

## VERETSKI PASS MUSIC FROM THE CARPATHIAN BOW

### Veretski Pass CD and Concert Reviews

Veretski Pass: "Trafik" (Golden Horn). This is a veritable Old World Klez supergroup, with Joshua Horowitz, Stuart Brotman and Cookie Siegelstein together for a second set of Yiddish dance music. Like the first one, which was a five-star effort according to this column, this is a collection of 30 brief tunes, brilliantly played. Siegelstein brings real fire to the threesome, with a biting tone (imagine Jackie McLean as a fiddler) and deft touch. Brotman's arco playing conveys an underlying melancholy to even the jauntiest of tunes like "Curly Wolf Patch" and Horowitz is equally at home on tsimbl and 19th-century accordion. On a tune like "Noisy Dog," you hear uncanny echoes (or anticipation) of the American fiddle standards that are the staple of bluegrass jams and square dances, but with the tang of fresh garlic. What else can I say? They've done it again, so go buy it.

*George Robinson, Hadassah magazine, January 2009*

### VERETSKI PASS, TRAFIK

Look at a map of the old Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia between 1835 and 1917. Veretski Pass is the trans-Carpathian artery that linked the communities of the Ukraine, Carpathian-Ruthenia, Bessarabia and Rumania. Had travel within the Pale not been highly regulated by the Czarist regime, this would have been the Pale's I-10. Veretski Pass is also the name of the klezmer instrumental trio of Cookie Segelstein (violin), Joshua Horowitz (accordion and tsimbl) and Stuart Brotman (cello, pan flute and baraban, a type of drum). The band plays a style of centuries old Eastern European roots music. Historically, Jews in the Pale were restricted to playing soft-sounding, mostly string instruments (as opposed to brass instruments played by military bands). No matter what the official restrictions were, Jewish musicians of the day played a wide repertoire of both Jewish and indigenous folk music. Put yourself in the hands of Veretski Pass. This is a musical experience that speaks to our inner Ashkenazi Jew. The CD is a "live studio" recording, made with no overdubs and a minimum of editing. The result is a concert type experience without the audience sounds. "Trafik" is easily the best Jewish music release of the year.

*Houston Jewish Herald Voice, October, 2008*

### VERETSKI PASS TRAFIK \*\*\*\* (4 stars)

The trio of musicians that make up Veretski Pass are some of the most accomplished on the klezmer scene ; Cookie Segelstein (violin), Joshua Horowitz

(button accordion and cimbalom) and Stuart Brotman (cello)... there's a fantastic sense of intimacy in this small-scale trio. You can imagine a group like this playing long ago in the hills, although you can bet they would never have played as immaculately as this.

*Simon Broughton, Songlines, April 2008*

Veretski Pass latest CD, *Trafik*, released Feb. 2008, is a timeless fusion of old and new, where songs are grouped in suites (as they were typically in the Old World, played for dances at weddings), and imparting different moods, or what the group likes to call “musical contraband” (a great pun, by the way). The playing throughout is virtuosic, and while this is a very serious chamber group, that doesn't stop the musicians from having fun, for example, with song titles such as “Curly Wolf Patch,” “Tango Under the Influence,” and “Dov the Cowswimmer,” or with a hint of bluegrass on numbers like “Noisy Dog.”

With “*Trafik*,” Veretski Pass has made one of the best klezmer albums in years.  
*Seth Rogovoy, Berkshire Jewish Voice, March 2008*

I am sitting here listening to my new favorite CD, the latest release by those hutsul-trafficking masters of traditional music, Josh Horowitz, Cookie Segelstein, and Stu Brotman; Veretski Pass. That Horowitz, Segelstein, and Brotman are transgressive, we always knew. Hence the reliance on outsider slang to label the pieces. That they are brilliant musically (and even moreso, together) we also knew, from the first album. Here is more of the same, but different. This isn't pop music or reified tradition-in-amber. Change is good. All I know is that it is clearly by the same folks who made the first album, but it sounds refreshing, different—as did the first in its day (and still does, when I go hours without listening to it).

*Ari Davidow, Klezmer Shack, Feb. 2008*

There are times when a musical performance completely transcends our notions of what we think of as “good” music, regardless of the genre. Such is the case with *Trafik*, the new release from the trio *Veretski Pass*. When you are presented with such distinctive material, virtuosic musicianship, and excellent engineering, you have the ingredients for an amazing album.

*Keith Wolzinger, Klezmer Podcast, Jan. 2008*

Veretski Pass.CD, Notable recordings of 2005, Best Klezmer Album

Veretski Pass both the mountain pass where the first Jews to settle in Hungary crossed over and the name of one of the best kept secrets in klezmer music. The klezmer band consists of tsimbl and accordion player Joshua Horowitz (founder of Budowitz) bassist Stuart Brotman (Brave Old World) and Cookie Segelstein.

*Aaron Howard, Houston Jewish Herald Voice, Jan 2006*

Rather than developing a new take on klezmer, the secular celebratory music of Eastern European Jewry, Veretski Pass recovers songs, melodies, and musical practices almost entirely wiped out by the Holocaust. Like an early-music ensemble, the trio has honed a sound unlike any other klezmer band by paying particular attention to authentic musical instruments.

*Eric Arnold, East Bay Express, Sept 14, 2005*

Cookie Segelstein (what a great moniker) has recently joined Alicia Svigals and Steven Greenman as Klezmer's most in-demand fiddlers. This is her debut CD with her new band, Veretski Pass. She is assisted by two veterans of the scene, Joshua Horowitz and Stuart Brotman, who contribute haunting, effective accompaniment and a few solo pieces of their own on several instruments apiece, including accordion, bass (with a great groaning timbre), cymbalom, and such exotica as Polish folk cello (three gut strings tuned in fourths, worn around the neck with a string, and bowed diagonally, and *baraban* – a bass drum with a cymbal bolted to the top.

But Segelstein is the center of attention and is prepared for the challenge. She has a recognizably individual style, with clear elements from mainstream Klezmer and Hungarian Gypsy. Her playing shows technical mastery and assured authority of the genres, often operating at full throttle, but always in full control. She uses her conservatory training in the service of the music with obvious attention to achieving driving rhythms.

The group puts out an amazing amount of energy for a trio. (There is some overdubbing.) Its sound is an old time style, a string ensemble with a minimalist approach to chord progressions. Segelstein describes the Veretski Pass sound as, basically, Carpathian fiddle music as would have been played by a band specializing in Jewish music, but also able to play the music of neighboring cultures.

Almost all the pieces are new to me; many, while from Jewish repertoires, are not mainstream Klezmer. The Crimean Tatar (from the area of the Black Sea) pieces are particularly striking as well as some Ukrainian and Transylvanian pieces. Segelstein adds even more variety with one piece with the fiddle in A-E-A-C# tuning and one viola suite.

*Stacy Phillips, Fiddler Magazine, Spring 2004*

...in an impressive line-up of US klezmer luminaries – fiddler Cookie Segelstein, accordion and *tsimbl* (cymbalom) player Joshua Horowitz and bassist Stuart Brotman. From the first notes of 'Tyachiver Sirba' you can hear this is earthy, rural music – and most of it unknown repertoire from the Ukraine, including a rare Karaite Jewish song from the Crimean Tartars with an unbending drone bass.

The 30 short pieces are grouped into suites with slight instrumental variations –

the violin is exchanged for viola, the tsimbl replaced by accordion. 'Horowitz's Lament', a solo accordion track, is a marvelous example of how the historical instruments – in this case a 19th century button accordion – make the music spring to life as you hear the buttons and bellows live and breathe.

Veretski Pass stands out as something bold, unusual and musically satisfying. *Simon Broughton, Songlines, Issue #26, September/October 2004*

The group takes its name from the mountain pass in the Trans-Carpathian region of Eastern Europe (now known as Ukraine) that many Jewish travelers crossed on their way to freedom. Those numerous travelers influenced the music of the region, and those influences and more can be heard on the trio's self-titled debut CD.

Joined by Budowitz founder Joshua Horowitz (tsimbl, button accordion) and

Stuart Brotman (bass, percussion), Segelstein has mined her ancestral home and created a gem of a recording. Veretski Pass plays "dance" music. You can hear the rhythms from the tsimbl (hammered dulcimer) and the melodies from the violin or viola and accordion. There's a real sense of joy in Segelstein's playing. Her lines seemingly fly out of her instruments. The bouncing sound of Horowitz's tsimbl echoes the melody on the majority of the songs, and his accordion work is exemplary.

Most of the pieces are short -- 30 tracks, all instrumentals, in less than 60 minutes -- but even the shortest cuts are played with verve or deep emotion. "Veretski Pass," the CD, is both a history lesson and dance party...  
*Richard Kamins, Hartford Courant, June 17, 2004*

This is a juicy, satisfying collection of traditional East European Jewish music. Racing through thirty tracks in just under an hour, this trio of solid American musicians keeps your ears open and toes tapping. Almost every track segues effortlessly and breathlessly into the next, sounding like they recorded the whole thing in one marathon session.

Segelstein's violin is at the center of this whirlwind, and it's a clean, muscular sound. She digs assertively into the strings, leaping and trilling without fear. Not to be outdone, Joshua Horowitz is equally at home on button accordion and tsimbl, matching Segelstein stroke for stroke. Stuart Brotman's bass buzzes and chugs underneath it all, adding just enough weight to keep things from flying off into the stratosphere. Individually, the musicians have impressive resumes; together they are a force to be reckoned with.

*Peggy Latkovich, Rootsworld, 10/04*

This is Eastern European Jewish music, mostly dance music. Sometimes there are hints of chamber music, as comes when three impeccable musicians

play together as one. But, mostly this is the most rocking, roots klezmer album I have heard in years. ... the music is incredibly, almost indescribably good.

There is a stunning suite of Crimean Tatar music and also a rare Karaite song, followed by improvisations and a pyrotechnic fiddle song performed on a scordatura violin. There are also original compositions, a suite with a bass and viola duet, traditional Jewish and Ukrainian dance tunes all accompanied by rich photographs and finely wrought essays (and even some family recipes) by each member of the trio.

Here's a couple of facts. First, Josh and Stu are two of the world's finest tsimbl players. And there are few instruments as good to listen to as the tsimbl. Second, Cookie is incendiary. I'm sure I said nice things about her playing on various albums over the years, because she is pretty incredible, but that was nothing. She tears the place up. Even better, where many klezmer musicians fall back on bluegrass when they are improvising klezmer and heading into the breaks, because that's what they know best when they need more ideas, Cookie improvises something that sounds like, well, living, breathing, must-dance-to klezmer. Also note that these aren't just tunes, they're medleys of tunes in dance sets, including a sher set that is taking the Eastern European Jewish dance world (granted, not the largest subset of humanity) by storm. It just doesn't get any better than this, at least, not until their next album.

Order a Veretski Pass CD right NOW.

*Ari Davidow, Klezmershack, 5/1/04*

...The bits of music cover a near mythical geography. Have you ever heard of Bessarabia, Ruthenia or Bukovina? These are some of the regions that come screaming out of the stereo. The tunes are at once familiar and from a strange other world — compelling in the same way that visiting a synagogue in a city where you can't speak the language would be.

This is part of what makes this recording more than just a powerful set of unusual and archival melodies passionately performed. Veretski Pass reminds you through its slightly jumpy dissonance that our Jewish past isn't necessarily knowable. Life in Europe for Jews 200 years ago is so far removed from our modern experience that perhaps the best vessel to understanding their lives is by submitting to a kind of confusion.

A Jewish teacher once said that Judaism is the practice of trying to grasp the ineffable. Veretski Pass is a fun way to start the journey toward grasping our ineffable Jewish history.

*Jay Schwartz, Jewish News Weekly of Northern California, June 2004*

...In an explosive concert of the trio Veretski Pass in a sold out hall of the Horst Castle. Veretski Pass introduced their CD in a world premier. The name of this new ensemble is taken from the actual Carpathian mountain pass where

Cookie Segelstein's father was born. Extremely virtuosic klezmer sounds with jazzy dance inspired passages and repeated rhythmic changes make for the intense contrast between Heaven and Earth, God and Finite Human existence. After only a few measures, Horowitz, tsimbl and accordion, the fiery Cookie Segelstein violin and viola, and Stuart Brotman, bass, contradicted the assumption that klezmer music is from an extinct cultural epoch. Klezmer lives!

Because the music is the ideal platform for influences that come out of the human micro and macro cosmos. The trio was ecstatically cheered.  
*Westphälische Rundschau, April 19, 2004*

Veretski Pass with Horowitz, Brotman and Segelstein played their traditional East European Jewish music in the sold out glass auditorium of the Horst Castle. They performed the melodies of the Tatars, from the Ukraine, Rumania and of course also from the Carpathian region of the Veretski Pass, over which many Jews traversed. Fiery and virtuosic dance music, and melancholy alternated back and forth and transported the listeners through an emotionally intensive musical journey which captured much of the rural originality. The audience was excited and danced at the end, new sense of abandon...

*Buersche Zeitung; Ruhr Nachrichten, April 19, 2004*

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