

Yisrolik

JEWISH · Walter J. Kin · Rigli Publishing

<https://jewishthemovie.com/music/russian/yisrolik>

← Jewish Songs in Russian

Russian Songbook · Sung by Elechka

Исролик

Yisrolik

A small ghetto boy who sells cigarettes, sings, and refuses to be pitied.

"Yisrolik" is remembered as one of the most beloved and most heartbreaking songs to come out of the Holocaust. According to the song's history, it was created in the theater of the Vilna ghetto in 1942, with words by the Yiddish poet Leyb Rozental (1916 to 1945) and music by Misha Veksler (1907 to 1944), the composer and conductor of the ghetto orchestra. Rozental is said to have written it for his younger sister, the singer Khayelev, who is remembered as the first to perform it.

The song gives voice to a boy named Yisrolik, a child of the ghetto who sells cigarettes and saccharine to survive. He is alone, yet he keeps his spirit: he sings, he whistles, he jokes, and he will not let himself be pitied. In his patched coat and galoshes he insists that he is not crying, because, as the lyric puts it, the moment you cry you are lost. He is offered as the voice of countless children whose lives were broken by the war.

Both authors died in the camps and did not live to see the war's end. According to the song's history, after the war Khayelev Rozental carried "Yisrolik" to stages around the world and recorded it in Paris in 1948. Today it is said to be heard at memorial concerts, in Jewish museums, and in theater and school programs, a living reminder of the children whose voices did not disappear.

On this recording, Elechka sings "Yisrolik" in Russian, in a poetic adaptation made for the project that carries these Jewish songs into Russian. The English film JEWISH grew out of these Russian originals.

Lyrics, line by line

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

Купите папиросы отдам почти за так

Buy some cigarettes, I will give them away for almost nothing

И сахарин я б тоже вам продал

And saccharine I would sell you too

Тут жизнь идёт за грошик а если за пятак

Here life goes for a penny, and if for a five-kopeck coin
Для гетто это целый капитал
For the ghetto that is a whole fortune
Я Исролик я вырос в нашем гетто
I am Yisrolik, I grew up in our ghetto
Пусть я мал но привык не быть в долгу
Though I am small, I am used to not being in debt
Ничего за душою нету
I have nothing to my name
Зато я петь умею и свистеть могу
But still I know how to sing and I can whistle
Штаны из мешковины пальто моё с дырой
Trousers of sackcloth, my coat has a hole
Калоши есть но нету башмаков
I have galoshes but I have no shoes
Но если кто посмеет смеяться надо мной
But if anyone dares to laugh at me
Я покажу ему кто я таков
I will show him who I am
Я Исролик я вырос в нашем гетто
I am Yisrolik, I grew up in our ghetto
Пусть я мал но привык не быть в долгу
Though I am small, I am used to not being in debt
Ничего за душою нету
I have nothing to my name
Зато я петь умею и свистеть могу
But still I know how to sing and I can whistle
Я вовсе не бездомный есть мама у меня
I am not homeless at all, I have a mother
И папа есть он звал меня «сынок»
And I have a father, he used to call me "son"
И я совсем не плачу ведь я не размазня

And I am not crying at all, for I am no crybaby
А ветер он ведь тоже одинок
And the wind, after all, is also alone
Я Исролик вам видно показалось
I am Yisrolik, you must have imagined it
Я не плачу заплачешь и пропал
I am not crying, once you start crying you are lost
То что в горе не поможет жалость
That in grief pity will not help
Знает даже тот кто очень мал
Even one who is very small knows this
Я Исролик я вырос в нашем гетто
I am Yisrolik, I grew up in our ghetto
Пусть я мал но привык не быть в долгу
Though I am small, I am used to not being in debt
Ничего за душою нету
I have nothing to my name
Зато я петь умею и свистеть могу
But still I know how to sing and I can whistle
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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.

Thank you so much, Olga, for these songs! Wishing you health and happiness, and God's help!

😊 Ольга, спасибо большое, Вам за песни! Здоровья и счастья, и помощи Божией!

@ГалинаТолстова-ыЗл

Bravo, Elechka, Olechka! What a soul you have. How it knows how to feel, to understand, and to convey it all!

Браво, Элечка, Олечка! Какая же ваша душа! Как она умеет чувствовать, понимать и передавать!

@olgaloze8303

Thank you, dear Olya.

Спасибо Оленька.

@ArtlvRod

Thank you so much for your art, it moved me deeply. But I am not crying: you cry, and you are lost!

Спасибо Вам большое за творчество, очень тронуло, но я не плачу заплачешь и пропал!

@АлексейРОГАЧЕВ-у8к

Laughter through tears.

Смех сквозь слёзы 😞😞😞

@свет-лица

I love it. In my opinion, this is a masterpiece.

А мне нравится, по моему это шедевр.

@МударисТалалайкин

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