

UNIT 8

**JEWES, JAZZ, AND JEWISH JAZZ**

**PART 1: JEWS AND JAZZ**

(Lorry Black and Jeff Janeczko)

סיפורי מוסיקה  
STORIES OF MUSIC



Since the emergence of jazz in the late 19th century, Jews have helped shape the art form as musicians, bandleaders, songwriters, promoters, record label managers and more. Working alongside African Americans but often with fewer barriers to success, Jews helped jazz gain recognition as a uniquely American art form, symbolic of the melting pot's potential and a pluralistic society. At the same time that Jews helped establish jazz as America's art form, they also used it to shape the contours of American Jewish identity. Elements of jazz infiltrated some of America's earliest secular Jewish music, formed the basis of numerous sacred works, and continue to influence the soundtrack of American Jewish life. As such, jazz has been an important site in which Jews have helped define what it means to be American, as well as Jewish.

### **Enduring Understandings**

- Jazz has been an important platform through which Jews have helped shape the pluralistic nature of American society, as well as one that has shaped understandings of American Jewish identity.
- Jews have played many different roles in the development of jazz, from composers to club owners.
- Though Jews have been involved in jazz through virtually all phases of its development, they have only used it to express Jewishness in a relatively small number of circumstances.
- Jazz has acted as a conduit for the development of relationships between the African American and Jewish communities.
- Because jazz is, at its core, an improvisatory art form, it is very adaptable and particularly well suited to writing one's story into it.

### **Essential Questions**

- Why have Jews been drawn to jazz?
- In what ways is Jews' involvement in jazz similar to or different from Jews' involvement in other genres of music?
- How has jazz facilitated the interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures?
- How have Jews' relationships to jazz changed (or not changed) over time?

# Preparations

## 1. Materials

- Computer with either internet connection or on which the presentation file for the lesson can be downloaded.
- Presentation slides.
- Speakers (Bluetooth or wired for amplification of audio and video selections).
- Projector and screen for viewing of slides.
- Whiteboard / blackboard / large newsprint pad.
- Microphone (as desired)
- Writing utensils / Paper

## 2. Resources

Hand out of texts for introductory discussion.

## 3. Instructional notes

Throughout these lessons, you will find suggested texts in discussion outlines. “Texts for the instructor are not meant to be ‘prescriptive’ ie. spoken word for word, they are provided simply as a discussion guideline. Please use your own words.”

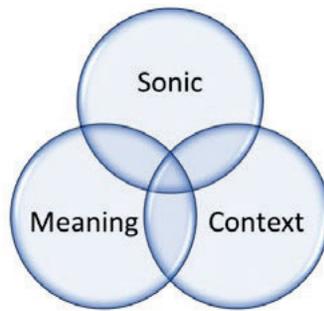
A. Some Principles of Adult Learning to consider (based on “What We Know About Adult Jewish Learning”, Diane Tickton Schuster and Lisa D. Grant):

- the motivation for participation often has more to do with connecting with / having an experience with friends that the subject matter.
- intrinsic motivation
- want to use their learning to deepen their understanding and seek connection of their life experiences to the content
- thrive in a ‘democratic atmosphere’ (discussion, experiential learning, collaborative inquiry)
- educated / sophisticated in many aspects of life, not so much in their Judaism.
- “life to Torah and then back to life again” (Rosenzweig)

B. This lesson, as well as those that follow, rely heavily on the following conceptual framework as a way to discuss and “define” Jewish music.

- **Sonic:** utilizes elements like scales, rhythms, and ornamentation that are generally considered to “sound Jewish” but not necessarily specific tunes, etc.

- Leonard Bernstein used cantillation motifs in symphonic works; jazz musicians might vamp on a Sephardic folk song; klezmer musicians record traditional freylakhs or Hasidic melodies.
- **Meaning:** a musical piece has some kind of Jewish frame of reference but doesn't necessarily use traditional tunes or scales, etc.
  - Anything that uses a Jewish text, is sung in Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino could fit here.
  - For example: Max Helfman's oratorio "The New Haggadah" is based on a poem about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Or, it could be something totally abstract, like an instrumental piece the composer feels reflects a Jewish concept or a personal identity.
- **Context:** "Jewish music is music created by Jews."
  - This category is broad and not as easily defined. Essentially, we refer here to music by Jews or music in Jewish social/religious contexts.
  - For instance, songs by (Jewish composers) Debbie Friedman, Craig Taubman, Rick Recht, Beth Schaefer, are derived from long standing Jewish values, but do not always directly use a Jewish text. Nevertheless, both their origin and their use, over time, in Jewish camp and synagogue settings has cemented their place as Jewish songs.
- Questions rising out of this frame of reference include:
  - Does any music a Jew writes inevitably reflect some aspect of his or her Jewish identity even if there is no specific Jewish content? i.e. Berlin's "God Bless America", Bob Dylan, or most of the Tin Pan Alley and Broadway composers.
  - Can "non-Jewish" music played in Jewish contexts be Jewish music? ie. Max Bruch
- Finally, it is important to emphasize that a lot of music can fit into multiple categories. This can serve as a reminder to students that music is not the "universal language" it's often framed as, but rather, that musical "meaning" is contextual and subjective.
- (See the following Venn diagram, based on work by Milken Archive Curator, Jeff Janeczko)



#### 4. Preparation

##### A. Advance Prep

- Please read through the lesson.
- Please read through, listen to, and familiarize yourself with all of the musical pieces referenced in this lesson.
- Please read through the appendices reference material. Use this material as a background resource on the musicians and music referenced in the lesson.
- Please be sure to familiarize yourself with the technology used in this lesson. Please go through the slideshow at least once prior to instruction so you are comfortable with the “choreography” of the lesson.

##### B. Classroom Setup

- Room setup is at the discretion of the facilitator and may be contingent upon enrollment.
- Projector and Screen should be set up.
- Speakers should be connected to computer.
- Technology should be tested in advance of class start time.

## Color Codes Used in the Lesson

This color is used to indicate suggested talking points for the instructor. Feel free to use the text as it is written in the lesson, or to paraphrase as you desire.

**?** These are questions to be asked of the students.

**≡** Texts highlighted like this are points of information and/or suggestions for the instructor in teaching this lesson.

**THE LESSON**

JEWS, JAZZ, AND JEWISH JAZZ  
PART 1: JEWS AND JAZZ

## Set Induction

Slide 1

## Hearing the difference.

Slide 2

Let's listen to two recordings from the early 20th century.

Play "Sher" from the album "Chekhov's Band"

<https://youtu.be/VbBpzYwiEZk>

Play Yiddisher Charleston or Yiddish Blues

<https://youtu.be/C2XFmYXnWgA>

? What do you hear in these recordings?

? How are they similar or different?

☰ Beyond the obvious American references in the lyrics to Yiddisher Charleston, the class should pick up on the very straight rhythms of the Sher and the rather syncopated ones of the Charleston. The point is to emphasize that early Jewish American immigrants were mixing Jewish and American musical traditions, especially jazz.

Introduce jazz as a musical genre:

? What is "jazz"?

? How do you know jazz when you hear it? (What are some of its defining characteristics?)

☰ Keep a list of student responses

## What is jazz?

Slide 3

"Now often referred to as "America's Classical Music," jazz first emerged from the unique amalgam of African, Creole, and European cultures in late 19th and early 20th century New Orleans. Much like "Jewish music," opinions on how jazz should be defined vary greatly and it is frequently invoked as an umbrella term for many different genres. Most agree that it has deep roots in African and

African-American expressive culture and involves certain musical characteristics.”

### Key Characteristics and Concepts

Slide 4

- Improvisation: Spontaneous creation. Involves the music coming into being as it is being performed.
- Swing: a nuanced approach to rhythm, phrasing, and articulation that emphasizes asymmetry and syncopation. (If possible, demonstrate the difference between swing and straight eighth notes)
- Syncopation: Deviation in a regular rhythmic pattern, or changing the emphasis within a pattern. (If possible, demonstrate a syncopation through clapping and foot tapping)
- Instrumentation: Choice of instruments
- Orchestra vs. Jazz ensemble (big band or combo): Common orchestra instruments include bowed strings, woodwinds such as flute, clarinet, oboe, and brass instruments such as trumpet and french horn. Jazz ensembles feature a combination of common orchestral instruments, and additional instruments such as drum set, electric guitar, saxophone, and vibraphone

Slide 5

- ❓ What is a “jazz standard”?
- ❓ Why are they significant to the development of jazz?

Explain Every style of music has a core repertoire from which the artform can build. In western art music (classical music), we have hundreds of years of musical development to draw from.

- ❓ Who are some of the classical standards? (examples: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven)

Provide a definition of “jazz standard” for the class.  
(Note: <http://jazzstandards.com/compositions/index.htm>)

Slide 6

“Jazz standards are a large body or canon of tunes (songs) that comprise, in part, the foundation of jazz. In the jazz world, standards are constantly being revisited and reinterpreted by new artists.”

Play some examples of 'jazz standards'.

Slide 7

☰ Consider sharing multiple artists versions of the same jazz standard. E.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYfF9VKMp4w>

"It Don't Mean a Thing"- George Gershwin  
[https://youtu.be/qd5\\_jzC1rxo](https://youtu.be/qd5_jzC1rxo)

"My Funny Valentine"- Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart  
<https://youtu.be/aoF6ZzP3Og0>

☰ Information about Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart in Appendix.

Continue: Particularly with jazz there is an expectation that every time a standard is performed or recorded, it will be reinvented, reflecting the artists' musical aesthetics.

Explain The canon of standards is vast and varied, drawing from many different eras and styles, but a very large portion of the standards come from Tin Pan Alley, the Great American Songbook and early to mid 20th century Broadway repertoire, and within that, many Jewish composers such as Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Jule Styne, Johnny Green and Sammy Cahn.

❓ Can you name any compositions that are part of the canon of jazz standards?

### **Jews in Jazz**

Explain: Jazz emerged in the late 19th century as a confluence of African and European musical practices. And though Jews were not central to the genre's creation, they have participated in the art form as musicians, promoters, managers, record label owners, and more, since the beginning.

List of prominent Jewish jazz musicians and composers.  
Minnie Bagelman (1923-1976) and Clara Bagelman (1920-2014),  
AKA The Barry Sisters

Slide 8

Anat Cohen (1979-)  
Anat Fort (1970-)  
Terry Gibbs (1923-)  
Benny Goodman (1909-1986)  
Stan Getz (1927-1991)  
Lee Konitz (1927-2020)  
Herbie Mann (1930-2003)  
Myra Medford (1957-)  
Buddy Rich (1917-1987)  
Artie Shaw (1927-2004)  
John Zorn (1953-)

Questions to think about (not to be discussed at this time)

Slide 9

- ❓ **Why have Jews been drawn to jazz?**
- ❓ **How has Jewish involvement in jazz changed over time?**
- ❓ **What have been the social and cultural conditions under which Jewish participation in jazz has taken place?**
- ❓ **How has jazz influenced Jews' understanding of their place in America?**

Explain That Jews have been involved in jazz is no revelation in-and-of-itself. It is relatively well-known that Jews have played prominent roles in many types of music, from popular and folk music to classical and the theater. To view the phenomenon productively we must ask (and try to answer) relevant questions.

Discuss

- ❓ **How might jazz have facilitated the relationship between the African American and Jewish community and, vice versa, how might these relationships have influenced jazz's history and development?**

Aside from being a form of entertainment and business, jazz has also been an important medium by which Jews have helped define the contours of both the Jewish and American sides of their identities. And it has been an important site in which the Jewish and African American communities have understood and related to one another.

☰ It may be worth revisiting the story of *Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn* from Lesson 1, reminding students that the arranger who made the song famous first heard it sung by two African American performers at a Harlem theater.

❓ Can anyone name the first movie that featured sound? (*The Jazz Singer*).

❓ Can anyone summarize the plot of the movie?

Summarize: *The Jazz Singer* tells the story of a cantor's son caught between the traditional Jewish world of his European-born father and the secular world of American entertainment.

Play Clip from *The Jazz Singer*  
<https://youtu.be/q3VAN3MPTys>

Slide 10

In the film, Jolson moonlights as a blackface performer singing in New York nightclubs, invoking the ire of his father when he is discovered and setting up a tension between Jewish tradition and American assimilation.

❓ Would a proper middle class or upwardly mobile Jewish family have balked at a child who joined the orchestra?

Explain that if Jolson's participation in Blackface performance makes us uncomfortable today, it highlights an important aspect of jazz and Black-Jewish relations. While there is no evidence that Jews as a group harbored racist views, they did participate in Blackface performance. It is not inaccurate to say that one way in which Jews expressed their Americanness and Whiteness was through the "othering" of African Americans. It is important to remember that at this time in American history people thought differently about race than we generally do today. Ideas about race were shifting from one in which different ethnicities were considered "races" to something more like a black/white binary. Ethnic stereotypes in music were rampant in this era, spawning an entire genre known as "race records." Sheet music covers

from this time period depicted these different ethnic groups in ways we would consider unacceptable today.

Sheet music covers from the early 20th century showing the rampant ethnic parody that was common.

Slide 11

Along with African Americans, Asians, and others, Jews were frequently parodied—and frequently parodied themselves—on these records. If this seems at odds with our current values, historian Hasia Diner has studied this period extensively and reminds us that “Jews . . . tended to work within the larger culture’s racist premises,” and, by doing so, “perpetuated views that they did not invent but also did not always fight.”

Only sometimes they did fight them. Let’s hear a 1922 song that pokes a little fun at Al Jolson’s “Mammy.”

Play: My Yiddishe Mammy

<https://youtu.be/11D7T5WGGFc>

☰ (See lyrics of both ‘Mammy’ songs in appendix)

Slide 12

Finally let’s have a look at one of the most famous Yiddish singers of the twentieth century.

CAB CALLOWAY

☰ Biographic information on Calloway can be found in the appendix

Slide 13

Cab Calloway was not a Yiddish singer per se, but he did speak Yiddish and performed several Yiddish songs.

Let’s first listen to the Yiddish folk song, “Ot Azoy Neyt a Shnayder” (This is How a Tailor Sews)

Play “Ot Azoy Neyt a Shnayder” from Ruth Rubin’s Yiddish Folksongs

<https://youtu.be/A2SIGiGbmQE>

Slide 14

Now, let's listen now to Cab Calloway's version:

Play Cab Calloway's "Ut Da Zey"

<https://youtu.be/3hh6U9e10-A>

- ❓ In what ways might Calloway's version be a commentary on Black-Jewish relations?
- ❓ How has the understanding of Jewishness, whiteness, and blackness shifted in relation to Jewish participation in Jazz?

☰ Note the close attention Calloway pays to musical detail, almost perfectly mimicking the *khor-shul* style that developed in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 19th century and became the standard of Jewish liturgical music during the "golden age" of the cantorate in the early 20th century.

Continue: As we proceed to explore the world of Jews and jazz we want to think about how jazz has been part of this bigger conversation about Jews, race, and America.

In his book, *Jews and Jazz: Improvising Ethnicity*, Charles Hersch argues that Jewish participation in jazz has gone through three periods.

1. Early 20th Century: In the early part of the 20th century, jazz helped Jews assimilate. Early American Jewish popular music showed that Jewish and American cultures were compatible. Slide 15
2. Middle 20th Century: In the middle of the 20th century, as many Jews moved to suburban neighborhoods, jazz became a means of resisting Americanization. By identifying with jazz's connection to urban black culture, Jewish jazz musicians resisted complete absorption into the American mainstream. While they did not assert their Jewishness (indeed, some renounced it), aligning with African American culture asserted a minority, outsider status. Slide 16

3. Late 20th century: Finally, since the 1960s, Jewish participation in jazz has taken a decidedly “ethnic” turn. Many Jews now use jazz to proudly proclaim their Jewish identities as both compatible with and distinct from Americanness.

Slide 17

The examples of Al Jolson and the Tin Pan Alley composers illustrate how the first Jews used jazz and popular music to help define America and their place within it.

### Segue to Benny Goodman

Continue: With individuals like Irving Berlin and the other great composers of Tin Pan alley, a foundation was laid for the growth of Jewish participation in jazz. With the solidification of the relationship between the African American music community and the Jewish music community, as well the maturation of jazz as musical medium, the groundwork was laid for the rise of big band music and the king of swing, Benny Goodman.

Introduce Benny Goodman:

 (Use biographical highlights available in the appendix as an introduction)

Slide 18

Continue: While only a small amount of big band repertoire was what we would actually call “Jewish”, many Jews played very prominent roles in the big band era. Benny Goodman, the famed Jewish clarinetist from Chicago, would be one of the main forces in bringing big band jazz to the masses.

His 1938 concert in New York’s Carnegie Hall would become a major turning point in the history of jazz. For the first time ever, jazz was being played on the same stage that often held one of the United States’ premier orchestras. What’s more, it was done with an integrated band (integrated in 1936, first with Teddy Wilson, Lionel Hampton, Charlie Christian). While the music itself may not be Jewish per se, Benny Goodman’s conduct and interaction with musicians of different races was reflective of his Jewish upbringing on the south

side of Chicago.

Interestingly, Benny Goodman’s first clarinet came from his synagogue, and his lessons with a teacher who would teach both young African-Americans and Jewish children.

Play “Body and Soul” by Benny Goodman  
<https://youtu.be/rkFrzgXQrUc>

Slide 19

Play “Don’t Be That Way” by Benny Goodman  
<https://youtu.be/lklc-FgSV4s>

**?** Is there anything intrinsically Jewish about the music?

Slide 20

**☰** Discuss the small role of klezmer in his music, and how Benny Goodman bought “Hot Jazz” arrangements from Fletcher Henderson, trying to sound more like the jazz coming from the African American musician community, and introducing it to a white audience.

**?** What are the social and cultural conditions that have governed Jewish participation in jazz?

**?** What have the effects been?

Conclude: In this lesson, we have explored Jewish participation in jazz—why Jews became involved in jazz, the relationship of the Jewish and Black communities that was negotiated through their common involvement in jazz and how jazz helped Jews define their place in America.

Jazz has also influenced the music of the synagogue and has played a prominent influential role more recently in the development of contemporary Jewish music.

In Part 2 of this lesson we will explore Jew-ish jazz looking at the

composition of jazz services as well as contemporary Jewish music that has been influenced by jazz.