



# Fire Flashing Up

Klezmer Dances for Strings

*"And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was round about it; and out of the midst thereof as the colour of electrum, out of the midst of the fire."*

-- Ezekiel 1:4

*Fire Flashing Up* is the first CD by Congregation Bet Haverim's homegrown string ensemble. The eight tunes presented here offer a potent mix of expressive melodies, poignant harmonies and joyful rhythms. Six are traditional klezmer tunes from Eastern Europe; two are klezmer-spiced tangos from Argentina; and all are performed by members of the congregation in arrangements created expressly for the CBH Strings. Please place your order below.

**The CBH String Ensemble:** Sarah Zaslaw, Ben Reiss, David Borthwick, Julia Borthwick, Ruth Einstein, Aria Posner, Will Robertson

Music arranged by David Borthwick. Produced and mixed by Will Robertson. Recorded and engineered by Martin Kearns at Down In Deep Studios, Atlanta. Cover art by Miriam Karp.

## TRACKS AND NOTES

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5. Terk (Yoducha Rayonai)
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## INTRODUCTION

by arranger David Borthwick

Four of these arrangements date back to 2010, when our group first played together as a string quartet plus bass, providing music for a festive Simchat Torah service. In this country, klezmer music is traditionally played by bands, with the lead taken by a clarinet, violin, or trumpet. But there are old photographs that show klezmer groups in Eastern Europe consisting entirely of string players, so there is some precedent for our ensemble. I wasn't trying for authenticity in the arrangements, though. My main goal was to come up with interesting parts for all of us, to make it fun for everyone to play. I wanted the parts to interact and interweave in the style of classical chamber music, while still projecting the energy and character of the original dance music. Those first tunes have since been extensively revised, often after suggestions from the players in rehearsal. Others were added over the years as we found more chances to perform together.

### 1. Nigun Sameach

This comes from a collection of klezmer melodies called the Kammen International Dance Folios, published by the Kammen Music Company starting in 1951. The idea was to print lead sheets (like [this](#)) for tunes played by New York klezmer bands, so that amateurs could learn the music, too. Nigun Sameach is the twelfth tune in Folio 9 (1961). The title is often cited in partial translation as Happy Nigun.

Our short introduction takes the form of a [doina](#), a traditional Romanian style where a melodic instrument like a clarinet or violin improvises over a series of long tremolo chords. Doinas are frequently paired with faster dances as introductions. I assembled this short section from fragments of tunes from the main piece.

### 2. Clarinetango

The Argentinian composer [Roberto Pansera](#) (1932–2005) wrote Clarinetango in 1990 for his friend [Giora Feidman](#), the famous klezmer clarinetist. Feidman grew up in Argentina and later became the founding principal clarinetist of the Israel Philharmonic. On the original recording Pansera plays the bandoneon, the small Argentinian button accordion that gives a tango its distinctive sound.

As the title indicates, the melodies of this tango are really meant for the clarinet. The direct inspiration for my string arrangement was a wonderful [version](#) performed by [Trivium Klezmer](#), a trio of Spanish musicians consisting of clarinet, bass clarinet and accordion. Their rendition is so infectious that I thought we had to find a way to play it, despite our lack of clarinets.

### 3. Der Heyser Bulgar

“Heys” is the Yiddish word for hot, so Der Heyser Bulgar translates as The Hot Bulgar. The tune was introduced to New York audiences in 1924 by the clarinetist and bandleader [Naftule Brandwein](#). ([Here](#) he is performing it.) It also appears in the Kammen International Dance Folios as the second tune in Volume 5.

A bulgar is a festive circle dance, perhaps the most common of klezmer dance forms, distinguished by a 3+3+2 rhythmic pattern. (Nigun Sameach is also a bulgar, for example.) [Watch](#) a small group learning the bulgar dance step, to the strains of the Heyser Bulgar, as it happens.

Our version of the Heyser Bulgar features a solo [viola](#). In the klezmer tradition, this would be a highly unusual choice of lead instrument. Presumably the lead needed to be a strong treble instrument to carry over a dance floor without amplification. Nevertheless, this tune seems particularly well suited to the lower range of the viola. Full disclosure: The arranger is the violist.

### 4. Nokh a Glezl Vayn

“Nokh a Glezl Vayn” means “another glass of wine” in Yiddish. The same tune is also commonly known as Bessarabski Zhok or Bessarabian Hora.

A hora, or zhok, is a dance style of Romanian origin, basically in a slow waltz tempo. Unlike a waltz, however, the hora has an emphasis on the first and third beats of the measure. (This East European type of hora is not to be confused with the Israeli-style hora a la Hava Nagila.) [Here](#)'s what a zhok looks like, danced to a different tune.

The drinking reference in the title seems to refer to the stutter in the first phrase of the opening melody. This effect is amplified in a version of the tune recorded by Belf's Rumanian Orchestra in 1912, with the melody taken by both trumpet and clarinet, which goes considerably faster than ours. I prefer to have the tune played more slowly, so that the “drunken” melody takes on a wistful, elegiac character.

### 5. Terk (Yoducha Rayonai)

Turks call this song Uskudar'a Gider Iken (see [here](#) or [here](#)). Bulgarians, Albanians and others also think of it as their own. There's a Sephardi love song on the same melody, called Fel Shara ([here](#)). There are many competing origin stories for the tune, the most outlandish of which traces it to a Scottish military march, introduced to the Balkans by Scottish soldiers during the Crimean War. (Perhaps one of my Borthwick ancestors played it on the bagpipes!)

The tune was recorded in 1924 by clarinetist Naftule Brandwein under the title [Der Terk in America](#). (In the klezmer world, “terk” refers to a style of tune of Turkish or Arabic origin. Amusingly, a terk features the same beat as an habanera.) The C (third) section

of Brandwein's version was an improvisation that didn't seem to fit well with the rest of my arrangement. After playing around with various combinations, I decided to adapt the middle section of another terk from Brandwein called Araber Tanz, which fit in nicely with the Uskudar tune.

## **6. Kutcher's Bulgar**

The first two sections of this piece are based on another tune from Kammen International Dance Folio, this time Volume 9, Number 13, labeled Joe Kutcher's Bulgar No. 1.

The original has no third section, but I thought it would be more interesting to include a contrasting section before returning to the main melody. For this purpose I lifted a section from a different Kammen tune (Volume 1, Number 3), which is known by the title Silberne Khasene (Silver Wedding) or Fun der Khupe No. 2 (From the Chuppah).

## **7. Dance of Joy**

Like the Clarinetango, this arrangement is based on a piece written for Giora Feidman by [Roberto Pansera](#). The standard 3+3+2 rhythmic pulse of the bulgar is also a very common basic beat in Latin music (and in the music of many other cultures as well). While Pansera's melody would fit well into a traditional bulgar style, the original 1988 version features a distinctly Latin sound. Our rendition for string septet was inspired by a thrilling version for clarinet and string orchestra recorded by the Finnish clarinetist [Kari Kriikku](#) with the Tapiola Sinfonietta.

The opening is a statement of the main tune of the dance drawn out as a series of elegiac solos and introduced by the double bass. The original Feidman performance features a moment late in the piece where drums enter and the clarinet goes into wild improvisation. I considered bringing in some drums at this point, but we found a more amusing solution by just having Will thump on the front of his bass.

## **8. Tango Sameach**

After the recording session for Nigun Sameach/Happy Nigun, I came across an [interpretation](#) of this tune by [Trivium Klezmer](#) (the group whose Clarinetango I had liked so much). Their setting had such a different character that I thought it would make a fun counterpart to the other. Here, the celebratory C section of the original becomes a wistful, muted introduction, and the sprightly main melody is transformed into a tango.