

Saturday, December 20, 2008, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Pomegranates & Figs
A Feast of Jewish Music

PROGRAM

Teslim

Kaila Flexer *violin, viola*
Gari Hegedus *lauoto, baglama saz, mandocello,
oud, frame drum*

Teslim Special Guests

Shira Kammen *vielle, viola*
Julian Smedley *violin*
Leah Wollenberg *violin*
Liza Wallace *harp*
Faisal Ghazi Zedan *percussion*

INTERMISSION*

Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble

Caitlin Tabancay Austin
Leslie Bonnett
Briget Boyle
Shira Cion
Catherine Rose Crowther
Juliana Graffagna
Janet Kutulas

* There will be a 15-minute intermission. Go! Have a nosh (snack) in the mezzanine.
Kibbitz (visit) with your friends a little.

The Gonifs

Jeanette Lewicki *vocals, accordion*
Peter Jaques *clarinet*
Aaron Novik *bass clarinet*
Aaron Kierbel *drums*
Stuart Brotman *basy*

Production Credits

Paul Knight *House Sound Engineer*
Kaila Flexer *Artistic Director & Main Balaboste*
Alexis Krumme *Production Assistant*

This concert is dedicated to Carla Zilbersmith.

Cal Performances' 2008–2009 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank.



Cambria Lowe

Kaila Flexer

WELCOME to *Pomegranates & Figs!*

We hope that you are enjoying the holiday season. What a momentous year it has been! As our lives speed up, sometimes to a blur, it's so nice to spend an evening enjoying live music together.

I met my musical partner, Gari Hegedus, three years ago, and we formed the duo Teslim, which has proven to be a wonderful collaboration. We are very excited about our debut CD, which has just been released (and which is available for sale in the lobby, just in time for Hanukkah). We are thrilled tonight to be joined by a number of special guests. When Teslim performs with these talented friends, people have dubbed this larger ensemble Teslim Extreme!

As many of you know, I have been programming Jewish music in the Bay Area for a long time, and I love bringing together inspired performers. While due to unforeseen circumstances Nikitov was unable to join us tonight, I've learned over the years that when life gives you potatoes you make *latkes*. I am therefore thrilled to present two of my favorite groups: The Gonifs will steal your hearts

with their rollicking and *hey mish* (homey) brand of *klezmer* music and Yiddish song. Kitka Vocal Ensemble will melt you with their rich harmonies and soulful delivery. Really, it makes me *kvell* (feel proud) that the Bay Area boasts so much talent.

We are so glad you came.

Happy Hanukah! *Fargin zikh* (enjoy)!

Kaila Flexer

Special thanks to Lucy Flexer-Marshall, Abe and Bobbie Flexer, Carolyn North and Herb Strauss, Shira Cion, Jeanette Lewicki, Sue Schleifer, Edith Morrow, Carla's Muselings, Sara Glaser, Catherine Rose Crowther and Juanita Greene.

Oriental carpets courtesy of Claremont Rug Company's Claremont II: outstanding vintage and antique carpets, 1813 Fourth Street, Berkeley.

A Feast of Jewish Music

Today, the thorny question of what makes music “Jewish” is often avoided (and feared) by scholars, musicologists and cultural historians alike, but it does occasionally spark heated discussions on e-mail lists and gathers the attention of bloggers worldwide. It is indeed a question with a thousand possible answers, and one that generates additional questions, which in turn end up blending and overlapping with one another. Invariably, the answers fail to consider the world of sounds, and instead raise issues concerning the many Jewish identities and cultures that surround us.

However, it was not so in the past, when European scholars—Christian and Jewish—shaped the modern notion of Jewish music, and in a way almost invented it. The first interest in the musical world of the Jews—and especially in what Jews sang in their place of worship, the synagogue—arose since the 16th century among Christian humanists, to whom we owe the very notion of *musica hebraeorum* (in Latin, “music of the Hebrews”). These scholars, who immediately understood that the music of the Jews had long been transmitted by way of oral tradition, hoped to find within Jewish liturgy the traces of Hebraic antiquity, and thus the roots of Christianity itself. Instead, what they found was a universe of diverse sounds (a “world music” of a sort) generated by the fact that Jews had lived in Diaspora for many centuries. In the fourth volume of his *Bibliotheca Magna Rabbinnica* (Rome, 1693), Father Giulio Bartolucci listed three different ways in which the Jews of his times chanted the Torah (the Hebrew Bible), and provided musical transcriptions according to the “German,” “Spanish” and “Italian” traditions, de facto stating the cultural differences between Jews who originated from ancient Palestine and those who lived in Central Europe (also known as Ashkenazi Jews) or that descended from the Iberian Jews who had been expelled from Spain and Portugal after 1492 (Sephardic Jews). Other Christian researchers followed in this path and by the 19th century, when Jewish scholars also became interested in the topic, it was very clear that there was no such thing as one “Jewish music” that

characterized all Jews living in the farflung corners of the Earth, and that Jews sang and played a host of musical traditions, almost all transmitted orally, which shared their traits more with the host non-Jewish cultures than among themselves. This diversity preoccupied Jewish intellectuals, whom in the midst of the Romantic and nationalistic fervors of 19th-century Europe were instead trying to prove, once and for all, the unity and distinctiveness (and thus the intrinsic value) of Judaism. The study of Jewish music by Jews themselves was therefore initially aimed at creating a place for Jewish musical culture, and not just for its supposedly ancient Hebraic construct, within the canons of Western cultural history. This preoccupation, and especially the rise of Zionism, led to a progressive focus on the diversity of the oral tradition and on the importance of non-European Jewish cultures.

In 1907, when Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1882–1938), the founder of modern Jewish musicological research, moved to Palestine, he was confronted with an overwhelming variety of Jewish oral traditions, which included liturgical music, folksongs and instrumental practice by Jews originating from Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, the Balkans, North Africa, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia. Already, then, the Eurocentric dichotomy between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish musical worlds was proving insufficient: Arab music, its modes (or *maqamat*) and aesthetic sensibilities were equally essential to Jewish musical history and required a whole new consideration. Throughout the 20th century, Idelsohn's quest for the unifying traits in this panoply of sounds has morphed into a research field that combines musicology, ethnography and anthropology, and that examines the variables of musical production in the context of the cultures of the Jews in the Global Diaspora.

While the notion of “Jewish music” is clearly a scholarly construct, the place of sounds and of musical practice within Jewish life is a fascinating reality that presents itself in many different guises. Since at least the beginning of the 20th century, Jewish music has existed in two parallel arenas. On the one hand, it continues to be produced (and consumed) within the specific context of communal Jewish life, and thus as part of synagogue

liturgy and life-cycle events, throughout the globe. The Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel have had a great impact on Jewish musical traditions. The destruction of countless European communities forever changed the soundscape of Europe, and the relocation of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from North Africa and the Middle East equally changed the soundscape of the Islamic world. Reconstructed Jewish traditions were subsequently recreated in Israel and the United States, where new musical expressions, including secular musical cultures, have progressively been shaped.

On the other hand, Jewish musical traditions have been the constant object of study and reinterpretation by Jewish performers and composers, primarily since the diffusion of commercial sound recordings. Artistic involvement has traditionally focused on Ashkenazi (i.e., East European) traditions, but also, and possibly for a longer time, on Sephardic (i.e., “Iberian” and/or “Mediterranean”) music. Early attempts to present the liturgical music of the Sephardic Jews on stage date back to late 19th-century Italy, while the Jewish Folk Music Society, active in St. Petersburg between 1908 and 1918, focused on the *klezmer* (instrumental) music, and the Hassidic and Yiddish song of the Ashkenazi Jews. The fact that traditional Jewish music, performed by professionally trained musicians, has been prominently featured by the recording industry has in turn influenced the practice within communal life, and traditional performers have increasingly attempted to sound more “like a recording” by adopting the repertoires popularized by their artistic counterparts. A symptomatic byproduct of the confluence between “tradition” and “art” is the flourishing, in Israel first and then in the United States, of a new musical genre—labeled *musiqah mizrachit* (in Hebrew, “Oriental music”) in Israel and “Mizrahi music” in the United States—which includes Arab (and thus, “Oriental”) modes, pop and rock arrangements, hints of a “world music” aesthetics, and lyrics that combine religious references and liturgical Hebrew with nods to the international canons of the “love song” repertoire.

The Jewish musical genres that have been the center of artistic and cultural revivals are *klezmer*

music and Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish (or Ladino) song. These genres are all prominently featured in tonight’s program through the interpretations of outstanding Bay Area performers. While music from their repertoires is sometimes presented together, often on the grounds of their shared “Jewishness,” they belong to very different soundscapes and social contexts.

Klezmer music is the instrumental repertoire of the Jewish professional instrumentalists (*klezmerim* or, in Yiddish, “vessels/tools of song”) of Eastern Europe, who traditionally accompanied Jewish weddings and other festive occasions, and also earned a living by playing at the weddings of their non-Jewish neighbors. The *klezmerim* had to be fluent in a variety of musical styles in order to please their highly multi-ethnic patrons, and their musical repertoires incorporated elements from Bulgarian, Rumanian, Hungarian, Polish and Ukrainian music, synagogue influences and globalized styles like the polka. Upon the mass immigration of East-European Jews to the Americas, the *klezmerim* adapted to the changing taste of their Jewish audience and incorporated elements of swing and jazz into their sounds, until their music became unappealing to the new generations of American Jews.

Since the early 1970s, the music of the *klezmerim* became the object of a new revival launched by musicians in Israel (Giora Feidman), New York City (Walter Zev Feldman and Andy Statman) and the San Francisco Bay Area (The Klezmerim). These early revivalists became the source for a small “army” of followers, and their music has become a new “primary source.” By the 1980s, *klezmer* music became a mass phenomenon within the World Music market, and it progressively incorporated Yiddish songs. Songs in Yiddish, which were not traditionally sung or accompanied by *klezmerim*, had been created in traditional Jewish contexts (bridging secular and religious themes) like other folksong repertoires in Jewish languages throughout the Diaspora, including Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Spanish. Beginning with the 19th century, however, Yiddish songs started to be written by Jewish poets and composers both as theater songs—in the growing arena of Yiddish theater—and as art songs, and to involve a virtually endless

variety of musical styles, ranging from synagogue modes to tango, from Russian folk themes to jazz. The revival of *klezmer* music has bridged the distance between these two genres, and today Yiddish songs (with all their aesthetic implications) are often considered an integral part its repertoire. Similarly, the genesis of Judeo-Spanish songs is the result of many layers of music and text. Their lyrics are in Judeo-Spanish, a language developed by the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula following the edict of 1492, promulgated by the Kings of Spain. Some of these lyrics originate directly from medieval Spanish literary models, and include detailed references to Spanish historical events. Others were instead created later, as part of the oral tradition of the Sephardic Jews living in the Ottoman Empire, where they found a new home after their expulsion. Their music varies greatly, as it was created in the Balkans, in Greece, Turkey and Morocco, and it is often based on the Arab

maqam system. Traditionally performed by women with minimal instrumental accompaniment, that of Judeo-Spanish song is, however, a relatively recent musical repertoire (traceable to the late 19th century), which bears traces of the melodies popularized by the global recording industry, and thus includes tangos and references to opera. The staged versions of these songs frequently include arrangements based on the canons of medieval, early and Mediterranean music, in an attempt to bring Judeo-Spanish songs back to an ancient, and often idealized, past.

Francesco Spagnolo

Francesco Spagnolo, PhD, holds degrees in philosophy and music from the University of Milan and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and is Head of Research at Magnes in Berkeley.



Anne Hamersky

Gari Hegedus (*oud, lauoto, baglama saz, mandocello, lauta, frame drum*) plays both bowed and plucked strings, including violin and viola, and a variety of instruments from Greece and Turkey, including *lauoto, oud, saz* and hand drums. In addition to playing in Teslim, he performs with world music group Stellamara and Persian vocalist Hamed Nikpay. Mr. Hegedus travels frequently to Greece and Turkey to study, collect instruments and gain inspiration. He has studied with *oud* master Naseer Shamma and has recorded and performed with Ross Daly. He has toured with the Mevlevi Dervish (Sufi) Order of America and continues to participate in Turkish ceremonial and devotional gatherings around the country. Mr. Hegedus had been playing fiddle and plucked stringed instruments for 15 years, when he found out that his surname means “fiddler” in Hungarian.

Teslim Special Guests

Julian Smedley (*violin*) is not only a wonderful jazz violinist, arranger, producer and sound engineer, he is a *mensch* (Yiddish for a *really* nice guy). Originally from England (where he co-founded the Bowles Brothers Band), he emigrated to the United States in 1979. He lives in Berkeley, where he has performed and recorded with many groups, including Kaila Flexer’s Third Ear, Clubfoot Orchestra, Dan Hicks, Paul Horn, Jim Kweskin, Mike Wollenberg, The Hot Club of San Francisco, Duo Gadjo, Café Americain and his singer-guitarist wife, Alison Odell.

Multi-instrumentalist and vocalist **Shira Kammen** (*violin, vielle*) is one of the leading early music performers in the world. This is not hyperbole. Not only that, she is one of the most energetic people you will ever meet. Her enthusiasm for music and for life is positively contagious. She has played with Ensemble Alcatraz, Project Ars Nova, Medieval Strings, The King’s Noyse, harpist-storyteller Patrick Ball, Kitka and the California Revels, and is the founder of Class V Music, an ensemble dedicated to performance on river-rafting trips. The strangest place Ms. Kammen has played is in the elephant pit of the Jerusalem Zoo.

Teslim

Teslim (*tes-leem*) means both “commit” and “surrender” in Turkish and features violinist Kaila Flexer, a descendant of Polish *klezmer* musicians, and Gari Hegedus on (mostly plucked) strings including Turkish *saz, oud*, Greek *lauoto* and hand drums. This potent duo performs original and Sephardic music. As composers, their original work reflects their deep respect for folk music. Teslim just released their debut (self-titled) CD. They have received partial funding for Project Tarab, an exciting collaboration with recording artist-composer Ross Daly that will culminate in October 2009.

Kaila Flexer (*violin, viola, Artistic Director of Pomegranates & Figs*) is a violinist, composer and music educator. Ms. Flexer founded *Klezmer Mania!*, a much-loved annual Bay Area Jewish music event presented for over 10 years (1989–2002). She has been at the helm of such bands as Third Ear, Next Village and Kaila Flexer’s Fieldharmonik, and has performed with Club Foot Orchestra, Kitka Women’s Vocal Ensemble and Persian singer Hamed Nikpay, among others. Ms. Flexer teaches violin and composition in her Oakland studio, as well as holding a variety of workshops, including the upcoming string and Balkan ensemble workshops at the Jazzschool in Berkeley (January–March). She is launching an educational deck of playing cards called The Music Deck.

The Gonifs

gonif (Yiddish): (1) a thief; (2) a clever, mischievous child; (3) “America *gonif!*” meaning, “Only in America!”

The Gonifs *klezmer* band formed in 1995 as the house band for San Francisco’s pirate radio station, Radio Libre. Part of the second generation of the *klezmer* revival that began in 1970s Berkeley, the Gonifs bring a fresh, quirky, anarchistic spirit to their deep love for Yiddish music.

As the Gonifs, singing accordionist **Jeanette Lewicki** (Klez-X) and clarinetist **Peter Jaques** (Brass Menagerie) meld Ms. Lewicki’s effervescent stage presence and fluent Yiddish with Mr. Jaques’s flu-



Jeanette Lewicki

idity in Greek, Turkish, Arabic and Jewish musical modes to create a language that speaks to everybody. Twenty-five-year-old drummer **Aaron Kierbel** (Rupa and the April Fishes) brings solid, danceable beats and playful ease to drumset, *dumbek* and an array of percussion toys. Bass clarinetist **Aaron Novik** (Floating World, Gubbish) is a contemporary composer equally at home with odd meters, sensitive improvisations and head-banging heavy metal. The newest Gonif, bassist **Stuart Brotman** (Brave Old World, Veretski Pass), has been playing and performing for nearly half a century. A multi-instrumentalist, composer and arranger, with the Gonifs he plays the *basy*, a traditional Carpathian bowed bass that drives the *klezmer* dance rhythm.

When 16-year old **Leah Wollenberg** (*violin*) was only four, she had a dream that she was playing the violin. For the next two years, she (nicely) asked her parents (painter Jenny Bloomfield and guitarist Mike Wollenberg) for a violin. Being artists themselves, how could they refuse? Ms. Wollenberg took lessons with Kaila Flexer for the next six years. Thus began Ms. Wollenberg’s love for Celtic and Balkan music, jazz, Swedish music and many other genres. She has also studied with Julian Smedley, Laura Risk, Bobbi Nikles, Jeremy Kittel, Martin Hayes, Bruce Molsky and Alastair Fraser. In addition, Ms. Wollenberg acts and composes fiddle tunes whenever she isn’t doing her Berkeley High School AP History or English homework.

Liza Wallace (*harp*), now 17 years old, began playing the neo-Celtic harp at age six. Her parents (dancer Beth Harris and choreographer Rick Wallace) home-schooled her (and her two brothers) until the eighth grade. Her harp teachers have included Diana Stork and Cheryl Ann Fulton. Kaila Flexer has been her composition teacher for three years. Ms. Wallace has performed with the Bay Area Youth Harp Ensemble, Pleiades, the White Horse Harpers and the duo Harpscotch. She is also a singer, dancer and actor, and performs in musicals, operas and plays throughout the Bay Area. Ms. Wallace will graduate from Saint Mary’s College High School this spring.

Born in Oum D’Baib, Syria, in 1972, **Faisal Ghazi Zedan** (*percussion*) grew up obsessed with the *derbakki*—a goblet-shaped hand drum, made of clay or metal, usually with a natural skin head and sometimes referred to as a *dumbek*. Largely self-taught, on *dumbek* and also *riqq* (a skin-covered, tambourine-like instrument), Mr. Zedan began his studies upon relocating to California in 1992, where he studied with noted ethnomusicology professor Ali Jihad Racy. He has performed with the UCLA Near East Music Ensemble, the Near East music group Kan Zaman, Julian Weiss of the Syrian-based Al Kindi Ensemble, *qanun* player George Sawa, and the Los Angeles-based Youm It Talaata percussion group, of which he is a founding member.

Shannon Harrison

About the Artists



Pixie Vision Productions

In recent years, Kitka has been exploring the soulful song traditions of Eastern European Jewish women. The group's live-concert documentary, *Kitka and Davka in Concert: Old and New World Jewish Music*, has won awards at international film festivals from Beijing to Toronto and has been broadcast on more than 80 public television stations nationwide. Sung in Hebrew, Ladino, Yiddish, Hungarian, Russian, Bulgarian and Ukrainian, Kitka's music showcases ecstatic Hasidic chants, contemplative prayers from the Ashkenazi tradition, tender Sephardic lullabies, and songs of work, love, loss and celebration from the Jewish Diaspora. Performers include Caitlin Tabancay Austin, Leslie Bonnett, Briget Boyle, Shira Cion, Catherine Rose Crowther, Juliana Graffagna and Janet Kutulas.

Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble

Kitka, meaning "bouquet" in Bulgarian and Macedonian, began in 1979 as a grassroots group of singers from diverse ethnic and musical backgrounds who shared a passion for the stunning dissonances, asymmetric rhythms, intricate ornamentation, lush harmonies and resonant strength of Eastern European women's vocal traditions. Since its informal beginnings, the group has evolved into a professional touring ensemble that has earned international recognition for its artistry, versatility and fresh approach to folk music. Through a busy itinerary of live and broadcast performances, recordings, educational programs, master artist residencies, commissioning programs and adventuresome collaborations, Kitka has exposed millions to the haunting beauty of their unique body of repertoire. Kitka has released seven recordings on their own Diaphonica record label, the most recent being *Sanctuary: A Cathedral Concert*.