

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

Organization: Klezmer (KlezCalifornia)  
Discipline: Music

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Martin Schwartz plays a selection from his klezmer music record collection.  
Still image from SPARK story, 2007.

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SPARK in Education

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### SUBJECT

Klezmer

### GRADE RANGES

K-12

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Music, dance

### OBJECTIVE

To provide a forum for students to explore klezmer music, its history and cultural significance.

### STORY SYNOPSIS

For over 30 years, Martin Schwartz has been collecting rare 78's, many of them klezmer recordings. His collection became an important resource for musicians to learn songs and playing styles from the almost forgotten kings of klezmer, fostering a klezmer revival that has endured until today. In this episode, Spark observes the current state of the revival at Klez California, a day-long event which includes workshops, singing and dancing, and explores its cultural history through interviews with important figures in the klezmer music scene.

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Hands-on group projects, in which students assist and support one another

Hands-on individual projects, in which students work independently

Group oral discussion and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing

Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To foster an understanding of klezmer music and its history

To illustrate the ways music can support sacred and secular traditions

To demonstrate how oral traditions function in the present day

To analyze how musical traditions change and develop and can be revitalized

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story on klezmer on DVD or VHS and related equipment or a computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card.

CD player and musical samples selected from the Resource section of the guide

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers  
Access to klezmer recordings and CD player  
Pencils, pens, and paper

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Logical-Mathematical – the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively and think logically

Musical Intelligence – the capability to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms

Interpersonal – awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal – awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Bodily-Kinesthetic – the ability to use one's mind to control one's bodily movements



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences at www.kqed.org/spark/education](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education).

### MEDIA MATTERS

The following SPARK stories may be used for compare/contrast purposes:

*Crooked Jades'* old time music revival  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/places/spark/profile.jsp?id=9862>

*Traveling Jewish Theatre* on Jewish theatre:  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/spark/episode.jsp?eid=125990>

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

For the past 30 years, Martin Schwartz has gathered an impressive collection of rare 78 records, many of them klezmer recordings. During the 1970s and 80s, Martin gathered together musicians who shared their passion for the music of the “kings” of klezmer, to learn from the old recordings and foster a burgeoning nationwide revival of the genre.

Meaning literally “vessel of song”, klezmer can be played by a variety of instruments, such as trombone, clarinet, violin, accordion, *tsimbl* (a kind of hammered dulcimer), drums, and bass, but the most commonly identifiable instruments are the violin and clarinet. The music harkens back to a time when music was an integral part of daily life, supporting weddings, bar mitzvahs and other sacred and secular celebrations. The instruments are played in a style that mimics the human voice common to liturgical singing styles.

At KlezCalifornia, anyone can attend workshops on music, dance or singing, and it is all taught in the oral tradition – no written music is handed out. This is true to the way klezmer music has been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years.

Spark explores this current revival at KlezCalifornia and through interviews with musicians and participants, sheds light on a tradition that has endured both time and hardship to prove its vitality and relevance to new generations.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Since Biblical times, there has always been music in Jewish culture. There are many written accounts in the Bible as well as in literature dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century of bands and orchestras performing for religious and secular (non-liturgical) functions.

What we today refer to as *klezmer* has a long history that parallels Hasidic and Ashkenazic Judaism. Due to the Ashkenazi lineage of this music, the lyrics, terminology and song titles are typically in the Yiddish language. The word klezmer is derived from a contraction of the Hebrew words *kle* (vessel) and *zemer* (song) - translating into literally, “vessel of song” - and only became used as a descriptive term in the 1970’s, as it was a catchy marketing label for the music.

Before that, it was simply the music that Jewish musicians (called *klezmorim*) played, encompassing many different dance styles and songs appropriate for sacred and secular celebrations.

In the mid-1700’s, the Hasidic movement had great impact on the way klezmer is played to this day. Born in the forests of Poland, Hasidism is a populist, mystical branch of Judaism, which emphasizes ecstatic emotion over rote learning. Many klezmer tunes are based on wordless melodies sung by Hasidic Jews to induce transcendent states of consciousness, called *nigunim*.<sup>1</sup>

With perhaps the exception of Biblical times, throughout history the typical klezmorim were not deemed high on the social ladder, as social status was achieved through income and education, and usually a musician had little of either. Their repertoire was largely dance music for weddings and other celebrations, but was truly a mix of Jewish ritual music and other melodies and dances of non-Jewish origin, as they were often hired by non-Jews for their parties and weddings and also played with non-Jews, especially Gypsies.

Still, their value to the community was critical and the klezmorim’s bread and butter was usually earned playing at weddings. This was one of the few religiously sanctioned places for live musical

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<sup>1</sup> The Essential Klezmer. Seth Rogovoy, Algonquin Books, 2000. p. 252

performance – as most instrumental music was frowned upon, a tradition dating back to the destruction of the second Temple in 70 C.E., upon which the Jewish people entered a state of mourning. In keeping with the laws of the time, the rabbis decreed that Jews, with the exception of at weddings, refrain from making instrumental music, further lowering the relative status of musicians.<sup>2</sup>

The wedding celebration, however, could last for several days, and then the importance of the klezmerim cannot be understated. In this context it was their religious commandment, or *mitzve*, to bring joy to the bridal party. There was lots of dancing, including bulgars, freylekhs, sirbas, and zhoks (horas) to name a few, but also some songs for reflection and listening, reinforcing the serious religious and spiritual aspects of the event. Musicians used the same vocal stylistics employed by the cantors themselves evoking the human voice.

Over the course of hundreds of years of persecution, Jewish klezmerim gradually found themselves in many parts of Eastern Europe, and by the 1800's were found throughout the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, including Bessarabia (modern-day Romania, absorbing aspects of those cultural traditions as they went. In fact, Greek, Romanian and Gypsy musical elements became so interwoven into Jewish music that despite distinguishing stylistic markers, some scholars couldn't distinguish them and refused to recognize klezmer as a separate genre.<sup>3</sup>

What we today refer to as klezmer music came to the United States during the heaviest period of Jewish immigration between 1880 and 1924, as Jews, tired of a lifetime of hardship, saw opportunity in a free country. In the span of 45 years, 2 ½ million Jews arrived in the U.S., mostly in New York, bringing with them their rich traditions.

However, in an attempt to assimilate into American culture, and overwhelmed by the new forms of entertainment now available to them in the form of vaudeville, theatre, musicals, and later film and

radio, many Jewish musicians began to leave behind some of their more traditional musical styles, and as they had done in previous centuries in different countries, also to assimilate some of the new traditions into their own. With each successive generation came new tastes such as the influence of the fox-trot, ragtime, and later on, big band dance halls and jazz, and eventually, "Old World" klezmer fell out of favor with popular Jewish culture.<sup>4</sup>

Then came the Holocaust, and much knowledge about Jewish music still extant in Eastern Europe was decimated with the deaths of over 6 million Jews. There are a few written accounts describing music of the Old World klezmer in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, but since there are no recordings and very little written music of the time, what the music of all those people truly sounded like will remain a mystery forever.

However, beginning in the 1960's and 70's, a new generation of Jewish musicians started looking for its roots. Across the country, musicians started listening again to old recordings, such as those of Naftule Brandwein, and to seek out those musicians still alive from the turn of the century, like clarinetist Dave Tarras.

The first band to make a new klezmer recording was the California group, the Klezmerim, in 1977. Band founders Lev Liberman and Dave Skuse started their investigations through old records they found, and later through the collection of mentor and musicologist Martin Schwartz, a professor at Berkeley. By listening, transcribing, and performing, they soon had an impressive repertoire, developing their audience along the way and by 1984, the band headlined at Carnegie Hall.

Meanwhile, in New York City, Dave Tarras had retired to an enclave in Brooklyn of Hasidic Jews that had refused to give up their Old World traditions. That's where he was found by Andy Statman – a formidable bluegrass mandolin player seeking his Jewish roots. He quickly became Tarras' protégé, and along with his musical partner Zev Feldman, Statman produced a new Tarras recording and a series of concerts that reintroduced Tarras to new audiences.

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<sup>2</sup> [Klezmer! Jewish Music from the Old World to Our World](#).

Henry Sapoznik. Schirmer books, 1999

<sup>3</sup> [American Klezmer, A Brief History](#). Hankus Netsky. Edited by Mark Slobin. Pp.13,14

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<sup>4</sup> [The Essential Klezmer](#). Seth Rogovoy, Algonquin Books, 2000. pp 53-55

A similar story applies to other bands such as Kapelye and Hankus Netsky and the Klezmer Conservatory Band all of whom were rediscovering Old World traditions, finding 78's and subsequently recreating the traditional klezmer sound.

This begs the question, "what is the traditional klezmer sound"? The instrumentation varies and can include violin, clarinet, trombone or trumpet, tsimbl, drums, bass, accordion, among others. The most identifiable instruments, however, are the violin and clarinet, as they have the unique ability to mimic the human voice. The can produce *krekhitsn*, *tshoks*, and *kneytshn* – respectively, the achy, bent and cutoff notes derived from the synagogue tradition of the cantor, often identified as the "laughing" and "crying" sound of klezmer. This is possibly the single most important characteristic of klezmer, both musically and in terms of its "Jewishness".<sup>5</sup>

Today, klezmer is expressed in a full palette of styles, from the more traditional sounds of the Old World – tapping in directly to the Hasidic prayer melodies or dances - to synchronizations with current popular musical culture, including fusions with jazz, avant-garde, techno, and ska.

In sum, klezmer has found its way back into mainstream Jewish culture, for some as an inseparable fusion of religious identity and music. For others, it is simply a vibrant tradition, celebrating all aspects of life and community. Regardless of the reasons, klezmer has proven its relevance to new generations, and its capability of transcending time and hardship as a form of ultimate cultural and devotional expression.

## RESOURCES – TEXTS

American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots. Edited by Mark Slobin. University of California Press, 2002

The Book of Klezmer: The History, the Music, the Folklore. Yale Strom. A Capella Books, 2002

The Essential Klezmer. Seth Rogovoy, Algonquin Books, 2000

Fiddler on the Move. Mark Slobin, 2000

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<sup>5</sup> The Essential Klezmer. Seth Rogovoy, Page 44.

Klezmer! Jewish Music From the Old World to Our World. Henry Sapoznik. Schirmer Books, 1999

## RESOURCES – WEB SITES

B'nai B'rith Radio, a 24- hour, all-Jewish-music radio station, broadcasting an eclectic Judaic play list including traditional Yiddish, secular Israeli, Jewish American, Instrumental, and Chasidic music. Its goal is to unite Jews around the world through music. B'nai B'rith Radio is available on the Internet at [www.bnaibrithradio.org](http://www.bnaibrithradio.org).

Website for the band Budowitz, with background information on Klezmer music and general information. <http://www.budowitz.com/>

Wikipedia: klezmer  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klezmer\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klezmer_music)

Website for the Klezmer Shack - a website with global klezmer information, connections to bands, websites, sheet music and more.  
<http://www.klezmershack.com/>

Planit Jewish – an online community event calendar for the Bay Area. <http://planitjewish.com>

## VIDEO/AUDIO RESOURCES

A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden. Dir., Michal Goldman, First Run Features, 1987. About the klezmer revival.

Itzhak Perlman: In the Fiddler's House PBS Great ith His Fiddle). Directed Joseph Green and Jan Nowina-Przybylski, 1936. A young teenage girl (and klezmer fiddler) dresses as a boy to hide her gender to fit in a man's world.

### Classic recordings:

Alicia Svigals. Fidl: Klezmer Violin. (1997) Traditional crossroads TCRO 4286

Andy Statman and Zev Feldman. Jewish Klezmer Music. (1978) Shanachie 21002

Brave Old World. Blood Oranges, (1999) Red House RHR 134

Budowitz. Mother Tongue. (1997) Koch/Schwan 3-1261-2

Kapelye. Levine and His Flying Machine. 1984 Shanachie 249 (NR)

The Klezmer Conservatory Band. A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden. (1988) Rounder Records 3105

Klezmer Pioneers: European and American Recordings, 1905-52, Various Artists.

The Klezmerim. Metropolis. (1981) Flying Fish FLY 258

Masada/John Zorn. Gimel (Three). (1994-97) DIW 890

Naftule Brandwein. King of the Klezmer Clarinet. (1997) Rounder 1127

Yiddish-American Klezmer Music 1925-56. Yazoo 7001. Contains tracks of Dave Tarras at the peak of his playing in 1939.

#### **Other Suggested artists:**

Andy Statman Klezmer Orchestra  
The Chicago Klezmer Ensemble  
David Krakauer's Klezmer Madness!  
Di Naye Kapelye  
Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band  
Hankus Netsky  
Joel Rubin Jewish Music Ensemble  
Khevrisa  
The Klezmatiks  
Mikveh  
Red Hot Chachkas  
Veretski Pass  
Zev Feldman

#### **BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS**

Absolute Music at The Friedman Center, presented by the Jewish Community Center, 4676 Mayette Ave., Santa Rosa. They present a music series that runs from January through May.  
<http://www.jccsoco.org/absolute-music.shtml>

The Jewish Community Center of the East Bay. The Center provides a comfortable gathering place for Jews wishing to affirm their cultural and ethnic

origins and the community. Check out their summer events. <http://www.jccebay.org/>

The Jewish Community Center of San Francisco's official website: <http://www.jccsf.org/>

The Jewish Music Festival – March 2008. The mission of the Jewish Music Festival is to present music that celebrates the Jewish experience and explores what it means to be Jewish in a multicultural world. The Festival produces creative and entertaining programs, challenges stereotypes, and fosters engagement with the broader community.  
<http://www.jewishmusicfestival.org/>

Klez California –The official website of this organization which produces a major event, typically with concert-dances and participatory workshops, about once a year, as well as occasional workshops, summer camps, presentations, and concerts. Lots of links to other organizations and websites!  
(415) 456-7547 <http://www.klezcalifornia.org/>

The Traveling Jewish Theatre - Traveling Jewish Theatre's mission is to reach people from all cultural backgrounds by creating and presenting theatre that shares the Jewish vision of *tikkun olam*, repair or healing of the world. 415/522-0786  
<http://www.atjt.com/>

## SECTION III – VOCABULARY

### DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

**Bar Mitzvah** – A 13-year-old Jewish male, considered an adult and considered responsible for his moral and religious duties. Also the ceremony that marks this milestone and initiates the boy into adulthood.

**Bulgar** – A very common klezmer dance tune genres, derived from a Bessarabian/Moldovan dance. Usually a fast circle dance in 2/4 time.

**Hasidim** – Members of a populist, mystical Jewish movement that was born in the forests of Poland in the mid-1700's and emphasizes ecstatic emotion over rote learning.

**Instrumental music** - Music that is played by instruments only, with no vocals

**Kapelye** – A band of musicians

**Klezmer** – (from Yiddish, etymologically from Hebrew kle (vessel) and zemer (song), or "vessel of song", is a musical tradition which parallels Hasidic and Ashkenazic Judaism. Originally, klezmer (plural klezmerim) referred to musical instruments, and was later extended to refer to musicians themselves.

Klezmerim draw on devotional traditions extending back into Biblical times, and their musical legacy of klezmer continues to evolve today. The repertoire is largely dance songs for weddings and other celebrations. Due to the Ashkenazi lineage of this music, the lyrics, terminology and song titles are typically in Yiddish.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klezmer\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klezmer_music))

**Kneytsh** – A sob-like “catch” played on an instrument.

**Krekhts** – voice-like bends and moans (“achy” notes) executed usually on the clarinet and violin, derived from cantorial technique.

**Liturgy** – The prescribed form or ritual for a religious service

**Oral tradition** – A tradition that is passed on through spoken or sung language, as opposed to written music or texts.

**78 records** – In the days of turntables and record players, these were records made of plastic vinyl which rotated on the turntable at a speed of 78 rotations per minute while being touched by a stylus that would then translate or “read” the grooves in the plastic to produce the actual sound through amplification..

**Schvitzing** - Sweating, in Yiddish

**Sheet music** – Notated music or songs written out for individual instruments

**Simkhes** – Celebrations like weddings or Bar Mitzvahs

**Tsimbl** – A trapezoidal, hammered dulcimer type instrument dating back to the Middle Ages in Central Europe. Closely related to the cimbalom.

**Violin or fidl**: The lead instrument of the Old World kapelye, which often had more than one violin. The second would play rhythm accompaniment.

**Yiddish** - A non-territorial Germanic language, spoken throughout the world and written with the Hebrew alphabet. It originated in the Ashkenazi culture that developed from about the 10th century in central and Eastern Europe, and spread via emigration to other continents.  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiddish\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiddish_language))

## SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### Listening and analyzing

Select from the suggested discography a variety of music and dance pieces. Styles could include bulgar (a fast 2/4), freylekhs (a happy, upbeat song, usually circle-or line-dances in 2/4 or 4/4), the hora (either the Israeli dance or the Romanian-Jewish dance often performed in an irregular 3/8 or 5/8 meter) and sirba (a traditional Romanian dance genre related to the bulgar, popular among American Jewish immigrants, with characteristic triplets in the melody over a rhythm in 2/4 time), and the doina (a combined listening and dance piece, with two slow sections intended for listening, followed by a moderate-fast dance in double time).

Using musical terminology such as tempo, mode and scale, ornamentation, and dynamics, listen to specific musical terminology and how it relates to the piece, and the modes used in both liturgical and instrumental Jewish music and their application to the piece. Present their findings to the rest of the class.

- Name that dance tune – using the resource guide as a starting point, compare these recordings with others from other cultural traditions, such as those of the gypsies, other folk dance music from Russia, Greece or Romania. Compare and contrast the recordings to identify musical markers and stylistic devices that link the music with its country of origin. Play a “name that tune” game, and challenge students to identify which music they are hearing.

#### Contextualizing Changing Musical Trends

Engage students in a discussion of cultural traditions, and the role of music and musicians within them. Begin with an analysis of the development of klezmer. Divide the class into groups, and assign each group a century. Each group should research the time period, finding out about different aspects of the era. Have students provide the historical context, the role of musicians in that time period, their social status or “class”, who was their audience, and what changed. Where possible, find out the types of popular dances of the time and place, the other musicians with whom they had contact and their origins. Present their findings to the rest of the class.

Encourage students to analyze how trends change with time and how roles shift as well. How does that impact the way music is played, who plays it and on what kinds of instruments?

#### RELATED STANDARDS

##### Music

Grade 4-6, Historical and Cultural Context

3.2 Identify music from diverse cultures and time periods.

Grade 8

Artistic Perception

1.5 Analyze and compare the use of musical elements representing various genres, styles, and cultures, with an emphasis on chords and harmonic progressions.

##### Grades 9-12

Historical and Cultural Context

3.5 Classify, by genre or style and historical period or culture, unfamiliar but representative aural example of music and explain the reasoning for the classification

## Exploring Folk Dance

Explore the various folk dances that are mentioned in this guide, such as bulgars, the hora, (either the Israeli folk dance or the Romanian-Jewish slow line dance), doina or other dances with which you may be familiar or to whom you may have access to learn. Teach your students the steps and have a dance party.

For very young children, moving to the beat can be challenging for children who have little experience with it, so just reinforcing movement to steady beat in group dances can be vital to their further ability to dance. Have students just hold hands and move in a circle to the beat of the music, to the right and then left, moving in and out of the circle, scissor kicking, doing a step-kick and a basic step-touch pattern can be a start for learning about moving to the beat.

Follow this with a written assignment discussing the roles of each member of the community and their social importance. Listen to the recordings as a group and identify specific characteristics of each piece. Break into discussion groups and assign each group the task of researching a different dance genre. Give a writing assignment that researches the histories of each piece, its functions, the kind of dance it is, a sample of the dance if possible, who dances it (men or women or both?), its significance culturally and/or religiously, and how it might be a vehicle for connecting with others within the community, and even in establishing status within the community.

Or, for older grades, reenact a medieval Jewish wedding complete with bride and groom, the musicians, jesters, bridal party and cantor. Research and understand the rituals associated with the ceremony and their significance first.

Extend this activity to include folk dance of other countries and compare/contrast their characteristics. Can students hear similarities or uncover facts that might suggest mutual influence?

## Discussion points

- Oral traditions – traditionally Jewish music has been handed down from one generation to

another via oral tradition, only in recent years has it been written down. Discuss what this means both from a musical standpoint as well as its potential benefits and drawbacks for a musician.

- Studying Jewish/Eastern European history – Use this topic as a springboard for broader research of the history of Jewish people. Create a general timeline for important events, migration patterns,
- Merging cultures – over time, Jews met musicians from all cultures – Gypsies, Russians, Turks, Greeks, Bessarabians, just to name a few. How did this melting pot affect the music, can one hear it, and how did it impact Jewish culture as a whole in the assimilation process when coming to the United States?

## Sparklers!

In this episode we see how being a klezmer was not always a respected career, yet for close to 2000 years, people have actively sought it out as a means of supporting themselves, however meagerly. Investigate what it means to be a klezmer musician today, and how one's role in society can change depending on in which country and time one lives.

Investigate local events from the resource list for performance opportunities to assign for extra credit. Perhaps there is a member of the community center or even among student's families that might come for lecture/demonstration on Jewish music. Compare and contrast different performances and analyze using specific criteria for making informed critical evaluations of quality and effectiveness of the presentation.

If you have the musical ability, conduct an oral tradition experience. Challenge students to first sing back or echo a simple vocalization that you provide, then depending on the instrumental level of the group, try having them play it back on instruments or continue on vocalizations.

Create a family tree! Have students investigate their family lineage to see from where they come, and

look into their family’s cultural heritage, customs, language and music. Make it a musical family tree – and color code the “leaves” of different musical heritages to reflect distinct or merging cultures.

**RELATED STANDARDS**

Dance – High School - Proficient

Historical and Cultural Context

3.1 – Identify and perform folk/traditional social dances with appropriate stylistic nuances.

3.2 – Describe ways in which folk/traditional and social dances reflect their specific cultural context.

3.4 Explain how dancers from various cultures and historical periods reflect diversity and values (e.g., ethnicity, gender, religious intent)

Connections, Relationships, Applications

5.4 – Explain how participation in dance develops creative skills for lifelong learning and well-being that are interpersonal and intrapersonal.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>.