THEODORE BIKEL
AN ACTOR’S HOLIDAY
an actor's holiday with THEODORE BIKEK

The phrase, "An Actor's Holiday," is very fitting to my state of mind when it comes to playing and singing folk songs. As a businessman might go fishing or a politician take to golf clubs, so would I take in a substantial part of my time off from the theatre by cultivating this six-stringed key to international folklore.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to folk singers and folk singers. Not only for countless hours of deep personal delight while listening and learning or listening to others what I had learned—that maybe in itself being as great a pleasure—but also I find that what actually was no more than a hobby has become closely intertwined with my work as a singer. The sense of rhythm and timing that are so necessary on the stage are indispensable whenever it comes to working and singing. The more time and concentration I dedicate to this, my interest in folk songs and my work as a singer, and as for slipping into different languages and nationalities—this cannot be but an extension of character playing; even more so, for one has to create the illusion of different costumes, bearing, or looks, through sound alone.

If, then, the title of this album seems to suggest a busman's holiday I accept the inference gladly.

Some words about the songs and how I came by them:

"Kolot L'Yo" and "Klof Shukett" are both Israeli songs by Ami'el Neeman who taught them to me when he revisited Israel in 1954. Ami'el, incidentally, accompanied me on his accordion during the recording of these two songs (as well as two other songs in this collection). I was inspired by the mixture of the two languages, Yiddish and Ukrainian.

"Mane Makes Me" was given to me by my American friend, Leon Gage, who came to London to complete his part as a young American soldier in the film, "Cry the Beloved Country." A fine actor and a very intelligent man.

Burl Ives first sang me his version of "Wheel of Fortune"—the words I sang were given to me by Ilsa.

"Matkavat" is a Hebrew song by Y. Zinreich, which I wrote on a plane, which I am often asked to include in my album of Israeli folk songs (EKL-132). It is included here to right a sin of omission.

There are many versions of "Los Cuatro Maderos" that have been recorded, including some with new words dating from the Spanish Civil War. In fact, I first learned the song as "Los Cuatro Generales" but liked the original "Maderos" better. I have heard it. I was so pleased with my version of this particular rhythmic pattern I am ashamed to say it was composed by Roy Breyfogle.

When I was playing a blind Portuguese cobbler on "Star Tonight" television show entitled "Fool's Gold," I used to sing at the work-bench. A charming lady of the Portuguese Information Office in New York, whose name unfortunately escapes me, took the trouble to teach me the song "Vira" which we then used.

Being very partial to the harmonies of Russian folk songs, especially when sung by a group, I wanted to turn myself into a male trio. Thanks to modern technology, I sing all three voices in "Na Konec Yarmolen." I am a song-hunting trip with Prince George Galitzine—who is my friend for guitars and gypsies—we used to hum this tune and harmonize on it while taking turns at the wheel. It made me want to learn the words properly. This as well as "Kvo Yevo Zvayet" is a fairly recent Russian tune.

Welsh "A Patch on Faith" by John Secondar, My thanks go to him for the English translation of this song.

Both "Blow The Candles Out" and "Perrine Eaito Servente" I have known for a good many years and the interpretation of them changes with the depth of naughtiness one feels while singing them.

"Sietiriont Kolilbennessee" was sung by that king of Russian romanticism, A. Vertinsky, for whom I wrote and sang the folk songs and the all-too-serious-intepreters-of-some that I am likely to come up with when a party is well under way. If you like this sort of thing, there it is: if you don't, there is an unusually wide space just before Band 8 so you can take the needle off right there. I won't be around.

"THEODORE BIKEK" is a unique personality in the field of entertainment. He is primarily a stage and screen actor whose diverse outside interests include playing the guitar and singing the folk songs of some fifteen countries in as many languages (ten of which are heard on this record).

Born in Vilna in 1924, Mr. Bikel emigrated to Israel (it was then Palestine) with his parents in 1938 and spent four years in a kibbutz. In 1943 he left the kibbutz to join the famous Habimah Theatre and in 1944 became co-founder of the Tel-Aviv Chamber Theatre.

In 1945 Mr. Bikel went to England and studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. His first appearance in England was in "A Streetcar Named Desire" directed by Sir Laurence Olivier. He has ranked among the finest character actors ever since 1950 when he portrayed the Russian Colonel in Peter Ustinov's "Love of Four Colonels." His performance as Inspector Missandridge in the Broadway production of "Tonight at Samarit and" was unanimously praised by the critics. This auspicious Broadway appearance was rapidly followed by a main supporting role opposite Julie Harris in "The Lark." The critics praised Mr. Bikel's "de Beauchicourt" as a rare gem of brilliant acting.

"Theodore Bikel" has made more than a dozen motion pictures—"The African Queen," "The Little Kidnapers," "Women Obsessed," "Enemy Below," "I Want To Live—but he is probably best remembered as the southern sheriff in "The Defiant Ones," a role which earned him a 1959 Academy Award nomination for best-supporting actor.

This recording is an illustration of the final facet of this brilliant personality, for Mr. Bikel has quickly become one of folk music's most treasured artists. His other recordings for Elektra include "A Young Man and a Maid," with Cynthia Gooding, EKL-109; "Songs of Israel," EKL-132; "Jewish Folk Songs," EKL-141; "Songs of a Russian Gypsy," EKL-150; "Folk Songs from Just About Everywhere," with Paula Gill, EKL-161; "More Jewish Folk Songs," EKL-165; and "Bravo Bikel," EKL-175.

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