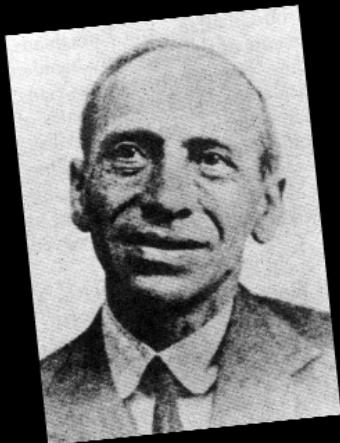


# s'brent!

A musical ghetto-notebook in yiddish songs  
by Mordechai Gebirtig (1877-1942)



played and sung by

**Daniel Kempin**

## s'brent! [s'brent!]

**A musical ghetto note-book in yiddish songs  
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This program is dedicated to one of the most important poets and composers in the Eastern European Jewish musical culture, Mordechai Gebirtig (1877-1942). It was developed by invitation of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. In the first half exuberant, loving, ironic songs bring to life an imaginary biography of Jewish life and from the time before September 1, 1939. In the second half, songs are performed that he wrote between the invasion of Poland and his death in 1942 – a deeply moving document.



*Nebbekh* is a characteristic of Jewish songs.  
Irony and self-deprecation for Jews is like the breath of life, a survival strategy, says Kempin and refers to *Chutzpah*, the Jewish "pushiness".  
He tells the following anecdote:  
In two months, a new biblical flood will destroy the world.  
The Buddhist monk tells his faithful to look deep into themselves to prepare for Nirvana.  
The Catholic priest tells his flock to repent and believe the gospels.  
The rabbi says however: OK boys, you have two months – go figure out how to live under water!

### CD Publications

**mazl un shlamazi**

1992, Melisma, MELI 3033

**mir lebn eybik!**

1994, Melisma, MELI 3035

German Record Critic's Award

**Mordechai Gebirtig:  
Krakow ghetto-notebook**

1995, Koch International Classics 3-7295-2H-1

**benkshaft – Longing**

1998, Melisma, MELI 3046

German Record Critic's Award

German Folk Music Award, 2002



**Die Welt:** Songs of unusual color, full of strength and melancholy, resigned and unbelievably unbending all at once.

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layout: www.zahndesign.de

# DANIEL KEMPIN



Photo: Simon

## s'brent!

**A musical ghetto-notebook  
by Mordechai Gebirtig (1877-1942)**



YIDDISH SONGS

www.daniel-kempin.de



Photo: Dirk Vogel

## Daniel Kempin – A musician from an unusual family

An unusual family, these Kempins! One son is the church organist of a catholic community in Germany. The other lives in Jerusalem and is a devoted christian with a jewish identity. The third, Daniel Kempin, was christian, and returned as a young man to the religion of his fathers, to judaism. One thing they have in common: They are all accomplished musicians. This gift was inherited from their parents, who were both church musicians.

Daniel Kempin sings in a language that his parents hardly would have understood, and that he himself worked hard to learn: Yiddish. He sings "Ven er tshespilt zikh mit zayn fidl, oy, mame vert mir gut on a shir" on his CD "benkshaft" (longing), which won him the German Record Critic's Award: "When he plays on his fiddle, oy mama, I feel so good". That a "Klezmer-boy" can set a girl's head spinning is understandable, if you consider the exciting Klezmer music that Daniel Kempin plays, just as generations of jewish musicians before him.

But it's not just happy love songs that Kempin sings best. "Arbetloze zenen mir, on a beged on a haym" (Unemployed are we, without clothes, without a home) is the marching song of the poet Mordechai Gebirtig who

was murdered in the Cracow Ghetto in 1942. Kempin devoted an entire CD to this man: "Krakow Ghetto Notebook", recorded by the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC.

Jewish culture isn't only created in Israel, but much more in the "Galuth", in Exile. America is a magic word for Daniel Kempin. He loves the natural feeling of life there compared to Germany. "Jewish life is much more diverse. In Crown Heights, for example, there are Kosher fast food restaurants". Also the tolerance and the religious life in America deeply impressed him. "In Germany, you don't go to a prayer house, but to a high security building", he says. For this reason Daniel Kempin is also known to the jewish community in America.

By contrast, in Germany he sings less for a jewish than for a German public. "Confusion" characterizes the reaction of some concertgoers. "People have even congratulated me for my 'fluent command of german'!" Or he is asked where he was born in Israel, since of course as a jew he couldn't possibly be German. There was also a stage manager who didn't want to put a bar stool on the stage for him. The reason: Typical jewish arrogance, wanting to sit higher than other people...

But it is Kempin's special wish to bring the richness of jewish culture particularly to gentiles. When in his concerts he uses songs from the middle ages to the recent, he is in a certain sense a historian, bringing jewish history to life through its music. Many a jewish song he has rescued from obscurity by (for example in Jerusalem) tape recording it and including it in his repertoire. There he visited a talmudic university, where he stayed even through the gulf war.

Kempin learned his Yiddish in intensive courses in England and Israel. This form of Eastern European jewish slang is no dialect of German, but a complete and independent language, with its own grammar and vocabulary. Since the nearly complete destruction of Eastern European Jewry in the Holocaust and the founding of the modern state of Israel, fewer and fewer people speak Yiddish, Kempin doesn't believe it is dying out. The death of Yiddish has been predicted for the past 100 years, he says, and there have always been renewal movements. In this art form he is considered one of the leaders in Germany.

Along with jewish music, Kempin has also found his jewish identity. He did not convert to judaism. Rather, he says, he reversed his grandmother's decision. She had herself and his mother baptized during the time of national socialist oppression.

Daniel Kempin fought a ten year internal battle with himself and finally decided for the jewish faith. But even here, the artist is conflicted to a certain degree: On the one side he is a board member of the Jewish Community in Mainz, and on the other he is a member of the Frankfurt Kehilla Chadascha.

And no wonder: Daniel Kempin just comes from an unusual family.



### Daniel Kempin

Born in Wiesbaden, Germany.

Member of the Jewish Community in Frankfurt am Main. Studied music in Darmstadt, with several semesters of Jewish Studies at the University of Frankfurt and a Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Intensive Yiddish in places such as Great Britain and Israel. Concerts and workshops with jewish music since 1983 in Switzerland, Luxembourg, Great Britain, Poland Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Israel and the USA.

Many radio and televisions programs in germany and elsewhere and participation in numerous book and CD ROM publications.

**Berliner Morgenpost:** Through his careful arrangements, Daniel Kempin's pleasant baritone voice, his excellent articulation of the Yiddish, and his classically trained Guitar playing are shown to their best advantage. Kempin's choice of repertoire agreeably sets this production apart from others in the genre.

**Ruhrnachrichten:** The manner in which he interprets the songs shows clearly the passion with which the artist approach his art. The palette of feelings, highly expressive, range from the gentlest tone colors to rousing, fiery outbreaks of emotion.

**Frankfurter Rundschau:** Sensitive and rousing at the same time, Daniel Kempin adapts his voice, gestures, facial expressions and his virtuoso guitar playing to the alternating pulses of joy and melancholy and hope and despair that determined the lives of the Eastern European Jews.

**Mannheimer Morgen:** One has the impression that Yiddish is a part of the singer and great entertainer himself. With his guitar and his way of singing he breathes fiery life into the songs. The musician filled the audience with enthusiasm with his breath taking virtuosity.

**Thüringische Landeszeitung:** A broad spectrum of moods from tender melancholy to mischievous boisterousness; from self ironic barbs to reflective observations.

**Die Welt:** Songs of unusual color, full of strength and melancholy, resigned and unbelievably unbending all at once.

**Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung:** Daniel Kempin has brought the heart of the Yiddish language back to life, as if Yiddish and its musical presentation were part of the singer himself. The same is true for his music: with a beautiful velvety tone that is equally capable of a sudden cry, Kempin's baritone combines with his unobtrusive mastery of the guitar to bring his songs vividly to life. ... He is not only a remarkable folk singer, but also a first-class entertainer.

**Süddeutsche Zeitung:** The singer-guitarist Daniel Kempin shows, with his breath taking manner of performance, how a message can be transported through song.

**Wetschernije Nowostij (Lithuania):** Professionalism combined with vast knowledge of Jewish culture and music and the great talent of the artist conquered the audience. The brilliant mastership of the guitar and voice, and the poignant performance helped the artist make the entire depth of his vast repertoire accessible to the Vilna audience. The folksongs, the songs of the Vilna Ghetto and the Jewish-American hits will remain long after in the memories of the public. (Translated from Russian).

**Litowski Jerusalem (Lithuania):** men hot gehert a sakh oysfilers, nor do iz geven epes naves: dos akomponirn mit a gitare in di hent fun a virtuoz, in dem tifn araynlebn zikh in inhalt fun yeder lid: a freylekh lid hot geklungen hultayish, an umetike – mit a tifn yomer, un alts azoj hartsik, nit gekinstlt.

**Jewish United Fund News (Chicago):** Daniel Kempin performs the songs with lev and nefesh (heart and soul). The musical settings are simple and powerful.

**Jewish Chronicle (Manchester):** The arts will be better than ever, with some incredible musicians such as Daniel Kempin from Germany.

**Folk Michel (2/93) on the mazi un shlamazi CD:** An excellent production. He sings not only the familiar songs ... there are an astounding number of good singers of Yiddish songs in Germany; for me Daniel Kempin belongs to the best. (Manfred Bonson)