

Tumbalalaika

traditional Russian Jewish

Verse

Am E7

Shteyt a bo - kher, un er trakht, trakht un trakht a

7 Am F

gan - tse nakht, ve - men tsu ne - men un nit far -

12 Am E7 Am

she - men, ve - men tsu ne - men un nit far - she - men.

Chorus

17 Am E7

Tum - ba - la, tum - ba - la, tum - ba - la - lai - ka, tum - ba - la, tum - ba - la,

23 Am F

tum - ba - la - lai - ka. Tum - ba - la - lai - ka, shpil ba - la -

28 Am E7 Am

lai - ka, tum - ba - la - lai - ka, frey - lekh zol zain!

Tuml is the Yiddish word meaning “noise;” a balalaika is a fretted Russian folk instrument with a triangular body which is somewhat similar to a mandolin. This is a riddle song (similar to the English “I Gave My Love a Cherry”), in which a young man looks for a smart woman to marry — and finds one. Translation adapted from Wikipedia:

1 (*Narrator*): A young lad stands and thinks, thinks and thinks the whole night: whom to choose and not to shame?
Chorus: Tumbala, tumbala, tumbalalaika, strum the balalaika, may we be happy!

2 (*He*): Maiden, I want to ask you: What can grow without rain? What can burn and never end? What can yearn, crying without tears?

3 (*She*): Foolish boy, why do you have to ask? A stone can grow without rain; love can burn and never end; and a heart can yearn, crying without tears.

4 (*He*): What is higher than a house? What is swifter than a mouse? What is deeper than a well? What is more bitter than gall?

5 (*She*): A chimney is higher than a house; a cat is swifter than a mouse; the Torah is deeper than a well; and death is more bitter than gall.