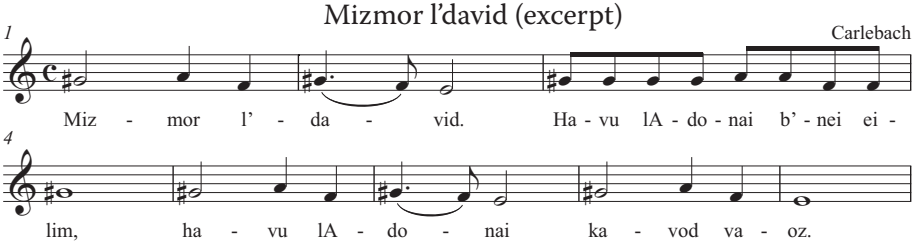
11 When congregations sing "*va-havi'einu l'-tsiyon ir'kha*" to the tune of "Hatikvah," they are actually singing it to the tune of "Carul cu boi," creating a double contrafaction.

The obvious advantage of contrafaction is that the tune is already well known. Some *piyyutim* (liturgical hymns) share a similar poetic meter and are thus ripe for melodic promiscuity. One often hears the same melody transferred from *Eil adon* to *An'im z'mirot* to *Adon olam* and beyond. And this is not a phenomenon that is new and unique to our generation. Recall Archivolti's observation about congregational singing in sixteenth-century Italy: "A single popular melody may be applied to many songs whose subjects are as distant from one another as the West is from the East, so long as they are all written in the same meter and rhyme scheme."[12]

One of the greatest Jewish songwriters of the twentieth century, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (1925-1994), sometimes would compose a melody before he had any lyrics in mind. His well-known melody for *Mizmor l'-david* (the final Psalm before *L'kha dodi*) (**Example 17.**) was composed in the summer of 1974. "Shabbos morning before davening I made up this niggun 'Mizmor l'dovid.' It didn't have words yet… Before it was set to the words 'Mizmor l'dovid' I used to sing it to the words 'Shabbat Shalom U-m'vorakh,' Good Shabbos."[13] And he would also not hesitate to retrofit one of his own melodies with a new set of lyrics. In 1977 Carlebach composed a lively melody for the text, *Ki va o'eid* (found in the Sephardic rite at the end of *Ein keiloheinu*) (**Example 18.**). But soon thereafter he began to use the same melody for singing the second Psalm of Kabbalat Shabbat, *Shiru ladonai shir hadash* (**Example 19.**).[14] A true Carlebach Hasid is not bothered by the fact that the versification of Psalm 96 becomes compromised in order to keep the tune going.

Example 17.

Mizmor l'david (excerpt)



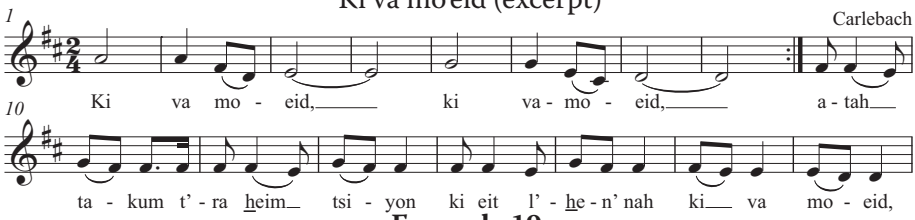
12 Archivolti, 100.

13 Ben Zion Solomon, ed., *Shlomo Shabbos: The Shlomo Carlebach Shabbos Songbook* (Meor Mod'im: Kehilat Jacob Publications, 1993), 15.

14 Solomon, 9.

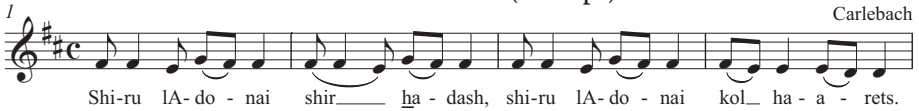
Example 18.

Ki va mo'eid (excerpt)



Example 19.

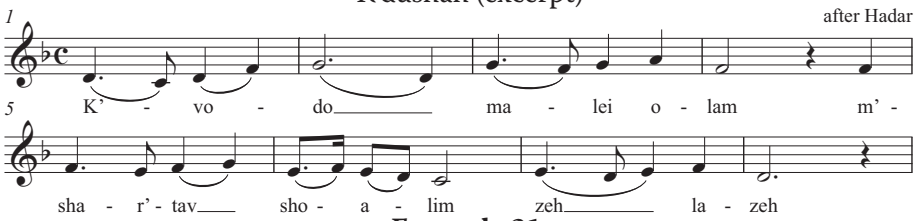
Shiru ladonai (excerpt)



Liturgical texts that are intended to be chanted by the congregation are ripe for contrafaction, even those that do not have a regular metric structure. In some synagogues the Shabbat Musaf *K'dushah* has become the ultimate Jewish karaoke. *K'vodo malei olam* (**Example 20.**) is sung to the tune of Yosef Hadar's love song, *Erev shel shoshanim* (**Example 21.**), and *V'-eineinu tir'enah malkhutekha* (**Example 22.**), to the tune of Rabbi Israel Goldfarb's *Shalom aleykhem* (**Example 23.**) or to the tune of Naomi Shemer's *Yerushalayim shel zahav* (**Example 24.**), to cite but a few practices.[15]

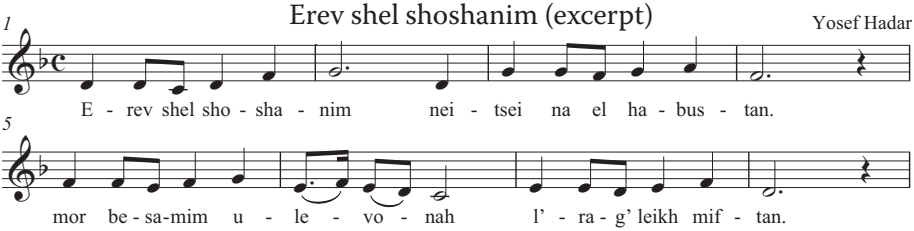
Shabbat Musaf Example 20.

K'dushah (excerpt)



Example 21.

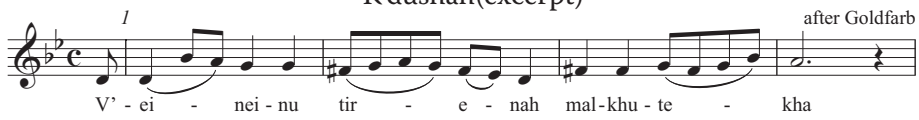
Erev shel shoshanim (excerpt)



15 Shemer's song itself is said to have been based on a Basque lullaby, "Pello Joxepe" composed by Juan Francisco Petrarena (1835-1869).

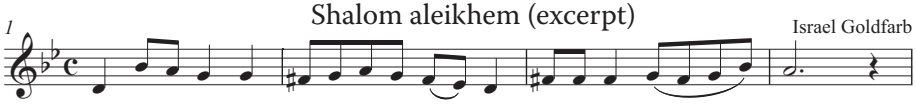
Example 22.

K'dushah(excerpt)



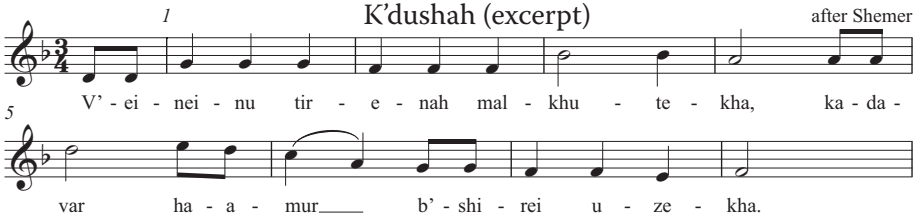
Example 23.

Shalom aleikhem (excerpt)



Shabbat Shaharit Example 24.

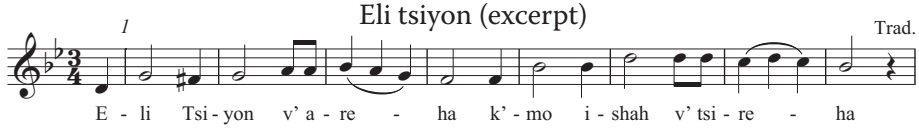
K'dushah (excerpt)



Sometimes congregational melodies are deliberately and effectively used as seasonal leitmotifs. For example, the Ashkenazic melody for the Tish'a B'Av kinah, *Eli tsiyon* (**Example 25.**), becomes the melody for *L'-Khah dodi* (**Example 26.**) on the Shabbat preceding the fast. On the Friday night of Hanukkah we try to fit the melody for *Ma'oz tsur* (**Example 27.**) to *Mi khamokha* (**Example 28.**).

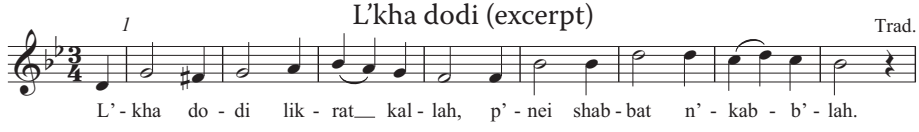
Example 25.

Eli tsiyon (excerpt)

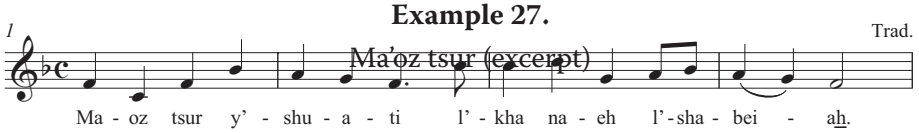


Example 26.

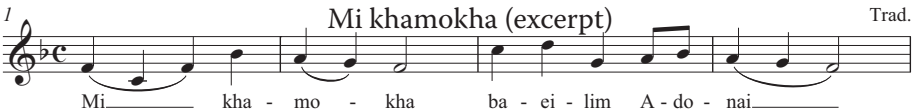
L'kha dodi (excerpt)



Example 27.



Example 28.



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That brings us to the subject of alien contrafaction: adopting non-Jewish melodies into the synagogue. Jews have been singing sacred texts to borrowed melodies for many centuries. The superscriptions of many of the Psalms most likely indicate the melody to which it would have been sung in ancient Israel. The heading of Psalm 45, for example, *la-m'natsei-ah al shoshanim,* has been interpreted as an indication to the music director (*ha-m'natsei'ah*) that the following Psalm should be sung to the melody of a song known as "*shoshanim*."

The *Ma'oz tsur* melody that we cited above is based on an old German love-song, *So weiss ich eins, das mich erfreut.* But for most Jews that origin is hidden and irrelevant. Indeed, many of the Ashkenazic piyyutim appear to be based on non-Jewish melodies, secular and sacred. In his book, *A Voice Still Heard*, Eric Werner asserts that there are "at least seventy-five instances of this process from the sixteenth and early seventeenth century."[16] Other alien contrafactions are more recognizable to the congregation. *Adon olam* has probably been the worst victim of indiscriminate contrafaction. I have had to endure hearing that majestic hymn sung to the tune of "Yankee Doodle Went to Town," "Take Me out to the Ball Game" and even "Silent Night." I suspect that the readers of this journal have their own horror stories, as well.

What is the traditional Jewish opinion on bringing gentile melodies into the synagogue? Some rabbis objected on theological grounds: one should not bring into the synagogue something that was used for worship in another religion. Other rabbis objected on a different basis. They pointed out that

16 Eric Werner, *A Voice Still Heard: The Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 94.

while singing contrafactions we might remember the original lyrics of these songs.

Rabbi Yehudah He-Ḥasid (c. 1150 - 1217) wrote, "In the case of a hymn composed by a priest for worship in a non-Jewish service, even if a Jew considers it to be a beautiful form of praise, he should not chant it to God in Hebrew."[17]

Rabbi Yehudah Al-Ḥarizi (c. 1170-1235) wrote of his visit to a Baghdad synagogue in 1220: "The cantors don't understand the words, and the people have no idea what they are saying. And instead of the holy (*k'doshim*) songs of [King] David, they sing the songs of prostitutes (*k'deishim*)."[18]

In the *Shulḥan arukh*, Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488-1575) wrote, "If a *sh'liaḥ tsibbur* sings using gentile melodies, you should protest that he should not do such a thing. And if he doesn't listen, you should remove him."[19]

The Italian Rabbi Samuel ben Elḥanan Archivolti (1515-1611) wrote, "What can we say? How can we justify the actions of a few *hazzanim* of our day, who chant the holy prayers to the tunes of popular secular songs? While reading sacred texts they are thinking of obscenities and lewd things."[20]

In 1605 Rabbi Ben Zion Sarfati (d. 1610) wrote that in his youth in the synagogue of Padua, Italy, his choir "used to sing the whole order of *K'dushah* at the request of [Rabbi Meir]. Certainly it was not worse, indeed better than the those who raised their voices against us,[21] singing [the *K'dushah* to the tunes of] the vulgar songs that are sung outdoors in the streets."[22]

In his *Shirei y'hudah* published in Amsterdam in 1696, Rabbi Y'hudah Leib Zelichower (d. 1709) wrote,

> But now, in this generation… they know not, they do not understand, they walk in darkness, they abandon the ancient melodies and toss them behind their backs, they laugh and make fun of them saying, "that's old stuff, and we get no pleasure from them," and they fabricate new melodies to take their place, either [melodies] of their own, or they borrow them

17 Yehudah He-ḥasid, *Sefer ḥasidim,* §428.

18 Y'hudah Al-Ḥarizi, *Taḥkemuni* (Tel Aviv: *Maḥbarot l'sifrut*, 1952), 226, in Amnon Shiloah, *Ha-moreshet ha-musikalit shel k'hilot yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Everyman's University, 1986), 12.

19 Joseph Caro, *Shulḥan arukh, oraḥ ḥayyim*, 53/25.

20 Archivolti, 101.

21 Sarfati compounds his condemnation by quoting Jeremiah 12:8 "My own people [or "heritage"] acted toward Me like a lion in the forest. She raised her voice against Me; therefore I have rejected her."

22 Modena, preface to *Ha-shirim asher lishlomo* by Salamone Rossi (Venice, 1622).

> from their theaters and bring them into God's Temple, and they sound like the melodies that go with mixed dancing. And there are even some of them who learn melodies from the uncircumcised… and sing them in our synagogues. Have you ever heard of such evil? Could God desire this kind of song and music?[23]

In an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Tokheḥah m'gulah* (*Open Demands*), written in Styria (now Austria) in the seventeenth century, we find several complaints lodged against *hazzanim*, including, "If you become used to foreign melodies, you will manage to destroy the proper *kavvanah*. And the listeners are focused on the melodies to such an extent that even Torah scholars haven't a clue how to concentrate and achieve *kavvanah*. What happens is that people become used to going to the synagogue [merely] to listen to pleasant singing."[24]

Moshe Vital, a well-known Sephardic cantor in Jerusalem in the early twentieth century wrote, "For artistic and theological reasons a Sephardic cantor is forbidden to introduce secular songs into the synagogue… Sometimes one of our cantors works also as a secular singer who entertains others with secular songs, and it is quite common to hear from his mouth the melody of a love song merged with sections of prayers, such as a *Kaddish* or a *K'dushah*… But he should allow himself to do this only if the melody is not recognizable to the congregation."[25]

Yet not all opinions have been against contrafaction. Some rabbis entertained a more positive view. Some expressed the hope that using melodies that people already knew and loved would encourage greater participation in the worship service. Others subscribed to the Kabbalistic idea that there is a spark of holiness in even the most degraded objects, and that it is a great mitzvah to rescue these sparks and redeem them into the service of the Holy One.

In the sixteenth century, Rabbi Israel Najara (c. 1555–c. 1625) wrote Hebrew sacred lyrics to be sung to melodies of then-popular Arab and Turkish songs. His intention was to distract young people from the secular world, allowing them to sing their favorite tunes, but with new, uplifting lyrics. "The

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23 Y'hudah Leib Zelichower, *Shirei y'hudah* (Amsterdam, 1697), 26B, in Israel Adler, *La pratique musicale savante dans quelques communautés juives en Europe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1966), 249-250.

24 Anon. *Tokheḥa M'gulah*, 29B, in R. Hanokh Henikh. *Reishit Bikkurim* (Frankfurt am Main, 1707-8), in Adler, *Hebrew Writings,* 247.

25 Amnon Shiloah, *Ha-moreshet ha-musikalit shel k'hillot Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Everyman's University, 1986), 13-14.

mouths of liars and the singing of sensual songs will be blocked, and they will no longer think about love songs when they see [my] songs."[26] His collection, *Z'mirot yisrael* was published in 1587 in Safed and subsequently reprinted in an expanded edition in Venice in 1599. In the introduction, Najjara wrote that his *piyyutim* are all "based on the characteristics of Arab melodies and other songs."[27] Of the 346 songs in this collection, 150 are based on Turkish songs, 60 on Arab songs, 30 on Spanish (Sephardic) songs, and a few others on Greek songs. Furthermore, Najara created a superscription for each *piyyut*, which included the word *laḥan* ("to the tune of") and then the title or incipit of a well-known non-Jewish popular song. For example, "*laḥan Istanbuldan çektim* Turkish."

But Najara was not clumsily superimposing a foreign melody on an inhospitable text. Najara was creating new lyrics, modeled after the very structure of the song he was imitating, thus ensuring a perfect fit of music to lyrics. In some cases he borrowed and transformed the content of the original song. The Ladino song "Arvolera," in which a forlorn wife is faithfully awaiting the return of her missing husband Amadi, becomes a *piyyut* in which the Jewish people faithfully await their redeemer. In other cases Najara consciously created a phonological link from the parody to the original. His *piyyut "Anna Eil, shomrah nafshi"* is based on an Arab song, "*Ana al-samra wa-sammuni sumayra*." Najara's songs were deliberately demotic, rejecting the learned esoteric style of earlier *payy'tanim* such as Eleazar ben Kallir. His songs were not limited to liturgical use, but could be sung on many occasions. Their content was often nationalistic, emphasizing the intimate relation between the Jewish people and their God, often using metaphors of the love of a man for a woman. The refreshing poetic style quickly caught on among the people of Safed and were transmitted far and wide by the many seekers who made pilgrimages to this center of spirituality. In all, Najara composed some 800 paraliturgical songs, many of which are still popular in the Sephardic world. The only song of his that is widely recognized among Ashkenazim today is the Shabbat table song, *Yah ribbon alam*.[28]

While Najara's songs enjoyed tremendous popularity, even among such prominent rabbis as Isaac Luria, not everyone endorsed his methods. Rabbi Menaḥem di Lonzano (1572-1619) denigrated Najara's work. Was it because

26 Abraham Z. Idelsohn, "Yisrael najara v'-shirato," *Hashiloah* 37 (Nisan-Elul, 1920), 25-36 and 122-135.

27 Hanokh Avenari, "Ha-shir ha-nokhri k'-makor hashra'ah l'-yisrael najara," in *The Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1965), 283.

28 Idelsohn, "Yisrael najara v'shirato," 25-36 and 122-135.

Lonzano's own *piyyutim* never achieved the same level of popularity as those of his rival?

> I have noticed that a few scholars are complaining [and saying] evil [things] about the composers of songs praising God using non-Jewish melodies. But they are wrong; there is no [problem] in this. But what are truly despicable are some [sacred] songs that start with [Hebrew] words that resemble the words of the non-Jewish [song]… [Najjara] thinks he did something great, but he has no idea that a song like this is an abomination, it is not acceptable. Because the person who sings it will be thinking about the [original] lyrics about an adulterer and an adulteress; his emotions and thoughts will be with them. That's what happens when people sing *shem nora* [God's mighty name] instead of señora, etc.[29]

Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews, in particular Syrians, continue the practice of contrafaction in their *pizmonim*.[30] The Syrian *payy'tan* Raphael Isaac Antibi (?-?) defended this practice, citing the Kabbalistic interpretation.

> A melody is a holy spark. When you play love songs the spark is hidden in its shell. Therefore in every new melody that the gentiles compose you must establish words from the scribes, words of holiness, in order to extract the spark from the "other side" [i.e. Satan] to the side of holiness. And this is an obligation no less than preventing sinners from sinning, causing many people to turn from sin, to extract that which is precious from that which is evil, to choose the sparks of holiness.[31]

Rabbi Israel Moshe Hazzan (1808-1862), who served in Jerusalem's High Religious Court, defended the practice of borrowing a beautiful melody that had been used in non-Jewish worship.

> And I testify by heaven and earth that when I was in Smyrna, the great city of scholars and mystics, I saw some of the outstanding religious authorities who were also great creators of the science of music, headed by the wonderful Rabbi Abraham Ha-Kohein Ariash of blessed memory, who secretly used to go (behind the screen) of the Christian church on their holy days to learn the special melodies from them and to adapt them to the High Holiday prayers which require great humility. And from those same melodies they would arrange the most remarkable blessings and holy prayers, and it is clear from this that the tune is not of the essence, but the sacred words.[32]

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29 Menahem di Lonzano, *Shtei Yadot* (Venice, 1617-18), 142A, in Adler, *Hebrew Writings,* 244.

30 Kay Shelemay *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance among Syrian Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

31 Raphael Isaac Entebbe, *Shirah hadashah* (Jerusalem, 1885), preface, in Idelsohn, "Yisrael najara v'shirato," 134.

32 Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne State University

Jacob S. Kassin (1900-1994), Chief Rabbi of the Syrian Community of New York, echoed this sentiment.

> [Borrowing melodies and providing them with new, sacred Hebrew texts is done for a] good reason, a reason of fundamental importance, and it is correct that it is said about it "that it is good." This is so because the melody is a holy spark. Because when one plays sensual love songs, the spark is submerged in the *k'lippot* [waste coverings]. It is for this reason that it is necessary to establish a foundation of holy words—drawn from the mouths of scholars and from the mouths of books—for any tune with a non-Jewish source, in order to lead the spark from the realm of evil to the realm of holiness. This is an obligation in the same way that it is an obligation to draw sinners to good, to turn away from iniquity, and to bring out the precious from the vile. It is an obligation to make clear the holy sparks. So it is with holy songs. The holy sparks bring light to the just.[33]

In 1976 Rabbi Ovadyah Yosef (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) wrote, "I have been asked if it is permissible for the cantor to graft the melody of a secular love song on to the blessings or other prayers… or whether a distinction must be made between the holy and the profane." His response was that removing the melody from its original context is likened to the performance of a good deed: "… it is a mitzvah to do so, and implies sanctification of God's name in that something has been transferred from the realm of the profane to the realm of the sacred."[34]

But Yosef then qualifies his *hekhsher*, indicating that the transformation will be successful only if the cantor "chooses the songs… out of the purest motives, to praise and sing to the Lord, blessed be He," and only if the adaptation is sensitive to the prosody of the Jewish text. He condemns the cantors who "contort the meaning of a verse, put the accent on the ultimate syllable, where it should be on the penultimate, and vice versa. These are boorish inversions, the way fools sing; they transform the words of the living God and subordinate the prayers and blessings to a secular tune."[35]

Among the Ashkenazim, it is primarily HaBaD,[36] the Lubavitch Hasidim, who allow, even embrace, non-Jewish melodies into the liturgy, provided they are sung with spiritual enthusiasm. These Hasidim believe in the importance of the mitzvah of *kiruv*: bringing Jews closer to Judaism, closer to God. They

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Press, 1992), 82.

33 David Matouk Betesh, ed., *Shir ushvaḥah hallel v'-zimrah* (New York: Magen David), http://www.pizmonim.org/ (accessed June 20, 2008).

34 Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, 82-83.

35 Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, 84.

36 Acronym for *Ḥokhmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (understanding), *Dei'ah* (knowledge).

believe that through this act they are redeeming a soul. They also believe that you can redeem a song; that you can take a secular song, remove it from its original profane context, outfit it with sacred words or even just with vocables such as "ai di di di dai," and not only do you have a sacred song, you have performed a mitzvah: you have converted something from profanity to the service of God.

But perhaps that is an oversimplification. To achieve *d'veikut* [adhering to God], one must have the proper state of mind. The transformation of a secular tune into a sacred niggun, the process of "musical *tikkun*," is a four-stage process, as described by Ellen Koskoff.[37] First an appropriate person must be able to recognize the potential in the song, to perceive the holy spark dormant in the music. Second, the redeemer must spend time with the song, creating a sense of ownership. Third, the secular lyrics must be discarded. Finally, the remodeled song will be performed by the devout with proper intention and in the appropriate style.

The Hasidim believe that once a song has been redeemed, it is no longer available to its original owner. The story is told that Shneur Zalman of Lyadi (1745-1813), the first HaBaD rebbe, one day heard an organ grinder sing a beautiful song. The rebbe tossed some coins to the street musician so that he would sing the song over and over. Eventually the rebbe was able to sing the song himself, to take ownership of the song (stage two above). From that time on, according to the legend, the organ grinder lost his ability to remember that song.[38]

Another story: In 1812 the rebbe heard "Napoleon's March" played by the French army as they crossed the Russian border. He understood it was time to escape before the arrival of the enemy forces. As a sign of gratitude to God for his deliverance, the rebbe designated "Napoleon's March" to be sung as a wordless niggun each year at the *Neilah* service, symbolic of the victory of the Jewish people over Satan.[39] Koskoff writes that this tune "also signals the ultimate defeat of Napoleon's power through the mystical transformation of his army's music and its redemption as a niggun."[40]

The rebbe's great-great-grandson, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), is credited with another unusual contrafaction.

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37 Ellen Koskoff, *Music in Lubovitcher Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2001: 77-78.

38 Ibid., 75.

39 Macy Nulman. *Concepts of Jewish Music and Prayer* (New York: Cantorial Council of America), 1985: 90.

40 Koskoff, 99.

> [In 1974] a large group of Jews from France who were looking into their roots came to Crown Heights (Brooklyn, New York) to acquaint themselves with the Lubavitcher movement. At the *hakofos* [the dancing on Simhat Torah], they were unable to join in with the singing, being unfamiliar with the melodies of the niggunim. Suddenly the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *shlita*, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, began to sing a tune they knew well, that of the French national anthem (*La Marseillaise*), accompanying it with the words of a prayer, *Ho-aderes v'ho-emunoh* [Power and Trustworthiness]. The singing began softly, as most of the Hasidic multitude were unacquainted with the song. But the momentum built up and before long, French guests and bearded Hasidim were singing the rousing march in unison. As the Rebbe kept them going, over and over, the newcomers felt that all these bearded people were not strangers at all, but brothers, with one soul and one God binding them all together. Feelings of love and yearning toward God were welling up and gripping them with their intensity.[41]

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Is contrafaction a vulgarity or a mitzvah, a distraction from the words of prayer or an effective shortcut to successful congregational singing? There are rabbinic sources to support each of these views. But perhaps the keys to any successful congregational singing can be found in two of the examples we examined. Israel Najara took great care to fit the structure of the lyrics to the tune. The HaBaD Hasidim adopt a tune only if it has a holy spark, only when its original identity has been forgotten, only if it can be sung with the proper intention, and only after it has been transformed into a vehicle for spiritual transcendence.

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41 Gitty Stolik, "Musical Rhapsodies," *Women's Youth Organization Book of the 29th Annual Convention* (May 24-28, 1984), in Mordechai Staiman, *Niggun: Stories behind the Chasidic Songs that Inspire Jews* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1994), 154. That melody is still sung in many HaBaD shuls. I heard it myself in the HaBaD House in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Shabbat, March 11, 2006.