PAVORAMIC STEREO

THEODORE BIKEL

SONGS OF RUSSIA

OLD & NEW
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SONGS OF RUSSIA OLD & NEW

Songs of New Russia arranged & conducted by
FRED HELLERMAN

Each side of this album presents—musically—a different face of Russia: The Old and the New; that is to say, Russia before the revolution and after.

By and large, we in the Western Hemisphere are better acquainted with the music of Old Russia. Despite the fact that the Soviets are always eager to disseminate their cultural output, even to the extent of subsidizing its distribution in the West, there has been a remarkable dearth of available recordings of Russian folk or contemporary popular music, until quite recently. On the other hand, the Russian émigré circles in Paris, London or New York have been keeping alive the performers of Old Russian music, so that Gypsy tunes, ballads, "romanzas," Cossack melodies, etc. have come to be accepted as part of the international "café society" and night club repertoire.

It is a pity, of course, that not enough attention is ever paid to the lyrics, for they can be quite exquisite; at times they indicate in one stroke of the brush the picture a Dostoevsky novel might painstakingly build for our imagination through many pages. For the "Russian soul" is not an empty phrase; it exists in all its splendour and misery, in its grandeur and humiliation, in its joyful pain and its doleful gaiety.

Unlike my previous Russian album, which was almost entirely Gypsy, the first side of this album contains a varied collection of songs, all old to be sure, but different from each other in character and background. The first, Pomnyuyu ya, is a peasant song, or rather two such songs strung together. Ya'mshchik guri k-yaru is a Gypsy song, as is Polso bylo lyublyatse, the latter partly in Gypsy dialect. Noch Tikha and Gari Gari Maya Zvezda are the "romanza" type of ballad that has always been a typical form of Slavic lyricism. Chuchekh is a whimsical, sad-happy story of a fellow's misfortune; it is perhaps the newest song in this "old" collection, but it too goes back to the early years of the century. Finally, Vyechemny zvon is the epitome of nostalgia; a choir piece, really, with a solo part—I am grateful to Messrs. Belostoksky, Lashevich, Bajenoff and Ledkovsky from the Russian Orthodox Church in Manhattan for their assistance.

Regarding the second part of the album, the songs of New Russia, a curious fact emerges. One has often wondered to what extent a people's music is influenced by changes of regime and in what manner, if at all, material or ideological factors are apt to play their role in shaping the folklore and music of a nation. It is undeniable that changes have indeed taken place, as evidenced not only by the lyrics—which one expected to be in a different tenor—but also by the pace of the music, its attack and sometimes its newly-found polish. Withal, there is one thing that seems to undergo no change, for it is never fashioned by surroundings or living conditions; these, being outside its gravitational centre, barely touch it. Russkaya dusha, the Russian soul, nurtured as it is from within, preserves its characteristics through all changes; and since it exerts its greatest influence in the realm of poetry and music, we seem to find again in the new song what we thought had disappeared with the old. No matter how many tractors cut furrows or how large the power stations loom or how high the Sputniks soar, today's Soviet citizen may speak with proud arrogance, but he still sings with the tender nostalgia of yesterday. I expect that is the reason for my being entranced by this music. While I have grave misgivings about Communism as it is preached, and am even more bitterly opposed to it as it is practised, the Slavophile in me is nonetheless charmed by the wealth of music which emanates from behind the Iron Curtain. Should you doubt the power of the Russian soul, then take a closer look at the song of the old droschke driver (Pudrushka milaya); the new Subway with its glittering bannisters has driven all his customers away—and I bet you that even the most hard-boiled dialectical materialist will not say, "Hurrah for the Subway!" but will shed a tear for the cabbie.

Theodore Bikel

Musician featured on this recording are:

HAROLD KOHON / GIOVANNI VICARI / LEONID I. KALBOUSS / MARTIN GRUDD / RAY SCHWEITZER / BERNARDO ZASLAV / TID TYLE / JOHN R. BARROWS / MIRKO MARKO / SASHA POLINOFF / ALEXIS HRAMOFF / GEORGE GREENBERG / SERGE KOLOFSKY

Production supervisor—JAC HOLLMAN mixing & editing—MARK ABRAMSON

Complete texts and translations enclosed

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Theodore Bikel

Songs of Old Russia

1. POMNYU YA (I REMEMBER)
2. YAMSHIKH GANI-KA K YARU
   (COACHMAN, AWAY TO THE FAIR)
3. NOCH TIKHA (QUIET NIGHT)
4. POLSO BYLO LYUBLATSE
   (I NEVER MEANT TO LOVE)
5. GARI GARI MAYA ZVYEZDA
   (TWINKLE, TWINKLE, MY STAR)
6. CHUPCHIK (CURLY FORELOCK)
7. VYECHERNY ZVON (EVENING BELLS)

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1. AT VOLGI DA DONA (FROM THE VOLGA TO THE DON)
2. TALYANOCHKA (THE CONCERTINA)
3. PADMASKOVNIYE VYECHERA (MOSCOW EVENINGS)
4. PADRUSHKA MILAYA (MY OLD PAL)
5. KATIUSHA
6. PRAVAZHANYE (PARTING)
7. TYOMNAYA NOCH (DARK NIGHT)

Arr. & cond. by FRED HELLERMAN

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