

## **Holy Ground: The Klezmatics Channel Woody Guthrie<sup>1</sup>**

*Ray Allen*

When Lorin Sklamberg sang "Come When I Call You" at the Brooklyn College Guthrie Centennial Conference the audience sat spellbound. The lyrics, Woody Guthrie's 1949 reflections on the ravages of war, were set to a haunting modal melody composed by Skalmberg. As the song ended and the audience erupted in applause, I experienced one of those miraculous musical moments when the dots connected. Here was one of New York's foremost interpreters of Jewish/Yiddish music, singing a contemporary song with sixty-year-old lyrics written by America's iconic Okie troubadour, who in turn had structured the piece after an African American spiritual ("Children Go Where I Send Thee"). Sklamberg, along with his band mates, the Klezmatics, had added a fresh twist to the age-old folk process of forging new sounds from old traditions — in this case the seemingly unlikely merger of Eastern European Jewish music with an Anglo-prairie folk song via a nineteenth century black spiritual.

So how did a nice Jewish band from New York City get caught up in Goyim folk music? The story began in 1997 at a Tanglewood concert that featured the renowned classical violinist Itzhak Perlman performing with the Klezmatics and three other klezmer bands.<sup>2</sup> Woody Guthrie's daughter, Nora, made her way backstage after the show and was surprised to learn that the lyrics to one of the Klezmatics' songs, "Fisherlid" ("Fisherman's Song"), had been written by her grandmother, the Yiddish poet Aliza Greenblatt.<sup>3</sup> "I almost fell through the floor," she recalled. "I never knew she wrote songs — I always thought she was just my 'Bubbie!'"<sup>4</sup> Nora mentioned to the group that her father had written and recorded several Hanukkah songs while living in Coney Island and wondered if they would like to look at them. The Klezmatics expressed interest and copies of the song lyrics were soon passed on to them.

Guthrie's connection to Brooklyn's Jewish community was not well known at the time, but it was family history that Nora had experienced firsthand. Her mother, modern dancer Marjorie Greenblatt Mazia, was Aliza Greenblatt's daughter. Guthrie met and fell in love with Marjorie in 1942, and the following year she gave birth to their first child, Cathy. In the summer of 1943 mother and baby moved to Sea Gate, a heavily Jewish, Yiddish-speaking community on the western tip of Brooklyn's Coney Island, where her parents lived. In the fall of that year Guthrie, Marjorie, and baby Cathy took an apartment a few blocks east on Mermaid Avenue,

where they would live until 1950, when they moved to Brighton Beach. They married in 1945 and had three more children together, Arlo (b. 1947), Joady Ben (b. 1948), and Nora (b. 1950). Although Isadore and Aliza Greenblatt were at first skeptical of their future son-in-law, they eventually warmed to him, due in part to their shared interest in progressive politics and social justice, and to Guthrie and Aliza's love of poetry and song. This relationship with his Yiddish poet/mother-in-law drew Guthrie deeper into Jewish culture and inspired him to begin studying the Old Testament and writing Hanukkah songs.<sup>5</sup> In 1949 he recorded several of these songs for Moses Asch, the founder of Folkways records and himself a Warsaw-born Jewish immigrant and son of Yiddish novelist Sholem Asch.<sup>6</sup>

The Klezmatics were not the first band Nora had encouraged to compose music to her father's unsung lyrics. In the mid-1990s, after discovering a trove of unpublished verse in his notebooks and journals, she invited British folkrocker/activist Billy Bragg into the Guthrie Archive. The resulting *Mermaid Avenue* CD (1998), featuring Guthrie lyrics set to music by Bragg and the Chicago alternative rock band Wilco, won a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Folk Album. Nora apparently had no qualms about Bragg or anyone else writing new music to her father's words, telling the *New York Times*, "I could put these lyrics behind glass cases, but I think it's truer to Woody's spirit to bring them to life as new songs. Some people thought it was blasphemous to have other people write music to these lyrics. I said it would be blasphemous to have the lyrics sit there where no one could hear them."<sup>7</sup> The fact that Guthrie had borrowed the melodies for most of his best known songs, including "This Land is Your Land," from various folk and popular sources seemed to offer further validation for her project.

Encouraged by the success of the Bragg/Wilco recording, Nora sought other outlets for her father's lyrics, especially the ones written during his Coney Island years. She was concerned that biographers and folk music critics had placed too much emphasis on her father's early Dust Bowl Ballads while downplaying his later songs: "He was a poet and a lyricist that wrote about everything. I don't want to see him turned into a freeze-dried, Dust Bowl icon representing a narrow version of what somebody thinks he was. These [Jewish/Coney Island] songs are just one more facet of his work that will add to a fuller picture of him as a songwriter."<sup>8</sup> Nora had additional motivation. Demonstrating the appeal of Guthrie's lyrics to a new generation of musicians like Bragg, Wilco, and the Klezmatics contributed to her father's legacy as a great American poet and song writer, and royalties from successful new song projects would help fund the Guthrie Archive.

In retrospect the Klezmatics were a logical choice for Nora to enlist for this project. She was well aware that the group was not exactly your

grandfather's Lower East Side klezmer wedding band. Formed in New York in 1986, the Klezmatics quickly established themselves as premiere interpreters of traditional Eastern European Jewish music, as well as innovators who blended their eclectic klezmer tastes with the sounds of rock, jazz, funk, gospel, Celtic, and American folk styles. They had collaborated with such cultural icons as Perlman, jazz greats Bootsy Barnes and Sam Dockery, Jewish African American gospel singer Joshua Nelson, the Moroccan Master Musicians of Jajouka, Downtown improviser John Zorn, beat poet Allen Ginsberg, and playwright Tony Kushner. Equally important, in the Klezmatics Nora found kindred spirits when it came to her father's life-long dedication to progressive politics. The Klezmatics first album, *Shvaygn = Toyt* (Silence = Death) supported AIDS awareness. Their 2002 release, *Rise Up/Shteyt Oyfe!* featured Holly Near's "I Ain't Afraid," a fierce excoriation of the excesses of fundamentalist Christianity, Judaism, and Islam sung in English and Yiddish. With album titles *Rhythm + Jews* and *Jews with Horns* the Klezmatics embraced cultural identity and mocked anti-Semitic stereotypes. Trumpeter Frank London summed up the groups' political attitudes on their website:

By putting forth a consistent and coherent political and aesthetic Yiddish/klezmer music that embraces our political values, supporting gay rights, workers' rights, human rights, universal religious and spiritual values expressed through particular art forms, as well as making particular musical choices that at turns emphasize the beauty or funkiness or Jewishness of the music itself, and eschewing the aspects of Yiddish/Jewish culture that are nostalgic, tacky, kitschy, nationalistic and misogynistic, we have shown a way for people to embrace Yiddish culture on their own terms as a living, breathing part of our world and its political and aesthetic landscape.<sup>9</sup>

Just as Guthrie struggled to reconcile his Christian upbringing with his socialist politics in his songs and writings, so did the Klezmatics search for common ground among their musical choices, their commitment to ideals of social justice, and their Jewish identity.

Nora's expectations were not immediately realized and the project lay fallow for nearly six years following her initial meeting with the Klezmatics in Tanglewood and the subsequent exchange of the Hanukkah lyrics. Then, in the summer of 2003, London booked the Klezmatics at New York City's 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y for a December holiday concert. In hopes of coming up with new material for the program he suggested to the band that they revisit the Guthrie Hanukkah songs and inquire if Nora had any additional material. She responded immediately, sending London several dozen sets of lyrics of what she identified as her father's Jewish/Coney Island songs, written

between 1943 and 1955 (the year after he succumbed to Huntington's disease and committed himself to the Brooklyn State Hospital). With the exception of several of the aforementioned Hanukkah songs and two anti-fascist/World War II songs which Guthrie had recorded in the 1940s, the band was presented with only lyrics — Guthrie had never recorded or written down melodies for the rest.



The Klezmatics (L-R: Frank London, Matt Darriau, Lisa Gutkin, Lorin Sklamberg, Paul Morrisett). Photo by Joshua Kessler.

Individual band members reviewed the material and chose lyrics to set to music. According to London, they were looking for songs that had references to four areas: Jewish/Yiddish culture; life on Coney Island; social justice/anti-fascism; and universal spirituality.<sup>10</sup> London, Sklamberg, and violinist Lisa Gutkin each made separate trips to the Guthrie Archive in search of additional lyrics. Following three months of composing, arranging, and rehearsing, the band came up with twenty new songs with old Guthrie lyrics. Two weeks before the concert London told a reviewer that the songs reflected the Klezmatics' diverse interests: "You have everything from songs that have no klezmer influences at all to songs that are totally klezmer. But very few of that extreme — most have different views of the meeting point, because each of us went back to our musical influences, which include klezmer and other things."<sup>11</sup>

The concert, billed under the title "Holy Ground: The Jewish Songs of Woody Guthrie," took place on 20 December, 2003, at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y in upper Manhattan. The program was well received by Jon Pareles of the *New York Times*, who noted that all the songs were not about Jewish themes, but rather "spanned Woody's moods and interests" while living in Coney Island.

He praised the Klezmatics' ability to play in diverse styles ranging from traditional klezmer to jazz, roots-rock, ragtime, and even classical chamber. "In any idiom, Guthrie's voice came through," he pronounced.<sup>12</sup>

Buoyed by the success of the Holy Ground concert the group began reworking and eventually recording their new Guthrie compositions. The result was two CDs that were released on the independent Jewish Music Group label in 2006. *Woody Guthrie's Happy Joyous Hanukkah* included eight Guthrie songs, while *Wonder Wheel* boasted twelve. *Wonder Wheel* received accolades from various critics, and in 2007 the CD won a Grammy for Best Contemporary World Music Album. *The Boston Globe* proclaimed the recording "a remarkable feat of resurrection" in which the Klezmatics successfully "breathed new life into lyrics that Guthrie wrote but never recorded..." Reviewer Andrew Gilbert confirmed that Guthrie had covered a "vast range of topics," while the Klezmatics' settings employed "Jewish melodies" as well as "jazz and folk themes."<sup>13</sup> The *Chicago Sun Times* identified "Jewish, simple folk, psychedelic, and Eastern European" elements in the music, while *Billboard Magazine* reported "a bluegrassy vibe" and "a 1950s style pop," as well as "iconic klezmer energy." The latter review concluded that "the Klezmatics prove themselves to be sensitive interpreters of any artistic language they choose, shapeshifting their sound around vocalist Lorin Sklamberg's lithe and heartfelt lead."<sup>14</sup> Robert Christgau of the *Village Voice* also lauded Sklamberg, proclaiming him "one of the age's signal voices," who now, singing in English, was "finally available on terms an Al Green fan can understand."<sup>15</sup> This praise was manna for Sklamberg and the Klezmatics, who had high hopes that *Wonder Wheel*, their first recording with all English vocals, might significantly broaden their American base.



A close reading of a sampling of the Holy Ground songs is useful in exploring a number of questions raised by the project.<sup>16</sup> That is, how successful were the Klezmatics in melding their Eastern European Jewish music with Guthrie's American folk and country traditions — do the final products make cultural and artistic sense? Put another way, did they remain true to Guthrie's aesthetic and political sensibilities in their selections and

settings of his lyrics? And how much do these songs reveal about Guthrie the songwriter during his Coney Island years?



The most traditional Jewish musical styles and textual themes are found on the *Happy Joyous Hanukkah* CD, which includes eight Guthrie songs (six with new music and two with Guthrie's original melodies as recorded in 1949) and four additional original instrumental pieces by the Klezmatics. While the overall CD is a musical potpourri, classic klezmer idioms abound. Pumping accordion, a bouncy 2/4 march

meter, and modal melodies played in precise unison or passed between the clarinet, trumpet, and violin are heard on "Honeky Hanuka."<sup>17</sup> "Hanuka Bell" grooves to a slow, slinky beat and minor-keyed melody. "Hanukah Tree," a galloping Eastern European *freylekhs* with an additional verse in Yiddish, adds rock and slide guitar embellishments toward the end of the piece. And there are other nods to American roots music, most notably the mountain gospel harmony on "Hanuka's Flame," the Nashville-style electric guitar and pedal steel on "Happy Joyous Hanuka," and a syncopated New Orleans R&B bass line that anchors the swinging "Hanuka Gelt." The mix of Klezmer and Americana works well in both the up-beat, dance-oriented pieces and the slower harmony oriented songs. Guthrie's lyrics are light and celebratory, encouraging listeners — especially children — to sing along, dance, eat, and enjoy the holiday. This is not surprising, as Guthrie supposedly composed his Hanukkah songs for family and community gatherings.<sup>18</sup>

The most sophisticated lyric on the Hanukkah CD reveals Guthrie's growing interests in Jewish history. "The Many and the Few" chronicles the struggles of the Jewish people, lauding a pantheon of Jewish heroes and heroines — Ezra, Hannah, Mattathias, and Judas Maccabee — who fought bravely against tormentors Alexander the Great, Syron, and Lusias. The song concludes with Judas Maccabee's victory over the Seleucid Empire, which resulted in the restoration of the holy temple in Jerusalem for which Hanukkah is celebrated. Guthrie expresses tremendous respect and empathy for the Jews ("the few"), while disparaging their enemies ("the hateful many"). The connection between the Jewish people and Guthrie's dust bowl migrants, both of whom were vastly outnumbered by their oppressors, is hard to miss. Guthrie ends his song with the provocative statement, "We think of the many in the hands of the few/And thank God we are seeds of the Jews." Whether he was taking on the identity of the Jewish heroes he sang about, or recognizing that he (the real Woody Guthrie), like all

Christians, is ultimately a descendant from a noble Jewish lineage, is left ambiguous.

The Klezmatics stick close to the melody Guthrie sang on his original 1949 recording of the song.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Guthrie did not compose the melody himself, but borrowed it from the mournful Appalachian murder ballad, "Down in the Willow Garden." But instead of the guitar accompaniment used by Guthrie, the Klezmatics employ a harmonium to drone out the chords beneath Sklamberg's voice. He alternates verses with Celtic singer Susan McKeown, creating a rich male/female dynamic. The final two stanzas, recounting the burning of the oil for eight nights to light the temple, are rendered in three-part, hymn-like harmony, evoking the communal triumph of the Jewish people and their descendants.

Another Guthrie song, "Ilsa Koch," reflects on more recent Jewish history. The piece was performed by the Klezmatics at the 2003 Y concert and subsequently recorded, but for reasons that will be discussed below, it was not included on the American version of the *Wonder Wheel* CD and is only available on the international version of the CD.<sup>20</sup> According to Guthrie's original typed lyric sheet, he wrote the song in October 1948, just as news reached the United States that the infamous Ilse Koch, known as "The Beast of Buchenwald" for her cruel treatment of Nazi concentration camp prisoners, had her war crimes sentence reduced. Koch had been found guilty of war crimes in 1947 by a US military court and sentenced to life imprisonment. There was an international uproar the following year when US Commander General Lucius Clay reduced Koch's original life sentence to four years based on insufficient evidence in her original trial.<sup>21</sup> Guthrie, who harbored an intense disdain for Nazi fascism, could hardly have missed the story which was covered almost daily in the New York papers from late September through October of 1948.

On the lyric sheet Guthrie noted that the words should be sung to the tune of "Another Man Done Gone," a bluesy African American prison song. But Skalmberg chose to compose his own simple melodic line, built on a repetitive, descending, four-note minor pitched phrase. Skalmberg repeats each of the opening lines, establishing the narrator as a concentration camp inmate: "I'm here at Buchenwald/My number's on my skin." Beneath his voice are the sounds of dragging chains, an eerie droning keyboard, and a plodding bass drum. As the narrator describes the bleak scene, a second female voice echoes his lead line: "The prisoners walk the ground/The hounds have killed a girl/The guards have shot a man/Some more have starved to death." Next, a low, dirge-like chorus, chants "Ilsa, Ilsa Koch." The song becomes more nightmarish as the narrator and his female counterpart describe the cracking of skulls, the stink of burning bodies, and ghastly piles of ashes and bones. The chanted chorus joins the two voices for the final verses as the piece drags on with the monotony of a funeral



procession, only to climax with the narrator's distressing revelation that "Ilsa Koch was jailed/Ilsa Koch went free." Suddenly the chorus drops out, and over the sounds of the clanking chains and droning keyboard, the narrator addresses his audience directly in a quiet voice seemingly meant for their ears only: "I've got to hush my song/Here comes the super man/I'll see you later on/I've got to duck and run." Guthrie's own voice is heard over these last phrases, whispering on a homemade recording that was mixed into the track: "Somebody turned Ilsa Koch, free/They let old Ilsa Koch go."

In "Ilsa Koch" Guthrie tackled the horrors of the holocaust by casting himself in the character of a concentration camp inmate who witnesses firsthand the Nazis' systematic torture and genocide through the real-life personage of Koch. His ability to personalize a situation as a means to explicate larger social ills — in this case the atrocities of the camps and the injustice of Koch being jailed and subsequently set free — is a device Guthrie used to his advantage in many of his most compelling songs. Three years after the fall of the Third Reich, Guthrie still felt compelled to speak out against the evils of fascism, and his obsession with gruesome details reflects what one scholar has identified as "the odd mixture of fear and fascination this 'monster' exerted on him."<sup>22</sup> The Klezmatics' setting of the lyrics as a plodding dirge was certainly in keeping with Guthrie's original intention, but the result was so dark that producer Danny Blume decided not to include it on the American version of the *Wonder Wheel* CD. Sklamburg surmised that Blume thought the piece was so depressing that it might turn off potential listeners, and further noted that the Klezmatics, like many Jewish performers, had a difficult time singing such explicit holocaust songs in public concerts.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the *Happy Joyous Hanukkah* CD, the songs on the *Wonder Wheel* recording are not exclusively Jewish-themed. A number, however, include Yiddish references and Jewish biblical subject matter, and are set to musical arrangements with obvious Klezmer influences. "Headdy Down," a lullaby for Guthrie's sons Arlo and Joady, was written in early 1949 during a period when he was sharing child care with Greenblatt, his Yiddish-speaking mother-in-law, while Marjorie taught dance classes. Sklamburg's melody is keyed in a natural minor mode that might be read as vaguely Jewish, although the electric guitar and tight-harmony chorus are more evocative of rock music than traditional klezmer. But the song contains a number of Yiddish linguistic signifiers. Guthrie's son Joady is referred to as "Joadulah," the "ulah" suffix serving as a common Yiddishism for a beloved family member. "Keppy down, Kepula" is Yiddish for lay your tiny head down. The Hebrew word "Dibuke" was Guthrie's nickname for Arlo; the term ("Dybbuk" in Yiddish) referring to a restless or wandering soul.



The devastation of World War II was still on Guthrie's mind the following year when he penned a set of lyrics he titled "Come When I Call You." The piece is based on a traditional African American spiritual, "Children Go Where I Send Thee" (also known as "Born in Bethlehem"). The original spiritual was a Christmas song that was cumulative in structure, with each line assigned a number and biblical reference, and as each new line is added the rest are repeated in descending order — "Four for the four who stood at the door/Three for the Hebrew children/Two for Paul and Silas/One for the little bitty baby," etc. The song had strong currency among black and white church singers, and a popular 1937 recording by the well known Golden Gate Quartet may have been Guthrie's source for the tune.

Guthrie's lyric makes no reference to Christmas, or for that matter Hanukkah. His first verse that introduces "the pretty little baby that's born, born, born and gone away" is quite likely a lament for his daughter Cathy who had died tragically in a fire in 1947 at the age of four. He continues with what is probably a romantic nod to Marjorie: "Two's for the love of me and you." In the following three lines he diverges from family and reminisces about the war, perhaps with a bit of patriotic nostalgia: "Five's for these warplanes that fly/Four's for the guns of war/Three's for these warships at sea." But the remaining lines belie such an interpretation, as he chronicles the ravages of modern warfare including growing anxieties over the bomb: "Ten for the atom bomb loose again/Nine for the crippled and blind/Eight for my eight million graves/Seven for the continents blowed up/Six for the cities all wrecked." Guthrie's post-apocalyptic description of the world is neither patriotic nor nostalgic, but rather a stark warning that leaves listeners to wonder if the vanished baby may be a metaphor for the slaughter of the earth's innocents.

Sklamberg's setting opens with an acoustic guitar strumming a minor chord. On the initial verse he establishes the key line about the missing baby, sung to a simple, minor-keyed modal melodic phrase that ascends and descends back to the tonic (home) note of the scale. Sklamberg explained his conscious juxtaposition of guitar, an avatar of American folk music, with a melodic line that those familiar with Yiddish music would recognize as "a Jewish modal reference."<sup>24</sup> As the song progresses a female voice enters to harmonize on the repeated opening refrain, "I'll come when you call me," and the musical texture thickens with the staggered addition of bass, low drowning accordion and violin, and eventually hand drums and finger cymbals which evoke a vaguely Middle Eastern mood. The Klezmatics' arrangement of the work maintains the structure of the original folk spiritual while adding a subtle sprinkling of Jewish musical idioms; the resulting arrangement is at once simple and sophisticated, providing an intriguing

backdrop for Guthrie's profound misgivings about the future of war in the nuclear age.

Making the world a better place for the common man and woman was a theme that ran throughout many of Guthrie's most powerful songs. In March of 1945 he jotted down the lyrics to a piece he called "Gonna Get Through This World." At the bottom of the lyric sheet he noted, "This song has been on my brain for some time but I didn't write it down until this morning." The song consisted of six four-line stanzas proclaiming his intention to "get through," "walk in," "talk in," "work in," "clean up," and finally "leave this world behind."<sup>25</sup> The Klezmatics' version of the song was composed by Lisa Gutkin, who combined the six stanzas into three verses with a chorus that reprised Guthrie's opening line, "I'm gonna get through this world/The best I can."

The song opens with a solitary banjo picking a G minor chord, an attempt, Gutkin noted, "to channel Woody with something recognizably American sounding."<sup>26</sup> The opening verses are sung by McKeown in a low register over a predominantly minor sounding banjo and guitar accompaniment, leaving listeners with a sense of uncertainty as to the protagonist's resolve to get through, work, talk, walk, or clean up the world. But the lead vocal line jumps higher with more assuredness and is joined by a second voice as the chorus unfolds. The final "I'm gonna get through this world/The best I can" is sung powerfully against strong major harmonies, conveying a sense of the singer's new-found determination to succeed. The chorus cuts quickly to a brief instrumental bridge lead by a low, modal improvisation on the clarinet. Following the second verse and chorus a new vocal segment appears, a wordless "di-di-di-di/di-da-da-di" reminiscent of a Hasidic *nigun* (wordless, a cappella song). Modal, slurred violin riffs fill between the vocal lines of the second and third verses and final chorus. The song closes with a second di-di-di-di/di-da-da-di chorus, this time with a squawking klezmer clarinet dancing above the voices.

Gutkin's setting is a true amalgam of styles, deftly balancing mountain banjo, Irish-tinged vocals, klezmer instrumental lines, and *nigun*-style singing. The musical setting highlights Guthrie's simple and direct declaration of a life-long commitment to social reform. Of course, leaving the world a better place is not the sole providence of Judaism or any other world region, but it certainly was high on the list of priorities of Jewish activists Aliza Greenblatt, Moses Asch, Ed Robbin, Millard Lampell, Harold Leventhal, Fred Hellerman, Irwin Silber, Ronnie Gilbert, and others in the labor movement with whom Guthrie came in contact. So was it, coincidentally, for Gutkin's Yiddish-speaking grandmother, Ethel Onik Gotlieb, who was an active Brooklyn labor organizer in the 1940s and 1950s.

The rollicking "Mermaid's Avenue" is probably the least Jewish sounding piece on *Wonder Wheel*, but the most evocative of Guthrie's everyday life in Coney Island. The only nod to Yiddish culture is Guthrie's use of the term "maidulas" in reference to young Jewish girls who left their "legprints in the sand" after rendezvousing with their boyfriends under the "lovesoaked boardwalk." The lyrics were written in 1950, perhaps as a farewell to Mermaid Avenue when Guthrie and his family were about to relocate to a larger apartment several miles to the east in Brighton Beach. In terms of descriptive language, this is Guthrie at his finest. Memorable lines are structured around the meeting of seemingly unlikely types: hags and wags, saints and sinners, grey hairs and wave curls (stylish young ladies), and the fur coats and bathing suits. Ethnic and culinary diversity abound: "All colors of good folks meet," bringing along their lox, bagels, smokefish, and pretzels, not to mention "hot Mexican Chili, Chop Suey, and meatballs sweet." Mermaid Avenue is the place "Where the beer runs to the ocean/ Where the wine runs to the sea," and even "the borscht sounds like the seas." Guthrie captures the essence of Coney Island's quirky energy in the final line, "She's a nervous jerk/But still she's hard to beat."

In the midst of recounting the blissful sights, sounds, and smells of Mermaid Avenue, Guthrie takes a familiar dig at an old peeve — authority figures who reinforced the rules of private property. Sea Gate, where the Greenblatts lived, was a gated community with limited public access. The result was a situation, Guthrie laments, "Where they pay the cops to stop you/When they hit that Sea Gate gate/Where them bulls along that wire fence/Scare the mermaids all away." Though years removed from his tussles with California police and train yard bulls, Guthrie's populist spirit and disdain for restrictions on public access to the land had not softened.

Frank London's musical treatment of "Mermaid's Avenue" has a distinctive West Indian feel, propelled forward by syncopated horn riffs and a choppy bass line associated with Trinidadian soca (soul calypso) music. Swirling Zairian soukous guitar licks add to the tropical mix. The popish, honking saxophone and crooning background voices that introduce Sklamberg's lilting vocal meld well with the bouncy soca beat. The tight harmony chorus ironically proclaims: "But there's never been a mermaid here/On Mermaid Avenue." The overall tropical feel of the music is in keeping with the carnivalesque nature of the lyrics, the island beach setting, and London's prior experience arranging and playing with Brooklyn soca bands. His lively, Caribbean-tinged accompaniment captures the energy of Guthrie's unabashed celebration of food, romance, and cultural diversity in postwar Coney Island.

Anti-fascist songs were a staple of Guthrie's repertoire as a solo singer and as a member of the Almanac singers. Two such pieces, "Going Away to Sea" and "Lolly Lo," coincidentally turn out to be the most Klezmer sounding

arrangements to come out of the Holy Ground project. Both were set by clarinetist Matt Darriau; the later made it onto *Wonder Wheel*, the former did not. "Going to Sea" has a complicated history. The original song was written in the 1930s by Kentucky balladeer Sarah Ogan Gunning under the title "I'm Going to Organize, Baby Mine." Guthrie heard Gunning's song after arriving in New York, re-worked it to recount his own rambling adventures as a labor organizer, and in 1941 recorded the song under the title "Babe O'Mine" for Keynote records.<sup>27</sup> Two years later Guthrie typed a set of similar lyrics under the title "Goin' Away to Sea, Honey Babe" in his notebook. But it was later discovered — after Darriau had set the music for the Klezmatics — that the lyrics in Guthrie's notebook had been written by fellow Almanac Singer Butch Hawes. A second notebook page, including a handwritten note by Hawes claiming authorship, evidently had surfaced and its authenticity was confirmed by Nora Guthrie.<sup>28</sup> But Guthrie's influence on the Hawes lyric is unmistakable — Hawes employs the same five-line verse structure and travelling motif heard on the 1941 Guthrie recording: "I'm going' away to sea, honey baby" (Hawes); "I'm goin' around this world, babe o' mine" (Guthrie). The Hawes version that became a source for the Klezmatics appears to be, at least in terms of form, a hybrid of the earlier Guthrie and Gunning songs.

The Hawes lyric proclaims the protagonist's resolve to go "set this old world free" by "fightin' on the ocean" to "Put them fascists in their place/In their long and narrow grave." For whatever reasons, Sklamberg chose to sing Guthrie's 1941 "babe o' mine" refrain rather than Hawes's "honey babe" as written on the 1943 lyric sheet. In any case, Gunning's original labor-organizing ballad was transformed into a pro-war, anti-fascist proclamation. Darriau set the lyrics to a mid-tempo march with minor chordal accompaniment and descending unison lines played between verses on the clarinet, trumpet, violin, and accordion. In instrumentation and style the music is unmistakably Eastern European Klezmer.

"Lolly Lo" was derived from a traditional West Indian folk piece with the common title "Hey Lolly Lolly." The May 1944 version Guthrie recorded for Asch was built around humorously suggestive lines like "Married man will keep a secret/Single boy will talk about you," interspersed with "Hey Lolly Lolly" choruses. Sometime that year, perhaps during his third Merchant Marine deployment in the summer, he wrote down a new set of lyrics for the verses. While "Goin' Away to Sea" anticipates action, Guthrie's verses to "Lolly Lo" appear to have been written from the deck of a warship in enemy waters, as Guthrie dreams of Marjorie and home: "I got a Gal in Coney Island/Just as pretty as y'all find/ And as I look out across the sea/She looks back and thinks of me." Baby Cathy was also on his mind: "I see the baby on the bed/I think of words I should have said/See her hair blow in the wind/See her smile when I walk

in." But Guthrie's personal longings are intertwined with his political mission: "I see the pillow on the bed/Where I know I lay my head/I see the enemy ships at sea/I know just what I'm fightin' for." Darriau's music for the lyrics is derived from a traditional Ukrainian *Kolomeyka* dance tune which is played at breakneck tempo. In between frenzied verses and minor-pitched "Lolly Lo" choruses are three original instrumental themes in the style of the lively, double-meter *Freylekhs*. Signature klezmer improvisory frills, known as *dreydlekh*, ornament the tight unison melodic lines played on wailing clarinet, trumpet, and violin. This typical klezmer instrumentation is momentarily broken on the second theme which is sounded on a fingerpicked banjo. Following the second chorus and another set of unison instrumental themes, the piece abruptly stops, only to return after a few seconds of silence with a slow, pulsing, "Lolly Lo" chorus. The chorus is repeated four times, each time a bit faster. On the band's 2006 *Live at Town Hall* CD this device serves to engage the audience in clapping and singing along. Why this high velocity, Dionysian romp was not recorded and included on the *Wonder Wheel* CD is unclear, but it is one of the band's most popular pieces, and often is used to close live performances.

By his own admission, Guthrie was not a church-goer, but there was little doubt he was deeply influenced by the bible and the philosophy of "Christian socialism."<sup>29</sup> In 1941 he wrote, "When the rich will give all their goods unto the poor ... This is the Christian Way and it is already on a big part of the earth and it will come. To own everything in Common. That's what the bible says. Common means all of us. This is pure old commonism."<sup>30</sup> In 1947, Guthrie wrote a lyric which he titled simply "Heaven." The song depicts an elaborate utopian fantasy that "flies down from the skies." In this paradise everyone has a job in "sunshine factories" where "every hand works in hand with the other and not for power and greed." There is no more war, disease, poverty, prisons, or profiteering; even "the atom is laboring as well." The mountains dance, the trees smile, and his friends all sing as he plays on the finest strings, horns, woodwinds, and drums. Guthrie acknowledges this is all a dream, but one that he suggests is obtainable in the here and now: "If you can only see with me this vision of heaven I dreamed/Then you can take new faith in working with comrades and friends." After he awakens, "I go back to work with my vision and drink down the bitter and sweet." The song reflects Guthrie's faith that social justice and a Christian vision of Heaven will someday be conjoined here on earth.

Bassist Paul Morrisett set the music for "Heaven." The piece opens with an airy theme played on two violins and pump organ sounded over piano, acoustic guitar, drums, and bass. The first vocal line of each verse ends over a jazzy-sounding ninth chord, while the final line of each verse ascends to a high note that is sustained over an alternating major and

pensive suspended 4<sup>th</sup> chord. McKeown trades verses with Skalmberg, and their duet singing produces a rapturous harmony. On the last verse the violin and organ return as Sklamberg and McKown intone the final line, "But if you'll sing songs of your dreaming, then you will reap treasures untold." They swoop into a sweet-flowing di-di-di finale over a swirling mix of strings, keyboards, bass clarinet, and guitar. There are no readily discernible Jewish or American folk music idioms here. Rather, Morrisett has created a very modern, sophisticated sound reminiscent of a Bob Dylan or late-Beatles rock arrangement.

When Guthrie checked into the Brooklyn State Hospital with Huntington's disease in 1954 his days of playing guitar and singing were over. But for several years he continued to occasionally jot down poems and song lyrics. Amidst his physical deterioration he apparently began to contemplate his mortality. "Pass Away," written in 1955, is a dark meditation on the end of the world. Everything on earth — city, town country, and farm — and everything above — heaven, stars, even dreams, Guthrie solemnly predicts, will pass away. But he clings to the hope that some part of his soul will survive, ending each verse, "Not a word of mine/ Will ever pass away." The music, composed by Darriau, opens with a slow, heavy electric guitar riff which is quickly joined by drums and low, droning violin. The modal drone and hypotonic guitar evoke an unsettling mood as Sklamberg and a second bass voice intone the passing of heaven and earth. A kaval (end-blown wooden flute) and violin trade modal improvisations during an extended instrumental break. The overall sound, somewhere between a Middle Eastern ritual dance and a 1960s psychedelic-rock jam, is well suited for Guthrie's musing on the final demise of humankind.

A second deeply spiritual piece written in the hospital in 1954, titled "Holy Ground," was inspired by the third chapter of Exodus. Here God orders Moses to remove his sandals as he steps onto the holy ground by the burning bush. Guthrie's opening verses recount Moses's experience: "Take off, take off your shoes/The spot you're standing on is holy ground/These words I heard in my burning bush/This place you're standing on is holy ground/I heard my fiery voice speak to me/This spot you're standing on is holy ground." Subsequent verses go on to recount how every spot, every inch, and every grain of dirt that Guthrie ever rambled over is holy ground. Though clearly a reference from the Jewish bible, Guthrie's assertion that all places are holy is a universal religious construct and may be a reflection of his maturing ecumenical sensibilities. Yet his final pronouncement comes from within *his* burning bush and *his* fiery mouth, not some external source, biblical or otherwise. There is preacher-like urgency to his words, as if he needs to communicate this message to his readers while he still has time.

At first there seems little that is Jewish or Eastern European about Frank London's musical setting for "Holy Ground," save the hammered dulcimer

that lightly sounds the chords in back of Sklamberg's opening vocal line. His solitary voice is joined by a second harmony part on verse two, and then a majestic, four-part chorus breaks out on the third stanza. During the second half of the song the dulcimer is replaced by a set of sustained, heavy electric guitar chords that serve to heighten the dramatic tension. A female voice echoes Skalmberg on the third and fourth verses as the song builds in volume and texture to its final, choir-like chorus. The simple melody, the major tonic/dominant/subdominant chord progression, and the four-part vocal arrangement sound southern gospel or hymn-like in style. But the melody, London notes, was adapted from a traditional Hasidic *nigun* from Galicia, a historic region that straddles present day Poland and the Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> Galician Jewish singers and musicians were known to employ major modes more frequently than did their counterparts to the east and south. Most American listeners will not make this subtle connection (which is not mentioned in the liner notes), and will no doubt find the southern gospel sounding vocals appropriate for a song whose bible-inspired lyrics declare the earth to be holy ground.

This brief survey of lyrics and their musical settings suggests that Nora Guthrie made an astute choice when she turned to the Klezmatics to articulate the Guthrie/Jewish connection, given the band's familiarity with a broad spectrum of Jewish and American roots music, and their individual talents as composers and arrangers. The best compositions, particularly "Come When I Call You," "Gonna Get Through This World," and "Holy Ground," subtly balance European Klezmer and American folk music idioms. "Goin' Away to Sea," "Lolly Lo," and the Hanukkah songs that foreground Klezmer musical signifiers sound Jewish while allowing the spirit of Guthrie's voice to be heard. And pieces seemingly devoid of Jewish musical idioms, most notably "Mermaid's Avenue" and "Heaven," are simply well crafted compositions that support Guthrie's inspired lyrics.

Stepping back to consider the broader historical arc, it is not so surprising that Guthrie's American folk material would lend itself to such convincing interpretation by a Jewish-American klezmer ensemble. The past is replete with examples of musical exchange between Ashkenazi Jews and their Gentile neighbors on both sides of the Atlantic. For centuries, in addition to their eclectic repertoires of Yiddish music and dance pieces, the European klezmerium were highly proficient in the popular folk music styles of their nearby Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish Gentile communities in which they regularly performed.<sup>32</sup> When they reached the shores of America at the turn of the twentieth century, influential klezmer musicians like clarinetist Dave Tarras and band leader Abe Schwartz did not hesitate to incorporate the sounds of popular Tin Pan Alley and big band swing into their style. In the late 1920s, Jewish-American "King of Swing" Benny



Goodman carried his wailing clarinet from the confines of his Chicago synagogue to the stages and airways of America. The song "Bei Mir Bist Du Schon," composed by Yiddish songwriters Sholom Secunda and Jacob Jacobs, rose to the top of the US pop charts in 1937, sung in English and Yiddish by the very non-Jewish Andrews Sisters. The 1950s and 1960s revival of American folk music was ushered in with the help of Jewish-American promoters including Albert Grossman, George Wein, and Izzy Young, and a plethora of musicians including Oscar Brand, John Cohen, Art D'Lugoff, and Robert Zimmerman (Bob Dylan), to name but a few. Two of the leading Jewish American figures in the 1970s klezmer revival, virtuoso clarinet and mandolin player Andy Statman and band leader, author, and banjoist Henry Sapoznik, began their folk music careers with bluegrass and old-time mountain music respectively.<sup>33</sup> The Klezmatics/Guthrie project can be seen as a natural extension of an American musical dialogue that has reached across cultural boundaries for more than a century.

Another way to view the Klezmatics' transformation of Guthrie's lyrics is through the lens of what Pete Seeger has called the folk process.<sup>34</sup> Seeger, a strong advocate of writing new folk songs inspired by old traditions, did not hesitate to change the lyrics to existing songs ("We Shall Overcome"), to write an original melody to an ancient verse, ("Turn, Turn, Turn"), or in tandem with Guthrie, set new lyrics to an old melody ("Union Maid"). Seeger's greatest mentors were Guthrie and Lead Belly, both known for writing new songs in traditional styles and setting original lyrics to preexisting melodies. The Klezmatics' creative work is simply one more link in this dynamic folk-process chain. What began as an African American spiritual ("Children Go Where I Send Thee") morphed into Guthrie's worried war lament lyric ("Come When I Call You"), which the Klezmatics in turn set to a Jewish sounding modal melody. Guthrie composed new lyrics for an old West Indian folk song ("Hey Lolly Lolly") that the Klezmatics then reinterpreted in the style of a Ukrainian folk dance. Guthrie borrowed the melody of a traditional Appalachian ballad ("Down by the Willow Garden") for a new song about Jewish heroes ("The Many and the Few"), which the Klezmatics then rearranged with harmonium accompaniment and modern sounding vocals. The Klezmatics were simply engaging in the ongoing folk process that Seeger and Guthrie had practiced throughout their careers and that formed the foundation of the singer/songwriter wing of the postwar folk music revival.

Turning to lyrical subject matter, the Holy Ground project reaffirms certain patterns in the Guthrie song canon, while illuminating areas in need of further investigation. Although critics have noted that Guthrie's overall creative output began to diminish in the postwar years, he certainly continued to produce memorable verses, with occasional gems like "1913 Massacre" (1945) and "Deportees" (1948). The former — a harrowing

account of a fire that killed the children of striking copper miners in Calumet, Michigan — is drawn from an historical autobiography; the latter — a lament for deported Mexican migrant workers who died in a tragic plane crash — comes from a newspaper account of the event. Likewise, historical sources and contemporary newspaper reports inspired Guthrie's most powerful Jewish-themed songs, "The Many and the Few" and "Ilsa Koch." The latter was written contemporaneously with a series of anti-Jim Crow songs including "The Ferguson Brothers Killing" (1946) and "The Blinding of Isaac Woodward" (1946). All three were composed about specific contemporary events which did not involve Guthrie personally but still managed to fire his rage over issues of race and social injustice.<sup>35</sup>

As Guthrie's political songs came to rely more heavily on historical and newspaper sources rather than lived experience, so too did they become broader and more visionary in their call for social justice and peace. "Gonna Get Through This World," while lacking in narrative structure and specific details, reaffirms Guthrie's commitment to social struggle in repetitive but compelling verse. In other songs from the period, including "No Disappointment in Heaven" (1941), "Good Old Union Feeling" (1944), and "This Morning I Am Born Again" (1945), Guthrie drew on Christian and socialist imagery, positing the notion of "one big union" as a metaphor for bringing the world's people together in peace and harmony.<sup>36</sup> His lyrics to "Heaven" (1947), which envision the possibility of a perfect socialist paradise here on earth, express his ongoing aspirations to merge the political and the spiritual and to demonstrate that heaven is not relegated to the afterlife.

By the late 1940s, Guthrie was becoming less hawkish, due no doubt to his association with People's Songs, his participation in the 1948 Progressive Party presidential campaign of Henry Wallace, and his desire to not demonize the Soviet Union as the Cold War heated up. In 1950, *Sing Out!* published "I've Got to Know," his probing query into the rationale for military action: "Why do your war boats ride on my waters?/Why do your death bombs fall from my skies? /Why do you burn my farm and my town down?/I've got to know, friend, I've got to know!"<sup>37</sup> The lyrics to "Come When I Call You," written the previous year, recount similar ravages of war and warn of the possibility of the slaughter of innocent children. These songs are a far cry from Guthrie's earlier World War Two compositions like "The Sinking of the Reuben James" (1941) and "Round and Round Hitler's Grave" (1942) that served as unabashed calls to arms against fascism.<sup>38</sup> "Come When I Call You" reflects an evolution in his thinking with regard to global politics and the validity of military force in light of the emerging Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Compelling as several of the individual pieces may be, this sampling of Holy Ground songs reveals little new about Guthrie's political philosophy.

They certainly add credence to the arguments made by Mark Allan Jackson and Will Kaufman in their provocatively titled works, respectively *Prophet Singer* and *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*; in his postwar songs Guthrie continued to rail against the evils of fascism, war, and economic injustice while dreaming of a social utopia. In terms of subject matter he cast a wide net, producing an oeuvre that should assuage Nora's earlier concerns that history would remember her father as solely "a freeze-dried, Dust Bowl icon." Moreover, the fact that Nora and the individual members of the Klezmatics shared Guthrie's progressive political sensibilities explains in part why many of the lyrics they chose to work with focused on human rights and social justice.

The freshest insights into Guthrie's life and creativity are found in his Coney Island and Jewish-themed songs. The Hanukkah songs bring these two strands together. Written during a period when Guthrie was spending a good deal of time in and around Coney Island, sharing child care with his mother-in-law while Marjorie taught dance classes, they reflect his growing interests in children's songs and Jewish culture.<sup>39</sup> The Hanukkah lyrics, consisting of relatively simple, repetitive lines that were easy for children to sing along to, were clearly meant to be performed at family and community celebrations. The Klezmatics' playful musical arrangements breathe life into the words, making the songs on their *Happy Joyous Hanukkah* exactly what the CD title implies — lively, child-friendly music meant for celebrating the Hanukkah season. Given the fact that Guthrie wrote more than three thousand lyrics over the course of his life, one wonders if there are additional Jewish-themed lyrics waiting to be discovered in the archive. Could there be more songs like "The Many and the Few" and "Ilsa Koch" that delve deep into Jewish culture and history, and if so, what might such verses reveal about Guthrie's embrace of Jewish thought and its relevance for his unique brand of spiritual socialism?

Like his Jewish songs, Guthrie's Coney Island lyrics focus attention on under-explored terrain. "Mermaid's Avenue" describes Guthrie's neighborhood in rich detail, celebrating its cultural diversity while mocking the authorities who guard its private property. "Lolly Lo," written from across the Atlantic, poignantly captures Guthrie's longing for his Coney Island home and family while taking a dig at his fascist antagonists. Written from personal experience and the heart, Guthrie's words convey a sense of earthiness and authenticity that are lacking in some of his more political and visionary compositions, while affirming that for the first time in his adult life he finally had discovered a place he could call home. Again, one wonders what additional Coney Island material exists. For example, "Ninety Mile Wind," written by Guthrie in 1944 and set to music by the German folksinger Hans-Eckardt Wenzel in 2003, is a haunting rumination on the struggle between man and nature, narrated during a hurricane Guthrie

viewed from the Coney Island boardwalk.<sup>40</sup> Other sets of lyrics that Nora has identified include the intriguing titles "Go Coney Island, Roll on the Sand" (1946), "I'm Living in Coney Island" (1947), and "Coney Island" (1951).<sup>41</sup>

Finally, "Pass Away" and "Holy Ground" reflect the profound spiritual concerns that consumed Guthrie during the onset of Huntington's disease. There are no grand narratives or rich descriptive language here, but rather lyrics that draw their affecting power from their simplicity and directness. Thanks to Darriau's and London's superb musical settings, the words are transformed into sublime deliberations on life, death, and the divine. While our knowledge of Guthrie's writings during his initial years of hospitalization remains thin, Nora is correct in asserting that these two songs, along with "New Star" (1954, set to music by Jonatha Brooke in 2008) and "You Sandal String" (1954, set to music by Joel Rafael in 2009) "exhibit a deep spiritual understanding that defies the traditional boundaries of religion."<sup>42</sup> Deep indeed; consider the astonishing fact that in 1954, after all his previous struggles and now facing a life sentence in a state mental hospital, Guthrie came to the unlikely conclusion that the whole world was "holy ground." What else was he thinking before the darkness closed in?

Biographer Joe Klein remarked of Guthrie's songs: "The music usually was an afterthought. The words were most important. He wrote songs at the typewriter; it was the instrument he played best."<sup>43</sup> Klein is correct in that Guthrie was a first and foremost a lyricist, not a tunesmith; yet he wrote as a singer whose compositions were meant to be performed, not as a poet whose words were intended for the written page. Even if we agree with Jackson's claim that Guthrie's lyrics on their own "have an inherent power and purpose," they simply do not stand the test of time as written poetry.<sup>44</sup> The larger public will only be able to appreciate the artistry and cultural significance of Guthrie's unsung lyrics if musician/composers like the Klezmatics, Billy Bragg, and Jonatha Brooke bring those lines of type to life. This will demand further mining through the mountains of notebooks, journals, and unbound lyric sheets Guthrie left behind to ferret out the choice material, and then employing a composer's magic to create songs like the ones we hear on *Wonder Wheel*. No easy task, but the success of the Klezmatics' Holy Ground project suggests that the effort will be worth it.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Readers are strongly encouraged to listen to the songs discussed in this article. The Klezmatics' "Holy Ground" songs may be heard on the CDs *The Klezmatics: Wonder Wheel* (Jewish Music Group 18033-2, 2006); *The Klezmatics: Woody Guthrie's Happy Joyous Hanukkah* (Jewish Music Group 18050-2, 2006); and *The Klezmatics Live at Town Hall* (Soundbrush Records B005OJCI4S, 2011). All songs are available for streaming or download purchase at Rhapsody, Amazon, or iTunes. Most of the Woody Guthrie original recordings can be found through Smithsonian Folkways at: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/searchresults.aspx?sPhrase=woody%20guthrie&sType=%27phrase%27>

The full lyrics to all songs can be found at the web link: <http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Lyrics.htm>

<sup>2</sup> For a review of the 1997 Klezmatics/Perlman Tanglewood concert see Shel Horowitz, "Itzhak Perlman Explores His Klezmer Soul" at <http://www.frugalfun.com/fiddlershouse.html> (accessed 4/06/2013).

<sup>3</sup> "Fisherlid" can be heard on *The Klezmatics: Jews with Horns* (Rounder Records 11661-3183-2, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Nora Guthrie, "The Yiddish Connection" at <http://www.woodyguthrie.org/merchandise/klezmatics.htm> (accessed 4/06/2013).

<sup>5</sup> According to Nora Guthrie, in addition to spending family time together, Guthrie and Greenblatt "often discussed their artistic projects and critiqued each other's works, finding common ground in their shared love of culture and social justice, despite very different backgrounds." Nora Guthrie, "The Yiddish Connection."

In a 9 July 1942 letter, Guthrie critiqued one of Greenblatt's poems about the war effort, concluding with a sentiment she no doubt shared: "It is the job of all artists, painters, dancers, writers, singers, sculptors, musicians critics, actors, everybody everywhere, to join hands with the war workers and work harder to root out, expose and kill out the fascist enemy everywhere, at home and aboard." Quoted in Dave Marsh and Harold Leventhal, eds., *Pastures of Plenty: A Self Portrait* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), pp. 90-93.

<sup>6</sup> Moses Asch, who worked with Guthrie throughout the 1940s, claimed Greenblatt was a significant influence on his song writing. See liner notes to *Woody Guthrie: Hard Travelin': The Asch Recordings, Volume 3* (Smithsonian Folkways CD SFW40102, 1998), pp. 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Himes, "Dead 40 Years, Woody Guthrie Stays Busy." *New York Times*, 2 September 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Nora Guthrie, "Woody, Martha Graham and Coney Island's Jewish Community" at <http://www.woodyguthrie.org/merchandise/klezmatics.htm> (accessed 4/06/2013). For commentary on the decline in quality of Guthrie's songs in the early postwar period see Ed Cray, *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004), pp. 300 and 306.

<sup>9</sup> Frank London at <http://klezmatics.com/about/bio/expanded-bio/8/> (accessed 0/06/2013).

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Frank London by author, 12/31/2012.

<sup>11</sup> Seth Rogovoy, "The Klezmatics Uncover the Jewish Woody Guthrie." *The Rogovoy Report*, 5 December 2003, [www.rogovoy.com](http://www.rogovoy.com).

<sup>12</sup> John Pareles, "Funny Woody, You Don't Look Klezmer." *New York Times*, 23 December, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Gilbert, "Klezmatics Celebrate Guthrie's Jewish Heritage." *Boston Globe*, 7 March 2007.

<sup>14</sup> "The Klezmatics: *Wonder Wheel*," *Billboard Magazine*, 14 August 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Christgau, *The Klezmatics: Wonder Wheel*. *Village Voice*, 18 June 2006.

<sup>16</sup> The lyrics to all Woody Guthrie songs under discussion are copyrighted by Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc., and reprinted through courtesy of Woody Guthrie Publications. "The Many and the Few," "Ilse Koch," "Headdy Down," "Come When I Call You," "Mermaid's Avenue," "Goin' Away to Sea," "Lolly Lo," "Heaven," "Pass Away," and "Holy Ground" © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc., and used by permission.

<sup>17</sup> Readers unfamiliar with the musical elements of Eastern European Jewish music should consult "Modes and Scales" in Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer: Jewish Music from Old World to Our World* (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 2006), pp. 265-269.

<sup>18</sup> Nora Guthrie claims her father "wrote Hanukkah songs for parties at local Jewish community centers." Nora Guthrie, "The Yiddish Connection."

<sup>19</sup> Guthrie recorded "The Many and the Few" in 1949 for Moses Asch. The recording is available on *Woody Guthrie: Hard Travelin': The Asch Recordings, Vol. 3* (Smithsonian Folkways CD SFW40102, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> "Ilse Koch" and three additional tracks can be heard on the European release of the CD *Wonder Wheel* (Blue Kapibara, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> See for example "Clay Explains Cut in Ilse Koch Term." *New York Times*, 24 September 1948. Koch was eventually retried and in 1951 re-sentenced to life imprisonment. She committed suicide in 1967.

<sup>22</sup> Marin Buber. "Words Shoot Back at You: Woody Guthrie's 'War' Against Fascism." In John S. Partington, ed., *The Life, Thought and Music of Woody Guthrie*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001), p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> Author's interview with Sklamberg.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Original lyric sheet from Guthrie Archive, courtesy of Lisa Gutkin.

<sup>26</sup> Author's interview with Lisa Gutkin, 31 December 2012.

<sup>27</sup> See Ronald Cohen and Dave Samuelson, liner notes for *Songs for Political Action* (Bear Family Records 1996), p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Nora Guthrie, liner notes to *Wonder Wheel*, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the concept of "Christian Socialism" and its influence on Guthrie, see Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), pp. 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Cray, p. 284.

<sup>31</sup> Author's interview with London.

<sup>32</sup> For a brief history of early European klezmer music and interaction between Jewish musicians and their Gentile neighbors, see Sapoznik, *Klezmer*, pp. 6-20.

<sup>33</sup> For a history of early Yiddish and Klezmer music in the United States, see Sapoznik, *Klezmer*, Chapters 3-4; background on Abe Schwartz pp. 87-90; on Dave Tarras, pp. 143-146; on Benny Goodman's Jewish background, pp. 134-135; on the history of the song "Bei Mir Bist Du Schon," pp. 129-132; on Sapoznik's move from old-time to klezmer music, pp. 168-174.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of Pete Seeger's allegiance to the folk process, see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), pp. 194-195.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Alan Jackson, *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Vision of Woody Guthrie* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007). For a discussion of "Ferguson Brothers Killing" see pages 146-150; for a discussion of "The Blinding of Isaac Woodward" see pages 150-153.

<sup>36</sup>Jackson, *Prophet Singer*. For a discussion of "Good Old Union Feeling" see page 240; for a discussion of "This Morning I Am Born Again" and the idea of unionism as religion see pages 244-45. Kaufman, in *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (pp. 12-12, note 49, p. 209), cites the song lyrics to "No Disappointment in Heaven" from a collection titled *The Songs of Woody Guthrie* located in the Woody Guthrie Manuscript Collection at the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. The song collection was not dated, but Kaufman surmises the date to be around 1941, given the other dated material in the box and folder in which he found the collection. Personal e-mail communication between Kaufman and the author, 16 January 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Woody Guthrie, "I've Got to Know," *Sing Out!*, Vol. 1, No. 6, October 1950, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> See Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*, pp. 82-109, for Guthrie's pro-war, anti-fascist songs.

<sup>39</sup> Guthrie's time with his children inspired him to write a series of children's songs which he recorded for Moses Asch who issued them on his Disc labels under the titles *Songs to Grow On: Nursery Days* (c. 1946) and *Songs to Grow On: Work Songs* (c. 1947).

<sup>40</sup> Hans Eckardt Wenzel's version of "Ninety Mile Wind" can be heard on the CD *Ticky Tock* (Contraer Musik, 2003). The German-produced CD is available at: [http://woodyguthrie.org/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store\\_Code=TWGS&Product\\_Code=CDTTE&Category\\_Code=OTH](http://woodyguthrie.org/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=TWGS&Product_Code=CDTTE&Category_Code=OTH)

<sup>41</sup> For a full list of all the song lyrics written by Guthrie from 1940 through 1955, as currently identified in the Guthrie Archive, see Nora Guthrie, *My Name Is New York: Ramblin' Around Woody Guthrie's Town* (Brooklyn: powerHouse Books, 2012), pp. 86-88. The lyrics to "Go To Coney Island, Roll on the Sand" are reproduced on pp.68-69.

<sup>42</sup> Nora Guthrie, *My Name is New York*, p. 75. "New Star" can be heard on Jonatha Brooke, *The Works* (Bad Dog Records, 2008); "You Sandal String" can be heard on Joel Rafael, *The Songs Of Woody Guthrie*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Inside Recordings, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (New York: Delta Books, 1999), p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> Jackson, *Prophet Singer*, p. 8.