

# Yale's Singing Ambassadors

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Boston

Cultural exchange, whether official or unofficial, must have already jolted some of our habitual condescension toward the arts as international lines of communication. And when an American university group equips itself to perform with the musical and verbal fluency of the Yale Russian Chorus—then the old chestnut about carrying coals to Newcastle becomes fresh and alive and hot with meaning.

At Jordan Hall on Sunday afternoon this remarkable interracial group of 28 men—undergraduates, graduates, and faculty of Yale—went through a formidable repertoire of Russian liturgical, classical, and folk music with an authenticity calling to mind the old Don Cossacks under Sergej Jarov.

True, these Americans don't whinny the high tenor or rattle the low bass parts quite the way the Cossacks did. But they cover the music's enormous range in both pitch and dynamics; and they do so with an even blend, a rousing attack, and a ready gallop that calls for no apology whatever. It is not surprising that they ran off with a French festival prize last summer.

What any chorus does to shape communication is largely what it learns from its director, and in Denis Mickiewicz this

chorus is blessed with a director of remarkable articulacy. Mr. Mickiewicz is technically unorthodox in some of his springy, all-out gesturing, and might at moments be emulating the Danny Kaye flair. But his approach is expressively consistent with the music and with itself, and it gets stupendous results.

How far these people have moved from the embryonic idealism, existing no doubt on many campuses, that aims to take something of American thinking and conviction and put it into language wholly understandable by Russians! The Yale Russian Chorus has been working toward this objective since 1958, when they made the first of four tours so far in Europe and the Soviet Union.



Their superb musicianship has been further implemented in these contacts by an ability to discuss current problems with their hosts in the Russian language. This has required not only idealism, but eminently practical discipline, and undoubtedly many individual sacrifices.

Mr. Mickiewicz has been able to put together and to train a chorus whose soloists show many individual facets of style—sinewy here, throaty there, and Slavic about everywhere—and yet whose ensem-

ble can produce a number of similarly authentic colors with rich homogeneity.

It was somehow startling, at the end of the program, to have a group which had identified itself so thoroughly with Russian music break into three Negro spirituals for encores. As Joshua fit de battle of Jericho, we weren't quite sure any more who was exchanging culture with whom. And of course it didn't matter, because the walls in any case were tumbling down.