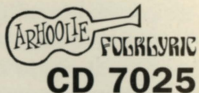


PAWLO HUMENIUK

King of the Ukrainian Fiddlers 1925-1927



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(I'm A Good Looking Cossack)
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(I Love this Girl)
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22. Do Poczajewa Na Widpust
(Pilgrimage to Pochayiv)
23. Dumka Y Kolomyika
(Dumka and Kolomyika)

Pawlo Humeniuk – fiddle (on all selections), with various accompaniments.

#1, 2, 3, 12, 13, 14, 15, 21, & 23 are instrumentals.
#4, 5, 8, 9, 16, 17 & 19 with Ewgen Zukowsky
& Nasza Roza Krasnowska on vocals.
#6, 7, 10, 11, 18, & 22 with Ewgen Zukowsky
on vocals.

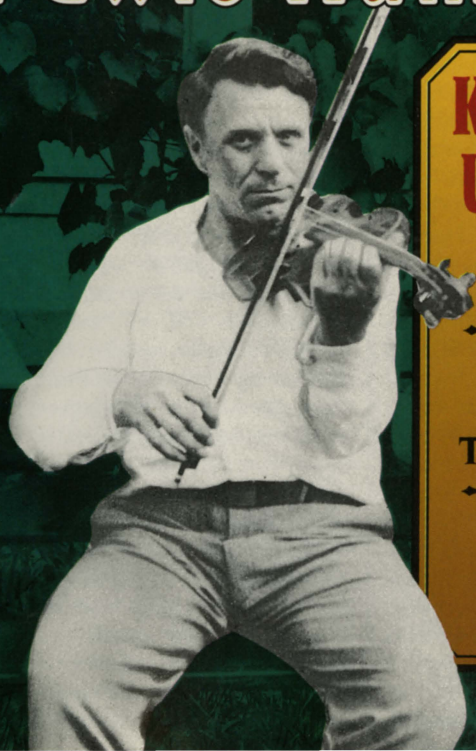
All recordings made in New York City, 1925 – 1927.

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Pawlo Humeniuk



King of the
Ukrainian
Fiddlers

NEW YORK
1925-1927

The Early Years



Pawlo Humeniuk

King of the Ukrainian Fiddlers

Pawlo Humeniuk was one of the major fiddlers of his time. His more than 250 surviving recordings place him on a level with Clark Kessinger, Clayton McMichen and Eck Robertson, even if they were as ignorant of him as he was of them. However, like them, Humeniuk's inspired legacy of recorded work bears witness to the depth and scope of his musicianship.

An undated obituary from the Ukrainian-language daily *Svoboda* of Jersey City, NJ, gives Humeniuk's birthplace as Pidvolochyska, a village in Western Ukraine. He was eighty at the time of his death on January 24, 1965; we may infer that he was born in 1884. He arrived in the United States around 1902 and studied violin with a Professor Makhnovetsky, a graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Though he was in demand for weddings, concerts and other Ukrainian social events, the shifting instrumentation from one record date to another suggests that he didn't employ a band on a regular basis, instead working each date with avail-

able musicians.

The late Myron Surmach remembered that Humeniuk was a skilled instrument maker and repairer. An early undated catalog from the Homenick Brothers Violin Shop printed in both Ukrainian and Polish bears this out, as do memories of Lucy Humeniuk Colligan, who attests that her father rode the subway from his home in Queens to the shop every day until his retirement, around 1960. She grew up in the 1930s with the sound of his violin in the evenings as he walked from room to room, plucking on the strings, whistling and humming, recollecting old tunes and transcribing new ones on music paper.

Surmach himself was a Ukraine-born bookshop owner and music retailer who worked out of several locations in New York's lower east side, from the time of his first store in 1916 to his death in 1991. As Ukrainian-language records became available from Victor and Columbia in the mid-to-late 1910s, he carried them for sale. At first, the records were formally conven-

tional performances of popular and standard material, along with concert arrangements of folk songs performed by trained singers. The records failed to reflect the tastes of Surmach customers who had grown up in rural villages, and who treasured the old world musical and ceremonial traditions that served as precious mementos for people making radical readjustment to new world circumstances.

Surmach and Humeniuk became friends in the early 1920s. One day in 1925, they were informally visiting in the bookshop when a record company representative dropped in. The company had been trying without notable success to market a line of Ukrainian discs, drawn from masters produced in Europe. There was no village music on these records and the man said he would like to record musicians capable of playing it. Of course he was introduced to Humeniuk and the two negotiated a record date on December 3, 1925. Humeniuk assembled an energetic quartet for the occasion, which turned out four traditional village dance tunes, two *kolomyikas* and two *kozachoks*. (The first three selections on this CD are from this session.) Few traditional Slavic fid-

dlers had been previously recorded in Europe or America, and none of them rivalled Humeniuk's combination of technical accomplishment and fiery enthusiasm.

Despite having been recorded by the old-fashioned acoustical method, the first Humeniuk records sold well enough to attract the attention of a rival company which had been using the new Western Electric recording techniques since April 1925. Their records by comic actor and singer Ewgen Zukowsky had been good sellers, though his broad humor and double entendres were viewed with alarm by at least some Ukrainian culture brokers, who thought him dangerously undignified. Zukowsky and a superbly cracked-voice singer named Nasza Roza Krasnowska joined forces with Humeniuk around April 1926 for one of the latter's next releases, "Ukrainske Wesilia," a two-sided dramatization of an old world wedding, complete with toasts, tears and music. Though it was on a relatively expensive (\$1.25) twelve-inch disc, customers of various nationalities bought the record, hearing echoes of their own memories, even when they didn't understand

Ukrainian. Claims for total sales of between 100,000 and 150,000 copies have been made, though no documents exist to support or refute them. Still, even a figure half that size would have been phenomenal for the times, and the fact that "Ukrainske Wesilia" was kept in print for a quarter century attested to its enduring appeal. Its success ensured a welcome for Pawlo Humeniuk (along with Zukowsky and Krasnowska) in the studios for the next decade.

Wedding and wedding-related themes formed a central part of Ukrainian village and rural life, as nuptial observances provided the means for entire communities to gather and celebrate. "Ukrainske Wesilia" opened the way for further skits, *kolomyikas* and dance tunes that commemorated wedding activities. The Humeniuk records from 1925 to 1927 proved so popular that he was engaged to record Polish-language dance tunes and wedding skits, including a number of polkas made with an eye towards the even broader international music market, but the best records continued to feature traditional Ukrainian dance tunes and songs, particularly the *kolomyikas* and *kozachoks*.

(Portions of the foregoing are drawn from my article, "Pawlo Humeniuk" in *Musical Traditions*, No. 10, Spring 1992, pp. 13-16.)

(Dick Spottswood)

The Selections:

Pawlo Humeniuk – fiddle on all selections.

#1, 2 & 3: With clarinet, trombone and piano, recorded December 3, 1925. The *kolomyika* is a Ukrainian dance of many centuries' standing which originated in the Hutsul region of the Carpathians in the southwestern part of the country. Its name derives from the town of Kolomyia. The *kozachok* is a lively folk dance which originated in the Kozak State of Ukraine in the 16th to 18th centuries.

#4 & 5: With guitar, drum and tambourine, Ewgen Zukowsky and Nasza Roza Krasnowska – vocals, recorded ca. April 1926. As the wedding guests arrive, the matchmaker brings the ornamental wedding loaf and the bride's mother sighs about being a good housewife. Bells announce the beginning of the ceremony and the bride and groom kneel to receive their parents' blessings. The bride's father proclaims, "I can't offer silver and gold, but I

do pray for your good fortune. May you be healthy as spring water, joyful as the spring and rich as the Holy Land." Both mother and daughter are weeping when the best man interrupts to suggest that everyone sing a happy tune.

#6 & 7: With second violin(s), trombone and brass bass, Ewgen Zukowsky – vocal, recorded May 1926. (6) The ritual of weaving garlands for both bride and groom takes place on the Thursday before a Sunday wedding. Friends attend to provide cheerful conversation and sing familiar songs. In this skit, the tearful bride is consoled by a song of two ducklings with beautiful grey eyes. Then the groom sings that he's getting married because he's tired of being single.

(7) The young men are unhappy that the musicians are late. When they appear, the singing begins as the suitor begs his intended not to refuse him. He heaps compliments on her, though he adds that, "the girl who is too choosy is not too smart."

#8 & 9: With guitar and drum, Ewgen Zukowsky and Nasza Roza Krasnowska – vocals, recorded September 1926. While the newlyweds are on their honeymoon, wed-

ding guests and musicians join the family for a post-nuptial celebration. The matchmakers wish everyone a good life and enjoin the guests to sow and till for a good harvest, so that they will have enough honey, wine and moonshine. The parents are done with the duties of the wedding. Now they can relax; this is their party, though they continue to make sure that all present have enough to eat and drink.

This custom has become all but extinct; in the old days, the party after the wedding could last for a week. As this one draws to a close, the mother of the groom tells her husband they should go home. He resists, saying that the musicians are playing and the matchmaker is singing: "Now isn't the time to pick mushrooms nor love the girls; autumn is the time."

#10 & 11: With trombone and piano, Ewgen Zukowsky – vocal, recorded September 1926.

(10) The shepherd is urged 'o leave his herd, but he claims that he must rustle sheep to stay alive and to give himself the chance to find a good woman.

(11) The Hutsuls live in the eastern part of the Ukrainian Carpathians. In this *kolomyika/hutzulka*, Zukowsky sings about

playing his *supylka* (shepherd's flute) at village dances and adds, "A Hutsul woman gave me birth, so I'll marry a Hutsul girl."

#12, 13, 14 & 15: With cymbal and string bass, recorded November 1926. This session of four tunes highlights Humeniuk's instrumental skills, and it features him at his brilliant best, against a simple background of traditional village instruments. "Tanec Pid Werbamy" and "Oj Kozacze Bilousyj" are medleys of *kolomyikas* and *kozachoks*. The former was deservedly cited in the *Svoboda* obituary as one of the fiddler's most celebrated recordings; as an exercise in verve and virtuosity, it would be hard to match. The remaining tunes are four-part *kolomyikas*; "Na Wesiliu, Pry Weczeri" is preceded by a *dumka*, or traditional air.

#16 & 17: With guitar, drum, tambourine, Ewgen Zukowsky and Nasza Roza Krasnowska – vocals, recorded December 1926. The curtains open with a discussion by the godparents on the merits of cooking soup with chicken or pike. Church bells summon them to the baptism as they argue over naming the baby boy: Father prefers Ivan, while Mother insists on Hryts.

Mother wins, but Father celebrates the new name with a song anyway. When they return home, Father proposes a toast as the godparents flirt with each other, pour beer for the musicians, and sing and dance.

#18: With accordion, Ewgen Zukowsky – vocal, recorded January 1927. As "Reb Duvid's Nign," this widely known old-time Yiddish dance tune can also be heard on early Polish and Swedish recordings. Zukowsky sings some Yiddish-esque scat and some informal Ukrainian lyrics which hint at borrowing from different people.

#19 & 20: With two second violins and accordion, Ewgen Zukowsky and Nasza Roza Krasnowska – vocals, recorded February 1927. (19) This four-part (ABACD) *kolomyika* begins after a wedding guest approaches the best man to ask that the musicians come out of the house to play for dancing. The host agrees, but only for two dances.

(20) This song tells of the courtship between a pair of doves in the beautiful oak forest. Then a young man asks the musicians for a *kozachok*.

#21: With two second violins, accordion and trombone, recorded February 1927. This

melody is one of the best loved in all Ukraine. Although this is an instrumental version, its lyric describes a smitten bandura player singing of his love for a beautiful brown-eyed maid. For her eyes, he would forsake his soul and he begs that she exchange her heart for his.

The Ukrainian *bandura* is a member of the lute family with fretted bass strings stretched along the neck and unfretted treble strings along the top of the sound board.

#22: With guitar, drum, tambourine and *lyra* (hurdy-gurdy), Ewgen Zukowsky-vocal, recorded March 1927. At a party in a pasture, a young man sings a *kolomyika* to the girl who has rejected him, asking for some powerful herbs to make him forget her. Then a blind minstrel with a *lyra* appears. He is on a pilgrimage to the monastery in Pochayiv, the site of a 15th century miracle.

His *duma* (or narrative air) tells of an old man who plants a guelder rose in the meadow as a poor widow gives birth to a son. She cries constantly, since there is no one she can turn to for help. The young man interrupts, saying that the song is spoiling the party and making the young

girls sad, and responds with a happy verse about his girl friend.

#23: With mandolin and guitar, recorded May 1927. The *dumka* is an instrumental equivalent of the *duma*. This short one is followed by a four-part *kolomyika*.

(Stefan Maksymjuk)

Discography:

1: 73810A/15535; 2: 73809A/15535; 3: 73808A/15534; 4: 205459-1/70002; 5: 205460-1/70002; 6: 106766-2/27055; 7: 106765-3/27055; 8: 107159-2/27070; 9: 107160-3/27070; 10: 107161-1/27071; 11: 107162-2/27071; 12: 107300-1/27078; 13: 107301-2/27078; 14: 107302-1/27084; 15: 107303-2/27084; 16: 205516-3/70004; 17: 205517-3/70004; 18: 107533-2/27085; 19: 107628-2/27087; 20: 107629-2/27087; 21: 107667-2/27089; 22: 107739-2/27091; 23: 107917-1/27100

Produced by Stefan Maksymjuk and Dick Spottswood
Transfer of 78s by Jack Towers, with sound restoration by George Morrow, using the No-Noise system.

Chris Strachwitz – executive producer
Cover photo courtesy Lucy Humeniuk Colligan
This CD is released by contractual agreement with Lucy Humeniuk Colligan, Pawlo Humeniuk's daughter.

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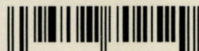
Over 70 Minutes of Historic UKRAINIAN FIDDLE MUSIC

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