



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



# Calling Spring

*Vesnianky, Hajivky, and the Ritual Songs of Ukraine*

**First Edition, revised October 2026**

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**Love. Care. Share.**

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sasha@drokacademy.ca. The author takes no income from this book. Proceeds after production costs support students. The author supports student caregivers and those who stand with Ukraine.

First Edition, revised October 2026.

This three-part edition (Love, Care, Share) is a scholarly cultural reader on the Ukrainian spring-ritual song repertoire. Translations from Ukrainian are by the author except where otherwise noted. Citations follow APA 7th edition.

First three-part edition: Spring 2026, built on the content of the First 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: When the Earth Wakes Up

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Spring songs are not songs about spring. They are songs that call spring. The distinction matters because everything else in this book follows from it.

In the agrarian Ukrainian past (a past that runs continuously, not metaphorically, into living memory) the turning of the year from winter to spring was not a meteorological event but a ritual one. The earth had to be invited back. The birds had to be addressed by name. The first thaw, the first green, the first migrating crane carried obligations as much as joys. A community that did not sing the spring back was a community that could not expect to receive it. This is the world in which *vesnianky* and *hajivky* originate, and although the world has changed almost beyond recognition, the songs have not. They continue to perform an act of address. They are still asking spring to come.

The repertoire is enormous, and the published collections of Filaret Kolessa, Volodymyr Hnatiuk, Klyment Kvitka, and Sofia Hrytsa hold a large part of it. Some are short magical formulae a child can learn in a single afternoon. Others are extended ritual cycles whose performance once filled the entire week between Easter Sunday and Trinity. Some are call-and-response between a soloist and a circle. Others are danced; others still are sung in the fields while walking. The form, in other words, is not one form. It is a family of related ritual practices, sharing certain core features (solar timing, female leadership, communal performance, often outdoor setting) but varying enormously in tempo, register, and choreography.

What unites them is the calling. Whether the song addresses the sun (Сонечко, сонечко, *Sonechko*, *sonechko*), a bird (Жайворонку, чубарю, *Zhaivoronku*, *chubariu*), a young girl in the centre of the circle (Подоланочко, *Podolianochko*), or the earth itself, it is structured as an invocation. It expects the addressee to respond. This is one reason the songs feel so different from concert music when you actually stand in a circle and sing them. They are not performances. They are conversations.

This book is built in four parts. Part I (Love) addresses the deep substrate: the names for what is being called, the oldest layer of zaklychky, the songs of awakening, and the lexical-poetic vocabulary of folk invocation that the ethnographic literature has preserved. Part II (Care) moves into the circle proper: hajivky in the Bright-Monday churchyard, mayivky in May, ryndzivky and the Easter visiting traditions, the children's games that are arguably the form's most durable inheritance, and the ritual objects (bread, egg, water) that locate the songs in their full embodied context. Part III (Share) moves outward across time and distance: the historical pedagogical networks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the contemporary archival laboratories that continue the work, the hundred-year hajivky tradition of Lviv, the diaspora preservation work across an ocean, the modern reinterpretations that put a Polissian ritual song onto the Eurovision stage, and the spring songs sung in air-raid shelters in the present war. Part IV (Sing With Us) turns from analysis to practice: how to host a circle, twelve songs to learn first, seven activities for families and classrooms, and a three-year arc for building a sustainable community circle.

The book closes with appendices: a glossary, a consolidated scholarly bibliography, an annotated audiovisual companion organized by hayivka name, and a working set of lyrics in three layers (Cyrillic, transliteration, working translation) for the most widely sung songs.

A reader who wants the songs themselves can skip directly to Appendix C. A reader who wants the cultural history can stay with Parts I through III. A facilitator preparing a circle can read the book in any order. The hajivka, after all, is a crooked dance, neither end, nor beginning, no fixed direction. It returns and returns. So does this book. So does the spring.

## Chapter 1

# The Old Words

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### Vesna, Yara, Lada, and the Names for What We're Calling

Begin with the words. Every spring ritual in the Slavic world rests on a small constellation of names: names for the season, names for the goddess of the season, names for the divine pair invoked in the refrain, names for the songs themselves. The names are older than the songs. The songs are older than the country. Understanding what is being called, and by what name, is the first work of any careful study of vesnianky.

The Ukrainian word for spring is vesna (весна), from the Proto-Slavic \*vesna, cognate with the Sanskrit vasanta, the Latin ver, and the English word for the same season at a slightly different etymological remove. The Proto-Indo-European root \*wes- carries the sense of brightness, warmth, glowing: the season is named, in the deep grammar of the language family, for what light does to the world. From vesna we get vesnianky: literally, spring-songs, the songs that belong to vesna.

But vesna is not the only old word. Across the Slavic world, the personification of spring carried other names too. Yara or Yarylo (Ярило) appears in eastern Slavic ritual as a young male solar figure associated with fertility and the awakening of the fields; the corresponding feminine, Yarynka or Yaryna, appears in some refrains. In Polish folklore the figure called Marzanna is drowned at the equinox to force her surrender of winter; the parallel Ukrainian rite (drowning the straw effigy of Mara) appears in some western Ukrainian villages, often accompanying vesnianky.

Most resonant of all is the name Lada. The famous refrain in А ми просо сіяли (А my proso siialy; Ой, дід-Ладю, сіяли, сіяли, Ой, дід-Ладю, siialy, siialy) invokes a divine pair (Did and Lada, sometimes Lel and Lada) whose status in the Slavic pantheon has been hotly contested in the scholarly literature for two centuries. Some early Romantic

ethnographers reconstructed Lada as a major Slavic fertility goddess. Modern critical scholarship, beginning with the work of Aleksander Brückner in the early twentieth century, has been considerably more cautious, suggesting that the apparent divine name may in some cases derive from refrain syllables (lado-lado) rather than from an attested cult. The truth is probably somewhere in between: the refrains preserve fragments of a once-living ritual address whose theological precision we can no longer fully reconstruct, but whose ritual function (invoking a paired generative principle at the moment of seasonal renewal) remains unmistakable to anyone who has heard the chorus rise.

The linguistic substrate of these invocations is itself a major field of study. The hajivky texts preserve a distinctive lexical stratum: a vocabulary thick with diminutive natural nouns (vesnochka, sonechko, zhayvoronochok), specific floral and faunal imagery (the kalyna, the periwinkle, the lark, the stork), and rhythmic imperatives that frame natural forces as accessible, responsive entities. The poetic effect is one of relational intimacy. The world is being spoken to as if it might answer.

This is the recurring pattern in any careful study of vesnianky. We can identify with confidence what the songs do (they call, they invite, they address) and we can document what carriers of the tradition have understood them to mean within living memory. We cannot always reach beneath that to a reconstructed pre-Christian theology with the precision Romantic-era scholars wished for. But the absence of a clean theological diagram does not weaken the songs. They never required one. The community has always known what it was calling. The earth, evidently, has always known what it was being called by.

There is one more old word worth naming at the start: hai (гай), the Ukrainian word for a small grove or wooded sacred space. From hai we get hajivka (гаївка): literally, the song of the grove. The word names a specific place: the open space adjacent to or behind the village church, often planted with old trees, where Easter ritual gathered the community in the days when the church doors had just reopened after Lent. The grove

was the older sacred site; the church grew up beside it. The hajivka, sung in that liminal yard, carries both inheritances at once.

Throughout Part I, when this book speaks of love as the substrate of spring song, this is what is meant. Love is the act of calling something by its name, of trusting that the addressee will hear, of believing that the world is a conversation. The songs in the chapters that follow are exactly that, in many regional variations: they are the world's oldest love letters, addressed to the earth, and read aloud each spring.

## Enjoyed this sample?

**The full book is available at [krasun.ca](https://krasun.ca).**

Teachers and community groups can request a review copy:  
[sasha@drokacademy.ca](mailto:sasha@drokacademy.ca)

**Sing along with the performances linked in the book**



**Songs 1 to 10**

27 videos