



Smithsonian Folkways

THE BROTHERS NAZAROFF

THE
HAPPY
PRINCE





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מוהל-מיסעך

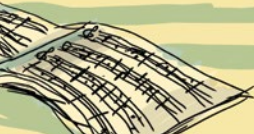
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HOLY
+
SPIRIT

CUCHIFRITOS
RESTAURANT

ODESSA
TRAVEL

OPEN



NAZAROVYE!

A GREETING FROM THE BROTHERS

NAZARISHE GREETINGS TO ALL. Thank you for acquiring this most joyous of musical tributes to our beloved lost uncle, the "Prince." Three score years ago, the venerable Moses Asch released Nathan "Prince" Nazaroff's 10" record, *Jewish Freilach Songs* (FW 6809). It has since proved to be a guiding light in the search for a missing link between our post-modern Babylonian exile and the lost Atlantis of Yiddish "Middle-Europe." The "Prince" came to our American shores in 1914, as the old world crumbled. One hundred years later, we, the amalgamated and wind-strewn spiritual nephews of the great Nazaroff, have gathered to honor our lost Tumbler Extraordinaire, a true troubadour of the vanished Yiddish street. Leaving our homes in New York, Berlin, Budapest, Moscow, and France, we began recording these songs in an astrological library in Michigan and finished up in an attic in Berlin. We were armed with a smattering of languages, several instruments, a bird whistle from Istanbul, and the indispensable liner notes to the original Folkways album (available for download from Smithsonian Folkways' website—we encourage any listener to this recording to obtain a copy). We have tried to stay true to Nazaroff's *neshome* (soul), *khokhme* (wit), style, and sense of music. The "Prince" was truly a big-time performer. By keeping his music alive, we hope to bring him into an even bigger time: the future. So let's now celebrate the discordant, obscure, jubilant, ecstatic legacy of our Happy "Prince."

NAZAROVYE!





THE

BROTHERS NAZAROFF

THE
HAPPY
PRINCE



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

THE
BROTHERS
NAZAROFF

THE HAPPY PRINCE

- 1. VANDER ICH MIR LUSTIG**
(WHILE I'M HAPPILY WALKING) 5:14
- 2. TUMBALA LAIKA** 4:01
- 3. IHR FREGT MICH VOS ICH TROIER** (YOU ASK ME WHY I'M MOURNFUL) 4:35
- 4. ARUM DEM FEIER**
(AROUND THE FIRE) 3:23
- 5. FREILACHS**
(MEDLEY OF FREILACHS) 3:10
- 6. MAIDLACH VIE BLUMEN**
(GIRLS ARE LIKE FLOWERS) 3:58
- 7. DER KOPTZEN**
(THE POOR MAN) 1:22 (Lyrics: Nathan "Prince" Nazaroff and Psoy Korolenko)
- 8. FISHALACH**
(LITTLE FISH) 3:09 (Aliza Greenblatt)
- 9. ICH A MAZELDICKER YID**
(OH! AM I A "MAZELDICKER" JEW!) 3:51
(Adapted lyrics: Daniel Kahn and Psoy Korolenko)
- 10. MAIDLID** (MAIDEN SONG) 3:06
- 11. ICH FLEE** (I FLY) 2:18
- 12. YIDDEL MIT ZEIN FIDEL**
(LITTLE JEW WITH HIS FIDDLE) 4:40
(Avrom Goldfaden)
- 13. KRASNOARMEYSKAYA PESN'**
(RED ARMY SONG) 3:35
- 14. NOW SING ALONG WITH THE "PRINCE"** (HAVA NAGILA) :21

Tracks 1–13 arranged by The Brothers Nazaroff based on arrangements by
Nathan "Prince" Nazaroff.

Lyrics for tracks 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 11 by Nathan "Prince" Nazaroff.

THE BROTHERS NAZAROFF

NOT QUITE THE YIDDISH
YOU'RE USED TO

by Michael Wex (Milton Nazaroff)

**“Tate-mame taratshen oys af mir di oygn, azoy vi zey zenen arayn
in Luvre un gefunen dort Milton Berle vu di Mona Lisa darf zayn.”**

“My parents were staring at me as if they’d gone into the Louvre and found
Milton Berle where the Mona Lisa should be.”

—Yoine Levkes, *Zikhroynes fun a sheyris-ha-pleyete kind*
(*Memoirs of a Child of Holocaust Survivors*)

YIDDISH IN “PRINCE” NAZAROFF’S DAY

There were two kinds of Yiddish fan in 1954, when Nathan (possibly also known as Nicholas) “Prince” Nazaroff went into the Folkways studios to record *Jewish Freilach Songs*, the album on which this Brothers Nazaroff CD is based: a relatively small number of hardcore, committed Yiddishists who sought spiritual sustenance in the language and its worthier productions, and a far larger group of immigrants who were often perfectly conversant with other languages and cultural milieux, but felt most comfortable in Yiddish, their mother tongue. Had anyone asked them why they kept on speaking Yiddish, their answer would have been something along the lines of “*Vos zol ikh den reydn? Terkish?* What else should I be speaking? Turkish?”

Where the first group fought over Sholem Asch’s allegedly sloppy prose and overly positive approach to Christianity, the second wanted to know why he was getting so dull; where the first group wondered if I. B. Singer was best regarded as a nihilistic hedonist or a sex-crazed nihilist, the second—who tended to skip anything in the *Forward* to which his name was attached—found him too busy with filth or philosophy to pay attention to narrative drive. These sentiments were still current ten years later, when I was earning pocket money reading the Yiddish papers (and the occasional book) to people whose eyes weren’t what they used to be. I loved Isaac Bashevis Singer long before I read him; I got to skip his stories and still get paid.

Still, if Yiddish in the United States was not quite moribund in 1954, it owed most of its fading vitality to these *amkho yidn*, the plain people of Israel who had come to the US before the Immigration Act of 1924 and never tried to conceal their origins. These were the people who read the Yiddish dailies and popular fiction, went to the Yiddish theater, and listened to Yiddish and Hebrew records—not only the cantorial showpieces, but also the theater-songs and comedy routines that the ideological Yiddishists, ever fearful of a lack of high seriousness, scorned as *shund*, trash.

While famous Yiddish poets worked as shoemakers and paperhangers, the *shund*-stars were the kinds of celebrities whom no one but audiences loved. Aaron Lebedeff, described by Daniel Pinkwater as “the inventor of scat-singing and Danny Kaye” (1989, 93); Herman Yablokoff, who called himself *Der Payats* (The Clown) and whose mega-hit, “Papirosn” (“Cigarettes”), makes the death of Dickens’ Little Nell sound like a peck on the cheek; and Seymour Rexite, who was on the radio every week sing-

ing Yiddish versions of English-language pop songs, were no more acknowledged by the high-minded guardians of “official” Yiddish culture than people like Menasha Skulnick and Molly Picon, who also worked in English-language theater, film, and television. While the highbrow cultural diet of quality literature, poetry, and art song was served up in secular Yiddish schools and summer camps, virtually all of these institutions were associated with non-religious and even anti-religious organizations that were politically far to the left of the mainstream Jewish community in those days of *Red Channels*, Joe McCarthy, and the blacklist.

Less highbrow Yiddish culture received a somewhat doleful injection of energy from Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivors who were still not fully at home in English. Though separated by a quarter-century and millions of bodies, neither the survivors (who were generally quite young) nor the pre-war immigrants (many of whom were only in their 50s) fit the new image that mainstream American Jewry was trying to shape for itself. Buoyed by the establishment of the State of Israel and highly conscious of the post-Nuremberg unacceptability of open anti-Semitism, we were pretty sure that the hour for which we’d yearned had finally arrived. After all the college quotas and restricted hotels; after the war crimes trials and newsreel footage of concentration camps; after the Israeli victory in the War of Independence proved that we could dish it out just as well as we could take it, we’d finally got to the point where we were able to qualify as white. If Gregory Peck could pass for Jewish in *Gentleman’s Agreement*, which won the Best Picture Oscar in 1947, the converse must also apply: Jews should be able to pass for Gregory Peck. Most of us were so well assimilated, so much a part of mainstream American life, that if we changed our names and didn’t mention religion, no one would ever know we were Jewish—and we didn’t need a bunch of refugees and *alte kuckers* messing it up for us. Unlike most of the people who still read the Yiddish press or listened to the Yiddish-hours that dotted radio schedules all over the country, we didn’t have accents. We weren’t old—not that kind of old, at any rate—and we had as little as possible to do with the atavistic revenants from the D.P. camps who made everyone so uncomfortable.

Many of us could still understand the Yiddish that we might have spoken with our immigrant parents, but we tended to use it only to talk dirty and keep things from our children, hardly the sort of national expression envisioned by the more intellec-

tual Yiddishist *faynshmekers*. If we bothered with Yiddish at all, it was for comedy, usually the slightly off-color sort typified by “Joe and Paul,” a comedy 78 by the Barton Brothers released the same year as *Gentleman’s Agreement*:

Mothers, do you have a young boy of 14 or 15 at home who likes to go to burlesque shows and buys French postcards? He comes home, runs into the bathroom, shuts the door and makes with the oh-oh-oh. Mothers, do me a favor and give the boy a couple of dollars and send him to Cockeyed Jenny. And if you don’t know where to find her, ask your husband, he knows the place real well already.

One of the Barton Brothers claimed that “Joe and Paul” sold three-quarters of a million copies in the months immediately following its release. Popular enough to be mentioned by Lenny Bruce in *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*, “Joe and Paul” is the sort of thing that let Lenny and a lot of other comics know that Yiddish was a way of sneaking all kinds of forbidden material past the Protestants in Standards and Practices.

For the rest—and it’s probably worth noting here that one of the Barton Brothers, who were siblings only in the Brothers Nazaroff sense, was said to have known so little Yiddish that he had to learn his parts phonetically—Yiddish, though still alive, was holding out for a decent burial even as most of the Jewish community was ready to toss it onto the trash heap. Yiddish accents and Yiddish-inflected English survived in the immediate post-war period in the kinds of pop-song parodies popularized by Mickey Katz, the basic message of which was that we, the listeners, were *not* the people with accents saying “*a glezele seltzer, chérie*”; we only *knew* people like that. While Gertrude Berg and the older members of her television family continued to speak with the twangs that they’d brought with them from *The Goldbergs’* long run on radio, full-blown accents like those of Jack Benny’s Mr. Kitzel (whose wife used to cook *enchilatkes*) or Mrs. Nussbaum on the Fred Allen show (who was always talking about her husband, “mine Pierre”) weren’t quite as cute when we were trying to distance ourselves from recent arrivals with similar accents but less amusing stories.

The trauma of World War II and the fragile triumph of our assimilation meant that Yiddish, when allowed into public at all, was supposed to be a nod to where we had come from, rather than a picture of where we were. The standard non-Yiddishist song repertoire thus leaned heavily on the late 19th-century ambiance of such lullabies as

“Afn Pripetshik” (“By the Stove”) and “Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen” (“Raisins and Almonds”), which had long since turned into elegies; on real elegies like “Eli, Eli” (“My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?”), “A Lawsuit Against God,” “God and His Judgment Are Just,” and “Our Town Is Burning”; and the occasional anti-elegy like the ghetto fighters’ “Partisans’ Hymn.” It was no competition for “Hava Nagila.”

ENTER THE “PRINCE”

It’s impossible to say whether Moe Asch, the founder and president of Folkways Records, considered himself more comfortable in Yiddish than in any other language. He was, however, the son of the most famous Yiddish writer of the first half of the 20th century, and his early career in sound technology involved a considerable amount of work for Yiddish theaters and summer camps; he even set up the transmitter for WEVD, the biggest Yiddish radio station of all. At the very least, then, Asch was as comfortable in Yiddish as in anything else, and he was thoroughly familiar with the Yiddish trends of his times. Indeed, his pre-Folkways recordings of Yiddish singers, cantorial stars, and girl groups on Asch and Disc Records were squarely in line with those trends, as was the first Yiddish LP issued by Folkways, Mark Olf’s *Jewish Folksongs, Volume 1*. The songs, which included both “Afn Pripetshik” and “Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen,” were arranged for voice and guitar and presented in a decorous style that owed a great deal to Pete Seeger and Burl Ives.

Folkways’ second Yiddish release, “Prince” Nazaroff’s *Jewish Freilach Songs*, is like the return of what was repressed on Olf’s album, a vinyl Yiddish counterpart to those old cartoons where the toys in the shop come to life after hours and misbehave. There’s little in the way of decorum here, no slavish devotion to things like time and pitch, no lullabies, kindly rebbes, or old country mamas, no “Kol Nidre” or “Eli, Eli.” The title says it all: *Freilach Songs*, happy songs. Instead of dirges and pleas, we get the songs that come out of Yiddish-speaking drunks, sung and played in a way that suggests a studio full of Yiddish-speaking drunks. Even “Ihr Fregt Mich Vos Ich Troier,” in which the singer’s best pal takes off with the singer’s best gal, turns into an apostrophe to the bitter vodka with which the singer is drowning his sorrows. Sure, it’s a lament; so is “Honky Tonk Women.” Sure, it’s sad, but drunk-sad, “Melancholy Baby” sad, rather than “they killed every Jew in a 50-mile radius” sad. If there had

been Yiddish bar bands in America in the early 1950s, this is what they would have sounded like.

Asch must have known what he was doing, and this must have been the sound that he was after—the noise of a tavern on Kola Street, the fictional street made famous by his father, Sholem, in a story so widely read that, as David Roskies puts it, it “became a generic name, the place in *shtetl* geography where the ne’er-do-wells hung out, where Jews and Gentiles worked in close proximity, where blood flowed freely and muscle was valued over mind” (1984, 142). Later Folkways sessions with Nazarov, similar in their workaday competence to three Russian-language 78s that Asch released between 1926 and 1930, remain unissued. If Asch had wanted the slick entertainment of people like Seymour Rexite or the Barry Sisters, or the operatic-cantorial approach of Jan Peerce or Sidor Belarsky, that’s the kind of album he would have produced. He’d recorded the Barrys for his Disc label when they were still called the Bagelman Sisters, but Asch seems to have been looking for something very different here—a Yiddish pendant to Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which Folkways had put out two years earlier. And he seems to have known exactly where he could get it.

“PRINCE”

If Nathan “Prince” Nazarov (the quotation marks seem to have been part of the title, unlike those of Clark “Superman” Kent) is the Nicholas Nazarov listed in the 1920 census whose occupation is given as “Actor,” we know that he was born in Russia in 1892 and considered Russian his mother tongue, though Yiddish is listed as the mother tongue of each of his parents and of his wife, Mary, who arrived in the United States in 1914, a year after her husband.

This jibes fairly closely with the information in the notes to the 1954 LP, which tell us that he “was born in Middle-Europe and came to the U.S. in 1914,” and—in a phrase that leads one to suspect that the notes might have been written by Nazarov him-





Nathan "Prince" Nazarov

self—“Ever since radio he is known to countless Jewish listeners as the ‘Prince.’” His surname is rendered as Nazarav in this paragraph and as Nazaroff everywhere else but the census, including his Russian 78s. According to a “Folkways presents” notice, the “Prince” was “well known as a big time performer [who] has played many times in the Palace Theatre on Broadway.” No one who calls himself big time ever is. The Palace, once the leading vaudeville theater in the nation, stopped presenting live acts and became a movie house in 1932, but vaudeville never died for Nazaroff, as proven by the whistling so prominent on that LP and this CD.

As anyone who has seen *The Jolson Story* knows, a pubescent Asa Yoelson took to whistling on stage until his voice settled down, and he did so for many years thereafter: he whistles a chorus on the 1920 recording of “Swanee” that helped make Gershwin famous. Jolson was able to do so because whistling was so popular in vaudeville that performers like Edward Avis and Sibyl Sanderson Fagan could become genuine celebrities. Joe Belmont, “The Human Bird,” had been the Edison Company’s most popular recording artist and worked with such major vaudeville and recording stars as Billy Murray and Byron Harlan. After dental problems brought Belmont’s career to a close, he made a series of instructional records intended to teach canaries to sing.

Sic transit gloria. These people were as forgotten by the early ’50s as they are now, but whistling had been a big thing when Nazaroff last recorded. He whistles on his Russian 78s, and if whistling was good enough for then—when he might also have been performing at the Palace—it was good enough for now. *Good* taste might be timeless, but *no* taste is eternal.

And that’s it. We know so little about Nazaroff that the Nazaroffs on this tribute album can pass as easily for his nephews as they can for five of Screamin’ Jay Hawkins’ estimated 75 children. But if Harry Smith’s *Anthology* gave birth to the Holy Modal Rounders, and the Holy Modal Rounders were midwives to the Fugs (whose first album was produced by Harry Smith), and all of them together helped define the punk aesthetic when most first-generation punks were still in elementary school, we’re going to have Nazaroff after Nazaroff to thank for the coming revolution in popular Jewish music.



Folkways Records presents the well known
International Actor, Singer, Musician and Entertainer
"PRINCE NAZAROFF"
PRINCE NAZAROFF is well known as a big show performer. He has played many
times in the Palace Theatre on Broadway, all over the U.S.A. and Canada.



A photograph of a person standing on a wooden boardwalk, partially obscured by a large teal circle. The person is wearing a light-colored patterned shirt and khaki pants. The background shows a clear blue sky and a wooden structure. The teal circle contains the title and author information.

BOARDWALK MUSIC

by Michael Alpert (Mishka Nazaroff)

GROWING UP IN LOS ANGELES in the 1950s and '60s, among East European Jewish immigrants like my family, I was ever enthralled by the informal Yiddish music sessions I heard in the parks and by the beaches of that great city, already the third largest Jewish community in the world. In West Hollywood's Plummer Park, Santa Monica's cliff-top Palisades Park overlooking the vast Pacific, and along the Venice Beach boardwalk, as a kid I thrilled to the Russian-Jewish jamming of small groups composed mainly of non- or semi-professional community musicians. Gathering usually on Sunday afternoons or warm evenings, they played mandolins, guitars (often Russian 7-string guitars, or *semistrunki*), accordions (frequently the small, Russian-style button accordion called *garmoshka*), the occasional violin, and not infrequently prima balalaika, usually played with a pick, a technique some musicians referred to as "Ukrainian" style.

Their repertoire was similar to that waxed by "Prince" Nazaroff and colleagues in their 1954 Folkways sessions, and by their 21st-century progeny on this recording. It included Yiddish folk and folklorized popular songs, often those that were favored and promulgated by the Yiddishist left and progressive movements in North America (as well as in the Russian Empire, inter-war Poland, and the Soviet Union). Overt-



ly leftist political songs from the same milieu, e.g., Nazarov's "Krasnoarmeyskaya Pesn/Red Army Song" or "Arum Dem Feier/Around the Fire," were also popular, as were traditional Yiddish dance tunes and Hasidic *nigunim*—traditional vocal melodies—in addition to Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, and occasionally Polish folk and popular songs and melodies.

To me, as a Yiddish- and partly Russian-speaking kid in the City of Angels, this *was* Yiddish folk music. I called it "boardwalk music." It was down home, rough hewn, spontaneous, imperfect, and infinitely exciting. The livelier tunes often brought on-lookers to dance a nimble *freylekhs*, *kazatske*, or waltz. It made me proud to be a Jew in what sometimes still seemed like the Wild West, or TV America. It was the opposite of upwardly mobile, assimilating Jewishness. This was music made and consumed with gusto by working- and lower-middle-class Jews, mostly immigrants from the former Russian Empire, some from inter-war Poland or Romania. Some were "refugees" from "the War," in Yiddish *der khurbn*—The Destruction; this was long before the terms "survivor" or "Holocaust" entered the global lexicon. It was our front-porch music, our Russian-Jewish version of the American old-time string band.

Yes, there were also the home and family-circle genres of unaccompanied, philosophical, by turns humorous and heartbreaking Yiddish ballads and folk songs, and their counterparts in Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Romanian, or a mélange of two or more of these languages. In a different but not unrelated context was the Hebrew and Aramaic chant of the *khazn* (cantor) or *bal-tfile* (lay prayer leader), as well as the unaccompanied Hasidic *nigunim* we sang at home on *Shabes* or Jewish holidays, or at congregational gatherings in *shtiblekh*, small Hasidic prayer houses. Finally, there was the more "Romanian-style," professionalized instrumental music for weddings (and later, bar and eventually *bas mitzvahs*), early 20th-century versions of which I heard on 78 rpm recordings and the Yiddish radio—what later became broadly known as "klezmer music." But decades before PBS specials and Hollywood Bowl concerts, the music of the parks and boardwalks played by the likes of Nazarov was the primary genre of Yiddish music heard in American public space.

Its prominent use of portable, plucked-string instruments—especially mandolin and guitar—embodied the transition of these instruments from court and classi-

cal instruments of 17th- and 18th-century Italy and Austria to parlor instruments throughout the world in the 19th century, and to the evolution of the mandolin in particular—given its by-then standard tuning combined with its relative ease of mastery—into “the people’s violin.” More easily available than its pricier bowed cousin, it found new life in the “mandolin craze” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the Yiddish world, along with the small Russian button accordion *garmoshka*—itself one chapter in the contemporaneous global diffusion of the accordion—the mandolin was a quieter yet lively home and party instrument of young people, used to accompany informal singing, dancing, and general *hulyanke* (partying), often when elders weren’t looking or listening. For the most part, these instruments were never embraced by the professionalized, often dynastic klezmer milieu. They were not traditional to it and, by the time they became popular, were simply not loud enough to compete with the increasing shift from strings to winds in the klezmer instrumentarium.

Hand in hand came the creation of mandolin orchestras, utilizing all sizes of mandolin and at times guitars. The mandolin became an important cultural and educational tool of transformative social and political movements worldwide, from Italy to Eastern Europe and the Philippines, India, and the Americas. At the same time, smaller ensembles of mandolin, guitar, accordion, violin, etc., became popular in Italy, Eastern Europe/Russia, and Western Europe (including the Isles), as well as the Americas, ultimately entering African American, old-time, bluegrass, and eventually country & western music in the US. In Russia, the balalaika—traditionally a folk rather than court instrument—underwent a similar transformation, leading to the creation of balalaika orchestras as well as small, less formal ensembles. These global currents all meet in the music of Nazaroff, of the park and boardwalk, and of the Jewish community and social venues where the “Prince” and friends performed. It is a classically American, early 20th-century immigrant phenomenon. The fact that Nazaroff chose the versatile octophone—first produced in 1928 by the Regal Musical Instrument Company in Chicago, a business closely intertwined with the Slovak-American Dopyera Brothers and their two legendary factories, the National String Instrument Corporation and the Dobro Manufacturing Company—is further testament to the multiethnic, immigrant roots of the music heard on this recording.



Michael Alpert (guitar) Daniel Kahn (accordion), Psoy Korolenko, Jake Shulman-Ment (fiddle), Bob Cohen (mandolin)

In 1975 or '76, flipping through the “International” bins at Vogue Records near UCLA, I stumbled across a copy of the original 10” Folkways LP *Jewish Freilach Music*, featuring a mysterious Nathan “Prince” Nazaroff and friends. It was one of the few recordings of non-Israeli Jewish music in any general music outlet I’d ever seen. I took it home, laid it on the turntable, and my room filled with the funky, unabashed Yiddish sounds of that small ensemble. Boardwalk music! Amazed that anyone (even Folkways) had thought to record those sounds, I devoured the familiar, *hey mish* tunes with Yiddish delight and pride, and shared them with friends. The music even featured the classic Russian village *beresta*, the small piece of birch bark or other thin material that produces the wild chirping noises heard on the original (and our reinterpreted) Nazaroff cuts. Not long afterwards, when a few of us in Los Angeles were gathering to begin our chapter of what would grow into the Klezmer

Renaissance, playing what at the time I insisted should be called “Yiddish” rather than “klezmer” music (funny, you don’t look klezmer...), one model for our repertoire and sound was the music of the Yiddish street and social hall, the music of “Prince” Nazaroff and his ilk.

A few years later, moving from LA to New York, to a next and continuing chapter of the Klezmer and Yiddish Renaissance, I quickly came to experience firsthand what I’d long known—that the same music I’d heard as a kid in Los Angeles was yet vibrant on the boardwalks of the Big Apple, especially in Brooklyn’s Brighton Beach and Orchard Beach in the Bronx. Particularly in Brighton Beach (“Little Odessa”), it gained a new listenership and the occasional instrumentalist and singer from among the Yiddish-speaking members of the Soviet-Jewish emigration to the US. Unaccompanied Yiddish song and women’s voices had their place in this environment as well. I will never forget the soaring, Slavic-style Yiddish voice of the late Sonia Kruger, piercing the Atlantic twilight with songs of the Russian-Yiddish poets who emerged from the same milieu as Nazaroff, like so many of us ultimately involved in this project.

“Prince” Nazaroff was a quintessentially New York character for most of his life. Yet, as I hope is clear from this tale, not all Yiddishkayt—East Ashkenazic Jewishness—is or was situated in New York. In 1989 I first strolled the palm-shaded boardwalk of South Beach in Miami, long a mecca for serious but informal Yiddish music making, with the likes of the late great Bessarabian-born Martin Kalisky—like Nazaroff a professional performer, but more trained and precise, holding forth on mandolin, *domra*, and guitar with a large circle of fellow Jewish boardwalk pickers, some European born, some US natives. Present-day masters of the Yiddish mandolin such as Andy Statman and Jeff Warschauer studied seriously with Kalisky and others like him. Yet the ongoing international, immigrant nature of the music reinterpreted here by the artistic disciples of the “Prince” and other exponents of Russian-Jewish “boardwalk music” is well illustrated by at least four of the global Brothers Nazaroff who grew up in huge, industrial cities far from the banks of the Hudson: Danik Nazaroff from Detroit, Pasha Nazaroff from Moscow, Hempl Nazaroff from Malmö, and of course yours truly, Mishka Nazaroff, from that far-off Pacific shore where my own Nazarovian tale began.

—July 2014, Kraków, Poland



Psoy Korolenko and Daniel Kahn



THE FORMATION

OF THE BROTHERS NAZAROFF
AND THE NATURE OF
THE PROJECT

by Daniel Kahn (Danik Nazaroff)



LIKE MANY OTHER MUSICIANS of the past three generations, both Jewish and otherwise, I was drawn to the Yiddish culture revival because the music hit me on a radical level. I fell in love with klezmer music not in the context of traditional Jewish weddings, where much of it was originally played, but on the streets of New Orleans, the clubs of New York, and the cafés of Berlin, where its funky, angular rhythms and dissonances joined easily with the jazz, punk, hip hop, and other folk musics that surrounded it. It became clear to me that the international family of *klezmerim* and Yiddishists was using this much misunderstood, much maligned, yet ever resilient culture as a universal human means to defy the very things that have kept it down: nationalism, essentialism, fascism, fundamentalism, and the destructive entropy of history itself. *Oy vey*. But above all, I fell for the feeling: how my tongue felt singing a nearly forgotten story in Yiddish, how my feet felt moving to those old ecstatic dances. Which brings me to the “Prince.”

I first discovered Folkways’ 1954 10” *Jewish Freilach Songs* hiding under a dusty wooden drawer in the back of a record shop in Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was many years ago, when my interest in Yiddish music was still rather new. I am generally in the habit of buying any old Folkways record I can get my hands on, so I paid the \$5 and took it home. I had no idea what I had found.

When I put it on, my brain exploded. Who was this man? What were these songs? What is an *octophone*? I was immediately hooked. In his mad howl, guttural whoops, piercing twang, and funky whistle I heard the alleys of Odessa, the cacophony of Coney Island, and the mountain air of the Catskills. I also heard a kind of lost Yiddish cousin to Joseph Spence, the Holy Modal Rounders, the Fugs, and a little bit of Woody Guthrie. These are all my own projections, of course. But, in short, I loved the “Prince.”

Over the next several years, I discovered that a number of my friends and colleagues in the Yiddish and klezmer world were also big fans of this mysterious troubadour and his one mysterious LP. After a lot of talk, and a lot of dreaming, we finally decided to pool our love for this record and make a tribute project. We would become a family of Nazaroffs. Like the Ramones, or the 3 Mustafas 3.

The Brothers Nazaroff came from all over the planet to join up and record. There was me, Daniel Kahn (Danik Nazaroff), born in Detroit, living in Berlin, leader of

The Painted Bird and theatrical troublemaker; Psoy Korolenko (Pasha Nazaroff), the traveling bard/professor, my main cohort from Moscow, my partner in “The Un-ternationale”; our mutual mentor and comrade Michael Alpert (Mishka Nazaroff), arguably the most important Yiddish singer of the klezmer revival and member of the legendary bands Kapelye and Brave Old World; Bob Cohen (Zaelic Nazaroff), Budapest-based expat, archaeologist of lost Carpathian klezmer and Roma music, leader of the Naye Kapelye, procurer of rare *palinkas*; Jake Shulman-Ment (Yankl Nazaroff), New York City–Romania composer, fiddler extraordinaire, member of my main band The Painted Bird; and Hampus Melin (Hempl Nazaroff), the great Swedish drummer of The Painted Bird and his own klezmer dance band, You Shouldn’t Know From It.

Our recording approach was simple: re-record the entire Nazaroff album note for note. No big-idea re-imaginings: just do honor to his energy and aesthetic. The same tunes, in the same order, only with more musicians and a bigger sound. The extensive Folkways liner notes were of course part of the original album’s appeal, and many of the translations in there were written to rhyme. We love the playful usefulness of these translations, and so we decided to sing many of the translations as well (with some minor adaptations here and there).

Since recording the original nine tracks, we managed to unearth some other recordings of the “Prince,” nearly lost forever. They include a few Russian 78s, recorded in the 1920s, and some unreleased outtakes and other sessions from the Folkways vaults. We have translated and recorded the material from two of the old 78s and two of the 1954 Folkways outtakes, and included them here. Perhaps most obscurely, we dug up two promotional fliers for *Jewish Freilach Songs*. The album is advertised on the front. The back, however, reads: “Now Sing Along with The ‘Prince.’” Below that follows a bizarre transliteration of the words to “Hava Nagila,” which we included in the album as well.



SONG NOTES

by Daniel Kahn, edited with Michael Alpert

A NOTE ON YIDDISH SONG TITLES AND LYRIC TRANSLITERATION

Yiddish, a rich and dynamic language, has been transliterated into Latin scripts in many ways throughout the ages. The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York is arguably the standard bearer of contemporary American Yiddish transliteration. However, the original Folkways liner notes, intended for an American English speaker's sensibilities, were published before the YIVO standard was popularly established, and they maintain what now appears to be a rather German orientation in the transliterated rendering of the Yiddish. Despite its apparent obsolescence, we will adhere to this method in the interest of aesthetic consistency and tradition. The original notes are also rife with what seem to be errors in translation, spelling, orthography, grammar, typesetting, typing, rhyme, etc. We love them therefore all the more.

Tracks 1 through 9 are songs learned from *Jewish Freilach Songs (FW6809, 1954)* and appear here in the order of the original LP.

1. VANDER ICH MIR LUSTIG (WHILE I'M HAPPILY WALKING)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Michael Alpert, vocal, guitar; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle; Bob Cohen, mandolin; Hampus Melin, *poyk* (marching drum and cymbal)

Listed in the original notes as a “Sailor Dance,” this jolly litany of bad luck is immediately recognizable to the Soviet-born ear as “Yablochko” (“Little Apple”), a balalaika folk favorite, popular in the turbulent times of the Red Navy during the Revolution. Here, Nazarov’s lyric makes it easily the world’s happiest song ever dealing with Wall Street speculation, financial ruin, industrial collapse, flash floods, agricultural misery, marital dysfunction, and cattle disease.

*Vander ich mir lustig / In regn in dem feld, [Nazaroff sings ...“in in kelt”]
Zing ich mir a freilachs, / Fife ich oif der velt.*

Happily I wander / In rain and cold / Singing a joyous tune / Whistling at the world.

[The original translators rendered this verse as:

Through the fields I’m strolling, / Full of fun and mirth,
Happily I’m whistling: / Not a care on earth!]

*Hob ich shoin kein geld nit, / Kein veib und nit kein kih,
Lost mich mein schlimmozzle / Itztershoin zu ri*

Now I have no money, / No mill, no cow, no wife,
My hard luck has left me: / I’m enjoying life!

2. TUMBALA LAIKA (ALSO KNOWN AS “TUMBALALAIKA,” USUALLY WRITTEN “TUM BALALAIKA”)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle; Bob Cohen, mandolin; Hampus Melin, *poyk*

This too-well-known folk song was popularized, among others, by the Barry Sisters. Their lyric, however, the commonly sung, psychedelically surreal, adolescent riddle ballad of growing stones and mopey lovers, is nowhere to be found in the “Prince’s” version. His lyric is most certainly his own and is evocative of a wine-soaked world of animistic and dreamlike natural enchantment. Nymphs and “gypsy girls” swoon in the magic of spring’s fertile blooming, and the singer is drawn into the night guided by his lusty longings. Forget the balalaika. This is Bacchus.

From the original Folkways liner notes:

*Is gevejn a frillingsobend / Hot gezittert in der luften,
Yugendliebe, lippenmurmel, / Oisgemished mit rosenduften.*

Once upon an evening in Springtime, / When air was trembling with promise,
Love was so young, and murmuring voices / Mingled their tones with fragrance of roses.

We sing:

Radiantly the eyes of maidens / Beckoned and like stars were twinkling,
Then I felt enchanted and dreamy / As if old wine I had been drink[ing].

3. IHR FREGT MICH VOS ICH TROIER (YOU ASK ME WHY I'M MOURNFUL)

Daniel Kahn, lead vocal, accordion; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Michael Alpert, vocal, guitar; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle

Based on the Yiddish theater song “Dos flesh/Tshort vos'mi,” and taking its melody from the Russian ballad “Karye Glazki” (“Brown Eyes”), this deep drunk blues describes the loss of a bride to the singer’s best friend. Sung as a rocking reggae number by legendary Moscow garage-klezmer guitarist and Nazarov acolyte Vanya Zhuk of the band Nayekhovichi, the song has a universal human appeal, especially for the vodka-afflicted.

*Ihr fregt mich vos ich troier / Vos vein ich oif'n koll,
Tzveb [2] freind hob ich ferlorn, / In beide aufeinmol.*

You ask me why I'm mournful, / Why alone I sit and pine?
Two friends I've lost forever, / And both of them at one time!

The chorus, mostly in Russian, remains oddly untranslated or even rendered in the original notes' Latin typewritten letters. This could be due either to the Russian illiteracy of the unknown translators, or McCarthyism. In the Yiddish (Hebraic) script, however, is written:

(Rusisher Chor)

Ach ti vodka, vodka gorkaya / Tshortvasmi, un azoi vaiter, [etc.]

Followed by a translation into English, written with Yiddish letters:
Oi, yu vodka, biter vodka, / Dhi devil teik im

4. ARUM DEM FEIER (AROUND THE FIRE)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Michael Alpert, vocal, guitar; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle; Bob Cohen, *tsuras*, second fiddle

This is a classic of the New York socialist summer camp scene. Nazarov's words more or less stick to the well-known version. He paints a real scene by singing the song first as a *nign* (wordless melody), then singing the lyrics, following with a medley of a Russian campfire chestnut (a hokey old popular song) and a real rocker of a *freylekhs*. We wanted to singe our toes, beards, and noses around the edge of this one.

*Arum dem feier is alles lieber, / Die nacht is teier, vir zingen lieder,
In sol der feier ferloshen veren, / Sheint inser himmel mit seine shtern.*

Around the fire we all are happy, / The night is lovely, we're singing gaily,
And should the flames of the fire sink lower / Our sky will send us its brilliant starlight.

And the Russian waltz verse, also not rendered in the notes:

Moy kostyor v tumane svetit, / Iskry gasnut na letu.

Nochyu nas nikto ne vstretit, / My prostimsya na mostu.

[My fire is shining in the fog / The sparks are fading in the air

At night nobody will meet us / We will say good-bye on the bridge.]

5. FREILACHS (MEDLEY OF FREILACHS)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle; Bob Cohen, second fiddle, mandolin; Merlin Shepherd, whistle; Hampus Melin, *poyk*

This redundant and beautiful title illustrates, albeit unwittingly, the multifunctionality of the word *freylekh* (the older spelling is the more German “*freilach*”), “happy” in Yiddish. It is both a song and a dance, an adjective and a noun, a feeling and an activity, a rhythm and a paradigm. The form of this medley could be represented as AABBBBC-CDC, then Verse Verse (mumbled), Refrain X, Refrain X, ACC. A, B, C, D, and X are all sections either from klezmer tunes, Hasidic *nigunim*, or Russian songs. In the middle of the medley is Nazarov's version of the song “Yidl Mitn Fidl,” a popular motif in Yiddish song. He calls it “Yiddel Mit Sein Fiedel.” His words, however, are different from most known versions. As we now know, he had recorded a Russian and Yiddish version of the song several decades earlier (see track 12). On the whole, this medley is as close as Yiddish dance music comes to the explosive, sonic energy of a runaway Rube Goldberg machine or a punk rock hoedown. It is very hard to not dance to this.



6. MAIDLACH VIE BLUMEN (GIRLS ARE LIKE FLOWERS)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle;
Bob Cohen, mandolin

Borrowing a melody from a well-known Russian folk song, “Din Din Din,” this ode to feminine wiles bespeaks an innocence and awe rarely found in the world today. Some of our sung English was of our own fashioning, some taken from the notes. In the last English verse, for the purposes of rhyme, we recorded the word “night” instead of “dungeon,” as it is rendered in the notes. We regret this decision, and in performance we now assume that “dungeon” is the better rhyme for “light.”

*Maidlach vie blumen / Reitzend ind shein
Zogt mir vie nemmt ihr / Den tzoiber ind chein*

Tra la la...

Girls are like flowers, / Tempting and fine,
Their charms have power, / Strong and divine
Life would be dismal / And dark as a dungeon,
If girls didn't give us / Their beauty and light.

7. DER KOPTZEN (THE POOR MAN)

Bob Cohen, Yiddish vocal; Psoy Korolenko, Russian vocal; Daniel Kahn, ukulele; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle

This lyric was so loved by Nazaroff that he used it twice on the same short record. It describes a quaint scene of proletarian familial frustration. Zaelic takes the lead vocal here. Pasha's Russian verse is our only entirely original textual contribution to the project. It is a children's rhyme he wrote a long time ago whose meaning is too scatological to be translated here. Indeed, much of Nazaroff's lyric was so unintelligible to the original liner note writers and translators that there is simply “. . . .” in places. To the best of our abilities we have tried to decode his pauper's jaunty lament:

*Shvebn koiles in der shtib / Vi di shvartze robn
Kinder shtimen larmen hoikh / Viln ale [zokhn?]*

Voices float around the house / Like black ravens / Children's voices cry loudly....
They all want...?

8. FISHALACH (LITTLE FISH)

Psoy Korolenko, lead vocal; Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle; Bob Cohen, *tsuras*

Usually known as “Fisherlid,” this is Nazarov’s only true cover song on the album. Thought of as a folk song, it was actually written and composed by none other than Aliza Greenblatt (1888–1975), the legendary American Yiddish poet. She came to the US in 1900 and published many books of songs and poems for young and old. She also happened to be mother-in-law to Woody Guthrie, who drew illustrations for some of her poems and wrote her enthusiastic letters about all manner of things lyrical and poetic. Nazarov’s version forgoes the usual languid, dreamy treatment of the song for a much more buoyant, whimsical mood. We feature here the stringed Greek instrument, the *tzoura*—or, as we call it, the *tsuras* (close to the Yiddish for “real troubles”).

*Furt a fisher oif'n yam, / Er furt arim baginnin,
S'vill der fisher minastam / Fishalach gefinnen*

A fisherman’s rowing around on the sea, / It’s early in the morning,
And the fisherman wants probably / To catch the little fish...

*Murmeln chvalyes troirig / Der yam is a betriebter,
Efsher is er, gor vi ikh / Oiched a ferliebter*

Waves murmur dolefully, / And the sea is gloomy,
And I’m thinking, maybe it, just like me / Also is in love

9. ICH A MAZELDICKER YID (OH! AM I A “MAZELDICKER” JEW!)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Yuriy Gurzhy, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, vocal, fiddle; Bob Cohen, vocal, mandolin; Merlin Shepherd, whistle; Hampus Melin, *poyk*

The “Prince” ends the record with his hit. This infectious, merry-making melody is the zenith of Nazarov’s wit and exuberance. The song is beloved from Vladivostok to Vancouver, inspiring such later interpretations as Geoff Berner’s “Lucky Goddam Jew” and covers by many klezmer ensembles. On vocal here we are joined by Berlin’s U-Riy Nazarov and our fiddling yiddel Yankl Nazarov. This one really gets a club or party bumping.

When singing the chorus in English, we sometimes render the word “*yid*” not only as “Jew” but “dude,” which is somehow also accurate. True, “*yid*” is Yiddish for “Jew” (not



the pejorative English epithet). In the Yiddish world, *yid* is also just a way of describing “some guy.” It’s a world where it’s totally normal to be a *yid*. It’s not really a question of religious or ethnic identity.

It should be noted that in many parts of New York City, the word “tired” does indeed rhyme with “riot,” as is illustrated by Yankl’s channeling of his aunt in his singing. Also, as in “Der Koptzen” (track 7), the original Folkways translators apparently misheard the word “*naket*” as “*naches*,” confusing the poor man’s screaming children’s nakedness with, as we are told in their footnote, “Naches: Pleasure you feel when something wished for very deeply comes true.” A pretty good description of this project for us Brothers Nazaroff.

From the original notes:

*Oy bin ich a mazeldicker mazeldicker yid, / Oy bin ich a mazeldicker mazeldicker yid,
Vie ich gei, vie ich shtay, / Her ich nur in ein geshrei:
Oy bin ich a mazeldicker mazeldicker yid!*

Oh, am I a mighty lucky Jew (dude)! (2x)
From today ’til I die / You will always hear me cry
Oh, am I a mighty lucky, mighty lucky Jew (dude)!

*Hob ich kinder kleine fiel, / Kinder hoilen naches
Hob ich choives mehr vie hor / Ind kein ‘cent in pocket.’*

*Kimm ich nor fin dem shop, / Kimm aheim a mieder,
Fangen un die kinder mir, / Zingen kinderlieder*

Our adapted verse:

I have lots of little kids, / They are running naked. [original notes: They should bring us “naches”]

But I have more debts than hair / And I cannot take it. [original: Nothing in my pockets]

When I’m finished at the shop, / I come home so tired,

Kids are singing children’s songs, / Then they start a riot.

TRACKS FROM OTHER SOURCES

Note: For these tracks we will include all the lyrics in the Yiddish transliteration as standardized by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, as well as our own translations, since they are not included in the original Folkways liner notes. Tracks 10 and 11 are interpretations of outtakes from a Folkways session reel—the same session that produced *Jewish Freilach Songs* in 1954. The remaining three reels in the Folkways archives were from a later session, in 1961, as yet unreleased. We await their publication with bated bird whistle.

Tracks 10 and 11 are songs learned from outtakes to FW 6809.

10. MAIDLID (MAIDEN SONG)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, *tsuras*, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle
A lovely lyric of youthful yearning and deep desire, if a bit old-fashioned and possibly inappropriate by contemporary standards.

*Oyf di vegn reyne, oyf di felder fraye / Vel ikh mir aroysgeyn, zikhn mayn getraye
Vel ikh zikh gefinen oyf di reyne vegn / Vet zi mit a shmeykhl kimen mir antkegn
Vet zi mit di oygn kishn mikh in gletn / Vel ikh far ir knien, vel ikh tsi ir betn
Vel ikh tsi ir tsigeyn, zi arimtsinemen / Vet zi zikh nit lozn, tsniesdik farshemen
Libn iz a narishkayt, me miz nokh zayn a ying / Vil men nor a meydele, braukht men
nor a ring
Shenkt men zey a tsatskele, farlibn zey zikh bald / Zugt men zey nor “lyubenyu,”
shpatsirt men shoyn in vald*

On the clear roads, on the open fields / I will sally forth, seeking my beloved
I will find her on the clear roads / She will approach me, smiling
She will kiss and caress me with her eyes / I will kneel before her, I will pray to her
I will go to embrace her / Modest and shy, she will not let me
Loving is foolishness, you have to still be a boy/ If you want a girl, all you need is a ring
You give them a trinket, they fall right in love / You call them “sweetie,” and you’re off to
the woods.

11. ICH FLEE (I FLY)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, *tsuras*, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle; Hampus Melin, *poyk*

This melody is immediately recognizable to *klezmerim* as the classic “Tants Tants, Yidelekh.” Other klezmer connoisseurs know it as “Reb Dovidls Nign.” Here, Nazaroff uses it as a peppy template for what is arguably his most brilliant lyric. The song is a veritable anthem to epic diasporic restlessness and the transnationality which typifies not only the wandering “*yid*” but the endless road of the troubadour. Nazaroff epitomizes both of these and takes us along on his hero’s winding way. The lyrics are mostly a sequence of rhyming travel destinations, many no longer bearing their sung names. Calculating the distances traveled within the song, the singer covers over 91,320 miles, or 146,965 kilometers. That means this song could encircle the earth at the equator about 3.67 times. And that’s if he’s traveling by air, and is allowed to carry on his octophone.

Ikh fur, ikh fur, ikh loyf in fli / Ikh hob kayn tsayt, ikh hob kayn ri
Ikh veys nit vu, ikh veys nit vi / Ikh hob kayn dortn, nisht kayn hi

Ikh fli, ikh fur fin Novi Dvor / Kayn Baltimor in kayn Shanghai
In fun Sudetn, kayn Manhetn / Durkh Brazilyen, kayn Terkay

In fun Poretshni, Molodetshni / Fur ikh kayn Madagaskar
Fun Moroko iber Krokov / Fli ikh azh kayn Zenzibar

Fun Amur durkh Singapur / Farfur ikh glaykh kayn Montreol
In fin Poltave durkh Libave / Blayb ikh shtekn in Aryol

Dantsig, Bremen, Irak, Yemen / Nagasaki, Port Sayid
Kirinayka, lamtsi drayka, i balalaika / S’furt a yid!

Vu a grenets, vu a hafn / Vu a kritshme bin ikh dort
Makht a vare, makht a vare / Vayle ikh reb yid! for!

I travel, I travel, I run and fly / I have no time, I have no rest
I don’t know where, I don’t know how / I have no there, have no here

I fly and travel from Novy Dvor / To Baltimore and to Shanghai
And from Sudeten to Manhattan / Through Brazil to Turkey

And from Parečany, Maladzyechna / I travel to Madagascar
From Morocco, via Cracow / I even fly to Zanzibar
From Amur through Singapore / All the way straight to Montreal
From Poltave through Libave / I get stuck in Oryol
Danzig, Bremen, Iraq, Yemen / Nagasaki, Port Said
Cyrenaica, *lamtsi draika*, and balalaika / A Jew travels!
Where a border, where a harbor / Where a tavern, I am there!
Make way! Make way! / For I, Mr. Jew (dude), am traveling!

Tracks 12 and 13 are songs learned from a Columbia Viva-Tone 78 recorded in November 1928, two of the previously unheard of recordings our “Prince” made in the 1920s, mostly in Russian. Lyrics translation by Daniel Kahn and Psoy Korolenko.

12. YIDDEL MIT ZEIN FIDEL (LITTLE JEW WITH HIS FIDDLE)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle

The singer, accompanied by a full orchestra, is listed as “N. Nazarov, tenor.” The lyric, in Russian with interspersed phrases and a refrain in Yiddish, is Nazarov’s rendition of a popular Russian version of a song originating in the Yiddish theater, most likely written by Avrom Goldfaden. Our translation approximates the playful tone of the original.

I want to sing you *gor an alte lidl* [a very old song] / I’m asking you to listen and to hear
I want to sing you *yidl mit zayn fidl* / I want that you should sing along *mit mir*
[with me]

No matter who denies it / You have to recognize it
That “yid” means someone talented and smart / On weddings and baptisms
And balls and circumcisions / This Yidl fiddles right into your heart

Oy yidl mit zayn fidl / S’iz vert milyonen gelt
Er hot dem bestn shmitshik / Vos gits nor af der velt
Kayn strun nit platst bay im kayn mol / Shpiln ken er on a tsol
Yidl mit zayn fidl

[Oh, little Jew with his fiddle is worth millions / He's got the best bow in the whole world
His strings never snap, he can play without end]

Yid never gets no sympathy or pity / Misfortune comes wherever he may roam
They try to throw him out of every city / And nowhere in the world is “yid” at home

In moments of great *tsores* [troubles] / He sings a Yiddish chorus
And wrings his hands in sorrow and dismay / But if he still is moping
His other way of coping / *Er nemt zayn fidl* [he takes his fiddle] and he starts
to play.

13. KRASNOARMEYSKAYA PESN' (RED ARMY SONG)

Daniel Kahn, vocal, accordion, whistle; Psoy Korolenko, vocal; Jake Shulman-Ment, fiddle

The B-side to “Yiddel,” this song employs doggerel verse to recount the glorious triumph of the Soviet Bolshevik revolutionaries over the dark forces of the tsarist White Russian reactionaries. Recorded about 10 years after the height of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the memory was still fresh in many minds what a thorough bastard the last tsar was. Our “trad-aptation” attempts to maintain the original’s ideological historical rigor and rhyme.

Many ages, many ages / Russian tsar was up on high
But his book has closed its pages / Only the bourgeoisie will cry

People show in spicy battle / Powers of the Soviet
Overthrew the tsarist saddle / No one ever will forget

Then the enemy surrounded / Russian land on every side
They thought the tsar would be rebounded / In his palace to reside

No way, no way you can beat us! / No luck for the bad, bad tsar
Lenin, Lenin he will lead us / On his head a red, red star

Generals and admiralty / Fly like dust into the wind
We have swept them excellently / Into history’s dustbin

Many ages, many ages / Without tsars we all are free
Over tyrants power rages / Proletarian victory!

14. NOW SING ALONG WITH THE "PRINCE"

Daniel Kahn, "Hava Nagila" music box, whistle

NOW SING ALONG WITH THE "PRINCE"

HAVA NAGEELA

Ha-va na-gee-la Ha-va na-gee-la

U-u-ru U-u-ru

Ha-va nagee-la V'-nees m'cha.

A cheem!

Ha-va na-gee-la Ha-va-na-gee-la

U-ra a-cheem b'leu sa meh-yach

Ha-va nagee-la V'-nees m'cha

U-ru a-cheem b'leu sa meh-yach

Ha-va n'-ra-n'-na Ha-va n'-ra-n'-na

U-ru a-cheem b'leu sa meh-yach

Ha-va n'-ra-n'-na V'-nees-m'cha

U-ru a-cheem b'leu sa meh-yach

Ha-va-n'-ra-n'-na Ha-va n'-ra-n'-na

U-ru a-cheem u-ru a-cheem-B'leu

Ha-va n'-ra-n'-na V'nees-m'-cha

sa meh-yach.





WORKS
CITED
/
FURTHER
READING

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ASSOCIATED MUSIC RECORDINGS

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Daniel Kahn & The Painted Bird, *The Broken Tongue* (2006; re-released Oriente, 2009), *Partisans & Parasites* (Oriente, 2009), *Lost Causes* (Oriente, 2011), *Bad Old Songs* (Oriente, 2013)

Jake Shulman-Ment, *A Wheel* (Oriente, 2011)

Di Naye Kapelye (featuring Bob Cohen), *A Mazldiker Yid* (Oriente, 2001), *Traktorist* (Oriente, 2008)

Psoy Korolenko and Opa!, *Live Not by Lies* (O-P-A, 2014), available from www.o-p-a.ru

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Michael Alpert and Julian Kytasty, *Night Songs from a Neighboring Village* (Oriente, 2014)

Brave Old World (featuring Michael Alpert), *Song of the Lodz Ghetto* (Winter & Winter, 2005)

You Shouldn't Know From It (featuring Hampus Melin), *It's Klezmer!* (Danzone-Oriente, 2015)

CREDITS

Produced by Daniel Kahn

Recorded, edited, and mixed by Thomas Stern at “Sternstaub” Studios, Berlin, 2011–14

Vocals, accordion, guitar for tracks 1, 3, 4 recorded by Ian Gorman at Heart Center Studios, Big Rapids, Michigan, September 2011

Fiddle for tracks 10, 11 recorded by Avi Fox-Rosen, Brooklyn, March 2014

Mastered by Ingo Krauss at Candy-Bomber Studio, Berlin

Annotated by Michael Wex, Daniel Kahn, and Michael Alpert

Track notes written by Daniel Kahn; edited by Daniel Kahn and Michael Alpert; translations by Michael Alpert

Cover and inside front cover drawing by Ben Katchor, 2014 and 2012. Used with permission.

Silver-colloidal glass photos by Oleg Farynyuk, www.slow-photography-berlin.com

Photos of the band by Fumie Suzuki

Photo of Nathan “Prince” Nazaroff and archival drawings on pp. 29, 32, and 39 by Ben Shahn, courtesy of the Ralph Rinzler Folkife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution

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SPECIAL THANKS AND A NAZARISHN GRIS TO Ethel Raim, Michael Wex, Marcia Kahn, Jack Falk, Geoff Berner, Fumie Suzuki, Oleg Farynyuk, Sasha Lurje, Vanya Zhuk, Frank London, Sarah Gordon, Merlin Shepherd, Michael Winograd, Itzik Gottesman, Eleonore Weill, Ben Katchor, Yuriy Gurzhy, Nora Haakh, Marianna Salzmann, Thomas Stern, Ingo Krauss, Emily Finer, Ilya Shneyveys, Michael Tuttle, Till Schumann and Gigi Backes of Oriente Musik, Hankus Netsky, Jenny Romaine, Benji Fox-Rosen, Julie Dawson, Jeff Warschauer, Deborah Strauss, Polina Shepherd, Avi Fox-Rosen, Berthold Seliger, Moishe Rosenfeld, Vicky Feldman, Arkady Gendler, Josh Waletzky, Mark Rubin, Hy and Sandy Goldman, Zheka Lizin, Mitya Khramtsov, Pete Rushefsky, Tine Kindermann, Rokhl Kafriksen, Sanne Möricke, Sveta Kundish, Sol Frieder, Julian Kytasty, Dan Blacksberg, Henry Sapoznik, Alan Bern, Bob & Seth Bernard and all at Earthwork Music and Harvest Gathering, Jewdas, Michael & Margaret Erlewine, Ian Gorman, Jon Kalish, Miriam Khaye-Seigel, Lorin Sklamberg, Walter Zev Feldman, Csaba Bereczki and the Hungarian crew, Klez Kanada, Kaffee Burger, Barbes, Maxim Gorki Studio Я, the Gypsy with the bird whistle on Istiklal, Sonya Cramer, Eldridge St. Synagogue, CTMD, Richie Barshay, Jon Kalish, and all at Smithsonian Folkways.

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF Fedor Mashendzhinov, A. David Kahn, Adrienne Cooper, Peysakh Fishman, Chane Mlotek, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman, Martin Kalisky, Chane Yachness, and of course, Nathan Nazarov, our “Happy Prince.” *Koved zeyer ondenk.*

ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.

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International klezmer supergroup the Brothers Nazaroff pays joyous tribute to legendary outsider Yiddish troubadour Nathan “Prince” Nazaroff, recorder of the mysterious 1954 Folkways EP *Jewish Freilach Songs*. Uniting as his spiritual heirs, the Brothers Nazaroff (Daniel Kahn, Psoy Korolenko, Michael Alpert, Jake Shulman-Ment, Bob Cohen, and Hampus Melin) celebrate the discordant, obscure, jubilant, ecstatic legacy of their Happy Prince. 46 minutes, 40-page booklet with artwork by Ben Katchor and an essay by Michael Wex.

- 1. VANDER ICH MIR LUSTIG** (While I’m Happily Walking) 5:14
- 2. TUMBALA LAIKA** 4:01
- 3. IHR FREGT MICH VOS ICH TROIER** (You Ask Me Why I’m Mournful) 4:35
- 4. ARUM DEM FEIER** (Around the Fire) 3:23
- 5. FREILACHS** (Medley of Freilachs) 3:10
- 6. MAIDLACH VIE BLUMEN** (Girls Are Like Flowers) 3:58
- 7. DER KOPTZEN** (The Poor Man) 1:22
- 8. FISHALACH** (Little Fish) 3:09
- 9. ICH A MAZELDICKER YID** (Oh! Am I a “Mazeldicker” Jew!) 3:51
- 10. MAIDLID** (Maiden Song) 3:06
- 11. ICH FLEE** (I Fly) 2:18
- 12. YIDDEL MIT ZEIN FIDEL** (Little Jew with His Fiddle) 4:40
- 13. KRASNOARMEYSKAYA PESN’** (Red Army Song) 3:35
- 14. NOW SING ALONG WITH THE “PRINCE”** (Hava Nagila) :27



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THE BROTHERS NAZAROFF