



## Going Down to Funky Town

# Abraham Inc. Is the Ruling Triumvirate of Post-Klezmer Groove

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**Quality Tunes:** Left to right: Josh Dolgin, Fred Wesley and David Krakauer getting down and funky in New York.

Here are a few lyrics from “Tweet Tweet,” the title track from Abraham Inc.’s recently released debut album: “We bring the nigguns from the street/Get off your seat/Stamp your feet/Come and touch me in the tweet tweet/Ya da di bum bum, ya da di bum bum, ya da di bum bum.”

Is this Abraham Inc. in a nutshell? Well, yes and no. Add a funk trombone, some klezmer clarinet playing, two electric guitars, an amazing rhythm section, a few more horns, a sampler and an accordion, and you’re almost there. If it sounds like an unlikely concoction, it is. But as Abraham Inc. proved at their entirely noncorporate CD release show February 25 at New York’s Le Poisson Rouge, klezmer, funk and hip-hop really do play well together.

Formed in 2005, Abraham Inc. is the collaboration between three musicians whose backgrounds could hardly be further apart. David Krakauer is an accomplished classical clarinetist who became one of the leaders of the klezmer revival and has distinguished himself in avant-garde and experimental music circles. Trombone player Fred Wesley was a staple of the funk scene in the 1960s and ’70s, playing, composing and arranging music for the likes of James Brown and Parliament-Funkadelic. And Canadian hip-hop artist Josh Dolgin, aka Socalled, has been turning heads in recent years with his idiosyncratic blend of hip-hop and klezmer.

So what makes this weird combination work? The sheer talent of these three artists, along with their impressive cadre of accompanying performers, certainly goes a long way. But Abraham Inc.’s achievement isn’t just making a counterintuitive amalgam of influences sound good. Rather, it’s showing us that maybe it should be intuitive, after all.

Now, I’m a person who likes klezmer. I’ll listen to Dave Tarras or the Epstein Brothers Orchestra for fun, or to more recent klezmer revival bands, or even to scratchy archival recordings rescued from rotting piles of old 78s. I don’t need to be converted — I don’t need (and, in most cases, don’t want) my klezmer pill buried in a pile of hip-hop ice cream. But Abraham Inc. doesn’t exist to make klezmer palatable to the Yiddish-averse masses, and they exist still less to tickle the fancy of the Yiddish-enthralled masses. They exist to make music. Good music.

Granted, there’s a smug satisfaction in hearing Abraham Inc. confirm what I think every time I listen to a particularly rollicking *bulgar*, a piece of dance music. Finding a riff by late klezmer clarinetist German Goldenshteyn layered onto a funk foundation reveals just how funky that little klezmer phrase is in its own right. But you don’t have to know anything about Goldenshteyn to appreciate Abraham Inc.’s music. For klezmer nerds like me, there’s a little ego trip for being in the know. But this isn’t an effort to make klezmer cool, or funky, or current, or hip, or whatever. Rather, it’s a demonstration that klezmer is already all these things. Why shouldn’t a music that’s so happy, so infectious, so exuberant be an appropriate ingredient in a funky, danceable, hip-hoppy mix? No reason, Abraham Inc says. No reason at all.

Of course, even the greatest make a few missteps, and Abraham Inc. is not immune. While their best numbers meld stick-in-your-head melodies and rap lyrics with irresistible rhythms, they occasionally fall prey to the pitfall of many fusion outfits, which is to sound like really great elevator music. Such is the case with “The H Tune,” a none-too-subtle poke in the side to “*Hava Nagila*” that fails to either honor or burlesque the ubiquitous song. But fortunately, this is the exception that proves the rule. For the most part, the numbers on “Tweet Tweet” are interesting, original and fun to listen to, and in live performance they only improve. With any luck, Abraham Inc. will be in business for a long time to come.

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