

Klezmorim take on Merovitz Project *By Heather Solomon*

Allan Merovitz and Henri Oppenheim both have reasons to love klezmer music. Nostalgia plays a major role for both of them. (...) It's Allan's warm tenor voice and humorous Yiddish tam that shapes tunes like *Lomir Zikh Iberbeitn* on the Merovitz Project + Brass album titled *Live in Montreal*, recorded last December. (..)

Oppenheim, the band's co-founder: "I was born in France to an assimilated Jewish family – intellectuals, scientists, doctors. I studied mathematics and was a nerd. I also played piano and drums and it was because I attended a Jewish scout camp that I learned guitar and later played rock and funk in the cafés of Paris for seven years," he says. The musician arrived in Montreal in 1997 and a year later enrolled at McGill University to study jazz guitar and composition. "I realized that klezmer and Jewish music had a special resonance, because I was far from home and my grandmother's generation was starting to die out. As the heritage was disappearing, I wanted to move toward my roots," says Oppenheim, who decided to learn the button accordion to interpret his klezmer music. His journey into the realm of klezmer gathered momentum after he established the band Kleztory in 2002. Though he still plays with them, the Merovitz Project is his new direction.

Oppenheim had been a longtime fan of singer/ storyteller Merovitz, whose early career as a folk musician had headed more and more into klezmer, with him fronting the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band for 8-1/2 years and forming the Simcha Klezmer Ensemble in Toronto, as well as Chutzpah, Ot Azoy Klezmerband and KlezMerovitz.



After Oppenheim e-mailed his admiration to Merovitz, who was based in Calgary for a time, the two met in the summer of 2007 at the Canmore Folk Festival. "We had a lot of similar ideas about klezmer music," says Oppenheim, who was drawn to the idea of having a vocalist conversant in the mamaloshen and able to

plumb the emotional nexus among Jews.

Their first collaboration was when Merovitz brought Oppenheim on board to be musical director of his internationally popular one-man show *If Cows Could Fly*, based on his ancestors' flight from persecution and his growing up Jewish in Smiths Falls. The two soon invited virtuoso violinist Julie Triquet to join them on the Merovitz Project, and the trio adds trombone, trumpet, bass and drums as the gig demands. (...)