

[Song of the Day](#)

By Tom Huizenga

A Suave Romanian Sings the Falsetto Blues

- ['La Salul Cel Negru' by Dona Dumitru Siminica](#)



Dona Dumitru Siminica packed cafes and clubs in Bucharest in the 1960s.

[NPR.org](#), October 10, 2006 · Men have sung in falsetto for centuries -- from 17th-century English church choristers to The Bee Gees, Prince and today's operatic superstar counter-tenor, David Daniels. Now there's a new release from one vastly overlooked practitioner of sky-high singing: the ultra-suave Dona Dumitru Siminica.

Virtually unknown outside his native Romania, with a perfectly pencil-thin mustache and a voice that flutters in mid-air, Siminica packed cafes and clubs in Bucharest in the 1960s. His style is rooted in the Gypsy Lautari tradition of slowly paced melancholy love songs, laments and drinking songs. The recordings he made 45 years ago for Romanian Electrecord, with fiddle, accordion, bass and cimbalom (hammered dulcimer), have just been issued in the U.S. for the first time.

It takes a moment to adjust to the eerily androgyny of Siminica's falsetto, but his subtle choice of color and shading is undeniably affecting. Take "La Salul Cel Negru" ("The Black Scarf"). As the cimbalom dolefully hammers out an accentuated oompah beat, Siminica spins his story: "I was happy / but to complete my misery / I suspected nothing / I was having too good a time / next to her / I didn't notice / that she loved the other man."

The songs on this new CD have rarely been attempted by other singers out of deference to Siminica. He was equally adored by Romanians and Gypsies, and sung in both their languages, yet when he died in the early '80s, it barely merited a mention in the Romanian press. Like America's own downhearted Delta blues or country ballads, Siminica's woeful tales of lost love are best sipped in doses the size of "La Salul Cel Negru" -- it's the best way to savor the sadness without drowning in tears.