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## Comptes rendus • Publications et ressources numériques

### Yiddish Music Resources Online

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#### Online Research in Yiddish Music: Preliminary Issues

Yiddish music research has undergone something of a renaissance lately, as more resources have come online. Increasingly sophisticated and robust research tools and collections have come to supplement and perhaps even supplant traditional printed books, sheet music, and (non-digital) audio and video formats. Exchanges among researchers, musicians, informants, and audiences also take place online with greater frequency, and the global pandemic has only accelerated the movement of materials, performances, and ideas across continents.

For researchers, the glut of digital music research content, much of it free of charge, is indeed a boon, though there is much to consider. First of all, access to online resources has never been equitable: social and economic disparities have come into even sharper focus during the pandemic. Not everyone has reliable Internet access or a device on which to use it. Even for those who do, not everything is online. The availability, quality, and sustainability of online content is also dependent upon resources; who decides what gets digitized and how, and who pays for it? The outsize presence of digitized materials can evince greater interest and use in them, while physical collections become less accessible or even less discoverable online. And what of the rights of professional musicians—how can music online remain accessible for research while providing appropriate compensation and recognition for those that create and perform it?

This article will describe some specific challenges of online Yiddish music research and provide an overview of websites for primary sources including commercial recordings, field recordings, and sheet music, as well as a small selection of related print sources. The content of the sites listed here is not exhaustive—it represents only a fraction of what actually exists—and undoubtedly reflects the author's perspective as a U.S.-based researcher in Yiddish vocal music. There is much to learn from casting a wider net in terms of language and location, namely access to a far richer variety of material. The speed of online research often raises the temptation to focus too narrowly or too broadly, but understanding the context of primary sources is a key component of research. The presence of a research community of scholars, musicians, and research professionals can help researchers make sense of primary sources and discover new materials and ideas

*Yiddish Music Research*

Yiddish music research has its own idiosyncrasies, growing out of a transnational folk culture with strong and diverse ideologies, and relative lack of institutional support. Yiddish, the thousand-year-old daily vernacular of Eastern European Jews, historically blossomed in literature, politics and the arts, among other areas, resulting in a proliferation of published and unpublished source materials from the late nineteenth century on. Yiddish music has yielded many streams, from traditional folk songs and instrumental music to theater compositions and literary, political, topical and art songs, all influenced both linguistically and musically by local languages and cultures. Yiddish became a global language as speakers traveled and emigrated and utilized various media forms to express themselves, including musically.

The revival of Yiddish music in the last few decades has yielded new enthusiasm and expertise among researchers, musicians, and audiences. This is apparent in the success of folk arts and language study programs around the world, and the proliferation of Yiddish singing and instrumental (“klezmer”) music. Additionally, academia has seen a burgeoning interest in the interdisciplinary field of Yiddish Studies. The recent move by many to an almost exclusively online environment has led to an explosion of artistic and educational Yiddish programming by and for a community that is more international than ever. This movement is distinct from the ongoing Yiddish music culture of today’s Hasidic communities, whose leaders shun secular culture and the Internet, although many Hasidim do use the Internet for disseminating and researching Yiddish music. Certainly, the widespread use of smartphones has made this research easier for those without easy access to an Internet-enabled computer.

Most Yiddish music researchers start their searches online, and even if they do not, they will probably need to use a library or archive, where the staff will consult online resources on their behalf. Therefore, I hope to guide users by outlining some major issues and sources in online Yiddish music research, drawing on my extensive work as a librarian and musician in the field of Yiddish. I also invite users to visit the New York Public Library’s online Yiddish Research Guide for an overview of research resources, including many online music sources covered here. Although far from everything can be found online, materials are increasingly discoverable and usable there. I believe that librarians must rise to the challenge of helping users by fielding individual questions, preparing research guides, and curating and managing collections to facilitate scholarly and creative work.

*Language standardization and research*

Conducting research in Yiddish is complicated for linguistic and technical reasons. The Yiddish language is not monolithic; there is considerable variation among the dialects, orthographies, and transliteration schemes used for Yiddish, which is written in the Hebrew alphabet. Researchers inevitably encounter spoken and written Yiddish that is different from what they encountered at home or in school, if they have any exposure to Yiddish at all. Arguments frequently arise over “correct” pronunciation, spelling, or vocabulary choices, and authenticity. Researchers should simply be prepared for varied, nonstandard primary sources that reflect their respective historical contexts.

On a practical level, orthographical variations mean that just searching for materials can be challenging for researchers whether they read Yiddish or not. The Yiddish-reading researcher must learn common spelling variations. They should also learn how to type in Yiddish; today a Hebrew/Yiddish keyboard can be found online, and/or as part of some word processing programs. The website UYIP (Understanding Yiddish Information Processing) provides detailed information on this topic. For some researchers, dealing with spelling variations in written Yiddish is easier than transliteration, but all Yiddish researchers should also familiarize themselves with various transliteration schemes. Transliteration is essential for those not literate in Yiddish, as well as those who are, since many collections can't accommodate Yiddish to describe materials in their online databases and instead rely on transliteration.

Even though most Hebrew-alphabet online sources lack *nekudes*—the vowels and diacritical marks that appear in Yiddish—and spellings vary, when searching in Yiddish, the user does not have to guess as much as to how words or names are transliterated. Some Hebrew-language sites use a Hebraic spelling of names or words; therefore Yiddish readers must also acquire a familiarity with Hebraic spelling styles when using these sources.

Various transliteration schemes exist to render Yiddish materials into the Latin alphabet. Transliteration is common in electronic resources that can't accommodate the Hebrew alphabet. The most common transliteration systems are Library of Congress and YIVO. There are also various transliteration standards in other Latin-alphabet languages such as Polish, Spanish, and German that attempt to accommodate the respective spelling patterns of those languages; these can however be problematic because they may reinforce incorrect pronunciation, particularly for non-native Yiddish speakers. IPA, an international linguistic standard, is sometimes used for transcribing Yiddish texts but not for cataloging.

Globally, many online library and archival databases use neither Yiddish nor standardized transliterations of any kind because of a lack of investment in language learning, standardization, and technology. Some systems simply cannot accommodate the Hebrew alphabet. Unfortunately, this lack sometimes results in researchers being unable to find and subsequently use Yiddish language materials in these collections. Even when standardized transliterations are used, errors and inconsistencies are very common, especially since the original sources are themselves frequently nonstandard.

In the United States, the Library of Congress transliteration, also known as “romanization,” is standard in academic and public libraries and facilitates simultaneous searching across multiple library collections. Library of Congress transliteration appears in library catalogs and in some online Yiddish collections that take their metadata from library catalog records. Library of Congress romanization uses a letter-for-letter rendering with diacritical marks to differentiate some of the letters. These diacritical marks can cause difficulty with online searches, sometimes skipping over relevant materials or displaying them improperly. Yiddish words and names with Hebrew and Aramaic roots are transliterated according to Modern Hebrew pronunciation. The Library of Congress system was designed for catalogers to read and categorize materials without being able to understand or even pronounce the language. The combination of frequent lack of spoken language ability and varying orthographies and dialects has led to widespread inconsistencies in the transliteration of diphthongs, vowels, and

nekudes. On the other hand, standardization is essential in order to categorize and find materials in a systematic way, within and across collections.

The transliteration scheme of YIVO reflects YIVO's standardization of Yiddish orthography, taught in the organization's Yiddish classes, as well as most other Yiddish classes in a non-Hareidi setting today. YIVO transliteration also predominates in most English-language academic publications today, and often in other Latin-alphabet languages as well. This predominance reflects generations of scholars educated at YIVO and/or in standard Yiddish. In YIVO transliteration, words and names are transliterated phonetically as they are pronounced in standard Yiddish, according to a set spelling, rather than strictly per letter as in the Library of Congress system. YIVO uses set consonants (or consonant combinations) to transliterate actual sounds from standard Yiddish, rather than specific letters, and does not employ diacritical marks.

Should all catalogers and archivists "standardize" Yiddish when creating catalog records rather than recording it exactly as it is spelled? This could make it easier to find materials, but on the other hand could detract from the integrity or historical significance of the original spelling. Proponents of standardization argue that the standardization extends to pronunciation, and that therefore nonstandard spelling should be pronounced, and therefore transcribed, in a standard way. But in the case of an old English text that employs the spelling "Jewes" instead of "Jews," for example, should the word in question be transcribed as "Jews" so that it is easier to find? This question is no longer as relevant as it once was, since the days of using a card catalog with a limited number of physically fixed access points are largely behind us. Computers allow multiple fields and therefore, multiple access points. A strong argument can be made for including multiple spellings, both standard and nonstandard, to facilitate ease of searching. In addition, libraries and archives should prioritize Yiddish education and knowledge among their cataloging staff.

Even as accepted standards, both the Library of Congress and YIVO transliteration systems can be disconcerting for users simply because they render Yiddish in a foreign alphabet. Some shared catalogs include multiple records for the same item, because of different transliteration schemes. Add this to the already inconsistent spelling in the original Yiddish, and widespread errors in transliteration, and it can be difficult to find seemingly simple titles.

### *Daily Challenges*

What do these linguistic, orthographic, and transliteration issues mean for Yiddish music researchers in their daily work? The challenges are manifold: researchers need to learn to navigate searches using standard and nonstandard Yiddish and transliteration, and to learn how to decipher and use the actual material for research, play, and performance. They must learn how to transcribe and transliterate nonstandard texts from printed, audio, and video sources, and learn about dialects (and dialect rhymes), and various other historical factors.

First, though, it's necessary to know where and how to look for research sources in Yiddish, and specifically in Yiddish music. In the following section, I will provide an overview of primary sources online, including commercial and field recordings, sheet music, and a small selection of printed sources for bibliographic research. Along the way, I will try to address some common research quandaries.

## Review of resources by category

In this section, I will provide an overview of online resources for primary sources including commercial recordings, field recordings, and sheet music. I will begin with commercial recordings. Recordings help researchers determine what singing and playing styles were used historically, ranging from dialect and pronunciation to vocal production, ornamentation and improvisation, instrumentation and arrangements. Recordings also provide information about composers, lyricists, performers, audiences, producers, and about the historical context of the music. Until relatively recently, researchers had several ways to access historical commercial recordings: obtain the actual 78 RPM records or other antiquated formats, seek out limited reissues in other formats, scour the Internet for questionable, unstable, and often unauthorized sources, and/or physically visit archives. While these all remain relevant, there is much more online today, both for discovery and access.

### *Commercial recordings*

Historical commercial Yiddish recordings have become increasingly available online over the past several years, especially recordings from the United States that are within the public domain [from 1925 and earlier, as of this writing]. To access recordings not in the public domain, some sites require potential users to register and explain their research purposes in order to receive a login. Most free sites provide streaming audio and less often, downloadable content. Some users resort to software to make their own unauthorized recordings from the streaming audio or contact archives directly to request a digitized copy of specific recordings. As described below, there are a variety of interfaces for accessing historical commercial recordings online.

#### *Ha-Sifriyah ha-Olamit (National Library of Israel) (Jerusalem, Israel)*

The National Library of Israel's massive collection of Jewish music is a treasure trove of global content and in particular for recordings produced in Israel. Many songs are cataloged individually, a welcome feature that is somewhat rare for library catalogs. NLI's catalog includes about 25,000 Yiddish songs, of which approximately 20% are available online. The Yiddish content spans the genres of theater, folk, cantorial repertoire, Hasidic music, and spoken word. The collection includes historical and contemporary works, and a substantial subset of radio broadcasts.

This site shows the advantage of including a diverse set of library and archival collections within a unified catalog, rather than creating and maintaining separate structures based on format or topic. Despite NLI's huge scope, musically and otherwise, it is easy to navigate the collection and to conduct and refine searches in the catalog. Users can employ standard categories like author and title for searching, and also browse the collection based on categories such as commercial, broadcast, and ethnographic recordings, availability by format and location, language, date, usage rights (copyright), topic, genre, and various categories of artists (performers, ensembles, composers, lyricists, etc.). Some items can be listened to online and some must be used onsite in the library; the catalog lists these options clearly and allows users to specify when searching.

The catalog opens a separate browser to allow continual searching while viewing or listening—rather than forcing a user to retrace their steps. It even employs some subject headings in Yiddish, although without *nekudes*, and the bibliographic records (largely in Hebrew) are often sparse. The site itself is available in Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

*Recorded Sound Archive (Florida Atlantic University) (Boca Raton, Florida, U.S.)*

The Recorded Sound Archive of Florida Atlantic University is one of the largest and oldest sites for Jewish music recordings. The collection is truly impressive in its size and scope, and well worth grappling with the site's somewhat clunky interface. Users should apply for a research login in order to access the full content, including many recordings that may still be under copyright.

The site's content is rich and vast, and its Yiddish content is particularly strong in American theater recordings (both musical and spoken word), art songs, cantorial works, and instrumental klezmer tunes. The artists' holdings are sometimes enriched by biographical information, often provided by their heirs, along with permission to host the artists' entire oeuvre online. The site also provides interesting playlists of seasonal songs. If you find a recording that is not yet digitized, you may request that it be digitized; the same goes if you need more information about a particular recording. Some works, usually more modern ones, are listed but have no recording online, because of copyright. Where available, the site also displays images of the recordings, including album jacket notes. Another useful feature is the ability to listen to an entire album without stopping rather than having to play tunes one by one; some albums are simply compilations of individual recordings, while some contain songs put together in an intentional order and/or upon a specific theme. The digital format however also enables users to choose which song(s) to listen to on a particular album and go to them immediately.

The Recorded Sound Archive is a substantial and outstanding collection that is well-deserving of more resources to modernize the site and make it easier to use. Finding song titles and individual artists is challenging for several reasons. There is just one search box, so users cannot choose access points such as artist, composer, lyricist, or song title. Additionally, the spelling and transliteration on the original recordings themselves are inconsistent and error-filled, and the subsequent transliterations are often garbled. The site does not accommodate Hebrew characters, so searching in transliteration becomes something of a guessing game where standard transliteration is nearly useless. This last issue also points to the lack of authorized forms of artists' names in collection databases; it is generally hard to find consistent name spellings for lesser-known Yiddish artists. The site also lacks a sufficient "back" button to pages within a multi-page search, so users frequently have to retrace their steps.

*Institut Européen des Musiques Juives (IEMJ) (Paris, France)*

The Institut Européen des Musiques Juives (IEMJ) provides an impressive amount of historical and contemporary Jewish music content on its website, all organized in a highly usable manner. IEMJ is both a physical Jewish music archive based in Paris and an online one, and its site aptly conveys the richness of these collections without being overwhelming. IEMJ's holdings



include the massive Henriette Halphen media collection (80,000 recordings of Jewish music, 380,000 pages of scores, and many other items) and archives of various individual artists, composers, institutions, and groups. Acquisition and digitization of collection items is ongoing and includes multiple formats such as cassettes, scores, photographs, and posters.

IEMJ's work with several partner organizations and its participation in Rachel (the European Network of Judaica and Hebraica Libraries) means that its collections are integrated into a larger shared library catalog with detailed records for each item. Helpfully, the site offers clear instructions on how to search, and also offers a guided search option. There are many access points for searching, such as author, composer, format, language, title, and archival group. Browsing is also easy, with playlists devoted to various holidays and music styles. The collection is strong in Yiddish vocal music and cantorial repertoire among a diverse international music collection of commercial as well as archival materials. Additionally, IEMJ also publishes and sells reissues as well as contemporary Jewish music recordings, which feature interesting and often rare content.

The site owes its dynamic feel to the seamless integration of so many different types of media within a scholarly context, and the constant addition of new content. In addition to historical and contemporary recordings, IEMJ's site includes biographies of musicians, topical articles, radio content, and cleanly organized recordings of its own slate of events ranging from concerts to conferences, many of which are hosted on its YouTube channel. The site is in French, with a substantial amount of its content also available in English.

*Mayrent Collection (University of Wisconsin-Madison) (U.S.)*

The Mayrent Collection at the University of Wisconsin-Madison specializes in Yiddish recordings, and includes 9,000 78rpm discs donated by collector and musician Sherry Mayrent. The collection covers Yiddish theater, popular and traditional music, cantorial songs, klezmer music, poetry, drama, and event ballads produced all over the world. The site lists each item both in Yiddish and in transliteration—which makes searching much easier—along with images of the corresponding records, where available. Other useful search filters include topics (genres), authors (composers, lyricists, artists) and languages. The recordings themselves are digitally remastered and linked to sheet music when possible. Users can listen to the songs online and actually even download some of them, copyright permitting.

The site's modern appearance and functionality reflect the resources invested in digitizing and cataloging the recordings. Furthermore, its holdings are part of a larger digital collection, accommodating multiple formats, that serves the university's own research community as well as the larger public. I believe that this inclusion within a larger digital platform decreases the risk of obsolescence, since many collections are at stake and share a common platform; the university therefore has a vested interest in maintaining it. The recordings in the Mayrent Collection are the core, but not the only component, of the Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture, which is associated with faculty, academic departments, and public programming.

*Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive (Hanover, New Hampshire, U.S.)*

The Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive is something of a hidden gem; it requires users to register, and if approved, to log in to use the content. The site is managed by faculty, and registered researchers need not be affiliated with Dartmouth. The collection includes 14,000 entries and continues to accept donated materials. In terms of Yiddish materials specifically, the site includes folk, as well as theater music and humor. Besides the interesting and wide array of materials on the site, another of its strengths is access to materials that are not commercially available, such as radio programs, field recordings, live concerts, and lectures.

The site offers several different options for both browsing and searching. The browse function allows users to search the entire archive vs. public domain, and by album/collection, genre, theme, language, occasion, and recent additions. This is a good way to quickly see the holdings, which include about 3,700 songs in Yiddish. This browsing function also allows one to search for songs on a particular topic. It shows that time was taken to collect and input data for at least some of the material. By using the search function, it is also possible to search by multiple access points, which is only sometimes successful. The search results are displayed in a vertical list of text. Users also have the option simply to use a single search box, which searches all types of metadata, so by searching the name of an individual singer and lyricist one can find both that artist's recordings and recordings of their lyrics made by other artists. The general search box accommodates some searching in the Hebrew alphabet, but not consistently. The transliteration used here appears to be taken directly from the original sources themselves, when possible, which is somewhat limiting, given the strange and inconsistent nature of transliterations on historical materials.

This site's design shows that it was created with researchers in mind. The layout is clear and relatively easy to use. The amount of attention to detail for each song is also an excellent feature. Each audio track here has its own page where users can view the original physical item, such as the record, or album jacket, and listen to the individual piece. One has to click for each track; there is no continuous album-style listening.

*Russian Records (Yuri Bernikov, Massachusetts, U.S.)*

The site contains quite varied recordings from Russia, including Yiddish vocal and instrumental music, particularly Yiddish folk song repertoire recorded during Soviet times. The site covers records produced in Russia as well as Russian-themed recordings from other countries. It is an excellent source for historical recordings that are difficult if not impossible to acquire commercially, particularly for those outside of Russia.

There are several ways to search and browse: users can choose from various format and topical categories, search alphabetical indexes by artist or label, and search particular ethnic and language groups. The latter feature makes it easy to see immediately how many recordings are on the site in any particular category. The site carefully attributes the artists and the source of the recordings. It also includes images of the recordings themselves and portraits of artists, along with biographical details, information on record labels, and links to outside sources. The site is in Russian and English.

*Harry Orovmaa Collection of Jewish Recordings (Europeana / Suomen Äänitearkisto)*  
*(Finnish Sound Archive Association, Helsinki, Finland)*

This site features about 200 recordings digitized from the collection of Finnish record producer Harry Orovmaa. The collection includes folk songs, cantorial repertoire, instrumental music and spoken word (theater) recordings produced in countries including the U.S., Poland, and France. This is another good source for historical recordings not readily available commercially today, and the collection has already been the source of reissue projects such as Michael Aylward's *Warsaw's Jewish Mermaid: Syrena Recordings from the Orovmaa Archive, 1909–1933*. Although there are few if any options to conduct or modify a search for a particular item, perusal is relatively easy. The display is visual, showing an image of each record, and users can choose a grid or list view. The record images are particularly helpful considering that the metadata is in the Latin alphabet and uses whatever (non-standard) transliteration is found on the record; by looking at the original text in the Hebrew alphabet, it is much easier to decipher the title.

*National Jukebox Collection (Library of Congress) (Washington, DC, U.S.)*

The National Jukebox Collection (Library of Congress) also offers a smaller selection of historical American Yiddish recordings within the public domain in the U.S. (1925 at the time of this writing). No login is required. The site provides streaming access to 113 items categorized as Jewish, which are helpfully further divided by terms such as “Musical Theater,” “Jewish,” “Ethnic Music” and “Target Audience: Jewish.” Access points include lyricists, composers, performers, and sometimes publishers. The musical selections include theater songs, cantorial, and instrumental tunes. Although the recordings are not downloadable, the record images are. The collection is searchable in transliteration only. The recordings are not linked directly to corresponding sheet music that may be held in the Library of Congress' sheet music collection (discussed later in this article), though they appear as suggestions at the bottom.

When using the above sites, users should contact the institutions that host them with questions or for help with the sites' contents. It is also helpful to use the multi-volume book set *Ethnic music on records. A discography of ethnic recordings produced in the United States, 1893 to 1942* by Richard K. Spottswood (c.1990) to find and verify information about commercial recordings. Volume 3 contains an extensive section on Jewish recordings, and Volume 6 includes an index by artist. These volumes are unfortunately out of print and expensive to acquire. For those who do not have ready access to Spottswood's piece, visit or contact a library or music archive for help.

### **Field recordings**

Recently, the digitization of Yiddish field recordings has resulted in several exciting online collections. In contrast to general online music archives, field recording websites focus on discrete collections made by researchers, and contextualize the songs and singers. Until relatively recently, Yiddish field recordings, which were never made for mass production or commercial distribution, were consigned to obsolete, endangered recording formats in archives and in private collections. New digitization projects now provide carefully curated access to important

historical collections. In particular, they preserve the Yiddish vocal and instrumental music traditions of Eastern European-born speakers.

*Ruth Rubin Legacy Archive (YIVO) (New York, NY, U.S.)*

The Ruth Rubin Legacy Archive of Yiddish Folksongs (launched in 2018 by YIVO) is the most comprehensive Yiddish folk music field recording site of its kind. The site is a digital home for the lifelong work of Yiddish folk song researcher, collector, and singer Ruth Rubin (1906–2000). The site is scholarly and rich in content, while accessible and easy to navigate—no small feat for a collection of 2,000 Yiddish songs recorded by Rubin on 78rpm acetate discs, reel-to-reel tapes and cassettes between 1946 and 1980. The site’s success is a testament to the work of a dedicated professional team who worked diligently to make Rubin’s work easily available in a new format, while preserving her original organizational schemata and documents.

The site’s clean format easily accommodates a variety of materials, including the songs as well as Rubin’s recordings, writings, bibliographies, discographies, and related documentation. Users can search or browse the recordings by several access points, including titles, performers, tapes, genres, and locations. “Tapes” refers to the original recording format and preserves the topics Rubin chose as a basis for organizing the collection. Each tape page includes an image of the original cassette liner with the song titles in order of recording. Users can then listen to each song, choosing from a list in the original order. They are also invited to help transcribe and translate the lyrics, under the oversight of professionals who manage the site. Additionally, the site has a convenient automatic citation feature. A discography of recordings that use Rubin’s repertoire shows the import of her work for contemporary artists. This site is an invaluable resource for researchers and musicians, and a very significant accomplishment in the digitization of Yiddish folk music and related scholarship.

*Vernadsky Collection (Institute for Information Recording, Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine) (Kyiv, Ukraine)*

This website features a collection of extraordinary ethnographic recordings collected by Julius Engel, Zinovy Kiselgof, Sh. An-Ski, and Moisei Beregovskii, who were all major figures in Eastern European Jewish ethnography. The digitization of these historically significant, rare, and long inaccessible materials is a cause for celebration. As one of the largest Jewish folklore collections of its kind, it includes 1,017 wax cylinder recordings made during ethnographic in Ukraine and Belarus, between 1912 and 1947. The site includes a detailed scholarly introduction to the context of the recordings.

The recordings on the site are divided into collections based on time period and genre, including cantorial repertoire, synagogue singing, folk music, Hasidic songs, instrumental klezmer tunes, and spoken-word materials such as rhymes. Each title is listed in standard transliteration and includes a brief description of the track with the performer, date and place of recording, cylinder number, and collector. Although not searchable, the content is well-organized, easy to discover, and finite enough to peruse easily. The site is in Ukrainian and English. In addition to listening to the songs online, users can also order physical CDs.

*Stonehill Jewish Sound Archive (Center for Traditional Music and Dance) (New York, NY, U.S.)*

The Stonehill Jewish Sound Archive, hosted online by the Center for Traditional Music and Dance (New York, NY) is another important Yiddish song fieldwork resource that has recently been digitized, at least in part. The online collection consists of 60 songs sung by Holocaust survivors in 1948 in the lobby of the Marseilles Hotel, an entry point for displaced Eastern European Jews arriving in New York City. Ben Stonehill, a folklore collector, recorded these songs on a wire recorder. Dr. Miriam Isaacs, as part of a fellowship at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, selected 60 songs from a total of 1,000 and 39 hours of recordings made by Stonehill. Copies of the physical recordings are in several archives but this is the first time the content has been digitized and made publicly available. Isaacs transcribed and translated the songs and organized them into categories which she briefly explains with examples. The site also includes an introduction to the material, an index and biographies of prominent individuals associated with the collection, as well as a list of all singers who gave their names and their birthplaces on the recordings. In addition to music, the site includes some literary recitations.

The recordings are mostly Yiddish, with some Hebrew, and the repertoire includes folk songs, cantorial repertoire, theater, and Holocaust songs. The recordings have a strong folk feeling, strengthened by the communal setting where it was recorded and the spontaneous joining in of a chorus on some songs. This site is an important resource for Yiddish song repertoire and singing styles, dialects and pronunciation, and the musical world of Holocaust survivors.

*Yiddish Song of the Week (Center for Traditional Music and Dance) (New York, NY, U.S.)*

The Yiddish Song of the Week blog, edited by Dr. Itzik Gottesman, is part of the An-Ski Jewish Folklore Project of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance. The site is a forum for field recordings long collected by Gottesman and other scholars and musicians. Each song is accompanied by transcribed and translated texts and scholarly commentary. The site presents a rare online venue for field recordings of traditional Yiddish folk singing, and provides a chance to learn about styles of singing and interpretation. It is all the more important given that many of the featured singers are no longer alive; these recordings preserve a memory of the singers and allow today's researchers to continue a dialogue with the singers and their songs. The site is also intended to inspire communication and interchange between current listeners, for example to discover new variants of songs or call up recollections of contexts where these songs were sung.

Yiddish Song of the Week's value is both in the song recordings, which come from various individual collections and otherwise would not be accessible to the public, and in the scholarly commentary provided for each song. The site utilizes a blog format, displaying songs based on the date when they were first posted, and each post is amply tagged with relevant keywords leading to related posts, along with commentary that contextualizes the work. Commentators often provide links to additional sources through direct links to audio and video content online or references to printed or recorded works. Yiddish Song of the Week is a good example of unique content, well-curated, and produced in a modest and yet scholarly manner.

*Other Fieldwork Sites*

The AHEYM (“homeward”) project is another fieldwork-based project, which is ethnographically focused and includes some music. The files are housed on the website of the Archives of Traditional Music at the University of Indiana-Bloomington. The site is freely accessible and no login is required. AHEYM is based on video interviews conducted with older Jewish residents of Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Slovakia, over the last few decades. The interviews are organized by location and provide an outstanding opportunity to learn about the lives and customs, told in regional dialects by people of the older generation who survived the Holocaust and remained in Europe. Although there is no way to search specifically for music, the interviews are organized with English-language metadata into timed segments by topic. There is no translation or transliteration to accompany the interviews, which were conducted in Yiddish and other local languages. As with other sites, the careful and accessible organization of its content within a general archival collection shows the benefits of being part of a larger collection and institution with academic and practical support.

There are other fieldwork sites that incorporate Yiddish music within the context of oral history interviews and witness testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Increasingly, audio and video interviews are available online and often indexed so that users can navigate to different points based on the metadata. The Voices of the Holocaust Project, featuring fieldwork interviews by David Boder, is another online fieldwork archive with Yiddish speakers that includes music. The Yiddish Book Center’s Wexler Oral History Project also includes interviews with contemporary Yiddish speakers, including musicians; the Book Center has also digitized Yiddish-language programs and concerts from the Jewish Public Library in Montreal. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s excellent website on Music of the Holocaust also features recordings of Holocaust song repertoire, including field recordings, along with background information. The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (Yale University) holds nearly 700 interviews with Holocaust survivors, some of them featuring music. The archive has produced video recordings of these historical songs by contemporary musicians, accompanied by scholarly commentary. There are many other sites, such as the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, devoted to oral history interviews with Holocaust survivors. Therefore, I will not explore them further here, but encourage researchers to reach out to specific collections to inquire about music content.

*New Projects*

Two exciting new projects focus on carefully curating Yiddish folk music performance as a pedagogical tool and making it accessible to users. These are not field recording sites *per se*, but serve as important vehicles for documenting Yiddish folk music, both instrumental and vocal. *Inside the Yiddish Folk Song* is an ambitious new online resource for Yiddish folk song researchers and practitioners. Created by a veteran team of scholars and musicians in the U.S., including Michael Alpert, Walter Zev Feldman, Itzik Gottesman, Ethel Raim, Josh Waletzky and Mark Slobin, the site explores this repertoire in its European context, and analyzes its structure, aesthetics and performers. It focuses on the genre of the folksong within the culture of eastern Ashkenazic Jews and the surrounding European societies, and upon its structure: text, melody,

and their interaction as well as upon the inner, aesthetic world of the song. The site includes articles and videos delving into song practices, with performances by traditional master singers, as well as bibliographic and scholarly resources.

The U.S.-based Klezmer Institute is a new organization that supports Ashkenazic expressive culture through research, teaching, publishing, and programming. The organization's focus is on traditional folk performers and repertoire. During quarantine, an international team of scholars and musicians has gathered virtually to work on a community digitization project for the Kiselgof-Makonovsky manuscripts, a collection of Jewish instrumental folk melodies collected by the Belarusian Jewish ethnographer Zusman Kiselgof (Zinovy Kiselgoff) from 1912–1914. The Klezmer Institute is currently building a digital tool for these materials with a team of scholars and digital technology experts.

On the subject of instrumental klezmer music, there are additional sites created by enthusiasts specializing in the genre that provide access to primary sources, or in some cases, to user-friendly adaptations of them. Klezmer Guide is a comprehensive source for information on instrumental klezmer tunes. The site lists songs by title along with links to recordings and sheet music. It also includes a list of sources cited: audio archives, discography of audio recordings, online sheet music archives, bibliography of printed sheet music sources, and additional recommended reading. The site is apparently a volunteer effort, and though not clearly attributed to one individual, draws on the work of several professional klezmerim (klezmer musicians). Virtual Klezmer, a site based in Germany, has useful resources for active musicians in instrumental and vocal music. It contains sheet music in various keys for popular klezmer tunes, song lyrics, and downloadable MP3s of standard repertoire. It also lists sources for further researching the history of klezmer generally, and in Germany in particular, including a listing of German klezmer groups.

There are also sites of this kind for Yiddish vocal music. *Jewish Folks Songs*, or *Shire Am Yehudim*, by Israeli singer and educator Bayta Fonda, offers Yiddish, Ladino, and Hebrew Jewish folk songs in English and Hebrew translation. It features song texts and thematic lecture with links to recordings, as well as useful links to other research resources. The site is in English and Hebrew. *Yidlid* offers popular Yiddish song texts written in Yiddish and translated into French; and *Zemerl* (started by Inna Barmash and continued by Dan Kurtz) provides Jewish song texts and translations, including Yiddish repertoire. These can undoubtedly provide useful tools, especially when research is done carefully and proper attributions made; they are also an important source of community interaction and exchange. On the other hand, it is often difficult to sustain volunteer efforts and ensure that the quality of such crowd-sourced sites is consistent. These sites should be used in combination with primary sources and professional assistance.

#### *More online archival tools*

- Robert and Molly Freedman Jewish Sound Archive (University of Pennsylvania Libraries) (Philadelphia, PA, U.S.)

The Robert and Molly Freedman Jewish Sound Archive is an invaluable resource for bibliographic research on Yiddish recordings, including many obscure and somewhat later ones. This is not a website for listening to the songs, but rather finding detailed information about

them that is often not available elsewhere. The collection includes 4,000 recordings, largely in Yiddish and Hebrew, and is particularly strong in recordings from the mid-20th century on, including cassette tapes, and also includes some radio programs. No login is required to use the site, which consists of a detailed catalogue of the recordings in the physical archive itself.

The site's strength is the level of information it provides for individual songs and albums. It's especially useful for determining which songs have already been commercially recorded, and for determining the composers, lyricists and performers of individual songs. The search terms include subject, genre, and style, and keywords on song genres, topics or moods. The site also cross-references variations in song titles, and its access points are linked. Some Yiddish text is included, though the site is not searchable in Yiddish.

The site employs YIVO standard transliteration, notably important given the inconsistency of primary sources. The site allows searching by the first line of a song, a highly useful search feature common to printed folk song references but not found often in online sources and/or for commercial recordings. For many researchers, getting the necessary information on an existing recording, whether in this archive or in other sources, is extremely useful. The site is especially convenient for finding Yiddish poetry set to music. Searching the site for a poet's name will often yield interesting details about compositions to their texts, providing enough information to look for a published score, if it exists. Finding published scores is another topic which I will delve into briefly, beginning in the following section on sheet music.

- Milken Archive of Jewish Music

The Milken Archive was founded in 1990 to document, preserve, and disseminate music on the American Jewish experience, and the archive is known for its robust catalog of new recordings. While emphasizing interactions with contemporary artists and works, its site also includes scholarly articles on historical Jewish music, including Yiddish music, particularly art and theater. The biographies of Yiddish artists are particularly noteworthy, as are the articles that contextualize the historical music of Yiddish theater productions.

### *Sheet Music*

Digitized Yiddish sheet music, much of it now in the public domain in the U.S., is available in several online collections. The heyday of Yiddish theater and popular song in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century yielded a substantial print industry, most heavily in New York City. Irene Heskes' *Yiddish American Popular Song* is a must-have reference work on sheet music, along with Mark Slobin's *Tenement Songs* as an essential introduction. Most commonly, sheet music featured vocal-piano scores, and occasionally violin or mandolin scores. For more complicated, unpublished music scores for orchestras, for example from Yiddish theater productions, as well as other unpublished music manuscripts, researchers should consult YIVO and other archival collections.

Online collections of Yiddish sheet music present the individual songs or song booklets in some cases, as downloadable files. This is vastly more convenient than having to visit an archive, consult a printed finding aid, and handle deteriorating paper materials. The following sites are quite useful, though not exhaustive as they largely focus on popular American Yiddish



sheet music within the public domain (pre-1925). Following an overview of the sheet music sites, I will also briefly discuss finding non-digitized public scores.

*Yiddish American Popular Sheet Music (Library of Congress) (Washington, DC, U.S.)*

Yiddish American Popular Sheet Music, an online collection of the Library of Congress contains more than 1,300 songs, making it the largest online collection of its kind. The collection includes sheet music that is in the public domain, according to U.S. copyright laws. The site includes a good cross-section of mostly Yiddish-language pieces, among them early theater songs, instrumental music, cantorial repertoire and topical songs, largely published in the U.S., primarily in New York City.

Users must search by Library of Congress transliteration in the search box; therefore the lack of a Yiddish search option is somewhat challenging as many of the pieces are not in standard Yiddish. The bounty of other access points in the left hand navigation, however, allows users to narrow their searches by location, collection, contributor (this includes lyricists, composers, and sometimes publishers). Even subject headings are included, albeit relatively generic ones. Some of the cataloging/metadata for the records comes from Irene Heskes's aforementioned *Yiddish American Popular Songs*, and this information can be helpful for example in connecting a song with a theatrical production.

The sheet music itself is displayed as individual, downloadable image files, which better preserves the visual quality of the material. Users can even choose from TIFF or various JPG sizes, though downloading, saving, and printing the individual files for each page is a bit more cumbersome. This quandary is common to many digital collections that include content that is both image- and text-based. An image-based digital format can make longer works, like books, difficult to read online and even more difficult to download when the book is treated as a series of images rather than as one file. Or what about not being able to see or read through even a relatively short piece of sheet music with multiple pages? Using image files can also hinder keyword searching, for example by not accommodating OCR (optical character recognition). But a text-based approach can sacrifice the visual quality of illustrations. Hopefully, new technologies will soon be adapted that will render these dilemmas irrelevant, and digital collections will invest in updating their platforms. In the meantime, an image-based format works fine for this collection.

*Brown University Yiddish Sheet Music Collection (Providence, RI, U.S.)*

Brown University's online Yiddish sheet music collection includes more than 300 pieces from before 1923, largely from the collection of Menache Vaxer, a Yiddish writer and Hebraist of Russia. The sheet music here is strong in materials from the American Yiddish theater, as well as art songs, folk songs in Yiddish and Hebrew, and cantorial repertoire. The online collection, found in the Brown Digital Repository, is slated to eventually include 400 more items. Altogether, the entire Yiddish sheet music collection (online and print) covers about 2,000 items and is part of the larger Sheet Music Collection at Brown's John Hay Library.

The site has several ways to search and browse sheet music, by selecting access points such as year, keyword, composer, publisher, illustrator, lyricist, performer, and creator. The

drop-down box for each category is conveniently pre-populated, in alphabetical order, for the items in each category. The site does not accommodate Yiddish searching; titles and other text are transliterated as they appear on the original sources, which employ various nonstandard spellings in Yiddish and English. The metadata contains standard transliteration or at least an attempt at it given the vagaries of Yiddish spelling and the challenges of transliteration by non-Yiddish speakers. Therefore, users may need to guess at spellings and/or search more thoroughly. Like the Library of Congress site, Brown's site also draws on information from Heskes.

The individual sheet music pages are available for download and viewing in a variety of formats and resolutions. The display is quite clear and could be used, for example, on a tablet while being read, sung, or played, without even being downloaded. It's possible to display and/or navigate easily between multiple pages, which is helpful. Although each page has to be downloaded individually, as on the Library of Congress website, the benefit again is higher resolution files. The site includes a bibliography of related works in Brown's collection as links to their library catalog.

*Digital Sheet Music Collection (Florida Atlantic University) (Boca Raton, FL, U.S.)*

In addition to its substantial collection of Yiddish audio recordings explored earlier in this article, Florida Atlantic University also has digitized about 300 pieces of Yiddish sheet music. The collection is searchable and browsable in several different ways. The search box allows keyword searching, albeit not in Yiddish. As with most sites, the inconsistency of spelling and transliteration on the original documents is a downside. Searching by title, for example, is challenging. Fortunately, it is also possible to navigate by access points such as creator (this refers to lyricists and/or composers but not performers), topical subject (here this refers to the type of arrangement, not the topic of the song).

Despite the relative lack of metadata and search options, this collection contains some unique surprises, such as many materials from after 1925 (the current cutoff date for public domain materials in the U.S.). The typical piece of Yiddish sheet music includes piano-vocal score, photograph of actors, composers, and/or lyricists, song lyrics, and information about the play, if applicable. This sheet music on this site, however, sometimes includes color illustrations, multiple photographs, plot summaries, artist biographies, and other information about Yiddish theater productions. The music itself is easily downloadable in PDF format which automatically includes all pages, as opposed to some sites that require downloading individual TIFF or JPG files for each page. It is worth spending time on this site for the truly interesting mix of material.

*Judaica Universitätsbibliothek (Goethe Universität) (Frankfurt, Germany)*

This collection has about 500 pieces of Jewish music, of which about 97 are in Yiddish, including many American Yiddish theater songs from the early twentieth century, and cantorial repertoire. Each piece is listed individually in the library's catalog, and searchable in the Latin or the Hebrew alphabet. Hebrew searching is an important feature here, since neither the original materials nor the catalog records employ standard transliteration. Users can refine their search by several categories, including date, language, author, publisher and format.

The site, which is in German, offers the option to view and enlarge pages online and also to download them in PDF format.

*Society of Jewish Music (American Society for Jewish Music) (New York, NY, U.S.)*

The Society of Jewish Music in St. Petersburg, founded in 1908, had a lasting impact on Yiddish and Jewish music. The Society emphasized folklore, composition, performance, and publication, and advanced the careers of many important composers. Its published scores have now been digitized through a cooperative project hosted by the American Society for Jewish Music. The database is organized into the categories of composers, compositions, publishers, and scores. The scores are viewable and enlargeable online, and also downloadable in PDF format.

*Jewish Music Societies Collection – Vilna Collection (YIVO) (New York, NY, U.S.)*

This collection focuses on Jewish music societies in Eastern Europe, featuring an array of unpublished and ephemeral documents, such as music and text manuscripts, posters, playbills, and institutional records dating from 1898–1940. It highlights the work of major Jewish cultural institutions including Hazomir, the aforementioned St. Petersburg Society, Kultur Lige, Society of Friends of Working Palestine, and includes some choral music. The collection is listed by organization name. Images are viewable and enlargeable online and downloadable in PDF format. The site is in English and the materials are in Russian, Yiddish, and other languages.

*Latviešu folkloras krātuves digitālais arhīvs (Digital Repository of the Latvian Folklore Repository) University of Latvia (Riga)*

This site features digitized music manuscripts from the Emil Melngailis folklore collection, part of the oldest and largest folklore collection in Latvia. The site is a bit difficult to navigate for those who don't read Latvian, but it is possible to find the 500 Yiddish items by selecting "languages" and choosing "Yiddish." The catalog display includes an image with each item listed, so that the music manuscripts can be readily identified. They are not identified by name. The handwritten music manuscripts include song texts written in the Latin alphabet, often in a Latvian Yiddish dialect, and include folk songs. The Giršas Etkina folklore collection may also be of interest on this site.

*Finding other published scores and song texts*

Many Yiddish music research questions can't be readily answered by visiting sites for commercial or field recordings, or sheet music, as these cover only some of the existing content and are limited geographically and chronologically. Some researchers are specifically seeking sheet music and/or written texts of songs. This is especially true in the case of folk songs and other genres that were not widely recorded, if at all. Notated music and written song texts also provide different types of information than recordings, and can be used in different ways. Some musicians understandably want to work with a printed score rather than having to transcribe the music and lyrics from a recording, which may be difficult to hear and understand clearly due to early recording technologies.

Finding sheet music and individual scores for Yiddish songs can be challenging; sometimes pieces are cataloged individually and sometimes not; sometimes this information is online and sometimes it is not. It may be in WorldCat (a collective online library catalog), or in a finding aid that is on a library or archive's website or sometimes only in print onsite. As with anything in Yiddish, the inconsistencies in Yiddish spelling and transliteration often make these searches difficult. Finding songs published within books can also be challenging, especially in books that anthologize works by multiple authors/lyricists and composers. Songs may be known by multiple titles. Most library catalog records do not list or index each song title that appears within a book; it's necessary to physically look through the book to get this information.

When it comes to using books, there are additional challenges. Some printed books do not even include musical notation at all. Books that do have musical notation can be difficult to use, especially for non-fluent Yiddish speakers; they might not have the original Yiddish text and/or might not use standard transliteration for the text. Some books employ the text (in Yiddish) under the musical notation, so the music is going from left to right, but the text is separated by each syllable and goes from right to left.

To touch very briefly on a few key print resources, the most essential and user-friendly printed collections of Yiddish song include the three volumes by Chana and Yosl Mlotek (*Mir trogn a gezang*, *Perl fun yidishn lid*, and *Lider fun dor tsu dor*). These research-based works are organized by genre, and include a simple melody and chord notation for each song, text in standard Yiddish and English transliteration, and translation, as well as indices by song title, first line, and occasionally by composer/lyricist. For American Yiddish theater music, the *New York Times Great Songs of the Yiddish Theatre*, transliterated and edited by Zalmen Mlotek is a solid resource; based on original sheet music, it contains vocal-piano arrangements for each song with transliterated text. Several books published by researcher and musician Jane Pepler recreate old sheet music and broadsides in an easy-to-use format, pairing facsimiles of historical works with clean, modern scores. For Yiddish folk music, Ruth Rubin's essential works include *Voices of a people. The story of Yiddish folksong* and Rubin's posthumously published volume of songs edited by Chana Mlotek and Mark Slobin, *Yiddish folksongs from the Ruth Rubin archive*. Another substantial and important source is the *Anthology of Yiddish Folk Songs*, which has sections and volumes devoted to various genres and to songwriters.

For more advanced researchers, and those able to read Yiddish, it is possible to find some historical songbooks online. They are not centralized but scattered throughout digital repositories over the world and largely consist of materials that are out of copyright. Some of the most popular sites for digitized Yiddish song books and books generally include Archive.org/Yiddish Book Center, HathiTrust, GoogleBooks, HebrewBooks.org, and the National Library of Israel. Use the subject headings including "Yiddish Song" and "Song, Yiddish" to browse the holdings.



This is not an exhaustive survey of Yiddish music research sources online. I focused here on professionally produced sites containing primary sources, which are necessarily limited

geographically, chronologically, and topically. The sites explored here represent only a fraction of Yiddish music resources, particularly those held in libraries, archives, and private collections and not easily discoverable or accessible. Major collections include the National Library of Israel, YIVO, IWO, New York Public Library (Dorot Jewish Division and Music Division), Institut Européen des Musiques Juives (IEMJ) and Hebrew Union College.

There is much yet to be written about informal and community efforts, such as volunteer research groups and individual projects to make primary sources more accessible online. These can be a wonderful resource when used with professional oversight and accountability. Unfortunately, it is very common to find individuals posting copyright-protected content online without permission or proper attribution of artists, composers and/or lyricists, for example. What is the best way to balance access with safeguarding intellectual and artistic property? I also remain concerned about the devaluing, both professionally and monetarily, of the work of scholars, translators, and musicians. It is necessary for communities and institutions to invest in educating, training, and adequately paying professionals to preserve and make content available and accessible. None of the resources reviewed here, nor this article, would be available without institutional support or without the hard and often hidden work of many people.

In closing, I hope that this survey has introduced readers to major challenges and resources in researching primary sources for Yiddish music online. I believe that it's important for research institutions to support digital resources not only on their own websites, but also to work in partnership with other collections to maximize their resources for the common good. I can picture a unified website for Yiddish song research hosting content from all over the world, accommodating multiple formats and collections. This would be analogous to the Historical Jewish Press website, an ever-growing collection of historical Jewish newspapers hosted by the National Library of Israel, featuring digitized content from libraries all over the world. By pooling resources such as funding, collections, and staff expertise organizations can often achieve much more by working together. A strong research community is an essential aspect of this enduring musical and cultural tradition.

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Klezmer Institute (U.S.)  
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**More online archival tools**

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[https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/english/music/about/pages/music\\_department.aspx](https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/english/music/about/pages/music_department.aspx)

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (New York, NY, U.S.)

<http://www.yivo.org>

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## Other websites

Historical Jewish Press (National Library of Israel) (Jerusalem, Israel)

<https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/newspapers/jpress>