

## ЛЕОНАРД ЛЕРМАН

### О ПЕРЕВОДАХ ТЕКСТОВ ДЛЯ ПЕНИЯ С РУССКОГО ЯЗЫКА НА АНГЛИЙСКИЙ

*Леонард Лерман* (р. 1949) – в прошлом свободный критик нью-йоркской музыкальной газеты «The New Music Connoisseur» («Знаток новой музыки»), заместитель редактора журнала «Opera Today» («Опера сегодня»), заместитель хормейстера Метрополитен-оперы, основатель Еврейского музыкального театра в Берлине и филармонического хора в Метрополитен. Он является автором 223 музыкальных произведений, включая 11 опер (4 из них основаны на произведениях русской литературы), 7 мюзиклов, 71 инструментальное сочинение, 90 хоровых произведений и 255 романсов для голоса. Занимаясь переводами, он осуществил 64 перевода с французского, немецкого, древнееврейского, идиш и, в особенности, русского (также 18 адаптаций). Степень бакалавра искусств им получена в Гарвардском университете (1971), степень магистра (1975) и степень доктора (1977) – в Корнельском (по композиции), а также степень магистра по библиотечному мастерству – в Университете Лонг Айленда (1995). Кроме того, Леонард Лерман обучался в Queensborough Community College (Квинсборо комьюнити колледж) Американской консерватории Фонтенбло, парижской Ecole Normale de Musique (Нормальная школа музыки) и Университете штата Индианы. Преподавал в Корнельском университете, Эмпайр стейт колледже (Empire State College) и Хибру юньон колледже (Hebrew Union) при College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Еврейский институт религии) в Нью-Йорке. Брал уроки композиции у Эли Зигмайстера и Леонарда Бернштейна. С 1995 года занимает пост главного библиотекаря Публичной библиотеки Oyster Bay-East Norwich (штат Нью-Йорк); с 2014 года – музыкальный директор и композитор-резидент Лютеранской церкви Христа в Роуздейле (штат Нью-Йорк), а также музыкальный директор празднеств при Метрополитен-синагоге в Манхэттене.

Леонард Лерман был самым младшим делегатом на Международном музыкальном конгрессе в Москве (1971) и самым старшим делегатом на Московском молодёжном конгрессе (1985). Вместе с женой, певицей Хелен Вильямс, они дали около 600 концертов на 4 континентах, записали более 1900 видеороликов на Youtube, которые просмотрели более 150000 пользователей. Сейчас они готовятся к выступлению 11 июня 2016 года в зале музея «Гостиная Владислава Голубка» в Минске с концертной программой, включающей сочинения Блицштейна, Меерополя, Зигмайстера, Даргомыжского, Борзовой, Слонимского, Сяняковой, Ровнера, Мандельбаума и Лермана, а также записи музыки Лермана для фирмы Parma Records с Санкт-Петербургским государственным оркестром под управлением Владимира Ланде (июль 2016 года) (см. сайт: <http://llehrman.artists-in-residence.com>).

Недавно ушедшая из жизни мать Леонарда Лермана Эмили Р. Лерман (01.03.1923–13.01.2015), с которой он много сотрудничал по переводческой работе, говорила на русском языке как на родном. Она была учёным (в 1947 году написала магистерскую работу о Пушкине в советской критике под руководством Романа Якобсона), преподавателем и переводчицей. Во время Второй мировой войны делала переводы для Соломона Михоэлса и его Организации помощи русским жертвам войны в Новой Англии (1943). Ею переведена книга Натальи Баранской «A Week Like Any Other Week» («Неделя, подобная любой другой неделе»), опубликованная в журнале «Massachusetts Review» (апрель 1974), а также книга Дмитрия Нагишкина «Folktales of the Amur» («Народные сказки Амура»), опубликованная издательством Abrams (1980). Публикуемая ниже статья посвящена её памяти.

*Д-р Антон Ровнер*

## WRITING (& PRODUCING) SINGING TRANSLATIONS, FROM RUSSIAN TO ENGLISH

“Singing translations are essentially obsolete today in the age of supertitles,” remarked Music Professor Joel Mandelbaum, introducing a guest lecture by Princeton Professor Caryl Emerson Nov. 18, 2015. “But,” he went on, “it was a very important art form, and what I discovered at the dress rehearsal [of Dargomyzhsky’s *Rusalka* in English] on Saturday [Nov. 14] is that it should still be [considered] an important art form, because **hearing singers sing their emotions in a language that I understand means more even than reading it in some accurate way while they’re singing in a language that I don’t understand.**”

That, in essence, is why the writing of singing translations to be sung in the native language of the audience has been and still is something worth striving for. Some of the most moving opera performances I have seen had been translated for the local audience: *Madame Butterfly* in English (Indiana, Aug. 1975), *La bohème* in French at the Opéra Comique (Paris, Nov. 1971), *Lohengrin* in Lithuanian (Vilnius, Oct. 1971). And a few companies like the 47-year-old Bronx Opera consistently perform all operas in English, no matter what their original language.

On the other hand, some works, like *Eugene Onegin* do not translate well into English. I had the pleasure of staging the beginning of Act II of *Boris Godunov* at the 1971 Boris Goldovsky Opera Workshop, in his English translation, and of then debating with him how one could possibly translate into English “Я люблю вас“ which becomes “Я люблю тебя” at the end of Lensky’s Act I aria sung to Olga. “Very simple,” insisted Mr. G: “I adore you!” followed by “I’m in love with you!” Yes, of course, it scans the rhythm of the music perfectly, but the meaning, the polite transforming into the familiar, as in Pushkin’s poem “Ты и вы,” is completely gone - lost.

The case for singing in the vernacular is strengthened by the fact that most singers perform better in their own native language. Mozart and

Wolf-Ferrari knew this, and authorized versions of their comic operas in both Italian and German. Berlin Komische Oper productions of works like Massenet’s *Don Quichotte* and Offenbach’s *Contes d’Hoffmann* were tremendously effective in German. The Berlin Staatsoper’s *Katja Kabanovna* and Theater des Westens’ *Mann von La Mancha* were, however, disasters: The former featured Czech singers with such highly-accented German they might as well have been singing in the original Czech; and the latter employed a translation so hideous in sound that all delicacy was destroyed, with lines like “Why do you do the things you do?” rendered as “Was er fuer solche sachen macht?”!

Russian is particularly difficult for non-Russian speakers, unused to the enormous differences between stressed and unstressed vowels, and dependent on transliterations which often do not adequately indicate stresses within words. (Many also make no distinction between и and ы or о and ой.) The first recording of Stravinsky’s *Mavra*, conducted by the non-Russian-speaking Robert Craft, made a butchery of the score, with the performers singing all the syllables nearly equally, as if they were French rather than Russian. As Caryl Emerson has put it: “most non-Russians who sing in Russian haven’t a clue what they’re singing about,” with “intonation and accent all weirdly misplaced.” Of course if the translation is not good, it only makes things worse. But if it is good, “then the psyche of the performer too is the beneficiary. Because translation is not only words. It is emotional impact, trajectory, rhythm, intelligent texture.” As an example, she cites my mother’s and my translation of the Miller’s opening aria in Dargomyzhsky’s *Rusalka*: “some liberties in meaning, perhaps, but absolute fidelity to the rhythm and emotion of this carefree demonic spirit selling his daughter’s love for trinkets.”

My own interest in translation dates back to 1966, when a penpal of mine in Leningrad sent me a recording of Eduard Kolmanovsky’s setting of Yevgeni Yevtushenko’s poem, “**Хотят ли русские**

**войны?**” This was a very meaningful song to me, growing up during the Cold War, in a progressive US family of Russian Jewish descent that wanted so much to live in peace with Russia, where we had so many friends and relatives. *Columbia University Forum* published Mario Pei’s translation of it which was very moving, but strayed far from the original imagery: The emotional climax of the penultimate stanza was particularly vitiated: “Ask of our mothers, old and gray; Ask of my wife, who prays each day...” No, no, no! This is a Soviet poem. There’s no prayer in the original. More accurately: “Ask of the women in our life. Ask of our mothers, ask my wife!” The meeting of US and USSR troops on the Elbe (the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which I later joyfully participated in at Torgau in the GDR in 1985) was also eliminated by Pei, substituting some irrelevant line about New York and Paris, asleep.

And most importantly, many of the rhythms of Pei’s words did not fit the music, which perhaps he did not know. The words “under” and “Russians” cannot be stressed on the second syllable. So I felt I had to write a singing translation, and managed to get it published in my high school newspaper. I don’t know if anyone ever sang it – songs of US-USSR peace and friendship were not very popular in the US in those days – but I had the pleasure of presenting a copy of the publication to Yevtushenko himself years later when I attended a lecture he gave at Queens College, Oct. 13, 2004. He seemed surprised, but gracious, and certainly not displeased.

My next adventure in the creation of singing translation came in 1970. I was a junior at Harvard, wrestling with the desire to create something classic of lasting value (as opposed to ephemeral pop), in conflict with the anger displayed in the streets everywhere, over the brutalities of race, class, and war, and the indifference of most of the elite to the sufferings of the powerless. Drawing on reading I’d done for a class I’d taken as a freshman in Russian Literature of the Soviet Period, I found my answer in Vladimir Mayakovsky’s 11-part poem, “Люблю,” specifically the fourth section, “**Мой Университет**” (“My University”). In setting the Russian text to music, I simultaneously wrote an English text to go with it, varying the rhythm, though not the contour, of the melody, occasionally to accommodate extra syllables. “Склоняете чудно. Ну и склоняйте!” does not really translate, literally, into comprehensible English, which has no declensions, so “declining” would not mean anything (except rejection!) to an English-speaking listener. I

substituted: “You study so well, you do. Well, so go study!” adding an extra note for the penultimate syllable in the first sentence, and syncopating the penultimate syllable in the second sentence. “Язык трамвайский” became “songs of trolley cars”; puns were made on “building stories” and “weathercock fighters.” The setting was virtually complete, with a few judicious cuts, like references to Dobroliubov and Barbarossa. Half-rhymes became off-rhymes: “I with my audience of only a building/Outside all the towers see what tomorrow will bring.” And the bitterness came through, especially toward academics “worthlessly rattling like ivory copper” as “they’d chatter on about each other...”

Designed to be performed in Russian or English, it was performed in both languages, one after the other, in two performances in quick succession: May 1, 1970 at Harvard’s Dunster House by baritone Rip Keller and two days later at a Massachusetts Federation of Music Clubs concert at Boston University by bass-baritone Gregory Sandow (who later became quite a well-known music critic), each accompanied by the composer. Recordings of the performances were broadcast over Harvard Radio WHRB and, in March 1979, over Pacifica Radio WBAI in New York. I sang the work myself, from the piano, at a lecture in Sergey Slonimsky’s class at the Leningrad Conservatoire in October 1971, and again at the Moscow Youth Festival in August 1985. In between, Viennese bass Walter Fink performed it with me at a May 1982 concert sponsored by the Gesellschaft fuer Musiktheater at the Hochschule fuer Musik in Vienna.

The New York premiere came April 30, 1993 at Lehman College, as part of a Mayakovsky Centennial celebration with star participants Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Professor Patricia Thompson, who revealed herself to be Mayakovsky’s and Lily Brik’s daughter, born of their affair in Paris. The NY Times characterized my music as “neat, spare, retiring in tone, rigorously contrapuntal, removed from the push and pull of tonal language,” noting that the African American singer “Charles Samuel Brown sang it pleasantly in both Russian and English. The composer played the piano.” An orchestral version of the work will be recorded in July 2016 by the State Symphony Orchestra of St. Petersburg under Vladimir Lande for Parma Recordings. A bass soloist has not yet been designated.

In the summer of 1970 I studied German for the first time and then translated and directed the US premiere of Bertolt Brecht’s *Days of the Commune*,

on the eve of the March 1971 centennial of the Paris Commune. *Massachusetts Review* published my translation, which led to many other translations from the German, and also the magazine's publishing my mother's Natalya Baranskaya translation.

In the spring of 1973 I took a Russian Music course at Cornell taught jointly by the distinguished musicologist William Austin (whom I'd actually met in Leningrad in 1971) and the distinguished Russian literature scholar George Gibian. I managed to enlist them and two of their graduate assistants in performing the first English singing translation which I wrote of Musorgsky's 1863 setting of Act I of Gogol's *Женитьба* (*The Marriage, or Getting Married*). We did it in class, at Barnes Hall, as readers' theatre (books in hand) melodrama – speaking the words over the piano, rather than singing them. Gibian played the lead, Podkolyossin, Austin his friend Kotchkaryov; Jerry Amaldev, a student from India, was the servant Stepan; and the matchmaker Fyokla Ivanovna was played by none other than Laurel E. Fay (later famous for her Shostakovich research and biography). The piece is fairly dry recitative, a kind of warm-up for *Boris Godunov* inspired by the *secco* style of Musorgsky's mentor, the composer Alexander Dargomyzhsky, who actually played Kotchkaryov (and hand copied out his whole part!) opposite Musorgsky's Podkolyossin at the work's first reading. Whatever monotony might have resulted in somnolence on the part of the class of over 200 was abruptly dispelled when Gibian purposefully smashed a small hand mirror that splintered all over the stage, waking everybody up!

Austin was so enthusiastic about the translation, he put me in touch with Alexander Tcherepnine (Jan. 21, 1899–Sep. 29, 1977), one of three composers who continued the setting of Gogol's play, which Musorgsky had given up on after the first act. Tcherepnine met with me in New York the year he died, and pleaded with me to translate his 1934–35 completion of the work which, he explained, was in only 2 acts – he had condensed the Gogol, the way Ippolitov-Ivanov had not – because he wanted it to be only half his and half Musorgsky's. I saw a production of it in Oberhausen, West Germany in 1983, in a German translation that Universal published back in the 1930s (as *Die Heirat*), which was quite entertaining. My mother wrote out a literal English translation of Tcherepnine's Act II. I will complete the singing translation, when and if a production in English transpires. Tcherepnine also

gave me the score of his first opera in Russian, *Ol-Ol*, from 1930, based on a 1924–25 play by Leonid Andreyev, which also looks interesting and worth pursuing. . . .

In 1979, the Bel Canto Opera Company in New York, which had the previous year produced the NY City premiere of my first two operas based on stories by Bernard Malamud, *Idiots First* (the completion of a work begun but left unfinished by Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964)) and *Karla*, commissioned me (and my mother, who however declined credit) to translate the first great Russian opera, Mikhail Glinka's *Жизнь за царя* about a folk hero named Ivan Sussanin who gave his "Life for the Tsar." The process was fun, but a bit of an obstacle course. No score of the original was available: only the Soviet version, from which all mention of the tsar had been removed and the opera retitled *Ivan Sussanin*. (Instead the off-stage entity being protected and sacrificed for became Minin, a general.) Stravinsky loved this opera, in which his father Feodor had sung the leading role, but was horrified at the Bolshevik bowdlerization. We decided, for our production, to put the tsar back into the opera. But how, with no score? We found a copy of the old libretto, as well as an edition (in the old orthography) with lyrics and a piano reduction – no vocal lines – and then proceeded to extrapolate (guess, really) which lines of Russian text originally belonged to which vocal lines in the Soviet edition. I then wrote the translation of the pre-Soviet version into the Soviet score.

Another problem was that the company was so small and the opera so big: only 4 principals, but choruses of both Russians and Poles, and a duration of 4–5 hours. "How to differentiate the two nationalities?" the director was asked by radio interviewer Bob Sherman. "Well, the Poles have more *dignity*," she ventured. And although that seemed sort of like trying to make a virtue out of necessity, it worked pretty well. As for the length problem, every possible cut was taken, and then some more. In fact even the great tenor aria in the last act had to be sacrificed. As consolation, the tenor got to sing the piece on the radio, even if not in the opera itself. In 2012, tenor Gregory Mercer performed that aria in our English translation, posted here: <<https://youtu.be/z6k62gRmUF8>>.

The next collaboration my mother and I undertook, again with the Bel Canto Opera in mind, was the second (and best) opera by Russia's second great opera composer, Alexander Dargomyzhsky, *Rusalka*, a work known to every student at Moscow



Conservatory, but almost totally unknown in the West, having been performed in the US in Russian in only one production, with Feodor Chaliapin as the Miller, in New York and San Francisco in 1922. Based on Pushkin's eponymous tragic scenes, the libretto uses the two rhymed sections (both women's choruses: the guests teasing the Matchmaker at the wedding and the mermaids at the Dniepr River) and rhymes most of the rest of Pushkin's unrhymed blank verse, leaving a few sections unrhymed as recitative. Finding rhymes that fit the music and sounded natural was the greatest challenge. My mother and I worked on it from 1984 to 1986, and dedicated it to the memory of my father's brother Edgar H. Lehrman, a Russian literature scholar, teacher, translator (of Gorchakov and Turgeniev), annotator (of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov), and editor (of Vladimir Seduro's *The Byelorussian Theater and Drama*), who died of a brain tumor at age 60, July 24, 1986.

We were hoping the Bel Canto Opera Company would do our *Rusalka*, but they opted instead for Emanuel Chabrier's *L'Etoile*, which they commissioned me to translate and direct in 1988, and folded not too long afterward. We then turned our hopes to the aforementioned Bronx Opera Company. But the only Russian opera they had ever performed was Shebalin's completion of Musorgsky's *Fair at Sorochintsi*, and they too proved more interested in Chabrier, commissioning a translation from me of his *Incomplete Education* in 2006.

A 1989 Naturist Opera Workshop at Domaine de Bezezy in Provence, France, included three Mermaid Operas: excerpts from the *Rusalkas* of both Dargomyzhsky and Dvorak, and the complete *Mermaid in Lock No. 7* by Elie Siegmeister and Edward Mabley. The entirely nude Mermaids' Chorus and Water Ballet proved a favorite that would be repeated at subsequent workshops in 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1996. In 2012 Benjamin Spierman performed the Miller's opening aria for the first time anywhere in English. After my mother passed away during heart surgery Jan. 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a group of us decided it was time to perform the work, in her memory, and on Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup>, we did. The website we set up for the production at has links to concert excerpts, introductions, a lecture, reviews, the interview Zhanna Agalovka did with us for Russia Channel One, and the entire opera, in 23 segments.

There were several challenges in producing the work. We were blessed with five fine soloists,

all of whom had sung leads with Bronx Opera, and a devoted chorus of 16 who worked tirelessly. Finding a singer for the role of the Princess proved most difficult, as it was too low even for most mezzos. Dargomyzhsky had cast her as an alto, to contrast with the Miller's Daughter, a soprano, whom he named Natasha, who drowns and becomes the Mermaid, *Rusalka*. The role of her confidante is also strange: In Pushkin's original she is *Мамка*, the Nurse, as in *Onegin*. But Dargomyzhsky needed a soprano for the ensembles with the Princess, so he made her younger and gave her the name Olga. But the superstitions she voices definitely stem from the character of the older Pushkin original!

As in the Bel Canto production of the Glinka, another challenge was how to cut the 4-act work. Valery Gergiev's Maryinsky Theater production honoring Dargomyzhsky's bicentennial in 2014 ran 3 hours and 45 minutes. Russian videos condense it down to 90 minutes total. We wanted something in between. So we cut all the ballets (the circle dance, the gypsies, the mermaids...) and much of the choral and ensemble music as well. *Rusalka*'s final vengeance aria was trimmed, as was the Princess's Act III aria, which she did however get to sing complete at preview concerts the previous month. The Prince's Aria, uncut, proved to be a highlight of the show. Modern sensibility seems to feel more for his remorse than the women's jealousy, grief, and desire for revenge.

The biggest challenge of all was how to end the opera. We weren't using projections or lighting in our concert version, so dissolving all in a vortex or whirlpool of special effects was not an option. Many hours were spent puzzling over the fact that Pushkin had left the ending open, stopping after the Prince's questioning the *Rusalochka*: "Откуда ты, прелестное дитя?"

Dargomyzhsky's ending, enacting the scene only predicted in the Pushkin, is still controversial with some scholars arguing that the poet actually meant for the Prince to return to the Princess, the way Tatyana returns to her Prince at the end of *Onegin*. One could have ended the piece as Toscanini ended the first performance of Puccini's *Turandot*, without Alfano's ending, saying: "And here the composer laid down his pen." And here Pushkin laid down his pen! It reminded me of the time when the Metropolitan Opera was reviving its first production of *Boris Godunov* in Russian (I was coaching & conducting the chorus) and Florence Quivar cancelled as Marina. For days we were

going around singing (to a tune from *The Sound of Music*) “How do you solve the problem of Marina?” Cancelling the Polish Act altogether and just doing Musorgsky’s original version was even (half) entertained. Eventually Mignon Dunn took the role and saved the day, so the foreshortened option fell out of consideration. And we really didn’t want to foreshorten *Rusalka* either.

So we came up with something that I believe has not been tried before. *Rusalka* mounted a pedestal behind the chorus and sang out with a high C on the final choral C major chord, then descended downstage where mermaids fluffed blue and green fabric simulating baroque theater-like waves. The Prince reached out to embrace her, but she placed kisses on her hands which she then placed on his eyes as he sank below the waves. As their daughter, *Rusalochka*, ran to her and embraced her, *Rusalka* watched the demise of the man who had meant so much to her, but betrayed her, and held tight to all that remained of him. If you have time to watch only one scene of this opera, watch this one, at <<https://youtu.be/zRLED53WXM4>>.

*Marriage, A Life for the Tsar and Rusalka* are the three major classic Russian operas I have translated. But other works of Russian literature have also spurred my imagination. In 1975, my Uncle Edgar showed me a play he had translated, *Ternovyi Kust*, by David Iakovlevich Aizman (1869–1922) that he had discovered in the Slavic Room at the New York Public Library, which he thought would make a terrific opera. It would, but was even more ambitious than *Days of the Commune* and I was not ready, yet, for another work that size. Of smaller scope was Aizman’s novella, *Чета Красовицких* (The Krasovitsky Couple) which I thought I could handle. Like the works of Aizman’s friend and admirer, Maxim Gorky, it exposed the hypocrisy and callousness of the rich toward the poor, reminding one of Gorky’s paraphrase of Chekhov’s outlook: “Look, people, how badly you live, and treat one another.” It also dealt with an orphanage adoption crisis, reminiscent of so many headlines then concerning Vietnamese orphans. I decided to turn the work into a libretto, and then an opera. My uncle helped by providing numerous alternative translations of numerous expressions in the text, for me to draw on in developing the characters. He also wrote the words of the final lullaby, sung by the poor Ukrainian maid, as she comes to terms with the little Jewish girl whose care is given

her, having lost her own child to starvation. The unnamed orphanage supervisor I gave the name of Lyuba Borisovna, after my second cousin, Lyuba Borisovna Glukhovskaya. I met her in Leningrad when she was 12, who later became a music teacher, married, and emigrated to Israel with her husband, and I understand (from Facebook) is now not only a mother but a grandmother, but with whom I have unfortunately not been able to re-establish direct communication. The work was produced by the Ithaca Opera Association in 1976 and was one of the first operas broadcast on cable TV in 1977. Videos of it were shown in the U.S., Germany, Switzerland, and at the Union of Composers during the Moscow Youth Festival in 1985. Translated into German, it was performed complete in Berlin in May 1984. Excerpts have also been translated into and performed in French and in Russian. The website <[tinyurl.com/LJL-Sima](http://tinyurl.com/LJL-Sima)> includes synopsis, production photos, and links to videos of excerpts and the whole opera on video.

In 1977, I was inspired by a Carnegie Hall performance by Galina Vishnevskaya to write her a song cycle based on classic Russian poems by Afanasy Fet, Ivan Krylov and Gavriil Derzhavin, each with an image of a bird. I called it “Songs of Birds” (*Песни птиц*) and presented it to her at a reception at the Russian Tea Room. Though she never sang it, a number of others have, mostly in English, sometimes in Russian. The first piece can be done with English horn, or clarinet, or piano. The second with piano or a combination of instruments (oboe, horn, viola, harpsichord + flute). The third is a cappella. All three are to be recorded by Parma in St. Petersburg in July. I sang the Krylov at the 1985 Moscow Youth Conference and on a number of other occasions, including here: <<https://youtu.be/0HRNBM7e2Ao>>. The Derzhavin, a cappella, is posted in two languages, here: <<https://youtu.be/gAukQAY-MMc>> and <[https://youtu.be/Wi8G3lth\\_UA](https://youtu.be/Wi8G3lth_UA)>.

Another a cappella setting I wrote to a short poem by Alexander Blok, “Benediction,” again in Russian or in English, premiered at Cornell in 1977. It too will be recorded in St. Petersburg in July, along with settings I wrote of poems by Velemir Khlebnikov (“Я и Россия” for his 1986 centennial); the contemporary American poet from Belarus, Galina Leybovich (“Untitled” [2015]); and Pushkin – posted here: <<https://youtu.be/7Mk0nKSkPgM>>. The Khlebnikov was first performed, in Russian, at the “Majakowski Galerie” in West Berlin,

Nov. 22, 1985. I shall never forget the lecture there that evening, in Russian, by Prof. Yuri Alexeyew, on the importance of learning Russian, for among other reasons in order to study “the Marxist classics.” (This to a German audience!)

Also to be mentioned, and I hope some day to see performed in Russia, are the one-act operas *The Family Man*, after Mikhail Sholokhov’s *Семейный человек*, and two based on works of Anton Chekhov: *The Birthday of the Bank*, based on *Юбилей* and *The Wooing* based on *Медведь*. The Sholokhov opera was written for Ronald Edwards, who performed it in New York in January 1984, June 1985 and September 1999. The great tenor George Shirley (the first African American tenor to sing at the Metropolitan Opera) performed it in Berlin (1985) in a German translation which I learned later was faulty. Musicologist/critic/translator Peter Zacher helped me write a new German translation, which Ronald Edwards premiered in Dresden (July 1996). Unfortunately the recording of that performance was stolen (along with 8 of 9 valises) in Leipzig shortly thereafter. But the website <[tinyurl.com/LJL-FamilyMan](http://tinyurl.com/LJL-FamilyMan)> includes production photos and links to a complete performance (in 4 segments) which was shown complete at the Union of Composers during the 1985 Moscow Youth Festival, attended by Andrei Eshpai, Sofia Gubaidulina, and others. Elie Siegmeister called this piece my “best work,” as it confronted and conquered the problem of setting prose (addressed and mastered by Dargomyzhsky and Musorgsky in the past) by incorporating 20 different Russian, Ukrainian and Cossack folk melodies as contrapuntal background and subtext.

My first Chekhov opera, *The Birthday of the Bank*, commissioned and workshopped by the Lake George Opera Festival in 1988, was a literal setting (again in the spirit of Dargomyzhsky and Musorgsky) of Chekhov’s play *Юбилей* in Russian. I then wrote an English translation of the play, different from any of the dozen or so already out there, to go with the music I had written to Chekhov’s original text. This necessitated numerous liberties, of course. My favorite example has always been “Я ничего не понимаю” which hardly scans or registers meaningfully as “I understand nothing” or “I don’t understand anything,” but resonates similarly to the original Russian as “I simply can’t make head or tail of it,” with just a small additional grace note for the extra penultimate syllable. My favorite spot

in the text is the quotation from Gremin’s Aria to Olegin, which in some productions I’ve had the whole chorus sing along to. Production history and photos and links to a composite from a number of performances given in 1998–1999 may be found at <[tinyurl.com/LJL-BirthdayOfBank](http://tinyurl.com/LJL-BirthdayOfBank)>.

My second Chekhov opera, *The Wooing*, is based on a libretto that I inherited, so to speak, from my teacher Elie Siegmeister (1909–1991). It was written for him by Abel Meeropol (1903–1986), but their collaboration broke off when Abel and his wife Anne adopted the orphaned sons of Julius & Ethel Rosenberg, and harassment by the FBI and American fascists ruptured their relationships with many former friends. Elie tried to reconcile with Abel years later, but by then his collaborator on numerous songs (including “John Reed”) and one opera (*Darlin’ Corie*) was too far gone with Alzheimer’s. On his deathbed, though, Elie said to me: “I don’t want to call you my disciple, as I don’t believe in doctrine, but you’re my ‘continuator,’” thus giving me a title for my planned autobiography: *The Continuator*. “I know when I die,” he continued, “if I leave something unfinished, you’ll finish it.” *The Wooing*, an adaptation of Chekhov that takes place in New England in 1910, based on Abel Meeropol’s very first draft (of several) was completed, performed and recorded in time for the 2003 celebration of Abel’s centennial. The 2012 revival is posted on YouTube. Links are best accessed here: <[tinyurl.com/LJL-TheWooing](http://tinyurl.com/LJL-TheWooing)>.

I do hope the reader will enjoy watching and listening to at least some of the examples to which I have provided background here. Writing and producing translations are part of what Boris Goldovsky called “bringing opera to life.” Though rarely the most lucrative part, they are often among the most satisfying.

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Lehrman’s late mother, Emily R. Lehrman (Mar. 1, 1923 – Jan. 13, 2015), with whom he often collaborated, was a native Russian speaker, scholar (writing her 1947 Columbia M.A. thesis under Roman Jakobson on Pushkin in Soviet Criticism), teacher, and translator in her own right (for Solomon Mikhoels for Russian War Relief throughout New England in 1943; of Natalya Baranskaya’s *A Week Like Any Other Week*, *Massachusetts Review*, 15:4, 1974; and of Dmitri Nagishkin’s *Folktales of the Amur*, Abrams, 1980). This article is dedicated to her memory.

## NOTES

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*The Hilltop Beacon*, Roslyn High School, Roslyn, NY, v. 13 no. 6, March 3, 1966, p. 3; posted at <<http://ljlehrman.artists-in-residence.com/translations/DoTheRussiansLongForWar.html>>.

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## Writing (& Producing) Singing Translations, from Russian to English

The author traces the origins of his interest in translating Russian literature into English, so that musical settings of the original words can be sung in both languages, beginning in 1966 with Kolmanovsky's 1961 setting of an anti-war poem by Yevtushenko, moving through Lehrman's own 1970 setting of a poem from 1922 by Mayakovsky, and including operas by Musorgsky, Glinka and Dargomyzhsky in their first performances in English, along with Lehrman's own operas inspired by Aizman, Sholokhov and Chekhov, and his original settings of poems by Blok, Fet, Krylov, Derzhavin, Khlebnikov, Pushkin, and Galina Leybovich.

**Keywords:** English translation, Russian opera, Musorgsky, Glinka, Dargomyzhsky, Chekhov, Sholokhov, Yevtushenko, Mayakovsky, Kolmanovsky, Caryl Emerson, Joel Mandelbaum, *Rusalka*, William Austin, George Gibian, Laurel E. Fay, Elie Siegmeister, Abel Meeropol, Julius & Ethel Rosenberg, John Reed

## О переводах текстов для пения с русского языка на английский

Автор рассказывает о том, как у него возник интерес к переводу русской литературы на английский язык для того, чтобы вокальная музыка, написанная на русские тексты, могла быть исполнена на обоих языках. Рассматриваемые автором тексты и написанная на них музыка включают в себя антивоенное стихотворение Е. Евтушенко, положенное на музыку Э. Колмановским в 1961 году и переведённое на английский автором в 1966 году; сочинение самого Леонарда Лермана, написанное в 1970 году на стихи В. Маяковского 1922 года. Сюда также относятся оперы М. Мусоргского, М. Глинки и А. Даргомыжского в их первых исполнениях на английском языке, оперы Лермана на тексты Давида Айзмана, Михаила Шолохова и Антона Чехова, а также его вокальная музыка на стихи Александра Блока, Афанасия Фета, Ивана Крылова, Гавриила Державина, Велемира Хлебникова, Александра Пушкина и Галины Лейбович.

**Ключевые слова:** английский перевод, русская опера, Мусоргский, Глинка, Даргомыжский, Чехов, Шолохов, Евтушенко, Маяковский, Колмановский, Кэрл Эмерсон, Джоэл Мандельбаум, опера «Русалка», Вильям Остин, Джордж Гибиан, Лорел Е. Фэй, Эли Зигмаистер, Эйбел Меерополь, Джулиус и Этель Розенберг, Джон Рид.

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