

Klezmer Music 101

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What is klezmer music?

- Traditional music played by eastern European, Jewish musicians (klezmerim) at weddings and other significant events.

What makes klezmer music unique?

- *Ornaments* are what have always separated klezmer music from the music of surrounding cultures. Klezmer ornaments largely mimic the human voice, especially the emotional cantillations of the chazan (prayer leader). Only recently have these ornaments been assigned names (krekht, kneytsh, tshok), but they are far from standardized. It's more important to know how to play them than to know what they're called.

How do I start playing klezmer music?

- Listen, listen, listen, and mimic, also read. Klezmer music is like a language. You learn by listening to those who do it best and copying them until you have a good enough grasp to go at it on your own.
- Practice common klezmer scales, especially harmonic minor and natural minor.
- Know music theory!
- Keep in mind that klezmer clarinet requires you to do things that you would never do when playing classical clarinet. Do not let this overtake your classical playing or you may tshok in your Mozart.
- Don't overdo the ornaments! They're just decoration.

Listening

"Traditional" Klezmer:

- Dave Tarras, Naftule Brandwein, Abe Schwartz, Harry Kandal, Epstein Brothers

Modern Traditionalists:

- Kapelye, The Klezmerim, Klezmer Conservatory Band, Andy Statman, Brave Old World, Joel Rubin, Budowitz, Maxwell Street Klezmer Band, Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band, Giora Feidman

Modern Non-Traditionalist:

- Klezematics, David Krakauer, Masada, Frank London, Margot Leverett and the Klezmer Mountain Boys, New Orleans Klezmer All Stars

Reading

Notable scholars/collectors:

- Yale Strom, Henry Sapoznik, Mark Slobin, Seth Rogovoy

Some Klezmer Ornaments:

Tshoks: Bent notes with a laugh-like quality.

Krekhts: Moans. Creates a sound like weeping. Can be done with the oral cavity or fingers.

Slides: Small slides between notes for emotional affect.

Trills, mordents, and grace notes: Standard classical ornaments, but they can cover many different intervals in klezmer music.