

Jim Marcovitch

Klezmer musician, accordionist, singer and songwriter 1974 - 2008

Jim came to Klezmer when klezmer came to London. He was chosen as a member of Louise Taylor's Jewish Music Institute Millennium Award project. The year-long study of traditional Eastern European Jewish music with Merlin Shepherd, completely absorbed Jim and his accordion. This culminated in the first klezmer band ever to perform at a SOAS graduation. And thus, in 2001, **She'Koyokh Klezmer Ensemble** was born (the word *She'Koyokh* roughly translates as 'Good on yer, mate!') with Jim as a central, gentle force.

This remarkable band, now numbering 8 regular players (some self taught others graduates of our best music academies) has stuck together and each year their prowess and reputation increases. They are now one of the most popular and successful gigging, busking, touring and Jewish wedding bands in the UK, with performances in as diverse venues as Exeter prison and London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. Radio, TV and Festival appearances include ITV's *Fat Friends* wedding band, Glastonbury, Broadstairs, Edinburgh and the Jewish Cultural



Festival in Krakow.

To Jim's – and JMI's – immense pride and joy, **She'Koyokh won first prize** at the International Jewish Music Competition held in Amsterdam in 2008. Their first album **Sandanski's Chicken** was released on the ARC label. She'koyokh has recently recorded a new CD called **Busker's Ballroom** which they have dedicated to Jim. The last track was recorded with Jim in October 2008 shortly before he died. At KlezFest – the annual JMI klezmer summer school – She'Koyokh members, with Jim as a shining light, have been the backbone since its inception in 2001, first as students and then as tutors. They have provided dance kapelyes (bands) and dance callers; they have led and joined jams, and graced the bandstand at Regent's Park. And in turn, KlezFest with its week of intense cultural immersion and stimulating international faculty has provided a spark and a stimulus for She'Koyokh. They have sadly lost their founding accordionist and tonight they pay tribute to him.

Jim knew the healing power of music and used it to sooth and restore. His interest in klezmer music came from his time working in a Romanian orphanage. In the evenings he and his great friend Ollie Cumming would play music with the gypsies. Jim's own JMI Millennium Award project was about using klezmer music to help with drug rehabilitation programmes in Newham. He also worked with Meg Hamilton's project giving klezmer workshops in Wormwood Scrubbs. Even as he became more accomplished as an artist, his compassion saw him as happy working in hospitals and prisons as in sophisticated venues.

Photos: Kristel Richards:
Right: Jim and Matt Bacon playing with She'Koyokh Sep '06 in Trafalgar Square at 'Simcha on the Square', cover and opposite: at 'Klezmer in the Park' Aug 2005 and 2006)



Sadly, Jim lost his long courageous struggle with Lymphoma in October 2008 at the age of 34. It was just six weeks after his and Jenny's joyful and emotional wedding.

Jim will be remembered with love and admiration as a compassionate man, a loving friend, an exciting musician and collaborator in klezmer music as well as in theatrical endeavours at the Little Angel Puppet theatre and the Battersea Arts Centre. Jim was also an exceptional song-writer, penning quirky, darkly humorous and very alternative songs which he sang and recorded with his band *Soup*.

In a poignant obituary in *The Guardian* last October, Tom Morris quoted a well-known theatre director who said of him: ***'He had a sort of contagious calmness which enabled the creativity of all around him to flourish'***.

His colleagues in She'koyokh say of him:
'Jim had an infectious enthusiasm which exhilarated the London klezmer scene'

'His theatrical flair, satirical sense of humour, talent for telling stories and anecdotes and for performing his own hilarious songs, combined with his unique accordion style, strong stage presence, popularity and excellent taste are but a few wonderful qualities Jim had that helped him to ensure the success and development of She'Koyokh. We will always be inspired by him, and he will always be with us in spirit.'