

# AMSTERDAM KLEZMER BAND

## Biography

Amsterdam Klezmer Band is both streetwise and classically trained; the band stands for tradition and innovation; they bowl party tents over as easily as draws tears in the theatre. The band plays Klezmer and Balkan, Ska and Jazz, Gypsy and Hiphop. Their music is many things to many people, but first and foremost: it's a party.

In fifteen years, a bunch of Amsterdam buskers has grown into an international seven-headed klezmer beast. Those who come expecting a traditional evening (because of the name) will get quite a shock. The AKB has moulded its own, unorthodox sound, where a Jewish traditional can be accompanied by a rap or a growling sax solo.

And yet, their roots can even be heard when the music is remixed by world-renowned DJs such as C-Mon & Kypski or Shantel. They play at venues and festivals throughout Europe, and have travelled to such distant countries as Brazil, Mexico and South Korea. But no matter whether it's the Hong Kong Jazz Festival or the Concertgebouw, Sziget or a bar in Slovenia, Lowlands or a Turkish boulevard: there will be dancing.

Saxophonist and band leader Job Chajes calls AKP a "mini brass band" that consists of three wind instruments, percussion, bass, accordion and a singer with a gravelly voice. "We still don't have a drummer, nor do we use any electronics. Our musicians are not only part of the band but are all excellent soloists in their own right; this is part of the unique nature of the band."

Chajes discovered his Jewish musical roots when busking during the early nineties. He had dropped out of college, and was busking to supplement his benefit money. The klezmer sound had become somewhat forgotten in Amsterdam, but people quickly warmed to it. Before long, his hat started to accumulate not only guilders but also the visiting cards of various parties and festivals. By this time, the repertoire already including the adventurous rhythms made popular by the Gypsy bands that also performed in Amsterdam.

1997 was the official year of birth of the Amsterdam Klezmer Band. They played as a quartet at the Oerol festival, at several liberation festivals and at street music festivals in Italy, Switzerland and Slovenia. However the real breakthrough was when they brought the house down at the Noorderslag festival in Groningen in 2001. The following day brought glowing reviews and calls from booking agencies and a TV show.

By that time, AKB was already the seven-piece band it is today. Alec Kopyt, the singer, lends the band a voice that is drenched in the bittersweet traditions of his hometown Odessa. The extended wind section caters for the Balkan and Klezmer tradition as well offering a generous helping of Funk, Jazz, Ska and Hiphop.

Since 1997 there have been more than a thousands performances and eleven albums. The band members are the spiritual kindred of the 'klezmerim': the professional Jewish musicians who trekked across Europe two centuries ago. The band has lost count of the amount of countries it has played in.

AKB was successful long before the Balkan hype became a worldwide phenomenon. They suddenly found themselves being sampled and mixed by dance producers, to their own astonishment. It appeared that the unique sound of the seven band members was perfect for the popular 'Balkan

Beat'. Even though this hype has died down, AKB continues to be busier than ever. The fifteenth anniversary of the band was celebrated with a big party in the pop temple Paradiso; it was AKB's one-thousandth concert.

While still on the current tour, the band is already at work on the next album. Each of the seven members provides material. "We are a democratic band," according to Job Chajes. "Sometimes, that can be a problem and lead to dilemmas, but it's that friction and diversity that gives us our own sound." That sound remains new and refreshing, and gets great reviews, time and again. Good reviews are well and good, but the band started on the streets and the streets remain their natural home. More important than the critics' opinion is that people get up and dance and follow in the swinging footsteps of the mini brass band.

*(by Leendert vander Valk)*

#### Line-up

Jasper de Beer: double bass, guitar banjo, backing vocals

Job Chajes: alto saxophone, vocals

Alec Kopyt: vocals, percussion

Gijs Levelt: trumpet

Joop van der Linden: trombone, percussion

Janfie van Strien: clarinet, backing vocals

Theo van Tol: accordion

#### Discography

- **Mesjogge** (MC 1996)
- **Leib in de Pijp** (MC, 1997)
- **De Amsterdam Klezmer Band** (MC and CD 1999)
- **Mala Loka** (CD, Syncoop - 5760 CD 2460)
- **Limonchiki** (CD, Knitting Factory - KFW300)
- **Katakofti** (with Galata Gypsie Band) Kalan Records
- **SON** (Connecting Cultures 2005)
- **Amsterdam Klezmer Band Remixed** (Essay Recordings 2006)
- **ZARAZA** (Essay Recordings 2009)
- **Katla** (Essay Recordings 2011)
- **Mokum** (Essay Recordings 2012)

