

Supplementary Materials

SF Examiner Review of last record, Poyln

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Stuart Brotman, Cookie Segelstein, and Joshua Horowitz, the members of Veretski Pass courtesy of Old First Concerts

The Veretski Pass trio of Cookie Segelstein, Joshua Horowitz, and Stuart Brotman is an ensemble based in the San Francisco Bay Area, which means that I have enjoyed the benefit of **listening to them in concert several times**. The name refers to a pass through the Carpathian Mountains located near the western border of the Ukraine. Their focus is on Jewish instrumental music from Eastern Europe prior to the Second World War. This would suggest that they are a klezmer trio. However, at **one of the concerts I attended**, Segelstein told the audience, “This is not your grandmother’s klezmer. It is her grandmother’s klezmer.” Since then, I have preferred describing the trio as “a group

of enthusiastic ethnomusicologists more interested in performing the results of their studies than in reading papers at conferences.”

A little less than two month’s ago Golden Horn Records released the latest recording of Veretski Pass performances, **Poyln: A Gilgul** (which translates from the Yiddish as “Poland: A Metamorphosis”). While Segelstein’s comment about the “ancestry” of klezmer referred, in part, to the absence of a clarinet in the Veretski Pass trio, this album features clarinetist Joel Rubin performing as a guest artist. The trio musicians play violin (Segelstein), bass cello (Brotman), and cimbalom and different forms of accordion (Horowitz).

Were I still an academic, I would probably suspect that the research behind the music on this album would make one hell of a paper at an ethnomusicology conference. Most of the selections involve traditional Polish dance forms, such as polkas, krakowiaks, Kujawiaks, and obersks. However, just as Frédéric Chopin polished up such indigenous source material to make it fit for performance at nineteenth-century French salons, the Jews of nineteenth-century Poland probably appropriated such music for their own festive gatherings. In addition, the likely confrontation between these Polish sources and the ecstasy-inducing Hasidic tunes may well have created a “critical mass” that “exploded” into new ways of making music.

The title of the album was inspired by a 1901 story by Isaac Leib Peretz (usually known just as I. L. Peretz) entitled “A Gilgul fun a Nign” (metamorphosis of a melody). This story provides the source for several Peretz quotes on his **Wikiquote page**, two of which are appropriate for the new album. The most relevant of these quotations is:

“According to the generation is the music thereof.”

The history of the Jewish people has always been one of confrontations between tradition (yes, in the Fiddler on the Roof approach to reading the tales of Sholem Aleichem) and the contemporary practices of neighboring goyim (non-Jews). Thus, the music on Poyln is “the music thereof” of one or more generations of Jews living in nineteenth-century Poland. However, the other quotation that really matters is:

“A letter depends on how you read it, a melody on how you sing it.”

This gets to why Veretski Pass prefers to spend their time “singing” the music they study through their instruments (all through their own highly personal arrangements), rather than reading dry papers to conference attendees. By doing so they bring to life music from past generations, not so much in the interest of riding the crest of a wave of interest in klezmer as in recreating a spirit behind that music, which is a heady mix of the sacred and the secular. Just as this is not the klezmer of recent ancestors, it is also not the music of the current “klezmer revival.” There are raw qualities of performance that honor the earthy metaphor of “roots” music; and those qualities are far more enjoyable than any of the more refined interpretations calculated (often by bean-counting managers) to appeal to mass audiences.

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