

Junior Klezmer Orchestra 30th Anniversary Concert
Students Since 1994 Reunite to Perform
with Maxwell Street Klezmer Band
on Thursday, May 2, 2024 at 7:00 PM in Highland Park, IL

March 5, 2024 – Highland Park, IL – For thirty years, the **Maxwell Street Klezmer Band** has been teaching teen instrumentalists and vocalists the skills of klezmer and Yiddish music through the **Junior Klezmer Orchestra (JKO)**. Klezmer music—the traditional dance music of Ashkenazi Jews—was lost in the Old World because of the Holocaust and Stalinism, while it faded out in America due to assimilation. Then, the klezmer revival of the 1980s brought this joyful music back to life. The Maxwell Street Klezmer Band was founded in 1983 and the Junior Klezmer Orchestra in 1994.

The JKO, founded by Lori Lippitz, Executive Director of the Klezmer Music Foundation, ensures that klezmer music in Chicagoland is passed on to the next generation. This ensemble has also inspired many young people on their journey to become music professionals:

"Today, I'm proud to be the music director and conductor of *Hamilton on Broadway*," says Ian Weinberger, who joined the Junior Klezmer Orchestra (JKO) in the late 1990s while in grade school. "Conducting *Hamilton* is a dream job, and I know my love for being in a band—collaborating on making music together—started in the JKO. Lori and her colleagues know so much about klezmer music, and they care so deeply about it—and their willingness to share the knowledge and the joy of playing klezmer is a true gift to a young musician like I was. Their excitement was, and is, infectious."

Weinberger is one of eighteen JKO alumni who will perform in the concert. Past and present JKO members will be joined by the Maxwell Street Klezmer Band for an evening of klezmer—music from the shtetls of Eastern Europe and the heyday of the jazz-infused sound of 1920s-30s Yiddish-American klezmer bands.



The JKO in 2003, including JKO alumni Ian Weinberger (far left); Steve Levin (left), Allison Zabelin (middle), and Aaron Silverman (back), who will all be performing on May 2, 2024.

The JKO began rehearsing in Lippitz's home in 1994 with a handful of young musicians. Fast-forward to the 2000s, when the JKO was discovered by the Russian-speaking Chicago Jewish community, and the orchestra quickly outgrew its cozy rehearsal space. Since then, the JKO has been hosted by synagogues in Skokie, Wilmette, and now in Glencoe.

Under the baton of Maxwell Street's violinist and bandleader Alex Koffman, the expressive sounds of laughing, crying clarinets, violins, and other instruments, along with young voices singing old Yiddish songs, reverberate down the halls of North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe.

The JKO performs at assisted living residences, schools and libraries, and plays every Spring at the Skokie Festival of Cultures. In February, the JKO performed for students at the religious school at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, teaching the 'joy of klez' to the next generation while connecting to their own heritage.

The mother of a current JKO clarinetist says, “As a Junior Klezmer Orchestra member, my teen connects with his Jewish identity, through his passion—music.”



This concert will be a chance for former JKO musicians to unite and to delight in the music they have all shared. Alumni include Allison Zabelin, a classical violinist, educator and performer; Matt Temkin, a popular drummer on the klezmer scene in New York; Steve Levin, a professional trumpet player who also plays with Maxwell Street Klezmer Band; and Margaret Selinger, a vocalist whose time with the JKO led to a career at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Alex Koffman, Lori Lippitz and the JKO playing at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in February 2024.

“Over those seven years in the JKO,” says Selinger, “I grew immensely as a musician and performer. But most importantly, I found a whole new way of connecting with my culture and history: experiencing klezmer in all its joy and liveliness!” Selinger will reprise “Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn,” a song that enjoyed a place on the 1930s hit parade.

The concert is also raising funds to help the Klezmer Music Foundation, an Illinois 501(c)(3) organization, continue to create new opportunities for young musicians for decades to come. “If the goal of the JKO was to pass the torch to the next generation,” says Lippitz, “this concert will give us all a moment to kvell over (to be proud of) the success of that mission.”

The Junior Klezmer Orchestra 30th Anniversary Concert

Thursday May 2, 2024, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, 1175 Sheridan Road, Highland Park, IL 60035

Tickets: <https://our.show/JKO30thanniversary>

Links:

[Promotional Photos of the Junior Klezmer Orchestra](#)

[About The Junior Klezmer Orchestra](#) | [Alumni Stories](#)

[Klezmer Music Foundation Website](#) | [Klezmer Music Foundation on Facebook](#)

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