

Ikh ken nit zogn Vitsn

For ABV

Lorin Sklamberg

Lyrics: Lorin Sklamberg

Arranged by Lysander Jaffe

Soprano

Alto

Gm D

ikh ken nit zo - gn vi - tsn, kh'ken nit

ikh ken nit zo - gn vi - tsn, kh'ken nit

3

D Gm Gm Cm

khan-fnen shves-ster bri - der; es du - nern un es bli - tsn oy,

khan-fnen shves-ster bri - der; es du - nern un es bli - tsn oy,

5

Cm F Bb

may-ne fray-hayts li-der!

may-ne fray-hayts li-der

Gm D D Gm

I'm not a fun-ny fel-low, and real-ly it's no won-der, I

I'm not a fun-ny fel-low, and real-ly it's no won-der, I

8

ikh
ikh

Gm Cm D Gm

write my songs for free-dom, the songs that flash and thun - der

write my songs for free-dom, the songs that flash and thun - der

10 Bb Cm Cm F Bb Gm Cm

ken nor gi - sn tre-rn tre-rn per - l-reyn likh-tik vi di shte-rn in

ken nor gi - sn tre-rn tre-rn per - l-reyn likh-tik vi di shte-rn in

13 Cm F Bb

hi - mls blo - yer kreyn

hi - mls blo - yer kreyn

Gm Cm

my eyes are wet from wee-ping, the

my eyes are wet from wee-ping, the

15

D Gm

in a crown of blue____

in a crown of blue____

Cm Fm Bb Gm Cm

8 tears I shed for you, just like the stars in hea-ven shine in a crown of blue____

tears I shed for you, just like the stars in hea-ven shine in a crown of blue____

Chorus

18 Gm Cm Gm Gm F Bb

Oy oy oy____ un oy oy oy oy oy oy oy yoy yoy

Oy oy oy____ un oy oy oy oy oy oy oy yoy yoy

Oy oy oy____ un oy oy oy oy oy oy oy yoy yoy

Oy oy oy____ un oy oy oy oy oy oy oy yoy yoy

20 Gm Bb Cm D7

oy oy un oy oy oy — oy oy oy oy

oy oy un oy oy oy — Oy oy oy oy

oy oy un oy oy oy — Oy oy oy oy

oy oy un oy oy oy — oy oy oy oy

22 Instrumental

24

oy vey un ot a - zey

oy vey un ot a - zey

oy vey un ot a - zey

oy vey un ot a - zey

27

Verse 2

ikh ken nor li - bn men-tshn li - bn mer, vi zikh_

ikh ken nor li - bn men-tshn li - bn mer, vi zikh_

ikh ken nor li - bn men-tshn li - bn mer, vi zikh_

ikh ken nor li - bn men-tshn li - bn mer, vi zikh_

30

Lorin

un a - mol eykh ben-tshn di vos shel - tn mikh

un a - mol eykh ben-tshn di vos shel - tn mikh

un a - mol eykh ben-tshn di vos shel - tn mikh

un a - mol eykh ben-tshn di vos shel - tn mikh

32

peo - ple I do love you more than my - self you see___ my

34

e - ne - mies I bless them as much as they curse me___

36 B $\flat$ Cm Cm F B $\flat$

un a - mol eykh flu - khn di vos li - bn mikh un

un a - mol eykh flu - khn di vos li - bn mikh un

un a - mol eykh flu - khn di vos li - bn mikh un

un a - mol eykh flu - khn di vos li - bn mikh un

38 Gm Cm Cm F B $\flat$

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray - hayt likht far zikh

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray - hayt likht far zikh

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray - hayt likht far zikh

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray - hayt likht far zikh

40 Gm Cm Cm Fm B $\flat$

Lorin

E - ven friends may curse me and some-times they are right but

42 Gm Cm D Gm

e - ven they can't stop me from see-king free-dom's light____

see-king free-dom's light____

see-king free-dom's light____

see-king free-dom's light____

see-king free-dom's light____

44 Verse 3 Gm D D Gm

ikh ken nit zo-gn vi-tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri-der; es

ikh ken nit zo-gn vi-tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri-der; es

ikh ken nit zo-gn vi-tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri-der; es

ikh ken nit zo-gn vi-tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri-der; es

47 Gm Cm Cm F Bb

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hayts li - der! ikh

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hats li - der! ikh

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hayts li - der! ikh

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hayts li - der! ikh

49 Gm D D Gm

ken nit zo - gn vi - tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri - der; es

ken nit zo - gn vi - tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri - der; es

ken nit zo - gn vi - tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri - der; es

ken nit zo - gn vi - tsn, kh'ken nit khan-fnen shves-ster bri - der; es

51 Gm Cm D Gm

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hayts li - der

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hayts li - der

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hayts li - der

du - nern un es bli - tsn oy, may - ne fray-hayts li - der

53 B♭ Cm Cm F B♭ Gm Cm

un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un shte-rn mit tsu zu-khn

un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un shte-rn mit tsu zu-khn

un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un shte-rn mit tsu zu-khn

un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un shte-rn mit tsu zu-khn

56 Cm F B♭ B♭ Cm Cm F B♭

fray-hayt likht far zikh un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un

fray-hayt likht far zikh un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un

fray-hayt likht far zikh un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un

fray-hayt likht far zikh un a-mol eykh flu-khn di vos li-bn mikh un

Back to chorus

59

Gm Cm D Gm

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray-hayt likht far zikh_____

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray-hayt likht far zikh_____

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray-hayt likht far zikh_____

shte - rn mit tsu zu - khn fray-hayt likht far zikh_____

IKH KEN NIT ZOGN VITSN - I CAN'T TELL JOKES

Words by David Edelstadt (1866-1892), sweatshop poet

English words and music by Lorin Sklamberg

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Lyrics

Ikh ken nit zogn vitsn,
Kh'ken nit khanf'nen, shvester-brider;
Es dunern un es blitsn
Oy, mayne frayhayts-lider!

I'm not a funny fellow
And really, it's no wonder
I write my songs for freedom
The songs that flash and thunder

Ikh ken nor gisn trern,
Trern perl-reyn,
Likhtik, vi di shtern
In himis bloyer kreyn

My eyes are wet from weeping
The tears I shed for you
Just like the stars in heaven
Shine in a crown of blue.

Oy-yoy-yoy un oy-yoy-yoy...
Oy, vey un ot azey!

Ikh ken nor libn mentshn,
Libn mer vi zikh,
Un amol eykh bentshn
Di vos sheltn mikh;

Dear people, I do love you
More than myself, you see
My enemies, I bless them,
As much as they curse me.

English translation

I can't tell jokes,
I cannot flatter, siblings;
My freedom-songs
Thunder and lightning!

I can only weep tears,
Pearl-clean tears,
Bright, like the stars
In heaven's blue crown.

Oy-yoy-yoy and oy-yoy-yoy....
Woe is me and so it goes!

I can only, dear people,
Love more than myself
And once again bless
Those who curse me.

Un amol eykh flukhn
Di, vos libn mikh
Un shtem mir tsu zukhn
Frayhayt, likht far zikh.

And even friends may curse me,
And sometimes they are right.
But even they can't stop me
From seeking freedom's light!

Oy-yoy-yoy...

[He thinks we are his friends!
Such high fallutin' language!
What does he know from love?
Do you even know
Who your friends are?
I curse my enemies!
Who does he think he is?
Again with the blessings!
I liked him better before!]

And sometimes, I'm also cursed
By those who love me
And hinder me from seeking
Freedom's light for myself.

Ikh ken nit zogn vitsn – I can't tell jokes

Yiddish Words by Dovid Edelshtat

English words and music by Lorin Sklamberg (of the Klezmatics)

"Ikh ken nit zogn vitsn" is a Yiddish klezmer song that explores themes of freedom, emotional expression, and human connection. Its title, "I Can't Tell Jokes," underscores the contrast between humor and the deeper, heartfelt messages conveyed through music, making it a meaningful piece in The Klezmatics' repertoire

FROM LORIN SKLAMBERG:

During the pandemic, I was looking through the collection of the beloved anarchist writer David Edestadt's works and I came across this short little inspirational poem and set it to music. Shortly after, Janis Siegel of the Manhattan Transfer contacted me to invite the band to appear on Vocal Gumbo, the cultural variety show she co-hosts that had moved online - and that's how the song, via a remotely assembled music video, made its debut. Fast forward four years, and we invited Janis to record it with us - adding her verve, sparkle, and "snappy retorts" to the mix. What a joy!

Edelshtat's Yiddish Labor Songs

David Edelshtat (1866–1892) was a pioneering Yiddish labor poet and anarchist in both Russia and the U.S. whose works became staples of the Jewish labor movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Two of his most famous songs are **"In Kamf"** (*In Struggle*) and **"Arbeter Froyen"** (*Working Women*), both still sung today in Yiddish schools, labor gatherings, and cultural events