

Case Western Reserve University

Department of Music

2025-2026 Concert Season

Contemporary Klezmer Compositions

Original Jewish Instrumental and Vocal Hymns

Composed by Steven Greenman

Klezmer Music Ensemble

Steven Greenman, *director*

7:30pm

Thursday, April 23rd, 2026

Florence Memorial Harkness Chapel

11200 Bellflower Road Cleveland, OH



Celebrating 200 years.

PROGRAM

Tokyo Freylekhs	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed March 2 nd and 8 th , 2023 © Greenfidl Music 2023
Moldavisher Nign	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed March 17 th , 2007 © Greenfidl Music 2010
Transition Hora 1	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Sept. 27 th /Oct. 27 th , 2017 © Greenfidl Music 2017
Skotshne Swing	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed March 8 th -9 th , 2021 © Greenfidl Music 2021
L'Kho Doydi	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Oct. 16 th and 23 rd , 2008 Arrangement written Dec. 2025 © Greenfidl Music 2010 and 2025
Moldovaner Freylekhs/Bulgar in E Minor	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Jan. 28 th , 2003 © Greenfidl Music 2004
The Unredeemed Soul	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Jan. 2005/Apr. 11 th , 2006 © Greenfidl Music 2010

– INTERMISSION –

Oishii Bulgar	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed March 2 nd , 2023 © Greenfidl Music 2023
Terkisher Freylekhs	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed July 8 th , 2002 © Greenfidl Music 2004
London Sirba	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed June 1 st , 2024 © Greenfidl Music 2024

Lubavitcher Nign	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Nov. 14 th , 2008 © Greenfidl Music 2010
Steve's Satmar Nign	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed April 9 th , 2008 © Greenfidl Music 2010
A Dobriden far Alan	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed June 24 th -25 th , 2025 © Greenfidl Music 2025
Shloymele's Sher	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Feb. 4 th , 2018 © Greenfidl Music 2018
Mishebeyrakh Freylekhs	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Nov. 2 nd -3 rd , 2017 © Greenfidl Music 2017
Ko RiboyN Olam	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed Oct. 21 st , 2002 © Greenfidl Music 2004
Tsigayner Zhok	Steven Greenman, b. 1966 Composed 1997 © Greenfidl Music 2004

PROGRAM NOTES

Contemporary Klezmer Compositions

Original Jewish Instrumental and Vocal Hymns Composed by Steven Greenman

This evening's program features original Jewish and klezmer compositions of the violinist Steven Greenman. Composed from 1997-2025, these compositions are distilled with a deep knowledge of the traditional klezmer music genres, style, and forms. Listening to these melodies, one can hear the ecstatic and solemn sounds of the *khasene* (traditional East European Jewish wedding) and the bustling activity of the *shtetl* (East European Jewish village). The performance of these pieces harkens us back to prior centuries of traditional East European Jewish artistic creativity. Fittingly, as new Yiddish and klezmer compositions continue to be created by contemporary modern artists, we see a continuation of the work of the old masters, and the artistic Ashkenazic tradition continues proudly from generation to generation.

Regarding his process for composing, Steven states:

Overall, the dedicated study of historical recordings intensely impacted and inspired my approach to composition. Regular listening exposed me to klezmer repertoire, style, phrasing, rhythm, ornamentation, technique, and harmonic structure that I could readily apply to my own works. Transcription work enabled me to focus on both the broader concepts of phrasing and style and the application of ornaments and stylistic nuances.

A second component to my compositional process is pure inspiration. I have been inspired to compose from hearing Jewish violinists both past and contemporary; from celebrating a Jewish holiday; or feeling the meditative spirituality of synagogue prayers. I derive a ‘feeling’ from the inspiration which I transform into a musical motif. This Jewish motif would float in my consciousness, and I would play around with it to see where it would lead. In a way, it is like grasping at the subconscious unknown and pulling out a raw gemstone that needs delicate polishing to fully shine. This process of compositional alchemy can often induce a trance-like state as I piece the creative thoughts together using the templates of my klezmer music knowledge.

A third component involves intellectual and analytical approaches. Choosing a key or mode that I have seldom used before has helped to inspire novel ideas. Composing from the piano and hearing the chords together with the melodic phrases can give me a better sense of the full piece. And, by taking an existing composition, I can find alternative ways to build melodic lines and phrases that are similar but not copying the original piece. This process opens many surprising possibilities and often leaves me with an entirely different and original composition. The challenge is to create a *new* composition that is not derivative but rather fresh and unique.

New composition in traditional folk music fields ensures the continued vitality of the genre. Older “traditional” works that became popular through repeated performances were carried and continued from generation to generation. As with most folk music genres, the authors of these popular melodies gradually become forgotten, with the works subsequently labeled as “traditional.”

Historically, the finest klezmer performers collected their compositions in special handwritten notebooks (*heftn*), but severely limited sharing them to preserve their unique repertoire. Many of these special works were performed for the wedding family at the wedding table (*tish*). These highly skilled *klezmerim* were also excellent improvisers who could perform a common dance tune while adding multiple variations. From this, melodic variants of the same work were born.

Klezmer music compositions were not officially notated and recorded until the early 20th century. The An-sky Ethnographic Expeditions (1912-1914) led by Shloyme Zaynvl Rapoport (and later joined by Zinoviy Kiselgof), and the collections of the Ukrainian Jewish ethnomusicologist Moshe Beregovski (*Jewish Instrumental Folk Music* – posthumously published in 1987, 2001, 2015) produced the largest body of klezmer music collected from the former Pale of Settlement. The collections of Zinoviy Kiselgof and Avraham-Yehoshua Makonovetsky’s “Wedding Manuscript” have now been compiled as part of the *Kiselgof-Makonovetsky Digital Manuscript Project*. Due to diligent efforts, these detailed folios and handwritten notebooks of researched klezmer music melodies have been transcribed and notated, complete with informant names and performers. These valuable resources are now available to all. Additional collections of klezmer tunes and folios from former *klezmerim* that were preserved by their descendants continue to be revealed. Unfortunately, these sources are scant in number, and only a few have been properly transcribed and catalogued. Other notable printed commercial sources for klezmer music include:

International Hebrew Wedding Music by Wolff N. Kostakowsky (1916)

Kammen International Dance Folio No. 1 by Jack and Joseph Kammen (1924)

HaKlezmerim by Joachim Stutchewsky (1959)

Jewish Wedding: Collected Melodies and Memories (Heb. *Chatunah Yehudit*) by Moshe Bik (1964)

Musical Treasures from Sofia Magid’s Jewish Collection (music compiled from 1928-1938; transcribed, annotated, and arranged by Dmitry Zisl Slepovitch, 2024)

The Hoffman Book – Joseph Hoffman Klezmer Collection (music compiled in 1927; presented by Susan Watts; edited by Ilana Cravitz, Dr. Hankus Netsky, and Hannah Ochner, 2022)

The Levitt Legacy Klezmer Folio Vol. 1 (music compiled in the 1940's; introduction by Clara Byom, edited by Christina Crowder, 2019)

The Library of Congress contains nearly 1300 public domain scores of klezmer, Yiddish theatre, and religious music attributed to American Jewish band leaders and instrumentalists of the early 20th century, including Abe Schwartz, Max Leibowitz, Harry Kandel, Israel J. Hochman, Joseph Frankel, Joseph Moskowitz, Isidore Moscovitz, and Joseph Cherniavsky. These Jewish musicians registered and copyrighted klezmer tunes they performed and recorded, although authorship of these handwritten transcriptions is debated.

Contemporary klezmer music composers that have created a substantial wealth of traditional and modern klezmer and Yiddish folk music include internationally renowned performers and educators: Hankus Netsky (klezmer scholar/multi-instrumentalist), Michael Alpert (vocalist/violinist/guitarist/ethnomusicologist); Frank London (trumpeter/film composer); Alicia Svigals (violinist/vocalist); Pete Rushefsky (*tsimblist*/banjo); Sherry L. Mayrent (clarinetist/archivist); Mark Kohnatskiy (violinist); Adrienne Greenbaum (flautist); Eric Stein (mandolinist); Michael Winograd (clarinetist); Daniel Kahn (vocalist); Yale Strom (violinist/author). These are but a few of the many contemporary artists creating new Jewish works in both traditional and modern styles.

Violinist Steven Greenman brings a unique addition to the new sounds of klezmer, Hasidic, and religious Jewish repertoire. Inspired by the legendary Jewish violinists of the 19th century, Yoysel Druker (aka *Stempenyu*), and Avrom Moyshe Kholodenko (aka *Pedutser*), who created and performed their own Jewish compositions as celebrated soloists at Jewish weddings, Steven recorded and produced the recordings *Stempenyu's Dream* (2004) and *Stempenyu's Neshome* (2010), featuring his original klezmer and religious Jewish works. In contrast to most of today's contemporary klezmer musicians, Steven's creative output comprises a plethora of the older European klezmer artistic "listening" repertoire (*dobriden, dobranotsh, mazltov, zogekhts, tish nigunim, kale bazetsns*, Jewish liturgical repertoire, and Hasidic-inspired *nigunim*). Scholar and *tsimbl* player Walter Zev Feldman, in his introduction to *Stempenyu's Dream* states:

The word soul (*neshome*) is part of the first title of *Stempenyu's Dream*. Steven Greenman, an American, has recreated something of the soul of the East European Jews. Of the pre-Soviet, pre-Bundist, pre-Zionist, unreconstructed Jews. Not the kind of synthetic soul churned out for decades by the Yiddish theater, but the kind of soul that was often left behind with the unclaimed luggage at Ellis Island. The kind of soul that was lost in the dumb communication of an older generation who lacked the means to tell and a younger generation who did not know how to ask. By its music I would judge that it is an introverted, even sad soul, but its sadness has depth and dignity. And it can also express joy and exuberance. For the most part, these tunes are not variations on specific models. Where they are, as in the *Dobriden*, they would rank as among the better examples in a classic klezmer collection like Beregovski's. For the most part, especially the non-dance music, they are original creations with suggestions of many previous models harmoniously blended. Greenman's palette is almost entirely drawn from the largely minor modality that was shared by klezmer music and Jewish prayer. And while the klezmer was a mainly secular figure, Greenman has picked up on the substantial religious underpinnings and repertory of his music, as in the *Neshome Nign, Tfile, Gaguyim Nign, Peysakh, Zogekhts* and of course in the hymns *Ko Riboyan Olam* and *Ahavas Oylam*. The centuries-old musical symbiosis with Greeks, Romanians, and Gypsies lives again in the *Terkisher Freylekhs, E Minor Freylekhs, and Tsigayner Zhok*. *Stempenyu's Dream* represents the kind of Jewish music that was considered old-fashioned, even archaic by many Jews in the generation of Mark Warshavsky and Sholom Aleichem. The wonder of all this is, how does a third-generation American musician come out with these melodies? A pity that Steven's great-grandparents aren't around to enjoy them, but we are.

Our evening's program includes the following compositions from the *Stempenyu's Dream* album: *Odessa Freylekhs*, *Moldovaner Freylekhs/Bulgar in E Minor*, *Terkisher Freylekhs*, *Ko Riboyt Olam*, and *Tsigayner Zhok*. From *Stempenyu's Neshome*: *Moldavisher Nign*, *L'Kho Doydi*, *The Unredeemed Soul*, *Lubavitcher Nign*, and *Steve's Satmar Nign*. In 2018, Steven composed his *Klezmer Concert Suite* for solo violin and chamber ensemble, that includes 18 original klezmer compositions. A few of these appear on our program: *Transition Hora I*, *Shloymele's Sher*, and *Mishebeyrakh Freylekhs*. More recent works on our program include Steven's *Tokyo Freylekhs*, *Zay Gezunt*, *Skotshne Swing*, *Oishii Bulgar*, *London Sirba*, and *A Dobriden far Alan*.

MUSICAL DESCRIPTIONS

by Steven Greenman

Tokyo Freylekhs – *Tokyo Freylekhs* was inspired by a trip to Tokyo and Kyoto, Japan, where I led klezmer music workshops and performed my *Klezmer Concert Suite for Solo Violin and Chamber Ensemble*. The *freylekhs* is a Yiddish line dance performed in moderate to brisk 2/4 time that is defined by its stateliness and spirited bouncing step. *Tokyo Freylekhs* involves a modulation from the A freygish mode to C major and back. The last section has aggressive rhythmic syncopations.

Moldavisher Nign (“Moldavian Tune”) – Inspired by Moldavian folk song and Hasidic *nigunim* with expressive creative harmonies.

Transition Hora 1 – The slow hora (aka *zhok*) is klezmer dance of Romanian-Moldavian origin that involves a limping rhythm in 3/8 time. *Transition Hora 1* was composed as part of my *Klezmer Concert Suite* and features a modulation from the A freygish mode to G freygish mode. The slow hora was often performed to lead guests to and from different parts of the traditional East European Jewish wedding.

Odessa Freylekhs – *Odessa Freylekhs* resembles the popular klezmer tune *Fiselekh*, *Fiselekh* (“Little Feet”) recorded by the Abe Elenkrig Orchestra, the Harry Kandel Orchestra (as *A Laibediga Honga*) and various others. Overall, this melody shares similarities with the urban Jewish dance music of 19th and early 20th century Odessa, Ukraine.

Zay Gezunt (“Be Well”) – *Zay Gezunt* melodies were performed by the *klezmerim* to wish the wedding guests a fond farewell. As with all klezmer artistic listening repertoire, the *zay gezunt* displays a warm and dignified character in addition to a restrained sadness.

Skotshne Swing – The *skotshne* is a klezmer display piece with musical similarities to the Yiddish dance *freylekhs* but more technically virtuosic in character. I was inspired to compose a more modern klezmer piece that emulated Dave Tarras' 1950 recording *Second Avenue Square Dance* with the Abe Ellstein orchestra with its syncopations and jazz-influenced rhythms.

L'Kho Doydi (“Come, My Beloved”) – *L'Kho Doydi* (Ashkenazic Heb.) is a Jewish liturgical song sung on the Sabbath eve (Friday night) during the *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Ashkenazic Heb. *Kabolas Shabbos*) service. The Hebrew lyrics were composed in the 16th century by Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz (c. 1505 – 1584), who later became part of the Kabbalistic movement in Safed (Tzfat, Israel). The prayer describes the mystical tradition of welcoming the Sabbath bride. This melody, with its minor modalities, enhances the mystical solemnity of this beloved prayer.

Moldovaner Freylekhs/Bulgar in E Minor (“Moldavian Freylekhs/Bulgar”) – *Moldovaner Freylekhs* is an example of the transitional repertoire of klezmer music. This repertoire is distinguished by its ties to

Moldavian and Romanian folk music. The *bulgar* is a Yiddish line-dance of Moldavian-Romanian origin that features accented and syncopated rhythms and became the popular Jewish wedding dance in 20th century America. *Bulgar in E Minor* was inspired by the recordings *Serba din New York* (Orchestra Romaneasca, 1916) and *Old Bulgar (Khevrisa-European Klezmer Music* – Smithsonian Folkways, 2000).

The Unredeemed Soul – A powerful composition depicting the Jewish soul’s wandering journey for redemption in a still yet unredeemed world. As a concert piece from the select repertoire of the *ershter fidler* (lead violinist of the ensemble), *The Unredeemed Soul* can be considered a *Tish Nign* (virtuoso table song) to be performed at the wedding family’s table (*tish*).

– INTERMISSION –

Oishii Bulgar (“Tasty Bulgar”) – Another composition inspired by my performances and klezmer workshops in Japan in 2023. *Oishii Bulgar* follows a typical klezmer modulation in the second section, moving from the tonic *A freygish* (notes: ((F# G) A Bb C# D E F G A) to *D HaShem Molokh* (D E F# G (G#) A B C).

Terkisher Freylekhs (“Freylekhs in the Turkish Style”) – Composed in the style of the Turkish tuning technique known in Yiddish as *shpiln af de tsvey strunes* (playing on the two strings), *Terkisher Freylekhs* was inspired by the recordings of the late Jewish violinists Leon Schwartz and Avram Bughici. The technique is accomplished by tuning the “A” string of the violin down a fourth to the note “E” and moving it close to the upper “E” string. This enables the performer to play both strings simultaneously, resulting in an octave sound. *Terkisher Freylekhs* combines Jewish melodic content with the underlying rhythm of the Greek *syrto* dance.

London Sirba (“Sirba Dance in Honor of Frank London”) – The *sirba* (Romanian spelling: *sârbă*; Moldovan spelling: *sîrba*) is a brisk Romanian dance in 6/8 time featuring fast-paced triplets in the melody. The *sirba* is another example of the Romanian-Moldavian influence on klezmer music. *London Sirba* is dedicated to Frank London, one of the leading lights in the Yiddish/klezmer revival.

Lubavitcher Nign (“Lubavitcher Hasidic Tune”) – *Lubavitcher Nign* is written in the style of traditional Lubavitcher Hasidic melodies and resembles certain phrases from the popular Lubavitcher tunes *Esn Est Zikh* (“Eating Comes Naturally”) and *Avinu Malkeynu* (“Our Father, Our King”).

Steve’s Satmar Nign (“Steve’s Tune from Satmar”) – A rousing tune inspired by a popular *nign* of the Satmar Hasidim. Wikipedia states: “Satmar is a group in Hasidic Judaism founded in 1905 by Grand Rebbe Joel Teitelbaum (1887–1979) in the city of Szatmárnémeti (also called Szatmár in the 1890s), Hungary (now Satu Mare in Romania). The group is a branch of the Sighet Hasidic dynasty. Following World War II, it was re-established in New York and has since grown to become one of the largest Hasidic dynasties in the world, comprising around 26,000 households making up a population of nearly 300,000.”

A Dobriden far Alan (“A Good Day for Alan”) – Dedicated to the internationally renowned musician, composer, educator and founder of Yiddish Summer Weimar, Alan Bern. The *dobriden* is a klezmer display piece written in ¾ time and performed the day of the traditional East European Jewish wedding to greet and honor the guests as they enter. *A Dobriden far Alan* explores modern harmonies and chord progressions while keeping the traditional melodic form of the *dobriden*.

Shloymele’s Sher (“Shloymele’s Jewish Contra-Dance”) – The *sher* is the Jewish contra or square dance that is similar musically to the Yiddish line dance *freylekhs* but differs choreographically.

Mishebeyrakh Freylekhs (“Freylekhs in the Mishebeyrakh Mode”) – *Mishebeyrakh Freylekhs* was composed as part of my *Klezmer Concert Suite* (2018). The klezmer mode *mishebeyrakh* (A B C D# E F# G A) is basically a minor scale with raised fourth and sixth scale degrees. This mode is often prevalent in

most klezmer *doinas* (free-rhythm shepherd laments). *Mishebeyrakh Freylekhs* is Romanian in character and has a unique chordal progression in the second section fanfare.

Ko Riboyan Olam (“L-ord, Eternal Master of Worlds”) – Written in Aramaic, this Sabbath *zemer* (song) was written in the 16th century by the Kabbalist Rabbi Israel Najara of Safed, Palestine. *Ko Riboyan Olam* describes the wonders of G-d’s creations. The melody was inspired by the touching recitation of the *Tefilah Ha Derekh* (“Prayer for Traveling”) sung personally to me by Cantor (now Rabbi) Neil Blumofe upon my leaving Austin, TX for Cleveland in October 2002. I was so moved by Neil’s intimate and soulful rendition that I wrote this melody on the plane ride home. This beautiful prayer was later revealed to be the appropriate match for this melody.

Tsigayner Zhok (“Romanian Romani Dance”) – *Tsigayner Zhok* is written in the style of the 3/8 Romanian “slow hora.” The goal was to compose a *zhok* using altered melodic turns and atypical chord progressions. The advanced chordal structures presented here reflect the complex harmonies often used by *lautari* (professional Rom musicians of Moldavia/Romania). The common interaction and interchange of *klezmerim* and *lautari* often produced hybrid forms of Jewish/Moldavian music. Eric Stein, the leader of the Toronto-based ensemble Beyond the Pale, suggested performing this piece in brisk 2/4 time for the recapitulation.

ABOUT THE KLEZMER MUSIC ENSEMBLE

The Klezmer Music Ensemble is dedicated to learning and performing traditional East European Jewish instrumental folk music. This vibrant genre of world music combines a distinctive performance style, a unique repertoire, and close chamber-music interaction.

In addition to preparing for one concert each semester, students are introduced to key concepts in Jewish culture and history to provide context for the music they perform.

MEMBERS

Adam Brann, cello (CIM)
Anton Dmitrik, clarinet (CIM)
Matthew Haimowitz, marimba/vocals (CWRU)
Jiani Liang, piano (CIM)
Benjamin Poulin, cello/banjo (CWRU)
Aarav Swami, xylophone (CWRU)
Laura Tsibelman, flute/piccolo (CIM)
Leo Yamauchi, violin (CWRU)

Kennedy Brehm, clarinet (CWRU)
Josh Felser, viola (CIM)
Sebastian Kelzenberg, oboe (CIM)
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