

Russian Folk Traditions. Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskii Dom) and Norman Ross: 2000. Sixteen CD set. \$420

Russian Folk Traditions is the second of two compact disc sets released in the United States by Norman Ross Publishing (available for order on their web site at <http://www.nross.com/cart/pd02.html>). The first, Non-Russian Folk Traditions (ten titles on twelve discs), features recordings of folk music from the peoples of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Siberia. Russian Folk Traditions consists of fifteen titles on sixteen discs of material culled from the phonogram archives of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskii Dom, Russian Academy of Sciences) in Saint Petersburg. The discs are entitled: Russian Epics; Ballads; Historical Songs; Spiritual Poetry; Lamentations of the Russian North; Wedding Songs and Incantations; Pagan Calendar Songs; Lyrical Songs; Recruit and Soldiers' Songs; Fairy Tales; Limericks (*chastushki*); Children's Folklore (including Lullabies); Incantations; Instrumental Music; Song Traditions of the Russian Dukhobors (two discs). Each disc features a playlist (in Russian) that includes the title and running time of each piece; the name of the performer; the date and location (republic, province [*oblast'*], region [*raion*] and/or village) of the recording; and the name of the recorder.

The strength of this set is the sound quality of each and every recording. Those of us who have struggled to decipher tapes of poor-quality vinyl records reproducing even poorer-quality recordings will reap great benefits from this set. Digital re-mastering has rendered all the material, even that taped in the early years of the twentieth century, clear and audible. These recordings make it much more likely that Russian folk music will engage students, since the sound quality allows the beauty of the folk material to shine.

While I welcomed owning this music and used it in my Russian Folklore class, overall I find that this set suffers from a significant number of limitations. The first problem is minor and could easily be corrected; in some cases the playlists are incorrect, which renders the information provided useless. This is particularly noticeable on the Russian Epics disc, where, for example, a purported twenty-minute track runs for only nine minutes, and the playlist states that there are eight epic tracks, while there are in fact twelve. A more serious lapse from the point of view of specialists is that the publisher does not include invaluable ethnographic information about the recordings. I was left to wonder whether the songs were still sung actively at the time of the recording or whether they were memories of past celebrations that had died out. In addition, whether these songs represent current practice or past performance, establishing who performed a song, to whom and at what point in a ritual is necessary to comprehend its significance. It is also unclear why these particular songs or prose recordings were chosen. Those who are not specialists in Russian ethnomusicology or folk music cannot determine whether they might represent a particularly fine example of the genre or might be distinctive in form, style or melody. What is most vexing about this lack of information is that all the expertise and information necessary to make this set a valuable scholarly tool is certainly available from the personnel and archives in Pushkinskii Dom. Since none of this information is provided, it is impossible to use these songs as an effective

teaching or research tool. We can only hope that the publisher chooses to rectify these lapses in any future endeavors into folk music and in later releases of this set.

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