



Jewish and Klezmer Violin Style Part 3

The Freygish Mode In Klezmer Music

by Cookie Segelstein

In our last article we spoke about the building blocks of Jewish instrumental music, or *klezmer*, the modes. I would like to show you musical examples of each mode. In this article, we will start with *freygish* (also called *Ahava Rabbah*, named after a prayer in the synagogue service with the same tonality), a minor type scale with a lowered, 2nd, and raised 3rd. Freygish is one of the most recognizably "Jewish" of the modes.

Here is the freygish mode. In this example we are using D as the tonic. The motives listed underneath the mode are typical examples of when a note's position (in this case the B) determines if it is a flat or natural.

AHAVA RABBOH (Freygish)
Scale

Even people who have little exposure to Jewish music will often say upon hearing freygish tunes, "That sounds Jewish!" Not surprisingly, the tune *Hava Nagila* is in freygish. One of the characteristics of this mode is a major tonic chord but a minor feel overall. So even though the accompaniment plays a D major chord at the beginning, because of the augmented second (between E flat and F#), we hear it as a minor tonality.

Excerpt from Hava Nagila

In *Hava Nagila*, there is much interplay between G minor and D freygish. If you ask a classical musician what key it is in, they will often say G harmonic minor, since there is a strong feeling of G, and an F# and Eb. But in the klezmer world, it is in D freygish. In most cases we write the music in the closest western key signature, in this case, 2 flats, or G minor, instead of putting both flats and a sharp in the key signature.

Like most oral (aural) traditions, reading the music off the page only gives a hint of what it sounds like when played in native klezmer style. The ornaments, the timing, the fills, and all the things between the staff lines determine the character of the music.

One of the tools used by klezmer musicians, *cadential variation*, is the art of varying the ending. Some do it more than others, and some stick to their favorite "licks".

Here are some cadences, or ends of phrases, in this mode.

Some typical Freygish Cadences

Here are these ideas of cadential variations applied to the first phrase of *Hava Nagila*

3 examples from Hava Nagila with cadence variation

1.

2.

3.

For our final musical example, we'll look (and listen) to a complete tune, an excerpt from the collection of German Goldenshteyn. Born in Otaci, Moldova (formerly Romania), he was a clarinetist who brought his native region's klezmer tradition to the USA. In 1994 he arrived with nearly a thousand klezmer tunes (many previously unknown) that he had transcribed over the years. This repository of tunes, together with the many concerts and workshops he gave, made a significant contribution to the klezmer revival in North America, as it was one of the biggest collections of klezmer music. The accompanying sound file is from the CD that was recorded by him and some other well known klezmer musicians in 2005, at KlezKamp (<http://livingtraditions.org/>), a five day Yiddish arts, klezmer music and dance camp. The CD was released only weeks before he died tragically of a heart attack in June of 2006.

In this tune, notice how the second section, starting at measure 9 begins in G minor, and then ends in D freygish. This is a typical maneuver. As is typical in oral tradition, you will notice some disparity between the recorded example and the written music.

[*"Freylakh" means "joyous" and refers to a wide range of uptempo tunes in this genre. The recording features mostly clarinet, but Cookie has some bowing recommendations to help you translate the music to fiddle. – editor*]

GermanFreylakh.mp3

Example of Freygish

Freylakhs #4

1.

9.

17.

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A Living Tradition
From the Repertoire of German Goldenshteyn
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In our next installment, we will examine some examples of *mishbeyrach*, a mode that is very important in one of the most expressive Jewish instrumental forms, the *doina*, which is taken from Romanian shepherd music and is one of the few forms in klezmer that can be totally improvised within a framework.