

Musical *Minhag*: Negotiating Prayer Melodies in a Liberal Synagogue in Vienna

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My deepest gratitude goes to the entire Or Chadasch community, a place that has always been a home for me. I extend my thanks to all the congregants and individuals who participated in this research, especially Rabbi Lior Bar-Ami, Richard Seniow, Mitchell Ash, and my father Eric Frey, for their trust and time. I am grateful to Ursula Hemetek for encouraging me to conduct this research and for her valuable comments on earlier drafts and to Benjy Fox-Rosen for thoroughly editing the article in its later stages. I also thank the various participants at the 2021 [isaScience conference “Heroes, Cults and Canons”](#) and the 2021 [British & Irish Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference](#) for their valuable feedback on the conference paper version of this article.



Abstract

This article examines the negotiation of prayer melodies at Or Chadasch, a liberal Jewish synagogue in Vienna, exploring how these melodies represent the community's balance between tradition and innovation within a progressive Jewish framework. As a "minority within a minority," Or Chadasch operates on the periphery of Vienna's Orthodox-dominated Jewish community and global progressive Judaism. The article begins by providing a historical context for progressive Judaism in Austria and by tracing the development of Or Chadasch and its repertoire of prayer melodies. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, it explores how the emotional connections of congregants and prayer leaders to specific melodies shape debates on musical tradition, continuity, and communal belonging. Central to this analysis is the concept of *minhag* (custom), an insider term that serves as a flexible yet deeply rooted foundation in the musical worship practices of the congregation. The article identifies six "modes of *minhag*"—continuity, habit, authority, potluck, participation, and choice—as distinct approaches through which congregants negotiate persistence and change in prayer melodies. These modes illustrate how *minhag* functions as both a stabilizing and adaptive force, which accommodates diverse attachments across transnational and transhistorical Jewish musical practices. The study posits that *minhag*, understood as enacted through multiple modes, transcends a simple binary of tradition versus innovation. Furthermore, the article situates the musical *minhag* of Or Chadasch within broader ethnomusicological research on minority communities, arguing that this *minhag* reflects the specific historical, ideological, and sociopolitical positioning of the congregation, thus serving as a living archive of the community's history.

Introduction

Progressive Judaism, including Reform Judaism in North America and liberal Judaism in Europe, is marked by openness to change, religious innovation, and adaptation to sociopolitical transformations such as gender equality and LGBTIQ* rights.^[1] Yet such changes in progressive Judaism were and continue to be the result of long-term negotiations of tradition and innovation. Changes in liturgical practices and prayer melodies, the music for Jewish prayer, are no exception and are often subject to emotional, heated debates even in progressive communities.

This article draws on ethnographic field research to examine changes in prayer melodies at Or Chadasch (Hebrew for “new light”), a small liberal synagogue in Vienna. It explores individuals’ emotional attachments to specific melodies and how the Vienna liberal Jewish community shapes debates around musical continuity and tradition. Additionally, it examines the tension between progressive Judaism’s openness to change and the contentious negotiation of musical changes within communities.

While ethnomusicological research has documented the negotiation of prayer melodies in Jewish communities of different denominations,^[2] most studies focus on the Anglo-American world, with more marginal sites of progressive Jewish communities in Europe left largely neglected. Vienna, a former center of Central European Jewish life, a past locus of Jewish reform, and a major site of Nazi destruction, is a peripheral site of contemporary progressive Judaism that exemplifies how the reconstruction of post-Shoah Jewish life intertwines with memories of a grand history and painful losses.

Today, most of Vienna’s 8,000 Jews are members of the Orthodox *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* (IKG), the administrative and representative organization of Jews in Austria.^[3] While Or Chadasch is officially recognized as an association affiliated with the IKG, it is not recognized as a synagogue according to religious law. This “minority within a minority” status provides a context for studying how local circumstances and exclusions interact with musical traditions in light of ethnomusicological minority research.^[4] Or Chadasch is thus doubly marginalized: not only by Austrian or Viennese society as a Jewish minority,^[5] but also within the main Jewish community for its non-adherence to Orthodox tradition.

Founded in 1990, Or Chadasch has about 150 members and 50 non-Jewish associated members. Unlike in the Orthodox tradition, people of all genders sit together, prayers are sometimes held in English or German, and LGBTIQ* couples can marry. The liturgy is abbreviated and often altered for theological or sociopolitical reasons. Due to these differences in religious practices and interpretations of Jewish law, many liberal Jews are not considered Jewish by the Orthodox community, limiting their legal rights and access to resources.

At the beginning of the congregation’s existence, prayer services were led by laypeople, with the occasional guest rabbi, largely because of a lack of funds to hire a permanent rabbi. Gradually the community was able to afford part-time rabbis who shared their time between multiple communities, leading services in Vienna every second weekend. In 2017 the community was able to hire a permanent rabbi for the first time, Lior Bar-Ami, who implemented several changes in religious practice, including changing some of the prayer melodies. And as it so often happens, changes led to conflict: some members of the community started to complain that the rabbi was not respecting the existing traditions and liturgical canon. These discussions were not just about music, but part of larger conflicts around the questions of changes in religious practice.^[6]

This article is based on ethnomusicological fieldwork, including participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and musical documentation, some of which I conducted remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.^[7] As a long-time congregation member and researcher, I navigate the ambivalent position of conducting research as a community “insider”^[8] as a form of “fieldwork at home.”^[9] Many of my research partners are people I have grown up with, including my father Eric Frey, who is the president of the congregation. This dual role as an insider researcher feeds into my methodological orientation toward “dialogical knowledge-production,” treating collaborators as equal partners and presenting material back to the community to avoid extractive power relations.^[10]

This article is centered around the word *minhag*—an insider term that was crucial to the conflict surrounding the music in the community. The Hebrew word *minhag* usually refers to a localized set of customs that are identified with a particular community, city, or ethnic group. As Philip Bohlman explains, the development of *minhag* was tied to the urbanization of Jewish life and thus connects liturgical practices to place, enacting localized identification.^[11] In my fieldwork, *minhag* emerged as central to negotiations of musical change at Or Chadasch, with varying meanings and functions. Through interviews and conversations, I examine Or Chadasch’s diverse *minhag* and distinguish multiple modes in negotiating the community’s musical traditions.

The article begins with a brief overview of the history of progressive Judaism in Vienna, addressing whether the nineteenth-century reform efforts of the Vienna Rite fit into this history and tracing the developments leading to the establishment of Or Chadasch in 1990. It then examines the development of the musical *minhag* of Or Chadasch, showing how the choice of prayer melodies enacts multiple transnational and -historical attachments to various Jewish traditions. The main ethnographic section explores the term *minhag* as mobilized in practice, distinguishing six different modes of *minhag*. The conclusion highlights the powers of *minhag* to transcend the binary between tradition and innovation and addresses the significance of prayer melodies for this community, situating it within the broader research on music and minorities.

The History of Progressive Judaism in Vienna

A persistent historiographical question is whether Reform Judaism has a history in nineteenth-century Vienna, or whether it only really manifested in the 1990s with the founding of Or Chadasch. While Germany is often considered the birthplace of Reform Judaism,^[12] efforts to reform Jewish services also took place in nineteenth-century Vienna, leading to the establishment of the so-called Vienna Rite or *Wiener Minhag*, which introduced significant aesthetic changes in services without altering the liturgy.^[13] These efforts were driven by Viennese Jews’ desire to assimilate into Austrian bourgeois society.^[14]

The first rabbi hired by Viennese Jews was Isak Noah Mannheimer (1793–1865), often framed as part of the first generation of European Reform rabbis.^[15] He created his own modern version of synagogue worship specifically adapted to the restrictions and demands of Viennese Jewry—the Vienna Rite. In contrast to traditional services, worshipers were asked to be silent during services and listen to the cantor rather than pray aloud. The first *Oberkantor* (chief cantor), Salomon Sulzer (1804–1890), not only led the prayers but also composed new liturgical music and led a choir, thus contributing to an aestheticization of the service that fit the sensibilities of bourgeois European culture. While the sermon was given in German, the prayers of the traditional service

all remained in Hebrew.^[16]

Reform efforts in Vienna did not match the innovation seen in Germany, raising questions about whether they can be considered part of the history of progressive Judaism or rather proof that Reform did not find such a fruitful ground in Vienna. Michael A. Meyer argues that the Vienna Rite's "attention to decorum, aesthetics, and socially relevant preaching ... clearly represented a reform of previous practice and values."^[17] Evelyn Adunka, a historian and founding member of Or Chadasch, also links the Vienna Rite to the history of Austrian progressive Judaism,^[18] though perspectives within Or Chadasch on this lineage vary.^[19]

In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the development and dissemination of progressive Judaism flourished in Germany, the UK, and the US, but not in Vienna.^[20] The World Union for Progressive Judaism (to which Or Chadasch belongs today) was founded in 1926 in London. Minor efforts in interwar Austria, such as those of the *Verein für fortschrittliches Judentum* (Society for progressive Judaism) in 1933, lacked support and were short-lived,^[21] supporting the view that progressive Judaism gained ground in Vienna only with Or Chadasch's founding.

After the *Anschluss* in 1938 and the Shoah, Jewish life in Vienna was nearly destroyed. The *Stadttempel* ("city temple") was the only synagogue spared during the November pogrom and is still in use. After 1945, only a small number of Austrian Jews had survived and only few returned from exile as displaced persons to settle in Vienna. Unlike post-war Germany, Austria lacked restitution laws and failed to reconcile with its past due to the "victim myth," only starting acknowledgment of its responsibility and symbolic restitution payments in the 1990s and full restitutions in 2001.^[22]

Jewish numbers in Vienna remained stable and low after the war. In 1965, Vienna became a transit point for Soviet emigrants to Israel or the US. Jewish migrants from Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan settled in Vienna in the early 1970s, increasing the community's size and diversity. Estimates of Jews in Vienna today vary, with the last census in 2001 counting 14,600 self-identified Jews. The IKG Vienna currently numbers about 8,000 members, which, however, excludes many Jews and most of Or Chadasch's members.^[23]

The 1990s proved to be a significant period of growth for progressive Judaism in German-speaking countries.^[24] Or Chadasch, founded in 1990, was the second German-speaking liberal Jewish congregation in the post-Shoah era.^[25] Its first service was held on May 4, 1990, in the Hotel Imperial's ballroom. By 2004, Or Chadasch had a permanent synagogue in the traditionally Jewish district of Leopoldstadt.^[26]

Since its founding, Or Chadasch has had an ambivalent position in relation to the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* (IKG). In Austrian law, the Jewish population is legally represented as a single entity, meaning that the IKG is the only organization permitted to represent Austrian Jewry. While the IKG accepts Or Chadasch as a Jewish association and also provides some financial support, it is not recognized as a synagogue. Many Or Chadasch members, especially converts, are not recognized as Jewish by Orthodox law, limiting their access to IKG resources.^[27]

Today, Or Chadasch is a diverse community in terms of country of origin, gender and sexuality, and conversion or non-conversion. Former part-time rabbi Walter Rothschild identifies three groups within Or Chadasch: expats from established progressive communities, Austrian Jews seeking modern practice aligned with their values, and non-Jews interested in an open-minded Jewish community.^[28] The congregation holds weekly Shabbat services, holiday services, themed

services such as “Pride Shabbat,” and community activities, including lectures, concerts, child programming, Hebrew classes, and conversion courses.

The Constitution of Or Chadasch’s Musical *Minhag*

From its inception, music has been central to Or Chadasch. Most important was the element of participation—that congregants were able to sing along with the prayer leader. This reflects the influence of the post-war American Reform tradition, particularly the counterculture and folk revival of the 1960s.^[29] Before the first public service in 1990, congregants rehearsed prayer melodies to participate actively. Sometimes guest rabbis would also send tapes with prayers that congregants could practice with before their service. Furthermore, many members responsible for prayer leading and musical accompaniment had professional training, setting a high standard for music in services.^[30]

The collection of prayer melodies at Or Chadasch combines various Jewish musical traditions, including compositions by Salomon Sulzer and Louis Lewandowski from the European Reform tradition, music from the countercultural American Reform movement, and contemporary melodies from the US and Israel. Gila Perach, the first musical director, and Mitchell Ash, the community’s lay cantor from 2002 until 2022, collected these diverse melodies to create what community members called a “braid” of music.^[31] This musical *minhag* was then slowly developed, with different guest rabbis introducing new melodies and adapting them to the existing ones. The eclectic nature of its liturgical music reflects its bottom-up and grassroots history, where until 2017 there was no permanent rabbi to curate the *minhag*.

The musical *minhag* of Or Chadasch is central not only to the participation of its members but also to its identity as a Viennese liberal Jewish community enacting different transhistorical and transnational attachments to multiple Jewish musical traditions. Melodies coming from the European Reform tradition, such as those by Salomon Sulzer or Louis Lewandowski, help situate Or Chadasch within a longer history of progressive Judaism that spans back to its origins in the nineteenth century and the choral tradition of Reform Judaism. Melodies from the late twentieth-century American Reform tradition, such as those by Debbie Friedman and Cantor Jeff Klepper, connect to the counterculture and folk revival of the 1960s^[32] and elicit a sense of familiarity to congregants with ties to the US. Widely popular prayer melodies like “Hine ma tov” or “Shalom aleichem” foster a sense of global Jewish belonging, tying in with a common origin in a postmodern Jewish geography and temporality.^[33] And melodies that are associated with specific individuals in the community form a living archive representing different phases of the community’s history.

These diverse attachments mean that changes to melodies can elicit resistance from community members, but they also enable the formation of new attachments and traditions. An example of a melody that was changed by Rabbi Bar-Ami is Louis Lewandowski’s “Ma tovu,” one of the opening prayers of the Friday evening service. Originally composed for a four-part choir in 1882, it was adapted at Or Chadasch to be sung in unison by the entire congregation.^[34] Rabbi Bar-Ami, unsatisfied with singing only the first voice of a four-part harmony, replaced it in 2018 with a contemporary setting by Israeli-born composer Danny Maseng. Maseng’s compositions, influenced by the American Reform tradition, often use a popular folk aesthetic, contrasting with Lewandowski’s nineteenth-century European choral style. Despite these differences, both

versions of the melody retain a participatory element, even if this was not Lewandowski's original intention.

Video 1: The melody of Lewandowski's "Ma tovu," sung by Lior Bar-Ami and the congregation at online Kabbalat Shabbat, October 22, 2021 (video from [Facebook](#))

When Rabbi Bar-Ami introduced the new melody, there was initial resistance: for some members, it was the sadness of not hearing the familiar "old" melody, while others missed the connection to the European Reform tradition represented by Lewandowski's composition. However, the community gradually became accustomed to the change and today embraces the new melody as part of its musical canon. So much so that, when Rabbi Bar-Ami occasionally switches back to the "old" melody, he finds that some participants no longer know it as well. As Mitchell Ash, the community's lay cantor, writes, the music at Or Chadasch "stands in the tradition of the great prayer leaders Salomon Sulzer ... and Louis Lewandowski" ("sie stellt sich auch in die Tradition der großen Vorbeter Salomon Sulzer ... und Louis Lewandowski").^[35] Even though Ash feels a deep attachment to Lewandowski's melody, he usually sings the new one now.

Video 2: Maseng's "Ma tovu," sung by the congregation at online Kabbalat Shabbat, March 20, 2020 (video from [Facebook](#))

Modes of Musical *Minhag*

The eclectic composition of the *minhag* creates different attachments to Jewish pasts and presents, some of them transhistorical or transnational and others thoroughly local and contemporary. But it is not only the content of the *minhag* that allows for multiplicity and flexibility, but also the form itself. In other words, *minhag* can be considered a concept that allows for multiple approaches to dealing with change in a community's musical repertoire and identity. It is precisely the flexibility of using the concept that is accommodating of different ways of relating music to identity.

But what is *minhag* exactly? *Minhag* is usually translated as "custom" and is used to distinguish one set of customs from another. As Bohlman writes, "*Minhag* includes a folkloric or ethnographic system of customs that gives identity to a community in a particular place, and it also describes a canon of written work distinguishing the Jews of a particular city."^[36] *Minhag* describes belonging to a place or group in narrow or broad terms: it can be the *minhag* of a family for Passover, a specific congregation, or an entire ethnic group, such as *minhag ashkenaz*, referring to traditional Eastern European Jewish liturgy and its related term *nusach*,^[37] or *minhag sepharad*, Sephardic Jewish liturgy. These definitions are always tied to a localized place or group, expressing a particular belonging.

Minhag has an intriguing relationship with tradition and innovation. Translating *minhag* as

“custom” suggests it aligns with tradition. However, according to Hobsbawm and Ranger, custom and tradition are distinct concepts. Tradition is a modern phenomenon arising from historical rupture and is always “invented,” whereas custom is a more fluid form of cultural transmission that incorporates change.^[38]

In order to move beyond this binary view, it is necessary to refrain from translating *minhag*, as this allows for a more fluid boundary between continuity and change or tradition and innovation. This approach is inspired by John Law and Annemarie Mol, who argue for studying what terms *do* in their original languages through ethnographic research. They write:

Translating “words” also detaches texts from their contexts. And this is a problem because texts are never simply about the concern they address or the object to which they may be referring. They are also located in a particular place and time: they are linguistically, geographically and historically situated.^[39]

They advocate for using non-English words to explore the situatedness of phenomena and reflect on the limitations of translations into academic English.

The choice not to translate *minhag* also reflects its use by my research partners. Despite Or Chadasch’s common languages being German and sometimes English, the term *minhag* is frequently used, even though few members have a command of Hebrew. This is common in Jewish practice, where many rituals retain their Hebrew names. Referring to the community’s musical custom as *minhag* adds meaning, integrating it into wider religious practice and elevating melody choice from the profane to the sacred. The term *minhag* signifies the importance and contention surrounding this issue for the congregants.

So then what is *minhag*, not when looked up in a dictionary but when studied ethnographically? The word in practice is multiple, not merely possessing multiple meanings but encompassing overlapping or clashing versions.^[40] These can be functions, attributes, associations, forms, or “modes,” as I decided to call these multiplicities, fitting the musical theme. In my ethnographic research, I identified six modes of *minhag* in this congregation: continuity, habit, authority, potluck, participation, and choice.

Minhag as Continuity

The first mode of *minhag*—continuity—is probably the most straightforward, as it is usually associated with the translation of “custom.” Here *minhag* is associated with a continuity with the past, be it continuity with the history of the congregation, a biographical continuity with childhood, or an elusive ancient continuity with Biblical times. It matters less *what* it is continuous with than *that* it is continuous with the past. In the words of a long-time congregant:

It’s not like I’m going there [to the service] because of faith or spirituality. It gives me childhood, community, connection ... That’s what it does for me. And that is what gets taken away with a single blow. ... For me it’s important that I feel at home and that I am one with my biography and my religious education.^[41]

In the case of this congregant, it was interesting to consider that as she did not grow up in a progressive Jewish environment, it was unlikely that she actually grew up with those melodies. But even though this continuity might not be grounded in historical facts, it can still feel “real.” This is precisely how continuity works; it is largely an emotional value, based less on the actual fact of continuity than on a *feeling* or *sense* of continuity. This becomes particularly important if

one is not religious or does not understand Hebrew. As the rabbi and ethnomusicologist Jeff Summit argues:

The tune, separate from the words, serves as a portal to the past, a connection with ancestors, real and imagined. The “right” tune grounds one in history and becomes an assurance of authenticity. The tune is a vehicle for transcendence. For many Jews who do not understand much Hebrew, the tune is the prayer.^[42]

Continuity becomes a value in itself that creates emotional meaning, connection, and attachment. Eric Frey, a long-time member and current president of the board, spoke to me about his feelings when hearing his favorite melody, one that he had heard in prayer services when attending college in the United States:

The one time when I told the rabbi, “Please, this hurts me,” was when he changed the melody for “Le’dor va’dor.” That’s when I told him, “No, you cannot do that.” He replied to me, “don’t react this stupidly, it’s only one time.” ... But for me it was like, “Please don’t—please don’t give up the melody, I love it so much.” ... I had the feeling it falls away ... during the holidays this would give me a feeling of pain.”^[43]

This sense of pain in a lack of continuity can also be contextualized within musical practices of minorities, who are frequently at risk of having their cultural goods eroded, as well as the “boundary-maintenance” tendencies of various diasporas.^[44]

Another form of continuity is related less to individual biography and more to an imagined continuity with an ancient past. As the rabbi and ethnomusicologist Jeffrey Summit notes, in all denominations there are Jews who “venerate worship traditions as if they had been passed down from God to Moses on Mount Sinai.” Many communities have members who insist that services remain unchanged.^[45] Such feelings are not based on any actual ancient histories of melodies but are purely subjective emotions favoring the “old” over the “new.”^[46]

The mode of continuity is thus consciously emotional, subjective, and irrational. The feelings of discontent, sadness, or pain are not justified because of a change in melody, and yet it still provides a powerful imperative to demand that melodies not be changed. Therefore, *minhag* as continuity is not just an attribute related to the past but also an imperative towards the future: the way things ought to be is the way they have always been.

Minhag as Habit

The second mode of *minhag* is habit. Like continuity, habit also relates to the way things have been in the past. However, habit is not subjective or emotional but purely rational and dependent on conditioning. Unlike a transcendental connection to a far-away past, habit can be changed over time. When *minhag* is habit, the feelings of attachment can be reconditioned. This assumption is also present when *minhag* is mobilized as a mode of habit. As Or Chadasch’s lay cantor Mitchell Ash put it:

Minhag is only habit; it doesn’t have a holy status from a liturgical point of view. ... If it’s only about that [the music] then it’s only conditioning and reconditioning, and it’s about who allows such reconditioning. ... That is *minhag*—everything thrown together and you get used to it, and that is then the *minhag*.^[47]

According to this definition, *minhag* is thus simply a matter of “getting used to.” This means that

the initial reactions of rejection and fear of change are simply phases of reconditioning and will also pass.

One way to explain this process of getting used to is in terms of familiarity. Once a new melody becomes familiar enough that it does not sound new any longer, it also enters into the *minhag*. As the community's president Eric Frey said about a new prayer melody:

I already know it [the new melody] so well—it's already *minhag* for me. You know, when you hear it three times, it becomes *minhag*. Then it already becomes kind of known, familiar.^[48]

While the modes of habit and continuity seem quite different from one another in their relation to rationality and subjectivity, they are similar in the sense that they both create a sense of familiarity, albeit in different ways. So even a rational mode such as habit can create feelings of warmth and homeliness through recognition of and familiarity with the melody. But rather than being oriented towards the past like continuity, conditioning is oriented towards the future when the unfamiliar has become familiar, the new old, the unhabitual habitual.

Controversies around changes in prayer melodies at Or Chadasch eventually subsided more and more due to habit. Some "new" melodies that initially met with resistance are now welcomed and appreciated, showing how this mode of *minhag* significantly influences the congregation's experiences. During my research, when I followed up with congregants, some reported changes in their own reactions to the melodies over time. Rabbi Lior Bar-Ami observed that the community has become so accustomed to the new melodies that they sometimes no longer know the old ones, and other congregants leading prayers now automatically sing the new melodies. However, he views this critically, as he prefers more variation in the melodies. Thus, once habit becomes too habitual, it can create an automated rigidity that limits the diversity in prayer melodies.

Minhag as Authority

The third mode of *minhag* is authority, referring to the community's authority. It is also linked to continuity, but instead of an emotional transcendental attachment to an individual biography it is a form of political legitimation rooted in the community's practice. This is what the community's president Frey referred to as the "politicized" form of *minhag*: *minhag* used as a tool or weapon to assert the community's authority against that of the rabbi. The full use of the word in this mode at Or Chadasch was *minhag hamakom* (Hebrew for *minhag* of the place)—a common term to denote the local differences of *minhagim*—a differentiation that became increasingly important through urbanization and the formation of different urban centers for Jewish life.^[49]

In the case of Or Chadasch, this phrase was used to refer to the *minhag* not of the city but of the community, in particular the *minhag* as a corpus that existed prior to the arrival of the new rabbi. As there were only temporary rabbis for the first decades of the community's existence, it developed its *minhag* with a relative independence from religious authority. When a conflict around Rabbi Bar-Ami broke out and general elections were called, a group of community members voiced a critique: "The rabbi: he/she must find ways to unite different religious views in the community with respect to traditions and the *minhag hamakom*." This term was thus deliberately mobilized to assert the community's right to shape the *minhag* and for the rabbi to respect these local traditions.

The use of the term *minhag hamakom* to refer to a community's local traditions and preferences, which can conflict with religious authority, is common in Jewish communities. The important role of the community in shaping religious practice, coupled with the non-absolute authority of rabbis or cantors, gives the concept of *minhag hamakom* political legitimacy. As scholar and cantor Benjamin Tisser argues, not all musical styles suit every congregation. Widely known melodies may seem universally accepted, but specific congregations often have ingrained favorites they fiercely defend. In such cases, where *minhag hamakom* prevails, introducing a new musical setting might not be successful unless it is featured as a one-time novelty, such as by a religious school class. As he writes, "With every innovation comes potential upset for a segment of the congregation who attend faithfully every week."^[50]

This also happened at Or Chadasch. The feeling of some community members was that their say on religious practices was not being respected enough. In an email exchange rife with conflict around various changes in religious practices (not just the prayer melodies), a former board-member wrote:

In questions of *halakha* [Jewish religious law], the rabbi has the highest authority and the final word.!!! [*sic*] However, here it is also his task "to unite the different conceptions about Judaism in general and liberal Judaism in particular, to constantly search for the common rather than the divisive, and in doing so to consider the different *minhagim* of the community" (taken from the attachment of the employment contract ...). Because of personal traditions and convictions, some of us need more time than an authoritarian decision to change the current conceptions 180 degrees.^[51]

The use of the term "authoritarian" shows that *minhag* here is used as a countermeasure to assert authority against that of the rabbi. It posits the *minhag* as a kind of "bottom-up" authority as opposed to an authoritarian decision of the rabbi against the will and custom of the community and is therefore akin to a form of democratic legitimation.

The most interesting trait of *minhag* in the mode of authority is that it is not about the music at all. The term *minhag hamakom* is broader than the music and includes all kinds of liturgical customs and choices. In this mode, music becomes a pawn in a power struggle between the community and religious authority. Since music acts so directly on affect and emotion, it is easy to refer to melody changes as sources of discontent among the congregants. Yet it is through examining melody choice that "we learn about the locus of authority and power of tradition in each community."^[52]

Minhag as Potluck

In the fourth mode, *minhag* as potluck, the history of the community and its members is embodied into the *minhag*. As the *minhag* is something that for the longest time was not ordered by a rabbi but grew out of the community itself over several decades, each aspect of the *minhag* can also signify different phases and people who have left their mark. The term "potluck" comes directly from one of my research partners from the community, who characterized Or Chadasch's *minhag* as "potluck: everybody brings something with them" ("potluck: jeder bringt was mit").^[53] In this mode, the fact that people come from outside and bring new melodies is not considered a rupture with tradition but is rather the tradition itself.

In contrast to the previous modes, this mode is not resistant but open to change and innovation. Here is how one of the founders and long-time members put it:

I can't join in on the big sorrow that old songs are going and new ones are coming, because with us it is always a process. Basically that's how it always grew; I would say that that is our tradition. We have the tradition that we have our music and that new things are constantly added to it, that every rabbi brings something new ... These many melodies are not coming from nowhere; it has been 30 years that this has been growing.^[54]

In this quote, the congregant welcomes not only the fact that the *minhag* changes but even considers it to be one of the main characteristics of the community. *Minhag* as potluck can thus be a powerful marker of belonging, as its different elements come together to form a unique collection that embodies a community's history.

In this mode, authority is neither on the side of the rabbi or prayer leader nor on that of the community. In the absence of any authority, it is purely the process of continual change and adaptation that shapes the *minhag*. Religious authority therefore is only the formal framework for embedding this process of potluck. For example, as lay cantor Ash explained to me, this means that the *siddur* (prayer book) is only a representation of the *minhag* in its embodied, situated form embedded in communal practice.

You can feel the eclecticism [in our *minhag*]. ... There are all kinds of elements that were thrown together. Our *siddur* is nothing but a codification of that what was already there.^[55]

However, this mode of *minhag* is also under threat when there is too much power of choice on the side of the rabbi. But since it is still common at Or Chadasch for congregants to regularly lead services, even with the presence of a permanent rabbi, the potluck element still continues to characterize the community's musical life.

It is also precisely this openness to change and the welcoming of new people and their traditions that can be considered a defining characteristic of progressive Judaism. Continuous and processual change is part of the religious imperative of progressive Judaism, which is grounded in the idea that traditions can and must be adapted to times and circumstances. One of the founders and former long-time president Theodor Much wrote:

The liberal/progressive tradition—in contrast to Orthodoxy—understands the divine revelation as a continuous process and therefore demands that each generation grapple respectfully but also critically with the laws anew and reinterpret or suspend some traditions with consideration to societal and social developments and circumstances.^[56]

Minhag as potluck thus embodies the history of progressive Judaism, which can be understood as a transgenerational potluck of different interpretations and reinterpretations of Jewish tradition in light of sociopolitical developments.

Many of the melodies were directly linked to the members who brought the music and remained even after the people left. For instance, some melodies were a mix of contributions from various community members. A notable example is a version of Psalm 92, "Mizmor shir l'yom hashabbat," sung in Or Chadasch's Friday evening service. The first two lines came from part-time rabbi Evelyne Goodman-Thau, the community's rabbi from 2001 to 2003 and the first female rabbi in Vienna. After she left, Ash continued to sing the prayer using her opening lines with a call and response principle and composed a second part for additional lines. He sang this prayer unaccompanied, with the congregation joining in for the response parts. This melody was

never written down, but Ash recalled it in an interview.

Ihr Browser kennt das HTML5-audio-Element noch nicht.

Audio 1: Recording of the Mizmor Shir melody by Mitchell Ash and Evelyne Goodman-Thau that is no longer sung in the congregation, sung by Mitchell Ash during an interview on June 30, 2021

In the mode of potluck, melodies or practices can become marks made by individuals in the congregation's history, continuing to enact these attachments even in their absence. Ash noted that Rabbi Goodman-Thau was a "rabbi of whom nothing else was left anymore" in the *minhag* of Or Chadasch. *Minhag* as potluck thus becomes a "living archive" of the congregation's history. Unlike other melodies passed down through generations, those composed by community members are grounded in the present and linked to real-life individuals. Such melodies' replacement can be a personal source of pain. However, Ash expressed no sadness over his melody no longer being sung, acknowledging that the rabbi had "all the right to introduce his own version" ("ein gutes Recht seine Version einzuführen").^[57] Even when tightly linked to past or present congregants in the potluck mode, melodies can be let go, continuing the adaptation and renewal of the *minhag*.

Minhag as Participation

Minhag as participation is also an embodiment of community, but in a functional rather than a symbolic sense: what matters most is that people are able to sing along during a prayer service. The growing importance of musical participation in contemporary Jewish practice, particularly in progressive traditions, has been widely acknowledged.^[58] At the same time, the increased focus on participation has also been contentious in many congregations, as some fear it erodes more traditional forms of prayer.^[59] The scholar and cantor Tisser highlights the identity crisis facing contemporary synagogues, questioning whether they are still primarily institutions focused on religious services with supplementary social and educational programs, or whether they have become more like cultural and community centers, suggesting that the latter is increasingly the case.^[60]

However, in many progressive communities, the centrality of musical participation is less a contention than a defining characteristic. At Or Chadasch, as in many other progressive congregations, participation in collective singing is a central element of the service. My research partners frequently described the congregation as a "singing community" —apparently also an observation that guest rabbis had made in the past. As described in the brochure for Or Chadasch's twenty-five-year anniversary, "the music in [our community] primarily revolves around the collective prayer. Almost everything that we sing—and that is the majority of the service—we sing together and, as visitors have regularly noted, very loudly."^[61] One of the founders told me, "right from the start it was important that we sing, and [that we have] piano accompaniment. These things were cornerstones ... This collective and uniting aspect of music was always there."^[62]

One of the reasons that is sometimes cited for the increasing importance of musical participation is the increasingly limited understanding of Hebrew among congregants due to secularization and assimilation.^[63] This was also one of community president Frey's explanations for why music plays such a central role:

Music replaces the knowledge of the prayers. We may not be able to read everything, but we have the melodies in our head and enjoy singing together. That was always a strong characteristic that distinguishes Or Chadash, and it is also strong in the international Reform, progressive Jewish tradition. ... You don't have to believe so strongly in God, because you can still be absorbed by the music and still have this emotional aspect ... [People come] because they like the music. Because they are also involved more [than in the Orthodox community], because they are closer, because they can sing along.^[64]

It is not only the absence of understanding of Hebrew that participation makes up for but also the lack of belief in God. As singing together can lead to powerful collective bonds and spiritual experiences, it thus fits the demands of an increasingly secularized Jewish population.

Minhag as participation is less an attribute than a function—*minhag* is that what people can participate in. This functionality is generally an attribute of what ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino calls “participatory” music-making, which is more about the activity itself and “the social relations being realized through the performance” than about an end product.^[65]

It is thus through participatory music that social relations, and thus community, are realized and enacted. This mode is thus less about the aesthetics of the melody and more about the willingness of congregants to participate. At the same time, certain melodies, in particular those from the American Reform tradition, do lend themselves more to musical participation than others, for example those with a verse-chorus structure. Therefore, this mode of *minhag* is also dependent on the form of the melodies and their suitability for musical participation.

Minhag as Choice

This brings us to the final mode of *minhag*: choice. Here, *minhag* is a set of repertoires that offer variety and flexibility, primarily for the prayer leaders. This mode appears in the accounts of the rabbi and the accompanist, highlighting a role division with different modes of *minhag* among congregation members. In Jewish communities of all denominations, worship leaders are usually expected to make musical choices at certain points in the service.^[66] Thus, while melody choice depends on the community's *minhag*, it is the prayer leader who makes the musical choice reflecting that *minhag* in the moment.

These musical choices contribute to identity construction and reflect broader choices on religious affiliation and practice. As Summit writes, “Melody choice in Jewish worship should be placed in a larger range of choices that American Jews make as they construct their identity in a society where ethnic and religious affiliation is increasingly voluntary.”^[67] So while melody choice has been a topic of discussion from the Talmudic period to the present, it becomes increasingly important in late-modern, post-secular society, where identity construction is a deliberate act. The conception of *minhag* as choice thus reflects a particular late-modern sensibility about individual and religious freedom.^[68]

Choice stands in the most extreme contrast to the first mode, in which *minhag* is defined through its continuity with the past. In the choice mode, *minhag* is completely immersed in the present moment and adapted to the situated circumstances. For the accompanist and jazz pianist Richard Seniw, this is a process akin to a jazz improvisation:

[Sometimes] the moment is better for this one song or melody, for whatever reason. That way you can adapt to the circumstances or the situation. I see it a bit like a jazz improvisation. If you stand on a stage in front of a crowd, you also feel what suits the feeling of the room in the moment, and that's also how it is during the synagogue service.^[69]

The value of the *minhag* here is having different options to choose from spontaneously—almost as a form of creative improvisation. The choice lies completely with the prayer leader, who also has the responsibility to understand and respond to the needs of the congregation in a particular moment. Therefore, choice is not a top-down decision but rather a dynamic process by which the needs of the congregation, the preferences of the prayer leader, and the spontaneity of the moment interact to shape the *minhag*.

Minhag as choice is not only a question of creative flexibility but also has spiritual or religious aspects in the sense that different melodies can change the relation to the prayer text. As Rabbi Bar-Ami puts it:

I think it's very important to expand the repertoire, so to speak, and to be able to also just sing a different melody sometimes, because a different melody can also give you a different approach to the prayer. ... At the same time ... it should be a good mix of old and new melodies and offer a certain kind of variety.^[70]

Here the breadth of choice is a way to help members relate differently to the prayers—perhaps find different meanings in the text or simply change their emotional connection to it. Thus the function of having a variety in choice of melodies is also of a pedagogical nature.

Yet in order to not alienate congregants, the variety in the melodies needs to be balanced out with the other modes of *minhag*, in particular participation. If congregants cannot participate and sing along to a melody, they might not connect to it at all. Therefore, the introduction of more variety also needs to be well prepared and organized. For example, one of the strategies the rabbi used to facilitate this was to create an online shared file with recordings and sheet music of the different melodies to assist the members in learning the new repertoire. During parts of the Covid-19 pandemic, services were held entirely online, with no participation; this served as an opportunity for congregants to listen to and gradually learn new melodies, enabling them to then participate once services resumed in person.^[71] Such practical solutions can help alleviate conflict also in the mode of choice, where much of the decision-making power lies with the prayer leader.

Conclusion: Powers of *Minhag*

This research began with fundamental inquiries into the significance of prayer melodies for congregants and the reasons why alterations to these melodies provoke such emotional and contentious debates. At first glance, such a “melody controversy” might appear as a straightforward clash between traditionalists and innovators—those who are open to change and those who are not. However, a deeper examination reveals that this binary opposition largely dissolves. Central to this understanding is the concept of *minhag*, an insider term that, when studied “in practice,” cannot be simply translated to custom or canon. Instead, *minhag* encompasses multiple modes that coexist within religious practice, sometimes overlapping and sometimes clashing. While this multiplicity occasionally leads to conflict, it also ensures that

minhag is not monolithic and does not strive for singularity or universality. *Minhag* is essential in accommodating differences, which is particularly important in a small minority community.

The six modes of *minhag*—continuity, habit, authority, potluck, participation, and choice—navigate persistence and change beyond a simple binary of tradition and innovation. While the modes range from traditionalist to innovative, *minhag* remains simultaneously stable and dynamic due to its multiplicity. Without a single “correct” mode, *minhag* thus accommodates both the desire for persistence and for change. It is also part of the dynamism of *minhag* that certain melodies can become “minhagified”, just as certain works can become canonized or practices become customary. There are different ways in which a *minhag* can be expanded or changed, particularly through finding local, situated solutions.

Ethnographic attentiveness to the multiple modes of *minhag* allows for rethinking the binary between tradition and innovation. It offers an alternative to the stereotypical views of Judaism as resistant to change or progressive Judaism as blindly innovative. This perspective is vital in progressive communities, where being open to innovation while preserving tradition is a religious value. The tension between choice and rigidity also reflects Jews’ minority position: being Jewish is both ascribed and chosen.^[72] Transcending the tradition-innovation binary is central to ethnomusicological minority research, as minorities often creatively navigate these opposing tendencies.

This article explored musical *minhag* as it is negotiated in practice at the liberal Jewish community Or Chadasch in Vienna, taking into account how different prayer melodies enact different transhistorical and transnational attachments. Melody choice is a central vehicle for community identity formation,^[73] creating attachments to grand musical traditions, transnational communities, and local histories. At Or Chadasch, these attachments include the grand composers of the European Reform movement, the participatory style of the post-war American Reform movement, and local connections to former members or guest rabbis, forming a living archive within the *minhag*. The particular composition of Or Chadasch’s *minhag* reflects its history, ideology, and situatedness in Vienna as a minority within a minority.

One might argue that marginalization has materialized in Or Chadasch’s musical *minhag*. Due to limited resources to afford a permanent rabbi, the *minhag* developed through a grassroots, bottom-up process. The aftermath of the near-total destruction of Jewish life in Vienna, especially within the secular, assimilated milieu, has made the synagogue a crucial space for what Brubaker calls the “boundary-maintenance” of a diaspora.^[74] The synagogue thus becomes a de facto space for the construction and affirmation of contemporary Jewish identity. Music and sound, particularly in a congregation not situated in a historical building like the *Stadttempel*, index the “Jewishness” of the space. Additionally, the experience of collective trauma means that changes in communal practice can trigger fears of cultural loss and destruction. These connections of the musical *minhag* to collective experiences are not merely representational but material, linked to concrete sociopolitical realities and distributions of resources.

It is due to these specific local factors that the choice of prayer melodies holds such importance for the practice of Or Chadasch. However, the ethnographic study of a term like *minhag*—resisting translation and focusing on the situatedness of words and melodies in their specific context—can extend beyond its local setting.^[75] *Minhag* is both a localized and a transnational, transhistorical phenomenon, weaving together multiple communities, localities, and histories. As a term that is multiple in practice, it unites divergent views and stances, functioning as a unifying element in a small but diverse community like Or Chadasch. *Minhag* can

also be politicized to divide and assert the community's authority against the rabbi. In summary, *minhag* is a term with many powers, enabled by its situatedness in a specific local context and its attachments to transhistorical and transnational communities and traditions. The only way to study its varying meanings is through localized ethnographic and ethnomusicological research, resisting abstraction and generalization and privileging the multiple over the singular, the particular over the universal, and the pragmatic over the representational. Only through this attentiveness do the powers of *minhag* become visible.

Postscript

This article focused on a particular period in the community's history when the musical *minhag* was actively negotiated. By the time of fieldwork, conflicts and negotiations had gradually subsided at Or Chadasch and continued to do so even more after the completion of this research. After the departure of some founding members and a reconfiguration of the board in 2020, conflicts diminished significantly. The community largely adapted to having different prayer melodies and accepted that these could change occasionally. Many younger members also joined the congregation and quickly became accustomed to Rabbi Bar-Ami's style of varying melodies. With Rabbi Bar-Ami's departure in 2024, Or Chadasch now faces another phase of change of its musical *minhag* with the arrival of a new permanent rabbi from the US, Rabbi Tobias Divack Moss, in the fall of 2024. Moss will continue to introduce new prayer melodies and accompany his services with a guitar, something Or Chadasch has deliberately avoided but is now open to. It is precisely through the powers of *minhag* that a small community like Or Chadasch can manage such changes and incorporate them into its continuously transforming tradition.

References

1. See, for example, "About us," [World Union for Progressive Judaism \(WUPJ\)](#), accessed August 17, 2022. ↑
2. Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Jeffrey A. Summit, *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship*, American Musicspheres (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ellen Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Sarah M. Ross, *A Season of Singing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2016); and Ruth Illman, "'Retaining the Tradition—but with an Open Mind': Change and Choice in Jewish Musical Practices," *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 53, no. 2 (2017): 197–218. ↑
3. This does not necessarily mean that they lead an Orthodox lifestyle but rather reflects the structure of the IKG as an *Einheitsgemeinde* (unified community), where membership is only available to Jews whose status can be confirmed by *halacha* (Jewish law). ↑
4. See, for example, *Music and Minorities from Around the World: Research, Documentation and Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. Ursula Hemetek, Essica Marks, and Adelaida Reyes (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014); and Mojca Kovačič and Ana Hofman, "Music, Migration and Minorities: Perspectives and Reflections," *Musicological Annual* 55, no. 2 (2019): 5–17. ↑
5. In my use of the term "minority" I build on the definition of the Music and Minorities Research Center at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna: "Essentials," [About Us, Music and Minorities Research Center, University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna](#), accessed August 17, 2022. ↑
6. These conflicts lead some members to leave the community, including one of the founders and a former

president of the board. ↑

7. For recent insights on how the Covid-19 pandemic changed Jewish worship practices, see [Jeffrey A. Summit, "Jewish Worship, Music, and Technology during the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 9, no. 2 \(2023\).](#) ↑
8. Also consider that the boundary between "insider" and "outsider" is always messy in ethnomusicological research: Marcia Herndon, "Insiders, Outsiders: Knowing Our Limits, Limiting Our Knowing," in "Emics and Etics in Ethnomusicology," ed. Max Peter Baumann, special issue, *The World of Music* 35, no. 1 (1993): 63–80. ↑
9. Jonathan P. J. Stock and Chou Cheiner, "Fieldwork at Home: European and Asian Perspectives," in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). ↑
10. Dialogical practices are a standard particularly in ethnomusicological minority research, where working with marginalized people risks enforcing an authoritarian and racist power relation between the researcher and the people researched. "Essentials," [About Us, Music and Minorities Research Center, University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna](#), accessed August 17, 2022. ↑
11. Philip V. Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity*, AMS Studies in Music (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 164. ↑
12. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), x. ↑
13. Marsha L. Rozenblit, "Jewish Assimilation in Habsburg Vienna," in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 228–29. ↑
14. *Ibid.*, 225–45. ↑
15. Evelyn Adunka, "Progressive Judaism in Austria," in "The European Union for Progressive Judaism: Anniversary Issue," ed. Jonathan Magonet, special issue, *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 49, no. 1 (2016): 32. Adunka also notes that, due to the legal restrictions of the time, Mannheim could not officially be designated as a rabbi and was instead referred to as the director of a religious school. ↑
16. Rozenblit, "Jewish Assimilation," 228–29. ↑
17. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 151. ↑
18. Adunka, "Progressive Judaism in Austria." ↑
19. Theodor Much, "Eine kurze Geschichte des Reformjudentums," *25 Jahre Or Chadasch: Jüdische Liberale Gemeinde Wien* (Vienna: Or Chadasch—Liberal Jewish Community Vienna, 2015), 11, a former president, sees Or Chadasch as introducing progressive Judaism to Vienna for the first time. ↑
20. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*. ↑
21. Adunka, "Progressive Judaism in Austria," 39. ↑
22. [Heidmarie Uhl, "Das 'erste Opfer': Der österreichische Opfermythos und seine Transformationen in der Zweiten Republik," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 30, no. 1 \(2001\): 19–34](#); Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2003); Judith Beniston, "'Hitler's First Victim'?—Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria: Introduction," *Austrian Studies* 11 (2003): 1–13; [Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, "Die Jüdische Minderheit," *Initiative Minderheiten*](#), April 24, 2019, accessed December 2, 2024. For a recent monograph that situates the victim myth in a context of philosemitism in Vienna, see [Frances Tanzer, *Vanishing Vienna: Modernism, Philosemitism, and Jews in a Postwar City* \(University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024\).](#) ↑

23. [“Die IKG Wien,” IKG-Wien](#), accessed November 16, 2024. For the immigration history of IKG members, see [Lappin-Eppel, “Die Jüdische Minderheit.”](#) ↑
24. Of particular note was the establishment of the *Abraham Geiger Kolleg* in Potsdam in 1999, a rabbinical seminary in the liberal tradition, a center for contemporary German-speaking progressive Judaism. The *Geiger Kolleg* continues to be an important partner institution for Or Chadasch, especially since the current rabbi Lior Bar-Ami was trained there. ↑
25. Leslie Bergman, letter in the name of the European Union for Progressive Judaism, *25 Jahre Or Chadasch*, 2. ↑
26. Theodor Much, “Grussworte,” *25 Jahre Or Chadasch*, 5. ↑
27. Eric Frey, informal conversation, July 7, 2022, Vienna. ↑
28. Rabbiner Dr. Walter Rothschild, “Kehillah Kedosha: ‘Or Chadasch’ at 25,” *25 Jahre Or Chadasch*, 6. ↑
29. [Joshua A. Edelman, “The Debbie Friedman Problem: Performing Tradition, Memory, and Modernity in Progressive Jewish Liturgy,”](#) in [“Liturgy and Performance,”](#) ed. Megan Macdonald, special issue, *Liturgy* 28, no. 1 (2013): 6–17; [Judah M. Cohen, “‘Sing Unto God’: Debbie Friedman and the Changing Sound of Jewish Liturgical Music,”](#) in [“New Directions in Jewish Music & Ethnomusicology,”](#) ed. Mark L. Kligman, special issue, *Contemporary Jewry* 35, no. 1 (2015): 13–34; and [Ross, *A Season of Singing.*](#) ↑
30. Mitchell G. Ash, “Musik bei Or Chadasch von 1990 bis heute,” *25 Jahre Or Chadasch*, 18. ↑
31. Ash, “Musik bei Or Chadasch,” 19. ↑
32. [Edelman, “The Debbie Friedman Problem,”](#) 7. ↑
33. Judah M. Cohen, “Exploring the Postmodern Landscape of Jewish Music,” in *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture*, ed. Vincent Brook (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 108–113. ↑
34. Usually it has piano accompaniment, but in the example below the accompanist was absent. ↑
35. Ash, “Musik bei Or Chadasch,” 18. ↑
36. Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity*, 164. ↑
37. Judah M. Cohen, *The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor: Musical Authority, Cultural Investment*, A Helen B. Schwartz Book in Jewish Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 21. I deliberately choose to not engage with the rich literature on *nusach* in my dealing with *minhag*, as even though these concepts might sometimes be theoretically related, *nusach* did not come up in my field research. ↑
38. *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2012). ↑
39. [John Law and Annemarie Mol, “Words to Think With: An Introduction,”](#) *The Sociological Review Monographs* 68, no. 2 (2020): 270. ↑
40. For more on this concept of “multiple,” see Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*, Science and Cultural Theory (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). ↑
41. Anonymous, informal conversation, January 8, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: “Ich bin ja nicht dort wegen Glauben oder Spiritualität. Es bringt Kindheit, Community, Anschluss ... Das bringt es heraus. Und das wird für mich mit einem Schlag weggenommen ... Für mich ist es bedeutend, dass ich mich dort wohl fühle und dort auch mit meiner ganzen Geschichte und religiösen Erziehung in einer Einheit bleibe.” ↑
42. Summit, *The Lord’s Song*, 33. ↑
43. Eric Frey, interview, June 12, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: “Das eine mal wo ich dem Rabbiner auch

gesagt habe 'Bitte, das tut mir weh,' war als er einmal auch für Le'dor va'dor eine andere Melodie eingeführt hat. Da habe ich gesagt 'Nein das kannst du nicht tun.' Und da hat er gesagt 'Reagier nicht so blöd, das ist ja nur einmal,' ... Doch für mich war es, 'Bitte nicht—bitte nicht die Melodie von Le'dor Va'dor aufgeben. Das liebe ich so' ... Da hatte ich dann das Gefühl das fällt weg, zu den Feiertagen wäre das ein Gefühl von Schmerz." ↑

44. Rogers Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 6. ↑
45. Summit, *The Lord's Song*, 23. ↑
46. Barbara Borts, "The Changing Music of British Reform Judaism," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 45, no. 1 (2020): 30. ↑
47. Mitchell Ash, interview, February 17, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: "Minhag ist nichts anderes als Gewohnheit; es hat keinen heiligen Status liturgisch gesehen ... Wenn es nur das [die Musik] ist, ist es nur Gewöhnung und Umgewöhnung und es geht darum wer sich umgewöhnen lässt oder nicht. ... Das ist *minhag*—alles durcheinandergeschmissen, man gewöhnt sich dran und das ist dann *minhag*." ↑
48. Eric Frey, interview, June 12, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: "Da sage ich inzwischen kenne ich sie [die Melodie] so gut, die ist für mich auch schon *minhag*. Weißt du, wenn man es dreimal gehört hat wird es *minhag*. Dann wird es schon irgendwie bekannt, vertraut." ↑
49. Bohlman, *Jewish Music and Modernity*, 164. ↑
50. Benjamin Tisser, "Preserving Nusah in the 21st-Century Conservative Synagogue," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 40, no. 2 (2015): 8. ↑
51. Email shared with the author by one of the recipients for research purposes, July 12, 2019. Original wording: "In halachischen Fragen hat der Rabbiner oberste Autorität und letzte Instanz!!!! Allerdings, hierbei ist es auch seine Aufgabe, 'die unterschiedlichen Auffassungen über das Judentum im Allgemeinen und das liberale Judentum im Besonderen zu vereinen, stets das Gemeinsame anstatt das Trennenden zu suchen und dabei die verschiedenen *Minhagim* der Gemeinde zu berücksichtigen.' (entnommen vom Anhang zum Dienstvertrag ...). Manche von uns brauchen aufgrund von persönlichen Traditionen und Überzeugungen mehr Zeit und mehr Überzeugungen als eine autoritäre Entscheidung, um das bisherige Verständnis 180 Grad zu drehen. Ich nehme an, dies muss in einer liberalen Gemeinde auch möglich sein, und das wäre auch gut so, da Religion ist nicht nur rationell sondern geht auch tiefer in die Gefühlsebene." ↑
52. Summit, *The Lord's Song*, 19. ↑
53. Anonymous, interview, July 2, 2021, Vienna. ↑
54. Anonymous, interview, July 2, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: "Ich kann mich nicht der großen Trauer anschließen, dass alte Lieder gehen und neue kommen, weil das ist bei uns immer ein Prozess. Im Grunde ist das immer so gewachsen. Ich würde sagen das ist unsere Tradition. Wir haben die Tradition, dass unsere Musik da ist und das immer wieder neue Sachen dazukommen, dass jeder Rabbiner etwas Neues einbringt ... Diese vielen Melodien die wir jetzt haben kommen nichts aus dem nichts—das sind 30 Jahre das das gewachsen ist." ↑
55. Mitchell Ash, interview, February 17, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: "Man spürt die Eklektik [in unserem *minhag*] ... Es sind alle möglichen Elemente zusammengeworfen worden. Unser *siddur* ist nur eine Kodifizierung von dem was schon da war." ↑
56. Theodor Much, "Progressives Judentum heute," *25 Jahre Or Chadash*, 8. Original wording: "Die liberale/progressive Theologie versteht—anders als die Orthodoxie—die göttliche Offenbarung als einen fortwährenden Prozess und fordert daher, dass sich jede Generation aufs Neue mit den Gesetzen respektvoll, aber doch kritisch auseinander zu setzen hat und manche Traditionen bzw. einzelne (unzeitgemäße) Gesetze, mit Rücksicht auf gesellschaftliche und soziale Entwicklungen und Gegebenheiten neu interpretiert oder ganz aussetzt." ↑

57. Mitchell Ash, interview, June 30, 2021, Vienna. ↑
58. Slobin, *Chosen Voices*, 195–212; Edelman, “The Debbie Friedman Problem”; Summit, *The Lord’s Song*; Cohen, “Sing Unto God”; Ross, *A Season of Singing*; and Matthew Austerklein, “The Sovereign Musical Leadership in the Conservative Movement,” *Journal of Synagogue Music* 46, no. 1 (2021): 19–23. ↑
59. See, for example, the discussion on “Nusah wars” in *Journal of Synagogue Music* 40, no. 2 (2015). ↑
60. Benjamin Tisser, “Preserving Nusah,” 5. ↑
61. Ash, “Musik bei Or Chadasch,” 18. Original wording: “Vor allem steht die Musik bei Or Chadasch aber im Zeichen des gemeinsamen Gebets. Fast alles, das gesungen wird—und das ist ein Großteil des Gottesdienstes—singen wir gemeinsam und sehr laut, wie Besucher immer wieder feststellen.” ↑
62. Anonymous, interview, Vienna, July 2, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: “Es war von Anfang in wichtig, dass wir singen und die Klavierbegleitung [haben]. Diese Dinge waren Eckpfeiler ... Dieses Gemeinschaftliche und Verbindende der Musik war immer da.” ↑
63. Summit, *The Lord’s Song*, 20 and 33. ↑
64. Eric Frey, interview, June 12, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: “Musik ersetzt Kenntnis der Gebete. Wir können zwar nicht alles lesen aber haben Melodien im Ohr und genießen das gemeinsame Singen. Das war immer ein sehr starkes Charakteristikum, das Or Chadasch auszeichnet, und in einer internationalen Reform, liberalen jüdischen Tradition ist es sehr stark ... Man muss bei uns nicht so fest an Gott glauben, weil man kann in der Musik aufgehen und hat noch immer diesen emotionalen Teil ... [Menschen kommen] weil ihnen die Musik gefällt. Weil sie auch näher involviert sind [als in der Orthodoxen Gemeinde], weil sie näher sind, weil sie mitsingen können.” ↑
65. Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 35. ↑
66. Summit, *The Lord’s Song*, 27. ↑
67. Ibid., 129. ↑
68. Ibid., 19. ↑
69. Richard Seniow, interview, April 22, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: “[Manchmal ist] die Zeit gerade besser für dieses Stück oder für diese Melodie, warum auch immer. Dann kann man sich ja auch an die Umstände anpassen oder an die Situation, je nach Gegebenheit. Ich sehe das ein bisschen wie auch eine Jazz Improvisation. Wenn man auf einer Bühne steht, vor einem Publikum, dann spürt man ja auch gerade was jetzt in dem Moment passt zu dem Gefühl was gerade im Raum ist, und so ist das auch beim Gottesdienst in der Synagoge.” ↑
70. Lior Bar-Ami, interview, January 19, 2021, Vienna. Original wording: “Und gleichzeitig halte ich es für ganz wichtig, dass man sozusagen das Repertoire erweitert, und zwischendurch auch einfach eine andere Melodie singen kann, weil eine andere Melodie einen anderen Zugang zu dem Lied, oder dem Text oder dem Gebet bieten kann ... Gleichzeitig ... sollte eine gute Mischung aus bekannten Melodien sein und aus neuen Melodien sein, aber eben auch eine gewisse Abwechslung bieten.” ↑
71. This echoes recent claims on how the use of the Internet fosters participation in Jewish practice. For more, see Rachel Adelstein, “Synagogue Music Comes to the People,” *Journal of Synagogue Music* 46, no. 1 (2021): 15–19. ↑
72. Summit, *The Lord’s Song*, 20. ↑
73. See Summit’s conclusion: “They chose music strategically in worship, to affirm their connection to Jewish history, to experience viscerally being part of the Jewish people, to carve out a separate space within the American superculture and negotiate their relationship with other Jews similar and different from themselves.” Ibid., 155. ↑

74. [Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' diaspora," 6.](#) ↑

75. [Law and Mol, "Words to Think With."](#) ↑

Cover image: Torah ark at Or Chadasch synagogue, credit: Andrej Grilc