

The un-believable successful story of a remarkable Trio

by Bernd Spehl



A Dream

A frenzied (as it is said) uproar of thunderous applause, of thousands of pairs of hands, the ovations are of course standing, hearts and voices are filled with exultation, in short: the hall (at least the *Carnegie-Hall*) vibrates with enthusiasm! Youths cheer, girls scream, couples fall into one another's arms in love, women smile moved, children jump around happily, while babies sleep blissfully and the elderly thump with their walking sticks, *one, two-and and four!* (in Bulgar rhythm)

A blissful sound of joint songs envelops three bashful, smiling instrumentalists and magics them off into the night.

An Encounter

It sounds nice doesn't it? It would be nice but its not true. Who are these three men, about whom I have just dreamt? I don't know. But I can and will tell you about three other men, about us, **A TICKLE IN THE HEART Swing & Klezmer Trio Köln.**

Three paths met together at a cross-road; three people met there and from the distance looked almost like brothers: they all carried an instrument, all wore a black suit and black glasses and also had very little hair on their heads. The most striking difference between

them just lay in the size of their luggage. What could have been better, making the most of this lucky coincidence, which doesn't occur very often, than following their paths together?!

The Naming

Because the path is generally known to be the aim, both path and aim were given the same name: **A TICKLE IN THE HEART.** A tickle in the heart is what one feels when playing and is a stimulation for all those who will listen and capture our music.

The name?

A film (Stefan Schwietert, 1996) stands here as a sponser, a remarkable documentary film of the musical life of the Epstein brothers, once famous in New York's Jewish world, now a cultic link between the dance and festive music over there and the creative multiplicity of the Klezmer music as it has developed today in central Europe (especially in Germany and Poland).

Three things fitted in so well:

1. The film is agreeably old-fashioned (made in black and white), even better, it is released from all sense of time.
2. The already ageing brothers praise their profession, which helped them to celebrate countless festivities together.
3. A song, or rather a ditty, which could produce something crucial, to which no great opera

has to add anything essential; which has a certain something, which one's heart yearns for: the "vus git mir in hartsn a kitsl"!

Style and motto had been found.

Tickles' Travels

Our triple travels, as "Tickle-Brothers" so to speak, began with a vigorous tempo and soon the first concert programme **At The Soul's Ballroom** went on tour! Churches as well as jazzclubs, cabarets and educational establishments experienced the encounter with Klezmer and Swing. For a short time they were turned fancifully into sheer heavenly dancing halls.

(CD-recording in home church, Dec.'98)

Up to six engagements in one town offered a new programme for the following year: this time the towns we visited became the sound studio for our imaginary broadcast **Radio TOV!**, which presented the lively Klezmer as *Yiddish Melodies in Swing.* (The new pieces, now five of our own, were recorded in January 2000 in front of the sound studio microphone.)

The arrival

Three instruments of different sizes are lifted out of an old, red estate car. After carrying out several rituals, they stand waiting in the dimmed lights of the stage awaiting the public...

The new CD Radio TOV!

In January 2000 in the IntoNations Studio in Cologne we got the feel of our second CD **Radio TOV!** As well as several Klezmer and Swing-meets-Klezmer-Classics, there are also compositions by the members of the Ensemble, for example, *Brave Little Dance* by Thomas Fritze, *Waltz & Bulgar* by Andreas Schmitges. We hope that this CD will also be so well accepted as our first work, **Ballroom.** Both CDs can be ordered from us, for DM 28.- (**Ballroom**) and DM 30.- (**Radio**

TOV!) excl. delivery, either by post or by email through our 'Internet-Shop' on our



Home page : www.SwingKlezmer.com

What the Press writes...

Now and again journalists visited our concerts. Because it is interesting to know what others write about oneself there now follows a small selection from newspaper articles over the past two years:

Pleasant comments...

"With breath-taking speed, the Trio juggles with style and tempo almost always impercep-

tible and with feeling and forms the completely different genres into one single unity without taking away their own power of expression."

(Allgemeine Zeitung Mainz)

" (...) sometimes played sentimentally, sometimes driven by inexhaustible vitality (...)"
(Elmshorner Nachrichten)

" (...) innovative, breath-taking

and entertaining (...) “
(Rhein-Sieg-Anzeiger)

These charming gentlemen played and gesticulated in TIL in such an unusual and different manner, that one is inclined to predict a Cult status on the “Klezmer horizon”.
(Gießener Allgemeine Zeitung)

“All music friends who were not at this concert should have the chance to hear once again, one of the best groups in this line of music.”
(Lübecker Nachrichten)

“(…) with their sometimes incredibly strange, then terribly sad, then peculiar leaping, suddenly running away, then almost fading away, to be precise, their simply fantastic music.”
(Elbe-Jeetzel-Zeitung)

Curious comments...

“True masters of Jewish Jazz”
(Oberbergische Volks-Zeitung)

“(…) this music can be compared to a trip on a big dipper, with racing slopes, which, through similar rhythmic sequences, loses itself in the



ecstasy of speed, in order to haul itself, groaning hoarsely, up the hill again and at the peak to carry out a dance of glee.”
(Kieler Nachrichten)

Sporting comments...

“These synchronous masters of musical high-diving coordinate each turn and twist.”
(Kieler Nachrichten)

Unsuccessful comments...

“The word Klezmer (...) means literally ‘das Gesäß des Gesangs’ = the seat of song”
(Kompass, Wilhelmshaven)

Comment from editor: the word ‚Klezmer‘ covers the style of music as well as the musicians themselves, which literally represents the ‘Gefäß des Gesangs’ = the vessel of song (hebr: ‘kli’ and ‘zemer’).

In at last!

www.SwingKlezmer.com

The homepage is online since April 2000. As well as general information, the visitor can expect recent news and the advantages of Internet as opposed to other media.

For example you can download excerpts from our CDs as a trial and you can then order it straightaway online. It is as quick as ordering it in a record shop and the CDs will be delivered to you at home.

Another advantage of the Homepage is the service page for the press and the organiser:

here you can download texts and photos from the press and therefore you are always up-to-date with the news.

The Homepage always offers new concert dates and tours. If you wish, you can also enter your name in our email-distributor. You will then regularly receive up-to-the-minute news from Swing & Klezmer Trio Köln. By the way, you will find this in ‘Contact’ on the Homepage.

Have fun surfing!

A double-bass isn't a recorder...

Commentary by Thomas Fritze, double-bass

A double-bass isn't a recorder... I don't really know what to make of this.

I find the expression absurd, frankly pretentious. It should not really bother me but it does, because this pearl of wisdom is acclaimed to me. A Bass isn't a descant-recorder – terrible! Let's presume I have said something of this kind, only supposing! I would have said quietly, hardly to be heard, as though apologizing for the provoking wording and likewise for the situation which should make it plausible: A Bass isn't a recorder,...you know? This perhaps does not convince everyone of the naturalness of this instrument's playful deficits but is it not a way of understanding it? While playing the Bass, it is not enough just to look graceful and to keep one's fingers over a few holes which will still be in the same place the next day. Besides, its size alone tends to be rather difficult in normal life, more likely a personality disorder. With unlimited consequences for oneself and one's surroundings, but Süskind has already dealt with that. Moreover, one cannot act like a funny musician, holding one's instrument to one's lips, radiating a joy of playing and living, hopping about the stage, no, one can, if the worst comes to the worst, - and to quote from the press - "with unwavering phlegm", "nothing short of stoicism",

sometimes (hurrah!) "conveniently" (or was it "obsequiously") pull at the strings of this bulky instrument, as if one cannot count to three and hope that the notes are still roughly where they were yesterday. It is not as if flautists do not have any difficulties with intonation, but after all one knows, the embouchure is indeed in tune, the air here is very dry, no I am not cold, the place is early in



the morning (late in the evening) too fast, I have not played all day (not at all today) and so forth.

There are no excuses for double-bass players, when one of them comes along in a clumsy manner, plays 1 and 3, that's all right, thankyou, O.K. I'll give you a ring. It is difficult – perhaps the saying is really one of mine? – to play fast, to sound good and to hit the right note all at the same time. How do the classical musicians manage it? I don't know. Most probably they all learnt the recorder as a child.



The History of Swing & Klezmer

by Andreas Schmitges

The origin...

...of Klezmer music lies in Eastern Europe. Since the Middle-Ages, many central European Jews took refuge there from persecution and discrimination and had set up large 'colonies' -*Shtetl* - in which they lived together. Their language, Yiddish, was developed out of the German dialect of that period, enriched with several Hebraic words. Out of it though, due to the increasing ghettoization of the Jewish population, sprung up their own language and culture. In connection with the local music Yiddish folk-songs developed, religious (vocal) music of the synagogue and the said Klezmer music. The task of the Klezmerim, the musician, was to play at all kinds of festivities.



Weddings filled in a lot of the time here. They often lasted several days and they must have been fairly lucrative as well as exhausting for the musicians. Furthermore, the Klezmerim were not only engaged for Jewish festivities, but also played for the regional potentates and princes. One of them, the cymbals player Michal Józef Guzikow, even managed to reach the west Europe concert halls.

"(...) the fiddle makes the party."

This remark by the poet Heinrich Heine from 1840, also

stands for the Klezmer music of that time. The violin played the leading role in the Klezmer ensemble in those days. Like the human voice, it has the ability of expressing emotions, it reads the musician's inner thoughts, the instrument and the music should speak to the listener. The clarinet, which has also become a symbol of Klezmer music here in Europe, with Giora Feidman, gained more and more significance in the Klezmer-ensembles at the beginning of the last century.

The emigration to America...

...meant the release from suppression and discrimination for many eastern European Jews. 2,5 million emigrated to the USA between 1880 and 1924. The new world offered religious freedom and possibilities for a striving nation. This emigration wave of course took musicians with it who were employed by the newly-developed record industry, in order to satisfy the emigrants' great demand for native tones. The most scintillating personality of this time was the clarinetist Naftule Brandwein. He was a great virtuoso and was very much admired. He and Dave Tarras recorded hundreds of records in the 20's and 30's, some of which can be heard today on CDs. This collection gives an authentic insight into the Klezmer music of this time. Because hardly any recordings were made in the old world or because existing research works were destroyed by the Holocaust, these recordings, apart from some, represent the only authentic origins of this tradition.

The Swing era of the 30's...

...gave the Klezmer music in

America a last great boom before almost 40 years of silence. The Andrew Sisters had made a hit with *Bay mir bistu sheyn*, a song from the Jewish theatre, and so gave the starting-signal for a whole row of "Swing-meets-Klezmer-Arrangements". Benny Goodman, Ziggy Elman, Artie Shaw and even Cab Calloway now played *Yiddish Melodies in Swing*, after which a radio broadcast that went out for years over the air waves, was later named.

During the 2nd World War and the Holocaust the Jewish population in America experienced great uncertainty. The native land and culture had been obliterated, everyone's eyes were now turned towards the newly established nation of Israel and the yiddish Klezmer music lost its significance.

The Revival...

...began in 1975 with the group "The Klezmerim" from the

USA and from the 80's onwards with Giora Feidman in Europe. Groups like "The Klezmatiks" from New York and many



other ensembles soon followed. They still all have the same thing in common, that they preserve of course, the tradition of Klezmer music, but they link it up with contemporary music, such as Rock, Jazz etc. and so reach new shores. One song by Max Epstein, the Methuselah of Klezmer clarinetists in America, which describes the actual and most important aim of the music, is never to be forgotten: It should tickle in the heart...

Books, music and CDs on Klezmer music

Only five years ago it was almost impossible to find literature on Klezmer music. Many libraries did not even have "Klezmer" as a keyword. Whoever wanted thorough information had to research for themselves. Several music scholars have done this in the meantime and published their works. Here are the most important publications: Rita Ottens & Joel Rubin: *Klezmer-Musik*, DTV, Bärenreiter Verlag, 1999. Here the music scholars and the co-founders of the Klezmer-Revival present the results of their many years of research. The book, which is very thorough and carefully investigated,

is not boring for one minute. A gripping story, extending from the Middle Ages right up to today.

Henry Sapoznik, also a co-founder of the Klezmer-Revival, has written a book, which can only be ordered in the USA or through Internet. Its title is

Klezmer! Jewish Music From Old World to Our World.

In the meantime there is plenty of music to be had. Especially worth a mention is The

Compleat Klezmer published by Tara Publications, Mel Bay's Klezmer Collection published by Mel Bay Publications and complete Giora Feidman books, published by Hal Leonard. Many





music shops do not look incredulous and ignorant any more if one asks for Klezmer music and often have an assortment in stock.

Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin have brought out altogether five CDs, with Trikont, which are concerned with the history of Klezmer music. The original recordings from the last century are, above all, interesting here, in which all the strength in

Naftule Brandwein's playing, or Dave Tarras' great virtuosity can be heard. These recordings, together with the excellent booklets, offer a good start for interested Klezmer fans. Henry Sapoznik has also produced "historical" CDs. One of them is about Naftule Brandwein, the other with Dave Tarras, both heroes of the American-Jewish music scene of the 20's and 30's. (A.S.)



Biographies of the musicians

Bernd Spehl, Clarinet, studied theology and German language and literature to begin with. At the same time, workshops with Giora Feidman, Helmut Eisel and Katharina Mütter motivated him to occupy himself intensely with Klezmer music. He is engaged as a freelance musician since the beginning of A TICKLE IN THE HEART Swing & Klezmer Trio Köln. His models are the Klezmer clarinetists Naftule Brandwein, Dave Tarras, Giora Feidman and David Krakauer. Benny Goodman's playing and that of other Swing clarinetists influenced him greatly. His knowledge of and passion for music makes him a source of inspiration for the concert programmes and for the history around Klezmer music.

Andreas Schmitges, Guitar, had first of all the benefit of a classical education, then studied Flamenco for a year in Granada/Spain and Jazzguitar in Maastricht with Joep Van Leeuwen and in Cologne with Frank Haunschild. Working in different musical connections brought him at last to Klezmer

music, to which he is completely hooked. Through his thesis, *Klezmer and Jazz – the points of contact between two styles of music*, he has found many interesting historical examples for the interplay of both styles, which in the meantime inspire him in his own compositions.

Thomas Fritze, Double-bass, studied the bass-guitar in Arnheim with Lene Te Voortwis and Pieter Douma and the double-bass with Henk Haverhoek. As the third founder-member he brings his various (Big) Band experiences with Swing and Fusion into the Trio A TICKLE IN THE HEART. His far-reaching musical experiences makes him an ideal accompanist for the ensembles' musical journeys. He also now writes for the Trio and appears as a composer on the new CD Radio TOV!



Tickle-Post

News from: **A Tickle In The Heart**
Swing & Klezmer Trio Köln

Editorial

Dear music friends in general, especially friends of Swing and Klezmer music and of course, last but not least, friends of our music: Here it is!

The first edition of the **Tickle-Post!**

From now on it is to appear fairly regularly and to start with, in this edition, we would like to give you information about us, our music, our plans and projects and dates of concerts.

Apart from this we would also like to invite you, dear readers, music and Tickle-friends, to an exchange of information and opinions, which concerns

music, especially of course Swing-Klezmer-Fusion, and to tell you about things which interest us, have affected us, have annoyed us, pleased or amused us, about a book on the subject, about our new CD, about amusing incidents on our last tour and organisation key events.

We hope you will enjoy this first edition of our periodical on every level and we shall be pleased to hear your reactions, criticisms, approval and lively comments.

Yours

The "Tickle-Brothers".

Thomas Fritze
Andreas Schmitges
Bernd Spehl

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Bertolt-Brecht-Str. 46
D-50374 Erftstadt
Germany
Fon / Fax: ++49 (2235) 430490
e-mail: Info@SwingKlezmer.com
Internet: www.SwingKlezmer.com