

SEMER ENSEMBLE RESCUED TREASURE

BACKGROUND & MUSICIANS

THE SEMER ENSEMBLE: BACKGROUND

1920s Berlin, the Scheunenviertel (“Barn Quarter”), a densely populated Jewish immigrant center right next to Alexanderplatz. In this milieu we find Hirsch Lewin, formerly a forced laborer conscripted to Germany from his native Vilnius during World War I. After the war, Lewin decides to remain in Berlin, finds work in a bookstore, and eventually starts his own business: the Hebräische Buchhandlung (Hebrew Bookstore), Grenadierstrasse 28. The year is 1930.

Lewin sells books in Hebrew; history books, children’s books and more; prayer shawls, candles and other religious items. His speciality: gramophone records! In 1932, Lewin creates his own label, “Semer.” One year later, the Nazis come to power, forbidding Jewish musicians to perform in non-Jewish settings. Semer becomes a Noah’s Ark for Jewish musicians who have nowhere else to go. For five years, Lewin makes recordings at a feverish pace, creating a precious time capsule of a world facing annihilation. On November 9, 1938, SA hordes attack the Hebräische Buchhandlung, demolishing stock and store, including 4,500 recordings and 250 metal plates. The memory of the Semer label falls into oblivion for the next 60 years.

Fast forward. From 1992-2001, musicologist Dr. Rainer E. Lotz travels the world to track down the Semer recordings. Miraculously, he is able to recover and restore almost the entire catalogue. In 2002, the Bear Family label reissues the recordings in a box set of 11 CDs and 1 DVD, titled “Vorbei: Beyond Recall.” In 2012, the Berlin Jewish Museum Berlin commissions New Jewish Music luminary Alan Bern to create new interpretations of the archival recordings. Bern puts together a world-class ensemble of musicians from all ends of his musical world – America and Berlin, the old generation and the new. For the first time since the war, Berlin is once again home to musicians with the artistry and knowledge to handle a repertoire with such a breadth and depth.

The Semer Ensemble’s music opens a time tunnel between 1920s Berlin and today’s New Jewish Music: Berlin cabaret, Russian folk songs, Yiddish theater hits, operatic arias and cantorial music are just a small sample of this remarkable repertoire.



THE SEMER ENSEMBLE: MUSICIANS

ALAN BERN (director, pianist, accordionist) was born in 1955 in Bloomington, Indiana, and moved to Berlin in 1987. He is the founding artistic director of the Other Music Academy (OMA), Yiddish Summer Weimar, the OMA Improvisation Project, among others. He is a composer/arranger, pianist, accordionist, educator, cultural activist and philosopher. He is co-founder and director of Brave Old World, founder and director of The Other Europeans, and he also performs with Bern, Brody & Rodach, Guy Klucevsek and Svetlana Kundish, among many others. He holds a master's degree in Philosophy and a doctorate degree in music composition. He has composed and directed music for theater and dance in New York, Montreal, Berlin, Lucerne, Essen and Bremen, among others. He is the creator of Present-Time Composition©, a highly innovative approach to music improvisation informed by insights from cognitive science.

www.alanbern.net

www.othermusicacademy.eu

www.facebook.com/alan.bern



© Adam Berry



© Yusuf Sahilli

PAUL BRODY (trumpet)

studied trumpet and composition at Boston University and the New England Conservatory. Until 2010 he has mainly worked as a composer and trumpeter in venues like the Deutsches Theater, Schaubuehne, and Volksbuehne; and with artists such as John Zorn, Barry White, Blixa Bargeld, Wim Wenders, Volker Ludwig, Julian Rosefeldt and Cate Blanchett. Recordings with his own band, Paul Brody's Sadawi, are on John Zorn's Tzadik label and Enja Records. His last album, Behind All Words, featuring Meret Becker, Jelena Kuljic, and Clueso, won the best list of the German Recording Prize. Currently, Brody focuses on the intersection of spoken language and music, which is reflected in his last album, David Marton's La Sonnambula, and in sound installations featured at the Jewish Museum Berlin and Transmediale Festival. His 2016 projects are a WDR feature about prisoners in Alabama learning art and poetry, a documentary exhibit examining perspectives on help, Voices of the Helper, for the Jugend Museum Berlin, and installations exploring the parameters of singing and spoken word for the Munich Kammerspiele Opera Department, where he is currently Artist in Residence.

www.paulbrody.net

THE SEMER ENSEMBLE: MUSICIANS

DANIEL KAHN (voice, accordion, mandolin)

Detroit-born, Berlin-based since 2005, fronts the award-winning punk-folk-klezmer band The Painted Bird, and is a founding member of The Unternationale, The Brothers Nazaroff, The Disorientalists, and Semer Ensemble. He tours the world as a singer, songwriter, translator, and teacher, collaborating with the best of the Yiddish cultural revival, as well as the international folk scene. At Berlin's Maxim Gorki Theater he works as a director/playwright (Genghis Cohn), composer/actor (Enemies: A Love Story), and music curator. In 2015, he played Biff in Castillo Theater's critically-acclaimed off-Broadway Toyt fun a Salesman (Death of a Salesman in Yiddish) in New York.

www.paintedbird.net

www.princenazaroff.com

www.gorki.de/ensemble/daniel-kahn

www.facebook.com/daniel.kahn.9803



© Oleg Farynyuk



MARK "STEMPENYUK" KOVNATSKIY (violin)

born in Russia, living in Hamburg, Kohnatskiy is a much-travelled and highly respected classical and klezmer violinist, composer and expert in Yiddish dance. He is musical director of the international "Yiddish Fest Moscow." He performs and teaches at music festivals throughout the world. In addition to performing with the Semer Ensemble, he directs the European World Music Ensemble and also performs regularly with the Joel Rubin Ensemble, the Queen Esther Klezmer Trio, Fialke and the Hamburg Klezmer Ensemble. He has also recorded and performed with Socalled, Aaron Alexander's Midrash Mish Mosh, the Painted Bird, and Forshpil, among others. In 2009 he was musical director of the KlezmerFest in Hamburg. His compositions are performed by music ensembles throughout the world.

www.facebook.com/mark.kohnatskiy?fref=ts

www.europeanworldmusicensemble.com

www.hamburgklezmerband.com

THE SEMER ENSEMBLE: MUSICIANS

MARTIN LILLICH (bass)

was born Bad Boll in Württemberg. Although he studied classical bass in Berlin and Stuttgart and worked intensively with the Young German Philharmonic he is equally at home on the electric bass and performs both instruments now at the highest level. As an educator he was the head of the Bass program at the Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler" in Berlin from 1995 to 2005. He taught Bass and Harmony at the Global Music Campus Pilot in Dar es Salaam and is jointly responsible for developing a harmonic theory for the degree program at the GMA which will incorporate all the major harmonic systems in the world. He is a musical polyglot having performed in the theatre, variety, radio, new oriental music, Jazz, Greek, African, Afro-american, Afro-cuban, Afro-brazilian, and Iberian music. He has performed and recorded with artists like Halil Karaduman, Sema, Erkan Ogur, Nuri Karademirli, Kenny Wheeler, Charlie Mariano, Enrico Rava, Leszek Mozdzer, Mikis Theodorakis, Al DiMeola, Benny Bailey, Pandit Kamalesh Maitra, Lynne Arielle, Chris Bennett, Perry Robinson, Helmut Brandt, Walter Norris, Maria Farantouri. He has performed European classical music with Gidon Kremer, Heinz Holliger, Murray Perahia, Nathan Milstein and Thomas Zehetmayr. Martin speaks fluent English, French, Turkish and Polish.

sites.google.com/site/martinlillich/home



© Marlene Karpischek

SASHA LURJE (voice)

born in Riga, Latvia and today a resident of Berlin, has been singing since she was three years old. She has performed with many groups and in various styles including classical and folk singing, jazz, rock, and pop. Parallel to her singing career she has also been involved in several theater groups where she focused on musical and improvised theater. Since 2003 she has been researching traditional Yiddish singing style and repertoire, investigating secular and religious vocal materials. With her band Forshpil, she is developing a new style of Yiddish music by integrating the traditional sound into modern context. Recently Sasha has collaborated with Daniel Kahn to develop an "interlingual" love song duo program STRANGELOVESONGS for the Maxim Gorki Theater Studio R in Berlin. In addition to the Semer Ensemble she also performs and leads Yiddish dance with the Berlin klezmer band You Shouldn't Know From It, among other international projects. Currently, she is researching traditional voice techniques and vocal production. She regularly performs and teaches Yiddish singing in Russia, Europe and North America and has been a longstanding artist and faculty member at Yiddish Summer Weimar.

www.sashalurje.com

www.forshpil.com

THE SEMER ENSEMBLE: MUSICIANS

FABIAN SCHNEDLER (voice)

studied Yiddish and German Literature in Trier and Berlin. He has been a student at Ernst Busch drama school, and worked as an actor with Robert Wilson among others. Since 1991 Fabian is involved in Yiddish singing. Together with Franka Lampe (1969-2016) he founded Schikker wi Lot in 2002. His band Fayvish brings together Singer/Songwriter, Indiepop and Yiddish poetry. In 2012 he gave idea to and since then is a singer of the Semer Project. Fabian Schnedler works at the educational department of the Jewish Museum Berlin.

www.fayvish.de

www.fayvish.de/schikker-wi-lot

www.schikker-wi-lot.de



© Adam Berry

LORIN SKLAMBERG (voice, accordion)

is a founding member of the Grammy Award-winning Yiddish-American roots band the Klezmatics, whose 30th anniversary recording, Apikorsim (Heretics) will be released globally in the fall of 2016 by World Village/Harmonia Mundi. He has been heard on innumerable recordings and live shows, solo and in collaboration with such diverse artists as Itzhak Perlman, Jane Siberry, Theodore Bikel, Chava Alberstein, Ehud Banai, Yoni Rechter, Emmylou Harris, Tracy Grammer, Neil Sedaka, Natalie Merchant and Tony Kushner. He has composed and performed for film, dance, stage and circus, and has produced a number of recordings of world and theater music. He also teaches Yiddish song from São Paulo, London, Paris and Weimar to St. Petersburg and Safed. Ongoing collaborations include Saints and Tzadiks with Dublin-born chanteuse Susan McKeown. Recent projects: the award-winning Yiddish-Bavarian collaboration Alpen Klezmer with Andrea Pancur and Ilya Shneyveys (a second cd will be issued fall 2016), Sklamberg and the Shepherds with Polina and Merlin Shepherd and composer Jocelyn Pook's Drawing Life, a multi-media song cycle commissioned by the Jewish Music Institute of London (JMI). By day Lorin serves as the Sound Archivist of New York's YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. "One of the premier American singers in any genre." – Robert Christgau, All Things Considered, National Public Radio.

www.klezmetics.com