

LOBACHEVSKY AND POPULAR CULTURE

Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky's name was the title of a song written by the satirical American singer — songwriter Tom Lehrer (1928 —), who studied mathematics at the graduate level for several years. Here are links to a video and lyrics for the song and also a link to the *Wikipedia* article on Lehrer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNC-aj76zI4>

<http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/PrintLyrics?OpenForm&ParentUnid=D97B21BF6516390448256A7D0024B8B9>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Lehrer

The subject of this song is a humorous account of plagiarism, supposedly following advice from Lobachevsky. Although plagiarism is an illegal activity and subject to academic, civil or criminal punishment, the story in the song seems far too ridiculous and factually incorrect to be taken seriously (the latter is often the case for comedic stories involving crimes). Actually, **the song is entirely fictional and is almost the EXACT OPPOSITE of Lobachevsky's REAL mathematical legacy; in contrast to the theme of plagiarism, Lobachevsky's work was highly original and he had essentially no contact with mathematicians of similar caliber until well after he made his breakthrough discoveries.**

Some listeners or readers may object to the lyrics or performance as promoting negative stereotypes about Russia or Russians. On the other hand, others may conclude that nothing in the song suggests animosity, prejudice or condescension. It might be best to stick with the previous assertion: The song is simply too nonsensical to be interpreted literally.