



Lowell Milken Center for
Music of American Jewish Experience

Klezmer: A Musical Expression of Jewish Identity

Resource Guide

סיפורי מוסיקה
Stories of Music

UCLA

Herb Alpert
School of Music



1) Artists and Industry Professionals in this Lesson

Performers/Composers

[Zoë Aqua](#)

[Naftule Brandwein](#)

[Josh “Socalled” Dolgin](#)

[Ellis Island Band](#)

[Abe Ellstein](#)

[The Epstein Brothers](#)

[Walter “Zev” Feldman](#)

[Lt. Joseph Frankel’s Orchestra](#)

[Lea Kalisch](#)

[Kapelye](#)

[Klezomatics](#)

[Klezmer Conservatory Band](#)

[Klezmorim](#)

[David Krakauer](#)

[Aaron Lebedeff](#)

[Loshn](#)

[Cantor Samuel Malavsky](#)

[Joseph Moskowitz](#)

[Molly Picon](#)

[Henry Sapoznik](#)

[Abe Schwartz’s Orchestra](#)

[Lorin Sklamberg](#)

[Andy Statman](#)

[Dave Tarras](#)

[Francesca Ter-Berg](#)

[Michael Winograd](#)

Recordings Used in This Lesson

(in order of use)

["Sam's Bulgar" from the Dave Tarras album *Tanz*](#)

["Vot ken yu makh, s'iz Amerike" as performed by The Dave Tarras Band ft. Aaron Lebedeff](#)

["Doina" \(quasi-improvisatory solo\) performed by the great tsimbl player Joseph Moskowitz](#)

["Freylekhs" by the London-based Klezmer trio, Loshn](#)

["Bukharester Bulgar" by the Klezmer Conservatory Band \(KCB\)](#)

["Dem Trisker Rebn's Khosid" performed by Itzhak Perlman and Cantor Yitzhak Meir Helfgot](#)

["Der Gasn Nign" Performed by Alicia Svigals \(on lead fidl\)](#)

["Doina," performed by the clarinet/tsimbl duo of Andy Statman and Walter "Zev" Feldman](#)

["Yidelekh Shimmy Tants" by Lt. Joseph Frankel's Orchestra](#)

["Yiddishe Blues" by Lt. Joseph Frankel's Orchestra](#)

["Maple Leaf Rag" by Scott Joplin](#)

["Lebidik und Freylach" \(Lively and Happy\) by the Abe Schwartz Orchestra](#)

[Heiser Bulgar performed by Naftule Brandwein](#)

["Tanz! Bulgar" by Dave Tarras](#)

["Yoshke, Yoshke" performed by the Klezmerim](#)

["Man in a Hat" by the Klezmatics](#)

["Kosher Style" by Michael Winograd](#)

["You Are Never Alone" by Josh "Socalled" Dolgin](#)

["Eshet Chayil of Hip Hop" by Lea Kalisch](#)

["In Vald Arayn" by Zöe Aqua](#)

Additional Videos Used

[Clip of the influential klezmerim, the Epstein brothers](#)

[David Krakauer describing klezmer](#)

[clip from the film *Yidl Mitn Fidl*](#)

[video of Zev Feldman and Andy Statman](#)

[Lorin Sklamberg discusses his early experiences with Jewish music](#)
[Lorin Sklamberg discusses discovering Jewish identity in New York](#)
[Lorin Sklamberg discusses the “Yiddish Revival”](#)
[live radio performance of the Klezmatics](#)
[clip of contemporary Klezmer cellist Francesca Ter-Berg](#)

Supporting Articles

[Pale of Settlement](#)
[small villages \(shtetls\)](#)
[Yiddish](#)
[Yiddish literature](#)
[Sholem Aleichem](#)
[Isaac Bashevis Singer](#)
[Yiddish theater](#)

Lyrics and Translation

“Vot ken yu makh, s’iz Amerike?”

Composer: Scholem Secunda (1894–1974)
Lyricist: Aaron Lebedeff (1873–1960)

Yiddish Lyrics

Keyn Amerike tzu kumen, hob ikh keyn mi geshport,
kh'hob gedenkt a rov tzu vern un farlosn zikh a bord.
Kh'hob gehat tzvey sheyne peyes, vi yeder frumer yid
Tzum sof onshtot a bord hob ikh di peyes oykhet nit.
Vet ir mir fregn: S'taytsh? Vi ken dos zayn?
Der terets derfun iz, libe fraynt mayn':
Vot ken you makh? Es iz Amerike!
Do in land do putzt men zikh azoy.
Vot ken you makh? Es iz Amerike!
Afile der yid hot dem ponim mitn goy.
Az fun peyes do zet men bay keynem nit keyn shpor,
Do trogn zikh di peyelech ale meydlekh gor.
Vot ken you mach? Es iz Amerike,
S'iz Amerike, un vot ken you makh?

Az do in Amerike iz altzding farkert,
 Di mener — zey sheyv'n zikh, un bay di vayber shprotzn berd.
 Vot ken you mach? Es iz Amerike!
 Oy, Amerike, un bol'she nye tchevo!
 In Yurop makht men khasene yunge meydlekh gor,
 Un nakher hobn zey kinder, vi es firt zikh punkt tzum yor,
 In Amerike iz gor andersh, me nemt zikh zayt on shir
 Me hot khassene do shpeter, nor di kinder hot men frier
 Vet ir mir fregn: S'taytsh? Vi ken dos zayn?
 Der terets derfun iz, libe fraynt mayn':
 Vot ken you mach? Es iz Amerike.
 Do ken pasirn altz, zog ikh aykh [akh],
 Vot ken you mach? Es iz Amerike,
 Az do aylt men zikh dokh mit a yeder zakh.
 Do zukht men tzu seyvn ekspenses af gevis,
 Derfar makht men di khassene tzuzamen mitn bris!
 Vot ken you mach? Es iz Amerike!
 S'iz Amerike un vot ken you mach!
 Az khosn-kale fun der khupe aheym nor me geyt
 Iz shoyn dortn a vigele mit a kind oykh ongegreyt!
 Vot ken you makh? Es iz Amerike!
 Oy, s'iz Amerike aley'n un "dets ol"

Translation

To come to America, I took great trouble.
 I thought I'd become a rabbi and grow myself a beard.
 I had two beautiful peyes, like every religious Jew.
 But in the end I had no beard and my peyes were also gone.
 Oh, you ask me how this can be?
 The answer is, my dear friend:
 What can you do, it's America!
 This is how you get dressed up in this country!
 What can you do? It's America!
 Even a Jew looks just like a goy!
 You don't see any trace of peyes,
 here, all the girls wear them!
 What can you do? It's America!
 In America, that's just how it is!
 Here in America everything's upside down.
 The men shave their hair and their wives grow beards.
 What can you do? It's America!
 In America, and bol'she nye tchevo [Russian, bol'she ne tovo, That's all]!

In Europe you marry off a girl at a very young age,
and afterward, they have a kid exactly a year later.
In America it's different, they really take their time.
Weddings happen later, but the kids come earlier!
Oh, you ask me how this can be?
The answer, is my dear friend:
What can you do? It's America!
Here all everything can happen, I tell you.
What can you do? It's America!
Everything here is done in a hurry!
Here everyone's looking surely to save on their expenses,
So they have a wedding, together with the bris.
What can you do? It's America!
In America, what can you do?
When the bride and groom leave the wedding canopy to go home,
there's already a cradle there, with the kid ready too!
What can you do? It's America!
It's America and that's all!

“Abi Gezunt”

Composer: Abe Ellstein (1907–1963)

Lyrics: Molly Picon (1898–1992)

a bisl zun, a bisl regn,
a ruik ort dem kop tsu legn,
abi gezunt, ken men gliklekh zayn.
a shukh a zok, a kleyd on lates,
in keshene a dray, fir zlotesh,
abi gezunt, ken men gliklekh zayn.
di luft iz fray far yedn glaykh,
di zun zi shaynt far yedn eynem,
orem oder raykh.
a bisl freyd, a bisl lakhn,
a mol mit fraynd a shnepsl makhn,
abi gezunt ken men gliklekh zayn.
eyner zukht ashires,
eyner zukht gevures,
aynnemen di gantse velt.
eyner meynt dos ganse glik
hengt nor op in gelt.
zoln ale zukhn,
zoln ale krikhn,
nor ikh trakht bay mir,
ikh darf dos af kapores,
vayl dos glik shteyt bay mayn tir.

A bit of sun, a bit of rain,
a peaceful place to lay your head ...
so long as you're healthy, you can be happy.
A shoe, a sock, an outfit without patches,
three or four measly coins in your pocket ...
so long as you're healthy, you can be happy.
The air is free, equal for all;
the sun shines for everyone,
whether rich or poor.
A little rejoicing, a little laughter,
some schnapps with a friend once in a while ...
so long as you're healthy, you can be happy.
Some look for riches,
some look for power,
to conquer the whole world.
Some think that all happiness
depends only on money.
Let them all search,
let them all scrounge.
But I think to myself that
I have no use for such things,
since happiness is waiting at my doorstep.

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