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# Parables of Our Talons: New Jewish Stories for Electroacoustic Voices

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**PARABLES OF OUR TALONS:**

**New Jewish Stories for Electroacoustic Voices**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Arts

in

**Digital Musics**

by Eli James Powers Berman

Guarini School of Graduate and Advanced Studies  
Dartmouth College  
Hanover, New Hampshire

April 2023

Examining Committee:

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(chair) *Ash Fure*

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*César Alvarez*

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*Shaul Magid*

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*R' Seth Linfield*

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F. Jon Kull, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Guarini School of Graduate and Advanced Studies



## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a creative portfolio of written and recorded experiments and performances from September 2022 to April 2023. The culminating piece of my portfolio is a ritual performance called *GOLEMATRIAK*. This ritual, along with the rest of my portfolio, weaves together *khazonus* (Ashkenazi Jewish cantorial singing), extended vocal techniques, and electronic dance music in Yiddish, Hebrew, and English. During a historic rise of global antisemitism and transphobia, *GOLEMATRIARK* is an exaltation of queer, diasporic Jewish power. The golem is a proto-robot made of inorganic matter that one animates through sacred Jewish texts. I have been creating my own golems in the form of *speaker-creatures*, a collection of DIY speakers made of PVC pipes, frame drums, and metals that emit electroacoustic dance music with samples of my voice. In this text I will dance on the edges of the sound/word, voice/drum, and human/machine with documentation of my music, personal anecdotes, creative writing, sacred Jewish teachings, and the wisdom of Emilie Conrad, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Rachel Carson, Tanya Tagag, and others concerned with embodied, matriarchal wisdom.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ash Fure, thank you for guiding my creative impulses through Ableton and encouraging me to weave my spiritual and communal values into my sonic visions. I'm grateful for how you have helped me strengthen my interests in all technical, creative, and spiritual dimensions of my work throughout my time at Dartmouth.

César Alvarez, thank you for teaching me how to start writing my first songs. Your guidance has given me the courage to finally start making dance music and building towards more theatrical manifestations of my work.

Taylor Ho Bynum, thank you for always reminding me of the touring musician I want to become. Your leadership in our improvisation workshops and in the New Music Festival has helped ground me during a time of intense creative change.

R' Seth Linfield and Juli Goodman, thank you for opening the doors of Dartmouth Hillel for me and my visions. The two of you have steered my growth as a Jewish learner and leader in so many ways. Thank you for helping me build relationships with other Jews on campus, for learning with me about Jewish genders and monsters, and for contributing your time and labor to making sure my performance went so well. R' Seth, thank you for ushering the start of GOLEMATRIARK with your beautiful, educational Havdalah. I'm proud that we brought Jewish spirituality to an audience who had largely never been to the Roth Center before. Deana Linfield, I am forever grateful for your idea to include Havdalah in my own ritual. Your enthusiasm for my art has been such a gift during my time at Dartmouth. Thank you for encouraging me to become a cantor.

Richel Cuylder and Charles Peoples III, thank you for trusting me to take you to new places with your voices. I learned so much from your interpretations of my music. Rodrigo Martinez Torres, thank you for all of your wisdom and energy in improvising with my vocal drum pads. I cannot wait to continue developing this music with you all.

Shaul Magid, thank you for encouraging me to dig deeper into my lineages of Jewish musicians in folk, liturgical, and experimental music. Your class on radical Jewish politics anchored me in the culture work of my music.

Samita Sinha, thank you for helping me remember the roots of my vocal exploration with Yiddish. Your emphasis on the unnameable wisdom in sound sensation has encouraged me to release the ways I have come to intellectualize parts of my ancestral work with sound.

Bethany Yongue and Raegan Padula, thank you both for all of your technical support and knowledge. Raegan, you have inspired me to become a DJ and to experiment more publicly with dance music. Bethany, thank you for helping me reconnect with my love for circuit bending in the short time you have been here. Sanni East, I am indebted to you for inviting me into your PHOTOPHOBIA project in 2020 and for inviting me to sing it with you on stage in 2022. You gave me the chance to make dance music all from my

voice for the first time, and you got me payed for it for the first time! These seeds have grown into this garden of new work that I'm just getting started on. Thank you for helping me cultivate strength and confidence as a producer, writer, collaborator. Anna Lublina, thank you for trusting me with Undying in Yidderland. This magical process has given me so much courage to continue lending my voice towards theater and movement rituals. I'm grateful to be building new Yiddish culture with you.

Stuart Meyers, thank you for allowing me to crash Welcome to Eden with my new song so last minute. I'm grateful for this first chance to sing my new music off campus, and for the opportunity to start collaborating with Aani Kisslinger. Aani, thank you for showing me that I'm not the only *feygele* making dance music out here, and thank you for giving *Mama Loshn Motion* so much fire from your trumpet.

Rachel Bernsen, thank you for workshopping potential dance elements for my GOLEMATRIARK music in March 2023. Emily Orling, thank you for helping me envision the construction of future feedback instruments for my future puppet plans in February 2023.

Armond Dorsey, Olivia Shortt, and Mac Waters, thank you all for your support and inspiration as friends and collaborators. It was an honor to perform in The Breathing Suite and Museum of the Lost and Found: gaakaazootaadiwag, and I am excited to see what work you create next, Mac.

Thank you Watermill Center for to the time, resources, and connection I needed to start building and sharing my speaker creatures. The interest in and support for my work from Elka Rifkin, Ava Locks, Nicole Martorana, Matauqus Tarrant, and many more has helped me feel more confident to share me work with new listeners.

Thank you Mom and Dad for your undying support through the many transitions in my personal and creative life over the past two years. I am so excited to grow my relationship with my first musical mentors now that I am ready to get to gigging.

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## WE NEED NEW WORK SONGS

There is grief wrapped up in our Spotify playlists. We task our machines with playing and even choosing music for us. Once upon a time, we had to make music for each other. The year is 1910 in a Southwestern Pennsylvania patch town (mining town) called Westmoreland. The miners are on strike, and 70% of them are Slovak men seduced by empty promises of industrial prosperity. Their wives are fighting with strike breakers brought in by the owners of the mine, and these women are sent to jail for their ‘harassment.’ Their children came with them to court and had no one to care for them, so they were sent to jail with their mothers. Along comes Mother Jones, who implores them to sing their Slovak songs through the night. They sing for five days straight. This gets them out of jail.<sup>1</sup>

My mother never taught me these songs, because she was never taught Slovak by my grandmother. The hills of Southwestern Pennsylvania could not carry their grass-cutting songs as the Tatra Mountains did in the old world. Their singing became a weapon. And this weapon was traded for whiteness, the deadliest. Now I learn Slovak songs from Spotify. How did we get here if the music that grew from our earliest ancestors “would have been almost certainly primarily communal and participatory rather than solitary, remote, and impractical” (Disanayake, *Ritual and Ritualization*, 3)? As corporations continue marching toward their supersedion of nation-states, I wonder what our new work songs will sound like. We are going to need them.

The rivers used to be the highways. Since the 1790s, my Scots-Irish ancestors would follow a creek behind my house to the Ohi:yo (Allegheny River), where they would go on to travel up and down what we call the Ohio river to trade. I was told of their “adventurous” blood, boiling over from centuries of clan violence in the Scottish lowlands and colonization projects in Ireland. They were sent here, my mother told me,

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<sup>1</sup> "The Women Who Sang Their Way Out Of Jail." *Pauline's Cookbook*, 30 Dec. 2010, <https://paulinescookbook.wordpress.com/2010/12/30/the-women-who-sang-their-way-out-of-jail/>. Accessed 20 Mar. 2023.



because the English needed their rebellious blood to flood the “frontiers” and decimate Indigenous people. My mother told me I have my grandfather’s voice. It is not as if we share a voice because we’re descended from Ulster Scots. It is because he chose to sing solos in church choirs, where he met my grandmother, whose parents first met while singing in a choir. Race ‘science’ isolates our voices. It gets in the way of our ability to trace the love. Blood is thicker than water, but water is wiser.

Rabbi Seth Linfield tells me that Torah is the water of life, flowing from our tongues, meandering through different ecosystems over millennia. Voices that bend and cut through prison bars. Voices that roar as rivers, and thunder, and waves.

I graduated college during the fourth month of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when collective singing had become one of the most dangerous activities one could do. For the first time since I was eight years old, I could not sing with others. It became unbearable to make music for a year and a half, but by the end of my first term at Dartmouth College in the Fall of 2021, I had finally returned to making music with voice and live loops for Ash Fure’s Sonic Arts II course. The following song is a ritual for the loosening of the jaws and hips.

## *HASHOMAYIM<sup>2</sup>*

Text:

The festering decay behind your face  
Ain't the start of these rotting floodgates.  
Muddy hips meandering wet  
Up through your tongue and your chest,  
Your cheeks and your neck.

Water rise.  
Catch flame.  
Vibrate the cage.

*Bubbi vil az ikh zol veynen*, (Grandma wants me to cry)<sup>3</sup>  
*Efenen zikh der farblotike bordbeyn*. (Open my muddy jaws)  
*Bubbi vil az ikh zol shrayen*, (Grandma wants me to scream)  
*Tz'efente kulbus - HaShomayim*. (Opened hips - the heavens)

Ever since I was a little girl, I have had a knot in my neck where the base of my skull meets my spine — most pronounced on the left side. In the Summer of 2018, when I first began to dip my toes into Yiddish, I took a workshop at the Banff Centre with a vocologist who shared common emotional blockages associated with specific locations of tension. The knot in my neck supposedly corresponded with self suppression. I cried for the first time in months hearing this. In her life's story, *Life on Land: The Story of Continuum*, Emilie Conrad details how a child's silenced voice contorts the structure of their skull and shoulders as they grow. I feel this silence behind my eyes. Wrapped around my jawbone, *mayn bordbeyn* (my 'beard bone'). I spent a year and a half growing out my beard to prove to myself I could be a beautiful woman who also looked like an old world rebbe. It is not that I was not allowed to speak as a kid — my parents did not have to let me howl around the house as much as they did — but I could never admit to myself or anyone that I was a woman until I was twenty-one. No matter how loud your

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<sup>2</sup> Link to song demo: <https://youtu.be/hbRuLvCsyBA>

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this text I translate Yiddish and Hebrew words into English in parenthesis. I use footnotes for further clarification around Yiddish and Hebrew transliterations and compound words I created out of Yiddish and/or English words.

voice is, it can never carry your full resonance if you are choking on it. I learned to hold much of this tension in my sinuses, around the cartilage of my nose. Growing up in western classical choirs, I was forbidden from singing through my nose. I did not know what the word “Ashkenazi” referred to until I was at least twenty. I always thought my father’s family was Russian and Ukrainian, and they just happened to be Jewish once upon a time. How was I supposed to know how to be a woman, let alone a Jewish woman?

That summer of 2018, I ‘returned’ to Yiddish and located the suffocating womanhood in my neck. This is when I made contact with my ancestors for the first time. I was hopping along the creek that runs behind my childhood home — the one my mother’s ancestors would follow to that highway called the Allegheny River. I dropped a leaf in the water and watched it turn in circles against the current until it decided to lead me downstream. The leaf landed on a rock pointing towards the old log cabin of James Powers, my great uncle seven generations back. The first of our family to settle in this Seneca territory in the 1790s. I continued downstream and halted before a fallen tree stretching over the creek. Mounds of twigs and leaves piled up around the trunk, only allowing the water to leak slowly from the detritus. I turn to the right before a massive black rock ledge lining the hallow carved out by the creek. Water trickled down into the rot, festering. I saw a sinewy shadow growing out of the top of the rocks, and I ran like hell out of there. Once I passed the zone of the creek where I dropped the leaf, I knew I held this rot in me. And I knew it had been given to me. A silent, wet heirloom. Mokoš, the Slavic goddess of wet earth, was asking me to open my muddy jaws and weep, to open my muddy hips and scream to the heavens. In the Hebrew Bible, we learn of “the heavens,” HaShomayim, as both fire (*esh*) and water (*mayim*).<sup>4</sup> The mysteries of the universe are stored in delicious linguistic gems.

I approach writing in Yiddish with this mystical lens, because I find the work of language planning to be quite magical. Yiddish is a post-genocide language that is currently

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<sup>4</sup> Lichtenstein, Harava Aharon. "Torah, Fire, and Water." Etzion.org, <https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/shavuot/torah-fire-and-water>. Accessed 14 Feb. 2023.

experiencing a renaissance among younger Jews who did not grow up with the language. Historically, Jewish women were not allowed to read or study Torah. Yiddish was the feminized language of the home, as opposed to Hebrew, which was spoken in the *shul* (synagogue/school) by men. Yiddish carries Jewish women's wisdom in prayers, music, literature, and spells. Most of us have lost our connection to our *mama loshn* (mother tongue) due to the murder of most of our native speakers during the Shoah (Holocaust) and the pressures of assimilation and antisemitism around the world. In response, I find pleasure in contributing to Yiddish language planning efforts by creating new words for my music, such as *feygelectrikayt*, *shmuescience*, and *neshamorganism*.<sup>5</sup> I'm

Sanders Gilman explains that Jew hatred has long relied on stereotypes of the Jewish voice and the Jew's "hidden language." He explains that "the language used by the Jew reveals or masks the Jew's corrupt nature. But the informed listener hears the Jew hidden within no matter whether this difference is overt or disguised."<sup>6</sup> Gilman locates this deadly perception of the Jewish voice in the manipulation of Jesus' last words in the gospels:

We see that in the first set of passages Jesus Christ speaks in Aramaic. Matthew, the first gospeler, represents a Christ whose last words are as follows: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?' that is to say, My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?" (27: 46)...The significance of this lies in the presentation of Christ as speaking the language of the Jews: his words need to be translated into Greek, Latin, German, or English for the self-labeled Christian reader to understand. The reader is thus made aware of the foreignness of Christ's language...Placed in the mouth of Christ, the "hidden" language of the Jews is the magical language of difference...But in the second ("later") set of passages, Christ speaks directly to the reader...In John, the last of the Gospels which related the life of Jesus, Christ is taken to Golgotha and there he said, "It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (19: 30). His language needs no translation; it is transparent, familiar not foreign...we thus abandon the image of a Jew who sounds Jewish and replace him with the image of one who sounds like ourselves (whether we speak Greek, Latin, German, or English). He becomes a 'hidden' Christian. Thus the existence of a language which would mark Christ as a "real" Jew, i.e., as a non-Greek-speaking

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<sup>5</sup> These words, among others, will be used and defined in the following chapter, *Parables of Our Talons*.

<sup>6</sup> Gilman, Sander. "The Jew's Body: The Jewish Voice." pp. 19-20.

Jew and therefore of lower status, was impossible (Gilman, *The Jew's Body: The Jewish Voice*, 13-17).

It is difficult for me not to identify with the manipulation of Jesus's language and body within Christian hegemony. I grew up with a Jewish father and a Christian mother, always feeling outside of either faith. It took twenty years to realize that my elementary friends were subtly encouraging me to convert to Christianity every Khanike.<sup>7</sup> When we visited my ninety-four year-old Grandma Anita for Khanike 5783 (2022), she was terrified to let the other seniors see me in my beanie with the word **אמת** *emet* (truth) across my forehead<sup>8</sup>...lest we provoke their imaginations about our secret, special, hidden language. Don not even hide it, just forget it! But there ain't much hiding her 'Brooklyn accent' (aka Yiddish accent). I wonder how much Grandma knows that. During lunch she told us all to quiet down and drop the Jewish stuff in public. I wonder how much of a rowdy Jewish family we look and sound like to her. I translate my hat and share the golem with them. Cousin Sophia thought grandma and grandpa were the only Jewish people in our family. I wish I had asked cousin Addy if she remembered those songs she learned in daycare at the Tempe JCC. I am so glad I got to hear cousin Charlie's beautiful six-year-old voice...she's singing all day everyday like I started to at her age. Six months ago I had an anxiety attack while driving as I talked to myself and realized that I had been suppressing my own 'Brooklyn accent' since childhood. I had brought this accent with me to preschool in Pittsburgh when we moved from Williamsburg in 2002. Soon enough I dropped it. Twenty years later, it was starting to bubble out of me again, and I was furious. After my break through, I wrote the following short story summoning metallic golems, sea monsters, and electric birds to channel my ancestral rage. This story came through me like a bolt of lightning, and it served as a guiding cosmology for my thesis show *GOLEMATRIARK*.

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<sup>7</sup> Yiddish transliteration of "Channukah"

<sup>8</sup> The most widely known method of creating a golem, a mythological Jewish creature made of clay, is to write **אמת** *emet* (truth) on it's forehead to bring it to life. In order to return the creature to dust, one must erase the first letter **א** *aleph* to form **מת** *met* (dead).

## PARABLES OF OUR TALONS



They've been thirsty for our blood a long time. they despise how liquid and mobile we are. They know we can't move so good if they drain our blood. It's as if every drop taken sears their metallic, electrified bodies, liquefying and deforming them upon impact as they harden into new shapes. this molting generates electricity for them. This is why they've told themselves and the world that we bake our weekly bread with their children's blood. Disguising The Thirst with our hunger.

The clock strikes 9 in Hanover. Abenaki land. A land that is the first of the continent to *shmues* (chat) with the sun every morning. Different time here. Different than the sun's conversation with industrial Appalachia. Capital of steel. Capital of robotics. Capital of Molten *Menschn* (people). City of *Glamim* (golems). This is what they've always wanted us to be. Of course they want to integrate my organism with machines. Don't you remember? They don't want us to be able to move. So they can possess us like video game zombies. Pushing our buttons. Pulling our strings. This is why they've imagined us as puppeteers of the globe. It's what they aspire to. And their Thirst is getting them there. With our molting relationship, they wanna melt the world. And here we are writhing around.

Are we ready to molt instead? Look up. The serpents of the sky are inviting us to learn. We don't gotta just tread water. we get to fly. And we will only learn to fly as flocks. *Un mir welln tsuzamn. mit tsutroy. Az mir proven flien, heybn on shmues mit valkns, eletrische naskeyt in vint. Di mames fun shtromen.* Mothers of currents. *Conduitnesses*.<sup>9</sup> *Zey brumen and shrayen. Mir veln enterfn mit hekhere kulus, mer oft.* As our wings molt. (And we will together. With trust. As we try to fly, begin to chat with clouds, electric wetness on wind. The mothers of currents. *Conduitnesses*. They growl and scream. We will respond with louder voices, more often. As our wings molt.)

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<sup>9</sup> "Conduit" + "witnesses"

I feel a matriarchy beyond our bodies. A transmission system energizing the biosphere. An all encompassing *shmues*, a jousting among the currents that create and destroy us all. Transmisogyny is a fear of this charge overriding the most meticulously golemized extension of our *neshamorganism*,<sup>10</sup> the phallus, and those who wield it, who are reduced to it. A fear of these short circuits disguised by a vicious duty to protect those assigned-oven-at-birth from the ultimate corruption of masculinity, the dough kneading of a mother breaking back. And either way you slice it, there can be no real breadwinners in the end if we're baking it with their children's blood. They mechanically bewitch our flesh in pursuit of their eugenic imaginations. we are no longer allowed to or able to sustain ourselves and our own hungry rhythms, but must produce to power their Frankenstein illusion of time.

I want to fly out of this. We have forgotten how to fly because they've rendered our flocks unrecognizable. But as the water rises, so do the memories of our organisms across civilizations and continents and epochs. Our bones sink into harmony with dirt around the world. anchoring our fluid bodies that ripple, now louder than ever, with memories of the commons. Memories of transformation. We're going to become monsters before we recognize our flocks. Sirens. Talons growing from our fingertips. Sharp quills beneath every hair. Femurs and scapulas molting into massive wingspans. And storm clouds will help us remember the technology of our flocking voices. *Shmuescience*.<sup>11</sup> *Feygelectrikayt* פֿײַגעלעקטריקײַט.<sup>12</sup>



“Vulcan salute”...taken from our *Birkhas Kohanim* (priestly blessing)...*volkn* (cloud) salutations ...*vos makhste mames fun shtromen* (what’s up mothers of currents) ...conduitnesses...*vos hern aykh?* (what do y’all hear?)

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<sup>10</sup> “*Neshama*” (breath/soul) + “organism”

<sup>11</sup> “*Shmues*” (chat) + “science”

<sup>12</sup> “*Feygele*” (faggot, ‘little bird’) + “electric” + “-*kayt*” (as in *Yiddishkayt*, Jewishness)

*Undzere kumindike kinder zenen do in volkn* (Our coming children are there in the clouds). Serpent sirens of the sea, rooted in the dirt at the bottom of the ocean, stretching through the static of sky. As Tanya Tagaq says it, “our electricity ensnares spirit and our flesh entraps it.”<sup>13</sup> I’m buzzing with curiosity for the feminine sun and masculine moon that guide Tagaq. What forms do the sun and the moon take to *shmues* (chat) with Ckuwapohnakiyik,<sup>14</sup> the land of the dawn? How do they choose to spill light onto the clouds for us to see in turn? *Ale undzer kinder fun tsukunft lebn in volkn* (All our children of the future live in the clouds). They leap from the waters to weep and shriek. what sounds do they offer to the creeks? To the shores? When we close our eyes, what can we hear and where can we feel?

But WHAT ABOUT *IS-REAL*???

Sadly, when you’ve been drained of so much blood, it doesn’t take long before the Thirst takes over you too. Don’t forget, they are paralyzed, and our liquid energizes their heavy bodies, shocking them into motion at lightning speed across the land and through the sky. And us? We’re still writhing around, wondering where our water is going and when the high waters will come to get us...if the blood suckers don’t get us first. We mistake the breath of the thirsty *glamim* (golems) for the wind, carrying stories stories about The Real Bloodsuckers and their secret riches in their *shuls* (schools), terrorizing our streets in their hoodies at night, barreling towards us in caravans, cooking up plagues in their labs. These fables are delivered on the currents of their rancid wind and the electric currents of their panopticons in our pockets. The sinners of these fables wear masks and sear our eyeballs as they look back at us. We spend our time screaming and asking what are we supposed to believe? Which face did you just see in the shadows?

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<sup>13</sup> Tagaq, Tanya. "Split Tooth." p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> Abenaki musician Mali Obomsawin taught me this word, which is the name for the ancestral homelands of the Abenaki Nation.



In the meantime, those thirsty *glamim* (golems) have already begun to alchemize us into machines like them. We feed on their plastics. We *shmues* (chat) through their circuits. Our organisms are armored up with lead. And they use our own blood to fuse these masks on to the armor they've cased us into. We're still writhing around, overseeing each other through malting masks with gaping mouth holes. Drained of our liquid, able to move enough to get into or out of each other's mouths. They force our parents into labor, force us out of their wombs and back into the mouths of our siblings, who are just so, so thirsty. And we all believe the quenching will save us in the end, because we're biting back The Real Bloodsuckers, right? There is no end coming. No rapture. In their frozen, lightning-speed time, they imagine the final death of their electrified rigor mortis with the so-called "coming" of their grandest golem. Jesus Christ. As if she weren't already created and destroyed here every day among us. This cannibalizing machine they've made of our ancestor.

It's degrading to be a Jew likened to Jesus by Xtians. I feel how they feed off of her. As a Jew of Xtian experience. Jewesss of X-communication. I command the infinite unknown X to distinguish herself in *undzer shmues* (our conversation), *un ikh zog zay gezunt* (I say goodbye) to the paralysis of my *neshamorganism*<sup>15</sup> by the cannibalistic conversion of the Thirst, the Xtian Kabbalah of "Judeo-Christian" values. Like the Jews who signed their letters *mit O's un nit keyn X* (with O's and no X's), I refuse to bear no more crosses. Some *yidenes* (Jewesses) gotta get fluent and fluid as x-men in order to claw away and moulting through our hard skin. X-communication. *Confluency*.<sup>16</sup> There is no end coming. No rapture. But we still got hope for us, the raptors. We bear our beaks through our noses and our teeth. Expand our wing spans with our rib cages, caged no longer! These are the parables of our talons. Of *undzere kumindike kinder* (our coming children).




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<sup>15</sup> "Neshama" (breath/soul) + "organism"

<sup>16</sup> 'Confluence' + 'fluency'

## MAMA LOSHN MOTION<sup>17</sup>

The following song, *Mama Loshn Motion*, was born shortly after I wrote *Parables of Our Talons*. The term *mama loshn* is a beloved Yiddish term for “mother tongue.” With this music, I began to give birth to *di kumendike kinder* (the coming children) from my earlier visions.

Text:

Voices of prayer,  
Voices of dance,  
Voices of drum,  
Voices of trance.  
Can you hear us?  
*Shmues* (chat) with us...  
Come to us...

*Vos makhste volkn*, (What’s up storm clouds)  
*Mames fun shtromn?* (Mother’s of currents)  
*Vos hern aykh itzt*, (What do y’all hear now)  
Mothers of currents?  
What do y’all hear now?  
What’s up there storm clouds?  
*Brumen un shrayen*, (Growling and screaming)  
Electricryin’.  
*Brumen un shrayn*, (Growling and screaming)  
*HaShomayim*. (The heavens)

Forever tethered to the dirt,  
Shaking up the shoots,  
Oscillating through generations  
From the root.  
Breathing in and out,  
Blushing with your touch.  
Move us *mama loshn*, (mother-tongue)  
Motion of the ocean.

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<sup>17</sup> Link to song demo: [https://soundcloud.com/eli\\_b-2/mama-loshn-motion-demo/s-ax8Ebj8FxLE?si=6021f3106d6a415f954f6d8a769aed0f&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/eli_b-2/mama-loshn-motion-demo/s-ax8Ebj8FxLE?si=6021f3106d6a415f954f6d8a769aed0f&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

*Di kumendike kinder* (The coming children)  
*Zenen do in taykhik.* (Are there in the river)  
Children of the future  
Dancing on lightning.  
*Di kumendike kinder* (The coming children)  
*Zenen do in volkn.* (Are there in the clouds)  
Children of the future  
From the bottom of the ocean.

Leaping out the water  
To weep  
Along the shore,  
Up and down the creek.  
Leaping out the water  
To shriek  
Along the shore,  
Up and down the creek.

Forever tethered to the dirt,  
Shaking up the shoots,  
Oscillating through generations  
From the root.  
Breathing in and out,  
Blushing with your touch.  
Move us *mama loshn*, (mother-tongue)  
Motion of the ocean.

We're *Yiddishe* (Jewish) musicians  
Bringing ammunition  
Against assimilation.  
This ain't a superstition.  
Mother tongue potion,  
Take a sip, it's kosher.  
*Mama loshn*, (mother-tongue)  
Motion of the ocean

*Di kumendike kinder* (The coming children)  
*Zenen do in taykhik.* (Are there in the river)  
Children of the future  
Dancing on lightning.  
*Di kumendike kinder* (The coming children)  
*Zenen do in volkn.* (Are there in the clouds)  
Children of the future  
From the bottom of the ocean.

Leaping out the water  
To weep  
Along the shore,  
Up and down the creek.  
Leaping out the water  
To shriek  
Along the shore,  
Up and down the creek.

*Vos makhste volkn*, (What's up storm clouds)  
*Mames fun shtromn?* (Mother's of currents)  
*Vos hern aykh itzt*, (What do y'all hear now)  
Mothers of currents?  
What do y'all hear now?  
What's up there storm clouds?  
*Brumen un shrayen*, (Growling and screaming)  
Electricryin'.  
*Brumen un shrayn*, (Growling and screaming)  
*HaShomayim*. (The heavens)

Forever tethered to the dirt,  
Shaking up the shoots,  
Oscillating through generations  
From the root.  
Breathing in and out,  
Blushing with your touch.  
Move us *mama loshn*, (mother-tongue)  
Motion of the ocean.

For Rosh Hashanah 5783 (2022), I was invited by Stuart Meyers to write and sing this new song for Flaminggg, New York City's only queer Jewish nightlife series. Their Jewish New Years party had a full garden of eden theme, so I knew I had to summon the serpents. *Mama Loshn Motion* started as a short love poem to Yiddish in my car. I had recently returned from a Yiddish course in Berlin, so I was able to finish the lyrics on the train ride down to the city, swimming again in the cracks of my English and Yiddish, but this time from my own vocabulary. I crashed at Stuart's apartment, where I recorded the tracks the day before the show. The day of the show, I met with cantorial pop star Aani Kisslinger, and we decided she needed to play trumpet with me. All of sudden my niche music and I were part of a scene! I wasn't the only noisy *feygele* (faggot, 'little bird')! After the Flaminggg show, I had two opportunities to perform four of my songs on

campus in Fall 2022.<sup>18</sup> First, Reagan Padula programmed me for an outdoor National Coming Out Day event by the Dartmouth Green. I sang my songs while drumming on a rusty metal flower pot/umbrella bucket. I learned that I could sing and drum at the same time if I really wanted to, but that this setup ultimately felt and looked more like a comfort object.<sup>19</sup> The second performance I had was at the Art Walk closing concert series for Hopkins Center for the Arts before their massive renovations. I sang straight through all of my songs for the first time in the remnants of the Paddock Music Library, where a year prior I had performed my first piece on campus and set my intentions for finally creating dance music with my voice.

I had finally grown the confidence to begin making my crunchy Yiddish beats, but I had no clue who my audience might be or if they even existed. Within a year I was invited to perform for the largest Yiddish culture event in the U.S. Borscht Beat Presents KLEZTRONICA: A Yiddish New York Afterparty. On Thursday 12/29, the Kleztronica scene was born. The crowd was packed. People were hungry for these sounds before they even heard them. The production was spearheaded by Chaia Berman-Peters, aka CHAIA, who helped pulled together a lineup seven acts offering distinct angles on the open experiment of Yiddish EDM. Our opener was Mama Liga, a well know Boston Klezmer band who ended their set playing on top of techno from CHAIA. Next up was Baile Ungar, who remixed solo Yiddish songs from the Ruth Rubin archive with their own R&B beats. I performed my four original songs in Yiddish and English with a mic, my backing tracks, and Aani Kisslinger on trumpet for my final song. Aani followed my set with her own original music in English, offering a beautiful cross pollination of Klezmer, Balkan Brass, and R&B. An accordionist and pillar in the global Klezmer ecosystem, Ilya Shneyveys, aka DJ Shney, offered his first ever public techno set. Sam Slate, aka Diva Nigun, gave their first public DJ set as well, blending house and contemporary Jewish worship/*khazonus*. It was a beautiful contrast with CHAIA's set of Klezmer bangers with

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<sup>18</sup> The rest of these songs — *Kontzentratzie*, *Only One*, and *Iron Tongue* — are discussed later in this text.

<sup>19</sup> I now aim to coordinate singing and drumming with digital drum pads after taking six months of drum lessons with Amy Garapic.

techno and reggaeton. This event felt historic, and it was palpable on the floor. People of all ages dancing the hora to grinding beats, crooning voices, horns, accordions, strings, and synths. By the end of this first Kleztronica gig, I knew two things: 1) that I could continue to grow the world of these songs to eager audiences, and 2) that I was tired of performing these songs alone with backing tracks.

In March 2023 I began to rehearse my own music with other people for the first time in three years for a workshop called *GOLEMATRIARK*. Richel Cuyler and Charles Peoples III sang with me while Rodrigo Martinez Torres drummed my vocal drum samples on a full electronic drum kit. Richel and I had been musing on the connections between our shared research in melismatic vocal techniques within and between Black American and Ashkenazi Jewish traditions respectively. I became interested in how to teach my extended vocal technique of circular singing on the inhale and exhale. Inspired by the vocal energy work that Charles, Rodrigo, and I learned with Samita Sinha from January–March 2023, we navigated together through my songs *Mama Loshn Motion*, *Only One*, *Iron Tongue*, and *Kontzentratzie*. In *GOLEMATRIARK*, we bookended these original songs with tunes by Debbie Friedman, an icon American Jewish folk music. The night of our workshop was the end of Shabbat during Passover, April 8th 2023. Accordingly, we incorporated Friedman’s *nigun* (wordless melody) for weekly *Havdalah* (end of Shabbat) prayers as well as Friedman’s *Miriam’s Song*, an upbeat tune that chronicles the part of the Passover story when Moses’ sister Miriam leads the women in song and dance after the parting of the Red Sea.

## MIRAM'S DRUM, LEVIATHAN'S ROAR: AN EXPERIMENTAL JEWISH VOICE GENEALOGY

Debbie Friedman's *Miriam's Song* exemplifies the power of the voice, our oldest musical instrument. I understand the voice as a technological inheritance that has and continues to shape our world. I have been venturing into new musical territory by creating electronic dance music from vocal traditions like *khazonus*<sup>20</sup> (Jewish cantorial singing) and Yiddish song, and I am excited to continue connecting my impulses to those of my predecessors in various musical genres and artistic disciplines who have dared to ask questions with their voices in new ways. The following grouping of artists—Debbie Friedman, Shlomo Carlebach, Yossele Rosenblatt, Jewlia Eisenberg, Victoria Hanna, Meredith Monk, Emilie Conrad, and Alfred Wolfsohn—is my initial formalization of a legacy of modern experimental Jewish vocalists that inform my practice as a vocalist, composer, and improviser.

In the 20th century *Fareynikte Shtatn* (United States), Jewish singing styles began to make their way into different forms of popular U.S. music. Debbie Friedman helped pioneer a distinctly American “Jewish folk music” during the early 1960s Folk Revival along with likeminded artists like Shlomo Carlebach, a Rabbi and musician. Their music diverged from the newly popular "Israeli folk music" of the 50s.<sup>21</sup> Friedman and Carlebach sang Jewish liturgical music in a vocal style rooted in the American Folk Revival while still connecting to Orthodox Jewry and other Jews familiar with life in the synagogue, where most communal Jewish singing still occurs.<sup>22</sup> In his album *Live at the Village Gate*, it's as if Carlebach's guitar takes the place of an organ and choir in a Golden Age cantorial tape from the 1920-40s, leaving room for his familiar melodies and improvisations in a newly relevant musical context.

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<sup>20</sup> Yiddish transliteration of *Chazanut*.

<sup>21</sup> Kelman, Ari Y., and Magid, Shaul. "The Gate to the Village: Shlomo Carlebach and the Creation of American Jewish 'Folk'." p. 521.

<sup>22</sup> Kelman and Magid, p. 514.

One of the earliest and most well known examples of the popularizing of Jewish music in the U.S. is in the career of Yossele Rosenblatt during this cantorial golden age. A Ukrainian Jew born in the 1880s, Rosenblatt's successful career as a *khazn* (cantor) in Europe eventually brought him to the U.S. in 1912. He went on to become the mostly widely known and admired cantor among Jewish and Gentile audiences alike. While retaining his religious Orthodoxy, he performed across North America and Europe on concert stages and in vaudeville. Rosenblatt even appeared in the *Jazz Singer* as himself singing in Yiddish.<sup>23</sup> He paved the way for future Jewish musicians to incorporate their liturgical music into wider cultural and spiritual traditions of the U.S.

Rosenblatt's recordings have become the backbone of my own burgeoning cantorial technique. I started to listen to him almost every day in the spring of 2019. The dexterity of his voice wove its way into my throat as I attempted to sing along with him. I had become accustomed to maneuvering between the bass and alto sections of western church choirs, and I regularly protested against the gender distinctions that people would try to place on the "male" and "female" registers of my voice. The way Rosenblatt traversed four octaves changed my instrument. I no longer needed to distinguish the different parts of my voice so much, because I had found a tradition that allowed all the sounds I could make to flow more freely. I did not have to consider myself a countertenor or a baritone. I could just sing like a *khazn* (cantor). The melismas came through me as I rode my breathe throughout my entire body. My assortment of extended techniques—gradations of controlled tension in the throat and abdomen—have latched on to this liquid motion like dropping a toaster into a creek. I can pick up 'interference' in my running voice by latching on to a subtone that resonates an octave below my fundamental pitch. This current descends another fifth lower until it scrambles into static vocal fry. In this zone, I am more than a man or a woman, more than a Jew or a Gentile. I feel my animal self.

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<sup>23</sup> Olivestone, David. "The Remarkable Career of Cantor Rosenblatt." Chazzanut.com, <http://www.chazzanut.com/articles/rosenblatt-2.html>. Accessed 25 Apr. 2022.



Jewlia Eisenberg is another musician who was adept at bringing experimental vocal techniques to Jewish singing styles. On her 2002 record *Trilectic*, Eisenberg blends contemporary jazz with extended vocal techniques and folk-rock rooted in Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Mizrahi music traditions. This mixture is apparent in her use of language alone combining English, Yiddish, Ladino, and Hebrew. In a live performance of the album,<sup>24</sup> Eisenberg arranged her music for Charming Hostess, her band of various singers and instrumentalists. The quartet of singers with additional percussion, bass, and accordion all layer mixed meter percussion—reminiscent of klezmer and Middle Eastern rhythms—with experimental a cappella vocalisms that move among jazz and blues idioms, throat singing, and cantorial melismas mixed with the full-throated ‘white voice’ technique of various Eastern European women's song traditions. In *GOLEMATRIARK*, I draw inspiration from her shapeshifting vocal writing for multiple languages and singing techniques. I find strength in Eisenberg’s fearless integration of Jewish music with Slavic folk singing, a combination that could easily be considered *treyf* (unkosher) for its blending of Jewish and ‘pagan’ spiritualities. Yet, Jewish music has never existed in a vacuum, including in Eastern Europe.

The layering of Eisenberg’s text and percussion harkens to Steve Reich, a prominent Jewish American minimalist composer. In his piece *Tehillim*, the first of his that explores his Jewish roots, Reich features four women's voices with a an assortment of acoustic instruments that predominantly features interlocking percussion. *Tehillim* has no fixed meter, fluctuating with the inherent rhythm of the Hebrew text. The voices sing Hebrew prayers in a ‘straight tone’ technique common to both early church music and modern experimental classical music.<sup>25</sup> This blending of Jewish and Christian devotional sounds allowed me to latch on to the magic of this music in high school, where I sang in choirs five days a week and had yet to truly engage my Jewish consciousness.

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<sup>24</sup> "Charming Hostess Performs Trilectic." YouTube, uploaded by Charming Hostess, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN6U3vyPqHU>. Accessed 24 Apr. 2022.

<sup>25</sup> "Reich - Tehillim - Complete (Official Score Video)." YouTube, uploaded by Boosey and Hawkes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf2qDuMyWHg>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2022.

Another artist who focuses on the sonic worlds that emanates from Jewish languages is Victoria Hanna. The first half of her 2018 self-titled album features a blend of hip-hop and Israeli music that emphasizes the rhythm of ancient Aramaic and Hebrew texts and mystical, Kabbalistic weight that is carried in their sounds as they interact with our bodies.<sup>26</sup> Both Steve Reich and Victoria Hanna have inspired my experimentation with Jewish languages within pulse driven music. As I have begun to produce beats, I have wondered if there is anything one could describe as a “Jewish rhythm”? The music I have always listened to most is electronic dance music (EDM): Hip-hop, House, Techno, Reggaeton, Afrobeats, and Balkan beats to name a few. Only in the past year, though, have I given myself permission to make my own. I gravitate towards artists like Arca, Lotic, and SOPHIE who experiment with Industrial Noise across an expansive EDM ecosystem. I notice that many of these noisier artists are also trans women seeking new shapes and new worlds through sound. I envision chaotic, metallic Jewish drums throbbing from the magic of our languages, propelling us into ecstatic trance states. Perhaps “Jewish rhythms” cannot be pinned down to certain patterns or cycles, but rather relationships between language and rhythm that are cited in our texts. For example, Debbie Friedman’s Miriam’s Song tells the story of Miriam’s *Shirat HaYam*, Song of the Sea. This epic telling of the Jewish exodus from Egypt was attributed to Miriam’s brother Moses for centuries until scholars like Carol Meyers began to uncover that “...a *song* accompanied by *hand-drum* and *dance* (בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחֲלֵלִת)...These three elements appear in several other biblical texts and one extra-biblical text—*always* with women as performers...”<sup>27</sup> I am continuing this role of Jewish storytelling through song and dance, and I look towards Jewish dancers for insight on how the movement of the voice and breath is inextricably linked to all movement in the body.

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<sup>26</sup> "Ani Yeshena" from Victoria Hanna (album). YouTube, uploaded by Victoria Hanna, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPjkCu-4H9E>. Accessed 24 Apr. 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Meyers, Carol. "Miriam's Song of the Sea: A Women's Victory Performance." TheTorah.com, 21 Mar. 2018, [www.thetorah.com/article/miriam-s-song-of-the-sea-a-womens-victory-performance](http://www.thetorah.com/article/miriam-s-song-of-the-sea-a-womens-victory-performance). Accessed 9 May 2023.

Jewish artists have explored the power of the voice and movement from a variety of sonic and spiritual angles. Meredith Monk is a famous example of a ‘voice artist’ whose experimentalism is rooted in Buddhism. When she performed at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, NJ in 2019, I asked her if her grandfather, a cantor, had any influence on her vocal technique. The answer was, roughly, ”no." Nonetheless, I can hear the influence of the mournful music of her grandfather in pieces such as *Education of the Girl Child*. In this staged work for movement, voice, and light, the dexterous wailing of cantorial singing is very much present in the final movement. The momentum of this wailing carries forth yelps, grunts, and other typically “non-musical” sounds of the western tradition that have come to characterize Monk’s music. Her work has been some of the most foundational to the development of my own extended vocal techniques. Now I see that I am aiming to create work that flows between voice and movement as Monk has for decades.

Emilie Conrad is another prolific Jewish dancer and founder of the Continuum somatic practice. In her life’s story, *Life on Land*, she discusses how her introduction to various Eastern spiritualities and the New Age movement of the 1970s impacted her own work with movement and sound. For instance, she describes coming in contact with ragas of Carnatic music (South Indian classical music) and her ability to sense the vibrations of the tones as Kundalini energy in the form of something akin to electromagnetic waves.<sup>28</sup> Conrad’s practice, Continuum, is a method of somatic healing that is rooted in human ancestral memory of the intrinsic movements of our evolutionary ancestors in the ocean. Her practice has been used to treat spinal cord paralysis among other bodily concerns. Conrad found that “sound is one of the most efficient and immediate ways of changing density and thereby liberating movement,” in addition to the idea that “language is probably one of the greatest tissue shapers of all, primarily because it is audible breath.”<sup>29</sup> Despite not having a background in music, Conrad spent about year attempting to "deconstruct" her throat by vocalizing and exploring previously unvibrated tissues in her throat, diaphragm, etc. Conrad knew that the well of feeling and memory that she was

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<sup>28</sup> Conrad, Emilie. "Life on Land: The Story of Continuum." p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> Conrad, p. 149

able to access in her body through the movement of the voice was inherited by her Jewish ancestors, who left her with both anxiety and knowledge of self preservation: “A burial heap of ancestors screamed through my throat...thrown against the wall...ghettoized larynxes shattered in my throat.”<sup>30</sup> For Conrad, movement in all forms, whether through dance or through the voice, served as a means of healing from an extremely abusive upbringing in 1930s New York City and from centuries of intergenerational Jewish trauma. She describes the importance of the voice for this emotional healing:

“Language, shaped by breath, sculpts our throats, signaling our connective tissue to orchestrate itself accordingly. Our breath, or lack of it, will determine bodily structure by the ways in which our diaphragm either liberates or cloisters emotional expression” (Conrad 149).

Though her work with the voice was not necessarily Jewish, her pursuit of recovery and connection the universal, fundamental intelligence of waveform movement in breath harkens back to the fundamental relationship between God and humans in the bible, with God breathing life into humanity. Conrad’s exploration of voice and movement has influenced how I understand my own extended vocal technique practice and why it feels important to share with others. These sounds have always felt therapeutic for my body and soul, and I have just begun to learn how to share this technology with others to attempt to create musical rituals for healing. Conrads ability to tether the mystical, biological, and social dimensions of movement through words has been incredibly inspirational to me as someone who seeks to disrupt boundaries between cultures and musical disciplines.

Another Jewish artist who pushed the limits of somatic healing and the voice generations before Emilie Conrad or Meredith Monk was Alfred Wolfsohn. A German Jew, Wolfsohn experienced horrific trauma from his involvement in WWI, resulting in persistent auditory hallucinations of dying soldiers screaming. He eventually found that he could begin to heal these psychological wounds by expressing the tortured sounds he heard in his inner ear through vocal improvisation. He went on to open a creative and therapeutic voice studio in London called the Alfred Wolfsohn Voice Research Centre, where he

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<sup>30</sup> Conrad, p. 136

guided students regardless of gender and age in expanding their vocal ranges up to five octaves with timbres outside of western classical bel canto technique.<sup>31</sup> A lack of gendered distinction in his vocal pedagogy became an important fixture of his pioneering work in extended vocal techniques, connecting to the more modern work of aforementioned Jewlia Eisenberg and her band Charming Hostess, which is self-described as an experimental rock band with “genderfuck sensibilities.”

It is safe to say that I share these sensibilities. Wolfsohn’s work is incredibly inspirational to how I have begun to teach my extended technique to others. When rehearsing for *GOLEMATRIARK*, I had the pleasure of introducing Richel Cuyler and Charles Peoples III to these techniques for the first time. I was apprehensive about harming their voices, but I quickly learned that I could guide them in exploring their own unique sounds and sensations between the cracks of their voices. The songs I taught them became islands that we swam towards with circular breathing improvisations on sacred Jewish texts... *HaSimaley V’sukos Oroh* (May we dwell in Leviathan’s skin)... *Vayivra Elohim, Et Ha-Tanimim, Hagedolim* (God created the sea monsters)... *B’tzelem Elohim* (In the image of God)... Our voices became water that transformed us into *khazanim*.<sup>32</sup> Sounding on the inhale and exhale, in and around every crack, we wielded our melismatic voices charged with confusion, rage, fear, and grief to arrive in trance and ecstasy at the river, ocean, and sky. We flowed through the Ohi:yo (Seneca word for Allegheny/Ohio rivers), *shmuesing* (chatting) with mud and the festering pollutants. Rachel Carson told us of these toxins. We took the mud and oil with us as we flowed to the gulf. We wondered when we might meet Leviathan, God’s greatest sea monster. He once had a mate. We wondered if she was still down here. The sludge took us down to the bottom. We were told the Leviathan’s skin would be made into a giant sukkah<sup>33</sup> for us once *Meshiakh* (Messiah) comes. We didn’t have time to wait for *Meshiakh*, so we *shmuesed* (chatted) with the lower *taninim* (sea dragons), pleading for any shedded skin or fallen limbs to create this

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<sup>31</sup> Newham, Paul. "Alfred Wolfsohn - Life and Work." Paul Newham, <https://archive.ph/20130411160734/http://www.paulnewham.com/alfred-wolfsohn>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2022.

<sup>32</sup> ‘*Khazn*’ (cantor) + ‘*taninim*’ (dragons/sea monsters)

<sup>33</sup> A temporary shelter crafted during the holiday of Sukkot.

here sukkah while we can. Emilie Conrad told us that even my landlocked breath remembers the motion of our oceanic ancestors. Leviathan’s roar reverberates in our voices.<sup>34</sup> Sacred rage with silent screaming, *hisbodedus* (Jewish meditation).<sup>35</sup> Dori Midnight tells a *midrash* (Jewish story) of God creating Leviathan as the biggest serpent monster in the sea. On the winter solstice, he roars to establish order:

“...it is the roar of the monster from the deep on Winter Solstice that restores the power imbalance, humbles the bigger fish, and protects the little guys, which is all part of *Tiqqun*, the Divine Work of Repair. Leviathan, this beast from below, is the repair. Leviathan is kin/descended from Sumerian deities like Tiamat, a sea Goddexe whose name is also thought to be the root of the word, *Tehom* – the primordial deep, saltwater, chaos, depth, the place creation is birthed from... Kislev and Hanuka light the path into these depths, where we meet Leviathan and our own creatures of the deep – our anger and rage, our beloved patterns forged by trauma, the parts of ourselves we have submerged. And perhaps here we also find ancient and collective rage for all those who have been labeled monsters or called scary, those who roar at injustice.”<sup>36</sup>

The embracing of *tehom*, the chaotic, salty darkness that Catherine Keller centers in her biblical theology over the predominant ideology of ‘light supremacy.’<sup>37</sup> Our voices were *tehom*. *Tehom* allowed for shape shifting. Our limbs transformed into our tails and wings. Oh, the connection between hand and foot and tongue...Miriam’s drum...talking and breathing with our hands, *leyening* (chanting) and *davening* (praying)...

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<sup>34</sup> Midnight, Dori. "Tevet: Moon of Depth." DoriMidnight.com, <https://dorimidnight.com/writing/new-moon-newsletters/tevet-moon-of-depth/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Midnight, Dori. "Tevet: Moon of Depth." DoriMidnight.com, <https://dorimidnight.com/writing/new-moon-newsletters/tevet-moon-of-depth/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2023.— “My five year old and I will often do a practice where we scream with our whole entire bodies but completely silently and it is amazing. Honestly, I think you should go do this right now. Clench your fists, bare your teeth, breathe fire, channel Leviathan energy.”

<sup>36</sup> Midnight, Dori.

<sup>37</sup> Keller, Catherine, “Face of the Deep.” p. 20

The pressure had begun to condense the oil and mud around our voices. Once Leviathan got hungry, he blew his hot breath from his nostrils, boiling the water around us.<sup>38</sup> The hot water lifted us towards the surface as it warped and elongated the sludge around us. The oil had formed into a pipe and was thrust into the air towards storm clouds. We followed as we evaporated upwards. Tanya Tagaq told us of flesh “ensared by electricity.”<sup>39</sup> We greeted *Ziz*, or *Renanin*, the celestial singer.<sup>40</sup> He and his flying friends are intimately aware of the connections between electrical currents, water currents, and air currents. All of these currents were endowed into the four songs we summoned, *Mama Loshn Motion*, *Only One*, *Iron Tongue*, and *Kontzentratzie*. Below, I explore the conception of the remainder of these songs.

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<sup>38</sup> Novia, Jun. "The Creation of the World - Fifth Day." Junenovea.wordpress.com, <https://junenovea.wordpress.com/tag/renanin/>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Tagaq, Tanya, “Split Tooth.” p. 111

<sup>40</sup> Novia, Jun.

## *IRON TONGUE*<sup>41</sup>

Text:

Mama I'm so tired  
Don't remember how we got here  
Tongues heavy as iron  
Polluting up our ears  
Breathing through noses of steel  
Rusty lungs carried our years  
Now I just wanna feel  
Mama tell me do you hear the

Muddy water flowing  
Through our hips in figure eights  
Shifting clay around our jaws  
Carving wings out our shoulder blades

We feel your screaming  
Some of us are born with fear  
Sending signals while we're dreaming  
That won't ring for eighty years  
Who will receive ours  
And where will they hear  
We'll find out in time  
If the river keeps us near with its

Muddy water flowing  
Through our hips in figure eights  
Shifting clay around our jaws  
Carving wings out our shoulder blades

My great-aunt Mary once told my mother that “some of us in this family are born with fear.” Aunt Mary passed before I was born, but the two of us grew up in the same farm house. Ninety years apart. I often felt her presence, and only now does the word “anxiety” feel like an accurate description of the buzzing she left behind in that wooden

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<sup>41</sup> Link to song demo: [https://soundcloud.com/eli\\_b-2/iron-tongue-new-demo/s-bHyMEIwVcOq?si=5aaa041f605e4e58b94ab15f9ed82fa6&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/eli_b-2/iron-tongue-new-demo/s-bHyMEIwVcOq?si=5aaa041f605e4e58b94ab15f9ed82fa6&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)



house. This song grew from *HaShomayim*, how I learned to call on the energies of my home to begin to address the physical pain that fuels much of my vocal technique. I composed the beats to give the illusion that the phonemes of my melody are spilling out of my mouth and rhythmically swirling around me like leaves in a storm. I wrote a melody with room for cantorial improvisation within a bluesy Appalachian tonality and song structure. RadioLab has a podcast called Dolly Parton's America, and in my favorite episode, Rhiannon Giddens draws connections between the elements of trance between Sufi chanting and the repetition of Appalachian songs. My favorite song of my mother's since I was a kid rings in my head...walkin' on water lemme go...throw me like a skippin' stone...

I grew up with an Appalachian songwriting mother who would refrain from singing about Jesus because my Jewish father was playing the drums or the lap dulcimer. Since the 70s, my mother's band Devilish Merry has continued to blend Celtic and Appalachian tunes with banjo, tin whistle, fiddle, and hammer dulcimer. For most of my life, my parents have performed with Mimi Jong in AppalAsia, a banjo, lap dulcimer, and erhu trio that creates new music from Appalachian and Chinese folk music. I grew up understanding 'traditional music' as playground for new ideas within old, on-going conversations. This is also how I have come to understand the study of Torah and other Jewish traditions, which beg for fresh, skeptical engagement.

In the mid-70's, Henry Sapoznik helped launch the klezmer revival when he went to North Carolina to study banjo with Tommy Jarrell. He was one of many "Jewbillies" coming from New York to learn old-time American music. When Jarrell realized that Sapoznik was Jewish, he asked, "don't your people got none of your own music?"<sup>42</sup> Just thirty years after the Shoah (Holocaust), this exchange helped galvanize a generation of American Ashkenazi Jews to reexamine the dance culture that their family's had largely

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<sup>42</sup> Sokol, Sam. "Henry Sapoznik, the Yiddish World's Renaissance Man." Forward, 24 Jul. 2014, <https://forward.com/news/208575/henry-sapoznik/#:~:text=Perhaps%20the%20most%20famous%20event,none%20of%20your%20own%20music%3F%E2%80%9D>. Accessed 9 May 2023.

assimilated out of. Klezmer and Appalachian music both make sound from the borderlands encounters of distinct cultures. African banjos and gospel wailing meet Irish fiddles and Indigenous four on the floor drumming. Cantorial crooning and *nigunim* (wordless melodies) meet the polka and waltz. I'm interested in combining the melancholy and trance of Appalachian songs with the weeping of *khazonus* to address our contemporary need for unleashing collective grief and pain.

With *Iron Tongue*, I began to address the extractive iron and steel industries of Southwestern Pennsylvania as a part of our collective environmental pain. I grew up with family stories from centuries before the first steel plant arrived. I wonder how much longer my family will remain. And if we do leave, how long will it take to forget the river? If I keep making songs like my mother, hopefully we won't have to forget. Growing up we drove six miles to get ice cream in the town that brought us Rachel Carson, the author of 1962's landmark environmental science book *Silent Spring*. In her introduction to a modern reprinting of *Silent Spring*, Linda Lear paints a picture of Springdale, PA when

“the second wave of the industrial revolution was turning the Pittsburgh area into the iron and steel capital of the Western world. The little town of Springdale, sandwiched between two huge coal-fired electric plants, was transformed into a grimy wasteland, its air fouled by chemical emissions, its river polluted by industrial waste...[Rachel Carson] observed that the captains of industry took no notice of the defilement of her hometown and no responsibility for it. The experience made her forever suspicious of promises of ‘better living through chemistry’ and of claims that technology would create a progressively brighter future” (Lear, *Silent Spring: Intro*, xiii).

I share these suspicions of techno-determinism. According to Emilie Conrad, the industrial revolution has “colonized our nervous systems” (Conrad 347), and this has only increased as communication technology becomes faster and more frequent. I want to hold on to the meaty, analog communication of our bodies in voice and other forms of movement. Rachel Carson illuminates our ecological interdependence through networks of contamination between water, fish, and humans. All of this contamination rests on the pollution of groundwater:

“Rain, falling on the land, settles down through pores and cracks in soil and rock, penetrating deeper and deeper until eventually it reaches a zone where all the pores of the rock are filled with water, a dark, subsurface sea, rising under hills, sinking beneath valleys. This groundwater is always on the move, sometimes at a pace so slow that it travels no more than 50 feet a year, sometimes rapidly, by comparison, so that it moves nearly a tenth of a mile in a day. It travels by unseen waterways until here and there it comes to the surface as a spring, or perhaps it is tapped to feed a well. But mostly it contributes to streams and so to rivers. Except for what enters streams directly as rain or surface runoff, all the running water of the earth's surface was at one time groundwater. And so, in a very real and frightening sense, pollution of the groundwater is pollution of water everywhere“ (Carson, *Silent Spring: Surface Waters and Underground Springs*, 42).

Makoš is the Slavic goddess of the wet earth. The wisdom of these slow moving waters underground, the vibrational intelligence of water’s wholeness and distinctions as it shifts form around and within the earth. The momentum of movement from metric tons of electrically charged water floating in the sky to the pressurized, subterranean domains of decay. Makoš is a protector of women, and some of our oldest images of Makoš depict her penis dropping from her dress to fertilize the earth.

Today I was woken up by the movement of briny mucus in my sinuses as my jaws and neck loosened in my sleep. Tectonic shifts opened up my muddy hips as I writhed underneath my blankets, legs merging into serpent tale in the brine. In pre-school, when we still lived in the Jewish homeland of New York City, I was constantly drawing fish, and if I drew myself, my form was never consistent. But I was often a mermaid. On Instagram, @Jewitches tells me that in Jewish mythology, we can impregnate mermaids, but they cannot impregnate us. As a trans woman, I know that procreation comes from the word, not the womb. As Daniel Boyarin put it once, Jews are “a collective grounded in a soundscape,”<sup>43</sup> a linguistic inheritance stronger than blood quantum or mitochondrial DNA.

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted from a talk at Dartmouth College in Winter 2022, *Bad Faith: Why the Jews Aren't a Religion*

## *KONTZENTRATZIE<sup>44</sup>*

Text:

Ikh bin geboyrn  
Mit moyre  
Far der morgns  
Umfartaydlekh tsures

Kontzentratzie  
Kontzentratzie  
Ikh gey mit neshome  
Es iz nit keyn pogrom (ober)

[repeat]

Translation:

I was born  
With fear  
For tomorrow's  
Inevitable tragedies

Concentration  
Concentration  
I move with spirit  
It ain't no pogrom (but)

[repeat]

I began this song by translating Aunt Mary's quote, "some of us are born with fear," into Yiddish. I was very pleased by the partial rhyme that emerged between "geboyrn" and "moyre," and from there, I stumbled into a stream of consciousness writing process with my Yiddish to English dictionary. Writing in the cracks between my own English and Yiddish, I summoned a cyclical spell that encapsulates a uniquely Jewish anxiety. For millennia, Jew hatred has ebbed and flowed in distinct waves. Following intense persecution, Jews are allowed to prosper in their given territory for a few generations.

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<sup>44</sup> Link to song demo: [https://soundcloud.com/eli\\_b-2/kontsentratsie/s-t9CrbaNC4ig?si=a63d7545616342289ac437d8c338099f&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/eli_b-2/kontsentratsie/s-t9CrbaNC4ig?si=a63d7545616342289ac437d8c338099f&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

When it's been good for a while, it tends to be a sign that things will get bad again and soon. Since 2016 we have been experiencing the end of our latest favorable cycle and the beginning of new old violence in the U.S. Though this song has more obvious textual repetition than Iron Tongue, I did not want it to necessarily induce a trance. At least not the same kind of trance. Most of the vocal drums in *Kontzentratzie* are not meant to emerge from the melody, but rather continue momentum from Iron Tongue. A through-line of fear transmuting into rage. Eventually my "cat scratch" vocal fry growl gets swept up in relentless cycling along with the guttural traces of my "ikh" by the end. The percussion has evolved since the first demo in January 2022 as my skills have grown, and it now sits somewhere between a trap beat and a Klezmer bulgar. The bulgar is a typically slower, Klezmer-flavored dembow. I hear the future of Kleztronica in the bulgar beat. I'm excited by how it might grow with reggaeton, hip-hop, and Afro-beats. The main vocal pads from the beginning of the song call upon my church choir roots for some long tone drama. The two voices that emerge by the last third of the song are in the style of *trávnice*, Slovak women's work songs. Music made for the Tatra mountains. Long sustained voices that bite and pierce through miles of open air.

## *ONLY ONE*<sup>45</sup>

Text:

A *feygele* (faggot, 'little bird') flying in the sun  
Tell me I'm not the only one  
Departed from *Eretz Yisroel* (Palestine/Israel)  
To land in another king's hell

Are you gonna run  
Or show me I'm not the only one  
Dance with me my friends  
Beyond the coming ends

Grandpa dig me a pond and  
Tell me I'm not the only one who's  
Itchin' to dig another hole  
Submerge it in my wet soul

When I am said and done,  
I know I won't be the only one  
Singing from the Earth,  
Fueling her rebirth

Our threads of doubt are spun, but  
Tell me I'm not the only one  
Feelin' our future take root  
A planetary reboot

Are you gonna run or  
Show me I'm not the only one  
Dance with my *khaverim* (friends, comrades)  
Into another new dream

*Only One* was born out of my yearning for queer Jewish community. I utilize a number of extended vocal techniques like wheezing and subtones to convey my desperation for voicing my full self with others. Even when it is not the reality, I often feel like the only *feygele* in a room full of Jews or a room full of queers. This song is about yearning to dance into the world to come, with any friends at all, beyond the inevitable collapse of the world that we have come to know. A first attempt at integrating Yiddish into an

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<sup>45</sup> Link to song demo: [https://soundcloud.com/eli\\_b-2/only-one-new-demo](https://soundcloud.com/eli_b-2/only-one-new-demo)

English song, *Only One* is my reaching out to hold on to any community I can, Jewish or otherwise. I took inspiration again from Polish folk ensembles like the Warsaw Villlage Band for my close harmonies and off kilter rhythm. As I started to find the melody on my drives home, it always managed to settle into 5/4. It was a beautiful challenge to create EDM in 5/4, and it taught me that any meter can be danceable with a strong enough feeling of 1/1 behind it. In the cosmology of GLMTRK/Parables or Our Talons, this is where the talons come in. I imagine this as the moment when the *khazananim* breach the surface after rising from the bottom of the ocean from the heat of Leviathan's breath. They're thrust into the sky and flying towards the clouds.

## CONCLUSION: CAN WE SHARE PLEASURE WITH OUR MACHINES?

In the beginning of her book *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs describes why she mimics and thwarts the standard, passive voice of western Marine Biology. Gumbs asks us to move with her from “identification, also known as that process through which we say what is what, like which dolphin is that over there and what are its properties” to a different interpretation of the same word: “identification, that process through which we expand our empathy and the boundaries of who we are become more fluid, because we identify with the experience of someone different” (Gumbs 8). I am learning to identify different components of circuits, relationships between data carried on electrical currents and sound propelled through air. I am learning how to digitally manipulate audio to convince someone that my voice is really where their perfectly invisible speakers stand. More so than identifying these phenomena, I am interested in how deeply I can identify with the vibrating matter of these machines.

In the Winter of 2020, I started to dream up a robotic *khazn* (cantor) character for César Alvarez’s musical *The Universe Is a Small Hat*. César tasked all of their performers with creating sentient A.I. personas for the year 2100, a time when the word “robot” might even be considered pejorative to these mechanic beings. Persons whose ‘religion’ is music, who marvel at the ability of vibration to call forth the collective memory of all matter that continues to unfold from the big bang.

I have no hope that our machines will replace or annihilate us, as convenient as that might be. In Yiddish, a “robot” is a *goylemat* גוֹלְמאַט—a “stupid thing,” linked to the phrase *oylem-goylem* עוֹלֶם-גוֹלֶם. According to Der Vortsman, an anonymous writer for the organization Yiddishkayt, the phrase *oylem-goylem* “is a foreshortened version of the cynical phrase: *der oylem iz a goylem* — the crowd is a fool. It was used mostly to challenge accepted ‘popular’ decisions, in politics, art or other areas reliant on public



approval.”<sup>46</sup> *Der oylem iz a golem* when it comes to modern stories of humans and machines, especially those set in the future.

According to Jewish tradition, the first human, Adam, is also the first golem. Made of mud and brought to life by the magic of the word, the golem is an enduring symbol of Jewish creation. HaShem (“The One,” God) sculpted Adam from dirt and animated Adam’s earthen body with neshamah (“breath,” soul) to birth a new organism, both man and woman. Emily Bilski explains that the term “golem” is first mentioned “only once, in Psalm 139:16: Bible, where ‘Thine eyes did see my ‘golem’...according to commentaries in the Talmud (collection of ancient Rabbinic writings that religious authority for traditional Judaism, compiled in the fifth and sixth centuries C.E.), these words were spoken by Adam to God.”<sup>47</sup> Right away, we have an artificial intelligence that respects its creator. Bilski goes on to describe a unique approach to the golem by 13th Century Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia:

“In Italy, ca. 1280, a Spanish Kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia, discussed at length the creation of a golem. Founder of the ecstatic Kabbalah tradition, Abulafia was interested in techniques that could be employed to achieve ecstatic experiences, not in the creation of a golem per se. He borrowed the techniques of combining letters from the Ashkenazi Hasidim, but he radically redefined the purpose of these techniques, conflating them with the notion of prophecy found in Maimonides and Spain's Aristotelian tradition Abulafia transformed the magical achievement of the Ashkenazi masters into psychological and mystical experience” (Bilski, 12).

I, too, have been searching for ecstatic experiences in artificially transforming the magic of Jewish languages. In Spring 2022, I began to create improvised vocal loops with sequenced beats. I had just written my *GOLEMATRIARK* songs in the studio and was craving a return to the live improvisation practice that I ignited months prior with *HaShomayim*. Over the summer, I began to sculpt digital drums from samples of my voice. This is when my laptop and loop station began to feel like a golem. I could start crafting the illusion of drums and synths falling out of my mouth, swirling around me. A

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<sup>46</sup> Der Vortzman. "Yiddishkayt." Yiddishkayt.org, <https://yiddishkayt.org/vortzman-artificial-intelligence/>. Accessed 19 Feb. 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Bilski, Emily “Golem: Danger, Deliverance, and Art.” p. 10

transfiguring chant. The following [Vox Beat Improvisations](#)<sup>48</sup> playlist demonstrates the development of my live, improvised voice and beats technique from March-December 2022. I begin with the inaugural Hopkins Center New Music Festival and end with a residency at the Watermill Center, where I began to send my live sounds through amplified frame drums, wooden tubes, hi-hats, and metal trays.

This configuration of speaker-creatures are the beginnings, the hatchlings, of larger-scale musical puppets I will create. In my last term at Dartmouth College, I am collaborating with Bethany Yongue to resurrect my acoustic feedback instruments for vocalists. While I transition to living in New York City after graduation, I hope to begin collaborating with visual artists, theater makers, dancers, and musicians to expand these instruments into massive golems that will emanate dance music in clubs, theaters, parks, and sanctuaries. These golems will be in the likeness of humans and other lifeforms. The eyes of dragons made of projectors, and mouths made of a giant tubes resonating with feedback. I envision us with blown up versions of yads<sup>49</sup> that extend the reach of our arms, reading and chanting from giant projections of prayers, Jewish monster maps, and constellations of Kabbalistic wisdom that map to our own bodies. I want to share Jewish magic with people at giant puppet dance parties. I want to create Shabbos Raves by transforming live samples of our praying voices into dance music.

I am interested in studying to become a *khazn* (cantor) in order to weave my own rituals into the vast, ancient web of Jewish wisdom through Torah study. I wish to experiment with this liturgical work while recovering Ashkenazi women's spiritual roles such as the *Klogerkes*, *Zogerkes*, and *Opshprekherkes* detailed in Annie Cohen's research.<sup>50</sup> A Yiddish cultural and spiritual renaissance is brewing. More young Jews are recovering earth-

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<sup>48</sup> Link to YouTube playlist of Vox Beat Improvisations: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpdrEn1a2KmeQAS34NMOIHtCk66wv2nXm>

<sup>49</sup> Ritual pointers used to read Torah. They are usually made of silver.

<sup>50</sup> Cohen, Annie. "Pulling at Threads." 2019, <https://www.pullingatthreads.com/>. Accessed 9 May 2023.

based knowledge and forgotten women's rituals. Yiddish connects us with matriarchal wisdom as a language passed down in the home, not in the temple. The language itself is a borderlands between Hebrew, Aramaic, Slavic languages, and Middle High German. Making dance music in Yiddish, English, and Hebrew connects us back to Miriam prophesying with her drum. Unearthing connections between the voice, drum, and word connects us to the *shmuescience* of communication between all creations, including 'inanimate' objects like drums, microphones, speakers, laptops, and midi devices. The legacies of humanity branching back to our common *golem* ancestor, Adam. Earthen being, both man and woman, breathed to life by God. Animated by the same breath behind Leviathan's sacred roar – the salty voice of *tehom*, chaotic creation. Life is woven together by the word, not the womb. Steady, improvised rhythms of prayer over millennia, helping Jews maintain ourselves as we graft on to the communities and cultures among us. As antisemitism continues to rise, I will help Jewish magic breathe through electronic music. My generation is coming of age during the rise of a white nationalist Christian theocracy in the U.S. We're more isolated from each other than we have ever been. We are craving any meaning in it all, and we're dying to rave together. We can use the machines that have been weaponized against us all to build new collectives in sound and movement. Just as klezmer and Appalachian music were born slowly from the collapsing of boundaries between distinct cultures, we are now creating new genres, like kleztronica, to energize and fortify our changing communities. We are resisting trends of isolation, segregation, and assimilation by experimenting with how we sing together and activate our ritual spaces, like *GOLEMATRIARK* transforming a shul into a dance floor. Creating fun, chaotic music in Yiddish is my act of language planning. By contributing to the evolution of experimental Jewish music, I am contributing to the survival of Yiddish and its ongoing relevance in U.S. culture. I hope my songs can be sung by future generations that know more Yiddish than I do. Only time will tell where their voices take us next.

*Kumindike Kinder fun tzukunft, vos hern aykh itzt?*

Coming Children of the future, what do you hear now?

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