

Maybe Young People Really Do Care

What follows is a YouTube analysis by my son, Joshua Rieders, for his course Music – 301. He asked me to guess what he selected, and I thought about The Beatles or perhaps some contemporary artist. Perhaps, he would even be moved by a classic Brahms or Berlioz piece. However, I was wrong; and what he had to say about his choice gives me great hope for the future Jewish generation.

This is what Joshua had to say:

I chose to focus on Klezmer music, Dave Tarras, and other influential artists who helped formulate the foundations for Klezmer. The book that I have decided to use can be found in the SUNY Empire library and is called: *The Book of Klezmer: The History, The Music, The Folklore from the 14th Century to the 21st*, authored by Yale Strom. The book is authored by Yale Strom, a self-described “revivalist in conducting extensive field research in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans among the Jewish and Roma communities.” (yalestrom.com) The YouTube video I have chosen is a recording of a concert that was coordinated by the Balkan Arts Center in 1978. The concert features the Dave Tarras Trio with Dave Tarras on clarinet, Samuel Beckerman on accordion, and Max Goldberg on drums and vocals.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6zKleJSYi4&ab_channel=CenterforTraditionalMusicandDance

In watching the first opening songs of this video, I immediately had goosebumps when I heard the clarinet. When I turned 13, my Bar Mitzvah featured a Klezmer band. My sisters both had Klezmer musicians at their Bat Mitzvahs. For me personally, I felt a strong sense of connection upon hearing Klezmer again for the first time in years. My grandparents on my father’s side were both (albeit to different extents) connected to traditions and the culture of the “Shtetl” (a closely-knit town or village of Jews in Europe). These connections were demonstrated through their love of old Yiddish music, plays, shows, and the Yiddish language in general. Despite my grandmother being fluent in Yiddish, sadly none of us in my family took the opportunity to learn from her when she was still around. My grandparents were not necessarily the most observant in terms of Jewish rituals and practices, yet they formed a deep connection with their Jewish neighbors by way of their love and admiration for the community. This community of individuals such as my grandparents were a part of the larger movement to revive the Yiddish language and Yiddish culture overall, including Klezmer.

In some respects, I believe my grandparents (as Yale Strom discussed in his introduction) utilized Yiddish music as a way of healing from the trauma that was the Shoah (Holocaust). For my grandmother in particular, whose extended family in Poland was murdered by the Nazis, she embodied the notion of Jewish survival and perseverance in the face of horrible tragedy. When I was younger, my grandparents had a next-door neighbor who had survived Auschwitz and fled to the states. I vividly remember seeing the numbers on his arm on the few occasions that we spoke. Initially, this quiet and stately gentleman (understandably) had no interest in reflecting on his traumatic history. It wasn't until my grandfather started pestering him to come to synagogue that he began to open up about his past. Ultimately, it took time for this survivor to at least partially heal, and I believe this is a decent metaphor for the revival of Klezmer in the 1970's. Prior to this period, Klezmer was perhaps viewed as a symbol of the past, a reminder of how bright and vivid the Jewish communities of Europe were prior to WWII. Like the survivor, Klezmer music and musicians needed time to heal and revive. I hope to delve more into these issues as I continue reading and watching videos about this fascinating history.

Strom, Yale *The Book of Klezmer: The History, The Music, The Folklore from the 14th century to the 21st*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2002.

Strom, Yale. "Yale Strom". <https://yalestrom.com/>

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