

Kidz Love Klezmer

by William Walsh

LOOK at little Gene dance. Spinning. Swinging his arms. Kicking out. His head down and then up. Look at his face. He's ecstatic. What's going through his mind? I call out to little Gene, This is a kolomeike, my boy. All the other kids are watching Gene dance. They are dancing like Gene. Kids love klezmer—it's true! Gene is pretending to play the accordion as he dances. His elbows are pumping. My wife wouldn't come today. She said, Kids don't like Klezmer. I told her she couldn't be more wrong. I told her, The event is named Kidz Love Klezmer. She waved her hands in my face dismissively. She said, You can take him—I'm not stopping you! Now they're forming the kids in a circle for a freylekh. Little Gene is the lucky duck between two cuties, sisters Delia and Rose Humphrey. He's trying hard to catch his breath. His face is red. All of the kids are red-faced and breathing heavily. But smiling. And dancing. I sneak a peek at the man playing upright bass. His hat is pulled low on his forehead. He wears oversized glasses. He plays his instrument like a dance partner. He never takes his eyes off the little man on the snare drum. And I'm clapping along and I didn't even realize. A sher and a khusidl and a zhok and a sirba. I'm not the only parent transfixed by this whirling, dancing sight. We're all speechless. I feel as though the dancing of the children could levitate the hall. The children are glowing. The musicians must be exhausted. The clarinet and the accordion are brothers, I see. Big, fat men with curly, klezmer hair. Little Gene is guzzling from the water bottle that's passing around. His legs keep moving as he pours the water over his head. I am clapping in time to the snare drum and stomping my foot to the upright bass. And I see across the hall that my wife has come! In spite of all that she said. She's here. I race over to the entrance and pick her up off her feet. I kiss her face and give her a chiropractic hug. I want to hug the juice out of her and drink it down! Look at little Gene, I say. He loves klezmer! All of the parents begin to dance with their kids. We form a circle of a

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hundred. Maybe more. We dance clockwise and then on cue we dance counterclockwise. Then we break off into dozens of tight family circles and dance faster circles. The band is playing louder and faster. The music crashes to a halt and the children cheer and fall to the ground. I bend to look into little Gene's face. I've never seen such exhaustion, such joy. His eyes are focused on the twinkling lights that hang from high ceiling. I ask him, What do you see, Gene? He says, Fireworks. Like it's the Fourth of July.

