THEODORE BIKEL AND GEULA GILL
SING FOLKSONGS FROM JUST ABOUT EVERYWHERE
Theodore Bikel and Geula Gill

folk songs from

Just About Everywhere

Pollerita (Bolivian)
Ah, Si Mon Moine (French-Canadian)
Shir Hanoar (Israeli)
Din Plaiurile Românei (Roumanian)
Rozhinkes Mit Mandles (Yiddish)
Darogoy Dalnoyu (Russian)
Yerazia (Greek)
Oleana (Norwegian-American)
Erets Zvay Khalay (Israeli)
Viva Jujuy (Argentine)
Ayit Ayit (Israeli)
Azizam (Persian)
Peixe Vivo (Brazilian)
Shney Khaverim (Russian-Hebrew from Israel)

Upon closer scrutiny, program notes written by performers on the backs of albums display several tendencies open to criticism. The more acceptable ones restrict themselves to a factual accounting of how the material was acquired or collected, sometimes telling a quick folk tale or two pertaining to the songs. This type is comparatively safe.

More vulnerable, however, are the sort of program notes that take a personal stand, profess a personal credo, using this space in fact not for purposes explanatory or complementary to the music, but to theorize, to verbalize, and to personalize.

(Sorry about this Madison Avenue slang but President Eisenhower used “finalize” on TV and we have entered a new era of language.)

In the past I have always been guilty of abusing my right to compose program notes in the manner described above. I feel no need to apologize for this, only to explain a little. A performer, because he is a performer, must necessarily deal in intangible, transitory values. The spoken word, the sung note, are, indeed, capable of evoking magic. But this magic, even at its height, lasts only so long as the artist and the listener are in contact. As soon as that is over, it dims immediately and then fades. Even now, in this age of electronics, the fact that a mechanical device captures life-like sound still does not compensate the performer for the void he feels after the curtain has come down. This is why I have always welcomed this space, for it allowed me to erect some sort of a verbal monument to make my vanity content with the knowledge of having conquered the galloping mortality through the printed word.

This time, however, I speak not for myself alone but for Geula, too, and must therefore try to be more conservative.

Most of the songs in this album are sung by both of us together. I suppose musically speaking that makes them duets. A duet, however, is a piece of music written for two voices, always with the composer whose conception carefully regulates the course of the two vocal performers. It is, to use Leonard Bernstein’s definition, “exact music.” Folk music, on the other hand, is not at all form-bound. If anything, it is performer-bound or at least style-bound. That is to say, each individual performer moulds and changes it according to his or her personality, keeping in mind only the style of its origin. A folk singer with a conscience will try to be as faithful to the source as possible, especially when he performs songs that are not his own national heritage. There is, nevertheless, a great deal of latitude and only a sense of good taste can be an adequate measuring stick.

If this dependence upon personality is true of folk music in general, then you will agree that a fusion of two such personalities, each with his (or her) own background, temperament, musicality and sense of attack is by no means a simple process—primarily, because there is no rule, no precedent, and no leader. There is no conductor to turn to, no composer to consult.

And each one of the two in turn leads, in turn follows; it’s all in the eyes.

Geula and I met a comparatively short time ago. Needless to say, I was greatly impressed by her talent. And when the occasion arose for us to sing together, as it invariably does at folk singing parties, it felt good. Both of us are, of course, quite at home with Hebrew music and it was to be expected that a Hebrew song performed by us both would sound well. But then we found that the blending of voices worked just as well when we sang songs from everywhere. That was when the idea for this album was born.

It is the result of a truly mutual effort. During the afternoons and evenings we sat together singing. Geula taught me many songs she had learned or picked up on her travels; notably in South America where I have yet to go myself. I, on the other hand, taught her others that I had known. Dov Seltzer, Geula’s talented husband, helped us a great deal and so did the ubiquitous Fred Hellerman. Billy Faier came in on the recording sessions and as we slipped in and out of different nationalities, so did his banjo. There are songs of eleven nations on this album and ten languages. Hence the title.

Having made the record it is of course impossible for us to evaluate the end result in an objective manner. Nor is it my place to do so; that is the public’s privilege—yours. I can only speak in terms of the personal experience. Upon listening to the finished record and reflecting in the light of what I said previously, there is one observation I can make. While both Geula and myself emerge quite strongly with unimpaired individuality, there seems to be yet a third personality present—born of a fusion of both. And that, you see, seems to make the whole experience worthwhile as far as we are concerned.

Theodore Bikel

Penpansie Theodore Bikel continuously entertains movie, theatre, and television audiences and has become one of folk music’s most treasured artists. His other records for ELEKTRA include An Actor’s Holiday (EKL-105), A Young Man and a Maid (EKL-109) with Cynthia Geeding; Folk Songs of Israel (EKL-107); Jewish Folk Songs (EKL-141); and Songs of a Russian Gypsy (EKL-150). His long-awaited More Jewish Folk Songs (EKL-165) will be released shortly.

Geula Gill is a Sabra (native of Israel) who won wide acclaim in her own country as an outstanding singer. She is now the featured performer with the Oranim Zabar Israeli Troupe, which has recorded for ELEKTRA: Shalom! (EKL-140), On The Road To Elyas (EKL-151), and the forthcoming Around The Campfire (EKL-169).

Production Supervisor: JAC HOLZMAN
Engineer: David B. Jones
Musical Supervisor: Fred Hellerman
Note: Rozhinkes Mit Mandle, Dia R’chaitle ovndimei, Amen, and Shney Khaverim arranged by Dov Seltzer.

COMPLETE TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS ENCLOSED

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