

# Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band:

## *Exploring Klezmer - Ashkenazi Music and Songs Educational Guide, Grades K-12*



### About the Performance

This fun, upbeat, and interactive performance program introduces klezmer music, the Yiddish language, and instruments from three different instrument families. Klezmer music is Eastern European Jewish (Ashkenazi) secular celebration music. Students will have fun learning about different musical instrument families (woodwind, string, and brass) as they move and sing along to a lively set of traditional tunes played on clarinet, violin, trombone, and double bass. They will also enjoy learning about klezmer music and its significance in secular Ashkenazi Jewish culture both in Eastern Europe and in the United States as they define popular Yiddish words and sing along to songs with Yiddish lyrics.



### About the Artist

Internationally-acclaimed Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band brings passion, virtuosity, and contagious energy to every performance. They improvise with the intimacy of chamber music and the intensity of a rowdy dance band. At the 2012 International Jewish Music Festival, they won the the "Best Klezmer Band" and "Audience Choice" awards, and judges heralded them as "a true musical democracy". Ezekiel's Wheels features Abigale Reisman (violin, backing vocals), Kirsten Lamb (double bass, lead vocals), Nat Seelen (clarinet), and Pete Fanelli (trombone).

### Program Learning Goals

1. To identify klezmer music and its significance in secular Ashkenazi Jewish culture both in Eastern Europe and in the USA .
2. To establish different musical instrument families and identify examples from each one.
3. To define popular Yiddish words and sing along to songs with Yiddish lyrics.

### Essential Questions

1. What makes a culture unique? What keeps a culture alive?
2. What is the importance of music, dance, and language to a culture?
3. What is the role of klezmer music in Ashkenazi Jewish culture?

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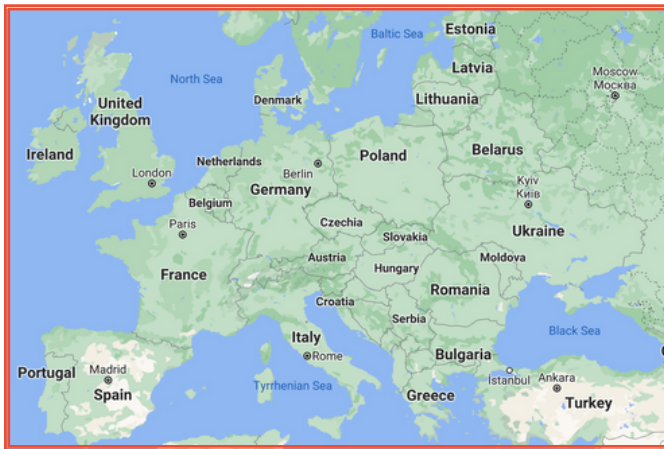


### Vocabulary

- **Ashkenazi:** a Jewish person from central or eastern Europe
- **Klezmer:** the celebration music of Ashkenazi Jewish people
- **Yiddish:** the language of Ashkenazi Jewish people

### Key Facts and Cultural Context for Students

#### Eastern Europe and Beyond



Map of Eastern Europe

Klezmer is the celebration music of the Ashkenazi Jewish people. It is secular, not religious music. It originated in central and eastern Europe in countries such as Germany, Poland, Hungary, and western parts of Russia. Many klezmer musicians came to the USA in the late 1800s and early 1900s, so modern klezmer is influenced by American jazz and other styles.

- Using an atlas or the internet, find the following countries on a modern map: Germany, Poland, Hungary, Russia. Then, compare the modern map to a map of Europe in 1800 and a map from 1900.
- How have the borders of these countries changed from century to century? Why do you think the borders changed? How do you think these changes affected the people and cultures in this region?
- Many Ashkenazi Jews left Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Where do you think they went? What routes and what kinds of transportation do you think they took to get there? How could you find out more about the history of the Ashkenazi Jews?

### Pre-Performance Activity: Introduction to Klezmer

Listen to these two versions of the klezmer tune “Ch’sidishe Nigunim”, recorded almost 100 years apart:

Click [HERE](#) or [HERE](#) too listen to Abe Schwartz (recorded in 1927 in New York City)

Click [HERE](#) to listen to Ezekiel’s Wheels Klezmer Band (recorded 2016 in Boston)

Think about the instruments you hear, the speed, the way the music makes you feel, etc.  
How are these two recordings different? How are they the same?

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### Post-Performance Activity- A Groom Without a Bride

This is a funny Yiddish song about a wedding called “A Khosn On a Kale” or “A Groom Without a Bride.” In Yiddish letters, the title looks like this: אַ חתן אן אַ קל

Click [Here](#) to Watch "A Khosn On a Kale"

Listen/watch for the word “oy” that you learned during the Ezekiel's Wheel's program.

At the beginning of the song, the bride’s family, the groom’s family, and the klezmer musicians are traveling to the wedding and happily singing “oy, oy!” to celebrate. However, the bride is not singing because she is not happy about marrying the groom that her family chose for her.

In the middle of the song, someone rides by on a horse and the bride gets very excited and sings “oy, oy!” because this is the person she wants to marry. The bride rides away on the horse and leaves the groom alone. Everyone sings a sad “oy, oy!” because the groom no longer has a bride.

Notice how “oy” can be happy or sad depending on how you say it. Write a short story or poem that uses the word “oy” as a happy word, a sad word--or both!

Here are 3 klezmer tunes written by members of Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band with different emotional feels:

- Click [HERE](#) to watch “Barry’s Bulgar”. How does it make you feel?
- Click [HERE](#) to watch “Nat’s Nign”. How does this one make you feel?
- Click [HERE](#) to watch “Der Dreyendiker Khosidl”. How does this one make you feel?

Pick one of these tunes to accompany your story/poem. (Or choose another one at <https://ewklezmer.bandcamp.com>)

Read your story/poem for your class while playing the klezmer recording in the background. If you make a video of it, please share with us at [ewklezmer@gmail.com](mailto:ewklezmer@gmail.com)!

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### Further Resources

- Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band [website](#)
- [Fiddler on the Roof](#), "Tradition" clip: (an example of Jewish life and traditional family roles in an Eastern European shtetl)
- [YiddishPop](#): (Yiddish language cartoon with basic Yiddish vocabulary)
- [Video of Steve Weintraub](#) teaching how to dance a freylekh (another dance style).

### Curricular Connections

#### Music PreK-8

##### Responding

- 7. Perceive and analyze artistic work. Analyze how cultures are reflected in a diverse range of musical work. (M.R.07)
- 8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. Explain how a musical work is connected to the particular cultural and historical context where it was created. (M.R.08)

##### Connecting

- 10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. Make connections between personal experience and a musical work. (M.Co.10)
- 11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. Identify how musical ideas and traditions migrate with the people who originated them to affect other cultures, historical periods, and musical genres and styles (e.g., immigrant European folk music). (M.Co.11)

#### History/Social Science

Gr. 1. Topic 3. History: unity and diversity in the United States [1.T3];

Gr. 2. Topic 2. Geography and its effects on people [2.T2]; Topic 3. History: migrations and cultures [2.T3]

Gr. 4 Topic 4. The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today [4.T4]; The Northeast [4.T4a];

Gr. 7 T4: Physical and political geography of Europe [7.T4a]