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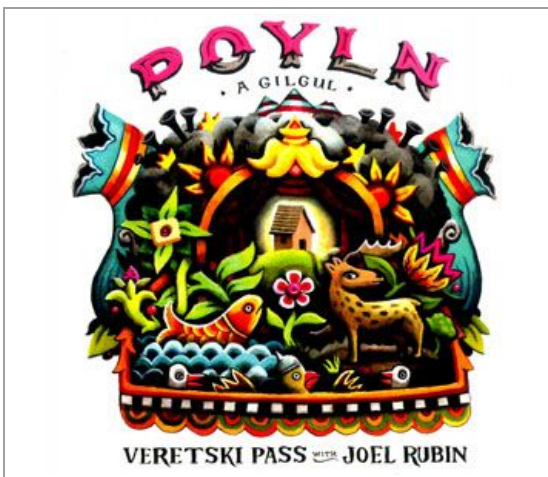
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Veretski Pass & Yale Strom and Hot Pstromi



By AARON HOWARD | JHV • Thu, Dec 31, 2015

Veretski Pass

"Poyln"

(Golden Horn)

The Pan is throwing a party! His peasants have completed the grain harvest. It's the time to celebrate. Invitations have gone out to all the neighboring Polish nobles. The entire mestechko (village) will be there. Pan even invited Isaac, the Jewish tavern owner. Of course, he had to, since Isaac is bringing the Jewish quartet that will play for the event. Pan did not want to hire any of the local Polish bands. They dip into the buckets of vodka all night. Then, they play badly, off-key and too loudly. What's worse is they flirt with the servant girls and pinch their bottoms. This tends to lead to brawls with the servant girls' boyfriends.

So, Isaac hired Veretski Pass. They actually are a trio and quite well-known among the local folk. The band consists of Cookie Segelstein on violin; Stuart Brotman on bass cello; and Joshua Horowitz on chromatic button accordion and cimbalom. Because this is a special event, the band is bringing a guest musician, Joel Rubin on clarinet.

Of course, Veretski Pass plays klezmer music: doinas, chosidls, freylekhs and horas. They also play obereks, kujawiaks, krakowiaks and polkas. You say you don't know Polish dance music? An oberek is a fast, spinning dance. A kujawiak is a slow, graceful dance. A krakowiak is a fast circle dance. The polka? Everybody knows the polka.

Since Veretski Pass often plays for non-Jewish communities, they indeed play both rural and urban music, Jewish and Polish music. You will hear Poland in all of these songs. They are all part of Polishness.

The Pan is paying for the musicians, the drink and the food. You're invited.

In hindsight, we know that changes in Soviet nationalities policies in the mid-1930s that sent pupils to ethnic schools also were changing. Quickly, ethnic language education came to be defined as a manifestation of unacceptable nationalism.

We have a taste of what this Soviet, denationalized Yiddish curriculum looked like. The songs on the CD, "City of the Future: Yiddish Songs from the Former Soviet Union," come from Shmuel Polonski's 1930 songbook, "30 Liner far Kinder" (30 Songs for Children).

For example, there's Itzik Feffer's "Girls Sewing at the Machines": "Quietly, Hodl speaks her piece/About labor and the Comintern/Her word pierce through, just like the needle/As all the others listen and learn."

And, there's Yankev Fridman's "The Young Guard": "We know the price of labor/Of sorrows and of pain/We come from sickle and from hammer/From fields in sunshine's light."

Klezmer revivalist and researcher Yale Strom put together this project of Soviet Yiddish songs, with the assistance of seven gifted Yiddish singers. In an artist's statement on the CD liner notes, Strom writes, "This recording brings a freshness to a genre of Yiddish songs that still resonates today. I hope this project encourages Yiddish singers to once again sing these songs that represent a golden era of Yiddish culture in Soviet Jewish history."

What Yiddish culture? There's no overt Jewish content on any of the songs on "City of the Future." Each one of these songs exists to promote a new vision, the Soviet way of seeing a transformed society. The goal was to create a new Soviet man (and woman), one who just happened to speak Yiddish.

Meanwhile, Jewish culture in the Soviet Union was disappearing. In hindsight, we know that "at no other time in Soviet history was there as much Jewish acculturation as in the 1930s. Many Soviet Jews lost their active Jewish identities and cultures at this time, and some even managed to abandon their passive identity," writes historian Zvi Gitelman.

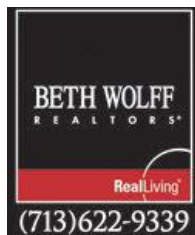
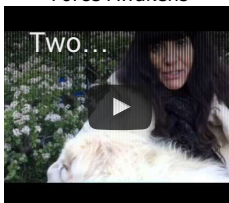
As a document of a moment in Soviet culture, this is an interesting CD. As something that represents "a golden era," hardly!

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Two Jews on Film: The Force Awakens



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