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JEWISH MUSICAL PERFORMANCE IN BUENOS AIRES

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For my mother
Nancy Wohl Z”L

And my grandfather
Gerald Green Z”L

May Their Memory Be a Blessing.

We live in a felt narrative progression, through which experience is transformed into memory. And memory edits its records of the past like a brilliant auteur—cutting, juxtaposing, creating a pace determined by the direction and emotion of a story. What is memory but a story about how we lived?

—Mark Doty, *The Art of Description: World into Word*

I see that I've never told you how I listen to music—I gently rest my hand on the record player and my hand vibrates, sending waves through my whole body: and so I listen to the electricity of the vibrations, the last substratum of reality's realm, and the world trembles inside my hands.

—Clarice Lispector, translated by Stefan Tobler, *Água Viva*

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the role of memory in Jewish musical performance in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Through ethnographic and archival research conducted between 2010 and 2014, I examine how Jewish Argentine musical performance constitutes a form of creative labor exerted on the past to renew contemporary cultural practices and expressions. These forms of musical engagement link the politics of memory in Argentina to Jewish theological imperatives tied to the biblical command to remember (Heb.: *zakhor*), as well as to modern concepts of tradition and cultural transmission. The musical processes connecting Jewish Argentines to memory claims position Jewish Argentine musical performance firmly within the paradoxes and contradictions of Latin American modernity, grounding debates about Jewish music in national and regional discourses of racial, ethnic, and religious difference.

In Buenos Aires, Jewish Argentine musical performance supports cultural and religious renewal initiatives led by key musicians, administrators, religious leaders, and other culture brokers. Emerging as a strategy of self-definition, musical performance spotlights the spectrum of community values, religious convictions, and ritual traditions invoking memory to mediate time, space, and Jewish embodiment. As “musical labors of memory,” musicians foster participation in everyday life in Buenos Aires, showcasing how the spaces of religious and ethnic identification are inextricably tied to the cultural imaginary. This dissertation addresses issues of performance, power, and identity associated with the musical processes of *reclamación* (protest and demand), *recolección* (recollection), *resurgimiento* (resurgence), *renovación* (renewal), and *religión* (religion).

A Note on Spelling, Transliteration, and Translation

Certain challenges arise from transliterating Yiddish and Hebrew into Spanish in the Río de la Plata region. For example, since the letter “y” is pronounced as “sha” instead of “ya,” Argentines generally replace the letter “ׂ” for the letter “i” in both Hebrew and in Yiddish. Due to the fact that the letters “v” and the “b” are pronounced the same in Spanish, there are often orthographic inconsistencies related to the transliteration of the letters “ׂ” and “ׁ” in Hebrew and “ׂ” and “ׁ” in Yiddish. In Hebrew and Yiddish, the letters “ׂ” “ׁ” and “׃” are spelled with a “j” to reproduce the “kh” sound. In attempting to maintain consistency in this dissertation, I have generally followed the Encyclopedia Judaica, 12th edition system for Hebrew spelling and the YIVO system according to Uriel Weinreich’s Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary for Yiddish. However, there are a few important exceptions that I would like to note.

The first exception is the use of pronouns, which I have maintained in their original forms. As such, the appearance of words like “Januca” may seem unusual to the native English-speaking reader but more faithfully render these words recognizable to the native Spanish-speaking reader. I have kept the original spellings of song names as they are written in song parts and notation to minimize the amount of cultural translation resulting from the translation of transliteration. It is important to note also that spelling inconsistencies proliferate in transliterations of Hebrew and Yiddish throughout Argentina. As such, I use spellings in common usage appearing in academic journals and other published sources. Non-English words appear italicized only the first time they appear in each chapter. Where indicated in footnotes, I use local spellings. Translation is a powerful art—one that shapes meaning in important ways and acts as a bridge between languages. I have very gratefully received translation assistance and advice from Sarah Green. All remaining errors are my own.

Introduction

Framing Jewish Argentine Musical Performance and Memory in Buenos Aires



Figure 1 “A People with Memory is Democracy Forever” – 2013 Public Campaign for the Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y Justicia, The National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice.

Meeting Ariel Rozen – Friday, July 30, 2010

“Somos Latinos”—We Are Latin Americans—Ariel said to me, an explanation for the kiss he would leave on my cheek as I headed out of his office at the children’s music school, the Escuela de Formación Musical Coral after our interview in the Belgrano neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Betraying my North Americaness, I felt somewhat uneasy at the intimacy expressed in the salutation, trying hard to seem less awkward during this ordinary encounter in Argentine life.

The interview with Ariel had been arranged at the suggestion of Natan Waingortin, a friend of Luis Lozano Paredes. I had met them both at a Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday Evening) service at the synagogue Comunidad Amijai, and the young men were students at the Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano “Marshall T. Meyer,” the Latin American rabbinical seminary founded in 1962.

Luis first noticed me sitting in the row behind him because I stood out from the rest of worshippers as a Korean American Jewish woman. As services concluded, we began chatting in English about his mother's discovery of her crypto-Jewish heritage and his personal challenges identifying as a practicing Jewish Colombian—marked as different from Jewish *Porteños* (Buenos Aires residents). That night, Luis invited me to Shabbat dinner, and he, Natan, and I left the synagogue, walking down the main thoroughfare Avenida Libertador toward his apartment.

After a meal of challah bread and ravioli pasta, Luis and Natan recited the Birkat Hamazon, the prayer after the meal, according to their personal Sephardic (Spanish/Portuguese origin) and Ashkenazic (Central and Eastern European origin) traditions. Natan told me that he would occasionally attend services at Comunidad Amijai, but like many other non-Orthodox Jews who attend religious services in Buenos Aires, he was not a dues-paying member of any particular congregation, and he rotated among different liberal, progressive Masorti Movement (Conservative) synagogues throughout the city. He said that he especially admired the congregation Fundación Pardés, its Rabbi Baruj Plavnik, and its musical director, Ariel Rozen. Natan insisted that I speak with Ariel, writing down Ariel's contact information for me.

Ariel Rozen is a *more de shirá* (music teacher) for children in Buenos Aires, and he has taught thousands of students throughout his long career. He is especially highly regarded as a local authority of Jewish music like his mother, who was also a well-known music teacher in Buenos Aires.¹ For many years, Ariel served as a music director and teacher at Comunidad Bet-El, the historic Masorti synagogue founded in 1963. Ariel's response to my open-ended question asking him to describe the *colectividad judía* (the Jewish community)—was to begin by narrating the Jewish past in Argentina.

¹ Interview with Ariel Rozen. September 1, 2010.

First, he provided a brief history of Jewish immigration to the region, starting with the swell of immigrants arriving in the late 19th century, culminating in the “*época de apogeo*,” or the “peak of Jewish achievement” in the 1950s and 1960s prior to, what Ariel described, as a decline in the growth of the Jewish community due to processes of Argentinianization and assimilation, in addition to emigration from Argentina to the United States and Israel. These emigrations began after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and later repeated during periods of political and economic instability throughout the late twentieth century, including the last military dictatorship of the late 1970s (ending in 1983), the bombings of the Israeli Embassy (1992) and the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) (1994), and the devastating economic crisis that led to massive unemployment of the middle classes (2001). For those who remained in Argentina, the political and economic climate had lasting effects on families newly separated by wide geographic distances as a result of late twentieth-century migrations and dislocations.

In his introduction to the role of music in Jewish life in Argentina, Ariel identified a common anxiety among Jewish Argentines: the loss of practitioners of Judaism and the shrinking of religious and cultural institutions supporting Jewish Argentine educational, social, and cultural needs. The history of the Jews of Argentina that he recounted was punctuated by developments in the institutional landscape of Jewish Buenos Aires, notably the establishment of Jewish schools, cultural initiatives, secular clubs and sporting associations, Zionist groups, social justice initiatives, and other political activist organizations. In our conversation, Jewish Argentine history unfolded through Ariel’s memory as he recounted specific moments of personal and political significance constructing a sense of belonging to a Jewish Argentine “collectivity.”

“Somos Latinos,” he concluded again as we said goodbye that evening, leaving me to think about a small statement that spoke to the wider issue of representing the Jewish Argentine musical experience in Buenos Aires in the 2010s. In his small farewell greeting, Ariel provided me with a hemispheric understanding of Jewish Argentines as Latin Americans, carrying shared histories of arrivals to and lives lived in Argentina. Through gestures and through words, he summarized a complex narrative of self-definition, nationalist longings, and the challenges of modern ethnicity, religiosity, and pluralism in Argentina. Revealing the tensions between Argentine identity and Latin American identity, as well as concepts of “north” and “south” in the performance of Jewishness in the Western hemisphere, my meeting with Ariel Rozen provided me with a broader context to shape this ethnography around the uses of the past and the narratives of history and memory shaping the personal and communal values affixed to musical performance in Jewish Buenos Aires.

Jewish Argentine Musical Performance and the Labors of Memory

This dissertation addresses the relation between memory and musical performance across intersecting spheres of socially-embodied cultural expressions with a focus on the ways in which acts of memory and “cultural recall” involve musical labor to create value and meaning for Jewish music in Buenos Aires (Bal et al. 1988). It is an ethnography of the musical uses of the past among a broadly-defined Jewish ethnic group in Argentina, who negotiate both internal diversity and external relationships to non-Jewish groups occupying shared urban space through the passage of time (Stokes 1997). Recognizing memory as a powerful tool to organize, debate, resist, and confirm cultural identities in Buenos Aires, Jewish Argentines approach memory as a pervasive part of everyday life. Not only is memory put to work in Jewish Argentine musical performance to facilitate cultural citizenship and senses of belonging in the modern nation

through the dynamics of collective memory, but the “cultures of memory” (Huyssen 2000) are also used to access, articulate, and express the fluidity of Jewish Argentine cultural expressions through the mediation of Jewish history and historiography. Musicians and their musical contributions are crucial to the establishment of a Jewish Argentine ethnic presence in Buenos Aires and in the Argentina beyond the capital (Agosín 2005; Huberman and Meter 2006; Zaretsky 2008; Ruggiero 2010).

Stated simply, “memory is the past made present” (Rothberg 2009: 3). As literary theorist Michael Rothberg points out, memory is both of the present and requires exertion—a form of “work” or “labor” exerted to negotiate the experience of temporality in contemporary practices of remembrance (ibid.: 4). As Jan Assmann argues: “Memory is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one’s own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation, or a cultural and religious tradition” (Assmann 2008: 114). “Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation. One has to remember in order to belong” (ibid.). Memory ties the individual to his or her sense of self, to familial ties, and to a broader group identity and its collective past, constructed by both top-down, “official” narratives as well as bottom-up “emic” considerations about the meanings of the Jewish Argentine past. This dissertation considers the intersection of memory, music, and performance to address the question of meaning and value in Jewish Argentine music, spotlighting how people use musical performance to explore and to assert Jewish Argentine identity, resulting in a series of social practices bringing the “musical labors of memory” into focus in contemporary music scene in Buenos Aires. In Jewish Buenos Aires, working with memory through music is a way to assert belonging not just within the nation but as an extension of the wider Jewish world.

Since the end of the most recent military dictatorship in Argentina (1983), discourses and acts of memory have been appropriated to support and to uphold the political project of democracy as a national commitment to sustaining the democratic process (Roniger and Sznajder 1998) (see: Figure 1). As in other nations such as reunified Germany after the Cold War (1990), the political uses of memory illustrate how different visions of the past collide and compete in the public sphere to tell us stories about how a nation grapples with its traumatic past (Confino and Fritzsche 2002). In the nation, memory becomes a way to “move from the individual to the group, the group to the individual,” and memory is differentiated from history, as Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree, and Jay Winter argue, by the connection that memory has to affect (Tilmans, et. al. 2010: 11). In Jewish Argentina, these affective links established in musical performance connect Jewish Argentines to Jewish communities throughout the Americas, Europe, and Israel through shared musical heritage. If the acceleration of globalization, the extension of media networks, and the widespread use of personal technological apparatuses now connect more and more people beyond geographical boundaries, then circulations of music in Latin America—including Jewish music—can still focus attention on the meanings of music in or of a particular place (Vila and L’Hoetste 2013; Aparicio and Jaquez 2003).

The performance of memory simultaneously communicates ideas about the nation while contributing to its embodiment. It is a “set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form,” according to historian Jay Winter (Winter 2010: 12). Taking performance scholar Diana Taylor’s work as a critical entry point to approach musical performance and memory, I highlight her argument that performances “function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called ‘twice-behaved behavior’” (Taylor

2003: 2–3). Musical performance in Jewish Buenos Aires demonstrates both the constructed nature of identity formation as well as its realness for practitioners and audiences. The simple contention of the existence of a Jewish Argentine musical tradition is not so simple at all, and as I discuss in the chapters of this dissertation, musicians, singers, choirs, song leaders, producers, DJs, and other musical professionals must first labor over the field of performance often borrowing from, translating, and renewing musical idioms to bring life to Jewish Argentine music.

By tracing how memory contributes to a shared, imagined past across intersecting spheres of musical performance, I spotlight what I call the musical labors of memory to address different approaches to musical engagement in Jewish Argentine life. In the absence of a sustained “authentic” Jewish Argentine musical tradition in Argentina passed on from generation to generation, the existing “canon” is an eclectic mix of songs and sounds joined together from both the “archive” and “repertoire” of Jewish Argentine cultural expression, which bridges oral traditions and written musical forms in the transmission of songs and melodies (Taylor 2003).² By focusing on the musical labors of memory, I spotlight the agency of Jewish Argentines in maneuvering through the landscapes of memory in an effort to avoid the pitfalls of relying on the invention of neologisms, which further splinter an already diffuse field of memory studies.

In Diana Taylor’s words, the archive is the repository of “supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones),” and the repertoire is the so-called ephemeral cache of “embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (*ibid.*: 19). The archive is embodied in material objects such as documents, maps, and literary texts, while the repertoire is defined by immaterial enactments performed through gestures, movements, song,

² Throughout this dissertation, I use “repertoire” to refer to Taylor’s theory of performance and “repertory” to refer to the accumulation of musical forms.

and dance (*ibid.*: 20). Jewish Argentine musical memory fluctuates between both the archive and the repertoire, eroding the perceived boundaries separating these analytical categories.

The question of labor and work is central to this dissertation. As ethnomusicologist Kaley R. Mason points out, musical performance is often “the culmination of years of training, sacrifice, devotion, competition, and self-management; in a word, labor, from the Latin root meaning pain and great difficulty” (Mason 2013: 441). A focus on labor therefore entails addressing the ways in which musicians attempt the difficult task of creating value for musical repertories, their performing careers, and the peoples to whom these traditions are linked. Labor recognizes the political, social, and economic structures of power mediating the recognition and misrecognition of folk, popular, and other expressive practices in public culture. In Argentina, the labors of memory reconfigure the democratic nation as an accumulation of past traditions intersecting in the modern, plural state—confirmed and contested by social actors who often narrate different versions of the past. But how is labor exerted on memory? What do the musical labors of memory do? What stories are told about the Jewish Argentine experience, and how do they shape knowledge about Jewish Buenos Aires? This dissertation takes up these questions as well as others to examine the ways in which Jewish Argentines participate in memory work to exert a new vision of the Argentine present through contemporary musical performance.

While positioning musical performance as a force of social action, I focus on the ways in which memory is used to simultaneously embody ethnic difference as well as to project Argentine nationalism in Buenos Aires. It illuminates the ways in which “[h]uman beings who ‘labor’ on and with memories of the past,” articulate new narratives and representations of the past to participate in global circulations of Jewish music, creating new spaces for Jewish Argentine artistic activity in the cosmopolitan space of Buenos Aires—a city that maintains a

hegemonic power in the national imaginary (Jelin 2003: 5). As sociologist Elizabeth Jelin argues, memory as a “passive practice” or “unconscious intrusion” is distinct from memory as an intentional “labor” utilized to transform social worlds through conscious, active efforts to produce something new—in this case, new forms of artistic expression (ibid.). For Jelin, “the person is an agent of transformation, and in the process transforms him or herself in the world. Activity adds value. Thus, to assert that memory involves ‘labor’ is to incorporate it into the activity that generates and transforms the social world” (ibid.).

Jelin’s insights into the role of memory as a social force of collective and individual action in post-dictatorship Argentina shape this ethnography in profound ways. I extend her theories to the realm of ethnomusicology to highlight the multiple meanings of Jewish Argentine musical performance, memory, and politically engaged cultural expression. While spotlighting how memory as musical labor transforms contemporary Argentine music, this study opens up a new aperture for approaching the relation between music and memory. Memory in musical performance establishes pathways uniting musical practitioners, materials, ideas, and beliefs while collapsing temporal voids predicated on both individual and collective imaginings of the past and present. An approach that focuses on the musical labors of memory emphasizes two main forms of labor: memory labor and musical labor.

The focus on the question of labor and music has grown in anthropology and ethnomusicology in the past decade (Hofman 2015; Peterson 2013; Shipley and Peterson 2012; Beck 2003). As anthropologists Jesse Weaver Shipley and Marina Peterson argue, “labor is crucial to understanding changing audio technologies and the circulation of sound” (Shipley and Peterson 2012: 399). Their introduction to a special issue on music and labor in the *Journal of Popular Music* provides a broad overview of the history of the tensions between Western views

of the autonomy of art—the notion of “art for art’s sake”—and the recognition of the work involved in musical activities rooted in the personal expenditures of the human effort of making music a social experience (*ibid.*). Shipley and Peterson’s goals are to relink “aesthetic value” to its “complex modes of production,” showing how aesthetic value is created and contested through various kinds of work and cultural production, resulting, also, in the expression of emotional affect (*ibid.*: 405–8). Most importantly, Shipley and Peterson bring into focus the relation between labor and value in music in the history of aesthetics to argue that discussions of canon formation often ignore the importance of labor in the creation of art and art worlds.

Over the past few decades, ethnomusicologists and musicologists have approached the social and cultural dynamics of the intersection between memory and music in different ways. For instance musical memory can unify the sound culture of a particular city (Waxer 2002); it can serve as a monument to national music (Rehding 2009) or to revive the cultural heritage of marginalized groups within a nation (Feldman 2007; Olsen 2004); it serves as a bridge between urban and rural identities (Dent 2009) and a consequence of traumatic dislocations (Frühauf and Hirsch 2014). Moreover, memory and practices of remembrance are fundamental aspects of religious practice and ritual traditions (Shelemay 1998; Waugh 2005). While remaining topically-oriented, musicological and ethnomusicological studies addressing the relation between music and memory tend to be methodologically disjointed—a criticism Wulf Kansteiner levels at the field of memory studies in general (Kansteiner 2002: 180).

In Jewish musical performance in Buenos Aires, musicians and audiences build value for Jewish music through memory. The stories and symbols they produce bridge embodiment and symbolic representation, personhood, and cultural form. To pursue this observation, I approach musical labor as a hybridizing force, collapsing time and making available the symbolic elements

necessary to supercede the idea of Jewish Argentines as a “hybrid” subjectivity. The pitfalls of discourses of hybridity are numerous in their seemingly endless ability to create new hybrid subjects. To focus solely on the “Jewish” and “Argentine” in musical performance would do little more than to reproduce the problematic systems of classification of racial and ethnic difference without challenging their inherent colonialist origins. As anthropologist Marilyn Strathern convincingly argues: “Instead of dismantling holistic systems through inappropriate analytical categories, then, perhaps we should strive for a holistic apprehension of the manner in which our subjects dismantle their own constructs” (Strathern 1992: 76). Approaching Jewish Argentine musical performance holistically then entails addressing musical performance and its performers as an accretion of “whole” cultural influences rather than as a deconstruction of “parts” (*ibid.*). As anthropologist Stephan Palmié argues:

...”hybrids” and “hybridity” are always and everywhere the products of the operation of classificatory regimes (Douglas 1972). As Bruno Latour (1993) points out, the more one strives for classificatory purity, the more “hybrids” will begin to multiply. Try and keep “society” and “nature” apart, and you will sooner or later find a lush jungle of what Latour calls “intermediaries,” or “inhabitants of the middle kingdom.” Animal breeders have known that for centuries, and the very origins of the term “hybrid” are, of course, immediately relevant here: the “hybrid,” after all, is the offspring of a domesticated sow and a wild boar. (Palmié 2013: 465)³

Debates about musical borrowing, fusion, and innovation often employ hybridity discourses to discuss the negotiation of boundaries and the de-stabilization of essentialist notions of music as culture (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000; Janeczko 2011; Lipsitz 1994; Pacini

³ Here Palmié makes reference to the domestic pig, a most “unkosher” example in the context of this thesis, but one that I employ to illustrate the biological underpinnings of species categorization in discourses of hybridity applied to the human world. Palmié’s essay is a comprehensive assessment addressing the problems of hybridity and celebratory discourses of post-plurality. See: Stephan Palmié, “Mixed Blessings and Sorrowful Mysteries: Second Thoughts about ‘Hybridity’.” *Current Anthropology* 54, no. 4 (August 2013), 463–82.

Hernández 2010; Wade 2000); however, in this dissertation, I elevate theories of memory rather than hybridity to maneuver fluidly across interlocking spheres of Jewish Argentine life in Buenos Aires, moving away from a focus on genre to a focus on the social role of Jewish musical performance to understand how individuals relate to as well as “dismantle their own constructs” (Strathern 1992: 76).

In Argentine musicology, the tensions between urban and rural space as incubators for creativity divide a musicological landscape fixing musical traditions to regional ethnic identities—e.g. tango and the cosmopolitan city of immigrants; *música folclórica* and the rural *criollo* (creole; mixed Spanish and indigenous), and folk music and dance of Indigenous groups in the provinces (Vega 1944; Aretz 1977; Collier, et al. 1997; Chamosa 2012). As Gerard Béhague notes, mid-twentieth century approaches to Latin American music were notably Eurocentric, circumscribing fixed concepts of musical traditions based in post-colonial conceptions about the groups performing these musics (Béhague 2000: 20). He argues:

Subsequent generations of Latin American scholars have insisted on setting the boundaries of musical traditions according to the existing social stratification. María Ester Grebe (1972), among others, perceived those traditions in a four-part model of stratification: “primitive” traditional indigenous communities, folk-rural-peasant groups, urban popular mestizo groups, and dominating elite urban groups. The basic difficulty with such a criterion of classification comes from the fact that stratification is not fixed and stable, and socio-cultural or ethnic identity can vary considerably in time and space according to the various contexts in which it is negotiated and for what purposes. Boundaries and borders are clearly related to the question of identity and must be rethought with special attention to the various factors that contributed to forge a contemporary identity. (Béhague 2000: 21–22)

Béhague’s observations and critiques point to the central concern of approaching music in Latin America beyond fixed models of stratification based in colonialist logic, and this study addresses the fluidity of social identities constitutive of Latin American musical genres. Situating

this study within the urban landscape of musical performance in and of Buenos Aires, I spotlight the city as a cosmopolitan space of “transcultural” exchange (Ortiz 1940; Pratt 1991) where Jewish Argentine music is performed in private theaters, public concert halls, restaurants, bars, streets, secular Jewish institutions and sacred synagogue spaces “to do” something; it differentiates between the Jewish and non-Jewish in Argentine music, while recasting Jewish music as Latin American music (Austin 1975 [1962]). Jewish music, in its (often limited) capacity to denote an association of musics, sounds, composers, and performance practices attributed to Jews circumscribes vastly different musical sounds, linking folk, sacred, popular, and commercial musics around a concept of Jewishness.⁴ The category of Jewish music is not static; rather, Jewish music, and Jewish Argentine music point to the intentional efforts—the work and labor of musicians—to enact their Jewish identities in musical performance. In Buenos Aires, through the musical labors of memory, musicians and audiences enter and exit the musical present, while drawing from the past to negotiate modern Argentine ethnicity.

Situating Jewish Argentine History and Memory in Buenos Aires

⁴ Bruno Latour’s work on actor-network theory (ANT) provides an interesting approach to Jewish music studies by providing a focus on “collectives” rather than “societies.” As Latour argues: “Using a slogan from ANT, you have ‘to follow the actors themselves’, that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish. If the sociology of the social works fine with what has been already assembled, it does not work so well to collect anew the participants in what is not yet—a social realm” (12). While it might be helpful to address Jewish music from this perspective, at this time not enough data supports an ANT analysis of Jewish Latin American music, even though the more frequently used word in Spanish to address the Jewish community is “*colectividad*,” or collective, instead of “*comunidad*,” or community. See: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Initiated by the constitutional reforms of 1994, Buenos Aires became an autonomous city—la Ciudad Autónoma—from a federal capital with a Jefe de Gobierno y Legisladores (Head of Government and Legislation) directly elected by the population rather than by appointment by the President (Bayardo 2013) (see Fig. 2).⁵ By restricting the power of the President of the Nation in the autonomous city, Buenos Aires is simultaneously a part of the nation and separate from it. The area commonly referred to as “Buenos Aires” is, in fact, two distinct geo-political areas: 1) Ciudad Autónoma, which is the most densely populated area and home to 2.9 million residents and; 2) Buenos Aires Province, which is home to 15.6 million residents, according to the 2010 Argentine national census.⁶ While different geo-political designations are commonly used to refer to the city of Buenos Aires and its surrounding areas, the term “Gran Buenos Aires” actually describes the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and the twenty-four *partidos* or neighboring districts that border it (see Fig. 3).⁷ In total, 9.9 million people live in the area of Gran Buenos Aires, or approximately 25% of the total population of the country of 40 million people. Argentina’s population, government resources, and political power remains centralized in the port city (see Fig. 4).⁸

⁵ During the time of this fieldwork, the Head of Government has been Mauricio Macri and his center-right government of the Propuesta Republicana (PRO) political party.

⁶ The Argentine National Census is undertaken by INDEC, the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censo in 2010. See: “Según el censo 2010, somos 40.091.359 habitantes en el país,” *La Nación*. December 17, 2010. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1334392-segun-el-censo-2010-somos-40091359-habitantes-en-el-pais>.

⁷ Censo nacional de población, hogares y viviendas 2010: censo del Bicentenario: resultados definitivos, Serie B N°2. Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos - INDEC, 2012.

⁸ Ibid.

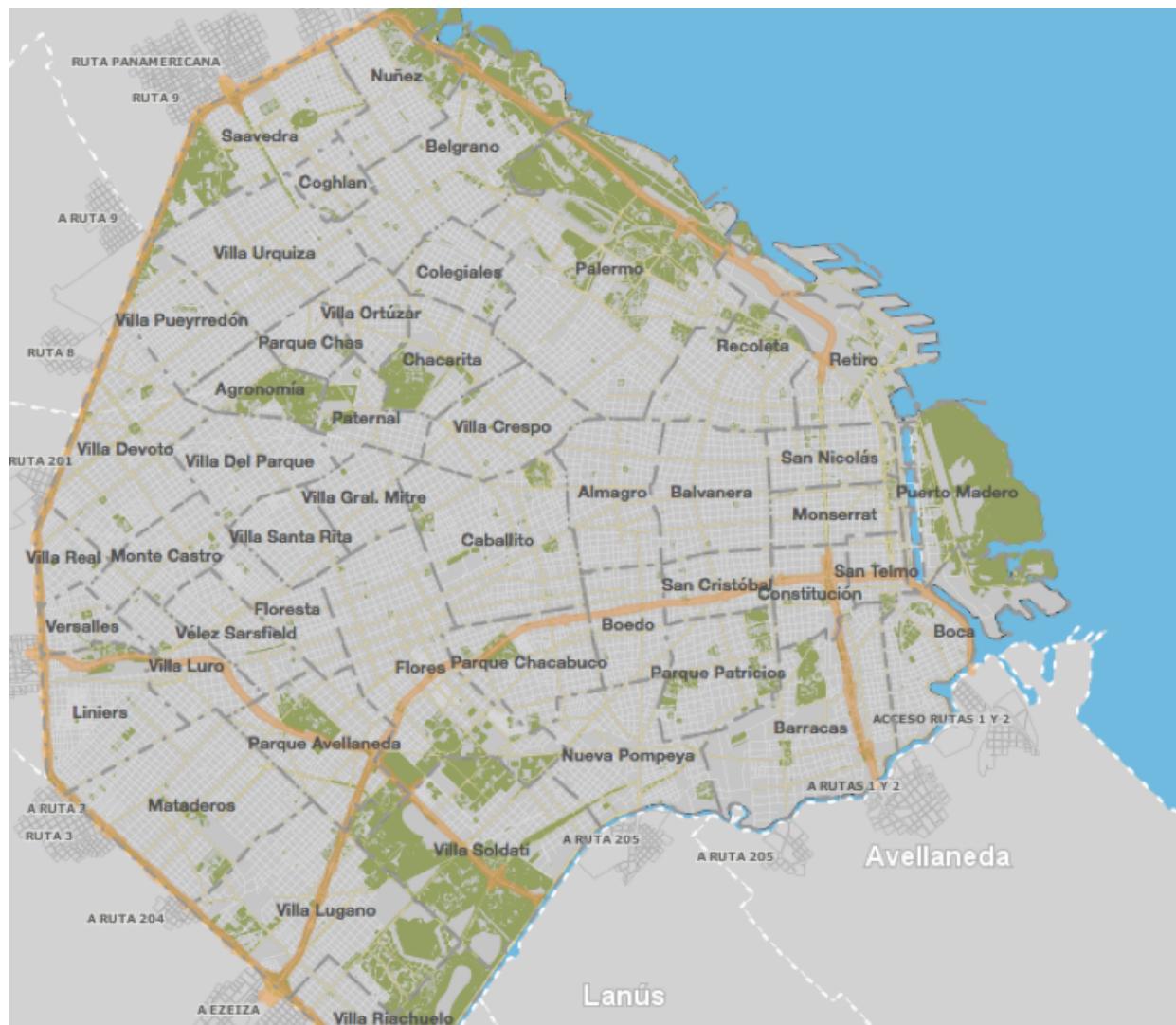


Figure 2 Map of the Forty-Eight Neighborhoods of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

Source: Buenos Aires Ciudad. Accessed July 6, 2015.
<http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/laciudad/barrios>.



Figure 3 Map of “Gran Buenos Aires.” Source: “Qué es el Gran Buenos Aires” Buenos Aires: INDEC, 2005 [2003].



Figure 4 Map of Argentina. Source: Instituto Geográfico Nacional (IGN).

Buenos Aires was first settled in 1580 as an outpost of the Spanish Empire. During the eighteenth century, Buenos Aires became the capital of the “Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata,” amid the Bourbon Reforms. By 1810, the year of Argentine independence, the city had grown to contain over 60,000 residents (Ross and McGann 1982: xvi). By 1910, Buenos Aires’s population exceeded 500,000 people (*ibid.*). It had become the “world center of trade for enormous amounts of agricultural and ranch exports, and the magnet for hundreds of thousands of European immigrants each year” (*ibid.*). Styled by elites as the “Paris of South America” in the late nineteenth century (Scobie 1992 [1974]), Buenos Aires occupies a central role in the history of Argentina and the Río de la Plata region. As historians Stanley R. Ross and Thomas F. McGann argue, Buenos Aires faces its own set of particular challenges in comparison to other Latin American cities: “Part of its attraction—mixed often with hostility and aversion, it must be admitted—may lie in the fact that it is a thwarted city, highly Europeanized and “Americanized,” yet remote from the power centers of the world and frustrated by unrealized dreams of continental and world leadership” (Ross and McGann 1982: xvi). Jews, while arriving mainly from Europe, provided newly-arrived immigrants from Spain and Italy a familiar internal “other” as they asserted their own Europeanness in Buenos Aires.

The consolidation of political power in the port city after the defeat of the dictatorship government of the powerful caudillo Juan Manuel de Rosas in 1852 gave rise to liberal philosophies promoted by politicians and intellectual elites such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888) and Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810–1884). Their belief in Argentina’s future prosperity rested on populating the country to build an infrastructure to support agricultural growth and to bring about modernity alongside a plan to “Europeanize” the nation. From the late

19th to the early 20th century, modernization efforts and nation-building projects encouraged millions of immigrants to migrate to Argentina.

By inventing the modern nation in the style of European modernity, the architects of the Argentine Republic sought new residents to work the land, following Alberdi's famous slogan, “gobernar es poblar” (to govern is to populate), which also disenfranchised the rural gauchos, Indigenous peoples, Afro-Argentines, and other immigrant laborers through discourses of “progress” and “civility” (Rotker 2002; Bobbio and Matteucci 1985, cited in Bergero 2008: 3; Guano 2002; Romero 2010). Liberal elites sought to weaken the power of the Catholic Church in Argentina by making trade agreements with England while breaking up the power of the landed oligarchs, who continued to maintain strong ties with the church. Nineteenth-century philosophers and intellectuals had a significant impact on the future of the Argentine nation, setting the stage for sustained Jewish immigration to the region in the late nineteenth-century.

Jewish Arrivals to Argentina at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

After significant debate about the “ideal immigrant” during the meetings of the Constitutional Assembly, the architects of the Constitution of 1853 reconciled their concerns over the “desirability” of non-Catholic immigrants in their effort to encourage immigration to Argentina (Avni1991: 4-5). In Article II in the Constitution of 1853, they wrote religious tolerance into law; no longer would the Argentine government impose Catholicism, rather the government would “sustain” (*sostiene*) the Roman Apostolic Catholic faith. Article II allowed for non-Catholics to settle in the country, opening the door to Jews, even though members of the Constitutional Assembly likely preferred the arrival of West and Central European Protestants (ibid.: 5). On October 19, 1876, the Argentine Senate passed the Immigration and Colonization

Law, bringing forth a government-sponsored program to support immigrants' arrivals to the port city and their travels to the interior. As Raanan Rein and Jeffrey Lesser write:

The cultural and political orientation, together with growing economic and commercial ties with Great Britain, contributed to the institution of a liberal constitution of 1853 (which guaranteed freedom of worship), the adoption of a liberal immigration law in 1876 (which did not discriminate against non-Catholic immigrants), and the enactment of state education as well as civil registration laws in 1884 (thus limiting power and influence of the Catholic Church), making Argentina a favorable place for the development of the JCA⁹ and Jewish community life. (Lesser and Rein 2008: 9)

By 1862, the first *minyan* (a quorum of ten adult males, thirteen years or older, who are necessary to hold Jewish religious services and ceremonies) was organized by a group of German Jews who formed the Congregación Israelita de Buenos Aires synagogue, later re-inaugurated as the Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina in 1897 (Avni 1991: 18). In 1894, the Jevra Kedusha Ashkenazi (JKA), re-inaugurated as the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in 1949, was established as a burial and aid organization for the growing number of Jews (Sofer 1982). Western European (German and Alsatian) as well as Central European Jews made up the first wave of Jewish immigrants to Argentina before the turn of the century. Sephardic Jews also made their way to Argentina during the late nineteenth through the mid twentieth-century primarily from North Africa, Turkey, and later the Middle East.¹⁰ Today, Sephardic Jews represent a small proportion of the total Jewish Argentine population, and East European Ashkenazic Jews outnumber Jews of German origin.¹¹ As of 2005, Argentina had the

⁹ The Jewish Colonization Agency was founded in 1892 by Baron Maurice de Hirsch to establish agricultural colonies in the Argentine interior.

¹⁰ See: Adriana M. Brodsky, "The Contours of Identity: Sephardic Jews and the Construction of Jewish Communities in Argentina, 1880 to the Present, PhD Diss., Duke University, 2004.

¹¹ See the works of Eleonora-Noga Alberti, an historian and singer of Sephardic music. Eleonora-Noga Alberti, "La canción tradicional sefardi: Un repertorio de alternativa," *Revista "Clásica"* Página/12. April 1992. 30, 32.; "Tres ejemplos y tres vertientes del cancionero

largest Jewish community in Latin America and was the seventh largest Jewish community worldwide after the United States, Israel, France, Russia, Canada, and Great Britain (Jmelnizky and Erdei 2005: 12).¹²

Historians of Jewish Latin America generally mark 1889 as the beginning of the permanent presence of Jews in Argentina with the arrival of the Wesser, a ship that brought 824 Ashkenazic Jews to the Río de la Plata region in 1889 (Weisbrot 1979; Lewin 1971; Avni 1991; Elkin 1998; Mirelman 1990; Sofer 1982). The Jewish immigrants who arrived from an area of the Pale of Settlement, now a part of the modern Ukraine, established the first Jewish agricultural colony in Argentina, which they named Moisesville, located in the Santa Fe Province. The immediate hardships these immigrants faced as struggling colonists forced them to make an appeal for financial assistance to Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a wealthy German Jewish banker, railroad magnate, and philanthropist. Baron de Hirsch saw great potential in Argentina for the survival of East European Jewry. After 1889, Jews began permanently relocating to Argentina in greater numbers alongside Italian, Spanish, and other migrant workers pouring into the Argentine port city of Buenos Aires en masse (Moya 1998).

tradicional judeoespañol,” In *Recreando la cultura judeoargentina 1894–2001: En el umbral del segundo siglo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 2001), 209–17.; “La Canción Sefardí: Tradición y protección,” *Cinco siglos de presencia judía en América 1949–1992*, eds.. Mario E. Cohen and Celina A. Lértora Mendoza (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sefarad 92, 1992). 453–67.; “El romancero Judeo-Español en Argentina, Chile y Paraguay,” *La Crónica, Spanish Medieval Language and Literature Newsletter of the Modern Language Association*, vol. xii, no.2, (Spring 1984): 275–76.; “Sefaradies y criollos: Algunos descubrimientos al recuperar la tradición oral musical judeoespañola,” *Davar* 128 (Fall 1992): 383–92.; “Tres romances de la tradición oral judeo-española: Algunas versiones recogidas en Buenos Aires,” *Incipit* IV (1984): 145–55. These documents are available in the library of the Centro Nacional de la Musicología in Buenos Aires.

¹² Adrián Jmelnizky and Ezequiel Erdei note that depending on the study, some researchers consider Ukraine as the seventh largest Jewish community, while others consider it to be Argentina. See: Adrián Jmelnizky and Ezequiel Erdi. *La población judía de Buenos Aires: estudio sodiodemográfico* (Buenos Aires: AMIA, 2005).

In 1892, Baron de Hirsch formed the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), which was later responsible for assisting tens of thousands of Jews to settle in Argentina and set up agricultural colonies in the interior provinces (as well as in southern Brazil, the United States, and Canada) (Avni 1991). As a part of the efforts of the JCA, many Jews formed small towns in Entre Ríos, Buenos Aires, and Santa Fe Provinces. Although mythology surrounding the presence of Jewish *conversos* (Jews converted to Catholicism) living in the Spanish colonies after the Spanish Inquisition of 1492 persists in collective memory, historian Judith Laikin Elkin dispels any confusion about crypto-Jewish origins in Argentina when she plainly states: “Contemporary Latin American Jews are the product of nineteenth-and twentieth-century migrations” (Elkin 1998: 21).

By the late 1910s and early 1920s, East European Jewish immigrants began arriving directly to Buenos Aires where they remained. Initial hardships in the agricultural colonies of the Argentine provinces compelled many Jewish families to move to the port city to seek economic opportunities in urban trades during the period of mass urbanization in the 1920s and 1930s. The colonies remain a site of history and myth reclaimed in the present and used to substantiate Jewish Argentine nationalism. Literary works such as Gerchunoff’s *Los Gauchos Judíos de las Pampas* (1910) or songs by the Lithuanian Jewish immigrant Jevel Katz pay tribute to this part of Jewish Argentine history, centralizing a body of autochthonous symbols of Jewish Argentine heritage around the image of the Jewish gaucho, the wandering singing bard, and the agricultural colonist (Lesser and Rein 2008; Aizenberg 1996, 2002).¹³

It was in the city—simultaneously the site of heterotopian, utopian, and dystopian projections and imaginations—where the Jewish Argentine community fully established lasting

¹³ See: Alberto Gerchunoff, *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*. Translated by Prudencio de Pereda (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

commercial and residential districts, while creating educational, cultural, political, social, and religious organizations to serve a variety of communal needs and interests. In the city, the industrious immigrant, the urban peddler, the book dealer and printer, the communist, the prostitute, the pimp, and the tango singer all negotiated the streets of the capital, emerging as symbols and stereotypes of Jewish Argentine cultural identity both in the early twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first (Foster 2009; Rein and Brodsky 2012; Dujovne 2014). As historian Ricardo Feierstein describes, Jews settled in neighborhoods that cultivated their own individual Jewish identities around Plaza Lavalle, Barracas, and in Barrio Once (Balvanera/Almagro), expanding into areas such as Villa Crespo, La Paternal, Villa Devoto, Villa Lynch, Flores, Barracas, and beyond (Feierstein 2006).

The majority of Jewish immigrants arrived before World War II, and between 1881 and 1914, approximately 112,000 Jews immigrated to Argentina (Elkin 1998: 52).¹⁴ Jewish immigration dropped off but rose again through the 1920s until it tapered off in the 1930s in the initial crisis leading up to the Second World War in Europe (Elkin 1998). In Buenos Aires, organizations such as the Sociedad Protectora de Inmigrantes Israelitas (Soprotimis) actively assisted new Jewish immigrants with the costs of passage and entrance into the country in the 1920s (Jmelnizky and Erdei 2005: 15). Nevertheless, many new arrivals struggled to establish themselves, and single women were especially vulnerable to the devastating white slave trade and prostitution ring operated by the Jewish crime group, the Zwi Migdal (Glickman 1999; McGee Deutsch 2010; Guy 1991).

¹⁴ This number is based on data collected by Jacob Lestchinsky, “Jewish Migrations, 1840–1956.” In Judith Laikin Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America, second edition* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1998), 154.

Throughout the age of immigration, music played a particularly important role in mediating Jewish life in Argentina. Informal as well as formal musical activities and organizations engaged Jewish settlers and new immigrants (Palomino 2016). In the city, tango provided a musical forum for Jews to join in the burgeoning musical life of the city, and numerous composers produced tangos in Yiddish, Russian, Polish, and Spanish on Jewish themes (Nudler 1998, Judkovski 1998, 2003; Czackis 2003). Individuals such as Max Glucksmann (Mordejai David Glucksmann) contributed to the nascent Argentine creative industries, especially film and music (Judkovski 1998; Lewis Nouwen 2013). As the importation agent for Odeon Records, a German record company selling records under the name Discos Nacional in Argentina from the 1910s to the 1930s, Glucksmann produced tango singer Carlos Gardel's first interpretation of the classic tango song, "Mi Noche Triste" in 1917 (Judkovski 1998).

Moreover, the 1920s were a critical decade during which Jewish music emerged as a topic of broad cultural significance in Buenos Aires. The Sociedad Israelita Pro-Cultural Musical¹⁵ devoted to the preservation, performance, and education of music was founded in 1925 to perform the music of Jewish (and non-Jewish) composers of Western Classical music.¹⁶ In spite of frequent solicitations from the Sociedad Israelita Pro Cultural Musical to the Jewish community for financial support, in the early 1930s, the Sociedad Israelita Pro Cultural Musical folded into the Sociedad Ieol Engel, named after the Russian Jewish music critic, composer, and folklorist, Joel Engel. This group, honoring Engel's contributions to the St. Petersburg Society

¹⁵ Prior to the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, the term "Israelita" was commonly used to describe a Jew. This term seems to be less popular after 1948 when Jewish Argentines began using "judío."

¹⁶ Documents about Sociedad Israelita Pro Cultural Musical are held in the archive at Fundación IWO, Buenos Aires.

and of S. Ansky's fieldwork expeditions, performed mainly folk and popular music.¹⁷ Articles about music appeared in the magazine *Mundo Israelita*, including essays by the German musicologist Curt Sachs, showcasing how music was emerging as an important topic of community interest to connect Jews of different ethnic backgrounds to a nascent Jewish Argentine communal identity.¹⁸ With the growth and expansion of Jewish religious, educational, and political institutions in the 1930s, Jews debated their ideological differences, developing a body of symbols and cultural practices representing Jewish Argentina (Brodsky and Rein 2014). Musician Jevel Katz, a Lithuanian-born folk singer nicknamed the “Jewish Carlos Gardel,” embodied this new paradigm and was beloved for his satires, parodies, and folksongs in Yiddish and Spanish, which he performed to large audiences in theaters in Buenos Aires and in the colonies of the interior until his untimely death in 1940 (Baker 2012; Svarch 2013).

The Mid-Twentieth Century to the Present – Approaches to Ethnicity in Argentina

By 1946, Argentina and the world beyond it had changed dramatically. After the 1943 military coup d'état, Juan Domingo Perón was elected president of Argentina on a populist political platform as the world recovered from the devastation of a multi-continent war. Jews in Argentina struggled to comprehend the full scope of the tragedy in Europe. In the years preceding and following the Second World War, they established new institutions to support and protect Jewish life and interests in Argentina. In 1935, the Delegación Asociación Israelita Argentina (DAIA) was founded in 1935 as an umbrella organization for smaller Jewish organizations to represent the Jewish community to the national government in order to combat

¹⁷ Documents about Sociedad Joel Engel are held in the archive at Fundación IWO, Buenos Aires.

¹⁸ Curt Sachs, “Instrumentos Hebreos.” *Mundo Israelita* 798. May 12, 1933.

antisemitism, discrimination, racism, and xenophobia. In 1949, the Jevra Kedusha Ashkenazi was reinaugurated as the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina.¹⁹

As historians Matthew B. Karush and Oscar Chamosa argue, the arrival of Peronism not only changed the political landscape of Argentina through significant economic and social reforms in the mid-twentieth century, but it also led to a profound cultural transformation (Karush and Chamosa 2010). As they argue: “Likewise, historians now recognize that Peronism’s impact cannot be reduced to its economic effects; the regime’s discursive innovations helped produce new identities that have shaped the course of Argentine political history” (ibid.: 10). After decades of struggles between Peronists and anti-Peronists, the military coup d’état in 1976 ushered in a period of authoritarian dictatorship referred to as the “Proceso Nacional” or the National Reorganization Process, and the manifestation of clandestine warfare and domestic terror from 1976-1983. During the Proceso years, approximately 30,000 persons were killed or “disappeared,” a euphemism for unlawful imprisonment, torture, and often murder (Crenzel 2015, 2011).

The fall of the most recent military dictatorship after Argentina’s defeat in the Guerra de las Malvinas (The Falklands War) in 1982 brought a return to a “second modernization project” to restore democracy and refocus national and international attention on human rights under the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989). In spite of initial public optimism, Alfonsín struggled to reign in the power of the military, and threats of a new military coup forced him to propose the controversial Full Stop Law (Ley de Punto Final) and the Law of Due Obedience (Ley de Obedencia Debida), which were approved by Argentine Congress in 1986 and 1987 respectively. These laws halted the prosecution of military officers, police, governmental officials, and others

¹⁹ Delegación Asociación Israelita Argentina website. Accessed July 6, 2015.
<http://www.daia.org.ar/2013/mision.php?id=1>

involved in the human rights abuses of the Proceso years. For nearly two decades, those responsible for human rights abuses during the last military dictatorship walked free until new prosecutions were initiated after these laws were repealed in 2003. In the aftermath of the last military dictatorship, memory discourses emerged as politically efficacious modes of public opposition as Argentines struggled to address the voids created by impunity and injustice fueling the deafening silences of the traumatic national past (Roniger and Sznaider 1998).

The controversial presidency of Carlos Menem, who took office in 1989 and was re-elected again in 1995, further fractured a nation already in transition. President Menem instituted a series of rapid neoliberal reforms as a solution to the country's growing economic problems. Coupled with the crippling debt undertaken by the dictatorship government, the Argentine economy under Menem deteriorated into deep turmoil (Guano 2002:183). Menem remains a controversial figure in Argentine history, especially among the Jews, for his role as the head of state during the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA, as well as allegations of his involvement in a cover-up after the bombing (Romero 2010). Menem's enormous impact on the economy and social relations in Argentina ostensibly influenced the country's political shift back to more radical economic policies under the governments of President Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and his wife President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015). As anthropologist Emanuela Guano argues:

At first welcomed by a population still ailing from the 1989 hyperinflation, Argentina's neoliberal turn spelled further trouble not just for the lower classes, but also for a middle class that in the 1980s composed about 70 percent of the porteño population (Minujin and Kessler 1995:21). . . . As Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INDEC) statistics show, in 1999 about 80% of the porteño population found itself living below the poverty line (i.e., earning less than the 1,030 pesos needed to support a family of four). (Guano 2013: 183)

The sharpening of class distinctions, the deterioration of the middle class (to which many Jews belonged), and the arrival of new immigrants moving to Buenos Aires has forced new public debates about the city's changing demographics and its civic identity over the past ten years (Guano 2002; Faulk 2013). Although Porteños take pride in the "cosmopolitan" appeal of Buenos Aires, new waves of immigrants coming from neighboring Latin American countries, as well as new immigrants from West Africa, Asia, and the Middle East bring renewed focus to an analysis of multiculturalism and pluralism in contemporary Buenos Aires. Recognizing that Jews share in the experience of "peripheral modernity" (Sarlo 1988), scholars in Jewish Latin American studies have begun arguing for new approaches to the study of Jewish Latin America that consider the ways in which Jews share in the paradoxes of the experience of modernity, belonging, and alterity with non-Jewish racial and ethnic minorities throughout Latin America (Avni, et al. 2011).²⁰

Historians Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, for instance, have promoted an understanding of Jewish Latin Americans in their experience *as* Latin Americans, disrupting particularist views about Jewish exceptionalism. They state: "Jewish Latin American cultures represent both examples of broader Jewish experiences throughout the Americas and wider minority group experiences as well. . . . Jews are not unique, but that in their Diasporic condition they are much 'like everyone else' (Lesser and Rein 2008: 5). This distinction fundamentally reorients approaches to Jewish ethnicity in Latin America and the possible meanings that an emphasis on nationality and territoriality affords. "Returning the 'nation' to a prominent position precisely at

²⁰ For a comprehensive list of scholarship addressing this topic, see the extensive footnote in Judit Bokser Liverant, Sergio DellaPergola, Haim Avni, Margalit Bejarano, and Leonardo Senkman "Cuarenta años de cambios: Transiciones y paradigmas," In *Pertenencias y alteridad: Judíos en/de América Latina: cuarenta años de cambios* (Orlando: Iberoamericana Vervuert Publishing Corp., 2011), 14–15.

a time when the ‘trans-nation,’ or perhaps no nation at all is often an unquestioned assumption in contemporary scholarship” shifts “the dominant paradigm about ethnicity in Latin America,” as Raanan Rein argues (Rein 2010: xviii). As a result, Lesser and Rein promote the use of the term “Jewish Latin American” rather than “Latin American Jews” to clarify an emphasis on citizenship, which I employ here in this dissertation.

For Lesser and Rein, this intervention breaks up the stronghold of particularism on Jewish Latin American studies, pointing toward the racialization of difference in the experience of ethnicity in Argentina. Still, the question of racial otherness remains pertinent in political discourses. A recent news story about President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s February 2015 visit to China brings into relief the persistence of racial stereotypes in national politics and current manifestations of racism in Argentina: “¿Serán todos de ‘La Cámpora’ y vinieron sólo por el arroz y el petróleo?” (Are they all from ‘La Cámpora’—the youth Peronist political movement in support of the Kirchner government—and did they come just for rice and oil?), she mused to her three and a half million Twitter followers. The tweet mocked a stereotyped Chinese accent in Spanish, substituting “arroz” for “arroz” and “petróleo” for “petróleo,” while demonstrating the “deep sense of whiteness” implicit in class formations and nationalist tropes asserting the hegemony of Buenos Aires in the national imaginary (Garguin 2013).²¹

As Enrique Garguin argues, two myths pervade the articulation of contemporary (middle) class identity: 1) the “myth of upward social mobility” undercutting the importance of class differences as these rags to riches stories were extended to the whole population; and 2) the “myth of Europe in the Río de la Plata” mapping the race and ethnicity of the overseas

²¹ Evan Osnos, “Cristina Kirchner’s Misadventure in China.” *The New Yorker*. February 6, 2015. http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/cristina-kirchner-misadventure-china?mbid=social_facebook. Accessed May 15, 2015.

immigrants who “descended from boats” onto the whole population (ibid.: 164–5). While Jews share in the experience of being one of Latin America’s “other others” (Plotkin 2011), their lives and experience of Latin America remains distinct from the experiences of Afro-Argentine, Asian, and Arab populations. Further ethnographic research will shed light on these differences and the limits of discourses of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism in Buenos Aires.

Jewish Memory, Jewish Music in Buenos Aires

For Jewish Argentines in the 2010s, memory is a multivalent site, one that patches together different ways to live with the past. Overlaid in an interlocking assemblage of issues, events, symbols, and space, the fabric of Jewish Argentine memory links the legacy of the Holocaust, biblical and theological imperatives rooted in Jewish religious texts, bonding rituals, practices of commemoration, and post-Diasporic responses to cultural dislocation. But is Jewish memory distinct from Jewish history as historian Yosef H. Yerushalmi once famously asked (Yerushalmi 1982)?

Archeologist Jan Assmann and memory studies scholar John Czaplicka note a particular emphasis on memory in Jewish bonding rituals, arguing that the Jewish calendar is in fact based on “figures of memory”—and “fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)” (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995: 129). Arguing that this is actually a function of Jewish religion, they state that remembrance serves as a foundational aspect of Jewish culture, basing their conclusion on French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ belief that religion maintained the remembrance of time “long past through the ages and without allowing it to be corrupted by intervening memories” (ibid.:129). Jan and Aleida Assman’s

theory of cultural memory describes a cultural, not just social basis for memory, which is constantly reworked by people seeking ways to assert belonging (Assmann 2008). In cultural memory, memories are constructed:

Here memories are “made,” as Nietzsche puts it. They are not built up gradually as with communicative memory, and they do not disappear again within the cycle of three generations. Sometimes they vanish after twelve years, sometimes they endure for thousands. It is not a matter of a physical wound that never stops hurting, nor is it a memory trace in the “archaic inheritance” of the soul. It is a projection on the part of the collective that wishes to remember and of the individual who remembers in order to belong. Both the collective and the individual turn to the archive of cultural traditions, the arsenal of symbolic forms, the “imaginary” of myths and images, of the “great stories,” sagas and legends, scenes and constellations that live or can be reactivated in the treasure stores of a people. (Assmann 2006: 7–8)

Jewish Argentine memory showcases intersecting trajectories of memory—both ancient and modern—folding together narratives, figures, events, and affective registers and references to the historical past. Voids created by the passive passing of time, the violence of authoritarianism in the twentieth century, the foreign terror attacks, and the breakdown of social and familial bonds during the economic crisis are regularly addressed in Jewish Argentine musical performances. As Yossi Goldstein argues, the recuperation of memory in Judaism in Argentina in the 1990s is directly connected to national discourses about the recuperation of memory that proliferated around this time (Goldstein 2006).

Memory studies is a diverse field connecting many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, but some scholars like historian Wulf Kansteiner wonder if there is a common intellectual and methodological basis tying together these different approaches (Kansteiner 2002: 180). The proliferation of memory since the “memory boom” in the 1980s has transformed certain truths about the past and broadened the facts of historical knowledge to include new material and immaterial forms of memory and historiography in Argentina (Olick et al. 2011). I

contend that contemporary memory studies are illuminating when convincingly argued, even as memory studies remains critiqued as an interdisciplinary field lacking a central methodology (Berliner 2005; Kansteiner 2002; Palmié 2010).²²

Jewish Latin American musical expressions throughout the Americas provide important insights into understanding how memory work produces new meanings about the past (Weinstein, et al. 1998; Benzcry 2003; Cohen 2006; Kun 2005). These practices illuminate issues of gender, class, age, religiosity, and ethnicity—making visible and audible the everyday musical life of a diverse community constituting one of Latin America’s largest peripheral ethnic groups: the Jews (Setton 2012; Fischman 2006; Jacobson 2006; Brauner 2002). This dissertation remains the first critical ethnography to address the question of music’s central role in contemporary Jewish Latin American life across the spectrum of secular and religious life.²³

Methodology and Chapter Summaries: An Ethnography of Jewish Musical Performance in Buenos Aires

²² Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins address controversy over the term “collective memory,” which they state is often criticized for seeming too broad. As they argue: “Critics who charge that ‘collective memory’ over-totalizes prefer a proliferation of more specific terms to capture the ongoing contest over images of the past” (112). While this is certainly true in many cases, the proliferation of new terms also dilutes and confuses the discursive space. See Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105–40.

²³ Historian Silvia Glocer’s doctoral dissertation, “Músicos judíos exiliados en la Argentina durante el nazismo (1933–1945)” focuses on the impact of professional Jewish musicians in Buenos Aires who were exiled from Europe during Nazism (PhD diss., Universidad de Buenos Aires, In Progress). Anthropologist Natasha Zaretsky also addresses the place of music in Jewish Buenos Aires in the work of the Coro Mordje Guebirtig in “Citizens of the Plaza: Memory, Violence, and Belonging in Jewish Buenos Aires” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2008). Ethnomusicologist Mitsuko Kawabata completed a master’s thesis “Musical Representation of the Gaucho and Immigrant: Navigating Identity within the Argentine Criollo Circus” (Master’s thesis, University of Miami, 2009).

Over the course of 18 non-consecutive months between July 2010 and April 2014, I conducted fieldwork on Jewish music in Buenos Aires. Arriving to Buenos Aires with the names of a few musical groups and scholars working in the small field of Jewish studies, I began by arriving at the AMIA to begin learning about the cultural history of Jews in Argentina. Initially, I considered a comparative study of musical practices in religious life throughout the Latin America's "southern cone" region, including Chile, Uruguay, and even southern Brazil. However, as I learned more about the lives of Jews arriving to and building an infrastructure for sustaining Jewish culture in Buenos Aires—a vast topic—I narrowed my focus on Jewish musical life and performance in Argentina's capital city. As I attended different events advertised on public billboards or in the monthly AMIA events bulletin, I began to meet individuals who assisted me in my search for information about the history and panorama of the experience of Jewish music in Buenos Aires.

Through interviews as well as informal conversations with musicians, culture brokers, audiences, among others, I collected information and documents on the history and significance of musical life. I conducted archival research at the Centro Marc Turkow at the AMIA, the Centro Nacional de la Música y la Danza, as well as the Fundación IWO, the Latin American branch of the YIVO organization, where I also volunteered to help digitalize recordings in their sound and music collection. Furthermore, I regularly participated in and observed rehearsals and concerts while singing with the Coro Popular Mordje Guebirtig, an adult Yiddish choir over a period of approximately six months in total. I attended Kabbalat Shabbat services on Friday evenings at Comunidad Amijai, a synagogue in the Belgrano neighborhood. Furthermore, I attended concerts and shows featuring popular musicians in Buenos Aires' nightlife scene, sometimes on Friday evenings as well. At all times, I tried to balance Geertz's practice of "deep

hanging out” with a search for documentary evidence to support the sometimes conflicting statements I heard in conversations (Geertz 1998). Like many researchers who have spent prolonged period of time conducting fieldwork, when I returned home, I felt as if I was just getting started.

In its format, this dissertation is an ethnography of contemporary musical practices and the narrative and represtational uses of the past. It draws from both musicological and ethnomusicological method; history and anthropology. Drawing especially from ethnomusicology, musicology, performance studies, and memory studies, this dissertation aims to provide a story about how Jewish Argentines have lived musically (as the quote in the epigraph by the American poet Mark Doty suggests). The first chapter of this dissertation begins by examining the legacy of the watershed moment of the tragic and shocking July 18, 1994 bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), the mutual aid society and community center in Buenos Aires. The bombing had a profound impact on the lives of Jewish Argentines in the aftermath of the attack, bringing to light serious questions about Jewish belonging in the region. Just two years after the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy, the AMIA bombing resonated with both religious and non-religious Jewish Argentines, inspiring many to reflect on the meaning of this event in their lives and in their city.

As I discuss in chapter one, musical performance played a critical role in commemoration events after the bombing. Throughout chapter 1, I address the politics of memory that emerged in the aftermath, discussing how “*reclamación*,” or “protest and demand” for justice involved musical performance and the work of musicians, who were integral to the public commemoration of and debates about justice for the attack. Chapter 2 continues this discussion, exploring how the AMIA was transformed into a site of memory at Pasteur 633, with cultural heritage becoming

an central feature of programming initiatives. By addressing some of the musical strategies of “*recolección*” or “recollection” taking place in ordinary musical performances in the AMIA building, I examine how collective memory is reassembled through musical performance to support the politics of memory at this site.

Since the 1994 bombing, which remains unsolved in the courts, the prolonged, failed investigations of the AMIA bombing have raised numerous questions about the efficacy of the legal and justice systems in Argentina, in light of the failure of the national government to convict the local element as well as foreign nationals accused of planning, executing, and covering-up the attack. The death of Federal Prosecutor Alberto Nisman on January 18, 2015 has raised new questions about the possibility of ever attaining justice for the 85 victims killed in the attack and the hundreds of others who were injured. Amid an on-going international public spectacle involving a number of conspiracy theories and complicated political maneuvers, the investigation into Nisman’s death, first ruled a suicide but later deemed “suspicious” in light of conflicting forensic evidence, has once again brought the AMIA bombing into the public spotlight. While this scandal and the media circus surrounding it continues to unfurl as one of the strangest conspiracy theory scenarios in Argentine history, the question of Jewish belonging in Argentina once again resonates in public debate. Although my fieldwork for this dissertation concluded prior to Nisman’s death, I mention it here to contextualize the current situation of the struggle for justice for the AMIA bombing amid recent developments in the prosecution of the case.

Chapter three addresses circulations of Jewish Argentine popular music in Buenos Aires through the lens of “*renovación*” as a musical process of “renewal” by focusing on the musical work of two performance groups, the Orquesta Kef and musician Simja Dujov. These musicians

harness nostalgia and interest in Jewish musical forms to foster cultural intimacies as affective bridges renovating the connections between musical aesthetics and emotion in live performance for Jewish and non-Jewish listening publics. In this chapter, I ask how present-day commercial and professional Jewish Argentine performers are actively renewing the Argentine musical imaginary while challenging ideas about Jewish musical tradition. By referring to issues of eclecticism and cosmopolitanism—each their own aperture for approaching musical difference and continuity—I examine how and what these Jewish Argentine popular musicians do rhetorically, sonically, and gesturally to articulate a musical aesthetic rendered meaningful to local publics in Buenos Aires as well as to audiences abroad.

Chapter four examines the musical aesthetics, social dynamics, group history, and performance practices of the adult Yiddish choir, the Coro Mordje Guebirtig (Mordechai Gebirtig Choir), one of many adult Yiddish choirs regularly rehearsing and performing throughout Buenos Aires. The chapter provides ethnographic sketches, personal interviews, and surveys to showcase the process of “*resurgimiento*” or the resurgence of Yiddish culture and heritage that draws these second-generation Jewish Argentines, most of whom belong to the *tercera edad* (third stage) demographic of senior citizens to this particular form of active leisure. In this chapter, I examine the musical repertoires employed by this group while discussing recent changes in the choir’s aesthetics and political orientation. The Coro Mordje Guebirtig was originally formed in the aftermath of the AMIA bombing by a well-known Buenos Aires Yiddish *lererke* (teacher), Reizl Sztarker, to process the significance and pain of the attack. At its height in the late 1990s, the group boasted nearly 200 members. Today, the group has around 80 active members, many of whom have been with the group for more than a decade.

In Chapter 5, I discuss music in a Buenos Aires synagogue to examine repertoires of Jewish liturgical music in Argentina and the role of music in worship and synagogue life. Comunidad Amijai is a temple to music—a place where innovation and experimentation redefine the meaning of music in Jewish worship at a liberal progressive congregation affiliated with the Masorti Movement, a member of the worldwide Conservative Movement. At Comunidad Amijai, music is a means to differentiate between and to personalize forms of worship and spirituality, as well as to serve as a mark of distinction within middle class and elite circles. Musical life serves the congregation in numerous ways to tie modern religious practices to ancient traditions, affirming the bonds of cultural memory. This chapter identifies religion as a key form of cultural memory through which Jews connect to each other and a longer past.

Chapter One

Reclamación | Protest

The Politics of Musical Performance after the Bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA)



Figure 1.1 Photo of the exterior façade of the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* building from Pasteur Street. Photo by author, July 2012.

Hearing the Past; Sacralizing the Present

When I look up at the orderly columns of symmetrical square windows on the ivory concrete façade of the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* (AMIA) building, I feel a small sense of relief after my hurried and often hectic travels darting through Buenos Aires's maze of city streets, cluttered with traffic, hand carts, pets, and people crammed along narrow sidewalks (see Fig. 1.1). I usually take the subway to the Facultad de Medicina stop on Córdoba Avenue in front of the University of Buenos Aires's School of Economic Sciences to get to the AMIA from my apartment in San Telmo. Then, I turn left at the intersection of Córdoba Avenue and Pasteur

Street, walking toward the guarded entrance next to the AMIA's memorial wall honoring the victims of the July 18, 1994 bombing, which killed 85 and injured hundreds more. This terrifying attack destroyed the original building, immediately reducing it to a sloping pile of metal girders, chunks of concrete, clusters of debris, and scraps of paper—sliding down toward the street.

By the early 2010s, it is difficult to imagine how this heavily guarded building was once the site of Argentina's most severe foreign terrorist attack, but the AMIA's tragic history is impossible to forget because it was rebuilt as a site of memory, a site of mourning, and a space to reclaim the spirit of the Jewish community of Buenos Aires. Approximately, twenty years after the bombing, the wall of names listed in bold letters on the security wall separating the AMIA headquarters from the city street is a public memorial to the terror attack (see Fig. 1.2). Painted in white letters and styled to look like graffiti, the wall of names visually underscores the sudden shock of the bombing and the resulting chaos in its aftermath. Naming practices, including the annual recitation of the names of the dead are important rituals in Judaism, and the names written on the wall resonate, not only with Jewish custom, but also with the politics of memory in Argentina. In this chapter, I discuss the role of musical performance in the aftermath of the AMIA attack, focusing on the ways in which musicians, dancers, program administrators, organizations, and audiences turned to musical performance as a representational means to seek justice for the attack.

The AMIA is a critical site of Jewish Argentine memory. As a physical space, the building is somewhat unremarkable in the greater vertical landscape of the massive capital city. Today, however, the memory of the bombing and the specters of violence and injustice enshroud it in controversy, rendering the edifice distinctive in its capacity to represent a Jewish Argentine

presence in the city and a history of failed attempts to claim justice for the attack.¹ Nearby, the physical remains of clandestine torture sites are evidence of other human rights abuses exercised against Argentine citizens during the last military dictatorship (1976–1983). However, the AMIA raises different kinds of critical questions about the relation between sites of memory and memorial responses in Buenos Aires—between the silences imposed by ethnic violence and state terror. “Newly designed memory sites in Argentina’s capital—‘a city emerging from the ruins of dictatorship’—represent diverse projects undertaken by a variety of agents, from city and state governments to human rights organizations to individual social actors,” argues literature scholar Janis Breckinridge (Breckinridge 2009: 137). In the wake of these traumas and the economic crisis of 2001, the erection of memorials dedicated to the traumatic events of the recent past created new uses for public space in Buenos Aires. The AMIA is one such memorial that also operates as a community center and aid organization.

With its thick security wall facing the public street, 24-hour security guards and small grey concrete barriers called *pilotes* lining the sidewalk, both “hard” and “soft” forms of memory create an interplay between the material objects of memory (memorials and physical objects composing hard memory) and the texts of memory (including literature, history and other narrative forms to compose soft memory) (Etkind 2004: 38–39). Memorial practices transmit knowledge and awareness of the AMIA bombing from its physical site into the collective imaginary of the city for Jews and non-Jews alike (Zaretsky 2009).

¹ On January 18, 2015, the day before he was scheduled to appear in court to formally accuse President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and her foreign minister Héctor Timerman of trying to broker a secret deal with Iran in connection to the AMIA case, federal prosecutor Alberto Nisman was found dead in his apartment with a gunshot wound to the head. The resulting investigation into his death has raised more questions than answers, putting the AMIA case back into the national and international spotlights. An excellent article on a very complex and confusing case appeared in the New Yorker. See: Dexter Filkins, “Death of a Prosecutor,” *New Yorker*. July 20, 2015 Issue. Accessed July 17, 2015.



Figure 1.2 Acto Central del Atentado a la AMIA, July 18, 2012. Wall of names of the victims of the bombing. The small white sign reads, “*recordar el dolor que no cesa*” (remembering the pain that does not cease). Photo and translation by author.

Historian Alexander Etkind proposes a theory for understanding how national traumas are reified in public space and collective consciousness. He sees two trajectories of public memory involving “hard memory,” in which material objects of memory, discursive inscriptions, and circulating narratives freeze certain historical moments, figures, and ways of remembering, and “soft memory,” in which discourses and memory practices solidify belief (Etkind 2004). Missing from his theory is a mechanism for understanding how the performance of ideas, social texts (at times involving narratives, though not always), and embodied practices mediate the “hard” and “soft” in commemorative practices. Looking at and listening to musical responses after the AMIA attack brings into focus this interplay and the porous boundaries between hard and soft, in which text and action are mutually constructive as “a practice in which meanings are generated, manipulated, even ironised, within certain limitations” (Stokes 1994: 4). By prioritizing the experience of hearing and listening to representations of the AMIA cause in the aftermath of the

bombing, I address how musical performance intervenes to mobilize public demands for justice and to renew a fractured Jewish Argentine community bound together by the legacy of the terrorist bombings.²

In the following chapter, I discuss musical performances connected to the AMIA cause, analyzing how these artistic practices serve the AMIA in manifold ways to project the cause for justice to broad public audiences as well as to unify Jewish participation around AMIA events. Just two years after the bombing of the 1992 Israeli Embassy, the 1994 attack on the AMIA confirmed the anti-Semitic—not just anti-Israeli sentiment—fueling violence against the Jewish community of Buenos Aires while initiating a profound crisis of identity and belonging on a scale never before experienced there (Fischman and Pelacoff 2002). With a reflexive turn toward a renewed interest in Jewish heritage and cultural expression, musical performances held on behalf of the AMIA and in every day concerts taking place within the walls of the rebuilt performance space (reinaugurated in 1999) shoulder the demands of *reclamación* (protest or demand). Musical *reclamación* is cultural work, deprivatizing expressive forms and articulating them as public acts to protest, make demands, enact commemorations, pay tribute to, and otherwise address matters of communal trauma and conflict. Acts of *musical reclamación* can very simply include a single song—a chant, hymn, anthem, folksong or instrumental themes. Often, these expressions are driven by lyrics, creating new narratives the past, or making sonic reference to an event through non-linguistic means. By discussing the role of musical performance for the AMIA cause, I argue that one main consequence of the attack in its aftermath was to stimulate artistic expression in the Jewish community of Argentina at-large,

² Here I also make reference to the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy bombing.

leading to the centralization of Jewish musical performance in Buenos Aires around a concept of memory and renewal.³

During multiple trips to Buenos Aires from 2010 to 2014, I routinely visited the AMIA to utilize resources at the archive of Jewish Argentine history, the Centro de Documentación e Información sobre Judaísmo Argentino Marc Turkow (Marc Turkow Center of Documentation and Information about Argentine Judaism). On countless occasions, I attended shows in the “Café Literario” library space on the second floor of the building and in the “Auditorio AMIA”—the subterranean theater on the two underground floors of the building. My archival research and concert attendance were critical to my general introduction to the networks of Jewish sound in Buenos Aires, which expands far beyond the walls of the AMIA. Each time I entered the facility, tracing a pathway through the open-air courtyard to enter the main building, passing by Israeli artist Yaacov Agam’s eight-paneled, multi-dimensional optical sculpture, “Monument to the Memory of the Victims of the Terrorist Attack on AMIA,” I was aware that this courtyard quietly buffers the activities of the AMIA office, insulating and humanizing this space with plaques and posters hanging on doors and interior walls commemorating the

³ In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a series of conferences entitled “*Recreando la cultura judeoargentina*” was organized by historian and novelist Ricardo Feierstein and literature professor Stephen Sadow, subsequently attracting international support and fostering greater local interest in projects addressing Jewish Argentine art, literature, music, theater, and film. See: Ricardo Feierstein and Stephen Sadow, *Recreando la cultura judeoargentina 2: Literatura y artes plásticas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 2004) and *Recreando la cultura judeoargentina, 1894-2001. En el umbral del segundo siglo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 2002). In 2004, a conference was held on Jewish music, organized by the esteemed conductor Mario Benzecry, who united music scholars such as the Argentine-born musicologist Esteban Buch and ethnomusicologist Edwin Seroussi to examine the role of music in Jewish life around themes such as music and the Holocaust, musical performance, and tango and the Jews. These conferences further consolidated interest and participation in Jewish artistic expression, facilitating informed discussions about the role of the arts in the Jewish experience. See: Mario Benzecry, ed. *Aporte del pueblo judío a la música* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 2009).

intangible yet pervasive social life of art, music, theater and dance throughout Jewish Argentine history (see Figs. 1.3–1.7).



Figure 1.3 Architectural Rendering of the AMIA building, including the underground “Auditorio” theater space located below the plaza/ patio area. From the archives of the Centro Marc Turkow.



Figures 1.4–1.5: Yaakov Agam’s statue “Monument to the Memory of the Victims of AMIA”; The AMIA logo on the outer wall of the main building next to photos of AMIA activities. Photos and translation by author.



Figures 1.6–1.7: Plaque commemorating the declaration of AMIA as a “Historic National Site” in 2007; Plaque commemorating the Yiddish theater, Teatro Soleil, which reads: “Here at this site, operated the Yiddish theater, Soleil. On its stage, dreams and words were the tears and the laughter of a theater hall whose spirit still endures in collective memory.”

Photos and translation by author.

Directly below this courtyard, the AMIA auditorium is a place where Jewish Argentine heritage is brought to life, activating different facets of the politics of memory enacted in cultural and artistic expressions. Jewish musical performance at the AMIA is a “complex entanglement of procedures of remembering, forgetting and the production of counter-memories” involved in the “identification of memory with place” as historian Katharina Schramm writes (Schramm 2011: 5). Schramm offers a flexible understanding of the relationship between “official commemorations” and “popular minority discourses” in the memorialization of space—a process, which she notes, requires an analytical framework sufficiently robust to interpret these spaces as sites of exchange between official commemorations and popular actions rather than viewing these procedures as mutually-exclusive, unrelated, or discontinuous parts. By emphasizing the role of physical locations (place) and conceptual landscapes (space) in actively shaping public and personal memories of violence, Shramm argues that the mediation between “violence, memory, body and landscape” produces a “sacralization” of these sites maintained through memorial practices which transform physical places into memorial landscapes

(Schramm 2011: 6). “Hence the sacred,” she argues, “is not to be understood as an innate and unchanging quality inherent to certain objects or sites” (Schramm 2011: 6). She adds:

Sacralization, as we understand it, takes place on two levels. First, it concerns the violent past and its relationship with the present....(....). Second, the concept of sacralization relates to concrete places. These may either unfold their (sacred) potentiality through their authentic appearance, as unintentional monuments, which often become spiritual abodes or pilgrimage destinations. They may also be specifically designed for commemorative purposes, as intentional monuments, which follow a spatial choreography that aims at the creation of a sacred center. (Schramm 2011: 6–7)

Judah Cohen argues that the process of musical sacralization can be defined as “the act of creating musical material objects specifically to enhance Jewish religious rituals,” but at the AMIA—a secular institution—mostly secular music sacralizes this space as a site of memory (Cohen 2007: 337). Musical objects such as folksongs, instrumental works, and films spotlight how memory ties the Jewish Argentine past to contemporary commemorative events. Musical performance is a key mode of social engagement in which the documents and physical traces of history are sounded to perform Jewish Argentine cultural heritage to publics within and beyond the AMIA. Musical performance at the AMIA sacralizes this space and reorients the culture of trauma by reframing Jewish Argentine heritage as pleasurable. At the AMIA, sacralization is a Jewish act of remembrance beyond the world of religious observance. As such, listening to the sound worlds of the AMIA not only provides us with information about the ways in which the AMIA centralizes its authority in the network of Jewish institutions throughout Buenos Aires, but it also shows us how the deployment of culture is believed to serve a “*puesta en valor*,” or a restoration of Jewish Argentine cultural patrimony. Everyday musical performances and ordinary public spectacles of Jewish heritage diversify the content and the conversation about Jewish Argentine identity by giving a wider context with which to attend to the changing dynamics of

pluralism, cosmopolitanism and the meanings of Jewishness in contemporary Buenos Aires, discussed in greater depth in Chapter two.

Brief History of the AMIA and the Departamento de Cultura (Department of Culture)

In 1894, the AMIA was originally founded as the Jevrá Kedushá Ashkenazi according to the model of the Eastern European *kehillah* (Hebrew: congregation)—a form of semi-autonomous, democratic self-governance born out of religious interests, which became increasingly more attuned to civic concerns by the twentieth-century (Sofer 1982). In Buenos Aires, the primary purpose of the Jevrá Kedushá Ashkenazi was to serve the needs of the Jewish community as a burial society, however, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the AMIA developed into a central aid organization owing to the importance of its founding work. According to historian Eugene Sofer, between 85 to 95 percent of the total Jewish community were members of the Jevrá Kedushá Ashkenazi in the years before 1945 (Sofer 1982). As Sofer argues, in comparison to other cities receiving a significant number of Jewish immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century, Buenos Aires's kehillah survived by maintaining its importance as a critical community entity in part due to Argentina's economic volatility, responsible for contributing to “the community's lack of occupational and residential mobility” (Sofer 1982: 5). When the Jevrá Kedushá Ashkenazi was inaugurated as the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina in 1949, it had become “the center of an extensive network of Jewish organizations and the institution that other associations and individuals looked to in times of need” (Sofer 1982: 7). Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, AMIA gradually expanded its social and educational programming offerings to serve the Jewish community, as well as to contend with new challenges of attracting younger members (Mirelman 1990). This quest for

younger audiences remains a current priority for the Departamento de Cultura, now called “AMIA Cultura” after a 2012 rebranding of the unit under the direction of coordinator Gabriela Wilensky, who replaced Moshé Korin after working for nearly eleven years under former director of cultural programming.⁴

By the mid-twentieth century, the closure of prominent Yiddish theaters throughout Buenos Aires due to the diminishing number of Yiddish speaking patrons coincided with the emergence of a generation of Argentine-born, Spanish-speaking Jews amid transformations in the technology of entertainment that decentralized the role of the Yiddish theater in community life. In response, the AMIA, in addition to a handful of other smaller Jewish institutions, began to diversify their programming options to address the changing demographics and tastes of the Jewish Argentine community. In the early 1950s, AMIA founded the Departamento de Cultura to organize lectures, provide scholarships, support workshops in literature and biblical subjects, publishing and theater—slowly broadening its cultural programming to appeal to a variety of interests and age groups. By the 1980s, the Departamento de Cultura was deeply committed to collaborations with different Jewish entities to attract new publics while retaining current members. Documents such as the “Departamento de Cultura y Extensión Communitaria Resumen de Actividades del Año 1980” (The Department of Culture and Community Outreach Summary of Activities for 1980) describe a public outreach program called “Sacar AMIA a la Calle Judía” (Taking AMIA to the Jewish Street), organized to reactivate, support, and stimulate the activity of smaller Jewish institutions, to collaborate with existing entities, and to develop programs in Spanish to appeal to wider publics.⁵ While administrators had already recognized

⁴ Interview with Gabriela Wilensky. March 19, 2014.

⁵ “Departamento de Cultura y Extensión Communitaria Resumen de Actividades del Año 1980”. Archive of the Departamento de Cultura. Buenos Aires: Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina,

the need to renovate cultural programs, the AMIA bombing expedited the process, politicizing Jewish Argentine culture in its aftermath. Today, seniors remain the most stable and steady audience consuming cultural programming activities at the AMIA; however, new programs such as AMIA para Chicos (AMIA for Children), established in 2006 to bring families to the AMIA targets, not only children, but also the parents of children from ages 30 to 50.⁶ Musical programming plays an especially vital role in outreach to younger publics.

Since the 1994 bombing, AMIA Cultura has refined and expanded its programming initiatives to incorporate members of the general public, including non-Jews as well, even though the organization was originally intended for Jews. As a secular institution, operating primarily as a mutual aid agency serving the entire metropolitan Buenos Aires community (including the autonomous federal capital and the outlying areas of the province of Buenos Aires), cultural programming fosters broad participation in AMIA activities and mobilizes Jewish Argentine collective identification, while representing Jewish Argentine interests abroad. In an interview with Gabriela Wilensky, she explained to me that the purpose of the Department of Culture is manifold:

The Department of Culture of AMIA has a dual mission. On the one hand, it proposes to spread Jewish culture within the Jewish community and within society at-large, and on the other hand to bring general cultural activities to the Jewish community. And to develop this double mission, it organizes shows, concerts, activities, courses and a quantity of events as often at AMIA, as in other institutions and in public life or in public spaces. Because the double mission is to be able to bring culture to the community and to society in general, its purpose is also to develop all of this and to guarantee the diffusion and, let's say, continuity of the Jewish Argentine community.⁷

1980. From the Centro de Documentación e Información sobre Judaísmo Argentino Marc Turkow.

⁶ Interview with Gabriela Wilensky. March 19, 2014. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

⁷ Ibid.

Prior to the bombing, concerts held at the AMIA in the old AMIA theater, which seated approximately 400 people was closed to the general public, served only the Jewish community. After the bombing, administrators opened its doors to everyone, aiming to promote a more inclusive environment for all those interested in attending an event, regardless of their background.⁸ As Wilensky confirms:

...after the bombing, which this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the attack, there was an opening of AMIA's doors toward all of society, opening the cultural offerings also—opening everything—including employment services, a large number of things, but opening culture as well to all of society to begin to encourage more visibility and participation for the institution.⁹

Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, the question of where to rebuild the AMIA building became a controversial issue as different factions concerned with the possibility of a repeated attack and preoccupied with the demand to build an appropriate memorial argued over where to build the headquarters. According to journalist Fernando Rodríguez for the Argentine newspaper, *La Nación*, family members of the victims wanted to commemorate their loved ones with a traditional memorial on the hallowed grounds at Pasteur Street 633, initially opposing the reconstruction of the AMIA offices there.¹⁰ Ultimately, the new building was constructed at its original site, requiring a concerted effort on behalf of the AMIA Board of Directors to bring back the fearful public and to work against the legacy of trauma associated with this site.¹¹ The expedient mobilization of cultural programming was launched to help counteract the specters of violence haunting the AMIA by attracting people back to the

⁸ Interview with Mario Benzecry. Buenos Aires, September 2012.

⁹ Interview with Gabriela Wilensky. March 19, 2014. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

¹⁰ Fernando Rodríguez, "Hoy será inaugurada la nueva sede de la AMIA," *La Nación*, May 26, 1999. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/139796-hoy-sera-inaugurada-la-nueva-sede-de-la-amia>.

¹¹ Ibid.

space.¹² As such, musical programming has served multiple roles for socializing participation within this arena, not only through commemoration and memorialization activities related to the history of the attack, but also through everyday activities that reposition the AMIA as a community institution for the neighborhood and the city more broadly conceived.¹³ On Wednesday, May 26, 1999, the new AMIA building was re-inaugurated almost five years later. As Rabbi Shlomo Ben Hamu, then Chief Rabbi of Argentina stated to the newspaper, *La Nación*:

Returning home symbolizes the spirit of our community. It's our protest for life that means that, even though 86 [sic] victims left a void in our hearts that can never be filled, no bomb will destroy our spirit.¹⁴

In two main performance contexts, the *Café Literario* culture series held in the library on the second floor of AMIA and in regular concerts and *espectáculos* (theatrical shows), musical programming fills the halls of this institution multiple times per week. *Espectáculo* is a word frequently used in Argentina to refer to shows, a category that extends, as Ernesto Schoo writes, from the “ancient arts of theater, music, song and dance” to the recent appearance of “present day technological interventions” (Sirven 2010: 13).¹⁵ *Espectáculo* connotes “spectacle,” a show designed to excite and to appeal to audiences through a high level of artistry, including but not limited to: choreographed routines, costuming, props, large ensembles—that is, a degree of polish and coordination. In English, the word connotes artifice but raises the question of

¹² Interview with Mario Benzecri. Buenos Aires, September 2012.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Fernando Rodríguez, “Hoy será inaugurada la nueva sede de la AMIA,” *La Nación*, May 26, 1999. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/139796-hoy-sera-inaugurada-la-nueva-sede-de-la-amia>.

¹⁵ In the Prologue to Pablo Sirvén’s *Breve historia del espectáculo en la Argentina*, Ernesto Schoo writes: “Se entiende: esas artes—desde las más antiguas (teatro, música y canto, danza) hasta las manifestaciones actuales que se sirven la tecnología (video, hologramas)....” In Pablo Sirven, *Breve historia del espectáculo en la Argentina*. (Buenos Aires: Editorial El Ateneo, 2010).

intentionality, of the possible interpretations of musical performance's meanings, opening up an approach to the ways in which “performative utterances” do something in the positive sense rather than pointing simply to their “inauthenticity” and what they fail to do (Austin 1975; DeBord 1967). Espectáculos and other performance formats are hallmarks of the AMIA Cultura musical programming today.

For the Benefit of the AMIA: The “Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA” and “Art and Memoria Activa”

In 1994, in the initial aftermath of the AMIA bombing, AMIA administrators planned a public benefit concert to commemorate the attack and to raise money to rebuild the AMIA headquarters.¹⁶ According to the newspaper *Página/12*, the event was organized as the first of a series of shows staged to combat *el olvido* (oblivion/forgetting)—to attempt to clarify the facts of the attack and to fundraise for the design and construction of a new physical headquarters.¹⁷ As the newspaper *Clarín* reported, the “AMIA Recital por la Reconstrucción” (Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA) was enacted “to keep the memory alive and to demand justice,” placing musicians at the center of this memory work to promote active public remembrance as a means to claim justice for the attack (see Fig. 1.8).¹⁸ Just four and a half months after the bombing, the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA was held on November 30, 1994 in the *Estadio Obras Sanitarias*, a popular space for sporting events and stadium concerts that can hold up to 4,700 people. The Estadio Obras Sanitarias, nicknamed the “*templo del rock porteño*” (temple of Buenos Aires rock), was founded as the stadium of the Club Atlético Obras

¹⁶ “Idolos de la música a beneficio,” *Diario Popular*, December 1, 1994, 17.

¹⁷ Luis Bruchstein, “Rock ‘para no olvidar’ en Obras en solidaridad con la AMIA,” *Página/12*, December 1, 1994, 3. From the AMIA archive at the Centro Marc Turkow.

¹⁸ ; “Emotivo festival para reconstruir la AMIA,” *Clarín*, December 1, 1994. From the AMIA archive at the Centro Marc Turkow.

Santitarias de la Nación on May 27, 1917 in the upper-class neighborhood of Nuñez.¹⁹

Television personality Julián Weich was the MC of the event, and Radio Station “Rock & Pop 95.9” donated sound, lighting equipment, and security services for the show. Tickets ranged from twenty to thirty pesos.²⁰



Figure 1.8 Street posters advertising the Recital por la Reconstrucción in 1994.
Photo courtesy of Centro Marc Turkow.

Newspaper *Página/12* reported that the AMIA organizers Luis Grynwald and Elio Kapszuk, aided by a group of youth volunteers, invited renowned *rockeros* (rock musicians) to play the benefit show, with each performer and his or her band ultimately electing to perform for free at the concert.²¹ The musical line-up consisted of famous Argentine musical icons Luis Alberto Spinetta, Fito Páez, Patricia Sosa, Sandra Mihanovich, Juan Carlos Baglietto and Ignacio Copani, representing a mix of national rock legends and popular artists whose fame would solidify throughout the 1990s. The Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA featured

¹⁹ “Estadio Obras,” accessed May 26, 2014. <http://www.estadioobras.com/>.

²⁰ “Por la AMIA, un recital bárbaro,” *Crónica*, December 1, 1994. “Un antídoto contra el olvido,” *Página/12*, November 30, 1994, 25. From the AMIA archive at the Centro Marc Turkow.

²¹ “Un antídoto contra el olvido,” *Página/12*, November 30, 1994, 25. From the AMIA archive at the Centro Marc Turkow.

musicians famous for their work resisting and protesting Argentina's last military dictatorship (1976–1983) and the anti-authoritarian, progressive politics associated with this style of musical resistance favored among youth (Manzano 2009).²²

According to Pablo Vila and Paul Cammack, rock nacional played “an extremely important part in the socialisation and re-socialisation of broad sectors of Argentinian youth during the military period.” They contend that rock nacional was responsible for “restoring truthful communication regarding the real country, salvaging the meaning of life in a context of lies and terror, consolidating a collective actor as a means of counteracting an individualistic model of life, [and] counterposing a supportive community of actions and interests to the primacy of the market.”²³ Furthermore, George Béhague and Irma Ruiz argue: “Rock nacional had great significance during this time for many young people: during a period of great political repression when young male conscripts were being sent off to fight in the war, many lyrics were opposed to the government position” (Béhague and Ruiz). Likewise, the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA shaped Jewish and non-Jewish perceptions about the AMIA cause by socializing the public through these style aesthetics. By spotlighting powerful political narratives of memory and forgetting invoked by these musicians and their songs, the benefit concert format created a public arena to address the AMIA attack in its aftermath, thus claiming and confirming memory as the “appropriate way” to unite support for the cause.²⁴

²² *Página/12* reported that: “En las instalaciones del estadio, casi cuatro mil jóvenes en jeans y camiseta, algunos de la colectividad judía, otros seguidores de los cantantes que aportaban su presencia y otros movilizados por el significado del acto, hicieron un minuto de silencio.” “Un antídoto contra el olvido,” *Página/12*, November 30, 1994, 25. From the AMIA archive at the Centro Marc Turkow.

²³ Pablo Vila and Paul Cammack, “Rock Nacional and Dictatorship in Argentina,” *Popular Music* 6, no.2 (1987): 129–48.

²⁴ Kip Pegley and Susan Fast, “America: A Tribute to Heroes,” in *Music, Politics, and Violence*, eds. Kip Pegley and Susan Fast, 41 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

As organizer Elio Kapszuk confessed to *Página/12*: “I know that there are artistic factors that are necessarily implicated by the show—that Spinetta hasn’t played in a long time and that Páez attracts his own crowd... but I assure you that at the box office sales for the show, the people were asking for tickets to ‘the AMIA show,’ nothing else. And that clarified a lot of things for me.”²⁵ Kapszuk’s comments assure the centrality of the AMIA cause to the nearly four thousand concert-goers who arrived to support the call for justice for the bombing—a call intending to combat the sentiment that the AMIA attack was only a Jewish concern, not a broader issue affecting all Argentines.



Figure 1.9 Luis Alberto Spinetta and Fito Páez performing at the Recital por la Reconstrucción. November 30, 1994. Photo courtesy of Centro Marc Turkow.

²⁵ Elio Kapszuk stated: Yo sé que hay factores artísticos que necesariamente están implicados en el show, que Spinetta hace mucho que no toca, que Páez convoca a su público...[p]ero te aseguro que de venta, la gente pedía sus entradas para ‘lo de la AMIA,’ nada más. Y eso me aclaró muchas cosas.” In “Un antídoto contra el olvido,” *Página/12*, November 30, 1994, 25. From the AMIA archive at the Centro Marc Turkow.

In the weeks preceding the event, AMIA administrators advertised the concert with the slogan, “Para que no perdamos la memoria,” or “So We Don’t Lose Memory,” a motto that marked a beginning of the AMIA’s public confrontation with the politicized discourse of memory (see Fig. 1.9). As Elías Lisicki, Vice-President of the AMIA stated, “what’s important is that the people are aware to not forget.”²⁶ Set firmly against a politics of forgetting, this “memory” in question allied the cause for the AMIA with human rights discourse circulating in Argentina—itself already derived, in part, from global post-Holocaust discourse, according to literature scholar Andreas Huyssen (Huyssen 2003). As Huyssen argues, “Holocaust discourse functions like an international prism that helps focus the local discourse about the *desaparecidos* (the disappeared victims of the military dictatorship) in both its legal and commemorative aspects” (Huyssen 2003).

In turn, these overlapping meanings of memory invoked at the benefit concert were refracted back on Jewish Argentine forms of commemoration, unifying the streams of national human rights discourse to the key themes of *memoria* (memory), *olvido* (oblivion) and *justicia* (justice) fueling the cause for the AMIA. As historian Yossi Goldstein argues, the recuperation of memory in Judaism and Jewish practices in Argentina in the 1990s can be directly linked to a boom in national discourses attending to the recuperation of memory emerging at the same time (Goldstein 2006). Furthermore, the political uses of memory are harnessed for political aims more broadly throughout the Southern Cone and Latin America to mobilize political protest against human rights and civil rights abuses. As sociologist Luis Roniger and political scientist Mario Szajner argue: “Parallel to the institutional mechanisms elaborated for treating these violations,

²⁶ Elías Lisicki states, “lo importante es que la gente tome conciencia de que no hay que olvidar.” In Luis Bruchstein, “Rock ‘para no olvidar’ en Obras en solidaridad con la AMIA,” *Página/12*, December 1, 1994, 3. From the AMIA archive at the Centro Marc Turkow.

a politics of memory and oblivion was generated, which involved contrasting attempts to preserve and diffuse the memory of the past or move beyond past experiences and their varied interpretations” (Roniger and Sznajder 1998: 133). By symbolically reinforcing both the Jewishness and the Argentineness of Jewish Argentines while emphasizing how these identity fields are not inherently separate, the concert assembled, shaped, and voiced public dissent after the attack not just as “the problem of an ethnic and religious group living in Argentina” but as a “matter of state”—a point absent from official narratives until former president Nestor Kirchner took office in May 2003, later accepting responsibility on behalf of the Argentine government to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for Argentina’s failure to prevent the attack and its inability to properly investigate the bombing in 2005 (Gurevich 2005: 99; Zaretsky 2008).²⁷ The selection of musicians more well-known for their contributions to “national” music rather than ethnically or religiously marked “Jewish” music thus buffered the event from being dismissed as peripheral to the concerns of the wider Argentine public and underscored a “national” political orientation. Since the concert, the AMIA has continued to make a concerted effort to feature musical performance as a central part of its strategy to renew the spirit of the Jewish Argentine community after this tragedy.²⁸

²⁷ Beatriz Gurevich, “After the AMIA Bombing: A Critical Analysis of Two Parallel Discourses,” in *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory*, ed. Kristin Ruggiero, 99 (Brighton, East Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2005).

²⁸ Fernando Rodríguez, “Hoy será inaugurada la nueva sede de la AMIA,” *La Nación*, May 26, 1999, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/139796-hoy-sera-inaugurada-la-nueva-sede-de-la-amia>. As Rabbi Ben Hamu, then chief rabbi of the Comunidad Israelita Argentina, stated at the reinauguration ceremony, “Volver a casa simboliza el espíritu de nuestro pueblo. Es nuestro reclamo por la vida y significa que, aún cuando las 86 víctimas dejaron en nuestros corazones un vacío que jamás podremos llenar, ninguna bomba podrá destruir nuestro espíritu.” (Returning home symbolizes the spirit of our community. It is our demand for life, and it means that even though the 86 victims left our hearts with a void that can never be filled, no bomb will ever destroy our spirit.). Originally, it was believed that there were 86 victims; that figure was later revised to be 85.

In the 1990s, the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA shaped public perceptions about the AMIA cause itself by appropriating politically powerful narratives of memory and forgetting invoked by these musicians and their songs. In this way, the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA claimed and confirmed “memory” as the “appropriate way” for the benefit concert format to create a public arena to unite together thousands of strangers to the cause (Pegley and Fast 2012: 41). As musician Ignacio Copani told *Página/12*, “this is an antidote to forgetting, speaking not as an artist but as a member of the public,” a discursive move common among national rock musicians.”²⁹ As Vila and Cammack argue:

The close relationship between artist and public is the nodal point of all the phenomenon known as rock nacional and the concert is the physical sphere in which it is moulded. In addition, this characteristic of the movement brings with it the idea of equality, absence of division: the musician is the representative of the lived experiences of his followers, and in order to continue in that position he must share these with them. (Vila and Cammack 1987: 129–48, 147)³⁰

Placing himself in the role of “his followers,” Copani asserted himself as a rock nacional musician by denying the distance between the public and the artist to demand justice alongside the thousands in attendance. Copani’s words valorized the power of the voice and music as a force to be wielded in public protest:

²⁹ Ignacio Copani states: “Esto es un antídoto contra el olvido, hablando no desde el lugar del artista sino como público,” in “Un antídoto contra el olvido,” *Página/12*, November 30, 1994, 25.

³⁰ Translation by author with Sarah Green.

“Nuestra Voz”

Entre los nefastos objetivos de la bomba seguramente uno de ellos fue dejarnos mudos.

Sin embargo estamos aquí para decirles a los sembradores de horror que nuestra voz solamente dejó de alzarse porque estaba ahogada por el llanto y dolor, pero jamás enmudecida.

Hoy nuestra voz se hace canción y canta de mil maneras y estilos a la vida, y en cada nota y en cada verso intentará sumar una piedra más para reconstruir.

Hoy nuestra voz debe agitar a la memoria para que se mantenga encendida por siempre, por nosotros y por quienes no tienen la dicha de estar aquí.

Hoy nuestra voz no tendría ninguna razón de existir, sería un sonido torpe, hueco y sin valor si no usara toda su fuerza para reclamar, para exigir... JUSTICIA [sic].³¹

“Our Voice”

Among the nefarious objectives of the bomb, surely one of them was to render us mute.

Nevertheless, we are here to say to the sowers of horror that we only ceased to raise our voice because it was suffocated by the weeping and the pain, but it never fell silent.

Today, our voice joins in song and sings to life in a thousand different ways and styles, and in each note and in each verse, it will try to contribute one more stone for the reconstruction.

Today, our voice should awaken memory in order to keep it burning forever, for us and for those not fortunate enough to be here.

Today, our voice would have no reason to exist; it would be a clumsy sound, hollow and worthless, if we did not use all of its force to protest, to demand justice.³²

In the aftermath of the AMIA bombing, controversy arose over how to advocate for justice for the families of the victims of the attack. While the AMIA organization represented their own interests, the independent grassroots advocacy organization Memoria Activa (Active Memory) was formed in 1994 to demand the “recognition of Argentine Jews as full and integral members of the Argentine nation” by “proposing a redefinition of the nature of the national imaginary as essentially plural, multiethnic and multicultural” (Faulk 2013: 98). Memoria Activa has no institutional affiliation with the AMIA, priding itself on its ability to operate and advocate

³¹ Ignacio Copani cited in “Un antídoto contra el olvido,” *Página/12*, November 30, 1994, 25.

³² Translation by author with Sarah Green.

for the families of the victims without the same conflicts of interest in national and municipal politics, or ties to Zionist organizations. Other politically-minded groups such as the Coro Judío Popular Mordje Guebirtig (the Mordejai Guebirtig Choir, which I discuss further in chapter 3) founded by Reizl Sztarker, a Yiddish lererke, aimed to create a space for participants to gather together to express their anxieties, fears, and admiration for Yiddish culture, drawing from the repertory of well-known Yiddish folksongs and *partizaner* (resistance) hymns to address these concerns by singing in plazas, parks, and other institutions throughout the city (Zaretsky 2008).³³

Although I have found no further archival documentation to confirm any additional fundraising concerts organized by the AMIA institution after the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA, the independent group Memoria Activa held a series of benefit shows in the late 1990s similarly styled as commemoration and entertainment. Memoria Activa member José Blumenfeld told me that the first benefit concert was held in 1997, when the beloved Argentine folklore singer and member of the Nueva Canción (New Song) Movement, Mercedes Sosa, headlined the event. Although he remembered that there was a concert in 1998, he did not remember details about it. In 1999, however, Memoria Activa organized a concert in the Teatro Gran Rex, an historic theater in downtown Buenos Aires.³⁴ The show, “El Arte Junto a Memoria Activa” (Art and Memoria Activa) drew together both nationally-recognized musicians such as León Gieco—sometimes referred to as the “Bob Dylan” of Argentina for his frequent use of the harmonica—as well as musicians performing identifiably “Jewish” musics within the Jewish

³³ The Guebirtig Choir now sings a more diverse repertory of popular, folk, and art songs primarily in Yiddish, but also in Hebrew, Spanish, English, and even Italian. However, under Reizl Starzker’s leadership, their original repertory represented the aims of political mobilization by performing mainly partisan, labor, and political songs from the interwar period and Second World War in Europe.

³⁴ Interview with José Blumenfeld in Buenos Aires. December 2011.

Argentine community.³⁵ These included the duo César Lerner and Marcelo Moguilevsky, Ignacio Copani, Victor Heredia, Los Destakados del Pelle (performing a song by the children's song by poet and composer María Elena Walsh), Gabriela Torres and Lucho González, Alejandro Lerner, violinist Damián Bolotin, Julia Zenko, the Coro Kennedy, and Opus Cuatro.

In the liner notes to the *Libro CD Testimonio* (CD Booklet of Testimony)—a booklet and cd holder—the concert is described more as a participatory spectacle of music and memory than a presentational concert, claiming it was imagined “not as a rally” but as “an expression of life of all men and women of goodwill, Argentine Jewish and non-Jewish, of all who want to join us in this claim for justice” (see Fig. 1.10).³⁶ The event featured speeches from Memoria Activa members, pieced together from speeches given weekly during the Monday morning protests in the Plaza Lavalle (in front of the Argentine Supreme Court Building), which started in 1994 and continued through 2004. Memoria Activa members María Rosa Gallo and Manuel Callau read these pieces aloud between musical sets, and poet and Yiddish scholar Eliahu Toker shared additional words. The event established a “carnavalesque” atmosphere by employing jugglers, street performers, people on stilts, mimes, and local street artists to foster a creative spirit and to perform memory in the search for justice by subverting the tropes of marginality (Bakhtin 1941). Each arriving participant was handed a small piece of paper with the words, “National Document against Impunity No. 18071994 (the date of the bombing) printed on it—“a small object, a symbol that synthesizes the search for justice that won’t give up,” signifying membership in the community and in the event.”³⁷

³⁵ Memoria Activa, *El Arte Junto a Memoria Activa*, Latín Gráfica, 1999, compact disc.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Impunity was a central theme of the Art and Memoria Activa spectacle, uniting multiple genres of Jewish memory and connecting the recent failures in prosecuting alleged perpetrators and conspirators of the AMIA attack to the human rights abuses of the last military dictatorship, the Holocaust, and even the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem (70 C.E.). By placing the AMIA (and the 1992 Israeli Embassy) attack into a longer chronology of Jewish Argentine experience, musicians were able to perform music *as* Jewish music, with Jewish Argentine musicians performing as Jewish Argentine musicians alongside non-Jewish Argentine musicians together advocating for justice. The first performance was by Damián Bolotin, who played a virtuosic violin arrangement of the Yiddish folksong, “Oif’n Pripetchick Brennt a Feier,” written by composer Mark Warshawsky, followed up by a communal sounding of the *shorafot*—ritual horns named in the bible as one of the earliest musical instruments used by the Jews (Bayer, et. al. 2007).³⁸ The shofar is iconic in Jewish religious ritual and also serves as a key symbol of Memoria Activa itself, who routinely sounded the shofar at 9:53 am (the exact time of the AMIA attack) each Monday in the Plaza Lavalle as a part of their weekly protest ritual.

The performances at the Art and Jewish Memory event also included artists representing the “multicultural” aims of the advocacy group. For instance, the percussion ensemble and *murga* group Los Desakatados del Pelle played a piece called “Señora de los ojos vendados” (“Blindfolded Woman”)—a performance punctuated by whistles, crashing symbols, and booming echoes of the *bombo* drum, which invoked the sounds of Afro-Argentine and Afro-Uruguayan music from the Río de la Plata region. Further emphasizing the theme of the event,

³⁸ “Oif’n Pripetchick Brennt a Feier” is perhaps one of the most circulated of all Yiddish folksongs and was featured in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993). This song also appears as a unifying musical theme in the 2009 Argentine film *Anita*, directed by Marcos Carnevale and starring Norma Aleandro and Alejandra Manzo, who plays a young Jewish woman with down syndrome, wandering around Buenos Aires after losing her mother (Aleandro) after the AMIA attack.

Ignacio Copani's performance of his song "Memoria Activa"—a song he wrote especially for *Memoria Activa*—asserted that memory is not a passive process, but a site of action:

"Memoria Activa"
by Ignacio Copani

Porque la memoria tiene alas de fuego
que encienden la vida con su resplandor,
más allá del llanto, el lamento y el ruego,
vuela sobre el tiempo su firme clamor

Porque la memoria es un grillo sin pausa
que a la fe dormida puede despertar
Porque la memoria es la única causa
contra las tinieblas de la impunidad

Tengo la memoria la memoria viva,
furiosa y activa, con sed de verdad
fervor en protesta, dolor sin respuesta
que entre las cenizas no quiere quedar

Porque la memoria le niega clemencia
a la mano oscura que mata y se va,
que destroza sueños, amor, inocencia
y está tan segura que no pagará

Porque la memoria de bronca y de lucha
exige castigo al crimen feroz
Porque a los caídos nuestra sangre escucha,
pidiendo justicia con toda su voz

Tengo la memoria la memoria viva,
furiosa y activa, con sed de verdad
Por nuestros ausentes con toda la gente
que nunca en la vida los podrá olvidar

Tengo la memoria la memoria viva,
furiosa y activa, con sed de verdad
fervor en protesta, dolor sin respuesta

Because memory has wings of fire
that ignite life with their radiance,
beyond the tears, the lament and the entreaty,
its unyielding outcry soars above time

Because memory is an unceasing cricket
that awakens a sleeping faith
Because memory is the only case
against the darkness of impunity

I have memory, memory lives,
furious and active, longing for truth
passionate protest, unanswered pain,
that in the ashes, wishes not to remain

Because memory denies mercy
to the dark hand that kills and departs,
that destroys dreams, love, innocence
and is so sure that it will not pay

Because the memory of uproar and struggle
claims punishment for ferocious crimes
Because our blood listens to the fallen,
demanding justice with all its voice

I have memory, memory lives
furious and active, longing for truth
for our absent members and all of the people
who will never be able to forget them

I have memory, memory lives
furious and active, longing for truth
passionate protest, unanswered pain

que entre las cenizas no quiere quedar
Que entre las cenizas no puede quedar

that in the ashes, wishes not to remain
That in the ashes, cannot remain³⁹

Gabriela Torres and Lucho Gonzalez sang a song aptly titled “Nunca Más” or “Never Again,” which was followed by with a instrumental arrangements of two *freilachs*, a dance music emblematic of Eastern European klezmer music performed by Cesár Lerner on piano and Marcelo Moguilevsky on clarinet. Their interpretation of “Freilach en Re Menor” (Freylakh in D minor) and “Freilach Rumani” (Romanian Freylakh) played with the “traditional” sound of this widely-recognized genre of Jewish music to underline the Jewishness of the content in this Memoria Activa sponsored show. In contrast, León Gieco’s well-worn anthem, “Solo le pido a Dios,” a rock nacional hymn, stood out as a universal plea for justice. Speaking prior to playing the opening chords of this song, Gieco can be heard stating: “Well, we are going to sing this song together. It’s a song that I have been singing for many years. It means many things... man is still just as foolish so we still need to sing it”⁴⁰ As Gieco played the refrain, his voice was joined by the audience clapping in unison on the downbeats to the lines, “*es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte, toda la pobre inocencia de la gente*” (it is a big monster and it treads heavily, on all of people’s poor innocence)—lines spotlighting the impact of impunity and struggles for justice shared by all Argentines. Rock musician Alejandro Lerner followed Gieco’s act, stating:

The truth is that I don’t have much to say. I think the event said everything. What we are here today to do is to exercise active memory, so that we can remember the things that we never want to happen again and, obviously, that we never want to happen to anyone on this planet.⁴¹

³⁹ Translation by Sarah Green.

⁴⁰ Leon Gieco can be heard making this statement on “Track 14: Solo le Pido a Díos”. Memoria Activa, *El Arte Junto a Memoria Activa*, Latín Gráfica, 1999, compact disc.

⁴¹ Memoria Activa, *El Arte Junto a Memoria Activa*, Latín Gráfica, 1999, compact disc. Translation by author.

“*El Día Despues*,” a choral arrangement sung by the Coro Kennedy with the Coro San Martín de Tours, Coro Club San Fernando and Coro Voces del Alma directed by Coro Kennedy’s choir director Raul Fritzche, ended the evening with a moment of intensity from the sound of hundreds of choir members singing together at the culmination of the concert. “Otherness” was the focal issue at this spectacle—an evening uniting both Jewish musical repertory with the protest aesthetics of rock nacional and folk rock. Unlike the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA, the Art and Memoria Activa spectacle employed prominent musical symbols of Jewish Argentine cultural and religious expressions to engage participants in memory work referencing their motto “*justicia, justicia, perseguirás*” (Hebrew: צדק צדק תרדך; English: justice, justice, you shall pursue), the biblical command from Deuteronomy 16:20. As Karen Ann Faulk argues,

In using this biblical passage, Memoria Activa is affirming that the struggle for justice is a moral injunction as well as a social responsibility. This appeal to the theological justification allows Memoria Activa to assert a religious identity, even while discursively inserting itself and its struggle within a broader national context of counterimpunity movements. (Faulk 2013: 96)

While both benefit shows foregrounded the role of the musician as a social and political actor, “keying” in and coding meanings for audiences, both achieved these aims by utilizing different aesthetics (Bauman 1977).

Songs of Memory for the AMIA

Beyond the Concert for the Reconstruction of the AMIA and the Art and Memoria Activa concert, a handful of song and dance performances addressing the AMIA and the Israeli

Embassy bombings detail the different ways in which a particular song or dance has transmitted meaning for the AMIA cause through the active labor of musical remembrance. For example, León Gieco's song "La Memoria" from the 2001 album *Bandidos Rurales*, is sustained as an anthem to Argentina and Latin America's victims of state terror during authoritarian dictatorship governments, folding in the Israeli Embassy and AMIA attacks into a longer history of human rights atrocities in the region, effectively "Latin Americanizing" the bombings in the ballad's lyrical narrative.

"La Memoria"

León Gieco

Los viejos amores que no están
la ilusión de los que perdieron
Todas las promesas que se van
y los que en cualquier guerra se cayeron

Old loves that are no longer present
the illusion of those lost
All of the promises that go forth
and those that fell through in a war

Todo está guardado en la memoria
Sueño de la vida y de la historia

Everything is stored in memory
The dream of life and history

El engaño y la complicidad
de los genocidas que están sueltos
el indulto y el Punto Final
a las bestias de aquel infierno

The deception and complicity
of unleashed genocides
the pardon and the Punto Final⁴²
for the beasts of that inferno

Todo está guardado en la memoria
Sueño de la vida y de la historia

Everything is stored in memory
The dream of life and history

La memoria despierta para herir
a los pueblos dormidos
que no la dejan vivir
libre como el viento

Memory awakens to hurt
the sleeping people
who will not let it live
free like the wind

⁴² Reference to the controversial 1985 "Ley de Punto Final," (Law No. 23492) in Argentina that ended the investigation and prosecution of those accused of rights violations during the authoritarian and military governments of the 1970's until the restoration of democracy in 1983, following the prosecution of a handful of top military officials. It was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Argentina in 2005.

Los desaparecidos que se buscan
con el color de sus nacimientos
el hambre y la abundancia que se juntan
el maltrato con su mal recuerdo

Todo está clavado en la memoria
Espina de la vida y de la historia

Dos mil comerían por un año
con lo que cuenta un minuto militar
cuántos dejarían de ser esclavos
por el precio de una bomba al mar

Todo está clavado en la memoria
Espina de la vida y de la historia

La memoria pincha hasta sangrar
a los pueblos que la amarran
y no la dejan andar
libre como el viento

Todos los muertos de la AMIA
y los de la Embajada de Israel
el poder secreto de las armas
la justicia que mira y no ve

Todo está escondido en la memoria
Refugio de la vida y de la historia

Fue cuando se callaron las iglesias
fue cuando el fútbol se lo comió todo
que los padres palotinos y Angelelli
dejaron su sangre en el lodo

Todo está escondido en la memoria
Refugio de la vida y de la historia

La memoria estalla hasta vencer
a los pueblos que la aplastan
y no la dejan ser
libre como el viento

The disappeared who search for each other
with the color of their births
the hunger and abundance that connect
mistreatment with its bad memory

Everything is stored in memory
Spine of life and history

Two thousand would eat for a year
with the resources of a military minute
how many would be freed from slavery
for the price of a bomb thrown into the sea

Everything is stored in memory
Spine of life and history

Memory pricks until it draws blood
from the people that fixed it in place
and who will not let it be
free like the wind

All of the dead from the AMIA
and those of the Embassy of Israel
the secret power of weapons
justice that looks on but does not see

Everything is hidden in memory
Refuge of life and history

It was when the churches were silenced
it was when soccer consumed everything
that the Pallottine priests⁴³ and Bishop Angelelli⁴⁴
left their blood in the mire

Everything is hidden in memory
Refuge of life and history

Memory bursts until it conquers
the people that squash it
and will not let it be
free like the wind

⁴³ Refers to the Massacre of San Patricio of three priests and two seminarians of the Pallatine Catholic order on July 4, 1976 by the Argentine military dictatorship.

⁴⁴ Enrique Ángel Angelelli Carletti, bishop of the Catholic Church was murdered on August 4, 1976 by the Argentine military dictatorship.

La bala a Chico Mendez en Brasil
150 mil guatemaltecos
los mineros que enfrentan al fusil
represión estudiantil en México

Todo está cargado en la memoria
Arma de la vida y de la historia

América con almas destruidas
Los chicos que mata el escuadrón
Suplicio de Mugica por las villas
Dignidad de Rodolfo Walsh

Todo está cargado en la memoria
Arma de la vida y de la historia

La memoria apunta hasta matar
a los pueblos que la callan
y no la dejan volar
libre como el viento

The bullet for Chico Mendez⁴⁵ in Brazil
150,000 Guatemalans
the miners who face the rifle
student repression in Mexico

Everything is loaded in memory
Weapon of life and history

America with destroyed spirits
The children the squadron kills
Carlos Mugica's⁴⁶ torment because of the *villas*⁴⁷
The dignity of Rodolfo Walsh⁴⁸

Everything is loaded in memory
Weapon of life and history

Memory aims until it kills
The people who silence it
And will not let it fly
Free like the wind⁴⁹

Utilizing Ignacio Copani's song "Memoria Activa" as the backtrack, the dance troupe, Grupo Agshamá, directed by choreographers Ariadna Faerstein and Leandro Díaz developed a dance piece, "AMIA Sombras" (AMIA Shadows) in the early 2010s. This shadow ballet danced behind a white sheet as a screen to narrate a series of tableaus portraying easily identifiable symbols such as the Argentine flag, a recreation of the AMIA building at 9:53 am and the scales

⁴⁵ Brazilian environmentalist and human rights activist murdered on December 22, 1988.

⁴⁶ Argentine Catholic priest active working with the poor of Buenos Aires murdered on May 11, 1974 by Rodolfo Almirón Sena, an operative of the militarized right wing organization, the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*.

⁴⁷ The *villas miserias* are shanty towns near urban areas with often improvised and precarious housing and services.

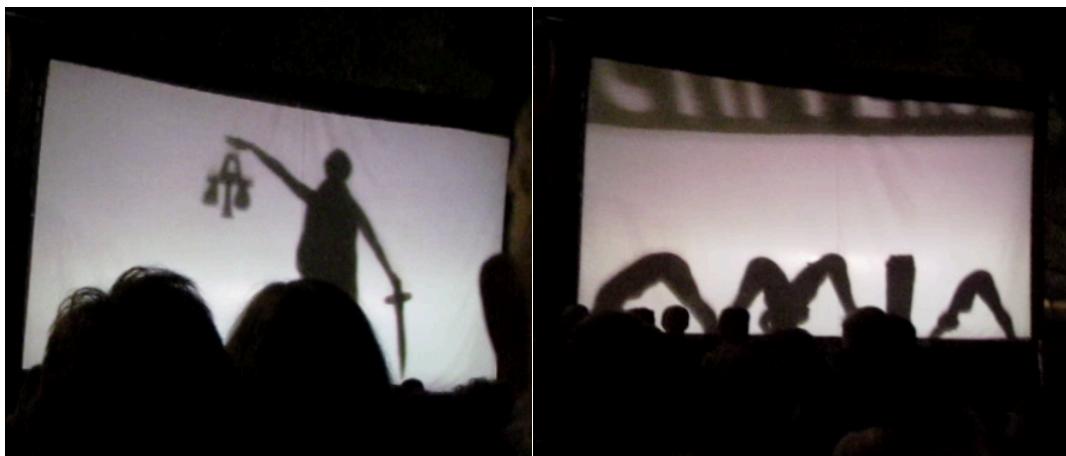
⁴⁸ Rodolfo Walsh was an Argentine writer and journalist murdered by members of the ESMA (*Escuela Superior de la Mecánica de la Armada*, or the Navy School of Engineers, a known site of clandestine torture).

⁴⁹ Source: itematika.com, <http://musica.itematika.com/letra/2622/la-memoria.html>. Translation by author with assistance from Sarah Green).

of justice features dancers Dalia Birman, Jesica Knoll, Carolina Zandper, Daiana Niño, Agustina Galinksy, Natalie Spynger, Gonzalo Rojkes, and Shirly Kaplan, who performed this routine at the 2013 *Acto de Iom Haatzmaut* (Demonstration for Israeli Independence Day), which I attended as a choir singer with the Guebirtig Choir (see Fig. 1.11–1.14). “AMIA Sombras” reenacted a highly aestheticized version of the attack, recontextualizing its meaning for contemporary audiences through the creative use of props alongside the imaginative use of the dancers’ bodies. Pre-recorded audio clips were digitally spliced into Ignacio Copani’s song, such that at the moment of the reenactment of the AMIA bombing itself, the audio clip of a radio announcement broadcast minutes after the attack stating, “*la tragedia Buenos Aires se vuelve a repetir*” (tragedy in Buenos Aires has returned again), accompanied the dancers’ collapse onto the stage. This historical moment reappearing in their dance piece established clear periods distinguishing between Jewish Argentine life “before” and “after” as the fabric stencil in the form of the AMIA building fluttering down enshrouding the dancers on the ground. In a complex series of poses highlighting the figure of the anonymous actor empowered to remember this tragedy, the dancers’ bodies also re-embodied the social worlds through individual movements coordinated to maneuver for justice and carve out a new space of belonging in the city of Buenos Aires and Argentina.



Figures 1.10 – 1.11: “AMIA Sombras” dancers perform the nation. Dancers commemorate the time of the attack of the AMIA at 9:53am. From the video published on Youtube by Leandro Vazquez Comisarenco on July 9, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clballk1Gg&feature=youtu.be>.



Figures 1.12 – 1.13: Dancers enact the scales of justice. “AMIA Sombras”dancers fold their bodies into the letters of the “AMIA.” From the video published on Youtube by Leandro Vazquez Comisarenco on July 9, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clballk1Gg&feature=youtu.be>.

Even contemporary pop singer-songwriter Kevin Johansen, teaming up with the Argentine comic artist Ricardo Liniers created their own *homenaje* (homage) to the victims of the bombing, with the song, “Candombito del recuerdo,” set to lyrics composed for the 16th anniversary of the attack and arranged from an earlier composition simply titled “Candombito,”

from Johansen's 2002 album *Sur o No Sur*. Singing, "La sombra de tu despedida / Como un tambor a resonar / Para las vueltas de tu vida / Y volverá a su lugar" (The shadow of your departure / Like a drum resounding / For everything you lived in life / And it will return to its place), Johansen places the act of remembrance in the work of music and the musician, positing the beating of the *tambor* as an actor serving to fill the void left by the passing of the victims while becoming a musical beacon to guide the memories of the dead for the living. Juxtaposing the sounds of the *repique* drum typical of candómbé to the return of the memory of the lives of the loved ones lost in the AMIA bombing, Johansen and Liniers's work centralizes musical labor as a process of remembrance.⁵⁰

In a video produced by Elio Kapszuk and Gabriel Scherman for the commemoration event, Johansen sings and strums on his guitar while Liniers paints a watercolor painting entitled *85 puntos de color* (*85 Points of Color*) in the patio space of the outdoor gallery within the AMIA complex. Seated just in front of Israeli artist Yaacov Agam's iconic eight-paneled, multidimensional optical sculpture *Monument to the Memory of the Victims of the Terrorist Attack on AMIA*, the gentle guitar chords and consonant harmonies sounded in the prerecorded, partially diegetic track are peaceful and texturally uniform, projecting a sense of intimacy as Johansen and Liniers are shown finishing their pieces and touring the gallery space as spectators.⁵¹

"Candombito del Recuerdo"
Kevin Johansen

"Little Candómbé of Memory"
Kevin Johansen

⁵⁰ One of three candómbé drums of medium size, larger and flatter sounding than the *chico* (small) and smaller and sharper sounding than the piano. Candómbé is especially important to Uruguayan musical and national identity.

⁵¹ This video is available on many websites. I consulted the official AMIA video posted to MSN Video by MSN Música, July 16, 2010.

Te fuiste como despidiendo
La otra vuelta que te vi
Ahora debés estar sonriendo
Parece que seguís aquí

La sombra de tu despedida
Como un tambor a resonar
Para las vueltas de tu vida
Y volverá a su lugar

Volverá
A su lugar
Na na na na na
Que volverá a resonar

Y ese repique de tambores
Por el camino que andarás
Ese latir de tus amores
Que volverá a resonar

Volverá a sonar
Volverá a su lugar

Na na na na na

(Source: Transcription from the official AMIA video posted to MSN Video by MSN Música, July 16, 2010.) Transcription of lyrics by author.

You left as though you were saying goodbye
The last time that I saw you
Now, you're surely smiling
It seems like you're still here

The shadow of your departure
Like a drum resounding
For everything you lived in life
And it will return to its place

It will return
To its place
Na na na na na
It will resound again

That *repique* of drums
On the path that you will walk
That beating of your love
It will resound again

It will resound again
It will return to its place

Na na na na na

(Translation by author with Sarah Green.)

As acts of musical “reclamación”—that is, musical protests, demands, commemorations, homages, and tributes to make claims or to address issues of violence or conflict—these songs, dance performances, and concerts associated with the AMIA attack commemorate, mourn, and demand justice, bringing into relief what musicologist Amy Wlodarski calls a “testimonial aesthetic,” wherein secondary witnesses later give voice to a “postmemorial” phase of

remembrance representationally distinct from primary accounts (Włodarski 2010).⁵²

Furthermore, ethnomusicologist Jonathan Ritter observes a “self-referentiality within the testimonial song tradition today, allowing meanings to stack upon meanings, remembrances upon remembrances, to accrue and sediment to particular texts and songs”—an observation echoed in the use of Ignacio Copani’s song “Memoria” by the Grupo Agshamá (Ritter 2012, 214).⁵³ Moreover, all of these expressive forms deal with the question of the politicization of memory through musical performance as an act of public commemoration making possible the opening of a discursive space for public debate.⁵⁴

In general, it is critical to note that in the AMIA context, not all musical practices supporting the renewal of the Jewish spirit in reference to the bombing directly address the attack or locate the importance of the role of musical forms in the aesthetic frameworks of primary or secondary witness. In fact, one critical outcome of the varied uses of musical performance after the AMIA attack—focused on understanding the *experience* of the uses of music—is that everyday musical performances and regular musical programming events taking place at and coordinated by the AMIA also emerge as a critical site of memory after this collective trauma. As ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman insists, “[t]he identity of Jewishness depends on where

⁵² On postmemory, see: Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Hirsch addresses the role of the visual medium of the photograph to mediate what she calls “postmemory”—the means of remembrance through secondhand means of the transference of memories, which she locates in the transmission of information and affect taking place through, especially, familial relationships.

⁵³ Jonathan Ritter, “Complementary Discourses of Truth and Memory: The Peruvian Truth Commission and the Canción Social Ayacuchana,” in *Music, Politics, and Violence*, eds. Kip Pegley and Susan Fast, 214 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ Ritter, “Complementary Discourses”; Pablo Vila, “Argentina’s ‘Rock Nacional’: The Struggle for Meaning,” *Latin American Music Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1989): 1–28; Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth Century Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Jewish music takes place”—a key point that lays a critical foundation for understanding how musical performance is experienced at the AMIA and one that I address in the following chapter in greater depth (Bohlman 2008). Within the walls of the AMIA, everyday cultural programming no longer needs to directly reference the bombing to elevate Jewish Argentine heritage in the service of memory. The AMIA building as a physical site of musical performance becomes a sacralized environment to explore the multiple meanings of Jewish memory and Jewish music—programs taken very seriously because they offer pleasurable activities and forms of “serious leisure” to audiences as an alternative to silence and forgetting (Thang 2006).⁵⁵ In comparison to social clubs like the Sociedad Hebraica, an important secular Jewish community center, or the Hogar Ledor Vador (a home for the elderly), the AMIA bombing, the mobilization for the AMIA cause, and the reinauguration of the building at the same site imbue this performance space with a sacred function, making music at the AMIA, Jewish Argentine music. Since the 1990s, musical performance and musical innovation has occupied an increasingly important role making visible Jewish Argentine subjectivities and community concerns to national and international audiences.

AMIA and the Politics of the Performance of Memory

In the weeks approaching the 18th anniversary of the AMIA bombing, criticism leveled at the AMIA administration regarding their plans for the “Acto Central del Atentado a la AMIA”

⁵⁵ Leng Leng Tang employs the term, “serious leisure” to refer to the joy and anxiety of performing karaoke to examine singing practices among older persons in Singapore (Thang 2006: 72). Thang states, drawing from R. A. Stebbin’s work: “[s]uch commitment displayed by older persons in karaoke suggests karaoke as a ‘serious’ leisure to them. In Stebbin’s (1992) construct, serious leisure differs from casual or relaxing leisure as it demands perseverance, personal effort in the development of specially acquired knowledge and skill. It also often encompasses ‘membership in or identification with a group of participants with distinct beliefs, norms, values, traditions and performance standards (Mannell, 1993, p.130).” In Leng Leng Thang, “Singing to More Good Years: Karaoke as Serious Leisure for Older Persons in Singapore,” in the *Indian Journal of Gerontology* (20)(1)(2) (2006-03): 67-80.

(Acto Central)—the protest-memorial held annually on the street in front of the AMIA building—drew attention to the ethical dimensions of commemorative displays in Buenos Aires.⁵⁶ Many questioned of the appropriateness of red stress balls printed with the phrase, “*no contengas la bronca, exigi justicia*,” or “don’t hold back your anger, demand justice” intended to be distributed during the acto, in addition to the dissemination of a recipe for the “*pan de la memoria*,” or the “bread of memory” featured in the public advertising campaigns to complement the overall theme “Alimentemos la Memoria” or “Let’s Nourish Memory.” In 2012, however, all of these criticisms were ultimately overshadowed by far more controversial decisions by the AMIA administration to omit testimony from the families of the victims for the first time in the history of the protest-commemoration, resulting in nearly all of the organizations representing the families of the victims accusing the Acto Central of being an “*acto light*,” or not a “true” protest, according to journalist Raúl Kollmann.⁵⁷

On July 18, 2012, I got off the bus near the AMIA and walked toward the mob of people, many holding 8x10 inch, black and white photographs faces of the victims of the attack with their names listed below—a symbol of resistance first employed by the Mother’s of the Plaza de Mayo, who protested the disappearance of their children during the dictatorship in front of the Casa Rosada (national government offices). That day, I waited in a long line on Pasteur Street to be screened by security personnel and scanned by a metal detector erected in the middle of the street. Parked school buses served as barriers to cars and other vehicles, shutting out traffic

⁵⁶ Anthropologist Karen Ann translates the Spanish word-concept “acto” as “protest-memorials.” Actos, or protest-memorials, frequently mobilize social actors to enact public protests and to demonstrate in the streets and plazas of Buenos Aires (as well as in other locations). These events often include some kind of musical or sonic component to unite individuals through organized sound experienced communally. See Karen Ann Faulk, *In the Wake of Neoliberalism: Citizenship and Human Rights in Argentina*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁷ Raúl Kollmann, “Un acto sin las palabras de los familiares,” *Página/12*, July 18, 2012. Accessed July 18, 2012. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-198970-2012-07-18.html>

around the Acto Central. Notably absent that morning were President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who was traveling to Bolivia, as well as her political adversary the Mayor of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri. In their respective steads, President Fernández de Kirchner sent along representatives Juan Manuel Abal Medina, her Presidential Chief of Staff, Julio Alak, the Minister of Justice, Nilda Garré, the Minister of Security, and Alberto Sileoni, the Minister of Education. María Eugenia Vidal, the Deputy Chief of Government for the City of Buenos Aires and Cristiano Ritondo, Vice-President of the Legislature represented the government of Buenos Aires.

As I stood there on the street, inching as close as possible to the temporary stage built at the corner of Pasteur Street and Viamonte Street, I was halted in my progress to stand alongside other people in heavy overcoats listening as the commemoration started at 9:53 with the ritual sounding of an alarm siren. The siren burst through the air transporting all listeners to the moment of the attack—a sensation that was deepened by the visual landscape of the sea of black and white photos of the faces of the victims bobbing through the air, disembodied from the lives they once occupied; arrested in time and floating above the crowd (see Fig. 1.15). Eighteen teenagers appeared on the stage—each one born in the year of the attack—to read short passages reflecting on their personal meanings of the bombing of the AMIA, representing the first members of Jewish youth born to a “generation of postmemory” and marking a postmemorial phase of the aftermath of the AMIA attack (Hirsch 2008). As I struggled to hear over the loud whirring sound of a mobile generator powering a television crew truck nearby, noting that the media presence at the Acto Central took priority over our collective experience as spectators, mourners, commemorators and protesters, I thought of the ways in which this commemoration

had become an example of “prosthetic memory”—that is mass-mediated and commodified, willing the AMIA cause into the public sphere as a media event (Landsberg 2004).

For the first time in the history of the Acto Central, the only speech that day was a brief statement by AMIA President Guillermo Borger. Claiming: “This is not a political demonstration; we are here to sanctify the victims of the attack,” Borger alluded to the polemical speech in 2011 by Sergio Burstein, a family member representing the families of the victims.⁵⁸ That year, Burstein’s public criticism of Mayor Mauricio Macri, Rabbi Sergio Bergman, and Jorge Alberto (Fino) Palacios, the Chief of the Metropolitan Police (indicted for the AMIA case for his alleged involvement concealing and tampering with evidence during the investigation) was interpreted as a politically-motivated, partisan speech in advance of municipal elections because of Burstein’s public support of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.⁵⁹ In the end, the AMIA and the DAIA were forced to make a public apology for Burstein’s polarizing speech. Although the AMIA administration agreed to allow Olga Detigar, mother to Cristián, who died in the attack, to say a few words (vetted by the AMIA prior to the acto), just prior to the event, Degtiar was denied the opportunity in 2012. As Rabbi Samuel Levin stated: “This year, the Acto Central will be without the family members of the victims as a part of the ceremony because we do not want conflicts and we do not want speeches debating particular issues.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Sergio Burstein now heads the independent organization 18J, named for the date of the attack, the 18th of July.

⁵⁹ Raúl Kollmann, “Un acto sin las palabras de los familiares,” *Página/12*, July 18, 2012. Accessed July 18, 2012. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-198970-2012-07-18.html>

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*



Fig.1.14 “Alimentemos la Memoria” banner on Pasteur on July 18th, 2012.
Photo by author.

Highlighting how the political interests of the families of the victims are in conflict with the institutional bodies leading the cause for justice, this incident of censorship further emphasized the senses of alienation felt by ordinary Jewish Argentines from the larger institutional bodies said to represent their interests. As I waited patiently alongside the crowd of people, thinking that there had to be more to the ceremony that year, I overhead people near me complaining bitterly about the brevity and lack of depth of the Acto Central. One even decried: “They didn’t even have a song!” That day, there was no anthem to unite the ideologically divided crowd—with very little connecting them—not even the participatory musical experience of listening and singing as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). As the politics of performance at the Acto Central demonstrate, the universalizing forces of the discourses of memory and forgetting have their limitations, making alternative forms of engagement with Jewish cultural expressions necessary to satisfy the desire for communal bonds.

Experiencing Music at the AMIA

As a process of transforming ethnic heritage into a culturally expedient tool in the aftermath of violence, the AMIA is both a symbol and space of negotiation between Jewish Argentine music, memory, and the past in Buenos Aires (Yúdice 2004). As George Yúdice argues, a theory of the expediency of culture “underpins performativity as the fundamental logic of social life today,” showcasing how “culture-as-resource” is mobilized to address matters of political, economic, and social importance (Yúdice 2004: 28). However, as ethnomusicologist Ana María Ochoa Gautier points out, “the relation between expediency, performativity, and care of the self is seldom smooth or successful” (Ochoa Gautier 2013: 14). She argues: “While the paradigm of expediency might be useful for interpreting how this music enters into circulation through live performances and recordings, it does not help us to understand why and how some musicians themselves experience this music” (Ochoa Gautier 2013: 14).

Musical performance serves the institution of the AMIA in multiple ways, directing the public cause for justice for the bombing, sacralizing the site of the AMIA as a place of memory, and renewing the institution and community from the inside out. Musical performance is engaged to serve both Jewish and non-Jewish publics as a way of experiencing what it means to be a Jewish Argentine in Buenos Aires. Ana María Ochoa Gautier’s observation prioritizes the almost too-obvious point of the importance of the experience of music to musicians and publics as more than just peripheral to its uses; rather, in the case of ethnic violence and conflict, the affective registers of *how* music is experienced and by whom replaces the emphasis on personal and collective embodiment. In reference to the politics of memory and to the power of memory to reconstitute social bodies, musical experience foregrounds the often deep importance of the place of music in people’s lives and the lives as lived experience.

The experience of music in relation to the AMIA engenders a particularly Jewish Argentine experience—one critically bound to the shared history and collective memory of this ethnically diverse group of varied religious convictions. Furthermore, the emergent meanings of Jewish music in Argentina in the aftermath of the AMIA attack exemplify an approach to musical programming and musical identity that considers a wide variety of musical styles constituent of Jewish Argentina. This eclectic repertory centralizes a transnational and trans-historical canon and concept of Jewish music that bridges the cultures of Jewish memory (Yerushalmi 1982; Rothberg 2009), the politics of memory in the region (Jelin 2003; Roniger and Sznajder 1998; Huyssen 2003; Masiello 2001; Spitzer 1998; Sarlo 2006; Taylor 1997, 2003; Werth 2010), Jewish Latin American memory (Meter and Huberman 2006; Agosín 2005), and memorial practices after the AMIA bombing (Aizenberg 2002; Sadow 2005; Zaretsky 2008a; Levine and Zaretsky 2015).⁶¹ While the bombing is often seen as a unifying force for the Jews in Argentina, different aesthetic approaches to practices of musical commemoration show how various groups responded to the cause for justice for the AMIA in the aftermath of the attack.

⁶¹ This list is by no means exhaustive of the many excellent articles, essays and full-length volumes now dedicated to the subject of art, culture, memory and politics in Latin America.

Chapter Two

Recolección | Recollection

Musical Performance and Collective Memory at the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA)



Figure 2.1 “*Papelito*” for a show featuring singer Alejandra Wila and pianist Enrique Cuttini, Auditorio AMIA, August 3, 2012.

Ein Lied von Liebe und Tod, or A Song of Life and Death: Musical Memory in the Everyday

The culture of memory, with its support of a diverse array of artistic practices of remembrance, is taken seriously at AMIA. I learned this lesson in an unanticipated way on a chilly Sunday evening in September 2012 at the beginning of spring in Argentina. I had arrived that night for a concert by guitarist and folk singer, Marina Parilli, for a program of traditional Argentine *música folclórica* in the Auditorio AMIA. Like other evenings arriving to the AMIA, I provided my information to the security guards and passed through the security process alongside elder attendees congregating for the concert. Holding the heavy front door to the main

building open as male and female senior citizens drifted through the entrance toward the elevators, I also stepped in to travel down a single floor with them, feeling the gazes of the older concert goers as they peered at me, smiling generously, but taking note of my unusual presence as a young Asian American woman, arriving to the show alone. As our slow column of spectators left the elevator, shuffling toward the theater doors, I found a seat toward the front of the auditorium, in the middle section of seats. The AMIA theater, a room I had seen first in the culminating scene of the Daniel Burman film, *El Abrazo Partido* (Lost Embrace), a film about the crisis of modern Jewish Argentine identity and the intergenerational dynamics marking Buenos Aires's changing demographics, showcasing Jewish Argentine memory amid the pressing voids of oblivion from the silences and omissions of the past. Both in the film and in person, the signature red velvet theater curtain dressing the stage in the Auditorio AMIA is iconic, appealingly framing the two-story hall and the performers on this stage. The classic red velvet curtain adds an element of glamour to the everyday cultural programs convened in this room.

As I sat and waited for the show to start, I couldn't help but notice that something was unmistakably off. The stage was empty except for a small table covered with a maroon tablecloth, and the usual promise of an upcoming musical performance was undermined by the lack of musical objects such as a chair, a music stand, a guitar or even some small hand percussion instruments to accompany a concert titled, "Baroque and Argentine Folk Music for Guitar." Wondering if I was in the wrong performance space, thinking perhaps the show was instead convening in the Café Literario room on the second floor of the AMIA building, I turned to a middle-aged woman sitting in the row above mine to ask her if we were in the right place. "I think so, but I don't know," she responded—which I took to mean that she thought the show was

also in the auditorium. Still confused, but at least not alone in my confusion, I turned around to face forward in my seat as a grey-haired man approached the stage. I watched as he ascended the three small steps toward the standing microphone at stage left. The show, he apologized, was canceled.

I turned back to share a knowing look with the woman seated behind me and then waited to hear the rest of the man's announcement. Explaining that Marina Parilli had been taken to the hospital the evening before on the Sabbath for an undisclosed illness, the announcer explained that no replacement could be found on such short notice, in spite of the efforts of Moshé Korin, then Director of Cultural Programming, and Sergio Zabiello, music producer and artistic director of a wide variety of shows at the AMIA. Instead, that evening, the film, *Ein Lied von Liebe und Tod*, would be shown—and that we shouldn't worry—Mario Ber, the coordinator of AMIA's Cine Club film series program and a local expert of Jewish cinema had chosen this film—a statement intended to serve as a reassuring testament to the film's quality. In response to the announcement, an elderly man stood up shakily from an upper row, verbalizing his approval of the programming change and testifying to the quality of the film. Another person murmured in agreement while other audience members expressed their approval. One woman even complimented the AMIA on its ability to create a new *papelito*, or paper flyer, describing the film, in spite of traditional work restrictions the day before on the Sabbath (even though this did not appear to be a very religious crowd).

Nodding up and down in reluctant agreement, the announcer accepted the public's approval of the programming change, apologizing once again on behalf of the programming committee. His face betrayed his continuing frustration and disappointment as I watched him raise his arm, his face twisting slightly as his jaw lowered and his right arm shot up in one final

proud (and unnecessary) gesture of defiance against the cancellation. “Moshé Korin never cancels a show!” he firmly declared, stepping back from the microphone, dropping his head and receding down the stairs of the stage. He was not Moshé Korin, the then director of Cultural Programming, but a volunteer coordinator tasked with upholding the dignity of cultural events at the AMIA. His gesture was profoundly unnecessary as not a single audience member left after the news of the program chance, nor did anyone criticize or question the Departamento de Cultura’s ability to manage its programming events, which was clear because no one started verbalizing their concern—a common practice at this sort of programming event. This regular crowd had arrived for an evening of free entertainment—to meet up with friends and acquaintances on a quiet Sunday night at the end of a long winter, and the content took lower priority to the act of socializing at a gathering promising Jewish content. I interpreted the lack of a negative uproar as underlining the fact that this audience trusted the curatorial direction of the AMIA administrators to represent their collective tastes and interests. Moreover, the older audience members sought out an opportunity to attend a social gathering, and even those who had already seen the film—many of whom stood up to make such pronouncements—stayed on to watch it again.

The film that evening was *Ein Lied von Liebe und Tod—A Song of Life and Death*, titled *Gloomy Sunday* in English, which traced the lives of three different men in love with the same woman in pre-World War II Budapest at the beginning of the rise of the National Socialist Party. Fictionally portraying the horrors and humiliations suffered by the Hungarians, both Jews and non-Jews alike during the Second World War, the film describes an personal memory that is ultimately vengeful in the patient pursuit of justice. I realized I had seen this film before, recalling the title song, “Gloomy Sunday,” famously interpreted by Billie Holiday, and although

I could draw parallels between the themes of memory and justice highlighted by the film and the politics of memory at the AMIA, which I discuss in Chapter 1, I felt curious and slightly uneasy about the nudity and sex scenes of the film. I wondered about the limits of representation at the AMIA and if, or to what extent, the AMIA's Comisión Directiva (elected leadership board) represented by the Orthodox council of the Bloque Unido Religioso (BUR) party, monitors or restricts the content of cultural programs. How is cultural programming at the AMIA managed by the AMIA organization? How does this shape musical programming, and what effects does this oversight have on the construction of a canon of Jewish Argentine performers and performance practices in Buenos Aires? What is the role of musical performance at the AMIA? The election of officials to positions of institutional leadership of the AMIA remains a controversial issue within the Jewish Argentine community of Buenos Aires, a polarizing debate showing the degree of religious diversity and political fragmentation among Jewish Argentines in Buenos Aires. In particular, polarizing topics such as the burial of Jewish converts in Jewish cemeteries, the question of Israel and local, municipal politics in general remain topics of public concern highlighting tensions between liberal progressive (ethnically identified) Jews and orthodox religious denominations.¹

¹ In April 2011, the controversy over recognition of conversions done in Argentina came to the fore when the AMIA authorities refused to allow the burial of a baby in a Jewish cemetery who died in utero during the eighth month of gestation. The parents, Yanina and Pablo, a liturgical vocalist at the synagogue Lamroth Hakol and her husband who had worked at various Jewish institutions for over twenty years were denied a burial for their child in a Jewish cemetery because the mother of Yanina was not born Jewish and her conversion took place at the Seminario Rabinico Marshall T. Meyer in Argentina; the current AMIA administration does not recognize any conversions officiated in Argentina. As Raúl Kollmann points out, this issue is specific to Buenos Aires, as Jews by conversion are permitted burial in Jewish cemeteries throughout the interior. Given the tragic circumstances, public outcry was significant, and although the couple buried their child in a non-Jewish cemetery, the AMIA leaders eventually designated a space in Jewish cemeteries for converts as a concession. However, this act was received with further dismay as many Jews viewed such an action as unfairly creating social

As I later found out from Cultural Programming Coordinator, Gabriela Wilensky during an interview conducted in 2014, the AMIA Board of Directors tends to leave AMIA Cultura alone to plan and to execute cultural programming initiatives within the AMIA premises as well as throughout the city in events sponsored by the organization. However, this is a sensitive issue getting to the heart of the cultural and political differences between the Orthodox leadership and the majority of the liberal progressive Jewish publics in Buenos Aires. In April 2013, while living in Buenos Aires, I was able to experience these tensions first hand as they surfaced in public debate as the AMIA electoral parties ramped up their campaigning efforts in anticipation of the AMIA elections held that year. Noting the posters and billboards strewn throughout the city streets advertising the political parties running for seats in the AMIA elections, the Jewish community was buzzing with the news of the vote. Although Acción Plural Comunitaria (Acción Plural), the political party championing a mission to fight for a “diverse AMIA, inclusive, open that would fight for the well-being and the growth of the entire community,” BUR again won the majority leadership for 2013–2016 in spite of strong mobilization by Acción Plural in synagogues, sports clubs and other public spaces throughout Buenos Aires.² One friend at the archive Fundación IWO, the Latin American branch of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, formerly housed in the AMIA building but now located in a separate office a few blocks away, admitted that part of BUR’s success lies in its ability to bring constituents out to the polls in spite of their smaller numbers overall. By organizing transportation to polling sites and generally making voting in the AMIA elections a high priority within the Orthodox community, BUR has

hierarchies distinguishing a “lower class” of Jews. See more: Raúl Kollmann, “La negativa de la mutual judía,” *Página/12*, April 26, 2011. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-166999-2011-04-26.html>. Translation by author.

² Raúl Kollmann, “El voto de la comunidad,” *Página/12*, March 31, 2013. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-217019-2013-03-31.html>. See also: Raúl Kollman, “Otro voto por los ortodoxos,” *Página/12*, April 8, 2013.

maintained its strong presence in AMIA elections for the past twelve years.³ As a friend in the Coro Mordeje Guebirtig pointed out optimistically, the liberal progressive faction, Acción Plural, won additional seats on the board, losing only by a small margin while winning 37.8% of the votes and being awarded 34 seats of the 90-person board.⁴

As I learned during my fieldwork, the conservative values of the Orthodox administration do not necessarily translate to critical oversight in the cultural programming initiatives at the AMIA. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that AMIA's duties primarily concern sustaining the social welfare programs befitting this mutual aid agency such as employment aid (for non-Jews and Jews alike), assistance navigating municipal and national bureaucracy, burial services and care for the elderly, infirm and impoverished. Instead, the former Director of Culture, Moshé Korin, a commanding figure in the Jewish community and former education administrator at the *Escuela Scholem Aleijem* seemed to make programming decisions from a position of authority with staff in the Departamento de Cultura until 2013 when Gabriela Wilensky took over its direction, renaming the department AMIA Cultura. During the course of my research, many musicians I interviewed who regularly perform at the AMIA reported that they did not feel pressured to change the content of their shows to perform there. However, some artists noted, given the age and taste proclivities of the AMIA audiences, that they approach the question of how to harness audience participation and enjoyment in a particular way when performing at the AMIA.

³ Personal communication with M. Szlajen, December 2012.

⁴ Personal communication with S. Moncznik. See also: Raúl Kollmann, "El voto de la comunidad," *Página/12*, March 31, 2013. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-217019-2013-03-31.html>. See also Raúl Kollman, "Otro voto por los ortodoxos," *Página/12*, April 8, 2013.

For example, Alejandra Wila, the dancer, singer and author of the show, “Hava Naguila Tango Bar,” once worried that her show’s content would be too challenging for older audiences due to its feminist re-imaginings of a fictional female protagonist remembering the circumstances under which she opened a tango bar in Buenos Aires because of the inclusion of bawdy jokes poking fun everyday corruption by public officials and gender dynamics in the libretto. As Wila and I discussed over coffee in a McDonalds Café in Villa Crespo, another central Jewish neighborhood sometimes referred to as “Villa Kreplach” (after the Eastern European Jewish dumpling), she was initially concerned that audiences would respond poorly to her show.⁵ However, quite the opposite occurred. The older audiences loved the content and laughed at the jokes. As such, she has been invited back many times to perform it again. One man told me that he had seen “Hava Naguila Tango Bar” at least eleven times, and that aside from small revisions to the libretto and choreography, it was still very similar to the original versions he had seen years earlier.⁶ On multiple occasions, I have watched the older audience members at AMIA yell words of praise at the stage, clapping enthusiastically and smiling throughout the program. Sometimes audience members fight with each other, self-regulating unscripted participation among the crowd with authoritative “hushes” intended to quiet those getting too involved as participatory rather than passive audience members.

In general, musicians and producers performing at the AMIA consider the parameters of “*buen gusto*” or good taste when planning their performances there. For example, Ariel and Raquel of the Dúo Mendelson, Lior Musikant, a jazz and klezmer clarinetist, Mirtha Zuker and Horacio Liberman of the Dúo Guefiltefish and Sergio Zabiello, the producer of many the AMIA

⁵ Interview with Alejandra Wila, Buenos Aires, April 2013.

⁶ *Hava Naguila Tango Bar* performance in the AMIA auditorium, Buenos Aires, January 27, 2013.

programs, all shared a similar opinion on how to approach performing at the AMIA.⁷ As Mirtha and Horacio told me, they try to maintain a sense of “*buen gusto*” to respect the age and aesthetic predilections of the older audiences they often encounter there—audiences seeking programming content that registers with audiences as “traditional” Jewish music and humor.⁸ These musics usually include well-known folksongs in Yiddish by composers such as Mark Warshawsky or Mordejai Gebirtig, Tin Pan Alley and Broadway classics, Israeli folksongs in Hebrew, Israeli Eurovision song entries and the occasional Ladino folksong or Argentine tango—a musical genre dear to the Jews of Buenos Aires (Judkovski 1998, 2003; Nudler 1998). As Sergio Zabiello told me, the only major restriction he thinks about prior to approving a show to send it to the AMIA depends largely on the sexual content; that is, he approves shows in which performers do not appear in overly sexual costumes, nor does he send artists to perform shows at the AMIA that contain content that would be prohibited for minors. He says:

I have not had any limitations beyond what I am explaining now, which would be logical and normal to other (ethnic) communities as well. The Armenian, Greek or Italian communities wouldn’t permit the performance of a show in which there would be bad things, bad words or bad texts that don’t treat the language respectfully, as well as profanities and other aggressive displays.⁹

⁷ Interviews with Ariel Mendelson, Buenos Aires. December 13, 2011. Interview with Lior Musikant, Buenos Aires. January 17, 2012. Interview with Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker, Buenos Aires, February 2012.

⁸ Interview with Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker, Buenos Aires, February 2012. Interview with Sergio Zabiello, Barrio Once, Buenos Aires, December 23, 2011.

⁹ As Sergio Zabiello told me in an interview: “Yo no he tenido limitaciones más que las que estoy explicando ahora que son lógicas y normales que se podrían dar en cualquier otra comunidad. La comunidad armenia, griega o italiana no permitiría tampoco hacer un espectáculo de un nivel donde aparezcan cosas de feo gusto o malas palabras o textos que no hablan bien del idioma que hay que hablar que hay insultos o agresiones.” Interview with Sergio Zabiello, Barrio Once, Buenos Aires, December 23, 2011.

Zabiello relates his understanding of the parameters of good taste at the AMIA beyond the Jewish community itself, likening the programming conventions operating within the Jewish community to other groups showcasing ethnic heritage for broad audiences. Once a business owner of a textile factory, working as a music producer on the side as well as a scorekeeper for soccer leagues, Zabiello quit his textile business completely in 2003-2004 (which had suffered during the economic crisis) to devote himself to music and theater full time. While he performs as a comedian with his own comedy show called “Humor Kasher” (Kosher Humor) in clubs, bars and Jewish centers, Zabiello’s main work is running a production company doing consulting and bookings for local artists whose music usually includes Jewish content but that he makes a special point to tell me also includes musics beyond Jewish content, including: jazz, tango, folklore, Brazilian, Cuban, and all of the variants of Jewish music—klezmer, Hasidic, Yiddish, Hebrew, Israeli, Jewish electronica, bands, duos, trios, quartets, octets, Ladino and Sephardi musics, and Israeli and Latin dance as well. Over the past ten years or so, he has had a close relationship with the AMIA, and many of the performers he represents play there regularly.

Since artists generally receive only a small stipend for their time performing at the AMIA, among those performers who have successfully amassed listening publics outside of the network of Jewish musical performance spaces and events, playing at the AMIA can be artistically limiting. As a result, many Jewish Argentine musicians beginning their careers or debuting a new show start out at the AMIA and later go on to perform in other venues, often returning again to perform specifically for the AMIA audiences once they have established a reputation as artists. As a result, the AMIA maintains a central role in supporting Jewish Argentine performance in Buenos Aires—a place of new Jewish Argentine musical beginnings and celebrated returns. As Marcelo Moguilevsky of the Dúo Lerner Moguilevsky, Buenos

Aires's accomplished klezmer duo recalled to me, some of their first performance opportunities were playing in the old AMIA theater in the early 1990s, prior to the bombing.¹⁰ With the growth of his career and the development of an experimental musical style—renewing instrumental klezmer repertory in Buenos Aires, for which he and César Lerner are now world famous—eventually, playing regularly in the AMIA became aesthetically confining. That is, the culture of memory and nostalgia at the regular AMIA programs, attracting mostly older audiences, is resistant to avant garde musical expressions, and the Dúo Lerner y Moguilevsky's musical style—which carefully cultivates musical silences as ardently as it promotes new musical approaches—can be aesthetically challenging to the AMIA's older audiences who want to hear easily recognizable folksongs and instrumental pieces that instantly connect them to iconic symbols of Jewish identity. On a return trip to Buenos Aires in 2014, I noticed that a Dúo Lerner Moguilevsky concert held on March 27, 2014 was being heavily advertised at the AMIA. With the fame that they had established in the past few decades and news of an invitation to perform with legendary Argentine folkloric musician and *charango* (small Andean lute) Jaime Torres in Israel to celebrate the arrival of Pope Francis's trip to the Middle East, the typical AMIA audience is prepared to embrace more challenging repertories after exposure to these styles. In other venues, musicians garner public recognition of their talent that later circulates within the Jewish community.

The evening of Marina Parilli's canceled performance and the substitution of the film, *Ein Lied von Liebe und Tod* raised questions about the constitution of a "Jewish" aesthetic in the cultural programming events at the AMIA. Furthermore, the film's thematic focus on memory, showcasing how the currents of the past arise in the present through the symbolic and affective

¹⁰ Interview with Marcelo Moguilevsky, May 2013.

language of song, spotlighted the importance of the place of memory in understanding contemporary Jewish Argentine musical intimacies (Herzfeld 2005; Stokes 2010). In the following section, I will elaborate on the atmosphere of memory in cultural programming at the AMIA, not only showing how Jewish musical performance on the stage in the AMIA involves a politics of memory in public discourse and street demonstrations, but that memory stimulates Jewish Argentine ethnic identification from within, enumerating the different ways in which musicians connect to the national and ethnic configurations of memory to explore and re-inscribe a Jewish identity for Jewish Argentine musical expression.

In the preceding chapter, I approached the question of how musicians and audiences perform political claims to demand justice for the AMIA bombing. In this chapter, I explore how everyday, ordinary performances of seemingly “apolitical” “ethnic musics” in the Café Literario programming series and in the AMIA auditorium are deeply politically motivated by a need to “renew the spirit” of the Jewish Argentine community (Faudree 2013). As anthropologist Paja Faudree argues in *Singing for the Dead: The Politics of Indigenous Revival in Mexico*:

“Understanding the political dynamics of modern—and postmodern—entities such as the nation requires ethnographically examining how people experience activities that are only sometimes read in political terms and that relate to ideas about the nation in oblique and hidden ways” (Faudree 2013: 8). With this contention in mind, I focus on the everyday musical performances as experiences that fill the *vacíos* or voids of memory through Jewish Argentine creative musical expression (Zaretsky 2008a: 51–52). Through the discourses of memory and its aestheticized forms in Argentina, Jewish Argentine musicians assert themselves in the greater cosmopolitan landscape of the city, past and present. It is then in the everyday musical performances that the subtleties of a politics of memory emerge in reference to broader contexts of the effects of

neoliberalism, histories of Jewish immigration, and the relationship between Jewish Argentines to historical origins in Europe and the Mediterranean. Furthermore, these contemporary pathways of musical exchange and encounter illuminate connections along worldwide Jewish networks. Music at the AMIA and in the name of the AMIA cause showcases two distinct, yet mutually reinforcing ways in which musical performances inscribe this space as a critical site of memory in Buenos Aires.

In the Café Literario: An Evening with the Dúo Guefiltefish and the Coro Ale Brider (All Brothers Choir)

The room used for performances for the Café Literario programming series is not much more than a large office with an old upright piano, built-in bookshelves, an audio system and books on Jewish history and Jewish culture. Because the room is rather bare, transforming it into a performance space depends mainly on the ability of the performers themselves to create a lively atmosphere during concerts and shows. On April 8, 2008, the series was inaugurated as a place for amateur and professional musicians to share their music in an intimate and informal setting. Furthermore, the program includes book talks, lectures, cooking lessons, and other programs ¹¹ When I arrived on that warm summer evening on Tuesday, December 6, 2011, particular evening for the Dúo Guefiltefish show, the fifteen-or-so adult choir members of the Coro Ale Brider (All Brothers Choir) milled about on the right side of the room, imbuing the place with a kinetic energy heightened by Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker's introduction of the Dúo Guefiltefish and the choir they direct, the Coro Ale Brider, to the audience—an amiable, relaxed crowd.

¹¹ "Inauguran la Biblioteca y Café literario en AMIA," *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), April 8, 2008. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1002523-inauguran-la-biblioteca-y-cafe-literario-en-amia>.

Coro Ale Brider began their portion of the concert after Horacio and Mirtha warmed up the crowd by singing and “*popurri*” of well-known Yiddish folksongs, including “Vie Nemt Men A Bisele Mazl,” “Tumbalaika,” “Bei Mir Bistu Shein,” “Tayere Malka,” “Az der Rebbe Zingt,” and “Dana Dana” (Sholom Secunda), appearing uninhibited while cheerfully combining their slightly out-of-tune and somewhat out-of-synch voices with purposeful attention to articulation, enthusiasm and personal enjoyment.¹² The *popurri* is an important formal musical structure found in the repertory of Yiddish choirs in Argentina. This cross-section of well-known portions of multiple songs (usually the refrain) is a unified arrangement of stylistic components and lyrical content (García Gallardo 1997). In this way, choirs are able to make reference to more folksongs—or “chestnuts” of Yiddish folksong—during a set performance time (Slobin 2003: 76). As a compositional practice, the *popurri* is related to the musical “remix” as an inter-textual form; however, rather than trying to create new meanings, the *popurri* is a series of samples taken to be easily recognized musical references directing audience responses back toward the past and to the complete version of the original song and its associated meanings. For a *popurri* to successfully engage an audience, it must include tunes and lyrics familiar to the intended audience as a technology of memory drawing on the soundscapes of shared history. The *popurri* canonizes particular songs into a recognizable repertory but remains a set of incomplete fragments. The Coro Ale Brider’s first song thereby set this tone of participatory engagement with the invocation of the *popurri* “Idish 1,” establishing the centrality of a transnational canon

¹² The question of enjoyment is not insignificant. As musicologist Karen Ahlquist writes, “Depending on the music and the setting, choral performances can assert artistic and educational achievements, aesthetic merit, and social, national, religious, or ethnic identity. Moreover (and not to be neglected), it often entertains performers and audience alike” In *Chorus and Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006, 2). Yiddish spellings of these particular songs reflect the titles of the songs as they appear in the Coro Ale Brider repertory that I collected during my fieldwork in Buenos Aires in 2011–2012.

of traditional Yiddish folksongs in Argentina. With their feathered endings and unequal balance of male and female voices, the audible, aesthetic qualities highlighted the emphasis on unison singing for social pleasure (Turino 2008).

Horacio later told me that the choir's practice of singing from memory without song parts or repertory folders is a technique he attributes to his thirteen-year membership in the prominent Argentine choir, El Coro Kennedy (where he and partner Mirtha Zuker first met). There, led by choral director Raul Friztche, Horacio learned the performance techniques that he developed with Coro Ale Brider, which he and Mirtha founded in 2008. Horacio and Mirtha design each song to cultivate a similar style of participatory musical experience, giving choir members a greater sense of artistic mobility and personal investment.¹³ In addition, through choreographed gestures and the exclusion of repertory folders—which separate an audience from the performer—audience members are encouraged to participate with the choir from their seats. Although he says that it was initially difficult to get the Coro Ale Brider members comfortable singing songs by heart while moving to the choreography (many even had trouble keeping basic time), now the members feel comfortable looking out face-to-face with audiences while communicating musically through different gestures in live performance.¹⁴ As he told me, for the people reluctant to stray from “the traditional,” through the concert performance experience, he is able to convince them of the effectiveness of this type of choral practice¹⁵ Although these gestural effects are less common among other adult Yiddish choirs in Buenos Aires (perhaps with the exception of Las Bobes Singuers (a choir consisting of Jewish grandmothers, organized

¹³ Interview with Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker, Buenos Aires, February 2012.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

by singer Zoila Piterman), the repertory of the Coro Ale Brider is, in fact, composed of familiar, easily recognizable tunes especially crafted for Jewish Argentine audiences (see Figs. 2.2–2.4).¹⁶



Figures 2.2 Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker sing in the Café Literario on December 6, 2011.



Figure 2.3 Horacio Liberman directs the Coro Ale Brider in the Café Literario on December 6, 2011.

¹⁶ Interview with Zoila Aginsky de Piterman. May 2, 2013.



Figure 2.4 The Coro Ale Brider sings in the Café Literario on December 6, 2011.
Photos by author.

After the popurri, the choir then moved on to sing a version of “Basavilbaso” by Jevel Katz, a Lithuanian immigrant and Jewish folk musician who arrived to Argentina in 1930 (Baker 2012). This strophic folksong narrates scenes of rural Jewish life in the eponymous colony in the Entre Ríos province, originally established by Baron Mauricio von Hirsch’s Jewish Colonization Agency (JCA) in 1887 (Sofer 1982). “Basavilbaso” refers to the history of the Jewish colonies in Argentina’s interior, a program that drew tens of thousands of Jews to Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The song presents portraits of social and familial life in the Jewish colony, while parodying the confrontation between religious imperatives linked to old world lifestyles, and the processes of secularization and acculturation among the recently arrived Yiddish-speaking, Ashkenazic Jews to Argentina.

Once centered in the interior provinces and rooted in a harsh agrarian lifestyle, the Jews, like other ethnic groups, were drawn into the process of rapid urbanization that swept the country in the early twentieth century and brought waves of migrants and other foreign immigrants to the federal capital of Buenos Aires (Mirelman 1990). From the city, the nostalgia for life in the colonies was famously lionized in the central mythology emerging around the figure of the

Jewish gaucho in the writings of Alberto Gerchunoff (Scobie 1964; Gerchunoff 2009 [1910]).

Stories of life in the colonies remain accessible in the songs of Jevé Katz as well, serving as musical repositories wherein, as ethnomusicologist Kay Kaufman Shelemay argues, “song texts and tunes encode memories of places, people, and events past; in this manner the songs are intentionally constructed sites for long-term storage of conscious memories from the past” (Shelemay 1998: 6). The regular performance of “Basavilbaso” highlights Shelemay’s point, demonstrating how the song narrative, the repetitive stanzas and the melodic simplicity of this folksong make it easily sung by amateur singers, serving not only as an homage to the composer—Jevé Katz—but also reinforcing Jewish Argentine bonds through the embodied practice of remembrance in communal singing.

The first published version of “Basavilbaso” appeared on Friday, July 31, 1939 as a part of the series, “Azoy Zingt Jevé Katz,” in the Yiddish daily newspaper, *Di Idishe Tsaytung*.¹⁷ Jevé Katz was nicknamed the “Jewish Carlos Gardel” after the beloved tango singer who composed and sung parodies and popular songs in Yiddish, Spanish, and a creolized mix of both languages locally referred to as “*Castidish*” to large Jewish audiences in theaters throughout Buenos Aires and in the colonies of the interior (Weinstein and Toker 2004; Baker 2012). Following Katz’s death in 1940, musicians in Argentina such as Max Zalkind and Max Perlman have maintained his musical legacy, performing Katz’s compositions on recordings, in live performances and even theatrical shows based on his life.

When Katz died unexpectedly in 1940, somewhere between 20,000–40,000 people attended his funeral procession (Baker 2004). Shortly after, in 1941, a commemoration concert was held in Katz’s honor, and in the 1980’s, a number of concerts and shows based on Jevé

¹⁷ Jevé Katz, “Azoy Zingt Jevé Katz: ‘Basavilbaso,’” *Di Idishe Tsaytung* (Buenos Aires), July 21, 1939.

Katz's life and legacy revived the specter of Katz on the stage for dedicated fans and new audiences.¹⁸ On August 17, 1984 at 7pm, at the Teatro del Globo in Buenos Aires (Marcelo T. Alvear 1155), a play debuted based on the life of the songs of the beloved Jevl Katz. *Jevl Katz, Juglar de los Años 30* (Jevl Katz, Minstrel of the 1930s) was directed by Santiago Doria, starring Juan Carlos Puppo. As journalist David Moises Pecheni asked: "Por que Jevl Katz?" or "Why Jevl Katz?" Why revive the image and story of this popular artist. In an article for the *Argentiner Yiddish Kulturnaim*, Pecheni discusses the central importance of Jevl Katz in accessing memory, both individual and collective.¹⁹ Like the songs that Katz sang in his lifetime, the recuperation of the work of Jevl Katz later in the century highlights the importance of the role of Katz's music in accessing the memories and history of Jewish life in Argentina, from life in the colonies to the city, from the past to the contemporary era. Through parody and satire, Katz was able to represent the preoccupations of immigrant Jews in Argentina. As Pecheny

¹⁸ Documents in the Jevl Katz Archive at the Fundación IWO describe different commemoration ceremonies, one taking place on April 3, 1941, one year after the musician's death due to a post-operative infection in 1940. The program was divided into two sections, with singers paying tribute to the beloved musician by singing some of the more well-known songs from his repertory. Fundación IWO President Samuel Rollansky gave the opening address, and highlights of the program included performances by Guita Galina and Max Perelman as well as accompaniment by Jascha Galperin. See: "*Concierto homenaje a la memoria de Jevl Katz*" (Concert in Honor of the Memory of Jevl Katz), organized by the 'Comite Jevl Katz' (Jevl Katz Committee) held in the Teatro Excelsior Yiddish theater in Buenos Aires. Later in the 1980's, two revival musical reviews depicting Jevl Katz's life and accomplishments included the show "*Jevl Katz: Juglar de Los Años '30*," (Jevl Katz: Minstrel of the 1930's), starring Juan Carlos Puppo as Katz, and it was directed by Santiago Doria. The show played at the *Teatro del Globo* in Buenos Aires in August 1984. The other show, "*¿Te Acordás de Jevl Katz?*" (Do You Remember Jevl Katz) played in the Auditorio AMIA (on an undisclosed date but likely around 1984 given overlaps in the cast). This show featured Cesár Pierry in the title role and was also directed by Santiago Doria. From the Jevl Katz Archive at the Fundación IWO.

¹⁹ See: David Pecheni "Jével Katz" document from the Jevl Katz Archive at the Fundación IWO.

states: “That his work is genuine is a subjective conclusion that comes from the test thereof and from the immediate knowledge of the era to which his work refers.”²⁰

Two years later, in 1986, the musical play, “Te Acordás de Jevl Katz,” or “Do You Remember Jevl Katz” was produced and performed at the AMIA. It ran on Thursday and Saturday nights with Sunday matinees, featuring a cast of Argentine actors, including César Pierry, with Renée Pecheny, Néstor Sánchez, Marisa Varela, Alejandro Escudero, Horacio Larraza, Roxana Klas, and Inés Estévez. The show was an hour and a half long. With an original script by David Benari and adapted for the stage by Martín Hernández, “Te Acordás de Jevl Katz” was directed by Santiago Doria with sets by Gustavo de Gregorio. The show consisted of various episodes portraying local Jewish life from 1930 to the present, in the city, in the provinces, and in the Jewish colonies of the interior. It reenacted characteristic Jewish scenes from the “Gringo Years” through dialogue and song.²¹

Journalist Bentsion Palepade, writing for the Yiddish newspaper *Di Presse* wrote, “that while Gardel’s love of tangos ‘were of interest just to young people, Jevl Katz [also] sang about present-day social issues, which elicited everyone’s interest (Baker 2012: 204).²² The refrain of the song describes the singer’s love for the little colony, which Katz calls the “Kasrilevke of Entre Ríos”—a performative substitution, or following theater and performance studies scholar Joseph Roach, a “surrogate,” for the Eastern European shtetl.²³ Katz’s reference to “Kasrilevke,”

²⁰ Ibid. Translation by author.

²¹ *Di Presse*. June 4, 1986

²² Zachary Baker refers to Palpeade’s article: Palpeade, Bentsion, “*Geshtorbn a institutsye: afn keyver fun Khevl Kats*,” *Di Prese* (Buenos Aires), March 10, 1940. In Zachary Baker, “’Gvald, Yidn, Buena Gente’: Jevl Katz, Yiddish Bard of the Río de la Plata.” In Berkowitz, Joel and Barbara Henry (eds.), *Inventing the Modern Yiddish Stage: Essays in Drama, Performance and Show Business*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012).

²³ Performance studies scholar Joseph Roach examines “how culture reproduces and re-creates itself by a process that can be best described by the word *surrogation*. In the life of a community,

the fictional town of the Jewish poor in tales by the celebrated Yiddish writer, Sholem Aleichem, translates the memory of Eastern European *shtetl* (village) life to the rural setting of the Jewish colonies in Argentina's interior provinces. As Roach explains: "Performances so often carry within them the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions—those that were rejected and, even more invisibly, those that have succeeded" (Roach 1996: 5). He notes the process of 'incomplete forgetting' and the affective registers, cultural actors, and shared histories brought together through performance. The legacy of Jevel Katz's "Basavilbaso," and the example of Kasrilevke shows how Katz deftly substituted one literary tradition for another in the new Argentine context (Roach 1996: 5). Jevel Katz's songs ensured that life of the shtetl was never forgotten in the Argentine agricultural colonies when he sang:

בָּסָאוּילְבָּסָא שְׁטָעַדְטָעַלְעַ דָּוּ מִיןַּן,
אֵיךְ וּוֹעֵל דִּיךְ גַּעֲדַעְנָקָעַן, וּוֹאֵיךְ אֵיךְ וּוֹעֵל נָאֵךְ זַיְוָן,
דוּ בִּיסְטַ מִיןַּן לְעַבְעַן, דָּו בִּיסְטַ אַחֲיוֹתָן
קָאַסְטְּרַיְלְעַוּקָעַ פָּנוּ עַנְטְּרַעְעַ רַיְאָסָן,
בָּסָאוּילְבָּסָא שְׁטָעַדְטָעַלְעַ דָּוּ מִיןַּן.

*Basavilbaso, shtetele mío,
Yo te recordaré ahí dónde esté
Vos sos mi vida, vos sos mi "jies"
Kasrilevke de Entre Ríos,
Basavilbaso, shtetele mío.²⁴*

Basavilbaso, my little shtetl,
I will remember you wherever I am,
You are my life, you are my passion,
Kasrilevke of Entre Ríos,
Basavilbaso, my little shtetl.

the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric" (2). See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2, 5.

²⁴ Translation by Ester Szwarc. Conducted in Yiddish class at *Fundación IWO*, Buenos Aires. November 2012. Translation from Spanish to English by author.

The lyrics published in the Yiddish newspaper *Di Idish Tsaytung* are written in a non-standard version of Yiddish according to Ester Szwarc, the Director of Education at Fundación IWO.²⁵ While it is unclear to what extent orthographic idiosyncrasies can be attributed to Katz, what is clear is that as a multi-instrumentalist with an impressive musical memory, Katz may not have required written transcriptions to perform his repertory of more than 650 parodies, satires and folksongs. Unfortunately, his gifts mean that few published or even hand-notated manuscripts survive in the archive of his personal papers and assorted documents at Fundación IWO.²⁶ As such, studies rely on musical parts and individual songs published in the Buenos Aires Yiddish newspaper.

Although “Basavilbaso” was originally published in the key of G minor, suggesting a tone of harmonic longing audible in the well-known version by Max Zalkind (which was recently re-released by RGS Music in 2006), Coro Ale Brider’s performance on December 6, 2011 presented a different affective valence (Katz 2006). With their jovial interjection of the Yiddish phrase “oi, oi, oi,” hand gestures and a staccato clap punctuating the word, “Entre Ríos,” the choir delivered a rendition of “Basavilbaso” rooted in celebratory exclamations about the Jewish Argentine past rather than nostalgic loss or grief (Boym 2001) (see Fig. 2.6). The increased tempo of this live choral arrangement of “Basavilbaso” was an additional factor disconnecting my hearing of Coro Ale Brider’s version from other recorded versions. Likewise, the choir’s focus on singing for social pleasure overshadowed the linguistic variation exemplified by the variations in the transliterated, phonetic song parts used by the choir in rehearsals (see Fig.

²⁵ Personal communication with Ester Szwarc, Fundación IWO, Buenos Aires, December 18, 2012.

²⁶ To the best of the archivists’ knowledge, these documents did not exist prior to the AMIA bombing and thus were not destroyed in it. Rather, only a small portion of Katz’s repertory was written down.

2.7). Subsequently, the Coro Ale Brider's public performance of "Basavilbaso" had much less to do with recreating an authentic rendering or revival of musical materials and more to do with the social act of revisiting shared history and collective memory through musical engagement. Since no original recording is available of Jevel Katz singing "Basavilbaso," contemporary performances of the song open up a variety of interpretive possibilities for performers. As the Dúo Guefiltefish concert in AMIA at the Café Literario concluded that evening, Horacio invited people from outside of Buenos Aires to declare their geographic origins, which included Tel Aviv, Buenos Aires's suburbs, Chicago (me), and even "Villa Clara!"—as one spry octogenarian proclaimed, connecting personally to another colony of the JCA in Argentina's interior.

Audience participation during a Dúo Guefiltefish directed show is intentionally crafted to extract positive emotional responses to the communal singing event, and the repertory of the Coro Ale Brider, curated by Horacio and Mirtha, is performed to deliberately access these personal connections. As Horacio told me in an interview conducted with him and Mirtha in their home in the Belgrano neighborhood on Buenos Aires's northern edge:

It is much more difficult to practice a choral repertory in Yiddish because you have to understand that, unfortunately, there are few people who really know Yiddish. The majority of our listeners have heard some traditional songs in Yiddish, and when they are sung, what you do is take them to some moment of their life that was, almost always, happy. And so, s/he enjoys listening to something that s/he likes and that s/he hasn't heard in a while. It's like smelling a perfume that brings you to some pleasant memory of a moment of your life. And so, that is our purpose—to find those songs.²⁷

By incorporating extra-musical gestures and forgoing the use of repertory folders—instead insisting that choir members memorize all song lyrics—the choir is able to relate to audiences in ways that reach beyond the sonic material to create an inclusive atmosphere not solely dependent

²⁷ Interview with Horacio Liberman, Buenos Aires, February 2012. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

on linguistic acuity but driven more by the symbolic currency of the post-vernacular musical resonances of Yiddish (Shandler 2008).²⁸

Throughout Buenos Aires, Yiddish choirs have played a special role in sustaining Jewish Argentine cultural expression, as anthropologist Natasha Zaretsky has shown (Zaretsky 2008). The social justice mission of the Guebirtig Choir was a central impetus for its formation under the leadership of the music teacher, Reizl Sztarker, who initially brought together a group of friends to sit together and sing songs in Yiddish while processing the aftermath of the attack (Zaretsky 2008a). Later, this group would go on to include hundreds of members at the height of its popularity in the late 1990's, participating in choral functions, actos and concerts throughout Buenos Aires and the interior provinces.²⁹ In contrast to the Guebirtig Choir, the Coro Ale Brider

²⁸ For more on Yiddish literature and expression in Argentina, see the writings of Eliah Toker. See also: Silvia Hansman, Susana Skura and Gabriela Kogan, *Oysfarkoyft: Localidades agotadas* (Buenos Aires: Del Nuevo Extremo, 2006).; Perla Sneh, “Ídish al sur, una rama en sombras,” in *Pertenencia y alteridad: Judíos en/de América Latina: cuarenta años de cambios*, edited by Haim Avni, Judit Bokser Liweant, Sergio DellaPergola, Margalit Bejarano and Leonardo Senkman, 657-676 (Orlando: Iberoamericana Vervuert Publishing Corp., 2011); and Fernando Fischman, “En la conversación fluía. Arte verbal, consideraciones emic y procesos conmemorativos judíos argentinos,” *Runa* 29 (2008): 123-138.; “Using Yiddish: Language Ideologies, Verbal Art and Identity among Argentine Jews,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 48 (1) (2011): 37-61.; “Religiosos, no; tradicionalistas, sí’: Un acercamiento a la noción de tradición en judíos argentinos,” *Revista Sambatión* 1 (2006): 43-58. I observed that the issue of repertory folders represents a broader issue of competition between adult Yiddish choirs for community recognition.

²⁹ As a part of my dissertation research, I worked extensively with the Guebirtig choir, observing and participating in weekly rehearsals and attending various concerts such as the Festival de la Canción Judío, their main annual concert held in the Teatro IFT, Buenos Aires's largest remaining Yiddish theater. Certainly their work should be considered as a key example of a group using musical performance to process, mourn and re-contextualize the AMIA bombing, however, I wish to give voice in this particular essay to additional artists who have rarely, if ever, factored into the literature on Jewish Argentine cultural expression. Again, Yiddish spellings of these particular songs reflect the titles of the songs as they appear in the Guebirtig choir repertory that I collected during my fieldwork in 2011-2012. See also ethnomusicologist Abigail Wood's 2013 book, *And We're All Brothers: Singing in Yiddish in Contemporary North America*, which is an excellent reference examining repertory and performance practices among Yiddish choirs in

was founded without such explicit political aims in mind. Instead, it originally grew out of the regular meetings of friends gathering together after Kabbalat Shabat services to discuss the impact of the Argentine economic recession of the late 1990s and the crisis of the 2000s, which left many people without work in the city. Horacio and Mirtha led and participated in these gatherings every Friday evening to share a pizza and to play games, eventually incorporating group singing into their regular routine and featuring folksongs in Yiddish and Spanish. By the mid-2000s, the Coro Volver a Empezar, and later the Coro Ale Brider, were officially formed and began singing regularly in the AMIA and at other Jewish institutions.

Folksong

Basavilbaso
בָּסָבִילְבָּסָו

Jevel Katz
Music by Jeremia Ciganeri

Voice

Simplification
Pattern (mm.6-7):

9

17 Refrain:
"Oi! Oi! Oi!"

25 Clap: "Entre Ríos"

Figure 2.5 “Basavilbaso” by Jevel Katz. Transcription by the author from the published manuscript in *Di Idische Tsaytung*, July 31, 1939. Performance Notation of the Coro Ale Brider in the Café Literario on December 6, 2011.

North America. See: Abigail Wood, *And We're All Brothers: Singing in Yiddish in Contemporary North America* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013).

Figure 2.6 “Basavilbaso” by Jevel Katz. Published in *Di Idishe Tsaytung*, July 31, 1939.

BASAVILBASO

**IR ZETZ ZIJ NOR ARAIN IN BAN, ESTACION LACROZE
ZET MEN NIT KAIN KRISTN DORT,
NOR JAIM FAIVL UN IOSHE
IR NEMT A BILET TZVEITE CLAS
UN FORT PRIMERA CLASE
IR DARF NOR ZUGN AZ IR FORT KAIN BASAVILBASO**

**OI OI OI BASAVILBASO,
SHTEITELE DU MAINS
IJ VEL DIR GUEDENKEN (OI) VI IJ VEL NOR ZAIN
DU BIST MAIN LEBN, DU BIST MAIN JIES
KASTRILEVKE FUN ENTRE RIOS
BASAVILBASO, SHTEITELE DU MAINS**

**BAI DEM TOIER SHTEIT A PORL BAI DI HENT ALEIN
SHTIL IN SHTEITL DI LEVUNE
SHAIANT ROMANTIK SHEIN
DOJ REDMEN FUN KAIN LIBE NISHT
UN FUN KAIN TNOIM FECHE
ZEI REDN FUN DI TZOIBER NAJT
VOS IS FAR DEL COSECHE**

OI OI OI ...ESTRIBILLO

Figure 2.7 “Basavilbaso” choral part used by the Coro Ale Brider. Courtesy of Horacio Liberman. March 2012.

A Theater of Memory: Opening the “Hava Naguila Tango Bar”



Figure 2.8 The “Hava Naguila Tango Bar” sign in “filete” in the Auditorio AMIA, January 27, 2013. Photo by author.

“Raptango a Buenos Aires”

*Como te sueño Buenos Aires
Aunque a veces me sienta un simple Don Nadie
Como un viento me envuelve tu pálido hollín
Y respire capullos de un fresco jazmín*

*Fileteá Buenos Aires mi bienvenida
Ne me des la espalda y me dejés herida
Que el dar una mano sea moneda corriente
Y grite por la calle, ésta es mi gente*

“RapTango to Buenos Aires” (music and lyrics by Alejandra Wila)

How I dream of you Buenos Aires
Even though sometimes I feel like a simple nobody
Your pale smog envelops me like a wind
And breathing the buds of a fresh jasmine

Paint in *filete* my welcome, Buenos Aires
Don’t turn your back on me and leave me injured
May lending a hand become legal tender
And I would yell from the street, this is my people
(Translation by Ariel Svarch).

Alejandra Wila is a singer and actress in Buenos Aires, who originally studied tourism

and worked as a tour guide of the city, devoting herself to artistic pursuits later in adulthood.

With her husband Omar Cisneros, a former soccer player for the Club Atlético Atlanta team, the

predominantly Jewish soccer club of the Villa Crespo neighborhood, they started taking dance lessons together, forming a duo creating musical shows that they performed for special events parties, lifecycle celebrations and in independent theaters. As amateur musicians, they made a little money, but mostly enjoyed working together in artistic pursuits, connecting their family history to the shows they developed.

In the AMIA, not only is the Jewish Argentine collective past reproduced on stage, it is often done for deeply personal reasons. When Alejandra Wila began writing the libretto and musical content for her show *Hava Naguila Tango Bar* in 2005 with the help of a director—a friend named Irene Rotemberg—Wila wanted to connect to Jewish Argentine audiences in order to address personal familial struggles resulting from the social consequences of the economic crisis. Her idea was to create a unique tango show different and distinctive from the great number of existing tango performances—one that drew from her theater and musical training but portrayed Jewish Argentine life in Buenos Aires by feminizing the space of the tango bar by emplacing women as the protagonists of an imaginary bar. Furthermore, she feminizes the space of the AMIA theater itself, acting the role of the protagonist, a woman named Estercita (diminutive form of the name Esther), who cares for her Aunt Rosita after the death of her Uncle Mario. To create the one-woman musical comedy—a show that tells “*la historia que estaba faltando*,” of the history that was missing,” as Wila searched through her own personal past for inspiration, moved by the stories and memories of her grandparents, parents, and the Jewish immigrants who found themselves building new lives in Argentina, far from their lands of origin (see Fig. 2.8).

At the time she began developing the basic narrative of the show, Wila was struggling with separation anxiety and feelings of loss after her parents moved to Israel, where her older

brother had immigrated years earlier, seeking economic opportunities before the economic collapse of 2001. At the time, Wila's daughter, Lucia, was just three years old, and her son, Juan, was less than one year old. Even though she still had her nuclear family in Buenos Aires, Wila longed for her parents and brother's family, wishing that her parents and children could spend more time together. Even in the modern city of Buenos Aires, it is common for children to live with their parents until they themselves marry. Families remain close-knit and frequently eat dinner together as an extended family on Sundays.

The experience of her family's emigration from Argentina is one that Wila likened to the experience of Jewish immigrants who arrived to Argentina in the early twentieth century—only in reverse. Remaining in Argentina, Wila devoted herself to raising her family, but one reason for creating the show was the hope to be able to perform it in Israel and to visit her family there. Family is a recurrent theme in Wila's theatrical projects, and her second show, "Hava Naguila Tango Bar, 2^a parte: La Familia," the sequel to the first show, starring Wila, her husband, her daughter, and her son. Unfortunately, Wila rarely performs "La Familia" because her children have grown into other interests, and it is more difficult to arrange performances around their schedules she tell me in an interview.³⁰

Although Wila strongly identifies as Jewish, like many other Jewish Argentines she keeps her distance from "official" religious Jewish customs and is not observant. She jokes that her husband, who also grew up in Villa Crespo alongside many Jewish friends and neighbors but who is Catholic, cultivated a strong familiarity with Jewish Argentine cultural and religious practices and knows more about Jewish culture than she does.³¹ "No soy religiosa," she tells me—"I'm not religious." "Celebro Rosh Hashaná. Me encanta la Navidad también. Celebro

³⁰ Interview with Alejandra Wila, Buenos Aires, April 2013.

³¹ Ibid.

todo" (I celebrate Rosh Hashanah. I love Christmas too. I celebrate everything).³² Wila's in-laws are Italian, and in the absence of her own nuclear family, they are all very close, shaping her view of family as inclusive. Her approach to Jewish Argentine ethnicity is universalistic—even though she portrays Jewish difference in its particular traditions, rituals, and approach to family as a gendered experience. Wila sees how her children live and experience both Jewish and non-Jewish culture, how natural it is to her life and to theirs to live the mixture of cultural influences, observing the transcultural exchanges that characterize everyday life in cosmopolitan Buenos Aires.

For Alejandra Wila, Jewish Argentine collective memory involves more than a simple retelling of the age of immigration; it also involves the processes of secularization and practices of endogamous cultural exchange that characterize the Jewish Argentine cultural and religious experience in Buenos Aires (Fischman 2006). If collective memory, according to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and distilled by sociologists Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, as "[t]he active past that forms our identities," then the "Hava Naguila Tango Bar," Wila makes use of the past—a past that revolves around her own experiences refracted through those of her grandparents during the age of immigration, her journeys as a mother, sister, wife, and daughter, describing the cycle of migrations of Jewish Argentine, including the emigration of Jewish from Argentina to Israel—to perform a collective present (Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). The "Hava Naguila Tango Bar" not only remembers the longer Jewish Argentine past, but Wila also uses this musical performance medium to approach the more recent past to assemble an intersecting, multi-layered, and feminized narrative of everyday Jewish Porteño life in the 21st century.

³² Interview with Alejandra Wila, La Quintana Restaurant, Buenos Aires, August 15, 2010.



Figure 2.9 Alejandra Wila in the Auditorio AMIA for the “Hava Naguila Tango Bar” show on January 27, 2013. Photo by author.

This wasn’t my first time seeing Alejandra Wila’s show, “Hava Naguila Tango Bar” when I attended a concert on January 27, 2013 in the Auditorio AMIA (see Fig. 2.9). I had seen Wila perform the entire show at the *café concert*, or dinner theater venue, La Biblioteca Café (The Library Café), and I had seen her perform portions of song and dance routines from the show, accompanied by pianist and composer Enrique Cuttini once before in the AMIA theater. However, this was my first time seeing it in the AMIA theater with the AMIA public. That evening, I wasn’t surprised to see that the room was almost full—around 150 people or more had gathered there. Wila had set up the stage with her usual props: a stool at center stage, a coat rack with a red robe, a purple boa, a dark hat, scarf and blazers, costumes she changes into to play different characters throughout the show. She covered a low table in a blue tablecloth, and a black rotary phone sat on top of it next to a poster board with the name of her show painted in the curlicues of the old-fashioned “filete” style used by traditional restaurants and bars in Buenos Aires to advertise their businesses. At stage left, a table also covered in a blue tablecloth had a

silver thermos, a *maté* (cup or hollowed gourd for drinking herb mate tea) with a *bombilla* (metal straw), a small silver menorah (candelabra), and a bottle of Slivovitz, a type of Eastern European brandy. A broom rested across the front of the table, an object she uses as a dancing partner during the show.

Alejandra Wila began on stage, wearing an apron and chef hat mixing a bowl with an egg-beater and beginning a monologue that introduced herself as the main character, Estercita. Recently married and with two small children, Estercita prepared the food at the bar she and her husband Tulio ran called the Hava Naguila Tango Bar. She is tired, exhausted from so much food preparation, raising the children, and she no longer enjoys running the bar like she used to. Her husband Tulio is focused on making money and selling food, and the live shows that were once the main attraction, occur less frequently. Estercita is tired, frustrated and nostalgic for the bar of the past—the bar she opened with her Aunt Rosita after the death of Uncle Mario, which she explains to the audience. Estercita’s journey is told in flashbacks, through episodes portraying important moments remembered by the protagonist until she loops back to the narrative present. Each memory of the past, that is, each scene, is accompanied by music and dance numbers, bringing in a variety of styles from cumbia to “*raptango*” a tango with spoken lyrics chanted in rhythm to the music. The musical focus is on tango, and Wila includes the melodies of well-known sung tangos by composers such as Carlos Gardel, Astor Piazzolla, Enrique Santos Discépolo, and other famous tango composers to set up the scene of the tango bar. In this musical comedy, Wila’s own contrafactum compositions—new lyrics she sets to existing tango melodies, allow her to tell a story through the interplay between her monologues and song routines. The show is approximately an hour long, divided into two main acts.

For example, one song “El Choclo,” a contrafactum composition depicts Jewish porteño life through satire. By retaining the melodic and harmonic structures of the classic tango, “El Choclo,” first written without lyrics by Ángel Villoldo (1903), Wila plays with prevalent stereotypes about Jewish Argentines to distill her ideas about identity, belonging, and community. Her reliance on pre-existing audience knowledge of “El Choclo”—especially the 1947 version written by Enrique Santos Discépolo canonizing the tango as the essence of the porteño experience—brings into focus certain particularities defining the Jewish porteño experience. Building on Discépolo’s conception of tango as a way of life, Wila criticizes both the non-Jewish neighbors who refer to the Jews in the prevailing vernacular of ethnic othering as “*rusos*” (Russians) or “*Moishes*” (Jews), and she chastises the Jews themselves for fulfilling these stereotypes: “Como se llama? que estudia? de que trabaja?/ Repite el karma mientras pide a un rebaja/” (What is their name? What do they study? What do they do? / Karma is repeated as someone asks for a discount). Her lyrics address public perceptions of the Jews in Buenos Aires from the point of view of a insider, who, describing herself as a “Jews—Jewish enough until death,” thus claims the ability to make such jokes, comically negotiates the borders of Jewish and Christian traditions, cultural expressions, and values.

“El Choclo”

Lyrics by Alejandra Wila

Music by Ángel Villoldo

El ruso, el Moishe, el judío así nos llaman
Católicos, cristianos, goyim, que nos
reclaman

La última cena, Cristo, Judas, la traición
Igual morimos nos vamos pa’l cajón

Negocios buenos pero bolsillos cerrados
Oliendo knishes, jrein y bíblicos pecados
Rosh Hashaná, Iom Kipur y guefiltefish
Leemos bien las tablas con un sentido

Ruso, Moishe, Jew is what they call us
Catholics, Christians, goyim, who complain about
us

The Last Supper, Christ, Judas, betrayal
But we all go to the coffin when we die

Good businesses, but tight purses
Smelling knishes, *chrein* and biblical sins
Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and gefiltefish
We read the ten commandments with a Yiddish

ídish

Hay diferencias que no puedo negar
El Bris por el Bautismo, Comunión por
Bar Mitzvah
Pascua por Pesaj, Purim por Carnaval
Y una ansia plena de quererse hacer notar

Al evocarte, rusito amigo
Siento que vuelven a sonar en mis oídos
Las frases dulces
De tiempos idos

Hoy que no tengo más en mi barrio
Aquellas bobes que con una Di Idishe
Tsaytung
Me convidaban té con limón y cedrón

Carancanfunfa allí están con sus narices
Con sello propio aunque tengan mil
matices
Con su kipá van caminando muy coquetos
Al Shil de Paso como monjes recoletos

¿Cómo se llama? ¿qué estudia? ¿de qué
trabaja?
Repite el karma mientras pide una rebaja
Yo soy judía bien judía hasta la muerte
Me ha tocado un suerte
Y que regrese otra vez

Sí, nuestra historia como triste Moishe
tango
Y casi siempre el mango
Es el primer actor

flair

There are some differences that I can't negate
The Bris for baptism, Communion for Bar
Mitzvah
Easter for Passover, Purim for Carnival
And a total yearning to stand out

Evoking you, my dear Russian friend
I feel that I hear again
The sweet phrases
Of times past

Today, what I no longer have in my neighborhood
Are those *bobes* that with a *Di Idishe Tsaytung*
Brought me tea with lemon and herbs

Carancanfunfa there they are with their noses
With their own airs, even though there are a
thousand versions
With their *kippah* they walk so flirtatiously
To the Temple on Paso Street like the monks of
Recoleta

What is his/her name? What does s/he study?
What does s/he do?
Karma repeats itself while someone asks for a
discount
I am a Jew, Jewish for sure 'til death
I have been lucky
And I hope it comes back again

Yes, our story, like a sad *Moishe tango*
In which money is almost always
The protagonist



Figures. 2.10 Alejandra Wila drinking a *maté* during the “Hava Naguila Tango Bar” show in the Auditorio AMIA, January 27, 2013. Photo by author.

During the first act of the show, Wila describes the challenges Estercita and Tía Rosita encounter opening a business in Buenos Aires. Following Wila’s introduction in character as Estercita, which establishes the “present day,” Wila then delves back into the past. After the death of her Tío (Uncle) Mario, Estercita convinces her Tía (Aunt) Rosita to open a tango bar to showcase live music, to feature Jewish tango artists and bands, dance shows, and other theatrical events. Aunt Rosita and Uncle Mario were *tangueros*, passionate dancers and admirers of tango, and they loved to go to the *milonga* (tango dance hall) to dance week after week. After Uncle Mario’s death, Estercita wants Aunt Rosita to put down her thread and needles from her work as a seamstress and engage in the unusual pursuit of opening up a woman-run tango bar business as a tribute to Tío Mario. They name the bar, “Hava Naguila” because Tío Mario loved to sing the song, and the name indicates the ethnic Jewish Argentine character of this particular establishment. For the bar they must choose a menu, and Wila’s character learns to cook the food that they will serve at the bar—a mix of traditional porteño foods and Jewish classics: Spanish

omelettes, *milanesa a la napolitana* (schnitzel covered in ham, cheese, and sauce), *varenekys* (Eastern European dumplings), and potato knishes (baked dumplings). Wila discusses folding the *repulges*, the crusts of the empanadas, after they are stuffed with different kinds of fillings and other familiar labors of the kitchen. Aunt Rosita and Estercita encounter a host of bureaucratic problems dealing with corrupt officials, including the police, firefighters, and mafia bosses in the neighborhood, who demand “*bonos anuales*” (annual bribes)—a moment that always get an understanding groan and a laugh from audiences.

Once opened, the bar is a lively scene filled with musicians and listening publics composed of Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, and Aunt Rosita and Estercita enjoy the atmosphere of the vibrant tango scene they created. One evening, Estercita meets a man named Túlio Pérez in the bar, and they later marry and have two children. Meanwhile, Aunt Rosita receives a phone call from her first boyfriend, and she goes on a date with him to an old-fashioned restaurant and bar, the Confitería Ideal on Suipacha Street, an establishment famous among the older generation known as a respectable date spot. After years of saving money and enjoying the success of the bar, Aunt Rosita returns to the city of Rosario, where she was raised and passes on her share of the bar to Estercita and her family. At the end, we return to the beginning of the play, with Estercita cooking and thinking about the past, remembering how she arrived at the present (see Fig. 2.10).

When Wila first began performing this show in the AMIA in 2006 or 2007, there were few shows of this personal and historical nature being performed there. As she told me: “era todo de la colectividad, todo formal” (it was all from the community, all formal), explaining how she approached the premier of “Hava Naguila Tango Bar” with a mix of anxiety and excitement.

When I premiered the show at the AMIA, I was like this (she makes an anxious face). I was a little afraid, because I was putting myself out there for them to throw tomatoes at me, you know? You get it? I have to be faithful to myself. I am not going to change anything just because I am at the AMIA. I said, “I am who I am. If they don’t like me here because the show is too much, or whatever, fine, thank you very much, excuse me, goodbye. I’ll take the show somewhere else.” It turns out that the people, as well as Director of Culture Moshé Korin, all really identified with it and were so thankful that, when it ended, you see, Moshé Korin hugged me and gave me a kiss! I couldn’t believe it. I thought they were going to run me out of there. But they didn’t, and I was surprised. At the heart of the Jewish community, there is a need for openness. Not just always, you know, the formal things, the orthodox things, shows that say, “Oy! Oy! Oy! Mazel tov!” and nothing else. People need other things, because those things open up their hearts.³³

Since then, Wila has been asked back countless times to perform the show again, making small changes to the libretto or musical routines, using the AMIA shows as an opportunity to workshop certain elements of the show. Initially, she included an additional half hour of material that delved into the emotional pain of the legacy of the disappeared during the most recent military dictatorship, which disproportionately affected the Jewish Argentine community, who made up approximately five to thirteen percent of the disappeared, far exceeding their representation in the total population of Argentina (Tarica 2012: 99; Kahan 2014, 2011).³⁴ She also included material directly addressing the challenges facing new immigrants during the first years of their arrival to Argentina. However, Wila cut out much of this material after performing it for a few years because she started to feel that the emotional weight was too much to bear over and over again, especially given the intensity of maintaining the energy of a one-woman show. At one hour in duration, the “Hava Naguila Tango Bar” show now excludes these topics, but retains the material related to the core issues of the contrasts and conflicts of the Jewish Argentine

³³ Interview with Alejandra Wila, Buenos Aires, April 2013. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

³⁴ See especially Emmanuel N. Kahan’s work on the subject of Jews disappeared during the most recent military dictatorship. Estelle Tarica’s footnote on the debated number of disappeared Jews illustrates the persistent problem of the lack of agreement on the actual number of the disappeared (108).

experience. One man and a woman in attendance, who I often saw attending shows in the AMIA, told me that they really liked Wila's show. Another older man with large plastic framed glasses who is also frequently in attendance at the AMIA shows told me what he thought had changed over the years. "It's pretty much the same," he said. A few things are different in the libretto." "How many times have you seen it?" I asked him. "Eleven times," he replied.

Audiences at the AMIA appreciate Wila's show because they connect to the nostalgic dramatizations of the Jewish Porteño past. Although highly nostalgic, Wila is able to undercut the otherwise overwhelming sentimentality of the show's libretto through humor and music that pokes fun at typical struggles of living in Buenos Aires. For instance, when Wila discusses paying off local authorities, she jokes that "*bonos anuales*" (annual bribes) are more like "*bonos anales*" (pain in the butt bribes), a joke welcomed with laughter during the AMIA show that I attended. When Estercita intends to marry Tulio Pérez, her aunt asks her whether he is "Pérez" or "Peretz," a play on words pointing to the homological similarities between the typically non-Jewish and Jewish surnames. Although she feels her critique is strong, she says that these barbs come from a place love for her Jewish Argentine community and personal identity, which allows audiences to join in with her in the humorous aspects of the show, thus offsetting any perception that these rhetorical games, costumes, and gestures should be interpreted as offensive. The "Hava Naguila Tango Bar" showcases women's roles in Jewish Argentine cultural and musical history, giving Alejandra Wila herself a space to explore her modern Jewish Argentine identity as a lived experience with ties beyond Judaism as well as to the past and familial lineages.

Musical Performance in the AMIA Theater: Coro Volver a Empezar (New Beginnings Choir) and the Origins of the Dúo Guefiltefish

The Dúo Guefiltefish formed in 2003 somewhat on accident. During a summer visit to Miramar, a vacation town on the Atlantic coast south of Buenos Aires, Horacio and Mirtha sang in an amateur music showcase at the Shopping Down Town (Downtown Mall). They decided on the name “Dúo Guefiltefish” just moments before they were scheduled to perform before a large, mixed Jewish and non-Jewish audience. Horacio and Mirtha sang songs in Yiddish and Spanish, and recounted the experience to me as “surprising” because of the enthusiastic reception they received from the large audience.³⁵ By chance, earlier that day, clouds had ruined an afternoon of sun and sand for summer vacationers, who flocked to the mall instead of the beach. Following Mirtha and Horacio’s debut, they decided to seek additional performance opportunities when they returned to Buenos Aires, sticking with the name “guefiltefish,” in honor of the preserved fish ball, customarily served at Passover *seders* (Hebrew: order; a dinner to celebrate Passover) by Ashkenazic Jews. As they state on their website: “...we call ourselves Dúo Guefilefish, so that no matter what is heard or read, there would be no doubt about the type of music we are making”.³⁶

Prior to working full-time as professional musicians, Horacio managed a textile factory that specialized in shirts, and Mirtha worked in the family business in advertising. As Horacio’s business slowed during Argentina’s economic crisis of the early 2000s, he and Mirtha began devoting more and more time to music. In 2002, before their debut in Miramar, Horacio and Mirtha convened weekly singing sessions with fellow congregants at the Temple Comunidad Iobel in La Paternal neighborhood each Friday evening after Shabbat services. Horacio and Mirtha

³⁵ Interview with Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker, Buenos Aires, February 2012.

³⁶ Duo Guefiltefish website, accessed October 2011.
<http://www.duoguefiltefish.com.ar/home.html>

searched for additional participants and advertised this group—a choir they later named *Coro Volver a Empezar*, the New Beginnings Choir—in various synagogues throughout Buenos Aires. At first, they attracted primarily women, and the group sang mostly in Spanish with a little Yiddish and Hebrew, but since then they have since added a handful of male singers. Horacio described the genesis of this *Coro Volver a Empezar* in relation to the economic crisis, explaining that the crisis was the impetus to gather socially and address the personal and professional problems everyone was experiencing individually, but in a collective setting. He narrated as such:

At that point, given the urgency in the city where there were no jobs and no one knew what to do and or what... and well, people were very worried. We faced... we had our problems as well, but at a community level, we began to do activities so that people would be entertained, a little, on Fridays after Shabbat services in the temples. We began in the Temple Iobel on Seguí Street in La Paternal, and when we started there, only a few people had heard about the choir, and by the end, we had seventy people who stayed on Fridays just to play—to do recreational activities. Each time, we would invent—it was a group of four married couples who hung out on Wednesdays to see what we wanted to set up to play—for example, we would play miming games, social games, group games. We bought pizza and split the price. It was absolutely not-for-profit. It wasn't even a very big group. One day, in 2002, we met up and we didn't have anything to do—Mirtha and I were putting together another choir, *Coro Argentina*, and we said, why don't we put together a choir? Let's sing, not exactly put together a choir, but sing. And there were seventy people in it, and it was very nice. The people were very fun, and they asked me if I would direct it.³⁷

The Dúo Guefiltefish and *Coro Volver a Empezar* continued playing shows at the AMIA and throughout the Jewish Argentine community during the early 2000s. By 2006, they had established their act throughout the region, securing a contract to perform regularly during the summer season at the Teatro Sagasti in Punta del Este, Uruguay. Horacio and Mirtha consider this opportunity—finding work abroad—a turning point in their ability to establish themselves as

³⁷ Interview with Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker. Buenos Aires, February 2012. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

full-time, professional musicians.³⁸ Although the first years as full-time musicians were difficult, their status as artists officially sponsored by the AMIA opened many doors for them, and they secured steady jobs with private parties as well as invitations to perform at Jewish community centers, synagogues and other venues in the interior of Argentina. Since establishing their duo, Horacio and Mirtha have performed in Resistencia, Córdoba, Corrientes, Tucumán, Salta, San Juan, Rosario and other former Jewish agricultural colony towns such as Moisesville, Basavilbaso, Villaguay, and Villa Clara, bringing their music to the interior provinces and to the historic Jewish colonies. Since the early 2000s, the Dúo Guefiltefish has played an important role representing Jewish Argentine music at the AMIA and carving out a space for Jewish Argentines to participate in musical life there as a part of the program to reinvigorate the spirit of the institution. In 2007, they were chosen to represent the AMIA as cultural ambassadors on a fundraising trip to Miami to seek donations from the U.S. Jewish community—in many ways a culmination of their work with the AMIA organization. At the Dúo Guefiltefish’s tenth anniversary concert, which they held in the Auditorio AMIA on December 2012, Moshé Korin spoke fondly of the group to open the show: “You should know that Liberman, Zucker—Mirtha and Horacio—are not only singers, great singers from the Coro Kennedy, but they have a spectacular stage presence, giving audiences what they want, and for me, providing great *joy* and *happiness* (my emphasis).”³⁹ The Dúo Guefiltefish has been invited to perform in Latin American countries such as Costa Rica, Bolivia, Chile, as well as in Israel and the United States.

³⁸ Interview with Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker, Buenos Aires, February 2012.

³⁹ Moshé Korin in the Auditorio AMIA. Field Recording. Audiovisual. December 2012.



Figure 2.11 Mirtha Zucker and Horacio Liberman singing in the Auditorio AMIA.
Photo by author.

The Dúo Guefiltefish and their choirs, Volver a Empezar and Coro Ale Brider frequently perform in the AMIA, and on January 24, 2012, I attended a show that drew together all three acts into an espectáculo featuring all three groups. The atmosphere in the Auditorio AMIA was markedly different from the communal singing session the month before in the Café Literario. Although the Coro Ale Brider was also present and performed a few of the same songs such as “Iome Iome,” “Dos ist Idish,” and “Cabaret,” the inclusion of the choir Volver a Empezar, who sings in Spanish, diversified the content beyond Yiddish folksongs. In the Auditorio AMIA, Horacio and Mirtha asserted more central roles in the performance, singing solos and duets such as their song, “Pimpidieta,” a contrafactum composition reworking the lyrics of a well-known song by Pimpinela (an Argentine duo, consisting of Joaquín and Lucía Galán), to teasingly parody the confrontation between a wife concerned about her husband’s cholesterol, and a husband who confesses to the audience his mischievous plan to sneak a pastrami sandwich (see Fig 2.11). Horacio’s performance antics and showmanship, entertaining the audience with his

borscht-belt style stand-up comedy act, served as a departure from the informal program in the Café Literario. On this occasion, the show was less improvised and less participatory, fundamentally more presentational as a performance experience transmitted from the formal stage to an audience, seated far from the stage itself in multi-level auditorium (Turino 2008).



Figure 2.12 Dúo Guefiltefish, Coro Ale Brider (left) and Coro Volver a Empezar (right) in the Auditorio AMIA. Photo by author.

The invocation of memory during the Coro Volver a Empezar's tribute to a fellow choir member who had recently passed away was as a significant example of the varied uses of memory at the AMIA beyond its politically charged uses publicly disseminated in connection with the 1994 bombing. Instead, musicians often connect to the culture of memory by performing musical concerts and shows to express a matter of personal significance. As Horacio announced to the seated audience:

A friend from the Coro Volver a Empezar left us. Well, she didn't actually leave; rather, she passed away, and we were all so hurt when we found out about her passing, and we had this performance [in her honor]. I know that each one of the choir members has been moved. We've had a few very sad days. This, well, today, we'll have to figure this out, but yes, we want you to see a tribute with this song that she...when she first joined the choir, I said, "This song is for her," and I chose her to be the soloist of this song. We are going to put all of our heart and joy into it...And why not just say it?—to pay tribute to her. This is a song from a famous musical comedy, *El Diluvio Que Viene*, and this year, I chose her to sing it, because the same thing happens in choral activities as it does with ants: ants are hard workers, but a single ant can't do the important things that they can all do together. The choir combines the individual qualities of each person and each person is important because of who they are and how they move. And that's how, one plus one, we have the strength a choir.⁴⁰

The song they performed, "Las Hormigas Mueven la Montaña" (The Ants Move the Mountain), from the Italian musical comedy, *El Diluvio Que Viene*, first premiered in Argentina in the late 1970s and continues to be performed there since its original debut. Coro Volver a Empezar's performance of this medium tempo march brought into focus additional facets of the uses of memory at the AMIA. Diana, who had been with the choir since it began ten years ago, took over the solo that evening, looking out into the wide audience and making eye contact with various listeners while moving her head with the phrasing of the verse and singing into a hand held microphone. As she finished the solo, moving into the refrain, four additional choir members joined her at the front of the stage, each grasping hold of one another around the shoulders and adding their voices to Diana's as they sang together gaining intensity in scalar, ascending motion as more choir members joined in singing, moving from the back of the stage to the front, using light choreography of hand gestures to visually punctuate the lyrical themes of solidarity, unity and support within a community from the AMIA stage (see Fig. 2.12).

⁴⁰ Horacio Liberman. Field Recording. Audiovisual. January 24, 2012 in AMIA. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

The Justice of Musical Heritage

From the stage of the AMIA, spectacles of Jewish musical performance make their home in a place of new beginnings itself. After the 1994 bombing, the new building was re-inaugurated and opened to the public on Wednesday, May 26, 1999 on the same spot at Pasteur 633. Costing around 8.5 million pesos, secured through various donors, including national, civic, private sources, philanthropic benefactors, public officials and community leaders helped to reconstruct the physical elements of the eight-story headquarters housing the AMIA organization, the DAIA, the Organización Sionista Argentina (Zionist Organization of Argentina) and the offices of the Chief Rabbi of the Comunidad Israelita Argentina, Rabbi Shlomo Ben Hamu.⁴¹ The inauguration ceremony marked a new era for AMIA activities. As Oscar Hansman, then President of the AMIA stated the evening before the event: “It will be a symbol of the fight against destruction and foreign terrorism that today will renew the demand for justice.” As Rabbi Ben Hamu asserted:

Returning home symbolizes the spirit of our community. It is our demand for life, and it means that even when the 86 victims left a void in our hearts that remains and can never be filled, no bomb will destroy our spirit.⁴²

If returning to the original site of the AMIA symbolized the return of the spirit of the community, musical performance embodies it, creating a sense of home from the inside out. In the halls of the AMIA, musical performances do not always directly reference AMIA’s tragic past to connect to the cultures of memory at this site. In the case of the Coro Volver a Empezar,

⁴¹ Fernando Rodrígues, “Hoy será inaugurada la nueva sede de la AMIA.” *La Nación* (Buenos Aires, Argentina). May 26, 1999. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/139796-hoy-sera-inaugurada-la-nueva-sede-de-la-amia>.

⁴² Ibid. Translation by author.

musicians can engage in a musical process of mourning, one tied not to the tragic history of the bombing but to the inter-workings of their own group. For Alejandra Wila, the AMIA is a place where the Hava Naguila Tango Bar, a site of personal and collective memories, comes to life with a receptive audience seeing a part of their own histories in the story and songs told from the stage. And for many other musicians I was unable to discuss in these pages, performing at the AMIA enlivens the space, refreshing and restoring the place of Jewish Argentine cultural expression at a central institution in Buenos Aires. Although the memory work enacted in the AMIA does not always refer to its traumatic past, the memorial atmosphere permits engaging with memories of the past and of the dead. As Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut argue, musical engagement can open up a social space that they call “the intermundane” to describe how living artists and actors sonically embody the specters of the dead (Stanyek and Piekut 2010). They state:

Deadness produces the resonances and reverances that condition all modes of sonic performance. We engage deadness not as displacement, but as emplacement in layered, rhizophonic sites of enfolded temporalities and spatialities. Within these sites, laborers are corporeal, bodies are always sonic bodies. (*ibid.*: 32)

If Theodor Adorno’s famous quote: “We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer active” resonates in the aftermath of the AMIA bombing, then the spell of the past makes even more critical the memorial labors of musical memory filling this space (Adorno 1986). As Elizabeth Jelin remarks, “at a more general, community, or family level, memory and forgetting, commemoration and recollections become crucial when linked to traumatic political events or to situations of repression and annihilation, or when profound social catastrophes and collective suffering are involved” (Jelin 2003). Regular, ordinary cultural programs—especially musical programming—fill the halls and the hearts of

those longing to renew the Jewish Argentine imaginary and the spirit of the community. If justice is the antonym of oblivion, then it seems that memory, sustained and diffused by the labors of musical performance, provide shape and substance to Jewish heritage at the AMIA.

Chapter Three

Renovación | Renewal

Jewish Argentine Popular Music and the Question of the “Culturally Unique”



Figure 3.1 The Orquesta Kef with the group Cafundó playing at the 2011 'Enciende la Luz' Hanukkah concert in Plaza Oriental de la República Uruguay. Photo by author.

Circulations of Jewish Popular Music in the Americas

In the present chapter, I discuss circulations of Jewish Argentine popular music in Buenos Aires at the intersection between local and global circulations of Latin American popular and folkloric musics in the Americas. Popular music plays an especially important role in Jewish Argentine life, allowing for musicians and audiences to negotiate the concept of tradition, to embolden senses of belonging, and to innovate the aesthetics of Jewish music for audiences in Buenos Aires and beyond. The reinvigoration of Jewish popular music in Buenos Aires at the turn of the twenty-first century brings into focus the processes of transference and transformation in the transmission of Jewish musical ideas, repertoires, and performance practices. At the center

of this chapter is the question of the “cultural uniqueness” of Jewish Argentine popular music—a term originating from U.S. immigration policy language as the legal standard by which P-3 non-immigrant visas are approved and denied for traveling musicians and artists performing to the United States.¹ In 2009, the Orquesta Kef, one of the groups featured in this chapter, was denied a P-3 visa to appear at a concert organized by the Skirball Center of Los Angeles.² The denial of the visa raised important questions related to the adjudication of non-immigrant P-3 visas in the United States; however, it also drew critical attention to the broader intelligibility of Jewish Argentine musical and cultural identities. As such, in this chapter, I discuss how Jewish Argentine musicians negotiate these challenges, examining discourses of hybridity, cosmopolitanism, and eclecticism—each their own aperture for approaching musical difference and continuity—to understand how and what these Jewish Argentine groups do rhetorically, sonically, and gesturally to renew Jewish musical “tradition” in Buenos Aires.

Groups like the Orquesta Kef, musician Simja Dujov, among others, are able to address Jewish Argentine musical tradition and innovation by embodying memory to harness and challenge nostalgia to foster cultural intimacies as an affective bridge to renew the connection between musical performance and affect for Jewish and non-Jewish publics. But, how, precisely, do Jewish Argentine performers renew the Argentine musical imagination in the first decade of the twenty-first century? How do they innovate Jewish sound? How do these performance groups create new spaces for diverse Jewish Argentine publics for religious and cultural

¹ Miriam Jordan, “Send Us Your Tired, Your Poor, but Only If They’re ‘Culturally Unique,’” *Wall Street Journal*. December 11, 2009. Accessed March 21, 2013.

² See Matter of Skirball Cultural Center, decided May 15, 2012 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Administrative Appeals Office.

expression? In the chapter, I relate these questions to the musical forms these performance groups embody, as well as to wider discussions of Jewish and Latin American music.

By situating the work of Jewish Argentine popular musicians within the greater political and social contexts of the post-dictatorship era during which Jewish Argentine popular musical sound began to emerge as a commercial practice, I connect Jewish Argentine popular music to two significant movements: 1) the rapid implementation and disintegration of the neoliberal project in Argentina, coupled with the influx of foreign imports and new practices of consumerism and consumption under the government of President Carlos Menem (1989-1999); and 2) the commercial project of “world music” and renewed interest in cultural heritage taking off in the West in the 1980s, influencing the emergence of the North American klezmer revival project that led to the re-imagination of klezmer and Jewish music around the world (Slobin 2000, 2006; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002; Bohlman 2004; Waligórska 2013). While klezmer references a particular Jewish musical experience of the traveling popular musician performing at weddings throughout the Eastern Europe, in many ways klezmer has since become a metonym for Jewish music, obfuscating the diverse and different musical repertoires associated with “Jewish music” (Bohlman 2004). While signaling Jewishness, klezmer often fails to fully describe the stylistic elements, musical concerns, and performance practices of Jewish-identified musical groups working between existing commercial and academic categories of music (Barzel 2015).

In the 1990s, in Buenos Aires, César Lerner and Marcelo Moguilevsky translated the North American klezmer project to Argentina, re-inventing Jewish Argentine musical heritage through their musical works. Their impact on renewing Jewish musical heritage, influenced in part by the music of Giora Feidman, in Argentina has been significant, jump-starting a process of

the localization of popular Jewish music repertoires while training new musicians in these styles.

While Lerner and Moguilevsky once performed in weddings, at synagogues (namely Comunidad Amijai), and in bars, concert halls, and the AMIA throughout Buenos Aires, over the past ten years they have ceased performing in lifecycle events to focus on recording albums as the “dúo Lerner y Moguilevsky” and playing in formal, presentational settings in concert halls and world Jewish music festivals in Latin America, North America and Europe.³

The return to democracy and the neoliberal project in Argentina at the end of the twentieth century profoundly changed how Argentines related to the nation. As critic Beatriz Sarlo writes, reflecting on the economic crisis that resulted from the aggressive institution of neoliberalism:

The institutions that produced nationality have become deteriorated or have lost all meaning. Other forms of identity have come to the forefront, ones that already existed, but that never before transcended the voids of belief to include those who would otherwise be abandoned like they do now. A plural nation did not spring forth from the upsurge of identities, but rather a pulsating survival.” (Sarlo 2010 [2001]: 18–19)⁴

In the years leading up to the crisis and in the years that soon followed, popular musics reclaimed a central role in performing national and ethnic identity as a fractured nation searching for meaning (Luker 2007). As ethnomusicologist Morgan Luker argues, the concept of “*renovación*” (“renovation” or “renewal”) “consists of drawing upon genre conventions, stylistic details, and musical repertoires from previous periods of tango history and incorporating that material into current practices” (Luker 2007:68). While Luker focuses on how “the past is sonically brought to bear on the present, which, in turn, is heard as a commentary on the past” in the renewal of tango

³ For instance, Lerner and Moguilevsky performed at the Museum of Jewish Heritage as an invited guest at the “Kulturfest” music series in New York City on June 14, 2015.

⁴ See Beatriz Sarlo, *Tiempo Pasado: Notas sobre el cambio de una cultura*, 2nd edition (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2010), 18–19. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

as a “national” music, likewise, Jewish Argentine musicians responded to the difficulties of the 1990s and 2000s through renewed engagement with popular Jewish music. As I discuss in the first two chapters of this dissertation, the impact of the bombings of the Israeli Embassy (1992) and the AMIA (1994) inspired introspection and exploration of Jewish Argentine identity in Buenos Aires. The search for a distinctive Jewish Argentine music in the early 2000s not only tapped into world music movements taking place outside of Argentina, but it was a part of a broader national preoccupation with the renewal of Argentine national identity itself.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, forms of sentimentality and nostalgia played a central role in re-shaping the social and political contours of music’s relationship to the politics of memory and everyday life in Argentina after the 2001 economic crisis. The pervasive forms of memory and nostalgia saturated porteño attitudes towards politics and culture as a form of reflection on the past and action exerted on the present, responding to, while resisting, “official histories” produced by governing bodies and major institutions. In Jewish Argentine popular musical performance, emergent forms of memory and nostalgia emplace the past as a paradoxical site of both failure and hope. These performance practices tie together the threads of public memory with genealogies of memory illuminating different modes of Jewish Argentine experience. While referring to commercial fields of music production and consumption, the term “*popular*” in Spanish also references collectivities and folk expressions of non-elites classes (Ochoa Gautier 2001).

“Cultural intimacy,” writes anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, is “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative

irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation" (Herzfled 2005: 3). Ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes utilizes Herzfeld's theory to examine the role of popular music in Turkish history, showing how popular musical taste is sometimes at odds with community values (Stokes 2010). By analyzing the importance of musicians and songs that "have slipped between genres, locales, and historical moments," Stokes focuses on the constitutive forces commanded by cultural intimacy that belie the distances and silences of cultural strangeness in the greater public sphere (Stokes 2010: 31).

In Argentina, spectacle, that is, shows, demonstrations, exhibitions, and other public performances assert a public presence in the everyday fabric of civic society. These social and cultural mobilizations establish public spaces for musical performance where the dramas of race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and difference play out in the city (Taylor 1997). Sentimentality in national and municipal life transforms the culture of public spectacle emerging through Jewish Argentine musical labors, locating opportunities for musical renovation often based in musical repertoires simultaneously exuding a certain "pastness" in musical presentations that are distinctly contemporary. From the platform of popular musical engagement, Jewish Argentine musicians not only reshape and innovate Jewish musical sound, they also redefine the public meanings of Jewish Argentineness in everyday life while showcasing how the category of ethnicity, as a contemporary tool of self-definition, operates on individual and communal levels in post-crisis Argentine music. In the early twenty-first century, Jewish Argentine musicians are just one of many groups revisiting questions of race, ethnicity, and heritage in contemporary Buenos Aires to reclaim a central role for musical performance, drawing on repertoires of the musical past to perform the state and the city as a nation of both dislocation and renewal.

This chapter focuses on all-male performers for two main reasons: 1) no all-female groups have yet to emerge in Argentina performing with the same regularity as these all-male groups. While female musicians such as Zoila Piterman and Zully Goldfarb are exciting singers in Jewish Argentine (namely Yiddish) circles, they perform less frequently, thereby rendering this popular musical scene one that is notably masculinized.⁵ 2) The second reason why fewer female singers perform regularly on this circuit pertains to *halakhah* (Jewish law) and rabbinic prohibitions disciplining the female voice. In Orthodox Judaism, which makes up a significant portion of the Jewish Argentine special occasions employing musicians in Buenos Aires, the *kol isha* prohibition limits women from being employed as singers. In Orthodox Judaism, this issue stems from the rabbinic debate in the Talmud over *ervah*, or the perception of the “nakedness” of a woman’s voice and the belief that a woman’s voice elicits sexual desire in men, originating from the interpretation of the line from Song of Songs 2:14: “Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance comely.” This prohibition restricts men from listening to a woman’s (singing) voice and restricts women from singing in a place where a man might hear her sing.⁶ Music, however, remains an important means for inspiring spirituality in ultra-Orthodox religious practice among Hasidic Jews as a marker of identity (Koskoff 2001), in the negotiation of the borders and boundaries of musical propriety and modernity in Orthodox Judaism (Cypess 2010), in recordings and the use of recorded music in

⁵ For instance, Zully Goldfarb’s elaborate, highly choreographed tangos in Yiddish shows are exemplary of female participation on stage in Buenos Aires. In addition, Paloma Schachman, a clarinetist, is another example of a young female musician working within these Jewish Argentine sound worlds. However, groups such as the duo César Lerner and Marcelo Moguilevsky, the Orquesta Kef and other bands produced by its production company, Sherbamate Productora, musician Simja Dujo, the hipster electronica band the Bar Mitz Midis, among other groups consist almost exclusively of men. Interview with Marcelo Moguilevsky. May 21, 2013. Interview with César Lerner. March 19, 2013.

⁶ See: Rachel Adelstein, “Braided Voices: Women Cantors in non-Orthodox Judaism” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013).

public events (Kligman 2002), and as a form of representation of Hasidism among non-Hasidic Jews in Yiddish musical repertoires (Wood 2007). Although kol isha prohibitions are not practiced in non-Orthodox Judaism, bands like Orquesta Kef that perform regularly at lifecycle events in Orthodox communities are aware of these restrictions.⁷ Nevertheless, few female singers and instrumentalists appear to work professionally on the Jewish Argentine music scene, perhaps also due to the music model of the big, all-male ensemble established by Orquesta Kef, which has led to a proliferation of new bands like Sher up!, Samaj, and others, who model their ensemble and sound after the Orquesta Kef.⁸

The musical labors of the Orquesta Kef and DJ and musician, Simja Dujov reposition Jewish Argentines and Jewish Argentine music as something audibly “culturally unique” in performances and recordings. The group Orquesta Kef, a big-band musical collective that plays special events and festivals organized by individual families as well as Jewish institutions, integrates a lexicon of Jewish sound rooted in the East European popular musical vernacular with the Latin American dance music repertory (see Fig. 3.1). Orquesta Kef’s business model of training and rotating musicians through their ranks to incorporate them into the Kef brand satisfies the high demand for their musical services for weddings, bar and bat mitzvah parties, and other celebrations. DJ and musician Simja Dujov, who performs regularly for Jewish organizations as well as in the nightlife scene in Buenos Aires, positions himself as a self-

⁷ For more on kol isha debates and the female singing voice in Judaism, see: Ellen Koskoff, “Miriam Sings Her Song: The Self and the Other in Anthropological Discourse,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 149–63.

⁸ Of course, some exceptions exist, and musicians such as Paloma Schachman, a clarinetist, plays klezmer repertory and is a student of Marcelo Moguilevsky. Furthermore, the explosion of “Balkan” music in Buenos Aires involves a number of exceptional female performers. Legendary singers like Rosita Londner, the Polish-born, Yiddish-theater star is a key figure in the Jewish Argentine musical imaginary, while other women performed regularly in the Yiddish theater scene, which experienced its heyday in the 1950s.

consciously Jewish Argentine representative of electronically-mediated Jewish Latin American music directed toward “*cosmopolatino/a*”⁹ youth audiences and consumers. Orquesta Kef and Simja Dujov put Jewish Argentine expression in Buenos Aires into a transcultural hemispheric perspective, bringing into focus the issues of the intelligibility of Jewish performers in and of Latin America. Throughout this chapter, I explore the concept of ‘culturally unique’ as an entry point into the Jewish Argentine popular musical experience—a small scene that exists within the greater panorama of popular and folkloric music performed in Buenos Aires. As an aesthetic critique mediating emic as well as etic public representations of Jewishness and Judaism in contemporary Buenos Aires, these musicians encourage cultural intimacies not only within Jewish Buenos Aires, but also beyond it.

Situating the “Culturally Unique”: Jewish Popular Music and Cosmopolitanism in/of Latin America

In 2009, the klezmer band Orquesta Kef was invited to perform at the “Fiesta Hanukkah” celebration at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, California by former Director of Programming, Jordan Peimer. After assembling a full North American tour including an appearance in Orlando at the NBA halftime game of the Orlando Magic and performances in Mexico and Central America, Orquesta Kef was forced to abandon their plans to play in the

⁹ As musicologist Deborah Pacini-Hernandez writes: “A Web search for ‘cosmopolatino’ turns up similar definitions referencing ‘young, urban, and bilingual [individuals who] are fusing aspects of Latin America with other global trends to create a unique cultural space in New York and other cities.’ Such definitions do not, however, make any references to race or to the racial locations of cumbia’s musicians or fans” (106). See: Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, “From Cumbia Colombiana to Cumbia Cosmopolitana: Roots, Routes, Race and Mestizaje.” In *Oye Como Va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 106–41. Furthermore, Claire Frisbie, a co-founder of the website Remezcla: Latino Culture and Event Guide, attributes the term *cosmopolatino/a* to art historian Maria-Laura Steverlynck and describes it as an insider category used within the New York Latin Alternative arts scene to discuss a particular audience of music fans defined as “cool, urban(e), bilingual Latinos in the mid-2000s.” Interview with Claire Frisbie, New York City, April 2010.

United States when the US Citizenship and Immigration Services denied their request for P-3 performers visas. After providing ample documentation, thus fulfilling the evidentiary requirements set forth by the US government, the adjudicator of the application stated that the band and their music had failed to meet the standard of “culturally unique” according to section 101(a)(15)(P)(iii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(P)(iii) (2006). For the Orquesta Kef this was not just disappointing, but also confusing. As the first big-band ensemble in Argentina performing the aggressive, beat-driven, Jewish Argentine music that channels East European rhythms and melodic motifs while transitioning into and out of Latin musical rhythms and harmonies with lyrics performed in Spanish, Yiddish, and Hebrew, the Orquesta Kef believed their performance aesthetic was special. This ruling, a small moment in a longer history of Latin American musical migrations within the Americas, called into question, not only the place of Jewish music in Latin America and Latin America in Jewish music, but also the standard of “culturally unique”—a burden of proof problematic in its overly simplistic and reductive approach to identity and artistic expression.

After months of preparation, the Orquesta Kef was disappointed and bitter about the denial of the visas, choosing to cancel the tour to North and Central America altogether.¹⁰ Over time, the band members could have forgotten the incident, moving forward with their busy performance schedule in Buenos Aires, however, immigration journalist Miriam Jordan—a writer for the *Wall Street Journal*—published an article appearing on December 11, 2009, spotlighting Orquesta Kef’s experience with the P-3 visa adjudication process while criticizing the application procedures for the class P-3 temporary visas for non-immigrant applicants.¹¹ At once exposing the arbitrariness of the law by exploiting the “exoticism” of Jewish Latin

¹⁰ Interview with Gastón Mohadeb, March 22, 2013.

¹¹ Ibid.

American subjectivity, Jordan Peimer of the Skirball Center of Los Angeles publically mused his frustration: “How more culturally specific can you get than Jewish music of Latin America?”¹²

With this issue in the public spotlight, the US Department of Homeland Security, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Administrative Appeals Office offered a surprising decision more than two years after the incident on May 15, 2012. They overturned the original visa denial. The P-3 non-immigrant visa filed on behalf of the Orquesta Kef by the Skirball Center was approved, forever tying the musical legacy of the Orquesta Kef to US cultural policy and immigration reform. Although the ruling was largely a symbolic gesture (occurring nearly three years after the Fiesta Hanukkah party), the decision was accompanied by a full clarification and reconceptualization of the definition of cultural uniqueness. Originally the Orquesta Kef did not meet the original burden of evidence because they performed a “hybrid or fusion style of music” not considered to be “culturally unique to one particular country, nation, society, class, ethnicity, religion, tribe or other group of persons,” but adjustments to the law expanded the definition of cultural unique so that it was “not limited to traditional art forms, but may include artistic expression that is deemed to be a hybrid or fusion of more than one culture or region”¹³ Furthermore, the new law states:

- 1) Congress did not define the term “culturally unique,” as used in section 101(a)(15)(P)(iii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(P)(iii) (2006), leaving reasonable construction of that term to the expertise of the agency charged with adjudicating P-3 nonimmigrant visa petitions.

¹² Miriam Jordan, “Send Us Your Tired, Your Poor, but Only If They’re ‘Culturally Unique,’” *Wall Street Journal*. December 11, 2009. Accessed March 21, 2013.

¹³ Matter of Skirball Cultural Center, decided May 15, 2012 by the US Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Administrative Appeals Office.

2) The term “culturally unique,” as defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(p)(3) (2012), is not limited to traditional art forms, but may include artistic expression that is deemed to be a hybrid or fusion of more than one culture or region.

3) As the regulatory definition provides for the cultural expression of a particular “group of persons,” the definition may apply to beneficiaries whose unique artistic expression crosses regional, ethnic, or other boundaries.

4) The regulatory definition of “culturally unique” calls for a case-by-case factual determination.

5) The petitioner bears the burden of establishing by a preponderance of the evidence that the beneficiaries’ artistic expression, while drawing from diverse influences, is unique to an identifiable group of persons with a distinct culture; it is the weight and quality of evidence that establishes whether or not the artistic expression is “culturally unique”.¹⁴

Recognizing that the US Congress’s failure to define fully the term “culturally unique” did not provide clear guidelines for contracted adjudicators to make informed decisions, lawmakers added language to update the process, noting that artists and entertainers arriving in the US may be individuals or groups engaged in work as performers, developers, interpreters, representatives, coaches, or teachers of “traditional, ethnic, folk, cultural, musical, theatrical, or artistic performance or presentation” for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.¹⁵ While opening up new ways of defining musical expression, these categories also imposed new challenges. By endorsing so-called “hybrid” or “fusion” forms of artistic expression, this new legislation once again illuminated the uneasy relation between artistic expression and personal embodiment. While artistic fusions highlighting musical encounters of the globalized era have been celebrated for showcasing performers otherwise without access to performance opportunities on the global stage, these sonic fusions have been criticized for their superficiality

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

as empty postmodern pastiche, bringing to light questions about the power of musical representation (Feld 2000; Meintjes 1990).

Hybridity, with its conceptual roots in biology and relation to processes of human and species categorization, has also been criticized for constructing and perpetuating racecraft rather than undermining and dismantling racial ideologies (Douglas 2002 [1966]; Hannerz 1987; Bowker and Star 1999; Palmié 2006, 2007, 2013; Fields, K. and Fields, B. 2012). Throughout Latin America, discourses of hybridity, including *mestizaje* (mixture) and creolization, have been critiqued for ignoring economic disparity while celebrating mixed racial heritage in relation to histories of colonization, conquest, slavery, and racism in the region (Wade 2000; Hale 2005, 1996; Vianna 1999). While Jews in Latin America do not easily fit within discourses of *mestizaje* because of their lateral or peripheral position within racial and religious hierarchies, musical projects direct attention toward the limits of discourses of race and ethnicity in the region, highlighting the current moment of what anthropologist Stephan Palmié, refers to as the “‘post-plural’ conception of human sociality and culture” (Palmié 2013: 464).

This update to US cultural policy and immigration law reframes important questions that have been raised in anthropology and ethnomusicology over the past few decades: What is a cultural unit? Is there violence in the proliferation of discourses of hybridity, and does the celebration of hybridity simply mask the aesthetic nuances and subtleties of musical sound performed by those occupying “peripheral” subjectivities extant social and economic inequalities? Does talk of hybrids simply reinforce the ideas of purity? As Palmié writes:

No doubt our world may truly be marked by an unprecedented degree of articulations between heterogeneous cultural forms and practices, a proliferation of seemingly novel forms of identification, and new ways of negotiating difference. Although humans have been moving across the globe ever since they started walking upright and left Africa, it would be hard to argue against such a claim. Nevertheless, it is not at all self-evident how

we have come to be aware of this or why it should matter to us. (Palmié 2013: 464)

Musical performance draws attention to recent innovations in the Argentine popular imaginary, confronting the ways in which society, governments, and individuals negotiate ontologies of the self through artistic expression. For Orquesta Kef band members and Skirball Center administrators, the question of cultural uniqueness was not an abstract philosophical issue, but rather a real challenge: a trip was canceled, revenue was lost, and prestige was unrealized because of a misunderstanding of their subjectivity and personhood as a site of music making. The imposition of an evaluative logic recognizing parts instead of whole entities—a logic of difference predicated on historical constructions of race and ethnicity, culture and nature, in the West—raises significant questions about the interpretation of forms and functions of musicians' migrations, opening up an array of epistemological concerns about how to approach musics and musicians in and of the “world.” But the Orquesta Kef incident was not the first time this issue had come before the US Congress. As anthropologist Anahí Viladrich writes:

In 2006, this escalating situation [that of artist visa denials] led the renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who made Astor Piazzolla’s tango music internationally famous in the 1990s, to testify in front of the US House Committee on Government Reform. This was part of a strategic appeal to force the American government to ease entry for foreign musicians. Ma spoke on behalf of the musicians joining the Silk Road Project, a company he founded more than a decade ago, which brings together artists from across Central Asia and the Middle East. His main argument highlighted the pernicious consequences that US visa delays and rejections have caused the global artistic community. (Viladrich 2006: 132)¹⁶

On behalf of the Orquesta Kef, the petitioner submitted a supporting letter from cultural theorist Josh Kun, who described the band as the “leading exponents and innovators of South

¹⁶ See: Anahí Viladrich, *More Than Two to Tango: Argentine Tango Immigrants in New York City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 132.

American klezmer” and “one of the world’s most interesting and important ensembles working within the new styles of klezmer music.”¹⁷ Claiming that “while it originates in Eastern Europe, it is a music [of] change and transformation and has migrated to different parts of the world through the Jewish Diaspora.”¹⁸ In twentieth-century Argentina, few living *klezmorim* (klezmer musicians) performed this East European musical repertory in Argentina until the late 1980s when it arrived to Argentina as a result of the appearance of the US-based American klezmer revival, rather than longer trajectories of inter-generational musical transmission. Magdalena Waligórska explains that the term klezmer is the “ Yiddish compound of two Hebrew words: *kley*, meaning a vessel, and *zemer*, meaning a song, klezmer signified initially a musical instrument, later a musician, and finally, also the musical genre” (Waligórska 2013: 2).

For more than two decades, Marcelo Moguilevsky and César Lerner helped initiate an interest in this music in Argentina, nurturing and experimenting with their personal sound to become established musicians of klezmer music arranged for piano, drum, clarinet, and a variety of other wind instruments. They have inspired musicians like the Orquesta Kef and trained numerous other students in East European klezmer musical repertory. Both performers have had successful individual musical careers; yet as the Dúo Moguilevsky, Marcelo Moguilevsky and César Lerner have elevated their style of klezmer performance as concert music in Argentina and on tour in the US, Europe, and Israel. Like in Poland and Germany where non-Jews have appropriated klezmer as a musical symbol of intercultural exchange and “authentic Jewishness” in the absence of a large number of living Jews, Waligórska argues that “Jewish music beame a

¹⁷ See Matter of Skirball Cultural Center, decided May 15, 2012 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Administrative Appeals Office.

¹⁸ Ibid.

source of inspiration for those seeking traces of the lose Jewish world, and a space where ‘Jewishness’ could be dreamed, reinvented, and performed anew” (Waligórska 2013: 4).

The broader use of the term klezmer in the Latin American context has only gained momentum in the 2000s with the 2009 premier of the Kleztival, an international klezmer festival held in São Paulo, Brazil organized by the Instituto da Música Judaica Brasil, an affiliate of the Jewish Music Institute in London, UK. But klezmer, a term coined in English in 1980 in the United States in part to distinguish it from other “heritage musics” is now a widely recognized commercial category tied to both insider and outsider concepts of heritage as a “field of music-making” worldwide (Slobin 2000; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002). Heritage music, a category Kirshenblatt-Gimblett uses to “distinguish between music that is part and parcel of a way of life and music that has been singled out for preservation, protection, enshrinement, and revival” works well in the North American context of highly festivalized and reified, often commercialized presentations of “ethnic” klezmer performance, but in Buenos Aires it fails to account for the ways in which Jewish musicians in Buenos Aires have learned from these revivalists to reassert their own visions and versions of this musical sentiment to establish a local musical idiom based in Yiddish folksongs, Hasidic melodies, Israeli popular songs, and other repertories of Jewish music in Argentina.

Events like the “Enciende la Luz” Chabad Hanukkah party, the Puro Purim concert, and Pesaj Urbano festival—public Jewish holiday events held in Buenos Aires—do not festivalize klezmer for the purpose of revival, but rather Jewish music to carve out city-space to innovate and renew Jewish Argentine cultural expressions. While klezmer is an important part of the musical style and musical education of the Jewish Argentine popular musicians, it is not the only type of music these musicians perform. In fact, while the klezmer repertories bring attention to

Jewish musical repertoires in the sound culture of Buenos Aires, the term is often used to mask the particular repertoires of Jewish music circulating in the repertoire of contemporary Jewish Argentine performance.

“Puro Purim” (Pure Purim) and the Concept of Tradition in the Music of Orquesta Kef



Figure 3.2 The Orquesta Kef at the Puro Purim Festival in the Plazoleta Pugliese, Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires. March 3, 2013. Photo by author.

The cab approached Plazoleta Pugliese circling around the one-way streets near Parque Centenario until it reached the heart of the middle-class neighborhood, Villa Crespo. The southeastern corner of the intersection between Avenida Corrientes and Avenida Scalabrini Ortiz, behind the bust of the legendary tango composer Osvaldo Pugliese, is a Jewish space marked not by overt symbols of religious Judaica but rather by iconography proudly symbolizing the Jewish porteños' adoration for two beloved cultural forms: tango and *fútbol* (soccer). The

common (if unsubstantiated) myth of Pugliese's Jewish origins is highlighted by the visual juxtaposition of a faded mural of the team crest of Villa Crespo's local fútbol team—Club Atlético Atlanta—painted on the side wall of a corner building. This space, mostly hidden from view, is the scene of the annual Festival Puro Purim, a location visually obscured from the two main streets but from which the music of Orquesta Kef echoed loudly into the busy intersection on March 3, 2013 when I arrived to attend the event (see Fig. 3.2). Setting the scene for the festivities while delimiting the festive space, hundreds of people gathered in the Plazoleta Pugliese to celebrate the holiday of Purim with the music of Orquesta Kef.

Purim is often called “the strangest Jewish holiday” by the Jews (Rubenstein 1992). It is a lively festival that scholars such as Jeffrey L. Rubenstein have suggested has roots in non-Jewish ritual celebrations such as the Greek Pithoigia holiday or the Babylonian Sakaia festival (Rubenstein 1992: 247–48). In Jewish traditions throughout the world, Purim recounts the story of Esther, who is said to have saved the Jews of Shushan (in ancient Persia) from the genocidal wrath of Haman, her husband King Ahasueras's advisor. Esther's story appears in the Book of Esther—the *Megillah*—a part of the *Tanakh* (Hebrew bible) found in the *Ketuvim* (Writings). As Rubenstein notes: “In many regions throughout the world, Purim celebrations include parading an ordinary citizen in the garb of a king, observing a fast, selection of a queen, execution of a malefactor, and distribution of gifts” (Rubenstein 1992: 249). Arguing that Purim should be understood as a “time of liminality,” following anthropologist Victor Turner, Rubenstein highlights the issues of “communitas,” or the shared experience of liminality, at play in the Purim rituals of the inversion of social roles and status, play-making and costuming (Rubenstein 1992: 249).

In Buenos Aires, the Puro Purim celebration opens up a space for experimentation with the structures of liminality implied and imposed in the modern city. It constructs a Jewish space to explore and to project cultural identity while naturalizing cultural difference through musical performance and dance as a hallmark of inhabiting the city-space itself. Musicians play an important role in deciding the contours of these relationships and the ways in which they are experienced in the city. As such, Jewish Argentine musicians in Buenos Aires participate in these public events in important ways. At Puro Purim, Orquesta Kef not only creates a musical forum to connect Jewish and non-Jewish space, but the ensemble denatures social distinctions within the Jewish community itself, embodying what Rubenstein describes “reversals” and “communitas,” utilizing the Turnerian analytical categories (Rubenstein 1992: 249). In the Puro Purim festivities, children dress as adult kings and queens from the Bible, religious and non-religious Jews gather together, costumed adults mix with those dressed normally, dancing replaces walking, and music substitutes silence.

Puro Purim, a public concert and parade organized by the AMIA, was established to increase the visibility of Jewish Argentine culture and Judaism in Buenos Aires to support Jewish participation in events and to represent Jewish culture to non-Jews.¹⁹ Like the Feria Internacional del Libro (The International Book Fair), Puro Purim is an AMIA sponsored event that represents Jewish Argentine cultural forms in Buenos Aires. On March 3, 2013, which marked the tenth anniversary of the Puro Purim event, hundreds of Jewish families and individuals arrived to partake in the free event and entertainment. Each year, more and more people attend Puro Purim, especially after the AMIA incorporated families with children into the

¹⁹ Interview with Gabriela Wilensky. March 19, 2014.

event by sponsoring a costume parade.²⁰ In 2013, Puro Purim was convened almost a week after the actual celebration of the religious holiday in order to avoid conflicts with Purim events scheduled in local synagogues in order to facilitate the participation of families with small children in Sunday school.²¹

On March 3, 2013, after I had taken photographs and listened to the band play in the plaza, I recognized a few members of the Coro Ale Brider and Coro Volver a Empezar, the two adult choirs directed by Horacio Liberman and Mirtha Zuker. Liliana, a member of the Coro Volver a Empezar, told me that she and her friends come every year. Her friend, David, reveled in his ability to “cut loose” nearby, donning a plastic wig and beret while taking lots of pictures all evening long. As Kef’s up-tempo, loud, beat heavy tunes continued into the evening, a spontaneous dance circle led by the choir members and their friends formed in the space between the stage and the folding chairs. As the dancers circled, a single dancer would step forward lifting his or her clasped hands into the air, maneuvering toward the center of the circle with his or her arms extended, and dropping them down again after returning to his or her place in the circle. Liliana and the other choir members brought me into the dance circle, filling the plaza with the sounds, sways, and steps of collective Jewish music making, bringing our bodies together in step before parting ways later in the evening (see Figs. 3.3–3.4). As dance ethnographer Rebecca Rossen argues, “dancing Jewish is an action that embraces the fluidity and complexity of Jewish identity;” it is a way to connect and arrange Jewish bodies collectively through dance (Rossen 2014: 3).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.



Figures 3.3–3.4 Dancing in the Plazoleta Pugliese, Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires. March 3, 2014.
Photos by author.

That evening, as I left the plaza area through the gate monitored by AMIA security personnel at the exit on Avenida Corrientes, I headed toward the bus stop to return to my apartment in San Telmo. Stepping onto the number 24 *colectivo* (public bus) along with other people leaving the Puro Purim event, I sat down next to an older woman who started chatting with me. She wanted to know if I had been at the party, mentioning that she thought she had seen me there. Yes, I told her, explaining that I was writing a dissertation about Jewish musical performance in Buenos Aires and answering her second question, affirming that I was also Jewish—an insider on the basis of faith. She smiled shaking her head up and down, not missing a beat by telling me how excited she was about the music during the event. She introduced herself as Dora, explaining that she was from Avellaneda, a town south of La Boca in the Buenos Aires Province, and although she had arrived to meet a friend at Puro Purim, she never did find her. “Did you hear ‘Hava Naguila’ when we were leaving the event?” she asked. “The traditional music really moves everyone,” she declared to me smiling. I smiled back, but her comment surprised me. Far from “traditional,” I realized that Orquesta Kef had come to stand for tradition in Jewish music in Argentina. Even though their modern aesthetic utilizing Latin American

instruments (especially hand percussion) to play cumbias, reggae, ska, zambas, tangos, and other Latin American popular musical forms arranged with the melodies and vocal traditions of East European Jews, including freilakhs, bulgarishes, shers, and other Jewish dances, their music exemplifies a contemporary rather than an “ancient” aesthetic.

“Música es sentimiento” (music is feeling) she told me, noting that music had the capacity to get everyone moving, echoing Raymond Williams’s oft-cited work on the “structures of feeling,” by which he offered a “cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements [affective elements of consciousness and relationships] and their connection in a generation or period”²² (cited in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002: 129–30). The music of Orquesta Kef provided Dora with a connection to her Jewish identity through the idea of musical tradition. Dora’s remarks pointed to a fundamental aspect of the “rules” of performance: “to defend the activity against encroachment from the outside” (Schechner 2010: 13).²³ Arguing that performance activities are all “traditional in the most basic sense” because special rules governing the activities of the world “apart from everyday life” are actually central and not peripheral to everyday life, performance theorist Richard Schechner suggests how performance contexts like the Puro Purim festival are spaces where musicians reinscribe senses

²² As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, speaking about the collected essays in Mark Slobin’s edited volume, *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): “In the hiatus between the old and the new players can be found keys to changes of sensibility that have made today’s scene possible. Whatever their ostensible subject, the contributors to this book sound the sensibilities specific to the klezmer phenomenon of the last twenty-five years. They show ‘klezmer music’ to be a powerful index of what Raymond Williams has called ‘changing structures of feeling.’ Williams distinguishes feeling (“meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt”) from ideology (“formally held and systematic beliefs”), noting that they are of course interrelated in practice” (129–30).

²³ This article originally appears as “Approaches to Theory/Criticism” in *TDR, The Drama Review* 10, no. 4 (1966).

of tradition even when performance practices they utilize challenge the very concept of tradition itself (Schechner 2010: 12–14).

The notion of tradition among Jews in Buenos Aires is fluid, marking a perceived break with the past and the intentional effort to connect the present to a longer Jewish past, as anthropologist Fernando Fischman argues (Fischman 2008: 45). As Fischman states, the word “*tradición*” (tradition) and its derivatives function as a mode to indicate change: “That is, that which is characterized as ‘traditional’ is representative of that which varies” (*ibid.*). Fischman further explains how religion and tradition are understood as different forms of Jewish Argentine embodiment and practice:

The notion of ‘tradition’ constantly comes up in conversational discourse as a substitute for religion. In general, it affirms that ‘the home’ (the family of origin) is not ‘religious,’ but ‘traditional,’ or that the person is not ‘religious,’ but ‘traditionalist.’ The difference is established based on knowledge of Jewish religious rules, and the observance of difference supposes these rules to include a series of obligatory religious practices, whereas ‘tradition’ would not be coercive and would leave room for those uses to be reformulated. As such, it manifests a conscious decision to continue with certain practices, but stripped of their religious mandate, causing religion to be relativized, and “tradition” to be separated from religion as a cultural practice of another order. (Fischman 2006: 46)²⁴

The contradictory meaning implied by the use of the word tradition in Buenos Aires recognizes ruptures in Jewish Argentine culture from Jewish Argentine religious practice, yet remaining in continuity with an imagined memorial past (*ibid.*). Performance forums provide the musical backdrop for the Orquesta Kef to participate in these processes of remembrance as an assertion of “traditionalist” values (*ibid.*).

²⁴ An error in the original text should read “deslindada.” See: Fernando Fischman, “Religiosos, no; tradicionalistas, sí: Un acercamiento a la noción de tradición en judíos argentinos.” *Revista Sambatón* 1 (2006): 46. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

The Origins of the Orquesta Kef

The Orquesta Kef is a musical ensemble that performs Jewish music in Buenos Aires, touring throughout Latin America with occasional performances in the United States and Israel. The word “*kef*” (קֵפֶן), meaning “joy” or “fun,” is Hebrew slang borrowed from Arabic. The Orquesta Kef marks April 9, 2001 as its founding birth date, tracing their history back to their first concert on that day—which the founders described as charmingly bad—but personally significant. While each band member was skilled on their respective instruments and had played in a handful of pop, rock, and funk bands they formed as teenagers in the 1990s, it was their first time playing through the Yiddish folksong and klezmer repertoires. Rafael and Gastón told me that they were deeply moved by the personal connection they felt to the musical sounds emerging from their instruments.²⁵ For Rafael and Gastón, these songs and melodies provided them with a sense of continuity to their family histories—a heritage imagined and remembered in the archive and repertoire of East European Jewish music. Soon after playing at Rafa’s wedding in the early 2000s, Gastón got the idea to officially start a Jewish music band to play at weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, anniversaries, and other events at the suggestion of his Aunt Sarita and a friend who worked as a professional wedding DJ.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, few special events Jewish bands performed regularly in Buenos Aires aside from a few soloists, some duos, including the esteemed musicians César Lerner and Marcelo Mogilevsky, and a handful of trios. However, there were no large ensembles playing Jewish music in Buenos Aires at the time. Ultimately, this opportunity to provide the Jewish community with a musical service compelled Mohadeb, Surijón and their friends to give it a try, launching a career by taking advantage of an opportunity to perform at

²⁵ Interview with Gastón Mohadeb, March 22, 2013.

Jewish special events parties in Buenos Aires. Gastón refers to this original group, consisting of Lionel Mohadeb (percussion), Ariel Liberczuck (keyboards and arrangements), Iván Barenboim (clarinet and saxophone), Cristián Martinelli (trumpet and trombone), Alberto Mirchuk (vocalist), and himself (percussion, vocals and organization), as the “first generation” Orquesta Kef—the founding members who established the band’s now iconic sound.²⁶

The Orquesta Kef is actually just one band among many performing groups operated by the Sherbamate Productora—the production company run by Gastón and Rafael. Although the band started with seven members, they now have up to eighteen musicians on their roster at any time, and many of these musicians perform with more than one of the Sherbamate groups. Some of the musicians are more flexible having played in the styles featured by the Sherbamate Productora, and as such, they play in more than one band. Other musicians play in one particular style with a single ensemble. The Orquesta Kef prepares multiple people to play the same parts, anticipating double bookings for weddings and parties by maintaining deep ranks of rotating musicians musically prepared for any occasion. As such, the bands do not always play with musicians they know well, performing the responsibilities of their instrumental part during any given performance. If the musicians do not know the klezmer, Hasidic, Yiddish folk song, and Latin American dance musical repertory before arriving to play with the group, they learn it quickly in rehearsals and in performances. Gastón tells me this is the most difficult part, to find the time to teach the musicians new repertory and to involve them in the different shows to build their flexibility playing the different repertoires. The band itself has become a vessel of musical training of Jewish musical tradition in Buenos Aires.

²⁶ Interview with Rafael Surijón in the Orquesta Kef offices. May 6, 2013.

Orquesta Kef is energetic, aggressive, and all male. As one band member explained to me during a comedy and music show at the Boris Café, he thought it was because the band plays at many Orthodox events where women would be prohibited from singing because of kol isha, but that frankly he really did not know. In general, he suspected that female musicians were less interested in playing with Orquesta Kef because of the long hours they spend performing late into the evening. He noted that he often agrees to perform at gigs at the last minute to earn extra money and that working in the unpredictable world of late-night entertainment can be difficult because of the sexualized environment.²⁷ According to musician Gastón Mohadeb, Orquesta Kef's performance ethos is distinctive to Argentina and Latin America, making possible the activity of creating and sustaining "Jewish music" in Buenos Aires—that is, placing Jewish sound in the greater panorama of Argentine musical forms; Jewish Argentine music, into the greater panorama of global Jewish musics. As Gastón told me:

The truth is that Kef is unique. There aren't other bands...lots of times what happens is that we meet people who tell us, "No, but in the United States there are thousands of klezmer bands that are doing the same thing." No, they aren't doing the same thing because the way we work is very different, because we have Argentine roots, Latino roots, with that mix that the country has, just like almost all countries have a mix, but we're, we're always (later...I'm going to have you listen to material from the latest Kef album) and we're mixing with local stuff more and more often. We *don't just make "klezmer"; we make Jewish music* (my emphasis).²⁸

The concept of cosmopolitanism is relevant here along to two different axes of meaning. As ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino argues: "Particular cosmopolitan lifeways, ideas, and technologies are not specific to a single or a few neighboring locales, but are situated in many sites which are not necessarily in geographical proximity; rather, they are connected by different

²⁷ Personal communication with Orquesta Kef musician. April 13, 2013.

²⁸ Interview with Gastón Mohadeb, March 22, 2013. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

forms of media, contact, and interchanges (what I call ‘cosmopolitan loops’) (Turino 2000: 8). Thus, cosmopolitanism can “refer to objects, ideas, and cultural positions that are widely diffused throughout the world and yet are specific only to certain portions of the populations within given countries” (Turino 2000: 7). The issue of cosmopolitanism in Jewish Argentine popular musical innovation highlights the broader question of approaching Jewish Latin American subjectivity as a stable field of identity. As Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhaba, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty argue: “All the derring-do between the local and the global in the dialectic of worldly thinking should not conceal the fact that neoliberal cosmopolitan thought is founded on a conformist sense of what it means to be a ‘‘person’’ as an abstract unit of cultural exchange (Pollock et al. 2002: 5). Music remains tied to people, and as such it remains an especially fruitful site of inquiry to explore the negotiation of Jewish Latin American ethnicity through the creation of new traditions, recorded in memory.

As the Sherbamate Productora website states, their musical mission is to facilitate communal sentiment by creating “uniquely enjoyable moments, memories that will stay recorded in the people”:

Our mission is to create uniquely enjoyable moments, memories that people will remember forever. We started out on our journey with Kef more than eleven years ago, and today we continue to increase our artistic and personal standards by putting on original, charismatic shows, encompassing different formats, genres and styles, and always contributing to culture, respecting ideas, art and—above all—the public.²⁹

The Orquesta Kef claims to use music to create collective memories to foster Jewish Argentine identification. To support Jewish Argentine cultural and religious expressions in Buenos Aires and Latin America more broadly, the Orquesta Kef creates new musical meanings by renewing

²⁹ See the Sherbamate Productora Website. <http://www.sherbamate.com.ar/#about>. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

Jewish musical aesthetics, adding to the sonic landscape of Jewish sound for Jewish Argentine publics who embrace these musics and performance practices as representative of a new tradition of Jewish Argentine music. In the next section, I discuss some of the particular Jewish musical repertoires that Orquesta Kef employs in their regular performances, including the influence of the music of Mordechai Ben David, the American Orthodox rabbi and rocker, as well as the folk musics of Argentina and Latin America.

Playing for the Messiah: Orquesta Kef Between Religiosity and Traditionalism



Figure 3.5 The Orquesta Kef performing at “La Fiesta de Januca,” Hanukkah Party in Plaza Oriental de la República Argentina, Buenos Aires, December 21, 2011. Photo by author.

The Orquesta Kef prides itself on being especially adept at navigating the boundaries of religious and non-religious publics in Buenos Aires, performing for religiously mixed audiences at public holiday celebrations, private ceremonies, and lifecycles events. The Hanukkah festival celebration held annually in the Plaza Oriental de la República Argentina in the upscale Palermo neighborhood is hosted by the local emissary of the Chabad Lubavitch (see Fig. 3.5). The event

is open to the public and widely advertised throughout the city in stops and on billboards in the weeks leading up to the event (see Fig 3.6). Sociologist Damián Setton argues that this event fails to serve as a “ritual of national collective integration” on the cultural level mediating the transnational Chabad Lubavitch mode of orthodoxy and local Argentine cultural practices; however, he misses the ways in which the Orquesta Kef provides a musical space of encounter (Setton 2012: 106). The Chabad Lubavitch Hanukkah Festival is a focal example of the ways in which the Orquesta Kef unites different public identities of Jewishness in Buenos Aires through their musical performance practices.



Fig. 3.6 “Enciende tú alma: Iluminar el mundo depende de vos” (“It lights your soul: Illuminating the world depends on you”) subway poster advertising the menorah lighting ceremony on December 21, 2011. Photo by author.

Although none of the musicians performing with Orquesta Kef identify as religiously orthodox, Orquesta Kef’s long-standing participation in Chabad Lubacitch sponsored events

demonstrates their commitment to performing for different sectors of the Jewish Argentine community as well as their flexibility playing for ultra-Orthodox, modern Orthodox, liberal progressive Masorti, and religiously un-affiliated crowds. As Rafael Surijón, bassist and co-leader of the group, told me:

We take Jewish culture and music as an expression of art. We put a strong emphasis on that which has to do with entertainment in order to reach the people who are not so close to the Jewish identity or religion. In that way, [we try] to provide content, yes, [based on] Jewish traditions that respect the things that are written in the Torah, from a place of enjoyment and entertainment.³⁰

Elaborating further, Rafael said: “We take a little from that line of this [non-religious] community that we are discussing, but not entirely because we do not go against the things that are written, let’s say, of what it says, of that which is in the Torah.”³¹ Surijón’s statement confirms the ensemble’s musical commitment to performing for religious Jewish audiences in the way that they develop their popular music projects.

While it is widely acknowledged that the Jewish community of Argentina is largely secular—a consequence of processes of secularization in Europe prior to immigration to Argentina—the growth of Jewish orthodoxy since the 1990s led by the establishment of a sect of the Chabad Lubavitch in Buenos Aires that has profoundly changed the landscape of Jewish culture and religion in Argentina (Fischman 2008; Barúa 1990; Setton 2008). The Lubavitcher Hasidic Jews trace their origins to the mid-eighteenth century Poland, where the founder of Hasidism, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov, or the Master of the Good Name, inspired a new fervor for spirituality in his day, spreading his teachings and

³⁰ Interview with Rafael Surijón in the Orquesta Kef offices. May 6, 2013. Translation by Ariel Svarch.

³¹ Ibid.

gathering followers. The Baal Shem Tov broke away from the standard forms of Jewish practice by emphasizing an individual personal connection to God through a religious devotion that returned to Jewish mysticism, allowing Jews as worshipers to break away from the rigidity of the hegemonic order of rabbis and scholars as authorities of authentic prayer. The Baal Shem Tov appealed to Jews wishing to connect to God through deep, personal prayer, whereupon “even the simplest peasant who knows not a word of the Law can approach God directly through heartfelt prayer and an outpouring of the soul” (Fishkoff 2003: 17). In 1955, Rabbi Dovber Baumgarten arrived as the first *schliach* (emissary) of the Chabad Lubavitch movement (Setton 2012: 99). With *schlichim* (emisaries) all over the world today, the Chabad Lubavitch presence in Buenos Aires connects practitioners to the worldwide Chabad Lubavitch movement.

The Buenos Aires Chabad Lubavitch Hanukkah party is a singularly elaborate public Jewish Argentine event, employing different levels of participation with musical content central to the program. This public festival involves a significant amount of coordination between event planners, choreographers, musicians, and audiences, featuring key appearances by powerful local businessmen, local rabbis, and politicians such as Hector Timmerman (now Foreign Minister to Cristina Fernández de Kirchner). Prominent individuals are publicly honored by participating in the ritual lighting of a two-story tall *menorah* (Hanukkah candelabra) with the assistance of a pneumatic lift. Prior to the beginning of the concert, while combining entertainment and spectacle in a ceremony harnessing religious symbols, this ritual is intended to make visible a Jewish presence in cities where it takes place. The spectacle itself dates back to 1975 in Union Square, San Francisco, when Chabad first began this custom (Fishkoff 2003: 286). As in the United States, the Chabad emissaries in Argentina seek out public spaces to hold the menorah-lighting ceremony, consecrating public space with the assistance of government officials to

illustrate, as Susan Fishkoff argues, “the Rebbe’s [Menachem Mendel Schneerson] point that [in America], Jews and the Jewish religion enjoy full legal and governmental protection” (Fishkoff 2003: 289). Similarly, the branch of Chabad Lubavitch in Argentina executes their Hanukkah menorah lighting ceremony in a very public space, illustrating Fishkoff’s argument. Music plays an important role in the public festivities, harmonizing the visual symbols to the sounds of local Jewish Argentine culture, and Orquesta Kef is critical in reproducing this atmosphere each year.

Although there are other Hanukkah parties held throughout the city of Buenos Aires in the AMIA, in clubs like Hebraica and in synagogues, the largest by far is the Chabad Hanukkah festival, which attracts thousands of attendees. For the party, the plaza is cordoned off into different areas with an entrance on the south side of the park. Two sections of chairs are set up for people to sit on and enjoy the show creating a pathway connecting the stage area to the space just in front, which is kept open for dancing. At the entrance, security guards monitor the crowd, and tables are set up for vendors selling Judaica items, from Hanukkah candles, *gelt* (gold wrapped chocolate coins) and cake pans in the shape of challah bread, to jewelry and other knick knacks in the makeshift market. This marketplace provided attendees with the opportunity to purchase gifts and cards for themselves and for loved ones to celebrate the holiday. Food stands with specialty items like *knishes* (baked or fried pastry filled with potato, meat, and other ingredients) are served alongside local favorites like hamburgers, french fries, and empanadas.

A video produced by the Jewish Educational Materials company (JEM), an organization associated with Chabad, played on the large screen hanging above the stage showing a family celebrating Hanukkah in their home by eating latkes (potato pancakes) and lighting their menorah. A narrator described the action in broad, generalized terms designed to inform small children and non-Jews as well as to remind practicing Jews of the origins and fundamentals of

the Hanukkah rituals, which celebrate the story of the Maccabees' defeat of the Seleucid army and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 166 BCE. A small detail—the insignia of the New York Yankees baseball team on the kippah (skullcap) of the boy in the video—put into perspective the transnational associations of the Chabad movement. The video modeling “correct” Jewish behavior arrived from the United States, evidence the connections between the Jewish Argentine community and the American Jewish community and the process of cultural translation in situating contemporary Jewish practice in Argentina.

The musical work of the Orquesta Kef connects participants to each other within the festival space. Since their repertory is intentionally crafted to be sensitive to rabbinic instructions pertaining to halakhah (Jewish law), the ensemble does not have to adapt their performance aesthetic to the largely religious crowd. Instead, their music translates to the stage appealing to both Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jewish Argentine audiences. In order to achieve this balance, Gastón Mohadeb and Rafael Surijón regularly appeal to local Orthodox rabbis for rabbinic instructions pertaining to halakhah to ensure that they are not performing in a way that would alienate their more observant listening publics. Furthermore, in their constant search for new repertory, they often consult with rabbis to discover new Hasidic melodies, Hebrew songs of religious and secular origins, as well as other musical materials. Playing in the Orthodox community allows Orquesta Kef to perform for a stable sector of the Jewish Argentine music market, which provides them with the steady business of making music meaningful to this sector of Jewish Buenos Aires. The band's sensitivity to issues of religious observance shapes their forms of musical innovations.

In 2011, the Hanukkah concert featured not only Orquesta Kef, but also Cafundó, an all-male percussion “sambareggae” ensemble that takes its name from the language of a small Afro-

Brazilian community in São Paulo state. Cafundó performs Afro-Latin percussion arrangements for their large drum ensemble, modeling themselves after the Afro-Latin percussion groups familiar to the region. One of its founders of Cafundó, Ezequiel Szusterman, performs and tours with Orquesta Kef in addition to his work with the percussion ensemble, and that year in 2011, Orquesta Kef wanted to do something special for the Hanukkah party, inviting Cafundó to do a guest set. The presence of Cafundó emphasized the recognizably Latin American musical elements that form the basis of their musical aesthetic. The Enciende la Luz concert spotlighted the Orquesta Kef's thickly-textured, percussion and bass-driven Latin Americanized, mostly Hebrew-language musical repertory.

Seated in the open air, I watched from the audience as the band took to the stage—ten musicians in total—playing trombone, trumpet, electric keyboards, saxophone, hand percussion, vocals, drum kit, electric bass, electric guitar, and congas. Under brightly colored spotlights, the band warmed up the crowd with a few tracks as smoke billowed up from a smoke machine on the stage, and the screen behind them flashed the words “La Fiesta de Januca” (The Holiday of Hanukkah) (see Fig. 3.5). Wearing their typical band uniforms—a long sleeved kelly green button down shirt under a black tuxedo vest, black pants with a black baseball cap featuring the kef logo embroidered in white thread—the band completed their sound check before breaking out into their first set. The Hanukkah concert spotlighted the Orquesta Kef's thickly-textured, percussion- and bass-driven Latin Americanized, mostly Hebrew-language music, incorporating *nigunim* (wordless melodies) to foster audience participation in songs with lyrics in Hebrew and Yiddish.



Figure 3.7 Gastón Mohadeb and Rafael Surijón performing at the Chabad Hanukkah Party. December 21, 2011. Photo by author.

The band, singing nigunim, covers, and other composed songs, belted the hooks and familiar refrains to their audiences who mouthed along to lines like “oy, oy, oy” and “kef, kef, kef” sprinkled throughout different tracks (see Fig. 3.7). They played a short set before the MC re-addressed the crowd introducing the band and announcing: ¡No hay fiesta judía sin música! (It’s not a Jewish party without music). Orquesta Kef played through a few upbeat tracks, many utilizing familiar melodies such as Handel’s “Hallelujah,” chorus motif turned upside-down into a “Jewish motif” with a saxophone melisma launching into a cantorial wail. The band’s choreographed dance moves and rock-influenced sound, replete with a three-person horn section, solidified the presentational mode of this performance. Bouncing up and down, left and right while playing their instruments, the band showed a synchronized front in spite of the large number of musicians. I remembered that Gastón had told me that he studied cinematography in college, and I thought his training in staging scenes likely influenced their inclusion of pre-rehearsed dance routines on stage. Fifteen minutes or so into their first set, the MC announced

the lighting of another arm of the menorah, and when the band returned, they were joined by Cafundó.



Figure 3.8 Cafundó performing at the Chabad Hanukkah Party. December 21, 2011.
Photo by author.

As the six Cafundó drummers assembled on stage, lining up in their green and orange t-shirts in a single line in front of their bandleader, the bands assembled to play a set incorporating both groups into the arrangements (see Fig. 3.8). One such example was their performance of the Mordechai Ben David song “Maaminim Bnei Maaminim,” from his 2001 album of the same name, creating a call and response exchange between Orquesta Kef and Cafundó that took advantage of the popular song form with an elaborate percussion solo during the middle-eight section. Composed in A minor, the song pivoted back and forth to the G major subtonic with an emphasis on the subdominant D minor chord, which created a sense of elevation, rising up to the tonic, with each stanza ending in a two-measure percussion break before the start of the next refrain. It appeared that the refrain was largely improvised by Cafundó, and each player attended

to his own drum, striking their different sized *repiniques* and *surdos* in interlocking rhythms as the bandleader pointed to a featured soloist while marking time. The drums were mobile, strapped onto the bodies of the male percussionists with leather belts hanging around their waists.

מאמינים בני מאמינים
בן מרדכי דוד “Ma’aminim B’nei Ma’aminim”
Mordechai Ben David

מאמינים בני מאמינים אנחנו
להישען מי על לנו ואין
אבינו על אלא אלא
שבשמיים אבינו We are believers, children of believers
And we have nothing else to rely on
But but on our father
Our father in heaven

ישראל ישראל
בטרב-הוא ומגינם עוזרם 'ה
ישראל ישראל
בטרב-הוא ומגינם עוזרם 'ה Israel Israel
Believed in The Lord
Israel Israel
For He is your aid and your protection

Lyrics from: http://shironet.mako.co.il/artist?type=lyrics&lang=1&wrkid=13046&prfid=3497&song_title=134d3d Translation: <http://hebrewsongs.com/?song=anachnu%28bnei%29maamin>

Asking for the crowd to clap with them, the band repeated the simple lines of the song combining two biblical verses, the first from Psalm 115:9, the second from Midrash Tanchuma. The saxophone solo bridge dated the tune in my mind—a ubiquitous element of 1980s and 1990s pop and rock music—recalled here as a soaring melody to a pulsing downbeat and bass accompaniment, enhanced by the bouncy dance feel that highlighted the solo as the vocals dropped out. By the final repetitions of the chorus all band members of both groups were playing aggressively, bouncing up and down and punching their arms up and down in the air. The chorus repeated many times as the group locked in sync; the audience moving back and forth in their seats or standing. Orquesta Kef and Cafundó followed up “Maaminim B’nei Maaminim” with an

East European folk tune “Siman Tov U’Mazel Tov”—a typical Jewish wedding tune employing the word “oy” as a vocable to draw people into mouthing along to the nigun—before breaking for another announcement from the MC. In 2013, Héctor Timerman, then Minister of the Exterior, was invited to address the public and to give a blessing, which he did in Spanish, with a speech rather than a prayer.



Figure 3.9 Hasidic men dancing to the music of the Orquesta Kef. December 21, 2011.
Photo by author.

As the night progressed and the party wound down, many families left to head home even as many young Lubavitcher men hung around waiting for the last songs. Cafundó left the stage but Orquesta Kef played on finishing their final set of the night. As the young men heard the opening chords to the Orquesta Kef version of the Mordechai Ben David song “Emmes” (“Truth”), they ran forward toward the stage, grabbing each other around the shoulders, linking their torsos while keeping their legs free to step and kick around in a circle, jumping forward and backward to this joyful “*simha*” (joy) dance. Wearing long dark coats, dark pants, and black hats,

the young Lubavitcher men inscribed the space in front of the stage as a place to perform religious orthodoxy. Orquesta Kef, taking advantage of the energy played to the crowd, and finishing the show with the song “Mashiach” (Messiah), or “Ani Ma’amin” (also composed and popularized by the American Hasidic Rabbi Mordechai Ben David), settled into a final set of songs without interruption to allow the Hasidic men to dance furiously (see Fig. 3.9). The Orquesta Kef’s rendition of “Mashiach” (Messiah), based on Ben David’s song is an up-tempo, aggressive, guitar and bass heavy arrangement and a fixture of Orquesta Kef’s repertory, well known now to Orquesta Kef fans not through Mordechai Ben David himself but through Orquesta Kef’s frequent performance of his repertory throughout Buenos Aires. The lyrics, which translate to “I believe/ I believe with complete faith/ in the coming of the Messiah/ I believe” are welcomed by the Orthodox (and often non-Orthodox) crowds and often just sound “festive” and “Jewish” to non-religious audiences.

The music of Mordechai Ben David, an American Hasidic Jew (born Mordechai Werdyger), the son of a well-known cantor David Werdyger in Brooklyn, is a hallmark of the Orquesta Kef repertory. Mordechai Ben David’s father, Cantor David Werdyger, was a significant figure in twentieth-century Orthodox Jewish music, producing a number of important recordings of Hasidic melodies in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. His son, nicknamed simply “MBD,” made a huge mark on Jewish music as a prolific recording artist of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Kligman 2003).

As ethnomusicologist Mark Kligman argues, Mordechai Ben David, is perhaps the most influential figure in late twentieth-century Orthodox music (Kligman 2001). Kligman argues that Ben David “appropriated an American musical style and a secular idiom and adapted them to fit a Jewish message,” writing songs mostly in Hebrew but also in English, while creating a “1970s

soft-rock ballad style in which the chorus is more energetic than the verses" (Kligman 2001: 110). Ben David's music circulated not only throughout Hasidic communities in singing occasions like *zmiros* (Sabbath table songs), *tisch* (Rabbi's table songs), concerts and special events, but he was also a prolific recording artist, producing over twenty-five recordings that allowed his music to travel far beyond his own Brooklyn community. Similarly, the Orquesta Kef incorporated Mordechai Ben David's refrain-heavy rock sound to develop their own musical identity in Buenos Aires. However, the Orquesta Kef is not just influenced by the 1970s soft-rock ballad style that influenced Ben David; they also incorporate Latin American popular and other American popular musics such as funk, reggae, ska, cumbia, and Argentine folkloric styles into their musical repertory, connecting their audiences to the local soundscapes of the city. Hasidic music is an important part of the core of Orquesta Kef musical repertory, and it was featured heavily in the Chabad Hanukkah party performances. As ethnomusicologist Abigail Wood argues:

The motivation to explore these repertoires is not only musical: these musicians believe that the experiential spirituality associated with this repertory can be accessed through music without necessarily subscribing to the uncompromising, ultra-Orthodox religious practices of the Hasidic community. This perceived division between religiosity and spirituality, defying a simple, bifurcated categorization of "secular" and "religious," is key to many current forms of non-Orthodox Jewish religious practice, reflecting wider contemporary popular attitudes to religion. (Wood 2007: 208)

Throughout Argentina and Latin America, Orquesta Kef's sound is recognized as "traditional" Jewish Latin American music as a result of their frequent performance gigs, public appearances, and representation in the media.³² Their music, however, is not solely based in the

³² On November 19, 2012, the Orquesta Kef appeared in an episode of the television show *Los Graduados*, a widely popular "telenovela" (soap opera), featuring a Jewish protagonist played by

aesthetic language of the Orthodox party rock of musicians such as Mordechai Ben David. Their five albums showcase a process of maturation and refinement from the early days of klezmer standards and unaltered covers featured on the album *Kef* (2003) to an exploration of Argentine folkloric musics like chacarera and zamba on the album, *ExtraKef* (2005), and in the presentation of Yiddish folksongs and klezmer pieces on the album, *Cantina Klezmer* (2010).³³ Most recently, their 2014 album *Identidad* (Identity) demonstrates a critical return to the core roots of the band's concept, showcasing how Jewish music in Argentina naturalizes a Jewish Argentine musical sound in songs like "Kan Chamamé," a rearrangement of Uzi Chitman's "Noladeti La' Shalom." By drawing on the taxonomies of Argentine folkloric music, in this case chamamé—a style originating from the northeast as a result of encounters between Roman Catholic missionaries and Indigenous groups living at the border of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil (referred to as La Región del Litoral), Orquesta Kef's latest album adds to the musical eclecticism of the voice of the Jewish experience in Argentina.³⁴

Since their appearance on the wildly popular telenovela program *Los Graduados* (The Graduates) in November 2012 on the Argentine television channel Telefe, Kef's status as Buenos Aires's premier Jewish special events band has crystallized within Argentina as well as throughout the region. Musical performance in the style of the Orquesta Kef has become widely

the famous Uruguayan actor, Daniel Hendler, produced by Telefe. Interview with Rafael Surijón in the Orquesta Kef offices. May 6, 2013.

³³ Recorded by the Sherbamate Productora band "La Gipsy," featuring material mostly composed and arranged by Martín Rur.

³⁴ Chamamé is an "Argentine polka-derived social dance performed during a *jineteada*" (256, 257, 259, 261, 269)—"an Argentine spectacle organized by traditionalist societies, local municipal authorities, or merchants, featuring traditional music and dance" (261). See: Dale A. Olsen and Daniel E. Sheehy, eds. "Argentina." *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 2 - South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*. Routledge, 1998. 269–92. See also: Olsen, Dale A., and Daniel E. Sheehy, eds. "[G]." *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 2 – South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*. Routledge, 1998. 1002–3.

recognizable and indicative of “Jewishness” in Buenos Aires. The Oscar-nominated 2014 film *Relatos Salvajes* (Wild Tales) directed by Damián Szifrén solidifies this image when it culminates in a final vignette dramatizing a darkly comic wedding party gone utterly awry. The band in the film, Babel Orkesta, plays a version of “Shalom Aleichem” as a ballroom full of wedding guests are bathed in the green light iconic of the Orquesta Kef aesthetic. The presence of Jewish music in this film demonstrates how their music signals difference while also capturing the sentiment of the city and the nation (see Fig. 3.10).

“Gypsy, Cumbia, Cuarteto, Surf, Blah Blah Blah”: Simja Dujov and Jewish Musical Eclecticism in Argentina

“Hailing from the land of Tango in Buenos Aires,” writes Adam J. Sacks of *The Jewish Daily Forward*, “Simja Dujov writes music that resembles almost anything other than that classic genre.”³⁵ Dujov, whose given name is Gabriel Dujovne, confirms Sacks’s assessment of his music, stating on the printed label on the disk of his record completed in 2012, *Santificarás la Fiesta* (You will Sanctify the Party): “This is real latin cumbia, Balkan gipsy klezmer, blah blah blah from Argentina to the World yes it is” (sic).³⁶ Dujov’s approach to contemporary Jewish musical innovation is eclectic and shows a deep awareness of the structures of genre and classificatory impulses of the world-music markets. While embracing the cosmopolitan migrations of Latin Alternative musics circulating throughout the Americas such as cumbia,

³⁵ Adam J. Sacks, “Music of the Mind: A ‘Happy Soul’ in Argentina Blends Sounds of the World.” *Jewish Daily Forward*, [Fast Forward]. Apr 29, 2009.

³⁶ Cumbia has become a widely recognized popular music in Argentina since the 1990s, arriving from Colombia and localized by musicians such as Pablo Lescano (Damas Gratis), who added electronic instruments, including the keytar, as well as large-form ensembles who popularized a big-band cumbia sound. These musical innovators added lyrics to reflect concerns specific to the working classes and the disenfranchised poor living in *villas* (slums) on the periphery of the city of Buenos Aires. Consequently, this sub-genre of cumbia is referred to as “*cumbia villera*” (Vila and Semán 1–23; Fernández L’Hoeste and Vila 1–27).

Dujov emplaces Jewish sound as a part of the greater panorama of the Latin American musical experience.

In this section, I will discuss the eclectic style and multiple musical projects of Jewish Argentine musician and DJ, Simja Dujov, whose work both within and beyond the Jewish community locates Jewish sound and Jewish Argentines within a greater matrix of urban activities and musical projects renewing the Jewish imaginary throughout the Americas. In Argentina's most populous region and its culturally, politically, and economically influential capital city of Buenos Aires, musicians such as Simja Dujov are working to expand the sound worlds of Jewish music beyond the echoes of klezmer revival (with its roots in North America from the late 1980s) while elevating Argentine musics beyond tango for global audiences. At once consciously representing a Jewish aesthetic in a wider sea of mostly "non-Jewish" music played and performed late-at-night in Buenos Aires, Simja Dujov has spent the past few years making a name for himself across various, interrelated music scenes.

Singer, DJ, and multi-instrumentalist Dujov champions a new authenticity for Jewish sound, one undergirded by Latin America's popular musical styles, which he mixes with the East European folk melodies and rhythms of his family's Jewish roots. With an eye and ear toward youth audiences, Simja Dujov (which means "happy soul" from the Hebrew and Russian respectively) positions Jewish music in and of Latin America within the global Jewish music markets, spotlighting Jewish musical labors in Argentina. Although his musical approach attaches positive associations to the concept of eclecticism to make his music comprehensible to local and global listeners, his struggles to affirm a singular aesthetic showcase the tension between the artistic practices of musical tradition and innovation. Furthermore, this question of Jewish musical authenticity is tied to a much longer history of Jewish cultural expression and the

experience of Jewish migration as a history of encounter and exchange in the passage through modernity (Bohlman 2008: xvii). While Dujov's work remains hemispheric in scope, the Buenos Aires resident and Córdoba native's everyday musical labors composing, singing, performing, producing, and sharing Jewish Argentine music raise important questions about cultural citizenship, musical diversity in Latin America and contemporary Jewish musical innovation in Buenos Aires.

Often collaborating with well-known musicians, DJs, private organizations and municipal cultural programming initiatives, as well as performing regularly in clubs, bars, and nightclubs, Dujov's music reaches a broad audience and listening public that sometimes registers the sound as Jewish, but often simply responds to his ability to heighten their enjoyment of a particular event, electrifying their night out dancing or entertaining audiences on an evening in the café or in the concert hall. For Dujov, performing throughout the Americas involves a flexible marketing strategy—at times as confusing in its eclecticism as it is suggestive—at once providing meanings for Jewish Latin American music rooted in ontologies of Latin popular music, yet simultaneously concealing and conflating the importance of the specific social histories associated with each of the many musical styles referenced in his music. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2014, I discuss Dujov's eclectic style, sound and artistic stance to argue that Jewish Argentine popular music not only draws on pre-existing cosmopolitan ideas and attitudes typical of Buenos Aires-centered discourses on national identity, but that Jewish Argentine musical cosmopolitanism also spotlights the centrality of new discourses of ethnicity and embodiment in contemporary Argentine music. While reflecting an awareness of twenty-first century “postnational” perspectives on circulations of Latin American music, Dujov's musical activities demonstrate the layers of complexity in his approach to music making and

performance.³⁷ By placing his work in conversation with scholarship from Latin American music studies and focusing on Dujov's individual style and approach to Jewish Argentine music, I draw attention to the ways in which Dujov's performance aesthetic and marketing strategies engage with the contemporary landscape of popular musical performance in Buenos Aires, resonating abroad in a multitude of directions.

“My Music is a Teleportation Machine”: Ethnography and Jewish Music in Buenos Aires – January 7, 2013

It was a warm Monday night in Buenos Aires's mid-summer in January 2013—quiet even for a Monday evening—as the majority of Buenos Aires residents had left the city to escape the heat, vacationing along the Atlantic coast south of the city in towns like Mar del Plata or Miramar. I, however, was headed toward the Club del Arte on Avenida Corrientes 3439, a venue I had never been to before, for a show that Simja had told me he was playing: “La Semilla de la Cultura Africana,” or the “Seed of African Culture.” I wasn’t sure how Simja’s music would fit into the show, or really what to expect from a Monday-evening club night not far from the massive Abasto Shopping mall in an area peripheral to the main nightclub districts. Getting out of the subway, I followed my notes, making my way to the door of the venue where a bouncer

³⁷ Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid write that the “postnational turn in music scholarship and marketing” represents movements away from representations of the nation as a static and stable location and recognizes the need among music scholars to approach the subject of music making and musicians in relation to the impact of globalization on cultural expression. They argue: “Postnational marketing surpasses national boundaries in order to better respond to the needs of an increasingly multicultural domestic market in the U.S. and Western Europe (much less so in Japan) as well as a global ‘transnationalized’ market. In the U.S., the conflation of musical styles, genres and regional manifestations under the rubric of ‘ethnic’ music, mostly replaced by that of ‘world’ music since the late eighties, represents a strategy that responds to both needs.” See: Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, eds. “Introduction: The Postnational Turn in Music Scholarship and Music Marketing.” *Postnational Music Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008: 10.

stood in front of a narrow staircase leading up to the dance hall and bar itself. The pounding beats of a percussion ensemble playing upstairs spilled out onto the street, indicating that I had arrived at the correct place after all. As I walked up the stairs emerging into an open room, I saw that half of the dark rectangular floor space was filled with people watching the drum group; the strong smell of stale beer and smoke combined with the visual pulsations of festive red and green lights blinking in tandem reminded me of the recent celebration of La Navidad (Christmas). This was not a Jewish space; rather, a nightclub open to a mostly non-Jewish public.

As the drums played faster and faster, louder and louder with a sound that hit me square in the chest, I struggled to see in front of the crowd of people. A young man standing next to me pointed out a small step, suggesting that I step up on it. We chatted for a bit, and it turned out that he was from the city of La Plata having traveled to Buenos Aires for the show that night—a trip he said he makes twice a week to go out and explore the nightlife scene—riding a public bus about an hour and a half each way. At the end of the evening, which usually extends far into the early morning in Buenos Aires, he finally returns home. Of course, it was difficult to hear him over the music, but he explained to me that the band that evening was associated with La Bomba de Tiempo, Buenos Aires's best-known percussion ensemble—an innovative large-form group that usually plays on Monday nights and occasionally on Saturdays in the impressive music venue popular among young people: the Ciudad Cultural Konex. The night starts there at 8pm, in this famous performance complex on Calle Sarmiento, after which, I was told, partiers are ushered to the bar, Club del Arte, where the party continues late into the morning. As this conversation progressed, I made the connection between Dujov's participation at the *Semilla* show and his regular work as a resident DJ for the Konex parties, warming up the crowd before

and in between Bomba de Tiempo’s sets (the precursor to the La Semilla de la Cultural Africana show).

Typically, Dujov follows the party to its second venue at the Club del Arte after the Konex show ends, where he DJs the late-night after party, spinning dance tracks in between different sets performed by the Afropop band led by the Senegalese musician Cheik Gueye. That evening in the Club del Arte, Simja began performing from a raised platform next to the bar on his silver MacBook Pro computer after the first percussion group—a warm-up band whose name I missed—finished up. He maintained the festive atmosphere for the remaining partiers but switched musical gears to lead with the Latin Alternative dance hit “*Fuego*” by the Colombian band, Bomba Estereo, followed by an electronic bhangra dance track that also sounded familiar. After about a half an hour, Simja finished his first round of DJing, signaling toward me to come say hello. He would continue to spin that night between Cheikh Gueye’s sets until 3am or later, but at that moment, we went up to the roof where there was outdoor seating and another bar and dance floor to talk about his music for the first time since we had met a few weeks before. “Mi música es una máquina de teletransportación” (my music is a teleportation machine), he tells me. I am eager to learn how.

Simja’s Musical Background

Gabriel Dujovne was born and raised in Córdoba—Argentina’s second largest city in the north-central part of the Argentine interior: the home to Argentina’s second largest concentration of Jews. Dujov describes Córdoba’s Jewish community as small; contentious issues that plague the religiously, politically, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse Jewish community in Buenos Aires are nearly non-existent in the smaller city with only a handful of synagogues and

other institutions. Music, however, remains an especially important part of everyday life in Córdoba, a place where traditional Argentine folkloric music and dance—the result of the musical mixture of mainly Spanish, Italian, and Indigenous musical practices—permeate the soundscapes of the region.

Córdoba is perhaps best known throughout the country as the home of *cuarteto*, a musical genre beloved by many and abhorred by others for its fast pace and wild kitsch aesthetic associated with the dramatic flair of its best-known performer, La Mona Jiménez (Juan Carlos Jiménez Rufino) (Florine 1998: 35). Cuarteto is influenced by jazz and rock and is played fast with a pulsating two-beat feel similar to Dominican merengue but featuring lyrics that reflect the difficult realities of working-class life in Córdoba, marked by violence, economic struggles and personal hardships in domestic life (ibid.). Growing up amid the controversial and expanding sound worlds of cuarteto of the 1980s as well as near the epicenter of *música folklore* showcased each year at the Cosquín Music Festival—an event that takes place in the small town of Cosquín, just outside of the city of Córdoba—Simja Dujov was exposed to a wide range of popular musics from a young age, listening to rock, jazz, and pop from the United States while internalizing the soundscapes of Córdoba around him.

At the age of eight or nine, Dujov began playing the guitar, learning from a teacher in his neighborhood. When he was fifteen, he began studying piano and later the saxophone, playing in an area youth band. At eighteen, he enrolled in the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba where he pursued a degree in musical composition from the Department of Music in the Division of the Arts (Facultad de Artes) and also took courses in the Visual Arts Department. During his studies, which were grounded in compositional practices of Western art music, Dujov also participated in numerous bands and played in various rock groups, ultimately starting a klezmer group that

played “*música gipsy*” called Simja Dujov & the Strudel Klezmer Band.³⁸ While studying with Argentine composer Oscar Bazan, Dujov began singing with the adult Yiddish choir that Bazan directed. Although Bazan was not Jewish, identifying as Christian and Buddhist according to Dujov, Bazan led Córdoba’s Yiddish choir for the extra income and invited Dujov to sing along with the mostly elderly choral group.³⁹ Dujov was the only young person in the group—an experience he describes as “*buenísimo*” (great) and the moment he began to learn the Yiddish folksong repertory:

He [Bazan] was really smart because instead of worrying about the most refined or perfected sound, he played with the voices, with sounds (*Dujov claps for emphasis*). There I learned—it was a great, it was an experience—because above all it wasn’t highly conceptual music. It sought other things. It didn’t seek perfected arrangements and that didn’t interest me anyway.⁴⁰

³⁸ Dujov’s use of the word “gipsy” is not without its conceptual problems. As Dujov tells me, the concept of “*música gipsy*” is tied to the aesthetics of bohemianism (still in fashion among ‘hippie’ youth in Buenos Aires) and “*la forma en que América Latina se entiende la forma gipsy*” (the way in which the ‘gipsy’ way is understood in Latin America), which includes a host of popular stereotypes: the fortune teller or palm reader, belly dancing and “*algo Árabe puede ser gipsy en el mundo latinoamericano*” (anything Arabic can be ‘gipsy’ in the Latin American world). While discussing this phenomenon with me, Dujov states that something Arab does not have anything to do with something ‘gipsy,’ and he quickly code switches to use the word “*gitano*” to make it clear that he is talking about a musical category existing in Latin American popular culture rather than an ethnic category describing a group of people. Interview with Simja Dujov, Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires, May 2013. Furthermore, as musicologist Carol Silverman writes: “Indeed the stereotypical ‘Gypsy’ musician is not only a ubiquitous fantasy figure in classic Western literature, art, and oral tradition (Trumpener 1992), but also a social actor (Herzfeld 1997). When placed in a political economic framework, this historical baggage, which more than ever informs contemporary representations of Roma, reveals a complex political economy of inequality in the realm of representation” (Silverman 335). See: Carol Silverman, “Trafficking in the Exotic with ‘Gypsy’ Music: Balkan Roma, Cosmopolitanism, and ‘World Music’ Festivals.” In *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse*, ed. by Donna A. Buchanan. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007. 335–61.

³⁹ Interview with Simja Dujov, Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires, May 2013. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Later, Dujov was invited to sing in the Masorti (Conservative) synagogue in Córdoba, the Centro Unión Israelita, and he also began playing the clarinet in religious services as well, going on to study with the great clarinetist and wind instrument player Marcelo Moguilevsky in Buenos Aires, traveling from Córdoba over ten hours by bus to work with him.⁴¹ From Moguilevsky, Dujov received various klezmer parts on sheet music and learned some of the klezmer repertory, gathering books and cassettes from which Dujov further experimented with Ashkenazic Jewish sound. Upon his permanent move from Córdoba to Buenos Aires in July 2008, Marcelo Moguilevsky put Dujov in touch with Santiago Vazquez, a fellow band member from the group El Puente Celeste. Vazquez, one of the founders of La Bomba del Tiempo, gave Dujov the job of DJing the Bomba del Tiempo parties, and soon after, Dujov expanded into other musical ventures. Dujov continues to reside in Buenos Aires when he is not touring.

You Will Sanctify the Party: “Pesaj Urbano” and Jewish Music In-Between – March 24, 2013

On March 24, 2013, I headed toward the *Plaza Armenia*, a posh square in the Palermo Soho neighborhood in Buenos Aires, home to fancy shops and upscale restaurants and bars popular among foreign expats as well as wealthy locals. Simja was playing a few sets for the “Pesaj Urbano” (Urban Passover) celebration, an elaborate street festival organized by Yok, an

⁴¹ As Dr. Daniel Fainstein writes, the word “Conservative” is particularly misleading in the Latin American context, where Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, a North American rabbi and graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, spent almost a quarter century helping to modernize Jewish worship and to localize an arm of the Conservative Movement as a vessel for change and transformation of Jewish community institutions and practices. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Conservative Movement in Argentina remains a liberal progressive in reference to social, cultural and political action. See: Daniel Fainstein, “Secularización, profecía y liberación: La desprivatización de la religión en el pensamiento judío contemporáneo.” PhD Dissertation. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006: 230.

initiative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, whose motto in Argentina is: “Judaísmo a tu manera,” or “Judaism your way.” Aiming to showcase Jewish culture to demonstrate Jewish cultural diversity, Yok brought together Jewish Argentines otherwise unaffiliated with institutional organizations or religious entities by hosting public festivals, events, arts programs and other activities in Buenos Aires.



Fig. 3.10 Simja Dujov in the DJ booth at the “Pesaj Urbano” Street Festival in Plaza Armenia. March 24, 2013. Photo by author.

In 2013, I attended Yok’s twelfth annual Passover event for which Simja had served as the musical coordinator, bringing along friends and fellow musicians, Ana Schaim and Ignacio (“Nacho”) Martínez to help DJ during the event. Inviting me up to the raised DJ booth built onto a mobile stage at the corner of Armenia Street and Nicaragua Street, Simja performed as I stood and watched the crowd wandering around the various food stalls and Passover displays

cultivated to teach the public about the multiple stories, themes, and meanings of the Passover holiday (see Fig. 3.11). Simja DJd tracks from some of his favorite groups like Gogol Bordello (an American “gypsy punk” band) as well as songs from his album, *Santificarás La Fiesta* (You Will Sanctify the Party), teaching Ana Schaim how to fade between tracks using the DJing software. As usual, Simja was wearing his oversized silver Star of David pendant, which hung on a chain around his neck, marking him as a member of the Jewish community. Dressed casually, he looked out at the crowd and asked me to take a few pictures for him for his Facebook page. I snapped a few photos from the ground and waited, listening to the music and watching as people of all ages walked up to the stage and danced.



Figure 3.11 *Santificarás la Fiesta* album cover. Cover art by Lola García Garrido. Image provided by Simja Dujo.

On the cover to his album released to the internet in 2012, *Santificarás La Fiesta*, Dujo wears a white sleeveless muscle shirt, his long dark dreadlocks unnaturally suspended in the air behind him in a cloud of yellow and cream-colored rays of sunshine emerging from beneath his

grey English driving cap. Dujov's left fist is clenched and his right hand tosses a white loudspeaker up in the air, absently and probably unintentionally making a pistol shape with his index finger and thumb extended. His signature Dalí-esque moustache curls up on each side and accentuates his facial expression, which is peaceful but roguish staring out from the photo. The image is suggestive. Dujov seems to be implying that his voice is a weapon of Jewish Argentine ethno-musical transformation, a playfully serious challenge to contemporary Argentine cultural politics and the state of Jewish musical expression (see Fig. 3.12). On the surface, his opinions about Jewish music in Argentina are flexible given his healthy dose of humor and irony, but in fact, his ideas about Jewish musical performance are firm. He views Buenos Aires as a place of musical opportunity unlike New York, for example, where a wide range of global musics are already firmly rooted in the local musical scenes. "It's a carrot," he says to me in English as we share a coffee in a little café near his apartment. "A carrot?" I ask, and he explains in Spanish:

You can do anything here. African music, do you know about Afrobeat, for example? If that were to come here, I mean, there isn't much African or Black culture in Argentina. If musicians come to make Afrobeat music, it's all new. So, you can do anything because we still don't have it here [in Buenos Aires]. It's like horror movies. There aren't many horror movies in Argentina. You can do anything. And that's the carrot, you know? That you can do anything, but you don't show up and say, "uhhh" ... imagine twenty years ago, or even now, that there's no klezmer in Argentina. So, I start making klezmer and suddenly now we're on a roll and I am doing something no one was doing. Now, there's a culture that goes along with that. People are interested in whatever's foreign, whatever's new, etc....⁴²

For Dujov, his music is a time machine to the future, a way of moving out of the static sounds of Jewish musics frozen in time. He takes his music seriously, understanding that it is a material cultural product, but a product deeply tied to the social collectivities and particular

⁴² Interview with Simja Dujov, Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires, May 2013. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

individuals who may not be on board with his music yet. “In my case, it was a constant search to understand my identity and for many people, you see, they search in the past, but I think that this is in error. My truth is this search for identity in the past, present and the future.”⁴³ Simja Dujov does not believe that Latin American music has anything to do with Judaism; instead he’s setting a path for other musicians to follow, a musical trail likening him more to the adaptable Yiddish folksinger Jevel Katz, a Lithuanian immigrant who arrived to Buenos Aires in 1930, fondly nicknamed the Jewish Carlos Gardel (after the tango singer) or “*el freylekher yid*” (The Happy Jew), than the French-Spanish singer Manu Chao—an allusion often perpetuated by the press about Dujov (Baker 2012; Svarch 2013).⁴⁴ In his catchy song “Buenos Aires,” Dujov sings tribute to his dear home and makes note of the difficult and unstable economic situation characterizing the Argentine experience. He criticizes the spectacle of football “as religion,” and sings in English, composing a track crafted for foreign audiences. The song starts with an accordion and drum vamp, accompanying Dujov as he narrates the verses in a breathy parlando style, gaining momentum and speed during the refrain from the addition of a tuba ostinato, cymbal crashes and *krekht*-like squeals on the accordion.⁴⁵ The oom-pah bass is polka-like in rhythmic form with a harmonic structure emphasizing the tonic and dominant tonal centers in A

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Adam J. Sacks, “Music of the Mind: A ‘Happy Soul’ in Argentina Blends Sounds of the World.” *The Jewish Daily Forward* [New York], April 29, 2009, Fast Forward. June 13, 2013; Liza Burkin, “Simja Dujov: The Man, the Mystery, the Mustache” *Landing Pad Buenos Aires Website* [Buenos Aires]. <http://landingpadba.com/simja-dujov-man-mystery-mustache/>. Web. April 22, 2010.; “Simja Dujov: las otras naciones unidas.” *Clarín* [Buenos Aires]. April 2, 2013. http://www.clarin.com/espctaculos/musica/Debutantes_0_893910756.html.

⁴⁵ A *krekht* is a musical ornament and embellishment achieved by sliding between neighboring notes at the resolution, rather than the articulation of the note. For more on the *krekht* in Ashkenazic klezmer performance, see: Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 105–29.

minor. He describes the city as busy, complicated, but filled with people who are resilient and willing to find a moment of enjoyment amid political instability and personal difficulties.

“Buenos Aires”
Lyrics and music by Simja Dujov

I come from Buenos Aires,
The biggest city in a bigger country.
We speak Spanish,
But our second language is crisis.
We live in South America,
Although nobody knows,
When we were humans brought up right,
We used to have no human rights.

Refrain:

We like to smile, we like to cry
We've learned to laugh even though we don't have time

We know nothing about real estate bubbles or subprimes,
We have been living this way all our lives,
Our eternal crisis has only one exit door,
And everyone knows it's in the international airport.

I come from Buenos Aires,
The biggest city in a bigger country.
We speak Spanish,
But our second language is crisis.

Our dance is tango, our music is cumbia,
Our piggy bank is a cow,
And the biggest pain is football
To forget about the real thing,
Every Sunday crowds gather on the field,
Where football is a religion,
And Maradona is the pagan god.

Dujov's interpretation of “Dhankoye,” a Yiddish folk song about a Russian town in the Crimea (now in Russia, which seized it from Ukraine in 2014), tells the story of Jewish agricultural life and farm work in the 1920s during the early Stalinist era, memorializing a small

railroad depot in lyrics that describe how to arrive at this place and what you should expect to find there. While online discussions stir up controversy about the song's historical origins, scholars like ethnomusicologist Abigail Wood have focused on the place of "Dhankoye" in the contemporary Yiddish song repertory (Wood 2013: 99). Wood notes that the song conforms to a "sing-along refrain" style with "little or no text," enabling "audience participation" (Wood 2013: 99). While Dujov sometimes engages audiences in collective singing during his shows—for instance, teaching his audience to shout "oy," "oy," "oy," for the chorus of "Low Fi" during a performance at the Oreja Negra space on February 2, 2013, when he performed music from his album, it is mostly presentational in format.

Dujov's version of "Dhankoye" is not necessarily intended to engender audience participation in singing, a fact that is further exemplified by the call and response between Dujov's lead vocals and the female voices recorded on track. Abigail Wood places this song in the "Jewish socialist tradition," identifying it with "leftist 'progressive' secular politics" and socialist origins, which resonates uniquely in the Argentine context where socialist-Zionist, socialist, and communist traditions were prominently represented among Jews in Buenos Aires in the early decades of the twentieth century. The landscape of the Jewish Argentine left was culturally and politically diverse, stratified between different groups whose ideological approaches to questions of Zionism, nationalism, and Jewish Argentine ethnicity often clashed with each other (Svarch 2008). Nevertheless, it is difficult to hear Dujov's updated version of "Dhankoye" without an ear to the history of the Jewish left in Argentina and the memory of the agricultural colonies in the interior provinces. The following lyrics illuminate this point:

Aunt Natasha drives the tractor
Grandma runs the cream extractor
While we work, we all can sing our songs

Who says Jews cannot be farmers
Spit in his eye who would so harm us
Say Zhankoye, Dzhan, Dzhan, Dzhan.

Not only does Dujov's update to the original material immediately change its sonic contours while creating a possible musical index linking the song to a specific part of Jewish Argentine history in the agricultural colonies, but his musical choices give the song a particularly modernized feel through the inclusion of horn, voice, and synthesizer samples. A pre-recorded voice begins the track: "Shit man, here I am with DJ Simja Dujov, chillin' here in the promised land," with the last line "in the promised land." It is turned up to echo over the drum part, accordion vamp, and horn samples, and it situates the listener in a global musical space. The question of the "promised land" resonates with the legacy of the JCA and the hope for a better life in Argentina for the immigrants who arrived at the turn of the twentieth century. However, this phrase also clearly points to question of the place of Israel in modern Jewish consciousness. Dujov eliminates some of the verses, featuring the following two stanzas with the repeated chorus (see Fig. 3.13).

"Dhankoye"

Yiddish folksong, original lyricist unknown Lyrics in English by Pete Seeger

Az men fort kine Sevastopol
Iz nit veit fun Simfereopol
Dortn iz a stantziye faran
Ver darf zuchen niye glikken
S'iz a stantziye an antikel
In Zhankoye, Dzahn, dzahn, dzahn

Chorus
Hey Zhan, Hey Zhankoye,
Hey Zhanvili, hey Zhankoye,

When you go from Sevastopol
On the way to Simferopol
Just you go a little farther down
There's a little railroad depot
Known quite well by all the people
Called Zhankoye, Dzhan, Dzhan, Dzhan

Chorus
Hey Zhan hey Zhankoye
Hey Zhanvili, hey Zhankoye

Hey Zhankoye, dzahn, dzahn, dzahn

Ver zogt az Yidden kene nit handlen
Essen fette yoich mit mandlen
Nor nit zine kine arbitzman?
Doss kenen zogen nor di sonim
Yidden shpite zay on in ponim
Tit a kik af Dzhan, Dzhan, Dzhan

Repeat Chorus

Hey Zhankoye, Dzhan, Dzhan, Dzhan

Aunt Natasha drives the tractor
Grandma runs the cream extractor
While we work, we all can sing our songs
Who says Jews cannot be farmers
Spit in his eye who would so harm us
Say Zhankoye, Dzhan, Dzhan, Dzhan

Repeat Chorus

Dhankoye

Simja Dujov

The musical score for "Dhankoye" consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Electric Guitar, the middle for the Bass, and the bottom for the E. Gtr. (Electric Guitar). The score begins with an intro in B-flat major and 4/4 time. The lyrics are in Yiddish. The guitar part features a recurring melodic motif in measures 3-4, which is highlighted in the score. The bass part provides harmonic support with sustained notes and rhythmic patterns. The electric guitar part includes both melodic lines and harmonic chords. The score is attributed to Simja Dujov.

Figure 3.12 Excerpt from "Dhankoye" showing the interplay between the electric guitar and bass parts and the recurring melodic motif in the guitar part from measures 3-4.

Notation provided by Simja Dujov.

Working within a matrix of governmental policies purportedly attempting to grow and to celebrate the diversity of cultural expressions and ethnic communities in Buenos Aires on a level greater than ever before, Simja Dujov's eclectic approach to genre can be understood as a tactic

to identify his music in a rapidly expanding middle-class “cosmopolatino/a” music market both in Buenos Aires and abroad (Pacini Hernández 2010). In France, he and his band are “Latin American”; in the United States, his music is received more often as “Jewish”; in New York City, they play in hipster bars for which the public is mostly Latino/a, and in Austin, the listeners are more of the “Jewish-vibe” type. In Canada, Dujov’s music is something between “World” and “Jewish” music, and in Chile it is more of the “Latin Gipsy-vibe.”⁴⁶ Around the world, everyone receives him differently.

While Dujov’s eclecticism does in fact turn toward local musical sources and signifiers within the Latin American musical and cultural vocabulary to break down hemispheric barriers of understanding along trajectories of Jewish migration and exchange, his eclectic approach appropriates widely from a variety of source materials to foreground the Jewish Latin American musical experience for audiences consuming his cultural products (Pacini Hernández 2010). Dujov’s manipulation of genre, more even than a time machine, embraces the practices of world music as a gateway to new places and spaces of musical innovation, a way to add nuance and subtlety to understandings of Jewishness in Latin America while pointing to new directions for Jewish sound in the Americas.⁴⁷

Jewish Musical Renewal in Buenos Aires

⁴⁶ Interview with Simja Dujov, Villa Crespo, Buenos Aires, May 2013.

⁴⁷ I’d like to thank Travis A. Jackson for reading and commenting on an earlier drafts of this chapter published in essay form as “‘Gypsy,’ Cumbia, Cuarteto, Surf, blah blah blah: Simja Dujov and Jewish Musical Eclecticism,” appearing in *Mazel Tov Mis Amigos: Jewish Music in the Americas*, ed. by Amalia Ran and Moshe Morad (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2015), forthcoming. His insights into the concept of “eclecticism” as a musical-analytical category were especially helpful for addressing the question of cosmopolitanism as a point of comparison and differentiation. I am also grateful to Shannon Garland for her challenging feedback on music marketing and economies of sound in contemporary circulations of Latin American popular music.

The renewal of Jewish Argentine popular music in Buenos Aires raises important questions about musical tradition and innovation—issues central to Jewish music studies responding to anxiety over musical borrowing and Jewish musical authenticity (Idelsohn 1992 [1929]; Werner [1959] 1984; Cohen 2010; Shiloah 1995). In this chapter, I have focused on two prominent Jewish Argentine musical performance groups and artists who are critical to the maintenance of public projects making Jewish life visible and audible within the sound worlds of the city of Buenos Aires. By addressing how Jewish Argentine history and cultural identity is imagined and renewed in live musical performance and recording projects, Jewish Argentine popular music is far from a fixed or stable category of Latin American, Argentine, or Jewish music. Listening beyond “Yiddish tangos” and “Latin klezmer”—the more easily distinguishable hybrids and fusions of musical sound—opens up the possibility of disrupting the proliferation of “impure” hybrids by recognizing these musical projects as representative of a lived experience that acknowledges both national and group identities. By thinking about cultural expressions as additive, constitutive, and a conglomeration of many wholes rather than partial cultural influences, Jewish Argentine popular musical performance moves away from essentialist ideas about race and ethnicity in modern Latin America to reinvent and innovate Jewish music.

Chapter Four

Resurgimiento | Resurgence

The Flows of Memory and Yiddish Culture in a Buenos Aires Choir



Figure 4.1 Zeev Malbergier directing the Coro Popular Mordeje Guebirtig in the rehearsal space at the Sholem Buenos Aires, Lavalleja 182. Photo by author.

Joining the Choir – September 2, 2012

The building where the Coro Popular Mordje Guebirtig (“Coro Guebirtig”) meets is a room in the headquarters of the Sholem Buenos Aires, a progressive secular Jewish organization with programs for children and adults. The organization operates a nursery school, a primary education program, a high school, and cultural programming initiatives for youth and seniors, as well as the Colonia Zumerland, a Jewish summer camp founded nearly 60 years ago. In addition to these programs, the Sholem Buenos Aires provides the C.A.S.S. (Centro Asistencial Comunitario de la Colectividad, the Jewish Community Aid Center) and the ICUF (Idisher Cultur Farband, or the Federation of Yiddish Cultures) with support and space to hold meetings

and events. The Coro Guebirtig, an adult Yiddish choir in Buenos Aires meets there twice weekly for rehearsals—once on Monday evenings from 8:45pm to 10:15pm and again on Wednesday evenings from 6:30pm to 9:00pm. The Coro Guebirtig is an affiliate of the ICUF, and it was founded on the leftist, progressive, Yiddishist, anti-Zionist ideals of this ideological movement, which it both preserves and transforms through its contemporary musical activities.

When I arrived to the Sholem Buenos Aires building at Lavalleja 182 on Monday evening, September, 2, 2012, I pushed the buzzer next to the hollow-core metal front door and provided my name to a voice on the other end of the intercom. I waited as the evening building manager unlocked the door, allowing me to jostle it open and walk into the narrow corridor. I arrived with another older woman, who looked at me quizzically, but with interest—she seemed to wonder what an Asian American woman was doing attending a rehearsal of an adult Yiddish choir in the Villa Crespo neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Side by side, we walked toward an open door off of the hallway where the rehearsal was meeting, following the sound of chatter pouring out from the adjacent room.

It's loud in here. I noticed it immediately. The rehearsal room, which was full of people, is bursting with conversation. I can't really hear what they are saying, but every once in awhile I hear a smattering of "shas" (the Argentine pronunciation of "y" and "ll") and the soft flutter of rolled r's. Sofia's¹ eyes brighten and widen excitedly as she gets up from her chair to meet me at the door. We had been emailing to arrange my plans to sit in on choir rehearsals, and she welcomed me warmly that evening, presenting me to the choir director, Zeev Malbergier.² Zeev remembered me from my attendance at prior concerts I had attended as an audience member, and we chatted briefly for a moment before the start of rehearsal. Sofia directed me toward a seat

¹ A pseudonym has been assigned by request.

² Zeev's full name is Alberto "Zeev" Malbergier.

under the bright fluorescent lights in the rehearsal space as the choir emitted a wave of “ohhhs,” “ahhs,” and a big, friendly round of hellos.

The classroom at the ICUF is rectangular with single pane glass windows lining the top of the front wall a few feet above three rows of red and white plastic chairs. Additional rows of chairs sit against the other two sides of the room, and there was space in the middle where shorter rows of chairs were placed perpendicular to the ones facing the front (see Fig. 4.1). Directly in front of the door, Zeev had set up his electric keyboard, which was plugged into an amplifier and an old standing speaker. Next to the keyboard and music stand is a microphone that Zeev uses during the rehearsal so that everyone can hear him clearly.

Initially disoriented, I tried to find a chair in the back rows of the room. A handful of men comfortably occupied the back area, sitting next to each other, some with elbows crossed, making what I can only assume are inside jokes: every time one of them whispered to another, the group would smirk and laugh. They saw me approaching, and one man tapped on the corner of his own plastic chair, indicating that I should sit there too. Instead, I sat nearby in the corner, making his friends burst into laughter as I rebuffed his offer. I laughed too.

Looking around and realizing that I did not have a *cancionero* (song book) or song parts like the other choir members, I stood up and walked back toward Sofia. She pointed to the chair next to her and jumped up to get me the sheets from a cabinet where the choir stores some items. The paper-clipped packet of two songs she handed me included “Mucho Ojo” by Jevel Katz and “A Komedian” by Paul “Pesach” Burstein, a Warsaw-born comedian and singer, who frequently traveled from his home in New York City to Argentina and Montevideo to perform in the Yiddish theaters there. I was especially excited to sing “Mucho Ojo” after spending some time working with the Jevel Katz archive at Fundación IWO and taking Yiddish lessons with Ester

Szwarc. As the rehearsal commenced, Zeev yelled to get the attention of the chatty choir members—a task more difficult than I expected. Although many of the choir members carried on with side conversations, it seemed that there many were simply consulting with neighbors to confirm the index number of the song. All of the songs in the Coro Guebirtig are numbered, and in total, there are approximately 300 songs in the repertory. The early repertory of the choir is mostly songs in Yiddish, but there are also songs in Spanish, Hebrew, and even Italian.

The first song that we sang through that night was “A Komedian” (#274), a song I was hearing for the first time. I noticed that Zeev had arranged it into multiple parts: soprano, mezzo-soprano or alto, and tenor/baritone. The song part I had received was a transliteration of “A Komedian,” which followed a four-line rhyming couplet scheme followed by an eight-line refrain. The choir had a difficult time with the verses, but when they got to the refrain, they sang out loudly in full voices as Zeev increased the tempo slightly. The syncopation of the last three lines of the refrain, “Di shande ieder minut/Es vert guezapt mir main blut/Fun dem gueshrei”³ reminded me of a tango, and I think the other choir members heard it too because their pronunciation sharpened and became more precise undergirded by the familiar rhythm, and I saw smiles spreading on their faces (see Fig. 4.2).

³ All song titles in Yiddish in the present chapter follow the exact transliteration from the song part used by the choir rather than the standard YIVO orthographic conventions.



Figure 4.2 Manuscript of the “Encore II,” featuring the melody from “A Komediant.” From the Paul Burstein and Lillian Lux archive at the YIVO Archives, New York City.

After singing through the entire song, Zeev started again from the beginning. In his mild voice, he instructed the choir to stay quiet and listen as he played through each part on the keyboard. Debates erupted after Zeev started explaining some of the lyrics—with the choir becoming an open forum for discussing the Jewish past and demonstrating knowledge about it. The song, a first-person narrative about the bittersweet travails of a comedian and his encounters with life on the Jewish street (“*in gas*”) became the hot topic of the evening. As Zeev used the word “ghetto” to describe the setting of the song, another choir member immediately provided a context. He reminded the choir that the word “ghetto” originated from the Italian prior to Jewish emancipation in Europe during the 18th century—making it a broader reference to life in a separate Jewish neighborhood rather than a strict reference to the Nazi ghettos of the Second World War. Some nodded and others continued to ask more questions and talk about the

distinction. After a few seconds, Zeev quieted the ensuing discussion and redirected the choir to the task at hand: singing the song according to the arrangement he had composed.

As Zeev clarified the parts on the keyboard, Sofia clarified the structure of the choir. The sopranos lined the far wall, the mezzo-sopranos filled the middle rows, the altos sat against the wall next to the hallway, and the tenors and baritones sat beneath the windows against the front wall of the building (see Figure 3.2). The choir was split into four sections, but “A Komediant” was arranged for three voices because there were not enough men to carry the lowest voice—altos also joined the tenors and baritones. As we sang through “A Komediant” one more time, the modulations from major to minor were difficult for some of the choir members. Zeev took the opportunity to give a general explanation to the choir: major is “happy” and minor is “sad.” “Many Jewish songs are in minor,” he generalized. He played a few bars of “Hava Naguila” as an example of a song in major. Then, he played an example of a song in minor: “Oifn Pripechick.” The choir hummed in agreement, and I noted how Zeev communicated musical information through the language of feeling and mood. Throughout the rest of the rehearsal, Zeev interjected stories and anecdotes to maintain a playful spirit and atmosphere. However, it was not difficult to keep up the choir’s energy. They were thrilled to be there, unafraid to sing, and slow to leave at 10:15pm after an hour and forty-five minute rehearsal.

The ICUF, the Jewish “Progresistas,” and the Formation of a Yiddish Choir in Buenos Aires

As anthropologist Natasha Zaretsky argues, the Coro Popular Mordje Guebirtig is a “vehicle for social change” (2008a: 158–59). It was formed in the aftermath of the 1994 bombing of the AMIA out of a concern for addressing Jewish Argentine cultural identity in the wake of this traumatic event. The founding director, a beloved music teacher affiliated with the ICUF

schools in Buenos Aires, Reizl Sztarker (Rosa Kafenbaum de Sztarker), was a dynamic and politically active advocate for the pursuit of justice after the attack. She remains a critical part of the origin story of the choir and is remembered by name by nearly every choir member who recounted the early years.⁴ Sztarker worked as a music teacher in the ICUF school system, and she spent most of her career at the Dr. Jaim Zhitlovsky School in La Paternal until the 1960s when she retired (ibid.: 163). Sztarker, a woman of diminutive stature with a dynamic and powerful presence, served as the director of the choir for many years. She passed away at 84 years old on June 30, 2009, deeply beloved by the Jewish community of Buenos Aires.⁵ Alberto “Zeev” Malbergier, took over as director in 2003 when Sztarker was unable to continue with the directorial duties due to her advanced age, and the choir had been under his direction for approximately eight years when I joined in 2012.

According to Clarita Fainsod, a member of the Comisión Directiva (Board of Directors), the interest in creating a Yiddish choir in Buenos Aires was already burgeoning among a group of former ICUF teachers prior to the AMIA bombing.⁶ They had a strong interest in exploring new ways to support Yiddish education and culture and to contribute to a resurgence of Yiddish culture in Buenos Aires. Through literature and music these cultural forms, they wanted to showcase “*todos nuestros elementos*,” or “everything that we are” as Ashkenazic Jews of mostly

⁴ Interview with Mario Ber. January 22, 2013. Conversations with Ester Swarcz in Fundación IWO. November 8, 2012. Interview with Clara Glicksman de Fainsod. January 31, 2013.

⁵ Many commemorations and personal testimonies honor her memory. See especially: Moshé Korin, “Una enamorada de la vida y de la música Reizl Sztarker Z”L,” Delacole Website. <http://www.delacole.com/cgi-perl/medios/vernota.cgi?medio=lavoz&numero=noviembre2009¬a=noviembre2009-6>. Accessed July 18, 2015 and Diana Wang, “Coro Guebirtig – Reizl Sztarker,” blog post. October 27, 2001. <http://www.dianawang.net/blog/2001/10/27/coro-guebirtig-reizl-sztarker/>. Accessed July 18, 2015. This blog post also includes a note written by Sztarker’s great-granddaughter, Mara, after an AMIA program honoring Reizl Sztarker in 2001.

⁶ Interview with Clara Glicksman de Fainsod. Buenos Aires. January 13, 2013.

East European origins and first or second generation-born Argentines.⁷ The interest in Yiddish culture was a primary motivating factor for Sztarker and the group of Yiddish teachers, who included Leike Kogan, Jaique Till, Pece Corman, and Paie Corman, to meet together and brainstorm ideas for what they could do to re-invigorate the Yiddish arts.⁸ As Fainsod remembers, there were six or eight “*lerekes*” (teachers) who used to gather in the home of Pece Corman’s elderly father to talk and to sing songs in Yiddish, which he loved. Why don’t you start a choir? Sr. Corman would ask, why don’t you start a choir? Soon after, they began to sing as a group of fifteen or twenty ICUF teachers, meeting in Reizl’s home. Later on, they moved to a larger space on Rocamora Street, and eventually into the Lavalleja location (ibid.: 166). Although the desire was already in place to start a Yiddish choir in Buenos Aires, the AMIA bombing made the issue of expanding the choir even more pressing, serving as a catalyst to bring together more people who sought out each other as they processed the meaning of the attack.

Not long after the AMIA bombing, Clara Fainsod joined the singing group after running into her old Yiddish teachers during a protest march on the street. Clara described how each week, the singing group doubled, and eventually, they decided to put out an advertisement in the newspaper *Página/12* to find additional individuals interested in singing Yiddish songs. The advertisement attracted hundreds of people—approximately 210 people—who wanted to sing in Yiddish.⁹ With these new members, the Yiddish teachers started the choir, naming it after the Polish poet, composer, and resistance fighter, Mordechai Guebirtig. As Natasha Zaretsky notes, Sztarker’s demand was that the choir had to be affiliated with the ICUF—an affiliation the choir has maintained from 1995 to the present (ibid.: 165).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The history of the ICUF in Buenos Aires spotlights the diversity of political ideologies influencing the establishment of different Jewish Argentine ethnic identities from the 1910s to the 1950s (Svarch 2008). The ICUF was founded officially in Argentina in 1941, even though organizers had been working under its ideological auspices in the years prior (*ibid.*). Unlike the Jewish Labour Bund, the *icufistas* (members of the ICUF) were leftist communists and sympathizers with the Soviet Union. The ICUF in Argentina was an instantiation of the ideas resulting from the Congress of Secular Jewish Culture in Paris in 1937 (*ibid.*). While Jews had been active in the communist party in Argentina since the 1910s, the defiantly secularist *icufistas* were deeply committed to their identity as Jewish Argentines and the re-establishment of the centrality of Yiddish cultural arts and literature in Argentina—calling themselves the “*progresista*” or “progressives.”

As historian Ariel Svarch notes, the members of the ICUF “abandoned the classist language, changing ‘proletarian’ for ‘popular’ and ‘working-class’ for ‘Jewish masses,’ in part to conceal their controversial political beliefs as well as to negotiate the political landscape of Argentina in the 1940s: the emergence of the populist platform of Peronism drew the working-class away from the communist party in general, and in Jewish political circles on the left, Jewish organizations were also losing members to the process of upward economic mobility making Jews a part of the middle classes (*ibid.*). The election of President Juan Perón in 1946 dramatically changed Argentina’s political landscape, as the working poor, the unemployed, and other marginalized groups such as women were empowered by Peronism (Bell 2003: 286).

During the early 1940s, two ICUF schools were founded in important sectors of the progressive movement in Buenos Aires. These included the I.L. Peretz school, affiliated with the I.L. Peretz club and library located in Villa Lynch and the Dr. Jaim Zhitlovsky school in La

Paternal (Visakovsky 2009). The Peretz school was founded in 1940 by members of the Jewish left who were involved in the textile industry in Villa Lynch, and the Zhitlovsky school was founded a few months later with similar ideological aims. According to historian Efraim Zadoff, when the schools were first founded, they operated on Saturdays and during Jewish holidays, Yiddish texts were taught in phonetics while Hebrew was avoided except for those words of the “*mame loshen*” (Hebrew) that appeared in Yiddish. The schools avoided teaching anything that could be interpreted as “close to religious tradition” (Zadoff 1994: 273). As its pedagogical mission, the ICUF educator and administrator Eliyahu Shmerkovich defined “progressive Jewish” aims as such: “to educate children such that they are in contact with the life of the Jewish people, so they know the history and growth of a national consciousness. The schools will allow them to know the treasures of Jewish culture, those who will protect and preserve it in the future” (ibid.: 277).¹⁰ As Zadoff points out, Shmerkovich’s assumption implies that the children were already a part of Argentine society, and that their Jewish cultural heritage needed to be protected through a progressive Jewish education that acknowledged their lives in Argentina (ibid.).

After a few years later of difficult negotiations, the ICUF schools joined the Va’ad Hajinuj, the Central Board of Jewish Education, which had strong ties to the AMIA (the Zhitlovsky joined school in 1943; the Peretz school in 1945) (ibid.: 273). As a result, the ICUF schools were allowed to accept AMIA subsidies in exchange for certain ideological compromises, including closing the schools on the Sabbath and holidays (Zadoff 1994; Svarch 2008). As Svarch notes, complying with the Va’ad Hajinuj’s policies did not change their core pedagogical orientation: Yiddish remained the primary Jewish language of instruction, and

¹⁰ Translation by author.

religious content was not transmitted even though classes were no longer held on Jewish holidays. Although the ICUF schools were accepted into the Va'ad Hajinuj, the battle for control over the AMIA and internal strife between Zionist and non-Zionist organizations such as the ICUF led to bitterness between Jewish political factions (Bell 2003). For those leftists Jews who did not identify as communists, the anti-Fascist beliefs of the group attracted other members.

After the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, Jewish education in Argentina continued to favor Zionists ideology. Most Jewish schools began teaching Hebrew instead of Yiddish, yet the ICUF schools continued teaching Yiddish until most schools had closed by the 1970s (ibid.: 159-162). Continuing strife between the different political factions was exacerbated by the anti-Semitism of the Communist government in the Soviet Union as well as the worldwide Zionist movement's turn away from Yiddish as they turned toward Hebrew-language instruction (Bell 2003: 285). As a result, Yiddish took on a new meaning as a language of nostalgia, according to Natasha Zaretsky:

As Hebrew supplanted Yiddish as the main language in Jewish schools, and the desire of children of immigrants to "assimilate" brought Spanish to the home, Yiddish persisted through the nostalgia of those who had spoken it; as the indexical language of the ICUF and progressive Jews; and in the 1990s to the present, as the secular language spoken among the followers of Chabad Lubavich who have introduced a revitalization of interest in orthodox (or ultra-orthodox) practice. (Zaretsky 2008a: 161)

Amid widespread tensions within the Jewish community of Argentina struggling to define local forms of Jewish nationalism, the realm of cultural engagement became even more heated. Cultural forms and works of literature, music, painting, and popular song, were further politicized in the context of the expansion of Zionism in Argentina. The icufistas embraced Yiddish culture in an attempt to ward off the threat of Zionism's turn away from the Ashkenazi Jewish past in Europe as it affixed its gaze on Palestine. Music was involved in this conflict, as

the question over the legitimacy of the “Hatikvah” anthem was debated in the Jewish Argentine schools, which and eventually imposed “Hatikvah” as the legitimate Jewish anthem instituted by Va’ad Hajinuj (Zadoff 194: 285).

Instead, the ICUF schools resisted this requirement and continued to recite the Argentine national anthem and the Partizaner march—“Zog Nit Kayn Mol,” by Hirsch Glick written in 1943 in the Vilna Ghetto—the unofficial hymn of the Jewish Argentine progressives. By 1952, the ICUF’s deteriorating relations with the central Jewish institutions in Argentina led to the complete separation of the progresistas from other Jewish groups, including the dissolution of relations between the Va’ad Hajinuj and the ICUF schools in 1952. By the 1970s, the majority of the ICUF schools had closed. Although many communist-leaning Jewish Argentines remained committed to the ICUF project, many were devastated by the facts of Communist rule in the Soviet Union as truths about Soviet repression and anti-Semitism emerged with the fall of the Soviet Union (Zaretsky 2008: 172). While the Coro Guebirtig was founded by ICUF teachers, only twenty or so committed progresistas remain in the choir.¹¹

In an interview with Clara, she lamented the closing of the Yiddish schools and the diminished importance of Yiddish culture and language in Jewish life in Buenos Aires. She mentioned two reasons why she thought the closings occurred. One reason was the problem of financing the schools, which resulted, in part from the separation of ties from the Va’ad Hajinuj. Another problem Clara discussed was that, as Jews aspired to improve economic situations for their families to become a part of the rising middle classes, they had less and less time to devote to maintaining the schools as a community of volunteers, who had once built the schools “one

¹¹ Interview with Zeev Malbergier. February 4, 2013.

chair at a time.”¹² It is critical to recognize then that the origins of the Coro Guebirtig and its affiliation with the ICUF under the leadership of Reizl Sztarker provides an important context for understanding the meaning of Yiddish aesthetics in Buenos Aires. In the early years of the choir from 1995 to 2003, the choir maintained a core aesthetic that has been transformed by the new choral director, Zeev Malbergier. Although the aesthetics have changed over the years, the Coro Guebirtig remains an important social movement in Argentina and the manifestation of the legacy of a progressive Jewish Argentine ideology. In the 2010s, the Coro Guebirtig remains an important public Jewish Argentine organization representing a diverse set of Jewish Argentine political and social interests.

As such, the present chapter is based on six months of regular participation with the Coro Popular Mordje Guebirtig from September 2012 to March 2013, when the choral season ended. While contextualizing the present day aesthetic in the history of this singing group and its transformation into a more inclusive, pluralistic Jewish Argentine choir, the present chapter highlights the individual voices of the choir members as musical laborers, who connect to the mostly Yiddish folksong repertory as an expression of nostalgia, love, and pride. Unlike other chapters in this dissertation, the present chapter extensively features individual testimonies, spotlighting the stories told to me by some of the choir members in written surveys. The present chapter elevates these testimonies to highlight the ways in which the Coro Guebirtig choir members draw significance from their participation in the choir. What I hope emerges is a clear portrait of the deep importance of Yiddish folksong, group singing, and the institutional structure of the choir as a social entity, providing connections between individual choir members to the

¹² Interview with Clara Glicksman de Fainsod. Buenos Aires. January 13, 2013.

threads of Jewish Argentine memory formed out of love for the repertory and personal histories accessed through Yiddish song in Buenos Aires.

Two Phases of the Choir: 1995 to 2003; and 2003 to the Present

As the aging Reizl Sztaker became unable to continue directing the choir, the board of directors sought a new director who could take over and provide stability and musical leadership. In the early 2000s, the board of directors chose Alberto “Zeev” Malbergier a “*moré de shirá*,” a music teacher in the Hebrew-language Jewish schools and temples. However, Zeev came from a household where his parents spoke Yiddish in the home. His father was born in Warsaw, Poland, and his mother was from a town nearby, just outside of Warsaw. His parents along with his grandparents immigrated to Argentina, and although he studied to become a Hebrew teacher, he also studied Yiddish in school. The majority of his musical training was with individual teachers, and although he never attended conservatory, his musical learning began at the age of six, when he started playing the piano with his older sister, who was taking lessons in their home. Zeev considers himself a keyboardist, but his main instrument is the accordion. When he was seven, he began studying the instrument with private teachers and conducted his first choir—a children’s choir—when he was just fifteen years old. While Zeev’s family observed some Jewish religious holidays, such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, he identifies his family as traditionalist, not religious. His grandparents, however, were more observant than his parents, and his great grandparents were much more observant: they were rabbis in Poland.

When Zeev first arrived to the choir in 2003, he found the dynamics of the choir to be very interesting. He initially worked with Shmuel Katz, who co-directed the group for five years, and later, Andy Levy joined the choir in 2011, leaving the following year. Prior to joining the

Coro Guebirtig as a director, Zeev had worked in the temples with liturgical music and full religious services for over 35 years, while continuing to maintain his own traditionalist personal identity. Suddenly, after joining the Coro Guebirtig, he found himself on the other end of the cultural manifestation of the Jewish Argentine political spectrum. The choir intentionally performed songs that did not have anything to do with God, and at the beginning, the choir did not want to sing in Hebrew because it was the language of Zionism. The leftist progressives had been in opposition to the Zionist project and were strong Argentine nationalists. Over time, however, Zeev grew accustomed to the political orientation of the choir and began instituting his own changes that have gone over well with the group, such as the use of multi-part arrangements and the expansion of more repertory in Hebrew, Spanish, and Italian—including *popurrís*. The changing demographics of the choir included more individuals who did not identify as progresista, and even those who maintain leftist political views have accepted Israel as a “first world country” of “science and technology.”¹³ Many choir members have visited Israel, and some have relatives who live there. As such, fewer members of the Coro Guebirtig reject the diversification of musical content beyond the core repertory of political Yiddish folksongs, which feature songs originating from around the time of the Second World War.

As Zeev told me, when he first arrived to direct the Coro Guebirtig, the discipline of the choir was very firm. Reizl Sztaker had been a career primary school teacher, and her commanding presence manifested in a highly disciplined choir. It was an “old school” (*del estilo antiguo*) form of leadership that helped shape the choir and maintain order within the group, which once numbered more than 200 members.¹⁴ Zeev’s leadership, however, is more laid back.

¹³ Conversations with choir members at the Acto de Iom Haatzmaut, the Yom Haatzmaut Commemoration in the Club C.A.S.A. on April 15, 2013.

¹⁴ Interview with Zeev Malbergier. February 4, 2013.

He allows the choir members to chat for a moment before quieting them down, and he recognizes that the choir provides emotional support for many of its members. For some choir members, the difference in disciplinary style is bothersome in part due to their memory of the earlier years and because of personal preferences, but others enjoy the side conversations and gossip that takes place during the rehearsals. Furthermore, Zeev told me that he has spoken with doctors about the choir, and now he tries to incorporate some of their medical suggestions about how to support the neurological health and memory of the choir members. He says that he has noticed an improvement among a handful of choir members who remember song lyrics and melodies better than when they started. While somewhat less formal than it once was, the Coro Guebirtig still sings with repertory folders, and they wear bright colored scarves and pins with the choir's logo around their necks instead of the light blue vests they wore during the first phase of the choir. While everyone in the choir recognizes its importance as a social endeavor, Sofia once joked with me: "You might be 92 years old, but you still need to bring your folder to rehearsal."¹⁵

The most significant aesthetic change implemented by Zeev Malbergier is the use of multi-part vocal arrangements. In the first phase of the choir, Reizl Sztaker instituted unison singing—a participatory practice lacking vocal hierarchies that arguably more closely aligned with her ICUF commitments. With Zeev, however, the choir sings in three-part simple harmonies, mostly in triads emphasizing cadential progressions. The vocal parts separate male and female voices, though some women with lower voices also sing the lowest part, including myself. As a result, the smaller proportion of men to woman is a significant issue with respect to the balance of voices in the choir. While the men of the choir are committed and active members

¹⁵ Interview with Sofia. April 22, 2013.

of the Coro Guebirtig, the women far outnumber the men, especially in Wednesday rehearsals, which meet earlier to accommodate the schedules of the less mobile, more elderly choir members, or those with other activities on Monday evenings. Many of the choir members are widows and widowers, and the choir is a support system and social space—even leading, on occasion, to new romantic partnerships.

In general, the changes instituted by Zeev lightened both the mood and the repertory of the Choir Guebirtig, while maintaining the core principles of a choir featuring musical repertory in Yiddish. In performances, he added a little humor and comedy, and Zeev speaks out directly to the crowd to involve them in the music. He also decided that performances do not need to be so long, changing the format from singing 16 or 17 songs to a reduced set list. He introduced a video component, providing images and lyrics for the audiences who do not speak or understand Yiddish. In this way, he creates new ways to keeping audiences engaged and entertained while respecting the choir's core principles of bringing about a resurgence of Yiddish culture two decades after the choir's initial formation. He understands that this choir is a vessel for bringing Jewish culture to parts of the region where few Jews remain tied to religious and cultural traditions. They felt especially successful during their travels in the interior provinces, where the choir performed at the small institutions remaining in the former JCA colony towns.

However, not all of the changes were well received by all choir members. Zeev remembers how he was leading the choir in a song they were performing from *Fiddler on the Roof*, which included the melody of the candle blessing for Shabbat, and eventually led to the departure of some choir members who did not want to sing in Hebrew nor act out a religious ritual.¹⁶ What is especially interesting here is the importance placed on the symbolic meaning

¹⁶ Here, he is possibly referring to “Sabbath Prayer” from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

inherent in the presentation of the performance of religious observance even as entertainment. Even though the choir members were re-enacting a version of the 1964 Broadway musical by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick—most likely consumed in Argentina by choir members either in the 1969 theatrical debut starring Pepe Soriano or in the 1980s, when the show returned featuring Marcos Zuker, the prevailing symbolism of the profession of religious sentiment outweighed the scene’s roots in musical theater and film.¹⁷ That is, the performance of prayer in the context of entertainment did not supersede its deeper meaning as Jewish religious practice. As such, some of the choir members left after this incident, even though Zeev suggested that the sing “ooh” instead of the words in Hebrew—a substitution that failed to convince some of the committed progressives who remained staunch in their political commitments.

From the beginning, however, the repertory of the choir was notably diverse beyond the famous Yiddish folksongs like “Oifn Pripichick” and “Roishinkes mit Mandlen” that appeared in 1995. The early repertory of the choir, while featuring mostly well known Yiddish folksongs, also included the “Himno a Sarmiento” with lyrics and music composed by Leopoldo Corretjer, praising the philosopher and former president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento.¹⁸ In 1996, the Coro Guebirtig added “Hatikvah,” sung in Hebrew and once a symbol of contention within the ICUF schools, as well as more songs in Spanish, including “Venceremos,” a translation of the American Civil Rights anthem, “We Shall Overcome” “Canción Para Todos,” “La Maza,” and “Fuego en Anymana.” In 1999, the choir added “Nabucco,”—the “Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves,” from Verdi’s 1841 opera depicting the plight of the ancient Jews during the Babylonian

¹⁷ See: Martín Goyburu, “El Violinista en el Tejado,” Balletin dance: La revista argentina de danza. Online. May 2002. <http://www.balletinarchivo.com.ar/2002/violinista.htm>. Accessed July 19, 2015.

¹⁸ An index of the songs of the choir from 1995 to 2000 was provided to me by Mario Ber, who no longer sings with the choir.

exile. Much of the repertory from the first phase of the choir (1995–2003) were political songs, nationalist songs, and even songs with clear Zionist content such as “Am Isroel Jai,” the Shlomo Calebach tune (written out in the Yiddish pronunciation).¹⁹

In general, Zeev finds that there are three basic challenges to directing an adult Yiddish choir of the size and of the public profile of the Coro Guebirtig. The first, simply, is that many choir members have deteriorating eyesight, which makes it even more difficult for them to sing along with the phonetic lyric sheets or to follow along in the musical notation. In spite of our difference in age, I too found this to be a challenge. The phonetic lettering placed below the musical staff in three parts takes up a lot of space across the page, and keeping up with the vocal line in musical time while flipping quickly through multiple sheets of music was challenging. Furthermore, Zeev notes that many of the choir members do not know how to read music. As such, he often plays a part over again for the choir members to learn from signing back multiple times. The general inexperience with vocal music allows the choir to maintain its “popular” aesthetic. The point is not to have a polyphonic, classical choir.²⁰ Instead, the choir represents the everyday voice of the Jewish Argentine people. As Clara told me, people “sing with their souls,” with the desire to share the contents of the Jewish collective identity and the objective of transmitting the richness of Jewish culture and tradition.²¹ However, Zeev does note that some people are more interested in acquiring musical knowledge and honing language skills than others, and some choir members have pursued music and voice lessons after joining the choir.

Although Zeev maintains significant influence as the musical director, the Coro Guebirtig maintains a board of directors that makes important programming and repertory choices for the

¹⁹ Song names appear in this paragraph as they are written in the song index.

²⁰ Interview with Clara Fainsod. January 31, 2013.

²¹ Ibid.

group. In fact, all repertory sung by the choir is chosen in consultation with the board, which is composed of five choir members. The board chooses showcases to perform in and finds performance locations. A finance committee tracks all dues payments, and notates the accounts, paying for the use of the space at Sholem Aleijem (to cover, lights, gas, cleaning staff, etc.). Choir Guebirtig members pay a monthly fee, which was 100 pesos in 2012-2013, or the equivalent of approximately \$20 US dollars. The Coro Guebirtig is a member of the Red Coral Argentina (Argentine Choral Network), which means that they can participate in choral activities and performances with other non-Jewish choirs in the Argentine Choral Network. These performances increase the choir's public visibility beyond the Jewish community alone and bring Yiddish folksongs to new audiences.

At the time of my departure in 2013, Sofia was searching for a place to hold their performance commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising on April 19, 2013. As Sofia told me, they were having difficulty finding an appropriate place to hold the event because most municipal theaters charged more than the choir could afford, and they did not want to hold the commemoration in one of the typical Jewish community centers in Buenos Aires. After being asked by a representative in the office of the Defensoría del Pueblo de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires-Tercera Edad (Public Council of the Defense of the People of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires – Seniors) why they did not just perform in “one of their own institutions,” she replied: “The point of this commemoration is to work against the memory of the Jews living in ghettos. If we perform in one of the Jewish institutions, we are still stuck in the ghetto.” Her statement undergirded the choirs’ commitment to sharing and transmitting Yiddish culture not just to Jews but as a wider representation of Jewish Argentine

cultural heritage among non-Jews. It also underlined the choir's commitment to its public identity as a secular activist Jewish Argentine choir above all.

El Festival de la Canción Judía in the Teatro IFT – November 24, 2012



Figure 4.3 The Teatro IFT from the street at Boulogne Sur Mer 549. Photo by author.

Among the many performance venues and concerts that the Coro Guebirtig participates in each year, the most important is the Festival de la Canción Judía (Festival of Jewish Song). The Festival of Jewish Song is an opportunity for the choir members to share their music with their families and friends, but it is also a fundraising event to raise money to manage the operating costs of the choir. It is held in the Teatro IFT, the last remaining Yiddish theater founded in Buenos Aires in 1932, which is also an affiliate of the ICUF (see Fig. 4.3). In the main entrance

of the theater the words “theater—a school for adults,” a quote from the Yiddish writer I. L. Peretz, is carved into the grey, stone wall in Yiddish and Spanish next to carvings of the faces of working-class men and women. The mural is a reminder to all visitors that this is a Yiddish theater—an independent theater of and for “the people.” The director of the Teatro IFT, Fanny Galperin, is also one of the youngest members of the Coro Guebirtig. Her ties to the institution and to the choir greatly assist the group in its annual planning and realization of the Festival of Jewish Song.²²

Each year, the concert features a special repertory selected by the board of directors and prepared by the choir in the months leading up to the event. When I joined the choir in September 2012, I did not realize that I would become an official member of the choir at the Festival de la Canción Judía until I saw my name listed alongside the 90 or so other choir members in the concert program. I felt a bit of a rush to see this in print—all of our names together, including my own.

In preparation for the concert, we had had a dress rehearsal in a backstage area of the Teatro IFT on November 17, 2012. The rehearsal was attended by only a small proportion of the total choir—just enough people to fill the seats, which had been arranged in a circle around Zeev, who stood in the center with his keyboard. The pre-recorded backtracks were notably louder than in rehearsals, and the amplified sound contrasted with the unamplified voices of the choir. The dress rehearsal was a final opportunity to run through some songs, and it was filmed by a videographer who was capturing footage that would be edited into a video playing during the Festival of Jewish Song concert. The balance was off, and the acoustics were different in the back stage area where we rehearsed, but the purpose was clear. It was a final reminder of the

²² Interview with Fanny Galperin. April 22, 2013.

musical material and a chance for the videographer to gather his footage that would be shown at the show.

Since I knew I would be performing in the show itself, I asked my roommate Christine if she might be able to attend the concert and film it for me just a few days later on November 24, 2012. We planned to meet in the main hall of the Teatro IFT prior to the show. As I waited for her to arrive, hundreds of friends and family members of the choir filed into the theater, purchasing tickets from the box office and finding seats in the downstairs seating area. As Sofia told me, for many years, the choir held its annual concert in the outdoor amphitheater at the Parque Centenario.²³ For the choir, this was a great location: not only did friends and family attend the concert, but random park-goers would also drop by to check out the choir. She remembers that thousands of people would attend the annual concerts until the amphitheater was dismantled around 2005, when a municipal park restoration project was commenced to address the park's state of disrepair resulting from Argentina's economic and political turmoil from the 1980s to the crisis of the early 2000s.²⁴

Following the loss of the amphitheater space, the choir began holding their annual concert in the Teatro IFT.²⁵ To me, it seemed like an incredible turnout that evening for a concert of Jewish music; around a thousand people or more must have been in the audience. In fact, due to the large number of people, I never found my friend. Our burner cell phones did not work well, and we often ran out of credit. That evening, we were unable to reach each other, and I waited anxiously in search of her until after the show began. As a result, I missed the first song,

²³ Interview with Sofia. April 22, 2013.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

“Mir Lebn Eibik,” while I snaked through the dark hallway to the backstage area to wait to rejoin the choir—finding my usual place next to Sofia in time for the third song (see Fig. 4.4).



Fig 4.4 Inside the Teatro IFT for the Festival of Jewish Song, November 24, 2012.
Photo by author.

To begin the concert, choir member Berta Safir read a few words to welcome the audience to the 18th annual Festival of Jewish Song. As Berta explained, the first part of the concert was dedicated to popular Yiddish poets. The second part of the concert was dedicated to songs about work and liberty, and the third part of the concert paid homage to the Yiddish theater. Berta referred to the Teatro IFT in particular, which was celebrating its 80th anniversary that year, and the crowd clapped and cheered at the mention of their historic community institution. They continued clapping as Berta named famous singers, comedians, and composers beloved in Jewish Buenos Aires—Jevel Katz, Max Zalkind, Rosita Lodner, Henri Guerro, and

Pesach Burstein—whose musical legacies were being honored that evening. As she finished up the introductions, Berta read a letter from the board of directors of the ICUF, who shared their well wishes with the choir:

The choir revalorizes this activity of singing in Yiddish that allows for the permanent renewal of the act of sustaining and maintaining alive the collective memory of the Jewish tradition. Through the passage of time, music is a cultural factor, a universal element, and a treasure of the people. Music should continue being the ‘king of the world’ to serve as a means of peace between communities, without missiles, without bombings, without attacks, without casualties.²⁶

As Berta read these final words, the crowd continued to clap, and I watched the faces of the choir members frozen in expressions of defiance against the acts of violence that they stood out against as an egalitarian and humanist organization. Stating a wish for peace in the Middle East and congratulations to Zeev Malbergier and the choir, Berta finished reading the letter from the board of the ICUF, and we began to sing.

In total, there were 19 songs, and the concert ran approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. The Yiddish song “Mir Lebn Eibik” (“We Will Live Forever”) opened the program followed by the “Oifn Pripetchick,” which was dedicated to the memory of Janusz Korczak, a writer of children’s books and caretaker for orphans in the Warsaw Ghetto, who was killed in Treblinka death camp. As we sang through the song, photos of Korczak flashed across the screen for the audience. “Los Bílbilicos,” a Ladino song that we did not spend much time with in rehearsal was next, and after that we sang, “Venceremos,” a song that we had practiced many times in rehearsal because the arrangement included the entrance of the choir on an upbeat rather than a downbeat during the refrain, about which choir members sometimes forgot. “Venceremos” was a mixture of Spanish and Yiddish—the first two refrains were sung in

²⁶ Field recording of the Festival of Jewish Song. November 24, 2012. Translation by author.

Yiddish from a translation done by Mina Reuter, from the lyrics in Spanish, translated and popularized by María Elena Walsh, a beloved Argentine children's music composer. For the performance, Zeev had set the song to a pre-recorded backtrack with a synthesized drum kit marking the off-beats at a moderate tempo, which often felt too slow to me.

The song itself was set to a "cowboy-like" feel that reproduced the motion of swaying back and forth, as if on a horse. For the concert, "Venceremos" was dedicated to the memory of Martin Luther King Jr., the American Civil Rights Activist, thus coordinating a number of unlikely sounds, symbols, and images. As Martin Luther King Jr.'s face flashed across the screen, live video feed of the choir was interspersed in between the images during the performance. After the concert, it was a moment that my roommate asked me about. "Can you explain how "Venceremos" came to be performed that way?" she wondered. I wasn't entirely sure, but I guessed that perhaps the cowboy-feel was an index of "American" culture, and that the choice to honor Martin Luther King Jr. was a reference to the English version of "We Shall Overcome," a civil rights anthem. In addition, a line from the refrain, "*quiero que mi país sea feliz*"—I want my country to be happy—had obvious echoes in Argentina's own traumatic recent history. Above all, the song was consistent with the choir's politics.

The following song, "Melodía de Arrabal," a famous sung tango by Carlos Gardel with lyrics by Mario Batistella and Alfredo Le Pera, sounded closer to the original arrangement. As the choir sang, many from memory, video footage of the city of Buenos Aires from the early twentieth century flashed across the screen. During the song, Zeev turned to face the audience, conducting them and encouraging them to sing along. The next song, "Por qué Cantamos" was dedicated to the memory of singer Eladia Blazquez and the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti,

and the song after, “Canción de Caminantes,” a cherished children’s song, was dedicated to its composer, María Elena Walsh.

The second section of the concert—songs of work and liberty—included the Yiddish song, “Dos Lid fun Goldenem Land,” by Mordechai Guebirtig and “Popurrí Hora” a of songs in Hebrew about working the land and building the State of Israel. As usual, the Hebrew lyrics got caught in people’s mouths, and a refrain that commonly tripped up the choir in rehearsal again resulted in difficulty during the performance. After we stumbled through, Sofia and I looked at each other and shook our heads, laughing as the moment passed. Then, we transitioned into the third part of the concert—the songs honoring the Yiddish theater—a portion of the concert repertory that was a favorite of the choir. These songs included, “Zug Farvus,” dedicated to the Tin Pan Alley composer Sholom Secunda, “J’vil,” dedicated to the performers Henri Guerro and Rosita Londner (stars of the Buenos Aires Yiddish stage), “A Komedian,” dedicated to its composer Pesach Burstein, “Mutcho Ojo,” dedicated to Jevel Katz, the song’s composer, and the song “Lejaim” followed a tribute to the choir itself and the Teatro IFT—for which a slideshow of photos, memorabilia, and important moments in the choir’s history ran across the screen on stage.

During the concert, the choir was not nearly as silly as they often were singing these comedic songs during rehearsals. A favorite antic was during “Mutcho Ojo” when the choir member, Ricardo, would extend the word “*nu*,” a Yiddish word meaning “so? really? to sound like a cow mooing. Choir members frequently snapped their fingers along to the songs from the Yiddish theater, but at the Festival of Jewish Song, everyone remained more formal and composed. Following the final song in Yiddish, “Doktoirim Eizn Lajn,” Clarita Fainsod came to

the front of the stage to read from a prepared statement, enumerating the political, social, and cultural aims of the choir.

In 1995, when everything felt so vulnerable and stormy, when it seemed like everything was falling into oblivion, we came together with Reizl Sztarker to revive, to remember, and to sing the most beautiful melodies and lyrics of the Jewish musical repertory. With Zeev we now have a diverse repertory with over 280 songs in Yiddish, Spanish, Hebrew, Ladino, and Italian. Songs that narrate the struggles of the Jewish communities that sing about labor that sing of a love that touches the soul—songs that wake up our utopian dreams for a better world of peace and of happiness. How can we quiet the worry, the pain, and our own impotence to be able to confront the things happening these days in the Middle East?

We can sing for a growing, emergent Israel—we participate at the festivities for Yom Haatzmaut to address the things that we confront today. We ask that the warring groups cease bombings and attacks against ordinary people. For 18 years, we have asked for justice and punishment for those who attacked the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA. At our next Festival of Jewish Song, we will see arrival of the clarification of facts about the attacks. We will see, in reality, the arrival of a true peace, on which not only we depend, but that we keep demanding, because the only victims are the people.

The Coro Guebirtig was never silent and was never absent from the protest for the return of the disappeared, and we are very happy for each grandchild that is being “recovered.” The Coro Guebirtig will keep singing to life because today and always, we remember those poets who contributed to our rich literature. That’s why we were also present at the presentation of the books in Yiddish that the Ministry of Education, together with the Sholem Buenos Aires, published in recognition of one thousand years of culture. In the Coro Guebirtig, we will continue with our objectives, proud of what we have achieved, and what we have already shared. Our repertory unites us one more time in singing and in life. And because the Coro Guebirtig is the Coro Guebirtig, it will always be this way. *Salud!* (to health); *Lejaim!* (to life); *Sholem!* (to peace).²⁷

To conclude the concert, we sang through the Italian song “Va Pensierro,” from Verdi’s opera *Nabucco*. “Hava Nagila,” sung as a round was the last song of the concert, and many people in the audience joined along to sing with the choir. As I congratulated my other choir members, who were beaming and smiling, I thought I understood the sentiment that unites this group. To sing is to belong, to belong, all one must do is to sing—an experience the Coro

²⁷ Translation by author.

Guebirtig graciously allowed me to share in order to know the Coro Guebirtig. As I hung around chatting with Sofia for a few moments, my roommate, who had been seated in the upper balcony section of the theater, found me on the stage. We walked out of the theater to search of dinner, chatting and remarking about the concert alongside other choir members and their friends and families saying goodnight.

Personal Testimonials of Members of the Coro Guebirtig



Figure 4.5 The Coro Guebirtig and the author in rehearsal at the Sholem Buenos Aires in March 2013. Photo by author.

Martha Sztelman de Lerner²⁸

Martha joined the choir in 2000 to explore her Jewish roots and to not lose the language of her elders. For her, Yiddish connects Jews trying to maintain and struggling to protect Jewish identity for thousands of years. She is a widow and started singing with the choir just a few months after the death of her husband. In total, she has four grandchildren—two girls and two boys. Her older son lives in Vancouver where he has been for 23 years, and he has two sons. Her younger daughter has two daughters and lives in Buenos Aires as well.

²⁸ Based on a survey submitted by Martha Sztelman de Lerner dated May 20, 2013. Translation by author.

When Martha was a child, she studied Yiddish in the school that her parents founded, the Domingo F. Sarmiento School in Avellaneda, in Buenos Aires Province. She has tried to remain *tradicionalista* without huge expectations for how to practice being a traditionalist, and she respects different traditions, noting that she tries to help her fellow man as best she can—a nod toward the *progresista* approach toward Jewish Argentine identification. Martha says that she is lucky to have a small, but marvelous family.

For Martha, the aesthetic of the choir is wonderful. It is beautiful because it is an amateur choir of mostly senior citizens—parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. She considers herself lucky to be able to attend both rehearsals twice a week because she learns more that way, and for her, it is a kind of therapy. In general, she likes all the songs because they each have their own characteristics that tell something about each era of the history and the essence of the Jewish people. She thinks that everyone likes all of the songs, but she recognizes that some are more difficult to sing than others, which makes it seem as if some songs are not as well liked. Each year, the Festival of Jewish Song gets better and better because they “sing from the heart.”

David Zakuski²⁹

David has been a member of the choir since 2001, when he joined as a means to participate in a cultural activity after learning about the choir from a friend who invited him to the annual Festival of Jewish Song held in the Parque Centenario. His father was born in Brest, a part of Russia that is now a part of Belarus. His mother was born in Argentina, and his grandparents were Ukrainian. Yiddish is the language of his grandparents. Like many of the

²⁹ Based on a survey submitted by David Zakuski dated May 19, 2013. Translation by author.

Coro Guebirtig members, David studied Yiddish in elementary school at the Dr. Jaim Zhitlovsky School where Reizl Szartzker was his teacher. He considers himself progresista and secular.

David's favorite songs in the repertory are diverse and include material in Spanish, Italian, German, Yiddish, and Hebrew: "Va Pensiero," "Tog Eyn Tog Oys," "Uf Gozal," "Melodía de Arrabal," "Shpil Zhe Mir a Lidele," "Eli Eli," "Brider," "Por qué Cantamos," "Du Hebst Mich Hoch," "Friling," "Benkshaft," "Erev Shel Shoshanim," "Fidele," "Chiquilín de Bachín," "A Komediant." He thought the 2012 Festival de la Canción Judía went well, but he wishes there was more formality in the behavior of the choir members during the concert. He finds that there is a lot of disorder filing onstage and getting offstage. In the festivals, there are choir members waving to family members and friends from the stage, which he finds somewhat disagreeable.

For David, the most important activities of the choir are the performances of the Red Coral Argentina, the Encuentro de Colectividades, and of course, the annual Festival of Jewish Song. Each week, he dedicates a few hours beyond the rehearsal time to organize his song materials and practice the songs. Since we often sat next to each other during rehearsals, I noticed that his repertory folder and song materials were often re-typed and printed out to better visually represent the pacing and pronunciation of each sung syllable. He marked his sheets in pencil during rehearsal, neatly drawing curved lines above and below the words to indicate the melodic contours of the songs. I would often look at his sheets if I forgot our part during rehearsal, and it was clear that he took pride in his preparation for the choir. The Coro Guebirtig is the only choir he participates in, and he studied music before joining the choir. For David, the Coro Guebirtig is a place where he enjoys pleasant distractions from every day life, and it ties him to the land—Argentina.

“Pablo”³⁰

Pablo has sung with the choir for 17 years because they sing the songs in Yiddish that his mother sang. He learned of the choir from a friend as well as a cousin, and Yiddish is meaningful to him in order to not lose his identity as a Jew. His parents arrived to Argentina in 1930.

Together with other family members, they all arrived with nothing. Each person looked for work and took it when it was available. He studied Yiddish in the Scholem Ajeijem School for six years. He considers himself to be tradicionalista and respects all forms of Jewish identification.

The most important activities of the choir for him are the performances in different institutions, but the Monday night rehearsals he attends are also very important to him because the choir is meaningful for the maintenance of the essence of Yiddish. For Pablo, the Festival of Jewish Song is always excellent because it is an opportunity to share and express their emotions through the music. He did not formally study music before joining the choir, but he likes all of the songs because he does not want the language to be lost to time.

Jaime Muler³¹

Jaime has participated in the choir for 18 years because in it, he says, he found his roots. He liked that through the music of the choir, he felt closer to his origins, and he likes to participate in the performances. He feels and thinks that Yiddish isn’t just a cultural and idiomatic part of Jewish life, it is the deep roots of his being. His parents came to Buenos Aires before World War II, escaping discrimination in Europe. They had three daughters in addition to their eldest son, Jaime. His reflections on his parents’ experience arriving to Argentina are

³⁰ A pseudonym has been assigned by request. Based on a survey dated May 15, 2013. Translation by author.

³¹ Based on a survey by Jaime Muler dated May 17, 2013. Translation by author.

nostalgic and positive; he says that Argentina took them in, like all immigrants, with love and with the opportunity to work. He studied Yiddish for a few years in a Jewish elementary school during his childhood, and he considers himself tradicionalista because he does not practice religious Judaism.

Jaime's appreciation for the choir extends to his fond memories of Reizl Sztarker, who he says gave them the "impulse and the affection" for Yiddish song. With the great maestro Zeev Malbergier, have toured the interior of the country, which was a lot of fun. The Coro Guebirtig brings a passion for music to his life through Yiddish song and songs they sing in Hebrew, Ladino, Italian, etc.

He likes all 300+ songs of the repertory because through them, he is able to remember his childhood, his identity, and his community. He feels that there are no unpleasant songs—he has encountered songs of love, of commiseration, and of peace and equality. For Jaime, the most important activities of the Coro Guebirtig are the musical and choral aspects—a nod perhaps to another era when the choir members devoted more time to non-musical political activism. He personally dedicates one day a week to the choir in addition to weekly rehearsals, extra performance rehearsals, and public performances. He does not participate in other choirs, and he studied piano when he was a child.

Lidia Raquel Brandes³²

Lidia has participated in the choir since its initial formation. For years prior to the formation of the choir, she had been searching for a Yiddish singing group. By word of mouth, she happened to learn about the choir from a friend. In the Coro Guebirtig, she found what she

³² Based on a survey submitted by Lidia Raquel Brandes dated May 13, 2013. Translation by author.

had been yearning for, and she remains passionate about Yiddish and loves singing the beautiful songs. Lidia's father arrived to Argentina in 1909, and her mother arrived in 1913. Her father was from Odessa and her mother was from the Crimea. The terror of the pogroms caused her parents to escape Eastern Europe in search for a place to live in peace, and they worked hard to start a new life in Argentina. It was not easy for them, she says, to integrate into the country, to learn the language, and to start a new life.

Lidia did not study Yiddish as a child. She learned it at home where her parents and grandparents spoke and sang to them in Yiddish. She says that she has known the language since she was able to think, but it wasn't until she was an adult that she learned to read and write Yiddish with a "wonderful teacher who she'll never be able to forget" (Reizl Sztarker). Lidia considers herself to be a traditionalista. She likes to respect the Jewish holidays—family meetings to share delicious delicacies of the European Jewish kitchen that our parents and grandparents taught us that are transmitted from generation to generation.

In the choir, she especially likes the happy songs; she prefers the picaresque and romantic songs much more than the sad songs about pain and suffering. For her, it is a good group of older people in a later stage of life who sing from the heart. Rehearsals are a very special day for her, and it is a gratifying hour and a half each week. She does not participate in other choirs and has never participated in another choir before or since the Coro Guebirtig. She likes the cordiality and companionship of their rehearsals and meetings, and the choir was something she had always wanted to be a part of—something that is now a "real part of her life." She feels so much happiness to be able to participate in the choir and its activities, including their travels to the Jewish agricultural colonies of Entre Ríos, to Mar del Plata, to Montevideo, as well as to other places where she has met people who welcome the choir "with open arms."

Ana Regina Bromberg³³

Ana has been with the choir for four years and joined because of the song repertory in Yiddish. She decided on the Coro Guebirtig because she had heard about it, enjoyed her experiences in it, and likes that the members of the choir also identify with her customs. The choir brings her back to her childhood, to her parents and to her family. She loves all of the songs, which she finds really moving and that “fill her soul.” She spends about three hours a week with them, and she does not belong to other choirs, but goes to shows and cultural events offered at the AMIA. She especially enjoyed the trip that they took to the Jewish agricultural colony towns of Entre Ríos, which was a very enriching trip for her. She finds the Coro Guebirtig “spiritually gratifying” and thinks that the Festival of Jewish Song is very creative.

Ana’s parents were Polish. Her mother was a Holocaust survivor, who lost her family during the Holocaust. Her father arrived to Argentina a year before World War II, but he was unable to save any of his family members. Ana learned Yiddish in school, and her parents spoke Yiddish in the home. She is respectful of tradition and tries to be a good person who is not “prejudiced against her fellow man and woman.”

Juan A. Ricardo Busi Michaud³⁴

Ricardo has participated in the choir for two years and joined because it is oriented toward retired seniors. He used to be involved in theater activities at another moment in his life and found out about the choir from listening to Radio Jai, the 24-hour Jewish radio station in

³³ Based on a survey submitted by Ana Regina Bromberg dated May 14, 2013. Translation by author.

³⁴ Based on a survey submitted by Juan A. Ricardo Busi Michaud that was undated but filled out in May 2013. Translation by author.

Argentina. For Ricardo, who is not Jewish, Yiddish evokes anecdotes and stories told to him by his beloved late wife Corina about her *zeide* (grandfather).

He describes the aesthetic of the choir as providing cultural continuity for the choir members who are reminded of their family, of their parents, and of their grandparents, whom he notes were mostly immigrants of Jewish communities in Europe (Ashkenazis) or Sephardim. His favorite songs are “Oifn Pripichek” (1), “Los Biblicos” (205), “Dos Lid” (220), “La Memoria” (113), “Nabucco” (249), “Mir Lebn Eibik,” “Shpil Zhe Mir a Lidele” (199), “Fidele” (266), “Partizaner Lid” (10), “Tzu Eins Tzvi Drei” (53), “Partizaner Himn” (31). He especially likes the songs that Zeev has arranged, and there really are no songs that he does not like.

Ricardo attends both the Monday and Wednesday rehearsals each week. He also participates in the Or Rina Choir that rehearses at the Templo Or Israel, and between all of the rehearsal time, he spends approximately five hours a week on rehearsals and performances. Prior to joining the choir, Ricardo studied music with a teacher at the Instituto Nacional Universitario de Arte.

For Ricardo, participation in the choir is affective—the time he spends with other choir members is an important part of his life in the *tercera edad*, or third stage of his life.

“Sofia”³⁵

Sofia joined the choir in 2000 when, by coincidence, she encountered a choir singing in Yiddish that was directed by Reizl Sztarker. Reizl was her music teacher in *shule* (school) at the Dr. Jaim Zhitlovsky School when she was just six years old. Hearing the repertory and seeing her old school teacher left her little doubt that she needed to join the group. Joining the Coro

³⁵ A pseudonym has been assigned by request. Based on a survey submitted on May 13, 2013. Translation by author.

Guebirtig allowed her to return to singing the songs of her childhood and to return to the memories she has of the songs that her grandfather sang. In her family, both her maternal and paternal grandparents spoke Yiddish. As such, it was the everyday language of family conversations, and when she was two years old, she started learning to speak Yiddish at the *jardín de infantes* (nursery school) program at the Zhitlovsky School. When her grandparents died, Yiddish stopped being spoken in her family, but since she joined the choir, she has realized how little she has actually forgotten. Until she joined the Coro Guebirtig, the only other choir she participated in was the one from her childhood at the Zhitlovsky School.

Sofia's paternal grandparents came from Poland after World War I, and her father was born in Argentina. Her grandfather was a master builder and worked in the construction of the Palacio Barolo and the Subte A line. Her paternal grandmother was a seamstress. Sofia's maternal grandparents, along with her mother, came from Poland before the beginning of the Second World War, to escape the Nazis. Like many other families, her grandfather arrived first to Argentina, and after establishing himself and saving some money, he was able to send for his wife and daughter. In Poland, he was a carpenter, and in order to get to Argentina, he became the librarian for the wood workers labor union. When her grandmother arrived, she worked in a candy and sweets factory. Sofia keeps the letters that her grandfather wrote to his wife while they were apart. They were written in Yiddish, and Sofia noticed that her grandmother would often write down the lyrics of a song to send to her husband. Now, Sofia sings these same songs with the choir.

The Coro Guebirtig is not a “formal, classical choir,” she notes. For that reason, she says, they call it the Coro *Popular* Mordje Guebirtig because it is not “academic.” They can’t maintain the same aesthetic of a professional choir because most of the members are seniors, and many

are unable to perform onstage without the assistance of chairs. To join the Coro Guebirtig, it is not necessary to have prior choral experience; it is only asked, she notes, that choir members commit to the activity. The choir, in all of its different activities, provides to its members, the form and function of an “institution,” allowing each choir member to draw their own personal significance from the experience. As an institution, it defined a model for Yiddish choral practice and an aesthetic that is recognized by people throughout Buenos Aires.

The Guebirtig choir came into Sofia’s life in the same year that the factory she worked at closed and she became “another unemployed person” in Buenos Aires during the economic crisis. As such, the Coro Guebirtig filled a void and provided her with something that she calls her own. “I could clean the house, cook, and attend to my family, but the choir is something for me that gives me more satisfaction than trouble,” she says. “That’s why, I try to do everything possible for the choir to progress, because I keep at it too.” Sofia is one of the members of the Board of Directors of the choir. Among various responsibilities, she manages the choir’s mail and helps to make decisions about where and when to hold choral showcases. In addition, she helps to research songs and music. In addition, she also serves as the general secretary of the Red Coral Argentina, the Argentine Choral Network, and she tries to spend as much time as she can organizing coral showcases and administrating choir activities. She is not affiliated with any other Jewish institutions.

The songs that Sofia likes best are the traditional songs in Yiddish that were written prior to the 1950s. She says that the songs written in “exile” (by which she is referring to the immigration of European Jews to non-European countries) have another rhythm, and that the majority of those songs have lyrics with less “actual content.” They are lighter (“*más light*”). To Sofia, the songs written in Europe reflect the real challenges of everyday life of Yiddish speaking

Jews, and the songs of “exile” seem to try “to forget” what happened. In general, she admits, she likes all of the songs.

Since its initiation, the Festival of Jewish Song was held outdoors each year in the Parque Centerario on a Saturday evening. In 2001, after Sofia had joined the choir, it was held on a Sunday at midday. She remembers that it was her first performance with the choir, and she felt especially excited because more than 1000 people were in attendance. It was a special afternoon because it was the last performance by the choir in the amphitheater at the Parque Centenario because the amphitheater was dismantled and no one could use it anymore. Since the closing of the amphitheater, the Festival de Jewish Song has been held in different theaters, with the public limited by the number of available theater seats. For the past two years, the Festival of Jewish Song was held in the evenings on workdays, and as a result fewer people attended the shows. But in 2012—the year I participated—the show was held on a weeknight, which was why the theater was completely full of people who had not seen the choir in a long time, she explains. The repertory, as usual, was discussed during multiple meetings with the director to create a balance between the “classic repertory” and other material.

Yiddish, Sofia says, is the language of the Jewish people—reflecting the teaching of the ICUF schools. “In good and in bad, the people sang,” she notes. Many songs were written in the ghettos, and the songs in Yiddish tell the life of the Jews. As such, she tells me, some of the songs are sad and others are happy. In the world, there is a resurgence of Yiddish. The Coro Guebirtig contributes “one small grain of sand such that, through singing, Yiddish doesn’t die.” Yiddish is a language that does not belong to any country, that’s why it is said that it is the language of the Jewish people.

Teresa Leibman³⁶

Teresa Leibman has been singing with the choir for 18 years, starting just a few months after it was founded. She loves music, and she loves Yiddish—a language she both reads and writes. She decided to join the Coro Guebirtig because they sing the songs that she heard sung by her parents. In 1995, when she heard that a choir was signing in Yiddish in the Parque Centenario, she went to hear it, and she admits that she cried from all the emotion it stirred within her. She promised herself to sign up for the next season and has sung with the choir ever since.

As she tells me, Yiddish is the language of her most tender childhood memories—the language of her nursery school, primary school and high school at the Sholem Aleijem School. Through it, she is able to identify with the Jewish people and with the State of Israel. Teresa's family came to Argentina from Europe. Her father arrived in 1928, and in 1932, her mother and sister arrived. In contrast to the icufistas, she identifies her family as very strongly committed Zionists and notes that most of her family now lives in Israel. Her parents, she says, moved to Israel and passed away there. She considers herself tradicionalista and tries to bring tradition of celebrating the most important festivities with her family.

She especially likes the song “Fraitik Oif Der Nacht” because her father sang it in the home. She likes “Roishinkes Mit Mandelen” because he mother sang this as a lullaby to her, and she likes “Oifn Pripechik” because she sang it as a lullaby to her own children, considering it to be “an anthem” of sorts. Teresa also especially likes “Iugnt Himn” by Schmerke Kaczerginski, the resistance fighter and composer who escaped the Vila Ghetto, arriving to Argentina after World War II. Kaczerginski was a friend of her family, and he died tragically in an airplane

³⁶ Based on a survey submitted by Teresa Leibman dated May 13, 2013. Translation by author.

crash after having survived the Holocaust. He wrote the song “Frilling” (“Spring”), a tango that is a popularized Yiddish song. Teresa states that she actually likes all of the songs and jokes that should can be a bit of a fanatic.

The choir, she describes, has a “force” and “strength,” and is “tender” at the same time. It is an example for others, and she hopes that more voices join so that the choir keeps going. For Teresa, the most important activities of the choir are the acts of remembrance—the public commemorations of the Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—and even though all these events bring up painful histories, she says the choir also tries to celebrate all that they can—from the birthdays of each choir member to the trips that they take together, to the great performances each time they sing.

Currently, she only participates in the Coro Guebirtig, but for a few years, she sung with the Sholem Aleijem Choir at the Sholem Aleijem School. At one point she had to choose between the two, and she chose the Coro Guebirtig (*obviously*, she adds). She says that the choir was always important in her life, but now that she is 75 years old, it is *super* important and she’ll never stop remembering their founding director, Professor Reizl Sztarker, for whom she has much love. For Teresa, The Festival of Jewish Song is important because it is the closing event of the year. She says that it makes her anxious because she wants it to go well. Not all of the objectives of the choir are always achieved during the show, she recognizes, but she notes that Zeev is a marvelous director and is especially charismatic with the public.

Frida Chmiel³⁷

Frida joined the choir just a few months after it was formed because she loves Yiddish songs and because the founding director was her music teacher as a child. Having Reizl Sztarker

³⁷ Based on a survey submitted by Frida Chmiel dated May 13, 2013. Translation by author.

as the choral director brought her back to her childhood. Originally, two people told her about the founding of the choir—one friend and another companion from the Yiddish class that she took. She feels that she sings all the songs that her paternal family sang and continues to sing, and she feels that each song in Yiddish binds her and unites her to all of her extended maternal family, who were killed in the Warsaw Ghetto. As such, she says that she feels like the choir chose her rather than her choosing the choir.

She thinks about the songs of the Coro Guebirtig as having their own history in and of themselves, and the songs she likes the most have lyrics that discuss family, the *shtetl*, work, and the everyday struggles of life. She likes songs that show thread or ties to the past. Her favorites include: “S’Brent,” “Iugnt Himn,” “Rivkele di Shabesdike,” “Oifn Pripetchik,” “In a Litvish Derfl.” She really loves going to rehearsals once a week, but there isn’t a day that she doesn’t review the lyrics and melodies at home. She enjoys the trip on the bus each week because it gives her a chance to think about the rehearsal and to warm up her voice, something that, for a lack of time, isn’t done in rehearsal.

Right now she does not participate in any other choral groups for personal reasons, but for many years, she attended a group with the teacher Bracha Waldman at the Tzavta Community Center. She spent two years in an opera workshop and participated in the Polifónico del Mar Choir directed by Marcelo Silberberg. Although she did not study music prior to joining the Coro Guebirtig, she saw the need to do so, and for a few years she worked with a teacher, Eliana Visbeck, to improve her vocal technique.

She has many fond memories of the choir, but one that is particularly meaningful took place in the Hogar Israelita para Ancianos (Burzaco), a nursing home where the Coro Guebirtig went to sing to the residents. In a room in a little building, she noticed one elderly man in

particular who was inform and very cut off from the rest of the world. Frida remembers how he looked at her and said, “I am Ricardo,” and began to hum along to the music as the choir sang. For Frida, each year, the Festival of Jewish Song is one more jewel in a beautiful necklace that was 18 years old, containing now, 18 gems.

After the Choir

After a missed connection in Atlanta from New York City, on a nearly impossibly brief six-day trip to Buenos Aires at the end of summer in North America, I ended up in Santiago de Chile waiting for a flight to Buenos Aires in August 2014. At a table in an airport café, beneath the snow-covered Andes mountains, I chatted with a young porteño couple that was returning to Argentina after a trip to the United States. They too had missed the same flight from NYC to Buenos Aires, and we ended up talking over a coffee in the airport while we waited. “Is this your first time visiting Buenos Aires? Are you visiting on vacation?” they inquired. “Not exactly,” I admitted, “I conduct research on Jewish music. The young woman’s eyes grew wide, and she broke into a slightly hesitant smile. “Do you know the Coro Guebirtig? My grandmother sings in it. Anita Thaler, and her sister, Libertad.” I did. We laughed and chatted about the choir—how it was a very special endeavor for her grandmother and her grandmother’s twin sister. As the granddaughter of a choir member, she recognized the importance if its value in her grandmother’s life and the special role it played in the Jewish community of Buenos Aires.

The Coro Popular Mordje Guebirtig provides choir members with an array of personal meanings and opportunities for social and cultural engagement. For some, the most important aspects are accessing an earlier part of their lives that are no longer available to them. Through singing in Yiddish, they recall their love for those who have passed—wives and husbands, parents, and grandparents, friends, and even relatives who were never able to leave Europe. The

musical material and Yiddish songs create not just a resurgence of Yiddish culture in Buenos Aires, but the flows of memory reconnect the singer to his or her personal pasts, pulling their memories along with them as they continue to move forward in their lives. For the choir members of the Coro Popular Mordje Guebirtig, the love that they have for their families, their childhoods, and their Jewish Argentine identities echo out from the act of signing Yiddish songs and remembering the past. The agency the choir gives to the songs—and to music in live performance and embodied practice—revalorizes Jewish Argentine cultural heritage through the belief in their own ability to change the future through the act of singing.

Chapter Five

Religión | Religion

Cultural Memory and Music in a Buenos Aires Synagogue



Figure 5.1. The *bet Knesset* of Comunidad Amijai, Buenos Aires 2013.
Photo by Author.

Forging Cultural Memory: Music at Comunidad Amijai

On the first page of the light blue booklet of publicity materials announcing the foundation of a new synagogue in Buenos Aires in 1992—the Comunidad Amijai—authors refer to a Hasidic parable attributed to the Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (c. 1698–1760), the Baal Shem Tov, or the Master of the Good Name, a Jewish mystic and founder of the Hasidic Movement. The parable describes how successive generations of Jews reinvent ritual tradition as a function of the process of collective forgetting and remembrance through the passage of time and in the face of external threats.¹ Drawing out the relationship between cultural memory and collective

¹ The version appearing in the Comunidad Amijai founding documents was translated into Spanish by Amalia Castro y Alberto Manguel from the Elie Wiesel compilation *Souls on Fire*:

memory, the parable showcases the experience of time at the intersection of Jewish ritual and the renewal of faith. The specificity of the act of ritual is ultimately subordinated to the performance of remembrance uniting Jews across generations since biblical times—a way of drawing close to God through the expression of faith whose ultimate meanings rely not on the authenticity of the ritual itself, but on the process of remembrance as an assertion of Jewish spiritual identity.

The evocation of the Baal Shem-Tov parable in the foundational documents of Comunidad Amijai provides a portrait of a new congregation in Buenos Aires rooted in the past, yet tethered to a longer tradition of Jewish worship. As Jan Assmann argues, cultural memory, a term I explore in the present chapter to discuss the role of music at Comunidad Amijai, is a substrate uniting practice and beliefs from ancient times to the present day (Assmann 2006). Building on sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's theory of a social basis for memory, Assmann argues that memory also has a cultural basis, one constantly referring to histories of ancient traditions, which transmit foundational narratives about group identity and group ethics, thus shaping structures of belief for future generations (Assmann 2006). Assmann spotlights Judaism as the “most impressive example” of “bonding memory” wherein collectivities “remember” through a “connective” semantics, “thereby producing forms of memory that are designed to stabilize a common identity and a point of view that span several generations” (*ibid.*: 11, 16). As he argues: “With cultural memory, the memory spaces of many thousands of years open up, and it is writing that plays the decisive role in this process” (Assmann 2006: 28). For the founders of Comunidad Amijai, the Hasidic parable describes a procedure for renewing Jewish religion, recognizing the role of memory in the transmission of tradition from biblical times to the foundation of this modern Jewish Argentine institution.

Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters, 1988 The document, “Amijai,” is located in the Marshall T. Meyer Human Rights Archive, Duke University Libraries.

Writing, however, is not the only way in which the spaces of time collapse to provide continuity to renew Jewish religious conviction. As I will discuss in the present chapter, music plays a significant role in different aspects of Jewish Argentine synagogue life, including the maintenance of liturgical practice (Kligman 2009); the definition of the taste communities within a particular movement of Judaism (Schiller 1992); contributions to the social and cultural life of a synagogue (Shelemay 1987); the signification of class, gender, and the political orientation of a congregation, as well as the representation of Jewish history and heritage in the greater sonic landscape of a city (Bohlman 2013). By foregrounding the social texts and embodied practices of musical performance that support a theory of cultural memory, I introduce Assmann's theory of cultural memory to examine the role of music in facilitating Jewish spirituality, worship, and congregational life to add further nuance and multi-dimensionality to his concept.

By focusing on non-textual practices in the performance of Jewish liturgy and worship, I explore how processes of cultural memory create awareness of and give form to Jewish Argentine religious practices. How does the establishment of new congregations transform Jewish Argentine religious rituals and musical canons shaping cultural memory? What does music do for clergy, musicians, worshipers, and non-Jewish audiences at Comunidad Amijai? As Philip Bohlman argues, “the place of Jewish music is powerfully performative, in other words, it comes into being when music shapes the stage upon which its performance takes place. Jewishness affixes itself to and transforms place when it is performed” (*ibid.*, xxxii). In the present chapter, I explore how the place of Comunidad Amijai is transformed by music.

A Note on Methodology: Approaching Jewish Liturgical Music in Buenos Aires

As musicologist Edwin Seroussi notes, there are both methodological and conceptual difficulties approaching the study of Jewish liturgical music. One such difficulty stems from the general prohibition on making recordings during worship services (Seroussi 1996; Summit 2000: 9-11). Although some congregations permit recording during services, many congregations prefer to record the music of their congregation in studio settings as “studio-audio art” or recordings made “as an art object to be created by one group for consumption by another group not present in face-to-face situations and with no reference to live performance” (Turino 2008: 91). Often then, the majority of the subtle inflections and improvisations during a sacred service can be lost to the ethnographer beyond the moment in which it is enacted. Besides bans on recording devices, in most congregations, the fieldworker cannot take field notes because of prohibitions on work on the Sabbath and the festivals—a rule that, if not explicitly stated in liberal progressive synagogues in Buenos Aires, is often made apparent through modes of self-regulation enforced by congregants. Recordings of synagogue music are different from the experience of live worship because they are sonic representations of the experience of worship outside the moment of prayer. As Judah Cohen writes, in their materiality, these types of recordings are “sound objects” (Cohen 2007). “Recordings of sacred music,” he argues, “allowed listeners to experience liturgical works outside the service ritual, providing both aesthetic pleasure and cultural education” (Cohen 2007: 345). These recordings are important documents from which to analyze sacred sound, even if the recordings do not reproduce the exact musical and liturgical choices made by clergy on a particular holiday or festival occasion.

Edwin Seroussi also enumerates a major methodological issue regarding the breadth and reach of the researcher’s investigatory regimen with respect to sacred music: With so many services occurring on a single night in different synagogues, how does a researcher make broader

claims about Jewish sacred music practices? “What is the social unit of research, and how many performances are needed from which to draw practical conclusions about liturgical traditions? (Seroussi 1996: 290).” He states:

The very concept of “music” within the liturgy is problematic. Is the object of our inquiry the entire “soundscape” of the synagogue, that is to say, all the structured sound beyond the realm of speech? Or is it our subject only what we, as Westerners, conceptualize as music? (Seroussi 1996: 290)

To address these methodological and conceptual issues, ethnomusicologists studying Jewish sacred music traditions have devised studies that confront these challenges in creative ways. In ethnomusicology, which largely depends on participant-observation fieldwork to illuminate the multiple meanings of musical expression, ethnography provides a flexible entry point into studying living traditions of sacred music—a realm of Jewish musical experience otherwise difficult to share with outsiders to the religion. For instance, ethnomusicologist Jeffrey Summit beautifully illustrates how his insider status as an ordained rabbi and his outsider aims as a researcher from a secular institution guided the form and functions of his study (Summit 2003).

For ethnomusicologist Mark Kligman, a self-identified modern Orthodox Jew, working with the Sephardic Syrian Jews of Brooklyn required him to devise a strategy in which he “lived with [his] fieldwork for an entire day each week, making it part of [his] personal routine” during a complete liturgical cycle from 1991-1992 (Kligman 2009: 7-8). Unlike Summit and Kligman, I do not observe Jewish ritual with any regularity and, though I hold Jewish religious practice in high esteem and consider myself an insider on the basis of faith, I am not a particularly observant Jew. As a result of this study, I was keenly aware of the fact that this facet of my doctoral research was actually responsible for drawing me into the synagogue as a worshipper as well as a researcher. Even with some background in the liturgy of the Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma’ariv

services, as well as familiarity with some of the musical settings, the inability to make notes or to record a religious service created real challenges during this portion of the study.²

Over the course of eighteen non-consecutive months of fieldwork, I attended twenty-three different Kabbalat Shabbat services at Comunidad Amijai and High Holiday services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in 2012. Although this chapter is largely focused on the role of music at this one particular synagogue, I had the opportunity to attend services in other liberal progressive synagogues in Buenos Aires affiliated with Conservative Movement, or the Movimiento Masorti (Masorti Movement) to which Comunidad Amijai belongs. In total, I attended three Kabbalat Shabbat services at Fundación Pardés, one service each at Comunidad Bet El, Comunidad Bet Hilel, and a handful of services with the “Kol Riná independent *minyan*” (meaning “number,” the “designation for the quorum of ten male adults, aged 13 years or over, necessary for public synagogue service and other religious ceremonies”³ organized by students from the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano, which met at the Hillel house in Belgrano.⁴

² At Comunidad Amijai, the term “Kabbalat Shabbat” refers generally to the Friday evening service. It is rarely, if ever, differentiated from the “Ma’ariv” service in conversation, nor is it differentiated in the *Sidur Boí V’Shalom*. See: *Sidur Boí V’Shalom para Kabalat Shabat y ocasiones especiales*, ed. by Rabbi Marcelo Rittner. Second Edition (Distrito Federal, MX: Comunidad Bet-El), 2001 [1995].

³ “Minyan.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 14. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 302. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. June 30, 2015.

⁴ In 2010, I tried to attend Rosh Hashanah services at Comunidad Amijai but my confusion over procedural issues regarding the sale of tickets—which was quite high for students—resulted in my inability to attend. At the time, I did not realize that the synagogue makes standing room available at no cost. While some synagogues have discounted tickets for students, in 2010, Comunidad Amijai did not, and like some other synagogues in Buenos Aires, the tickets are priced according to tiers: seats closest to the *bimah* are the most expensive. Wealthy and well-known synagogue members purchase tickets for their families and thus occupy positions of elite distinction in the synagogue. Standing room tickets at no cost are available to accommodate the many families with more limited resources struggling with Argentina’s volatile economy. Individuals stand in the back of the hall or in the patio space if the weather allows the doors to the *bet Knesset* to be opened. In 2012, I attended High Holy Day services, securing a seat for

Furthermore, I spent a Shabbat in Santiago de Chile, Chile at the Congregación Israelita de Santiago and visited the Nueva Congregación Israelita for their Hanukkah program in Montevideo, Uruguay.

In Buenos Aires, each synagogue represents its own subsection of the greater religious Jewish population of Buenos Aires, cultivating an individualized approach to worship with few instances of cross-congregational collaboration. Of the original four synagogues I visited in Buenos Aires (and one each in Uruguay and Chile), one stood out for its special ties to music: Comunidad Amijai—an affluent congregation whose unique commitment to establishing a public identity hinges on its musical identity. However, musical life at the other synagogues I visited was also important to the experience of worship and the expression of Jewish Argentine spirituality. For instance, musical director and long-time music teacher in the Buenos Aires area, Ariel Rozen, is well known and beloved throughout the Jewish Argentine community and serves as the Director of Music at Fundación Pardés. Dr. Felipe C. Yafe, the rabbi at Comunidad Bet Hilel, is a professor at the Instituto de Jazanim Morim de Shira “Bet Asaf”—Latin America’s only cantorial program at the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano “Marshall T. Meyer.” This chapter explores some of the ways in which Comunidad Amijai exercises its vision of modern Jewish Argentine worship rooted in cultural memory and activated through the cultivation of a strong musical identity.

Erev Rosh Hashanah, Shacharit (morning services), Arvit (evening services), Shacharit on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Kol Nidre and Shacharit, Yizkor, Mincha and Neila services from September 16, 2012 to September 26, 2012. The cost of the ticket was AR 1,040 pesos for a seat in the 30th row, sector A, seat 6. In September 2012, according to official national exchange rates, that ticket was approximately \$225 US dollars, according to X-rates.com. See: X-rates.com. Accessed September 27, 2014.
<<http://www.xrates.com/average/?from=ARS&to=USD&amount=1.00&year=2012>>.

During this on-going study of music in the Ashkenazi synagogues of Buenos Aires, I struggled with methodological as well as conceptual issues regarding the question of Latin Americanness in Jewish Argentine worship. As Rabbi Daniel Goldman argues, this issue of Latin Americanness or, in his particular case, Argentineness, is connected to a longer history of struggles about national identity since the nineteenth century (Goldman 2011). Goldman recognizes that multiculturalism and globalization have contributed to making Argentina more “Latin American” along three main axes: 1) the increase in the divide between the rich and the poor emerging in the neoliberal 1990s; 2) a growing educational gap for people between the ages of 18 and 30; one out of every four Argentines has not completed primary school; 3) growing contradictions and paradoxes among political, economic, and communications development amid governments weakened by authoritarian military regimes and the political and social aftermaths (ibid.). As he states:

If we take this question of “Latin American identity” and add the complexity of Jews in their liberal conservative instantiation of tradition and change on a continent that keeps changing its political, economic and social variables, or even add a Judaism that keeps changing its community structures, the intersection of these elements results in something much more sophisticated in terms of the archetypal context of the preservation of that collective identity. (Goldman 2011: 643–44)⁵

The paradoxes of Argentine modernity have had a significant impact on Judaism in Latin America. The only Latin American seminary was built in 1962 in Buenos Aires as a training ground for new rabbis, and it now serves synagogues and Jewish communities throughout Latin American countries, as well as congregations in the United States. The practice of liberal

⁵ See: Daniel Goldman, “El movimiento conservador en Latinoamérica y el legado del rabino Marshall Meyer. Un testimonio” In *Pertenencia y alteridad: Judíos en / de América Latina: Cuarenta años de cambios*,” eds., Haim Avni, Judit Bokser Liwerant, Sergio DellaPergola, Margalit Bearano, Leonardo Senkman. (Orlando, FL: Iberoamericana Vervuert Publishing Corp., 2011): 643-44. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

progressive Judaism in Latin America is tied to the establishment of the American Conservative Movement and its growth in Argentina in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In Buenos Aires, each congregation develops its own approach to the practice of modern Judaism, though most are modeled after a rabbi-centered worship and leadership style likely influenced by Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer's clerical style from the 1960s to the mid-1980s. As a result of these factors and other practical issues related to scope, the present chapter does not attempt to generalize broadly about Jewish Argentine sacred musical practices; further research is necessary to detail Jewish Latin American sacred music practices beyond the practical scope of this study.

Ultimately, as Mark Kligman suggests in the introduction to his study, the role of memory—notably a memory tied to religious ritual and transmitted orally through repetition in worship and performance—became a critical tool for me as a fieldworker of Jewish liturgical music (Kligman 2009). Liturgical music becomes a part of Jewish history in part due to the art of memory, with the biblical command to remember framing the narrative structures of knowledge about the transmission of sacred sound (Yerushalmi 1982; Shelemay 2008). In ethnographic studies of sacred music, an individual researcher then too becomes a vessel of sacred song and sound even when they are provided with recordings as mnemonic tools.⁶

⁶ I would like to thank Caroli Iconikoff, the Talmud Torah teacher at Comunidad Amijai, for providing me with a set of recordings of the Kabbalat Shabbat service recorded by Rabbi Darío Feiguin, Germán Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, and Bianca Lerner in the mid-2000s.

The Space of the Synagogue



Figure 5.2 The doors to the *bet Knesset* at Comunidad Amijai. Photo by author.

In the early 1990s, Comunidad Amijai emerged during an era of congregational consolidation among existing synagogues as well as the decentralization of worship in Buenos Aires due to the founding of fledgling congregations such as Comunidad Amijai (Babis 2009). Furthermore, the expansion of ultra-Orthodoxy with the growth of the Chabad Lubavitcher movement in the region diversified Jewish worship in Argentina even further, renewing religiosity among a largely non-religious, *traditionalista* Jewish population (Fischman 2006; Jacobson 2006; Setton 2010). As part of the performative language of contemporary worship and the performance of spirituality and religion across the spectrum of the sacred and secular divide, liturgical musical practices and musical programs at Comunidad Amijai bridge faith and aesthetics, bringing together Jewish and non-Jewish publics in a place of holiness. The temple—with its physical presence and biblical resonances establishes both an imagined continuity among

modern Jews across history and geography and a reminder of the continuity of Jewish life and religious commitments.

Comunidad Amijai is a temple to music. With acoustic sound equipment built into the structure to maximize the musical experience, the synagogue space enhances the experience of prayer and the experience of music in an annual series of concerts begun in the early 2000s. Throughout Buenos Aires, Comunidad Amijai is referred to as the “mini-Colón,” a nickname linking the synagogue to the great Opera house, the Teatro Colón. Although Comunidad Amijai’s musical profile attracts worshipers through its doors for its sacred services, and its public musical programming, aesthetic choices and the cultural and social capital associated with perceptions of taste at the Comunidad Amijai also attract local critiques about the profundity of the spiritual experience at this very upscale congregation, even as it is widely admired for the beauty of its architecture. The modern musical content, the sleek aesthetic design of the synagogue and its use as a public concert hall make Comunidad Amijai a unique place of worship in the landscape of Buenos Aires synagogues.

In 2001, the founding patron and president of Comunidad Amijai, Natalio, commissioned the building and paid for its construction, which was completed in 2004. As a prominent businessman in Buenos Aires, Garber had a close relation with the commercial and classical music worlds as the founder of the Argentine music chain store, Musimundo, which he started in 1952 as Elgar Disquería and sold in 1998 for \$235 million US dollars.⁷ With the proceeds from the sale of the business, Garber committed funds to construct the synagogue building, making a promise to other synagogue leaders that, if the sale went through, he would provide a new home

⁷ Alejandro Rebossio, “La crisis llevó a Musimundo al concurso de acreedores. *La Nación*, August 30, 2001. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/331397-la-crisis-llevo-a-musimundo-al-concurso-de-aceedores>.

for his congregation.⁸ The building complex was designed by the architecture firm Estudio Baudizzone Lestard and was inaugurated in August 2004 (see Fig. 5.1). Admitting that, from the beginning, there was strong interest among the original founding families to initiate a music program that would be a special part of the Comunidad Amijai experience, Comunidad Amijai founders designed the synagogue space to be able to transform it into a concert hall.⁹ To facilitate the sale of concert tickets, they built a box office window near the front entrance of the synagogue.

The synagogue complex of Comunidad Amijai was built on Calle Arribeños at the site of a former safe factory on the main corridor of the small but popular destination of “Barrio Chino” (Chinatown) in the northwestern part of the city.¹⁰ Barrio Chino—known throughout Buenos Aires for its concentration of pan-Asian restaurants and Chinese street food stands—is also a place to purchase hard-to-find cooking supplies and foods imported from abroad. Although the area is home to new immigrants of mainly Chinese and Taiwanese descent, on Calle Arribeños between Calles Olazabal and Blanco Encalada, the Comunidad Amijai synagogue is evidence of the Jewish presence in this neighborhood. Nearby, the historic neighborhood synagogue Comunidad Bet El anchors a longer Jewish presence in the area. The rabbinic seminary is also located just a few blocks away on Calle José Hernández 1750. Rabbi Darío Feiguin, the founding rabbi of Comunidad Amijai was ordained there in 1983, and Rabbi Alejandro Avruj, Comunidad Amijai’s current rabbi, was ordained there in 1999.

⁸ Interview with Eugenio Scavo. April 12, 2014.

⁹ “Del Colón a Buenos Aires: La música clásica encontró nueva morada en una sinagoga.” *Comunidades, Radio Jai*. April 25, 2006. Accessed April 8, 2011. http://www.radiojai.com.ar/online/notiDetalle.asp?id_Noticia=20774.

¹⁰ Interview with Eugenio Scavo. April 12, 2014.

The synagogue complex consists of a two-story building whose front façade is stark and unadorned with a metal security gate guarded by security. The main building houses the temple offices, library, classrooms, and a small chapel used for Shabbat morning services. Inside the complex, a patio and garden lead to a separate temple sanctuary building (see Fig. 5.3). The rounded, light grey, stone structure of the *bet Knesset* (house of assembly; synagogue) at Amijai is trapezoidal in shape with a wood-paneled rectangular door featuring a stylized golden “A”—a design vaguely reminiscent of the Hebrew letter “*aleph*,” repeated the full length of the front entrance (see Fig. 5.2). The temple sanctuary, not including the patio area in front of the temple, can hold up to 600 people.¹¹ Prior to the construction of the new building, prayer services had been held in the rabbinic seminary for almost a decade.



Figure 5.3 The entrance to the patio space inside the synagogue complex.
Photo by author.

¹¹ Ibid.

The synagogue is a historically significant site of Jewish music. As Philip Bohlman writes: “Sacred music had to re-enter the modern history of public religion, and it did so, significantly, as music. The space of public sacred music-making changed dramatically at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Bohlman 2013: 209). With the emancipation of the Jews in Europe beginning around the time of the French Revolution (1789-1799), the expansion of rights granted to Jews in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries not only gave them access to public spaces and institutions, but it enabled Jews to work beyond the walls of the ghetto to build new spaces of worship throughout Europe. It also made Jewish spaces places of encounter, and music, as Bohlman argues, a critical mode for modernizing Jewish expression. As cantorial training through apprenticeship (the *meshorerim* tradition) gave way to the formal musical training of young cantors in *lehrerseminare* (teacher training colleges), which were required by the German states “to qualify for official status as educators, religious functionaries, and eventually, cantors,” the role of the synagogue as a place of Jewish music was strengthened in urban centers, and the compositional advances of nineteenth-century synagogue composers like Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890, Vienna), Louis Lewandowski (1821-1894, Berlin), Hirsch Weintraub (1811-1881) and Samuel Naumbourg (1817-1880, Paris) defined a new era of Jewish sacred music aesthetics of the Classical Reform movement (Cohen 2009; Goldberg 1992; Idelsohn 1925).

When Jewish liturgical music arrived to Argentina with the Central European Ashkenazic Jews from Germany and Alsace, they brought with them the music of the synagogue of their places of origin. As such, the musical repertory and aesthetics of the music of Classical Reform Judaism took root in Argentina, later expanding musically with the arrival of waves of East

European Jews, who brought their own musical traditions to Argentina from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.¹² As Bohlman writes:

Spaces inside the synagogue became public in new ways, not only within the Jewish Reform movement in northern Germany, but for the growing liberalisation of city synagogues in the rapidly urbanizing Jewish communities across Europe and the Americas. The urban synagogue was a place of gathering for Jews from different ethnic and historical backgrounds. Jewish music accommodated the public nature of the new synagogues by providing a vehicle for vernacular language, polyphony and instrumental music. (Bohlman 2013: 209)

As a “place of gathering” for Jews and non-Jews alike, the Comunidad Amijai congregation is a contemporary musical center for the largely urban Jewish community of Argentina concentrated in Buenos Aires. Comunidad Amijai provides religious and cultural programming activities, carving out a space for Jewish music to enter into and transform modern Argentine music in the predominantly Catholic nation. Concerts in the Comunidad Amijai temple establish a public presence for this religious institution as a place of music, supplying a social space of encounter between Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines. Through music, an identity for Jewish Argentine religiosity emerges alongside other musics presented at Comunidad Amijai. While cultural programming largely focuses on Western art music, it also regularly includes performances of popular and folkloric musics. Sacred musical settings in worship and prayer are based in the musical lexicon of Jewish music, including Israeli pop songs, Hasidic melodies, Classical Reform melodies, and musical settings from twentieth and twenty-first century North American synagogue composers, Israeli composers, and new prayers settings by Argentine composers such as Alberto (Zeev) Malbergier. By establishing Comunidad Amijai as

¹² Mark Slobin’s book, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Champaign-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), provides a portrait of the ways in which Jewish immigrants influenced American Jewish sacred music repertoires in the United States. See especially chapters 2 and 3.

a place for music enthusiasts throughout and beyond Buenos Aires, Jewish Argentine space becomes a place to imagine the global soundscape of modern Jewish sacred sound—to remember trans-Atlantic Jewish history and to experience Jewish musical performance in and of Latin America.

In three main arenas, music plays a fundamental role in constructing a public persona for Judaism in Buenos Aires: 1) by establishing the synagogue as a place of Jewish music; 2) Kabbalat Shabbat services; and 3) concerts and performances organized and promoted by the Departamento de Cultura (Department of Culture). At Comunidad Amijai, twentieth and twenty-first century transformations in worship, liturgy, and musical aesthetics reflect broader issues facing modern congregations in Buenos Aires struggling with maintaining the economic health of the congregation and mediating the impact of globalization and new media technology within Latin America. Jewish music no longer solely arrives to Argentina through migrations of musicians and musical materials such as foreign-born and trained cantors, sheet music and recordings; instead, the widespread use of the internet and technology makes the exchange of Jewish musics and “best practices” in the synagogue more readily known and accessible.

If, as ethnomusicologist Timothy Rommen has argued, an “ethics of style” emerges from the articulation of the intersection of musical choice, participation, and religious conviction, then a “music and poetry in action” foregrounds the ethical dimensions of a need for a music of worship that does something for congregants (Rommen 2007).¹³ Music in action in the synagogue serves the call to prayer, shaping attitudes toward faith and religiosity as a means to negotiate questions of modernity, tradition, and authenticity in Jewish Argentine religious life. After addressing the history of liberal progressive Judaism in Argentina, I return to a discussion

¹³ Document from the Marshall T. Meyer Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.

of the music of the Kabbalat Shabbat services at Comunidad Amijai during my fieldwork from 2010 to 2014. Following this discussion, I explore the role of musical programming in the Temple of the Comunidad Amijai Music Season.

‘I Need Music and Poetry in Action’: Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer and the Growth of the Conservative Movement (Movimiento Masorti/Masorti Movement) in Argentina

The Conservative Movement in Argentina has been described as an “ideological movement” that created a new religious, social and intellectual space for Judaism in Latin America (Weil 1988: 13; Goldman 2011). But that movement did not take root without significant contributions by a handful of Jewish leaders striving to reform Jewish religious practice in the twentieth century. One such individual, whose work renovating and institutionalizing a liberal progressive branch of Judaism distinct from the existing orthodox and secular leftist Zionist Jewish groups, was the American Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer. Rabbi Meyer’s legacy in Argentina is far-reaching, and although he is largely remembered for his human rights work during the violent military dictatorship from 1976–1983, Meyer’s contributions establishing key progressive Jewish institutions in Argentina have facilitated the local training of clergy, the transmission of local traditions and the support of the sustainable growth of Judaism in the region. His changes to the liturgy—making worship services more accessible and oriented toward a modern style of worship—targeted youth members of the Jewish Argentine community to establish an institutional foundation and community engagement to secure a future for liberal progressive Judaism in Latin America.

Marshall Theodore Meyer was born on March 25, 1930 in Brooklyn, New York and grew up in Norwich, Connecticut. As a child and later as a high school student, Marshall Meyer had an early passion for music. From an early age, Meyer was an opera aficionado, a passion he pursued

throughout his life, and his opera studies provided him with an outlet for his rhetorical pursuits and training as a public orator. Music was highly valued in his family; Rabbi Meyer's sister's in-laws were from a distinguished line of aristocratic Prussian Jews and were accomplished musicians and opera enthusiasts.¹⁴ Rabbi Meyer's sister's mother-in-law was a concert pianist and soprano singer, and her husband, Benno Meyerowitz, was a co-founder of the Society for Königsberg Opera (Die Königsberger Operngesellschaft) in Königsberg (East Prussia) in 1921 with Bruno Dumont du Voitel.¹⁵

In 1946–47 and again in 1947–1948, the young Marshall Meyer authored and hosted a half-hour long radio program each Sunday evening for the Norwich Broadcasting Company serving Eastern Connecticut called “Great Moments in Music” as a high school student. While playing mainly French, Italian and German operatic repertory, Meyer carefully wrote radio shows that featured musical content and context, focusing on the histories of the pieces he played and the lives of the singers who sung them. Meyer's carefully typed commentaries are evidence of a curious and intelligent young man whose incisive and precocious writing was impressive in its breadth of knowledge, attention to detail, and awareness of musical terminology. During his radio shows, Meyer once featured Jewish liturgical, operatic and folk repertory, commentary on

¹⁴ I owe a great deal of thanks to Dr. Eric M. Meyers, Bernice & Morton Lerner Professor and Director of the Department of Religion at Duke University for his kindness and for sharing memories of his uncle Marshall Meyer and his family history. I would also like to thank the Judaica/Hebraica librarian Rachel Ariel for her assistance with the Marshall T. Meyer Papers in the Human Rights Archive while visiting Duke University as a Research Fellow in Jewish Studies and the Hebrew Bible at The Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library and the Center for Jewish Studies in 2013.

¹⁵ Daniel Fainstein also notes that Rabbi Meyer collected many of the playbills he received from attendance at opera concerts at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City (from 1945–1966), the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires (from 1959–1983). See: Daniel Fainstein, “Secularización, profecía y liberación: La desprivatización de la religión en el pensamiento judío contemporáneo. Un estudio comparativo de sociología histórica e histórica intelectual.” PhD dissertation (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. México, D.F., México), 231.

Jewish musicians and comments on religious and social life, highlighting this material as a part of the “panorama” of “great” music presented to the secular East Coast American public (Bohlman et al. 2005).¹⁶

Meyer’s statements about Jewish music promote a vision of music as a medium for public and personal connections to Jewish identity with Jewishness. The transcripts to these radio shows clearly indicate Meyer’s deep interest in Jewish musical expression as a young man in eastern Connecticut. If Rabbi Meyer’s model of Judaism was predicated on an idea of “personal commitment,” in which Jewish individuals create rather than refuse ties to non-Jewish society, people and cultures, as Rabbi Daniel Goldman argues, then the transcript of his 1947 program celebrating Jewish music are evidence of the early development of his personal convictions about his Jewish identity, which later guided his views on Jewish reform in Argentina when he arrived there in 1959 (Goldman 2011).

As a student at Dartmouth College, Marshall Meyer was active in the theater scene, skills that would later inform his leadership style on the pulpit. Rabbi Meyer’s studies with philosophers Eugene Rosenstock-Huesy and Martin Buber were also significant to his intellectual development during his student years (Fainstein 2006: 246). After receiving a Senior Fellowship at Dartmouth College, Meyer was able to pursue his studies on the topic of “the concept of love in currents of Jewish thought” under the tutelage of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), traveling once a month from Hanover, New Hampshire to study in New York City (Fainstein 2006: 248). In 1951, Marshall T. Meyer attended Camp Ramah in the Poconos, Pennsylvania (run by JTS), where he met a young

¹⁶ “Great Moments in Music” transcript. September 14, 1947. From the Marshall T. Meyer Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.

woman, Naomi Friedman, whom he would later marry in 1955 (Fainstein 2006: 253). After graduating from Dartmouth in 1952, Meyer studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Columbia University, later enrolling at JTS to pursue rabbinic studies.¹⁷ His teacher and mentor at JTS continued to be Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the noted theologian and later civil rights activist, who had a significant impact on Meyer's theological and intellectual development. Heschel's commitment to social justice initiatives made him a key Jewish leader in the American Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, inspiring Meyer's own activism in Argentina during the violence and uncertainty of Argentina's last military dictatorship in the 1970s and the challenges of re-democratization after 1983.

In 1958, after receiving his ordination from JTS, Rabbi Meyer was contracted to serve the historic Buenos Aires synagogue Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina (CIRA) as the assistant rabbi in charge of growing and expanding youth programming at the invitation of Head Rabbi Guillermo Schlesinger and Dr. Adolfo Weil. CIRA, also nicknamed "Templo Libertad" for the street on which it is located, was founded in 1862 as the Congregación Israelita de Buenos Aires and is one of the oldest Jewish religious institutions in Argentina. Ashkenazic Jews from Germany and Alsace founded it, and the CIRA maintained Classical Reform aesthetics and worship practices in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸ A program from the High Holiday services in 5721/1960 shows the influence of the Classical Reform repertory and composers in the liturgical music at the CIRA, which featured the music of Salomon Sulzer, Louis Lewandowski, Abraham Dunajevsky, Isadore Freed, Max Helfman, Nisson Blumenthal, Abraham Baer, Herbert Fromm, Jacob Matz, as well as original compositions by Cantor

¹⁷ Wolfgang Saxon, Obituary of Marshall T. Meyer, *New York Times*. December 31, 1993.

¹⁸ Website Templo Libertad. Accessed September 10, 2014.
<http://www.templolibertad.org.ar/english.html>.

Abraham Belchorowicz and arrangements and compositions by Choir Director and organist Walter E. Rosenberg (see Appendix C).¹⁹

When Rabbi Meyer and his wife Naomi arrived to Buenos Aires on August 10, 1959, they settled into a hotel while their two-bedroom apartment on Plaza Libertad was painted and furnished with a bed, some basic furniture, and a “frigidaire.”²⁰ From the moment of his arrival, Rabbi Meyer went to work immediately, meeting with important community members to figure out “which people are working on what projects and how far along they are” in order to determine how to develop his role as the representative coordinator of “youth” programs. He quickly learned of the importance of the social category of youth in Argentina, which included everyone to the age of 45, concluding that this “obviously involves the whole make-up of the synagogue” (*ibid.*). While recognizing the caution necessary to respect the current establishment and the old guard at the CIRA, Rabbi Meyer quickly initiated programs for youth, a demographic category of increasing importance in Argentina in the from the 1950s to the 1970s (Manzano 2014).²¹

In the first month of his arrival to Argentina, Rabbi Meyer he had already pitched the idea of establishing the “Majané Ramah”—the American Conservative Movement’s Camp Ramah program for youth—and was attempting to raise 14 million pesos or \$175,000 to

¹⁹ “Programa de Música Liturgica para las Fiestas de Tishrei (5721/1960). The Marshall T. Meyer Papers in the Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.

²⁰ Marshall Meyer letter, “Dear Folks,” September 8, 1959, Buenos Aires. From the Marshall T. Meyer Papers in the Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.

²¹ Historian Valeria Manzano engages with the concept of youth and interrogates its historical transformations to understand social formations of youth groups as a political category in Argentina from the mid-twentieth century in her book, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

purchase the nearby building as a separate place to host youth functions and education programs.²² On September 8, 1959, he submitted a memorandum to the Executive Board of Directors, aggressively pursuing his vision of a sustainable progressive Judaism in Argentina and recommending immediate reforms to the liturgy and worship at the CIRA. On September 11, 1959, Rabbi Meyer enumerated his thoughts on the role of music in the synagogue in a letter to the synagogue leadership:

Music is one of the most powerful factors for introducing the spirit of worship, and, therefore, it should be held in the highest possible esteem. There are many sections of the service that would allow the community to participate in song. Adopting melodies that are easy to sing and that have musical integrity, *that are—one way or another—Jewish* (my emphasis) and could match the feeling of prayer, would constitute a major advance in promoting the warmth and beauty of the service, thus awakening congregational participation. It is suggested that, for the Friday service as well the Saturday morning service, specific music be chosen and arranged for congregational singing, and that said music be distributed among the congregants, who will be provided with the transliteration in Spanish for those members of the Congregation who do not know how to read in Hebrew, so that they may participate in the songs. In the future, I will present a memorandum indicating which prayers I consider most appropriate for congregational singing.²³

Rabbi Meyer's interest in the affective power of music and its potential to bring worshipers into the experience of prayer is expressed in his promotion of congregational singing, as well as his insistence on the availability of Spanish translations and Hebrew transliteration. Furthermore, his preference for easily sung melodies with musical "integrity," reconciled with a "feeling of oration," demonstrates his greater interest in a participatory service. Regarding the

²² This letter is from the Marshall T. Meyer Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.

²³ See Anexo III by Marshall T. Meyer, "Memorandum sobre liturgia y oficios sabáticos," in Adolfo Weil, *Orígenes del judaísmo conservador en la Argentina*. 1988. Furthermore, an original copy can also be found in the Marshall T. Meyer Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University. Translation by author with Sarah Green

role of music in the synagogue, Rabbi Meyer's beloved mentor, Rabbi Heschel, understood the “task of the hazzan” as the leader of prayer and agent for the spiritual renewal of the synagogue through a sustained engagement with musical and liturgical materials to expand the profundity of the worship experience for clergy and congregants alike (Heschel 1972).²⁴ Heschel, who called for a re-personalization (against his perceived “depersonalization”) of prayer, understood the importance of music to enhance the meaning of liturgical texts, with its aesthetic roots in *nusah* (traditional melodies and style) when he argued: “Music is not an end in itself but a means of religious experience”:

The tragedy of the Synagogue is in the depersonalization of prayer. Hazzanut has become a skill, a technical performance, an impersonal affair. As a result the sounds that come out of the Hazzan evoke no participation. They enter the ears; they do not touch the hearts. The right Hebrew word for Cantor is *baal f'fillah*.²⁵ (Heschel 1957: 63)

Like his mentor, the Rabbi Meyer believed that music in the synagogue was not an end in itself but a form of action with deep spiritual, political, affective resonances. In a brief statement outlining his musical philosophy, Rabbi Meyer makes no mention of specific musical terminology such as *nusah* or *hazzanut*, instead using the word “song” (*canción*) that suggests a more liberal attitude toward worship music than his mentor Rabbi Heschel. It is also important to note that Rabbi Meyer makes no mention of the role of the hazzan directly in this memorandum, nor during his years at Comunidad Bet El did he regularly employ one.²⁶ When he and his colleagues founded the Latin American rabbinical seminary, they did not establish a cantorial

²⁴ Abraham Heschel, “The Task of the Hazzan,” *Conservative Judaism* 12, no. 2 (Winter 1958): 1–8. This essay is also published as “The Vocation of the Cantor,” in *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Noonday Press, 1967), 242–53.

²⁵ A typographical error in the printing should be corrected to read “baal t'fillah.”

²⁶ Interview with Rabbi Darío Feiguin in the Comunidad Amijai offices, Buenos Aires. January 17, 2013.

program. While Rabbi Meyer held music in high regard, he did not establish a permanent training program to centralize and sustain a Jewish sacred music tradition in Argentina. As such, Buenos Aires synagogues have relied on the musical knowledge and investment of skilled individuals to serve as the “*jazan*” or “*jazanit*” (male or female cantor) who have received their training outside of cantorial schools.²⁷.

Prior to Rabbi Marshall’s arrival in 1959, the question of Judaism in Latin America was a growing concern among rabbinic leadership in North America (Volcovich 2009). As Rabbi Daniel Goldman writes, the initial appearance of progressive Judaism in Argentina appeared as early as the late 1940s and early 1950s when Rabbi Hans Harf, a German Jew and disciple of Leo Baeck, founded the Nueva Comunidad Israelita congregation and created the first liberal Jewish synagogue in Argentina. Similarly, in Brazil, the Asociação Religiosa Israelita and the Congrecação Israelita Paulista were established at the initiative of Fritz Pinkus, and Rabbi Fritz Winter’s work in Uruguay was critical to establishing a liberal congregation there (Goldman 2011). These individuals were responding to significant transformations in Jewish identity in the 1960s in Latin America as Jews continued to search for ways to become “Jewish Argentines.” As Rabbi Daniel Goldman writes, quoting Dr. Adolfo Weil, an architect of the institutionalization of Conservative Judaism in Argentina:

There was a distinct feeling that something had to be done to keep Judaism from dying. Jews in a changing world had to be given options. The context in which this situation developed was rigid and inflexible, and despite the existence of this supposedly modernized synagogue, the options for Judaism in Latin America were limited to orthodoxy or secular Zionist Judaism. There was no framework for syncretism to mix religious life with the surrounding culture, and the need for a for an alternative space,

²⁷ Following local orthographic conventions from Hebrew to Spanish.

which was, up until that point, unfamiliar on the continent, inspired the emergence of a different type of Judaism.²⁸ (Goldman 2011: 644)

In 1956 and 1957, while Marshall T. Meyer was still a student at JTS prior to his arrival in Argentina, the North American rabbis Morris Silverman and Maxwell Abbell visited Argentina to initiate an inter-American intervention to address the future of Judaism in Latin America (Volcovich 2009: 22). These rabbis, perceiving a “threat” to the future of Judaism in the region, petitioned Rabbi Schlesinger of the CIRA to pursue contact with the North American Conservative Movement to abate the weakening of ties to Judaism among youth as a result of assimilation and social and political rather than religious commitments to Judaism. In 1957, Rabbi Schlesinger joined the Rabbinical Assembly and, along with other individuals, organized the Convención de las Sinagogas Unidas de América (Convention of the United Synagogues of America) in August 1957 (Babis 2009; Volcovich 2009: 22). In 1958, the convention met with the objective of analyzing issues pertinent to Latin American Jewry—the first time in the history in which Jewish leaders, including both Ashkenazic and Sephardic rabbis from throughout the continent, met to address questions directly addressing the state of Judaism in Latin America (Babis 2009: 60; Volcovich 2009: 23). They were particularly concerned about the shifting demographics of Argentina’s Jewish population, with the emergence of a generation of Argentine-born Jews less connected to Orthodox customs and religious activities. Furthermore, they noted the diminishing role of the synagogue in Buenos Aires, accompanied by the growing importance of the role of the “club” as a central Jewish community institution (Laikin Elkin in

²⁸ See: Daniel Goldman, “El movimiento conservador en latinamérica y el legado del rabino Marshall Meyer. Un Testimonio.” *Pertenencia y alteridad: Judíos en / de América Latina: cuarenta años de cambios*, eds., Haim Avni, Judit Bokser Liwerant, Sergio DellaPergola, Margalit Bearano, Leonardo Senkman. (Orlando, FL: Iberoamericana Vervuert Publishing Corp., 2011): 643–44. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

Babis 2009; Rein 2014; Volcovich 2009). Rabbi Meyer's arrival initiated a period in which religious institutions and clergy took a more active role in addressing the question of youth involvement in religious activities.

The Conservative Movement emerged in Argentina in the early 1960s as a movement embarking upon a project to modernize Jewish worship in Argentina as a liberal progressive denomination, which did not exist prior to the activities of the late 1950s (Goldman 2011). As Daniel Fainstein argues, the name “conservative” fails to effectively describe the aims of this religious current in Latin America (Fainstein 2006: 225). He notes that the term “*masorti*,” meaning “tradicionalist” in Hebrew, better describes the “values of egalitarianism, pluralism, tolerance and democracy in the development of Jewish tradition promoted by The World Council of Conservative/Masorti Synagogues (Masorti Olami) ” since the late twentieth century (Fainstein 2006: 225).²⁹ While distinctions between Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative are critical to the landscape of progressive worship in the United States, in Argentina during the twentieth century, the need for a progressive option for worship superceeded the politics of denominational affiliation, and most non-Orthodox progressive Jews joined the Masorti synagogue (Weisbrot 1979: 115).

As historian Deby Babis notes, the changes brought about by the growth of the Conservative Movement were significant; they included attempts to change negative attitudes toward organized religion and Jewish religious traditions by reconceiving Jewish religious practices as accessible and attractive (Babis 2009). Modernization efforts were especially aimed at youth groups, re-establishing the synagogue as the center of Jewish life. By the 1980s, the

²⁹ “About Us,” World Council of Conservative/Masorti Synagogues (Masorti Olami) Website. Accessed October 10, 2014. <http://masortiolami.org/about-us/>.

synagogue had taken on a renewed importance more broadly within the Jewish community of Buenos Aires (Babis 2009).

The CIRA was the first synagogue identified with Conservative Judaism and the group responsible for first importing the liberal philosophies of twentieth-century Jewish thought to Argentina, including the ideas of Solomon Schechter, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. In his years at the CIRA, Rabbi Meyer's popularity among youth animated interest in Judaism within a new generation. However, Rabbi Meyer's youth advocacy and reform ideals initiated a schism between more traditional factions of the congregation and younger congregants searching for modern, progressive avenues to pursue religious Judaism while maintaining Argentine identities.

Although he initially planned to return to New York to complete doctoral studies at the conclusion of his two-year contract in Argentina, Rabbi Meyer chose to remain in Argentina to oversee the Camp Ramah project he and others had worked to establish there. In 1962, his work helping to found the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano culminated in its inauguration. Also in 1962, Rabbi Meyer helped to realize the project of assembling and translating a *siddur* (prayer book) in Hebrew and Spanish for use in Latin America with Rabbi Mordejai (Marcos) Edery, which was finally published by the Consejo Mundial de Sinagogas y Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano (World Council of Synagogues and the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary) in 1968. *Ha-Siddur l'shabbat u'l'Yom Tov (Ritual de oraciones para todo el año/Prayer Ritual for the Whole Year)* is used in student curriculum at the rabbinical seminary; however, many contemporary congregations have moved away from this particular prayer book.³⁰

³⁰ This insight was told to me by a student at the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Buenos Aires. Conversation with Natan Waitgortin. July 2010. See also: Marcos Edery, editor and

In 1962, Rabbi Meyer parted ways with the CIRA, establishing a working group of families that met each Shabbat to pray while planning to start their own, new, liberal progressive congregation in Buenos Aires. Founded on the idea that: “We were few but sincere dreamers, imbued with unbreakable faith in the labor of a fortified spiritual Judaism that would interpret the existential anguish of our epoch in keeping with the legacy of our ancestors,” the new synagogue community, the Comunidad Bet El, would have a profound effect on progressive Judaism in Argentina, becoming a home to families seeking a progressive Jewish education for their children and a place where Judaism could thrive as a reformed, modern practice from the mid-twentieth century onward in Argentina.³¹

At Comunidad Bet El, cultural activities such as a theater series, films screenings and discussion groups, concerts of renowned musicians, and recreational activities were made available for congregants of all ages. During the High Holidays, Rabbi Meyer hired a cantor, including individuals like Eli Bard and his wife Esther, as well as cantor Héctor Sus (Volcovich 2009: 129). As Rabbi Feiguin remembers, there was an organ in the Comunidad Bet El synagogue, but no other instrumentalists performed there regularly, and although congregants sang—the service encouraged congregational singing—there was no permanent cantor; volunteers would chant or sing to fulfill the role when asked. As was widely known by his students, Rabbi Meyer strongly disliked the nigunim, yet warmly received the spiritual message of neo-Hasidic Judaism (Volcovich 2009: 115; Kligman and Fader 2009: 8). From 1982 to 1992, Rabbi Baruj Plavnik served as head assistant and later as head rabbi after Rabbi Meyer’s

translator. *Ritual de oraciones para todo el año*. Marshall T. Meyer, general supervisor. Buenos Aires: Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano, 2007.

³¹ See: Mariela Volcovich, *Marshall T. Meyer: El hombre, un rabino* (Buenos Aires: Grafo Impresiones y Diseños, S.A., 2009), 113. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

departure. Rabbi Darío Feiguin served as assistant rabbi from 1983 to 1988 before leaving to serve as the Director of Jewish Studies at the Comunidad/Colegio Tarbut School from 1988 to 1992. Rabbi Daniel Goldman, the current rabbi at Comunidad Bet El, has served the congregation since 1992.

Of the many initiatives of Rabbi Meyer and the founders of Comunidad Bet El, one central tenet of this congregation was the deep commitment to social justice ideals, undergirding a Judaism that served humanity as a humanistic Jewish practice reaching out to both Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Institutionally, programs at Comunidad Bet El supported this vision, prioritizing youth education, and the Comunidad Bet El school was founded in 1973. With the strengthening of the authoritarian government and the subsequent military coup in 1976, Rabbi Meyer became a unique voice of dissent against the dictatorship government. His legacy as a human rights advocate and his work securing the release of then-journalist Jacobo Timmerman is documented in the 1981 book *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, a testimonial memoir that incited international awareness of the violence of the Argentine military dictatorship (1976–1983).³²

For his work advocating for disappeared persons and families of the disappeared (in most cases a euphemism for illegal imprisonment and murder), Rabbi Meyer was appointed to the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Comission on the Disappearance of Persons, CONADEP) by then President Raúl Alfonsin in December 1983. In 1984, Rabbi Meyer was awarded the Orden del Libertador General San Martín (Order of the Liberator General San Martín), Argentina's highest award for service before returning later that

³² See: Jacobo Timmerman, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

year to the United States after a quarter century influencing the growth of liberal progressive Judaism in Argentina.

The Decentralization of Progressive Jewish Worship in Buenos Aires, 1992–Present



Figure 5.4 Rabbi Darío Feiguin, Rabbi Baruj Plavnik, and Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer from the pulpit of Comunidad Bet El in the early 1980s. Courtesy of the Marshall T. Meyer Papers in the Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University.

The past is present here and now. You know? Because your ancestors knew to talk about the future, to us. If they would have lived only for their time, their epoch, if they would have left the legacy of history in search of that which is ephemeral in the moment, we would not be able to listen to the echoes of history.

— Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer³³

The synagogue did not occupy a central role in Jewish life in Buenos Aires until the mid to late twentieth-century after the arrival of Rabbi Meyer (Babis 2009). Although there existed a number of important synagogues in the 1950s in Argentina, their role in Jewish community life was limited. With the expansion of the Masorti Movement during the 1980s, the synagogue took

³³ Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, quoted in Mariela Volcovich, *Marshall T. Meyer: El hombre, un rabino* (Buenos Aires: Grafo Impresiones y Diseños, S.A., 2009), 35. Translation by author.

on an increased importance in Jewish Argentine religious, social and cultural life in Buenos Aires (Babis 2009).

By 1992, after only thirty years in Argentina, the Masorti Movement had become the denominational affiliation of approximately forty-five synagogues (Babis 2009). In large part, this expansion in Argentina and throughout Latin America was a result of the conversion of existing Orthodox synagogues to the Masorti Movement. However, in the early 1990s, new synagogues further contributed to the decentralization of progressive Jewish worship in Buenos Aires. By 1988, there were over eighty synagogues throughout Latin America, most located in Argentina, though that number has receded in the past thirty years due to mergers and closures (Weil 1988: 9).³⁴ The diversification of the landscape of Jewish worship in Buenos Aires coincided with other major challenges for the Jews of Buenos Aires. On March 17, 1992, the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was bombed by an Islamic Jihad Organization, and on July 18, 1994, the AMIA was destroyed in a separate attack. These events challenged Jewish Argentines to reconsider their Jewish heritage and spiritual convictions while addressing the profound trauma of these events.

After nearly a quarter century of work revitalizing the synagogue as a key space for Jewish spiritual and cultural life, Rabbi Meyer's departure from Buenos Aires in 1984 left a vacuum in the city's progressive Jewish Argentine leadership that contributed to the further decentralization of progressive worship. Between 1984 and 1992, ideological and personal tensions between the young, emerging leaders of the liberal progressive Jewish Argentine community initiated changes to the landscape of worship during the era of re-democratization,

³⁴ Facebook profile pages of the Federación de Comunidades del Judaismo Conservador (FEDECC) at José Hernández 1750, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.
<https://www.facebook.com/FEDECCArgentina>.

economic expansion and on-going debates about human rights and the democratic process. These young rabbis sought to establish their own individual congregations and occupy their own pulpits as spiritual authorities and leaders. In September 1992, Comunidad Bet El's head Rabbi Baruj Plavnik and his wife Perla Klel left Comunidad Bet El to form their own congregation, Fundación Pardés—a center for the “study and promotion of the wisdom and the art of being Jewish.”³⁵ In the early 1990s, Rabbi Felipe Yafe became the founding rabbi of Comunidad Bet Hilel in the Palermo neighborhood, and Comunidad Amijai was born in 1992, headed by founding rabbi Darío Feiguin and ten other families (Lunic, et al. 2012) (see Fig. 5.4).

The synagogues affiliated with the Masorti Movement share fundamental values as progressive entities. However, each synagogue cultivates its own approach to modern worship and music, calling into question the idea of a mainstream or hegemonic “Argentine style” (Fader and Kligman 2009).³⁶ As Rabbi Feiguin states, within the Movimiento Masorti, certain practices remain common across different synagogues.³⁷ For instance, men and women are seated together, temples utilize amplified sound, women are counted as part of the *minyan* and their status is equal to that of men in the synagogue (*ibid.*). Masorti synagogues use both Hebrew and Spanish. As Rabbi Feiguin clarifies: “Within the Masorti Movement, we are closer to reform than to orthodoxy, that is for sure. However, even though we are closer to the Reform Movement, we have some things that are more traditional” (*ibid.*). ”

For instance, at Fundación Pardés, Music Director Ariel Rozen leads the congregation in worship with an emphasis on congregational singing, employing an adult mixed choir seated

³⁵ “Historia” Fundación Pardés Website. Accessed September 25, 2014. <http://www.pardes.org.ar/institucion/historia/>.

³⁶ New York City’s B’nai Jeshurun congregation on Manhattan’s Upper West Side has had a significant impact on the landscape of worship in the United States since the early 2000s. Its initial explosive growth, popularity and reputation as a unique religious environment.

³⁷ Interview with Rabbi Darío Feiguin in Buenos Aires. January 17, 2013.

near him in the egalitarian prayer circle formation that they utilize at this synagogue. Sometimes percussionists play hand percussion instruments such as a *darbuka*, adding a rhythmic component to the experience of the Shabbat liturgy, which is accompanied by Rozen on electric keyboard, the typical accompaniment instrument of most Buenos Aires synagogues because of its portability and lower cost. Comunidad Bet-Hilel and Comunidad Bet El also involve music as a critical part of the worship experience. Comunidad Bet-Hilel employs part-time cantors Gustavo Bulgach and Carolina B. Liberczuk, as well as music director and pianist Nelson Duvidovic.³⁸ Rabbi Feigin argues that Comunidad Amijai is distinct from other Masorti congregations in Buenos Aires because of its more extensive use of Hebrew and its closer connection to Israel, which Rabbi Feiguin considers a fundamental aspect of the congregation's Jewish identity.³⁹ Through music, Amijai distinguishes itself from other Masorti synagogues throughout Buenos Aires.

Listening at Comunidad Amijai – January 8, 2013

The main exterior gate is cool grey metal with a visible lattice overlaid on each of the paneled doors to emphasize a modern and minimalistic effect. It is impossible to ignore the change in physical space and the calming design of the synagogue campus, which is meticulously groomed and landscaped upon entering Comunidad Amijai. The spectacular garden is a unique private yard in an urban landscape dominated by tightly packed high-rise buildings lining congested streets. On the right hand side of the patio area sits the green, yellow and brown stone sculpture “Eitz Jaim,” or “El árbol de la vida”—The Tree of Life—designed by the famous

³⁸ Bet Hilel Website. Nov. 12, 2012. <http://bethilel.org.ar/novedades/2012/11/concierto-de-jazanim>.

³⁹ Ibid.

Argentine architect Clorindo Testa, whose work creating the brutalist facades of Buenos Aires's most famous buildings (such as the Biblioteca Nacional, the National Library) shapes the architectural landscape of the city. The Testa sculpture at Comunidad Amijai doubles as a functional *ner tamid* (eternal light), and during the summer, when the solemnity of the temple sanctuary can be exchanged for the natural serenity of the patio garden, Kabbalat Shabbat services are held outdoors (see Fig. 5.5).



Figure 5.5 The Comunidad Amijai patio and the “El árbol de la vida” *ner tamid* by Clorindo Testa. Photo by author.

Attending services during the quiet of the summer months in Buenos Aires—December through February—is a departure from the regular Shabbat rituals of the rest of the year, and these outdoor services exemplified Rabbi Feiguin’s flexible approach to incorporating diverse styles into the music of the synagogue. During the summer, Rabbi Feiguin often experimented

with new sounds achieved by the inclusion of instruments unusual to the synagogue: Tibetan singing bowls of different sizes, the Peruvian *cajón* (wooden box drum), hand cymbals, and other percussion and wind instruments were often used in these outdoor services.

On January 8, 2013, when I arrived for services, Rabbi Feiguin was accompanied by the usual ensemble of musicians: Germán Kalinsky on piano, Bianca Lerner on hand percussion, as well as another instrumentalist (likely his son, Adam) who played the *pandeiro*, a type of Brazilian tambourine, and the *berimbau*, a bowed string instrument associated with Brazilian capoeira. This musician replaced Dmitry Rodnoy, the cellist and a core musician of the ensemble, who was absent that evening. Rabbi Feiguin was dressed informally in a white short-sleeved polo shirt, white pants, white sneakers and no *tallit* (prayer shawl). As was customary, the musicians performed a brief musical *intermedio* to set the mood before Rabbi Feiguin delivered his sermon. In that moment, the froggy, metallic twangs of the *berimbau* added an earthy naturalness to the feeling of being outdoors, and I watched as the flames engulfed the gas flickering out of a branch of the Testa sculpture.

It felt so nice to be outside, undisturbed by traffic or other pedestrians in the seemingly untilled urban expanse of the city of Buenos Aires. It was a luxury to sit out under the sky as twilight enveloped us, an experience that allowed my senses to focus on the sounds of the instrumentalists and the textures of surfaces surrounding me—the lattice on the door; the stars appearing on the night sky. Germán threw out blues chords, swaying at the electric piano as he moved up a scale chromatically with a certain flair uncharacteristic of his indoor musical style. “Jewish history is about the future,” said Rabbi Feiguin during his sermon. “In Judaism, we can’t live by a manual. Life, even Jewish religious life, is not like that. It is not one fixed thing or the other exclusively, but rather to do what’s next. We must not have closed ideas about what we

are. We must transform and allow for change and accept that we do not always know what something means right away.”

His informal, contemplative sermon aligned clearly with his personal approach to music in the synagogue. As percussionist Bianca Lerner suggested, Rabbi Feiguin’s approach to worship and spirituality was probably “*más hippie*” (more hippie) than the current Rabbi Avruj, and this ethnographic moment reveals some of the ways in which this approach to spirituality manifested musically. Rabbi Feiguin actively cultivated a form of spirituality, inducing introspection through contained silences, open harmonies and percussive vibrations to evoke a sense of grandeur and religious commitment through textures of sound.⁴⁰ Music, a passion of Rabbi Feiguin, was elevated as a focal point of the Shabbat evening service to open up avenues to become closer to the Divine.

Liturgical Structures and Musical Textures in the Kabbalat Shabbat Service at Comunidad Amijai

On a typical Friday evening, I would enter the cavernous sanctuary decorated minimally with paneled blonde wood interior sidewalls, cut glass windows, and an angled ceiling drawing the eyes toward the *aron hakodesh* (ark containing the Torah scrolls) at the front of the room. Usually an usher would stand by each of two entryways on either side of the temple structure. He or she would pass out siddurim, the *Boí V'Shalom* prayer book, a publication of the Comunidad Bet-El community of Mexico City, as well as a weekly supplement, the “*Kol Amijai*” (“Voice of Amijai”) newsletter that circulated within the congregation.⁴¹ The “*Kol Amijai*” was a booklet

⁴⁰ Interview with Bianca Lerner in Buenos Aires. April 2014.

⁴¹ The *Boí V'Shalom* siddur was assembled with commentary by Rabbi Marcelo Rittner of Comunidad Bet-El of Mexico City, Mexico. It uses Hebrew texts from the *Siddur Sim Shalom*, edited and with translations by Rabbi Jules Harlow—the main siddur of the American

distributed each week that listed upcoming events taking place in the synagogue, community activities, and weddings and bar or bat mitzvah announcements. The “Kol Amijai” was likely based on the “Kol Bet El” (“Voice of Bet El”—Comunidad Bet El’s weekly newsletter—established in print sometime in the mid-1960s by Rabbi Meyer, Rabbi Feiguin’s teacher and mentor. At Comunidad Amijai, the “Kol Amijai” supplement contained commentary on the weekly *parashah* (Torah portion) written by a clergy leader like Rabbi Feiguin, former Assistant Rabbi Pablo Gabe, or a commentary translated into Spanish by a member of the congregation, such as congregant Eduardo Nicenboim. Moreover, the “Kol Amijai” was a musical record and anthology of song; each week, Rabbi Feiguin selected a song—often an Israeli pop song or folksongs in Hebrew—and introduced it to the congregation. His inclusion of a song from this popular Israeli repertory was usually followed by a musical intermedio (interlude and meditation), which set up the mood of introspection prior to the sermon just after the Kaddish Shalem prayer following the conclusion of the Amidah prayers.

In his clear, refined tenor voice, Rabbi Feiguin, accompanied by the synagogue musicians, would lead the congregation in singing a new song during the intermedio section of the service. This musical practice was unique to Comunidad Amijai and broadened the musical repertory of the congregation. This repertory, which predominantly featured Israeli folk and popular songs, served the purpose of strengthening the congregation’s cultural connections to the State of Israel. During the intermedio, the people would sing along with ease if the song had been featured before in the “Kol Amijai” supplement. It was often the case, however, that the songs appearing in the “Kol Amijai” were new to the congregation, and when Rabbi Feiguin

Conservative Movement—published by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of America (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1985). Among various differences, the Friday evening service is not separated between the Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma’ariv services.

would sing a song for the first time, the worshipers would listen and then later, perhaps the week following, join along to sing with the rabbi after acquiring some competency with the tune (Appendix A).

The majority of the Israeli pop songs and folksongs in the Comunidad Amijai repertory came from the “Shirei Eretz Yisrael” (SLI) canon—the Songs of the Land of Israel—which, as Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi argue, “greatly helped to usher in the emergent identity of Israeliness in its formative years” (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 244). The songs that I collected from the “Kol Amijai” newsletters generally embodied the basic formal characteristics of the SLI; they addressed themes of nature and the land [of Israel] with poetic underpinnings produced as Hebrew poetry that also asserted a sense of Israeli national consciousness (Regev and Seroussi 2004) (see Appendix B). Associations with the nostalgia industry connected to the SLI repertory curiously elided with the forms of nostalgia associated with Argentine folkloric music, which shares similar themes of agriculture, labor, nature, and a personal connection to the land. Rabbi Feiguin’s inclusion of this repertory in Friday evening Shabbat services links this musical lexicon of the folk-inflected image of Israel of the 1960s and 1970s—the Israel of his personal adolescence and young adult life—to the modern religious practice at Comunidad Amijai. In particular, songs such as “Uf Gozal,” composed by Miki Gavrielov with lyrics by Ark Einstein, “Ihie Tov,” composed by David Broza with lyrics by Jonathan Geffen, “Slichot,” by Oded Lerner with lyrics by Lea Goldberg, “El Sham” by Nurit Hirsch with lyrics by Ehud Manor, among others, were included in the intermedio section of the Kabbalat Shabbat service giving congregants exposure to this repertory of Israeli popular music (see Appendix D). As ethnomusicologist Mark Kligman states:

The most significant change in Conservative congregations since the 1960s has been the inclusion of Israeli songs at public gatherings and occasionally during the *kedushah* section of the service—melodies such as “*Erev Shel Shoshanim*” and “*Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*” are the most common. Generally, though, as in the case of the Orthodox, new music functions for Conservative Jews as a means of entertainment rather than worship. (Kligman 2001: 125)

“*Erev Shel Shoshanim*” (Night of the Roses) by Moshe Dor and Yosef Hadar and “*Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*” (Jerusalem of Gold) by Naomi Shemer both appeared in Friday Evening service during my research. “*Erev Shel Shoshanim*” appeared in the *Kol Amijai* for the week of January 6, 2012, and I also heard an instrumental version of “*Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*” during the High Holidays in 2012, played by a trio of piano, cello, and percussion. During this arrangement of the well-known song, a congregant seated next to me leaned in to say that it was “*un tema muy antigua*”—a very old or ancient tune. Certainly, however, I knew this assertion to be inaccurate. The song was written in 1967 by Naomi Shemer and is memorialized as an unofficial Israeli national anthem following the re-unification of the Jerusalem after the Six Day War—a moment now heavily politicized in light of continued violence and territorial disputes in Israel and Palestine (Figueroa 2014). Confusion among congregants over the specific details of the histories of particular songs and canons of Jewish music flowing through the spaces of worship in Buenos Aires is emblematic of paradigms of misrecognition of Jewish music in Argentina beyond the synagogue itself due, in part, to Argentina’s peripheral geographical location and the development of the worship style of the *Masorti Movement* congregations and popular music idioms.

The musical eclecticism of the collection of songs and repertoires employed at Comunidad Amijai parallels the musical developments in the American Conservative movement enumerated by Mark Kligman (2001). However, while the SLI repertory was not sacred music,

nor was it purely entertainment. Rather, the musical intermedio consisting of the SLI song and instrumental improvisation served as a musical preparation for spiritual introspection and personal connection to prayer, ideas, and texts discussed in the weekly sermon. Rabbi Feiguin's attachment to the SLI repertory can be contextualized within global movements of concurrent musical trends emerging in the mid-twentieth century in the Conservative Movement in the United States, but it was also representative of his personal approach to music (Kligman 2001: 125). The Kabbalat Shabbat service felt fluid and denominationally independent because of the character of the music and musical textures. While Comunidad Amijai did not have an organ, nor did they have a guitar-led service, preferring a different type of "contemporary sound."

Noticeably absent from the musical aesthetics of the Comunidad Amijai were musical influences from the US folk-rock song leaders of the 1960s-1970s American Jewish Reform Movement (Cohen 2006, 2009). In the musical settings of the Kabbalat Shabbat service at Comunidad Amijai during the tenure of Rabbi Feiguin, I noted only one melody tied to this movement, the Debbie Friedman havdalah melody used as a nigun to transition to the Barechu prayer. In general, the liturgical settings were varied but mainly "contemporary."⁴² Some were based on "traditional" melodies for key prayers such as the well-known Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890) Shema and Aleinu and certain chanted prayers such as the Chatzi Kaddish, Kadish Shalem and Mourner's Kaddish, as well as the *chatimot* (seals; the last line of a prayer which is usually chanted to signal the transition to the next prayer and the place in the liturgy) of certain blessings based in the *nusah*.

In general, the majority of the prayer settings regularly employed at Comunidad Amijai were composed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Yedid Nefesh, a *piyyut*

⁴² The term "contemporary" is highly contested within progressive Jewish worship for its inability to refer to a particular time period or specific aesthetic.

(liturgical poem) typically sung at the beginning of the Kabbalat Shabbat service, was set to a version of the 1970s composition by Ehud and Sara Zweig that debuted at the Chassidic Song Festival in Tel Aviv in 1970.⁴³ Shiru L'Adonai, Mizmor L'David (Psalms 96 and 46), and the Mi Chamocha prayer seemed to be based on Shlomo Carlebach melodies. The Mizmor Shir prayer followed a melody employed by the Beit Tefilah Israeli Congregation in Tel Aviv, a musically experimental, liberal, egalitarian community.⁴⁴ The L'cha Dodi was a version of a Hasidic tune composed by the Rabbi Menachem Goldberger of Baltimore of the Congregation Tiferes Yisroel, and the final stanzas of the L'cha Dodi prayer were often sung by volunteers into a cordless microphone that was circulated among the first rows of the sanctuary to allow congregants to participate.

Further underlining the contemporary feel of the service, Rabbi Feiguin included a three-part prayer for peace, an approximately eight minute-long arrangement of Hashkiveinu, Ufros Aleinu, and “Salaam” accompanied by piano, cello, and hand percussion. The Hashkivenu prayer was set to the Craig Taubman melody that led directly into an Ufros Aleinu melody composed by the Jewish Argentine composer and choral director Alberto (Zeev) Malbergier. Mosh Ben Ari and Sheva’s famous song “Salaam” (“Od Yavo”) finished up compilation as the peace prayer concluded, transitioning into the Veshamru, Chatzi Kaddish, and Amidah prayers.⁴⁵

The theme of introspection continued through the Kedushah, culminating in the Kol Amijai Israeli pop or folksong, which was always followed by an improvisatory instrumental arrangement of a melody or theme that the musicians played for approximately four minutes

⁴³ Various Artists, *Chasidic Song Festival 1970*, © 1970. Hed-Arzi 14150, LP, Israel, 1970. <http://www.discogs.com/Various-Chasidic-Song-Festival-1970/release/3492769>.

⁴⁴ Rabbi Menachem Goldberger, L'cha Dodi, © 2004 Rabbi Menachem Goldberger / Rabbi Menachem Goldberger (634479709340), Digital album on cdbaby. <https://www.cdbaby.com/cd/rmgoldberger>

⁴⁵ Sheva and Friends, *Celestial Wedding @ 1997*. Lev Haolam Production LEV-1 A3 3106277.

leading into the sermon. The core synagogue musicians, Germán Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, and Bianca Lerner, had played with each other for nearly seven years, and they required no more than a few minutes prior to the beginning of services to decide on a theme and sketch out a progression. Like the bridge of a song, the musical intermedio was a variation on the theme of the service that was sometimes inspired by the liturgy or festival occasion, but often flowed from a particular feeling or inspiration from the rabbi or one of the musicians. It was a departure from the liturgy that expanded the intentionality of prayer.

The concluding part of the service beginning with the Kiddush, Aleinu, and Adon Olam prayers ended in a community building singing exercise. Each congregant would stand in front of their seats, grasp hold of each other around the shoulders or waist, and sway as Rabbi Feiguin and the musicians led them in singing the Shefa Gold melody for Ma Gadlu (Psalm 92), which was repeated, declaring the greatness of God's deeds and thoughts (Gold 2013). Each week, the service would end, and the musicians would transition to an upbeat version of a downbeat-heavy Shalom Aleichem that resembled a Hasidic tune. Congregants would wish each other a Shabbat Shalom, putting away their prayer books and meandering to the back of the hall, which was opened up to reveal folding tables laden with little cups of juice and fat, golden challah breads. Sometimes I would stay and chat with the congregants, and other times I would walk slowly toward the line of people filing out of the synagogue to sit down at a nearby Chinese restaurant and write up my notes from the evening.

The Search for a Personal Sound: Musical Transformations at Comunidad Amijai

From 1992 until approximately 2006, musician and composer César Lerner accompanied Rabbi Feiguin on piano, serving as a musical director and co-developer of the Comunidad

Amijai services. During the early 2000s, additional instrumentalists were added to the ensemble, including clarinetist Marcelo Moguilevsky, who performed briefly at the synagogue before being replaced by clarinetist Iván Barenboim, who later moved to the United States and now serves as an instrumentalist at Central Synagogue in Manhattan. Rabbi Feiguín's son Adam joined the synagogue as a percussionist, introducing the *djembe* (West African, skin-covered, wooden goblet drum) and the *udu* (Nigerian idiophone percussion instrument) to the Kabbalat Shabbat service. When César Lerner left to pursue other projects, pianist Germán Kalinscky replaced him. Bianca Lerner later replaced Adam Feiguín, the rabbi's son, and Dmitry Rodnoy was brought into the group to add the color of the cello—an instrument that is somewhat unusual for weekly Shabbat services. Since the mid-2000s, Germán, Bianca, and Dmitry have played together on Shabbat, performing for weddings and other festival occasions as well. They freely improvise with each other, comfortably elaborating prayer settings, themes, and motifs—performing the nigunim, folk song melodies, classical, popular, and contemporary Jewish sacred music repertoires mostly learned from playing in the synagogue. The musical personnel of this congregation and the musical choices result from the careful cultivation of instrumental textures of sound woven with the spoken and singing voice of Rabbi Feiguín. Music was a central feature of worship at Comunidad Amijai, a constant search for “un sonido personal” (a personal sound).

Instead of hiring a permanent cantor, Rabbi Feiguín regularly employed a group of musicians and a backup vocalist, supplementing the core sound achieved by the piano, percussion, and cello with invited guests who would play flutes, the accordion, and other instruments. Often, Rabbi Feiguín would accompany the congregation on tambourine as he led the singing and chanting of prayers from the bimah. With the donation of a “super piano,” as Dmitry calls the Steinway grand piano donated anonymously to the synagogue, the musicians

were able to continue pursuing an acoustic sound that was increasingly less mediated by electronic amplification.⁴⁶ As Bianca Lerner stated in a group interview with Damián Rovner in the Amijai magazine published annually: “I also think that we are searching for our own sound, trying to give the soundtrack of the ceremonies at Amijai its own personality. I mean, some arrangements just have their own personality: ‘All You Need is Love.’ I think we’re trying to set ourselves apart.”⁴⁷

After many years playing together, the musicians know each other closely and trust each other’s musical instincts, largely improvising instrumental sections of the liturgical settings, as well as the musical meditation, or intermedio, during the service (see Appendix D). As Dmitry Rodnoy stated in an interview for the Amijai magazine published annually: “Improvisations, when they happen, seem as if they were written as arrangements.”⁴⁸ However, the style of the music flowing at Comunidad Amijai was flexible, and the musicians were encouraged to follow their musical intentionality for any given service. As a result, the liturgical order is supplemented by a musical flexibility that changes the feeling of the service each week.

César Lerner was the first musician to give form to the music of the service at Amijai. He established the idea of accompaniments and arrangements in the style in which they were employed in the synagogue during my fieldwork. The result, after years of experimentation and intimacy achieved by playing together since 2006, was a greater understanding of the type of

⁴⁶ Damián Rovner, “En búsqueda de un sonido personal,” *Amijai: La revista de la comunidad* 19, no. 22 (September 2011): 153.

⁴⁷ Bianca Lerner stated: “También me parece que estamos yendo en búsqueda de un sonido propio, que el soundtrack de las ceremonias de Amijai sea personal. O sea, hay arreglos que tienen personalidad, ‘All You Need is Love’. Me parece que estamos tratando de diferenciarnos.” In Damián Rovner, “En búsqueda de un sonido personal,” *Amijai: La revista de la comunidad* 19, no. 22 (September 2011): 153.

⁴⁸ He states: “Las improvisaciones, cuando salen, parece que están escritas como arreglos.” Damián Rovner, “En búsqueda de un sonido personal,” *Amijai: La revista de la comunidad* 19, no. 22 (September 2011): 153.

sound they wish to achieve. “Minimalist, not so overdone,” said Germán. “For each sound to be precise, more than just a bunch [of sounds],” according to Dmitry. “And porous, as well,” as Bianca added. As an ensemble, Dmitry considered the sound to move through the hall as a circle or cycle of different forms of participation—a dialogue between the musicians and the congregation:

We musicians capture that state and respond by playing differently. Then, the rabbi does the same thing, as well, and that comes back to the sanctuary. And so that’s how the circle is closed. The sanctuary is another participant.⁴⁹

In Dmitry’s estimation, the space of the synagogue itself physically constructed the social relations between congregants, clergy, and musicians, establishing a dialogue between musicians and congregants with the music facilitating worship. The sanctuary space guided participation in the Kabbalat Shabbat service and the experience of Jewish Argentine Masorti religious ritual through sacred music. The sound structured by the space determined aesthetic factors, as the music created an atmosphere of worship. Rabbi Feiguin’s preference for “non-lyric” (non-operatic) voices—voices Dmitry described as “distinctive, very local, folkloric”—filling the hall with a type of vocal timbre that was more folk than *bel canto*.⁵⁰ Dmitry stated: “We have an African drum, one of the greatest pianos from Germany, a cello from the eighteenth century, an extraordinary tenor who represents what lyric song means in popular music, and having that unique cantor grants the synagogue a certain status.”⁵¹ “We’re in search of a personal sound with

⁴⁹ See: In Damián Rovner, “En búsqueda de un sonido personal,” *Amijai: La revista de la comunidad* 19, no. 22 (September 2011): 153. Translation by author with Sarah Green.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

personal instrumentation,” Dmitry concluded, elevating the importance of timbral choice in the creation of a Comunidad Amijai musical aesthetic.⁵²

The timbres of the instruments played integral roles in the musical sound in the synagogue. Reminiscent of the debates surrounding the role of the organ in Reform Jewish worship from the nineteenth century onwards, the grand piano at Comunidad Amijai is a mark of prestige as well as modernity for the congregation (Frühauf 2009). The 2.74-meter Steinway & Sons grand piano was manufactured in 2004 in Hamburg, Germany, arriving in the city of Pescara, Italy, where international piano dealer Angelo Fabrini then sold it to an anonymous donor.⁵³ The cost of importation and import taxes were not covered by the donation, so members of the Amijai community worked to raise the funds to transport the instrument to Buenos Aires. First chosen by Argentine pianist Eduardo Hubert in Pescara, the Steinway & Sons piano was reviewed and tuned by Sr. Carlos Nery, who is considered one of the greatest piano technicians in Argentina.

The congregation is proud of the instrument, ensuring that it remains one of the finest in Argentina to attract the world’s greatest musicians to play in in the great hall for its public music concerts series season. On November 3, 2011, the piano had its debut concert, played by pianists Daniel Rivera and Martha Argerich.⁵⁴ The instruments and the musicians maintain a special relationship to the sound of sacred music in the synagogue. Unlike most synagogues in Buenos Aires that use an electric keyboard or synthesizer, the Steinway Grand piano distinguishes the Comunidad Amijai synagogue from the rest. Their performances facilitated the mode of spirituality and sanctity of the Kabbalat Shabbat service and the experience of the Sabbath

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Un nuevo piano para la actividad musical de Buenos Aires,” *Amijai: La revista de la comunidad* 19, no. 22 (September 2011): 148-49.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

rituals. In the next section, I discuss the core musicians, Dmitry Rodnoy, Germán Kalinscky, and Bianca Lerner to illuminate their backgrounds and particular approaches to sacred music.

Dmitri Rodnoy

Just three months after arriving to Buenos Aires from Moscow when he was just twenty-four years old, Dmitry Rodnoy's Stainer cello was stolen from his rented apartment in San Telmo—an instrument more than 200 years old that his father had given him eight years earlier when he graduated from secondary school and entered the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Immediately, Dmitry started looking through the Buenos Aires classifieds, posting notices in the conservatories throughout the city and putting out the word among musicians to keep an eye out for leads indicating the whereabouts of his instrument. More than thirteen years later, long after he had lost hope of finding the instrument, Dmitry found the cello with the help of his cat Jaime, who had jumped up on the keyboard of his computer and accidentally clicked a key that popped up a webpage showing a picture of his Stainer cello.⁵⁵ Dmitry called his lawyer, and after arbitration with local authorities, including the presentation of evidence proving that the found cello was the same one that had been stolen, the instrument was returned to Dmitry, almost six months later. Once again, Dmitry Rodnoy began playing on his treasured instrument in Comunidad Amijai, giving lessons and performing with various musical groups with the aid of his precious instrument.⁵⁶

When Rodnoy arrived to Buenos Aires in 1995, he couldn't have guessed that he would become an integral part of the sound of Jewish worship at a key synagogue in the city. Coming

⁵⁵ Interview with Dmitry Rodnoy. April 19, 2013.

⁵⁶ Verónica Pagés, "La historia de Dmitri y su violonchelo, *La Nación* (Buenos Aires). October 29, 2008. Accessed April 17, 2013. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1064197-la-historia-de-dimitri-y-su-violonchelo>.

from a non-religious Jewish family while growing up in Soviet Russia, Rodnoy's musical training was achieved through formal conservatory study of Western classical music. The loss of Rodnoy's instrument was significant, and it forced him to seek employment outside of musical performance. He worked at a real estate office and borrowed instruments of lesser and poorer sound quality, consequently excluding him from jobs in professional orchestras. With the borrowed instruments, Rodnoy began exploring popular musical idioms to improve his economic prospects and to keep performing. Recording with musicians such as Gustavo Santaolalla and Afro Verde, Divididos, Los Pericos, La Renga, Bersuit Vergarabat, Pedro Aznar and los Redonditos de Ricota, Rodnoy adapted to a career outside of classical art music.⁵⁷ When he arrived to Comunidad Amijai in 2006 at the recommendation of César Lerner, Rodnoy and his cello quickly became an integral member of the Comunidad Amijai ensemble.⁵⁸

Germán Kalinscky

Germán Kalinscky, Comunidad Amijai's conservatory trained pianist from the city of La Plata, first joined the musical ensemble in 2006 after being invited to play there by Rabbi Darío Feiguin and César Lerner. While officially named the Musical Director at Comunidad Amijai, Kalinscky resists the implied authority of the title, preferring to describe himself as just another musician contributing to the style and energy of the ensemble.⁵⁹ As a child, Germán started studying the piano and later attended the Escuela de Música Popular de Avellaneda (EMPA), completing the jazz track in the four-year arts school with specialized programs in popular music

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Interview with Dmitry Rodnoy. April 19, 2013.

⁵⁹ Interview with Germán Kalinscky and Amijai musicians in Comunidad Amijai in Buenos Aires. April 11, 2013.

performance in jazz, tango and folklore.⁶⁰ Kalinscky studied composition in the Facultad de Bellas Artes at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata before moving to the city of Buenos Aires to start his career as a full-time, professional musician.

When Germán speaks about the sound of the synagogue ensemble, he often uses the word “color” to differentiate between the timbres of the instruments and to refer to the individual tones contributed by each musician. “Each one of us comes from a different school [of musical training], more classical, more klezmer, and all of those colors coexist to support the liturgy.”⁶¹ Germán says that the beginning of the Kabbalat Shabbat service is a good example of how these different colors shine through the liturgy, which can be noted especially in the Hine Ma Tov and the Yedid Nefesh prayers. Hine Ma Tov is played at a slow tempo in a “Sufi” or “Middle Eastern” style, leading directly into the Ehud and Sara Zweig setting of the Yedid Nefesh (see Appendix D).⁶² Both settings lean into the minor tonalities, using piano, supporting vocals in thirds and hand percussion in the “Hine Ma Tov” to demarcate the arrival of the Sabbath and a break from ordinary to ritual time. The rumbling bass line in the left hand of the piano part during “Yedid Nefesh” warms up the sanctuary, filling it with the reverberations of the rich textures of sound while the dissonant chords and melodic progressions alternate in the right hand to balance the cooling effect of Rabbi Feiguín’s clear tenor voice. When Rabbi Feiguín sang, “yarutz avd’ja k’mó ayal” (Tu siervo a tu voluntad/Your servant to your will), his voice would

⁶⁰ Website of the *Escuela de Música Popular de Avellaneda* (EMPA). Accessed December 17, 2014. <http://www.empa.edu.ar/>.

⁶¹ Kalinscky states: “Cada uno de nosotros viene de una escuela diferente, más clásica, más klezmer y todos esos colores conviven para portar la liturgia.” Interview with Germán Kalinscky and Amijai musicians in Comunidad Amijai in Buenos Aires. April 11, 2013.

⁶² B’nai Jeshurun Congregation, *The Music of Shabbat: With Every Breath*, ©1999. Produced and arranged by Anthony Coleman. Congregation B’nai Jeshurun, digital album Amazon, 1999. Various Artists, *Chasidic Song Festival 1970*, © 1970. Hed-Arzi 14150, LP, Israel, 1970. <http://www.discogs.com/Various-Chasidic-Song-Festival-1970/release/3492769>.

open, broadening and projecting out toward the sanctuary, to affirm the words of the prayer to the congregation.⁶³

In the moment before the service, the musicians would meet for a few minutes to decide on a melody or theme for the musical intermedio. As Germán tells me, choosing a piece for the evening depends on the mood of the clergy and of the musicians. For example, on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, they would follow the notated musical parts more faithfully (a reference to traditional nusah).⁶⁴ Furthermore, he explained that in the process of choosing a motif for the intermezzo during the Kabbalat Shabbat service, the musicians did not prescribe or specify the texture of the arrangement before playing it. The “work” of the musicians during the services, “it is work and it is not work,” unfurled in complex ways.⁶⁵

While Germán notes that, although the musicians are professionals and are paid for their contributions each week, he profoundly enjoyed coming to the synagogue each week, performing the music of Shabbat and sharing time chatting with the other synagogue musicians in the back hall of the “*trastienda*” (“back of the store” or back office) where they share challah bread and drink *maté*, catching up with each other and playfully cracking jokes before services begin.⁶⁶ As each of the musicians arrived, Germán and the sound technicians checked the microphone levels and discussed a plan for what to play that evening. More than accurately intoning the notes on a page of music, the Comunidad Amijai musicians aspired to use music in a communicative capacity. “The initial idea was for all of us to be part of the same energy. So, what we have to do

⁶³ See: *Sidur Boí V'Shalom*. See: *Sidur Boí V'Shalom para Kabalat Shabat y ocasiones especiales*, ed. by Rabbi Marcelo Rittner. Second Edition (Distrito Federal, MX: Comunidad Bet-El), 2001 [1995]. Spelling follows the conventions used in the publication.

⁶⁴ Interview with Rabbi Darío Feiguin in Buenos Aires. January 17, 2013.

⁶⁵ Interview with Germán Kalinsky and Amijai musicians in Comunidad Amijai in Buenos Aires. April 11, 2013.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

is make sure that the communication that comes along with the music is a type constant of ‘feedback’ between us and the people. We’re not looking for an “a” or “b” reaction from them, but the idea is that it’s a loop,” Germán told me.⁶⁷

Bianca Lerner

Bianca Lerner began working as a musician at Comunidad Amijai when she was sixteen years old, inheriting a role in the musical life at the synagogue from her father, César Lerner, who, alongside Rabbi Feiguín, initiated the early phase of the artistic development of religious services and musical programming at Comunidad Amijai. Bianca took up playing percussion recreationally as a young girl, and her childhood home was filled with musical instruments, including drums, because of her father’s work as a film composer and professional musician.⁶⁸ At the suggestion of her father, Bianca began playing hand drums regularly with him, her friend Tati, and Tati’s father in a drum circle at her home most days after school.⁶⁹

For approximately six years, Bianca and her family and friends kept the drum circle active, and as she began to realize just how important of a role percussion had come to play in her life, she searched for a music teacher in Buenos Aires to help her to improve her technique. Bianca began studying with the Senegalese drum teacher, Abdoulaye Badiane, who had arrived to Córdoba in 2002 and later moved to Buenos Aires in 2003, founding the art school

⁶⁷ As Kalinscky stated: “La idea madre era que seamos todos parte de la misma energía, digamos. Entonces, nosotros, lo que tenemos que lograr es que la comunicación que pase con lo musical sea un ‘feedback’ entre nosotros y la gente constante. No es que buscamos que la gente reaccione de manera “a” o “b” sino que la idea es que sea un circuito.” Interview with Germán Kalinscky and Amijai musicians in Comunidad Amijai in Buenos Aires. April 11, 2013.

⁶⁸ César Lerner composed the soundtracks for a number of important Argentine films, including: *Nueve Reinas* (2000), *Esperando al mesías* (2000), *El abrazo partido* (2004), and *Derecho de familia* (2006).

⁶⁹ Tabasco Rivas, “El cuerpo es el tambor,” *Clarín* (Buenos Aires). April 4, 2014.

Darachosan with centers in Caballito and San Isidro where he conducts workshops, percussion seminars and lessons in traditional African dance and singing.⁷⁰ With Abdoulaye, Bianca studied Senegalese drumming techniques on the *djembe* drum and later traveled to the Senegalese coastal town, Cap Skiring, where she spent a month studying percussion and dance with a performance arts troupe in 2000.⁷¹ Bianca's understanding of her work as a musician is influenced by her studies of African drumming: "el cuerpo es el tambor" (the body is the drum), she says in an interview with journalist Tabasco Rivas for the newspaper *Clarín*, maintaining that drumming, and group drumming, especially, can be a way to re-embody oneself, breaking out of life's "auto-pilot" mode to recuperate from the anxieties of everyday life, allowing the body to emerge as facilitator of musical being.⁷²

Bianca's beliefs about the role of Jewish music in the synagogue are commensurate to her ideas about Jewish personhood. Bianca does not agree with rejecting popular musics as creative influences to encourage the expression of Jewish music. For instance, she cites the music of the Beatles—repertory that the new rabbi prohibits from use in weddings and other synagogue services—as a key example of how secular, non-Jewish melodies can inspire Jewish expressions of faith and commitment to Judaism. For Bianca, Jewish Argentine musical innovation is a process of constant change and exchange—rather than restriction—a process she emplaced in the longer history of Jewish music-making. "I am talking about Jewish particularism because when particularism keeps going around and around in circles—Jewish music about Jewish music, more

⁷⁰ Interview with Bianca Lerner. April 2014.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Tabasco Rivas, "El cuerpo es el tambor," *Clarín* (Buenos Aires). April 4, 2014.

Jewish music about more Jewish music—we don't get anywhere. Jews are a mixture of everything. Just look at you!" she tells me as we laugh during the interview.⁷³

Finding the Voice of the Congregation

In the absence of a widespread, institutionalized and professionalized cantorate operating in Latin America, the role of the *hazzan*, the cantor—the voice of the congregation—is filled by vocalists whose training in Jewish liturgical musics, including traditional, classical reform and modern reform repertory is limited in most cases. Hazzanim, sometimes referred to as “*morim de shirá*” (music teachers) in Latin America, often serve as the musical director of their congregation. In general, the training for becoming a singer or soloist in a Buenos Aires synagogue is more flexible in Argentina than in the United States. Singers are hired for the qualities and sounds of their voices rather than the depths of their Jewish musical training.⁷⁴ At Comunidad Amijai, Rabbi Feiguin heavily favored open harmonies provided by Germán and Marina Wilensky, and the rabbi himself was a key musician in the musical team. Rabbi Feiguin’s crisp tenor voice projected well. His phrasing was smooth, and his pitch as nearly impeccable. Rabbi Feiguin’s vocal skill distinguished him from other rabbis in Buenos Aires, many of whom take a secondary role with respect to the musical life of the synagogue.

Prior to the Second World War, immigrants arriving to Argentina included notable musicians, composers and cantors (Glober 2012).⁷⁵ These cantors included Israel Barsky, a

⁷³ Bianca Lerner stated: “Hablo del hermetismo judío porque cuando el hermetismo se queda dando vueltas—que la música judía sobre la música judía, la música judía sobre la música judía—no vamos a ningún lado. Los judíos son una mezcla de todo. Mirá vos!” Interview with Bianca Lerner. April 2014.

⁷⁴ Conversation with Yanina Grinberg in Comunidad Amijai. April 11, 2013.

⁷⁵ Gabriel Fleischer, “Hazzanim in Argentina,” *Hazzanut at the Masorti Movement Newsletter*. January 2011.

Russian immigrant who arrived in 1931 and was hired by the CIRA. Pinjas Borenstein arrived from Poland in 1923 and worked as the first ḥazzan at the Gran Templo de Paso. Abraham Blejarovich arrived to Argentina after the Second World War from Poland and sang in the CIRA, serving as the president of the Liturgical Singer's Association (*ibid.*). Aaron Gutman, born in Poland, arrived in 1924 and became the ḥazzan at the Gran Templo Paso from 1951-1972. As Gabriel Fleischer notes, other ḥazzanim such as Menajem "Muni" Balaban, Kalman Dashevsky, David Hitzkopf, Leo Fisher, Guershon Kiperchtok, Tavi Wilner, Kalman Weitz, Abraham Rozenmacher and Eliahu Borujovich were all notable cantors in Buenos Aires (*ibid.*). Bernardo Feuer and Jacobo Skliar were choir directors serving congregations and leading choral performance of Jewish liturgical works. According to Fleisher, a workers group—the "Jazunem Farbund"—was founded in the 1960s to unite cantors socially and professionally to talk about music and to organize to defend the rights of synagogue singers (*ibid.*).

Perhaps, the most famous and well-known ḥazzan in Argentina is "Leibele" Schwartz, born Yehuda Kirzner Schwartz in Brody, Poland (now Ukraine) in 1931.⁷⁶ After arriving to Buenos Aires with his family when he was just eight years old, Schwartz studied voice, piano and liturgy. In 1959, he moved to South Africa and sang at the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Sandton synagogue in Johannesburg, later heading to Congregation Share Zedek in New York City to serve as cantor for five years before returning to Buenos Aires to sing at the CIRA as their senior cantor in 1970. Schwartz's son, Adrián Kirzner Schwartz, known as Adrián Suar, is a famous Argentine actor and media producer.

For the majority of the twentieth century, the absence of an institutional center for the training of cantors in Argentina meant that the profession itself has not been protected and

⁷⁶ "Leibele Schwartz," Find a Grave.com <<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=120830300>>. Accessed September 23, 2014.

supported in the same way as it has been in the United States. To become a cantor at the Gran Templo Paso, for example, hazzan Oscar Fleischer of the Kehillah Benei Tikvah remembers that he had to pass a series of exams testing his knowledge of the *nusah hatefila* (prayer chant) during the 1970s without formal training.⁷⁷ The Gran Templo Paso, an Orthodox synagogue in Buenos Aires, was purportedly “the place where people could listen and enjoy the purest and most traditional liturgy” (ibid.). Today, each synagogue had its own process of hiring vocalists, and although the Instituto “Bet Asaf” was established at the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary to initiate important conversations about cantorial training, professional standards and the transmission of traditional repertory. In the early 2010s, vocalist Marina Wilensky, a trained jazz singer with a warm alto voice, joined the Comunidad Amijai ensemble. When she agreed to sing at the synagogue, Rabbi Feiguin taught her the hazzanut and prayer settings.⁷⁸

A Temple to Music: Cultural Programming at the Comunidad Amijai – May 7, 2013



Figure 5.6 The Comunidad Amijai sanctuary for a Verdi tribute concert on May 7, 2013.
Photo by author.

⁷⁷ Oscar Fleischer, “The Hazzan and His Tasks.” *Hazzanut at the Masorti Movement Newsletter*. February 2011.

⁷⁸ Interview with Rabbi Darío Feiguin in Buenos Aires. January 17, 2014.

I had visited Comunidad Amijai many times, but this was the first time I was visiting the synagogue for a secular concert performance. That evening, on Tuesday, May 7, 2013, I arrived for a program called “Extraordinaria Gala Lírica: En Homenaje a Giuseppe Verdi en el Bicentenario de su nacimiento,” a tribute concert to Giuseppe Verdi’s lyric opera repertory in honor of the composer’s birth in 1813. The Verdi concert was the inaugural program for the ninth season of musical programming at Comunidad Amijai, a celebration not only of Verdi’s accomplishments in music, but also the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the congregation. As Rabbi Darío Feiguin wrote in the concert program, “spirituality appears not only in worship and in ancient customs, but also in music, art, and all of humans beings’ cultural expressions, regardless of origin, nationality or religion.”⁷⁹ On a weekday evening, the sacred hall of Jewish worship opens up into a public space of art and folk music.

There was an air of formality as I waited in line behind a group of men and women, mostly in their 60s and 70s, dressed smartly in full-length fur coats and suits, carrying designer handbags. A staff member attends to each arriving guest, acting as an usher to show guests to their seats. The temple hall felt old-fashioned with this heightened decorum, making it feel as if we were in a different time or place. For the concert, the sanctuary was filled with extra chairs, the same ones used for High Holiday Services, to accommodate the concert-goers. A taupe, velveteen curtain was hung in front of the ark, obscuring the doors to the *aron hakodesh* and hiding the symbol of Judaism. The ner tamid was extinguished to prevent a fire. To transform the temple into a concert hall, the symbols of Jewish ritual faith were hidden to secularize the space.

⁷⁹ “Extraordinaria Gala Lírica: En Homenaje a Giuseppe Verdi en el Bicentenario de su nacimiento.” Comunidad Amijai program notes. May 7, 2013.

The crowd that arrived to Comunidad Amijai that evening entered faithful to another love—that of opera, a pursuit in Buenos Aires inspiring its own fervor, as sociologist Claudio Benzecry argues (Benzecry 2011). The people in attendance are familiar with the famous arias featured during the program from Verdi operas, including: *Othello*, *Don Carlo*, *Rigoletto*, *La Forza del Destino*, *La Traviata* and *Un Ballo in Maschera*. The couple seated next to me often hums along during the program, and as the concert winds down, the singers become more energized, transforming the hall as Arnaldo Quiroga sings the aria, “La Donna è Mobile,” from *Rigoletto*, to the great delight of the crowd, which hums and sings along with the tenor. The crowd appears to be nearly 450 people that evening, filling up the temple space and enthusiastically applauding singers Soledad de la Rosa (soprano), Eugenia Fuente (mezzosoprano), Arnaldo Quiroga (tenor), Ernesto Bauer (baritone) and piano accompanist Susana Frangi at the conclusion of the concert.

The Director of Cultural Programming at the Comunidad Amiaji, Eugenio Scavo, told me in an interview in the café of the Automóvil Club Argentino (Argentine Automobile Club) that he saw no problem working for a Jewish Argentine religious institution to develop their sacred space into a premier concert hall to create a cultural programming series that would attract world-class performers to their state-of-the-art soundstage. Scavo’s longtime friendship with Natalio Garber—whom he had met many years earlier at the Teatro Colón where Eugenio Scavo worked in various capacities for over thirty years—led Garber to invite Scavo to oversee, direct and develop the new cultural programming initiative started in 2004.⁸⁰ Scavo, who is Catholic, accepted the opportunity to develop this musical programming series under the auspices of the Departamento de Cultura Amijai without reservations on the basis of religious difference. Armed

⁸⁰ Interview with Eugenio Scavo. April 12, 2014.

with state-of-the-art sound equipment, the sanctuary at Comunidad Amijai is now celebrated as one of the finest acoustic spaces in Buenos Aires, attracting world-famous musicians to perform in its hall, the traditions of opera fanaticism representing the porteño fervor for live musical performance grounded in this Jewish sacred space.

Since 2004, the series has featured renowned classical musicians, Argentine folkloric musical ensembles, dance troupes and rock and popular artists such as Israeli violinist Shlomo Mintz, Argentine pianist Bruno Gelber, charango legend Jaime Torres, accordionist Chango Spasiuk and violinist Rafael Gintoli, and the Russian National Orchestra, to name a few. In 2010, the institution founded, organized and hosted Buenos Aires's First International Violin Competition, as well as a second competition held in 2012 in coordination with the city and national governmental institutional bodies to host the event in the extraordinary Teatro Colón. "It will be a blessing if you are able to feel like this House is your own, and to be a part of the deeper meaning of this shared building and this gathering," wrote Rabbi Alejandro Avruj—an invitation to new publics to discover the place of Comunidad Amijai as a space of music.⁸¹

In total, the Comunidad Amijai Cultural Programming department has organized over 300 shows from 2002 to 2012 (*ibid.*). As Kay Kaufman Shelemay argues about the of music in Congregation Beth Israel synagogue of Houston, Texas: "Correspondingly, liturgical music is at the core of Beth Israel's image, but remains only one of the several domains of musical activity that at different times in Beth Israel's history have either existed independently or interacted closely" (Shelemay 1987: 409). Likewise, at Comunidad Amijai, musical activity is at the core of this synagogue's image, radiating out along different trajectories for particular publics.

⁸¹ Program notes. Translation by author.

Returning to Prayer: On the Peripheries of Jewish Sacred Sound – April 4, 2014

When I arrived to the synagogue on a Friday evening in early March 2014, I was relieved to see Russian-born cellist Dmitry Rodnoy on the bimah, seated closest to the new head, Rabbi Alejandro Avruj, at Comunidad Amijai. Next to him, Bianca Lerner, the percussionist, and Germán Kalinsky, the pianist, were seated in their usual places on the stage in the luminous sanctuary of the modern synagogue hall. The young Rabbi Avruj, who had recently left Temple NCI-Emanu EL to take on the role of head rabbi at Comunidad Amijai (in December 2013), was tall and slim with his shaggy dark hair sticking out beneath his circular *kippah*. He stood behind the wooden lectern where Rabbi Feiguin once conducted Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday evening) services each week. The unexpected departure of Rabbi Darío Feiguin, which I learned about from the United States from Dmitry in a message on Facebook, left me concerned about my friends who worked as synagogue musicians. I wondered how this change in leadership would be reflected in the music and the liturgy of the new Comunidad Amijai.

That evening, as I walked into the synagogue—as I had done many times before—I was confronted by my pressing thoughts about the ways in which ethnography fails to represent the ethnographic present when a significant moment of transformation turns a recent “present” into a historical or memorial past. During the research for the present chapter, I realized that the “pastness” of this material was even more concrete because of the change in clergy and subsequent transformations to the music of worship. I wondered about the resulting implications for ethnography and the representation of Jewish sacred music: How does an ethnographer represent multiple historical trajectories, each of which feeds into the representation of a present as a past distinct from the recent present? No longer was Rabbi Feiguin the musical voice of

prayer, nor were all of the same settings employed. The musical life of the synagogue was markedly different—even as the core ensemble remained in tact.

In a socio-demographic study of the Jewish population of Buenos Aires, Adrián Jmelnizky and Ezekiel Erdei found that 7% of participants regularly attend Kabbalat Shabbat services.⁸² However, of those responding to the study, 24% expressed a link to religious organizations, that is, synagogues (Jmelnizky and Erdei 2005). The study did not ask participants to define themselves denominationally, but one can assume that a significant percentage of those who regularly attend weekly Shabbat services at synagogues are affiliated with Orthodox rather than Masorti institutions (Jmelnizky and Erdei 2005). Liberal progressive synagogues in Buenos Aires compete for the small number of practitioners searching for places of worship. Consequently, music acts as a catalyst for encouraging participation and attracting congregants—bringing in new members and involving them in religious practice while distinguishing different taste communities around the aesthetics of sacred music.

Since the inception of the Comunidad Amijai congregation in the early 1990s, music has played a pivotal role in the development of this congregation. Rather than relying on traditional models for musical engagement in the synagogue, Comunidad Amijai founders approached the question of music as a process of transformation, innovation, exploration, and change still tied to the structures of cultural memory, Jewish ritual, and bonding practices, connecting different facets of Jewish Argentine spirituality and religious commitments in late twentieth and early twenty-first-century Buenos Aires to the history of Jewish worship.

⁸² Based on people who self-identify as Jews and are older than 16 years old. In total, 967 Jewish homes were identified, and information was gathered on 2,045 Jews and 585 non-Jews living in Jewish homes. See: Jmelnizky, Adrián and Ezekiel Erdei, *La población judía en Buenos Aires: Estudio sociodemográfico*, (Buenos Aires: AMIA, 2005), 26–19.

From this vantage point of innovation and renovation, synagogue music, worship, and non-sacred musical practices and programming initiatives makes Comunidad Amijai a unique site of Jewish Argentine religious engagement as well as a unique site of Jewish Argentine music-making for the ways in which timbre, repertory, text, and performance are illuminated through the use of particular musical settings, instrumentalists, vocalists, and the sacred space itself. The idea of musical innovation and experimentation in the sacred music of a Buenos Aires synagogue and the musical events and programming series beyond the liturgical context are not unique in and of themselves, but emplaced in the history of modernization in Ashkenazic Jewish worship from the Haskalah to the present (Idelsohn 1925; Werner 1976; Bohlman 2008; Cohen 2011). The search for a personal sound at Comunidad Amijai is a continuous process of making use of music to give the textures of Jewish worship a home in the spiritual practices of the congregation.

Conclusion

Reflections on History and Memory in Jewish Musical Performance in Buenos Aires

After a two and a half month research trip to Buenos Aires in 2010, I simply could not bring all of the items I had amassed back to the United States. My suitcase was filled with the books I had purchased from local publishing houses, and my winter clothes took up more space than any of the summer clothes I dreamed of wearing again after three consecutive cycles of winter. My dark green backpacker's pack was overstuffed, and I could barely stand with all of my items dangling off and dragging behind me. That's how I forgot my Poogy record in Argentina. I had found it in a record bin in the Mercado de San Telmo, a large indoor market near my apartment with rows of stalls selling treasures from distant eras: silver platters, steamer trunks, porcelain lamps, antique phonographs, tango paraphernalia—as well as fresh produce, bulk grains, freshly baked bread, and barbecued meats, straight off the *parilla* (grill).

While perusing English-style tea sets and antique French perfume bottles, I spied the Israeli pop record in a cardboard box on the floor of a vendor's stall. The cover, emblazoned with Hebrew script, stood out in a box of old tango records labeled in Spanish. The record jacket was dusty and stained, torn on the corner, but the vinyl album itself only seemed to be moderately scratched. I paid the 15 Argentine pesos, or approximately \$4.25 to bring this piece of musical memorabilia to my nearby apartment, thinking at the time that this was a unique relic of Judaica in Argentina. I figured I would listen to it when I returned to the United States because I didn't have a record player in Buenos Aires. Without looking closely, I put it on a shelf next to the small television and rows of books, noting the peculiar green, red, and yellow vegetables in the background behind the seven-person band assembled together in the lower left-hand corner. Then I left it behind.

The journey into thinking about the forgotten and its wider meaning for memory and Jewish Argentine musical performance led me to search the internet for more information about my forgotten record. After googling “Poogy,” I found out that the album was released in 1974 by Bizarre Records in the same year that Poogy competed in the Eurovision Song Contest with “Natati la Khayay,” or “I Gave Her My Life”—a catchy pop song in English and Hebrew. Making it to the final round, they eventually placed sixth, losing to a very memorable winner: ABBA’s “Waterloo.” Upon further digging, it also turned out that the vegetables in the background of the album cover had an explanation as well. The band pictured in black and white, was sitting in a pita pocket, not the misshapen, much-too-small boat that I had initially imagined it to be. The album was called *Poogy in a Pita*.

When I returned again to Buenos Aires in November 2011, I stayed in the same apartment in San Telmo but with a different roommate—a graphic designer who collected found objects. While I had been gone, the ceiling had fallen in on the small apartment, exposing a beautiful, brick interior layer recently cleaned up by its inhabitants who were fortunate enough to survive unharmed by the sudden, falling debris. In spite of having thrown out nearly everything in the apartment after the destruction, I returned to find my Poogy record still there, hidden behind a broken mirror that was reclaimed from a pile of discarded items picked off the city streets. To my amusement, I peered at it curiously and let it remain behind the mirror, peeking out through a transparent portion of cracked glass. Still without a record player, I left it unheard in the kitchen, later moving it to my bedroom, and finally bringing it back with me to the United States a few months later.

On a fall day in 2013, I finally had a chance to listen to the songs scored into the thin layer of vinyl while volunteering to help digitalize some records in the sound collection. While

volunteering at the Fundación IWO, the Latin American branch of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, I listened to the record for the first time. The YIVO collection mainly focuses on books, newspapers, photos and other documents in Yiddish, and the sound archive also contains over 20,000 sound recordings, musical publications, and manuscripts from Argentina, Europe, Israel (Palestine), the United States, most of which were recorded from the 1930s to the 1980s in a variety of languages, including Spanish, Hebrew, Ladino, Polish, Russian, and Yiddish. Fundación IWO's sizable collection of Israeli popular, folk, and sacred music recordings is evidence of the circulation of these materials in Argentina in the mid to late twentieth-century. Putting them into historical context, Ariel Liberczuk, a moré de shirá at the Martin Buber school and a founding member of the group Orquesta Kef (who now leads his own klezmer group Sher-up! Power Klezmer) told me that the surge in Israeli recordings in Argentina in the early 1980s coincided with the last dictatorship government's brief ban on music in English.⁸³ As is more widely acknowledged, rock nacional flourished during this period, however, the same legislation may have had the unintentional effect of supporting music in languages other than Spanish, generating further interest in Israeli popular music among Argentines. In the 2010s in Buenos Aires, you can still find Israeli records of all kinds in markets and record shops all over city.

Jewish records present a uniquely musical form of documentary evidence mediating history and memory to give voice to the silences of the past (Trouillot 1995). Personal handwritten inscriptions, dedications, and stories addressed to community leaders as well as to ordinary people inscribed on the cover and backs of records outline a network of musicians, musical patrons, supporters, and audiences. As documents of the musical past, records in the recording and sound collection at the Fundación IWO provide musical histories with their

⁸³ Interview with Ariel Liberczuk. April 23, 2013.

inclusion of biographical information and stories of the circulation of musical material published on these recordings. Music, in its physical form and capacity to socially-embody ethnicity, religiosity, and collective identity, can be a productive tool of both the historian and the ethnographer in Jewish Argentina and beyond.

In considering the wider issues of oblivion and forgetting in relation to memory and musical performance in Jewish Buenos Aires, the story of the Poogy record stands out in my mind because it illuminates issues pertaining to the place of Jewish music in Argentina. Considering the forgotten initiates a process of remembering, constructing, connecting, translating, transferring, and transforming both the material objects of musical memory as well as the immaterial, intangible embodied practices that make up musical performance. Thinking about oblivion marks the beginning of a process of remembering.

Although music had been an important part of Jewish life in Buenos Aires after Jews began arriving to Argentina in significant waves in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the 1990s, musical performance became an especially important part of Jewish Argentine cultural expression for three reasons. The first is the death of the generation of foreign-born immigrants who carried memories of Europe and cultural expressions with them to Argentina. The passing of this generation and the highly secular composition of the greater Jewish community in Buenos Aires stimulated the need to address questions about the future of Jewish Argentine culture and identity at the turn of the twentieth-century.

The second reason for the growth of musical performance in Jewish Buenos Aires since the 1990s is the confrontation with “*desmemoria*”—what Jewish tango historian José Judkovski defines as the intentional, voluntary imposition of a revised past of partial truths and historiographical violence persisting in collective consciousness—a broad concern in Argentina

with respect to the genocide of the native populations, the whitening of tango history, and the clandestine torture and violence of Argentines and foreign nationals during the last military dictatorship.⁸⁴ Since the end of the military dictatorship, the politics of forgetting have initiated a search into oblivion as a politicized trope to clarify the facts of the past in the absence of uncontested truths. For Jewish Argentines, the question of desmemoria also applies to the attempt to silence Jewish life with the 1994 bombing of the AMIA. In the aftermath of the AMIA bombing, the Jewish community of Buenos Aires—a diverse and diffuse community with competing and conflicting cultural, religious, political, and social interests—was brought together around a central concern for claiming justice for the attack. Following the AMIA bombing and that of the 1992 Israeli Embassy preceding it, the question of what Jewish Argentine culture and identity is and is not was a prevailing concern for those struggling to understand how they simultaneously fit into the nation and defined their Jewish selves. Central to this concern was the remembrance of cultural forms and material culture feeding into immaterial practices of the performance of Jewish identity.

Finally, the third main factor contributing to the renewed interest in Jewish music in Buenos Aires was the 2001 economic crisis that fundamentally changed the status quo and forced reflection on twenty-first century Argentine identity, especially among the middle classes.⁸⁵ In this watershed moment, the crisis allowed individuals to reclaim the arts as a central part of their lives in the face of underemployment and unemployment. As such, musical performance unfurled organically as trained and amateur musicians began to explore the practice of music making, performing in public in Jewish community institutions and beyond. Argentina's geographic location in the Río de la Plata, the peripheral status of Jewish Argentines

⁸⁴ Interview with José Judkovski. April 30, 2013.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

in relation to the global Jewish world, and the relationships Jewish Argentines maintain with other ethnic groups within Argentina facilitated a type of artistic innovation less deeply rooted in the anxiety of influence about Jewish musical “authenticity” that preoccupies North Americans. The cultural, political, and experiential distances support experimentation, renewal, and transformation in the face of multiple meanings of tradition.

As discussed in this dissertation, Jewish Argentine musical performers frequently refer back to existing songs, performers, performance aesthetics and sounds to make Jewish music relevant to local audiences in Buenos Aires. Due to the multiply peripheral status of Jewish Argentines, their distance from global Jewish institutions headquartered in the United States and Israel permits a less fraught connection to Jewish music to establish a Jewish Argentine cultural identity in the present. While on the one hand, Jews in Argentina have been dependent on foreign aid and support from American, European, and Israeli Jewish institutions, Jewish Argentine musicians and circulations of music show how Jewish history and culture in Latin America has followed its own trajectory along the axis of memory showcasing a different way of embodying Jewish music’s pastness. Through the physical migration of music and individuals—as my story about the Poogy record illustrates, Jewish music is recollected, renovated, and renewed to pursue political aims, religious convictions, social movements, and personal agendas.

As memory workers, Jewish Argentine musicians have collected the musical materials—the recordings and songs, instrumental parts, sheet music, and other documents from the archive of Jewish Argentine life to transform a repertoire of Jewish Argentine musical performance practices. The material artifacts of Jewish musical history and the stories they make available to contemporary listeners highlight the transnational roots of musicians and music in Buenos Aires, foregrounding networks of exchange to give new afterlives to old Jewish songs and melodies.

Although the performance of Jewish music and memory in Buenos Aires fails to answer the question of what Jewish music is, it opens up possibilities to consider what Jewish music can be.

Appendices

Appendix A – “Uf Gozal” lyrics by Arik Einstein and music by Miki Gavrielov, appearing in the Kol Amijai supplement on August 6, 2010.



UF GOZAL

Hagozalim sheli azru et haken
parsu knafaim veafu
vaani tzipor zkena nisharti baken
mekave meod shehakol ihie beseder.

Tamid iadáti shelavó haiom
shebó tzaríj lehipared
aval ajshav ze kája ba li pitóm
az ma hápele sheani ktzat doég.

Uf gozal, jatoj et hashamáim
tus leán shebá lejá
rak al tishkaj iesh nésher bashamáim
gur lejá.

Ajshav nisharnu levadenu bakén
aval anajnu beiyad
javki oti jazak tagudí li ken
al tidaugí, beiyad kef lehizdakén.

Uf gozal, jatoj et hashamáim
tus leán shebá lejá
rak al tishkaj iesh nésher bashamáim
gur lejá.

Ani iodéa shekája ze bateva
vegam ani azáti ken
aval ajshav kshebá harega
az majnik ktzat bagaron, majnik ktzat
bagaron.

Uf gozal, jatoj et hashamáim
tus leán shebá lejá
rak al tishkaj iesh nésher bashamáim
gur lejá.

VUELA PICHÓN
Letra: Arik Einstein
Música: Miki Gavrielov

Mis pichones abandonaron el nido
extendieron sus alas y volaron
y yo soy un ave vieja que permaneció en el
nido
Espero que todo esté bien

Siempre supe que llegaría el día
que nos tendríamos que despadir
Pero ahora que llegó de repente, ¿qué es lo raro
que me preocupe un poco?

Vuela pichón y e irrumpe en el cielo
Vuela hacia dónde tu quieras
Sólo recuerda (no te olvides)
que hay un águila en el cielo
Estate atento

Ahora nos quedamos solos en el nido, pero esta-
mos juntos
abridzame fuerte y dime que si
no te preocupes, es divertido envejecer juntos

Vuela pichón y e irrumpe en el cielo
Vuela hacia dónde tu quieras
Sólo recuerda (no te olvides)
que hay un águila en el cielo
Estate atento

Yo se que así es en la naturaleza
Y yo también abandoné un nido
pero ahora que llega el momento
siento un nudo en la garganta

Vuela pichón y e irrumpe en el cielo
vuela hacia dónde tu quieras
Sólo recuerda (no te olvides)
que hay un águila en el cielo
Estate atento

UFF GOZAL
מילים: אריק איינשטיין
לחן: מיקי גבריאלוב

הוגלים של עזבונו את הארץ
חפוש כפסים וופן
גוני ציפורים זונת שירית בזען
מחווה מואוד שוחל צהה בسور

תמיד שעת' שיבוא הום
שוכן בצר' ליטיסטר
אבל נסיע זה כה בא' לי
פראטן

או מהו הילא שאני קאמ' צווע

UFF GOZAL
הוחן את השם
הו לאן שבא' לן
ה' אל מלחכה
יש נור בשמיים
פער לן

עכשי' נשרטם לבדון בזען
אבל גאנטום בחרוד
הבקן אוות' חון תביד' לן
אי מדאיג ביזטור כף' לוזזען

UFF GOZAL

אי זוע שיכחה זה בסבב
ואב אוף עבעטן
אבל נסיע כשבה הרען
או מרכיק קאצט ביגראן
ומניין קפּת ביגראן

UFF GOZAL



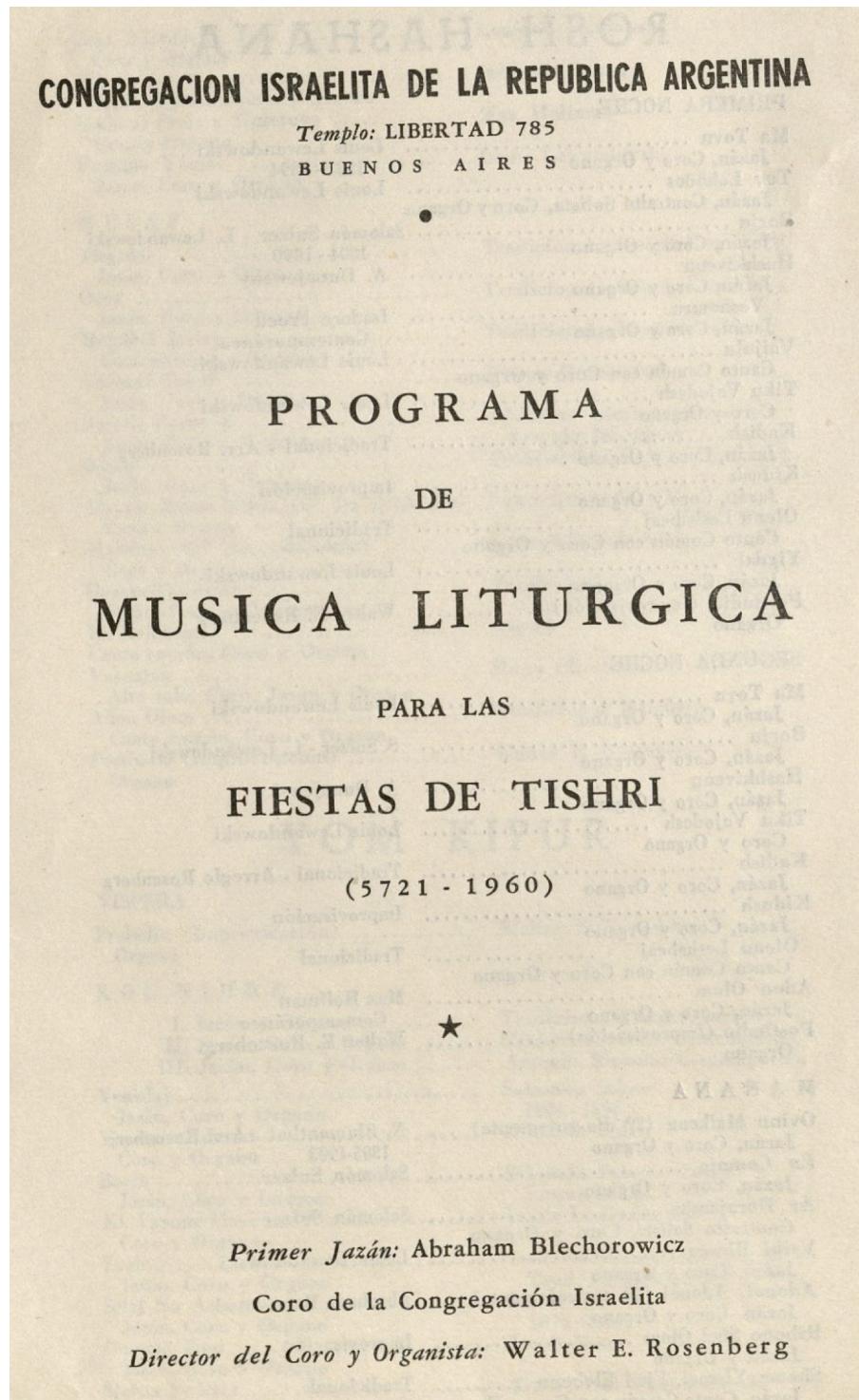
Appendix B – An Overview of Kol Amijai Song Selections from the Kabbalat Shabbat Service at Comunidad Amijai

Kol Amijai Song List and Musical Programming Schedule						
	Title	Title (Translation)	Composer (Lyrics)	Composer (Music)	Musicians	Musical Programming
7/30/10	"Taguídi"	"Decí"	Shlomo Artzi	Shlomo Artzi	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier and Florencia Grisovski	8/12/2010: Pinchas Zukerman with the Zukerman Chamber Players. (6th Musical Season)
8/6/10	"Uf Gozal"	"Vuela Pichón"	Arik Einstewin	Miki Gavrielov	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier and Florencia Grisovski	8/12/2010: Pinchas Zukerman with the Zukerman Chamber Players. (6th Musical Season)
8/20/10	"Haísh Hahú"	"Aquél Hombre"	Natan Yonathan	Shlomo Artzi	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier and Florencia Grisovski	8/23/14: Concierto Homenaje a Pía Sebastiani. (6th Musical Season)
8/27/10	"Ihie Tov"	"Irá Bien"	Jonatan Gefen	David Broza	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier and Florencia Grisovski	8/31/2010: Orquesta Académica de Buenos Aires. (6th Musical Season)
12/9/2011 to 12/15/2011	"Etzim"	"Arboles"	Arik Einstein	Sholom Hanuj	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski and Mauro Agrelo	Cycle of Two Chamber Music Concerts
12/2/2011 to 12/8/2011	"Shiru Shir Amén"	"Cantemos una Canción, Amén"	Shamrit Or	Henry Berter	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski and Mauro Agrelo	
1/6/2012 to 1/12/12	"Erev Shel Shoshanim"	"Tarde (Noche) de Rosas"	Moshé David	Iosef Hadar	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski and Mauro Agrelo	
1/13/12 to 1/19/12	"Al Kol Eile"	"Sobre Todo Esto"	Noemi Shemer	Noemi Shemer	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski and Mauro Agrelo	
8/3/2012 to 8/9/2012	"Slichot"	"Perdones"	Lea Goldberg	Oded Lerer	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski and Mauro Agrelo	8/8/12: Grupo de Danza UNSAM (Universidad Nacional de San Martín) and 8/21/12: Concierto de Música de Cámara, organizado con el auspicio institucional de la Embajada de Estados Unidos de América
8/24/2012 to 8/30/2012	"El Sham"	"En Algún Lugar"	Ehud Manor	Nurit Hirsch	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski and Mauro Agrelo	8/30/12: La Compañía La Arena y la UNSAM, "Leonardo Trabajo Práctico #1; 9/4 and 9/5 - The Harlem Opera Theater
8/3/2012 to 9/6/2012	"Ki Haadam Etz Hasadé"	"Porque el Hombre es un Árbol del Campo"	Natan Zach	Shalom Hanoch	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski and Mauro Agrelo	9/8 - The Harlem Opera Theater
9/14/2012 to 9/27/2012	"Otaj"	"De Vos"	Uri Asaf	Igal Gordon	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	10/15, 10/22, 10/29: Ciclo de 3 Conciertos de Camara en Dias Lunes: Vivan Debussy and Ravel! (VIII Musical Season); 10/4 Sunwook Kim Piano Recital (In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Argentina and Korea)
9/14/2012 to 9/27/2012	"Otaj"	"De Vos"	Uri Asaf	Igal Gordon	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnay, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	10/15, 10/22, 10/29: Ciclo de 3 Conciertos de Camara en Dias Lunes: Vivan Debussy and Ravel! (VIII Musical Season); 10/4 Sunwook Kim Piano Recital (In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Argentina and Korea)

Appendix B, cont. – An Overview of Kol Amijai Song Selections from the Kabbalat Shabat Service at Comunidad Amijai

Kol Amijai Song List and Musical Programming Schedule						
	Title	Title (Translation)	Composer (Lyrics)	Composer (Music)	Musicians	Musical Programming
1/11/2012 to 1/17/2012	"Slijot"	"Perdones"	Lea Goldberg	Oded Lerer	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	
3/22/2013 to 4/4/2013	"Iarej"	"Luna"	Shlomo Artzi	Shlomo Artzi	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	
	"Shirim ad kan"	"Canciones Hasta Ahora"	Natan Yonatan	Nahum Heiman		
4/5/2013 to 4/11/2013	"Aní Yehudi"	"Soy Judío"			German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	
4/19/2013 to 4/25 2013	"Uf Gozal"	"Vuela Pichón"	Arik Einstewin	Miki Gavrielov	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	Inauguración de la IX Temporada Musical: Extraordinaria Gala Lírica: Homenaje a Giuseppe Verdi en el bicentenario de su nacimiento
5/2/2013 to 5/9/2013	"Iom Shabatón"				German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	Inauguración de la IX Temporada Musical: Extraordinaria Gala Lírica: Homenaje a Giuseppe Verdi en el bicentenario de su nacimiento; Inauguración de la IX Temporada Musical: Extraordinaria Gala Lírica: Homenaje a Giuseppe Verdi en el bicentenario de su nacimiento
4/26/2013 - 5/2/2013	"Jofim"	"Playas"	Natan Yonathan	Nahum Heiman	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	Inauguración de la IX Temporada Musical: Extraordinaria Gala Lírica: Homenaje a Giuseppe Verdi en el bicentenario de su nacimiento
5/10/2013 to 5/23/2013	"Uf Gozal"	"Vuela Pichón"	Arik Einstewin	Miki Gavrielov	German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	Inauguración de la IX Temporada Musical: Extraordinaria Gala Lírica: Homenaje a Giuseppe Verdi en el bicentenario de su nacimiento
	"Iom Shabatón"				German Kalinsky, Dmitry Rodnoy, Bianca Lerner, Jonathan Tolcachier, Florencia Grisovski, Marina Wilensky, Dan Hakim and Mauro Agrelo	5/13/2012: Recital Extraordinario del Pianista Evgeni Mikhailov (Artista Emerito de la Federación Rusa)

Appendix C – “Programa de Música Liturgica para las Fiestas de Tishrei (5721–1960)” of the Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina. Courtesy of the Marshall T. Meyer Human Rights Archive at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University



ROSH HASHANA

PRIMERA NOCHE

Ma Tovu	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	1821 - 1894
Tov Lehodos	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Contralto Solista, Coro y Organo	
Borju	Salomón Sulzer - L. Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	1804 - 1890
Hashkivenu	A. Dunajewsky
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Veshomru	Isadore Freed
Jazán, Coro y Organo	Contemporáneo
Vaijulu	Louis Lewandowski
Canto Común con Coro y Organo	
Tiku Vajodesh	Louis Lewandowski
Coro y Organo	
Kadish	Tradicional - Arr. Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Kidush	Improvisación
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Olenu Leshabeaj	Tradicional
Canto Común con Coro y Organo	
Yigdal	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Postludio (Improvisación)	Walter E. Rosenberg
Organo	

SEGUNDA NOCHE

Ma Tovu	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Borju	S. Sulzer - L. Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Hashkivenu	A. Dunajewsky
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Tiku Vajodesh	Louis Lewandowski
Coro y Organo	
Kadish	Tradicional - Arreglo Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Kidush	Improvisación
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Olenu Leshabeaj	Tradicional
Canto Común con Coro y Organo	
Adon Olom	Max Helfman
Jazán, Coro y Organo	Contemporáneo
Postludio (Improvisación)	Walter E. Rosenberg
Organo	

M A Ñ A N A

Ovinu Malkenu (2º día solamente) ...	N. Blumenthal - Arr. Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	1805-1903
En Comojo	Salomón Sulzer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Av Horajamim	Salomón Sulzer
Contralto Solista, Coro y Organo	
Vaihi Binsoa	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Adonoi, Adonoi (2º día solamente) ...	Abraham Baer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Ribono Shel Olom	Improvisación
Jazán y Organo	
Shema Yisroel, Ejod Elohenu	Tradicional
Jazán, Canto Común con Coro y Organo	

Lejo Adonoi	Louis Lewandowski
Coro y Organo	
Ashre	Salomón Sulzer
Jazán, Coro unísono y Organo	
Hodo al Erets y Haleluyo	Max Helfman
Coro y Organo	
Uvenujo Yomar	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
M U S A F	
Yisgadal	Tradicional - Arreglo Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Ovos	Tradicional - Arreglo Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Mejalkel Jayim	Tradicional - Lewandowski
Coro unísono y Organo	
Unesané Tokef	Nisson Blumenthal
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Berosh Hashono	Abraham Blechowicz -
Jazán, Coro y Organo	Arreglo Rosenberg
Olenu	Tradicional - Arreglo Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Hayom Haras Olom (2º día solamente)	Louis Lewandowski
Coro y Organo	
Haleluyo (2º día solamente)	Louis Lewandowski
Coro y Organo	
Hayom Teamtsenu	Tradicional
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
En Kelohenu	Algazi
Canto común, Coro y Organo	
Vaanajnu	Hugo Ch. Adler
Alto solo, Coro, Jazán y Organo	
Adon Olom	Tradicional Weinberg
Canto común, Coro y Organo	
Postludio (Improvisación)	Walter E. Rosenberg
Organo	

YOM KIPUR

VISPERA

Preludio (Improvisación)	Walter E. Rosenberg
Organo	

K O L N I D R E

I. Jazán y Organo	Tradicional - Improvisación
II. Jazán, Coro y Organo	Herbert Fromm - Contemporáno.
III. Jazán, Coro y Organo	Arreglo Russotto - Contemporáno.
Venislaj	Salomón Sulzer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	1804 - 1890
Vayomer Adonoi	Salomón Sulzer
Coro y Organo	
Borju	Salomón Sulzer - Louis
Jazán, Coro y Organo	Lewandowski
Ki Vayom Hasé	Louis Lewandowski
Coro y Organo	
Yaalé	Trad. Blechowicz (1, 2, 7 y 8) y
Jazán, Coro y Organo	Trad. Rosenberg (3, 4, 5 y 6)
Selaj No Ashmos	Jacob Matz
Jazán, Coro y Organo	1876 - 1927
Omnom Ken	Jacob Matz
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Shema Kolenu	Tradicional - Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	

Ono Tovo Lefonejo	Herbert Fromm
Solistu, Coro y Organo	
Oshamnu	Salomón Sulzer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Veal Kulom	Herbert Fromm
Jazán, Coro a capella y Organo	
Olenu Leshabeaj	Tradicional
Canto común con Coro y Organo	
Yigdal	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Postludio (Improvisación)	Walter E. Rosenberg
Organo	

MAÑANA

Ovinu Malkenu	N. Blumenthal - Arr. Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
En Comojo	Salomón Sulzer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Av Horajamin	Salomón Sulzer
Contralto Solista, Coro y Organo	
Vaihi Binsoa	Salomón Sulzer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Adonoi, Adonoi	Abraham Baer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Ribono Shel Olom	Improvisación
Jazán y Organo	
Shema Yisroel, Ejod Elohenu	Tradicional
Jazán, Canto Común con Coro y Organo	
Lejo Adonoi	Louis Lewandowski
Coro y Organo	

Y I S K O R

Adonoi Mo Odom	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Terceto y Cuarteto Vocal, Coro y Organo	
El Molé, Rajamim	Tradicional
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Ashré	Salomón Sulzer
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Hodo al Erets y Haleluyo	Max Helfman
Coro y Organo	
Uvenujo Yomar	Louis Lewandowski
Jazán, Coro y Organo	

M U S A F

Yisgal	Tradicional - Arr. Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Ovos	Tradicional - Arr. Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Mejalkel Jayim	Tradicional - Lewandowski
Coro unísono y Organo	
Unesane Tokef	Nisson Blumenthal
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Berosh Hashono	Abraham Blechorowicz - Arreglo Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Olenu	Tradicional - Arr. Rosenberg
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Veja Hoy, Vehakohanim	Sulzer - Tradicional
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Hayom Teamtsenu	Tradicional
Jazán, Coro y Organo	
Kadish	Tradicional
Jazán, Coro y Organo	

Appendix D – Basic Outline of the Kabbalat Shabbat Service at Comunidad Amijai, 2010–2014

Kabbalat Shabbat Service, Comunidad Amijai (2010-2014)											
Kabbalat Shabbat Liturgy	Bei V'Shalom (page #)	Time of Segment (approximate)	Type	Style	Tempo	Frequency	Melody	Composer/Attributed	Mood	Accompaniment	Notes
Hinei Matov	34	2:27	Hymn	Sufi/Middle Eastern	slow	standard	flexible	Unknown	Contemplative	piano, percussion, supporting vocals	Available on <i>Bnai Jesurun Recording</i>
Yedid Nefesh	26	2:30	Pyuyut	contemporary/ modern reform	slow	standard	fixed	Ehud and Sera Zweig	Contemplative	piano, supporting vocals	Debuted at the 1970 <i>Classic Song Festival</i> in Tel Aviv. Recorded by <i>Hed-Arzi (BAN 14150)</i>
Lekhut Neranena	36	0:19	Psalm 95	nusach	moderate	standard	fixed	*based on Adolf Katchko	Chant	piano	
Arbaim Shana	36	0:34	Psalm 95	nusach	slow-moderate	standard	fixed	*based on Adolf Katchko	Chant	piano	
Shirim Ladonai	38	3:55	Psalm 96	hasidic	moderate-fast	standard	fixed	Shlomo Carlebach	Upbeat	piano, percussion, cells, tambourine, supporting vocals	
Za'arat L'Adonai	42	2:07	Psalm 98	(ballad)	moderate	standard	fixed	Unknown	Contemplative	piano, percussion, cello	
Mizmor L'David	46	2:48	Psalm 29	hasidic	moderate-fast	standard	fixed	Shlomo Carlebach	Upbeat	piano, percussion, cello, tambourine	
Lecha Dodi	48-53	8:27	Pyuyut	hasidic	moderate-fast	standard	flexible	Rabbi Menachem Goldberger, Baltimore	Upbeat	piano, percussion, cello, tambourine, supporting vocals	For the concluding stanzas, sometimes the microphone is passed around the congregation and congregants sing the verse
Mizmor Shir & Tzadik	54-55	4:28	Psalm 92	contemporary/modern reform	moderate-slow/fast	standard	flexible	Kayla Denis	Contemplative/ Upbeat	piano, cello	From the BTI Tel Aviv congregation
Adonai Malach	56	2:31	Psalm 93	contemporary/Latin America	moderate	standard	fixed	Alberto (Zev) Malbergier	Upbeat	piano, percussion, cello, tambourine	
Nigun				contemporary/ modern reform		standard	flexible	Debbie Friedman	Contemplative	piano, cello	Havdalah melody
Barechu	60	2:39	Prayer	traditional		standard	flexible	Traditional	Expectant	piano	
Nigun (1x)				contemporary/ modern reform		standard	flexible	Debbie Friedman	Contemplative	piano, cello	Havdalah melody
Ma'ariv Aravim (Chatimah, Umaravim (om) Ahavat Olam (Chatimah, Ki Hein Chatenu)	60	0:42	Prayer	nusach	moderate	standard	flexible		Chant	piano	
Shema	61	0:46	Prayer	nusach	moderate	standard	flexible		Chant	piano	
Adonai Elohechem Emet	67	1:13	Prayer	early reform	slow	standard	flexible	Solomon Sulzer	Expectant	piano, cello, supporting vocals	
Mi Kamocho	68	1:50	Prayer	hasidic	moderate-fast	standard	fixed	Shlomo Carlebach	Upbeat	piano, percussion, cello, tambourine	A Carlebach melody used for the Mi Kamocho
Veneemur (Chatimah)	68	0:35	Prayer	nusach	moderate	standard	flexible		Chant	piano	

Appendix D, cont. – Basic Outline of the Kabbalat Shabbat Service at
Comunidad Amijai, 2010–2014.

Kabbalat Shabbat Service, Comunidad Amijai (2010–2014)											
Kabbalat Shabbat Liturgy	Bei v-Shalom	Time of Segment (approximate)	Type	Style	Tempo	Frequency	Melody	Companist/Arbiter	Mood	Accompaniment	Notes
Haskivene-Utter-Salm	70	7:57	Prayer/Prayer song	contemporary/modern reform	moderate-slow-moderate/fast (increasing)	standard	fixed	Craig Tashman/Alberto (GZer) Mahrerz/Mosh Ben Ari	Contemplative/Upharmonic/Upharmonic	piano, cello, piano, cello/piano, percussion, cello, tambourine	"Old Yaro"
Vidurim	72	1:01	Prayer	contemporary	moderate/fast	standard	fixed	Unknown	Upharmonic	piano, percussion, cello, tambourine	
Chant Kiddush	73	1:26	Prayer	contemporary/modern reform	moderate	standard	fixed	Based on Sandler	Chart	piano, cello	
Adonai Shem	78		Prayer	contemporary/modern reform	slow	new addition	fixed	Noah Avremi	Contemplative	piano, cello, supporting vocals	
Ani Lechah	79-84		Prayer	Silent					Silent		
One Shalom	92	1:56	Prayer	contemporary	slow	standard	fixed	Sara Hirsch	Contemplative	piano, cello	addition of "val kol yosheh" level
Vi Lechah	92	0:55	Prayer	contemporary	moderate/fast	standard	fixed	Unknown	Upharmonic	piano, cello	
Barzel Avot (Avot Yitzchak)	92	0:58	Prayer	traditional (US)	moderate	standard	fixed/variable	Isaac Goldfarb/Unknown	Contemplative/Upharmonic	piano	
Mogen Avot - Vetei Liderim	92	3:47	Prayer	traditional (US)	moderate	standard	fixed/variable	Isaac Goldfarb/Unknown	Contemplative/Upharmonic	piano, cello, supporting vocals/piano, percussion, cello, tambourine	basic melody
Kedushah Shalom	94	1:09	Prayer	ritual	fast	standard	flexible	Based on Adoff	Chart	piano	
Nigun	kol amijai supplement	3:30 (approx.)	Song	Israeli popular/Yiddish folksong/ranc-	depends	standard	fixed	Unknown	varies	varies	See discussion of Kol Amijai song
Instrumental	4:00 (approx.)		Instrumental	clattering on a rugan or tannos/leirah	moderate	standard	flexible	varies	varies	varies	See discussion of instrument
Alitzu	104	2:42		early western	moderate/fast	standard	fixed	Solomon Salzberg	Contemplative	piano, cello	
Adon Olam	110	3:43	Hymn	contemporary/popular	moderate/fast	standard	fixed	Uri Ohman	Upharmonic	piano, percussion, cello, tambourine	Based at the 1976 Classical Sing Festival in Tel Aviv. Recorded by Hef-Alef (BAN 14150)
Nigun Final (Ma Gdula)	2:15			ritual	slow	standard	flexible	Shek Gold	Contemplative	piano, cello	
Shtain Alshein	1:56			fast	standard	flexible	Unknown	Upharmonic	piano, percussion, cello		
Kiddush	97	3:00		traditional	moderate	standard	fixed	Chart	none		

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Glossary

<i>acto</i>	Spanish	protest-commemoration
<i>bel canto</i>	Italian	“beautiful singing”; a style of operatic singing
<i>berimbau</i>	Portuguese	a bowed lute instrument
<i>beit knesset</i>	Hebrew	“assembly”; synagogue or house of worship בֵּית כְּנָסֶת
<i>bimah</i>	Hebrew	“elevated place”; platform in the synagogue on which stands the desk from which the Torah is read בִּמָּה
<i>café concert</i>	Spanish	dinner theater or concert
<i>cancionero</i>	Spanish	songbook
<i>Castidish</i>	Spanish	creole language mixing Spanish and Yiddish
<i>charango</i>	Spanish	Andean stringed lute
<i>colectividad judía</i>	Spanish	Jewish community or collectivity
<i>colectivo</i>	Spanish	public bus
<i>converso</i>	Spanish	forced Catholic
<i>cosmopolatino/a</i>	Spanish	a bilingual, cosmopolitan Spanish speaker
<i>cuarteto</i>	Spanish	music genre from Córdoba, Argentina that is upbeat with a 2/2 metric feel
<i>desmemoria</i>	Spanish	forgetfulness
<i>ervah</i>	Hebrew	nakedness עָרָה
<i>filete</i>	Spanish	a decorative style typical of Buenos Aires and tango culture

<i>freilachs</i>	Yiddish	“happy, merry”; a song/dance performed at special events	פֿרײַלַךְ
<i>fútbol</i>	Spanish	soccer	
<i>gelt</i>	Yiddish	money or coins	גַּלְטַּ
<i>Halakhah</i>	Hebrew	The legal side of Judaism, which embraces personal, social, national, and international relationships, and all the other practices and observances of Judaism	הַלְכָה
<i>hatimah (pl: chatimot)</i>	Hebrew	“seal”; the final recited line of certain prayers	הַתִּימָה, חֲתִימֹת
<i>hazzan (pl: hazzanim)</i>	Hebrew	cantor officiating in a synagogue	חַזָּן, חַזָּנִים
<i>hazzanut</i>	Hebrew	cantorial music; the cantorate	חַזָּנוֹת
<i>homenaje</i>	Spanish	homage or tribute	
<i>icufista</i>	Spanish	an Icufist; a person belonging to ICUF	
<i>intermedio</i>	Spanish	musical intermission or interlude	
<i>jardín de infantes</i>	Spanish	nursery school	
<i>kef</i>	Hebrew / Arabic	fun	כִּיף or פְּנִיקִיף
<i>kehillah</i>	Hebrew	“community” or “congregation”	קָהִילָה
<i>kippah</i>	Hebrew	head covering	כִּיפָּה
<i>klezmer</i>	Yiddish	a secular musical and dance tradition of the East European Jews	קְלָעָזְמָעָר
<i>klezmorim (pl)</i>	Yiddish	klezmer musicians	קְלָעָזְמָרִים
<i>kol isha</i>	Hebrew	“the voice of a woman”; refers to Talmudic dictum prohibiting women from singing in front of	אִישָּׁה קֹול

		men	
<i>Ketuvim</i>	Hebrew	the third (and final) section of the Hebrew Bible	כתובים
<i>knishes</i>	Yiddish	snack food; a dumpling	קניש
<i>krekht</i>	Yiddish	sob-like groan or moan-sounding ornamentation in klezmer music	
<i>La Navidad</i>	Spanish	Christmas	
<i>lehrerseminare</i>	German	teacher training schools	
<i>lererke</i>	Yiddish	teacher	Lehrerke
<i>mame loshen</i>	Yiddish	“mother tongue”; Hebrew	מעם לאשען
<i>Megillah</i>	Hebrew	“scroll”; may refer to the Book of Esther	מגילה
<i>menorah</i>	Hebrew	candelabrum; for Hanukkah	מנורה
<i>meshorer (pl: meshorerim)</i>	Hebrew	boy choir member	משורר, משוררים
<i>mestizaje</i>	Spanish	mixture; may refer to race mixture	
<i>milanesa a la napolitana</i>	Spanish	schnitzel covered in ham, cheese and tomato sauce	
<i>milonga</i>	Spanish	dancehall or bar where tango dances are held	
<i>minyan</i>	Hebrew	“number”; designation for the quorum of ten male adults, aged 13 years or over, necessary for public synagogue service and certain other religious ceremonies.	מניין
<i>moré de shirá¹</i>	Hebrew/Spanish	“teacher of song”; music teacher	
<i>música folclórica</i>	Spanish	folk music of Argentina	

¹ Following spelling in Spanish.

<i>música folclóre</i>	Spanish	folk music of Argentina; especially of the northern <i>criollo</i> (mixed Indigenous and European) traditions
<i>ner tamid</i>	Hebrew	"eternal lamp"; a light which burns perpetually in front of the synagogue ark. נר תמיד
<i>nigun/im</i>	Yiddish	tune or melody; refers usually to songless melodies sung on vocables ניגון, ניגונים
<i>nu</i>	Yiddish	so? well? נו
<i>nusah</i>	Hebrew	musical term referring to specific traditions of liturgical music and the rules and modes for singing the liturgy גָּתָה, גָּתָּה, גָּתָּה
<i>papelito</i>	Spanish	flyer
<i>pandeiro</i>	Portuguese	Brazilian hand drum, like a tambourine
<i>parrilla</i>	Spanish	grill
<i>partido</i>	Spanish	parts; districts
<i>partizaner</i>	Yiddish	partisan; supporter of a cause פֿאַרְטִּיזָןֶר
<i>piyyut</i>	Hebrew	Hebrew liturgical poetry; a lyrical composition intended to embellish an obligatory prayer or any other religious ceremony, communal or private פִּיאָט
<i>popular</i>	Spanish	the construction of the folk; folk customs, people, and culture
<i>Porteños</i>	Spanish	people from or residing in Buenos Aires
<i>progresista</i>	Spanish	“progressive”; Jewish communists in Argentina

<i>reclamación</i>	Spanish	protest; demand; complaint	
<i>recolección</i>	Spanish	recollection	
<i>renovación</i>	Spanish	renovation; renewal	
<i>repiniques</i>	Portuguese	two-headed Brazilian drum used in samba percussion ensembles	
<i>repique</i>	Portuguese	small single-headed Brazilian drum	
<i>repulges</i>	Spanish	the braided crusts of an empanada	
<i>resurgimiento</i>	Spanish	resurgence	
<i>seder</i>	Hebrew	“order”; Passover meal following the liturgy	סֵדֶר
<i>schliach/schlichim</i>	Hebrew	“emissary”; a member of the Chabad movement who spreads Hasidism throughout the world	שליח, שליחים
<i>simha</i>	Hebrew/Yiddish	joy; fun; celebration	שְׂמִחָה
<i>shofar (pl: shofarot)</i>	Hebrew	an animal's horn prepared for use as a musical instrument	שׁוֹפֵר
<i>shtetl</i>	Yiddish	town or village	שְׁטָעַטֵּל
<i>shule</i>	Yiddish	school	שׁוֹלֵעַ
<i>siddur (pl: siddurim)</i>	Hebrew	prayer books used in Jewish public worship generally used for weekdays and Sabbath liturgy	סְדֻרָּוֹן, סְדֻרִים
<i>surdos</i>	Portuguese	bass drum used in Brazilian samba percussion ensembles	
<i>tambor</i>	Spanish	drum	
<i>Tanakh</i>	Hebrew	Three books of the Hebrew Bible: Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim	תָּנָךְ
<i>tangeuero</i>	Spanish	A tango dancer	
<i>tercera edad</i>	Spanish	“third stage”; the later years of a	

		human life, usually referring to the retirement years	
<i>tisch</i>	Yiddish	“table”; in reference to music, this refers to table songs sung after the Sabbath meal	טִישׁ
<i>Torah</i>	Hebrew	"instruction, teaching"; generally refers to the five books of the Hebrew Bible.	תּוֹרָה
<i>tallit</i>	Hebrew	prayer shall	טַלִּית
<i>tradicionalista</i>	Spanish	a person who identifies as Jewish but does not observe all or any Jewish holidays; may be atheist	
<i>tradición</i>	Spanish	tradition	
<i>trastienda</i>	Spanish	back of the shop; back of the store	
<i>vacíos</i>	Spanish	voids	
<i>vareneky</i> (<i>kreplach</i>)	Russian/ Yiddish	dilled dough dumplings	קרעפֿלעַךְ
<i>zeide</i>	Yiddish	grandfather	זַיִדָּע
<i>zmiros</i>	Yiddish	Sabbath songs	זְמִירֹות

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