



COURTESY OF MILLIE BLEHERT JOHNSON

FAMILY STORY: A 1905 photograph of the Tenenbaum family, taken in Visoko-Litovsk, Lithuania, is featured in 'Homeland to Heartland' a multimedia klezmer concert by Millie and the Mentshn.

MUSICAL JOURNEY

Like many Jewish immigrants, Morris Tenenbaum had a good story to tell. Born in 1896 in the village of Visoko-Litovsk in Lithuania, Tenenbaum kept detailed journals in which he documented his family's history from his parents' arranged marriage to their arrival in the United States. Millie Johnson, the granddaughter of Tenenbaum's cousin, was inspired by the journals, and so she decided to set the stories to music. Her musical ensemble, Millie and the

Mentshn, performs "Homeland to Heartland," a narrated, multimedia concert that

features Old World-style klezmer melodies — the group of classically trained musicians has been described as a "chamber" klezmer ensemble. Johnson, who by day is a math professor at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Wash., began researching music in order to find melodies that must have been playing in the background throughout Tenenbaum's life.

"They had such incredible struggles, and yet music seemed to make their lives better," Johnson said of her family. "The descriptions were so vivid, and everything [Morris] described [involved] music and dancing."

With a slide presentation of family photographs as the backdrop, Johnson reads segments of Tenenbaum's journal throughout the two-hour performance, which will be presented in Anchorage and Fairbanks. The presentation leads audiences on a musical journey from Lithuania in the late 1800s: the family's survival of the pogrom, their ship voyage to Liverpool and their eventual arrival in the United States, where they settled in St. Paul, Minn. The story ends in the 1940s.

"I think that the struggles, the optimism, the strength, the love and the tradition of the Jewish people become transparent, or can be experienced, through the music, pictures and stories," Johnson said. "I hope that we might be doing a tiny bit in helping to keep Jewish culture alive. I believe that when the music and traditions survive, so do the people."

— SARAH KRICHEFF

Congregation Beth Sholom, 7525 E. Northern Lights Blvd., Anchorage; Sept. 15, 7 p.m.; \$10; advance tickets available (907-338-1836). University of Alaska, Charles W. Davis Concert Hall, Fairbanks; \$15, \$10 for seniors, students and military; \$5 for children under 12. (907-474-5733 or www.fairbankssymphony.org)