



**RACHMANINOV**

**ALEKO**

**LIBRETTO**

**(Rosa Newmarch)**



**J. & W. CHESTER**  
LONDON & BRIGHTON.



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# ALEKO

Opera in One Act

The libretto based on Poushkin's poem "THE GIPSIES"

by

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Music by

S. RACHMANINOV

English version by

ROSA NEWMARCH

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## CHARACTERS

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|  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |                  |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------------|
| ALEKO                                  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | <i>Baritone</i>  |
| A YOUNG GIPSY                          | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | <i>Tenor</i>     |
| AN OLD MAN ( <i>Zemfira's Father</i> ) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | <i>Bass</i>      |
| ZEMFIRA                                | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | <i>Soprano</i>   |
| AN OLD GIPSY WOMAN                     | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | <i>Contralto</i> |
| GIPSIES                                | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |                  |



# “ALEKO.”

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## *SYNOPSIS.*



HIS Opera is based upon a poem by Poushkin, written in 1824. Aleko, the hero of “The Gipsies,” belongs to the picturesque type of social outcast who figures again and again in the works of both Byron and Poushkin. Aleko, weary of the social world, joins a tribe of wandering gipsies and falls passionately in love with Zemfira, the daughter of the old Gipsy leader. For a time their illicit union is rapturously happy, but when the beautiful capricious girl is fascinated by a younger man, a member of her own tribe, Aleko is devoured by jealousy. Zemfira’s mother had deserted her child years ago for the sake of a stranger whose tent had been pitched near their own for the space of a few days, and history repeated itself in the case of her daughter, who was on the point of fleeing with the young Gipsy when Aleko discovered her perfidy and killed first her lover and then the false Zemfira herself. The Opera ends with a dignified reproof from the old Gipsy to the guest who has brought discord and bloodshed into the free and simple life of the caravan. The Gipsies do not punish the hero, but they will not suffer him to dwell in their midst, and the curtain falls upon the melancholy figure of Aleko left once more alone in the world.





RACHMANINOV  
ALEKO

(ROSA NEWMARCH)

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*On the banks of a stream. At the back of the scene the gipsies' tents, some white, some coloured. In one of the tents nearest the front of the stage ALEKO and ZEMFIRA are seen. The gipsies' carts, hung with mats and coverings. Here and there camp-fires over which the supper is cooking in cauldrons. Groups of Men, Women and Children intermingle casually. Most of the Gipsies, however, are quietly employed preparing the meal. The moon is rising red across the river.*

CHORUS OF GIPSIES.

What joyous freedom in our camp!  
And when we sleep beneath the span  
Of heav'n's blue arch, what peaceful dreams  
Await us in our caravan,  
For as the camp-fire and the tent;  
To us belongs the great highway;  
And when we wake at early dawn,  
To God we offer up the day.

THE OLD GIPSY'S TALE.

The wondrous magic power of song  
Has cleared my misty memory,  
Visions of days, some bright, some sad,  
Have suddenly come back to me.

THE GIPSIES. Tell us, while still the camp-fires blaze,  
Some legend of those famous days.

THE OLD GIPSY. Our wand'ring tribe knew poverty;  
Need did not spare our caravan;  
We could not wander from our fate,  
Nor flee from fatal passion's ban.

Ah, all too quickly passed my youth,  
Flashed like a meteor swift and clear;  
But swifter still love's season sped—  
Marioula loved me just a year!

'Twas near the waters of Kagoul,  
We met a tribe of strangers there;  
Gipsies, who near us made their camp  
Upon the sloping hillside fair.

Two nights we tarried, side by side,  
Upon the third they struck their tent ;  
Forsaking her girl babe and me,  
Marioula with the strangers went.

I slept in peace, the sun rose bright ;  
I woke and missed her from my side.  
I sought her, called her, found their tracks.  
Ah, how Zemfira cried !

And I too, wept. But since that day  
When Marioula took her flight,  
All women, for her perfidy,  
Are hateful in my sight.

THE GIPSIES. But why did you not follow them,  
Full tilt, and catch the gipsy's cart,  
Then take revenge upon the man,  
Plunging your dagger in his heart ?

ZEMFIRA. How so ? Youth's free as any bird !  
Love is not held by bolt or chain.

THE YOUNG GIPSY. Aye, joy to each is given in turn,  
What has been cannot be again.

ALEKO. If in th' eternal unplumbed deeps  
I found myself brought face to face  
With such a foe, without a qualm,  
In scorn, I'd drive him from his place.

ZEMFIRA. O father, see, Aleko's wrath !  
How threateningly he looks at me.  
Such love as that repels my heart—  
My heart, that would be gay and free.

THE OLD GIPSY. Nay, vex him not. Be silent, child,  
Wait till his passion cools and dies.

THE YOUNG GIPSY. He's jealous, but I'm not afraid.

ALEKO. 'Tis grave. My heart for vengeance cries.

THE GIPSIES. Enough, old man ! Your tales are sad.  
In dance and song let us be glad.

#### GIPSY DANCE.

*While the others are dancing ZEMFIRA and the YOUNG GIPSY hide themselves.*

#### GIPSY CHORUS.

*The Gipsies, men and women, prepare the camp for the night.*

The fires are dying out,  
But in the cloudless height  
The moon is shining clear  
And bathes the camp in light.

THE YOUNG GIPSY. One kiss! One more before we sever.

ZEMFIRA. Begone! Aleko's dangerous.

THE YOUNG GIPSY. One long, long kiss and then good-night.

ZEMFIRA. Farewell, before he comes again.

THE YOUNG GIPSY. Say, will you keep your tryst with me?

ZEMFIRA. Yes, when the tell-tale moon has set,  
Wait by the ancient burial mound.

THE YOUNG GIPSY. Her words are false, she will not come.

ZEMFIRA. Begone! He's there! I'll come, my love.

[*Exit the YOUNG GIPSY. ZEMFIRA enters the tent and sits down by the cradle.*]

ZEMFIRA'S CRADLE SONG.

“ Husband old, husband fierce,  
Stab me, burn me if thou wilt;  
I am brave and do not fear  
Flames that scorch, or knives that pierce.  
Yes, I loathe thee,  
And I scorn thee,  
For another man I sigh,  
And for love of him I'll die.”

ALEKO. My soul's oppressed with secret sorrow.  
Where are the joys of lawless love?

ZEMFIRA. “ Slay me, throw me in the flame,  
My tongue is tied, I'll speak no word.  
Husband old, husband fierce,  
Thou canst not guess my lover's name.”

ALEKO. Silence! Such songs are far too wild.

ZEMFIRA. You like it not? Well, what care I?  
'Tis for myself I sing.  
“ My love is fresh as Spring,  
Warm as a summer's day,  
So young, and brave, and gay,  
And, ah, he loves me so!

ALEKO. Silence, Zemfira, I can bear no more.

ZEMFIRA. You take my song amiss?

ALEKO. Zemfira—

ZEMFIRA. Be angry if it pleases you!  
Once more I'll sing the ditty through:  
“ How many a fond caress,  
I give to him, he gives to me,  
Before the silent night has fled,  
And how we laugh in mockery.  
To think of thy grey head!  
My love is fresh as spring,

Warm as a summer's day,  
So young and brave and gay,  
And, ah, he loves me so!  
Ah!

[*Exit ZEMFIRA.*

ALEKO.

The moon is higher in the sky and looks smaller and paler.  
The camp's asleep. The moon above  
Is shining in her midnight splendour.  
Why does my sorrowing heart beat fast?  
Why weighs on me this secret anguish?  
I have no cares, and no regrets,  
I lead a simple wand'ring life ;  
Scorning conventions and the world,  
I dwell among the gipsies free.  
I live, nor recognise the power  
Of blind and cruel destiny.  
But God! How passion still can play  
On my distracted soul at will!  
Zemfira! How I loved her well!  
How in the silence of the steppes  
She yielded gently to my kiss ;  
What hours of rapture night beheld ;  
How often with a tender word,  
Or with a passionate embrace,  
She drove my gloomy brooding thoughts  
Away from me, as dawn the dark.  
I well recall the glowing words  
She whispered in those blissful hours :  
" I love thee, for thou art my lord,  
Aleko, I am thine for aye !"  
Then list'ning to her glowing speech,  
Forgetful of all else, I bent  
And clasp'd her in a wild embrace,  
Lost in the depths of her dark eyes.  
Then in the wondrous, perfumed dark,  
Zemfira's lips met mine . . . . And she,  
Filled with a melting ecstasy,  
Clung fast to me and gazed so long.  
Into mine eyes . . . . And now, and now . . . .  
Zemfira false! Zemfira cold!

[*Exit ALEKO.*

ORCHESTRAL INTERMEZZO.

*The moon sets and night gradually gives way to the dawn.*

SONG OF THE YOUNG GIPSY.

Lo, in the vault of heav'n  
The fickle moon roams free,  
On all things as she passes  
She shines indifferently.

Who'd fix her place appointed,  
And bid her never range?  
Who to a maiden's fancy  
Would say: "Love cannot change"?

ZEMFIRA. 'Tis time!  
THE YOUNG GIPSY. Wait!  
ZEMFIRA. Nay, 'tis time, my love.  
THE YOUNG GIPSY. Zemfira, stay till dawn!  
ZEMFIRA. 'Tis late.  
THE YOUNG GIPSY. How timidly you love. Stay on!  
ZEMFIRA. Ah, would you ruin all my life?  
THE YOUNG GIPSY. One moment more!  
ZEMFIRA. 'Tis time! What if my husband came  
And found me not within our tent?

*Enter ALEKO.*

ALEKO. He has returned. Move not. You here?  
Or do I dream? (*To ZEMFIRA.*) Where is your love for me?  
ZEMFIRA. Leave me, Aleko, for my love is dead.  
The past can never live again for us!  
ALEKO. Zemfira, O remember, sweetest friend,  
How I have given all my life to share  
Love's joy and pain with you—  
A willing exile for your sake—  
And can love vanish like a dream?  
ZEMFIRA *and the* YOUNG GIPSY. Piteous and foolish in our eyes!  
ALEKO (*to the GIPSY*). Ah, no! To you, my shameless foe,  
I will not cede my rights o'er her.  
ZEMFIRA (*to her lover*).  
Escape, my love, escape from him!  
ALEKO. Stand still! Now whither would you flee,  
My fine young cock? Lie there! Lie there! [*Stabs him.*]  
ZEMFIRA. Aleko!  
THE YOUNG GIPSY. I am dying fast! [*Dies.*]  
ZEMFIRA. Aleko, you have murdered him!  
See, all your clothes are stained with blood.  
What have you done?  
ALEKO. Why, nothing.  
Now whisper him your vows of love!  
ZEMFIRA (*throws herself on the corpse*).  
O my beloved, say farewell!  
My love it was that caused your end.

ALEKO (*threateningly*). You weep?

ZEMFIRA. I do not fear your threatening looks.  
But curse you for a murderer!

ALEKO (*stabbing her*). Die too!

ZEMFIRA. I die, but love him still.

*Enter the Gipsies in haste.*

Why all this noise, and whence these cries?  
What breaks the silence of the night?  
Say, what has happened in our camp?  
Old man, awake, awake, arise!

THE OLD GIPSY. Aleko! And Zemfira too!  
O see, O weep! Behold her there,  
Bathed in a pool of blood!

*[The Gipsies filled with horror surround the group.]*

THE GIPSIES. The rising sun looks down upon  
A dreadful deed, for which the Lord,  
In anger for such murders done,  
Will punish all the gipsy horde.

ZEMFIRA. Father, Aleko's jealousy  
Has brought me to this pass. Farewell! *[She dies.]*

THE OLD GIPSY *and the Others.*  
Give rest for all eternity!

ALEKO. Zemfira! See, before you stands  
A man remorseful, sad and lone,  
Who for one glance of life from you,  
Without regret would give his own.

THE OLD GIPSY. Men, hasten now across the stream  
And dig for these a clay-cold bed.  
Now let the women come in turn  
And kiss the eyelids of the dead.

*[To ALEKO]*

We wild folk make no cruel laws;  
We neither torture, judge, nor slay;  
We do not ask for blood or tears,  
But near a murd'rer we'll not stay.

We are a kindly, timid tribe,  
But thou art full of hate and ill;  
So leave us now and go thy ways,  
Yet peace be with thy spirit still.

*[The Gipsies bear away the two corpses. ALEKO is left alone.]*

ALEKO. O grief, O anguish! All alone once more!



# RUSSIAN SONGS

## WITH PIANOFORTE ACCOMPANIMENT

English Translations by ROSA NEWMARCH, unless otherwise stated.

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