

DONA, DONA (Zeitlin / Secunda)

Oyfn furl ligt dos kelbl,  
Ligt gebundn mit a shtrik,  
Hoykh in himl flit dos shvelbl,  
Freyt zikh, dreyt zikh hin un krik.

Chorus:

Lakht der vint in korn,  
Lakht un lakht un lakht,  
Lakht er op a tog a gantsn  
Mit a halber nakht.  
Dona, dona, dona, dona...

Shrayt dos kelbl, zagt der poyer:  
Ver zhe heyst dikh zayn a kalb?  
Volst gekert tsu zayn a foygl,  
Volst gekert tsu zayn a shvalb.

(chorus)

Bidne kelber tut men bindn  
Un men shlept zey un men shekht,  
Ver s'hot fligl, flit aroyftsu,  
iz bay keynem nit keyn knekht.

(chorus)

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Mendele: Yiddish literature and language

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January 23, 1996

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1)-----  
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 1996 14:33:50 -0500 (EST)  
From: mashinke@wam.umd.edu  
Subject: Dona Dona

David Jacobs is looking for the original Yiddish words to "Dona". You're right David, the song comes from the Yiddish theatre and here are the original Yiddish words, the title of the play and the name of the author.

Aaron Zeitlin (1889-1973) wrote the words, Sholom Secunda (1894-1974) the music and the sheet music was published by Metro Music Co., New York, 1943.

The song, originally "Dana, dana, dana," was written for Zeitlin's play "Esterke," produced by Maurice Schwartz, 1940-41. It was printed in the

program, enabling it to become one of the most widely sung Yiddish songs. Yiddish and English translations were performed by Theodore Bikel, Joan Baez and others. German and Korean translations have also appeared.

In some collections the words are erroneously attributed to Yitshok Katzeneison, Hebrew-Yiddish poet active in the Warsaw Ghetto underground.

Oyfn furl ligt dos kelbl,        In a wagon lies a calf,  
Ligt gebundn mit a shtrik,        it is tied with a rope,  
Hoykh in himl flit dos shvelbl,    High in the sky a swallow soars,  
Freyt zikh, dreyt zikh hin un krik.    is joyous and runs back and forth.

Refrain:

Lakht der vint in korn,        The wind laughs in the cornfield,  
Lakht un lakht un lakht,        laughs and laughs and laughs.  
Lakht er op a tog a gantsn        It laughs a whole day  
Mit a halber nakht.            and half the night.  
Dona, dona, dona...

Shrayt dos kelbl, zogt der poyer:    The calf cries and the farmer says,  
"Ver zhe heyst dikh zayn a kalb?    "Who told you to be a calf?  
Volst gekert tsu zayn a foygl,        You could have been a bird,  
Volst gekert tsu zayn a shvalb.        you could have been a swallow.

Bidne kelber tut men bindn        Poor calves are bound  
Un men shlept zey un men shekht.    and slaughtered.  
Ver s'hot fligl, flit aroyftsu,        Whoever has wings flies high  
Iz bay keynem nit keyn knekht."        and is no one's slave.

I don't know the name of the book this information came from but it "was printed with the permission of the copywrite owners, Ethnic Music Publishing Co., Inc.

zayt zhe ale gezunt un hob a freylekhn yor, 1996. ikh hob a sakh hanoef fun leyenen di ale Mendele postn. a dank tsu Noyekh un ale Mendelyaner.

Marcia Gruss Levinsohn

2)-----  
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 96 21:23:01 IST  
From: f46047@vm.biu.ac.il  
Subject: Dona Dona

The song is not from the Yiddish theatre at all but was written by a fine Yiddish poet called Aharon Zeitlin, who came to New York in 1939 to the World's Fair and was trapped by the war. His family, including his father Hillel - a famous Jewish philosopher recognized by the Polish academic world - were all killed in the Shoah.

Adah Lappin  
Netanya, Israel

3)-----  
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 1996 00:19:23 EST  
From: bbnk42a@prodigy.com  
Subject: Dona Dona

David Jacobs asked for the words to "Dona Dona". Unfortunately I do not know

the title of the play or the author. The melody is lovely, and it was made popular a few decades ago in English by Joan Baez, I believe.

Carl Goldberg

[More or less identical versions been posted by Add Lappin and Carl Goldberg as well as by Anno Siegel and Jonathan Bellman.]

4)-----  
Date: Mon, 22 Jan 1996 17:03:37 -0500 (EST)  
From: mgodfrey@runt.dawsoncollege.qc.ca  
Subject: Aliza Greenblatt

Aliza Greenblatt [ref. 5.224], Arlo Guthrie's mother, is the author/composer of the lovely song "Fisherlied," popular in Europe and America in the thirties. It begins "Fort a fisher oyfn yam/Er fort aroys beginen/Efsher vet er ergets vu/Zayn libstn nokh gefinen/Tra la la... ."

Michael Godfrey

5)-----  
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 1996 08:15:20 +0200  
From: keli@techunix.technion.ac.il  
Subject: Badkhonim

I'll be grateful if anyone could help me with references or ideas about the subject: "The phenomena of the Badkhonim as reflected in the new yiddish literature and in the new Hebrew literature."

Thanks

Ariela Krasney

6)-----  
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 1996 01:44:52 -0500  
From: cassblum@aol.com  
Subject: Kamer-kamer-hoyz

Does anyone know the meaning of the term "kamer-kamer-hoyz?" It appears in at least two Sholem Aleichem stories I have listened to on tape. It seems to be a children's game, from what I can figure out.

Ellen Cassedy

7)-----  
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 1996 15:05:38 -0500  
From: kromobile@aol.com  
Subject: The "demise" of Yiddish and Judzmo/Ladino

So Yiddish literature and its writers with their secularist bent are what brought about the "demise" of Yiddish (language? literature? culture? David Herskovic's sentence [5.229] is not completely clear)? Take! as my mother would have said.

There is another Jewish language, Judezmo/Ladino, that is in a far more precarious position than Yiddish - and there was no "secularist" literature in Judezmo/Ladino comparable to that of Mendele, Perets, et. al. What happened there?

Let us be clear. Yiddish is a language. What brings about the "demise" (not my word, Herskovic's) of a language is what brings about a diminution in the number of its speakers. There are various ways for this to happen, as everyone realizes. So far as I am aware (but maybe Herskovic knows something I don't), it was not secular Jews who herded people into concentration camps in Europe in the 1930s and 40s. The vastly diminished number of present-day Yiddish (and Judezmo/Ladino) speakers has something to do with the speakers who were murdered in this century. There are other reasons for the decline in numbers as well, but to state as he does that "the demise of Yiddish" has come thanks to the "achievements" of secular Yiddish writers is, to put it as charitably as possible, disingenuous.

Who are these 'fraye yidn' and "impeccable secularists" that he is setting up as straw men? Since he is apparently not one, it would be better to let people speak for themselves.

Marti Krow-Lucal

8)-----  
Date: Tue, 23 Jan 96 16:01:19 EST  
From: leiser@pacevm.dac.pace.edu  
Subject: Yiddish tzvishn di khsidim

A brief note in response to David Herskovic's comments on khsidishe yiddish: He notes, correctly, that among the Bobover khsidim, it is not unusual for English to be used, and suggests that the Rebbe himself does not use English, and might not even be able to do so. From my personal acquaintance with the Bobover kehile, the Rebbe, and his family, stretching back many years, I can say with complete confidence that although the Rebbe does not ordinarily communicate in English, he can do so without much difficulty. The Rebbetzin and the Rebbe's sons and daughters--including his oldest son, Naftoli, who was the only one to survive the khurn in the Rebbe's immediate family (the other, younger children having been born in the U.S. to his second wife, the current Rebbetzin, after the war) all speak English fluently. However, like most of the Bobover khsidim, they communicate in Yiddish in almost every context, in the bes medrash, in the yeshiva, in their businesses (except where necessary to communicate in English), at home, and on the streets.

Derekh agav, the discussions of khsidish yiddish are certainly appropriate for Mendele, for the khsidim are widespread and are among the few holdouts who continue to employ yiddish in their daily lives. Their accents and dialects may differ from those of other Yiddish speakers, but they are no less legitimate so far as I can see. Though I am not khsidish, I must confess (forgive the personal note) that it is painful to read the nasty remarks that are often directed at the khsidim on Mendele. It's an old minhag, of course, among maskilim, but one we should perhaps think of laying to rest. There's enough bitterness in the world, and enough sniping at yidn, that for us to participate in it is somewhat unbecoming. Please forgive me if I sound as though I'm preaching or teaching mussar, for that isn't my intent at all. It's just that we should be able to enjoy this wonderful Mendele without being hateful toward one another or toward other yidn.

Zeit alle gezint.

Berel Leiser

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