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**Author:** Philip V. Bohlman

**E-mail:** boh6@uchicago.edu

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Philip V. BOHLMAN  
University of Chicago

## “Balkan Borderlands” and “Transylvanian Transit”: Cabaret-esque Topographies of East European Modernity

**Keywords:** Jewish music, Hermann Rosenzweig, Abe Elstein, heteroglossia, salon

### AVANT PROPOS – CHARTING THE JOURNEY

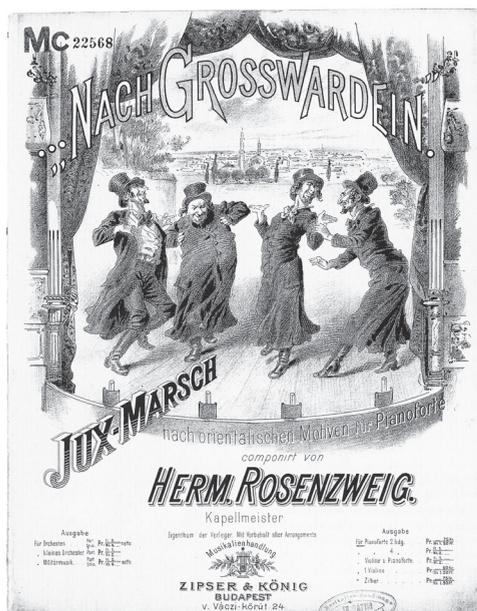
Journey is the stuff of music scholarship, perhaps nowhere more than in Southeastern Europe. Musicians inhabit the region through their mobility, their restlessness, the call to perform for Others no less than for Selves. Chapters of music history form around borders, but these are constantly redrawn, responsive and resistant to the rituals and repertoires that spill across them. It is in Southeastern Europe that theories about wandering melodies come into being. It is here that wandering minstrels – Ottoman *özans* and Jewish *klezmerim* – meet to sound the borderlands of empire, the peripheries of continents collapsing toward their centers.

There is irony, too, in the musical journeys that chart the soundscapes of Southeastern Europe. The soundscapes of stasis coexist with the meter of mobility. All that is at rest is also in *perpetuum mobile*. The dissonance sounded along the path through foreign lands is nonetheless resonant in the cohabitation of intimate spaces, not least among them the salons with which the contributors to this volume concern themselves. It is the irony of musical journey through Southeastern Europe that I seek to capture in this essay, specifically with the contradictory metaphors of my title, “Balkan Borderlands” and “Transylvanian Transit”. They would seem almost not to converge because of their evocations of rest and restlessness, home and exile, the familiar and the remote. And yet, they do converge, as crossroads in complex topog-

raphies formed by journeys of musical mobility, at once sounding arrival and departure.

It is this world of music on the move in Southeastern Europe that I here describe as “cabaretque”. In the pages that follow I elaborate on what I mean by cabaretque, but in this introductory section it is important to establish that I apply the concept to the structure of the essay itself. The borders of sections and case studies in the essay are marked with musical examples, many of them songs drawn from my dual roles as ethnomusicologist and performer, that is, as the artistic director for over twenty years of the cabaret ensemble, the New Budapest Orpheum Society. Theory and practice, then, will travel together through the following pages, forming their own borders and sites of transit. With the convergence of Balkan borderlands and Transylvanian transit in mind, I begin charting my journey through Southeastern Europe at the historical and musical borders of Romania, with a song about a time and place where we find them both in ebullient abundance, . . . *Nach Grosswardein*.

### . . . *NACH GROSSWARDEIN* – . . . *IN TRANSIT*



**Fig. 1.** Hermann Rosenzweig and Anton Groiss, . . . *Nach Grosswardein* (cover of sheet music; ca. late 19th century).

...nach Grosswardein  
Jux-Marsch

Hermann Rosenzweig

Ei - ne Stadt im Un - gar - land

doi de-ri-di ri-di ri-di roi - doi, ist des - we - gen so be - kannt doi de-ri-di ri-di ri-di

roi - doi, weil die al - ler - schön - sten Mäd - lech dort zu - fin - den sein

und e Csár - dás kön - nen al - le tan - zen, Gott, wie fein.

1.

Eine Stadt im Ungarland – *doi deridi  
ridi ridi roidoi*,  
Ist deswegen so bekannt – *doi . . .*  
Weil die allerschönsten Madlech dort  
zu finden sein  
Und e Csárdás können alle tanzen,  
Gott, wie fein –

A city in the Land of the Hungarians  
– *doi deridi ridi ridi roidoi*,  
Is for a certain reason well known – *doi . . .*  
Because the most beautiful girls live  
there  
And all can dance a csárdás, God,  
how nice –

[ : *Doi dideridi, titam, dideriditam,*  
*Doi dideridi, titam, dideriditam!* : ]

Darum reisen voller Freud’ – *doi . . .*  
Männer hin von weit und breit – *doi*

We’ll go there full of joy – *doi . . .*  
Men from far and wide – *doi . . .*

Trio

Aron Hirsch und Itzig Veitel – <i>doi</i> <i>dideridi roi didoi,</i>	Aron Hirsch and Itzig Veitel – <i>doi</i> <i>dideridi roi didoi,</i>
Moische Bär und Natzi Teitel – <i>doi</i> . . .	Moishe Baer and Natsi Teitel – <i>doi</i> . . .
Und der ganze Schnorrerverein – <i>doi</i>	And the whole Beggars' Society – <i>doi</i>
. . .	. . .
Fahren herein – nach Grosswardein – <i>roi.</i>	Take a trip – to Grosswardein – <i>roi.</i>

**Ex. 1.** *Hermann Rosenzweig and Anton Groiss, . . . Nach Grosswardein. Verse 1 (music set by Dr. Andrew McManus). First verse and trio of lyrics, German with English translation.*

Like the Romanian city of Oradea today, the Großwardein in the title of . . . *Nach Grosswardein* was a border city, between the trans-Danubian plain of eastern Hungary and the Carpathians of Transylvania. In the closing decades of the Habsburg Monarchy, however, Großwardein's borders also contained diverse linguistic groups and religions. The diverse religious and cultural topography of the city is strikingly evident in the many names by which it was known: Großwardein (German) / Nagyvárad (Hungarian) / Oradea (Romanian) / Varat (Turkish) / Groissvardain (Yiddish). In the late nineteenth century, when . . . *Nach Grosswardein* became a hit song, the city was a particularly important center for Ashkenazic Judaism, for it was as much as 70 percent Jewish and a confessional border city, with large numbers of Orthodox Jews as well as Reformed and liberal Neologe communities. It was also during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that Großwardein/Oradea became one of the most important centers for Calvinism among Christian confessions in Southeastern Europe.

Published in Budapest, Hermann Rosenzweig's . . . *Nach Grosswardein* was one of the biggest hits of fin-de-siècle East-Central Europe. With lyrics by Anton Groiss, the song, whose title today might literally be translated as "To Oradea", is the tale of Jewish travelers to one of the ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a border city *par excellence*. Coming from far and wide, these travelers, "out for a ride", meet in the marketplace, celebrating with song and dance. Everything is turned on its head, the cluster of symbols and stereotypes fitted to the intimacy of the stage for which the song was created, probably that of the Budapest Orpheum theater itself. The song, using the style of a potpourri, portrays Jewish travelers and residents alike, at least on the stage, as ultra-orthodox, eastern, and exotic. The *mise-en-scène* in the song is surely farther east from Budapest than

Großwardein and the culture of a Hassidic Jewish population. The cover of the sheet music is itself, and it is designed deliberately to include the “oriental motifs” in the subtitle as the backdrop of the stage (see Fig. 1). The singing and dancing travelers would seem, therefore, to be on their way to Jerusalem, which however in this case more closely resembles Damascus (for a modern recording, see New Budapest Orpheum Society 2002, track 2).

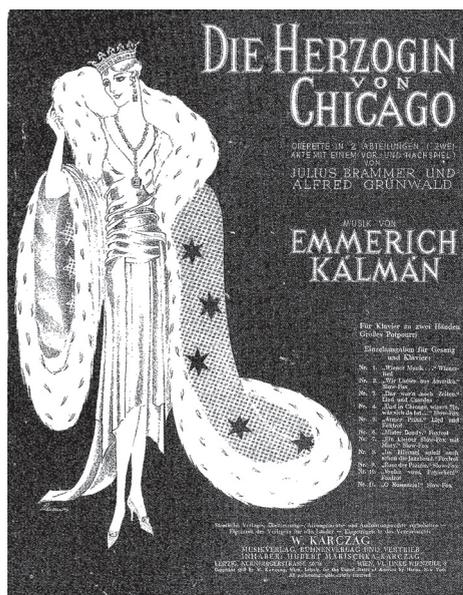
The music of the song is no less geographically rerouted along divergent transit lines through Transylvania. In the main verse (Ex. 1), what is called a march also formally gives way to a *csárdás*, the Hungarian dance of the inn at the crossroads. If the verse is western in form, the trio loses no time in moving to the east. The trio is a cover of the Yiddish dance, *Ma Yofus*, itself another hit song, in this case in the popular Jewish circuit of Romania (see Ex. 1). Though *Ma Yofus* moved widely across Southeastern Europe, there is reason to claim a special affinity to Romania, because it is highly likely that the very first recordings were made in Bucharest, in the first decade of the twentieth century by klezmer bands, such as the Belf’s Romanian Orchestra (for a digitized version of an early recording, see, e.g., *Klezmer Pioneers* 1993: track 5). All in all, the potpourri is a mixture of styles and genres capable of doing cultural and commercial work as diverse as the very world in Großwardein where the travelers arrive in the song itself.

The cosmopolitan mix that we find in the music, formally and semi-otically, is further modulated by the physical and material dimensions of the tradition of publishing popular music as sheet music that itself moves across Eastern Europe. Popular song publishers such as Zipser and König in Budapest deliberately fashioned their products for as many consumers as possible. Most songs appeared in two languages, Hungarian and German, and genres were gathered up and set in musical motion from across Southeastern Europe. This vast musical soundscape is evident at a glance when we look at the advertisement pages that accompanied the popular songs published by Zipser and König, with their mix of titles such as “Emancipated Women” and “As Strauss Composed the First Waltzes” (see Bohlman 2019; 221).

Though fin-de-siècle popular songs such as these began on the stage, they found their way to intimate performance in published forms like the one in Fig. 1, following circuits like those examined elsewhere in this volume. . . . *Nach Grosswardein* was also the music of the salon, which for its performance and reception was the world turned upside-down in the familiar spaces of cosmopolitans, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Such cosmopolitans were largely elites. The world of dancing Jewish travelers in Großwardein was not their own, but rather it is the world from which their parents and grandparents had come as they jour-

neyed from the villages of Eastern Europe, the *shtetl*, to the cities, where they had increasingly entered the elite by the time songs like . . . *Nach Grosswardein* found their way to the pianos in their homes and social clubs. As elites, they, too, created the intimate stages upon which the cabaret-esque would be enacted.

## THE CABARETESQUE IN THEORY



**Fig. 2.** Emmerich Kálmán, *Die Herzogin von Chicago* (cover of the piano-vocal score).

Borders proliferate across the soundscapes of Emmerich Kálmán's operettas, dizzily so in his 1928 *Die Herzogin von Chicago* [The Duchess of Chicago] (see Fig. 2). Throughout *Die Herzogin von Chicago* an international cast of characters moves across the stage, transforming it into a borderland in which the musical genres of America – jazz and tin pan alley – meet those of Eastern Europe – *csárdás* and the dances of the urban dance hall. The music itself – its lyrics and the embodied dance styles – is constantly in motion, laying out the borders of a world turned upside-down. Selves become others, and others become selves. The elite and the vernacular embrace each other. No less than in the *Grosswardein* and *Oradea* of Hermann Rosenzweig, borders are rea-

ligned through through transit in order that they might converge on the stage, musically remapping America and Europe in one aria, chorus, and dance scene after the other, as in *Wir Ladies aus Amerika* [We Ladies from America] (Ex. 2).

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for  
the wonderful reception! America  
forever!

Mary, so sprach mein Papa,

Mary, wir haben es ja!

Nimm dir viel Money mit,

Nimm dir den Johnny mit . . . ja!

Was dir da drüben gefällt,

Kauf's dir und schau nicht aufs Geld!

Mit einem kleinen Scheck

Kauft man sich die Welt!

Wo ich mich zeige, ruft alles:

Die golden Mary!

Die kennt nicht Sehnsucht, nicht Schmerz!

Jeder fragt spöttisch mich: Golden

Mary

Sag, hast du kein Herz? Oh ja!

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for  
the Wonderful reception! America  
forever!

Mary, my Dad would say,

Mary, we're very well off!

Take plenty of money with you

And also take Johnny along . . . yes!

Whatever pleases you most,

Buy it, no matter the cost!

With a little check

You buy the whole world!

Wherever I appear, everyone calls out:

There is golden Mary!

She knows no pain and longing!

But they all ask with scorn: Golden

Mary

Do you have no heart? Oh ja!

*Refrain*

Wir Ladies aus Amerika

Sind auch verliebt so hie und da!

Wir träumen auch vom Glück

Bei süßen Drinks und bei Musik!

Auch wir erglühen heiß bei Jazz und

Saxophon

Und träumen bei des Banjos süßem

Ton,

Und eh' man sich versah,

Auf einmal ist die Liebe da!

We ladies from America

Now and again attract lovers!

We also dream of love and fortune,

Inflamed by sweet drinks and music!

We glow as hot as fire with jazz and

saxophone

And dream to the banjo's sweet

sound,

And before you know what's going on,

A case of love is what you've got!

**Ex. 2.** *Wir Ladies aus Amerika* (from *Emmerich Kálmán*,  
*Die Herzogin von Chicago*, 1928).

*Wir Ladies aus Amerika* and the entire *Herzogin von Chicago* are dazzling examples of what I call in this article the “cabaretique”. The cabaretique is a theoretical formulation that I have been developing during the past few years, expanding it theoretically through my own performance activities as the artistic director of the cabaret troupe, the New Budapest Orpheum Society (see, e.g., Bohlman 2020). In this article, it provides the theoretical glue connecting the two metaphors of my title, borderlands and transit. The very doubleness of these metaphors and of the cabaretique themselves resonate as one as I seek their convergence in practice – my own work as a cabaretiste – and in theory – my work as a music scholar.

As a point of departure that allows me to theorize the cabaretique, I have drawn upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s famous notion of the “carnavalesque”. The cabaretique relates to and distinguishes itself from the carnivalesque in general and specific ways. I seek to relate the two concepts in textual, contextual, and historical ways. Bakhtin develops the concept of the carnivalesque by turning his concept of “heteroglossia” toward the carnival, in other words, the social realm created during Christian pre-Lenten festivities. The concept emerges most notably in Bakhtin’s book, *Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, known in English translation usually as *Rabelais and His World* (Bakhtin 1984). The carnivalesque is by no means limited to carnival, with its Christian and pagan implications, and that is why I have drawn upon it for my own performance and research in Jewish cabaret.

Central to Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque is another concept that describes the counterpoint of multiple speech acts in a place with diverse residents, or a stage with multiple actors, “heteroglossia” (literally, different voices). Please permit me to add a few words about “heteroglossia”, which is necessary for understanding Bakhtin and for creating a theoretical connection to the cabaretique. By heteroglossia Bakhtin refers to two attributes in all forms of communication. First, there is the attribute of communication that is systematic, thus allowing an utterance to have a repeated and repeatable set of meanings for all who experience it. Second, the attribute of context is one that allows for extensive alteration of meaning. Heteroglossia means, then, that speech acts may mean what their fixed meanings state they mean, but in the same instance they have virtually unchecked additional and alternative meanings.

The songs and skits of cabaret, of course, rely extensively on heteroglossia. Singers and actors intentionally invest words with many meanings, usually contradictory. The serious is made humorous; the humorous is rendered seriously; the world on the stage is turned upside down so that the border

between stage and audience breaks down. Just look at the lyrics for *We Ladies from America*. The singer Mary mixes slang from English and German, creating a space in which her wealth is enjoyed by all, while she seems impervious to those who see her as heartless. In order for performers to bend meanings in a skit, they must have sufficient fixity to allow for malleability, and musical style, jazz for Kálmán, provides just that. The interaction between the fixity and malleability is crucial to the types of alteration and inversion of meaning that thrive in the carnivalesque and the cabaretesque.

### **“BALKAN BORDERLANDS” – THE CENTER OF EUROPE AS CABARETESQUE PERIPHERY**

The ethnographic journey across Balkan Borderlands has been one of the most fundamental of all research methods employed by scholars of Jewish music. The journey to Jewish music in Eastern Europe has both spatial and temporal dimensions, both necessitated by the distance from Jewish song imposed by the tragedy of the Shoah. In search of Jewish music we follow the paths of others, figuratively and physically, crossing the borders between present and past. As scholars and performers we cross these border to listen beyond the silence of history, re-sounding whatever music we can on this side of its borders. In the present section I trace two journeys across the Balkan borderlands of Jewish song.

With brief excursions accompanying two different field journeys I reroute our methodological transit in this essay, first to the ethnographic past and then approaching the present. The two journeys that concern me here unfolded themselves as expeditions through the northern borderlands of Romania, deliberately so, following the Carpathian Mountains because of the ways in which they acted as natural, national, linguistic, religious, ethnic/racial, and musical borders. Such borders were both external and internal to northern Romania. Externally, they might separate ethnic and linguistic groups from each other, or Romanians from Ukrainians across the political border between two nations. Internally, they generated one of the most extensively multicultural areas in the world. Because of the internal borders, it becomes impossible to speak of Jews and Jewish culture in the singular, but rather we increasingly recognize the ways in which exchange and difference among Jewish communities was dynamic and, critically on the eve of the Shoah, modern.

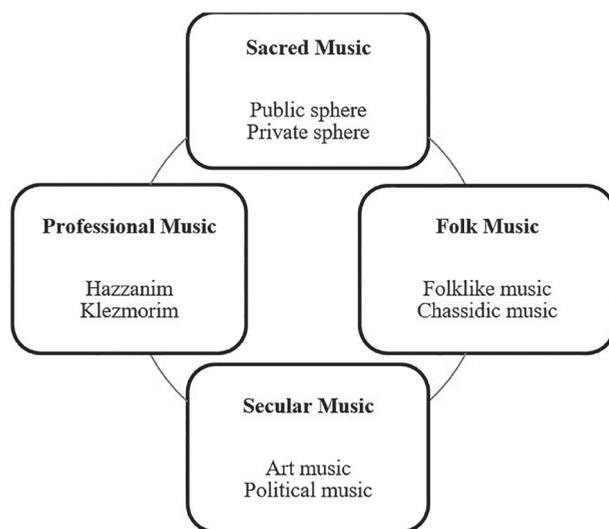
It was the very ethnographic and ethnomusicological function of borders that motivated Gustav Küppers-Sonnenberg from 1935 to 1939 (Ziegler

2011). The goal of Küppers-Sonnenberg's three field-recording trips was that of traditional early twentieth-century folklore – driving from village to village across the rural regions of Eastern Europe, each day recording songs from as many of the inhabitants in those villages as possible. He generally recorded in a public place. Singers would come to the cumbersome wax-cylinder recording machine loaded into his automobile, performing one after the other. Within certain limits, therefore, the recordings he made were representative of the diversity of the Balkan borderlands in which he worked. Critical for scholars of Jewish music, Küppers-Sonnenberg did not exclude Jews from the cultural and linguistic groups he recorded, but rather he created recordings in which we find that Jewish musical traditions were woven together with those of all other groups (Bohlman 2011).

Though Küppers-Sonnenberg undertook his field excursions with the financial and technological support of the National Socialist government in Berlin, he also took advantage of the opportunity to bring his daughters along for the ride. Officially, however, he was charged with data-gathering in the borderlands that would soon be invaded by German armies and transformed forever through war and genocide. He recorded by using wax cylinders, which were then transferred to copper galvanos, but found their way because of the circumstances of World War II to a basement at the University of Regensburg. Ten years ago, the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv undertook a project of restoring, digitizing, and analyzing the recordings, which is where I entered the project, assuming responsibility for the Jewish recordings (Bohlman 2011).

Recording in the Jewish villages and small cities across these borderlands, especially across the Carpathians, was no more nor less than an act of ethnographic thoroughness. By gathering some sixteen pieces from Jewish repertoires in his field recordings, Gustav Küppers-Sonnenberg was following traditional practice in folklore and folk-music practice, which recognized the presence of Jewish communities in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. It was commonly assumed that the Jews of Eastern Europe constituted a folk group that dwelled largely in villages, *shtetls*, and was unified linguistically by the Yiddish language. Both the *shtetl* and Yiddish located them in a time and place of pastness, which in turn would be chronicled by folk song and music that made them more alike than different. Travelers and scholars who visited the lands of Ashkenaz, inhabited by Yiddish-speaking Jews, customarily returned with ethnographic and journalistic evidence documenting decline and disappearance, the “vanished world” captured in the photographs of Roman Vishniac (1999) and the fictional stories of Karl Emil Franzos (1988) and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1892).

The counterpoint of Jewish religion, the Yiddish language, and rural idyll shaped a Jewish folk music that was authentic and utopian. This was not, however, the Jewish music that Küppers-Sonnenberg recorded while in transit along the Romanian borderlands during his second field trip of 1937. The songs and instrumental pieces he collected do not represent a vanishing world from yesterday, but rather a vital, contemporary Jewish music culture that embraced diverse processes of change within the Jewish community and, in particular, documented the numerous ways in which music revealed contact and exchange between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds of the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Figure 3 provides a schematic overview of the dynamic processes of contact and exchange that are documented in the 1937 collections, limited even as these were. Particularly remarkable is just how musically diverse even these sixteen songs from the Romanian borderlands were and how they expand our understanding of what Jewish music was on the eve of the Shoah.



**Fig. 3.** *The Jewish Musical World of the Eastern Europe in 1937, Represented by the Jewish Collections of Gustav Küppers-Sonnenberg.*

What is clear from recordings across the Carpathians is that the diversity and cosmopolitanism of even a small sample from regions in Eastern Europe with

substantial Jewish populations provides a glimpse into a much longer history of mobility and modernization, which remained unabated in 1937. Though his Jewish recordings may open a small window upon Jewish music before the Shoah, it opens onto one of the most significant borderland landscapes of Jewish music and allows us to experience its immense diversity.

As just one of many case studies we might look more closely at a single recording of what Küppers-Sonnenberg called a “Doina”, sung by “Frau Maresch”, who probably lived in Borşa, a small city in the eastern Transylvanian Carpathians in eastern Maramureş County. Even though the recording is of such a poor quality that it is impossible to transcribe the lyrics, Frau Maresch’s “Doina” opens a window into the complex Jewish music of the Romanian borderlands. This song with two parts, the first with text, the second with yodeling, was the cause of considerable confusion for Küppers-Sonnenberg himself. Though labeled Yiddish, it was further described as Romanian, and possibly containing two *doine*, one of the most characteristic Romanian genres, widely used by klezmer musicians in Romania and Moldavia. Such traits would confirm it as a mere trace of a sound thought to be authentically Jewish.

Frau Maresch’s “Doina” came from none of these possible genres, but rather it is a lovely performance of a *Wienerlied*, with an extended coda of yodeling in Biedermeier alpine style. The lack of recorded fidelity notwithstanding, there can be no question that Frau Maresch once again chose a distinctive style that would have been entirely appropriate for cosmopolitan Czernowitz, in fact for the salon culture that was so vital for Jewish life in the city. Her “Doina” beautifully reflects the traditions of *volkstümliche Musik* (folklike music) that flowed between Vienna and the cosmopolitan centers of Jewish music culture in the Balkan borderlands.

Almost sixty years after Küppers-Sonnenberg, I undertook a similar field journey across the Carpathian borderlands, which took my research team of colleagues from Austria, Hungary, and Romania to the center of Europe, albeit a Europe that in 1996 was anything but centered. The cosmopolitan music in transit in northern Romania for which my colleagues and I were searching was no less complex than that of 1937 in the ways it demarcated the musical borderlands between Roma modernity and the Jewish past. The Ukrainian-Romanian borderlands of the New Europe also contained a juxtaposition of cultural, historical, and musical fragments. It was there that Jewish music survived, even thrived, doing so however in the counterpoint of past and present that has shaped its ontology across the historical *longue durée*. It is this borderland that the performances of two Roma musicians, Gheorghe Covaci and his son, Gheorghe Covaci, Jr., charted again with both Roma and Jewish music.



**Fig. 4.** *Gheorghe Covaci and Gheorghe Covaci, Jr. in their home, Vadu Izei, Romania, in February 1996 (photograph: Roland Mahr).*

The Covacis are Roma musicians living in Vadu Izei, a village in Maramureş County, not far from Sighetu Marmaţiei, a border city with a long and distinguished Jewish heritage. In traditional Romani style, the Covacis performed from a well-known sacred Jewish folk-music repertory, which reflected the Jewish-Hassidic tradition of Eastern Europe, with songs in both Yiddish and Hebrew. The Covaci family is not Jewish, rather Romanian Catholic, and they earn much of their living playing for Christian weddings on both sides of the Romanian-Ukrainian border. A remote, inhospitable region, the geographical center of Europe symbolized by the Covacis is multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial, multireligious, and multilinguistic to the extreme.

Musically, they symbolize a center that is a juxtaposition of many parts and a folk music that was extensively cosmopolitan, with way stations in the urban and elite culture further symbolized by the salon and the cabaret. The evidence for this culture lies in the music itself, strikingly so. The Covacis and other Roma musicians in the Carpathian borderlands draw rather extensively from Jewish traditions. When asked how this came about, they tell tales of performing for the Jewish vacation resorts, hotels, and spas that were common in the Carpathians prior to World War II. There is no need to explain

Ruhig, aber nicht schleppend.

û - mar a - dôï - schem l<sup>e</sup> - ján - kôiw, eu ta - t<sup>e</sup> - nju.  
 host doch mir zî - g<sup>e</sup> - sûgt: al ti - rû aw - di ján - kôiw! eu, wæi  
 ta - t<sup>e</sup> - nju. far wûß - ž<sup>e</sup> schlûgt m<sup>e</sup>n inß, ta - t<sup>e</sup> - nju? far  
 wûß - ž<sup>e</sup> plûgt m<sup>e</sup>n inß, ta - t<sup>e</sup> - nju? wen wet sán a ßof, eu wen?

ûmar adôischem l <sup>e</sup> jánkôiw ...	אָמַר יְיָ לְיַעֲקֹב . . .
eu, tat <sup>e</sup> nju.	אוי, טאַמעניו.
host doch mir zîg <sup>e</sup> sûgt:	האַסט דאך מיר צוגעזאָגט:
al tirû awdi jánkôiw.	אַל תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב.
eu, wæi, tat <sup>e</sup> nju.	אוי, ווײַ, טאַמעניו.
far wûß-ž <sup>e</sup> schlûgt m <sup>e</sup> n inß, tat <sup>e</sup> nju?	פֿאַר וואָס־זשע שלאָגט מען אונס, טאַמעניו?
far wûß-ž <sup>e</sup> plûgt m <sup>e</sup> n inß, tat <sup>e</sup> nju?	פֿאַר וואָס־זשע פּלאָגט מען אונס, טאַמעניו?
wen wet sán a ßof, eu wen?	ווען וועט זײַן אַ סוף, אוי ווען?

bûchar adôischem b <sup>e</sup> jánkôiw ...	בְּחַר יְיָ בְּיַעֲקֹב . . .
eu, tat <sup>e</sup> nju.	אוי, טאַמעניו.
host doch mir zîg <sup>e</sup> sûgt:	האַסט דאך מיר צוגעזאָגט:
al tirû awdi jánkôiw.	אַל תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב.
eu, wæi, tat <sup>e</sup> nju.	אוי, ווײַ, טאַמעניו.
far wûß-ž <sup>e</sup> schlûgt m <sup>e</sup> n inß, tat <sup>e</sup> nju?	פֿאַר וואָס־זשע שלאָגט מען אונס, טאַמעניו?
far wûß-ž <sup>e</sup> plûgt m <sup>e</sup> n inß, tat <sup>e</sup> nju?	פֿאַר וואָס־זשע פּלאָגט מען אונס, טאַמעניו?
wen wet sán a ßof, eu wen?	ווען וועט זײַן אַ סוף, אוי ווען?

**Ex. 3.** “Jakobslied” aus Rumänien [Song of Jacob from Romania] (Kaufmann 1971: 49).

to readers that the Covacis in this photograph did not acquire Jewish repertoires in the 1930s, when they had not yet been born. Instead, they had inherited their Jewish repertory from earlier generations of Roma musicians who did play in the cosmopolitan culture of the Carpathian borderlands, in transit through a soundscape constituted also of popular and elite stages. That these Roma musicians perform Jewish music is, we should understand, no less unusual than Frau Maresch’s repertory of *Wienerlieder* and Yiddish art song, giving those repertoires an elite presence in Borșa. Songs – Jewish, Romani, Christian, secular, really of all kinds and genres – moved into, across, and beyond the Transylvanian lands because they were so very hospitable to them. Songs such as the “Song of Jacob from Romania” (Ex. 3) spread widely across Eastern Europe, appearing repeatedly in Jewish folk song collections, where they coalesced with other songs from the Balkan borderlands to form the musical canon of modern Jewish music (Kaufmann 1971: 49; see also Bohlman 2019: 128-131).

### GENRE ALONG THE BORDERS OF SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

Shloyme hamelekh hot tzu zayn Shulamis gezingen a libes shir, Un punkt vi Shloyme dan, gelibte mayne breng ikh mayn lid its tsu dir: Ikh zing far dir mayn shir hashirim, Mit libe ikh batsirim, far dir nor neshome mayn. Ikh zing far dir mayne khaloymes. Mayn libe vi a troym iz fun dir nor nekhome mayn. Ven ikh gey oys fun benken nokh dir gelibte mayn. Un ven ikh halt in eyn denken az du vest nokh amol mayne zayn. Ikh zing fun hartsn mayne lider. Mayn shir hashirim vider gelibte far dir ikh zing.	King Solomon sang a love song to his Shulamit. And just like Solomon, I sing my song to you, my love: I sing to you my Song of Songs, With love I adorn it only for you, my soul. I sing for you, my dream. I sing of my dreams for you, my beloved. When I’m about to die for you, my beloved. And when I realize that you will once again be mine. I sing my songs from the heart. My Song of Songs again, beloved, for you I sing.
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**Ex. 4.** *Abe Elstein and Molly Picon, Ikh zing [I’m Singing] (from Mamele [Kid Mother], 1938).*

Beginning epigraphically with a Yiddish song about song itself, I should now like to turn inward, to the music itself, seeking the borders of form, style, and genre that realize Balkan borderlands and Transylvanian transit within the music itself. A remarkable network of borders runs through Abe Elstein's *Ikh zing* (I'm Singing), a hit song from the golden age of Yiddish film and film music prior to World War II (for a modern recording, see New Budapest Orpheum Society 2014: track 15). In this tradition, migrant actors from Eastern Europe and musicians from Central Europe and the United States returned to film studios in Eastern Europe to transform Yiddish theater traditions, among them cabaret, into films that would also usher in what would become the Hollywood film musical. In the Yiddish of Ashkenazic Eastern Europe, *Ikh zing* traces its narrative to the biblical *Song of Songs*, or *Shir HaShirim*, one of the most sensuous, even erotic books of the Bible. The textual border between two Jewish languages, Yiddish and Hebrew, marks the historical border between past and present, as does the genre border liturgy at the synagogue altar, or *bima*, and that of Yiddish cabaret, or *bine*.

The borders of sexuality are also blurred and extended, not least by the similar-yet-different names of the two lovers in Abe Elstein's song, Shlomo and Shulamit. In Hebrew, these are the same name, the former, however, male and the latter female. The three radicals of their linguistic root are exactly the same (shin lamed mem / ש ל מ). *Ikh zing* also contains narratives of transit across the borders between sacred and secular, between homeland and diaspora, and, critically for the modern history of Ashkenazic Jewish Eastern Europe, Old World and New World.

I examine the Yiddish film song *Ikh zing* here not only because its history of transit across the borderlands of Eastern Europe reflects the metaphors in the aesthetic topography in the present essay, but also because it internalizes them. It locates them in the music itself, and in so doing, I want to suggest, Yiddish film song affords us with a way of thinking about musical genre itself. Music scholars are well aware of histories of accounting for such musical mobility, from the local to the regional to the national, across temporal and historical borders, and intrinsic to the very questions of genre itself. From Johann Gottfried Herder's theorizing of new and modern subjectivities in the relation between "Lied" and "Gesang" (see Herder and Bohlman 2017), to Wilhelm Tappert's "wandernde Melodien" (wandering melodies; see Tappert 1890) to the temporal and stylistic distinctions through time coded by Béla Bartók as *parlando rubato* and *tempo giusto*, we follow an intellectual history of analytical models that map borders and transit. In the twenty-first century, such models of transit and mobility have become the norm for much music

scholarship about Europe (cf. the essays in Clausen, Hemetek, and Sæther 2009). We could search for those analytical models in diverse genres – I have done so above with Yiddish theater and film, and generally with cabaret in this essay – but for the moment I turn to one of the most quintessential of genres in Southeastern Europe, Balkan epic.

At the aesthetic and ontological core of epic’s narrative and musical structures lies the formal and performative properties of “heterophony”, a concept that broadly describes singing and playing the same music in an out-of-synch togetherness. In the nineteenth century, the epic acquired a new musical ontology that drew attention to the ways in which seams, breaks, and the fissures between individual vocal and instrumental lines functioned in the understanding of epics. Within these breaks – metaphorically the aesthetic topography of structural borders in an epic song – syllable count and formulaic pattern acquired an enormous importance. When we analyze epic singing, therefore, we seek to translate music’s functions into a narrative architecture connected to the historiography of isolating the smallest unit necessary to provide the structural cohesion. Through an analytical and ontological paradox these units – be they syllables, words, internal word boundaries and caesuras, or line breaks – became the templates for compositional and performative formula.

Formula, minimally realized, became the model and motor for epic’s musical structures, maximally realized. Figure 5 schematically represents the way Roman Jakobson turned to the smallest unit and the network of internal structural borders (first published in his influential 1929 article, *Zur vergleichenden Forschung über die slavischen Zehnsilber*, and expanded in several later essays, which appear in Jakobson 1966). Béla Bartók and members of the mid-twentieth-century school of Hungarian ethnomusicology translated the temporal constituents of narrative time in epic to meter in music, asserting that it was time and its expandability that provided the necessary structural fit between epic text and its heterophonic performance in song (Bartók and Lord 1951). By the mid-twentieth century, the inherent heterophony of epic song had metaphorically remapped the genre across the Balkan borderlands in which it played such a dominant role.

1. Isosyllabism, or equal metric value for each syllable
2. Line breaks signify syntactic borders
3. A “caesura”, or word boundary, falls between the fourth and fifth words, and is rigidly observed
4. Metric rhyme, or *zeugma*, meaning that the fourth and tenth syllables belong to the same words as the third and ninth syllables

5. Two-syllable words should begin on the odd-numbered syllables in a line
6. The ninth syllable receives the primary accent in a line
7. Even syllables provide anacrusis, odd syllables crasis, producing trochaic feet
8. Avoiding closed syllables at the ends of lines in preference to open syllables, creating a sense of overlap between lines

**Fig. 5.** Roman Jakobson's overview of internal structural borders in epic song.

### THE SALON AND THE CABARETESQUE

Fräulein Gigerlette lud mich ein zum Tee.	Mme. Gigerlette invited me to tea.
Ihre Toilette war gestimmt auf Schnee; ganz wie Pierrette war sie angetan.	Her dress was surely made of snow; she shone as a precious stone.
Selbst ein Mönch, ich wette, sähe Gigerlette wohlgefällig an.	A monk myself, I dared to stare at her straight-on.

**Ex. 5.** Arnold Schoenberg, *Gigerlette*, from *Brettli-Lieder* (Schoenberg 1901).

The pleasure-seeking of the populace and the green of the flora create the charm that the devil has given to Bucharest. No one sleeps during these bright nights. One is drunk from the noise, the dust, and the odors. . . . The public officials request a cash advance for the coming month, the students pack off their furs to the Jews, . . . and the dizzying pace of night-life accelerates with excitement. . . . No one knows what accounts for the dizziness, whether strolling along the footpath, or the mixture of the mild evening air with the open-air cinemas! Every ten meters a new cabaret is opened. (Paul Morand, *Bucarest*; Morand 1935: 123)

What magical worlds of intimacy and music we traverse in the song and text that serve as epigraphs to the present section. They are worlds transformed by the chronotope of the cabaret, in which love burns intensively, if fleetingly. We travel with Arnold Schoenberg's *Gigerlette* across the stage of his 1901 *Brettli-Lieder*, or "Cabaret Songs", straying far beyond the chambers in

which she would serve us tea. The Gigerlette in this setting of lyrics by Otto Julius Birnbaum combines the purity of snow with the extravagant glamour of a youthful seductress, drawing the narrator across the borders of social propriety. Schoenberg wrote his cabaret songs at a moment of transit in his own life during 1901-1903, when he sojourned in Berlin, engaged as a performer at the Überbrettel cabaret. The cabaret style of his own songs marks one of the most important moments of musical transit and transition in his own compositional approach, his stylistic transformation from chromaticism and atonality to the modernism of twelve-tone composition.

Modernism may well have been the farthest from the minds of Paul Morand’s *flâneurs* from 1935. The young lovers walking through Bucharest’s parks become drunk in their own way, the sounds and smells that transform their sensoria leading them to the ubiquitous cabarets, where they, too, could enact the intimacy of desire. The intimate spaces of salon and cabaret overflow into the public spaces of Bucharest, reconfiguring the borders of sociality and sexuality with the transit through sound and the senses.

The “salon” that emerges as text and context in the musical and narrative epigraphs with which I begin this section, or in the songs of Frau Maresch in *Borşa* and of Abe Elstein in Yiddish film, differ from each other, but I wish to suggest here that they belong to the same tradition, not least because of the ways in which salon and the cabaret have histories in Eastern Europe that are parallel and that converge. Critical for both are the ways in which music moves across the distinctions between performers and audiences alike, doing so in intimate spaces. As we see in the songs marking musical borders throughout this essay, the reconfiguration of the stage is critical to the convergent histories of salon and cabaret. The cabaret stage marks a social division between performers and audience. In the intimacy of the salon music affords social mobility and the breakdown of ethnic/religious/linguistic differences. The salon and the cabaret both make possible the formation of new elites, above all in my own research the rise of a new class of Jewish intellectual and mercantile class, intensively mobilized by music and invested in building a new culture industry. In the salon and the cabaret, music undergoes a transformation to new meanings of song and ontologies of sound.

The materiality of song – print, recording, film – provides a channel for the vernacular to enter the salon and the stage, transforming them. In both Central and Eastern Europe, for example, Yiddish emerged as the language of the Jewish stage and the salon, lending itself to “jargon”, or dialect, song for cabaret and the literary styles of Jewish art song in the salon. New genres emerge in this cabaret salon. Cosmopolitan circulation magnifies, for

example, when Jewish genres enter the diaspora and transform it, mobilizing the history of modernity. The cabaretesque mobilizes vernacular genres and transforms them for the elite, making it hardly surprising that a new cabaret may open every ten meters in Bucharest by the 1930s.

## **ENVOICING THE CHORUS OF THE EAST EUROPEAN BORDERLANDS**

And one doesn't know, fellow travelers, what's more dreadful:  
Albion or the merciless Muslims? Freedom without borders or the  
Islamic yoke? Europe or Asia?! . . . Jesus, truly, may we never have  
to make such a frightening decision. (Andrzej Stasiuk, *Czekajac na  
Turka* [Waiting for the Turk]; Stasiuk 2009: 43)

As I begin to draw toward the conclusion of this essay, I do so by transforming what I have been calling transit into journeys of return, reflecting on the passage across the borderlands of Eastern Europe, having entered them in the borderlands of an Austro-Hungarian empire of the past, and with transit through an epigraph from Andrzej Stasiuk's writings about boundaries as I chart the borderlands of the New Eastern Europe. Across the soundscape of songs in this essay the time-spaces of borderlands have been easier to open than to close. In Hermann Rosenzweig's . . . *Nach Grosswardein*, the arrival of carriages full of Jewish sojourners on the Sabbath filled the city with song and dance. The Polish writer, Andrzej Stasiuk, departs from an older Europe, lulled into believing there were common borders fixed by the Enlightenment, but returns to the multiple centers that expand it internally with the rapidly expanding immigration of the twenty-first century. Borders once encompassed utopian spaces; now they are bulwarks against the encroachment of dystopia. Stasiuk's 2009 play, *Waiting for the Turk*, takes place in a border region at once somewhere, anywhere, and nowhere in Eastern Europe. For those who inhabited the border region – border guards, smugglers, sex traffickers, refugees, nationalists, a chorus of Europeans – it had been familiar, not least, because it buttressed the known against the unknown. In the post-Schengen world of the European border region, borders might seem to have lost all functions, even to cease to exist. The border becomes European, just as the chorus sings in a language that all understand and therefore come to fear.

There would be no need for Stasiuk's allegorical border culture were it not for "the Turk" – used in the singular in Polish to stand in for the East, Asia,

and Islam – of the title, for whom Europe waits, its future no less Godotesque than grotesque. The “Turk” symbolizes otherness, those unwanted, the more contemporary image for Hermann Rosenzweig’s *ganzer Schnorrerverein*, the “entire beggars’ society”. For Hermann Rosenzweig, Frau Maresch, the Covacis, Abe Elstein, and the others whose voices are gathered in songs cited throughout this essay, music’s borders, too, might have blurred and become unnecessary except for the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and populism in the twenty-first century. For Eastern Europe, the ghosts of the bloodlands might have ceased haunting the borderlands had it not been for Crimea, the Maidan, and eastern Ukraine. In 2019, many remain waiting at the borders and in the borderlands. It is the waiting that forestalls conclusion, that transforms the awareness of Islam at the borders of Europe into an anti-parable for Andrzej Stasiuk.

Even in this anti-parable, however, we find the chorus, the voices that swell because it is they who lay claim the borderlands. It is that choralism – Johann Gottfried Herder referred to them in his seminal collections of folk songs, as “voices of the people in song” (*Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, the name given to *Volkslieder* in editions after Herder’s death; see, e.g., Herder 1975) – that has historically resonated in the borderlands. In few places has this been more resonant than in Eastern Europe. The poetic and political consonance of massed voices has historically formed a counterpoint that resisted simple resolution, but returned to themes of reaffirmation, revival, and, even, reconciliation. These borderlands were also the place of violence and tragedy throughout much of the twentieth century, described by Timothy Snyder also as Europe’s bloodlands (Snyder 2010). In the music of the East European borderlands lay the power to bring about transition in the Eastern Europes of the Enlightenment, empire, Cold War, and reunification, for it is in the variations that fill the borderlands that we hear the thematic unity issuing from the voices revived in chorus for a continent still in search of renewal.

### **RETURN TO THE BORDERLANDS**

In the twenty-first no less than the twentieth century, Europe’s center sounds more like its peripheries. It is cultural otherness rather than canonic sameness that thrives in the new center, with its surfeit of musical borders, which in the transition of the historical present decenter rather than center (see Andruchowysch and Stasiuk 2004). It is this decentering of the themes of the past that revives the variations that lead me, as an ethnomusicologist, to return to the borderlands in Bucharest. If, as I suggested earlier, music

effected the transition toward unity in the New Europe, it also reflected the historical divisions that transition needed to overcome. The divisions form along geographical and cultural borders, and they generate historical and religious conflicts. As we know only too well at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, they are the divisions that still threaten the very future of European unity, and they pose very real questions about whether Eastern Europe can survive with its present borders.

We might ask ourselves if the historical and modern divisions between East and West have forestalled transit and transition themselves. The modern division between East and West – and this is the distinction that yields the designation of “Eastern Europe” in the literature on transition that became operable after 1989 – is the result of World War II and the Cold War. The nations of the West presumably adhered to democratic principles of government, the East to socialist or communist principles. The political division could not have been more real to anyone crossing the borders between East and West prior to 1989.

If we return to the center articulated by borderlands – to the Romani and Jewish traditions played by the Covacis – we find that all these divisions, layered, intersecting, overlapping as historical narratives, are present, even in Vadu Izei, a Romanian village in the heart of Eastern Europe’s borderlands. With such extreme division, so evident in the Jewish traditions sung by a Roma family in a Carpathian village no longer with Jewish residents, we may wonder if a larger European unity – a Europe not divided by borders – could ever be possible.

### **EPILOGUE – THE TOPOGRAPHY OF AFTERLIVES**

In closing, I return to the music upon which I have been drawing for the underlying historical leitmotif in this essay, music from a Jewish past that comes to life in the twenty-first century through song. This Jewish music passes from past to present, across the borders of trauma, experienced in our own day as the sonic afterlives from places of the placeless, the borderlands of Jewish Eastern Europe. I use the term “afterlife” here as it is employed by scholars in Jewish Studies, especially to describe the possibility of return to Eastern Europe, notably by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer in their *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010). It is critical to sound these afterlives with song, I believe, because the topographies that I have charted in this essay have often become invisible, not least through temporal chronotopes of destruction that rendered place placeless

and time timeless. These are topographies that the cabaret retrieves through sonic acts that commemorate afterlives (see Bohlman 2020).

In order to witness such afterlives, I close with the example of song, once again drawing on the research and performance that I have undertaken with my cabaret ensemble, the New Budapest Orpheum Society. I close with a song composed and performed by Friedrich Holländer, with Marlene Dietrich, in the salon of the Hotel Eden in post-World War II Berlin, famously brought to life in the 1948 Billy Wilder film, *A Foreign Affair* (Wilder 1948; see Fig. 6). The performance in the Hotel Eden, portrayed by one of the first films made in Berlin in the wake of the Shoah, profoundly captures the spirit of Jewish musical afterlives with its uncanny commemoration of the first German sound film, *Der blaue Engel* [The Blue Angel], from 1930 on the eve of the Shoah, in which the Holländer and Dietrich also perform, in the Blue Angel cabaret from which the film took its name.



**Fig. 6.** Marlene Dietrich and Friedrich Holländer performing in the Hotel Eden, *A Foreign Affair* (Billy Wilder, 1948).

In *A Foreign Affair* both Holländer and Wilder represent the cosmopolitan world of Eastern Europe transformed in ways that signaled the loss of the past and its afterlife in the cabaret. Wilder grew up in the borderlands of Galicia and the Bukovina, his life in transit across material and aesthetic

borders of twentieth-century film. He was born and spent his childhood in Sucha Beskidzka, in the borderlands of southern Poland. *A Foreign Affair* was filmed in Berlin with the hope of finding those who had slipped back – were taken by force back – across the borderlands of war to Eastern Europe. Wilder and Holländer returned to Europe from American exile in search of those who were lost, Wilder especially searching for his mother, who, however, had disappeared, surely through an act of violence, in the Shoah. What is left of those borderlands and the transit that erased them was the illusion – the illusion of the cabaret-esque, the illusion of the world of elites that could be retrieved only in song and film, in transit across the borderlands of history.

Want to buy some illusions? Slightly used, second-hand?  
They were lovely illusions, reaching high, built on sand.  
They had a touch of paradise, a spell you can't explain,  
For in this crazy paradise you are in love in vain.

Want to buy some illusions, slightly used, just like new?  
Such romantic inclusions, and they're all about you.  
I sell them all for a penny, they make pretty souvenirs.  
Take my lovely illusions, some for laughs, some for tears.

**Ex. 6.** *Friedrich Holländer, Illusions (from the film A Foreign Affair, 1948).*

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