Topics to Consider in Unit VII

- *What does the absence of an accurate portrayal of two of our world's dynamic cultures do to distort our vision of history?*

- *What do our Jewish and Romani (Romany/Roma/Rom) communities share in common? In what ways did they also influence each other?*

- *What are some of the main historical events and considerations in understanding the evolution and subsequent impact of the Jewish Diaspora on our world today?*

- *What is "Sephardic" or "Ashkenazi" Judaism? And – what is the impact of both these groups and the Hassidic movement on European culture and musical evolution (including that of Klezmorim)?*

- *What are some observations we can make about "Jewish music" from the recordings of the "Burning Bush"? And – how can we describe the difference in Sephardic and Ashkenazi music based on the recorded examples?*

- *What are some of the observations we can make about the influence of Jewish music and culture on today's music, musical theater, and films?*

- *Who may have been among the first groups to contribute (if not be solely responsible) to the development of the "guitar," the violin, and numerous other developments in European "classical"/art and "folk" music practices?*

- *What were the reasons that both Roma and Jewish groups likely became so proficient in musical performance?*

- *What are some examples of Romani music, dance, and "fusion" of cultural influences?*

- *What is the message of "intra-cultural" exchange and the changing dynamic of identity we can glean from the members of "Harmonium"?*

- *What are some of the most important dynamics in the evolution of Spain and Greece on much of our world today? And – what must we consider concerning our music today?*

- *What is rhythm? And – what are some of the things we can say about rhythm to distinguish the diversity of ways music flows over time?*

UNIT VII

Jewish and Romani: Stories of Creativity and Influence

"All music is 'folk' music … I have never heard no horse sing a song."
Louis Armstrong, New York Times, 1941

Perhaps the single-most glaring discrepancy in the documentation and instruction of European music, whether classical or otherwise, is the lack of respect and support given to the influence of a few of Europe's "minority" groups. At least as concerns the archives of scholarly documentation from which subsequent generations would operate, only scant acknowledgement is given to the creative influences of the *folk,* generally, and these groups, specifically. When, however, we do find references to the "folk" music of Europe, such references generally omit or underestimate the influence of two groups: the **Jewish** and **Romani** (Rom, Roma, or Romani). Both groups are not only formidable contributors to the evolution of Western music practices but also among the main contributors to dance, song, and instrumental repertoires of all European music genres, *folk or classical.*

For reasons and circumstances that parallel the exclusionary treatment received by African-Americans or Native Americans from the historical discussions and archives of our American/European scholars and universities, the *Jewish and Roma*[7.1] cultures have for centuries somehow managed to pass *under the radar* of most academicians, musicologists, and historians who are not, of course, Jewish or Romani. What is missed by the maintenance of centuries of prejudice and exclusion is the lesson that music, dance, and art possess the power to heal, inspire, and transcend even the most severe forms of repression. For this reason, if no other, cultures that have experienced the repression and hierarchically separatist actions of a larger culture system and contributed so much creativity to our world's music deserve an immediate seat at the table of legitimacy.

What explanation can be given for the missing voice of these communities, including their pervasive use of music, enormous creativity, and musical and technological innovations (i.e., development and transfiguration of instruments), whose influence is fundamental to what we call Western music? We'll explore this question in this unit.

Pic. 7.1A *The Dombrover Rebbe of Monsey with the Nadvorna Rebbe (Rebbes or Rabbis signified by pelz or fur coat or lining) at a ceremony to build a new facility. The Hasidic (Chassidic or Hasidism) branch of Judaism is credited to Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698-1760). At a time when persecution of the Jewish people had reached a severe level, European Jews had "turned inward" to Talmud study, and many felt that "spirituality" and joy had been replaced solely by academic study. Therefore, Hasidic Judaism began to place an emphasis on the use of music and even dance as a means to "spirituality."* Photo: released to public domain, courtesy JJ211219 and Wikipedia.org.

Pic. 7.1B *A Roma family living on the edge of town in Smyrna, Turkey. Were the Roma naturally "nomadic," as many historians suggest, or were they forced into a Nomadic lifestyle because few culture groups accepted them as even remotely equal, forcing perpetual isolation and migration as a means of survival?* Photo: Courtesy Wikipedia.

Despite the fact that some members of the Jewish or Romani communities may themselves not wish to claim similarities to each other,[7.2] there are strong reasons that we can speak of these groups in nearly equal terms as concerns contributions to the evolution of European culture and music. Among these:

- Both groups were exiled or expelled from a "homeland" and spent centuries in transition, or needing to assimilate or adapt as an essentially "minority" culture.
- Both groups experienced enormous repression, ridicule, and extermination throughout Europe for *centuries,* at times being singled out for blame or persecution, often paying the ultimate penalty with loss of life, destruction of family or community for a variety of justifications (including being blamed as the cause for the "Black Death" [plague]).
- Frequently, in order to be "successful" within the societies in which they lived, both groups were required to "mask" or renounce their religions and their cultural beliefs, to take new names, to alter their associations, or to convert to either Christianity or Islam.
- Both groups had two initial paths of migration: the *northern route,* which took them through Russia and Eastern Europe to Western Europe; and the *southern route,* which extended through the Middle East, to North Africa, and into Spain. In the case of the Jewish, however, the dispersion patterns are more erratic. Often Jewish and Rom communities who were in Western Europe were disbanded or expelled to Northern or Eastern Europe, and vice versa.
- And, most important to this chapter, both groups became enormously attracted to and adept in the performing arts. In both cases, probably more than any other "ethnic groups" in Europe, the Jewish and Rom cultures used the performing arts as key elements in the sustenance, healing, and bonding essential to forge a sense of community through centuries of repression.

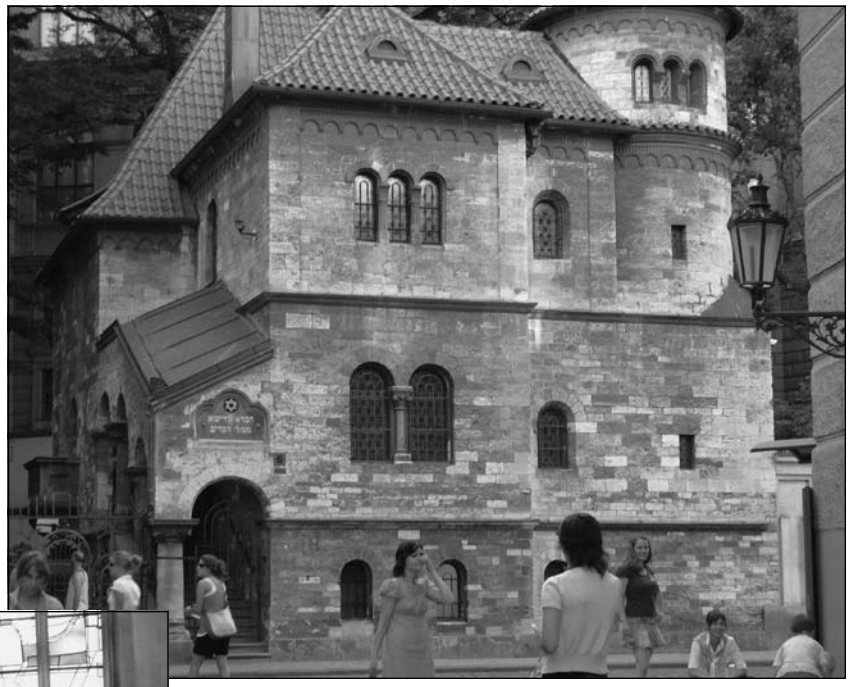
Because of the migratory or nomadic requirements placed on both Jewish and Romani communities, not a single "nation" and culture group in Europe can claim exclusion from strong if not predominant influences from these culture groups, especially as regards their music. Moreover, as a general principle, both groups became highly proficient at adapting to the cultures in which they found themselves. In one sense, this capacity for flexibility and adaptability created a role for both communities in interconnecting, much like "cultural honey bees," Europe's cultural and musical expressions.

Under the Radar: The Jewish Diaspora

Fragmentation of Jewish communities goes back to the conquering of the kingdom of Judea, the southernmost of two Jewish kingdoms (6th century BCE), after which many Jews were exiled to Babylon and others returned to Israel. Under Roman rule, Judea was first a Jewish kingdom, but increasingly came under direct Roman administration. When many in the community revolted against the Romans, a large part of the temple in Jerusalem (where currently the famed "Western Wall" now stands) was destroyed and, in time, many Jewish communities themselves were also destroyed. Others were either forced into slavery or forced to convert as loyalists to the Roman way of life.

By all definitions now a *Diaspora,* the splintered Jewish community settled in pockets throughout areas of the former Roman Empire. There are records of Jewish communities in France and Germany from the 4th century and large communities in Spain even earlier than that. During the rise of Roman Catholicism throughout the Middle Ages, Jews were frequently persecuted or systematically exterminated, especially during the Crusades of the Middle Ages.

Jewish property was frequently confiscated, and few individuals were given opportunities to prosper. At one point, because of a ban by the Catholic Church on such practices for Christians as book-keeping and money-lending (a precursor to banking), "Jews" were permitted to occupy these positions. [Note: This turn of events also contributed to age-old Jewish stereotypes, positive (thriftiness and material prosperity) and negative (overt shrewdness and pecuniary obsession)]. But without justification, Jewish property could be confiscated; Jews could be banned, exiled, or persecuted for little or no reason.



Pic. 7.2 *A Jewish cemetery (mausoleum) and former synagogue in the "Jewish Quarter" of Prague is now a place of pilgrimage of hundreds of Jewish and non-Jewish tourists who wish to remember not only the Jewish suffering of the Holocaust, but that of centuries before – and decades since.* Photo: Authors.

Pic. 7.2A1 *An equitable understanding of our world's darkest hours might not see entire nations, ethnic groups, or religions as "good" or "evil." In this sense, we should seek an equity and accountability in our own investigation of multiple truths. One example, in Germany, there is a monument in a St. Paul's Cathedral for Cardinal Clemens August Graf van Galen, who, during Nazi control, harbored, protected, and saved many Jewish refugees – and who in turn suffered for his convictions. In virtually every "holocaust" of human history, the legacy of the countless stories of cultural sacrifice or unity have yet to find their way into most of our history books.* Photo: Authors.

Under the Radar (Part II): The Creativity of the "Romani"

The opening page of the Association of Gypsies / Romani International website, which assisted us in locating musicians and Roma/Rom scholars, begins with the phrase: *"Gypsy, one scattered race, like stars in the sight of God."* Then later, a poem ("The Dreamers") by Theodosia Garrison:

> *"The Gypsies passed her little gate, / She stopped her wheel to see.*
> *A brown faced pair who walked the road, / Free as the wind is free;*
> *And suddenly her tidy room / A prison seemed to be.*
> *She watched the footer (walking) Gypsies pass; / She never knew or guessed,*
> *The wistful dream that drew them close, / The longing in each ear,*
> *Some day to know a home like hers, / Wherein their hearts might rest."*

But most touching was this mission statement:

> *"The Association is a non-profit association with the intention of giving glory to God, of preserving, maintaining, promoting our Roma culture, ethnicity, pride and integrity. It is time to halt the negativism that is prevalent about us, time to dissipate the prejudice, we are loyal, intelligent, God loving people! Let us proceed in the 21st century, as one united people among all with the honest, truthful purpose of Loving God, and loving our fellow humans …"*

By varied accounts, there are between 12 and 15 million Roma in the world today. Through the changes and chances of evolution, Romani communities became highly evolved in music and dance, and created a musical legacy that is either responsible or partly responsible for the following musical developments and innovations that can be said to have affected much of our planet's music:

Pic. 7.8 *A Romani family traveling (1837 print). The perpetual need to uproot, to find a new home because of persecution and lack of acceptance contrasts with other accounts that "Rom prefer isolation or lack the desire to integrate." We might ask, should self-isolation, closely guarded community orientation, and even acts of resistance or mistrust of others occur if we continue to maintain that human beings and cultures are equal but different? What perpetuated this tendency? The simplest action is to find faults with other cultures. Especially as concerns cultures mistreated over centuries, the more difficult of paths might be to ask: What might I (my culture or my ancestors) have done to perpetuate these actions? To this extent, perhaps, Western cultures and specifically Western education are sorely in need of greater work as concerns an equal consideration of others*
Photo: Public domain and courtesy Wikipedia.org.