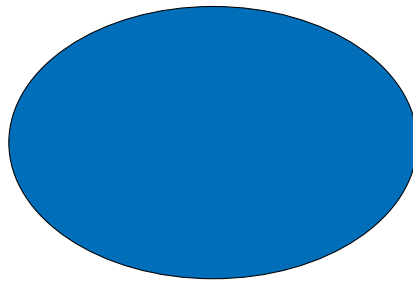


FOUR CENTURIES

Russian Poetry in Translation



№ 26, 2021



Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation

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Contents

Preface. The <i>Four Centuries</i> library	5
--	---

XIX

Ivan Krylov – Иван Крылов

<i>Swan, Crawfish and Pike</i>	6
<i>Mouse and Rat</i>	6
<i>Quartet</i>	7
<i>Farmer and Donkey</i>	8

Translated into English by Irene Gersch
Перевод на английский Ирины Герш

XX

Aleksei Kruchyonykh – Алексей Крученых

<i>American Grimace</i>	9
<i>In a Gambling House</i>	9

Translated into English by James L. Richie
Перевод на английский Джеймса Л. Ричи

Vyacheslav Kupriyanov – Вячеслав Куприянов

<i>Сълзите на света</i>	10
<i>Памет</i>	10
<i>Теория на отражението</i>	11
<i>Пейзаж с полифем</i>	12
(No title)	12
<i>Идва време</i>	13
<i>Обяви</i>	13
<i>Благословение</i>	14

Translated into Bulgarian by Roman Kissiov
Перевод на болгарский Романа Кисова

Mikhail Aizenberg – Михаил Айзенберг	
<i>Moscow – the festive capital ...</i>	15
<i>Red, orange, cleverly arranged ...</i>	15
<i>And the day still goes on, still lingers ...</i>	16
Translated into English by Boris Kokotov	
Перевод на английский Бориса Кокотова	
In memoriam	17
Eugene Dubnov – Евгений Дубнов	
<i>Suite in Three Movements</i>	18
<i>Exile</i>	19
<i>Assniation</i>	19
Translated into English by Anne Stevenson and the author	
Перевод на английский Анны Стивенсон и автора	
Vladimir Stockman – Владимир Штокман	
<i>Малко по-близо до небето</i>	21
<i>Requiem aeternam</i>	21
Translated into Bulgarian by Roman Kissiov	
Перевод на болгарский Романа Кисова	
Viktor Ivaniv – Виктор Іванів	
<i>Irgendwann hatte ich ...</i> (first translation)	23
<i>Irgendwann hatte ich ...</i> (second translation)	24
Translated into German by Daniil Fockin	
Перевод на немецкий Данила Фокина	
References	25

(The choice of colors for different languages is random and has nothing to do either with national flags or traditions.)

The Four Centuries Library

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for reading our magazine. Concurrent with the *Four Centuries* journal, Perelmuter Verlag is also creating a library of Russian poetry in translation – the *Four Centuries Library*. The ambitious goal of this project is to collect books, periodicals and other papers with Russian poetry, old and new, translated into different languages, and finally to donate the collection as a whole to a university or public library. You can join me in my efforts to implement this idea by sending your donations in the following categories:

- Monographic poetry collections by separate poets translated into different languages;
- Anthologies of Russian poetry translations;
- Periodicals with translations of Russian poetry.

Please, send your donations to:

Dr. Ilya Perelmuter
Erikapfad 7
45133 Essen, Germany

The list of all the gifts with the names of the contributors will be published in *Four Centuries*.
Thanks a lot for your support in advance!

Yours,
Publisher

Ivan Krylov (1769–1844)
ИВАН КРЫЛОВ (1769–1844)

Translated into English by Irene Gersch
© Irene Gersch, translation, 2021

Swan, Crawfish and Pike

When partners can't agree,
Their venture can't succeed.
The only outcome is a fiasco.
Once upon a time, Swan, Crawfish, and Pike
Signed up to move a loaded cart.
They put a harness on and started pulling hard.
They promised their bestest to deliver.
The load was light, barely few pounds,
But Swan was taking off for clouds,
Crawfish was backing up, and Pike was aiming for the river.
Who's wrong? Who's right? We're not to rub anybody's nose,
But to this day the cart is still exactly where it was.

1814

Mouse and Rat

“I have the news to make you smile!”
Said Mouse to her neighbor Rat,
“I heard that Cat is in the claws of Lion;
From now on, we need not be afraid.”
“Don't yet rejoice, sweetheart,”
Responded Rat,
“Just keep your fingers crossed.
When fighting starts,
Our Lion is toast;
No beast is scarier than Cat!”

I've seen it many times,
And mark my words:
When a wimp is scared,
He feels his fear is shared
By the entire world.

1816

Quartet

Prankster Monkey,
Clubfoot Bear,
Bearded Goat,
And stubborn Donkey
Had time to spare and, why not,
Arranged to play a quartet.
Obtained the score, a bass, a viola, two violins,
Then found a shady spot, et voilà, so it begins,
All's in place for the grand event.
They started and – disaster, I'm afraid!
“Wait, friends,” screamed Monkey, “Slow down!
We must be seated right for the proper sound.
You two sit opposite each other,
And I'll switch places with the second violin.
The harmony will happen, brothers!
Then trees and hills will dance and spin!”
They switched and bowed again at once.
Result? A dissonance.
Donkey yelled insisting that he found
The secret. The players should assemble in a line.
This sure would improve the sound,
And every note would ring divine.
The quartet followed the advice.
Now what? No change to no surprise.
They started arguing about the seating choice.
It so happened, Nightingale flew by,
attracted by the noise. Our gang then pleaded with the pro
To take the time and solve the riddle,
“Maestro, what is wrong? We have the score,
The bass, the alto, two Amati fiddles.
Just tell us who should be seated in the middle?”
Nightingale replied, “Mes chéris,
Music is the high vocation,
You need a good ear for intonation,
And training obviously is the key.
Regardless of your chair positions,
My dear, you are no musicians!”

1811

Farmer and Donkey

Farmer hired Jack-the-Donkey for a fair price
To guard his garden patch,
To scare off hungry birds, to be precise.
Jack's character was well above reproach,
Not ever mixed up in a crime,
Jack wouldn't munch on greens or steal a dime.
He chased away birds with a fervent zeal,
But Farmer's profits came to zero, nil.
While racing after sparrows and crows
Along the cabbage patches and across,
Jack wouldn't stay a single minute still
And trampled crops right down to the roots.
Once Farmer saw the fruits
Of his hard labor wiped,
He paid Jack back with lashes on his hide,
While onlookers yelled, "Go get that stupid Ass!
Who says he has the smarts
For such a task?"

And I'd say, not to defend our Jack,
He is at fault (and he has paid his dues),
It only seems the one without a clue,
Who hired Ass to do the job, is guilty too.

1819

[Irene Gersch](#) left Russia in 1974, shortly after graduating from Moscow University in applied mathematics. She managed to have a career doing statistical analysis in the insurance industry. She splits her time between Western NY in summer and Palm Coast, Florida the rest of the year. She started translating Russian poetry into English two years ago.

Aleksei Kruchyonykh (1886–1968)

Алексей Крученых (1886–1968)

Translated into English by James L. Richie
© James L. Richie, translation, 2021

American Grimace

Isn't it strange, really?
The tubes and skyscrapers in the background
As if sick hearts
Are served for breakfast?
 In red gauze?

In a Gambling House

With a hot needle
Unstoppable waves
Go through to the brain
The whip drives through the sect
 Of colorful parrots
 In a motley flock
And there with the chains of marriage
Before the Golden Calf, I bind
The kinds of absurd people
The insignificant soul for the merchant.

[James L. Richie](#) was born in Stillwater, Minnesota. He has published translations of Italian and Spanish poetry in *Ezra. An Online Journal of Translation*.

Vyacheslav Kupriyanov (1939)

Вячеслав Куприянов (1939)

Translated into Bulgarian by Roman Kissiov

© Vyacheslav Kupriyanov, poems, 2021

© Roman Kissiov, translation, 2021

Сълзите на света

Все още не познавайки мировата скръб
но вече усещайки студа на света
и плашейки се от непрогледната му нощ
с чисти сълзи плачат децата

И вече възрастни в края на живота
защо са пораснали без да разбират
в бягството на времето отделяйки минутата
те плачат със тъмни тежки сълзи

И все пак всички плачат различно –
нечий плач е разменна малка монета
а у други и сълзите са златни
тях ги поставят в касичка отделно

Гледайки хората – и ангелите плачат
сълзите им са снежинки в Рождественската вечер
а в обикновени дни сълзите им са грижата
да поддържат нивото на световния океан

Памет

Седем града са спорили за правото
да се считат за родно място на Омир,
а той е зависел от случаен водач,
но сам е бил родно място
на „Илиада“ и „Одисея“.

Овидий е бил прокуден от Рим в изгнание
не в Малка Скития,
а в необятната съвременност,
и ако той е с нас от месец на месец,
причината за това е „Изкуството на любовта“,
а не гневът на Октавиан Август.

Времето уголемява този,
който е казал своята дума.
Неговият глас
звучи във всяка правдива реч.
Той улавя умовете
и ги пуска в морето на живота
с духовна храна.
Мрежата на паметта му
е крепка, като звездното небе.

Върху картите на света
времето изтрива границите
на свещените империи.
Непреходните
черти на Ада и Рая,
видени на земята
от стария Данте.

Теория на отражението

Стани огледало и отрази
всичко на земята и на небето
отрази слънцето
и ще видиш как
зайчета попадат
в очите на неразумни деца.

И децата
хвърлят камъни в отговор
и майките им крещат:
– Престанете!
Счупеното огледало
носи нещастие!
И ето че камък те удря
и те изкривява
и ти отразяваш ударите
и времето
когато децата порастват
отразяваш пространството
изкривено
от вражди.

И трябва със своята кривина
да изправиш кривините на света

да изправиш душите
така да отразиш изкривените лица
че да не остане камък на камък
от всичко
което ги изкривява.

Пейзаж с полифем

Всичко това е отразено:

Сизиф търкаля своя камък
Икар пада в морето
Прометей е прикован към скалата

И безгрижно се забавляват
доисторически нимфи
аполитични фавни

във възторг
от мимолетността на живота

Всичко това е отразено
в кръвоизлива
на самотното око на Полифем

което ето-ето ще бъде овъглено
от търсеция своята родина
странник Одисей

* * *

Удивен ангел
приличащ на самотно дърво
стои на вятъра
и грее над снега
измръзналите си при полета
невидими крила

той се страхува
да повдигне отново очи към звездите
защото те нашепват
едно и също: това е
твоята
родина

Идва време

Изпята е твоята песен
Славею
Идва време на
Гарвановия грак
Вълчия вой
Змийския шип
Смеха на хиената
Мечешките услуги
Крокодилските сълзи

Лъвския
Пай

Обяви

Утре
във всички кинозалони –
нелетящо време
възможни са бури

В 13.00
местно предаване
ще излъчва шумолене на листа

По първа програма
на цветната телевизия
ще бъде показан
миналогодишен сняг

По многобройни
молби на читатели
във всички вестници
ще бъде публикувана
таблицата за умножение

Благословение

Да прибавиш
към ежедневните грижи

отварянето на вратата
сбъдването на мечтата
сътворяването
на света

Vyacheslav Kupriyanov is a well-known Russian poet and translator. He graduated from the Moscow Foreign Languages Institute in 1967. He is a member of the Russian & Serbian Writers Unions. He is a recipient of a great number of literary awards in Russia, Italy, Serbia, Japan and other countries. His last book was published in 2019 by BSG-Press.

Roman Kissiov was born in Kazanlak, Bulgaria in 1962. He is a poet, translator and artist. His works have been published and translated in more than twenty languages. He has taken part in many prestigious international poetry festivals. Roman Kissiov lives and works in Sofia.

Mikhail Aizenberg
Михаил Айзенберг

Translated into English by Boris Kokotov

© Mikhail Aizenberg, poems, 2021

© Boris Kokotov, translation, 2021

* * *

Moscow – the festive capital,
never-ending fireworks.
Look, the white exploding rapidly
overpowers the black dome.

All we need on our holidays –
tinsels, streamers, confetti.
Other stuff, whoever called for it,
we don't really want to see.

Expectations are relentlessly
on the air in the news.
Fireworker forwards messages
and his deputy salutes.

How to get out of a goggle-box
colonized by talking heads
someone who is not insulting us
with suspicion and contempt,

as if we were the Soviet punks
or the treacherous half-wits –
telling us in a foreign tongue
that it's not the time to quit.

Yet the time is so precarious
that we're failing to address
children being chased by rats,
water's up to their chest.

* * *

Red, orange, cleverly arranged
on crumpled wings with ashy edging.

Night butterfly's futile attempts
to keep itself away from danger.
But silence offers no remedy
from the tickle keeping us awake.
It's getting dark so fast already!
Perhaps it's time to turn clocks back.

Let's save to memory all this:
late summer stillness, a quiet setting.
Towards the end of the armistice
tranquility becomes deceptive.
As rumors swiftly multiply
we dare not confront the trouble
that like a kite is passing by
incomprehensible and subtle.

* * *

And the day still goes on, still lingers.
As if blind, in every pit it falls
searching for and tortured by the headlines,
leaves behind an atmospheric trail.

All my troubles are hanging in the air
like a ski run ready to recede
in the open going nowhere.
I'm not obliging, God forbid.

Guilty, but refuse to kowtow.
Learned my lesson but not saying thanks.
I don't melt like sugar anyhow
and I only speak to someone else.

[Mikhail Aizenberg](#) is a poet, literary critic, and essayist. Born in Moscow in 1948, he graduated from the Moscow Architecture Institute. His works appeared in periodicals, almanacs and anthologies. He is the author of ten books of poetry and five books of essays. His poems and essays were translated into many European languages. Mikhail Aizenberg is the recipient of numerous literary awards in Russia including the Andrey Bely Prize (2003) and the Moskovsky Schet Grand Prize (2016). He lives in Moscow.

[Boris Kokotov](#) is a poet and translator. He is the author of several poetry collections in Russian language. His translations from German Romantics were published in the anthology *The Century of Translation* in Moscow. His translation of Louise Glück's *The Wild Iris* was published in 2012 (Vodoley, Moscow). His original work in English and translations into English appeared in *Adelaide*, *Blackbird*, *Constellations*, *Poet Lore* and *Washington Square Review*, among others. He lives in Baltimore.

In memoriam

When in 2012 our magazine was launched I could not predict that so many authors and translators from different countries would be ready to publish their work in *Four Centuries*. Working together with them has always made me really happy. Unfortunately alongside with enjoyment we have to face heavy losses. Seven of our authors have passed away since the start of the magazine. As a publisher I have promised myself not to forget them and try to go back to their poetry: to find the opportunity to publish them again in our magazine. I am really glad that my wish has come true for the three poets published below in this issue.

Ilya Perelmuter, publisher

Eugene Dubnov (1949–2019)
ЕВГЕНИЙ ДУБНОВ (1949–2019)

Translated into English by Anne Stevenson with the author
© Eugene Dubnov, poems
© Ann Stevenson and Eugene Dubnov, translation

Suite in Three Movements

1.
Like quicksilver, the evening road
Above the river glistens after the warm rain,
And were it not for that anxiety, very little
Would suffice to make you happy: crossing

The granite bridge, to descend the steps
To the water and its boats, their lights
And voices - and all at once to hear the singing
Of a bird high up among the leaves.

2.
A kind of cry in the silence between the tick and tock of the clock:
As if the voice of an owl on its imperturbable way under a stern moon
Were heard, or a call resounding in your mind
Out of the stream that's been called timeless and irreversible.

Between thought and thought, between two beats
Of the quickened heart, you seem to hear the whistle and rustle
Of a flying squirrel. Between tremor and tremor of the hand,
Rolls of thunder in the storm clouds distanced by space and time.

3.
Going down the steps of desire,
to its crypt, under the grooved vault,
rising up to the flutes of the columns,
rushing out to follow the hurrying shadows
of high, naked clouds over the ground:
our bodies
and their business
have missed the deadline.

Exile

From one turnstile to another,
from corn field to meadow, from green
shoots to yellow stubble, my tale is
again about sowing and reaping.

Along a half-harvested field,
pale with its dead grass, runs
the path of the captive will,
like the way of the vole and the owl.

Now that the woods have fallen still,
and birds are drenched in rain,
and loneliness has settled on the bridge,
comes the synchronous moment:

In the same instant that a swallow
flies over the Thames through a blue dawn
a hot forehead is brushed
by a blizzard in a square in Moscow.

Assniation

Agitated, you run, slipping on the snow
of the railway platform, waving goodbye,
gliding and stumbling - how many years have gone by,
and still you insist on running!

And I myself, I admit, am still feasting
my eyes on you - the way you used to be,
the way you have remained, coming and going.
I've put a record on the gramophone, that suite

we were both so fond of, now I'm trying
to call out to you - but you don't hear:
you're absorbed in yourself, your features
so tense, so strained - sliding and staggering,

you appear to be running to an assniation
unknown even to myself - and there, by yourself,
widening your eyes and giving your child-mouth
over to words, you stand at the edge of a precipice.

Eugene Dubnov was born in Tallinn in 1949 and educated in Moscow and London Universities. He taught English, American and Russian Literature and was Writer-in-Residence at Carmel College, Oxfordshire, and Wingate School in London. His poetry and prose in English translation and written in English have been widely published in periodicals in Britain, USA, Canada and elsewhere, as well as in several European, North American, and Australian anthologies. Nine of his short stories have appeared on BBC Radio 3. Eugene Dubnov died in 2019.

Anne Stevenson is a well-known Anglo-American poet. She is the author of over a dozen volumes of poetry, essays and literary criticism, a biography of the American poet Sylvia Plath, *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath* (1989), and two critical studies of Elizabeth Bishop. Anne Stevenson died in 2020.

Vladimir Stockman (1960–2020)
Владимир Штокман (1960–2020)

Translated into Bulgarian by Roman Kissiov

© Vladimir Stockman, poems, 2021

© Roman Kissiov, translation, 2021

Малко по-близо до небето

В тъмницата на желанията и мечтите
на безлюдния град
въздигам тихи слова
на възвишението
на мислите правдиви,
толкова е странно това ...

Времето изтича,
смъртоносно време,
дори камъните се ронят
под ударите на неговите капки,
а аз съм човек, крехък като тревата,
и правото мое е да стоя на земята.
Не по-високо от другите,
само малко по-близо до небето.

Requiem aeternam

Но
в изолацията,
в мрака
на пустите нощи
безмълвни,
да вървиш по ръба
на бездната на битието
и смъртта,
да учиш, но да не знаеш,
да гледаш, но да не виждаш –
това е участва на безсмъртните,
временно живи,
безвременно заминали,
но ...

Из триезичната книга с избрани стихотворения „Горното море“ („Górne morze“, „The Upper Sea“, „Верхнее море“) – на полски, английски и руски (Краков, 2007). Бележка и превод от руски език: Роман Кисъов

Vladimir Sztokman (literary and stage name: Vladimir Stockman), Russian and Polish poet, translator and singer-songwriter was born in 1960 in Rostov-on-Don, Russia. Since 1992 he has been living in Krakow, Poland. He wrote poems in Polish and Russian, translated Polish and Russian poetry and prose into Russian and Polish. He was the author of a poetry collection *The Upper Sea* (2007). His poems have been translated into English, Italian, Armenian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, and Chinese, and have been published in a lot of literary magazines and anthologies in Poland, Russia, and other countries. As a translator of Czesław Miłosz he reached the final stage of the contest for the best translation of Miłosz organized by the Polish Institute of Books in 2011. He was a member of the International Federation of Russian Writers and the South Russian Writers' Union. In 2016 he was awarded the literary prize IANICIUS 'For Services to Polish Culture'. Vladimir Stockman died in 2020.

Roman Kissiov was born in Kazanlak, Bulgaria in 1962. He is a poet, translator and artist. His works have been published and translated in more than twenty languages. He has taken part in many prestigious international poetry festivals. Roman Kissiov lives and works in Sofia.

Viktor Ivaniv (1977–2015)
Виктор Іванів (1977–2015)

Translated into German by Danil Fockin

© Viktor Ivaniv, poems, 2021

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Danil Fockin offers two translations of one and the same poem. The reader will find the second translation on the next page, with a note by the translator on his two versions.

Irgendwann hatte ich ...

Irgendwann hatte ich ein Spieglein
Seine Kante konnte Finger ritzen
ein Adler erhob sich von unten, wenn ich es in Hände(n) nahm
Die Rückseite war völlig gefärbt
Nichts hatte es nicht-unseres, fremd
aber die Farbe löste sich ab
und wenn ich mich in ihm betrachte –
o, wie zersplittert es war! –
Fichtewiesen sah ich durch mich
und, vielleicht, den Polarstern,
an dem die Weite des Himmels bisschen gewendet ist,
oder was in den Anlagen zusammengekratztes
oder liebliche, holde Locke

und derzeit
aus allen possenhaften Faxen
die waren so unterschiedlich
sogar früher konnte ich erkennen
einen Sonnenfleck
ein Mäuschen
ein Teufelchen
und das Messdienerchen
sind in ihm nicht mehr zu sehen.

Irgendwann hatte ich ...

Irgendwann hatte ich Spieglein
An der Kante konnte sich schneiden
-Wenn ich es in Händen nahm, hob von unten ein Adler ab
Die Rückseite war völlig gefärbt
Nichts hatte es fremd, alles war unsrig
die Farbe löste sich ab
und wenn ich mich selbst in ihm betrachte –
o, wie zersplittert es war! –
waren Fichtewiesen durch mich sichtbar
und wahrscheinlich der Polarstern
an dem die Weite des Himmels bisschen gewendet ist,
oder was in den Grünanlagen zusammengekratzt
oder irgendjemandes holde Locke

und jetzt
aus allen possenhaften Faxen
die waren so unterschiedlich
sogar früher konnte ich erkennen
einen Sonnenfleck
ein Mäuschen
ein Teufelchen
aber das Messdienerchen
ist nicht mehr in ihm zu sehen

Viktor Ivaniv was born in 1977 in Novosibirsk. He graduated from the Novosibirsk State University. He is the author of collections of poetry and books of fiction. His works have been published in numerous literary journals and anthologies. In 2009 he received Andrey Bely Prize for fiction and was among laureates of the same prize in 2012. In 2003 he was awarded International David-Burljuk-Futurismus-Prize. Viktor Ivaniv died in 2015.

Daniil Fockin is a poet and translator. He has been studying colour metaphors in the poetry of Georg Heym and late Hölderlin. He has published poetry both in Russian and German in literary magazines in Russia, Ukraine and Israel. He has participated at a number of conferences devoted to linguistics and text analysis. © Danil Fockin, translation (2021).

Postscript by the translator | The text of Victor Ivaniv is not easy to translate for a number of reasons. The author uses a complex set of rhyme schemes, such as assonances, consonances, alliterations, half rhymes. As a result the text reaches a high level of 'phonological thickness'. Another complication for translation arises out of acoustic components of the text. The poem is full of diminutives and reflexive verbs. Alongside metric variations they bring playfulness, childishness and dynamics to the text. My aim as translator was to preserve the mood and spirit of the poem and to transfer melodic patterns into German. I do not care much for keeping to the original meter. In the first version I avoid some function words and articles to bring the translation close to the Russian original. The second version differs from the first one: it is more literal with more attention to grammatical and semantic aspects.

References

If you want to delve deeper into the work of a poet or translator featured in this issue, some of the previous issues of *Four Centuries, Russian Poetry in Translation* may certainly be worth looking into! Here are the references you will need.

Poets

Vladimir Stockman

– № 20, 2019: translated into Polish by Maciej Froński

Viktor Ivaniv

– № 7, 2014: translated into Slovene by Jelka Ciglencečki

Translators

– Daniil Fockin: 22;

– James L. Richie: 20; 24

Poem titles / first lines in Russian

Mikhail Aizenberg

– Moscow – the festive capital > Вот она, Москва-красавица ...

– Red, orange, cleverly arranged > Неровный, чуть помятый строй ...

– And the day still goes on, still lingers > День ещё идёт, и в каждой яме ...

Eugene Dubnov

– Exile > Изгнание

– Suite in Three Movements > Сюита в трех частях

– Assignment > Назначение

Viktor Ivaniv

– Irgendwann hatte ich ... > Когда-то у меня было зеркальце ...

Aleksei Kruchyonykh

– American Grimace > Американская гримаса

– In a Gambling House > В игорном доме

Ivan Krylov

– Swan, Crawfish and Pike > Лебедь, Рак да Щука

– Mouse and Rat > Мышь и Крыса

– Quartet > Квартет

– Farmer and Donkey > Осёл и Мужик

Vyacheslav Kupriyanov

- Сълзите на света > Слёзы мира
- Памет > Память
- Теория на отражението > Теория отражения
- Пейзаж с полифем > Пейзаж с полифемом
- Удивлённый ангел... (For the original title please the first line) – Идва време > Приходит пора
- Обяви > Объявления
- Благословение > Благословение

Vladimir Stockman

Малко по-близо до небето > Чуть ближе к небу

Requiem aeternam > Requiem Aeternam