

# Mp3 Neil Blumofe - Piety And Desire



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Original jazz that brings together traditional Jewish music and improvisational chant cooked in the flavors of New Orleans. 7 MP3 Songs JAZZ: World Fusion, WORLD: Judaica Details: MUSIC BEFORE THE BREAKING (Vegetable Love) In our latest project, we create music for a wedding. This is music that bestirs love and examines choice. Having walked apart on the open road, two souls now stand under a delicate canopy, united in deliberate possibility of a life made together. This is a joining, living after exile. This soulful reuniting is nothing less than two lovers standing as one again in the Garden of Eden, re-formed in Gods first creation of man and woman -- the Adam inseparable from the Eve -- one being contained wholly in heated happiness. This new creation is enlivened with force and strengthened by love, permeating the barriers existing in the essential differences of mind and body. In the telling of this wedding, we do not present a transfiguration, celebrating the ephemeral and triumphing only the spirit. We play rather, in the realm of the real: honoring doubts, unconcealing misgivings, archiving inevitable advice and preparing for the rapture of a honeymoon. We are intense with the fever of sex and the creditors of the morning after. Bringing together the resounding voices of jazz with the estimable voices of traditional Jewish liturgy and chant creates a chorus of leavening spirit. In our music we recreate the holy efforts poured into forming and maintaining a relationship, based on the everyday craft of improvisation. Here, we summon the world as we signify love -- past, present and future. AFTER THE EXILE There is a proposal, a betrothal, and commitment is spoken and sealed. Fast Confession tells of excitement gaining momentum as the wedding day approaches. Many voices speak in a discordant concert -- gossip is a given -- constant encouragement, joking premonition and righteous counsel seek a listening ear from the bride and the groom. Friends, like a Greek chorus, aver of time and tide. In this group, history speaks first. Maurice Browns muted trumpet solo references Richard Wagners, Treulich gefuhrt, (Bridal Chorus)

from the opera Lohengrin, setting the stage for memory, context and moving forward. The Bridal Chorus is easily recognized, but this music is a riptide beneath surface recognitions. The patterns of the piece are parlayed directly into the mode of confession, the selicha mode of the synagogue. Wagner and his message of antisemitism, is deconstructed and transformed, through the striving of an ensemble's combined musical effort. The groom is riveted by the gaggle of well-meaning suggestion, suggested by the playfulness of Matt Perrines tuba and Ben Saffers impassioned clarinet. The bridegroom has an *aufruf*, (an honor given publicly in celebration of an upcoming marriage, celebrated on the Sabbath before his wedding). He attends synagogue the week before the wedding and chants the Haftarah (selections from the Prophets). This week his portion is from the prophecy of Jeremiah: I have caused to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall be a waste. The chanting is underscored by the musical trope (cantillation) of the Prophets. This marriage is an act of defiance -- against the grim words of this prophecy of desolation, against the low expectations of keeping a marriage intact and past the rushing sounds of time's winged chariot, there is a family created in holiness and deliberate hopefulness. Decisions are weighed, food is bought and a celebration is prepared -- it is now the marriage day. There is a custom for a couple to fast on their wedding day and to make a Vidui (individual final confession) for their accrued sins. The self is shedding its sense of primacy and will soon cleave to another in a mutually fragile union. This is an heroic action. In preparing for what mystics call a day like death, faithfulness and confidence are what inscribe these newly attached selves. There is selflessness and new discovery in this spiritual cleansing. The beloved's separate confession while fasting, follows: Ashamnu (we have become desolate), Bagadnu (we have betrayed our potential), Gazalnu (we have stolen), Dibarnu Dofi (we have been hypocritical), Heevinu (we have made things crooked), Vhirshanu (and we have made others wicked), Zadnu (we have sinned intentionally), Hamasnu (we have been violent), Tafalnu Shaker (we have lied and lied and lied), Yaatznu Ra (we have given bad advice), Kizavnu (we have disappointed), Latznu (we have been contemptuous), Maradnu (we have rebelled), Niatznu (we have enraged people), Sararnu (we have turned aside), Avinu (we fall victim to our impulses), Pashanu (we justify lies), Tzararnu (we have afflicted others), Kishinu Oref (we have been stiff-necked), Rashanu (we have been wicked), Shichatnu (we have been immoral), Tiavnu (we have been abominable), Tainu (we have erred), Titanu (we have misled others). On the way to the ceremony,

we hear the juxtaposition of a familiar and now chilling folk melody coupled with a dance melody. The first melody is familiar as the Protestant hymn, Praise the Lord. The song was originally composed by Joseph Haydn as Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser (God Save Emperor Francis), a part of the String Quartet in C major (The Kaiser-Quartet). This composition was used for more than a century as the national anthem of the Austrian monarchy and as the patriotic song Deutschland, Deutschland uber Alles (Germany, Germany above all else), which became the national anthem of Germany in 1922. It was retained as the anthem of Nazi Germany. This song was discontinued after World War II, but reinstated in 1950 by West Germany, using only the third verse. The 19th century Austrian synagogue cantor, Salomon Sulzer, used Haydn's anthem in his own composed wedding music, reflecting his enthusiasm in sharing the greater cultural milieu and his confidence in having other musics inform Jewish sacred events. Later, the dissonant 20th century associations of this theme with horror and evil made these earlier attempts to connect cultures seem naive and paltry. Co-mingled with this anthem of despair is the second melody Tants, Tants, Tants (Dance, Dance, Dance), a well-known Polish wedding song of the Vilna ghetto. It describes in a self-mocking style a scene of ghetto dancers. This song establishes the intrusion of the cruel world and the happiness of marriage is then turned inside out. The words of this tune speak of the bitter frosts of the ghetto and the linings and the collars being torn from coats by the Nazi persecutors. And so, what will the future of this couple be? In dreadful irony, the wedding itself is undermined by the impending, dim future captured in the historical associations of the music. Life can be snuffed out in an instant, by creeping totalitarianism, by neglect, or by the impact of a gale-force hurricane. In this merging of musical identity the bride and groom are aware of danger and yet resolved to be together. In Revolutions, the bride and groom are called to appear before God under the huppah (wedding canopy). Brucha Habah; Adir Elokeinu; Siman Tov uMazel Tov; Hatan Baruch Hu; Kallah Brucha vNaah. Boi Kallah (May she who comes be blessed. Mighty is our God, good signs and good fortune. May the groom be blessed. The bride is blessed and beautiful. Here she comes). There is a slow procession up the aisle --the groom goes first and waits for his beloved. A traditional klezmer (Eastern European Jewish) rhythm is employed as she reaches him - then she circles him seven times to convey a making of a new world, a new couple. The intensity deepens with each circling, demonstrating a world of possibility contained in the number seven -- the totality of creation - there is the sober realization that two lives are joining, connected until death. This new couple steps into the huppah together as partners, reflective and sure, as Steven

Greenmans soulful violin brings the divine down to the human. The guests wait in a larger circle, gathered around expectantly. But who are we kidding? The steps up to the huppah are hard for anyone to climb - stepping with aspirations of both piety and desire. The opening of Arnold Schoenbergs, Die Jakobsleiter (Jacobs Ladder) is referenced in Roland Guerins surging bass. The marriage is now in The Tent of Meeting, a place of honesty and truth. The ascent begins, as the music builds on a traditional Sephardic wedding song from Turkey, Scalerica de Oro (Ladder of Gold). From this foundation the groom sings for permission to speak and for guidance to speak truth. The request is to be pure of heart - to refine the flames of lust and doubt and be granted clarity of mind and spirit - to concentrate on the task at hand - joining with another in the purest way - neither for convenience or for money, but for love. May the power of careful speech always support the bride and groom. Ochila laKel Achale Fanav Eshala mMenu Maane Lashon. Asher Bikhal Am Ashira Uzo Abiah Rnanot Bad Mifalav. LAdam Maarchei Lev uMeihaShem Maanei Lashon. haShem Sifatai Tiftach uFi Yagid Thilatecha. Yhiyu IRatzon Imrei-Fi vHegyon Libi Lfanecha haShem Tsuri vGoali. I hope in God, I implore Gods Presence. I ask God to grant me meaningful speech so that I may sing of Gods power in the community. I may sing joyful songs, praising God. Intellect is a mortal exercise, but meaningful speech only comes from God. My God, open my lips and my mouth will praise you. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts in my heart be authentic and acceptable as I stand before You God, my Rock and my Redeemer. With this ascension, a sacred and fragile structure is built. The first part of the wedding ceremony is chanted - the Erusin, the Betrothal. Baruch Ata haShem Elokeinu Melech haOlam Borei Pri haGafen. Baruch Ata haShem Elokeinu Melech haOlam Asher Kidshanu bMitzvotav vTsivanu Al haAarayot vAsar Lanu et haArusot vHitir Lanu et haNsuot Lanu Al Ydei Khupah vKidushin. Baruch Ata haShem Mkadesh Amo Yisrael Al Ydei Khupah vKidushin. Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine. Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and has commanded us concerning forbidden connections and has forbidden to us any who are only betrothed and has allowed to us anyone through huppah and kidushin (holiness). Praised be you our God, who sanctifies Your people Israel through huppah and holiness. The brass band feel of High Fidelity brings the wedding to the greatest heights. The pulsing expectation is carried into the street as spontaneous joy resounds. Beyond any unsettling danger or doubt, it is now the point of fantastic no return that brings a hopeful vision to a couple and to a community. Past the blotches and the misfires

necessary in the experiences of growing up, a couple bespeaks their lifelong desire to concentrate on each other, centered now in the Godly moment, represented in the words of the prophet Hosea: VAirastich Li IOlam. VAirastich Li BTsedek uvMishpat uvChesed uvRachamim. VAirastich Li BeEmunah vYadaat et haShem. I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me with righteousness, justice, kindness and mercy. I will betroth you to me with fidelity and you shall know God. This wedding then, is larger than the two people standing together. This is a mystical union, soon to be sealed with a kiss. Matt Perrines strong tuba playing underneath the first section of the piece complements Jason Marsalis inventive percussive interpretations in this commingling of the best of New Orleans traditions. The second section has a swing feel - written in the Jewish chant mode of Akdamut, this musical motif is used to beckon a special bride and groom to the Torah on the Festival of Simchat Torah. The third section reprises the first. Encouraged by Derek Douget and Maurice Brown, the ending turns into a jam session - perfect for this composition - the couples future together may be intentionally planned, but in the world, the future ends up being surely improvised. Seven Blessings in the Garden District caps the ceremony. These seven blessings are the culmination of the duets deepest hopes and dreams. It is through the recitation of these blessings that the couple is eternally connected each blessing forming a created day in the new universe of the lovers. In communion, Steven Greenman and Fred Sanders bring introspection and thought to these beginning blessings. This exploration intensifies with Derek Dougets soprano sax work and also the ensemble contributions, expanding these blessings into a meditative and then an ecstatic experience, reminiscent of John Coltranes finest spiritual work. The sweep of the blessings brings us into the reflection of the divine. In the fifth blessing, which evokes images of sadness and destruction, the Hebrew Eicha (Lamentations) cantillation system is employed. This music creates a thoughtful space as the couple reflects on living with the noblest intentions and the threats of becoming victim to the vagaries of life. This is the comment of Alex Cokes fine bass flute solo, restoring solid ground to a desperately watered land. Fred Sanders picks up the cello to introduce the sixth blessing, lending his musical depth in search of the authentic. Transcendence does come -- Greenman and Sanders are joined by Jason Marsalis with an entrancing rhythm and Roland Guerin and then Mark Rubins basswork allow these blessings to jump from underneath the huppah. With the seventh blessing, the parade begins. Intensity is fired in the kiln of possibility. This is an organic enfolding - one player falls into and depends on the other - it is here - the reunification of the original souls of the bride and the groom -- back in the

Garden of Eden there is laughter and joy and so, the prophetic words of Jeremiah have fallen flat. The bride and groom have returned from estrangement and there is shalom, completeness.

1. Baruch Ata haShem Elokeinu Melech haOlam, Borei Pri haGafen. Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

2. Baruch Ata haShem Elokeinu Melech haOlam, Shehakol Barah Lichvodo. Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has created everything for Gods glory.

3. Baruch Ata haShem Elokeinu Melech haOlam, Yotzer ha'Adam. Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, the creator of humanity.

4. Baruch Ata haShem Elokeinu Melech haOlam, Asher Yatzar Et ha'Adam Betzalmo, b'Tzelem Dmut Tavnito, veHitkon Lo Mimenu Binyan Adei Ad. Baruch Ata haShem Yotzer ha'Adam. Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has created humanity in Your image, in the pattern of Your own likeness, and provided for generation after generation. You are blessed, Lord, the creator of humanity.

5. Sos Tasis veTagel haAkarah, bKibbutz Bane'ha Letocha bSimcha. Baruch Ata haShem, Mesame'ach Tzion beVaneha. Let the barren city be jubilantly happy and joyful at her joyous reunion with her children. You are blessed, Lord, who makes Zion rejoice with her children.

6. Sameach TeSamach Re'im Ahuvim, KeSamechacha Yetzircha bGan Eden miKedem. Baruch Ata haShem, MeSame'ach Chatan VeKalah. Let the loving couple be very happy, just as You made Your creation happy in the garden of Eden, so long ago. You are blessed, Lord, who makes the bridegroom and the bride happy.

7. Baruch Ata haShem Elokeinu Melech haOlam, Asher Barah Sasson vSimcha, Chatan VKalah, Gila Rina, Ditzza vChedva, Ahava vAchava, vShalom vRe'ut. MHera haShem Elokeinu Yishama bArei Yehudah u'Vchutzot Yerushalayim, Kol Sasson vKol Simcha, Kol Chatan vKol Kalah, Kol Mitzhalot Chatanim mChupatam, u'Nearim Mimishte Neginatam. Baruch Ata haShem mSame'ach Chatan im haKalah. Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who created joy and celebration, bridegroom and bride, rejoicing, jubilation, pleasure and delight, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. May there soon be heard, Lord our God, in the cities of Judea and in the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of celebration, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride, the happy shouting of bridegrooms from their weddings and of young men from their feasts of song. You are blessed, Lord, who helps the bridegroom and the bride rejoice together. In its evocation, Euphrosyne, Aglaia and Thalia is a cantorial fantasia, inspired by the hazzanut (sacred improvisatory skills) of Sholom Katz. There is a blessing made - an offering to this perfect coupling: Yvarechcha haShem vYishmrecha. Yaair haShem Panav Ailecha vChuneka. Yisa haShem

Panav Ailecha vYasaim Lcha Shalom. May God bless you and guard you. May Gods countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God turn Gods face to you and guide you in peace and grant you completeness. The vibes solo of Jason Marsalis brings a unity to the simple baseline melodies which in turn, grow into the melody of the Priestly Blessing. This Priestly Blessing melody is used a few times a year in the Jewish liturgical calendar, as it is sung by the descendants of the High Priests, the Cohanim, when they arise and bless the congregation. There are two parts to the special melody - as the winds and the piano act in counterpoint to each other. Roland Guerins shrewd bass playing imitates the ticking of a clock, suggesting the passing of time and, despite the best intentions, the unresolved weariness that creeps into even the best relationship as it ages and succumbs to pressings of time. What will happen to this couple? The ensembles chord at the end, the interval of a second, leaves it knotted and unsure. Regardless of this, the glass is stomped, the lovers kiss and then they disappear to consummate the marriage in private time, known as yichud. Playpen Stomp brings the frenzy home - inspired by the merger of traditional Ottoman court music and the nascent Turkish urban song, this music known as fasil, is both sophisticated and accessible. Mark Rubin extends this coupling with an oud solo blending the fasil influence with the American folk song tradition. A combination of two traditional songs, I Never Will Marry and Jubilee, the friends and family cluster round again - the ensemble weighs in with good-natured ribbing, wolf-whistles and advice for the new couple - greetings and good wishes are exclaimed as everyone prepares for the party afterwards, and after lovemaking, the couple eventually rejoins their loving community, refreshed and happy, only tomorrow to foot the bill.

GOING HOME: A LOVESONG TO NEW ORLEANS

There is no musical grammar to use when lives are washed out. After the rains, we exist, barely, in a time of transparency and authenticity. We undergo the task to overcome our fears. We may be thwarted at any time. A lifetime of building and acquiring possessions and an outlook may be flooded over instantly, leaving a watery truth, remaining. We are dependent on our memories as we strive to adjust to a new order. We are made vulnerable by our most intense hopes - to overcome sadness and knit people together - to be a balm for healing and to stop pain. We must tolerate no facades. We ask the deepest questions - who will die and who will live -- who by fire and who by water. As we live in uncertainty, may we walk unafraid - may we have renewed faith in God and may we trust our diverse traditions to speak as we continue to find our voices within them. There will be rebuilding and a regathering of the exiles - may what is consecrated as the new city be solidly built with the deeply hewed

traditions that have made New Orleans what it is - a mottled beauty. May the partnership and the spirit of this music guide our way. We play not for the flashbulb or the camera but for the harder responsibility of making things better moment to moment, note by note.

**Bio for Neil Blumofe:** Neil Blumofe is a sacred singer, composer and teacher. A classically-trained pianist, schooled in jazz saxophone in New Orleans, Blumofe was trained in the vocal cantorial arts at the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York City. He has studied voice with Spiro Malas and was nominated as best male vocalist in Austin by the Austin Critics' Circle. Hazzan Blumofe has recently released, *Piety and Desire*, (2006: Horeb Records) a project of original compositions that bring together the sounds of jazz and hazzanut (Jewish liturgical music), in the recreation of a traditional Jewish wedding. This music joins *Moses Muses* (2004; Horeb Records). Both projects feature Jason Marsalis, Roland Guerin, Maurice Brown and Alex Coke. In 2002, Blumofe brought out *Root Music*, vol. 1, a survey of Jewish synagogue and folk music. At Congregation Agudas Achim, where he has served as Hazzan since 1998, Hazzan Blumofe enjoys leading the community in inspiring and participatory prayer, teaching students of all ages, pastoring to the community's diverse membership and participating in all aspects of this growing vibrant and welcoming community. He has established a reputation as a creative leader of worship and transmitter of Jewish musical traditions, ancient to modern. He is known as a discerning improviser in prayer, concerned with caring for and uplifting a congregation. In 2005, Hazzan Blumofe was an invited participant in the University of Texas Humanities Institute symposium. In 1999, Blumofe was invited to be a speaker and performer in the Sacred Music Conference of the Magreb, in Fes, Morocco. In Austin he currently is a Board Member of Austin Public Radio (KUT 90.5 FM), is on the National Advisory Board of the *Journal of Synagogue Music*. Additionally Hazzan Blumofe has worked extensively both with the Islamic Dialogue Student Association at the University of Texas and the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

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