

# WINDOW on WESTERN

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## Songs Never Silenced

By Dee Johnson  
UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

In his journal, Morris Tenenbaum relates the daily experience of family members who survived the pogroms in turn-of-the-century Lithuania. They escaped to America, traveling in the steerage compartment of a freighter. In their trunks and boxes and bags, they carried jars of chicken schmaltz mixed with hot water and hard bread, kosher food that would sustain them on their very long journey.

In their hearts, they carried the music that had always sustained them.

A generation later, when the Holocaust was beginning, Jews were herded onto the boxcars of trains going to unannounced destinations. They gave up their trunks and boxes and bags, but they did not give up their music.

Using music, stories and slides, *Millie and the Mentshn*, a Klezmer band, shows how Jewish music changed as it moved across time and space before, during and after the Holocaust. Campus visitors will have an opportunity to experience this journey when the band brings its multimedia concert to

Western's Performing Arts Center on April 22.

*Millie and the Mentshn* was formed in 2002 when Millie Johnson, a WWU professor of mathematics, began researching the lyrics and melodies that shaped the music so often remarked on in the journals written by her grandfather's cousin, Morris Tenenbaum. Band members include Lou Lippman, piano, Warren Palken, drums, Ken Bronstein, oboe, and Phil Heaven, viola and violin. Johnson is the vocalist for the band and also writes the musical arrangements.

Lippman and Bronstein are also on the faculty at Western. Lippman is a professor of psychology; Bronstein is an accounting lecturer.

Following a chronological path, the April concert will introduce folk tunes starting from the late 1800s. The program will include a love song written in 1933 by Eliza Greenblatt. Her musically gifted family included son-in-law Woodie Guthrie and grandson Arlo Guthrie. Other songs from the Depression era will include "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" made popular by Bing Crosby.

The program will include a selection of songs written in the ghettos and concentration camps. Rarely do these songs address normal happenings—romance, children at play, the joy of learning. These songs chronicle families torn asunder. The lyrics, often narrative, are less soothing than the music. *Dremlyn Feygl* (Birds Are Dreaming) is a typical example of a lullaby.

*Your cradle once did stand*

*Woven out of happiness.*

*And your mother, oh, your mother*

*Never will return. Hushabye.*

The music began to change in 1941 as the partisan movement developed. Johnson says that "What distinguishes the music of this period is the march rhythm (4/4 time) and the themes, which changed from tragedy and desperation to courage, dignity and survival. Many resistors, and they included non-Jews, were living in the woods and using what weapons they could steal or borrow. The rhythm of the music evokes a feeling of strength and spirit."

After the war, as survivors immigrated to the United States, joy and hope tempered by grief fused together to form a new dynamic. The music that evolved was a synthesis of Old World traditions and the sounds of Broadway tunes and jazz that greeted them in the New World. Like the survivors, the music has adapted.

"*Songs Never Silenced*" has received generous support from the WWU Diversity Fund and from other campus organizations, including Hillel, Lutheran Campus Ministry and the Northwest Center for Holocaust, Genocide and Ethnocide Education.

The title "*Songs Never Silenced*" is being used with permission granted by Velvel Pasternak, editor of a book with the same title.

For more information about this band, go to [www.millieandthementshn.com](http://www.millieandthementshn.com).

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Sculpture: Rock Rings © Nancy Holt/licensed by VAGA, New York

Courtesy photo/Millie and the Mentshn

*Millie and the Mentshn* will present "Songs Never Silenced" at 3 p.m. Sunday, April 22.

Tickets are \$5 for adults and \$3 for students and seniors. For reservations, call the WWU Box Office at (360) 650-6146.



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