

Max Peter Baumann/Tim Becker/Raphael Woebis (Hg.): Musik und Kultur im jüdischen Leben der Gegenwart (= Kulturwissenschaften, Bd. 2). Frank & Timme: Berlin 2006. 281 S., 29,80 €.

The present volume is the most recent of several anthologies in German to have appeared in the last several years on various aspects of Jewish musical traditions. It raises a number of questions regarding the study of Jews and their music and, in particular, the relationship of German scholarship to this topic. It will require a bit of contextualization in order to place the content of this collection. *Musik und Kultur im jüdischen Leben der Gegenwart* is the proceedings of an interdisciplinary symposium of the Musicology Institute of the Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg which took place on 21 and 28 November, 2004 within the framework of the travelling exhibition “Klezmer – heimisch und hip: Musik als kulturelle Ausdrucksform im Wandel der Zeit”. The exhibition had been organized by the Cultural Department of the City of Gelsenkirchen as part of its “Klezmerwelten” festival in 2003. The organizer of this symposium was the ethnomusicologist Max Peter Baumann of the Universität Bamberg, who had already organized another symposium, “Tradition – Migration – Identifikation: Musikalische Traditionen in Zeiten der Globalisierung”, as part of the Gelsenkirchen festival. Both symposia were characterized by the fact that they danced around the topic of klezmer music. In fact, the 2003 symposium did not have a single scholarly presentation on klezmer music, other than a short introduction by the director of the city’s Cultural Department (and festival organizer). The 2004 symposium had a solitary contribution on klezmer, Baumann’s “Klezmer Musik und Klezmerim im Zeitalter der Globalisierung”, which I discuss below.

What, then, are the purpose and subject of the collection under review? It helps us to know that the symposium was also the outgrowth of a partnership between the university and the Jewish community of Bamberg, and that the celebration of the forthcoming opening of the new Bamberger Synagogue in

June 2005 was the larger context within which the exhibition and symposium took place. It should also be noted that the university's Centre for Interreligious Studies, which focuses on connections between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, was opened in November 2004. In association with this, the university was expecting to receive a chair for Judaic Studies, although it did not have one at the time the symposium took place. It appears in any case that the university was transforming not only its relationship to the study of Judaism, but also to its oldest faculty, theology, which is being eliminated according to an agreement reached in November 2006 between the Bavarian Cabinet and the Catholic Church (<http://www.uni-bamberg.de/ktheo/>). There were therefore numerous – and possibly competing – reasons why Bamberg would want to organize such a symposium at that particular point in time. The goal was, according to Baumann, “ein kleines Zeichen der kulturellen sowie interreligiösen Verbundenheit [zu setzen]” (7), in anticipation of the synagogue opening. Baumann's solution was to organize not an international or even regional symposium, but rather to gather together Bamberg professors, other local academics and members of the Bamberg Jewish community to investigate the subject. The only two Jewish voices are community leaders and non-scholars (Heinrich C. Olmer and Antje Deusel), whereas all of the non-Jewish voices are those of scholars. The result is that not the work of a single major scholar whose research focuses on klezmer or other Jewish musical traditions, or any of the other disciplines represented here – Jewish ethnology, philosophy, literature, theology, film studies, and art history – is represented here.

Taking all of this into account, it should not be surprising that the volume lacks a central focus and, at the same time, suffers from a quite narrow viewpoint. While the debate on what is Jewish music (and culture) has been a continuing one ever since the publication of Wagner's *Das Judentum in der Musik* in 1850 – both inside and outside of Jewish circles – what emerges here is evidence of what seems to be a viewpoint of Jews and Jewish culture which is particular to contemporary Germany. One might question, for example, the inclusion of an essay on the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his interpretation of the so-called Jewish Question from a Christian theological standpoint (Heinrich Bedford-Strohm), or of a theological interpretation of the relationship between the Church and the Jews and a reflection on Christian-Jewish dialogue (Heinz-Günther Schöttler). One might also wonder about the interpretation of the poetry of the communist writer Erich Fried as Jewish (Heinz Gockel) – at least, without problematizing the issue – or, for that matter, of the thinking of the Marxist philosophers Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Ernst Bloch

or even Hannah Arendt as “Jewish philosophy” (Tim Becker). The latter – that this viewpoint is in contrast to the typical understanding of Jewish philosophy as being informed by Jewish religious texts, traditions and experiences, and that the list of important 20th century Jewish philosophers is usually considered to include figures such as Fackenheim, Levinas, Kaplan, Leibowitz, Soloveitchik and Heschel, and not Adorno and co. – is at least problematized in Markus Jüngling’s essay on the films of Amos Gitai.

That none of the three editors is a specialist for Jewish Studies allows for important mistakes to go unnoticed or unchallenged in the text. In his treatment of the Jewish works of Marc Chagall, Karl-Konrad Seufert claims that the “starke jüdische Prägung” in Vitebsk was “einmalig im zaristischen Russland und verlieh Witebsk den Charakter einer Enklave, deren Lebenswelt seit Jahrhunderten von jüdischem Glauben, jüdischem Geist und Sitte geprägt war” (208). Besides the fact that the notion of a hermetically sealed Jewish life in Eastern Europe – the so-called “shtetl myth” – was effectively deconstructed at the latest by folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in her introduction to the 1995 edition of Zborowski and Herzog’s study *Life is With People*,¹ the case of Vitebsk was certainly not unique. There were literally hundreds of similar communities with a large percentage of Jewish population about which one could make similar claims. In the same article, Seufert states that the important position of the violinist in the traditional Jewish community was such that he played, among other things, at burials (218). Of course, to stress the importance of the position of the violinist in the traditional community via his involvement in the wedding celebration and at certain other communal events, is warranted. Instrumental music at burials is, however, forbidden or, at least, inappropriate according to most Jewish interpretations. In addition, Seufert makes use of clichés such as the “jüdische Mame” (209) and, potentially more dangerously, the “Ewige Jude” (210).² Such lack of specialist knowledge on the side of the editors can also lead to errors that are truly examples of involuntary humor, such as transformation of the Persian villain Haman into Hamas (!) in Jüngling’s recounting of the Esther story (164-166).³

1 Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, New York: Schocken, 1995 (orig. ed. 1952).

2 One would think that at the latest with the Nazi exhibition of the same name in Munich, November 1937, such terminology could no longer be used without further explanation – certainly not in the German context.

3 That this is not simply a typographical error is made clear by the fact that it occurs five times in the text. Contrast this with the intentional hummus-Hamas wordplay in the recent satirical film, *West Bank Story*, by Ari Sandel (2005).

Since the occasion for the Bamberg symposium was the klezmer exhibition, it is worth looking a bit more closely at Baumann's contribution to this volume. His main thesis is that contemporary klezmer music is predominantly to be understood as a phenomenon of Weltmusik or, at least as the product of the local meeting the global – "Glokal" as he terms it (121). Other recent studies on contemporary klezmer, including those of ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and myself, indicate a consensus that the global or world music aspect represents only one of many competing factors.⁴ Most agree that it is Jewish identity politics which are at the center of much of the work in contemporary klezmer music, which Baumann only touches upon briefly. Since Baumann has not carried out primary research on klezmer music, he is forced to rely on the works of others. For example, his description of modality in klezmer (121-22) is gleaned from Winkler (2003), an extremely problematic and unreliable work which I have discussed elsewhere.⁵ In fact, the reliance by scholars on non-scholarly publications on klezmer, such as the work of journalist Seth Rogovoy and Yiddish activist Henry Sapoznik,⁶ to name but two, leads to a kind of telephone game in which the same wrong or unsupported facts, distortions and interpretations continue to be passed on from publication to publication. Beyond factual errors,⁷ Baumann makes use of language which would seem

4 See, for example: Rita Ottens, Der Klezmer als ideologischer Arbeiter, in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 3 (May-June 1998): 26-29; Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Sounds of Sensibility, in: *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots*, ed. Mark Slobin, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002: 129-73; Joel E. Rubin, Ambivalente Identitäten: Die amerikanische Klezmer-Bewegung als Reaktion auf Krise und Trauma, in: *Berichte aus dem ICTM-Nationalkomitee Deutschland XIII: Traditionelle Musik und Mode(n) – Freie Berichte*, ed. Marianne Bröcker, Bamberg: Universitätsbibliothek, 2004: 89-115; and Joel E. Rubin with Rita Ottens, Book review Georg Winkler, *Klezmer: Merkmale, Strukturen und Tendenzen eines musikkulturellen Phänomens*, in: *Lied und populäre Kultur. Jahrbuch des Deutschen Volksliedarchivs* 49 (2004): 285-321; Joel E. Rubin, Book review of *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots*, ed. Mark Slobin, in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60 (1) (Spring 2007): 238-253.

5 Rubin with Ottens 2004.

6 Seth Rogovoy, *The Essential Klezmer: A Music Lover's Guide to Jewish Roots and Soul Music, from the Old World to the Jazz Age to the Downtown Avant-Garde*, Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2000; Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer!: Jewish Music from Old World to Our World*, New York: Schirmer Books, 1999.

7 This is not the place to list them all, but a few examples include: the Hebrew word for Tabernacles (Laubhüttenfest) is *sukkot*, not *sukke* (122); the works of the ethnomusicologist Beregovski were not known to the earliest group of American klezmer revivalists (123), as they were first published in English in 1982, several years after the first groups had formed; the genres *doina*, *terkischer* and *taksim* are not dances (126); the technique of "growling" on the clarinet is not indigenous to traditional klezmer style (128), it was first introduced in the 1970s as an import from swing jazz by Giora Feidman; the Hebrew compound *kle-zemer* means musical instruments, not "beseelten Körper", as implied here (124). Again, this was an interpretation popularized by Feidman in the 1970s.

more suitable for a world music journalist than for a renowned ethnomusicologist, for example the “Flair übermäßiger Sekunden” – whatever that is supposed to mean – or the use of such loaded terms as “Puristen”, “Neutöner” (122), “Authentizisten” or “Fusionisten” (134). Perhaps the biggest problem with Baumann’s article is that, in his embracing of the music’s globalized incarnation, he tends to downplay significant aspects of the music and its history, in particular its centrality to Jewish experience. Klezmer was never a part of the German musical landscape historically yet,⁸ in Baumann’s account, the music was “auch in Deutschland seit Ende der 1980er Jahre *wieder ins Gedächtnis zurückgeholt* worden” (123, emphasis mine). A statement such as “Klezmorim seien für gewöhnlich Juden gewesen, doch nicht notwendigerweise immer, und diese spielten zu Hochzeiten auf, doch auch nicht ausschließlich” (125),⁹ is correct on the surface, yet it obscures the reality that the vast majority of klezmer musicians historically *were* Jews – in Europe, in the USA, and certainly in the Land of Israel.¹⁰ In a similar vein, the statement that “einige nichtjüdische Musiker [führen] Klezmermusik sogar besser aus... als manche jüdischen Klezmorim, die sich selber zu den Ersten des Revival zählten” (125),¹¹ may be correct, yet it comes across as a plea for (non-Jewish) German musicians to play klezmer music. It would seem that the continual need of German musicians to justify their right and ability to play klezmer music – as if someone had denied it to them – speaks volumes about the German-Jewish dialogue at the turn of the 21st century.

I do not mean to say here that the work presented in this volume is not in many cases the result of solid research by the scholars in their respective fields. In the final analysis, however, the reader is presented with a constricted and one-sided view of music and culture in contemporary Jewish life. Developments in North America, Israel and other countries are seriously underplayed. I would propose an alternative work that would take into account musical phenomena

8 Rita Ottens’ research shows that klezmer musicians or musicians with klezmer heritage may have played a role in the inner-Jewish musical life in immigrant neighborhoods such as Berlin’s Scheunenviertel in the interwar years (*The Place of Yiddish Music in Berlin 1988-2003: Issues in Cultural Identity and Ideology*, ongoing doctoral dissertation, City University, London). It did not, however, appear to have impacted German society at large.

9 Paraphrasing a pamphlet of the Klezmergesellschaft e.V. cited in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002.

10 See Joel E. Rubin, *The Art of the Klezmer: Improvisation and Ornamentation in the Commercial Recordings of New York Clarinetists Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras 1922-1929*, PhD dissertation, City University, London, 2001, Ann Arbor: UMI 2003; Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin, *Klezmer-Musik*, Kassel and Munich: Bärenreiter and dtv, 1999.

11 Here he is drawing on a statement by American accordionist Alan Bern cited in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2002).

such as Matisyahu, Jewish hip hop, *muẓika miẓrahit* (Israeli Mediterranean music), Radical Jewish Culture, Orthodox popular music, Reform popular music, the renaissance of Sephardi *piyyutim* (religious hymns) in Israel, the emergence of *muẓika etnit* (Israeli ethnic music), or the new Jewish art music of composers such as Osvaldo Golijov or Paul Schoenfield, to mention some of the important trends of the past forty years. In the broader realm of culture, it could include the new Jewish literature of authors such as Michael Chabon and Thane Rosenbaum, the emergence of new cultural institutions such as the National Yiddish Book Center, Nextbook and Reboot, Jewish culture festivals like Oy-hoo and Ashkenaz, contemporary representations of Jews in cinema and television (from *Borat* to Larry David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*), hipster magazines like Heeb, and Jewish cultural-educational gatherings such as CAJE, Limmud and Jewcy. The possibilities are seemingly endless. As long as the German publications, however, continue to rehash the same things: the Jewishness of Mahler and Schönberg, the works of exile composers and authors, the philosophy of German writers of Jewish origin (Adorno, Arendt et al.), or the Christian-Jewish dialogue, they will not take note of these important cultural developments which are so central to the contemporary Jewish experience.

Joel E. Rubin, Charlottesville/Virginia (USA)