Street Music in Jerusalem: Global Trends and Local Flavor*

NATALIE ROTENBERG

Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance

Abstract: Whilst writing the abstract for this article, the streets of Jerusalem sank into a deafening silence. Following recent events, the Israeli government and the Jerusalem City Council ordered a full lockdown on major parts of the city: no one was allowed outside their zones, and all businesses except the vitally important ones were closed. One was able only to hear the sirens—ambulances rushing, bringing new patients who had tested positively for COVID-19. Even if only temporarily, the unique phenomenon of street music in Jerusalem became a part of history—of the past. This article explores the variety of street music practices in modern-day Jerusalem, the author's hometown. The diversity of repertoire, the scope of different musical backgrounds as well as the variety of performative strategies and available venues all serve as an indicator of the sophisticated and multicultural urban identity. For the principal methodological tools, the author used a range of collected recordings of street musicians in Jerusalem—some, of the author's own, and others from the shared social media as well as from documented interviews with performers ranging from 2010 to this day.

Keywords: street music, Jerusalem, urban culture, urban soundscape, musical identity, creativity.

Street Music Today: Reasons and Creative Practice

Street music operates in a liminal position: between genres and forms, festivals and protest campaigns, professionalism and dilettantism, harmony and noise, business and charity, art and hooliganism. Street performance is a creative practice of ultramodern megapolises. It is constantly being updated with technology, and at the same time is historically associated with antique celebrations and folk traditions. As constantly ever-changing as urban life, street music, as Watt notes, "educate[s], and entertain[s] or annoy[s] their willing (or unwilling) audiences"[1] from ancient times to this day. Despite the ambiguity of perception and attitude, and despite not being prestigious, street music continues to exist, and, by the beginning of the third millennium, it is impossible to

* **Acknowledgments:** I gratefully acknowledge my colleagues and friends A. Keitlin, V. Polonsky, and Dr. A. Rosenblatt, for their contributions to the preparation of this text. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof. I. Macijewski for his enthusiastic encouragement. My special thanks go to Nethanel Pollak, who devoted a great deal of his energy to this project, for his helping with translation and organization of interviews, as well as for his comments. I would like to thank all my informants—musicians who agreed to devote their time and answer my questions. With the exception of the interviewees, who officially perform in the streets of Jerusalem, all others are referred to only by initials or nicknames to protect their privacy.

[1] Paul Watt, "Editorial—Street Music: Ethnography, Performance, Theory," *Journal of Musicological Research* 35/2 (2016): 69. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411896.2016.1165563.

ignore the tendency to strengthen the "presence effect" of street musicians in the urban soundscape.

Street musicians are everywhere in the "global city," just like graffiti, billboards, and fast food. There are several probable reasons for the flourishing and spreading of street music.

1. Improving the urban audial environment. The perception of the city as a "large factory," dating back to previous centuries, is gradually giving way to ideas of a new urbanism. This concept was formulated in the 1990s by the American architect S. Polyzoides, and refers to creating a friendly environment within the city.[2] One of the priorities of urban ecology is the fight against noise pollution. In many cities, noise ordinance laws have been adopted to regulate industrial and domestic noise, as well as the volume of music. Thus, the soundscape of the modern city is becoming a more comfortable environment for both street musicians and citizens.

2. Ability to overlap the background noise using amplification. Thanks to the modern music-tech industry, many needs of contemporary minstrels are now being treated accommodatingly. In 2008, the Roland company launched a new line of production, entitled "Street," which includes equipment (speakers, amplifiers, and microphones) specifically designed for street performers. It is important to note that manufacturers are guided by the requirements of audio ecology—that the maximum volume does not go beyond the accepted standards.

3. Development of global and urban transport systems. Not only music and instruments, as in previous days, but also the musicians themselves can now easily move around. Long distances and borders between states generally are no longer an obstacle to cultural exchange.

4. Availability of musical instruments and information. The making of musical instruments is no longer the exclusive work of talented single masters or manufacturers. Mass-production and the sale of musical instruments is now carried out on an industrial scale. Thanks to the achievements of scientific and technological progress, those wishing to make music have access to electronic instruments and playbacks (pre-recorded accompaniment). Since the vast majority of modern musicians can read musical notes (this is no longer primarily an oral tradition, as before), the accessibility of musical material (both in paper and electronic format) plays an important role as well. However, for those who still play "by ear," there are also more ways to learn music, thanks to the recording industry. Figuratively speaking, Bach in our day would not have to walk from Arnstadt to Lübeck to listen to Buxtehude. Furthermore, today there are even websites with "life hacks" on how to make a musical career on the street, where musicians can find recommendations on how to choose repertoire, locations, optimal times, permitted volume, and clothes. Even tips on how to establish contact with local authorities and create communication with a random audience are provided.

[2] Robert Davis, Andres Duany, & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, *The Lexicon of New Urbanism* (Miami: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., 2002).

5. Urban dwellers' need of creativity. British urbanist Ch. Landry presumes that creativity in the modern city is a specific human behavioral feature. Urban dwellers need to get intensive rich and sensory experiences in order to feel their connection to their neighborhood. The average citizen is used to the intensity of urban existence: street music is not merely a familiar soundtrack of everyday life, but also one of the important sources of creative involvement. Moreover, the desire for creative experiences is an incentive for both the musicians themselves and their listeners.

6. Documentation and distribution of information on street musicians in the media. Street performers permeate not just geographical soundscapes, but also the virtual media space. Amateur recordings of street musicians appear on the internet every day, and interviews with artists and essays on this subject are published periodically. Many online communities collect and disseminate street performances on the Web. In one of them, the "World Street Music project," started in 2012, enthusiasts from all over the world have already posted over two hundred videos on YouTube. Self-documentation is also conducted on different websites, blogs, and social networks.

7. Positive changes in the mass perception of street musicians. The representation of street performers is actively exploited not only by mass culture (primarily visual—advertising, video clips), but also in the so-called academic music scene. An amusing example is the recording of Schubert's "Ave Maria," made by outstanding German countertenor Andreas Scholl and renowned Israeli pianist Tamar Halperin on the streets of New York, at Christmas 2012. Social experiments and other events, in which famous artists perform "incognito" on the streets, strengthen the prestige of the street musicians' craft. Among those who have explored "going to the people" are rock stars Sting and ZAZ, as well as classical celebrities—violinist Joshua Bell and pianist Lang Lang.

8. Support of municipal authorities. Municipalities around the world regularly hold street music festivals. In some cities, the town councils purposefully organize and improve the designated spots for the performances of street artists. Montreal, Cincinnati, and Tel Aviv have the most valuable experience in this matter.

9. The street functions as a place for young musicians to test their professional skills. Many professional music-education institutions (secondary to higher) arrange "concert training" events for their students in public urban spaces. In Jerusalem, for example, groups of music students often perform in the squares, and, in the United States (Los Angeles, CA), professional musicians even hold street workshops and master classes.

10. Street music becomes a part of the urban economy. Spots where street musicians can be found are included in tourist brochures, along with graffiti and other "unofficial" art objects. Street musicians are invited to "promote" more marginal urban zones such as neglected train stations, or factories. Both bring more people, foreign and domestic, to visit all sorts of sites, and thereby contribute to the local economy.

Each city is characterized by its specific street music content: it has its own style palette, genres, and instruments. Street musicians interact within their "context" depending on

their location: their relationship with the audience, other street artists, and the municipal authorities will vary accordingly.

Culture Exits to the Streets

We start our journey around Jerusalem with street music being our audio guide. Jerusalem is a true center of diversity: according to the Bible, it has seventy names; it is also the place where the three Abrahamic religions were born and clashed, "an ever-changing city that has thrived and shrunk, been rebuilt and destroyed many times."[3] The city is now constantly living "under the gun" of news agencies from around the world, and is the epicenter of interest for so many. It is a noisy and dynamic junction of cultures, almost Babylonian, where "incidents" frequently happen at the crossroads, and then need to be settled. Perhaps thanks to all the above, Jerusalem of our days, "a city of continuity and coexisting," is an ideal platform for social and artistic experiments.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the municipality of Jerusalem has been actively implementing a program in the spirit of the new urbanism to improve the ecological and communal conditions in the city: expanding pedestrian zones, reducing traffic congestion, and combating noise pollution. All these positive changes, as mentioned above, contribute significantly to the thriving street music experience. The entrance of art into the open streetscape reflects a major trend of modern culture, when the boundaries between art and life become blurred. Reality gets involved in art, and vice versa: artistic practices step into everyday life.

"Culture Exits to the Streets" is quite a special name for a project started in 2010 in Jerusalem, supported by the city council. One of the main goals of this experiment was to create a pleasant audial environment. To accomplish that goal, the project organizers, also sought to support artists—who naturally belong to the weaker echelons of the social economy—and engaged street musicians to take part. The musicians are provided with a "spot" (the performance location, in the professional slang), equipment, and the opportunity to "open their cases" and collect donations. In addition, the street musicians who play in one of the festivals organized as part of this project are paid per hour. Performance venues are offered both in the more publicly known areas (the downtown area symbolically called "Heart of the City," which includes the streets of Ben Yehuda, King George, Jaffa, Nahalat Shiv'a, and Zion Square), and more distant locations (courtyards in the German Colony, the First Railway Station, and the Talpiyot industrial area). The definition of music as "an art of modulation," which dates back to the Greeks, becomes a metaphor for the transformation of peripheral urban zones into a "place of sociability."[4] From the new urbanism point of view, this helps to smooth out one of the main antinomies of the city—periphery versus core.

[3] Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), p. xxii.
[4] David Chaney, *Fictions of Collective Life: Public Drama in Late Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993).

The "stylistic panorama" below discusses the nature of street musicians in Jerusalem, their different backgrounds and approaches, repertoire, and instruments. The deep connection to the city will be studied through an examination of global influences, local features, and some new creations that were born domestically.

Global Reflections in a Local Context

> *All cities are windows into foreign mindsets but this one is also a two-way mirror revealing her inner life while reflecting the world outside.*
>
> Simon Sebag Montefiore,
> *Jerusalem: The Biography*

Like their colleagues in other cities and countries, Jerusalem street musicians regularly and happily perform globally recognized tunes—jazz standards, worldwide hits of pop and rock styles, cinema music, and favorite classics. Due to their popularity, these tunes have become a sort of "musical Esperanto," and attract passersby (local or tourist) who can recognize them easily, as if seeing a familiar face in a big crowd. There are all sorts of different individuals and ensembles who play and sing in this "Esperanto style": instrumental and vocal soloists, "one-man bands," groups, and even choirs. The instruments can be acoustic or electric, stereotypical or unique, sometimes existing only in a single copy.

More than any other image, a guitar player is a figure that is linked to street music in Jerusalem—and everywhere else. From the late 1950s on, the acoustic guitar was established as one of the most popular instruments among street musicians. To list the more obvious reasons for this: the guitar is light in weight, portable, not as fragile as bowed instruments, relatively cheap, and it is easy to achieve a decent level of playing (chords, as an accompaniment), even as self-taught material. Another more complicated reason is the influence of the mid-century Rock culture, and the desire of many to imitate their favorite stars, such as the Beatles (Lennon and McCartney), Bob Dylan, and others. Moreover, according to Australian scholars Benneth and Rogers: "the simplicity of the instrument seamlessly resonat[ed] with the established aura of the street musician as a no-frills artist whose craft relied essentially on accessibility and spontaneity."[5] From the Central Bus Station area to the Old Town, and in every neighborhood and borough, Jerusalem is full of street guitarists, who play at all levels and in all styles.

For woodwind and brass instruments, typically sounding pretty loud, open urban spaces are a natural habitat. In Jerusalem, the lead instruments among the street wind soloists are saxophone, clarinet, and trumpet. They often perform with a playback, as can be demonstrated by a trumpeter who plays in the Mamilla Shopping Center, or a saxophonist who plays in Ben Yehuda St. In the same area, different wind ensembles can also be seen, from a trumpet and trombone duet to a saxophone quartet. Many of these

[5] Andy Bennett & Ian Rogers, "Street Music, Technology and the Urban Soundscape," *Continuum Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 28/4 (2014): 456. DOI: 10.1080/10304312.2014.893991.

wind performers are students from the Jerusalem Academy of Music, and younger fellows from its high school and afternoon Conservatory, who enjoy the open space as an alternative stage. Depending on their specialization, they perform jazz or classics, and sometimes their own music or other folk tunes.

The sheer love of folk and world (ethnic) music in Israel and Jerusalem, and particularly among street musicians, emanates from the highly diverse multicultural and plurilingual local reality. It seems that Celtic music is the most favorable ethnic timbre in Jerusalem, perhaps thanks to its somewhat mystical, charming, yet charismatic sonority that draws people to listen. During one of the first planning meetings of the "Culture Exits to the Streets" project (see above), Nir Barkat, Mayor of Jerusalem between 2008–18, recalled that after returning from a recent family trip to Ireland he was deeply enchanted by the local musical tradition, and how music was played everywhere in the public space: cafes, pubs, and on the street. The so-called Celtic repertoire in Jerusalem is in fact fusional and includes Irish reels, English ballads, and Scottish strathspeys. Instruments commonly used by the local Celtic performers are violin, viola, flute, Irish whistle (a type of fipple flute), acoustic guitar, and diatonic harp. Extremely rare, although highly affiliated with the genre, are the bagpipes that are mainly used by guest performers who visit Jerusalem. During festivals and holiday events, larger ensembles perform, with a rhythm section, bass and electric guitars, and electric violins. The "Backflying Bird" ensemble is a great example of the local Celtic fusion, both in terms of instrumentation, and repertoire. The three members of the group (violinists Alina Keitlin and Anna Ioffe, and guitarist Alexander Gamburg) play as a trio or in duets, and combine Celtic tunes and songs with early British (and other European) Baroque and Renaissance pieces. They switch between traditional fiddles and instruments with historically informed setup (Baroque violins and violas, Baroque bows), and even use electric instruments and amplification, as desired.

"Jerusalem Syndrome"

When the West Meets the East

Despite the globalization and the unification it has brought to art and life in general, street musicians in Jerusalem often feel the necessity to perform music related to the city itself. Jerusalem, in all its interpretations, presents a large cultural associative spectrum—historical, ethnic, and religious. The inspirational sources for street musicians come from the many different facets of Jerusalem: from the topography to the naming of objects on the map, from the exclusive mixture of languages to the unique sound events (church bells, synagogical chants, sirens),[6] or climate, and mythology.

[6] The topic of local sound events, particularly, and the Jerusalem soundscape as a whole, is considered in the article "*If I Forget Thee*: The Sonority of Jerusalem Soundscapes" by Dr. Karel Volniansky from the Department of Music Theory and Composition at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance in the present issue of the *Min-Ad* Journal, pp. 138-56.

The chosen repertoire, for instance, represents the city's identity, for its common textual connection to either a local language (Hebrew, Arabic) or a local content. This description obviously applies to vocal performance, but is not limited to singing. Geographical references can exist in the name of a well-known song or a religious tune (Chassidic *nigun*, or a *piyut*), even when played by instruments alone ("Jerusalem of Gold," "On Top of Mount Scopus," "Let the Temple Be Built").

A major proportion of the individual musicians and ensembles that play in the downtown area, is related in one way or another to the Klezmer style. Under its large umbrella, not only the Eastern European Freilachs or Shers can be found, but also famous Yiddish songs ("A Yiddishe Mame"), fragments from "Fiddler on the Roof," works by L. Utesov, a Jewish composer from Odessa, as well as Jewish–Russian criminal subcultural tunes ("Murka," "7:40"). All of the genres mentioned are influenced by and have inspired the world of Klezmer over the years. It is quite apparent, then, that the more commonly used instruments in these settings are violin and clarinet, often accompanied by an accordion and percussion (kajon). "Borya the mandolin player," well known to Jerusalem passersby, who used to play at the junction of King George and Jaffa St., has been the key person in this local genre for many years. Formerly a horn player with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra (IBA in the past), and a self-taught mandolinist, he plays music from any of the branches listed, and is a true "human Klezmer encyclopedia."

Speaking of instruments, musicians and audiences find great importance in the function of different musical timbres as a tool of indigenization (giving common objects or personas a native identity). V.D., a flutist who repatriated from Russia and started his Jerusalem street career in the 1990s, switched to clarinet after a few years, claiming that it was a more "Jewish" instrument, which works better in the local context. A street performance by a young harpist Y.M., who usually plays at the Jerusalem Theater square, is often associated with "King David's Harp" (violin in Hebrew, due to the famous mistranslation), and strengthens the connection to Jerusalem as the "City of David." Her presence in Jerusalem is not unique, and, interestingly enough, within the relatively small population of about one million citizens, there are four harpists who perform regularly on the streets of Jerusalem, and that number is doubled during feasts and holidays.

Another voice unique to the area that has become part of the local motive/soundtrack derives from the traditions of the Sephardic Jews and Mediterranean Islam, both of which have been deeply influenced by Arab music. The music of the Ladino culture (mostly its Greek/Cypriot section), represented by the clarinet and the bouzouki, mixes with the Arabic maqam with its lead instruments: oud and darbuka. Two interesting performers in this field are vocalist Nataly Oryon—a guest of many street music festivals, and oudist Niro Abekasis—who plays in several spots and cafes. Besides being (somewhat anonymous) street performers, both are highly recognizable in their own more conventional scene; both compose, and have released several CDs with their music. In their street performances, they explore the seemingly more authentic venues of Sephardic music: Oryon from the Greek side and Abekasis from its Arabic roots.

How Religious Identity Sounds

Extraordinarily active human components of the Jerusalem street music scene are members of the Breslov (Braslav) Chassidic community, who follow the old Chassidic testament of "singing and being happy." The main repertoire they use is the Chassidic *nigunim*, typically old Eastern European melodies without words, but with phonemes such as "bim-bam" or "ai-ai." Their performances usually will happen in close proximity to a Mitzvah Tank. The Mitzvah Tank or Mitzvah Mobile is a large vehicle that operates as a portable synagogue, equipped with a very loud speaker, from which musical and verbal recordings are transmitted. In a sense, it serves as a substitute for the shofar as a device of communication, even an alarm, especially since many believers have abandoned radio, TVs, and the internet. The Breslov Chassidim do not usually seek or receive legal permission to use the public acoustical zone for their over-the-top loud ecstatic activity that goes way beyond any standard permitted volume. They also do not ask for the authorities' approval when they aggressively write graffiti on the walls or attach stickers with the slogan with which they are most identified: נ נח נחמ נחמן מאומן, all over Jerusalem and Israel. The slogan can also serve as a textual/phonemic base, as was seen in 2016 on Ben Yehuda St., when it was sung in the melody of the popular "Lambada."

In the following example, the Chassidic intention to make people sing joyfully, to increase the spiritual level of worship, are combined in a much more gentle way with the local identical element discussed before. An old man, dressed in a traditional black frock coat—a Kaftan, sitting next to a charity box with the famous Breslov sticker on it, playing the autoharp, and improvising in a style that is reminiscent of Ukrainian folk songs. Thanks to his kind temperament, his unique appearance, and the harp that is so strongly associated with Jerusalem, this old man has become a local street celebrity.

Tomer, a Rock guitarist, also a street celebrity, is known in Jerusalem as the "singing Rabbi." He appears regularly in documentaries, TV articles, and the social media. In a viral YouTube video from 2015, he sings Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" along with Catholic priest, at one of the most crowded light-rail stations on Jaffa St. He accompanies the singing with his guitar, and is joined by his wife Tzipora, who plays the quinton. Tzipora and Tomer spend many hours together on the streets, and their repertoire includes Jewish music unique to Jerusalem along with more universal hits, from classical music (Vivaldi's "Four Seasons") to jazz standards.

A few steps from the City Hall, another Orthodox Jewish man sings, accompanied by his guitar. His song is the famous Breslov *nigun* "Kol HaOlam Kulo—Gesher Tsar Me'od" ("The Entire World is a Very Narrow Bridge"). Instead of singing the text as written, he changes its second part, and replaces "Gesher tsar me'od" with "Gesher HaMeitarim" and then adds the word "Yerushalayim" (Jerusalem) that falls under the same rhythm. Gesher HaMeitarim, literally translated as "Chords Bridge" or "The Bridge of Strings" is a bridge located at the main entrance to Jerusalem, and is one of the most significant modern-day symbols of the city. It was designed by Spanish architect

Santiago Calatrava, visually quoting a phrase from Psalms 150: "Praise Him with the harp and lyre." The bridge's silhouette indeed reminds us of a 66-string harp, and its shape is somehow similar to a shofar. Perhaps for that reason, the monument of unsounded instruments has inspired street musicians around the city to make their own music heard.

As seen, the choice of repertoire and instrumentation might indicate the musicians' cultural identity, thereby enabling them to assemble a group of dedicated listeners. The musician sends a signal, message, hoping for it to find the right addressee and be heard properly. "Street musicians as well as their listeners, are trying to create a human environment 'in His own image' in their own biocenosis. Music can help identify the people around you, and help them to define your own identity," as A. Gamburg, the guitarist of "Backflying Bird" ensemble, explained.[7]

Strangers on the Streets

Besides being a stage for global trends, often using local elements, Jerusalem is also rich in unique phenomena that make the city's street music scene extraordinarily diverse.

Near the Jaffa Gate, or the downtown area, as well as the Machane Yehuda market, street musicians can be heard playing on either early folk, or newly invented exotic instruments. For instance, the African Balaphone, Australian Digeridoo, or the Dutch Hung. Unique and unknown timbres attract the attention of audiences passing by, for their ability to depart from the everyday urban soundscape, including the more commonly used street music instruments, acoustic and electronic. However, those instruments are usually associated with more meditative Trance-like music, a feature that suits some local (Mediterranean, Levantine) cultural aspects. In this way, surprisingly, the foreign instruments blend naturally into Jerusalem's acoustic environment.

Outdoor Piano

An interesting stranger in the urban open air is the piano. Originally designed for indoor spaces, it was never in use on the streets before our days. The first attempts of local authorities to stun their citizens with this unusual instrument took place in semi-outdoor, yet not completely uncovered public spaces, such as metro stations (Japan, Russia, France), rail stations, and airports (Germany, Poland, Malta). Nowadays, the piano has finally made it to the promenades: since 2019, many YouTube videos, with the hashtag "street piano," show street performances by passing-by anonymous artists and amateurs, as well as famous pianists such as Lang Lang and Valentina Lisitza.

Jerusalem is home to a unique sort of piano: the "Outdoor Concrete Pianos" that, in 2020, are located in front of the Central Bus station, in Zion Square, Safra Square, and the Hadar Mall in Talpiot. Israeli start-up company "Cadenza," founded by Dr. D.

[7] Alexander Gamburg, interview by author, 5 May 2016.

Kaufman and E. Rubin, created these pianos for outdoor use.[8] These solar-powered electronic instruments are resistant to external damage—from bad weather conditions to human vandalism—despite the fact that the very idea of putting an acoustic piano on the street seems rather vandalistic.

The project founders had several goals in mind when they created the piano. Socially, their wish was to make the piano a center of communication, in which music would bring together people from different ethnicities and age groups, religions and political identities that might not otherwise collaborate.[9] Artistically, the piano, when located in an urban space, becomes an installation. At the same time, the urban space also receives a new function: it enlarges the piano, by serving as an additional sounding board. From an emotional perspective, the existence of a musical instrument on the street seems like a metaphor for breaking everyday routine, escaping fear, aggressions, and fighting for territory, enabling free creativity and self-confidence. Altogether, the piano becomes a game changer in urban reality. The people, who are tired of conflicts, battles, and ignorance, and experience the urban space as a brick jungle or a mega-machine, can now enjoy the city in a completely different utopic way, as a place for play and art.

According to Dr. Kaufman, his street piano is accessible to everyone: professional pianists, beginning amateurs, or even someone who just wants to touch the keyboard and make a sound.[10] His vision indeed has become reality, and every passerby in Jerusalem can try being a street musician. Adam Ippolito, keyboardist for Lennon's Ono Plastic group who plays Beatles hits, or a young Charedi, who plays "Dance of the Little Swans" by Tchaikovsky, both get an equal chance to be heard in the big city.

The Jerusalem Street Orchestra

Another newcomer is the Jerusalem Street Orchestra, a unique Israeli project that brings together academically trained musicians to perform regularly on the streets. Maestro Ido Shpitalnik, an alumnus of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, started this project in the early 2010s, and has served as the orchestra's artistic director and main conductor ever since. In his vision, the orchestra's main conception is to explore alternative performing spaces. At first, the group functioned as a string orchestra, and gradually transformed into a chamber orchestra. According to Shpitalnik, such an ensemble is quite rare in the world of street music, as opposed to wind bands that often perform in parks and open spaces, or military bands.[11] In his words, "[w]e consciously decided to avoid the traditional concert stage, a barrier between the audiences and the

[8] "Outdoors Pianos for Public Spaces." Cadenza. Accessed 20 January 2019. https://www.cadenza-piano.com/.
[9] Jessica Steinberg, "Social Piano Experiment Has Jerusalem Passersby Keyed Up," *The Times of Israel*, 26 September 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/social-piano-experiment-has-jerusalem-passersby-keyed-up/.
[10] Shoshana Rice, "Presenting Israeli Entrepreneurs' Latest Innovation Success Story: The All-weather Street Piano," *TimeOut*, 21 February 2018, https://www.timeout.com/israel/news/presenting-israeli-entrepreneurs-latest-innovation-success-story-the-all-weather-street-piano-022118.
[11] Ido Shpitalnik (conductor, the Jerusalem Street Orchestra), interview by author, 20 May 2016.

performers."[12] The listener chooses her or his own point of observation, whether conventionally standing in front of the orchestra, or at any other spot around/behind it.

> People these days get more and more disconnected from live performances, and mostly consume their music in digital formats such as recordings, media, and all sorts of live-streams. As a result, they now again seek a closer interaction with art, desirably within touching distance.[13]

The orchestra that plays without any amplification creates a fascinating effect in this regard:

> Passersby experience a great sensation when realizing that the sound the orchestra makes is natural, and "works without electricity." They feel that "this is the real deal." Moreover, audiences usually admit that they wouldn't have expected such a powerful sound to come out of acoustic instruments.[14]

Shpitalnik then describes his special responsibility as conductor of such an orchestra, given the fact that the audiences are free to choose the amount of time and concentration they want to spend listening to the street performance.

> Our concerts never start in a "formal" way, when the musicians go on stage while the audience applauds.… Instead, they trickle in and tune their instruments freely. Then comes my part, to spot the right moment to start playing, catching the right level of interest and attention, confirming that the potential listeners are ready. It is hard, as it can be so tricky to find that right moment, and not miss out.[15]

All of the above associates with the sense of time in archaic societies such as that of Madagascar, as discussed by the intercultural communications expert R.D. Lewis in his research: the optimal time to take action is not set to a fixed schedule but to the readiness of the participants. "Buses leave not according to a predetermined timetable, but when the bus is full. The situation triggers the event."[16] With that in mind, the way Shpitalnik's orchestra performs better represents the local Mediterranean mentality, in contrast to the punctual habits of the West. Regarding the choices of repertoire, Shpitalnik says,

> [o]ur goal is to bring classical music to those who would not consume it in their everyday life, due to their social or cultural backgrounds, or for other reasons. The acoustic condition at the venue plays an important role: for example, the orchestral "articulative" textures in Mozart's music are perfectly suitable for any acoustic, even a dry one. We know that many of his works, like the Serenades and the Divertimenti, were intended to be performed outdoors. Another element to consider is the accessibility and "recognizability" of the music. Along with the classical highlights that we play, we include in our program some Beatles hits and all-favorite Israeli songs. The arrangements

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Richard D. Lewis, *When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures*, 3rd ed. (Boston–London: Nicholas Brealey International, 2006), p. 60.

> are specially made for us, taking into account the specific needs of street performance. We enjoy collaborating with local composers and arrangers.[17]

In 2017, the Jerusalem Street Orchestra took part in a community project that aimed to reorganize public spaces, initiated by Israeli studio "City Peloton," and created by Ilan and Anat Berman, an architect and an artist.[18] The musicians recorded a soundtrack for "The Royal Playback Orchestra," produced by the young Israeli prodigy Jonathan Goldstein. This art object, known in everyday language as "symphonic chairs," consists of an open stage with a podium for the conductor, and 20 chairs, attached to the ground, organized in a similar way to a chamber orchestra. Under each chair, there is a sensor that activates a hidden speaker, which then plays a designated orchestral part of the specific seat. When all the chairs are occupied, the entire "tutti" orchestra is heard. Every passerby can join the "game"—as an orchestral player, or even a conductor. The art object's name is an allusion to "Playback Theater"—a performance art-practice of group improvisation. Both concepts focus on forming new meanings for a given environment, breaking through real life, crossing borders between audiences, actors, stage managers, and playwrights. Such an experience presents the city with yet another dimension, of a theatrical stage, where the *homo urbanicus* can explore their musical or artistic potential.

Musical Theater

Speaking of cross-disciplines, during festivals and holidays of all kinds, several music-theater street performers appear in the downtown area of Jerusalem. To characterize their performance: they play with the audiences (collectively and individually), play with each other, and do a role-play of different musicians. Their theatrical set of tools includes wide usage of pantomime, buffoonery, dance, marching around, and even musical eccentricity, when they use musical instruments oddly, not in the way intended (upside-down, switch hands, hit instead of blow, etc.). To complete the dramatic setting, they use costumes, wigs, and makeup. The music, therefore, is not the main element in their show, but rather an ingredient. In most cases, it is used as part of a group improvisation, based on a spontaneously-selected rhythmic pattern (that turns into an ostinato), a bourdon, and a very simple melodic line that can be rearranged in many ways (a "modus"). The orchestration happens in the following way: the melody is played ordinarily by a plucked instrument, the bourdon by an unprofessional blow into a wind instrument, and the rhythm-section may vary from regular percussion instruments to anything hittable. After a period of marching, acting, and playing, the ostinato takes over, and all the participants (performers and audiences) start joining the jam, and play the rhythmic pattern on whichever instrument they are using, or just by clapping. This genre is perhaps the best representative of archaic practices that still exist in our days, such as the medieval buffos.

[17] Shpitalnik, interview.
[18] "The Royal Playback Orchestra." CityPeloton. Accessed 8 September 2018. https://www.citypeloton.com/.

Who Are You, Mr. Black?

The last "newcomer" described in this article, is another hybrid between two street-art disciplines: a living statue and a sound installation. How does such a mixture work? Typically, "mime figurines" stand in full costumes and makeup, and their reaction to the contribution of a coin or a bill would be a movement, smaller or larger, that sometimes can involve the passersby, and even include selfies. These can be found in many cities around the world. The Jerusalemite take on this is quite unique, as "Mr. Black"—Israeli double-bassist Orr Hasson can testify. "I have been doing this since 2013, mostly at the Machane Yehuda market, on Friday afternoons, when many different people are walking around, buying stuff for Shabbat, or just touring on their day off."[19] He is dressed in a black suit, and his skin is entirely covered—with gloves, a mask, and a hat—to the extent that he is unrecognizable as a person. "I can see the audiences, but they can't see who I am." He stands still with the instrument ready, and when the "quarter is inserted," the action starts: he becomes "alive" and plays a musical fragment, usually improvised, or based on a short pattern from either the classical repertoire or a sonority that matches his feeling of the atmosphere. "The choice of repertoire is not as important as the act of being controlled by the audiences like a music box. Sometimes I try to react to the ethnical background of the person who 'activates' me, or to the time of the year, the upcoming holiday etc." On occasion, his colleague, Israeli cellist Eilon Freeman joins him as "Mr. White." Both are alumni of the Jerusalem Academy of Music, and members of the Jerusalem Street Orchestra. It seems that the city of Jerusalem, "full of contrasts and confusion, with all the love and all the hate" as Mr. Black describes it,[20] is indeed a very inspiring platform for experimental street performances.

With a large variety of traditional European to rare folk instruments, high-tech devices, or homemade handicrafts, and with a wide range of performing styles, the street music in Jerusalem is a true "quodlibet." These experiments, as seen here, are not limited to one discipline, and go beyond the sphere of music. New hybrids occur as a birth of an original combination between different fields in the arts, or as a rebirth of ancient syncretic art forms. In this way, street music today can be described not only as "omnipresent,"[21] but also as an "omnitude."

Conclusion

Street musicians function as flagmen, town criers, publicity agents, and entertainers—and are essential to the city in the same way as architects, building engineers or designers. Street music gives a great sensation of vitality to the city, and is a significant voice in the metropolitan polyphony.

The location of the performance functions as a "frame," managing the behavioral standards as well as the relationship between the musicians and the audience, and setting

[19] Orr Hasson, interview by Nethanel Pollak and author, 3 April 2020.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Benneth & Rogers, "Street Music," 454.

certain expectations from both sides. In Watt's opinion, the street as a site "of protest, commercial interest, entertainment, and—at times—nationalist expressions, [...] occupies a potentially powerful force in the formation of musical identity, genre, and practice."[22] In return, the street music affects the public by generating new meanings and ideas, and engaging special communicative situations in which the listener's position shifts from being just an art consumer to experiencing emotional creativity. Some might consider Jerusalem noisy and intense, overly crowded, and we might assume that these people would ignore music on the streets, in the same way that they would escape the everyday sounds of sirens, protests, and war. Yet, even for these people, the street music brings joy, comfort, and confidence to their lives. They feel protected, and that "everything is under control," even if they just pass by a street musician, or stand only for a few seconds to enjoy their performance.

We are leaving Jerusalem through its newest gate—the Central Bus Station, passing by the concrete "Outdoor Piano" where a woman plays Joplin's Ragtime. Across the street, there is an old religious man with a microphone and amplifier, who improvises "brachot" on the spot—blessings and wishes for everyone, beating out the rhythm with his tin of coins clanging against each other. On the opposite side of the street, a young tenor with his guitar performs his own songs in a Mizrahi style, and somewhat further away a percussionist plays on plastic buckets as his drum set. Under the Bridge of Strings, followed by both the din of the Mitzvah Tanks' dynamic speakers and the collective singing of the *nigunim*, we conclude our Jerusalem journey.

Since April 2020, during the days of Passover, when an irregular silence filled the streets due to the COVID-19 situation, the street music has been missing in many hearts as part of the normal everyday routine. Musicians give "balcony recitals," and the residents all around listen with great enthusiasm and look forward to the next performance. That is, if nothing else, the best way to prove how essential open-air music is to the public in Jerusalem, and all over the world.

About the author:

Natalie Rotenberg is a harpsichordist and musicologist. MA from the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance (2009); PhD student (ABD) at the Russian Institute of Art History, St. Petersburg. Currently: harpsichord teacher and collaborative pianist at Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance's High School and Conservatory. Research interests: music and urban studies, popular culture, and organology.

[22] Watt, "Editorial – Street Music," 70.