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Jews United and Divided by Music

Contemporary Jewish music in the UK and America^{xi}

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As twin pillars of the 'West', Europe and America are important points of comparison in the study of contemporary industrialised society. This has never been truer than with regard to the study of religion. In recent years, assumptions about the 'secularisation' of the West have given way to a more complex understanding of how the role of religion in society has been transformed in different locations in different ways. For Grace Davie (2002) Western Europeans^{xii} broadly speaking 'believe but do not belong' – they are largely 'unchurched' – whereas Americans are much more inclined to be religiously 'seeking' and 'consumerist'. There are clearly many nuances that complicate any simple picture of European–American contrasts (see for example Halman 2006; Voas 2005). There is significant 'religious consumerism' in Europe as well as in America. Similarly, there are plenty of Americans who 'believe without belonging'. Furthermore, when one broadens the spectrum of religious practice to include non-Christian religions, the picture becomes even more opaque. Nonetheless, in a globalised world, Europe and America can be viewed as providing distinctly different religious models.

Different models of modernity do not emerge in isolation from one another, but are moulded through complicated global networks of communication. Members of religions throughout the world are in communication with each other, and global religious institutions create connections between religious practitioners in different locations. The global religious landscape is one of fragmentation and of unification – of difference and of homogeneity. The same is true for other global social and cultural phenomena that, to varying degrees, produce both global fragmentation and unification. One of the most important forms of global cultural expression is that of popular music. As a central part of the global

entertainment industry, popular music is closely implicated in processes through which cultural forms, often originating in America and the 'Western' world, are globally disseminated. This process is highly uneven and the situation is far from a case of 'one-way traffic'. Western popular music is not equally successful in all parts of the world; Western forms are adapted in idiosyncratic ways in local contexts; non-Western forms are also disseminated in the west (Lipsitz 1994; Mitchell 1996; Taylor 1997; Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000).

An examination of the interaction of popular music and religion sheds light on the interplay between two forces of global fragmentation and unification. Looking at how religious communities in one location draw on popular music from another location provides an insight into the ways in which religion is positioned in relation to global cultural flows. A consideration of popular music and religion in Europe and America helps to illuminate the complex relationship between these two cultural-religious models.

This chapter considers how one particular form of popular music – contemporary Jewish music – circulates between the British and American Jewish communities. In focusing on how the music of the pioneering contemporary American contemporary Jewish musician Debbie Friedman has been received in Britain, I will consider how contemporary Jewish music both provides a cultural 'bridge' between two Jewish communities and also highlights deep differences between them.

Popular music in the Jewish world

The Jewish world is perhaps a small one (around 13 million in 2005 according to DellaPergola, Dror et al. 2005) but it has historically been a highly globalised one, with significant communities located throughout the world. The holocaust, immigration and assimilation have, however, concentrated the global Jewish population within a small number of significant centres and a larger number of smaller concentrations. Israel and the United States are the main Jewish population centres with over 5 million Jews each. The European Jewish population is much smaller but still significant, with the French (around 500,000) and British (around 300,000) Jewish populations being the largest outside the former Soviet Union.

Since the destruction of the second temple, Jews have seen themselves as a population 'in exile' (*galut*) or as a 'diaspora'. Implicit in both concepts are notions of movement and

dispersion. The Jewish world has, over millennia, developed sophisticated practices intended to bind Jews together over considerable expanses of space and time. Texts, individuals and ideas have always circulated throughout the Jewish world creating a unifying sense of being a 'people' (*am*) that has been sustained remarkably successfully despite often trying historical circumstances. At the same time, the process of diaspora creates continuous fissures both between and within Jewish communities scattered throughout the world.

The balance between processes of unification and fragmentation is a delicate one. It is threatened when particular locations within the diaspora become in some way privileged. In the contemporary Jewish world, the disparity in size and wealth between the Israeli and American Jewish communities and other Jewish communities is noteworthy. This disparity means that Israeli and American Jews may have much more influence over the direction of global Jewry than other communities do. Just as is the case with other global cultural flows, the popular music industry included, there are imbalances. Yet at the same time – again as in the popular music industry – there is no straightforward 'cultural imperialism'. Local idiosyncrasy and difference is still retained throughout the spectrum of smaller and more marginal Jewish communities.

Music has been an important marker of difference within world Jewry. There is a vast range of melodies used within the liturgy. Not only are different musical styles and modes preferred in different locations, but different families and peer groups often use different melodies for the same elements of the liturgy. In modernity, this musical anarchy has been both reduced and added to. The growth of Jewish umbrella institutions (such as the Reform and Conservative movements in America) meant that certain styles and melodies came to be dominant and in some cases even prescribed. At the same time, the major Jewish population movements of the last two centuries meant that new forms of music were transplanted to new locations where they co-existed and competed with other forms.

The case of Jewish popular music is in certain respects even more complicated. For one thing, the division between 'secular' and 'religious' music is extremely blurred in Judaism. Liturgical music can frequently be considered popular in the truest sense of the word. Nevertheless, there is a case for examining Jewish music that draws on post-1950s African-American-derived popular music as a separate field. This is because the engagement by Jews in this kind of music has been paradoxical and complex. Jews have been highly involved in the development of contemporary popular music as performers, songwriters, producers and

impresarios, in America and elsewhere (Rogin 1996; Billig 2000; Melnick 2001). Yet they have not generally done so *as Jews*: singing about Jewish themes and openly identifying themselves as Jewish. The development of an openly Jewish popular music, for specific consumption at least in part within the Jewish community, has been highly erratic.

In mapping the landscape of contemporary Jewish popular music, a number of salient points are immediately visible. There is no global Jewish popular music, consumed by Jews throughout the world, that corresponds to other commercially powerful and influential diasporic musics such as the music of various South Asian diasporas or that of African-originated 'black Atlantic' (Gilroy 1993). Jewish popular music is not commercially important, with the partial exception of klezmer, which has a niche within the 'world music' market (Slobin 2000). A further complicating factor is the position of the thriving Israeli popular music industry, which produces music by Jews in Hebrew yet has a very limited market amongst Jews outside Israel (Regev and Seroussi 2004). There are Jewish popular musics that bind different communities together, but they tend to be the popular musics of particular kinds of Jews. Ultra-Orthodox Jews have their own extremely vital popular music industry that constitutes a truly global culture. Zionist groups, particularly Zionist youth movements, also have a distinctive popular music culture (ironically, one increasingly seen as archaic in Israel itself).

Compared with the high level of development of Jewish liturgical music, Jewish popular music is not a strong force for either unification or fragmentation within the Jewish world. Rather, Jewish popular music reveals of the fissures within the Jewish world and the limitations of diasporic cultural flows. The case study of contemporary Jewish music will demonstrate this.

Debbie Friedman and the American contemporary Jewish music scene

The United States boasts the most extensive range of Jewish musical communities in the Jewish world. With the partial exception of klezmer, most American Jewish music is produced and consumed outside the non-Jewish mainstream of the music industry. This is just as true for Jewish popular music that draws on and contributes to the legacy of post-1950s African-American derived music. There are two broad modes of relating to contemporary popular music: ethnic and religious. The former consists of music such as klezmer that deals with non-religious themes, is often played by secular Jews and is primarily

concerned with establishing and exploring Jewish ethnic difference (including internal ethnic difference). Religious Jewish music is music that, at some level, foregrounds the belief, theology and ritual practice at the heart of its version of Jewishness. Generally speaking, the ethnic mode tends towards a syncretic relationship to popular music – in which Jewish musical sources are combined in various ways with non-Jewish ones – and the religious mode tends towards an appropriative relationship – in which non-Jewish music is drawn on as a vehicle for a Jewish ‘message’.

Whilst there are many exceptions to these rules, the case study of the contemporary Jewish music scene demonstrates the generally appropriative mode of religious Jewish popular music. Contemporary Jewish music (CJM) is the term often applied to forms of American Jewish popular music that have developed since the 1960s; that emerged principally from the Reform and Conservative movements; that frequently use English lyrics and that borrow extensively from a restricted set of contemporary popular music styles.

The strain of contemporary Jewish music that I am particularly interested in is that which emerged in the 1960s via the medium of Reform Jewish summer camps. Summer camps have been a part of diaspora Jewish life since the early twentieth century. This is particularly true of the United States where summer camps are a standard part of the middle-class American youth experience. Jewish summer camps draw to varying degrees on a number of historical antecedents, such as the Zionist youth movement, the scout movement, Christian youth movements and German outdoors movements. The importance of camping in the American Reform Jewish world grew in the post-war period. Summer camps are intended to provide an intense experience of Jewish practice that will hopefully lead to greater Jewish identification (particularly with the Reform movement) during the rest of the year.

From the beginning, singing and song-leading have been important parts of American Reform Jewish summer camping (Schachet-Briskin 1996). As Cohen (2006: 194) puts it: ‘Through its centralized placement, songleading ... became an emblem of the Reform Jewish camp experience itself.’ Communal singing occurs not only at special song sessions, but also at synagogue services, mealtimes and countless informal occasions. The focus is on singing accompanied by the guitar, which, as Cohen argues, ‘served as a dominant icon for representing music and musical leadership at camp’ (Cohen 2006: 196). Although there is a strong ethic of equal participation, and formal musical training is not required, song-leading is a practice that is actively taught. To this end, camps have offered specialised song-leader

training at certain camps since the 1960s, and 'Hava NaShira', a specialised song-leader camp, was established in the 1990s. Such training is inseparable from the training of Reform Jewish leaders, as song-leading is a prestigious route into communal leadership positions.

At camp, singing takes place in a number of contexts ranging from the liturgical to the avowedly non-liturgical. Nevertheless, the difference between the repertoires used in such contexts is not clear cut and there is no absolute separation between liturgical and non-liturgical music, still less between sacred and profane. The *Shironim* (songbooks) that have been produced over the years reflect this in their diversity. Zionist pioneer songs coexist with 'traditional' melodies, with liturgical and biblical texts reset with modern tunes, and with English-language popular music. The latter is a particularly striking feature of camp music, with 50s/60s American folk music by the likes of Joan Baez, Simon and Garfunkel, and Peter, Paul and Mary being particularly influential, along with modern tunes by bands such as the Dave Matthews Band. Whilst the repertoire of Reform Jewish summer camps has never been static, a recognisable style has emerged that harks back to the values and aesthetics of 1960s folk music and hippiedom.

This style has also engendered a large and growing core of music written within and emerging from the camp experience. Since the 1960s, the musical cultural of American Reform Jewish camping has spread, first to NFTY (North American Federation of Temple Youth, the Reform Jewish youth movement), then to Reform synagogues, and then onward to the wider Jewish scene. By the 1990s, music by camp alumni had made substantial inroads into synagogue liturgy. This process has been uneven, varying from synagogue to synagogue, and has encountered substantial resistance, particularly among the more traditionally minded cantors. Today, graduates of the Reform cantorial college routinely learn song-leading and guitar-playing as part of their study programme. Songs developed and popularised at camps form an increasingly well-established part of the liturgy. This includes both new tunes to traditional sections of the liturgy as well as new songs, including songs written both in English and Hebrew.

Particularly important in this process has been Debbie Friedman. Debbie Friedman was born in 1952 in New York state, but grew up in Minnesota, an area with a small Jewish population (an interesting echo of Bob Dylan). She was a product of the summer camp system and learned song-leading and the guitar within it (despite not being able to read music). She maintains a strong connection to the Reform camp system of the 1960s:^{xiii}

I am a product of the Reform youth system ... It was a wonderful wonderful movement. It was a movement concerned with social action and a movement concerned with human values. And they were tied to Torah. And it was value-oriented. And it connected every nerd in the world! They weren't such nerds; they were wonderful people and they really cared about the world and transforming the world and we felt we could to affect some change ... It was very 60s.

These 'very 1960s' values are still at the core of what Friedman teaches:

I still maintain those values. I haven't lost that direction. I haven't lost those things for which we gathered, for which we stood in the 60s. Those values are probably only the staying values, these are two values that nobody can take away. Even though people say that it's really dippy to talk about peace and love, oh people say it's really simplistic ... but in essence those are two values that nobody can degrade, nobody can deny you the right to feel those feelings.

By the early 1970s Friedman was writing, and later recording, her own music that quickly became added to the camp repertoire. While Friedman was by no means the first or the last to follow this route (others include Jeff Klepper), she is distinguished by her ongoing popularity, which has grown among American Jewry. Friedman is today the best-known and most successful CJM artist, and in this respect her story is not a typical one within the Reform Jewish camping milieu. At the same time, her story dramatically illustrates the process by which the musical developed in Reform Jewish summer camps has become an important part of the American Reform Jewish world and beyond.

Friedman's body of work consists of 19 albums and a number of song books. Her work has frequently been educationally focused; she has worked in schools and continues to lead choirs and teach song-leading. At the same time, her CDs and concerts are part of a growing set of institutions that constitute the contemporary Jewish music scene. She has toured since the early 1970s and her audience has become broader, moving from camps to synagogues to cross-communal institutions such as Jewish Community Centres. Her status as

a popular Jewish artist was cemented in 1996 when she played a 25th anniversary concert at Carnegie Hall, New York. Outside the Orthodox world, where females are not allowed to sing for male audiences, her work has become a part of the Jewish communal landscape in America.

Friedman's work is strongly connected to traditional Jewish texts. She has contributed dozens of new tunes for well-known and less-known passages in the *Siddur* (prayer book) and other Jewish texts such as the *Tanach* (Old Testament). She has also adapted such texts in songs in Hebrew, English or a mixture of both. One of her best-loved songs is 'Not By Might'. Based on a lyric from Zechariah 4:6, it is set to an up-tempo tune that is ideally suited for singing along and is a firm standard within camps and youth movements:

Not by might, & not by power,
But by spirit alone
Shall we all live in peace.

The children sing, the children dream,
And their tears will fall,
But we'll hear them call,
And another song will rise.

One example of her Hebrew-English repertoire is 'Mi Shebeirach' ('The one who blessed'), an adaption of the traditional formula used in blessings:

Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M'kor hab'racha l'imoteinu
May the source of strength,
Who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing,
and let us say, Amen.

[...]

Bless those in need of healing with r'fuah sh'leimah,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,
And let us say, Amen.

Friedman's version of the prayer uses English to emphasise its healing purpose. 'Mi Shebeirach' has become popular in the American Reform liturgy and is particularly important in healing services. Friedman has helped to popularise healing rituals in the Reform community. She herself has suffered from a severe illness for a number of years and this in part has motivated her to develop new forms of prayer designed to help the healing process. In such ways, Friedman's work has been adopted, with varying degrees of ease, into synagogue services.

Debbie Friedman has also produced work that resembles non-Jewish popular music in more conventional ways, designed to be listened to as much as sung along to. Such songs discuss Jewish issues or more diffuse themes. One example of the former is 'Miriam's Song', which celebrates Moses' sister's life from the perspective of the song she led on crossing the Red Sea:

Chorus: And the women dancing with their timbrels,
followed Miriam as she sang her song,
sing a song to the One whom we've exalted,
Miriam and the women danced and danced the whole night long.

And Miriam was a weaver of unique variety
the tapestry she wove was one which sang our history.
With every strand and every thread she crafted her delight!
A woman touched with spirit, she dances toward the light.

Given the educational contexts in which Debbie Friedman's music is used, it is not surprising that a portion of Friedman's work is aimed at children and young people. One such light-hearted song that is also popular with adults is 'The Latke Song' (latkes are potato pancakes eaten on the festival of Chanukah):

I am so mixed up that I cannot tell you
I'm sitting in this blender turning brown
I've made friends with the onions and the flour
And the cook is scouting oil in town.

[...]

Chorus: I am a latke, I'm a latke
And I'm waiting for Chanukah to come.

Friedman resists labelling or categorising her work. In fact, an important feature of her work is its blurring of the boundaries within the Jewish community. Whilst not transgressive in the conventional sense, Debbie Friedman has tried to expand the boundaries of worship within the Jewish community. As she explains about the impact of her early work:

People were now able to understand prayer, tefillah, in a way that they weren't able to before. We opened doors together ... to explore the possibility of entering into a level of prayer we had never experienced before together.

As she says about one of her early songs, 'V'ahavta':

That turned the liturgy upside down ... that was the first thing I wrote and that was the first thing that kids sang and when they sang it they stood arm in arm, and they were just weeping and it was like all of a sudden they realised that they could take ownership of their tefillah, they could take ownership of what was theirs anyway but they could take it back. They didn't have to use other people's poetry anymore in order to have a meaningful worship experience.

Friedman's work defies any simple division between liturgical and non-liturgical music, although some of her work, such as 'Mi Shebeirach', is particularly well suited to a more ritualistic context. As with contemporary 'worship music' in the Christian context, the distinction between a Debbie Friedman concert and a synagogue service can be a fine one. There is a deliberate attempt to bring prayer out of the synagogue into the world:

What I'm trying to do is help people to understand that prayer is not limited to the sanctuary or to the synagogue – that prayer is a part of everyday life, part of everyday experience; that it happens in the grocery store as deeply as it happens in the sanctuary. And sometimes it's as vacant in the sanctuary as it can be in the grocery store.

Within the synagogue itself, the use of Friedman's work, and the work of others like her, breaks down the more rigid barriers between the leader of the service and the congregation. Whilst Jews do not have priests, the work of the cantor (*chazan*) often involves very formal (and often quasi-operatic) vocal styles which, particularly if combined with choir and organ, can inhibit participation. The increased popularity of Friedman's work in synagogue services is part of a trend towards greater participation by the congregation in services and a concomitant decline in *chazanut* (solo tunes sung or chanted by the *chazzan*) and classically influenced synagogue art music (Shleifer 1995). This has led to criticism of Friedman and contemporary Jewish music from some quarters, particularly more traditionally minded *chazans*. This controversy is discussed in 'A Journey of Spirit', a 2005 documentary film about Debbie Friedman. However, Friedman herself is not attempting to undermine other approaches to liturgy, asserting 'A lot of people are really scared that we are going to take their traditional stuff away. I'm not interested in taking anything away from anybody.'

Friedman has also played an important part in the greater participation of women in Jewish ritual life. While Reform Judaism has long preached formal equality of the sexes, only in 1972 were women first ordained as rabbis. Friedman has helped to give women a central role as leaders of worship not simply through her own example but also (as we shall see later in this essay) through her own mentoring activities. Furthermore, Friedman is probably the first woman in Jewish history to have a more than nominal influence on the content of synagogue services.

Friedman's creation of a Jewish analogue to Christian worship music suggests parallels with evangelical Christianity. Inasmuch as Friedman attempts to inspire love of Judaism, that comparison is valid. However, unlike evangelicals, she does not attempt to proselytise amongst non-Jews, nor is she (as some Jewish groups such as Habad are) didactic in

encouraging greater Jewish observance. Rather, her work embodies a highly universalist world view:

It extends beyond Jews; it goes beyond Jewish community to *tikkun olam*,^{xiv} that we have an obligation to conduct ourselves in such a way so as to begin to heal the world and help the world grow and become whole and less chaotic and less pained. That's really what we're here to do, not just a few of us, not just a chosen few but all of us, not just the Jews.

Despite the universalist message of her work, Debbie Friedman has not managed to cross over in any significant way to a non-Jewish market. Although some of her later albums in particular are less 'Jewish' than her early albums, there does not appear to be an obvious place for her outside the Jewish world. As with contemporary Christian music, contemporary Jewish music circulates in its own world, even if its message may be non-evangelical and potentially universalist. One reason for this may be that Friedman's music, for all its challenging of boundaries in the Jewish world, is very conventional in popular musical terms. Friedman's major innovation has been to change the way music is used in the Reform Jewish community and to challenge the strict demarcations of ritualistic music. However, musically her work is non-innovative and rooted heavily in the music of the 1960s. Although her later work features more complex arrangements and instrumentation, there is little to it that is likely to be of interest to non-Jewish music fans. To put it baldly – there is already a Joan Baez and a Joni Mitchell; why does the world need a Jewish equivalent? This is one of the paradoxes of the work of Debbie Friedman and of other contemporary Jewish musicians: they have had a significant, even radical, effect on elements of Jewish communal and religious practice, while at the same time being musically non-innovative, even perhaps conservative. Contemporary popular music has had a transformative effect on the Jewish community, but the reverse has not been true.

The impact of Debbie Friedman and contemporary Jewish music in the UK

In 1996 I attended the annual Limmud conference that takes place over Christmas every year in Britain. At the welcoming gala, a young British song-leader, Jess Gold, taught the audience a Debbie Friedman song called 'The Time is Now', a song created to be sung at

communal events. The song is slow, stately, and emphasises how ‘we’ll make this space a holy place’. To my surprise, a man in his sixties suddenly got up and walked out, grumbling to his wife that he ‘couldn’t stand all this pop music’. This incident surprised me as, being accustomed to the more challenging forms of contemporary popular music, I hardly considered that the song might be offensive to anyone. In fact, I myself found the song to be the epitome of consensual music. The incident has stayed with me ever since and has led me to think about how forms of musical innovation – even of the most gentle kind – may cause stress and tensions in the Jewish community. Yet the peeved reaction of the man at the conference is not necessarily typical of the reaction of the UK Jewish community to Debbie Friedman’s work. In fact, the very singing of a Friedman song at a large gathering such as Limmud demonstrates how her work has gained a following in the UK.

There are significant international networks through which Jewish leaders from different countries learn from each other. Given its size and degree of organisation, the American Jewish community has always provided inspiration to a steady but significant trickle of British Jewish leaders who visited. The attendance of Reform Jewish youth leaders at summer camps such as Kutz, resulted in American camp music and culture being brought back to Britain. The British Reform youth movement RSY-Netzer (Reform Synagogue Youth: Netzer is a Hebrew acronym for Reform Zionist Youth) has, since the 1960s, developed a Shiron that has strong similarities with the American one. Like their American counterparts, since the 1960s young British Reform Jews have sung a heady mixture of Zionist pioneer songs, traditional melodies and sixties folk and rock n’ roll. Since the 1980s, they have been singing Debbie Friedman too. When I attended Reform summer camps in the UK in the mid-1980s, Friedman standards such as ‘Not by Might’ were among the most popular in the repertoire, and they continue to be popular today.

The entry of contemporary Jewish music into the UK was further facilitated by the growth in popularity of the Limmud conference in the 1990s. Limmud was born in the early 1980s and was originally intended to be a British equivalent of the giant American Coalition on Alternatives in Jewish Education (CAJE) conference. Limmud grew as a cross-communal, anti-establishment challenge to the perceived narrow-mindedness, anti-intellectualism and division of the mainstream Jewish community. By the mid-1990s it drew about 1,000 participants a year, and by the end of the decade this had reached over 2,000. From being a conference for educators it had developed into a diverse showcase of the best of Jewish

learning, spawning a strong volunteer culture and attracting speakers and participants from across the world. Music had always been an important part of Limmud since its inception, and since the early 1990s it has invited artists from across the Jewish world. In 1994 Debbie Friedman herself came to Limmud. Her visit to the conference, in which she both performed and directed the Limmud choir, is still talked of today as inspirational. Friedman herself was inspired by her experience at the conference:

It was one of the most wonderful experiences; I will never forget it in my life ... It was a very powerful community experience because of it. Everybody was there; everybody showed up; everybody made it beautiful; everybody sang.

Friedman's visit inspired a number of young British Jews to visit America and learn song-leading at American institutions. Ever since Friedman's visit, there has been a steady stream of American contemporary Jewish musicians visiting the conference, such as Rick Recht and Doug Cotler.

However, even if Limmud has provided an important showcase for CJM and for Debbie Friedman, the impact of this music in the UK Jewish community as a whole has been much less than in the American Jewish community. Debbie Friedman and a few others have contributed some repertoire to Jewish youth movements and have played occasional shows in synagogues and other locations.^{xv} However, contemporary Jewish music has had only a limited impact on the liturgy of Reform and other synagogues. Debbie Friedman tunes are sometimes used, but generally at Friday night services and in services geared towards 'youth' they are far from being mainstream and have not yet challenged the primacy of other forms of liturgical music. Furthermore, there have been few attempts at making a British version of contemporary Jewish music. Inspired by Debbie Friedman, the British song-leader Jess Gold made a CD with her band Red Sea Blue and even toured American summer camps. However, she has been unable to make a living as a song-leader in the UK and her work has not had a wide circulation.

While contemporary Jewish music has had some limited impact in the United Kingdom, there is no contemporary Jewish music 'scene' as such. There are two clusters of explanations for the relatively low presence of CJM in the UK: institutional and cultural. Institutionally, the British Jewish community has a number of crucial differences compared

with the American Jewish community. Perhaps the most important is the differing significance of non-Orthodox Judaism. In America, the non-Orthodox denominations (Reform, Orthodox, Reconstructionist and others) are in the majority. Of the roughly 40 per cent who are affiliated with a synagogue, around 70 per cent are affiliated with a non-Orthodox synagogue.^{xvi} In the UK, of the 70 per cent of Jews affiliated with a synagogue, around 70 per cent affiliate to a synagogue belonging to an Orthodox umbrella body (Hart and Kafka 2006), although the majority of them are unlikely to be Orthodox in their Jewish practice. The British Reform community, while significant, is a minority, and other non-Orthodox denominations are also small. The non-Orthodox 'power base' of CJM is thus much less significant in the UK than in America.

A further complicating factor in comparing American and British Jewry is that the Reform movements in the two countries do not exactly correspond. While there are institutional connections between the two movements, there are also differences in theology and practice. The British Reform movement has tended to take a slightly more conservative line on Jewish practice and theology. In many ways the British Reform movement tends to correspond to the left-wing of the American Conservative movement (the British Masorti movement corresponds to the right-wing of the American Conservative movement). The American Reform movement tends to correspond more closely to the small British Liberal Jewish movement. All this further fragments the market for CJM in the UK and the possibility of CJM finding a natural 'home' in the UK.

While developed in a non-Orthodox and particularly Reform setting, American CJM is also institutionally supported through cross-communal institutions. The most important of these are Jewish Community Centres, which frequently host concerts in the United States. The UK is only now setting up a Jewish Community Centre in London. CJM artists such as Debbie Friedman are also able to play in cross-communal settings such as the American Jewish Congress. In the UK, the dominance of Orthodox institutions means that cross-communal institutions have to enforce a consensus acceptable to Orthodox members, and this precludes non-Orthodox artists, particularly female artists. Debbie Friedman cannot be a consensual 'common denominator' in the UK. Limmud is one of the very few cross-communal settings in the UK where CJM artists can play.

CJM in the UK also lacks an institutional foothold due to the scarcity of specialist musicians in the community. *Chazans* are much rarer in the UK than in the USA, and there

are none working within the Reform community. An important reason for and outcome of the success of Debbie Friedman in the USA was the transformation of the education of *chazans* to include song-leading. It is almost impossible to make a living in the UK as a song-leader or *chazan*, in part because the lack of tradition of this kind of position and in part because of the smaller size of the community. This means that CJM lacks full-time 'champions' who can smooth its entry into the synagogue mainstream.

Over and above these institutional differences between the British and American Jewish communities, there are also cultural differences that have consequences for how CJM has been received in the UK. There are crucial differences between the communities in terms of how Jewish identity is constructed. Cohen and Eisen's study 'The Jew Within' (2000) shows how Jewish identity is constructed in America through the prism of the 'sovereign self'. American Jews tend to search for meaning within Judaism and are inclined to have a consumerist approach to Jewish life. These tendencies help to create a community in which tradition and institutional involvement are less important than finding a way of being Jewish that is personally meaningful. In contrast, research in the UK Jewish community (Cohen and Kahn-Harris 2004) has shown that British Jews are much more committed to ideas of tradition and authenticity than American Jews. Even non-Orthodox Jews in the UK legitimate their Jewish choices more with reference to ideas of correctness and 'properness' than with references to personal meaningfulness. This difference between American and British Jews is reflected in their choices of synagogues; in America there is a much closer 'fit' with the ideology expressed by the synagogue to which Jews are members than in the UK.

CJM foregrounds meaning and spirituality in its vision of Jewish identity. It is earnestly concerned with the individual's spiritual journey and the self's Jewish exploration. In the case of Debbie Friedman's work this is most evident in her emphasis on healing. Established modes of Jewish music practice are less important in CJM than finding a clear and unambiguous vehicle for the communication of 'messages'. There are those within British Jewry who find such a form of Jewish practice attractive. Yet in the main, CJM is a very alien form of Jewish practice in the UK. This is in part due to the heavy use of English. In Orthodox synagogues, English is hardly ever used in prayer, and even in Reform synagogues in the UK (where English prayers are read) few will countenance singing in English. In a community predominantly concerned that Jewish practice should feel somehow authentic and traditional, its use of contemporary modes feels inauthentic. In a community that is less

interested in spiritual meaning and personal exploration, CJM's earnestness may feel uncomfortable and even embarrassing. While Limmud concerts by CJM artists do show there is a minority interested in this kind of music, the amount of ridicule they attract from other participants is noteworthy. As the song-leader Jess Gold puts it (personal interview January 2006): 'People don't understand it [CJM] here. It's the whole "happy clappy" thing. People are more into their heads here and they don't like to let go.'

Viewed through the lens of British Jewry, there is much that seems ridiculous in American CJM – its over-earnestness, its dated use of 1960s music, its self-centredness, its similarity to evangelical Christian music. However, there are important elements of CJM that, in being rejected in the UK, help to reinforce problematic elements of the UK Jewish community.

CJM is based on the blurring of boundaries within the Jewish community. The blurring of the boundary between worship and performance is problematic within the British Jewish community as it challenges the idea of the synagogue as a place of worship separate from everyday life. CJM's ambiguity does not fit easily into a community that has fairly rigid ideas about how Jewish life should look. CJM, and Debbie Friedman in particular, also challenge notions about who can be a leader in the Jewish community. English-language songwriting, a lack of emphasis on musical virtuosity, and an emphasis on participation and song-leading – all of these aspects help to make CJM a reasonably democratic musical form. Furthermore, the example of Debbie Friedman shows that CJM can not only be very open to women's participation, but it can also empower women as leaders and contributors to liturgy. With its Orthodox majority, the British Jewish community is less open to female leadership and participation, and is founded on a much less democratic institutional structure.

Alternatives to CJM – ethnic and Neo-Hassidic music

If CJM reveals the differences between the UK and British Jewish communities, other forms of Jewish music display a much closer relationship. In the past few decades there has been a considerable revival of 'ethnic' Jewish music; that is, music that is not so heavily tied to religious and liturgical contexts and meanings. The most important ethnic Jewish music to be revived is klezmer, the celebratory music of the pre-holocaust *shtetl*. The klezmer revival originated in America, when a new generation rediscovered their parents' and grandparents' music in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the klezmer revival has become a global movement

(Slobin 2000) and is as significant in Europe as it is in America. To be sure, there are differences between klezmer in different locations – continental European klezmer is often played and enjoyed by non-Jews (Gruber 2002). However, klezmer and ethnic Jewish music does provide a much more equal ‘bridge’ between Europe and America than CJM does. British musicians such as Sophie Solomon have collaborated with American musicians and there is considerable multi-directional touring traffic.

In the sense that it requires a level of skill to play, klezmer is much more elitist than CJM. However, klezmer and ethnic Jewish music are a lot more open to participation by a wider range of Jews than CJM, and there are many secular, progressive Jews involved in it. Given that ethnic Jewish music is generally not focused on religious practice and meaning, it is potentially more open to be used in cross-communal settings than religious Jewish musics such as CJM. In the UK, where the community is strongly divided along religious lines, ethnic Jewish music can be a unifier. That much of the ethnic Jewish musical repertoire is instrumental helps in this as it removes the Orthodox ‘problem’ of women singing (though perhaps not the problem of mixed dancing).

Although all Jewish music is ultimately syncretic and borrowed, to contemporary, Western ears ethnic Jewish music somehow ‘sounds’ Jewish. As such, it is potentially of more interest than CJM to British Jews who are concerned that their Jewish involvement should feel somehow traditional and authentic. The same is true for the forms of neo-Hassidic music that have emerged since the 1960s. A crucial figure in this world is Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (d. 1994), the ‘singing rabbi’. Carlebach was an orthodox musician who became known in the 1960s for his fusion of 1960s folk music and Hassidic styles. A prolific composer, he contributed many melodies and *niggunim* (songs without words) to the Jewish canon. Carlebach attempted to proselytise amongst non-observant Jews and his music has a large following across the Jewish spectrum. This includes the Reform movement where, in recent years, Carlebach melodies have become popular within the liturgy (Summit 2000). This is the case in the UK as well as America. Whereas CJM has made few inroads into liturgical life in the UK, Carlebach-style neo-Hassidic music appears to be much more acceptable. While neo-Hassidic worship, like CJM, foregrounds spirituality in the Jewish experience, it does so via a musical medium that feels far more authentic to British Jews.

Conclusion: Jews united and divided through music

For Jews, questions of Jewish music can never simply be questions of taste. Music permeates Jewish practice, not simply within 'religious' contexts but in 'secular' ones as well. Whereas it is possible to simply avoid or dismiss other forms of music that one dislikes, any Jew with anything more than a nominal connection to the Jewish community encounters Jewish music. Not liking CJM, or any other Jewish music, has consequences for the Jewish community and ones own and others' Jewish identities. While taste is never neutral in any context whatever, its connection with identity and practice in the Jewish – and other religious – contexts is particularly strong.

It is inconceivable in a global community as large and as diverse as the Jewish community that there should be any unanimity as to what good Jewish music consists of and what is musically appropriate in a Jewish setting. The example of CJM, together with ethnic and neo-Hassidic music, demonstrate both this lack of unanimity and also the ability of Jewish music to create connections between and generate change within Jewish communities in different locations. Questions of Jewish music are inseparable from questions of Jewish identity and practice. CJM raises a range of complex issues such as the nature of liturgy, the position of spirituality in Jewish life and the nature of Jewish communal leadership. Musical controversies are both epiphenomenal to such questions and help to animate them in accessible ways.

The case study discussed in this chapter affirms the idea that there are substantial differences between American and European models of religion. It also shows that these differences should not be seen to mean that the systems are mutually exclusive. Rather, the Jewish world, like the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and other religious worlds, is permeated by forces of unification and fragmentation that work on a global scale. Music provides a valuable way of tracing the contours of these complicated global forces.

^{xi} I wish to thank Debbie Friedman, Jess Gold, Michael Shire, Steven M. Cohen and Fiona Karet for their help in researching this paper.

^{xii} Western Europe here includes the UK. Whilst the UK is often an exception to wider European trends, in religious terms it is within the European mainstream.

^{xiii} All quotations from Debbie Friedman in this essay are taken from a personal interview with her conducted on 5 January 2006.

^{xiv} *Tikkun Olan* is a kabbalistic concept meaning 'repair of the world'. The concept has been extremely important in the development of non-Orthodox theology in recent years.

^{xv} Friedman played concerts at two UK synagogues in 1992 and 1997.

^{xvi} These figures are rough estimates. My thanks to Steven M. Cohen for providing me with an unpublished paper comparing findings from the 1990 and 2000 National Jewish Population Surveys.

