



Michael Winograd and the Honorable Mentshn and Leah Koenig
Artist Information Sheet
7th-12th Grades

Artist Biography:

Michael Winograd and the Honorable Mentshn and Leah Koenig

The Honorable Mentshen—whose name is a pun on the plural form of the Yiddish word “mensch,” meaning a person of integrity—was formed by New York clarinet virtuoso **Michael Winograd**. Michael grew up in a religious Jewish household in Long Island, New York and began to study music at an early age. At 14 he was invited by a friend to attend a camp where the Jewish community came together to share traditional Eastern European Jewish music and he was hooked ever since. He found old recordings and sought out the elders of Klezmer, musicians who brought this music from Europe to the United States in the early and mid-20th century. Michael learned their traditional music quickly and was soon regarded as a leader of the new generation of klezmer players. Michael would later study at the prestigious New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and now lives in Brooklyn, where he creates music informed by the past and shaped by the present. Michael regularly sits in with the band Vulfpeck, adding his klezmer sound to their funky energy, including guest spots at Madison Square Garden and Bonnaroo, where they created a Klezmer wedding band on stage in front of tens of thousands of amazed (and confused) audience members.

Leah Koenig is one of the brightest young voices in Jewish cooking. She explores the food and connected cultural traditions (sometimes called foodways) from throughout the Jewish diaspora across the world. Like Michael, Leah lives in Brooklyn, NY and has authored seven cookbooks, including *The Jewish Cookbook* (Phaidon, 2019) and *Modern Jewish Cooking* (Chronicle Books). Leah is a self-taught cook who ran the food and agriculture-related programs at Hazon, a Jewish environmental and sustainability organization.

Tradition:

Klezmer Music + Ashkenazi Food

Klezmer is the traditional celebration music of the Eastern European Jewish people. Klezmer incorporates religious melodies and folk songs, poetry, and Greek, Romani and Ottoman influences. Klezmer is a secular (non-religious) music. A wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe in the early to mid 1900s’ brought this music to the U.S.

Ashkenazi Food is the cuisine of the Jewish people who came to the U.S. from Eastern Europe and utilizes ingredients influenced by the food traditionally grown there, as well as Jewish dietary rules which forbid the eating of pork or shellfish or mixing of dairy (milk and cheese) with meat.



The music and food of Eastern European Jews here in the U.S. is influenced by both America and other places; it is rooted in Eastern European Jewish life, but it changed significantly after their arrival to America. Just as the Jewish instruments fused with different styles of music, Jewish food went through similar changes: the classic Jewish home-cooked dishes of today is likely different from the food made three or four generations ago—just like the Klezmer music of today is very different than what might have been heard at a village wedding in 1860s Ukraine.

Place:

Eastern European Jewish Diaspora

What is a diaspora? A diaspora is the spread of a people from their original homeland. A vibrant Jewish culture emerged in Eastern Europe in the 10th century which lasted until the early to middle 20th century when that population settled new parts of the world due to persecution.

There are Jewish communities all over the world, each with their own traditions and customs. Much of the Jewish community in the United States has its roots in Eastern Europe Jews from Central and Eastern Europe are called Ashkenazi Jews. Ashkenazi cuisine uses many ingredients that were affordable to the historically poor Jewish community of Europe and thus found a place at their tables. Some ingredients they used were considered less desirable to their non-Jewish neighbors in Europe, such as a tough cut of beef called the brisket, chicken liver, and artichokes. Due to anti-Jewish laws, many Jewish communities were forbidden from owning land in which crops were grown, so their cuisine includes fewer fresh vegetable dishes.

European Jewry had a total population of over 9 million at the end of the 19th century. Anti-Jewish riots at the turn of the 20th century across Europe led many to immigrate to the United States and other places. The Holocaust, where over 6 million Jews were killed, decimated the remaining communities. There are now just 1.4 million Jewish people scattered throughout Europe with most Jews of Ashkenazi-descent living in the United States and Israel.