

Chassidic music re-imagined by Breslov Bar Band; Lichtenberg sets Yiddish songs to exotic arrangements

Breslov Bar Band
Have No Fear
Jewishmusician.com
breslovbarband.com

Band leader Binyomin Ginzberg, a well-known musician and singer on New York's Jewish music scene, founded the Breslov Bar Band as an outlet to explore the songs and tunes of the Breslov Chassidim – the only Chassidic group, according to Ginzberg, currently producing new music “that is intensely personal and stylistically unique.”

The Breslov music on this album – some of it recent, some from earlier centuries, some of it instrumental, some with religious lyrics or sung as wordless nigunim – is creatively re-imagined by the Breslov Bar Band, five musicians steeped in klezmer, rock, jazz, reggae and world music. Ginzberg, who plays standard keyboards and vibraphone, a small mouth-blown keyboard, is joined by electric guitarist Allen Watsky, electric bassist Yoshie Fruchter, clarinetist Mike Cohen and drummer Rich Huntley – inventive musicians all.

There's a remarkable range of music in this set from meditative pieces like “Adir Avom,” to the full throttle rock ‘n’ roll religious devotion expressed in “Ani Ohev Et HKB’H,” to the reggae of “Mi Yiten,” a Communist-era lament of Breslov Chassidim forbidden to travel to the



Music

Michael
Regenstreif

grave site of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, the sect's founding rebbe, to the more traditional klezmer approach of “Debka Medley.”

Lenka Lichtenberg
Fray
Independent release
lenkalichtenberg.com

Toronto-based singer and composer Lenka Lichtenberg, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, grew up in Prague with Yiddish as her first language. She arrived in Canada as a young adult and studied ethnomusicology at York University. Her MA thesis was on Yiddish songs of the Holocaust. In addition to her solo career, she sings with the all-female klezmer-swing band Sisters of Sheynville, whose

CD, *Sheynville Express*, I reviewed in the *Bulletin* three years ago.

On *Fray*, her fourth solo album, and first since 2003, Lichtenberg adapts a primarily Yiddish repertoire to world music arrangements, featuring musicians drawn from a variety of world music and jazz traditions and backgrounds.

While Yiddish songs are most typically heard in folkloric or klezmer-style arrangements, the 14 songs here are given more exotic flavourings created by the blend of Lichtenberg's Eastern European voice with the world and jazz musicians. The result is an album that largely seems Old World Ashkenazic in most of its lyrics and vaguely, but not necessarily, Sephardic in its melodies and arrangements.

Among the album's highlights is “Es Khlipen Di Malokhim (Weeping Angels),” Lichtenberg's setting of a Yiddish poem by Beruriah Wiegand with an English verse by Lichtenberg. Over an insistent rhythm driven by percussionist Ravi Naimpally's tabla and bassist George Koller, Lichtenberg sings about angels, forbidden love and sin.

Another is the haunting “Nje Buditche (Don't Wake Me Up),” a Roma song that was sung at Auschwitz during the Holocaust. The poetic lyrics – English translations of all the songs are available on Lichtenberg's website – mournfully capture the darkness of the Holocaust period and the memories of what once was.

Just who am I when I'm being myself?

I was in a grumpy mood today and was talking to a friend who suddenly looked at me and said, “You're not yourself today.”

This stopped me in my tracks. If I'm not myself, who am I? My next door neighbour?

And, as the Jewish Buddhist asks, “If there is no self, whose arthritis is this anyway?”

Maybe I have many selves, even though I think of all of them as me. ‘Grumpy Ruben’ is just me feeling slightly unhappy because I didn't sleep well.

Then there's ‘Writing Ruben’ who writes this column. I'll let you in on a secret. The author is not all of me. I imagine a person writing, trying to find something interesting to say and then words come out through my fingers even though it's another self that's thinking all this stuff up.

When I go on stage, I invent a character who says the kind of things that are in the script. Is that another self or is it just me trying to be an actor?

Then there's the happy-go-lucky me, who greets everyone at work, makes jokes and sings songs. Of course, if I feel ill and am not so vociferous, they notice right away and say that

I am not myself. Well, wait a minute. Maybe this is my real self and not the happy-go-lucky one whom I project just in order to get along with other people. Or, maybe, I'm that serious and intense thinker, or the nerd who loves computers, or the wimp who cries at sentimental movies.

That's a lot of selves already, and I haven't even scratched the surface.

There's the self in the mirror who is always facing the wrong way and who looks so much older than I feel. Is that me too? I need to smear myself with cream and take a ton of vitamins.

I'm the same guy who feels extremely nervous inside, but who speaks with confidence at meetings and in front of 800 people. How is that possible? Shouldn't I be more consistent?

So, the reason it's so hard to follow the rules of the Torah is not that it's hard, for instance, to love your neighbour as yourself; it's to figure out which of your selves you're supposed to love.

What if you don't like any of your selves? Does that mean it's OK not to like your neighbour?

Hillel asks “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” But, which self am I going to be for? I have to decide



Humour me, please

Rubin
Friedman

who my real self is before I can ask others to be for me.

And, have you ever tried to figure out where your self is located? In your big toe, your hands, eyes, ears?

Of course, most of us would look inside our heads to find the self, no matter how much that gout is killing you, or how much your kidney stones are knocking you for a loop.

And, I don't know what I'd do if I were transgendered. I have a terrible time trying to figure out which self I am without that complication.

I have a suggestion for figuring out who your self is. Go into a room full of people you know. When they call you by your name, see who answers? That's your real self and you should get to know him or her. Who knows? Instead of contempt, familiarity might breed a sort of warm affection.

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