folk songs of

ISRAEL

sung by

THEODORE BIKEL
FOLK SONGS OF ISRAEL SUNG BY THEODORE BIKEL

This album is not meant to be a work of reference; not an anthology of
yellowing pages of folk-history, nor a contemporary collection somewhat
snugly presented "strictly for the connoisseur." And although the connais-
sseurs will probably not find the items lacking in authenticity we have tried
to preserve the element of entertainment first and foremost. Being an actor
I hardly could have done otherwise.

What precisely is a folk song? The common definition reads somewhat
like this: "A traditional song performed with or without accompaniment,
often passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation and changing as
it passes through oral tradition. As implied by the name it is commonly sung by
simple folk."

However, there's more to it. It is true that the themes of folk songs in every
national heritage are substantially the same: work on the
land or with livestock; pioneering; the sea; the bad boss;
the nagging wife; and, above all, love. Often, surrealistically,
fairies or the devil come into it; or an old legend is
told in the song. As for the music, who is to know how
that was created? "Composer Unknown" it says, or "Old
Folk Melody."

How then are we to justify the fact that all the songs
contained in this album (as indeed all Israeli songs) were
written by living composers within a period of twenty
years or less? Is this not a direct contradiction of what a
folk song should be?

Had this been the case anywhere else but in Israel
we would have had to acknowledge the fact that we were
dealing in "pop" songs, created at the moment and for
the moment. I must insist, however, that these songs
should be labeled "folk songs" quite legitimately.

Consider the unique predicament of the Israeli na-
tion: A people with a strong tradition of over 2000 years;
with ethnic, racial and religious bonds that made survival
throughout ages of persecution possible. But, a people
without a land, a people that was confined by official
decrees to non-manual professions, to trade or, at best, to
studies. Nevertheless, a people which, although scattered
through Russia, Germany, Spain and the four corners of
the earth, obstinately prayed for rain when the season
came for Palestine to be dry and thirsty; that gave thanks
for the first harvest although their great-grandfathers had
already forgotten the memory of wielding a sickle.

And all the time the words were there; the words
that spoke of the land and the plough, the seeds and the fruit.
But the people were far from the soil and their harvest was but imaginary. So they
used the words to pray with and by doing so preserved the essence of folkloric
tradition — the text.

New the Jewish people are back on their own land and they are catching up.
Milking, ploughing, watering trees and sowing had to be re-learned, and with all
these a different song came to be sung. Certainly, somebody made up the melody,
somebody not in the far distant past but a friend, a neighbour, sang it on a cool
starry night. He used the old words that had been there all along but the melody
was new. It carried the sensation of new colours and smells, the lift of the Arab
shepherd's flute from across the valley and a trace of memories from Eastern
Europe as well.

Yes, they are composed songs but in a little while nobody will know the
difference. Was "Greensleeves" a "pop" song in its day? And how long is it necessary
to wait for a stamp of folkloric authenticity? One generation? Three? Frankly,
I do not think it matters at all. What does matter is the spirit of the song, its format,
its content and the way in which it is passed on. If Matityahu writes a song today
in his settlement of Ramat Yochanan and — a week later — the head shepherdb

THEODORE BIKEL

THEODORE BIKEL 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.

Born in Vienna 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 1946 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 Mussohuro in the Broadway produc-
tion of "Tonight in Samarkand" was unanimously praised by the critics.

Theodore Bikel has made a dozen motion pictures but he is probably best
known to moviegoers for his work in "The African Queen," "Chance Meeting" and
for his outstanding portrayal of the Dutch doctor in "The Little Kidnappers."
FOLKSONGS OF ISRAEL
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1. DODI LI
2. MI BARECHEV
3. HECHALIL
4. PTSACH BAZEMER
5. KAREV YOM
6. SHECH ABREK

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1. SISOO VESSIMCHOO
2. EL GINAT EGOZ
3. SHOMER MAH MILEL
4. HANA’AVA BABANOT
5. ANA PANA’ DODECH
6. SHIM’OO SHIM’OO
7. LYLAL YLYA

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