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Established 1902

December 30, 2016

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### Klepper kibbitzes Klezmer

From Cantor Jeff Klepper's website, kolbseder.com  
**By Laura F. Deutsch**  
Advocate correspondent



**Chanukah** is here, and if you are considering what to give a music lover, look no further than klezmer.

The word klezmer translates to "instrument of song," and klezmer music originated with [Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe](#). It was instrumental and rarely accompanied by singing. Although klezmer is rooted firmly in Jewish tradition, its style has always been eclectic. Klezmer musicians, known as klezmorim, used portable instruments such as clarinets, violins, flutes, accordions and drums. They traveled about Eastern Europe to play at weddings and other celebrations. Romanian, Romani and Hungarian music influenced the klezmorim during their travels.

From approximately 1880 through 1920, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe brought klezmer to the United States. Klezmer blended with American Jazz including the swing sounds of [Benny Goodman's](#) clarinet and Gershwin's "Rhapsody in [Blue](#)." Assimilating Jews used more "non-Jewish" types of music at celebrations, and klezmer became less popular. However, klezmer has gone through several revival periods, and interest in this unique music form continues to grow.

What accounts for klezmer's popularity? What is the best way to introduce someone to this wonderful musical form? I discussed these questions with [Cantor Jeff Klepper](#) of [Temple Sinai in Sharon](#).

[Jeff Klepper](#) became interested in the guitar as a boy because he was "raised in the '60s." He loved folk music ([Pete Seeger](#)) and rock 'n' roll (The Beatles) which came together for him in the sounds of [Bob Dylan](#). His experiences as a Jewish camper inspired him to bring

"Jewishness" into his music. He became a cantor in 1980 and obtained a master's in music. Klepper has written close to 300 songs, including the hauntingly beautiful "Shalom Rav," which he cowrote in 1974. He also teaches at [Hebrew College in Newton](#). He has performed all over the world and was one of the first cantors to use a guitar during a service.

Klepper attributes klezmer's huge 1970s revival to the fact that fans of bluegrass and folk discovered this exciting music form and incorporated it into their own melodies. Klezmer's eclectic roots allow it to absorb these



Klezwoods

PHOTO: KATHY CHAPMAN

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Sharing your Simchahs – Celebrations with the Community

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[Singles Calendar](#)

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Parshat Mikeitz

BOSTON	4:03
FALL RIVER	4:05
LOWELL	4:03
SPRINGFIELD	4:10
WORCESTER	4:06
PORTLAND, MAINE	3:55
MANCHESTER, N.H.	4:02

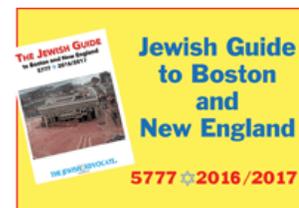


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PHOTO: KLEZPERANTO.COM

different influences and still maintain its own identity. Klezmer continues to rise in popularity precisely because it is so malleable and blends with a variety of musical styles.

Klepper was kind enough to show me nearly 20 different CDs that illustrate his point. Klezmer manifests itself in jazz, gospel, classic, avant

garde, bluegrass, chamber music and hip-hop. An increasing number of young Jewish people now identify with klezmer and use klezmer as a way to express their own Jewish identity.

Klezmer is important because it has evolved in a way that brings many aspects of the Jewish community – and non-Jewish community – together. Klepper considers klezmer a “free-form” type of music, and Reform, Conservative and [Orthodox Jews](#) enjoy it. The universality of klezmer is the “secret of its power.” Its attitude is “adventurous, playful and edgy.” Although klezmer purists maintain the modern day form is as removed from traditional klezmer as “Riverdance” is from traditional Irish dance, Klepper believes the variations in musical style do not take away from Jewish tradition because early klezmer musicians in Eastern Europe were continually absorbing other musical types.

So how do you introduce someone to Klezmer? Klepper calls [Boston](#) a “klezmer town,” and two of the best klezmer bands come from here: Klezperanto (which blends rock ‘n’ roll, jazz and klezmer) and Klezwoods. Temple Sinai’s assistant cantor, Rebecca Khitrik, is a member of Klezwoods, and their CD, “Oy Yeah” mixes klezmer with Balkan jazz. Other recommended groups are The Klezomatics, a [Grammy](#) winning group out of [New York](#), and The Andy Statman Quartet. Although [YouTube](#) contains thousands of klezmer videos, a klezmer CD makes a wonderful gift. These CDs are found in the Folk/World section, although some stores now have their own klezmer section.

Klepper believes klezmer concerts are a wonderful, “G-rated” family activity. He suggests people explore “Yidstock,” which takes place each summer at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst. This famous klezmer festival lasts several days and even provides dance lessons. For people interested in learning more, [Temple Israel in Boston](#) is running a series of classes on Jewish music in early 2017. (Klepper and Khitrik are both teaching.)

In conclusion, a klezmer CD makes a unique gift, and exposure to klezmer on any level will get one’s toes tapping. Klezmer might be only one of the many musical languages we speak, but it connects modern trends with Jewish tradition and continues to draw more listeners into its ever-evolving melodies.