

Book Reviews

Martha Forsyth, *Slushaj̄shterko, i dobre zapomni. . . Pecnite i zhivota na Linka Gekova Gergova ot selo Bistritsa Sofīsko/Listen, Daughter, and Remember Well. . . The Songs and Life of Linka Gekova Gergova from the Village of Bistritsa, Sofia* (St. Kliment Ohridski University Press: Sofia, 1996). Available from Martha Forsyth at 51 Davis Avenue, W. Newton, MA 02465-1925 (telephone: 617-964-2003; email: forsyths@world.std.com).

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Martha Forsyth's 740-page bilingual (Bulgarian-English) monograph celebrates the life and songs of Linka Gekova Gergova (1904-1992) from Bistritsa, a village south of Sofia. It includes numerous transcribed songs taped by Forsyth, as well as descriptive text filled with excerpts from the many hours of conversation that she recorded of Linka between 1980 and 1992. The volume is divided into two main sections. Part I, "*Zhivotŭ na Linka*" ("Linka's Life"), contains details about Linka's childhood in her native village, her life as a young woman, her marriage, widowhood, and later participation in a village women's singing group "*Bistrishkite babi*" (The Bistritsa *Babi* [Grannies]). While Forsyth provides the narrative frame for Linka's biography, much of the text in this section is directly taken from the singer's own words. The style is engaging, effective, and informative. Forsyth, who is fluent in Bulgarian, offers exemplary translations; she captures colloquial, regional, and obscure Bulgarian in smooth and unaffected English. Colorful ethnographic detail fills every page. Invaluable descriptions about household and field labor in the village, eating and food preparations, washing clothes, child-bearing, and so on enhance the narrative. We also learn about singing within the family, music at the village dance on Sundays, customs, oral traditions, costumes, and much more.

Linka sang in the *Bistritsa Babi* starting in the late 1930s, then discontinued for a number of years and rejoined during the 1950s, singing with them until 1981. Singing in traditional three-part harmony, the "*babi*" eventually became well-known. During the 1960s, they were discovered by an Austrian musicologist who helped to spread their fame both throughout Bulgaria and abroad; by the 1970s, they had toured western Europe and the United States. Linka identified strongly with singing and the rich song repertoire which she commanded. As she noted in her later years, "'For me the songs have always been the most important thing. Both now, and when the times comes for me to die, the songs are the *only* thing I'll be sad to leave. I won't miss anything else. I—it's only the songs that have given me a little life, a little space to live. I've suffered such an *awful* lot, I've lived through *so many* terrible things, and it's only that I was able to get away a little—between all those bad things, and all the people that died, and all—I managed to get away and go out with the women and sing, and cheer up a little' (141)."

Part II, "*Pesni i traditsii*" (The Songs and the Traditions), spans over 450 pages. It contains 205 songs placed in divisions based on the four seasons and the songs and traditions associated with them (for example, Winter: Christmas, New Year's, and so on), followed by a division titled "*Prez tsialata godina*" (All year long) which includes songs and traditions surrounding "*svatba*" (the wedding), "*na goske*" (at the festive table), and "*khoro*" (the dance), as well as a number of original compositions by the Bistritsa *Babi*. The transcriptions—in Bulgarian with English translations—furnish a wealth of traditional song material, complete with transcribed melodies. The descriptive notes to each division are charming; they are conveyed in the words of Linka, who offers her memories in a personal and inimitable style. Interspersed throughout the volume are illustrations and photographs as well. Forsyth also provides three appendices. One presents Linka's account of a monastery near her home; another includes maps. Perhaps the most interesting—particularly for specialists of traditional song—contains a comparison of versions of a song as sung by Linka and one of her fellow "*babi*." The volume concludes with endnotes to the songs, a song index, glossary, bibliography, discography, and a compact disc that includes most of the melodies in the volume. Forsyth's monograph will prove fascinating and informative—not only for scholars and devotees of Balkan traditional culture and music but also for use in college and university courses devoted to the study of folksong, Bulgarian language, Slavic and East European oral traditions, and Balkan society.