

# Kindling the Flame

For Eastern European Jews, klezmer music was the populist song of the little man, the instrumental backdrop to life's joys and tragedies. Largely improvised, it was akin to a type of Jewish dixieland. Though frequently mournful, it was essentially dance-based with exuberant rhythm. Klezmer played hide-and-seek throughout jazz's early years, appearing in Max Fleischer cartoon soundtracks, in Ziggy Elman's 1938 trumpet solo on "And The Angels Sing" and in Leo Watson's rendition of "Utt Da Zay (The Tailor's Song)" in 1939. Woe to the interviewer, though, who tried to suggest to Artie Shaw that *klezmerim* (klezmer musicians) should be taken seriously.

When the beginnings of what turned into the klezmer revival first stirred in the late 1970s, it brought out preservationists, the ecstatic and the curious. Bands like The Klezmerim served up lots of razzle-dazzle onstage while scholars set about trying to take the historic measure of a music that was often forgotten or poorly chronicled. Israeli Symphony clarinetist Giora Feidman displayed a klezmer flipside, and cutting-edge clarinetist Don Byron raised eyebrows by giving serious tribute to the legacy of musical clown Mickey Katz. Klezmer was no longer confined to weddings and bar mitzvahs.

The ripples in the klezmer pond are still emanating, and a current group of recordings shows some of the surprising directions the music is taking. Europe has embraced klezmer, so it's no surprise that clarinetist Annette Maye and guitarist Martin Schulte's Duo Doyna album, ***Sammy's Frejlach* (Konnex 5311; 45:21 ★★½)**, is on a Berlin-based label. Their 2013 duo recital at Germany's Multiphonics Festival telescopes ensemble music down to two voices.

This is klezmer for the concert hall: cleanly executed and with program notes. Schulte's nylon-string pickings are always conscious of pulse and harmonies that suggest a long-ago tradition. Maye plays with learned precision and occasionally a marvelous expressiveness—like the ornate tag to "Las Estrellas De Los Cielos" and her marvelously undulating lines on Feidman's "Ballad For A Klezmer." From the Orientalism of "Araber Tanz" (with its allusions to the Afro-Cuban habanera) to the Argentine tang of "Clarinetango," these two touch a lot of diverse sources.

**Ordering info:** [doyna.de](http://doyna.de)

So does Australian-born, Berlin-based composer-violinist Daniel Weltlinger. His ***Ko-blenz* (Toca 12121; 43:20 ★★★★★)** makes a thoughtful case for Django Reinhardt's gypsy jazz as a kissing cousin to klezmer. Weltlinger goes deep into the guitarist's Sinti and Roma roots while touching on his own family history. Using a mid-sized band that includes guitarists Ian and Nigel Date and pianist Daniel Pliner, Weltlinger has written 11 pieces that trace Reinhardt's trajectory. The songs are an irresistible grouping: gypsy

Martin Schulte (left) and Annette Maye of Duo Doyna



and flamenco ("Musique Metisse"), New Orleans/Caribbean ("Louis"), a fittingly elegant nod to Reinhardt's great collaborator Stephane Grappelli ("Stephane"), the French dance halls where Django played ("Bal Musette") and a Romani rave-up ("Bale Boldo"). These may be highly trained players, but this is not the music of the conservatory. The inclusion of guitarist Lulo Reinhardt, Django's great nephew, is a nice bit of heritage.

**Ordering info:** [danielweltlinger.com](http://danielweltlinger.com)

Guitarist-composer Yoshie Fruchter's ***Schizophrenia: Cantorial Recordings Reimagined* (BlueThread; 53:32 ★★★★★)** takes a post-modernist approach to Jewish sacred music. The grandson of a cantor, Fruchter channels rock bands like Radiohead to remake 20th century recordings by great cantors like Yossele Rosenblatt and Gershon Sirota. With a quintet that includes bassist Shanir Blumenkranz, drummer Yonadav Halevy, percussionist Rich Stein and keyboardist Brian Marsella, Fruchter makes much of the minor chords and old melodies ("B'Rosh Hashonoh," "Shir Hashirim" and "Brich Shmeh" among them). Traditionalists might recoil from the electronically enhanced guitar and crushing power chords, but Fruchter stays close to the changes and makes smart rhythmic adjustments. His use of his grandfather's home recordings is an additional source of harmonic variety, and Fruchter plays off of them beautifully. This set should appeal equally to open-minded jazzers, fans of Yiddishkeit and downtown habitués.

**Ordering info:** [yoshiefruchter.com](http://yoshiefruchter.com)

Flute soloist and bandleader Mark Weinstein takes a decidedly Latin jazz approach to traditional Hasidic melodies and consonant originals for ***In Jerusalem* (ZOH 201506; 44:55 ★★★★★)**. Guitarist Steve Peskoff assembled the Israeli rhythm section that is heard here. Time signatures like 7/8 seem quite unforced under the singing quality of Weinstein's lyrical playing. His prolific flute improvs, Peskoff's harmonically acute guitar chords (not unlike Jim Hall's), Gilad Abro's economic bass and Gilad Dobrecky's percussive tang bring to mind Brazilian jazz. It's an apparently effortless mixture melding the difficult combination of spiritual aspiration with the romantic.

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**Ordering info:** [zohomusic.com](http://zohomusic.com)