

“Lakhn mit Tern” is a Yiddish saying that means “To laugh with tears,” and which refers to the moment between happiness and sadness. Music portrays a range of human emotions and experiences in a universal language that everyone can understand, no matter what part of the globe they come from. In their journey through life, everyone experiences happiness, sadness and the gamut of emotions in between. Musically, this theme of the balance point between joy and sorrow is found not only in Ashkenazic (Eastern European Jewish) music, but in music by non-Jewish composers too. This program, based on Jewish elements in classical and traditional musics, invites the audience on a musical journey influenced by this multicultural concept.

The program comprises six distinct pictures of Jewish life: the Shtetl, the Lost World, the Wedding, the Gipsy Interaction, the Lullaby, and the Wandering Jew.

**The Shtetl:** Using a book of Jewish poems, in 1948 Dmitri Shostakovich composed 11 songs in the spirit of the Jewish music of the shtetl (the small Jewish towns in Eastern Europe). The five selected melodies describe this “folkloric” mood. They are simple melodies, but they alternate between sadness and happiness, peace and anger. Shostakovich (a non-Jewish composer) was persecuted by the Soviet government and felt a spiritual kinship to the Jews, who also lived under similar persecution.

**The Lost World:** This suite is a “farewell”—or tribute—to the past expressed through different Jewish and non-Jewish composers. It recalls the height of German culture through Erich Korngold’s melodies, and bids farewell to the past world at the door of the First World War through Maurice Ravel’s “Énigme Éternelle.” Ernest Bloch’s prayer, “Abodah,” recalls a religious farewell, and it is, at last, a farewell to the Shtetl life I myself experienced through the people who carried this heritage, but who live now only in memory.

**The Wedding:** Similar to Dmitri Shostakovich, Serge Prokofiev (another non-Jewish Russian composer) wrote on Jewish themes. The first melody of this piece is melodically similar to the selected “Khupah Tants” (dance of the Chuppah), which is one of the many melodies of the same name that are part of the Klezmer wedding repertoire, and which would be played immediately after the breaking of the glass at the end of the wedding ceremony. These two pieces flow naturally together, and the celebratory theme continues with two additional Klezmer wedding tunes. A Korngold melody, telling the story of a dark dead cavalier during the night, rounds out the suite as the kind of supernatural story customarily told during a Jewish wedding to keep away evil spirits.

**The Gypsy Interaction:** As members of their respective guilds, Gypsy and Jewish musicians often played together (for both Jewish and non-Jewish celebrations), with individual musicians filling in to established orchestras depending on who happened to need an extra instrument or two during the busy wedding season. This suite demonstrates this interaction by showing Jewish music with Gypsy influences: two traditional Klezmer tunes, and an arrangement of the third movement of classical Jewish composer Erwin Schulhoff’s Duet “alla Zingaresca” (*in the Gypsy style*). A free cadenza in the gypsy style — full of the characteristic flourishes of the gypsy violin, and quoting from the classical repertoire—opens the set, with Ravel’s famous “Tsigane.”

**The Lullaby:** Darius Milhaud’s Lullaby is the thread of this picture. Milhaud was Sephardic but he composed around an Ashkenazi lullaby. This suite modulates tension—through Ernest Bloch’s “From Jewish Life”—and release—through Felix Mendelssohn’s “Songs without Words”.

**The Wandering Jew:** Gustav Mahler takes the character of the Wandering Jew in this suite, with an arrangement of the slow movement of his first symphony. He wrote: "I am thrice homeless: as a Bohemian among Austrians, as an Austrian among Germans, as a Jew throughout the world." The program ends with a "Freylekh" (happy dance), showing the Jew's eternal quest for happiness.