

Rhythms of  
Resistance

Musics and  
Judaisms

Secular Spirituality  
Through Music

# HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

WINTER 2024



## Johnny Clegg

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SOCIETY FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM'S  
2023-2024 ROLE MODEL OF THE YEAR

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## Why Humanistic Judaism?

Humanistic Judaism provides community for people of all backgrounds to explore and shape the evolving meaning of Jewish traditions through a nontheistic, inclusive worldview. It incorporates a humanistic philosophy of life into Jewish liturgy, holiday celebrations, and lifecycle events in place of traditional worship of the supernatural. Founded in the 1960s by a community led by Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, it gives voice to the way most Jews already believe: that ethics and values are human-made, not divinely revealed, and are continually progressing based on reason, knowledge, empathy, and justice.

Today, our faith rests in one another, in the power of people to understand our world and influence it for the better to achieve universal human dignity and steward the future of our planet. For justice to exist in our world, we must create it together. And to gain new knowledge we trust academic and scientific methods over religious dogma. Because our approach is cultural rather than religious, we welcome all to participate without boundaries and we celebrate the diversity of our multiracial, multicultural, and LGBTQ+ households.

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# FROM THE EDITOR



## Lean on the past, look to the future

**H**umanistic Judaism is rooted deeply in the experience of Jewish culture and identity in the past, but also in the creative energy that Jews bring to our culture today.

SHJ Founder Rabbi Sherwin Wine described this well in an essay that described a “new Judaism”:

*The new Judaism needs to enrich our lives with the significant creations of Jewish nationalism during the past century. Language, music, dance, and literature from the Zionist and Yiddishist past can reinforce the humanistic quest. . . At the same time, the new Judaism is liberated from the past. It studies the past, uses the past, borrows from the past, but does not need the approval of the past. It has no need to appropriate what does not fit.*

*The new Judaism is creative. It*

*recognizes that most of the literature it needs to read, the music it needs to hear, the formats it needs to follow, have to be created. Jewish identity arises, not only from identifying with the Jews of the past, but also from identifying with the Jews of the present.*

Music is important because it not only connects us with our past but also provides an outlet for the creative expression of our values today. This is why we are exploring the role of music in our movement in this issue.

We begin by focusing our attention on our Humanistic Judaism Role Model of the Year, Johnny Clegg. Richard Logan tells us Clegg’s story, and how his life of music and solidarity played a key cultural role in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, but also how Clegg’s life exemplified humane and liberating Humanistic Jewish values.

We also explore the role of music in the struggle for liberation in apartheid-era South Africa in Denise Handlarski’s, “Rhythms of Resistance in South Africa.”

This issue also explores the ways that music functions for Humanistic Jews today. We first hear from Sandi Horwitz, who celebrates the power of music in congregational humanistic settings, including the development of new songs. Cantor Jonathan Friedmann discusses “many musics” and their relationships to the multitude of Judaisms. And we hear from Adam Skryznski who shares how music helps us to “evolve and transform our lives and experience of the world.”

Also in this issue, we have news from three of our affiliated communities: Congregation Or (Adam Phoenix, AZ), Cultural Synagogue (Portland, OR), and Beth Chaverim (Deerfield, IL).

We always welcome your comments, questions, and ideas for future content for our magazine. Please email [humanisticjudaismmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:humanisticjudaismmagazine@gmail.com).

J.M.B.  
Editor

Use the QR code to find citations, notes, and other resources that accompany this issue.



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WINTER 2024

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**Robert Rubenstein** is a founding member of the Cultural Synagogue in Portland, OR.

**Adam Skrzynski** is a physician, MPH candidate at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and student in the IISHJ Leadership Program, living in South Jersey with his wife and 3 daughters. Adam's connection to Humanistic Judaism began before birth with his parents being married by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, and in much searching, he has found no better synergy with his personal beliefs and love for his Jewish heritage.

**Janna Walsh** has been a member of Or Adam for 10 years and in various positions on the board for most of that time. She lives in Scottsdale, AZ.

## Humanistic Judaism: meaningful jewish community without god

**Support our mission** to increase well-being through meaningful Humanistic Jewish life-cycle and holiday celebrations, education, and identity in communities throughout North America and to individuals around the world.

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# COMMUNITY NEWS

DEERFIELD, IL | BETH CHAVERIM

## Beth Chaverim Celebrates 20th Anniversary

To celebrate our twentieth anniversary, we set out to complete twenty community service projects under the banner that giving is better than getting. We did it! Coming together as a community allowed us to reach this goal. We earned recognition from Governor Pritzker and Congressman Schneider for our efforts. The generosity of our members in terms of time, goods and dollars made this a reality. Together we volunteered at: Bernie's Books, Feed My Starving Children, the Northern Illinois Food Bank, Fill A Heart for Kids, GiveNKind and St. Paul's Soup Kitchen.

We also staffed the Gleanings Table at the Deerfield Farmers' Market, delivered holiday food packages for Passover and Rosh Hashanah with Maot Chitim, made Valentine's Cards for seniors, provided dog pull toys for the Anti-Cruelty Society, made breakfast for Hope House

and for PADS, collected food for the Deerfield Township Food Pantry, and toys for the holiday toy drive with Jewish Children and Family Services. Our members also assembled "Dignity Bags" for women fleeing abusive situations for the National Council of Jewish Women and decorated cookies for first responders. Our community also participated in the Buffalo Grove Pride Parade, painted ukuleles to raise funds for the Ukulele Kids Club for children receiving music therapy in the local children's hospitals, and made holiday cards for military personnel stationed overseas.

While so many benefited from our efforts, we also benefited from being engaged with the larger community, from increasing our sensitivity to the needs of others, and from being enriched by the experience of repairing the world.

— Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld



PHOTOS BY JODI KORNELD



PHOTO BY STEVE OZAN



From top of page: Beth Chaverim in action!





An adult dance event at the Cultural Synagogue

PORTLAND, OR | CULTURAL SYNAGOGUE

## Cultural Synagogue of Portland celebrates Hanukkah

Cultural Synagogue held our first Hanukkah celebration as a SHJ affiliate. This joyous multi-family activity brought to life the vision that inspired us when we were forming in 2021. About 45 adults and children attended.

The celebration was planned by our second group of B Mitzvah students as a service project. Some students welcomed people at the door and helped them put on name tags. All of the students

participated in the candle-lighting ceremony. Three played musical instruments. Of course, everyone danced, sang, and ate latkes, donut holes and applesauce.

One student led the dreidel gaming table with chocolate gelt for the younger children. The class also offered a dreidel gaming table with real money. Two students led the gaming at a quarter a spin. Non-players were encouraged to donate. Two hundred and



thirty-five dollars was collected and donated to a Community Transitional School.

– Robert Rubenstein

PHOENIX, AZ | OR ADAM CONGREGATION

## Hybrid Holidays

Or Adam Congregation had a very successful holiday season, reaching out to all our members wherever they were in the world. Our hybrid of Zoom and in-person services allowed our “congregation without borders” attendance from those in California, Illinois, numerous other states, Canada, and New Zealand. We enjoyed lovely live music, and, as is our tradition, on Rosh Hashanah our congregation contributed water gathered from past-year travels to a common vessel. At our *Nizkor* (remembrance celebration) service on Yom Kippur, each person desiring to remember loved ones who have passed placed flowers in the vase with a brief tribute. Those on Zoom participated with help from someone in the synagogue. As we move into the new year, our community enjoys robust growth, facilitated by our local/remote model. Our hybrid offerings include services, youth education,



Holiday celebration at Or Adam Congregation.

book club, movie discussions, Speaker’s Bureau, and Controversial Topic dialogues. We haven’t quite figured out how to handle our Eat, Talk, Laugh club remotely – but we can guarantee the food is always excellent!

– Janna Walsh

## TRIBUTES

To Myrna Baron

**In memory of your beloved husband, Rabbi Peter Schweitzer**

From: Shari & Richard Gelber  
Miriam Jerris & Steve Stawicki  
Sybil Maimin  
Barry Swan  
The SHJ Board & Staff

To Stuart Dolnik

**Thinking of you, Stuart**

From: Rabbi Miriam Jerris

To Miriam Jerris

**Thinking of you and your husband, Steve; we wish him a speedy and thorough recovery**

From: The SHJ Board & Staff

To Laura Kamienny

**In loving memory of your father, Fred Kamienny**

From: Miriam Jerris  
& Steve Stawicki

To Rabbi Mary Raskin

**In memory of your husband, Gary Sampson**

From: Andrea & Mark Friedlander  
Miriam Jerris & Steve Stawicki  
The SHJ Board & Staff

To JFASD & SHJ

**In honor of Devera & Michael Witkin being named the recipients of Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award**

From: Rabbi Mary Raskin

To SHJ

**An anonymous donation is made in appreciation for materials produced and shared by SHJ members.**

To SHJ

**In honor of my late beloved daughter, Leonora, March 11th –September 2001, who, at the age of 20 years and 6 months, died of Acute Myeloid Leukemia.**

From: Sylvia Wallinger

# COVER STORY

# Johnny Clegg

## Tikkun Olam in South Africa

BY RICHARD D. LOGAN, PHD

*After first seeing a young white man perform Zulu dances brilliantly and sing in impeccable isiZulu, a young Zulu girl asked her father, “Who is this man?” “This man is changing our world,” her father answered. “Johnny Clegg didn’t write songs. He wrote anthems.”*

– Singer Zolani Mahola

Johnny Clegg was an anthropologist, ethnomusicologist, superstar singer-songwriter-instrumentalist, philosopher-poet, intellectual, teacher, storyteller — and courageous anti-apartheid activist. He composed “crossover” music — Celtic with Zulu. He called it “a conversation between cultures.” And it proved to work that way. He sang in the Zulu language about Zulu life and migrant workers, formed multi-racial bands, and played to multiracial audiences, violating many apartheid laws.

Johnny was born in 1953 in Bacup, Lancashire, England, to a British father and a Jewish Rhodesian mother. His parents divorced when he was very young. Mother and son moved to Rhodesia, South Africa, Israel, and Zimbabwe, all briefly, before settling in segregated Johannesburg when Johnny was 11.

Young Johnny was always the new outsider, going to six schools in three countries in five years — and he was Jewish. His marginality provoked a lifelong

search for an enduring identity. He entered apartheid South Africa just as he approached self-aware adolescence. His secular, free-thinking Jewish mother, a jazz singer in a South Africa dominated by the white Nationalist Party and the puritanical Dutch Reform Church, gave her curious son free rein to explore.

Seeking answers to his big existential questions, Johnny sought out the fenced-off African world. Starting at age 14 he sneaked illegally

into Black migrant workers’ hostels to learn Zulu dance and ritual stick fighting. He saw that Zulu cultural rituals helped dislocated Zulu migrant workers keep their identity. He was arrested many times. But these workers accepted, and protected, him. He would spend his life returning that favor, and he was on a path to an encompassing identity. South African security police would follow him for years — disrupting his concerts, staking out his house. But the

risks to his life he took to learn another culture had earned him immense lifelong street cred.

There were many threads of identity in Johnny’s life. Was he most fundamentally a transplanted Brit? Or a white South African? Or was he the Zulu warrior he strived to become, and indeed became in many ways? Or was he genuinely a white African? (And, just how Jewish was he?) After his death, many — of all ethnicities and political parties — eulogized him as “a true son





of Africa." But others who knew Johnny best felt he had become even more universal than that. His first album, *Universal Men*, was titled *Universal Men*. Was this an early hint of his identity path?

One day teenage Johnny heard Zulu street musician Charlie Mzila playing Zulu maskanda guitar. He asked Mzila to teach him. This would change his life and help him change the world. Shortly after, he met Zulu musician Siphosiso Mchunu, who would become a close friend and mentor in Zulu music, language, and culture. They formed a music partnership that would bend the world of apartheid.

Johnny became such a good and dependable team dancer that he earned the praise name Skeyi, meaning the pin that secures the paired oxen team together. This honorific would prove uncannily emblematic, as Johnny would through his music do much to bring all South Africans together. (Think of what we mean by "linchpin.") He became the most beloved white man among black South Africans.

Siphosiso and Johnny sang together from 1969 until 1979, when they formed the racial band Juluka — sweet in isiZulu, the name of agrarian Siphosiso's favorite bull (possibly referencing that white South Africa's wealth came from the toil of its Black laborers). Their mostly Zulu songs became hits, especially in Black communities. An early song in isiZulu even became a soccer anthem.

His immersion into Zulu culture led Johnny to >

**Page 9 cut from this preview edition.**

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## Johnny Clegg: IN HIS OWN WORDS

### Regarding his Jewish identity:

[Johnny] was proud of his Jewishness, and he wrestled with it at times,” says his close friend of 35 years, Anthony Chait. “Once, when performing at Sydenham Shul ....., he quipped that ‘in the first instance I’m a Zulu, then a Jew’, but he never forgot his Jewish identity, and never hid it or suppressed it.

**Page 10 cut from this preview edition.**

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“Asimbonanga” was the first song to mention – illegally – the greatest of all anti-apartheid anthems.

➤ study anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand and, later, to teach anthropology there. He published several papers on Zulu culture and history while still performing, and soon became so successful that Johnny resigned from the University to pursue his music career.

In 1985, Johnny’s producer Hilton Rosenthal organized the first large public multiracial concert in South African history. (Multiracial bands like Juluka were prohibited from performing at many venues.) The concert in the park was South Africa’s Woodstock, but more. It was an earthquake that shook the apartheid world. One hundred and fifty thousand people of all races attended. Even white police danced.

Record producer Hilton Rosenthal (as recounted in a retrospective article in *The Forward*) remembered that it was Johnny Clegg and his performance of the song “Scatterlings of Africa” that made the crowd go “nuts” and that “there was a jovial,

celebratory atmosphere (that) showed what a non-racial South Africa could be.”

The song’s message that all humans have the same roots and shared humanity, the anthropologist. I have since told my son on human origins, with the drum solo a mighty exclamation point.

Juluka disbanded in 1985 when Sipho, though acclaimed for celebrating his culture, chose to forego the alien world of celebrity and return to the roots of his identity in the cattle culture of KwaZulu Natal.

In 1986, Johnny formed another multiracial band, Savuka which means We Have Arisen in isiZulu – a name that was directly political.

In 1986, he also wrote his powerful anthem “Asimbonanga” (We have not seen him [Mandela]), when Mandela had been imprisoned for 23 years. It was the first song to mention – illegally – Mandela’s

personal and musical journey was a pursuit of a humanist universal identity that refused the narrow boundaries of racial and cultural essentialism. ‘Anthropology tells us that before all culture is human culture,’ Johnny says. The constituency of anthropology is humanity, not any one culture.

### Regarding the role of culture:

[His clan .... of Zulu migrant workers] brought him dignity, pride, and kinship. Clegg didn’t appropriate a culture, he absorbed it and was transformed by it. It sculpted him into a force who would change lives for the better .... It .... helped him overcome his chaotic, unstable childhood and go on to be a true pathfinder.” His deep sojourn into Zulu culture became the platform for a more universal identity, and for becoming a great humanist.

name. To many – including this writer – it is the greatest of all anti-apartheid anthems. (Mandela was freed four years later.)

So beloved was “Asimbonanga” that it was the soundtrack of many Mandela tributes. It also was in many tributes to Johnny after he died in 2019.

It is hard to believe that a curious Jewish kid who fell in love with Zulu street music went on to become one of South Africa’s greatest warriors against apartheid – and a role model for how to be a human being in today’s too-tribal world. 🌟

*There are many more resources about Johnny Clegg and his legacy on the supplemental resources page for this issue at: <https://bit.ly/HJ-Winter2024>*



## Musics and Judaisms

Music is an essential part of what makes us human. Although difficult to define across cultures, music—a “know it when you hear it” phenomenon—likely predates language as a means of communication and has evolved alongside language into a variety of dialects. From the viewpoint of ethnomusicology, (the study of *why* and *how* human beings are musical), music is not an independent or supplemental aspect of our lives, but is intimately linked to emotions, arts, crafts, religion, politics, identity formation, social institutions, mundane tasks, and elevated moments. No human society, ancient or modern, has existed without music, and all groups use music for similar purposes: work, war, healing, ritual, recreation, celebration, instruction, bonding, and so on. Moreover, contrary to Western assumptions, what makes our species musical is not some special skill or talent possessed by a select few, but our shared capacity to recognize, interpret, and react to music.

Because of music’s universality and multifunctionality, there are few things more diverse than musical sounds. The website *Every Noise at Once* has mapped out over 1,500 musical genres. These categories go far beyond the *Billboard* charts to include subgenres, local varieties, and micro-styles, such as flick hop, vaporwave, deep discofox, progressive thrash, Brazilian surf rock, Myanmar indie, Swedish tropical house, and Croatian electronic. Yet, even expansive lists only scratch the surface of music’s dizzying diversity. Yiddish folklorist and singer Ruth Rubin observed that “Jewish folk music is as diverse and variegated as the Jews themselves.” If this is true for the Jews—a tiny subset of the human population—imagine what it means for a species approaching eight billion.

In recent years, some music scholars have abandoned genres altogether, arguing that labels artificially reduce music to its basic features (often for marketing purposes) while ignoring hybridity: the seamless mixing of various forms, styles, elements, and influences. These scholars recommend appreciating each piece of music on its own merits, no terminology attached. Of course, this does little to satisfy our pattern-seeking brains, which thrive on organizing nearly everything we encounter. However, it reminds



**CANTOR  
JONATHAN L.  
FRIEDMANN,  
PH.D.**

us that music isn’t a single or easily boxed thing: the world is full of *musics*.

The instructive pluralizing of once-singular terms is not unique to music. Over the past few decades, Jewish studies scholars have taken to using *Judaisms* in place of the singular form, emphasizing that Judaism is not monolithic. There are numerous and significant cultural, ethnic, linguistic, aesthetic, ritual, culinary, and philosophical differences among and between Jewish communities. As such, subgenres, local varieties, and micro-styles are not just musical features, but Jewish ones too.

It thus makes sense that each Jewish community would have its own “soundtrack.” An interesting study on this topic is Jeffrey Summit’s *The Lord’s Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship* (2000), examining musical choices in five Boston-area Jewish congregations—Hassidic, Modern Orthodox, Reform, Renewal, and Hillel—and how those choices mark who they are, and who they are not, as Jews. Across these communities, the functions of music remain consistent: ritual, celebration, bonding, instruction, etc. But the sounds are not the same.

Where do Humanistic Jews (a tiny subset of a tiny subset of the human population) fit in this discussion? As with other music cultures around the globe, Humanistic Jewish communities absorb and adapt musical influences from their surroundings, filtering out songs with incompatible texts, updating texts when possible, creating new songs, and bringing in thematically relevant popular tunes. Again, the purposes of this music are universal, both Jewishly and humanly. What distinguishes the music is who is using it, what the music says about the user, and how the user’s identity is expressed through it. Following the movement’s emphasis on “saying what you believe and believing what you say,” lyrics tend to reflect non-theistic, values-driven messages affirming the dignity of each person, humanity’s creative potential, and our collective role in improving the world. Style or genre considerations are less pressing than these conceptual factors. The music itself can be—and arguably *should* be—drawn from a range of sources. Ultimately, whatever music a Humanistic Jewish community uses is carefully guided by two adjectives: Humanistic and Jewish. 🌟

“

Over the past few decades, Jewish studies scholars have taken to using *Judaisms* in place of the singular form, emphasizing that Judaism is not monolithic.





# ESSAY

# Rhythms and Resistance in South Africa

BY RABBI DENISE HANDLARSKI

When I began rabbinical school at the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, the educational arm of the Secular Humanistic Jewish movement, I was completing a PhD dissertation on South African writing by Black, feminist authors. While there was nothing about Judaism in my dissertation, I believe the tenets and practice of Humanistic Judaism are still blueprinted in the study.

Being a South African-born Jew, I was always intrigued by the role Jews played during apartheid. Jews, usually classified as “white” under the racist apartheid logic,

had immense social privilege in a society stratified along racial lines. However, Jews also understood the dangers of such stratifications, having lived in places where they were treated as the lesser-than social “other.” Most Jews in South Africa also experienced high levels of antisemitism, creating a sort of “insider/outsider” identity.

It is no surprise, then, that many of those who struggled against apartheid, from Helen Suzman to Arthur Goldreich, to Albie Sachs, to Johnny Clegg, were Jewish. Judaism and especially, in my view, Humanistic Judaism, is built on a foundation of *tzedakah* (justice), *tikkun olam* (repairing the world),

and a good deal of *chutzpah* (gumption/the ability to speak truth to power). Even though my dissertation wasn’t about Judaism, my interest in it stemmed from some of these Jewish ideas.

Music was also a connector between Jews and Black South Africans. I knew a good deal about Jewish music, especially how music became a uniting and fortifying force for Holocaust resistance heroes. It is perhaps no surprise that my research began to focus on South African resistance music. Music was an integral part of anti-apartheid organizing and activity. It was a constant feature of both protests and



political life. This persists to this day. I recall, in 2008 my trying to set up a meeting with an anti-racist educator in Johannesburg, and he told me that the only place to be able to meaningfully hold that meeting was a jazz club.

I am glad John... Jewish role model. Johnny Clegg's legacy is tremendous. He had such an important voice. It is also important to recognize that for Black South Africans, music was a key component of both resistance and survival. It was a way to carry some of that history.

In the document... we hear a constant refrain of a frequent refrain, sung by playwright and poet Grina Mhlobo and poet, singer and... and chanting: "Resistance is defiance." This defiance required a tremendous amount of bravery, given the scale of apartheid violence. Anti-apartheid protests commonly used the *toyi-toyi*, the drum-led political marches that included... and chanting. These, the main form of protest marches under apartheid, reinforced... the very structure of resistance. The rhythm of the *toyi-toyi* was able to intimidate police officers and continue to bolster... The collectivity of the group raising their voices together united the... under the threat of extreme repression. Mhlobo and therefore argues that the South African anti-apartheid movement was the "only revolution to take place in four-part harmony" (*Amandla!*).

Jazz was also... organizing. Jazz has its roots in the history of Black America (Malcolm X was famously inspired by the Harlem Renaissance... ways in which jazz as a musical form could defy and reinvent convention). But in South Africa too, jazz became a form for the expression of dissonance and dissidence, both musical and political.

Michael Titlestad... *South African Literature and Reportage*, describes the cultural power of music, providing solace, healing, and empowerment to resistance fighters. Titlestad reads jazz in South African culture as being a constant site of play, expression, and resistance, arguing that anti-apartheid resistance would have been impossible without the music that provided its beat. He writes, "even if jazz has not brought about a new world order, it has generated a parallel textuality in which local versions of freedom and social hope could be imagined and

articulated." Terms like "improvise," "dissonance," "cacophony," are musical and belong specifically to jazz, but apply to descriptions of social upheaval and resistance as well.

Titlestad's research draws on Ajay Heble's *Dissonance, and Critical Practice* in which he traces jazz dissonance and social dissidence through a variety of contexts. His argument is that jazz, as a form of music particular to Black communities in America and in... "dissonance" of jazz music, breaking with musical... social dissonance that civil rights, and apartheid, and other race-based movements create. Not only... fuel the movement, but the act of collaborating in making musical dissonance that appeals to the ear is symbolic of the acts of collaboration that lead to social dissonance that, in turn, affect meaningful change. This is, Heble's social organizing and music: "Jazz is about building... and reinvigorating protest and the magic of dialogue and collaboration."

these themes as a rabbinical student stem from the Judaism is also often perceived as "landing on the wrong note." Because in our cultural creativity, our dissidence, and defiance, we also create beautiful new rhythms of Jewish life. Music is hugely central to Jewish communal... not comparing the resistance of Humanistic Judaism against Jewish mainstream tradition to the resistance of freedom... context and stakes are vastly different. But the idea of music being a way to connect community, challenge authority, and literally rewrite ideas into cultural practice. That seems very germane to what we do.

also used music to bring people together across racial lines, which served to resist to apartheid's divisive logic. As a South African Jew, he, like me, knew that it is a false economy for white Jews to benefit from racist systems. He also shared the sentiment of another famous Jewish social disruptor, Emma Goldman, that "if I can't dance... I don't want to be part of your revolution." 🌟

Citations and additional resources for this article can be found at: <https://bit.ly/HJ-Winter2024>

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“Music was an integral part of anti-apartheid organizing and activity. It was a constant feature of both protests and political life.”

# REFLECTIONS

## Creating Spirituality for Humanistic Jews through Music

Having attended an Orthodox shul (synagogue) throughout my childhood in Montreal, I always loved it best when the cantor was singing; his voice was wonderful, and everyone always “oohed” and “aahed” over his interpretation of the traditional liturgical melodies. But for me, the rest of the synagogue experience was meaningless, as I had become a skeptic early on. And, except for *simchas* (celebrations), I did not attend any services for more than 20 years.

That all changed when my husband Robert and I joined Oraynu Congregation’s forerunner, the Secular Jewish Association, in 1986. Being a singer, I became part of the holiday choir. The director, a well-known local folk singer/musician, had created some wonderful arrangements of traditional Jewish music, with some alterations to the lyrics to make them more suitable for secular humanistic values. That first Rosh Hashanah program was so powerful for me; I sobbed when it was over because I knew



**SANDI  
HORWITZ**

I had found a place to express my Judaism in a comfortable way — where I could say every word of the service with honesty and an open heart. And, then there was the music, of course. . .

The next year I was asked to sing the “Kol Nidrei” for Erev Yom Kippur, and it was a truly spiritual experience. Here I was a woman, and a non-believer, and yet I had been given the opportunity to sing a piece of Jewish liturgy that spanned generations of our people and centuries of Jewish life. Being part of this chain of Jewish tradition touched me very deeply, and that realization left me stunned and so emotional. Although I have not sung it for many years now, the power of that beautiful ancient melody never diminishes.

After getting more involved, and because they knew I wrote songs for children, Rabbi Eva Goldfinger and Madrikh (Humanistic Jewish leader) Dr. Gerald Bain invited me to collaborate with them on creating a new song for our community. What we produced together was **“There’s a Place (Yesh Makom)”**, which is now sung in other congregations in the movement.

When I began to teach music for the B’nai Mitzvah program, I felt it needed songs that would be more meaningful for the students and composed a couple of new tunes for the ceremony. One of them, which sets up the whole presentation and its theme of *tikkun olam*, and which all the kids at our Sunday School learn, is called “Repair the World – Tikkun Olam.” It’s modeled on “Blowin’ in the Wind” which asks, in the verses, three questions and then makes a statement in the last line, before the chorus which we all know (“The answer, my friend ...”). My song deliberately has the reverse pattern. It makes statements in each line, all beginning



**Oraynu Congregation High Holiday Choir**



# Repair The World - Tikkun Olam

By Sandi Horwitz

*Think about the little child who has no food to eat.  
Think about the homeless person living on the street.  
Think of all the violence we hear about each day.  
How can we turn our backs and walk away?*

*Chorus:*

*The task belongs to ev'ryone  
Repair the world - tikkun olam.  
Think about the ways that we can help our earth survive.*

*How can we turn our backs and walk away?  
Each of us can make a difference, if we do our part.  
Each of us can make a change, or maybe just speak out.  
That's what tikkun olam is all about.*

*Chorus:*

*The task belongs to ev'ryone  
Think about the ways that we can help our earth survive.*

*How can we turn our backs and walk away?  
Each of us can make a difference, if we do our part.*

with “Think about the .... (e.g. little child who has no food to eat).” The last line of each verse is then the question: “How can we turn our backs and walk away?” leading into the chorus:

*It's up to me, it's up to you,  
'Cause now we know what we must do.  
The task belongs to ev'ry one:  
Repair the world – tikkun olam.*

More recently, I adapted the first two verses to make the song suitable for Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day).

Over the years, Rabbi Karen Levy, Rabbi Eva Goldfinger, and others helped produce more songs for the High Holidays and festivals – a labour of love for all of us! I even “collaborated” with Rabbi Sherwin Wine when I asked his permission to write a song for his “Ayfo Ori,” which he was open to. He was enthusiastic and liked the finished product, which we use at Oran.

In 2003, our High Holiday choir accompanied by a bass worked with a recording engineer to lay down tracks for 18 songs then used in our services and ceremonies. The album is titled *Oraynu Sings*. The song selections in our services are somewhat different now, but the album remains a testament to what we accomplished together musically.

In recent years, for Yom Kippur and Yom Kippur, we have been fortunate to attract some of our best musicians in addition to our resident member flautist and a pianist/music director: viola, clarinet, guitar, cello, and oboe. And, besides the choir and musicians, we have two or three soloists who join us.

We engaged an arranger to create some charts for some of our Yom Kippur music and then our guest musicians helped put together some terrific arrangements for other holiday songs. It's such an uplifting experience at rehearsals when we sing and play together and reach that “aha” moment when we all know that we have produced something beautiful.

After each service is done, we all leave on a real high. For the singers and musicians, that's the true meaning of the “High”

who have provided feedback over the years, and the joy of our musical experiences.

Musical underscoring is used to enhance selected poetry readings — imagine the plaintive sound of an oboe or the dulcet tones of a poem. And, during our powerful Nizkor memorial, when we sit in contemplation of our beloved late family and friends, a moving four-minute instrumental medley of Jewish music helps to provide an almost spiritual-like experience for our members and guests.

And isn't that what music is supposed to do? In lieu of praying, we humanists must look for other means of elevating the spirit. And we do find it – in music, in the beautiful words of the poems and philosophical

reflections that have integrity and meaning for us, and in shared community.

We are fortunate at Oraynu to have found a great team of musicians we can call on, but that is something that any size congregation can do. Tap your members or network to find some volunteers (student or adult) to form a choir and see what kind of beautiful music you can make. Even if everyone sings in unison, the blend of voices will still add something wonderful to your services, and it will be a satisfying experience for the singers. Look for the joy as you share your music, offering your congregants a unique and enriching experience that perhaps may even draw new members into the fold. 🌟

*Listen to There's a Place (Yesh Makom) at:  
<https://bit.ly/HJ-Winter2024>*

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# Music and Humanistic Judaism

BY ADAM SKRZYNSKI

“Where words leave off, music speaks,” Heinrich Heine tells us. And indeed, this is true. Music is often a metaphor for the themes, melodies, and harmonies of life. Music is there for us when other forms of language fail, or when we are alone with our thoughts. It can transport us to another time and place and bring forth emotions that previously lay long dormant. Music can serve as a bridge to that which is most important to us, connecting us to visceral memories that fill us up and make us whole. At its best, the human experience of music is a spiritual one, requiring no specific beliefs or practices to attain, but one that comes naturally to our psychology and neurobiology. That is certainly the case in my own experience, where music has played a key role in my life for as long as I can remember.

I started piano lessons at age five, in my own mind following in the footsteps of a grandfather whom I loved and idolized. He could have been a successful concert pianist if he had chosen to pursue such a career, having won a piano competition at Carnegie Hall when he was in high school, and having been accepted to Juilliard before deciding on a different path. When my grandparents moved to Florida, we inherited his mint-condition upright Acrosonic, and every time that I played this piano, I was reminded of him and the love and kindness that he always directed my way. It meant the world to me when one day he listened to me play and told me that I had a very nice

touch on the keyboard. Following his death, playing those familiar keys has served to keep his memory alive and sharp in my mind’s eye.

My grandfather was also Jewish, and in my mind the piano became inextricably linked with his *Yiddishkeit*, and served for me, a secular kid growing up in a predominantly Christian suburb of Detroit, as a profound link to my Jewish heritage. I listened to recordings of the masters, especially Rubinstein and Horowitz, and the fact that they were Jewish added to my pride in my heritage, and I learned everything that I could about them. For me, music came to mean Judaism in so many ways. I distinctly remember watching an episode of *Great Performances* on PBS in 1995 featuring the great violinist Itzhak Perlman play his Klezmer album, *In the Fiddler’s House*. My brother and I purchased the cassette recording of this album and would play it repeatedly in the years that followed, a lovely emotional bond with our ancestral past that served to cement my Jewish identity. I can think of no better bookend to this childhood experience than when I was able to see Perlman play at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor several years back, then ran into him later that evening at Zingerman’s Deli, ordering a beef tongue sandwich of all things! I shook his hand and thanked him for the performance. Later I realized that I was really thanking him for the priceless gift of connection to my Jewish ancestors and the identity that his music gave to me, a gift of much strength and comfort. ➤

“

Music can both transmit and be of itself a family tradition, a universal transmitted heritage as important as any other.

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It was my long-time childhood piano teacher who always said that music is a thread in the fabric of time's progression. My brother and I, through our weekly piano lessons throughout the years, came to see him as a third grandfather, and one did tell him so. In reply, he would tell us about his musical "family tree" back through generations of pianists, including Beethoven himself. In that way, he wrote us, we too were "descended" from Beethoven, a musical family united by the passing on of sound and technique. Music can both transmit and be a part of a universal transmitted heritage as important as any other, able to weave in and out of the other strands of one's identity, adding to their flavor. It turns out that he also knew my great-uncle, who was a trombonist in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, more evidence of musical kinship.

So that brings us to music's role in our own movement. There is no doubt that Humanistic Judaism is enriched by the traditional melodies that we have incorporated into our services and the

sounds of familiar Jewish languages like Hebrew and Yiddish. Music is little else more human than the appreciation of music, with its deep effects on our psyche and experience of life. As music has helped connect me with my biological and chosen families, it does the same for the people of our movement. Music can be said in rhythm and melody that cannot always be said in words, and the emotional valence of a deeply felt implicit memory is probably the essence of what we experience. For us, it is not necessary to maintain the theistic content of traditional prayers and songs that we choose to incorporate into our services. These can often be shaped to conform to our values and sense of integrity without losing their power. I think that it is truly the cadence, the sounds, the emotional tenor of community that adds value to our liturgy. That is why we can appreciate the stirring melody of "Kol Nidre" without having to connect with its content.

Music is both the substance of and the catalyst for our memories and connections. It is beyond doubt one of the fundamental human creations and continues to evolve and transform our lives and experience of the world. At its heart, music reaches deep into the past and ties together the disparate threads that make our lives today both rooted in the past, and able to confront the future. Music has also been a profoundly Jewish endeavor up until the present day (thanks to Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, to name a few). It can create family and community, and provide direction. Music is a fundamental heritage in all cultures, but one that can make our experience of Humanistic Judaism profoundly rich and embedded within the larger course of Jewish history. Music is a celebration of what it means to be human, a fundamental right of commemoration and celebration. For many of us, it is both the accompaniment in the background of our story, as well as sometimes the story itself. What else but music can implore us to "drink *l'chaim* to life?" ❖





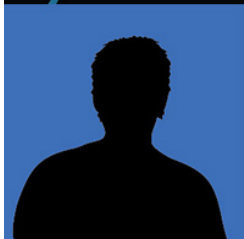
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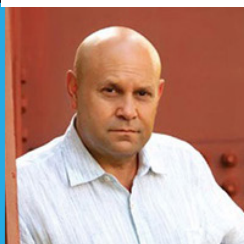
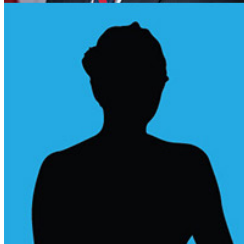
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