



# GEOFF BERNER

*"The Avenging Angel of klezmer"*

- Canada's Globe and Mail

Singer/songwriter/accordionist/novelist Geoff Berner's music combines klezmer (for the uninitiated, the folk music of Eastern European Jews), punk, political satire, and Balkan dance rhythms. He writes sharp, literate songs that make you want to weep, laugh, grind your teeth, or kick out a window – often all at the same time. A lot of famous people have covered his compositions. Look it up.

Berner has built a serious cult following throughout North America and Europe by touring relentlessly through thousands of bars, cafés, and festivals. With his weirdly compelling stage presence, he has a strange ability to create fun chaos. He describes his typical audience members as "odd, bookish people who like to drink. There's a surprising number of physicists."

Berner counts himself as part of the "Klezmer Bund" movement of makers of Radical Jewish Culture, artists like Daniel Kahn of Berlin, Psoy Korelenko from Moscow, and the rabble-rousing Jewdas group in London. The Klezmer Bund rejects orthodox and ultra-Zionist conservative notions of Jewish identity, and seeks to connect with the deep roots of left-wing Jewish thought in a way that's entertaining and accessible for everybody.

*"Geoff Berner might be klezmer's saviour."*

- NOW Magazine

*"5/6"*

- Oslo Dagvisen

*"An evening spent with Geoff Berner's music is, in the words of the good Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, "a wild combination of menace, madness, and genius... fragmented coherence that wreaks havoc on the mind of any listener."*

- Vue Weekly, Edmonton

*"Cherish him, cherish him, for there really is no one like him. Fantastic."*

- Billy Bragg

## WEBSITES:

[www.geoffberner.com](http://www.geoffberner.com)

[www.oriente.de](http://www.oriente.de)

[www.coaxrecords.com](http://www.coaxrecords.com)

## AUDIO LINKS:

[www.geoffberner.bandcamp.com](http://www.geoffberner.bandcamp.com)

## VIDEO LINKS

### Swing A Chicken 3 Times Over Your Head

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0ckHGBgZT4>

### When DeeDee Gets Her Donkey, Everything Will Be All Right

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW-etl1Meyg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW-etl1Meyg)

### Mayn Rue Platz

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX-10JN3EcQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX-10JN3EcQ)

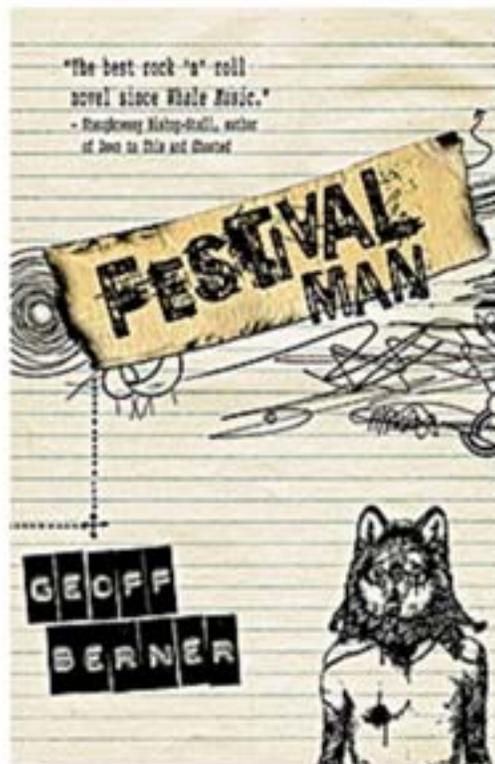
### Whiskey Rabbi

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzoRWpl0w6U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzoRWpl0w6U)

## BOOKING AGENT

EUROPE:

[geheimagentur.de](http://geheimagentur.de)



## Book review: Festival Man A rock'n'roll novel by Geoff Berner

Reviewed by Michael Barclay, *Maclean's Magazine* Oct.10, 2013

### Festival Man By Geoff Berner

Sometimes it takes a work of fiction to speak truths. Because really, what self-respecting musician would spill the goods on the larceny, loathing and lies that exist beneath the polite construct of multiculti hippie bliss that is the Western Canadian folk festival circuit? Geoff Berner, a fearless klezmer punk accordionist and self-proclaimed “whisky rabbi” who has played more than his share of festivals in Canada and Europe (where he’s opened stadium shows for Norway’s most popular rock band), makes his debut as a novelist by writing about what he knows: grifters and drifters, poets and performance artists, and the delusion and daring necessary to make difficult art happen in a culture such as Canada’s.

The plot of *Festival Man* is suitably ridiculous, and yet entirely believable to anyone who’s ever made big gambles on low stakes in the Canadian music industry—or anywhere else: a con man and artist manager who survived the siege of Sarajevo makes one last bid for greatness by trying to bag a big-time British management deal for his misfit clients, who are playing the Calgary Folk Festival on the pretext of backing up a hyped Inuit throat singer. There is no gripping climax here. Instead, Berner employs his unreliable narrator as effectively as Paul Quarrington’s *Whale Music*, or, say, Keith Richards’s *Life*—each of which, page for page, Berner can match with both anecdotal hilarity and razor-sharp Richler-esque satire.

*Festival Man* is absolutely required reading for anyone who’s ever played, worked or fallen down drunk at a folk festival. But Berner’s wit transcends a niche audience in the same way you don’t need to know anything about New Orleans to appreciate *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Readers of *Festival Man* don’t have to be able to spot microscopically veiled portraits of Corb Lund, Tanya Tagaq Gillis or Billy Bragg—or even know who they are—to laugh out loud repeatedly. Few would believe these stories if told they were true—which, in fact, many of them are.

Michael Barclay



## Geoff Berner

Sunlit Stage 3, Regina SK, August 9

By James Brotheridge

**Exclaim.ca**

Published Aug 10, 2014

How much can Geoff Berner push the line? At the Regina Folk Festival, his main set — other than workshop appearances, a tweener set on the main stage, and a reading from his novel, *Festival Man* — was at three p.m. on the day stage with the most non-RFF foot traffic coming by. What does he do? He drinks beer onstage, encourages the crowd to yell "Fuck the police!" and is his general, rabble-rousing self. That's the thing: when the world-trotting first man of accordion klezmer provokes, Berner fans will know it's coming to some degree, but it never fails to surprise.

Stirring shit up isn't Berner's only goal, though. For one, he's got an ear for tunefulness, heard this day on tracks like "It's All Just a Matter of (Where You Draw the Line)" from Carolyn Mark's *Duets* album and his cover of Kris Demeanor's "One Shoe," about the death of Neil Stonechild. Within those songs, he's always looking at the institutions of power for the black humour involved. If he's not bringing insight then at least he's bringing clarity.

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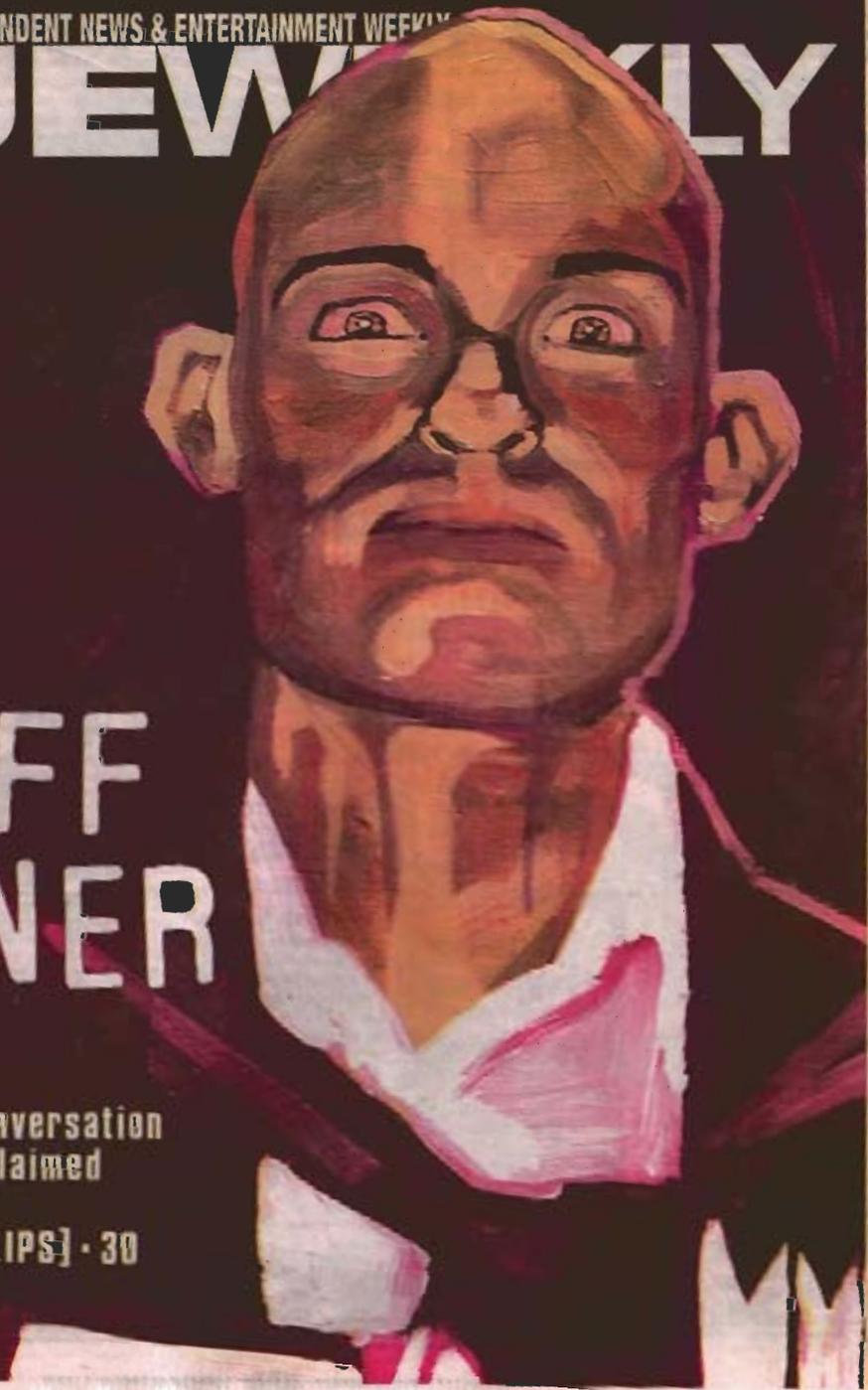
# VIEW WEEKLY

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## GEOFF BERNER

An intoxicating conversation  
with the self-proclaimed  
Whiskey Rabbi  
[By SHANNON PHILLIPS] • 30



**ON THE COVER**

# Whiskey business

Geoff Berner's *Whiskey Rabbi* delivers a decidedly unorthodox brand of liquor-fueled klezmer

By SHANNON PHILLIPS

An aura of cruel foreboding surrounds the whiskey drinker. For the sober, the music of the whiskey drinker is a manic spiral in a minor key, the rhythm speeding up in a progressively more bile-inducing, room-spinning, cymbal-clashing mash of noise and dizzy disruption that, if the whiskey-plied subconscious feels playful, may result in melody and harmony. And who better, really, to pen the soundtrack for such a tightrope trip but a travelin' man with an accordion?

This is the Whiskey Rabbi. This is Geoff Berner. A screeching, terrifying romp through klezmer and punk, through melancholy and filthy Eastern European bars and hospitals, through displacement, diaspora and searing criticism of things evil and unfair. An evening spent with Geoff Berner's music is, in the words of the good Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, "a wild combination of menace, madness, and genius... fragmented coherence that wrecks havoc on the mind of any listener."

Sitting down after a buttoned-down, tucked-in community centre gig in Calgary (replete with pressed white tablecloths), Geoff Berner is about to kill a bottle of Jameson's with a flair that would make Hunter S. proud—minus, of course, the guns and mescaline. Our so-called "interview" weaves from memories of how great the Payolas were to Berner's theory on Ralph Klein's secret plan for privatizing firefighters—it's gone off the rails so many times that I'm now completely Zen to what I'll have to actually work with once it's all over.

Not that Berner doesn't appear buttoned-down or tucked-in. You'll never catch him in anything but a properly pressed black suit and white shirt, except perhaps in summer, when the beige suit is donned. Berner is no slack-ass, trucker-hat-wearing, alt-Canadian tour rat—not in his appearance, nor in his words. Through the chaotic, roaring rambles of a semi-sober quasi-conversation, lucidity eventually triumphs over even the most apparently pointless repartee.

At 33, ("I'm the same age as

Jesus; by my next birthday, I will be officially older than Jesus, but right now I'm in the Jesus year. Geoff Berner's hit a musical stride. With his Associates—Diona Davies on violin and Wayne Adams on percussion—Berner's second full-length studio album, *Whiskey Rabbi*, is doing just fine, thank you. The critics are impressed, even though Berner insists his mom's been the one writing reviews. "That one in the *Globe and Mail*... That was my mom. She wrote it under the name Robert Evert-Green just to fool everybody."

**BERNER CREDITS** much of his recent success to Davies's and Adams's musical expertise—he describes his violinist as "the best in the world" and Adams as the creator of a "crazy Carpathian drum kind of thing, incorporating new wave and punk into the djembe." By adding killer musicians to his gig, Berner's been able to move beyond the singer/songwriter-with-accordion show he's been steadily building up an audience with for the past five or so years. He's known as a songwriter with an acerbic wit laced with a tinge of the absurd, and he's been rewarded with folk-fest bookings aplenty for his efforts. Paired with his accordion Estella, Berner's songs have taken him on tour with Billy Bragg, flown him to Europe for three tours in the past year and, when the Be Good Tanyas covered his "Light Enough to Travel" on their gazillion-selling debut album *Blue Horse*, landed one of his songs in the CD collections of thousands of alt-bourgeois musical aficionados everywhere.

But that's all history now. With his Associates, Berner plays only a couple of the old tunes, preferring to regale the crowd and pry their asses out of their chairs with rip-roaring klezmer numbers like "Lucky God Damn Jew" and "Song Written in a Romanian Hospital." Punk rock's snarl is still there; in fact, the first verse of the title track on *Whiskey Rabbi* is hurled at the audience with a harsh rebuke: "You've all been worshipping a false Messiah/I pray to God that I got here in time to guide



PREVIOUS **KLEZMER**

continued from previous page

you/I came to bring you hope/I came to bring you joy/So I've got to stay alive and drunk and unemployed." When Berner plays, he looks out over his accordion with a perilous gaze as if he were communicating something of grave import. Something like: "You might think these lyrics are somehow eccentric or funny. You might be laughing now. But if you're paying attention, you won't be laughing for long."

**THE MAKING AND TOURING** of *Whiskey Rabbi* is nudging Berner's musical horizons a little wider. Recorded in September 2004 ("In the common era, *not* in the year of our Lord—not *my* Lord, anyway, I'll tell you that!") in the same studio where Motley Crue recorded *Dr. Feelgood*, *Whiskey Rabbi* came on the heels of a transformative trip for Berner and his Associates around Romania with ethno-musicologist Bob Cohen.

"Cohen is the leader of the only klezmer band that matters: Di Naye Kapelye. They rule," Berner intones solemnly. (When Berner talks music,

he speaks as if life and death are at stake. And it probably is.) "I was starting to think I didn't even like klezmer until I heard them on a compilation. They play like stink. They play with guts. They lose it. It's the punk rock ethic of emotional expressions and ideas over technical precision and musical ability. Not that they're not monster players. But they lose their technique in the moment."

"Cohen was a New Yorker who moved to Budapest because he wasn't satisfied with the antiseptic sound of the klezmer revival," Berner continues. "I had been writing back and forth with him, and out of the blue I wrote and asked him what he was doing in June, 'cause I wanted to hang out with him. He said, 'Well, I won't be able to hang out with you in June because I'm embarking on this project where I'm going back to Mare Mures'—which is the Ozarks of Romania. Seriously... that fucker [former Romanian head of state Nicolae Ceausescu], that awful dictator, tried to tax their moonshine and it was just like that Steve Earle song 'Cop-

perhead Road'—anyway, 'to get digital recordings of all these guys who played in the old klezmer bands.' And so I said, 'I'll drive you around!'"

**AND SO IT CAME TO PASS** that Berner spent two months driving around rural Romania with a multilingual Brooklyn klezmer anthropologist, a Japanese travel writer and violinist Davies, who fixed the flat tires. They found 90-year-old Wexler, the last Jewish klezmer fiddle player in Romania. "Cohen speaks Yiddish, bought him a couple of drinks, told him a couple of filthy Yiddish jokes, and he started to play," Berner says. "Cohen is the only person he will play for in the entire world. He didn't just play the klezmer wedding repertoire; he played tunes from the Jewish theatre of the '30s, the musical theatre. There was a vibrant scene there, because there were thousands of Jews in these towns. And then he played his new compositions. He captured it all, the beauty and the ugliness. Really, this is the shit. You can't get it any other way—only by

following Bob Cohen around!"

Berner's exercised now—the mandering, conversational fluff has officially cleared the room. He is down to the serious business of klezmer. It was this serious business (along with several bottles of Romanian booze called Palinka) that Berner and his Associates brought into the studio last fall to record *Whiskey Rabbi*.

As for walking the whiskey tightrope between hilarity and madness, Berner prefers to answer the question with a question. "Does

whiskey make you crazy?" I inquire.

"You know why Hitler didn't drink whiskey?" he asks. "Because it made him mean!" And with that, he descends into raucous laughter and proceeds to explain, in earnest, his thoughts on God. "It puts me in mind of a novel by Mordecai Richler.... He says, 'Don't mess with God, because he's a motherfucker.'" ☉

**GEOFF BERNER**

With Kris Demeanor and Matt Allen • Powerplant • Sat, Apr 2 (8pm)



National

March 2005

## WOOD, WIRES AND WHISKEY

### Klezmer Messiah

**GEOFF BERNER**  
*Whiskey Rabbi*

Geoff Berner has flowered some on his latest, thanks specifically to a first-hand immersion into the domain of Romanian Klezmer music and a less actor-ish approach to songwriting. Titles listed here like "Lucky God Damn Jew" and "Unforgettable Song" might make you think again, but Berner shows increasing maturity and reserve while still being catchy. For example, he sings that "freedom is the true enemy," blaming all the evils of the world, from Pontius Pilate to Osama Bin Laden to Vancouver cops pounding on protestors, on ennui. Like his far-distant relation David Byrne, Berner too claims to be a messiah of sorts, though in a much less jack-ish way. The album, built almost entirely on fiddles, accordions and aggressive lyrics, still manages to be a lot of fun, albeit dark fun. The drumming is not by Native, too. It is a tribal statement of sorts, but Berner also craves psychedelia by recording the words of a radical Palestinian poet as a klezmer song. An international album, as opposed to one with universal appeal—especially thanks to liberal use of F- and c-words. But we don't only read novels to find out about our little corner of the world, right? Above all, I like the lessons Berner teaches us about being himself. (Black Box, www.blackboxmusic.com)

*What happened to make you mature as a musician?*

I really found my true calling. I've concluded a journey that I've been on: I was moving in search of who I am and then I arrived. I went to rural Romania and found out where klezmer music really came from and how much less different from my own punk roots



it is than I thought. There's that same aggression—it's about an emotional expression rather than any technical perfection. I'm not there just as a musician now, I'm a religious figure.

*You delved into something more personal to find a universal truth? It's not any different than what Nina Gold did by searching out her Virginian grandmother's music.*

*Your inclusion of Palestinian prose could be seen as biased. You're playing with interesting fire.*

I think there's a Jewish ethic I used that goes a lot like that, that you have to keep fighting the good fight, whether or not you win. Making progress is important— you just keep going because that's who you are, not for results. I hope people are offended. I did it so people would be offended. Fish Griukowsky

R30

7

# staying in

## The world accordion to Berner

### CD OF THE WEEK

Robert Everett-Green

#### POP Whiskey Rabbi

Geoff Berner  
Black Hen Music  
★★★★

!!! Woody Guthrie had a label on his guitar that read "This machine kills fascists." Geoff Berner's accordion needs at least two slogans, something like "this machine maims hypocrites," and "horedom is damnation."

Berner is the avenging angel sent to rescue klezmer from becoming the sound of a shtetl theme park. He rescues and destroys at the same time, because klezmer is not a style he has adopted, but a tradition he has swallowed down without chewing, like Gargantua eating a cow.

"You've all been worshipping a false Messiah!" he yells near the start of the title track, breaking in on the tune's sauntering processional music like a prophet startling the timid. His natural form of address is a confrontation in a narrow hallway, or in a tent where the circus of human folly presents the same shabby stunts again and again.

His songs are punk music that has wiped the dust from its pass-

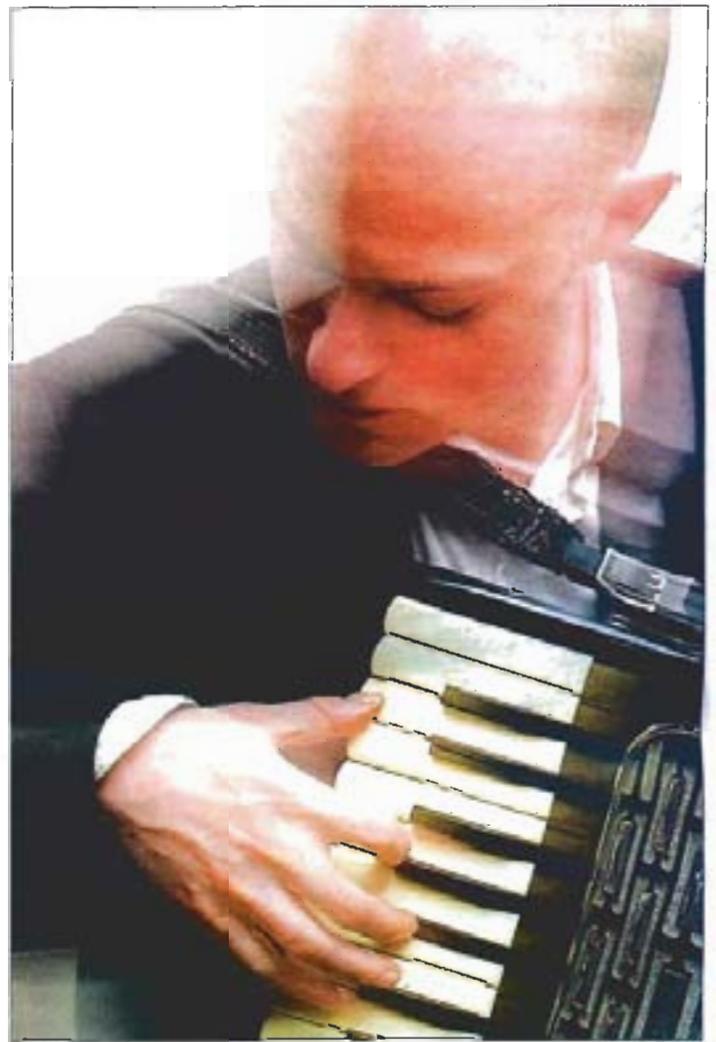
port and cursed the state hyenas who require that all be registered so that deviance may be isolated. The elaborate malediction of *The Traveller's Curse* recalls the dedication found in a Cela novel: "to my enemies, who have been of such help to me in my career."

While you're measuring the insults, the tunes pull at your coat and demand a dance. This is party music with a conscience, not the well-groomed inner guardian of "smug sobriety," but the ragged, disreputable conscience of a man who serves truth undiluted from the bottle.

These songs are full of drama and character, and comic irony too. The breathless hero of *Song Written in a Romanian Hospital* is the same pleasure-seeking, death-fearing clown found in the pages of Cervantes and Chaucer. *The True Enemy* finds the thread of ennui hidden in a tapestry of evils, and *Lucky God Damn Jew* reads the difference between victim and oppressor in the movements of a weather vane.

*Unlistenable Song* is something else again: a tender, allusive number about the truth that cuts too close to be mentioned out loud. It's the best epistolary song I've heard since *Famous Blue Raincoat*.

Berner's arrangements have a sparse, rubbed-raw feeling that suits the songs perfectly. Diona Davies's whispering, complaining, rhapsodizing fiddle throws off virtuoso flourishes like the wreckage from a storm. Wayne Adams's percussion bangs and shakes out the beat as if it were a bar room rug,



JESSICA ATON

and Berner's accordion wheezes around the tunes with the sharp-eyed deference of a flea-market peddler.

**Geoff Berner: rescuing klezmer from becoming the sound of a shtetl theme park.**

Geoff Berner begins his 15-city Canadian tour tonight and tomorrow at the Oasis, 294 College St., 416-975-0845.

## Klezmer's dauntless revivalist

Most of **Geoff Berner's** klezmer tunes are edgy short stories, coloured by misfits and plot turns, his worldly instrument urging them along with frenzied dissonance or graceful rolls, depending on the trouble therein. Brave enough to grace stages alone with just his accordion, nothing stops him from including a few furious punk rants on *Whiskey Rabbi*, his valiant new album. Berner, who has toured in 15 countries, including England with Billy Bragg, wrote the new tunes after a stint in rural Romania, where he studied klezmer music. His raw urgency is a nod to the traditionalists; it's high time klezmer was wrung of its soggy way and made crisp again. His trio plays WISE Hall, Saturday.



**GLOBEANDMAIL**

**Geoff Berner.** Although he aims to drag Klezmer music kicking and screaming back into the bars, the Vancouver singer-accordionist's new and furious *Whisky Rabbi* possesses an edgy drama that would fare as well on a Fringe theatre circuit as any barroom stage. Today and tomorrow, 9:30 p.m. Oasis, 294 College St., 416-975-0845.

**OTTAWA CITIZEN**

Whiskey Rabbi Rating four Geoff Berner (Black Hen Music) Those lucky enough to have caught Vancouver accordionist-singer-songwriter Geoff Berner at last year's Bluesfest will recall a performer of singular merit. Wiry, anarchic songs -- along with a riveting stage presence rooted in his theatrical training -- are Berner's specialty. His latest album continues and expands the Berner tradition. It has black-humoured tunes like the snarling title track about a wayward man of the cloth without a single redeeming feature, and *The True Enemy*, a meditation on genocide, terrorism and books about chicken soup for the afflicted that traces the fount of mankind's ills to simple boredom. More even than on his previous albums, Berner delights in skewering pretension and unmasking officially sanctioned evil, while klezmer melodies, some quite jaunty, intersect with punk to keep the album bubbling. Patrick Langston

# Weirdo martian takeover

Geoff Berner is a story teller who uses music as his medium. His songs are often witty, peculiar and even heartbreaking with much insight into the human condition. Geoff has travelled all over the world with his music and he has been artist in residence for the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival. Here he shares his thoughts and experiences of Belfast...

IT WAS JUST a simple Jewish-Canadian Punk Rock Accordionist, and I've never been an Artist in Residence before. To be honest, until I started Residing here in Belfast on May 1st, I had no idea what an Artist in Residence did. But now that my residency is drawing to a close, I can heartily recommend the job to anyone out there contemplating career options. Of course, I can't guarantee you that Residing anywhere besides the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival would be as good. The staff and volunteers here have made a unique, wild, bizarrely wonderful thing here. If you've missed it so far, I have to wonder what you've been doing. I myself have been playing, and playing. And playing some more. It's



lovely. I've played on a boat, on TV, on the street, in a purple room, on the radio, at an Irish Jazzercise Noodle House, and of course, in bars. Many bars. Oh the beautiful bars of Belfast. Oh dear.

I've read over the years about different groups and factions in Belfast, and their various struggles, so I feel that it's only fair to warn everyone else in Belfast that The Cathedral Arts Quarter Festival is clearly a shiny-velled move

by the Weirdo, Eccentric and Martian factions to tighten their grip on the city. Led by Sean Kelly, the intrepid crew of the festival have succeeded in bringing in a vast array of foreign agitators from around the world, including the headliner, Patti Smith. But it's been the local folk who have made the experience most memorable. Just to name a few: Dan Eggs the fearlessly truthful and hilariously funny poet; Terry Hoolley the one-eyed genius chaos machine and the cast of The Chattering Classes on Northern Voices Radio, with whom we had a spirited debate regarding Jewish Cetera's love of vinyl's grant certures instigat in a discussion most. There's a sign at the Arcaida Gate that says "Belfast 2001: Still a Bit S\*\*t". That may have been then, but as the weirdos and eccentrics become more bold and powerful in this city, as an outsider it seems to me that the place is becoming less and less S\*\*t, and more and more fun. Thanks for having me over to Reside. Thanks especially to Krasanna Agnor and Colin Reid, for letting me Reside in their house and eat the official CQAF toast!

# Can morris dancers look away now

Say the word "accordion" to an Englishman and images come to mind of morris dancers with unruly facial hair wafting handkerchiefs around. You certainly don't associate it with punk.

But that's what Canadian Geoff Berner brings to the instrument. Punk, with a dash of two more of the accordion's unlikely bed fellows: politics and religion.

But let's leave those monoliths subjects aside for now, as Geoff explains how he married his instrument to punk music: "I guess it came from listening to some of the celtic punk, and alternative country music that's come out in the last 20 years.

"These folks took the music of their heritage, and married it to their punk aesthetic. The result was something actually more authentic than the gelded, slick rubbish that called itself 'new country' or 'trad' music."

Geoff's UK tour to promote his 2005 album *Whiskey Rabbi* concludes in Croydon on November 26, and the Vancouver-born singer lists "girls, drinking and God" as the chief subjects behind his songs.

This apparently attracts "odd, bookish, sensitive people who like to drink", (which perhaps explains his popularity in Scandinavia).

His Judaism beliefs inform his raucous, energetic set, as does the Jewish 'klezmer' style of music. It's a style that's barely recognised in the UK outside of Judaism; it is made for dancing and defined by very expressive melodies which almost mimic the human voice and emotions.



"I heard this traditional sort of punk music and thought 'somebody ought to do this to Jewish music.' Then I figured I might as well do it myself," he says.

"I want to make original klezmer music that's drunk, dirty, political and passionate. As a Jew of eastern European descent, I feel I have a calling to make this music live, not just preserve it under glass like something in a museum."

So we've got the hoozing, the sex, the religion, the politics (Geoff has previously supported the political-charged singer Billy Bragg, and for more than a decade was active in the British Columbia's Green Party), but what's the end result for an unsuspecting audience?

"I try to make music that's quite complex emotionally. It is possible to feel more than just one feeling at once and most pop/rock is fairly simple and limited, in terms of what it talks about.

Also, there's the fact that I'm an odd looking man in a black suit, alone on stage with an accordion.

"I want to drag klezmer music kicking and screaming back into the bars."

● Geoff Berner, Green Dragon,

CRO 1NA; Sunday, November 26, 8pm; free entry. Details from 020 8686 1322 or geoffberner.com.

**Accord and satisfaction:** Geoff Berner has caused a stir with his punk influenced accordion show



# Whiskey og trekkspill

– Et trekkspill er som et helt garasjeband inne i en kasse, sier Geoff Berner. Han er oppvarmingsartist på hele turneen til Kaizers Orchestra i høst, og gir ut et eget album denne uka.

## GEIR RAKVAAG

geir.rakvaag@dagbladet.no

Kanadiske Geoff Berner er blitt en kulturold i norske musikermiljøer etter flere turneer her i landet de siste årene. Hans andre album var «Live In Oslo», og flere norske artister har begynt å framføre sangene hans i tillegg til sine egne. Det nye «Whiskey Rabbis» handler om på Stavanger er utkastet CCAP denne uka.

## GJERDING BLINDRING

– Geoff Berner er en fantastisk. Han er som helt for seg selv, sier Kaizers Orchestra om mannen som er deres spesielle gjest på konsertene i høst. En mann som er vant til å spille på små klubber eller opptre for tusenvis av mennesker.

– Kaizers Orchestra kom da ut til meg etter en konsert på Mono og spurte om jeg ville være innsettelsen i å varme opp for dem. Jeg tenkte at det helst måtte være noen de ville ha tatt av dagen til gjengjeld. Jeg ba dem føre meg opp som interessert, ler Berner.

– Jeg til Kaizers Orchestra for første gang i 2000, og syntes de var et strålende ukooperert band, med musikk helt på siden som de ville få bare oss. Tenk de er på toppen av påskaten på store festivaler, reiser gitarer, og plater deres selger på bensinstasjoner, sier Berner.

## FRA PUNK TIL FOLKEMUSIKK

Geoff Berner kommer fra Vancouver i Canada, og vokste opp med en mengde diett av punkrock fra lokale grupper som D.O.A. og No Means No. Selv spilte han piano, men oppdaget trekkspillet gjennom en venninne.

– Jeg var litt irritert på en fest der alle skulle ut å spille på gitar. Jeg kunne ikke ta med gitarer, så jeg tok med meg et trekkspill i stedet. Så viste det seg at en viktig del av et trekkspill, som jeg begynte å øve på for å være skyld. Det tok over tankene mine. Og minnet meg om min jødiske bakgrunn.

Etter hvert har Berner sammensatt et album som heter «Whiskey Rabbis» – jødisk folkemusikk slik den lyses og fremst er blitt pekket i et europeisk. Men teksten hans er ikke spesielt religiøs.

– Jeg trodde jeg gjorde noe



Kanadiske Geoff Berner er blitt kulturold i norske musikermiljøer og i denne uka kommer «Whiskey Rabbis» ut på Stavanger-utkastet CCAP. FOTO: JESSEBJØRN

sjenerfelles helt til jeg begynte å forstå litt selv. Før jeg lagde denne plata var jeg i Romania, og oppdaget at sex, drikking og politikk er en viktig del av tradisjonen. Sangene ga tilfelle til å si ting som ellers ikke var akseptert. Det viser seg at jeg følger tradisjonen mer enn de som har borgerliggjort musikken og

alt bort de grovne elementene. «Now I got my own country/Where I'm free to persone/People with less than me/better do it stucky God damn law» på det nye albumet «Whiskey Rabbis». Jeg vil bli et en politisk drøyt i jødiske kretser? – Jeg irriterer de rette folkene. Jeg synes det er viktig at musikk

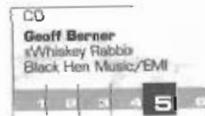
og kunst ikke tilfelle-bistiller alle, de vil det være ganske greit.

■ Turneen med Kaizers Orchestra starter i Stavanger i morgen. Fredag spiller de på Rockefeller i Oslo. Berner spiller også i Oslo 7. september på Mir og 9. oktober på Mono.

Før jeg lagde denne plata var jeg i Romania, og oppdaget at sex, drikking og politikk er en viktig del av tradisjonen.

Geoff Berner

## Galskapsklezmer



Geoff Berner har siden sist latt belgspillet sitt smitte av en rekke rabiate impulser, selv om klezmer-musikken fortsatt står han nærmest. Nå blander han sammen en høytt rocke cocktail av øst-europeisk klezmer, kabarett-musikk, finsk tango, folkelig fusel og singer-songwriter-materiale som har både irsk whiskeystank og amerikansk Jonathan Richman-toner. På overflaten har også Berner visse berøringspunkter med Kaizers Orchestra, men der Kaizers går i retning rocken går Berner inn i sin egen tvurige galskapsblanding av folke-musikklider og relativt mykt rock.

Likert er «Whiskey Rabbis» absolutt ikke politisk korrekt musikk i forhold til hvordan de jødiske musikerne i mellomkrigstiden Det-Europa lagde sin klezmer, og hvordan denne jødiske sovjetmusikkens bevarer av dages religiøse ledere, men det gir ja plasser bare enda mer sarr-budig og morsom. «Why did God put evil in the World, zoddannit!» synger han sangen «The True Enemy», og er flere «makkemanger» bare akkompagnert av trekkspill. For at Gud skulle ha noe å underholde seg selv med, konkluderer han i svaret, og gir til kjente refren om at kjendisheten er den største fienden menneskeheten står overfor.

Klezmer og Berner har en klar forbindelse av musiklærns retter og hvordan den fungerer i sammenheng med andre stilarter. Mer og mer har han perkolert inn Wayne Adams og folklinsen Dena Davis, men det er hans egen trekkspill som får platen sterkt merket uttrykk med et villnis av morsomheter, dryppende sarkasmer og giffige anfall mot det Berner mener for å være verdens urettferdigheter.

Og alt dette er dynet i brun og fast drikke, noe som synger sangen som avslutter den «Whiskey Rabbis» og «Drink All Days».

## MOSE STEINKJER

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Inspired by a near-death bender, Geoff Berner is making staid folkies loosen up.

## Squeeze play

Accordion ace Geoff Berner gets loaded

BY Jered Stoffco

GEOFF BERNER CD release with KRIS DEMEANOR at Oasis (294 College), Friday and Saturday (March 11 and 12). \$8. 416-975-0845.

Klezmer-crazy accordion ace Geoff Berner's liver must hate him.

While a little alcohol never killed anyone, it got Berner into trouble last year. While exploring the roots of traditional klezmer music on an Alan Lomax-style jaunt through the smoky hills of Romania, the Vancouver native hit the bottle a bit too hard. On one occasion, he awoke to the most vicious hangover of his life.

Alan Lomax? Try Keith Richards.

"I was trying to be culturally sensitive," explains Berner from a tour stop on the West Coast. "If you don't drink with the locals you're just being rude, and I ended up puking and puking. Obviously, I got really thirsty when I was done, so I drank a bunch of water from a well."

Apparently, the well water in rural Romania isn't exactly pristine, and Berner found himself laid out with a mysterious nasty bug in the infectious diseases ward of a hospital in Brasov.

"I thought I was gonna die," he admits.

But did he hang up his drinking hat and get off the sauce? Oh, no. Instead, Berner wrote a song about the experience (the aptly titled *Song Written In A Romanian Hospital*), smuggled some of that Roma hooch home with him and titled his new record *Whiskey Rabbi*.

Like a Jewish Shane McGowan, Berner writes the kinds of songs that play out like a drunken group therapy session – crude, brutally honest and often shockingly funny.

Maybe that's why roots mainstays like the Be Good Tanyas and Corb Lund cover his tunes, and his raucous live show goes over equally well in front of klezmer fans, folkies and punks.

"Nietzsche talked about the Apollonian and the Dionysian," explains Berner. "I think too much of folk music is Apollonian, like it has to be played perfectly and it has to make people smile. I'm going for the opposite."

No kidding. During sessions for the new record, Berner says he and pals Wayne Adams (percussion, vocals) and Diona Davies (violin, vocals) dipped into his stash of Palinka moonshine and made the record, which he thinks of as a collection of "new Jewish drinking songs," half cut.

"We were at the same studio in Vancouver (Little Mountain Studios) where Bon Jovi and AC/DC made all those horrible records in the 80s, so the equipment is top-notch. Everything was done with impeccable mics and expert technology, but we were going for lots of drunken energy."

Berner started doing regular solo gigs after his old band, West Coast punks Terror of Tiny Town, called 'er quits. Spurred on by enthusiastic audience response, he debuted with the folk-inflected *Light Enough To Travel LP* in 2000. Three years later, he followed up with *We Shall Not Flag Or Fail, We Shall Go On To The End*.

A fervent brew of gravelly klezmer, protest folk and manic punk energy, the new record dives mouth first into love, sex and politics. On the track *Lucky Goddamn Jew*, Berner gets downright political, cutting into Israeli domestic policy. "Now I've got my own country," he sings, "where I am free / to persecute people with less luck than me."

"Conservative Jews? I hope I piss them off," Berner exclaims. "Actually, people have suggested I shouldn't play a song like *Lucky Goddamn Jew* in some places, like New York.

"But I haven't gotten any letters from B'nai Brith yet."



**Interview**  
**GEOFF BERNER**

**If Mordecai Richler were reincarnated as a Vancouver singer/ song writer who played the accordion, his name would be Geoff Berner. A tragicomic satirist and hedonist of the highest order, Berner's recent reconnection with his Jewish musical heritage led him to Romania, where he helped klezmer archivist Bob Cohen track down legends who had been presumed dead. That influence surfaces on 2005's Whiskey Rabbi disc, and at this weekend's Ashkenaz Yiddish-culture festival, Berner is certain to challenge expectations of what klezmer music is and can be.**

**What was your relationship with klezmer before you went to Romania?**

*At Hebrew school and synagogue, we were exposed to Jewish sacred music, klezmer and some modern Israeli pop. I really enjoyed some of the kibbutzim folk songs, which gave me a bizarre back-door socialist indoctrination. I went away from it a little bit as a teenager, but I really came back to it through touring with alt-country people like Corb Lund and Carolyn Mark. They were punk rockers who had taken the [country] music of their heritage and applied their own aesthetic to it, which turned out to be way more authentic than what was being marketed as country music. It seemed like something that ought to be done with klezmer. In Romania, I saw that the roots of the tradition are much more profane and dirty and sexy than maybe much of klezmer is marketed as.*

**I think of your songs as more satirical songwriting. Where do you think your songs fit into klezmer?**

*If you were to be perfectly accurate about what I'm doing, I'd say I'm writing new Jewish drinking songs. There are an awful lot of Jewish drinking songs in the traditional canon. So few of the classic klezmer records are 100 per cent wedding music. There's so much more to Jewish music than that. It's totally understandable why they need one word to market this stuff, because it's kind of complicated to explain what it all is.*

**But you're not a fan of a lot of what's marketed as klezmer.**

*Well, 99 per cent of every style of music is crap, just because of the way the need for polite music in middle-class society tends to suck. There is that effect on Jewish music as well. There's nothing about what the preservationists did that I would say is wrong or bad. I understand what they were doing. Sometimes it had the result of being played as if it were classical chamber music. It's really important to preserve that stuff, but it's not where my skills lie: in faithfully representing something with the utmost scholarship and most precise technical reproduction.*

**Yet you do revel in blasphemy, do you not, sir?**

*Blasphemy can be fun! It can be healthy, too. There's a serious intellectual and cultural motivation behind what I'm doing, and part of it is that the cultural agenda in our lives has been seized by fanatics. Not just in the Jewish world, but in every major religion. It's very important for those of us who like to drink and screw and swear to stand up for ourselves, and say, this is our culture, too! We can't abandon Jewish music to the Matisyahas of the world.*

**MICHAEL BARCLAY**

**GEOFF BERNER PLAYS THE ASHKENAZ FESTIVAL SEP 2, 11PM, IN THE BRIGANN TINE ROOM AT HARBOURFRONT CENTRE (235 QUEENS QUAY W). FREE. FESTIVAL RUNS TO SEP 4. SEE [WWW.ASHKENAZFESTIVAL.COM](http://WWW.ASHKENAZFESTIVAL.COM) FOR COMPLETE LINE-UP.**

# Folkie's sampler

## Folk fest offers plenty of new stuff for veterans to experience

By JENNY FENIAK  
Special to the Sun

Any great relationship or monumental event inevitably has its ups and downs. The Edmonton Folk Music Festival is a favourite of mine every year, but nothing's ever perfect, including elements far beyond the control of organizers and guests.

Every year the weekend unveils a superb array of talented artists and musicians. Some I'm familiar with, and others, unknown going into the weekend, wind up as new favourites. It's one of the many great and mysterious ways of Edmonton's folk fest. But this year I decided to explore beyond the music and indulge in the festival "extras." I've browsed what the industrious folks arrived with this year. And instead of the usual lunch bag of fruit and trail mix, all I brought was a bottle of water and a healthy appetite.

### Familiar welcome

Music: It seems every day begins with a healthy dose of Celtic music. It isn't my favourite, but it's a wonderfully familiar welcome sig-

nalling the start of another fabulous day at Gallagher Park.

But the synthesized sounds coming from a concert on Stage 1 caught my attention. Broken Social Scene's Jason Collett not only provided a rousing wake-up concert, but cover to run for when the rain came raining down.

Kiran Ahluwalia filled the same space later with the sweetest sounds of the day.

Unfortunately, Collett was the dud playing alongside Sarah Harmer, Bruce Cockburn and Australian Paul Kelly for Stage 6's Which Side Are You



On session. Interesting takes on sides were shared, like Kelly's examination of which side God's on if both leaders in the current war think he's whispering in their ear. Collett hardly said a word to the crowd and was so quiet, he couldn't have been terribly concerned with the audience's side at all.

The great thing about folk fest sessions is giving brilliant musicians a chance to do anything, and more often than not they play favourite songs by other artists.

I only heard Harmer play one of her own pretty tunes with others from a couple of unknown friends, as well as bluegrass pro Peter Rowan, who performed the day before.

Geoff Berner went in the opposite direction with his prayer-like song *Light Enough to Travel*.

"The Be-Good Tanyas covered it and a lot of people think they wrote it. So I'm going to take this opportunity to re-assert my copyright," he announced to a packed hill.

### Coolsville cover

Hawksley Workman was next to Berner at the "Coolsville" session. Choosing to also play a cover, his choice of Paul Simon's *Mother and Child Reunion* wasn't the best fit. Another key maybe?

And off to the beer gardens, keeping folks moving was Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys. The Acadian Cajun fusion pulled out a song by their own David Greely that Linda Ronstadt, another performer this year, covered.

"I'm hoping to renovate," commented Greely.

On a low note, the Mexican metal-guitar duo Rodrigo y Gabriela pulled a no-show. Apparently they're here somewhere and have a couple of shows tomorrow, so we'll try again then.

Food/beverages: I ate a lot today. I drank a bit, too. The apple juice and iced cappuccino were a good start to the day, but as my first solid food, the Thai combo may have been a mistake. In the rain, the warm steamed rice was perfect and the pad Thai satisfied, but the bland, boiled chicken in a watered-down curry sauce disappointed as did the all-but-empty deep-fried spring roll wrap.

The famous green onion cakes were a must of my past, but they've grown so popular you could collapse waiting for them in the constant mile-long lineups.

Poutine's been adopted as my new standard and someone was offerring an alternate version called cactus poutine. Made with fresh-cut potato chips, it just didn't work the way french fries do. And then it was back to the ever-faithful beer gardens because nothing else will wash away a salty, greasy mess like that than good ol' Big Rock beer.

Misc: If you missed a performance or were blown away by one, make sure to take the music home with you. It's all available in the merchandise tent.

The Craft Marketplace is another fun stop and had a few new additions this year.

Nicola Harper's Acorn Studios sells eco-friendly gifts like the keyboard pin board made with corks for \$20. Chandelier necklaces are just \$10 and business card holders made from used circuit boards are \$16. They also sell hairpins and cufflinks made of computer keys. Fun and not to be found anywhere but the folk fest (and her website [www.acornstudios.ca](http://www.acornstudios.ca), of course).



### Light work

Geoff Berner took the opportunity to re-assert his copyright to his song *Light Enough to Travel* during the Coolsville session.

# The new Folk Fest quest: To build the next oasis

Some sessions weren't just must-see. They were **MUST-SEE**. If you missed them, your humanity was in question.

A session called Coolsville on Saturday afternoon with The Waifs, Geoff Berner, Feist and Hawksley Workman drew one of the biggest off-mainstage crowds ever. This moment, and others like it, were part of producer Terry Wickham's grand design.

"You stick someone like Geoff Berner in there with well-known artists like that, drawing that kind of crowd, and things happen," Wickham said Sunday afternoon.

Berner, who turned out to be one of this year's Great Discoveries, is a clever man-and-accordion act from Vancouver who usually plays small, dark venues with walls. But he was an ideal festival performer, smart and funny, probably the only artist in the history of popular music to write a waltz about the Maginot Line.

"Maginot Line, Maginot Line/ Thought you were so safe and strong/ Maginot Line, Maginot Line/ Stupid! Stupid!/ You were wrong."



“You stick someone like Geoff Berner in there with well-known artists . . . , drawing that kind of crowd, and things happen.”

Folk Fest producer Terry Wickham

## A FEW HIDDEN GEMS



Berner



BENEDIKT SARTORIUS

## der abend der alleinunterhalter

■ Die so genannte «Weltmusik» verkommt im globalen Supermarkt immer mehr zum touristischen Amusement und Pflegen von lieb gewonnenen Vorurteilen über die jeweiligen Ethnien. Dass beispielsweise der griechische Rembetika die Musik der Junkies, der sozial geächteten, schlicht die Musik des Bodensatzes der Gesellschaft war, spielt in den Club-Meds dieser Welt nicht die geringste Rolle. Um diesen Missstand einigermaßen zu korrigieren, beziehen sich einige Musiker explizit auf Traditionen und Wurzeln, die oft genug in den Spelunken der Entrechteten liegen.

Geoff Berners Variante der Klezmer-Musik beruft sich direkt auf diese Wurzeln, die fern der glatten Oberfläche liegen. Der Kanadier mit jüdischen Vorfahren in Ost-Europa sieht es als seine Aufgabe an, dem Klezmer seine Leidenschaft zurückzugeben. Dabei gilt es nicht, das hehre Phantom der «Authentizität» einzufordern, sprich die «guten alten Zeiten» zu verklären, sondern vielmehr die Emotionen des nicht nur im jüdischen Milieu ansässigen Klezmer auszudrücken. Emotionen, die laut Berner mit dem Punk verwandt sind. Emotionen, die in lauten Liedern über Sex, Politik und Alkohol kanalisiert wurden und Berner als seine Auffassung der Klezmer-Tradition bezeichnet.

Mit dem Akkordeon und seiner mal zornigen, mal sanft gebröchligen Stimme inszeniert Berner explizite, kompromisslose Lieder, die ihn letztes Jahr ins Vorprogramm des Kaizers Orchestra hievten und ferner beim klassischen kämpferischen Songwriter Billy Bragg auf offene Ohren stiessen. Nach einem Solo-Album mit dem traurigen, von Heimatlosigkeit durchtränkten Lied «Light Enough To Travel» liegt nun Berners neues Album

«Whiskey Rabbi» vor. Violine und Perkussion ergänzen das Akkordeon als Grundinstrument und stärken den Punk-Charakter von Berners Musik. In seinen Texten wechseln kalauernde Reime («Because whiskey on whiskey on whiskey is risky...») mit bitterem Ernst wie etwa in «The True Enemy», wo Berner die stumpfsinnige Langeweile als Ursache von Verbrechen und Missständen dieser Welt ansieht. Ein leiser Kontrast bildet schliesslich «The Unlistenable Song»: ein Lied über ein Lied, das den singenden Briefschreiber zu stark aufwühlt, um es auch nur ein zweites Mal anhören zu können.

Geoff Berner ist einer von fünf Künstlern, die an der Nacht der Solo-Entertainer verschiedene Zugänge des intimen Vortragens ausloten werden: die Kanadierin Lindsay Ferguson wirkt dabei als eher traditionelle Songwriterin, Jenny Popper alias Sandra Küenzi gibt die Poetry Slam erprobte Wundertüte ab, während die Sparte der primitiven Rock 'n' Roll One-Man-Bands durch Beat-Man und dem Guitar Fucker bedient wird. Ein vielfältiger Abend also, der zwei Wochen später in den psychedelischen, geisterbahnartigen Countrysongs von Delaney Davidson (The Dead Brothers) seine Ergänzung findet.

### Konzerte:

**4. März:** The Night of the Solo-Entertainers

**17. März:** Hugo Race & The True Spirits mit Delaney Davidson im Vorprogramm

Beide Konzerte finden im Dachstock der Reithalle statt.



## Lucky God Damn Jew

Geoff Berner punks klezmer music back to its historic roots

By Antoine Tedesco

"It was an accident. I was drunk. But I'd do it again," said Vancouver's Geoff Berner about picking up the accordion.

Over the month of February Berner and S&H.ca exchanged several electronic conversations about his new release *Whiskey Rabbi* (Black Hen Records); a fists-at-the-ready approach to klezmer music that Berner admits, "a lot of people who generally like klezmer, will hate my record a lot."

The current state of the world – political, economic, social and spiritual – weave their way through this punk-fuelled drunken dirty ode to klezmer, the mystic music associated with the Hasidim - Jews who maintain the highest standard of religious observance and moral action.

"I don't think people know too much about klezmer, or the Hasidic movement, either. It's a long discussion, what we mean when we say 'klezmer,'" he typed. "I use klezmer as a convenient term to talk about Jewish music that originated in Eastern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Hasids listened to it, other Jews listened to it, but the musicians who played it were never noted for being terribly worried about obeying every detail of the Talmud [a collection of Jewish law and traditions]. Why should quasi-fundamentalists like the Hasidim have a monopoly on the music of my people, any more than fundamentalist Baptists should have a monopoly on country music?"

"My big concern right now is those pesky fundamentalists," he continued. "Christian ones. Muslim ones. Hindu ones. Jewish ones. Or New Age ones. Fundamentalists are humourless, hypocritical busybodies. I refuse to concede a monopoly on religion or meaning to these wackos."

Berner's music is a mix of boozy whirlwinds and melodic droning. On *Whiskey Rabbi* his soulful accordion is joined by Diona Davies' often-dizzying violin and Wayne Adam's driving percussion. The three instruments play off each other beautifully. And all three musicians offer up vocals on various tracks, which can sometimes be a real trip.

His music doesn't scream "punk", more a wild gypsy caravan of emotions. Berner explains punk is about being yourself "and anyone who has a problem with that can fuck off. Musically, it's about putting emotional expression and meaning above technical facility or precision. These are things I believe in. Johnny Rotten was a prophet against boredom."

He goes on to type that boredom, which he sings about on 'The True Enemy', comes from monotony and repetition with the antidote being "diversity of thought, of activity, of possibility. If you want to combat boredom, try making something. Write a song. Try avoiding boring shit. Like a Starbucks or a McDonalds or a melodic pop punk guitar band."

With songs like 'Lucky God Damn Jew', 'Drunk All Day' and 'Volcano God' it's easy to see why Berner might think his brand of klezmer will illicit a certain kind of reaction among traditionalists.

"You've all been worshiping a false Messiah," are the first words that come out of his mouth on the lead/title track. Throughout the release he sings of pity, loss, violence, and pain with extreme joy and profound sorrow – all very traditional themes in klezmer, but it's his approach, his style that smashes you in the ears.

Berner considers himself a "certified Jew", having a Bar mitzvah and attending Hebrew School; conceding, "Some people think I'm pretty observant. I can also be somewhat obtuse. Sometimes on purpose."

Our e-mails touched on tons of stuff: what is the worst thing about being a touring musician, prayer, and his trip to Romania where he discovered that the real klezmer musicians there are more like him than he had been led to believe.

"They like to drink and swear and other dirty stuff."



**BRA I BERGEN:**  
Geoff Berger liker Bergen så godt at det ikke var nok med tre konserter her i februar. Tirsdag gjør han en til, og tar like godt med seg en venn fra Canada.

## Canadisk mini-invasjon

Geoff Berner kapret mange fans i Bergen da han var innom i februar og gjorde tre konserter på en uke. Nå er han tilbake, med forsterkninger fra hjemlandet Canada.

LARS HOLGER URSIN

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Sammen med folkrocksangeren Kris Demeanor skal han legge flere uskyldige sjeler under seg. Denne gangen har de også tatt radioen til hjelp.

- Vi har akkurat vært på «Midt i musikken» på NRK, snøvler Geoff Berner. Og unnskylder diksjonen sin, en sen søndag ettermiddag:

- Det er rart med det. De samme tingene som du gjør for å motivere jetlag, som å være oppe lenge og feste, kan faktisk forlenge det også, konstaterer han.

- Det er bare å ringe

Geoff er på tur i Nord-Europa igjen. Denne gangen blir det bare en konsert. Tro du?

«Det er bare å ringe» er en sang fra kveld 2004, så hvis noen har lyst til hyre oss, er det bare å ringe, sier kanadieren.

Geoff er i Bergen litt for å spille på Logen bar tirsdag, men kanskje mest for å bidra på platen til Real Ones, med vokal på et par av sine egne låter. Men både her i Bergen og i resten av verden, har han og Kris et nobelt mål med musiseringen sin.

- Folkemusikk har alltid hatt en god porsjon skitt i seg, men nå om dagen er den for steril. Det prøver vi å gjøre noe med. Sånn at vi kan vise at den har relevans for folk på vår alder også, sier Geoff Berner. De to står riktignok langt fra hverandre i stil - Geoff Berner er tungt influert av jødisk klezmer-musikk, som han er oppvokst med. Kris Demeanor er på overflaten en typisk nord-amerikansk singer-songwriter. Men begge har lånt holdningene sine fra punkverdenen, og bruker satire og humor, både i musikken, og mellom låtene.

- Og vi liker å skrive om de mørkere sidene av livet. Vi synes de hører hjemme i musikken. Den mer kommersielle musikkindustrien har en tendens til å vaske dem ut der

fra. De har kastret musikken, sier Geoff Berner.

**Bestemor fra Sverige**

Melankoli er jo velkjent for oss her i vintermørket, men de to virker ikke nevneverdig plaget med det. For et sjeldent alvorlig øyeblikk blir totalt ødelagt når Kris legger til:

- Jeg har vært i Skandinavia før, og har en bestemor fra Sverige. Så jeg har litt peiling på hvordan hjernene deres virker. Jeg har jo litt av det selv. Sitter ofte i timevis og stirrer ut av vinduet, før jeg plutselig begynner å gråte, helt uten grunn, sier Kris.

Og så ler begge to hjertelig. De to har lagt hodene og vennekretsene sine sammen for denne turneen - Kris sine kontakter i nettopp Sverige, Danmark og Tyskland har ordnet tur og opphold der, mens Geoff sine kontakter i Norge - blant annet Real Ones - hjelper melankolikerne her. Du skulle jo tro at canadiere, en fra regntunge Vancouver, den andre fra kalde Calgary, hadde sett pris på å dra til Svalden på ferie når det blir mørketid. Så hvorfor i all verden kommer de på tur i Nord-Europa i november?

**Parasitter både her og der**

- Godt spørsmål, egentlig. Det er vel fordi vi liker å utsette oss for prøvelser, det gjør hele opplevelsen sterkere. Hele denne reisen tynger jo mer og mer for hver dag som går, sier Kris.

- Som lokket på en jernkiste, legger Geoff til.

- Nettopp. Det gjør oss litt mer sammenkrokte bitre, som jo kler musikken, fortsetter Demeanor. Og de to bryr seg ut i krampelatter. Ikke engang drikkevannsparasitter skremmer canadierne. Geoff Berner vurderer imidlertid å legge en cover av Nick Drakes «Parasite» inn i settet sitt.

- «You may see me hanging around, I'm the parasite of this town», synger han, nesten ordrett etter originalen.

- Jeg har forresten hatt den parasitten alt, i Romania. Rumenske sykehus er ikke mye tess. Dere er heldige som får den i Bergen, og ikke der. På den annen side må jo jeg være immun nå. Jeg kan sikkert bade i Ganges, og gulpe ned digre munnfuller uten å ta skade av det, hevder Geoff.

MANDAG  
NORWAY

Norway

November 15, 2004

electroniske Pistier  
fra kjøkkenet

## Geoff Berner

For et par dager siden var jeg på konsert med Geoff Berner. Jeg snappet opp navnet sist han spilte i Bergen, syntes det virket interessant og lastet ned et par mp3er fra hjemmesiden hans. Dessverre fikk jeg ikke gått på konserten, jeg har glemt hvorfor. Men denne uken spilte han altså igjen, sammen med Kris Demeanor. Det er lenge siden jeg har kost meg så mye på en konsert.

Geoff Berner omtales ofte som "klezmerpunk". Men det er ærlig talt ikke stort av punk å spore i musikken. Det som er punk er holdningen han har. Og da snakker vi god, gammel hederspunk av bohem-typen. Jeg er sikker på at Geoff Berner og Jens Bjerneboe ville kommet godt overens. Uansett hva man velger å kalle det - om du synes en absinthdrikkende jødisk misantrop med trekkspill høres ut som et godt utgangspunkt for en musikkopplevelse, så anbefaler jeg at du får med deg konserten neste gang han kommer dit du bor.

Kris Demeanor var et nytt bekjentskap for meg. Han spiller hard folkrock av typen som passer like godt inn på en folkemusikksamling som en punkfestival, med tekster som er sammenhengende historier. Det var bra live, og jeg har planer om å laste ned mp3 fra sidene hans og høre litt mer.

# Geoff ... the Billy Bragg of Canada



Geoff Berner ... thoughtful, slice-of-life observations

By Una Bradley

FORMER Green Party candidate, social activist and punk accordionist, Geoff Berner is like a spiritual heir to his all-time musical hero, Billy Bragg. Indeed, the Canadian singer-songwriter is to Vancouver's ultra-conservative middle classes what Bragg was to Thatcherite Britain — a massive thorn in the (back)side.

Despite his musical career now firing on all cylinders, former TV writer Berner still finds time to campaign, most recently on the election of Vancouver's first left-wing mayor in 20-odd years.

So when the 31-year-old played support to Bragg, at a recent concert in Belfast, it was like a piece of personal history coming full circle.

"It was a dream come true," he says, with a mad smile that makes his doe-like green eyes go all dazzling.

He first saw Bragg at a folk festival, in 1986, and later shared a stage with him at a Vancouver workshop.

"The first time I saw him I thought, that guy's all alone up there and it works," he

explains.

"I thought, that guy's more punk-rock than most punk-rock bands."

The idols Berner subsequently gathered as he moved through his teens fell into the same bracket of musically adventurous pioneers with something to say about the world: The Clash, the Dead Kennedy's, Leonard Cohen, Woody Guthrie.

Now that he has released his own CD, *We Shall Not Flag Or Fail, We Shall Go On To The End*, Berner has joined such distinguished company.

From a song about WW2 (*Magnit Line*) through to one called *We all Gotta be a Prostitute Sometimes*, his debut is dense with thoughtful, slice-of-life observation.

Musically, he has gone out on a limb, using his accordion to produce a richly textured soundscape that is part punk, part klezmer.

The klezmer is, he believes, an unconscious nod to his eastern-European heritage.

His great-grandfathers on both sides came to Canada as part of the homestead programmes of the late 19th century, which brought settlers to farm the prairies.

The Jewish link remained strong and Berner was raised orthodox. He now calls himself "practising, in the loosest, loosest sense".

When he first started performing, he was in a regular rock band, called *Terror Of Tiny Town*.

He played guitar, sang, but only occasionally took up his accordion.

The band was moderately successful, but "never enough to pay the rent".

He continues the story: "After we broke up, in 1999, I would sometimes play my accordion at house parties.

"My friends told me they liked it better than the stuff we had done in the band — at least you could hear the words."

Words are important to Berner. He has a degree in creative writing and spent his twenties penning documentaries, comedy and drama for TV.

It never really lit his fire, though.

When he found he was having trouble scripting a children's programme called *Cleo The Misfit Unicorn*, he decided to call it quits.

"Even my two daughters weren't impressed with *Cleo*," he smiles.

Small, with elegant, chis-

elled features, he looks like Sinead O'Connor's long-lost twin brother.

He also bears a passing resemblance to Moby, which seems fitting, as Berner appears to be moulded out of similar stuff — the educated thirty-something's rock star, if you like.

Not that he seems to be an intellectual snob. Despite — or most likely because of — his "relatively privileged" background, what enrages him most is "a world view where some people are considered better than others".

"It even makes me angry when people who have committed crimes are treated as less than human," he says angrily.

"There was this situation in Vancouver recently where about 50 women went missing from the most under-privileged part of town," he continues.

"The police denied there was a problem but eventually, they were pressurised into investigating.

"It was alleged some guy was murdering them and then burying them on a farm.

"But no-one had really cared, because they were drug-addicts, single moth-

ers, prostitutes.

"It was as if this whole class of people was totally expendable."

He's in Belfast for the duration of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, of which he is the official artist-in-residence.

While here, he's staying with good friend, guitar supremo Colin Reid, and his partner Kresanna Aigner.

Aigner is in the music business, too, and helps arrange some of Berner's European dates.

His next stop is Norway, a country for which he has developed a great fondness.

"Perhaps it's the similarity between it and Canada," he muses. "They both project this image of being beautiful and boring. But Norway is actually incredibly open, artistically speaking. When you stop at a gas station along the highway, you can pick up a Leonard Coehrn CD."

●Geoff Berner will be performing at the Duke of York pub on May 8, Arcadia cafe on May 9 and Writers' Square on May 11, along with some other yet-to-be-confirmed dates. For tickets and up-to-date information, ring Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival on 02890232403.



## THE WHISKEY RABBI COMETH

### Geoff Berner Gives Klezmer Back Its Guts

By Vish Khanna

There are few musicians who've achieved as unlikely an ascent as Vancouver singer-songwriter Geoff Berner. When he released his last album *We Shall Not Flag Or Fail, We Shall Go On To The End* in 2003, he garnered a bucketful of acclaim and attention for his sharp, witty lyrics and his allegiance to the accordion as a folk-rock weapon. In a sense, Berner's first real foray into the world of a touring artist was a blind leap of faith.

"When I put out the last record it was in hopes that I could become a professional, full-time musician and it worked," he says with a hint of disbelief. "I've spent the last two years playing and I've just gotten better at it."

Indeed, Berner has certainly earned his reputation as a charismatic live performer who tells great stories. His growth as a musician and lyricist has culminated in the recent release of his excellent new album, *Whiskey Rabbi*, which finds Berner marrying traditional klezmer music with punk rock.

"The thing is, they lived together a long time before they got married, so they knew what they were getting into," Berner explains. "My feeling is that they get along so well because they have a lot in common. They're both played by so-called uneducated musicians who have reputations for maybe drinking and skirt-chasing; they're both simple forms of music that emphasize melody and a beat; and they both have a sense of humour and subversiveness about them. So, they really have a lot to talk about, lots they can do together."

Berner had his eyes opened after a trip to Mures, Romania found him in the birthplace of klezmer. He and his new bandmates — violinist Diona Davies and Carpathian percussionist Wayne Adams — met up with Bob Cohen, leader of the Budapest klezmer band *Di Naye Kapelye*, who Berner describes as "an incredible man." With Cohen's help, Berner began to see the potential that klezmer might have in reaching punk and indie-rockers.

"There's power chords in the klezmer of that region and there's thumping beats too," he explains. "Bob translated a lyric to me that went, 'The way Maria is dancing is making my dick so hard, I had to pour candle wax on it,' okay? Or, how's this for a political lyric: 'Die Ceausescu! Die, die!' So, punk and klezmer can sit down, have some drinks, and really enjoy themselves together."

Though the Jewish musical form is a part of his heritage, Berner's passion for klezmer may actually surpass cultural expectations. In fact, Berner seems bent on saving klezmer music all on his own simply by adapting its traditional form into something more contemporary.

"For me and my aesthetic, there was a kind of guts missing from traditional klezmer. I'm not trying to insult any bands who are part of the klezmer revival but I was trying to bring something else to it in an organic way. The precedents for me would be what they call alt-country — Neko Case, Carolyn Mark, and some of the Wilco stuff — and what the Pogues did with Celtic music. It doesn't sound like, 'Oh, you got punk in my Celtic music.' They sound like they belong in the same place and like that's the way it was meant to be all along."

Berner had one of these 'meant to be' moments at last year's Hillside Festival, where he had a rapt, mostly unsuspecting crowd in stitches during his magical Lake Stage set. "That was one of the best shows I've ever done," he gushes. "It was one of those ones where everything came together the way it was supposed to. The thing about any craft is that, if you do it enough, you start to know what you ought to do next without being able to explain why. I had just watched Rory McLeod the night before and every time I watch him it's like a master class inow to do the solo songwriter thing. He's a great man."

That day, Berner also had some kind words for his friend and frequent tour mate, the hilarious and gifted Carolyn Mark. In introducing his own version of Mark's "Edmonton," Berner made a point of heralding her songwriting as more substantial than it is often credited for.

"There is a tendency among songwriters to think that, to be really top-drawer, you have to be solemn as the grave and that's a big mistake," Berner states. "The great writers are able to get any response they're looking for. You know Shakespeare, if you go and see his comedies now, it's fucking funny. Even Tolstoy; if you pick it up, there's lots of funny shit in *War and Peace*. But there is a false distinction between high and low art, and when something is entertaining or funny, they think, 'That's not the stuff.' "Carolyn's a genius; I've never met anybody smarter than her and she deals with very serious ideas in her work and is one of those people who, just by getting out in front of people, takes a risk. People respond to that but I don't think she's gotten her due as a songwriter."

Though *Whiskey Rabbi* is poised to garner Berner a lot of respect himself, he modestly counts himself among music's most fortunate souls. "When you get up on-stage alone with an accordion, there's like nothing there; it's just you and you have to do something," he chuckles. "So, whenever it works, there's something kind of surprising about it. It keeps working! I'm making a living as an accordion player so basically every day is a kind of miracle."

## **A rabbi of rebel; Geoff Berner travelled to the farthest corners of Romania to learn music of his ancestors**

You would need to look long and far to find an artist who has even the slightest criticism of Guelph's Hillside Festival -- the ultra-hip, musician-friendly love-in held yearly at Guelph Lake. But those who were paying attention last summer would have been hard pressed not to notice that accordion-wielding songwriter Geoff Berner was not having all that great a time of it during a workshop dedicated to the songs of the Velvet Underground.

Hosted by ex-Junkhouse leader Tom Wilson, White Light White Heat took a clutch of festival performers and had them present songs from Lou Reed's seminal 1960s band. But the conscientious Berner soon discovered he had done far more homework than others on the panel. When it came to his turn, his set list had already been ruthlessly plundered by his cohorts. "I had learned four songs and they were all nabbed by others on the stage because they only knew one song," Berner said. "One by one they were bargained away except for *Femme Fatale*. And everybody had learned that one." So Berner paid tribute to his beloved Velvet Underground by performing a Big Star song, all the while with a very un-Hillside-like scowl on his face.

If nothing else, the anecdote shows that Berner does not cut corners when taking on musical projects. If his task is to learn some Velvet Underground songs, he'll learn them. And if his task is to revisit the klezmer music of his heritage, he will not hesitate to travel to the farthest corners of Romania. It was in a town called Mara Mures that Berner began studying the sounds of the Romany -- or Gypsies as they were known in less sensitive times. He studied with the masters of the form, accompanied by percussionist Wayne Adams and violinist Diona Davies.

Those are the musical traditions that most obviously inform his third studio album, the wry and often hilarious *Whiskey Rabbi*. It was while a vocalist of Vancouver's punk-influenced *Terror of Tiny Town*, Berner first began experimenting with the accordion,

which spurred an interest in the music that he had heard while a youth of "Eastern European Jewish" background at family gatherings. "I picked up the accordion as a convenience and the sound that started coming out of it reminded me of the songs from my childhood," Berner said. "So I started to look into what was going on with that kind of music. There was a huge revival of klezmer music. It was really a matter of realizing that klezmer, the music of my people, is no different than any other type of music in that 90 per cent of it is crap. So I had to find the stuff that speaks to me."

Initially, he found that in De Naye Kapelye, a fiery klezmer act based out of Hungary and led by New Yorker Bob Cohen. When Berner discovered that Cohen was heading to Romania for some field research, he asked if he could tag along. Mara Mures "is like the Ozarks of Romania," he said. "It's this hilly region that was geographically cut off from a lot of the 20th century. People still travel by horse and car and farm by hand and make ass-kicking moonshine in their backyard. It's not that they can't get stuff from the outside world, they just think that their's is better." And as a former punk rocker, Berner felt a special kinship to the Romany musicians. "They were the punk rockers of their day," he said. "They were socially looked down upon and considered tough and unschooled. It was music for getting drunk and having a party to." So Berner and his friends studied and drank moonshine, eventually crafting the violin-accordion drenched sound found on *Whiskey Rabbi*.

Still Berner acknowledges that his new CD is not without its spiritual leanings. As a vocalist, Berner attacks *Whiskey Rabbi*, *Lucky God Damn Jew* and *Drunk All Day* with the enthusiasm of a revival tent preacher. As he tours the country, he claims to be forging brave new ground in Judaism. "I'm the *Whiskey Rabbi*," he said. "I'm representing a new ultra reform of Judaism that I have founded and that endorses all sorts of things the more conservative sects may frown upon. I'm always available after shows to discuss issues of interpretation."



**Geoff Berner leans against the walls of the white room, planning his explosive escape.**

## Music Interview: whiskey rabbi's sermon

Playing in a band is a whirlwind experience. As new places whizz past the window of your tour bus, various people constantly rotate in and out of your social sphere to provide all sorts of opportunities to engage in questionable activities. Despite the undeniable allure of free booze, drugs and anything else you can imagine caution needs to be exercised--you might end up in a Romanian hospital.

This may sound like after-school public service announcement, but it actually happened to Canadian singer-songwriter-accordionist Geoff Berner.

At least he got a song out of the whole ordeal.

"My band and I were just trying to be culturally sensitive by drinking at the same rate as everybody else," Berner explains. "Things got a little out of hand and I ended up puking in a chicken yard from about four in the morning to seven. I made the mistake of drinking some well water which might have had something in it. I found myself shitting my guts out in Dracula's castle in the public toilet. I remember thinking this would seem kind of cool if I didn't feel like I was going to die.

"Eventually they did take me to a hospital but Romanian hospitals are pretty different than Canadian hospitals. They're kind of the way public hospitals would be in Canada if Ralph Klein had his way. Once I came to and realized I wasn't going to die, this song kind of shot into my head. I literally did write it in the hospital on my discharge papers."

The song in question turned out to be the aptly titled "Song from a Romanian Hospital," one of the many highlights on Berner's latest album, *Whiskey Rabbi*. A sometimes hilarious, often thought provoking album, it's an always enjoyable journey through our twisted world. Within its tracks, Berner explores his Jewish roots in his adoption of a traditional klezmer sound, discovered on his trip through the rural areas of Romania. This sound mixed with Berner's fiery delivery and controversial lyrics makes for a tantalizing blend of old and new, tradition and change.

"The new record is a drunken klezmer album," he says. "Oddly that makes it more focused than the last record. I've been moving in the direction of doing more and more klezmer and this record is the first one I would refer to as a true klezmer record or more like a fucked-up klezmer record.

Demonstrating a startlingly powerful conviction, Berner overwhelms listeners with drunk ramblings, poignant lyrics and his jovial demeanour. Never one to shy away from a politically charged subject, *Whiskey Rabbi* contains some of Berner's most powerful lyrics on such topics as religion, consumerism and advertising. The song "Lucky Goddamn Jew" walks the particularly thin line of a Jewish man criticizing Israel's position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I think people mainly get it," Berner says. "I've had some walkouts at shows, but for the most part people understand exactly what I'm going for. The record only came out on Feb. 22 so there's still time for people to hate it, but I just did the Ontario-Quebec leg of the tour and the venues have been jumping in size. There's way more people who know the stuff, it seems like the record, and whatever is on it, is helping me so far."

Though the subject matter of his songs may be dense, Berner's live sets have the reputation of being an uproariously good time. A typical show includes unhealthy amounts of alcohol, copious amounts of humorous stage banter, some badass accordion solos, a whole bunch of dancing and a reminder of how being in a band is the best job in the world, even with the dangers.

"I don't know if people expect me to be loaded to the point of incapacity, but it is nice to have a job where you get to drink," he says. "Nobody's going to fire me, but I'm not going to get so drunk that I can't play. If you can't play the songs well then you suck. I don't generally go to that point, except maybe after the show."

# Klezmer: Humorvoll und tragisch

Heute, 20.30 Uhr, Theaterstübchen, Jordanstraße: Geoff Berner & Daniel Kahn

Am Vorabend des Nikolaustages führt der mit Geschenken bepackte Schlitten schon einmal zwei international renommierte Klezmer-Musiker auf ihrem Weg durch die Republik nach Kassel.

Daniel Kahn aus den USA und Geoff Berner aus Kanada machen im Theaterstübchen halt, um dem Publikum eine Musik näherzubringen, die eine immer größer werdende Anhängerschaft findet.

Klezmer ist die ins 15. Jahrhundert zurückgehende Volksmusiktradition osteuropäischer Juden, die vor allem jiddisch dargebotene Tanzlieder beschreibt. Die traditionelle Klezmer-Musik hat sich in den vergangenen Jahren vor allem in den USA und Deutschland weiterentwickelt und in Fusion mit Ska, Jazz, Rock und anderen Genres eine eigene Musikrichtung ausgebildet. Zwei treibende Motoren dieser Entwicklung sind Daniel Kahn und Geoff Berner.

Der aus Detroit stammende Kahn wird seine von Leonard Cohen, Bertolt Brecht und



Geoff Berner sieht sich als Bewahrer einer traditionellen Klezmer-Musik, die ebenso politisch wie leidenschaftlich ist. Foto: nh

Tom Waits beeinflusste Musik vorstellen. Geoff Berner führt im Gegensatz zu Daniel Kahn die traditionelle Klezmer-Musik mit der Energie der Rockmusik zu einer einzigartigen

Synthese. Als Jude osteuropäischer Herkunft sieht er es als seine Bestimmung, diese Musik lebendig zu machen und nicht wie in einem Museum hinter Glas aufzubewahren.

## Geoff Berner treedt op tijdens Sinterklos

EMMELOORD – Open Jongeren Centrum De Klos aan de Meldestraat in Emmeloord staat zaterdag 2 december in het teken van de jaarlijkse Sinterklos met speciaal deze keer een optreden van de Canadees Geoff Berner. Hij is een singer-songwriter van een bijzonder niveau, zijn liedjes zijn scherp, rauw en doorspekt met een vreemdsoortige humor zoals ook André Manuel dat heeft. Een avondje sitdown comedy onder het genot van pepernoten en warme chocolademelk. De deuren gaan open om 21.30 uur en er wordt entree gevraagd. Voor bezoekers onder de 18 geldt een gereduceerd tarief.

'Ik wil originele klezmermuziek maken, dronken, vies, politiek en vol passie. Met schoppen en slaan klezmer muziek terug de kroeg in krijgen.' Zomaar twee doelen van accordeonspeler Berner. Als een van origine Oost-Europese Jood voelt hij zich haast verplicht deze muziek live te spelen, en zeker niet te bewaren in een glazen kast. Tours met onder andere Billy Bragg, Kaisers Orchestra en

André Manuel scherpten zijn cabaretachtige performance aan, nu is hij – gewapend met slechts een kleine accordeon – op trek om zijn eigen werk te promoten. Hij kiest niet de gemakkelijkste weg, het liefst speelt hij zover mogelijk van bekende of grote steden vandaan.

Geoff Berner's teksten zijn een regelrechte aanklacht tegen eenieder die zichzelf boven mensen plaats die geen eigen plek hebben in de wereld. Een thema wat steeds terug komt, zoals ook in 'The Violins', een klezmer bewerking van een gedicht van de Palestijnse schrijver Mahanoud Darwich. Berner's muziek dient maar één doel: om in de beste klezmertraditie God te loven voor het feit dat hij nog niet naar de eeuwige jachtvelden geroepen is. Een aanstekelijke vorm van carpediemuziek is het gevolg. Tel daarbij zijn aan Tom Waits herinnerende grappige opmerkingen tussendoor en het publiek gaat gegarandeerd in no-time mee. Zo weet Berner net als Black Ox Orkestar eerder op een andere manier, de traditionele Joodse (drank)liederen naar nu te tillen.



Sitdown comedy en promotie eigen werk.

Das ist los

Denmark

April, 2006



Emmeloord, NL

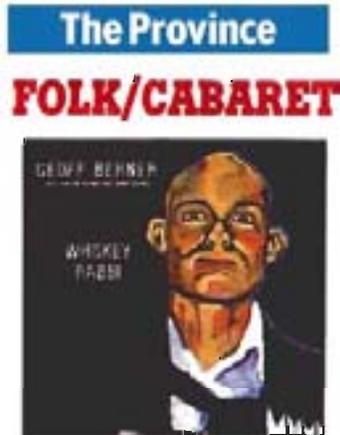
Nov., 2006

**GEOFF BERNER Whiskey Rabbi**

Black Hen/Maximum

Celebrating all things drunken and klezmer, Berner has caused waves out west (as well as in Norway, strangely). Unencumbered by anything but accordion, violin and percussion, songs like the title track and "Lucky God Damn Jew" spew satire aplenty without spiralling into self-deprecating yucks. Other tracks, like "Unlistenable Song," are genuine tearjerkers. Indeed, it is Berner's poetic sense that is at the centre of this disc -- his musings on boredom being the cause of all evil on "The True Enemy" are compelling (although the Vancouver police force may not get the joke). And klezmer fiddle jams rule. CHRIS ROLFE

Geoff Berner plays Oasis (294 College) Mar 11-12.



**GEOFF BERNER: Whiskey Rabbi (Black Hen)**

Inspired by Graham Greene's tale of the whiskey priest, local folkie Berner has found his calling, as a razor-wit of "highly reformist Judaism" carried via new klezmer songs. "I'm trying to destroy all the false piety, most of all . . . smug sobriety," he sings in the opener title cut, establishing a current of caustic observation that won't quit. Tunes such as "Lucky God Damn Jew" ("Thank you, thank you everyone for not completely stamping us out") and "The True Enemy" ("Boredom is the true enemy") might offend sensitive types. Tough. It's not their world. **A** —S.D.  
*Saturday @ W.I.S.E. Hall.*

**chart**

**GEOFF BERNER Whisky Rabbi**

(Black Hen) In this follow-up to 2003's *We Shall Not Flag Or Fail, We Shall Go On To The End*, Vancouver's Geoff Berner has honed his unique sound to create an even more engaging and wonderfully perplexing collection of songs. *Whiskey Rabbi* features Berner's klezmer-punk accordion stylings, accompanied by percussionist Wayne Adams and violinist extraordinaire, Diona Davies. Berner weaves a series of tales steeped in his wickedly edgy sense of humour, particularly in tunes like "True Enemy" and "Lucky Goddamn Jew." Listen carefully, laugh, frown, scratch your head, but don't miss a word. Then sit back and take in the musical nuances that create this undeniably original musical package. - Shannon Whibbs

**GEOFF BERNER, Whiskey Rabbi**

(Black Hen) Victoria, BC's nouveau-klezmer troubadour continues his unrelenting campaign against boredom and his own liver on this, his third release. He slurs through the opening title track, setting the mood for the whiskey-filled romp to come. Berner's dark humour is punctuated by his trademark drunk- en accordion button-mashing in the rollicking "Drunk All Day" and "Lucky Goddamn Jew." The touching "Unlistenable Song" is the only lighthearted respite from this black comedy. — Sean MacGillivray

**GEOFF BERNER Whiskey Rabbi**

(Black Hen)

Geoff Berner is a cross between Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, your grandfather from the Old Country and your drunk uncle—but while Charles made gospel music sexy, Berner is making klezmer music boozy. With *Whiskey Rabbi*, the Vancouver-based accordionist with the messianic appeal of a young Dylan has completed his transition from political folk to heritage-hybrid punk. On the title track, he belts out a pied-piper introduction, the same opening barrage that shocked a talkative crowd into silence at the Sidetrack a few months ago: "You've all been worshipping a false messiah/I pray to God that I got here in time to guide ya." (Later in the same song, he busts rhymes like "I sure hope she's gonna be sympathetic/She's a hot little Catholic paramedic.")

These lyrics, and tracks like "Lucky God Damn Jew," showcase Berner's irreverent cleverness, but he also has a serious side. The disc features a chilling spoken-word version of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's "The Violins," and on "The True Enemy" he brings together Vancouver police brutality and the World Trade Center attacks (in a song you could dance to at your cousin's bar mitzvah). Berner gets big ups from musicians like Billy Bragg and Corb Lund, records with Po' Girls's Diona Davies on violin, and is scheduled to tour Scandinavia with Carolyn Mark in May. Thank God he'll be hitting Edmonton first. **4.5/5**

—Dan Rubinstein

NKLIEDER: GEOFF BERNER

## HR SEID RM DRAN»

»i Akkorde und ein Akkordeon: Der  
»adrier Geoff Berner verbindet die  
»ishe Klezmer-Musik mit der Attitüde  
»i Punk.

»i Philippe Amrein

»off Berner ist kein Mann der verbalen Um-  
»weife. Dies bewies er bei seinem Zürcher Gast-  
»del letzten Herbst im Vorprogramm von Kaizers  
»hestra gleich zu Beginn. Mutig stellte sich der  
»zköpfige Kanadier damals im X-tra ans Mikro-  
»und gab erst einmal den Tarif durch: «Hey,  
»weizer! Wisst ihr was? Ihr habt zwar materiellen  
»lstand, aber spirituell seid ihr ziemlich arm  
»n.» Dann grinste er verschmitzt ins verblüffte  
»likum – und griff sogleich in die Tasten seines  
»kordeons, das er liebevoll Estella nennt.



Jetzt gehts zur Sache: «Whiskey Rabbi» Geoff Berner.

Seit ein paar Jahren schon zieht Berner mit sei-  
nen «religiösen jüdischen Trinkliedern» erfolgreich  
durch Nordamerika und unternimmt gelegentliche

Irrfahrten im Walzertakt, die ihn nach Europa füh-  
ren. Im leichten Reisegepäck füllt er diesmal auch  
sein zweites Album, «Whiskey Rabbi», mit, in des-  
sen Songs der kanadische Kommodenquetscher  
stilsicher die «besoffene, schmutzige, politische und  
leidenschaftliche» Klezmer-Musik mit dem Geiste  
des Punk – dem man natürlich dieselben Attribute  
attestieren kann – verbindet.

Er besingt Glück und Vergänglichkeit, irdi-  
sches Vergnügen und himmlische Vorsehung,  
berichtet von seinem Aufenthalt in Ostblock-  
Krankenhäusern und macht sich mit schelmischer  
Freude über die ungeschickt arrangierte Maginot-  
Verteidigungslinie der Franzosen her. Aber in  
erster Linie gibt er den cleveren Trinker, der  
ehrliebe Ziele verfolgt: «I want to drag klezmer  
music kicking and screaming back into the bars.»  
Dieses Vorhaben trieb er nach seinem letzten  
Auftritt in Zürich tatkräftig voran, indem er  
gemeinsam mit Estella durch die einschlägigen  
Kneipen der Stadt zog. Geoff Berner ist eben auch  
kein Mann der gastronomischen Umschweife.

Wintorthur, Salzhaus  
So 5. 3. 20 Uhr

## Spiller på mange strenger

To allsidige trubadurer setter  
hverandre stevne på Kamelon  
mandag – kanadiske Geoff  
Berner og Leiv Reed fra Nord-  
fjord.

KARI FAUSKANGER

kari.fauskanger@bt.no

Leiv Reed er ikke så glad i ordet truba-  
dur. «Omreisende artist», passer ham  
bedre. For han har allerede hatt en  
omflakkende tilværelse. Du kan like  
godt treffe på ham og gitaren i en bak-  
gard i Frankrike eller Spania som i  
Bergen. Et halvår i Sør-Amerika har  
han også fått med seg. Nordfjordingen  
kom til Bergen for et års tid siden og

fant seg raskt til rette i det pulse-  
rende musikkmiljøet.

– Jeg har vært heldig som har fått  
innpass på den fantastiske musikk-  
scenen i byen, sier han.

Musikken hans er influert av stor-  
heter som Nick Drake og Bob Dylan.  
Antydninger om at navnet Reed er  
inspirert av Lou Reed bare flirer han  
av. Leiv Reed kommer fra Reed i  
Gloppen kommune. På Kamelon stil-  
ler han med eget band. Det består av  
Bosse Litzheim fra Ai Phoenix og  
Jørgen Sandvik fra Real Ones. Det  
blir smakebiter fra den kommende  
platen, som er planlagt utgitt på nya-  
ret.

Kveldens andre artist, Geoff Ber-  
ner, har med seg stoff fra et rykende



ALLSIDIG  
ARTIST: Her  
øver Leiv Reed  
(nr. to fra  
venstre)  
sammen med  
Tom Sawyer  
and The  
Huckleberry  
Finns og Heidi  
Torsvik før en  
konsert på  
Kamelon under  
Bergenfest i  
mai.

ARBEIDSGI-  
FRED TILBYGG-  
KLEMT 2007

ferskt album. «Whiskey Rabbi» fikk  
en femmer hos BTs anmelder for et  
par uker siden. Kanadieren er en flit-  
tig gjest i Bergen og har spilt konser-  
ter det går gjetord om i byen. Trekk-  
spilleren brenner for den litt ra og

folkelige musikken og spiller en  
slags punkete klezmermusikk. Etter  
konserten på Kamelon skal han var-  
me opp for Kaizers Orchestra på  
gruppens europaturné.



**LUN HUMOR:** Geoff Berner varmet mange med sår stemme og trekkspill på Cementen i går. I kveld varmer han opp for Kaizers på Folken.

## En provoserende jøde med trekkspill

**Kanadieren Geoff Berner skal følge Kaizers Orchestra på deres europaturné. I går varmet han opp på Cementen med klingende klezmer-pønk.**

Kine Hult | tekst  
Anders Minge | foto

**PLATESLIPP:** – Musikk er til for å formidle sterke følelser, og det håper jeg at jeg skal få til. Gjerne mange forskjellige følelser på en gang.

Geoff Berner har ankommet Stavanger for noen få timer siden. Han har jetlag, men er likevel klar for sin egen slippfest. Albumet som slippes heter «Whiskey Rabbi», og er det lokale plateselskapet CCAP sin første utenlandske utgivelse.

– Plata består av nye jødiske drikkeviser, derfor synes jeg «Whiskey Rabbi» var en passende tittel, sier Ber-

ner og smiler underfundig over guinnessen.

Det umiddelbare inntrykket man får av ham, er at han er en reflektert og avbalansert person, men han legger ikke skjul på at han liker å provosere. Han åpner plata med å synge om at alle har tilbedt en falsk Messias.

– Dette er en av de linjene jeg håper kan trigge mange følelser på en gang. Selv sagt henviser jeg til det jødiske ståstedet, som sier at Jesus ikke var Messias, og at kristendommen altså er basert på gale premisser.

Hans jødiske bakgrunn spiller ikke bare inn i tekstene. Musikken er i stor grad basert på klezmer.

– Hvordan vil du beskrive denne musikken?

– Klezmer er tradisjonell folkemusikk skapt av østeuropeiske jøder. Den hadde sin første store blomstring i første halvdel av forrige århundre, og ble etter krigen tatt opp igjen i New York på 70-tallet. Nå blir den spilt rundt om i hele verden igjen. Min musikk

er en blanding av denne stilen og pønk. Når det er sagt, synes jeg ikke det er så lett å beskrive det jeg selv holder på med. Å snakke om musikk er som å danse om arkitektur, som Duke Ellington så fint sa det.

Berner beveger seg med andre ord langt fra mainstreamens store sluk. Og når han entrer podiet på Cementen, er han bevæpnet kun med trekkspill. Folk ser imidlertid ut til å sette stor pris på både musikken og den lune humoren hans. Det er sannsynligvis ikke så dumt å sende en mann av dette kaliberet av gårde med Kaizers Orchestra.

– Jeg gleder meg veldig, ikke minst siden jeg liker Kaizers veldig godt. De spiller med en utrolig energi og lidenskap. Jeg synes det er fantastisk at de har gjort det så bra. Det viser at Norge er et land hvor musikk som mange karakteriserer som sær, kan nå toppen av hitlistene. Noe sånt hadde nok aldri skjedd i Canada.

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