

## **Kalushiner Klezmerim**

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(Kałuszyn, Poland)

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We never knew who was the first. Suddenly there appeared a band. An entire family took up the "music playing" trade, abandoned tailoring and shoemaking, and founded an orchestra.

The leader of the band was Asher, a player, a virtuoso. Experts would wonder how such a player occupied himself by only playing concerts of classical music, and the brothers derived great pleasure from their brother's mastery.

Asher did not reveal all he knew everywhere. At weddings, in a large din of dancing couples, between the *mitzve* dances and foot-stamping, Asher never once put down his violin and bow, and the drummer banged until deafness ensued and Sane klezmer stroked and stroked one string of the bass. Asher would then say: this is not music, and for the audience it is also too much . . .

Therefore, when the audience settled down a little and moved closer to the tables, Asher, the orchestra's soloist played something that tugged at the heart and seeped into one's bones. His fingers ran acrobatically from the lowest (part of his) palm - upwards, and from the top - down, with degrees of delicate nuances one could barely hear, where the flight of his soul, like an unseen wind that moves leaves and flowers, like the whisper of a butterfly. That's when Asher revealed what he knew.

He would then throw back his head, close his eyes, and suddenly - grow, become taller, stronger, not the same Asher.

His fingers became enchanted. Palms flowed like fine wine and intoxicated the audience. The people smacked their lips, some winked and rocked themselves in delight.

"What a player!" And Asher himself, woken from his musical trance, opened tear-filled eyes, caused by his own playing, until he came to himself and was reminded that he is not only a musician, but the leader of a band.

After such playing, money fell into his pockets, and the greater the sums of money - the stronger the band patted Asher on the back: "Asher, you are a *MALADYETZ* (Polish-Yiddish for "most capable and worthy fellow). (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: My Mother, O"H, pronounced it *maladjetz*)

PHOTO CAPTION: The Klezmer Family

From (R) : The first - Dovid, the last, Moyshe Reuven

After Asher the outstanding figure of the band was Moyshe Reuven. He was the director and (lit.) note-knower/reader, this intelligent man, who established the band's urbanity and worldliness.

Moyshe Reuven led the band in daily rehearsals. The orchestra began to play at Polish balls in the city, in the castle hall and at rich Polish weddings where Warsaw intelligentsia performed classical music. Because of this, Moshe Reuven put the group to work.

Everything had to move like a watch. He kept order. Everyone had his place and his notes, creating harmony and no mistakes were allowed. He would stop in the middle of the playing to correct a half or lesser tone from the second violin of his brother Dovid, who loved to sneak in a mistake. Moyshe Reuven's stature was honored by all and everyone listened to his insights.

The band rocked (*gekłapt* = "knocked") every plate in its path, and if the encore was favorable, we finished up with shnapps and cookies. Between all the courses up to the vocalizing, there was never a lack of a drink of whiskey.

The orchestra had their own beat/rhythm and style and also their own klezmer jargon, a language they used when they wished that others should not be able to understand them. The "fool" was not allowed to understand and not allowed to "*KNASN*" (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: not in dictionary; due to context, I suggest "know") what was going on in the band. "Fool" (*yold*) was what the son-in-law/daughter-in-law's father that hired the band for the wedding was called and the son-in-law/daughter-in-law's mother was called a (fem. *yoldevke*) fool.

Amongst themselves, the klezmerim used to talk about the previous "masters" (*bal*, *beler*(pl.)) they played for and about the fine manners of the Polish intelligentsia.

The officials and teachers, apothecaries and *STRAZSH*-commandant, military officers and their pretty ladies - from these masters (clients) the klezmerim came home drunk more than one time.

The band had serious worries when they set out for a wedding in a remote area. Half the night passed with all in order; gentile boys and girls danced polkas and mazurkas and they spun to *karakhodn* until they were tired out or until they moved to the tables and got drunk. Fights broke out and blood flowed like water. The klezmerim barely got away with their lives and ran, should the gentiles decide to let out their anger on the *zhidkes* (Pej. "Jews").

After such nights the klezmerim came home tired and broken, cursing the louts and vowing never again to play at remote gentile weddings where one risked his life.

Among all my memories of the Kalushiner klezmerim, one episode remains engraved in my memory from 1916. When Kalushin was occupied by Kaiser Wilhelm's army, the relationship between Germans and Jews was tolerable and at the expense of the starving population, the Germans did not refrain from balls and revelries.

At that time they welcomed the Kalushiner music, and it was well received. At night, about ten o'clock, the whole town was asleep in their homes; during the late-night hours it was forbidden to walk in the streets.

Maybe the German soldiers were unhappy and, to cheer themselves up a little, they brought in the musicians. They assembled the entire band on Baltshan's veranda and Asher, the soloist, on the other side, under the apothecary's balcony. Asher played a Vayenyovski concert, "Legende" - a piece of enchanting music. The band on Baltshan's veranda played along and accompanied him. The Germans stood in the middle of the road, and listened intensely to the trembling of Asher's violin. The whole scene appeared mystical in the late-night of the occupied town. Asher played in his usual style, with heart and with love to the music-lovers.

At that time Asher was not thinking that in some "tens of years," he and his children would be victims of these same music-lovers.

The Kalushiner musicians later went to Warsaw and there together presented their orchestra - they, in the tragic days of the Warsaw ghetto, on trembling strings, played the heartfelt, tearful Gebirtig song "Dos Shtetele Brent" ("The town Is Burning").