

KLezmorim
Jewish Folk Musicians
A Study in Cultural History
by Isaac Rivkind,
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Introduction

- A) Clowns and Klezmers
- B) Klezmorim in the Wedding
- C) Conductor of Dancing
- D) Numbers of Klezmer
- E) Klezmers in Pictures and Art
- F) Comments on Klezmer

Below is a translation of pages 12, 13, 14, 15 of Rivkind's book from the Clowns and Klezmorim chapter. This is not exactly a word for word translation and not every footnote was translated, but hopefully gives the overall meaning of the contents.

Sincerely,
Helen

Clowns and Klezmorim

The author did not give much attention, did not stand on literally, to the name of his book "The Musicians." This title begs explanation. From what time, from when did this word become empty of its first original meaning which is instruments of music, literally playing instruments of music, and then changed its meaning to those who played instruments of music? This is not just a linguistic question but in it is sandwiched an important problem from a number of perspectives.

For many, many years, there was confusion in the meaning of players of music, or klezmorim. At times it served as a general term for instruments of music and at times for the players of instruments. In my opinion, one needs to differentiate between Western Europe and Eastern Europe during the period that preceded the 18th century. For example, in the west, there were "clowns" and in the east "musicians." And even though the maharab who was mareynu Harab Meyence [which is a place where this particular rabbi comes from] shares in the ceremony from a place called Mayence a wedding that took place in Rheintz, in Germany, "then the rabbi led the groom beforehand and all the people followed by the light of the torches with a "klezmer" to the courtyard of the synagogue and returns to bring the bride with her friends or attendants." This quote comes from the Laws of Marriage. It is clear that "klezmer" here means musical instruments, and the players here are referred to as "letsonim" or clowns.

[translator's comment—The town of *Mayence* is a very famous place in Europe where many famous rabbis lived. the *Even though* has to do with how rabbis talk when they are making a rabbinic decision or giving explanation to a particular issue or commentary on a particular passage--even though refers to the fact that the maharab felt or thought or passed a decree differently in another situation (or so I can gather from the text).]

Clear proof is found in another source, from Rav Yosef Yossman, son of Rav Moshe Kashim and it relies on the testimony of his senior. It says in the testimony of Yosef Omes among the laws of Tisha b'av it is written: "it is forbidden for the children of the wealthy to study or play klezmer." Here the reference is instruments. Even during the rest of the days of the year, it stands to reason that clowning or playing around is not allowed.

(sidebar interpretation paraphrased. The reason for not allowing this on Tisha b'av has to do with the remembrance of the destruction of the temple because it is forbidden to hear any kind of music when one is in mourning. All the more so in this case because it was considered that learning to play instruments was considered to be an act of enjoyment. It was therefore forbidden to do so on Tisha b'av.)

From here one can simplify that in Ashkenazic tradition, one calls players of musical instruments "letsonim" and that poor people are permitted to play instruments for the enjoyment of others, as a livelihood. It is written "if this is how you gain your livelihood/sustenance." And, anyone who interprets the stringency of the law is blessed.

It is characteristic to the author that the playing of musical instruments is a source of making a living, a kind of destiny to the children of the poor, and one should be cautious as they are the source of music for the people of Israel.

[translator's note: I think he is referring to the author of the book he is critiquing--Hmmm re people of lowly status...I think he is questioning how in a culture where people of lowly status are looked down upon as were the klezmerim--how they could be so called *trusted* although they were entrusted to provide the music for weddings and the like--just not to be emulated in terms of encouragement as a career for one's children. Not sure about the reference to the keepers of the music of the people of Israel. Certainly seems as if the status of such people from biblical times to the 18th century changed considerably---maybe the influence of the general society in which they lived]

It is also clear that during the course of time, there followed great confusion with the word "letsonim." The word included in it different roles/positions: mimes [mochanim??] comics, players. You never know what the reference is to when you are using that word "letsonim". It can include all of those different meanings. "Letsonim" had a lowly position in society. Sometimes it is all three meanings together. Other times, just one of the possible defining roles. Even in the clowns of Purim as drawn in the well known pictures in the books of Minhagim [customs] and from the Bikrat [??Hamazon], they are dressed like clowns with musical instruments in their hands.

The author also did not catch the difference in time and place and therefore placed the klezmerim and "letsonim" on the same level but clearly they were not seen that way. The rabbis when commenting on what was permitted or prohibited categorized and saw both groups together even though there were differences between them.

[translator's note: I think he is talking about the difference in status between klezmerim (the profession) and *letzanim* i think that the reference to letzanim

after reading this has to do more with the multifaceted entertainer--as in comedian and musician and entertainer being the letzan. And the klezmerim the players of music being just that players of music. It is interesting that letzanim in modern hebrew today means clowns! as in circus clowns.]

Evan Lipschitz who noted this discrepancy was not exacting in his description or his identification of "letsonim." Rav Rabeinu Moshe Shutzeav in the volume of his Responsum on "Letsonim" [responsum is literature the rabbis wrote in response to a question] as it refers to marriage ceremonies refers to them as "b'aleh zemer," the owners of a song, a word that never rooted itself in the Hebrew language.

In the response of his son, Rav Chaim Yaeer, referring to the mitzvah of making happy the bride and groom, is seen or envisioned, the lower socioeconomic status given to "letsonim". If someone who is knowledgeable of the utmost status of the klezmerim knows how to play the violin leading the bride and groom or the bridal party to the festive meal, the question is, is he allowed to play or is he prohibited from lowering himself or degrading himself from the honour of the Torah? [they were very concerned with the status of the person who played instruments. Was it just a lowly person who wasn't that knowledgeable? If somebody who had a lot of knowledge and experience in the community and knew how to play the violin, if he played, would they think he was l'aetzanon?]

The responsa asked, someone who is learned and knows how to play a number of musical instruments asked if he had permission to play a violin before a bride and bridegroom [that's a huge mitzvah], both leading to the chupah and at the festive meal. The wedding meal is described as being a "sudah mitzvah" a festive meal, that is commanded. It is something that we are supposed to do at a wedding. The answer was given: It is a bit like lowering oneself according to the order of the custom of the people.

Neither really proves that the reference here is to "letsonim." The reference is to "nevel" [a lyre] in two separate words. The custom is to refer to the word "letsonim" in two separate meanings when it is a reference to using the instruments of the nevel.

Even the Jews of Lithuania and Poland who didn't call klezmer "letsonim," who never had a reference to it in their countries, when they emigrated to Holland and there was a decree that was made in the year 5302. There they added a decree #44: "about the "letsonim" and the guardians of those who give birth[???].

How much the word klezmerim was not yet rooted and not accepted in the west at the beginning of the 18th century you can learn from the national celebrations. In the description of the festive procession of the Jews of Prague in the year taf-eyeen-vav [?not sure what year that was]. At any rate, when the word klezmerim is referred to alone its meaning is clear: players. But still this meaning was strange and not well known to many. When Rav Chanya Kirchon in the 2nd half of this book "The gladness of the Soul" talks of his musical notes he compares them to:

[The following is a loose translation. The passage is in Yiddish]

“And the words in front of you. And this is the way of the dance in which there are no klezmerim who are accompanying. The way of the song where there is no melody. It is just the words and even if the melody is not understood [even if you can't read the musical notes] you can still find players who can read this, you will be able to approach one of them and listen to what the tune is”

Also, in the beginning of his book he suggests to study the musical notes with the person who is playing the music. It is still not clear to me the relationship between “musicani” [?musicologist—it is not a Hebrew word] and klezmerim. If one has to distinguish between the two, “it’s like a dance that doesn’t have music. Like a song without a melody or a dance that doesn’t have musical notes that go along with it, along with it, people who play the music.

This is how the period of the “letsonim” took place in the west until mid 18th century and there are some sources and some decrees (footnote 18 explains—the question until the end of the 18th century is, what those distinctions are). Only in the last quarter of the 18th century do we find in the southern Ashkenazic countries, the word klezmerim minagnim=klezmerim who play, that are typical.

[A Yiddish expression by a comic is quoted]”tell me what you think of the song for the groom, you the klezmerim.” This is the first clear reference to the klezmerim who were playing the music. And at the end of the song:

[pgs.16-17]

"Dear groom, give gifts to the clowns (letsonim), to the cantors, to the poets and to the klezmerim." In that song they made a clear distinction between the "letsonim" and the klezmerim, since they mention the whole group that participated in a wedding.

In Eastern Europe there wasn't much of a difference between the musicians and the klezmerim. The role of "letsonim" was performed by the "marshlik" or the comedians.

After the slaughter of Jews during 1648-1649 by Cossacks under Chmielenski in Southern Russia, it was prohibited to hear the sound of any musical instrument in the whole Jewish community.

The chronicle from the days of destruction describe how the Nazis gave the klezmer Jews a sadistic role: to accompany with music their brothers and sisters on their last way to the gas chambers.

A shocking picture: destruction and persecution of the Jews of "Horanda." One night in December 1942, 3000 Jews were gathered in a synagogue. The lawyer Issac Gujanski, who was a respected man in the city was put in the lead with a hat of "letsonim"(with bells all over it). On each side he had fiddlers. All were forced to sing and play music leading the Jews to their death. Out of the concentration camp they were shot to death.

The soil of Poland was soaked with blood. The "letsonim" were called the "letsonim of death" and all klezmer songs were lamentation.

This chronicle describes the "black wedding:" every morning the corpses were taken out of the huts by their relatives, and the head of the ghetto ordered them to dance and sing around the corpses.

The author begins the chapter of "Klezmers" by honouring one of the klezmers that was led to the gas chamber in Auschwitz, just because he had to play the drum leading the Jews to their death. Being shocked, he forgot to play the drum. His end was as his brothers. On Zion Mountain in Jerusalem you can see the drum of Rabbi Issac the Klezmer, that was brought from the Diaspora.

Klezmers at the Wedding pgs 18, 19, 20, 21

That is the name of the last chapter in the 2nd part of the book named "The Klezmer's World." The chapter specifies "talking about the klezmer's role in the wedding."

By the description the wedding is of Eastern Europe, more accurately of the Russian Jews. We wouldn't complain as to why the wedding of Western Europe was neglected even though the whole book discusses countries of Central Europe as well as the Mediterranean countries.

At the beginning of the book, the author gives reasons as to "why the book doesn't include the klezmer's world in other Jewish communities such as Yemen, Spain, Bukhara etc." The reasons are very weak.

Let's see how acceptable is the author's description of the "nice tradition of the Jewish wedding in Eastern Europe, their customs and ceremonies."

Russian Jewry, prior to the 1st world war was united in a sovereign way but scattered geographically and the characteristic of the Jewish customs varied by the regions, communities, tribes and assemblies. And even though the form of the wedding is basically one for all Jews, for each community there were different customs, ceremonies and etiquette. Polish Jews, the Jews from Lita, Ukraine, Kamkaz didn't have a wedding with one general pattern with permanent rules and ceremonies. The customs in each city or village was influenced by the locals and received a special nuance from the place; therefore, the klezmer's role on the different places customs and ceremonies.

Things should be said first. One who comes to describe a Jewish wedding and doesn't need to depend on the memories, recollections and descriptions of Pauline Wengeroff, who had described the wedding of her older sister and her own in detail and with much talent, Alexander Cheddarboim, Yehuda Leib Levanda, Yakov Zismer and more, will certainly be mistaken and wouldn't write the correct thing. Even an author who writes in a Hebrew book a chapter describing the klezmers in a wedding without relying on the

“Elka’s Wedding” by Tchernichowsky wouldn’t be forgiven. If you wish, this is the idealization of Jewish klezmers and their traditional role the Jewish wedding in the Diaspora of Eastern Europe.

The author begins with a rare custom of the participation of klezmers in the writing of the conditions. Usually it was not accepted that the klezmers will take part in the private family matter of setting the conditions. Definitely not in a village in Lita. The only source that the author relies on are the melodies of the “two dances of the fathers of the bride and groom” before and after the signing of the conditions that was published by Gabriel Grant. This is not proof that the klezmers participated in the signing of the conditions ceremony and it seems that these were only rhythmical dances without lyrics. If there was that kind of custom it is impossible that it hasn’t been mentioned in the memoirs and literature and wouldn’t have been living in our personal memories.

On the contrary, all sources show that there wasn’t such a custom as Erez writes “the conditions were mostly very simple, cake, wine and with the wealthy men chicken and honey.”

There is room to describe the klezmer’s role in the events before the wedding. That is in the “Oyseshtyer” that means in the chapter about the preparations for the wedding that started a few weeks prior to it. Four weeks before the wedding by the descriptions of Cheddarboim, the preparations had begun. And each week had a special name, iron, copper, silver and gold. The first week started with the sewing of the wedding clothes with special festivities with the participation of the klezmers who played the “vivert.” According to Mr. Stutchewsky “the job of the musicians started on Saturday evening prior to the wedding” and moved to the wedding and the ceremony of the chupah. The author skipped on a few customs that the klezmers had an important role such as the leading of the bride to the mikvah. In the chapter “Klezmers” in Jerusalem the author brings “the memoirs from a person in Jerusalem” a sentence such as “a bride to be led by a klezmer to the mikvah the evening before the chupah.” The custom of leading the bride with a crowd with songs, music and dance was accepted not only among the primitive Israeli tribes but sometimes among the Jews from Poland, Lita and the Ukraine.

With regards to that custom or the broad different sources and I would like to add a source from the literature. Orlich Kalamost in the Humouristic play printed in 1871 “Geschite Von Zeltemnem Brit on a Generte Chatonah” mentions with ridicule this custom. With the descriptions of a very old woman that got a tricky divorce from her husband and is getting married to him again and insists on getting the klezmers to lead her to the mikvah.

This custom announces one of the readers in Taranagrowd Lublin Two “the klezmers waited behind the synagogue until the bride had appeared with her mother in law. They played all the way to and from.”

Another role that the klezmers had but is not mentioned in the book the welcoming of the groom and his parents if they arrived from a different city or from a far away distance. In

this case they send a messenger from the bride's home and when they notice the coming party immediately he returned and announced their arrival and was paid announcement fees (bracken broid).

Then the bride's parents and relatives would go out to welcome the comers. Then they met at the inn close to the city entrance and there was gladness, joy, happiness. From there, Chedderboim writes they led the groom with the klezmer's accompaniment through the city up to the place that the bride's father had arranged for him to stay.

This occasion, the meeting of the inlaws to discuss the wedding and the klezmer's activity, is described in the 4th song of Tchernichowsky's idyll. "End of the Wedding" in Stutchewsky's book (pgs. 176-177), is also not quite accurate. This [note from Helen-he is referring to the practice of having the klezmers stay for the entire 7 days of the wedding] may have possibly been the custom in big cities where the klezmers permanently resided-we're talking about a wealthy wedding in big cities-where the klezmer's activity may have continued through the 7 blessings (and perhaps also in a non-wealthy wedding. It all depends on local custom). As a Jerusalemite recalls in his memoirs; "at times the klezmers used to play in the young couples' home throughout the 7 days of feasting." But in small towns where the klezmers were brought in from other places, their activity ended formally the day following the wedding as Tchernichowsky artistically depicted at the beginning of the 6th song, the last of the wedding idylls: "Then the musicians came and Yosl the jester with them.

The klezmers stood together, tuned their instruments and started playing a sad tune, a beautiful tune of separation.

The musicians again received wine and other spirits and desserts.

And they sat in the rented trailer (like a covered cart) that was waiting for them.

And they parted contentedly from the house of Mordecai with blessings, because they were very well compensated by their hosts."

Footnote to the poem: #25. Five people play in the band, violin, base, 2nd fiddle, trumpet and drum. There is a note of mockery and ridicule on the part of the local jester towards the musicians.

The set wages is the key to the klezmer's economic problem. The author addresses this problem casually and does not give it the treatment it deserves (pg 59-61 Stutchewsky).

Based on his experience at his parents' home, the author makes a very extreme generalization about the competition between the musical bands: "They used to court the privilege to play at a wedding and the band paid the bride's parents a certain sum of money." (pg. 59). This is a rare detail that does not indicate the general custom. Usually the band received a fee even at a poor or an orphaned bride's wedding, one that was paid for by the community (pg 179-180).

The author doesn't even thoroughly cover the issues concerned with payment and division of wages among the musicians, the very same things that Beregovski, who is the

origin, noted. And why did he omit the prices for every dance in the 1870s? This detail is brought to us by Levanda in the book *Yiddishe Klezmer* pg. 433 & note.

I've already noted elsewhere that the Jewish custom of the guests' compensating the musicians was praised, resulting in the hosts not lacking and the klezmers are pleased. But in the case of non-Jewish weddings, in some cases the bride's parents would go bankrupt by spending so much money on the wedding (Rivkind's notebook, pg 255).

How accurately is this Jewish custom described in the poet's words:

“Even though Mordecai said, “I will pay for all the dance expenses” the guests insisted on paying for freylekhs and more freylekhs.”

Another detail- besides the violin case (*Klezmer* 60, note 104 *Yishe Klezmer* pg. 433 note) it was mainly the *tsimbl* that was the “pocket” for the dance money. As the expression implies “the one who puts the money in the *tsimbl* choses the dance.”

According to Erez “whoever dances with the bride puts [money] in the *tsimbl* for the klezmer.”

Footnote 26: compare my note to the klezmer *loshen* in *Yiddishe Sprache* vol 19 1959 pg 64-65

Shabbat note-see my book *Yiddishe Gelt* in note to item 598. It is interesting to add here that a word similar to that can be found with Persian Jews with the same meaning [note from Helen—we are not sure which word he is talking about here or is it the expression about paying for dance requests that he is talking about?] “in honour of the occasion the orchestra plays and one of the musicians declares *Shabbash* [from Helen—we think this is a Persian word] donations in the form of gold coins given on behalf of the groom and bride. This money is given later to the musicians. Source is Chanina Mizracki in “The Jews of Persia”, Tel Aviv. About the klezmer's earnings, see table of contents in my book pg. 290 under “Leading the Bride” and “Klezmers.”

On behalf of the klezmers it should be said that not all of them, and not always were they always concerned with payment. They demonstrated repeatedly that they have a Jewish heart and they also know how to give.

Heinich the violinist from *Vilkovishek*, a Lithuanian klezmer is presented by Hillel Bavli in his verse “*Rabbi Itzele in the Hamlet*.” The song is a description of a wedding in the village of *Pilovishuk* in which *Rabbi Itzele*, student of *Rabbi Israel* from *Salen*, participated. *Rabbi Itzele*, “who is as talented a vocalist as he is a musician,” is entreated by the inlaws and the crowd “to sing a *nigun* of his *nigunim*.” They entreated him by offering to donate money to charity for his singing. The money started streaming in. At that point, *Heinich* declared in a festive voice “the orchestra is also donating for charity 5 shekels and if the honourable *rabbi* sings his song, I *Heinich* the violinist will be happy to accompany him with my rendition on the violin.” (from *The Cloak of Years* 220).

As we know, Christian musicians used to participate in Jewish weddings because they used to play on Sabbath. It's a pity that the author addressed this issue with only a few hints about the Christian musicians and the problem of the Sabbath, without knowing of the accumulation of material that sheds light on Jewish life from the middle ages to the end of the 19th century. More sources that I will now note have been added to the material I have already published (Rivkind's notebook ph 249).

New Sources:

1) In the book of ethics "Good Heart" it says: [note from Helen--the passage is in Yiddish and someone else will have to translate it].

2) In one of the Pozna amendments, they are even harsher [me again—it's in Aramaic so again will have to find another translator for it]. Dov Winerib is quoted from *Communities in Poland*, New York 1951.

3) The source of modern times is Cheddarboim's testimony (night of rest on Sabbath before the wedding). Usually the wedding started after Havdalah but if it started on the Sabbath day they invited Christian klezmers.

Apparently there was a traveler named Charney. The traveler Charney's comment is interesting about the musicians in the wedding of the Jews of the mountains, "in all the land the musicians who entertain in the weddings are all of Armenian extraction and the Jews would hire them for their festive occasion of the wedding. I have not met more than 2 musicians at the wedding. Two were playing at the groom's home and 2 at the bride's home." (note 29 Charney wrote "Book of Travels pg 157, where he describes the types of instruments and the movements of the dance. At a different place he describes another wedding, the dances were accompanied by "one of the non-Jewish women beating the drum and they, the dancers, danced to the beat. They do not have klezmer like we do, only balalaika, drum and flute but among the Jews I saw only a drum and a flute." Pg 130

Conductor of Dancing

In the chapters where the author speaks on the cultural and the musical aspects of the dance one cannot find even a short description or explanation of the Mitzvah dance which is the oldest dance among Jewish wedding dances.

According to Rabbi Yehudah Halevi "The mitzvah dance in some places is a dance for Saturday night after Havdala. Also according to the "book of customs" from the 16th century" men dance with the groom and women with the bride." It seems that this is a social group dance; it is not an individual dance, that has been developed and formed over generations.

Rabbi Yehiel Michal Epstein has mentioned this dance in his book saying "some of the people dance with the bride with a wrapped hand." It is the mitzvah dance as it is known

nowadays. According to some books dealing with customs “In some communities people danced the mitzvah dance with the bride and groom. Among the Sadigor’s dynasty it was a custom to move up the mitzvah dance. It took place not after the meal on the wedding night, but during the groom’s meal; the dancers were the bride and the groom, not their parents.

I do not know when or where the name “kosher tanz” was born. Some believe that the kosher tanz is the bride’s dance and the mitzvah dance is dancing with the bride and the groom. Probably it is because it is a mitzvah to bring happiness to the bride and groom. The reason for the name “the kosher dance” is simple because if the wedding is “kosher” meaning the bride is “kosher” for her husband, then she would have stood in the centre of the room holding the handkerchief and all important guests (male) one at the time would hold the handkerchief and would make one turn with the bride. The bride’s eyes would look down and her face blushing.

A.M. Deak and Berkovitch in his book “Klezmer” both mentioned only the kosher dance. The origin of the dance probably in Lita; however, Saul Tchernichowsky in his poems talks also about Ukraine. [from the footnote: The kosher dance is referred to also as a dance that the rabbi would dance with his followers, the Hasidim.]

Tchernichowsky mentions in his poem, as soon as the people playing music finished their dinner, the modest bride came out and stood in the centre, ready for the kosher dance. One by one also all the honoured men came out, walking slowly towards the bride while the crowd clapped and cheered.

Mr. Stutchewsky mentions the “mazel tov dance,” after reading the conditions (tengim), saying a blessing and mazel tov. This dance was done individually. However the badkhn Able Zismar from Horanda described this dance in his book as a woman’s dance when all the women danced with the bride after the ‘bedekns,” similar to the mitzvah dance for the man. Before the dance the badkhn would call out the women’s names and the musicians would play music. The mazel tov dance was a source of making money for the badkhn and the musicians.

The dances after the chuppah were called either the “chuppah dance” as a general name or the specific name for each dance as the “challah dance” a dance described in some cooking books “after the chuppah the older women danced before the bride and the groom. The women carried a challah bread, very crusty and baked nicely and they would ask the groom “what do you choose for yourself, the challah or the kalla (bride)?” This custom was known in places around Warsaw Poland where the women stick candles in the challah too. Berkovitch in his book mentioned that the mother of the bride welcomed them after the chuppah with this dance dancing before them moving forwards and backwards.

Saul Tchernichowsky described this as a ceremony, not a dance, to welcome the bride and the groom after the chuppah. The mother of the bride put 2 candles in the challah holding it with one hand and a cup of wine in her other hand.

Regarding “sher” the scissors dance, the author says that since we cannot use material about Jewish dances from the USSR of the 19th century as we are unable to follow the development of other Jewish dances and this dance (sher) with complete certainty. Now that the walls in Eastern Europe have fallen down, it is the right time to search for material in Israel and the USA (because of immigration). Since I would like to speak about the sher dance, I would like to make a comment. The Volzeni dance that I describe in other writing is the sher dance.

The sher is a dance of 4 pairs standing each by one direction of the room facing each other; however, I remember that sometimes we danced in a group of 16, (2 couples on each side). When we bend our head we also bowed our head towards each other. Also we switched places to the other side while one walking under the hand of the other couples who were holding hands up (forming a gate).

The Hasidim used to make these dances more Jewish by giving them Jewish titles (names) and making them also meaningful. Unger tells us that the Chasidic dance Hakhnaah was created by Rabbi Elimelech Meliznasak. However this dance is the same dance as sher that the Mitnagdim danced at Wolozin. Why it was named “Hakhnaah dance” (Hebrew for respect and fear)—because when in the dance dancers bowed their heads it was a symbol of the gesture to show respect to others.

Unger also brings information about the Shtiler dance, the quiet dance that people danced without music but with clapping hands and banging feet. This dance was created by Rabbi Elimelech’s brother, Rabbi Zusya from Hanipoli (Annapol). The ideas of the quiet dance is to teach the Jews to worship God quietly without any noise, music or words. The shtiler dance is actually the patch dance. Another freylekh Chasidic dance is the (circle) igool tanz where people danced in many circles.

Stutchewsky writes also about the “shtock dance” (stick dance/broom dance) saying he could find only little information. It is clear that the shtock dance is the “shtock shpill” (stick game), a game where one person danced with a broom, dancing around chairs, then all chairs are taken and only one person left with the broom. It is a dance created by Elikum Tzunzer and it carries a moral lesson. Beregovksi has mentioned shtock among other dances in his book “Yiddish Klezmer.”

During WWI I saw this dance game in a wedding in my home town Lodz. If I recall correctly , people danced it also in Volozin’s Yeshivah during the holiday of Succot even before WWI.

According to one of the paintings, the badkhn dance, the farewell dance and the Shabbat dance were very well known in Galitzia. I could not find many details about the Shabbat dance it was probably a dance for the Shabbat before the wedding . Officially the wedding parties started on Shabbat with “farshpil” and zmirot etc.

The farewell dance was mentioned by the bakhn Zismer in his memory book saying that the last minutes of the wedding were interesting. The badkhn said “the blessing of

fairwell” and “good words” about the separation between parents and children etc. The klezmerim would play the music for the farewell dance, and lots of tears were shed at that moment. Then the wedding concluded with freylekhs and hopke and that was the end of the wedding.

Additional notes on the stick game by Dick Crum:

Hi Helen,

I'm attaching the "stick game" poem from page 34 of Rivkind. The Yiddish has a couple misspellings (as your friend noted), but not enough to make it unreadable. My translation is "loose". A literal word-for-word translation would sound really awkward.

The stick game was apparently something like "musical chairs" but without the music, and without "leftover" people dropping out. The poem indicates that everybody walks around the chairs; the extra person just ambles around the chairs, carrying the stick, then suddenly sits down on one of the chairs, probably just leaves the stick on the floor, everybody rushes to find a chair and the person who doesn't get a chair has to take the stick and the game starts all over again.

This game is found all over Europe, usually in the form of a change-partners dance, with a broom instead of a stick, and almost always with music. The extra man dances around with a broom until the music abruptly stops; he grabs some fellow's partner, hands him the broom in exchange, etc., and the music resumes.

From Leon Blank:

In many countries (I remember it from Poland, but also now in Sweden) we do have such a game, sometimes to music, with a stick, or a broom, or without anything. For each turn you take away a chair, and at the end only one chair is left for the winner.

[Note from Helen

Saul Tchernichowsky's wedding idylls are called Elka's Wedding. Elka is the bride and Mordecai is her father. Part of this poem can be found in: S. Y. Penueli and A. Ukhmani, Anthology of Modern Hebrew Poetry, Jerusalem, 1966, v. 1, pp.67-71. The section is called Mordechai of Podovka was translated by Robert Friend. The book is not available here in Calgary. I don't know if the rest of the poem was ever translated into English. It is supposed to be based on memories of weddings during Tchernichowsky's childhood in Russia.

Also found out that Rivkind (1895-1968), the author of the manuscript being translated, was Chief Librarian of Hebraica in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. That must be why he used so many different sources. He was born in Lodz Poland and was educated in yeshiva. He was a scholar and was actively involved in many Jewish organizations (e.g. cofounder of the American YIVO).

Rabbi Zusya mentioned in the dance chapter was rebbe of Hanipoli or Annopol. He died in 1800. Was born near Tarnow in Galicia (Encyclopedia Judaica)

Rebbe Elimelech was a brother to Zusya and lived 1717-1787

Leib Levanda (1835-1888)

Was born in Minsk (Encyclopedia Judaica)

Another excerpt from Elka's Wedding can be found in Zvi Friedhaber's Article
In Dance Research Journal 17/2 & 18/1 (1985-86):

But the musicians had finished the wedding feast, then the modest bride went into the tent and stood to dance the kosher-tants, and in her palm was a white handkerchief. Her shame covered her and she did not know where to hide. The musicians began with a polonaise and the Rabbi Rafael stood up and stepped with joy and neared the bride. He had her sit down and grabbed one end of the kerchief. He stepped slowly and with great thoughtfulness. The father of the groom also took slow, careful steps and revolved around her three times to everyone's clapping. One by one all the honored men of the world all stepped carefully. This is the way they did it.]