

Between Authenticity and Aestheticization
Musical Responses To The Holocaust
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Between Commemoration and Amnesia
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On the Terrain of Popular Music: Wolf Krakowski's . . . Global Beats

Writing from the field of critical discourse studies, John E. Richardson has noted, mass mediated depictions of the Holocaust are complicated by the perceived need for commercial culture to “mitigate against rigorous examination” and to please audiences. Within such a scenario, stories of survival, heroes, and rescuers are paramount along with happy endings. This explains perhaps, why Holocaust commemorative music was a relative latecomer to popular music.

Canadian blues and rock musician Wolf Krakowski (b. Saalfelden Farmach, Austria 1947) has created his own genre, combining Yiddish with influences of “guitar-driven popular musics of the post-Second World War English-speaking world: 1960s counter-culture rock and folk-rock, hard-edged country, and reggae with a nearly-ubiquitous female chorus rooted in gospel and rhythm and blues”, as composer Alex Lubet has written. After years of touring with carnivals and being mentored by musicians like bluesman Big Joe Williams and Richie Havens, Krakowski, a child of Holocaust survivors born in a DP camp – began singing in his native Lodzer dialect repertoire associated with both pre-war and Holocaust-era eastern Europe, recording his first album *Transmigrations*, in 1996. As Lubet notes, Krakowski’s recordings are “neither archival or an attempt to revive with fidelity a historical style. Lubet considers Krakowski’s renditions to be tantamount to new compositions, and compares *Transmigrations* favorably with the Beatles’ 1967 LP *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* because of its “stylistic breadth and conceptual depth.” Krakowski himself regards music as a form of remembrance. He says,

I sing through them and those that were silenced sing through me [...]. It is as if all the people who I left behind somehow ‘transmigrated’ over here, and their stilled voices, cloaked in the raiment of R&B blues, country-rock and reggae act as a bridge from the Old World to the New through me.