



Seth Baum

The Band Doesn't Have a Name and Neither Does the Article

by Seth Baum

You're in a what?" I asked. "A circus klezmer band," my housemate, Anna Thomas (flute) replied.

"Of course. Isn't everybody?"

Apparently, pretty much everybody is. This Jamaica Plain-based ensemble has upwards of 20 members.

So what is klezmer music anyway? According to wikipedia.org, the free, user-written online encyclopedia, "Klezmer is a type of folk music, performed traditionally by Jews in Germany and Eastern Europe. It is characterized by a fast beat; the music is driven primarily by the violin and the clarinet. Since its inception, klezmer has spread throughout the globe, especially to the United States."

Translation: it *is* your grandmother's music. In fact, the Memorial Day weekend backyard barbecue I first saw the band at was probably your grandmother's scene, or at least my grandmother's scene, before she fled Nazi Germany. There were people literally of all ages, socializing, eating, and drinking. Many people were wearing somewhat raggedy clothes, often completely mismatching, but somehow coming off stylish in that "when our grandparents were young" look.

The music fit the atmosphere perfectly. Despite the chaos and confusion that must inevitably accompany a then-two-week-old, 20-

piece amateur band, or perhaps because of it, the music was lively, energetic, and engaging. Because the performers were friends and not some professional outfit, I was delighted when they managed to simply play in harmony.

Flash forward to the following Thursday. The violin I bought on eBay just arrived, and I needed some help getting it set up, so Anna sent me to the klezmer band practice to enlist the violinists. They played around with it a bit, then said the

bunch of people. The temphe was a bit bland, but that's probably because I didn't flavor it with anything.

Flash forward to June 19. The Longfellow Bridge, which spans the Charles River from the bottom of Beacon Hill to Kendall Square in Cambridge, has some of the best views of Boston, especially on a warm summer weekend day, with all the sailboats out on the water, as was the case on this day, when the bridge played host to the March for Health Care.

The klezmer band was invited to play for the marchers, to uplift their spirits. Like they say, nothing uplifts the spirit like circus klezmer music. So we set up on a little space next to one of the giant stone support towers—the sort of place people walking by pause at to catch the view.

The march, though perhaps not the 3,000 people they hoped for, still was by far the largest crowd yet to see the klezmer band. Not to mention all the through traffic on the bridge that caught bits and pieces.

There we were, a haphazard, amateur band, that was willing to put yours truly in, even if just on the cowbell, playing in one of the most scenic spots in one of the most scenic cities, in front of throngs of activists. And there I was, having never been in a band before save for high school music class, jamming with them, even if just on the cowbell. **WU**

Seth prefers to spell "anyway" with an "s" at the end, but we don't care.

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bridge was missing. "The what?" Apparently violins need a bridge to keep the strings elevated or something. Who knew?

As the band was practicing, they decided they needed some percussion accompaniment. They looked at me. Next thing I knew, I was playing in a circus klezmer band, even if just on the cowbell. I guess they were satisfied, so they invited me to play cowbell for them at this barbecue on Saturday.

Flash forward to Saturday. I went to the barbecue, and I played with the band in front of a