

From Klezmer to Dabkah in Haifa and Weimar: Revisiting Disrupted Histories in the Key of D

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Abstract

During the summer of 2017, a musically and culturally diverse group of fifteen young musicians from Haifa, Israel, and fifteen from Weimar, Germany, came together for ten days in each city to form the “Caravan Orchestra,” a new ensemble that sought to reopen lost musical connections between cognate Jewish, Arabic, and European repertoires. Seeking to explore an “often-overlooked historical, transnational cultural matrix” rooted in the long arc of the Ottoman empire, the Caravan project proved to be a wider voyage of discovery, in which a large group of stakeholders from two countries—ethnomusicologists, musicians, students, funders and institutions—explored what such a conversation might entail. Like many intensive musical projects, the Caravan Orchestra was a transformative experience for many of those involved, marked by the exhilaration of producing good music on a concert stage and validated by audience applause, dancing and ovations. Yet beyond aesthetic satisfaction, what kind of insights can such a project offer into the “disrupted musical histories” that it seeks to explore? In this article, I explore this question via three elements of the Caravan experience: musicianship, repertoire, and identities.

Thirty young musicians stand on a stage, playing a raucous rendition of “Ashreinu,” a nigun (melody) of the late Hasidic Jewish leader, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, an encore after a two-hour, high-adrenalin concert. Rich sections of Western string and wind instruments flank a central group of Middle Eastern melodic instruments—‘ud, buzuq, qanun and ney—with a strong supporting keyboard and percussion section behind them. Above the musicians, a large sign proclaims the name of the festival of which this concert is part—Yiddish Summer Weimar—and in front of them tens of audience members have spilled into the aisles, circling the hall in a Jewish wedding-style chain dance. The conductor motions for a percussion solo, then points to three musicians in the front row. A reedy sound pierces the air as ney player Khalil pulls out a mijwiz and begins to play Palestinian dabkah; riq player Rami moves to the front of the stage and leads an energetic rhythm. Clapping to the beat, the audience roars with appreciation as ‘ud player Tawfiq raises his arms and begins to dance. A dramatic octave glissando on the mijwiz leads the orchestra back into “Ashreinu;” this time, the orchestra sings

the melody, Hasidic-style, the dabkah rhythm still sounding behind them. (Fieldnotes, 6 August 2017)

This musical moment, filmed on a shaky mobile phone and shared on the band's Whatsapp group, marked the culmination of an ambitious musical exchange project.¹ Fifteen young musicians from Haifa, Israel, and fifteen from Weimar, Germany, came together for ten days in each city to form the "Caravan Orchestra," a new ensemble that sought to reopen lost connections between cognate musics. The rather laconic programme notes, written well before the Caravan set out on its journey, stated that, "Jewish, Arabic, and European music are part of an often-overlooked historical, transnational cultural matrix, which the project will make visible once more."² In reality, the Caravan project proved to be a wider voyage of discovery, in which a large group of stakeholders from two countries—ethnomusicologists, musicians, students, funders and institutions—explored what such a conversation might entail.

The Caravan Orchestra grew from a meeting point between scholarship and practice. As a researcher of Yiddish music teaching at the University of Haifa in northern Israel, I found that the musical language of klezmer resonated surprisingly strongly in our multicultural music department, whose students, around half Jewish-Israeli and half Palestinian Arab-Israeli are largely drawn from Israel's northern periphery.³ While klezmer music is conventionally narrated through Ashkenazi Jewish diasporic historical and identity narratives, I found that Jewish and Arab students of diverse musical and ethnic backgrounds connected easily with the music, expressing similarities to familiar Jewish, Greek, Turkish and Arab repertoires, instinctively sensing rhythms and melodic modes, finding many points to enter and jam, and asking questions about musical elements and social practices that pointed to similarities with their own cultural backgrounds. My ethnomusicological ears twitched: did these shared musical sensibilities point to historical connections through the long arc of the Ottoman Empire, still deeply embedded in the contemporary Levant?

An opportunity to explore these questions arose from a meeting with klezmer music practitioners Alan Bern and Andreas Schmitges, respectively founder and artistic director and curator of Yiddish Summer Weimar. A summer festival and series of workshops that has run yearly in Weimar since 1999, Yiddish Summer Weimar has gained a reputation as Europe's most serious place to learn and play Yiddish music, with a long track record of exploring connections between klezmer and other central and eastern European musics. Bern and Schmitges sought to expand these musical conversations to Israel, and after an interactive seminar at the University of Haifa, they offered to partner with the department. Following extensive discussions and a successful funding application by Yiddish Summer Weimar, the Caravan Orchestra took shape as a youth exchange project for twenty-eight musicians aged between 18 and 26, fourteen based in Haifa and fourteen based in Weimar, around half of each group recruited from the host universities—the University of Haifa and the University of Music Franz Liszt Weimar—and half from surrounding communities, together with two young musical directors, klezmer accordionist Ilya Shneyveys from Riga and composer and *buzuq* player Jiryis Murkus Ballan from Nazareth.



Fig. 1: *Caravan Orchestra, University of Haifa, July 2017.*
Photograph: Abigail Wood.

At the core of the Caravan project lay embodied music-making: an intensive two-week rehearsal and travel schedule that would stretch and challenge the group's musicianship, leading to three public concerts. Nevertheless, the project was also intimately bound to questions of musical genre, practice and identity: the Caravan Orchestra sought to open a space to explore connections between a group of musical repertoires which are on one hand highly cosmopolitan, reflecting centuries of musical interaction between diverse populations in central and southeastern Europe, Turkey and the Levant, but on the other hand are today often framed within bounded identity discourses as "ethnic" or "heritage" musics.

As Clayton, Byron and Leante observe in the introduction to *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*, people make music with bodies as well as minds. Some musical practices and experiences "are tied to physical experiences of musical performances but owe little to linguistic mediation;" nevertheless, musical meaning is equally shaped by the discourses in which musical practices are embedded (2013:1). Collaborative music projects such as the Caravan Orchestra often involve negotiation between stakeholders with quite different goals: funders seeking to instrumentalise music as a tool of social intervention; audience members seeking to experience "conspicuous openness" to unfamiliar cultural products as a sign of cultural capital (Regev 2011:111) or seeking to see "authentic" representation of famil-

iar music by cultural others, and musicians seeking artistic enrichment, professional advancement or opportunities for travel.

While the potentially redemptive resonances of a musical project bringing together Jewish and Arab young musicians from Israel with their German counterparts, and culminating with a concert in a city with a heavy Nazi past, might have appealed to our funders, and certainly reflected recent European interests in music as a means of conflict resolution (Bergh & Sloboda 2010; Urbain 2008), the Caravan team was aware of the problematic history and Orientalist political undertones of European-funded musical initiatives seeking to intervene in the Middle East (Beckles Willson 2013). Having recently discussed musical conflict resolution projects in an undergraduate seminar at the University of Haifa, I was also mindful of my students' sharp critiques of the seemingly dual purpose of projects that sought to intervene in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict via music. While they agreed that formal dialogue activities might be a desirable activity for those who sought to engage directly with politics, my students resented the forced coupling of these to musical activities: why shouldn't participants just be allowed to make music? Second-year student Yigal made an even stronger point, critiquing the possibly negative impact of seemingly benign coexistence politics:

Do you remember when Rabin was assassinated? My parents were at that rally, and when they got back to the kibbutz their neighbour told them that Rabin had been shot immediately after the rally. It broke them—they've never been the same again. People were in euphoria, then they were let down. And it's the same with musical peace projects. They try to create an euphoria—but in the end everything stays the same, and they just drop you back into everyday life. I can't do that again.

Yigal's comments were a sharp reminder of the responsibility of project organisers to anchor musical practice in sustainable narratives, and to avoid casually framing individuals and their interaction as iconic of wider political processes. As such, the Caravan team sought to avoid deterministic identity discourses as far as possible. We chose to refer to the musicians using the relatively cosmopolitan term of city of origin ("musicians from Haifa," "musicians from Weimar") rather than by terms invoking state affiliation or ethnic identity (Israeli/Palestinian/German/Arab/Jewish), allowing participants as much space as possible to determine and express their own identity within the group. The musicians were accompanied by a student documentary film crew from Weimar who were present in most rehearsals; logistics and administration were handled by small teams at both institutions. The present article represents a final stakeholder in the project: like many academic ethnomusicologists who undertake performance projects as "overload" over and above their regular university teaching load (Rasmussen 2009:216), I sought both to theorise the group's experiences and to translate musical experience into academic capital acceptable to my university.

Like many intensive musical projects, the Caravan Orchestra was a transformative experience for many of those involved, marked by the exhilaration of producing good music on a concert stage and validated by audience applause, dancing and ova-

tions, but also reflected in the coalescence of new friendship groups and new musical skills, as musicians mixed by gender, ethnicity, citizenship and musical background chose to hang out, jam, and share reflections on the project well beyond the formal rehearsal schedule. Yet beyond aesthetic satisfaction, what kind of insights can such a project offer into the disrupted musical histories that it seeks to explore? In the following discussion, I explore this question via three elements of the Caravan experience: musical knowledge, repertory, and identity discourses. My comments are based on participatory fieldwork during the project—besides my administrative role as head of the host department, I sat in on rehearsals, enjoying the opportunity to flex my musical fingers, and joined the band in most social activities—and on recorded materials, including two concerts and several individual and group interviews with participants. All quoted material is from interviews and personal communications that took place during the three-week project. While the project leaders and musical directors are named here with their permission, names and other identifying characteristics of the participating musicians have been changed. Spoken English has been lightly edited for readability; where comments or interviews were not in English, the translations are my own.

Musical knowledge

Drawing together a group of thirty participants who spanned at least seven native languages (all participants were fluent in at least two languages and several used three languages on a daily basis) and four religions, the Caravan project clearly served as a meeting place for participants of diverse cultural and musical backgrounds. Unlike projects that seek to enable musical collaboration between performers from distinct ethnic-musical traditions, here, the musical fluencies brought by participants represented a more complicated matrix of knowledge and practice. Around half of the participants were primarily performers of Western art music, and around half had prior experience playing either Arab or klezmer music; many were also competent in other musical styles including jazz and Irish, Palestinian and Swedish folk musics. Yet participants also shared Western cosmopolitan cultural norms: most had experienced music education in Western-style institutions, all had at least some fluency in English, which served as a lingua franca for the workshop, and all shared to some degree the norms of globalised youth culture.

These different layers of stylistic and pedagogical experience produced not just an insider-outsider nexus, but rather a multidimensional set of musical competences and expectations that shaped the way that musical practices unfolded. Ambiguous musical terminology was initially confusing—Shneyveys clarified, “when I say ‘C,’ I mean ‘doh,’ not ‘si’”—yet participants quickly built musical bridges by seeking shared musical languages, jamming during breaks on jazz, popular music and melodies learned during the workshop. During one guided improvisation session, musicians began individual improvisations accompanied by a rhythmic ostinato, building

the wake of the almost complete destruction of Yiddish-speaking Jewish communities in the Holocaust. For most of today's young klezmer musicians, klezmer is not their first musical language or one replicated in their immediate home environment: they learn to play in formal workshops and experience Yiddish culture primarily through educational or consciously revived events. While this is common to many revived musical cultures in the Western world, the clean break in the klezmer tradition in Europe erased the possibility of musical heritage travel: today, affinity communities like Yiddish Summer Weimar stand in for lost "authentic" communities, and historic recordings stand in for contemporary culture bearers.

Differences in musical knowledge and habitus were not only reflected in repertoire, but also in contrasting cultures of musical work. During the early days of the project, differences in bureaucracy came to the fore, highlighting the cultural gulf between Western Europe and the Levant: the Haifa team found it difficult to assemble details of all of the participants in time to meet the German funders' seemingly early deadlines, as young musicians were unused to committing to a project several months in advance, and the lack of formal street addresses in Arab villages in Israel and a stateless Syrian Druze participant from the Golan Heights confounded seemingly simple administrative forms.

Likewise, among musicians the most frequent points of contention regarded rehearsal practices rather than stylistic knowledge. Classically trained musicians found it difficult to learn arrangements by ear: after two days clarinetist Shira exclaimed with exasperation, "I'm used to having notes in front of me! Here, even when we do have notes, the arrangement jumps between sections—for me it all has to be written down!" Similarly, during the project's feedback session, several classically trained musicians complained that rehearsals did not start on time, arrangements kept changing, and there was too much "democracy" regarding musical choices. By contrast, musicians from non-classical backgrounds tended to express appreciation that they had some input into musical choices, and suggested that the experimental nature of rehearsals had strengthened the group's ability to improvise on stage during the concert.

Repertoire and pedagogy: bridging disrupted histories

A palette of musical items drawn from diverse repertoires lay at the core of the Caravan project, providing the backdrop for subsequent discussions of style and genre. While descriptions of musical encounters in multicultural ensembles often place particular weight on interpersonal encounters between individual musicians from different ethnic and musical backgrounds, in practice, much of the musical and rhetorical work of collaboration is often borne by the selection of repertoire. The concert programme itself becomes a music-analytical statement, drawing often diverse parts into a coherent narrative. As Scott Marcus has observed, educational ensembles tend particularly frequently to perform eclectic repertoires, eschewing the

separation between genres that in the region itself are often performed, historically or presently, by separate ensembles, in favour of presenting a broad representation of regional culture. Discussing his UCSB Middle East Ensemble, Scott Marcus notes that including co-territorial regional and religious repertoires alongside those of ethnic minorities enables the ensemble both to present a “dense, multilayered sense of Arab cultures,” and to highlight “how deeply these pieces are connected within the culture, in terms of contexts, values, and meanings” (2009:207).

Likewise, both Shneyveys and Ballan drew eclectic elements from core repertoires that are already internally diverse. As Scott Marcus observes (*ibid.*), “Arab music” might potentially encompass art, folk and classical musics from a broad geographic region and historical remit, encompassing very diverse regional styles and reflecting broad histories of interaction with music of neighbouring regions including European and North American musics. Likewise, Walter Zev Feldman notes that historically klezmer repertory was heterogeneous; the core repertory of dance and listening genres exclusively associated with *klezmerim* (klezmer musicians) during the late 19th and early 20th century drew upon Jewish prayer melodies, European Baroque dance forms and stylistic elements drawn from Turkish and Balkan sources—and in practice, this repertory was interleaved with cosmopolitan and co-territorial non-Jewish repertoires, and with Jewish genres influenced by Gypsy and Moldavian musicians.⁵ The wider klezmer canon underwent further transformations in north America during the 20th century and in Israel, where klezmer musicians incorporated Ottoman melodies (Feldman 1994, Mazor 2000). Meanwhile, revival ensembles from the 1980s onwards voraciously combined historical instrumental klezmer music with other East Ashkenazi Jewish repertoires including Yiddish folk song, Yiddish theatre music and Hasidic *nigunim* (Wood 2013).

Nevertheless, while each of the Caravan Orchestra’s two musical directors reached well beyond core canonic repertoires in their respective genres, highlighting the internal diversity of the musical repertoires they brought, they approached the choice of pieces in different ways, reflecting different musical paths to the expression of cross-cultural connection. Ballan sought to expose the musicians to existing points of contact between Arab and Euro-American musical cultures, including classical music and jazz. The repertory he chose was primarily contemporary, drawn from the repertory of Middle Eastern jazz crossover musicians including Ziad Rahbani (Lebanon, born 1956) and Anouar Brahem (Tunisia, born 1957), whose music is coloured both by Arab folk materials and by contact with Western music cultures, in part rooted in the region’s colonial past. This repertory focused primarily on short motifs and repeated phrases, linked and extended in performance by improvisation and creative orchestration.

At the same time, he also drew upon local musical sensibilities including the strong connection of Palestinian Arabs living in northern Israel to Lebanese music and culture, highlighting a contiguous Levantine musical culture that defies historical disruptions—the current political reality makes travel between the two countries impossible:

I quoted “Caravan” from a Lebanese movie. For me it’s a big deal to expose this piece, because when we speak about [well-known Lebanese musicians] the Rahbani brothers, for example, we talk about their famous pieces, the well-known pieces that were published by record companies, but we don’t take the other side of them, like their soundtracks, which explain about the Lebanese identity (...) We come from the Galilee [region], many of the [Arab] musicians come from villages in the mountains, and this scene was shown in the movies.

These choices in part reflected Ballan’s personal musical interests, but also reflected two significant musical constraints: first, this was an instrumental ensemble, eschewing the primacy of the vocalist in much Arab music, and second, many instruments could not play quarter tones, limiting the range of *maqamat* that could successfully be played by the full band. Bridging complex musical geographies required finding musical repertoires that would actually be playable by the musicians of the Caravan Orchestra. While the project began with no heavyweight Arab classical music in the repertory, some Arab musicians requested to add the well-known *muwashshah* “Lama bada yatathanna” to the band’s repertory. While he agreed, this choice jibed with Ballan’s initial desire to move away from repertory that he perceived as stereotyping Arab musical culture:

“Lama bada yatathanna” (...) this was very tricky for me—we have a term in Arabic, especially in Lebanon: *mjaljaa*. *Mjaljaa*, it’s like, you use it a *lot*. And every “peace ensemble,” especially in the 1990s, played this piece. It’s like, “come on! We’re not going to play this cliché again.” So I tried really hard to break the stereotype (...) not to keep the original as it is. And here there was a conflict. I tried to start with the guitar solo, playing harmony, and many people complained that it’s not the [correct] rhythm (...)

Shneyveys, by contrast, primarily selected older repertory which tended to reinforce established canons of klezmer repertoire and practice, and prepared more prescriptive arrangements, some written out in full score. Two items were based upon substantial klezmer pieces recorded by early 20th century U.S.-American ensembles. Both echoed the theme of revisiting ruptured histories: “Liebes Tanz” (Yiddish: “Love Dance”) recorded by the Romanian-born klezmer bandleader Abe Schwartz was in fact recorded under the band name “Orchestra Romaneasca,” pointing to a southern European connection, and the title of Ukrainian-born Jewish clarinetist Naftule Brandwein’s virtuosic solo “Der Yid in Yerushalayim” (“The Jew in Jerusalem”) together with its use of the klezmer rhythm called in Yiddish *terkisher* (“Turkish,” related to the Greek *sirto*), pointed to the Middle East (though Shneyveys was quick to point out that the picturesque names of klezmer pieces recorded in the early 20th century were often assigned by record companies to pieces that otherwise circulated with no title).

A third substantial piece posited connections between adjacent repertoires marked as Jewish and non-Jewish: Shneyveys coupled the well-known “Sultaniyegah Sirto” by Sadi Işılav (Turkey, 1899–1969) with a short composition entitled “Jewish Dance” by Soviet Jewish film composer Isaak Dunaevsky (Ukraine/Rus-

sia, 1900–1955). Both pieces are “folk-like” art music; originally part of a film soundtrack, Dunaevsky’s dance opens with an identical two-beat melodic motive to that with which Işıl原因 opens the first fast section of the “Sultaniyegah Sirto.” Rather than a more conventional coupling in which one piece follows the other, Shneyveys inserted the second piece into the first, drawing attention to the sectional nature of the music and to the melodic links between the pieces, and also allowing his orchestral arrangement of “Sultaniyegah Sirto” to build upon the ‘camp’ overstated orchestral style of Dunaevsky’s dance.

Another core component of the Caravan Orchestra’s klezmer repertory was a series of three Hasidic *nigunim* (including “Ashreinu,” discussed above). Like “Lama bada yatathanna” in the Arab repertory, these melodies, not attributed to a particular composer, stood for a historical musical authenticity, accentuated by their connection to Hasidic religious practice. Notably, during the learning process, these four pieces served as particularly strong sites of stylistic learning.

Preparing this diverse repertory—eventually totalling around two hours of music—for public performance entailed diverse learning experiences. Musicians had not only to learn to perform the “notes;” they also had to perform in front of paying audiences including expert listeners. Seeking to shape the sound and stylistic nuances that they sought, the two musical directors employed a range of pedagogical techniques. Primary among these was listening. A few weeks before the project began, participants received a large folder of musical recordings, sometimes including multiple versions of the same piece by different artists, to which they were asked to listen in preparation for the project. Both musical directors returned to these recordings frequently in rehearsals, preferring to call up a recording on YouTube and listen together to a solo lick several times rather than to begin from a fixed notation. The corpus of recordings shared by the band served as a locus of ‘authentic’ performance practice, but in its diversity also deconstructed any conception of a single authoritative source.

In teaching klezmer repertory, Shneyveys drew upon explicitly analytical instructional techniques cemented in international klezmer workshops, particularly in Yiddish Summer Weimar, where he is a regular teacher. Reinforcing the conception of Hasidic vocal repertory as an aesthetic core from which to learn Yiddish musical style, he began from the Hasidic *nigun* “Ashreinu,” teaching the melody to the Haifa group during a brief initial meeting, and to the Weimar group on the bus from the airport to the university campus in Haifa. On the first day of rehearsals, waiting for the final musicians to arrive, the whole group sat in a circle in the foyer of the university’s School of Arts, singing through the melody, and noting significant stylistic points: internal heterophony created by two variants of the same phrase, and a repeated-note hook which introduced the second section: features which would return in more melodically complicated klezmer pieces; later in the programme, the group would sing this and other *nigunim* around the table at a traditional Jewish Sabbath meal, linking stylistic practice to cultural context.

Likewise, for the two core klezmer pieces Shneyveys circulated four- or five-line scores which sought to educate players about the overall structures and textures of the music:

There are four or five-line arrangements with bass, chords, harmony, sometimes a counter-line, and the melody, so that everyone can see the whole thing. This is a very important skill and concept that I learned partly from Alan Bern: when you're playing music that has some improvisational element, you cannot just be a player (...) you have to think like a composer, you have to know what the other instruments are doing, even if you can't hear them (...) [because then you can] modify what you're doing depending on what other people are doing. (...) When I play accordion or an accompanying instrument I want to make sure that I know the form, where the melody comes in, on which instrument, because I want to keep everything together. But really, *everyone* should be thinking about that.

These analytical pedagogical approaches to klezmer repertory explicitly acknowledged the lack of fluency of most musicians in the genre, seeking simultaneously to build practical competence and theoretical understanding of the repertory.

By contrast, the group tended to learn Arab music in a more embodied manner, focusing on stylistic gestures rather than formal reference to genre or theory. Orchestration and arrangement were flexible: the orchestra learned the melody, and a number of Arab musicians weighed into decisions, demonstrating: "it should go like this (...)." The *'ud*, *qanun* and *ney* players instinctively rendered phrases with appropriate ornamentation and responded to solos. Unused to the textures of Arab music, some classically-trained musicians initially misunderstood these practices as bad musicianship: fellow musician Jürgen interpreted *'ud* player Tawfiq's responses to the solos of others, in Arab musical culture an indicator of engaged listening, as a desperate bid to be heard: "He tries to play solos whenever he can, when it's quiet. It's really annoying." Here, the process of embodied learning was slower but still effective: by the two-week mark Jürgen remarked to me that he found that he had assimilated the basic *maqam* structures by hearing Tawfiq play next to him.

Since most of the Arab repertory was based around short phrases, in this repertory individual improvisation played a central role. The ability to improvise *taqasim* is fundamental to Arab art music culture (Racy 2000); in practice, improvisatory sections in the orchestra's arrangements built upon the prior competences of musicians. Tawfiq and Khalil, experienced and strong improvisers within the Arab classical style, frequently performed *taqasim* and embellished phrases; likewise, clarinetist Erica who had substantial experience performing klezmer music, performed *doinas*. The jazz crossover origin of several pieces enabled broader participation: several musicians brought a strong background in jazz and added solos.

Musicians assimilated the basic modal structures of most of the music fairly quickly, especially since around two thirds of the repertory fell between D minor and D *hijaz* modality (and its close klezmer equivalent, *freygish*); they also built skills including learning melodic and harmonic formulae to accompany improvisations in Arab and klezmer music. However, tuning issues and rhythmic structures drawn from Arab music challenged many orchestra members. As the band became more

fluent in modal structures, Ballan experimented with introducing quarter tones into one of the klezmer pieces, building upon microtuning present in the early 20th century recording on which the Caravan's version was based:

Yesterday, for example, I asked all the violins to play quarter tones. And they did it! And it was amazing, just so perfect. And then Ilya said, maybe the flutes and clarinets will start—and I said, no, wait, we have something pure here. Let's keep it pure, don't make it a cliché. (...) So it's like a lab, you try things.

Likewise, the rhythmic structures of Arab music were hard to grasp for many musicians, since the patterns of accentuation had no clear parallel in classical, jazz or klezmer repertoires. During a master class, University of Haifa professor Taiseer Elias, a master performer of Arab classical music, taught the group to clap the ten-beat *sama'i thaqil* pattern that underlies "Lama bada yatathanna," clapping the hands on the knees for the strong *dum* beats and clapping the hands together for the weaker *tek*. With guidance from *riq* player Rami, percussionists Christoph and Yael learned the basic rhythmic cycles underlying the Arab repertory, yet during the first concert, a week into the programme, these still sometimes slipped: it took a further week for the rhythm section fully to internalise the beat. Further, while players of melodic instruments made gestures towards Arab ornamentation practices, incorporating trills and slides, they did not necessarily notice the close correspondence between the accentuation patterns of the melody and the rhythmic cycle. While the percussion section learned to accompany Ziad Rahbani's "Raqsat Tahiyat" with a *baladi* pattern, most melody players simply played the melody with a 4/4 feel, failing to notice the pronounced accent on the second quaver of the bar in recorded versions of the piece, echoing the second *dum* stroke in the rhythmic pattern.

These differences stood out to the Arab players: hearing a cello play the melody of "Lama bada yatathanna" in a classical style, saxophonist Lubna whispered to me "It sounds totally un-Arab, no?" In a later interview, she contrasted the Caravan Orchestra with her experience of playing in a more established Arab-Jewish youth orchestra, in which musicians had the time to "get the feeling of what really is a [*maqam*] *rast*, what is a [*maqam*] *bayat*." Nevertheless, she noted a shared pleasure in experiencing new musical styles: "This is the first time that I play Yiddish so I'm experiencing the Yiddish genre. First of all it's hard but I like it. It really resembles some of the Arab music." Likewise, referring to Arab music, she noted, "It's really nice to see how people react to this music, especially people who come from the classical field. Sometimes I want the piece to be played differently, but after that I just stop playing and just hear everyone." Sometimes this listening led Lubna to new ways to approach familiar repertory:

When I jam with my friends in Haifa I always try to play some Arabic music and some jazz licks, and sometimes it's nice, but when we play a piece that Jiryis gave us, I would never think about doing this, because I came from Arab music and I restrict myself from doing jazzy licks. But when I see jazz players like the trumpet and the trombone player play a piece in which I never thought of doing a jazz solo... when I

see people from different places placing their own feelings, their own playing, I think it combines very nicely.

Identities

It's a project about young people having fun with music, so this documentary will be about young people doing music and having fun in a city they don't know... [We originally intended to focus our film] on how "otherness" can be broken by being in another country and living with people, how it can start discussions about nationality, ethnicity, and religion—that's what we expected, that the musicians would be talking about it as well, because this is such a significant topic in their lives (...) And we realised, they are just young people who make music together and enjoy the time and get to know each other through the music and the trips, but there are no discussions! (Karoline, film crew member, interview 28 July 2017)

In focusing on differences in nationality, ethnicity and religion, Karoline's expectations were congruent with the ways in similar music projects tend to be represented both in the media and in academic literature. The Caravan Orchestra intersected with two musical meeting points that have received heavy attention in recent years: projects that bring together musicians from conflicting groups in the Middle East, and questions about Jewish and non-Jewish identities in the European klezmer scene. In both cases, attention to identity issues has tended to outweigh discussions of musical practices, and in both cases, scholars have critiqued the framing of these projects both by journalists and by those organising and promoting them. For example, media coverage of the West-East Divan orchestra tends to focus almost exclusively upon the political statement made by the orchestra, typically interpreting the project as a positive sign of how the wider national groups from which the musicians are drawn might interact (see, for example, Burton-Hill 2014). While scholars including Rachel Beckles Willson have critiqued the "problematic utopia" (Beckles Willson 2009:21) embodied by the orchestra, such critiques still primarily focus upon extra-musical narratives rather than upon the day-to-day practice of music-making. Likewise, the vast majority of recent literature on klezmer music in contemporary Europe focuses on identity issues and authenticity discourses: what does it mean for non-Jewish Germans and Poles to engage with this music, 'reinventing' Jewish culture in a Europe virtually devoid of Jews, or for Jews to return to play music in formerly Nazi territory (see, for example, Gruber 2002, Sapoznik 1998, Waligórska 2013).

Nevertheless, for a project that seemed to carry so much extra-musical baggage, which had been discussed at length by the organising team, it was indeed noticeable how little such topics seemed to arise in conversations between Caravan participants. Musicians seemed to prefer minimal identity statements: during the first meeting of the whole group in Haifa, Shneyveys launched straight into music-making, later introducing himself and Ballan by simply saying: "We have two musical directors; he's from here, I'm from there;" later that morning when the group introduced themselves one by one, all present elected simply to give their first name.

Communications acted to some extent as a barometer of collective ease: I noticed that when rehearsals were progressing well participants tended to hang out in mixed groups and to stick to English in rehearsals; whereas when the group was stressed, participants tended to hang out in native language groups and sometimes chose to communicate during rehearsals in languages not understood by all. However, by the end of the project, most participants genuinely seemed to hang out in mixed-ethnic, mixed-gender groups, as evidenced both by my own observations and by some two hundred photos and video clips shared by participants on the Caravan Orchestra WhatsApp group. These pictures showed a group of young musicians enjoying activities that young musicians enjoy: an impromptu busking session on a sunny Weimar morning earned them enough money to eat at a fancy ice cream café, and jam sessions seemed to erupt whenever possible.

Outside formal rehearsals, most musicians stayed to participate in a wide programme of social activities, including trips to the beach and local tourist spots. Such events also served as informal learning zones, exposing participants to social contexts connected to the repertoires they were learning. Notably, these activities required members of the Haifa group to cross cultural lines usually firmly embedded in Israeli society: Arab members of the orchestra participated in a traditional Jewish Shabbat dinner, Jewish members jammed at downtown bar Kabareet, primarily an Arab music venue, and several Jewish and Arab participants shared an apartment during their ten days in Weimar. During a feedback session, Jewish-Israeli participant Irina commented, “I lived [in the apartment] with a lot of people: we study together but I got to know them a lot better. In the university [of Haifa] you can feel a difference between the Arab and the [Jewish]-Israeli people, but here we mixed together (...) we enjoy the same jokes and it was really super fun.”

Nevertheless, this comfortable interaction masked disparities in the experience of difference, most frequently revealed in private conversation. During one-on-one interviews, participants employed strikingly different narratives and expectations to parse their experiences of the project. German-speaking participants tended to frame the Caravan project as part of a wider multicultural society, playing down cultural differences between participants. Erica exclaimed that the music played by the group “reflects all of us,” Mette said, “I don’t think there are really any [cultural] differences,” and Jana reflected that compared to similar projects she had participated in in Eastern Europe, this project focused on music more than on identities. When misunderstandings did arise, these participants tended to attribute them to personal qualities rather than national stereotype.

Conversely, in private conversation both Jewish and Arab musicians from the Haifa group were more likely to speak explicitly about identity issues, revealing that the project had stretched comfort zones, requiring a conscious effort to cross cultural fissures firmly ingrained in Israeli society. Here, politics quickly bubbled to the surface. While klezmer music was warmly appreciated for its musical qualities, Arab musicians were unused to experiencing Jewish culture from a minority, diaspora standpoint; one expressed initial discomfort at participating in a Yiddish culture

festival. Ihab told me “I never dared to play klezmer before—you get the impression from the media that you’re a traitor to your people;” Shadi, a Syrian resident of the Golan Heights, was wary of implicit political agendas, checking before signing up that the project did not “have a political character;” during the early days of the project he debated in Arabic with a fellow participant how he should respond to the film crew: they asked him to explain what it meant to have “undefined” written in the nationality category in his ID document—but he had to be careful when talking about politics, since he was employed by the Israeli health ministry. Jewish participant Yael, who came from outside Haifa, admitted that she had never really met Arabs before, and had been shocked that a friend responded to her plan to participate in the Caravan project with a racist attitude, asking her, “why don’t you make music with your own people?” At first, Yael reflected in Weimar, she had wondered whether she ought to apologise to Arab participants about the Israeli occupation—but then she realised that if so, the German participants should also apologise to her, since had her grandparents not fled the Nazis this would be her homeland. In the end, she concluded, none of the participants should apologise: it’s not their fault.

Such comments were rarely made in public fora. However, when during a rehearsal Shneyveys compared the musical texture he wanted in “A yid in yerushalayim” to his perception of the marketplaces of Jerusalem— “here you hear a piano, here some other music (...)”—Ihab burst out: “And the police, and the army...,” abruptly reminding the group that their music-making was not immune to omnipresent regimes of identity and power. Nevertheless, the decision not to foreground identity narratives in the Caravan project did appear to make space to bring other narratives to the fore, and crucially allowed this to remain a project whose primary focus was music, not identity.

Conclusion

It felt like arriving somewhere: arriving in the orchestra and arriving in a bubble we were able to create (...) it’s hard to put these experiences into words. Maybe this is a sign for a high-quality experience: that you can’t really put it into words. (...) It was interesting to see the group dynamics: how we change, how the music changes us, how we change the music, how we help each other. (Jürgen, German participant, feedback session 7 August 2017)

Judging from the responses of participants, audiences and funders, the Caravan Orchestra project was a success. The musical energy of the rehearsals and concerts was infectious, and more than one participant commented to me that the experience of participating had been one of the high points of their musical lives. No such project can be immune to utopic discourses about cultural connections—indeed engaging with such discourses may be a requirement to get funding—however, the moment with which I began, when a Hasidic *nigun* fused with Palestinian *dabkah*, shows that the musical project of combining repertoires was convincing enough to

sustain a project in which for the musicians involved, such discourses would not be the driving force.

Yet to what extent might such a project also serve as a research tool, making visible hidden connections between Arab, Jewish and European musics? A two-week performance project cannot in itself undertake the historical and analytical research needed thoroughly to address this question; however, the meeting of Levantine and klezmer musical fluencies in this project did provide several pointers for future research. As performers began to become fluent in unfamiliar musics and bridged differences in rehearsal practice, points of intersection emerged. Klezmer researchers have debated the intersection between Ashkenazi Jewish and Turkish and Arabic melodic modes; listening to Arab *'ud* player Tawfiq instinctively play a phrase of klezmer melody in *maqam bayat* pointed to a specific melodic figuration where this might be explored; likewise, Shneyveys's coupling of Russian-Jewish and Turkish repertory brought out a clear example of stylistic intersection. Conversely, the incorporation of film and popular musics alongside more traditional numbers and the tendency of many band members to jam in jazz styles in between rehearsals brought home the intersection of global and local flows in musical style, recalling that such flows are not only a product of late modern globalisation, but are also audible throughout the history of the seemingly distinct repertoires being performed.

Further, in generating intense creative energy around a chosen nexus of repertory, the project helped to create interpersonal connections, both academic and musical, that might in turn make a trans-regional musical research project possible. Modest travel funding enabled participants from both privileged and peripheral communities to travel and explore their individual musical competences in new contexts, often broaching conventional social boundaries, and sometimes even pushing political boundaries, such as when Palestinian-Israeli musicians from Haifa were able to jam with Syrian refugees in a restaurant in Weimar.

Finally, such research calls for a nuanced approach to the topic of music, identity and conflict. While, as Svanibor Pettan has noted, increasing numbers of projects in applied ethnomusicology seek to use musical knowledge to improve the human condition in conflict zones, and as a tool "to empower minority groups and at the same time to enlighten majority groups" (2010:178), allowing essentialising identity discourses to overshadow the multifaceted musical backgrounds of participants risks limiting expressive and discursive space, and likewise tends to reinforce rather than challenge simplistic musico-social discourses—whether exclusivist ownership narratives regarding "heritage" musics that play down cross-communal interchange, or utopian discourses that overlook stylistic diversity in order to frame music as a universal language. Rather than framing groups of participants as Others then charting a triumphal musical path to unity, we might seek instead to explore how musicians probe similarity and difference in practice, playing with and around the edges of identity narratives, echoing similar processes in the long histories of their region, and in turn offering a more convincing metaphor for lived human relationships in a complex, divided region.

Acknowledgements

The project “CARAVAN ORCHESTRA—A Transnational Journey of Musical and Cultural Discovery” was organised and managed by Yiddish Summer Weimar, with the financial support of the Stiftung Deutsch-Israelisches Zukunftsforum, ConAct: Koordinierungszentrum Deutsch-Israelischer Jugendaustausch, DIG Erfurt, and the UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music Studies at the University of Music Franz Liszt, Weimar. Rehearsals were hosted by the University of Music Franz Liszt Weimar and the Department of Music, School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, University of Haifa. I acknowledge with gratitude the hard work of Alan Bern, Nasser Halahlih and Andreas Schmitges, together with their teams in Weimar and Haifa, without whom the project could never have come to fruition. I thank all the participants in the Caravan Orchestra project for their willingness to participate in this research and their good humour and musicianship, and Jiryis Ballan, Rachel Harris, Anne K. Rasmussen, Andreas Schmitges and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

Endnotes

- 1 A short film including some video footage of this concert is available online at <http://caravanorchestra.eu/video/>, last accessed 17 February 2018. Several sound recordings from the concert are also available on this site.
- 2 <http://yiddishsummer.eu/special/caravan.html>, last accessed 29 August 2017.
- 3 Most Arab students at the University of Haifa self-identify as Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. Unlike Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, they hold full Israeli citizenship, but are not required to serve in the army and in practice frequently experience discrimination or are the targets of discrimination in public discourse. Most are Muslims and Christians; but there are also Druze students from neighbouring villages who do serve in the armed forces and have a strong Israeli identity, and from the occupied Golan Heights, who do not hold Israeli citizenship and identify as Syrian.
- 4 See Seroussi & Regev 2004 for discussion.
- 5 Feldman 2017, chapter 2.

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