

Luba BILASH, *Ukrainian Immigrant Songs* (added title in Ukrainian: “*Slid po zhuravliakh*” [= In the path of flying cranes] [1992]. One audio-cassette (LV 7891) with notes, photo of singer, and separate insert sheet with fourteen song-texts in Ukrainian and English translation. Recorded at Dyvo Studios, Kiev, Ukraine, with subsequent editing and mixing at Damon/Soundtrack Studios in Edmonton, Canada. Produced and distributed by Luba Ventures, 3, 8616-115 Ave., Edmonton, AB, T5B 0L6.

Robert B. Klymasz

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# AUDIO-VISUEL REVIEW /

## COMPTE RENDU AUDIO-VISUEL

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Luba BILASH, *Ukrainian Immigrant Songs* (added title in Ukrainian: “*Slid po zhuravliakh*” [= In the path of flying cranes] [1992]. One audio-cassette (LV 7891) with notes, photo of singer, and separate insert sheet with fourteen song-texts in Ukrainian and English translation. Recorded at Dyvo Studios, Kiev, Ukraine, with subsequent editing and mixing at Damon/Soundtrack Studios in Edmonton, Canada. Produced and distributed by Luba Ventures, 3, 8616-115 Ave., Edmonton, AB, T5B 0L6.

Collectors of folksongs are sometimes delighted to witness the reworking and popularization of their “raw” field materials by folksong revivalists (see, for example, Barbeau 1962: [7]; and Creighton 1975: 164-244 passim).<sup>1</sup> In my case, listening to this audio-cassette was an intriguing experience for I vividly recalled those moments when I recorded these songs *in situ*, on the prairies some three decades earlier. The cassette became a point of instant comparison with original field recorded renditions and their published transcriptions (original field audio-tapes are housed by the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, a Division of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec: Klymasz 1970). Here, it seemed, was a rare and unusual opportunity to chart and study a variety of venues used in the transmission of folklore today. Without too much trouble, it was easy to detect those “shifting habits of perception” regarding auditory/visual stress noted by Marshall McLuhan (1962:20).

Released as a salute to the centenary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada (1891-1991), this cassette features fourteen songs performed by Luba Bilash of Edmonton. Eleven of these are credited as “adapted from” Klymasz 1970. Seven were also reproduced in the book from the original field tapes on the flexi-disc recordings that accompany the publication (noted below by asterisks, if applicable). Only one song (side 1, item 7, no. F.3\* in

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1. I wish to thank Lucien Ouellet, my colleague at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, for drawing my attention to these and other comparative data relating to the topics touched upon here.

the book) is accompanied by a musical instrument, the *cymbaly/tsymbaly*, the Ukrainian version of the hammered dulcimer. With this exception, all the songs are sung a cappella. In this way Bilash preserves the original sense of solitude and profound loneliness, a basic characteristic of the early Ukrainian pioneering immigrant experience in western Canada. One could classify most of the songs as lyrical laments that decry the immigrant's fate in an unknown land and hostile environment. Bilash has captured this aesthetic in an outstanding manner "Dont be baffled, beautiful world" (item 4, side 2) is especially haunting: "Oh, to sail back to our families/Over that frightful ocean.../There our lives will be easier/And the dark times will be forgotten."

Judging these performances from a traditional perspective, Bilash's interpretations of narrative folksongs that depict the Ukrainian Canadian immigrant experience maintain traditional lyrical quality with considerable success and impact (for example, the dialogue format in no 2 on side 2). Less noteworthy are her heroic stylizations of rollicking narrative (for example, side 2, item 5 [no. B.6 in Klymasz] and 6). Occasionally, Bilash's approach is overly tender and caring; her interpretation of a wedding song (item 7, side 1) retreats from its partying dance tempo to result in a sentimental romance. These flaws only underscore Luba Bilash's true mastery with lyrical song material. Her diction and empathy for the original singer and his/her intent always shines through. By avoiding guitar self-accompaniment (Bilash's other recordings show her to be quite accomplished in this regard), she enhances the delicate introspection that typifies this corpus of folksongs as found and recorded in the field.

With the declaration of Ukraine's independence in 1991, Luba Bilash has introduced many of these Canadian Ukrainian folksongs of immigration to new audiences abroad, chiefly in Ukraine itself. Her participation in the new wave of post-*glasnost* folk revival in eastern Europe underscores the dynamics of folklore and its ability to overcome barriers of time space.

The value of this audio-cassette is enhanced considerably by the accompanying sheet of song texts in Ukrainian and English translation. The sound quality is unobtrusive and never overmodulated. Thanks, Luba!

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