



**JEWES AND JUDAISM
BY BARUCH LEVINGER
RELIGIOUS EDITOR**

Chasidic Music

Unlike other musics, Chasidic music has no formal composers. To the Chasid music is not an art. To the Chasid music "Negima" as it is known, is a medium of expression, through which the Chasid expresses his innermost feelings, love, devotion and longing to bind his soul with the Almighty.

In order to have a better understanding of chasidic music one ought to look at Jewish music in general. On Shabbat, for example, there is the Mitzvah of Oneg Shabbat, joy of the Sabbath. We sing zmiroth and chant prayers, and have special cantellations for reading the Torah and Haftorah. Then on the High Holidays, we have special traditional tunes.

Jewish music has been important in Jewish history also. When Moses and the Jewish people crossed the Red Sea they expressed their gratitude to G-d by singing a song of praise. In the Holy Temple the Levites sang and played musical instruments during the service. King David sang and played his harp in serving G-d.

For many years music was used only in the synagogues to accompany the services. However, with the rise of the Chasidic movement, music became a way of life. The Bal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chasidic movement, taught that every Jew, regardless of his knowledge of the Torah, could serve G-d as long as his observance comes from the depths of his heart and nothing serves better to bring out the uppermost feelings of a person than music.

Thus music no longer was confined to the synagogue. Every time and place a Jew desires G-dliness he can express his feelings through song coming from the depths of his heart. This song can be an expression of longingness, love or joy, depending on the occasion.

Many Chasidic nigunim have words from Biblical verses or sections of the prayers. Since the melodies often go deeper than words, many Chasidic songs have no words at all, and comes from the soul.

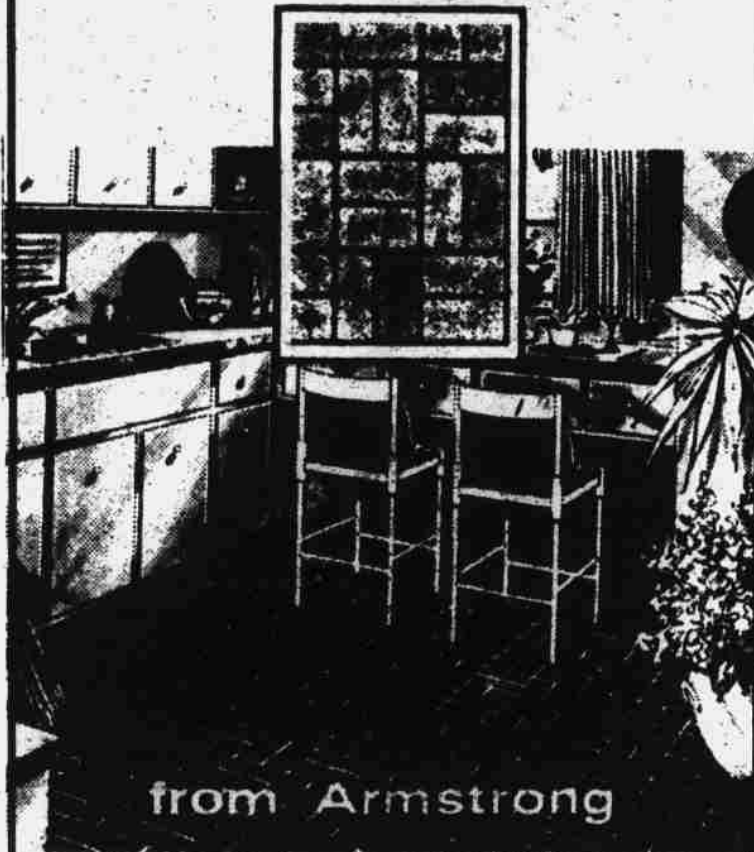
Many of the early Chasidic melodies were composed by Rebbes themselves, but unfortunately much of the early songs were lost; few Chasidim could write music and many rebbes prohibited committing their melodies to writing, for fear that these melodies would become part of the public domain and be used for secular purposes.

These melodies, as most folk songs, were transmitted orally and Chasidic music was generally taken from the environment in which the Chasidim lived. There is Chasidic music for all moods; Songs of longing, songs of attachment, Songs of Soul Outpouring, Songs of Joy and Songs of Dance.

Today there is a growing interest in Chasidic music. It has been brought to the concert stage, used at Shabbatons and youth gatherings, and filtered its way into the mainstream of Jewish music.

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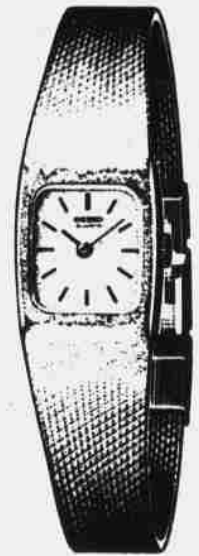
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