

No Money for the Rent

JEWISH · Walter J. Kin · Rigli Publishing

<https://jewishthemovie.com/music/russian/dire-gelt>

← Jewish Songs in Russian

Russian Songbook · Sung by Elechka

Нет денег

No Money for the Rent

A hundred-year-old joke about the rent, still ringing true in a warm new voice.

"No Money for the Rent" is a Russian-language take on the old Yiddish song Dire Gelt, whose title simply means "rent money." It first took shape in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe at the start of the twentieth century, with no known author. The song is true folklore, passed along by ear from singer to singer. Its words are the complaint of a poor tenant: the pipes are leaking, the stove in the kitchen has broken, and the landlord is at the door asking for the rent again. The refrain answers all of it with a rueful, cheerful cry to the heavens.

The folklorist Y. L. Cahan set down the first printed version in 1912. From there the song spread through Jewish communities across Europe and the United States, especially among working families, and it was sung in the streets, in taverns, on theater stages, and at gatherings of every kind. In 1939 it was performed by a Jewish chorus in Kyiv, and in the 1960s the actor and baritone Theodore Bikel recorded it and helped carry it to wider audiences in the West. Later it found a home in the klezmer revival and on Yiddish stages, sung in Yiddish, English, and other languages.

What has kept Dire Gelt alive for more than a hundred years is not only its tune but its spirit. It turns the everyday hardship of being poor and behind on the rent into something you can laugh at, even while it stings. It carries the memory of a time when many Jewish families lived in rented rooms, often hungry, and every visit from the landlord became a small tragicomedy. The melody stays bright through all of it, the kind of humor a people earns by learning to smile at its own troubles.

On this recording Elechka sings the song in Russian, with her own guitar accompaniment. The Russian words keep faith with the original's wry humor while giving it a new life for Russian-speaking listeners. The recording is part of a project that carried these Jewish songs into Russian so that more people could hear and feel them.

These Russian originals are also where the English-language musical film JEWISH grew from. The songs came first, recorded for the RIGLI channel, and the film grew out of them. "No Money for the Rent" has reached well over a hundred thousand listeners on YouTube, and the comments below show how far a small, funny, hard-won song can travel from one home to another.

Lyrics, line by line

The full Russian text of the recording, with a plain English translation under each line.

Нету денег ой ой ой

There is no money, oy oy oy

Нету денег боже мой

There is no money, my God

Кто не платит тот пойдёт

Whoever does not pay, that one will go

По миру с сумой

Out into the world begging with a bag

Мне пришёл по почте пакет

A package came to me by mail

В нём счета за воду и свет

In it the bills for water and electricity

Посижу полистаю а что ещё делать

I will sit, I will leaf through them, and what else is there to do

Если денег нет

If there is no money

Нету денег ой ой ой

There is no money, oy oy oy

Нету денег боже мой

There is no money, my God

Кто не платит тот пойдёт

Whoever does not pay, that one will go

По миру с сумой

Out into the world begging with a bag

Вот хозяин заходит в подъезд

Here the landlord comes into the entrance

Он кричит что наложит арест

He shouts that he will impose a seizure

Каждый месяц одно и тоже

Every month it is one and the same thing

Как ему не надоест

How does he not get tired of it

Нету денег ой ой ой

There is no money, ой ой ой

Нету денег боже мой

There is no money, my God

Кто не платит тот пойдёт

Whoever does not pay, that one will go

По миру с сумой

Out into the world begging with a bag

Сколько могут трубы течь

How long can the pipes keep leaking

Поломалась в кухне печь

The stove in the kitchen has broken down

Пусть хозяин сам заплатит

Let the landlord himself pay

Чтоб жильцов себе сберечь

So as to keep his tenants for himself

Нету денег ой ой ой

There is no money, ой ой ой

Нету денег боже мой

There is no money, my God

Кто не платит тот пойдёт

Whoever does not pay, that one will go

По миру с сумой

Out into the world begging with a bag

Listen on YouTube

Back to Songs

What listeners say

Real comments left under the recording on YouTube, translated into English, with the original Russian beneath each one.

Whatever your nationality, the life of an ordinary person is the same everywhere. It is all clear, right down to the soul. Thank you.

Кто бы ни был ты по национальности, жизнь простого человека везде одинакова. Все понятно до глубины души. Спасибо .

@elenazhulan8977

A grandmother got her grandson hooked on Elechka. Everyone listens.

Бабушка подсадила внука на Элечку. Все слушают 😊

@VlizkoMaryna

I have watched the series about Mishka Yaponets five times now, and there are songs in it. I found Elechka. I am a Russian person, but the tears pour down like hail.

Уже 5 раз смотрю сериал про Мишку Японца, и там песни, нашла, Элечку, я русский человек, но слезы градом льётся

@МаринаАлексеева-гЗщ

My dear mama, forgive me that you are no longer here. They are singing your songs here.

МАМОЧКА МОЯ , ПРОСТИ, ЧТО ТЕБЯ БОЛЬШЕ НЕТ!!! ТУТ ТВОИ ПЕСНИ ПОЮТ....❤️❤️❤️❤️💔😭
😭😭❤️❤️❤️❤️

@lenareshetnikov3470

Thank you! The voice and the words of these songs touch you to the depths of your soul.

Спасибо! Трогают до глубины души голос и слова песен!

@ЛарисаАхметова-кЗл

A very cheerful little song, with a subtle philosophical undertone. Great is the people that can allow itself such splendid irony about itself. And the singer's magical voice completes it all. The voice simply works wonders. Thank you for the emotions and the feelings your songs give us.

Очень веселая песенка, с тонким философским подсмыслом. Велик тот народ который может себе позволить великолепную иронию над самим собой. А волшебный голос исполнительницы довершает ситуацию. Голос просто творит чудеса. Спасибо за те эмоции и чувства которые дарят Ваши песни.

@alexanderluahovich6850

How beautifully you sing. Thank you for all the songs.

Как красиво вы поете.спасибо вам за все песни

@marianubaydullayeva2892

What a voice, it reaches right into the soul.

Какой голос проникающий в душу

@ГалинаАндреевна-ы4л

Very sad and very funny.

Очень грустно и смешно 👍

@valerij1980

A beauty! And what a soul!

Красавица! И душа!

@tatianasavoskina5688

So talented! I listened to all the songs with great pleasure. Thank you so much!

Очень талантливо ! С огромным удовольствием слушала все песни . ОГРОМНОЕ СПАСИБО !!!

@НинаЧерненко-ц5ъ

Thank you so much for your songs! It is such a joy to listen to your voice! I have neither a voice nor an ear for music, but I sing every one of these songs along with you.

Спасибо большое за ваши песни! Такое наслаждение слушать ваш голос!!!!

У меня нет ни голоса, ни музыкального слуха- но пою все песни с вами...

@allamoos1684