

# The Schmooze Stories with a Yiddish Twist

YIDDISH GUIDE TO SINGER, MICHAEL FEINSTEIN

by  
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Michael Feinstein is an American singer, pianist, and music revivalist. Shown below is a Yiddish Guide to this caretaker of the Great American Songbook.

“geboyrn-tog” (birthday)  
September 7, 1956 in Columbus, Ohio.

“tate” (father)  
Feinstein’s father, Edward, used to be a singer and also a sales executive for the Sara Lee Corporation. (No wonder that Feinstein has a “ziseh neshomeh”—a sweet soul.)

“muter” (mother)  
Feinstein’s mother, Maizie, did tap dancing semi-professionally.

“tate-mame” (parents)  
“I loved the music that my parents listened to rather than

what was on the radio at the time. I was very enamored with show music and I listened to a lot of the music I now perform.” (Feinstein quote)

Feinstein’s parents had a cast recording of the show, “Finian’s Rainbow,” a recording of Beatrice Kay singing “Hello MyBaby,” and a Glenn Miller record of “Little Brown Jug.” Feinstein said, “It was a whole mishmash of things, but they made me interested in Broadway and different kinds of piano playing as well as different songs.”

“shvester” (sister)

[about how Michael annoyed his sister because he could duplicate whatever she practiced on the keyboard]

“At one point she was practicing ‘Malaguena’ over and over again. As soon as she was finished, I could sit down and play the piece because I had heard it enough times. It used to make her nuts.” (Feinstein quote)

Bar Mitzvah

Feinstein wished not to be bar mitzvahed at the traditional age of 13. His family belonged to a conservative temple and were not particularly observant as regards religious dogma. They wanted all three of their children to have a Jewish education, which included knowledge of their heritage and Judaic traditions. Feinstein was a rebel; he thought the bar mitzvah was more of a show for the parents than for the initiate. Feinstein said, “but its full significance hit me much later on in life.”

(Source: Jewish Virtual Library -The Library)

“sod” der (the secret)

“lakhn” (to laugh)

[about his early love of music]

Feinstein said, “I was secretive about what I did, what I listened to. It was clear that my friends—what friends I had—would laugh at me. The fact is, I didn’t have many friends.”

“tsunemenish” (nickname)

Feinstein is known as the “Ambassador of the Great American Songbook.”

“heym” (home)

Feinstein owns a 50-acre ranch in Santa Barbara, California. It has more than 4,000 trees. Judge Judy Sheindlin offered him \$3 million over his purchase price—in cash—shortly after he bought it.

“khasene” (marriage)

Feinstein is married to Terrence Flannery. In October 2008, he married his partner of 11 years. The wedding ceremony was officiated by close friend, Judge Judy Scheindlin, at the couple’s estate in Los Angeles. One hundred and fifteen friends celebrated their nuptials. They included Warren Beatty, Annette Bening, Doris Roberts, Joan Collins, and Henry Winkler. There was a special performance by Liza Minnelli and Barry Manilow in honor of the couple’s special day.

“tsvey hundert” (200)

Feinstein performs more than 200 concerts a year.

“onheyb” (beginning)

“farkoyfer” der (the salesman)

“I was 20 years old. I had moved to Los Angeles from

Columbus, Ohio. I was working as a piano salesman. I couldn't sell them. I could demonstrate them, but people wouldn't buy them from me." (Feinstein quote)

Feinstein's musical career was launched by Liza Minnelli. She asked Feinstein to join her at one of her New York concerts.

"nomen" (name)

"I never dreamed that one day I would be opening a nightclub in Manhattan. To show how things have changed. The name Feinstein's is a name that would never have adorned the sign of an older establishment because Jewish ethnic was out Now, it's in!" (Feinstein quote)

"groys" (big)

"I love big theaters. I love playing the Hollywood Bowl and big venues, but there is a special something that happens in venues like Feinstein's at the Nikko [San Francisco], I think." (Feinstein quote)

"barimt" (famous)

In 1988, Feinstein's one-man Broadway show called "Isn't It Romantic: Michael Feinstein in Concert" made him famous.

Feinstein's repertoire includes songs by George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Johnny Mercer, Duke Ellington and Harry Warren.

'tsurikkumen" (to return)

In 2016, Feinstein returned to his namesake San Francisco venue with a salute to Judy Garland.

“mazi tov!” (Congratulations!)

In 2007, Feinstein founded the Great American Songbook Foundation, which is dedicated to celebrating the art form and to preserving it through educational programs.

Feinstein said, “...a song that we are still listening to and humming and swaying in 20 years is one that endures and therefore becomes part of the Great American Songbook. It is music and lyrics that have transcended the time in which they were written and still have pertinence and meaningful audiences that are new.”

In 2012, Feinstein was named Principal Pops Conductor for the Pasadena Symphony.

“zal” (auditorium)

Feinstein recorded his 20th album, “Michael Feinstein With the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra.” The CD was recorded at Tel Aviv’s Mann Auditorium and was the joint brainchild of Feinstein and his friend, conductor, Zubin Mehta.

“dankbar” (grateful)

“I went to Israel because I wanted to be there and it was so moving because the people I met were so grateful for anyone who stepped foot on their soil given the intense political situation.” (Feinstein quote)

“pyane” (piano)

In 2012, Feinstein tested out a piano from the movie, “Casablanca.” The piano had 58 keys, not 88 keys. He said, “You can smell the dust as the keys are depressed.”

It was auctioned off at Sotheby's.

“emotsye” (emotion)

“orkester” (orchestra)

“There's definitely a physical feeling performing with an orchestra because our bodies are made up of vibrations and all music that is acoustically-based resonates with the vibrations of the body. So to be onstage with all those instruments vibrating - the emotional effect is thrilling - It's like a high; a wonderful legal high.” (Feinstein quote)

“bukh” (book)

Feinstein wrote a book titled, “Nice Work If You Can Get It: My Life in Rhythm and Rhyme.” He also wrote, “The Gershwins and Me: A Personal History in Twelve Songs.”

“koyakh” (power)

In 2009, Feinstein teamed up with Cheyenne Jackson to create a nightclub act titled, “The Power of Two.”

“shiker” (drunk, intoxicated)

Feinstein played in piano bars five hours a night. One night he was playing in a club on New Year's Eve, and among the attendees was Joan Fontaine. She was seated down front (“fornt”), gloriously dressed, and she was gesticulating to the audience. She was enjoying her champagne until she became inebriated. She then started saying thing like ‘You're terrible! Get off the stage!’—and started yelling.

Feinstein went from the joy of seeing Joan Fontaine sitting there to the horror of thinking ‘Joan Fontaine? Yelling at me?’ That was quite an experience.

(Source: [latimes.com](http://latimes.com), "Michael Feinstein is Keeping the standards alive" by Mike Boehm, May 31, 2014)

"oyftretn" (to perform, to act)

Feinstein played at a party for Frank Sinatra's wife. He said that Frank hated the song, "My Way."

Feinstein wrote a children's pirate song for the Macy's Parade; he was going to be on the pirate float.

"frayndshaft" (friendship)

Feinstein wrote about the late Elaine Stritch. "Elaine had a way of disappearing before the bill arrived." But when Feinstein's dad was sick ("krank") and couldn't get a bed at a local hospital, the legendarily salty-tongued Stritch "made two phone calls" and his dad was in. "Money can't buy that kind of friendship," said Feinstein.

"yayn" (wine)

When Michael Feinstein was invited to the home of Sammy Davis Jr., Sammy asked, "Do you want something to drink?" Feinstein asked, "Do you have white wine?" Sammy replied, "We've got all color wine here!"

"vetshere" (supper) club

Feinstein's 54 Below is a cabaret and restaurant, located at 254 W. 54th Street Cellar. Broadway's brightest talents perform nightly on the cabaret stage. They offer a \$64 three course price fixe dinner. For \$80 you can get premium seating. Lemonade costs \$9, plus tax. No blue jeans!!!

"gadles" (dos) - arrogance

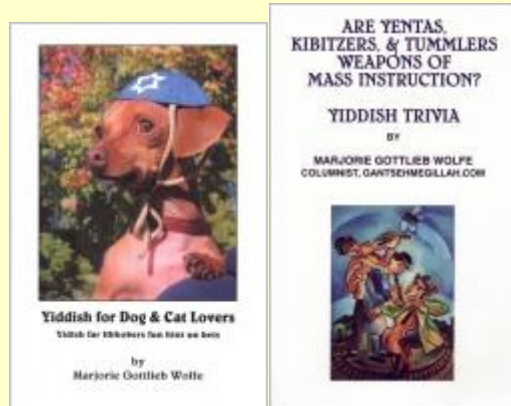


“Many times, at the end of a recording session, I would find myself exhausted by the beauty of what we had managed to do together. Maybe that sound arrogant, but it was a great feeling. Michael is the man.”

Quote by Jimmy Webb. Source: ‘One Life’ for Feinstein, Webb” by Elysa Gardner, USA Today

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**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:**



**"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tummlers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia." To order a copy, go to her website: [MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com](http://MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com)**

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