

Sofias Reisen – new CD by the Ensemble WAKS

The Hamburg-based Ensemble WAKS — Inge Mandos (vocals), Hans-Christian Jaenicke (violin), and Klemens Kaatz (piano, accordion) — is releasing its third album, *Sofias Reisen – Di rayzes fun Sofia*. At the center stands the Jewish-Russian music ethnologist **Sofia Magid (1892–1954)**, who undertook around twenty research trips between 1928 and 1949 throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union, archiving Yiddish folk songs on wax cylinders with great personal dedication. Magid was driven by a clear awareness that very little time remained to save the Yiddish heritage of Eastern Europe from disappearing.

Following the traces of these journeys, Ensemble WAKS approaches the material with sensitivity, imagination, and musical skill. They recreates the travels in sound. Ultimately, with this multifaceted project, Inge Mandos places herself in service of the mission Sofia Magid began, thus preserving the treasure of Yiddish folk songs from being forgotten. In a previously unprecedented approach, WAKS uses excerpts from this material in an experimental and creative way to craft new arrangements and compositions — achieving the nearly impossible: making music together with original voices from the last century. The authentic recorded voices resound as if from a long-vanished world.

Sofias Reisen tells of a time marked by pogroms, wars, and oppression — and sadly, these songs have become highly relevant once again. Uplifting, encouraging melodies alternate with melancholic and dramatic sounds. The themes are love, loss, friendship, and, not the least, the looming decline of East-European Jewish culture.

The lovingly and artistically designed booklet (Hans-Christian Jaenicke) spans 40 pages and includes all Yiddish texts in transcribed form, along with summaries of the songs in German and English. It also contains excerpts from a fictional travel diary of Sofia Magid (written by Inge Mandos), based on historical research, illuminating the historical background and the conditions in the shtetls she visited.

The source material comes from: Elvira Grözinger and Susi Hudak, "Unser Rebbe, unser Stalin," Harrassowitz Verlag 2008. The project was supported by the Mara & Holger Cassens Foundation, Hamburg.