

## **Klezmer Music Song and Dance in the Midlands and North:**

**KlezFest 'graduates' from Birmingham to Edinburgh take klezmer to Folk Festivals, Ceilidhs, Universities and pubs – not to mention weddings and barmitzvaahs!**

**Written August 2008**

Shortly after Klezfest in August 2007, a group of klezmerim from Manchester including clarinettist Ros Hawley, guitarist Mark Fish, accordionist Adrian Dobson and his wife, dance leader, Judith Plowman, all newly inspired with dance steps and tunes, came together to play for the wedding of klezmer violinist, **Michael Kahan to Eva**. It was a very special celebration, full of joy and energy, leaving all the performers and also Michael with fresh enthusiasm to go out and infuse the North with klezmer music, song and dance.

In September 2007, Fiona Frank organised an extremely well attended **Klezmer Ceilidh in Lancaster**. Adrian says: 'I don't think we could have squeezed another dancer into the hall. Sue Cooper led the dancing with support from Judith, while Michael, Steve Landin and I provided the music.' This event became the catalyst for further events in Lancaster later in the year.

The enthusiasm led the main players to create a special **band which they called 'The Klatsh'** (meaning an informal conversation, chat or chatter) with members (all KlezFest 'graduates') Adrian from Glossop, Andrew Gardiner and Simon Carlyle (both from Edinburgh!), Phil Tomlinson from Matlock in Derbyshire and Sue Webb (from Birmingham!).

Phil Tomlinson with a powerful baritone voice had been developing the singing strand in the band as well as making Yiddish song, klezmer music and dance popular in Derbyshire. Phil says: 'In September 2007 we took a wholly **Derbyshire klezmer band to the Wirksworth Festival** near Matlock, and played at four venues around the town including the market square. The band consisted of clarinet, flute, accordion and guitars, and we were supported by our dance teacher, Judith Plowman, who encouraged participation.

'This was new music to many of the visitors to the Festival and was extremely well received. Several hundred people stopped to listen. Wirksworth has now been introduced to klezmer, and we were asked to return this year, but unfortunately we had to decline as key band members are playing klezmer in Birmingham that weekend!'

In fact **Birmingham City Council** in their press release for Birmingham ArtsFest September 2008, heartily welcomes klezmer thus: 'Klezmer band Klatsh will be giving free performances in a taster session at Brindley Place and on the eclectic music stage based at the Arcadian Centre. There will also be a klezmer dance workshop at the Crescent Theatre, where beginners are welcome. Klezmer's development as the musical accompaniment to weddings and celebrations means that the traditional dance forms are simple enough for everyone to take part in.

Cllr Ray Hassall, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport & Culture, commented, 'ArtsFest is the city's best platform for so much art, from the traditional through to the edgy and new, and the klezmer events exemplify this. Birmingham City Council is delighted to be bringing klezmer to a new audience.'

But back to last year! In November 2007 Phil invited people with an enthusiasm for singing Yiddish song to his house near Matlock - an 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage looking out over the valley to the hills beyond for a **Day of Yiddish Song**. Twelve people were able to attend aged 6 to 56 coming from Derby, Chesterfield, Manchester and Glossop. Phil says: 'We brought songs to share, and sang eight songs including the poignant "Vu iz dos Gesele", and the more light-hearted "Bulbes" .That left us as many more for another day. We had a wonderful lunch – homemade parsnip and ginger soup, challah, scones, bagels with cream cheese and smoked salmon, chopped herring, potato salad. It was thoroughly enjoyable – we learned new tunes, improved our Yiddish, and left with great plans to meet up again. It has taken me over a year to arrange it, but I am now ready to run another day in the New Year on Sunday 1 February 2009. Details will be circulated soon, and anyone can be added to the mailing list by emailing me at: [phil@jmi.org.uk](mailto:phil@jmi.org.uk).'

Phil's wife Judy Sherwood, together with Sue Cooper – both 'graduates' of the **JMI Yiddish crash course Ot Azoy!** meet regularly in Buxton to learn together, to keep their Yiddish alive and developing until they have the opportunity to be at Ot Azoy another year. Sue and Judy would be pleased to hear from anyone interested in joining them [contact phil@jmi.org.uk ]

Also in November, Adrian and Judith were invited to lead an evening of Klezmer music and dance for **Lancaster WEA Folk Music** group involving some 20 local musicians and dancers. This was so successful that it was decided to hold a Lancaster Klezmer Day in March. Klatsh musicians taught Klezmer style and rhythms in a workshop setting during the morning, and then led a dance-band of local musicians to play for an afternoon dance with Judith. In all about 30 musicians and dancers took part in a stimulating day.

Judith has been running a **monthly Yiddish Dance session in Manchester**, supported by members of Klatsh who have used these regular sessions as opportunities to meet and practise together. Judith says: 'Normally we have 12 – 20 dancers and between four and six musicians. The chance to dance to a live band makes for a very committed group of dancers. Additionally Adrian and I have run taster sessions at folk dance events locally, at Hartington and Youlgrave in the Peak District, each with around 25 dancers taking part. These have led to an invitation to run Klezmer Dance workshops and perform at the **Bakewell Day of International Dance** for the last two years. This is an extremely well attended street festival with a good 25 dancers at each venue, many enticed off the street by the dancing, with hundreds of spectators for the outdoor events'.

In January, Ros Hawley and Michael Kahan in their superb duo: 'Klezmer Gourmets' were invited to perform at **Imperial War Museum North** as part of a series of music, visual events and talks to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

Phil was invited to participate in the Derby City commemoration event for **Holocaust Memorial Day** together with a fantastic fiddle player, Rachel Bolton, singing songs of the Holocaust in Yiddish and English. Phil says: 'I also sang two of these songs on BBC Radio Derby as part of the publicity for the event. And I also had the privilege of appearing on Radio Salaam Shalom, an internet radio station based in Bristol, and performed a substantial group of Holocaust Songs which were interspersed with the testimony of a French survivor now living in the USA, Annette Herskovits'

This year Adrian says, 'We have played at two benefit concerts for '**Windows for Peace**', a charity which funds projects involving young Israelis and young Palestinians working and learning together. For the Manchester concert we formed a big band of some twelve musicians and played to an audience of well over 150. A substantial core of dancers from Judith's regular class encouraged large numbers of the audience to get up and dance. We also performed to slightly smaller numbers at a Garden Party at West Manley Hall near Chester in aid of Windows for Peace. Both events raised over £1000.

Other performance events for Klatsh have included the **Glossop and Hathersage Folk Trains**. As Adrian explains: 'A band is invited every fortnight to play on a train from Manchester out into the Peak District, and then continue the session in a local pub before returning to Manchester Piccadilly'. Lured by the promise of free beer, a motley assortment of local Klezmer musicians come together to play for this under the title of the **Klezmer Kollektive**, which has a considerable following in local folk circles. Adrian says: 'We are told that we draw the largest number of spectators for any folk-train performers – usually some 80 or so passengers get off at Glossop and Hathersage to follow us to the pub.'

Since the Song Day in Matlock, songs have begun to feature in Klatsh's repertoire, and Phil now performs some amazingly moving pieces accompanied by Sue Webb on the fiddle. Adrian continues: 'Raising the profile of Klezmer in the region has led to a number of bookings for **weddings, barmitzvahs – even civil partnerships**. What is significant is that both Jews and non-Jews have chosen to book us for their celebrations. One particular event sticks in my mind when Michael Kahan and I played to celebrate a civil partnership at Mellor on the edge of the Peak District, whilst Judith coaxed dancers of every age to form lines, to cast and to tunnel. Grandfathers were seen to drop to their knees to crawl through arches made by 5 year-olds. At

that event we had about 40 dancers on their feet, watched and applauded by another 90 spectators. Unamplified musicians have never had to play so loud before! This year we have played Klezmer for barmitzvahs in Leeds and Birmingham, weddings in Manchester as well as for an annual gathering of Freemasons and their wives!

At the invitation of JMI, Ros and Klatsh members: Adrian, Michael, Phil and Simon played Yiddish Dance music for wind band students – who were working on composer, Adam Gorb's, wind band piece called 'Yiddish Dances' at the **JMI Wild Wind Weekend at Liverpool University**. Ros had been invited by JMI to be the klezmer tutor giving the students an idea of the rhythm and style of Yiddish dances and Judith again led the students in the dance steps before they started learning to play the classical piece. One music student remarked that she had never done anything so tricky in her whole life!

As a direct result of these workshops in Liverpool, Ros was invited to participate in the **Paris Klezmer Week** as assistant clarinet tutor to Merlin Shepherd, teaching every day, helping to improve skills in playing by ear, use of ornamentation and understanding of Klezmer modes. Ros says, 'Liverpool participants have also requested further workshops as and I'm working with a local enthusiast, to set up one per term in Liverpool for musicians interested in Klezmer.'

Ros has created another klezmer band called 'Deli Babies' which was voted 'Best Band 2007' in Studio Salford's Embryo Awards at the King's Arms pub and theatre venue in Salford. Awards are given each year for new acts in music and theatre. As a result they were invited to run a **klezmer music residency at the Kings Arms** which will be developing into a weekly klezmer night including a class for instrumentalists, music jam and performance by the Deli Babies.

Deli Babies has also been invited to perform as part of the **Royal Exchange Special FX series** throughout 2007/08- next date is 26 September, 6-7pm, free admission. Clare Simpson, Marketing Director, Royal Exchange Theatre says: 'The Deli Babies persuaded people to dance, the beginning of a tradition amongst our audiences! They filled the space with joy and wonder and a lively professionalism. I want them to come back and so do audiences'. So do go along to join in the fun – dancers very welcome! More information from [ros@jmi.org.uk](mailto:ros@jmi.org.uk)

In another outreach session, Adrian, Michael and Ros performed in a lunchtime concert at **Manchester Grammar School** (where Adrian teaches) to an audience of about 20 interested school students.

Adrian continues, 'On the afternoon of Sunday 1 June 2008, we held one of our most successful **dance sessions in Chorlton** with 20 dancers, completely oblivious of the fact that Michael Kahan had been stabbed to death near his home in Manchester earlier that morning. For months I had been asking Michael for a copy of Bughici's Freylekh, and he had always promised to write it out for me once he had a moment. Strangely, that afternoon the tune was mentioned amongst the band members, and Simon Carlyle handed me a copy. It really made my day! Not until the next morning did we learn of the awful tragedy which had befallen Michael. The shock was almost unbearable and has kept resurfacing at unexpected moments!'

The following weekend Ros and Michael had been due to play together for '**Feast in the Park**' at **Platt Fields**, an extravaganza of music, performance and fireworks in inner city Manchester. This became instead a focus for Klezmer musicians and dancers from all over the North to meet, play, dance and mourn together on a little grassy hill around a framed photo of Michael. Adrian says: 'We were joined by passing revellers, tiny Asian girls with their diffident mothers, silly pre-teen girls, angular teenage boys, inebriated students and comfortable women, all drawn to the dance by the circles, spirals, arches and casting. Michael would have loved to have been playing with us there, and in a way he was'. (Another gathering of Klezmerim took place in London that weekend in memory of Michael arranged by Ilana Cravitz, JMI Millennium Award winner and klezmer teacher at SOAS evening classes).

Everyone at KlezFest this year spent many moments **remembering Michael Kahan** who had been a popular participant and regular attendee since 2003. Ros, who has been coming since the first KlezFest in 2001, led a special jam and dance for Mike. Ros, with JMI, initiated a Bursary Fund in Michael's name for a student from the North who comes to klezmer later in life (as

Michael had) to come to KlezFest. Already one bursary has been collected at KlezFest. Ros and Mike's widow Eva, will be starting to put together a memorial klezmer concert for Michael for later this year and will publicise the bursary in his name. This tragedy has increased the resolve of klezmerim in the North to take this music to the people.

**To book klezmer musicians in the north or to join in any of the exciting events still to come in 2008/9 (see some of them listed below) or to contribute to the bursary fund, watch the JMI Website [www.jmi.org.uk](http://www.jmi.org.uk) and also contact [ros@jmi.org.uk](mailto:ros@jmi.org.uk), [phil@jmi.org.uk](mailto:phil@jmi.org.uk) and Adrian and Judith at [klezmernorth@jmi.org.uk](mailto:klezmernorth@jmi.org.uk)**

30 / 31 August: Moseley Folk Festival, Birmingham  
Klatsh introduce and demonstrate Klezmer, then play for a Klezmer Ceilidh

7 September, 12 noon: Jewish Museum, Cheetham Hill Rd, Manchester  
Adrian, Sue and Simon play to celebrate the European Day of Jewish Culture and Heritage.

Sunday 7 September: Carlton Club, Whalley Range, Manchester 2pm – 5pm, Judith leads the Yiddish Dance session to live music from Klatsh and friends.

Saturday 13 September: Birmingham  
Afternoon presentation of klezmer at a synagogue. (It is also hoped that Sue Shortland Webb will be teaching klezmer sessions at Birmingham Conservatory from the Autumn term)

Sunday 14 September: Birmingham  
Klatsh perform at three venues at Birmingham Artsfest with dance opportunities

Friday 26 September, 6-7pm, Deli Babies perform as part of the Royal Exchange Special FX series. Admission free

Sunday 5 October: Carlton Club, Whalley Range, Manchester 2pm – 5pm. Judith leads the Yiddish Dance session to live music from Klatsh and friends.

Saturday 18 October: Bangor, North Wales  
Klezmer Ceilidh with Klatsh

Sunday 2 November: Carlton Club, Whalley Range, Manchester 2pm – 5pm  
Judith leads the Yiddish Dance session to live music from Klatsh and friends.

Sunday 7 December: Carlton Club, Whalley Range, Manchester evening  
Judith leads a Klezmer Ceilidh to live music from Klatsh and friends.

Sunday 1 February 2009. Another day of Yiddish Song at Phil's house near Matlock in Derbyshire - an 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage looking out over the valley to the hills beyond. Anyone can be added to the mailing list by emailing [phil@jmi.org.uk](mailto:phil@jmi.org.uk)