Dzintars

songs of amber

The Latvian Women's Choir
Latvia, a small country on the Baltic Sea, celebrated its twenty-second year of independence in 1940, when the "non-aggression" pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union was signed. Within a year, the Soviet army occupied the Baltic States (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania), which were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union. Today, thanks to glasnost, the Baltic States have begun their struggle to regain independence.

The struggle for national identity and political independence is often reflected and reinforced in folk song. Though a few older sources exist, collections of Latvian folk music and song were made during the mid-to-late 19th century as one branch of a general interest in Latvian history, language, and tradition - all of which had, since earliest times, been intertwined with those of its neighbors. Andrejs Jurjans and Emilis Melngailis were major figures in this collection effort at the turn of the century. Today, the folk song collection at the Latvian Academy of Sciences comprises about 1,500,000 song texts and 30,000 melodies - an extraordinarily rich heritage.

Many choirs and folk dance groups continue to perform this material, both in rural, traditional settings, and in urban, modern ones. Some composers have harmonized or arranged many volumes full of folk song settings. Other composers have preferred to compose new settings of traditional texts, with varying amounts of folkloric feeling. On this disc are examples of both of these styles, as performed by Latvia’s leading female choir, Dzintars.

*Dzintar* is the Latvian word for amber, fossilized pine pitch turned into a warmly glowing semi-precious stone. Amber is considered very special among Latvians, worn in necklaces, bracelets, and rings. As a symbol of national identity, it stands for beauty, openness, and freedom. The Dzintars choir was founded in 1947 and has become a highly acclaimed professional artistic group. They are skilled professional singers, and
include in their repertoire traditional and modern Latvian songs, and folk songs of other nations (several of which are represented here). Under the direction of Imants Cepitis and Ausma Derkevica, the unique sounds of Latvian music have been heard and acclaimed both at home and abroad. They have won numerous awards and prizes, including a Gold Diploma in the Bartok Competition (Hungary, 1968), Grand Prix (Hague, 1977), and similar awards in Germany, Great Britain, and other countries.

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The songs on this disc provide a cross-section of the Dzintars’ music, and allow us to explore the remarkable musicality of this talented group. At the recording session at Lucasfilm’s Skywalker Ranch, they shared with us some of the music that they brought to the United States during their 1989 tour. Included are arrangements or "settings" of traditional folk songs ("Blow, Wind, Blow," "The Sun Moves Quickly," "Breaking Flax," "A Forest Shook From Dancing," "Where Have You Been, Brother?," "Orphan In White," "Christmas Masquerade"), and even
avant-garde new songs by young Latvian composers ("Song Of The Wind," "Autumn Landscape," "The Tomtit’s Message"). To represent folk songs of other nations, they chose one modern Russian setting ("So Silent Is The Ukrainian Night") and three Yiddish folk song settings ("Sleep, My Child," "Di Raike," "Oi Hanuke"). We have given the composer or arranger’s name whenever possible. Included in the troupe were 76 singers, 2 conductors, 2 accompanists, 2 choir masters, and 1 soloist.

The Dzintars are, in alphabetical order:


Imants Cepitis Chief Conductor
Ausma Derkevica Conductor
Ruta Vintule Accompanist, piano
Aivars Kalejs Organist
Gunta Malevica Choir Master
Anna Savickaja Assistant Choir Master
Inesse Galante Soloist, Latvian State Opera and Ballet Theatre

The Dzintars are, in alphabetical order:
Produced by Mickey Hart & Jerry Garcia
Recorded at Skywalker Ranch Soundstage on April 27, 1989
Engineered by Tom Flye
Assistant Engineers are Jeff Sterling and MT Silvia
Mixed at Front Street Studio, September 27-October 2, 1989
"Breaking Flax," "Where Have You Been, Brother?," and "The Tomtit's Message"
Mixed at Studio X, Petaluma CA Nov 15, 1989
Engineered by Tom Flye
Assistant Engineers are Jeff Sterling and Kris Wiskes
Vice-Minister of Culture, Republic Of Latvia: Nellija Janaus
Interpreter Extraordinaire: Olga Lisagor
Series Ethnomusicology Consultant: Fredric Lieberman
Liner Notes: Laura Rokpelne
Black & White Snow Photo: Halina Krukowski
Color Photos: John Werner
Package Design: Steven Jurgensmeyer
Digital Mastering: Joe Gastwirt

Special Thanks to George Lucas, Jane Bay, Tom Scott, Doug Norby, Robin Dietrich Veasey, Rikki Didier (& the Kitchen Crew), Tami Butcher, John Boyd, Bob Heilman, Daira Cilnes, Halina Krukowski, Atesh Sonneborn, Kathy Newton, Sergio Lub, Dan Stockbeck, Judith Stockbeck and Terrence Yallop.

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Traditional arrangements by Dzintars

TECH NOTES:

The Dzintars choir was recorded utilizing near and far field miking techniques. The near field microphones were Neumann U87's and KM 84s. The soloist mic was a KM 86. Far field microphones included: a Neumann SM69 stereo mic from the conductor's perspective, a pair of AKG C12s at mid-room, and a pair of Brüel & Kjær 4003s in the rear of the room. A Neve V-Series console was used for preamps and was routed to a Studer 820 24-track analog tape recorder, utilizing Dolby SR noise reduction. The master 24-track tape was mixed from a Studer 820, through a Neve V-Series console, to an Ampex ATR 100 1/4 inch 2-track, except "Breaking Flax," "Where Have You Been, Brother?," and "The Tomtit's Message" which were mixed from a Studer A80 through a Neve 8058 to an MCI JH110 1/4 inch 2-track, both processes using Dolby SR noise reduction. This analog 2-track master was transferred to 1630 digital format to create 1630 digital masters for CD.
DZINTARS
Songs Of Amber

1. Blow, Wind, Blow 3:10
2. Breaking Flax 2:10
3. The Sun Moves Quickly 3:07
4. Sleep My Child 3:21
5. Song Of The Wind 2:10
6. So Silent Is The Ukrainian Night 2:32
7. The Forest Shook From Dancing 2:10
8. Where Have You Been, Brother? 2:28
9. Orphan Girl In White 4:13
10. Di Raike 1:52
11. Christmas Masquerade (Mummy Song) 2:32
12. Oi Hanuke 1:33
13. Autumn Landscape 2:17
14. The Tomtit's Message 5:19

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