

**What brought you to play Jewish music?**

I grew up going to synagogue, and for most of my school years, every Sunday I went to religious school. It was a reform synagogue, a pretty liberal setting, and I wasn't very observant. We had music every week, and a lot of that Jewish music was inspired by U.S. folk music - consequently, the music was very singable. I've loved singing since I was a child, and I loved that mix of Jewish and English songs. As a child I didn't know what klezmer was, but I was regularly exposed to this other Jewish music.

**Did your interest in Judaism grow? What about music in general?**

I had my Bar Mitzvah, but as an older teenager, I was not very involved in the synagogue. I was more interested in jazz and American soul, R & B, and rock music. But then in my 20's, I returned to Jewish music, because when I started playing music professionally, I did some work in synagogues - in part because I knew the music as a child, and in part because it was an interesting job. And being in New York, I could also follow musicians such as John Zorn and The Klezmatics who had been exploring new sounds in Jewish music.

**What triggered the decision to initiate a project related to this music?**

I had the thought many years ago, but over much of the past 15 years, my group Gutbucket has kept me actively engaged with tours and recordings. So that's where much of my creative energy went. But as a Jewish musician, the idea to engage creatively with Jewish music was always there, in part as a kind of musical self-exploration. So in 2012, Gutbucket became a bit less busy, and I thought it was time to write some music for a different group that was dedicated to Jewish music. Then I began to think about an instrumentation and people that I wanted to involve. I started sketching ideas to see where it all might lead me.

**Gutbucket is three quarters of Bop Kabbalah: how come you did not use the whole band?**

Gutbucket is a collective, and everyone writes their music separately. In Bop Kabbalah I had to think about it for a moment before being sure I had the right people. Although the musicians in Gutbucket are wonderful and I love playing with them, I needed to distinguish between that band and this new project that became Bop Kabbalah. Gutbucket has a certain dynamic, and Bop Kabbalah operates differently because I'm the band's leader. Not that I have to be the boss, but it's different if I'm writing all the music. Obviously I look to each member of the group for some feedback, but I set the tone and push the vision of the group.

**It does not seem that the guitar plays a big role in Jewish music. How do you reconcile this with Bop Kabbalah?**

It depends on the type of Jewish music that you're considering. If you're talking about traditional klezmer music of Eastern Europe, then in that context, the guitar is not an important tool. I'm not an expert on the history of the guitar in klezmer music, but this is what I know. However, in recent years, there have been people exploring new ideas, like Jeff Warschauer, or groups like Hasidic New Wave. So there is quite a bit of fusion involving the guitar. Bop Kabbalah does not pose a problem of authenticity or of reverence towards the way that things are supposed to be. I wanted to play guitar with

the group, not just be the composer. And I wanted to write for a group that had the bass clarinet because it has a wider range than the clarinet, which is traditionally found in klezmer. Consequently, the instrumentation is not what you'd expect from a Jewish music group. On the other hand, in the melodic material, there's definitely something that's connected to Jewish music. It's a new perspective on Jewish music using my own original material...though on occasion we'll throw a cover song or two into our live set.

**You seem to have a fondness for mixing genres: where does this come from?**

By being a music lover and having an open mind about the music I hear. I don't care to play according to genre definitions in music - they're fairly collapsible. Take for example indie-rock - even in that world, there's not a single sound or aesthetic: there are rock bands who have no guitar or vocals, but instead there's a cello. There's a lot of exploration in that world. So it doesn't really matter to me if you don't play music that's clearly defined. What's important is to play music that's fun and interesting and challenging.

**Can you describe the creative process as it unfolds within the Collapse Guitar Quartet?**

The band's four members [Yoshie Fruchter, Eyal Maoz, Jon Goldberger and myself] all write and arrange music. We haven't done any tours but we are currently working on putting together a recording. Each of us brings pieces that we wrote and arranged for the group. Some are strictly composed, others have some flexibility in the arrangement. And then we work them out together. But there are plenty of sections that feature improvisation.

**Is this band somehow influenced by the avant-garde guitarist Glenn Branca?**

Not directly. I played a piece of his a while ago and I loved it. I think it was Symphony No. 13 for a hundred electric guitars: it had a power and a synergy that was irresistible. But I think Collapse doesn't focus so much on the strength of the electric guitars, though the identity of the band is still forming. I believe that much more direct influence comes from the Fred Frith Guitar Quartet, a group that I love. That connection is much more evident.

**How do you explain humor as a constant of your music?**

On good days I think I have a pretty decent sense of humor. Sometimes this works its way into my music. Many times humor is conveyed by lyrics, but that's not what I do. There are many composers and instrumentalists who express humor and a certain playfulness in their sound: Frank Zappa is one, Fred Frith another. Sometimes Thelonious Monk's playing was eccentric, even ironic. I think it's great when music can elicit laughter, among other things. I try not to worry about being silly. I also try not to worry about being serious when necessary.

**You wrote a piece called Murakami for Gutbucket's album "Flock." How important is literature in your work?**

I like reading. I don't always have the time to do what I want, but I like reading when I can. I worked on "Murakami" after reading his book "What I Talk About When I Talk About Running," a play on the short story by Raymond Carver, "What We Talk About

When We Talk About Love". Murakami's book makes a connection between running a marathon and writing a novel. Literature is a great source for ideas, and for me it's great to be inspired by other art forms. I can also take ideas from paintings or poems. Murakami's book attracted me because of his perspective on what you do and the exercise of patience in doing so.

**What programs are there for the residence that Gutbucket has at Stone this coming November?**

I'm just about to send out our final draft for the event calendar! We're making a record of new material for release in 2015. We have a new project with the string quartet JACK Quartet. We'll present the world premiere of another new project with the percussion trio Tigue. We'll also have a night of live music and film, with two of our rarely performed live scores. Then we'll have the Gutbucket Chamber Orchestra on the final night, when we'll play extended versions of our pieces, with special guests.

**You are from St. Louis. As you became interested in music and jazz in particular, were you aware of the contribution of the Black Artist Group? Did it influence you?**

I was not aware of them as a boy. But after I moved to New York, I learned about both the Black Artist Group and the AACM, another important organization from the Midwest. There are several artists from St. Louis that have been important for me: Grant Green, Lester Bowie and, obviously, Miles Davis. I left St. Louis at 18 - I was a kid in the suburbs with a limited interest in the world of jazz in St. Louis...even though I loved music and kept my eyes and ears open. I now realize the significance of the avant garde jazz from St. Louis, but while I was living there I was a bit young and sheltered, and interested in other things.

**Who are the people that have been important for your musical development?**

There are countless people I've played with or seen in concert. I always learned a lot in the groups that I've been a part of too. When I was 14-15 years old I was playing in a band led by a guy two or three years older than me, and I learned a lot there. Then, after I moved to New York, I studied guitar with Chris Rosenberg, who had an extraordinary influence on me. He played with Ornette Coleman & Prime Time, among many others. I hadn't taken steady guitar lessons since I was in middle school, so Chris gave me a sense of how to take myself seriously as a guitarist and musician. He encouraged me to nurture my strengths and work on problem areas in my playing. This helped me become a professional musician and [figure out] how to organize my time and my thoughts. This is at the top of the things I learned from him... More recently, I felt really honored to receive the invitation from John Zorn to record this project for Tzadik Records. The first time I met John was when he and I were both playing at the Warsaw Summer Jazz Days Festival in 2003. After his concert with Naked City, I went backstage to introduce myself. We stayed in touch and he had Gutbucket play at a festival that he curated at Tonic in 2004 or 2005.

**What criteria do you use to decide to work in a group of others?**

I love working with people doing interesting and creative music - people who take creative risks and with whom I'm having fun playing. I also consider what contribution I

could make to the music. But lately most of my attention has turned to Bop Kabbalah, Gutbucket and Collapse Guitar Quartet. I've done some work as a sideman, but in recent months I haven't been touring with anyone else. I'm also a father - my wife and I had our second child last year. And having a second child, composing, recording a new body of songs, forming a new group - all this didn't leave me much time to do anything else! It might be different in a year or two. I'm spending some time writing chamber music and we'll see where that goes. I'm trying to spend more time composing for groups in which I don't play.

**When did you discover that music would be your career? And what would you have done otherwise?**

It's interesting because it's not what I envisioned when I was 5 or 10 years old. I finally had a clearer picture of being a full-time musician in my early 20's, when I was working with Chris [Rosenberg]. I got a sense of how I could continue, and pursuing music became less romantic and more realistic as a life project. There's a bunch of things that I'm interested in, but it's different if you have to think about doing something everyday. Before going to college I wanted to be an architect. If I had to change careers today, I don't know- maybe I would be a radical socialist economist. I could imagine doing something very different and continuing to have an interesting life, but I don't have plans to change course anytime soon! So interview me in twenty years and let's see what I'm up to.

**Ty Citerman [CD REVIEW]**

The guitarist Ty Citerman made himself a name as a member of the jazz-punk quartet Gutbucket. Taking advantage of a switch in the band, he has been able to focus on the project named Bop Kabbalah, which gives him the opportunity to develop ideas inspired by Jewish music, an intrinsic part of his cultural heritage. The composition of the band is strangely similar to that of Gutbucket: Citerman is joined by drummer Adam D Gold and Ken Thomson, who plays bass clarinet here. The combo is further defined by trumpeter Ben Holmes, with whom Citerman has worked on and off in the past. The comparison with Gutbucket is therefore inevitable, but the overall impression is that Bop Kabbalah is more controlled and meditative as well as less raucous and rude. Perhaps because the goal of Citerman is mainly to show his ability as a composer rather than a guitarist. In fact, as an instrumentalist, he often remains more in the background, leaving most of the solos to Thomson and Holmes, although everyone is active during the passages of improvisation, or harmonizing or supporting the soloist. Many pieces begin with a simple and effective melody which can also be capricious, as in "Talmudic Breakbeat". They usually do not follow the structure of orthodox song. "Snout" even includes freely improvised segments that make extensive use of extended techniques. And it also shows that the idea of replacing the clarinet - klezmer instrument par excellence - with the bass clarinet is more than effective. The powerful exaltation of the trumpet's ringing tone offers plenty of colors and shades.

Citerman makes full use of the sounds available to him, for example in "(Conversation with) Ghosts," an exercise in which the unison passages alternate with melodic counterpoint. But with "Exchanging pleasantries with a Wall," the band takes another path: an exploratory piece impregnated with electronic effects. In this one, Citerman,

Holmes and Thomson gradually increased the level of intensity, while Gold shoots from all cylinders before they all join together in a grand conclusion. It will be interesting to see what the next step of this band will be.