

אין אַ טונקל בלויער נאַכט
in a dark blue night

ALEX WEISER



in a dark blue night | אין אַ טונקל בלויער נאַכט

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|---|------|
| 1. Evening אָונט, <i>words by Morris Rosenfeld</i> | 3:40 |
| 2. Broadway בראָדוויי, <i>words by Anna Margolin</i> | 4:33 |
| 3. Like the Stars in Heaven ווי די שטערן אויף דעם הימל, <i>words by Naftali Gross</i> | 1:59 |
| 4. Golden Honey גילדענער האָניק, <i>words by Celia Dropkin</i> | 3:53 |
| 5. Night Reflex נאַכט־רעפּלעקס, <i>words by Reuben Iceland</i> | 4:16 |

Coney Island Days

- | | |
|------------------|------|
| 6. Coney Island | 2:16 |
| 7. Pennies | 3:31 |
| 8. Knish Store | 2:00 |
| 9. Russian Bath | 3:08 |
| 10. Mother | 2:48 |
| 11. Aunt Fanny | 2:26 |
| 12. Ellis Island | 3:14 |

Total: 37:44

Annie Rosen mezzo-soprano
Lee Dionne piano | Yasmina Spiegelberg clarinet
Brigid Coleridge violin | Lun Li violin | Jordan Bak viola
Julia Yang cello | Sam Suggs double bass



IN A DARK BLUE NIGHT consists of two connected song cycles. The first, *in a dark blue night*, sets to music modernist Yiddish poetry about New York City at night, all written by Jewish immigrant poets at the turn of the 20th century. The second, *Coney Island Days*, transforms an oral history with the composer's late grandmother, Irene Weiser, into a musical exploration of the period of time when Jews became Americans and the way that humble, individual stories can capture the sweeping breadth of history.

Annie Polland, president of the Tenement Museum, and Niki Russ Federman, fourth-generation co-owner of Russ & Daughters, share their thoughts on IN A DARK BLUE NIGHT, Jewish immigrant life in New York, family history, and collective memory.

AP: American Jews today don't have the connection to immigration that our parents and grandparents once did. This time, when individuals were coming to a new country with almost nothing and trying to create life in a new and alien place, was such a critical moment in Jewish history and American history. The tensions that Jewish immigrants were experiencing—how to reconcile Jewish culture with American culture, Jewish politics with American politics, and creating a new identity from these disparate parts—is still very much present in our society. To have an understanding of how people did this 100 years ago when they were first encountering New York is so important. This album is a beautiful entrée into this world and is a way to bring to life the diversity of Jewish experience in the first half of the 20th century and hold it up as a mirror to examine these same issues today.

NRF: To live an integrated life—both as an individual and as a collective—it's essential to have an understanding of, and to be in relationship with, who and where you came from. Being disconnected from that can be very dangerous and alienating. This music provides a vehicle to connect with a shared past. In many ways it relates to what I do at Russ & Daughters, using food and our space, which is 110 years old, to create a throughline of experience and to be in conversation with history. If you walk into any

Russ & Daughters, whether it's the shop or the cafe, you will see that there are pictures on the walls—my family pictures: my great-grandfather, grandmother, pictures of the Lower East Side. But you'll never see a wall text explaining who was in those pictures. This is intentional, because I see those pictures in the same way I see the food we serve: I want people to see their own story and their own family in those images and in taking a bite from a bowl of kasha. This is what comes through in the music. These works have a universality. They are an invitation for anyone to transpose their memory and their stories onto them.

AP: We have such a powerful connection to the immigrant Yiddish poets whose works form the texts of *in a dark blue night*. They are encountering the same city, the same skyscrapers, the same modern landscape that we are seeing today. The songs on the first half of the album breathe life into the city, with the distinct blend of nature and architecture that give New York its own beautiful form. In many ways then, these songs, even though they are in Yiddish, present a New York perspective more than anything else. They are the words of people who feel very much a part of the built environment and part of the cityscape. But at the same time, these are the works of marginal newcomers, and in that way, these songs provide

a very specific insider/outsider viewpoint. We think about history all the time, but in many ways it has been made static. Through this music, though, the dynamism of history is made apparent. It gives you a jolt and forces you to experience the city you have always known through the perception of a newcomer, bringing into relief the emotional experience of what it would have been like to encounter the city for the first time.

NRF: You feel a creative tension between the world of the past that is represented in the album texts and the contemporary sound of the music. The dialogue between the two, where the present informs the past, really helps to reframe this history and imbue it with freshness. I think in a way this music is also giving voice and dignity to the experience of the individual, especially through the words of Alex's own grandmother in *Coney Island Days*. There was very often a feeling among the immigrant population that their own stories were not that important. It wasn't shame, exactly, but the idea that their family history wasn't interesting. We don't have that much surviving history about Russ & Daughters because my ancestors didn't think it was anything worth recording or writing down or saving, because they believed the work they did was simply a means of survival. There was nothing glamorous about it. My great-

grandparents at one point lived behind Russ & Daughters with their three daughters, and at the time they probably felt pretty ashamed about that. This music imbues this experience, of being an immigrant family living in the cramped quarters behind the shop where they're trying to make a living, with beauty, and it allows the listener a way to claim that story as their own.

AP: People want to find a place to commemorate history, to make it physical, to write it down, to be able to imagine it in some way that gives it a tangible shape. This album both asks and answers the question of what we can do with the individual and collective memories that are passed down to us. This album isn't simply an invitation to remember the past. Rather, it shows us that remembering is our responsibility. ♦

אין אַ טונקל בלויער נאַכט

אָוונט
מאַריס ראָזענפֿעלד

אויף די פּאַליסאַדן רוט די זון,
וואַרפֿנדיק איר לעצטן, זיסן בליק
דעם פֿאַרלאָזענעם האַדסאָן, וועלכער ליגט
אין זײַן קאַלטער זילבער־בעט פֿאַרטראַכט,
מורמלענדיק אַן אומעטיק „גוט נאַכט.“

גוטע נאַכט דיר, ליכט־פּרינצעסין, שטום
ווי אַ יוגנט־חלום אין די בערג
זינקסטו, נעמענדיק מיט זיך די פֿרייד!
ליכטנדיק פֿאַרגייסטו אין דיין פּראַכט,
לאַזנדיק די וועלט אַליין — גוט נאַכט!

באַלד בלייבט איבער נאָר אַ רויטער פֿלעק
אויפֿן האַריזאָנט ווי בלוט, אַ שמערץ
וועבט זיך אויס אין מערבֿ און אַ וויי
וויגט די פֿעלדער שלעפֿערדיק און זאַכט
און עס שעפטשעט אומעטום: „גוט נאַכט“...

in a dark blue night

Evening
Morris Rosenfeld

The sun rests on the Palisades
Casting her last, sweet glance
To the forlorn Hudson, which lies
In its cold silver-bed lost in thought,
Murmuring a lonely “good night.”

Good night to you, princess of light, silent
As a dream of youth on the shore
You're sinking, taking joy with you!
Luminously setting in your splendor,
Leaving the world alone — good night!

Soon only a red spot remains
On the horizon like blood, an ache
Takes shape in the West and a pain
Rocks the fields sleepy and calm
And whispers everywhere: “good night”...

aph Co.
on the Hudson, N. Y. City.



בראָדוויי, אָוונט
אָננאַ מאַרגאָלין

דער אָוונט בליט. די גאַס רוישט העל ווי טויזנט קוואַלן.
עס שווימען פֿייערן אַרויף פֿון זונשטויב און קאַראַלן.
וויטרינעס — פֿלאַמענדיקע היילן. וואַסערפֿאַלן
פֿון טיפֿן סאַמעט, זיידנס שווער און קיל.
און מענטשן אין אומענדלעכן קאַדרייל
באַגעגענען זיך און ווערן ווי פֿאַרפֿאַלן.
און ס'זוכן אויגן, אויגן זינגען, לאַכן,
אַבער מיר דאַכט, עס קניען אַלע זאַכן.

בלוי בליט דער ווינט. בלויע שאַטנס פֿאַלן.
עס פֿליט אַ קאַר פֿאַרביי אויף לאַנגע שוואַרצע שטראַלן.
אַ רעקלאַמע שניידט זיך איין אין הימל ווי אַ שווערד.
און שטימען שאַרכן, קושן זיך, אי יאָ אי ניט דערהערט,
און וויקלען זיך אַרויף ווי ליכטיקע ספּיראַלן.
און אויגן זוכן, אויגן זינגען, לאַכן.
אַבער מיר דאַכט, עס איז אַ טרויערן, עס איז דאָס לעצטע וואַכן,
די לעצטע שעה פֿון געזעגנען מיט דער ערד.

Broadway, Evening
Anna Margolin

The evening blooms. The street rustles bright as a thousand springs.
Fires swim up from sundust and coral.
Shop windows — fiery caves. Cascades
Of deep velvet, silks heavy and cool.
And people in an endless quadrille,
Meeting each other and losing themselves.
And there are searching eyes, eyes singing, laughing,
But to me, everything is kneeling.

The wind blossoms blue. Blue shadows fall.
A car soars by on long black rays.
A billboard takes shape in heaven like a sword.
And voices rustle, kissing each other, heard and unheard,
And wind upward together like spirals of light.
And eyes searching, eyes singing, laughing.
But to me it is tragic: the last watch,
The final hour of farewell on the earth.

ניו־יאָרק
נפתלי גראָס

ווי די שטערן אויף דעם הימל
אין אַ טונקל־בלויער נאַכט,
צינדן דיִינע גאַסן זיך,
צינדן דיִינע טורעמס זיך
גרויסע רוישנדיקע שטאַט.
צינדן דיִינע טורעמס זיך,
צינדן דיִינע פֿענצטער זיך,
צינדן ווי די שטערן זיך
אין אַ טונקל־בלויער נאַכט.

New York
Naftali Gross

Like the stars in heaven
In a dark blue night,
Your streets are illuminated,
Your towers are illuminated
Great noisy city.
Your towers are illuminated,
Your windows are illuminated,
Illuminated like the stars
In a dark blue night.



ניו־יאָרק בײַנאַכט בײַ די ברעגן פֿון האַדסאָן
ציליע דראָפּקין

אין די קאַמערן פֿון דיניע וואַלקן־קראַצערס
רינט גילדענער האַניק, — דאָס ליכט,
דורך די מיליאָנען פֿענצטער,
ווי דורך די קאַמערן פֿון גיגאַנטישע האַניק־נעסטן,
זעט מען דעם גילדענעם האַניק,
דעם מענטשנס האַניק, דאָס ליכט.
ריזיקע בינען האַבן געבויט דאָ זייערע בינשטאַקן,
אַ וואַלד פֿון בינשטאַקן,
און איבערפֿולט זיי מיט האַניק,
מענטשלעכן האַניק, — דאָס ליכט.
שוואַרץ ווי פעך, איז דער האַדסאָן בײַנאַכט,
און דער האַניק שטראָמט אַהין,
און שלינגט דעם פעך בײַ די ברעגן פֿון ניו־יאָרק.

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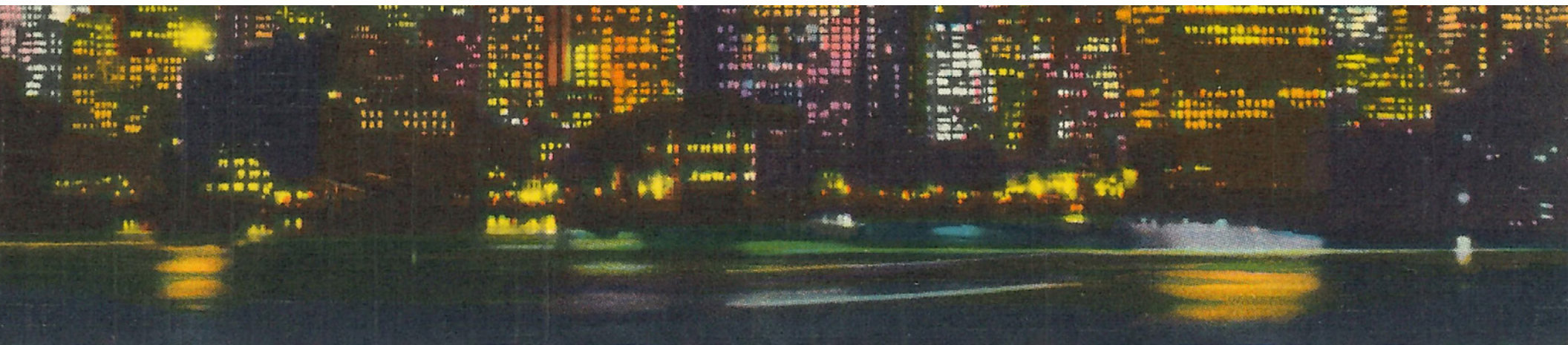
ביימער אַזעלכע מיט גילדענע פֿרוכט,
אַ וואַלד מיט גילדענע פֿרוכט,
ריזיקע צעדערן,
באַהאַנגען מיט לאַמטערן.

New York Evening By The Hudson Shore
Celia Dropkin

In the rooms of your skyscrapers
Golden honey runs — the light,
Through the millions of windows,
As if through the rooms of a gigantic honey-comb,
You can see the golden honey,
The honey of mankind, the light.
Giant bees have built their beehives here,
A forest of beehives,
And overfilled them with honey,
Mankind's honey — the light.
The Hudson is pitch black at night,
And the honey flows over there,
And engulfs the blackness of the shores of New York.

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Such trees with golden fruit,
A forest with golden fruit,
Giant cedars,
Covered with hanging streetlights.





נאַכט־רע־פֿלעקס
ראַובֿן אייזלאַנד

פֿון דער ווייכער, פֿליסנדיקער אָוונטלעכער גרויקייט,
רייטן זיך די וואַלקן־קראַצערס, ווי ריזן נאַקעטע,
מיט פֿינצטערע שטערנס און פֿייערדיקע אויגן —
אַ מעכטיק געשריי פֿון מענטשלעכן ווילן,
צו שאַפֿן ווונדער אינעם ווונדער פֿון דער וועלט.
און ווונדערלעך־פֿאַרצויגן, ווי אַ שוואַרצער ריזיקער בויגן,
שפּאַנט זיך ביי־כיק־שטייף אַ בריק פֿון ברעג צו ברעג
איבער אַ שוואַרצן טייך.
און לעבן, אָנגעשטרענגט פֿון טעג,
און טרוימען, אויסגעצויבערט אין די נעכט,
פֿליסן גאָלדיק דורך שטאַלענע אָדערן
פֿון ווונדער צו ווונדער,
ווי מענטשן האַבן פֿענצטער אין הימל אָנגעצונדן.

Night Reflex
Reuben Iceland

Against the gentle, flowing gray of evening,
The skyscrapers scream, like naked giants,
With dark brows and fiery eyes —
A mighty cry of human desire,
To build wonder within the wonder of the world.
And wonder-veiled, like a giant black bow,
A bridge stretches curved-taut, from shore to shore
Over a black river.
And life, drained from days,
And dreams, enchanted in the nights,
Flow golden through steel veins
From wonder to wonder,
Where people have illuminated windows in heaven.

Coney Island Days

Coney Island

I was very young. We used to go to the beach ourselves. We ran in the water. We came out. We were there all day. There was no limit. We were there without an adult. The adult was Morty, and he didn't pay any attention. I'd go out with Bea. We went to Nathan's. They used to give us fifteen cents or a dime to go on the boardwalk, and get something... custard and a ride. I used to go with Marlene, nine times out of ten she dropped hers on the boardwalk, so I had to share my fifteen cents with her. I had good times. All my family was loving to me.

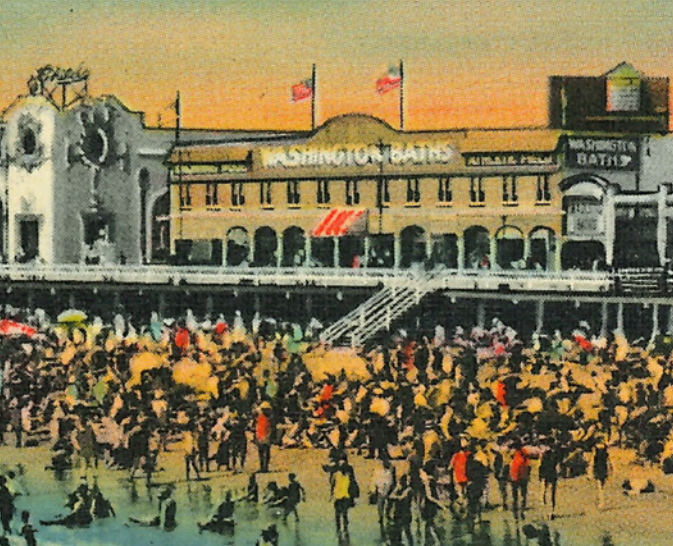
Pennies

My mother, she had a pot, a commercial pot, and she filled it with pennies, so Bea and I, you know, Bea was a little bit of a devil, I was younger, I only followed whatever she did, so we bought candies, we went to the movies with that money... Years later I was fully grown, I said, I knew we were doing wrong, that's stealing. But if I asked my mother she'd say you could have it, but we didn't ask, we just took. But, you know, Morty was a goody-goody. My brother was an angel. I found out he did it too. I was so shocked, because he was so good, you know? I thought we were very bad.

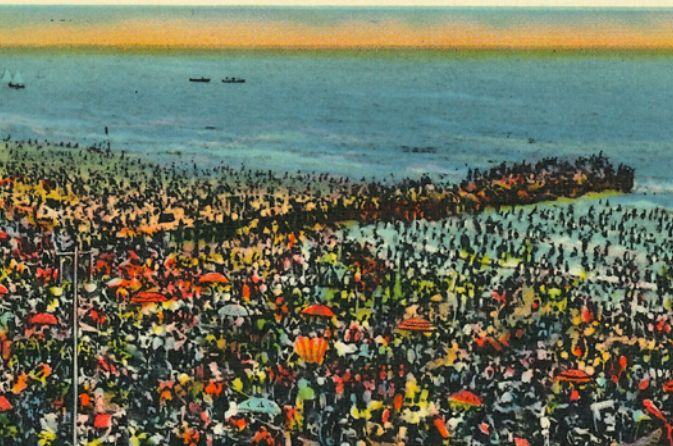
Knish Store

We had a knish store. We waited on customers. My uncle Joe stood by the oil. When we came over to get the knishes, he said in Jewish, *avek! Avek!* He was so nervous that I'd get hurt. We had a room in the back of the store. They had one bathroom. Just a toilet. Maybe a sink, no bathtub. All of us slept in one room, except Morty. There was a hotel attached to the store, for Morty they gave him a tiny room, but for us we all slept in one room.





THE BOARDWALK AND BEACH. CONEY ISLAND. N. Y.



Russian Bath

You know in Coney Island they had Russian baths. I used to go with my mother to the bath. You know the women would be naked. I was a little child, and when I'd see their bodies I thought it was very funny. My mother had no shame. I always saw her. I went with her.

Mother

My mother never knew her age. She never celebrated her birthday. She always went to school to speak better English. When she died, she had leukemia, she was still going to school. She was heavy. She used to buy a corset. When she went to get measured, I went with her. My mother used to take me all over. I was like her pet. My mother, she was a saint. She was wonderful.

Aunt Fanny

Wherever we lived, Fanny had to have an apartment in the same building. Her and my mother, they didn't go out without each other. And me. I used to go out with them all the time. She liked the mountains, she didn't like Coney Island. She used to take me every time she went. She stayed in a hotel sometimes, they called it a *kokhaleyn*, where you cook yourself. And when she saw me she used to jump up and down, she loved me so much. I loved her. My mother was a little jealous. But you know I loved my mother. Nobody could love their mother more than I loved her.

Ellis Island

You know, Bea and I paid. My mother and father, I had their names put down — a record of their names in Ellis Island. We had to pay for that. Yea, Bea and I did it. We did it for them both. And then all my life I said, why can't I do it for Fanny? She would have loved it. But I felt her children should do it, and I didn't do it for her. But I'm sorry I didn't.

Produced by Alex Weiser
Recorded at Power Station,
May 26th, 2022
Audio Engineer: Nick Lloyd

in a dark blue night was originally commissioned by The ASCAP Foundation Charles Kingsford Fund. The world premiere performance was given as a recorded audio/video presentation by Annie Rosen and Dan Schlosberg on January 5, 2021 at 4:43pm (sunset), on Facebook and YouTube. It was edited and mixed by Gleb Kanasevich. The cycle was subsequently expanded with additional songs and instruments and premiered in its present version with the performers recorded here at Kettle Corn New Music on May 27th, 2022. This performance also featured the premiere of *Coney Island Days*.

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