

## Firebirds – Daria Kulesh & Marina Osman – the Russian song notes

**1. Oy, Moroz, Moroz (Oh Frost, oh Frost).** Quite the Russian classic and a very popular drinking song. If interpreted literally, it's a plea to Jack Frost to not freeze you to death! Which sounds a bit grim. But actually, the vibe of the song is quite different. It's a challenge to Jack Frost, thrown by a rather confident (or perhaps inebriated) young man, who boasts of his fine horse and beautiful wife – yes, in that order. It seems to imply, "Ah go on, Jack Frost, do your worst – I'm not afraid and have a lot to live for!"

**3. Shchedryk (A Song of Plenty).** Traditionally sung in Ukraine on New Year's Eve, or Shchedryi Vecher (Plentiful Evening), this carol rains blessings onto the master of the house and his family. "May your ewes have plenty of lambkins, may your chests be full of coin, may you have a beautiful black-browed wife". Yes, don't look at me all surprised – big bushy black brows are a quality of True Feminine Beauty in Slavic folk songs and tales. We can safely assume that the carol singers would have been generously rewarded for their efforts by the host – otherwise, they would have changed their tune! Stingy households would get taunts and curses instead...

**5. Korobeiniki (The Peddlers).** Known as the theme tune to the classic video game Tetris, this is a cheeky song, full of innuendo, which describes what happens when two young lovers rendezvous in a field of rye. The courting ritual is compared to peddling and bargaining. The start is rather innocent, "My chest is full to the brim with the rarest of silks and jewels... Come and bargain with me, fair maiden, take pity on my plight!", but as things heat up, the last verse rather prudishly resorts to "la-la-la's"...

**6. Podmoskovnye Vechera (Moscow Nights).** The song describes an idyllic summer evening in the countryside near Moscow. A courting couple, on the banks of a silver moonlit stream, are behaving rather more timidly than in the previous raunchy number. In fact, the suitor can't quite find the right words to confess his romantic feelings... Poor devil!

**8. Perevoz Dunya Derzhala (Dunya's Ferry).** A playful Russian song about an enterprising young girl who – apparently – operates a thriving ferry business. However, she refuses a ride across the river to both her father and her mother – but when her boyfriend shows up and asks for a ride over to the green meadow, she's only too happy to oblige, anytime... The nightingales burst into song and the summery woodland comes to life as Dunya embraces her sweetheart.

**10. Ochi Chiornye (Black Eyes).** A breathless, mad lament of misery which ensues when one falls in love with the wrong person, probably a wild gypsy queen. "Black eyes, full of passion... Oh, I love you so! Oh, I fear you so! You have ruined me forever, you have stolen my peace and happiness!" Ah we're all doomed anyway, so let's dance and party...

**12. Odin Raz v God Sady Tsvetut (When Gardens Blossomed).** Originally sung by Anna German, whom I would describe as Poland's Eva Cassidy, immensely popular behind the Iron Curtain. A very folksy story of an innocent girl whose simple dreams of happiness are shattered by a fickle lover and a Jolene-like temptress. Blossoming springtime gardens represent, not unexpectedly, the love and hopes that blossom in her soul. However, I completely disagree with the moral of the story which implies that while spring comes round and gardens blossom every year, true love and a chance of happiness come round just once in a lifetime, and then it's all downhill – misery and vodka and doom. What nonsense!

**13. Vals Boston (Boston Waltz).** Very popular in Russia but little known elsewhere, this romantic, jazzy song was written by Alexander Rosenbaum. It's a poetic vision of Autumn: a carefree young dancer, she sweeps through a run-down neighbourhood, scattering pure joy and intoxicating beauty in a colourful whirlwind of falling leaves. Even when she fades into a distant memory, the mere thought of that magical moment warms tired hearts. As a humorous side note, I sang this song aged 16 at a beauty pageant held in a summer camp in Italy, earning the title of Miss Mystery.

**14. Mokhnaty Shmel (Bumblebee).** Featured in the classic Russian film "A Cruel Romance", this is an intoxicating, wildly operatic song of seduction, beguiling and leading you astray, "to the ends of the Earth and beyond" – to follow your love, your fate. To heaven or hell – who cares? Just surrender to summer's heat and the fire in your heart... Mind, in the film the song is sung by a cynical playboy with a band of hired gypsies. So be careful out there!

**15. Kalinka.** The one that everyone knows! What is not entirely apparent from the frantic, frenzied jolly tune is that the words convey a sad tale of a broken heart. The fair maiden does not answer the plea of "love me back, my soul, my treasure" and the unlucky suitor is asking his mates to lay him down to rest under a pine tree. "Be quiet, my sweet green pine, be quiet" – although the tune is anything but!!