RUSS 4360

**Russian Culture through the Prism of Song**

Prof. Stuart Goldberg

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### In this course, songs are both the object of study and a stepping off point for broader discussion and writing as we explore key issues in the last 80+ years of Russian and Soviet culture and history. Materials are presented in a specially designed computer interface. Baseline advanced learners will find rich annotation to help develop a sophisticated understanding of these often not uncomplicated songs, while a broad range of contextual content in various media is provided for directed exploration of the broader cultural context by more fluent reader/listeners who have spent time abroad. Songs run the gamut from 1930s popular music to bards, rock and other contemporary forms.

Some topics to be covered include the fate of the capable individual in Brezhnev’s Russia, gypsy song in Russian culture, Soviet official attitudes toward jazz and other Western musical forms, as well as exploration of the subcultures that formed around them, the history of the Soviet/Russian national anthem, ironic strategies for challenging official discourse, the Soviet experience during World War II, reflections of Putin’s Russia in the songs of the Chechen war, prayer and religion in Russia and the Soviet Union, reflections of camp life, the Soviet-era cult of the hero and its reverberations (Gagarin), glasnost era rock music and youth alienation, complicated love for the motherland, the fate of communism and communists in a post-communist era, satire and its relation to power, the problem of compromise or non-compromise of principles in choosing a career, the problem of emigration, and the fate of the “little man” in capitalist Russia.

Our objectives are improvement in 1) oral and aural proficiency (with a special focus on listening for detail), as well as 2) reading and 3) writing proficiency in Russian at the advanced level, capitalizing on the innovative interface and encounters with a broad range of authentic target-culture texts in various media; 4) the ability to present in class for 10 minutes on the cultural context, sense and significance of an iconic song; 5) in-depth knowledge of select focus areas of Russian culture, 6) sophisticated critical reflection on the complexity and context of songs as cultural objects, and 7) development of ability to compare perspectives and practices both within Russian/Soviet culture and between Russian and American cultures.

Course site: [http://www.clsp.gatech.edu](http://mlg-grant.iac.gatech.edu/Song_Project/index.php)

*Instructions for use of the materials are available in the first section: “Введение: How to use these materials.” Be sure to read them carefully.*

*The course site is fully functional in* ***Mozilla Firefox****,* ***Google Chrome*** *or* ***Opera****. Please choose one of these browsers to connect to the site.*

*Written work can be printed directly from the site (use the feedback or print buttons) or compiled into a Microsoft Word document to be printed later. I suggest that you use Microsoft word for compositions.*

Course requirements: Weighting

Attendance and active, prepared participation in class discussions 20%

Timely and conscientious completion of homework

(corrected but not graded) 20%

Compositions/essays (approx. one/week) 40%

Oral presentation (March 15) 10%

Final essay (due at final exam) 10%

**Summary Schedule:**

Week 1 – Vysotsky’s anti-fairytales. Fate of the talented individual in the era of Stagnation. “Besshabashnaia toska i gusarstvo.”

Week 2 – The gypsy song and gypsies in Russian culture.

Week 3 – 1930s popular music. Tango and jazz. Jazz in Soviet polemics about appropriate musical forms. The mass song.

Week 4 – The Soviet and Russian national anthems in historical perspective and popular performance.

Week 5 – War, part I. Songs of the World War II.

Week 6 – War, part II. Songs of the Second Chechen War. Anti-war songs and neo-patriotism in Putin’s Russia.

Week 7 – Prayer in Russian poetry and song. Okudzhava’s “The Prayer of Francois Villon” and Soviet militant atheism.

Week 8 – Songs of the [labor] camps. Songs of the criminal world.

Week 9 – Gagarin. Gagarin the man and Gagarin the Soviet hero figure par excellence. Gagarin’s death. The Soviet cult of Gagarin and youth reaction (s*tyob*).

Week 10 – *Glasnost’* and youth alienation. Tsoi’s “The Cuckoo.” Covers and remakes. **Student research presentations**.

Week 11 – “Strange love” for the motherland/step-mother in Russian culture. Katya Iarovaya’s “On the Death of Russia.”

Week 12 – Moscow October: 1992-93. Fate of the communists in post-communist Russia. Changing social mores.

Week 13 – Satire and the powers that be in Putin’s Russia. Elections and protests.

Week 14 – Life choices. Question 1: Career or (sub)culture. The “stylish ones” (*stilyagi*). Music on bones (contraband records cut on used x-ray film in the 1950s). Question 2: To emigrate or to “stay put?”

Week 15 – The little man in Russian culture. The “chelnok.” Grisha Danskoy’s “Na verkhnei bokovoi.” Review. **Final paper**.

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| **ML PERFORMANCE GOAL #1: PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION** | |
| **ML Learning Outcome 1 : Demonstrate oral and aural proficiency in the target language** | Students will continue to develop oral and aural proficiency (with a special focus on listening for detail) |
| **ML Learning Outcome 2:** Demonstrate effective presentation skills in the target language | Students will demonstrate the ability to present in class for 10 minutes on the cultural context, sense and significance of an iconic song |
| **ML Learning Outcome 3: Demonstrate writing proficiency in the target language** | Students will demonstrate writing proficiency in Russian at the advanced level, capitalizing on the innovative interface and encounters with a broad range of authentic target-culture texts in various media |
| **ML Learning Outcome 4:**  Demonstrate proficiency in comprehension of authentic written texts in the target Language | Students will improve reading comprehension, focusing on reading authentic texts such as newspaper articles for detail |
| **ML PERFORMANCE GOAL #2: INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE** | |
| **ML Learning Outcome 5: Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a *specific* target-language country or region** | Students will cultivate in-depth knowledge of select focus areas of Russian culture |
| **ML Learning Outcome 6:**  Demonstrate the ability to analyze an issue from target-culture perspective(s) | Students will critically reflect on the complexity and context of songs as cultural objects |
| **ML Learning Outcome 7:**  Demonstrate critical reflection on cultural complexity and context | Students will develop the ability to make sophisticated comparisons of perspectives and practices both within Russian/Soviet culture and between Russian and American cultures |