

Yiddish Princess bringing free performance to Rutgers

MaryLynn Schiavi, Correspondent 1:02 p.m. EDT March 8, 2015



(Photo: PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHE GEISE)

Story Highlights

- Yiddish Princess fuses rock, pop and traditional Yiddish music creating a contemporary experience of Yiddish culture.
- Dating back to 1875, Yiddish is a German language written in Hebrew characters that is spoken by Jews and descendants of Jews of central and eastern European origin.
- "I think a lot of listeners will find this music surprising; it's not what they expect of Yiddish music — or of hard rock, for that matter," said Jeffrey Shandler, Professor and Chair, Jewish Studies, Rutgers University.

Hailing from Brooklyn, New York, Yiddish Princess is a musical group that blends hard rock, pop and traditional Yiddish music.

While the concept of the group may sound like something out of a Woody Allen movie, the group expands the possibilities of Yiddish culture and how it can be understood in the 21st century, according to Jeffrey Shandler, professor and chair, Department of Jewish Studies in New Brunswick.

Yiddish Princess will perform a free concert on Tuesday, March 10, at 7:30 p.m. at Rutgers University Victoria J. Mastrobuono Theater located at 85 George Street in New Brunswick.

Dating back to 1875, Yiddish is a German language written in Hebrew characters that is spoken by Jews and descendants of Jews of central and eastern European origin.

"There's great musical talent and cultural energy at work in Yiddish Princess, and their music can encourage people to rethink common assumptions about what Yiddish can be," Shandler said.

The band sings a variety of Yiddish songs, sometimes taking traditional folk songs and giving them a completely different sound. They also draw on the traditional instrumental music of Yiddish-speaking Jews to transform those melodies and rhythms by making them rock.

The concert is presented in conjunction with Shandler's undergraduate course at Rutgers on the Culture of Yiddish, which surveys Yiddish language, and culture from the Middle-Ages in Europe -- to contemporary Brooklyn.

Shandler said the idea of a hard rock Yiddish band may seem surprising and incongruous to those who think of Yiddish as being tied to the past, but many young musicians are busy creating 21st-century Yiddish culture.

"For me, Yiddish Princess exemplifies contemporary Yiddish hipster culture, which draws on the riches of Yiddish going back generations and energizes it with the most up-to-date sounds and sensibilities," he said.

He said similar fusions of past and present are happening through the world music scene — in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Yiddish Princess was cofounded by Sarah Mina Gordon and Michael Winograd. Gordon, the band's lead singer, has recorded and performed with the top Yiddish groups worldwide, including The Klezmatics and Frank London's Klezmer Brass All-Stars.

Winograd, the group's keyboardist, is a leading Klezmer clarinetist. The band released a self-titled EP in 2010.

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According to Shandler, often people think of the Yiddish language and culture as either dead or frozen in a pre-World War II past, but he said this is simply not true. Rather, Yiddish has changed a lot since the prewar period.

"A diversity of communities employ the language often in ways that would have been unimaginable before the war," he said. "This concert is a chance to see one example of what's happening with Yiddish today in a way that's very creative and exciting."

The concert is sponsored by the Department of Jewish Studies and the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life at Rutgers. It is free and open to the public and free parking is available.

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