

SONS-OF-FREEDOM SONGS IN ENGLISH

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The sometimes very uncomfortable interactions between the English-Canadian and Russian immigrant (Doukhobor) inhabitants of southern British Columbia have borne musical as well as other fruit: the development and unrestricted singing of English-language songs expressing Doukhobor ideals. Though the scanty literature makes no mention to date of such songs, they are not necessarily very recent.

The Doukhobors are a group distinguished by their national origin, which is Russian, and by their religious beliefs. Their present population in Canada is above 20,000, of whom most live in the West Kootenay region of south central British Columbia, and of whom some 2,500 are members of the sect known variously as Svobodniki, Freedomites, or Sons of Freedom. Centres of population are the Columbia River valley between Nelson and Trail, adjoining mountainous valleys, and scattered communities to the east and west. Grand Forks is a major centre for social activities and communication. One exceptional community is located some 400 miles further west, in the Fraser Valley 60 miles from Vancouver: the Mountain Prison village at Agassiz.

The Doukhobors first emerged in eighteenth-century Russia; their origin is obscure, but they probably comprise some of the sects that arose at the time of the *raskol*, the seventeenth-century conservative rebellion against Orthodox decadence.

The first ideals of Doukhobor faith are pacifism and brotherhood. Applied to animals, these values include vegetarianism; they are also the rationale of communal living, now almost entirely eroded by the automobile. Apart from references to modesty, no religious explanation is given for conservatism in clothing, most manifest in women's dress, which characteristically consists of multiple skirts and petticoats, and a white *babushka* embroidered with delicate, fragmented floral designs.

The Doukhobors aroused the violent opposition of the Czarist bureaus in the nineteenth century when communities in a debated border area refused to arm against possible attack from Armenia. When a military governor warned certain villages to prepare to defend themselves, they responded by burning their weapons, provoking harsh persecution. When Tolstoy heard of the Doukhobors' plight, he decided they were ideal Christians, and, with the help of powerful Quaker meetings in London, helped them to emigrate to Canada between 1899 and 1904.

The first Canadian settlements were in Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta, areas geographically similar to the steppes. Economic hardships and related community problems led most of the Doukhobors to move to British Columbia around 1908. The communal business organization, the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB) borrowed from banks and trust companies to establish farms, industries, and businesses. The Doukhobors, though segregating themselves from their English-Canadian

neighbors, prospered as a group. Individuals endured hardships to enable the CCUB to pay off some five-sixths of the loans by the time of the depression. This was not enough: the creditors foreclosed, and the Doukhobors lost not only title to their land, but also the money already repaid, and the improvements they had made. By paying the outstanding debt balance, the Provincial Government took title to the Doukhobor lands; thus the Doukhobors became "squatters" on their lands, which were held "in trust" for them by the Government. The insolvent CCUB was reorganized as the United Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC), but for years was economically powerless. The economic losses and pressures of this period crushed the spirit of the communities, an effect from which they have only recently begun to recover. Productive land fell into disuse; implements and buildings fell into disrepair; terrorism increased.

Terrorism took the form of arson and bombings of Doukhobor homes, government buildings, churches, schools, and railroad bridges and switches. Most of this was the work of the Sons of Freedom, Doukhobor extremists whose ideals emphasize communal living and action, ecstatic religious doctrine, and anarchic attitudes towards external regulation. Their acts have often been irrational by their stated standards: they proclaimed pacifism but acted violently. At least some such acts, however, such as the destruction of one's own home or participation in nude parades and demonstrations, are symbolically valid as personal and communal repudiation of materialism.

The Sons of Freedom first appeared in Saskatchewan in 1902, but they did not use violence until the mid-1920s, very probably as a reaction to economic pressures in the expanding community. Orthodox Doukhobors were distressed by the actions of the Sons of Freedom, not least because English-Canadians came to consider all Doukhobors to be violent all the time. Nevertheless, it was Sons-of-Freedom disturbances in the early 1950s which led to the appointing of a Royal Commission that negotiated the return of Doukhobor land titles to the occupants for a reasonable payment.

Sometimes the outcome of a disturbance has been two-sided. When Mountain Prison was established, it was some 400 miles from the key Freedomite village of Krestova (Place of the Cross). For no clearly stated reason, nearly all of the Krestova community initiated a march to Mountain Prison, where a number of relatives were held; this "trek," as the press called it, began in September 1962. The marchers wintered in Hope, a town some thirty miles east of Mountain Prison. The village commissioner of Hope, concerned for the Freedomites both as an administrator and as a humanitarian, expedited the bussing of a representative group to the Legislature in Victoria in early December. Here the Sons of Freedom marched and picketed for several days. By the following August, having spent time in Vancouver, they established a semi-permanent village in Agassiz, a quarter-mile or so from the prison.

The effect of this migration was dual. English-Canadians at the coast were able to see and speak to persons they previously knew only through news media, some of which were notable for bigotry and inaccuracy. Some Vancouver citizens took Sons of Freedom into their homes. The Sons of Freedom, in turn, were for the first time exposed as a group to an urban

environment, encountering a community to whom they were neither possible redeemers nor a fearful threat, and met people who were willing to accept them as individuals. At Agassiz, in spite of prior fears and rumours, the migrant Sons of Freedom proved productive and valued farm workers, and their children's entrance into the local schools was highly successful.

On December 4, 1962, I was present with a small battery-operated tape recorder when some 300 Sons of Freedom arrived at the Victoria Legislature. I spoke with several of them, and asked an elderly man for his account of "the beginning of the Doukhobors" that he had just given a reporter. An elderly woman at his elbow argued against the recording of "one person's" opinions, and although I was asked not to record the account, both gave me an impressionistic description of the troubles at the time of the Burning of Weapons, and told me to ask the Choir Leader about recording the singing. This person, a middle-aged man, consulted with a young girl who later proved to be a song leader, and agreed that I might record at will.

One song they sang had been used on the trek from Krestova to Agassiz. It may date only from the time of that march, but might also have appeared in English at the time of the migration to Canada, or of the migration from Saskatchewan to British Columbia. It is hard to say whether the text is a translation of a Russian song, or whether it was originally conceived in English, since usage is characteristically Doukhobor.

1. WE ARE MARCHING

The image shows a musical score for the song "We are marching, we are marching". It consists of four staves of music with lyrics written below. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "We are march - ing, we are march - ing, And no force can stop us now: All u - nit - ed, all u - nit - ed, In the name of Douk-ho - bors." The second staff continues: "And we know our cause must prosper And we sing a - loud in joy For the Ang - el,". The third staff is labeled "REFRAIN" and contains: "For the Ang - el of the Lord goes on be - fore. Let my peo - ple go,". The fourth staff concludes with: "Let my peo - ple go, Saith the Lord of Hosts, Let my peo - ple go." The music features a simple, rhythmic melody with some rests and a final cadence.

We are marching, we are marching,
 And no force can stop us now:
 All united, all united
 In the name of Doukhobors;
 And we know our cause must prosper,
 And we sing aloud in joy,
 For the Angel, for the Angel
 Of the Lord goes on before.

Let my people go, let my people go,
 Saith the Lord of Hosts: let my people go! } twice

We are marching, brothers, marching,
 With our women and our babes.
 The nation watches, the nation watches,
 Watches with a sense of awe.
 Our forefathers are with us,
 And we know we cannot fail,
 For the Angel, for the Angel
 Of the Lord goes on before.

(Refrain)

We are marching with no weapons
 Save our faith and trust in God
 And his mercy, and his mercy
 For the suff'ring and the poor.
 The road is nearly, nearly ended,
 O Doukhobors, take heart;
 For the Angel, for the Angel
 Of the Lord goes on before.

(Refrain)

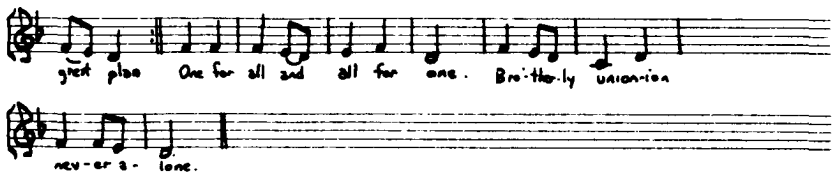
For part of that morning and most of the next day I stayed with the Sons of Freedom, who either sat on the Legislature steps or marched up and down the drive before it in a desultory fashion. I spoke several times with people, usually elderly men: their demeanor was gentle, approachable. Most were disinclined to propagandize or preach at me, and I received the impression that, once having committed themselves to a leader's direction, they would no longer bother themselves about the immediate aim or effectiveness of their protest.

Conditions were unpleasant: the weather was windy, gloomy, and rainy; the Sons of Freedom were defended against it by only a few spare overcoats. Some blankets were donated, and a local restaurant owner – taking care to use an antique car placarded with his trade signs – delivered stale hamburger buns and large vats of coffee twice daily. After the Sons of Freedom offered to camp in front of the Legislature, the grounds office turned on the lawn-sprinklers.

As the Sons of Freedom marched up and down in the rain they sang the following hymn:

2. ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the staff: "All men are bro-thers, all men are bro-thers, we'll join in- to one great-". The second staff continues the melody with similar note values. The lyrics below it are: "cha, ever-ver de-ter-minal, ev-er un-der-tod, ful-ful-ful-ways God's".



All men are brothers, all men are brothers;
 We'll join into one great clan,
 Ever determined, ever undaunted,
 Fulfilling always God's great plan.

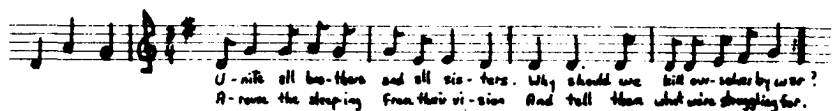
One for all and all for one,
 Brotherly union, never alone.

All men are brothers, all men are brothers;
 We'll join into one great clan,
 Ever determined, ever undaunted
 Fulfilling always God's great plan.

The sentiment of "Brotherly union, never alone . . ." is typical of the Sons of Freedom: the voice of the individual sounds ineffectual and confused; concerted action is the product of lengthy discussion by the immediate group, who then move together, united.

About this time there was some jeering and noisemaking from a section of the on-looking English-Canadians. Later, while the marchers had been singing a psalm as they paced slowly up and down the Legislature drive, one of the onlookers more or less caught the spirit of the whole affair, and shakily began to sing "O Canada." He was joined by quite a number of other bystanders, who gave an unusually bad and spontaneous performance of the first verse of the Canadian national anthem. The Freedomites continued marching, not singing, and waited till the others were finished; then someone immediately led off this song, which the rest sang loudly:

3. ENOUGH OF HATE



.....
 coming day,
 Enough of hate and exploitation,
 Throw all your chains and (jails?) away. } 2

Enough of
Our brothers' blood we will not spill;
Enough of wars and all destruction; } 2
Our aim: restore the land to till.

Unite, all brothers and all sisters:
Why should we kill ourselves by war?
Arouse the sleeping from their vision, } 2
And tell them what we're struggling for.

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.
Why should we slave for these extorters, } 2
And gather millions by the score?

It is noteworthy that this song was a direct response to another sung by a very different group. The singing of "O Canada" was thoroughly spontaneous; the Sons-of-Freedom response was immediate, although the number of comparable occasions must have been very small indeed. The Sons of Freedom appear to have consciously used song as a means of dominance; and the singing bystanders – however unconsciously – took up the same weapon, and were answered in kind.

The marchers were unable to bring out any government officials, though an aide eventually appeared and said the government would continue to seek some *rapprochement*. After four days, the Sons of Freedom returned to Hope, later to go to Vancouver, and then to Agassiz.

Two years later I moved to nearby Chilliwack to teach, and occasionally visited the village at Agassiz. One Saturday, accompanied by another teacher, I arrived at the village and was directed to the cabin of an elderly man; we spent a good two or three hours in general talk.

In the late afternoon the old man said, "Come, see how these poor people talk to each other from far away." He took us to the north end of the village, where a high bank gives a clear view across to the prison compound. A dozen or so women and children stood on the bank, waving white cloths held at one end by each hand. Each person waved the cloth in a distinctive pattern; when we looked across to the prison grounds, almost a half-mile distant, we could see prisoners on exercise waving cloths in similar patterns. The old man said, "That's how they talk to each other. Each knows their own pattern – it's wonderful. If the other is not there, they know he's sick or something wrong like that."

Before leaving, I asked if we might record singing, and after conferring with the choir leader, the old man told us to return on Sunday about 1:00 p.m. Thus we returned with a tape recorder, and were taken to a little earth-floored cabin near one end of the village. Here a number of young people were gathered in several rows, those in the rear standing on benches; girls were on the left facing us, boys on the right. Their ages were between about sixteen and twenty-five. The session began with some preliminary

discussion in Russian, the speaking of a short prayer, and the chanting of the Lord's Prayer. After this, each song was begun by one singer, usually the girl I had seen in Victoria. The singing carried on for about an hour and a half, and we were asked to play back much of it afterwards.

Among the songs they sang was "We Are Marching," which I had recorded in Victoria, and the following hymn, which I had not heard before.

4. HISTORY CALLS US, SPIRITUAL BRETHREN

History calls us, Spiritual Brethren, To unite for the
 causes of yore; Our forefathers all lived in Russia, And
 again it brings us to the fore.

History calls us, Spiritual Brethren,
 To unite for the causes of yore;
 Our forefathers all lived in Russia, }
 And again it brings us to the fore. } 2

Against churches, and kings, and all armies,
 They did wrestle without any doubt;
 Against bloodshed and endless betrayal, }
 And the falsehoods the priests (dinned out?). } 2

Unto death, they stood staunchly and firmly,
 And were true to the Good of their name,
 Flinching not before torture and prison; }
 Then to Canada bravely they came. } 2

Many years we have sojourned, Dear Brethren,
 In a land that is foreign and cold,
 And your people still have no conception }
 Of the truth that we strive to uphold. } 2

Our life here is not for excesses,
 But for bringing of life from above;
 Let Humanity be as one family, }
 On the basis of freedom and love. } 2

This is the only one of the four songs that is unmistakably recent, with its references to the emigration to Canada, the cold climate, and the ignorance of other Canadians about Doukhobor matters.

Doukhobor Music

It might be argued that song is the main distinguishing trait of the Doukhobors, at least in Canada. It is certainly a central, conspicuous, sustaining element in their society. Harry Hawthorne reported that, when other women visit a housewife, singing will usually start spontaneously, and any children about may join in freely. An English-Canadian from Nelson, B.C., told me that men and women will sing in groups while working in the fields, or while being shaken about in the back of a pick-up truck on the roads to and from work. Song is also the most highly respected medium for the transmission of religious doctrines. Every village area maintains several choirs, to at least one of which each villager can belong.

It is difficult and pointless to distinguish precisely between social and religious gatherings, especially when they are large; the Doukhobors make no such distinction themselves. Apart from visiting, which is initiated with "Slava Hospodi!" (Glory to God!), and may well include a prayer and religious singing, all gatherings are nominally religious. They range through the prayer meeting or *sobranie* (a religious assembly for prayer, meditation, and the singing of hymns and psalms); memorials (which take place several days after a burial, and dismiss the spirit of the dead from the grave-site to the afterworld); weddings; festivals; and communal banquets. The latter are largely social, allowing distant dwellers to meet and talk with old friends in an environment of song that is still strongly religious.

On some exceptional occasions, song is still the preferred mode of expression. Thus, after the troubles of 1954, Orthodox Doukhobor choral groups were sent throughout British Columbia to demonstrate the peaceable goodwill of non-Freedomites. Choirs attended Expo 67 in Montreal. When the Sons of Freedom have demonstrated, held nude parades, or disrupted court proceedings, the singing of hymns has again been conspicuous.

The Doukhobors discern three classes of song: *Psalom*: psalms; *Hymny*: hymns; and *Shtichy*: verses, non-religious songs. The division between *Psalom* and *Hymny* is a subjectively determined boundary between more and less sacred religious songs, much like the distinction drawn by some Fundamentalist sects between Sunday Morning and "other" hymns. We might define psalms as chanted religious poetry and hymns as sung religious verse. The music of a chanted psalm is highly amorphous: the melodic line is extremely elongated, whole phrases being expended on a single syllable of the text. The hymns have uniform stanzas, and the melodic line, moving faster in relation to the text, is correspondingly simpler.

Professor Alexei Kiselev says that Doukhobor songs are mixed in vocabulary, incorporating Volga, White Russian, and Ukrainian texts. Some are macaronic, and possibly unintelligible to most who hear them. Doukhobors seem to prefer melodies that sound – to my western ear – gloomier than those preferred by the few other Slavic people I have met. The melodies generally move at a more rapid rate than those of the religious songs. Religious songs may be sung at any gathering, though psalms will rarely be sung at a less solemn occasion, such as a wedding or community banquet, and *Shtichy* will not be sung at *sobranies*, and rarely at festivals.

Unless completely informal, the singing site will include a table bearing bread, salt, and water, set before or between the singers. If the situation is quite formal, men and women will sit in sex-segregated groups facing one another. Performances, such as festivals or recitals given for non-Doukhobors, will find the singers standing side by side, although men will still stand either behind or to one side of women. Only in marching or sitting-in groups will the sexes be mixed, and in the rare and recent trios or quartets.

Choirs may be composed of elders, men, women, young men, young women, male voices, children, and so on, allowing individuals to participate in several groups. A choir leader gives advice between songs, discusses repertoire, and coaches at practice. He does not conduct; in performance he may stand a little ahead of the group, but this is not essential. Songs are nearly always started by a "leader," but not necessarily the choir leader, who sings the first phrase or line of each verse, after which the rest join in. Kenneth Peacock notes that this is to "give the group a point of reference for pitch and tempo, whereupon everyone enters in at his accustomed harmonic level." The final one or two notes of a song will be extended beyond their normal duration, and the harmony will be full and resolved. Unlike Western folk usage, Doukhobor performance is subject to wide dynamic range, though this is a pattern repeated from verse to verse. Voice timbre is nasal; tone is controlled high in the throat and can be described as "metallic." Accompanying instruments are not used, though electronic amplification may be.

The most obvious characteristic of this singing is its contrapuntal harmony. For two reasons the style sounds archaic to the conventional Western listener. First, in common with Sacred Harp singing, the melody is assigned to high male and low female voices, singing either in unison or an octave apart. Secondly, the soprano and bass voices "frame" this core melody, singing an approximate fourth or fifth interval above or below the core line, respectively. This fourth or fifth interval harmony has been eschewed by Western art music for at least four centuries, and is best represented by medieval Organon harmony. Such harmonies appear frequently in Sacred Harp music, but are not characteristic of the harmonic line.

The totally oral nature of this music introduces a complicating factor. Singing is heard and practiced from early childhood, and the style is assimilated unconsciously, rather than through formal training. Tunes are transmitted orally, although song texts may be written down and circulated until familiar. Musical parts cannot be frozen; while there is strong stability of melodic line, harmonic relativity is very free. When an old lady, at a *sobranie* where about twenty people were present, told me: "There are twenty parts to that psalm," she was quite correct. It was not that twenty formally discreet melodies were being sung, but each singer might introduce occasional slight variations in his melodic line. Such introductions of tonal variations is by no means discouraged, and objectively they enrich the sound, and render otherwise possibly dreary and monotonous pieces infinitely changeable. The variations may be caused accidentally, by a late start after breathing, and then continued consciously, developed to a discord or a resolution beyond the

singer's range, and consciously discarded, the singer reverting to the line sung by the majority of his voice-group.

Because of this embroidery of the musical parts, it is almost impossible to prepare an accurate transcription of any Doukhobor song. The musical texts given above do not give a precise rendering of what is customarily sung as polyphonic music, but merely the essential melody on which the parts are based, or that a solo voice would sing. The tunes of the first three were transcribed for me by Professor Alexei Kiselev, the fourth tune was transcribed by Professor Leonard Atherton.

The music of the Sons of Freedom is generally more conservative and rigid than that of the Orthodox Doukhobors; less Western material or influence appears. The groups are also less formally arranged for performance, especially when members are singing during a protest action of some kind. These four songs in English are thoroughly Doukhobor in style, resembling translated texts of Russian-language hymns, and they are also Doukhobor in their sense of destiny and their appeal to in-group action: the emphasis on "We. . ."

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Résumé: Mark Mealing relate les grandes lignes de l'histoire dans Doukhobors du Canada et présente plusieurs de leurs chants en anglais, chants dont il a fait la collection en 1962 auprès des Fils de la Liberté lorsque ceux-ci faisaient du piquetage devant la Législature à Victoria. Au cours d'une visite à Agassis en 1964, il a enregistré des hymnes et il décrit les trois genres de chants des Doukhobors ainsi que leur façon de les chanter.

FOLKLORE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Edith Fowke and Carole Henderson have prepared a preliminary edition of A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CANADIAN FOLKLORE IN ENGLISH which runs to 146 pages. It covers the following areas: (1) Reference Materials, Bibliographies, and Checklists; (2) Periodicals; (3) General; (4) Folktales; (5) Folk Music and Dance; (6) Folk Speech and Naming; (7) Minor Genres: Proverbs, Riddles, Games, Jokes, Children's Lore; (8) Superstitions, Popular Beliefs, and the Supernatural; (9) Folklife and Customs; (10) Folk Arts and Material Culture; (11) Biographies and Appreciations; (12) Records; (13) Films; (14) Theses and Dissertations. The section on folk music contains 24 pages and is subdivided into General, Anglo-Canadian, Indian and Inuit, and Other Cultural Groups.

The bibliography may be ordered for \$3.00 from either Edith Fowke, English Dept., Ross Building, York University, 4700 Keele St., Downsview, Ontario M3J 1P3, or Carole Henderson, Humanities Division, Winters College, York University.