

Freedom Tango

JEWISH · Walter J. Kin · Rigli Publishing

<https://jewishthemovie.com/music/russian/freedom-tango>

← Jewish Songs in Russian

Russian Songbook · Sung by Elechka

Танго Освенцима

Freedom Tango

A child's tango, carried out past the wire and sung again, gently, in Russian.

"Freedom Tango" belongs to the Songs of the Holocaust cycle. It is based on the real song known as Tango fun Oshvientshim, a Tango in Auschwitz, set to a pre-war Polish tango melody. According to the National Library of Israel and the Jerusalem Post, its words are attributed to a twelve-year-old named Irka Janowski, who died in Auschwitz; those sources note that she was Polish and not Jewish.

In pre-war Poland the tango was music of youth and of ordinary freedom, and this is remembered as one of the rare songs from the camps that names the place itself. The lyric reaches for a river, a spring, a flute, and at the end an image of freedom flickering past like a white bird beyond the wire. It is said to have been sung quietly in the barracks by prisoners of many nations, and after the war it traveled in Yiddish, German, and Polish before reaching this recording.

Here Elechka sings it in Russian, in a poetic version, not a literal translation but a careful reconstruction that keeps the breath of the original. The recording is part of a project carrying these Jewish songs into Russian, and the English film JEWISH grew out of these originals. It is offered with restraint, as remembrance rather than spectacle.

Lyrics, line by line

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

Фокстрот и танго среди других мелодий

Foxtrot and tango among the other melodies

Мы больше всех любили до войны

We loved most of all before the war

Их грусть была тогда как будто в моде

Their sadness was then as if in fashion

А их слова наивны и нежны

And their words are naive and tender

Но позади остался тихий город
But behind us a quiet town remained
Где мы с тобой бродили у реки
Where you and I wandered by the river
Так спой мне мейдл за лагерным забором
So sing to me, maidl, behind the camp fence
Про выстрелы про печи и штыки
About the gunshots, about the ovens and the bayonets
Это наше танго играй под чёрным дулом
This is our tango, play it under the black gun barrel
Наше танго пой в Освенцинском бараке
Our tango, sing it in the Auschwitz barrack
Чтоб наконец-то в дыму и мраке
So that at last in the smoke and the darkness
Свобода белой птицею мелькнула
Freedom flashed by like a white bird
Это наше танго играй под чёрным дулом
This is our tango, play it under the black gun barrel
Наше танго в Освенцинском бараке
Our tango in the Auschwitz barrack
Чтоб наконец-то в дыму и мраке
So that at last in the smoke and the darkness
Свобода белой птицею мелькнула
Freedom flashed by like a white bird
И вспомнит негр как брал он мандолину
And the Black man will remember how he used to take up the mandolin
И прозвенит неслышно пара нот
And a couple of notes will ring out inaudibly
Француз подхватит и расправит спину
The Frenchman will join in and straighten his back
А третьим англичанин подпоёт
And as the third one the Englishman will sing along

Поляк возьми же маленькую флейту
Pole, do take up the little flute
Она давно охрипла от тоски
It went hoarse long ago from longing
Сыграй про вёсны сыграй про лето
Play about the springtimes, play about the summer
Сыграй ещё про город у реки
Play once more about the town by the river
Это наше танго играй под чёрным дулом
This is our tango, play it under the black gun barrel
Наше танго в Освенцинском бараке
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What listeners say

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

No words.... A deep bow.

Нет слов.... Низкий поклон! 🌸

@marikastojanowsky7292

Thank you, for the remembrance. God and memory will help us survive. Shalom to all people.

Спасибо, за память. Бог и память помогут выжить. Шалом лехоль анашим.

@olegermakov8163

Girls, you are simply wonderful! Moved to tears! Thank you!

Девочки, вы просто чудо! До слёз! Спасибо!

@Витус-ж9г

Thank you, girls! Thank you, Irka and Elya and Olya.

Спасибо, девочки! Спасибо, Ирка и Эля и Оля.

@ivarzmay3749

Thank you. In these days in Israel there are evenings of remembrance for those who perished and suffered in the Shoah, for the few who remain and their relatives.

Спасибо. В эти дни в Израиле проходят вечера памяти погибших и пострадавших в Шоа для немногих оставшихся и их родственников.

@dimadima37

Thank you for the remembrance.

Спасибо за память

@ЮрийАберкон-и2ц

A tragic tango.

Трагическое танго

@ЮрийАберкон-и2ц

This recording has fewer published listener comments; the ones above are what we found that fit.