

# DECCA

*presents*

*A Specially selected group of RUSSIAN FOLK and other  
Typical Songs sung by The*

# RUSSIAN IMPERIAL SINGERS



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*Decca Album No.53*





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# RUSSIAN FOLK SONGS

Sung by the

## RUSSIAN IMPERIAL SINGERS

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DECCA ALBUM NO. 53  
COMPLETE ON SIX 10-INCH RECORDS

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### *Contents:*

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|------|--|--|
| 2514 | Part 1: MOSCOW STREET SONGS                    | <i>Russian Folk Songs</i>              |
|      | (1) NOTCHENIKA                                 |  |
|      | (2) KANAVKA                                    |  |
|      | Part 2: DOWN BY THE RIVER VOLGA                | <i>Russian Folk Song</i>               |
| 2515 | Part 3: SOLDIERS' SONGS (I)                    | <i>Russian Folk Songs</i>              |
|      | Part 4: THE VANISHED YOUTH                     | <i>Russian Folk Song</i>               |
| 2516 | Part 5: SOLDIERS' SONGS (II)                   | <i>Russian Folk Songs</i>              |
|      | Part 6: SONGS OF THE REAPERS                   | <i>Russian Folk Songs</i>              |
| 2517 | Part 7: KALEENKA                               | <i>(Snowball Tree)</i>                 |
|      | Part 8: THE SLEEPING LAKE                      |  |
| 2518 | Part 9: EVENING BELLS                          | <i>(Vetserni Zvon)</i>                 |
|      | Part 10: (1) THE STEPPES (2) GRANDFATHER PAHOM | <i>Russian Folk Songs</i>              |
| 2519 | Part 11: THE BIRCH TREE                        | <i>Russian Folk Song</i>               |
|      | Part 12: FAMILY QUARREL                        | <i>(Domashnia Ssora) (Dargomijsky)</i> |
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With the changes which have taken place in the musical as well as the political life of Russia, a tremendous interest has grown up abroad in the music of the earlier days, and the distinctive manner of its performance. Decca has been extremely fortunate in securing the services of the Russian Imperial Singers, who have been enjoying a tremendous success in presenting this music to America. A carefully planned program exhibits to fine advantage the gifts and accomplishments of this well-known group, and at the same time affords a musically satisfying selection of this fascinating music. Those who have heard the Russian Imperial Singers in concert will be delighted with this opportunity to welcome them into their homes, while those to whom this kind of singing is a new experience have an exciting musical treat before them.

### THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL SINGERS

NOTES BY PHILIP LIESON MILLER

The subject of racialism in music affords a rich field for discussion. It is well known that the great national schools which have sprung up throughout the world in the last century or so have endeavored to build upon the particular characteristics which have set the folk music of their peoples apart from that of any others. What has not been sufficiently stressed, I think, is the fact that as all music has its roots in language, the differences which exist, and which we are able to recognize immediately, between, let us say, the music of the Germans and that of the Italians, are so bound up in the genius of the German and the Italian languages that it is practically impossible to say whether the language owes its characteristics to the music, or vice versa. One thing is certain: both are products of the psychology of the people in which they flourish.

Now all this has a direct bearing on the reaction of the average non-Russian person to such music as that presented by the Russian Imperial Singers. There is something so strongly racial in the music of the Slavic peoples that it can hardly escape the attention of the dullest listener. Perhaps, indeed, it is the very gap between the Russian psychology and ours, and the strangeness of the language, which give this music its especial charm. But aside from the music and the language, there is a haunting and irresistible quality about the sound of a Russian voice. I have heard it asserted that no racial quality can exist in the mere tone of a voice, but I am convinced to the contrary. The explanation, besides the above mentioned psychology, is to be sought in the sound and physiological formation of the language each man is brought up to speak. In the Russians, it seems, these peculiarities are particularly strong. In no other race do we find such bass voices as Russia produces, nor is the technique of tenor singing as practised by the Slavs like that of any other people.

Because of these unique and striking characteristics Russian choral and group singing is a thing apart from that of other countries. Russian ensembles have at their command many special effects which are not possible to others, from the low "bull-frog" notes of the basses to the high falsetto of the tenors. And they add to these things an intensity and fervor which cannot be matched, and which possibly more than anything else captures the imagination of hearers who do not understand the language.

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## RUSSIAN FOLK SONGS

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The Russian Imperial Singers is a group of five men who are carrying on the artistic traditions of the music of Czarist Russia. Each of them was born and raised under the old regime, and in each the significance of the old-time art is a birthright and a heritage. The leader of the group is the baritone, Stephan Slepoushkin, a native of the Ural Mountain region. His musical career was interrupted by the World War, in which he received thirty wounds and four medals for conspicuous bravery. He was forced by the revolution to flee to China, where he enjoyed considerable success singing in opera and in concert. Later he joined the ensemble of Nemirovich-Dantchenko's Moscow Musical Studio, a branch of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Michael Dido, the first tenor, was born in a little town near Odessa, the son of a priest who was noted for his beautiful voice. Dido attended the seminary and the conservatory. When the revolution came he was a lieutenant in the White Army. Escaping to Constantinople, he continued his musical studies there; then became leading tenor with the "Chauve-Souris." The second tenor, Demetre Criona, is a native of Odessa, though his parents were Greek. His father owned three tanneries, and the boy was brought up to step into the family business. However, his voice proved so remarkable that he was allowed to study singing instead. He began a successful career with a debut at the Odessa Municipal Theatre as Prince Sinodal in Rubinstein's "Demon." Leaving Russia for Greece, he became a popular figure in the opera houses of Athens, Saloniki and Smyrna.

Andrew Grigorieff, basso, was born in Moscow. He sang as a boy in a church choir, and later entered the chorus of the Zimenn Opera. He was selected from among the thousands of applicants to come to America as a member of the imported choir in the Russian Cathedral in New York. Ierinarh Zragewsky, the basso profundo, was born in Kiev, where he attended the university and studied for the bar. His extraordinary voice, however, practically forced him into a musical career. His range is a remarkable one, even for a Russian bass, covering three octaves down to the low G below the bass cleff.

These five men bring to their singing, besides its very strong Slavic flavor, a consummate ensemble, a perfection of intonation which is the fruit of long hours of work together, and a magnificent sense of rhythm which breathes life into everything they sing. Every mood and emotion known to their great race is to be found in the music of the Russian Imperial Singers, and each is faithfully reflected and reproduced in their performances. And to those who still cling to the old notion that all Russian music is sad or melancholy, these recordings will come as a revelation. Here are gay songs, humorous songs and grotesque songs; here is boldness and drollerie as well as wistfulness and nostalgia.

### *Songs In The Album*

#### **PART 1: MOSCOW STREET SONGS (Decca Record No. 2514A)**

##### **(1) NOTCHENIKA**

O dark gloomy autumn night! Not a single star is in the sky. I am lonely, for my sweetheart is far away. The darkness of the night torments me.

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(2) KANAVKA

A young horseman was trotting down the dike. Sasha, his sweetheart, called to him from her window, asking him to come into the house. He answered "I will not come until the green grass grows in your yard."

**PART 2: DOWN BY THE RIVER VOLGA (Decca Record No. 2514B)**

This song tells of the beauty of the Volga in stormy weather. Nothing can be seen except a dark spot which is a lonely boat, lost in the midst of the storm.

**PART 3: SOLDIERS' SONGS (I) (Decca Record No. 2515A)**

(a) A young girl was washing clothes in the river. She was very pretty and with her beautiful eyes captured all who happened to pass her.

(b) A young soldier is walking down the wide street. He sings as he goes along, and captures all the girls on his way.

(c) We are marching along the Moscow river into the heart of Moscow. In front of the saloon, fast asleep, we find the bartender. We punch him in the ear—for he is in love with our sweetheart Maroocha. Then we punch him in the face—for he makes the soldiers drunk. One, Two Three.

**PART 4: VANISHED YOUTH (Decca Record No. 2515B)**

My youth has flown away like a nightingale. Now I roam over the world, knowing neither love nor happiness. My strength is gone and my body worn out. I have only my memories of those golden days when I was young and strong.

**PART 5: SOLDIERS' SONGS (II) (Decca Record No. 2516A)**

(a) A young captain was marching boldly at the head of his company. When he passed his sweetheart, Masha, he stopped the company and said "How do you do, Masha?"

(b) This song tells about a young peasant girl flirting with a young army officer.

(c) Young blacksmiths, working in their shop, sing a song about Dunia (the traditional army sweetheart).

**PART 6: SONGS OF THE REAPERS (Decca Record No. 2516B)**

In those good old days when there was no machinery in Russia, the harvesting was done by hand. Sometimes hundreds of reapers worked together. At the end of the day, when the work was finished, they used to return home singing, first slow songs, then spirited ones.

**PART 7: KALEENKA (Decca Record No. 2517A)**

Kaleenka, the snowball tree, appeals strongly to the imagination of the people, and many songs have been composed about it. Perhaps the Russians like this tree because of the many pleasures it yields: they enjoy its beauty in the blossom time, and they make many delicacies from its berries from the late autumn to the spring. This particular song tells of a beautiful snowball tree in full bloom. A youth and his sweetheart often meet beneath this tree to enjoy its beauty. He picks the flowers to make garlands to crown his love, whose beauty increases as that of the tree diminishes.

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**PART 8: THE SLEEPING LAKE (Vogel) (Decca Record No. 2517B)**

It is night—the beautiful lake is dreaming. The birds have gone to rest among the leaves, and their songs are hushed in the silence of the night. The quiet beauty of the lake brings peace to the suffering soul.

**PART 9: EVENING BELLS (Decca Record No. 2518A)**

A popular setting of a Russian version of Thomas Moore's well-known poem.

Those evening bells! Those evening bells!  
How many a tale their music tells  
Of youth and home, and that sweet time  
When last I heard their soothing chime!

Those joyous hours are past away,  
And many a heart that then was gay  
Within the tomb now darkly dwells  
And hears no more those evening bells.

And so 'twill be when I am gone,  
That tuneful peal will still ring on,  
While other bards shall walk these dells,  
And sing your praise, sweet evening bells.

**PART 10: (1) THE STEPPES, (2) GRANDFATHER PAHOM  
(Decca Record No. 2518B)**

(1) This song tells about the endless steppes (plains) and the eagle flying over them, about "Mother Volga" and the burlak (boatman) walking along it.

(2) *Grandfather Pahom* is a kind of Santa Claus, but instead of bringing Christmas presents he takes them away. He wears a cap just like a crow's nest. His beard resembles a horse's tail, and the devil himself made his sandals in the moonlight.

**PART 11: THE BIRCH TREE (Decca Record No. 2519A)**

The melody of this song appears in the last movement of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. The words of the song are amusing but untranslatable nonsense.

**PART 12: FAMILY QUARREL (Dargomijsky)  
(Decca Record No. 2519B)**

A peasant, having had a very successful day at the market, celebrates his good fortune at a saloon, where he not only spends the profits, but sells his oxen and wagon, then his overcoat, boots, and finally his shirt. Late at night he returns home, and, fearing for the welcome he will receive from his wife, decides to use the old war tactics—"attack the enemy before he (or in this case she) attacks you." His wife watches him, astounded, as he breaks the furniture and dishes, and then she takes up the cudgels. At last the husband realizes that he has lost the battle, and the only thing left to do is to cry, now in a high voice, now in a low one: "Ooooi, Ooooi, Ooooi, Ooooi!" And to avenge herself completely, his wife goes to the saloon herself, gets drunk, and with the other customers she sings and dances the Gopak.