78TH SEASON OF CONCERTS
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART | DECEMBER 1, 2019

FROM A WALL STENCIL
GRAY MAINE 1800
PROGRAM

Alicia Svigals, klezmer fiddle and voice
Uli Geissendoerfer, piano
With special guest William Schimmel, accordion

Beregovski Suite: Reimagining a Long-Lost Klezmer Archive

December 1, 2019 | 3:30 p.m.
West Building, West Garden Court

The program will be announced from the stage.
THE MUSICIANS

Alicia Svigals
Violinist, vocalist, and composer Alicia Svigals is the world’s leading klezmer violinist and a founder of the Grammy-winning Klezmatics, which she codirected for seventeen years. She has composed music for violinist Itzhak Perlman, the Kronos Quartet, playwright Tony Kushner, documentary filmmaker Judith Helfand, and singer/songwriters Debbie Friedman and Diane Birch, with whom she has also collaborated, as well as with the late poet Allen Ginsburg, Led Zeppelin’s Robert Plant and Jimmy Page, Gary Lucas, and Najma Akhtar. Svigals has appeared on Late Night with David Letterman, MTV, Good Morning America, PBS’s Great Performances, and the soundtrack for the L-Word. Her klezmer roots band, Alicia Svigals’ Klezmer Fiddle Express, plays at festivals around the United States and the world.

Svigals was awarded the Foundation for Jewish Culture’s annual New Jewish Music Network Music Commission for her original live score to the 1918 film The Yellow Ticket, which she is currently touring. She has been a fellow at LABA: A Laboratory for New Jewish Culture, located at the 14th Street Y in New York. Every year LABA invites a group of artists to consider ancient texts and create works that push the boundaries of what Jewish art can be. While at LABA, Svigals composed a song cycle based on Yiddish poetry. She is currently touring her newest project, which features a music score she wrote with Donald Sosin—a legendary silent film music pianist—to the 1923 silent film, the Ancient Law.

Uli Geissendoerfer
Jazz pianist, composer, and scholar Uli Geissendoerfer has worked with Grammy-nominee William Cepeda, Groove Collective, Blood, Sweat & Tears, Leslie Uggams, Tito Puente, Cirque du Soleil, and David Cassidy. His current projects include “Colors” a World Jazz Quintet; Bangalore Breakdown, and an Indian world jazz project featuring multi-wind player Premik Russell Tubbs. In 2009, Geissendoerfer moved to Las Vegas where he was the conductor, pianist, and bandleader for the Cirque du Soleil’s Viva Elvis show. He resurrected the Latin Jazz Ensemble at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which has since won DownBeat awards in 2013, 2014, and 2015. He has also initiated a lecture series at the university and serves as curator for the Steinway Concert Series. He founded the Jazz Club at the Dispensary Lounge.

William Schimmel
William Schimmel earned his doctor of music degree from the Juilliard School. A composer, author, lecturer, philosopher, and virtuoso accordionist, he performs in a wide variety of styles and has appeared with major symphony orchestras. He has recorded with such noted performers as Sting and Tom Waits, the latter of whom said, “Schimmel doesn’t play the accordion—he is an accordion.” An authority on Kurt Weill, Schimmel has recorded all of Weill’s music with accordion. He is a prolific composer for both the concert stage and Broadway and founded the renowned Tango Project. In 1992, he was named “Best Accordionist” by Keyboard Magazine and was also recognized as the person who has done the most to elevate the instrument’s image.
Beregovski Suite: Reimagining a Long-Lost Klezmer Archive

Twenty years ago, violinist Alicia Svigals released her groundbreaking album *Fidl*, the first contemporary recording of the deep and ecstatic klezmer fiddle music that had been beloved across Jewish Eastern Europe for hundreds of years. In 2018, she followed up this recording with *Beregovski Suite*, a project with Grammy-nominated jazz pianist Uli Geissendoerfer. Together the musicians bring to life long-lost melodies from the early twentieth-century fieldwork of Moshe Beregovski (1892–1961) and reimagine them for the twenty-first century.

In the 1930s, Moshe Beregovski, a Jewish scholar from Ukraine, set out with eerie prescience to collect and preserve the deep and rich Jewish musical tradition around him. On what turned out to be the eve of the destruction of European Jewry, Beregovski organized expeditions to Ukrainian shtetlach (small Jewish towns) and sought out the eldest singers and instrumentalists, asking them to pour their collective folk knowledge into his recording horn. In this way, he managed to save thousands of beautiful Jewish folk songs, klezmer dance tunes, and religious melodies on wax cylinders, the medium of the day. A few years afterward, the culture he had documented was destroyed in the Holocaust, and Beregovski himself was arrested and sent to the Gulag. He never saw his work published in his lifetime, and for decades it was thought that those precious and important recordings were forever lost. But in the 1980s, ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin published Beregovski’s transcriptions of his collection, and in the 1990s, with the opening up of the Soviet Union, the cylinders were unearthed in a dusty archive in Kiev. Now those long-lost melodies and voices are beginning to speak to us again.

*Program notes by Alicia Svigals*

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General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

Concerts are made possible in part through the generosity of donors to the National Gallery of Art through The Circle. Reserved seating is available in recognition of their support. Please contact the development office at (202) 842-6450 or circle@nga.gov for more information.

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