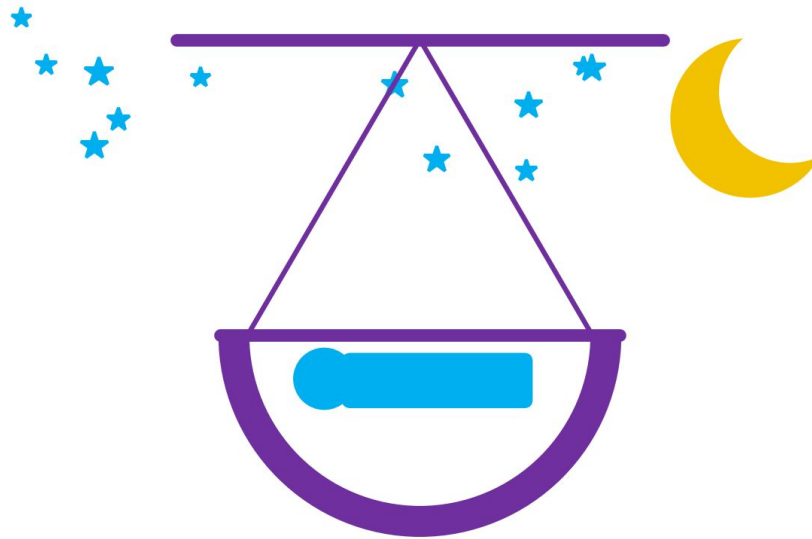




DROKACADEMY · A companion to the CARE+ Anchor volume (Healing the Roots)



Calling Sleep

Kolyskovi, Cradle-Songs, and the Family-Ritual of Ukraine

First Edition, revised October 2026

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DROKACADEMY · Kamloops · 2026

Love. Care. Share.

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First Edition, revised October 2026.

Translations from Ukrainian are by the author except where otherwise noted. Citations follow APA 7th edition.

The first edition remains the author's edition and will keep being updated. Second editions are written with co-authors who have lived experience; where they see a matter differently, each view is shown with its sources.

AI tools supported the research and drafting of this book. That support was substantial and I am grateful for it. I read and proofread the book myself, and every idea and every decision in it remains my responsibility.

Songs and poems still under copyright are described, not reproduced; links to performances and lyrics are in the references.

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Introduction: Why We Sing the Cradle

A lullaby is not, in the first instance, a song about sleep. It is a song that brings sleep. The distinction matters because, as with the *vesnianky* and *hajivky* of the companion volume, everything else in this book follows from it. The *kolyskova* is performative speech in the technical philosophical sense. It does what it names. It is not describing a state; it is producing one. When a Ukrainian mother sings *Ой ходить сон коло вікон* (Sleep is walking past the windows) she is not reporting on a folkloric figure. She is calling that figure to her child's room. The song is not commentary. The song is the act.

This is one of the reasons the *kolyskova* has survived so much. A repertoire that is doing observable practical work (that reliably accomplishes, by virtue of the singing, what it sets out to accomplish) has an in-built reason to persist. Even in periods when other folk genres retreated under modernization, urbanization, the suppression of village life, and the deliberate erasure of Ukrainian culture under various occupations, the *kolyskova* continued to be sung at every cradle, because every cradle still needed to be sung. The form is, by physical necessity, intergenerational. It does not survive in archives because it survived in arms.

Three points about the *kolyskova* distinguish it from the other Ukrainian song traditions catalogued in the companion volume. First, the *kolyskova* is the only Ukrainian folk-song form whose primary work is to produce silence. The *vesnianka* calls. The *hajivka* invites. The *koliadka* announces. The *kolyskova* closes the calling and opens the silence. Second, the *kolyskova* is, in the strictest sense, the first language a Ukrainian child meets: earlier than speech, earlier than story, earlier than naming. The mother's voice in the cradle is, by physical fact, the child's first acoustic environment. Third, the *kolyskova* has carried more freight, across more centuries, under more conditions, than almost any other song form in the inventory. It has been used as a sleep-aid, a teaching device, a protective spell, a lament for the absent, a love song for the present, a political statement under occupation, a coded transmission of forbidden language,

and (in our present war) a reckoning with what it means to sing a sleep-song to a child while the windows shake with shelling.

The book is built, like *Calling Spring*, on the Love · Care · Share framework that has organized my teaching, my writing, and the small institution called DROKACADEMY for the better part of a decade. Love is the relational layer: the mother's voice, the address to the child, the act of love that names what cannot yet name itself. Care is the holding: the cradle, the household, the long extended pedagogy by which a culture teaches a child what world she has been born into. Share is the inheritance: the kolyskovi that travel from mother to daughter, from village to diaspora, from one war's children to the next war's children, and across the long line that connects a fourteenth-century Galician cradle to a 2026 nursery in Mariupol. The fourth section, *Sing With Us*, gathers the practical materials a reader can use to begin their own family or community kolyskova practice tonight.

The book is a working draft. The kolyskova repertoire is enormous: H. V. Dovzhenok's 1981 study of the versified genres of Ukrainian children's folklore is one foundational survey (Dovzhenok, 1981), and the Polyphony Project archive holds field recordings from villages across Ukraine. The book selects, foregrounds, and analyses a working core; it does not claim completeness, and it cannot. If you grew up with a grandmother who sang you a kolyskova that I have not included, hers is also in the family. Please write to me. She belongs.

Names, regional attributions, and translations have been checked against the published sources I could access; corrections from carriers of the tradition will be incorporated in subsequent editions. The translations throughout are working translations, intended to convey sense and image rather than to be sung. The transliteration is a modified BGN/PCGN designed for English readers. Citations follow APA 7th edition. The audiovisual companion in Appendix D catalogues YouTube and Polyphony Project recordings of every song discussed, so that a reader can hear the songs as well as read them.

The kolyskova tradition has, in its long history, been called many things by many singers. The folkloristic literature calls it kolyskovi pisni or kolyskova pisnia. The Galician term is kolysanka. The diaspora term is most often, simply, 'the lullaby Mama sang.' In every register, the form has the same work to do: to hold a child in sound until the child can be released into sleep, and to hold the singer in the act of holding. This book is an attempt to put that work into words, and to point readers toward the songs themselves, where the words finally end and the singing begins.

Old Words: Kolyska, Liuli, Son, Drimota

Begin with the words. Every cradle-song tradition in the Slavic world rests on a small constellation of names: names for the cradle itself, names for the rocking and the calling, names for the personified figures who are summoned to the bedside, names for the song-form as a whole. The names are older than the songs as we currently know them. The songs are older than the country in its modern form. Understanding what is being named, and by what name, is the first work of any careful study of kolyskovi.

The Ukrainian word for the cradle is kolyska (коліска), from the Proto-Slavic *kolyska, related to the verb kolykhaty (колихати, to rock or sway). The same root produces kolysaty (колисати, to cradle), kolyshu (колишу, I rock), and the noun kolysanka (колисанка, a song to rock by). From kolyska come both kolyskova (the cradle-song proper, an adjective in form, originally modifying pisnia or 'song,' as in pisnia kolyskova) and kolyskovi (its plural). The genitive form kolyskovoi pisni (колискової пісні) is the standard scholarly term for 'lullaby' in Ukrainian folkloristic and musicological writing. In Galicia and the Carpathians, the term kolysanka is more common in everyday speech; in central and eastern Ukraine, kolyskova is the dominant term.

The most distinctive feature of the Ukrainian cradle vocabulary, and the one that distinguishes it from its East Slavic and Polish cousins, is the address. The song is named by the cradle it is sung at, not by what the singer is doing or what the child is doing. This is a small detail with substantial consequences. In Russian, kolybel'naia derives from kolybel' (cradle) but the emphasis is similar; in Polish, kołysanka derives from kołysać (to rock); in Belarusian, kalykhanka follows the same logic. What every Slavic name shares is the centrality of the cradle as the place where the form lives. A song sung over a sleeping child not in a cradle is, technically, a different kind of song. The kolyskova requires the cradle.

Of all the refrain syllables in the form, liuli (люлі) is by far the most common and the most important. It appears as a doubled or tripled refrain (liuli-liuli, liuli-liuli-liuli) in the opening line or the closing line of an extraordinary proportion of the documented Ukrainian kolyskova repertoire, and it also appears in extended forms: liulai (люляй, an imperative singular meaning 'rock!' or 'cradle!'), liuliu (люлю), liulesyку (люлесику), and many regional variants. Olga Kharchyshyn (2023, p. 1461) notes that the formula liuli-liuli also occurs among neighbouring peoples, naming the Russians, Poles, and Belarusians.

The etymology of liuli is disputed. Some philologists have proposed a connection to the personal name Lel and the goddess-name Lada that appear in the spring-song refrains discussed in the companion volume; in that reading, the cradle-song refrain preserves a fragment of an addressed pre-Christian divine pair invoked at the moment of the child's first rest. Other philologists argue that liuli is a pure phonetic refrain (a sound that the human voice produces gently and that the infant ear interprets as soothing) with no underlying lexical reference. The truth, as is so often the case in Ukrainian folkloristics, is probably a mixture: a phonetic refrain that may have absorbed and reflected an older ritual address whose specific reference is no longer fully recoverable. What is recoverable is the function. Liuli holds the child. The mouth that says liuli is held in its own gentle rounded shape; the voice that produces liuli is necessarily quiet, necessarily warm, necessarily intimate. The form has worked out, over the centuries, how to produce a sound that physically embodies what the song is asking of the world.

Two other old words are worth naming at the start: son (сон, sleep) and drimota (дримота, drowsiness or slumber). These are not merely common nouns in the kolyskova repertoire. They are persons. They appear in songs as named figures who arrive at the bedroom window, who are asked where they will spend the night, who are directed toward the cradle of the singer's child. The most famous lullaby in the Ukrainian repertoire, Ой ходить сон коло вікон, is built entirely around the

personification of Son and Drimota. They walk together past the windows. They have a dialogue. They are asked to come in. They are directed where to sleep. Chapter 3 returns to these figures in detail. For now, what matters is the name. Sleep is not a state. Sleep is a guest. The cradle-song is the act of inviting that guest in.

Finally, there is the word that names what the song does on its protective side: oberih (оберіх), an amulet or protective object. In the older Ukrainian tradition, the cradle-song was understood not merely as a sleep-aid but as a verbal oberih, woven of words rather than of cloth or wax or wood, whose function was to surround the child with a protective acoustic boundary inside which harmful forces could not enter. The relationship between kolyskovi and the broader Ukrainian заговляння (zamovliannia, charms or protective verbal formulae) tradition is the subject of Chapter 7. The point at the outset is that the kolyskova is a multi-functional verbal artefact. The same song that brings sleep also encloses, also blesses, also instructs, also transmits. The old words are doing more than one kind of work at once. This is part of why they have lasted.

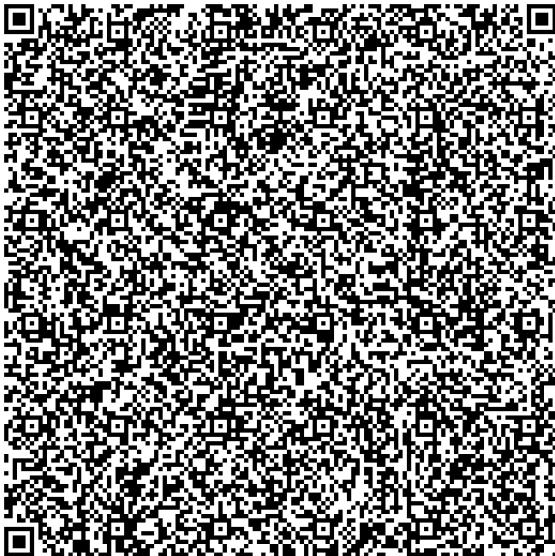
A note on usage. Throughout this book, I will use kolyskova (singular) and kolyskovi (plural) as common nouns in English text, untranslated, because no English term carries the same precision. 'Lullaby' is the closest English equivalent but loses the cradle-as-locating-object that the Ukrainian form requires. Where I use 'lullaby,' I am speaking generically across cultures; where I use kolyskova, I am speaking specifically about the Ukrainian form. The distinction is small but it matters, and it is the kind of distinction that the form itself rewards careful attention to.

Enjoyed this sample?

The full book is available at krasun.ca.

Teachers and community groups can request a review copy:
sasha@drokacademy.ca

Sing along with the performances linked in the book



Songs 1 to 49

50 videos



Songs 50 to 66

17 videos