

# Keeping Yiddish alive: Festival in Valhalla will feature klezmer music from local musicians

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Kenny Green, music director of the Westchester Klezmer Program, will perform at this weekend's Yiddishfest in Valhalla. / File/Colin Gustafson

When Kenny Green performs at this weekend's Yiddish festival in Valhalla, he'll undoubtedly be extremely proud of his intergenerational band from The Westchester Klezmer Program. In other words, he'll be *kvelling*.

Green, music director of the Westchester Klezmer Program, is passionate about keeping Yiddish alive — and such a fan of klezmer that he helped create a program 10 years ago focused exclusively on the historic celebratory music of the Jews of Eastern Europe.

"Yiddish is the key to unlocking and understanding the history of this part of the culture," says Green, a music educator who lives in Somers. "And the soundtrack to this is the music of the klezmer."

Written by [Linda Lombroso](#)

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At The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring's "YiddishFest 2011: Music for a Better World," Green will play tenor banjo with a band from the Westchester Klezmer Program, a group that includes children introduced to the genre by Green himself. Many are rock musicians, he says, who need a little coaxing when it comes to playing music from the late 19th century — even if it is dance music.

"I say, 'Don't think of this as your great-grandparents' music,' because that image is a musty image," says Green. "I say, 'Think about your great-grandparents being kids, and at that point in time this was the cool music, the adventurous music, the dance music, the party music, and to some extent even a little subversive.'"

**If you go**

What: The Workmen's Circle's "YiddishFest 2011: Music for a Better World," presented in cooperation with the Westchester County Parks Department  
When: 5 to 8 p.m., July 31 (food will be available for sale)  
Where: Kensico Dam Plaza, Valhalla (bring blankets and lawn chairs); if it rains, it will be held at Temple Israel Center, 280 Old Mamaroneck Road, White Plains.  
Admission: Free  
Information: 914-864-7275 (Westchester County Parks Department) or 212-889-6800, Ext. 223 (Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring)  
Westchester Klezmer Program:  
[www.westchesterklez.org](http://www.westchesterklez.org)

Klezmer, which has enjoyed a revival in recent years, has been popularized by musicians including violinist Itzhak Perlman and the Grammy-winning band The Klezmatics. Even non-Jewish musicians — among them, clarinetists Christian David and Don Byron — have joined the klezmer movement, says Green.

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YiddishFest, which will feature a variety of musical groups and entertainers, is a cultural celebration, not a religious one, stresses Green. Yet Yiddish culture remains an integral part of Jewish history — and it is The Workmen's Circle, organizer of YiddishFest, which deserves credit for helping keep it alive, he says.

The national organization, founded in 1900 and headquartered in Manhattan, offers Yiddish classes, klezmer workshops and other programming aimed at fostering Jewish identity and activism, says Adrienne Cooper, executive officer for programs.

Ann Toback, executive director of The Workmen's Circle, believes the free concert brings eclectic Jewish culture to a wide audience while honoring the organization's "heritage of making the world a better place" — something that music always does, she says.

Acts set to appear at Sunday's event include the Sruli and Lisa Family Band, singer Joanne Borts, cantor Hayley Koblinsky and Green, who will lead a singalong.

If it rains, the event will be held indoors at Temple Israel Center in White Plains — not too much of a schlep from Valhalla.

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