

# Music as an expression of Jewishness in contemporary Poland

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## Abstract

Over half a century after the Holocaust, in Eastern European countries where the Jewish community remained only a small part of the population, products of Jewish culture (or what is perceived as Jewish culture), including music, have become vital components of the popular public domain. In Poland, there are festivals and concerts of Jewish music, more and more records with this music, Jewish museums, and renovated Jewish districts, with Jewish cuisine, and music that are offered to tourists visiting Poland as the main attractions. They attract enthusiastic – and often non-Jewish – crowds.

I consider how non-Jews involved in this movement in Poland perceive and implement Jewish culture, why they do it, how much it involves the recovery of Jewish heritage, and how this represents the musical culture of Jews in museums and at events organized for tourists. I also consider the relation of non-Jews as a majority group to Jews as a minority group, as well as the impact of the musical actions of the former on the musical culture of the latter.

The article is based on field research and observations I have made during more than twenty years, both among the remaining Jews in Poland and in mixed or non-Jewish communities where music perceived as Jewish is promoted.

**Keywords:** Jewishness, Jewish heritage, music, Poland, minority group

Elements of Jewish culture (or what is perceived as Jewish culture), including music, have become vital components of the popular public domain in Eastern European countries where the Jewish community remained only a small part of the population over half a century after the Holocaust. In Poland, there are now a number of festivals and concerts of Jewish music, records with Jewish music, Jewish museums, renovated Jewish districts, with Jewish cuisine and music for visiting tourists. All these attract enthusiastic – and often non-Jewish – audiences.

In the present essay, I will consider:

- the role of Jewish music festivals and concerts in the restoration of the memory of Jews,
- how musical performance opens up cultural spaces to think in new ways

about the identity of individuals and communities, as well as about the relationship between ethnic and national minorities and majority group.

My reflections are the result of field research and observations I have made during more than twenty years, both among the remaining Jews in Poland, and in mixed or non-Jewish communities, where music perceived as Jewish is promoted.

## Recalling a shared history

The history of Jewish presence on Polish territory dates back a thousand years. The oldest source attesting to this presence dates from around 965. It is a travel account by Ibrahim Ibn Yakub, a Sephardic Jew from Cordoba, containing a description of the state of Mieszko I.<sup>1</sup> While throughout this millennium Poland was periodically even considered a “paradise for Jews” (Krzyżanowski 1975:329), during the Holocaust it actually became their hell. 90 per cent of the 3.3 million Jews living in Poland before the Second World War were murdered. After the war, the number of those who returned or stopped hiding was around 380,000 (according to Yad Vashem), but most of them soon left. The last wave left in the wake of the anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic campaign in March 1968. Today, there is a small Jewish community in Poland consisting mainly of Jews who did not emigrate and their descendants. Jews who stayed were often unaware of their Jewish origins, or did not think of themselves in terms of being Jewish out of fear or shame (Garbowski 2016:16).

Aleksander Hertz, a sociologist of Polish-Jewish relations, claimed in his book *The Jews in Polish Culture* that there were no Jews in post-war Poland, while at the same time stating that Poles would never be able to forget the Jews (Hertz 1988:5). His words turned out to be prophetic in a sense. In the past three decades the collective memory of Jewishness in the post-PPR country has been gradually returning. The increasing number of places where one can come into contact with various elements of Jewish culture, festivals of Jewish culture and publications in Polish introducing this culture, have become visible symbols of this process.<sup>2</sup> This memory persists not only in large centres, such as the community in Kraków with its Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, the best-known and most often described by researchers (e.g. Slobin 2000; Saxonberg & Waligórska 2006, 2013). Many events dedicated to Jewish culture also take place in smaller towns, inhabited before the war by large numbers of Jews, but now absent from them (Shapiro 2020). A special role in the process of refreshing memory is played by non-Jewish musicians who create and perform klezmer music, which is very popular in Poland. As “intermediaries” between past and present they, more than others involved in the transmission of Jewish traditions, influence how the Jewish part of their country’s history is perceived. Their music has also become an important means of dealing with the traumatic legacy of the Second World War and the Holocaust, with which the memory of people living in Poland is burdened. Particularly in small towns, such as Sejny, or Chmielnik, Lelów and Szczekociny, where Eleanor Shapiro conducted her research (Shapiro 2020), Jewish music

1. <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/bio-gramy/2821-ibrahim-ibn-jakub> (last accessed 1 July 2022).

2. This is discussed at length by Magdalena Waligórska in the chapter “Klezmer as Simulacrum” (2013:5–8).

concerts contributed to break the silence of the Jewish part of the history of these places. The organisers of the concerts and the artists testify to this.

The spreading fashion for Jewishness in Europe and in Poland is not seen positively by everyone. It is controversial that art originating from a genre of an ethnic/religious group is being culturally appropriated by artists who do not identify themselves as Jewish. Ruth E. Gruber, for example, writes about the European klezmer scene as part of a “virtual Jewishness” that threatens to replace and overshadow “authentic” Jewish culture (Gruber 2002:50). Addressing the problem of “new authenticities” in later works, Gruber points out the analogy between the phenomena of “virtual Jewishness” and the “imaginary wild West”, having to do with the fascination of Poles (and other Europeans) with the culture of the Far West (Gruber 2009). She also points out that as a result of the rapid proliferation of social media and the recent lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the boundaries between what is real and what is “virtual”, and between different identities, are becoming increasingly blurred (Gruber 2022). Indeed, the de facto absence of Jews in Europe has given impetus to the creation of a Jewish world by non-Jews living here, and the resurgence of this culture through them is sometimes seen as a misrepresentation of reality. One argument for the validity of such an assessment could be that Jewish culture (including music), which reaches the widest audience, has become an object of commerce. Negative emotions are also generated by associating the places where it is presented with persecution and extermination. Attention is also drawn to the fact that there are elements of kitsch in the efforts to promote Jewish culture, which is perhaps inevitable if one wants to cater to the tastes of mass consumers. Critical statements even include terms such as “Jewish zoo”, “fakelore”, “Jewish Disneyland” and even “cultural necrophilia” (Waligórska 2013:5). There is a less pejorative tinge to the term “phantom community” used by Mark Slobin to refer to the “lost population” whose music of “presumed authenticity”, the product of a fantasy shared by audiences and musicians of various sorts, is presented in Krakow’s Kazimierz. Slobin wonders whether the term “entertainment”, rather than “presentation”, is more appropriate for this situation, but on the other hand it seems to him an “equally strange” word to describe the way people spend their time in a place associated with Jews who are no longer there (Slobin 2000:83).

However, the renaissance of Jewishness in Poland can be looked at from a different perspective and seen in a positive light. Indeed, the growing number of events related to Jewish culture is apparently fulfilling a widespread desire among non-Jewish inhabitants of this country to change their ambivalent attitudes towards Jews, Poland’s historical Other. The educational and cultural activities undertaken and the involvement of the media in promoting Jewish heritage can be seen as an effort to strengthen a political option oriented towards supporting multiculturalism in a national environment polarised between populist and globalist worldviews. Magdalena Waligórska points out that the revival of klezmer and the boom in Jewish heritage in Poland can be

seen as a translation of this heritage and that cultural appropriation can be seen in terms of enrichment of one's own and adapted culture rather than mere deprivation (Waligórska 2013:8–15). Of course, as in any such process, Jewish music performed by non-Jews today cannot have the same form, meaning or function as music played by Jewish musicians in Europe before the Holocaust. It is only natural that it takes on new forms and acquires new meanings, relevant to the community in which it currently functions. It is worth noting at this point that this borrowing of elements of one culture by another is, in the case of most Polish artists, based not on an uncritical and unreflective adoption of the music of the Other, but on selective and creative adaptation. One could say that we are dealing here with hybridity, which would mean a dynamic and interactive process of borrowings and as a result the origin of some new, open eclectic and changeable culture. It should be noted that in Poland the cooperation between cultures seems to be supernatural and supercultural rather than international and intercultural, which is the case in many other countries. This means that it takes place at a deeper level than that which would be determined by national or cultural conditions. Music serves as a metaphor for national identity, but the nature of the introduced changes makes it go beyond national borders, geocultural space and historical periods (Goldschmitt 2014).

Here, I will focus on the positive aspects of the resurgence of Jewishness in Poland thanks to Jews and non-Jews living here or coming from abroad. I distance myself from negative views that perceive this phenomenon as meaningless, driven purely by economic motivations and detrimental to "real" Jewish culture. I am particularly interested in how the music of the Jewish Other is being revived in Poland, what constitutes the Jewishness of this music, and how this revival contributes to the majority group's respect and understanding of Jewish minority culture, not the only minority group living in Poland.

## The "new" Jewish tradition

Poland was once home to the largest Jewish population in the world and was one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse countries in Europe. Today, the Jewish minority makes up only a small percentage of the total population, and Poland is a relatively homogeneous country in terms of culture (quite apart from the situation in recent months, when refugees from Ukraine began arriving here in large numbers). However, even the Holocaust and its catastrophic effects did not cause the annihilation of the culture produced over the centuries by Polish Jews, although its transmission now takes place in different contexts and under different conditions.

An important role in the process of saving Jewish culture from oblivion and reviving it is played by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which has been operating in Warsaw since 2013. It differs from other Jewish historical museums in its philosophy and the way in which it presents its exhibits. It does not focus on the martyrdom of Second World War and the



Holocaust (as other museums of Jewish history do), but instead shows the contribution by Jews to the development of Polish culture, science and economy. This does not mean that the museum closes itself off to difficult moments in the history of Polish Jews. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Chief Curator of the Permanent Exhibition, sees the museum “as an act of recovery”:

There’s been a terrible break in this history. It is irreparable, and we have to acknowledge it. And the way I think about it is that we have to build bridges, fragile as they might be, across the chasm – this is expressed in the very form of the building’s main hall. “Po-lin”, which sounds like Hebrew for “here you shall rest”, conveys the message that Jews are a fundamental part of this place, in spite of some of the worst events in human history (Garbowski 2016:6).

While museums are traditionally regarded as repositories of tangible heritage, the collections presented in the Warsaw museum are largely based on intangible heritage resources. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that intangible heritage is an extremely important part of history, not to be underestimated when artefacts are missing, a situation we often face in the case of the history of Polish Jews (Dudek & Sikora 2016:38). Giving the example of a wooden synagogue ceiling in the museum, the researcher shows how, through its refashioning using traditional tools, materials and techniques learned from surviving documents, this intangible heritage, i.e. the knowledge of how to do it, was recovered.

Figure 1. Reconstructed wooden synagogue ceiling in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews; <https://virtualtour.polin.pl/punkt/3-gwozdziec-synagogue/>; <https://virtualtour.polin.pl/punkt/3-gwozdziec-synagogue/> (last accessed 3 March 2023).

In doing so, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett emphasises that the objects created in this way should not be regarded as forgeries, reproductions or reconstructions. They are actual objects of a *new kind*, whose value is closely linked to this recovered heritage (Dudek & Sikora 2016:39; see also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:25).

Although Jewish music is an intangible heritage, the way it has been restored in recent decades in Poland shows a certain analogy with the above-described procedure concerning the recovery of intangible heritage linked to lost material heritage. Many musicians who take part in such activities undertake research on Jewish music, study various types of surviving textual documents, musical notations, recordings and interview old Polish performers who remember this music.

It should be further noted that, despite the rupture caused by the Holocaust, “Jewish” music performed in Poland today has retained the ability which makes it remain in the space of encounter between Jews and non-Jews that it had before the war. Observing today’s musical practice, one could even say, following the late historian of Jewish origin living in Poland, Henryk Halkowski (2003:152), that both in the sphere of the profane and the sacred a “Jew profession” (“zawód żyda”) practised by non-Jewish musicians has been created here.

Although the term may seem to have a pejorative overtone, it is important to realise that non-Jewish klezmer musicians in Poland are generally professional musicians in the sense that they often have a musical education and earn their living by playing. They draw inspiration from Jewish culture and perform in place of Jews, providing a unique insight into their music and history. It is also worth recalling that older Polish folk musicians were often pupils of Jewish musicians. After all, before the war, Jewish music co-existed with Polish (and also Roma) music in many villages and towns. Jewish bands played at Polish weddings, and when there was a shortage of Jewish musicians, Polish colleagues were asked to help.

### New hybrid musical genres as an outcome of cross-cultural dialog

Music performed as “Jewish” in Poland today is based on hybrid models. It should be noted that the adaptation of foreign melodies in Jewish music has been practised by Jewish cantors and klezmer musicians historically, in various forms and with varying intensity. Jewish musical genres, which had different functions and were often linked to specific ritual or social contexts, interacted with each other and drew inspiration from different musical traditions (Muszkalska 2008).

In the case of klezmer music, the models for musicians in Poland are the styles of playing known to them from recordings introduced in the U.S. of the 1910s–1930s by David Tarras, Naftule Brandwein, the Epstein Brothers and other musicians who emigrated from Russia, Ukraine and Poland in the early twentieth century. Characteristic of these styles is the blending of traditional

klezmer music brought from its homeland with big band and combo jazz. Giora Feidman's performances in the 1980s spreading hybridity in Germany, provided an important impetus for Jewish music performers in Europe, including Poland. Since the early 1990s and through the influence of the Krakow Jewish Culture Festival, Polish musicians also draw from American Jewish klezmer revival musicians, who absorb elements of blues, jazz, as well as pop and rock from the late 1970s. The influence of popular music is evident not only in klezmer music. It is also noticeable in other genres of music defined in Poland as Jewish, as exemplified by the songs with religious texts performed at concerts and festivals by Symcha Keller of Lodz.

Symcha Keller is a former chairman of the Jewish Community in Lodz and prayer leader at the local synagogue. He describes himself as a *hazan*, or synagogue cantor, who has taken over the traditional style of singing prayers from the cantor Isaac Froimovsky, who was already active before the war. The traditional cantillation of texts from the sacred books is preserved by Keller during services,<sup>3</sup> while in songs sung outside the liturgy he reaches for different styles. His "Hassidic triptych" consisting of three CD albums *Gates* (2017), *Chojze – "The Seer from Lublin"* (2019), and *Chasidic Road – from Lublin to Kock* (2021), recorded with Jewish and non-Jewish musicians, contains, among other things, recordings of songs that date from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and even go back to the Middle Ages.

According to Keller, he tried to be as faithful as possible to the historical originals, while other songs were taken from traditional Hasidic music and performed in contemporary arrangements – with elements of reggae, rock, folk, and even punk.<sup>4</sup> Keller is strongly influenced by a Hasidic rabbi, composer and musician from New York, Shlomo Carlebach, nicknamed "The Singing Rabbi", who visited Poland in 1989. Later Keller accompanied him on his tours of America.<sup>5</sup> For Carlebach music was a medium providing an opportunity to reach Jewish and not only Jewish listeners of different backgrounds. The songs he composed were based on verses of prayers and easily catchy repetitive melodies, drawing on various musical traditions and styles of popular music, a characteristic of Hasidic *nigguns* (a form of Jewish religious song or tune). The synthesis of the aesthetics of cantorial music and American folk music, which incorporated various styles of popular music, became a model for synagogue song in America of the later 20th century (Kelman & Magid 2016).

The echo of the pre-war cross-cultural dialogue resounds in the projects of the Borderland Centre based in Sejny, carried out in cooperation with prominent American klezmer musicians beginning in 2001. In this case it is possible to follow the process of acquiring know-how in the area of Jewish music by Poles, which has resulted in the restoration of this music, albeit in a new shape, to the local soundscape. Sejny is a small town in north-eastern Poland, which before the Second World War was inhabited by a fairly large Jewish community. Today, only a few houses, a synagogue, a school, and *macevas* (tombstones) used to build roads and stairs in the town, are left. There is also a theatre group and a klezmer band formed by young people to better understand the world of Jewish beliefs and music.



Figure 2. Cover of the album *The Gates* by Simcha Keller.

3. <https://incрудо.bandcamp.com/album/their-voice-goes-out-into-all-the-earth-music-in-the-religious-life-of-the-ashkenazi-jews>; no 37, 38 (last accessed 30 October 2022).
4. <https://www.e-kalejdoskop.pl/muzyka-a212/od-rock-mana-do-rabina-r6024> (last accessed 1 July 2022).
5. Interview with Symcha Keller 25 July 2002.

The klezmer ensemble in question began its activities with the production of the play *Dybbuk* by S. Ansky in 1996, which was preceded by deep studies of the city's multicultural heritage. When its members presented the play at the Jewish Culture Festival in 1997 in Krakow, they met David Krakauer, whom they invited to Sejny. The fruit of the meeting was a joint project called *Musicians' Raft*. Its aim was to find traces of Yiddish culture in Central and Eastern Europe, and to renew links with the lost past by establishing contact with people who had preserved Yiddish language and music. Since then, the *Musicians' Raft* has become Sejny's border music festival, held periodically in 2001, 2004, 2006, 2010 and 2017. The musical encounters looked different each time. It could be typical klezmer music workshops giving Polish amateur musicians the opportunity to play together with prominent representatives of the klezmer music revival movement from overseas, David Krakauer, Michael Alpert, Stuart Brotman, Jeff Warschauer, Deborah Strauss, Paul Brody and Frank London. At other meetings the aim was to gather musicians from all over the world representing new sounds of Jewish music in a creative way.

In 2004, the title of the project, "A raft of musicians between New York and Sejny", included names of places with symbolic significance. Sejny symbolises the cities and towns in Eastern Europe where Yiddish culture lived and thrived, while New York symbolises the world where Jewish emigrants who left Europe at the turn of the 20th century settled and preserved the traditions of klezmer music. Since the third edition, the *Raft* formula has been expanded to include seminars, led by eminent specialists in Yiddish culture and the history of Eastern European Jews, and presentations of documentary and archival films. In 2017, the aim of *Raft* was also to create collaborative music and record an album by the Sejny Orchestra with guests, marking the next stage of innovative artistic and educational work to build a bridge between generations and cultures through music.<sup>6</sup> As for the style of music taught to the Sejny youth by American klezmer musicians, it



Figure 3. Klezmer band of Sejny with Frank London in 2017; <https://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl/artykuly/orkiestra-klezmerska-z-frankiem-londonem-8-12-pazdzier-nika-2017/>; (last accessed 1 March 2023).

6. <http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl> (last accessed 1 July 2022).





Figure 4. Kapela Brodów; <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=978226512233188&set=pcb.978228345566338> (last accessed 1 March 2023).

represents in part the old Eastern European tradition, and on the other hand creative arrangements often with elements of jazz.<sup>7</sup> An additional bonding element for the groups in the music workshop were participation in Friday Shabbat evenings, after which traditional Jewish songs were sung.

Another example of a klezmer music project aimed at reviving Jewish music that had not been performed for decades, is the Muzikaim project carried out by Kapela Brodów. The members of this group studied persisting written and recorded documents, and interviewed people who remembered the music that they performed. The project resulted in the recording of a CD album with the same name (P002MO).

The idea for the project was inspired by the Kolberg Year celebrations to mark the bicentenary of the birth of Poland's most famous nineteenth century ethnographer. Although Oskar Kolberg did not devote a separate volume to Jewish music in his multi-volume work *Lud. Jego zwyczaj, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusta, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce* (*The People. Their customs, Way of Life, Language, Folktales, Proverbs, Rites, Witchcraft, Games, Songs, Music and Dances*, published in 1857), the Jews are present in the background of his descriptions of Polish culture and transcriptions of Jewish music can be found in various volumes. They also formed the basis for some of the performances of the pieces presented on the album. On the cover of this album there is the following statement by Witek Broda, the band's leader, who describes himself as a "subjective researcher of tradition":

The songs on the album came from my wandering around the villages, paging through the works of Oskar Kolberg and the archives of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences. I heard Jewish sounds from village musicians – vivid, foreign, intriguing. Sometimes it was a phrase, sometimes a whole piece. Overheard under the window, learnt from a Jewish fiddler, then played for dancing at parties and weddings. I collected these motifs, glued the crumbs together. This is what Jewish music might have been like in the villages in pre-war Poland. (Kapela Brodów 2015)

7. A part of this repertoire was recorded on the unpublished CD 'The Musicians' Raft Concert Between New York and Sejny (for promotional use only).

The performers on the album point to elements of scale, cadential motifs and ornaments that distinguish Jewish from Polish folk music, notated by Kolberg and performed today.

A more dramatic example of foreign melodies and style incorporated into klezmer is the piece “Chopin’s Freilach” by the Krakow ensemble Di Galitzianer Klezmerim, performed with clarinet, accordion and double bass.<sup>8</sup> Freilach is the name of one of most popular Jewish dances and the above-mentioned piece is based on three Mazurkas by Chopin: g-minor, op. 67, no. 2, a-minor, op. 68, no. 2, and C-major, op. 64, no. 2. It has been performed on Polish and foreign stages (among others during the 2006 Chopin Days in Salzburg), and has received numerous awards, including first prize in the 1st National Chopin Competition for All Instruments Except the Piano “Chopin Open”.<sup>9</sup>

## The case of Wrocław

The place to which I will devote special attention in the context of the cross-cultural musical dialog and hybridity is Wrocław, a city where I lived until recently and with which I am still professionally connected. As a city located in western Poland, which belonged to Germany before the World War II, it is important for Jewish history and art and highly symbolic for the Polish and German national narrative. Over the past two decades, it has not only become a significant bastion of Jewish culture, but also an important destination for Holocaust tourism as a unique place due to its complex heritage.

Jews were already present in the city in the Middle Ages, proved by a cantor’s tombstone from 1203 in the Jewish cemetery. In the 19th century, German Breslau became one of the main centres of progressive Judaism. The new style of synagogue music associated with this trend was introduced here by Moritz Deutsch (1818–1894), cantor and founder of the cantorial school at the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary. He was a pupil and later assistant of the famous Salomon Sulzer, author of synagogue music reform, active in Vienna. In 1829, the synagogue “Under the White Stork”, still in use today, was opened in Breslau, where one of the first Reform services in the German-speaking area was held.

Hitler’s rise to power brought with it anti-Jewish laws that excluded Jews from Breslau community life. After Second World War, survivors from Eastern Europe began to arrive in the now Polish city. For many, it was an intermediate station on their way to Israel and other Western European countries. Those who stayed and felt Jewish were active in Jewish organisations as well as informal groups maintaining their Jewish identity.

Today, the religious and cultural life of Wrocław’s Jews and supporters of Jewish culture is concentrated in the so-called Quarter of Four Faiths, also known as the Quarter of Four Temples or Quarter of Mutual Respect, which overlaps territorially to a large extent with the former “Jewish Quarter”. Its boundaries are defined by streets in which a Catholic church, an Evangelical



Figure 5. Di Galitzianer Klezmerim; <http://www.klezmerim.pl/rameng.html> (last accessed 1 March 2023).

8. The piece was recorded on the album *Nokh Amol* (TCD 008).

9. <http://www.klezmerim.pl/rameng.html> (last accessed 1 July 2022).

church, an Orthodox cathedral and a synagogue nowadays belonging to the Orthodox branch of Judaism.<sup>10</sup> “The district” has a symbolic dimension, reflecting the diversity and mutual tolerance characteristic of a city where followers of different religions and representatives of different cultures have lived in the past and live today. The faithful of the four denominations organise joint charity events, educational meetings for children, ecumenical prayers and concerts to bring the cultural and religious diversity of the city closer. The White Stork Synagogue, mentioned above, has a special function in this context. It is not only a place of worship, but also a venue for artistic events. Alongside it are restaurants, cafés and music clubs, where Jewish songs and klezmer music can be heard.

Cultural events, including Jewish music, taking place in the synagogue are under the auspices of the Pro Arte Foundation, established in 2002, whose mission is “understanding through art”. The Foundation cooperates with Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox parishes as well as with Jewish communities in Poland and abroad. It creates and promotes programmes to discover common multicultural roots. It works for tolerance and ecumenism, as well as the restoration and protection of the European heritage of national and religious minorities. Its artistic and educational projects include festivals, concerts, exhibitions, workshops and lectures addressed to a wide audience.

One of the three largest Jewish cultural festivals in Poland under the patronage of the Pro Arte Foundation is the SIMCHA festival, which had its 24th edition in 2022. The festival is intended to remind people of history and allow them to learn and understand the diversity of Jewish culture. This is as important for the Jewish minority living in Wrocław as it is for the rest of the city’s inhabitants. The festival’s programme includes concerts with the participation of Polish and foreign artists performing works representing various genres of Jewish music, from synagogue music through klezmer to Yiddish songs, lectures about this music and Jewish dance workshops. It is worth mentioning that children are also involved in the festival events as dancers, musicians and singers.

Another cyclical event organised by the Pro Arte Foundation is the Havdalah concerts held in the synagogue, during which mainly klezmer music is presented. They have been organised since 1996 on the initiative of Stanisław Rybarczyk and are a continuation of the 19th century tradition connected with the person of the aforementioned Moritz Deutsch. Havdalah marks the ceremonial end of the Sabbath and the simultaneous beginning of a new week, a bridge between the sacred and the everyday. The concerts begin, according to Jewish tradition, one hour after sunset, every last Saturday of the month. They have become an important, high-impact cultural event that attracts artists and music lovers from Poland and abroad. The Quarter of Four Faiths is also home to a second foundation, set up by the Norwegian singer, actress and playwright of Jewish origin, Bente Kahan, who settled in Wrocław in 2001. The foundation was established in 2006 and bears the name of its founder. It began its activities by renovating and revitalising the buildings of the White Stork Synagogue and the adjacent *shul* (small synagogue).

10. Since the synagogue opened in 1829, it served the liberal faction of the Wrocław Jewish community, and from 1872 to 1943 the Conservative faction. After the World War II it was reactivated as a synagogue of Orthodox Jews.

In addition to holding services on major holidays, the large synagogue houses the Centre for Jewish Culture and Education, of which Bente Kahan is the director. It hosts exhibitions, film screenings, workshops, lectures, the annual concert series “Summer at the White Stork Synagogue” and educational performances written and directed by Bente Kahan. On the balconies of the synagogue you can visit the permanent exhibition “Recovered History. Jewish Life in Wrocław and Lower Silesia”. Bente Kahan places particular emphasis on educational activities in the belief that this is the best way to understand not only difficult history, but also what is happening in modern times, which is sometimes also not easy to understand.

Wrocław is not only a Mecca for outside artists fascinated by Jewish culture and music. It is also home to local soloists and ensembles such as the White Stork Synagogue Choir, founded in 1996 on the initiative of its conductor Stanisław Rybarczyk. The choir’s members are mainly students and graduates of Polish origin at the Wrocław Academy of Music. The ensemble performs Jewish repertoire a cappella or with instrumental accompaniment, much of it related to various moments in the liturgical calendar. Liturgical and secular works are mainly presented by the choir at concerts, but also at Jewish services. The choir’s performance during liturgy must be approved by the rabbi, and only the repetition of the prayer text by the rabbi or the *baal tefillah* (prayer leader) gives the verses sung by the choir the status of a prayer. Rybarczyk, the choir’s director, admits that when selecting singers he is guided not by their background, but by their abilities and skills to achieve a high artistic level of performance. Moritz Deutsch is a figure eagerly cited by the conductor, as he represents the link between the choir’s current activities and the past of the place where the choir is based.<sup>11</sup> The choir performs works from the composer’s published collection *Breslauer Synagogengesänge, Liturgie der neuen Synagoge, in Musik gesetzt für Solo und Chor mit und ohne Orgelbegleitung* (Leipzig 1880), created for the city’s newly established Reform synagogue. The ensemble’s repertoire also includes works related to Jewish tradition by other Jewish and non-Jewish composers. In addition, the choir collaborates with Piotr Baron, a jazz saxophonist, as well as with artists representing the popular music scene, such as the Polish singer Justyna Steczkowska, who was accompanied by the choir on the album *Alkimja* from the Ashkenazi and Sephardic tradition (Justyna Steczkowska 2002) or the aforementioned Bente Kahan. The White Stork Synagogue choir is undoubtedly widely perceived as a showcase of the Jewish community in Wrocław.

Among the soloists, apart from Bente Kahan, who performs mainly the repertoire of Ashkenazi Jews, mention should be made of Marek Eliezer Marossanyi, who has been leading prayers at the synagogue in Wrocław for several years, but also takes up collaboration with various musicians to present Jewish repertoire on stage. Outside the synagogue, the musician performs Sephardic music as well as music of Jews from Yemen and Morocco with texts in Ladino and Hebrew from prayer books and the Torah, among others. One of Marossanyi’s greatest achievements was the formation of a band in 2003 (the ensemble no longer exists) with Wrocław-based jazzman

11. Personal communication, Stanisław Rybarczyk. See also <https://proarte.org.pl/projekty/chor-synagogi-pod-bialym-bo-cianem/> (last accessed 18 February 2022).



Figure 6. The White Stork Synagogue choir; [http://www.gaudemater.eu/2010/informacje/66/Artysci/Chor\\_Synagogi\\_pod\\_Bialym\\_Bocianem](http://www.gaudemater.eu/2010/informacje/66/Artysci/Chor_Synagogi_pod_Bialym_Bocianem) (last accessed 1.March 2023).

Andrzej Waśniewski. This band consisted of keyboards, saxophone, djembe, darabuka and other percussion instruments, which the musicians intended to give the old songs of oriental Jews the colour characteristic of electro-club music. The band performed not only in Wrocław, but also in various cities in Poland and the Czech Republic.

## Conclusions

Music described as Jewish in contemporary Poland is an important subject of research in the context of the “Music and minorities” theme undertaken in this issue of the journal. After all, the Jewish minority along with its culture was an important part of Poland’s cultural landscape for nearly a millennium. One may wonder whether the manifestations of the revival of this culture, which can be observed in this post-communist state in last decades, should be interpreted as an expression of appreciation on the part of the majority group for the minority community, or rather as a cultural hijacking. Opinions among researchers are divided, but I chose to focus my reflection on the positive side of the minority and majority group relationship in relation to music.

As I demonstrated in my study music perceived as Jewish in contemporary Poland is one of the most significant forms of intangible Jewish heritage used to express what is referred to as Jewishness. The process of its transmission involves Jews and, to a large extent, non-Jews, which is a common phenomenon in contemporary Europe. The participation of non-Jews in restoring lost ties to Jewish heritage seems inevitable and necessary given the small number of Jews remaining in Poland. This cross-cultural dialogue leads to the emergence of new hybrid musical forms, showcasing a wide stylistic cross-section achieved through the fusion of music belonging to various Jewish traditions with classical, popular music and jazz. This is especially true of klezmer music, as in the projects *Musicians’ Raft* from Sejny or *Muzikaim*, but also of songs based on texts taken from the Bible or Jewish

prayer books, performed outside the liturgical context by Symcha Keller from Lodz, Marek Elizer Marossanyi, and The White Stork Synagogue Choir from Wrocław.

Music has become an important medium in restoring the memory of the Jews. Musicians who include music described as “Jewish” in their repertoires often undertake a search for surviving historical sources and among living people for knowledge of what it should sound like. And last but not least the experience of music opens up a space for mutual contact, facilitating the empathetic engagement of Poles in understanding the Other and making us remember Jews not only as victims, but also as people who created a rich culture and art through which they expressed their emotions. Jewish music in today’s Poland is at once a border maintaining mechanism, setting up, strengthening and showcasing the difference between Jewish and non-Jewish, and a mechanism or function that bridges over this border, inviting people of all sorts to pass over this bridge as musicians, activists and listeners. This is the function of all kinds of bridges, as Simmel showed in his short but extremely influential paper on bridges and doors (Simmel 1908). The role in building such bridges by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Pro Arte and Bente Kahan Foundations from Wrocław and many other institutions in Poland, as well as festivals and concerts of Jewish music organizers cannot be overestimated.

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