

PRESS RELEASE

International Days of Jewish Music · *Internationale Tage Jüdischer Musik*

From “Rivers of Babylon” to “Hallelujah”: the International Days of Jewish Music switch on the light right across Germany

From the Baltic coast to the Ruhr: five evenings between Leonard Cohen, Boney M. and a thirteen-year-old cellist

22 to 26 November 2026 · Germany · Theme “Yehi Or – Let There Be Light”
· Shantel · Jascha Nemtsov · Norman Lebrecht · Paul Brody · Charlotte Melkonian

Heringsdorf, Germany, 27 October 2026 – As the days grow shorter and the light fades earlier, the **9th International Days of Jewish Music** (*Internationale Tage Jüdischer Musik*) switch it back on, right across Germany. Their theme is the first command of creation in the Hebrew Bible: **“Yehi Or – Let There Be Light”**. From **22 to 26 November** they light up five places in four German federal states – from the Baltic seaside resort of Heringsdorf on the island of Usedom via Stavenhagen and Zinnowitz in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, on to Essen in the Ruhr region, Dresden in Saxony and Berlin.

The guests are **Shantel**, the German musician who invented Balkan pop, with his twelve-strong ensemble **Mentsh United**, the pianist **Jascha Nemtsov**, the music journalist **Norman Lebrecht**, the trumpeter **Paul Brody**, the thirteen-year-old cellist **Charlotte Melkonian**, winner of the 2026 Usedom Music Prize, the vocal ensemble **Le Bois Chantant** and the electronic music pioneer **Alberto de Campo**. One question runs through all the concerts: where is Jewish music hiding inside the things everybody already knows?

The answers are played, sung, improvised and danced – and where that happens, a building stops being merely a place of remembrance. The **Alte Synagoge Essen** burned out in 1938; on 24 November there will be dancing in it. “When people dance, eighty-eight years later, in a building the National Socialists set on fire in 1938, that is more than remembrance. It is the present,” says the festival’s artistic director **Thomas Hummel**. “Jewish music does not belong in a museum. It belongs on stage. Because it brings light into our hearts.”

The International Days of Jewish Music invite you to hear the psalm inside the disco hit, to understand what a Kindertransport of 1939 has to do with a

school workshop, and to witness why a thirteen-year-old closes the festival alongside a pianist fifty years her senior.

Advance booking opens tomorrow, Wednesday 28 October, at 9 a.m. at itjm.de.

The International Days of Jewish Music are supported by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium des Innern, BMI), the Elisabeth Selbert Fonds (ESF) and the Sebastian Cobler Foundation for Civil Rights and Jewish Life in Europe (Sebastian Cobler Stiftung für Bürgerrechte und Jüdisches Leben in Europa e. V.).

Two global hits and the prayers inside them

Few songwriters have shaped popular music as deeply as **Leonard Cohen**, whose death falls ten years ago on 7 November – and few have carried as much of the synagogue into it. “Who by Fire” sets a Yom Kippur prayer he had heard as a child; “Hallelujah” became one of the most covered songs in the history of pop. His final album, released two weeks before his death, was made with the cantor and the choir of his Montreal synagogue. At the opening night, **Norman Lebrecht**, whose website “Slipped Disc” is read around the world, talks about Cohen and about how Jewishness found its way into popular music with **Jascha Nemtsov**, who holds Europe’s first chair in the history of Jewish music, at the Franz Liszt University of Music in Weimar. Nemtsov also takes to the keyboard himself, and **Paul Brody** brings Cohen to life on the trumpet – he has played in that Montreal synagogue himself.

Three days later the same thought leads to Dresden. Boney M.’s worldwide hit “Rivers of Babylon” goes back to Psalm 137, a lament over exile that **Salamone Rossi** had set to music 350 years earlier. The vocal ensemble **Le Bois Chantant** performs it improvised according to Renaissance rules, without sheet music; **Alberto de Campo** answers with live electronics.

Buildings that have burned

Two of the venues carry the same history. The **Alte Synagoge Stavenhagen** was set alight by the National Socialists in 1938 – a neighbour put out the fire. After decades as a carpenter’s workshop and in decay, it has been a memorial and meeting place since 2017. The **Alte Synagoge Essen**, the largest synagogue building in Germany when it was consecrated in 1913, burned out in the November Pogrom of 1938; today the city runs it as a house of Jewish culture.

It is there that **Shantel** performs on 24 November. Born Stefan Hantel in Frankfurt, he made Eastern European brass music popular on Western dance floors in the early 2000s, became the first German artist to win a BBC Radio 3 World Music Award and had a hit in 2007 with “Disko Partizani”.

He named his club “Bucovina”, after Bukovina, the region his mother’s family came from: a place where Jewish and Roma music were inseparably interwoven, and whose Jewish life was destroyed in the Holocaust. Anyone dancing to Balkan pop in Germany is dancing to sounds from there. With **Mentsh United**, an ensemble of thirteen Jewish and non-Jewish musicians from across Europe, Shantel takes that sound back to its origins.

What gets passed on

In Stavenhagen and Zinnowitz, Paul Brody works on 23 November with school classes from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania on one-minute video pieces about origin, identity and prejudice. He comes not as a guest speaker but as a first-hand witness: his mother escaped from Vienna in 1939 on one of the last Kindertransports.

On 26 November a circle closes in Berlin. In September, **Charlotte Melkonian** opened the Usedom Music Festival before 1,200 guests at the Peenemünde power station and received the 2026 Usedom Music Prize there – now the thirteen-year-old closes the International Days of Jewish Music, which are also staged by the Usedomer Musikfreunde association. She made her Carnegie Hall debut in 2024, has been the youngest scholarship holder of the Anne-Sophie Mutter Foundation since 2026, and plays a cello made by Stefano Scarampella around 1900, which she won at the competition of the German Music Instrument Fund (Deutscher Musikinstrumentenfonds). Beside her at the piano sits Jascha Nemtsov, fifty years her senior, who rediscovered much of the programme himself: works by Wepprik, Bloch, Ullmann and Weinberg. Melkonian’s mentor David Geringas has been a guest of the International Days of Jewish Music in earlier years.

About the International Days of Jewish Music

The International Days of Jewish Music celebrate the shared life of Jews and non-Jews in Europe, follow the traces of Jewish life past and present, and make the richness of Jewish music audible and visible. They grew out of the synagogue tours of the Usedom Music Festival, which have been exploring Jewish life in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania since 2009; since 2016 they have carried the message of a peaceful coexistence built on respect and curiosity beyond that region and into Germany as a whole. Since then this commitment has brought to the synagogues of Central Europe, among others, the clarinettist Sharon Kam, the cellist David Geringas, the chansonnière Sandra Kreisler, the singers Helene Schneiderman, Sveta Kundish and Avital Gerstetter, the violinist Piotr Plawner, the Jewish artist Roman Grinberg, as well as the Ladino Andaluze Ensemble and the Nigun Quartet.

Dates

All times are local (CET). All venues are in Germany.

- **Sun 22 Nov, 7.30 p.m.** · Seetelhotel Villa Esplanade, Heringsdorf (Usedom, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) · “Leonard Cohen – a Hallelujah in Biblical Images”, with Norman Lebrecht, Jascha Nemtsov and Paul Brody
- **Mon 23 Nov** · Alte Synagoge Stavenhagen and Zinnowitz (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) · “Your Life in 60 Seconds”, workshops with Paul Brody
- **Tue 24 Nov, 7.30 p.m.** · Alte Synagoge Essen (North Rhine-Westphalia) · Mentsh United feat. Shantel
- **Wed 25 Nov, 7.30 p.m.** · Jewish Community of Dresden (Jüdische Kultusgemeinde Dresden, Saxony) · “By the Rivers of Babylon”, with Le Bois Chantant and Alberto de Campo
- **Thu 26 Nov, 7.30 p.m.** · Nemtsov&Nemtsov, Berlin · Charlotte Melkonian and Jascha Nemtsov

Tickets: +49 38378 346-47, www.itjm.de

Press contact: Alexander Datz, +49 176 741 61157 Internationale Tage Jüdischer Musik | www.itjm.de | presse@usedomer-musikfestival.de