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## NOMADS IN THE GLOBAL SOUNDSCAPE: NEGOTIATING AESTHETICS IN POST-SOVIET TUVA'S TRADITIONAL MUSIC PRODUCTIONS

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*This article explores some of the relationships between ideology, aesthetics, circulation, and agency in productions of “traditional music” and “world music” made by musicians from Tuva, a Turkic-speaking republic in Inner Asia that is now a part of the Russian*



*Federation. This article contends that the conditions surrounding the dissolution of state socialism in the former Soviet Union laid the groundwork for the meaning and value of culture and identity in post-Soviet Tuva, including traditional music, to be renegotiated. The intentions of actors and interest groups involved in renegotiating the aesthetics of Tuva's traditional music were diverse and not always consistent. Nonetheless, their efforts in combination had the effect of rejecting Soviet state-sponsored folkloric models as overly mediated and embracing global music industry models as*

## НОМАДЫ В ГЛОБАЛЬНОМ САУНДСКЕЙПЕ: К ВОПРОСУ ОБ ЭСТЕТИКЕ В ТРАДИЦИОННЫХ МУЗЫКАЛЬНЫХ ПРОЕКТАХ ПОСТСОВЕТСКОЙ ТУВЫ

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*С распадом советского государства, переходом к глобальному рыночному капитализму ансамбли фольклорных музыкантов из Республики Тыва (Российская Федерация) начали выезжать в заграничные туры. Представляя богатую традиционную музыкальную культуру своего региона, они сталкивались с новыми возможностями и интересами, с новой экономикой и аудиторией. Очарованная горловым пением хөөмей международная аудитория, тем не менее, была недостаточно информирована о тувинской музыке и культуре. Более того, у самих тувинских музыкантов и исследователей не было единого мнения о звучании традиционной музыки или ее представления миру. Хотя это и не было четко сформулировано, тувинские музыканты, наряду с местными и иностранными продюсерами и этномузыковедами, находились в поиске «души» тувинской музыки — звукомызыкальной чувствительности, которая отражала бы мировоззрение предков тувинцев как кочевых охотников-скотоводов.*

*Данная статья основана на этнографической и архивной полевой работе автора в Туве, Соединенных Штатах и Европе (2005–2017). Исследуется взаимосвязь идеологии, эстетики и ряда других факторов, что отразилось на создании тувинской «традицион-*

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more representative of “authentic” Tuvan musical practices. Neoliberal “branding” of *xöömei* throat-singing and Tuvan traditional music within the world music industries produced new forms of meaning and value for Tuvan people in the post-Soviet era. It also gave legitimacy to local projects of postcolonial historiography and precipitated a reevaluation of indigenous culture, language, and identity. This article traces and attempts to disentangle the work of some of the agents who were instrumental in shaping Tuvan musical aesthetics during the 1980s and 1990s, which are foundational to understanding Tuva’s contemporary music scenes based in the republic’s capital city of Kyzyl.

Keywords: Post-Soviet Tuva; traditional music; world music; *xöömei*; throat-singing; ethnomusicology; music entrepreneurship; Tuva Ensemble; Z. Kyrgys; T. Levin; V. Suzukei; Huun-Huur-Tu; Yat-Kha

ной музыки» и «мировой музыки» в 1980-х и 1990-х гг. Стремления заинтересованных групп и авторов, которые были вовлечены в процесс переосмысления эстетики традиционной музыки Тувы, были разными и не всегда совместимыми. Но их совместные усилия повлияли на отказ от фольклорных моделей, возникших в советский период, как чересчур искусственных, и принятие моделей мировой музыкальной индустрии как лучшие представляющих «аутентичность» тувинских музыкальных практик.

Описываются некоторые эстетические решения, которые подводят фундамент под этнографические записи звукомызыкальных практик в Туве, которые были созданы во время перестройки и получили широкое распространение в Европе, Северной Америке и Японии. Исследуется международная аудитория и формирование групп единомышленников. Подчеркивается важность роли репрезентации, увлечения и ожидания в формировании восприятия тувинских музыкантов, когда они только начали выезжать в международные туры. Рассматривается развитие предпочтений — музыкальных и эстетических — нескольких ранних составов тувинского «неотрадиционного» музыкального ансамбля «Хун-Хурту».

Ключевые слова: постсоветская Тува; традиционная музыка; мировая музыка; *xöömei*; горловое пение; этномышленничество; музыкальное предпринимательство; ансамбль «Тыва»; З. Кыргыз; Т. Левин; В. Сузукей; Хун-Хурту; Ят-Ха

In 1999, *Washington Post* music critic Mark Jenkins reflected on the rising international popularity of Tuvan throat-singing during the 1990s:

Perhaps because mainstream pop has become exceptionally bland and characterless, the market continues to grow for ethnic music that is rich in meaning and exotic in sound. Thus the remarkable boom in [the 1990s of] such unfamiliar forms as, of all things, Tuvan throat singing (Jenkins, 1999).

Yet Tuvan musicologist Valentina Suzukei, responding to this newspaper article from the perspective of communities living in this small Turkic-speaking republic in south-central Siberia, observed that the “remarkable boom” of Tuvan throat-singing’s emergence into world music markets occurred in Tuva “rather imperceptibly” (Suzukei, 2007a: 51).

The gap between Jenkins’s and Suzukei’s observations is an invitation to consider the history and role of throat-singing, or *xöömei*, in the traditional



music of Tuva. On the one hand, *xöömei* is an old and respected art form that has played, and continues to play, an important role in the development of Tuvan people's unique traditional music culture<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, *xöömei* throat-singing is not among the more popular genres of music consumed and enjoyed by the majority of people living in Tuva today. That *xöömei* only begins to scratch the surface of an inherited “nomadic” musical ecology—one linked with a timbre-centered system of sound organization found in a number of older vocal and instrumental music genres—suggests that international awareness of Tuvan music has been selective in focusing its attention on *xöömei* and not on other musical and sound-making practices<sup>2</sup>. Understanding the contemporary situation in Tuva's traditional music scenes is made more complicated by this Inner Asian region's modern history as an independent country (1921–1944), an autonomous socialist republic within the Soviet Union (1944–1991), and a republic in the Russian Federation (1991–present). During each of these periods of history, practices associated with rural nomadic life were documented, institutionalized, and (re)shaped in various ways to match prevailing folkloric ideologies for Tuvan “traditional” culture.

With the dissolution of Soviet state socialism and transition to global market capitalism, ensembles of folk musicians from Tuva began touring internationally and engaging with new opportunities, interests, economic forces, and audiences in order to present the region's rich traditional music culture. Enamored especially of *xöömei* throat-singing, international audiences were not particularly well-informed about Tuvan music and culture; moreover, Tuvan musicians and scholars were not in agreement about the way Tuvan traditional music should sound or how it should be presented to the world<sup>3</sup>. Many were less interested in the cultural processes that came about from the modernization of Tuvan folklore during the Soviet Union and more interested in those practices that were not mediated by institutions—or, at least, in models for representing these cultural practices which did their best to remove or

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<sup>1</sup> Commonly called “throat-singing” in English, *xöömei* refers to solo-voice drone singing practices associated with nomadic pastoralism, male guttural virtuosity, and multi-phonic overtone melodies with historic roots in the Sayan-Altai Mountains of Inner Asia. *Xöömei* singing is most commonly associated with the Republic of Tuva and Western Mongolia (where it is called *xöömii*), but related vocal traditions are practiced in Altai (*kai*) and Xakassia (*xai*), Bashkortostan (*ödläü*), and in other parts of Central Eurasia under different names.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the “timbre-centered system” and related concepts of “sound mimesis” in Tuva's sonic-musical cultural practices, see Levin, Suzukei, 2006; see also Behrs, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the debates originating at the “Xöömei-92” First International Symposium of Traditional Throat-Singing of the People of Tuva, Kyzyl (Melodii Khoomeia, 1994).



counteract the perceived “Europeanization” of Tuvan musical aesthetics. While not explicitly articulated, Tuvan musicians alongside local and international producers, promoters, and ethnomusicologists were searching for the “soul” of Tuvan music—a sonic-musical sensibility that reflected a worldview of Tuvan people’s ancestors as nomadic hunter-pastoralists living in yurts and interacting with the sounds of animals and spirits in the Sayan-Altai Mountain environments of Tuvan people’s Inner Asia homeland<sup>1</sup>.

Drawing on ethnographic and archival fieldwork in the Tuva Republic, the United States, and Europe (2005–2017), this article explores some of the relationships between ideology, aesthetics, circulation, and agency in productions of Tuvan “traditional music” and “world music” during the 1980s and 1990s<sup>2</sup>. This article contends that the conditions surrounding the dissolution of state socialism in the former Soviet Union laid the groundwork for the meaning and value of culture and identity in post-Soviet Tuva, including traditional music, to be renegotiated. The intentions of actors and interest groups involved in renegotiating the aesthetics of Tuva’s traditional music were diverse and not always consistent. Nonetheless, their efforts in combination had the effect of *rejecting* Soviet state-sponsored folkloric models as overly mediated and *embracing* global music industry models as more representative of “authentic” Tuvan musical practices<sup>3</sup>. Neoliberal “branding” of *xöömei* throat-singing and Tuvan traditional music within the world music industries produced new forms of meaning and value for Tuvan people in the post-Soviet era. It also gave legitimacy to local projects of postcolonial historiography and precipitated a reevaluation of indigenous culture, language, and identity. This

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of “nomadic sensibility” in post-Soviet Tuva’s traditional music scenes, see Beahrs, 2014 and forthcoming work.

<sup>2</sup> In conceiving of “tradition,” this article draws on Raymond Williams’ understanding of “an intentionally selective version of a shaped past and pre-shaped present” (Williams, 1977: 115). The term “world music” is a Western European music marketing category used since the mid-1980s to refer to non-Western folk, pop, and classical musics. For a discussion of the politics of aesthetics, mediation, and cultural representation in “world music,” see, for example, Erlmann 1996; Guilbault, 1997; Feld 2000.

<sup>3</sup> In tracing agency through processes of articulation, I am most indebted to the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall and the way his work has been taken up by ethnomusicologist Jocelyne Guilbault. In *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad’s Carnival Music* (2007), Guilbault conceives of agency “as resulting from a combination of material conditions, individual and collective actions, and historical events and contingencies *in their articulation*—that is, not orchestrated by an institution or a sovereign subject. I differ in my analytical use of ‘agency’ from those who understand the term as the sole property of an intentional, willful, human individual or collective social group...” (Guilbault, 2007: 269–270).



article traces and attempts to disentangle the work of some of the agents who were instrumental in shaping Tuvan musical aesthetics during the 1980s and 1990s, which are foundational to understanding Tuva's contemporary music scenes based in the republic's capital city of Kyzyl.

The first section of this article describes some of the aesthetic decisions that underpinned ethnographic recordings of sonic-musical practices in Tuva produced during *Perestroika* and circulated widely in Europe, North America, and Japan. The second section examines how international audiences and affinity groups formed in relation to circulating representations of Tuvan people as “nomads” during the final decades of the twentieth century. This section emphasizes the central role of representation, fascination, and expectation in shaping how Tuvan musicians were received when they began touring internationally during the early years of the post-Soviet era. The third section examines the musical and aesthetic negotiations of several early line-ups of the Tuvan “neotraditional” music ensemble Huun-Huur-Tu. It also examines processes of mediation in recording studios, showing how this mediation helped establish an aesthetic groove for the ensemble's new sound. Finally, the last section of the article discusses how the global circulation of Tuvan musicians and media productions, audience reception, international collaborations, and individual musicians' creative artistry worked synergistically to reshape notions of the “traditional” in post-Soviet Tuva and to inspire other Turco-Mongol populations across Siberia and Inner Asia to reevaluate their traditional music practices and cultivate new forms of cultural production and entrepreneurship.

### ***I. RUPTURES IN LATE SOVIET FOLKLORIC IDEOLOGY***

During the Tuvan People's Republic (1921–1944), also called Tannu Tuva, practices associated with nomadism were abandoned as “backwards” ways of life<sup>1</sup>. During this period and in those that followed, sonic-musical practices

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<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath prefer the term “mobile pastoralism” to “nomadism,” because it does not bring with it commonly held assumptions of nomads as “backward” peoples (Humphrey, Sneath, 1999: 1). As they write, “nomadism is a category imagined by outsiders, and it brings with it many suppositions about pastoral life, such as that it is free and egalitarian ... or based on segmentary lineages ... or uses a wandering type of movement .... Other well-known images are of fierce, warlike tribes given to predatory expansion ... or simple folk whose highest cultural achievement is a colourful rug. Another, and influential, view is that nomads have a low technological capacity and are necessarily dependent on the ‘outside’ sedentary world” (ibid.).

associated with Tuvan herders and hunters were documented, systematized, and elevated as quintessentially national artistic forms. As a result, *xöömei* throat-singing and Tuvan traditional music were grounded in those very nomadic practices and sensibilities that were being deliberately pushed aside in the name of nation-building and socialist modernization (Beahrs, 2014). In 1934, the first recordings of *xöömeizhi* (master throat-singers) and folk musicians were made in Moscow. Musicological examination of *xöömei* began in the pre-Revolutionary era with the work of music folklorist Andrei N. Anokhin (1874–1931) and took on more serious study in the 1940s when Russian composer Alexei N. Aksenov (1909–1962), working alongside Tuvan musicians and folklorists such as Maksim Munzuk (1910–1999) and others, produced the first scholarly monograph devoted exclusively to Tuvan folk music (Aksenov, 1964)<sup>1</sup>. By the late 1960s, *xöömei* was actively cultivated in regional Houses of Culture across the Tuvan ASSR as an amateur art form, and, by the 1970s, the first ensembles of throat-singers were organized, and various line-ups of musicians



Figure 1. The Tuva Ensemble posing near Lake Bai-Xöl, Erzyn, Tuva (1991); sitting, left to right: Anatoli Kuular, Gennadi Tumat, Radomir Mongush, Sergei Ondar, and Kaigal-ool Xovalyg (photo courtesy of Pan Records).

Рис. 1. Ансамбль «Тыва» рядом с озером Бай-Хөл, Эрзин, Тыва (1991); сидят, слева направо: Анатолий Куулар, Геннадий Тумат, Радомир Монгуш, Сергей Ондар и Кайгал-оол Ховалыг (фото предоставлено Pan Records).

<sup>1</sup> Munzuk's collection *Yrlar* ("Songs") in Tuvan language was published in 1956, and the follow-up *Tyva ulustung yrlary* ("Tuvan folk songs") was published in 1973. Munzuk's musical notations were preceded by several collections of song lyrics in the 1940s, including one co-edited with S. Saryg-ool entitled *Chyyndy yrlar* ("Collection of Songs"). See also Anokhin, 2005.



performed in amateur arts festivals across the Soviet Union and even abroad<sup>1</sup>. During the 1980s, Tuvan folklorists and musicologists working at the Tuvan Scientific-Research Institute of Literature, Language, and History (TNIYaLI) began more serious collections of folkloric material, arranging traditional music ensembles, such as the Tuva Ensemble (see Figure 1; Media example #1), and redefining amateur artists as professional folk musicians<sup>2</sup>. As a result of these efforts, *xöömei* was further elevated as a musical art form worthy of national cultural distinction, and *xöömeizhi* were honored as professional artists of the republic.

Tuvan traditional music and the actors who sought to shape it were faced with a paradox that reflected a changing political, cultural, and economic moment during the final decades of the twentieth century. While Soviet-directed modernization policies had worked to shape, build, and differentiate Tuvan national culture within the sphere of Soviet multiculturalism and internationalism, it also imported values and sensibilities of European art music and Romantic folkloric interpretations. Despite the efforts of folklorists to reorient Tuvan traditional music towards ethnographic nomadic realism, state sponsorship of Tuvan music in the 1980s continued to favor large ensembles of folk musicians using arranged texts and theatrical staged performances of rural nomadic life. This began to change during *Perestroika* when the first Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition (1987–1988) was organized with the goal of finding and recording Tuvan musicians who were not a part of professional music communities. The professionalization of Tuvan musicians implied to these researchers that the artists' musical sensibilities had been aligned with Soviet folkloric aesthetics and away from the rural sound of Tuva's nomadic herders and hunters living in the countryside—the “original” context of “authentic” throat-singing. Like all ethnographic projects, this one had an agenda, and the result was again to shift attention toward a different model for valuing Tuvan folklore—rural and untrained village musicians.

### ***RURAL TRADITION-BEARERS***

According to American ethnomusicologist Theodore (“Ted”) Levin, *xöömei*

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<sup>1</sup> The ensemble, called Sygyrga (in Tuvan, “Oriole”) included, at various times, such notable musicians as Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak, Kara-sal Ak-ool, Maksim Dakpai, Marzhymal Ondar, and Sat Manchakai. See Karelina, 2009: 250–251.

<sup>2</sup> The Tuva Ensemble was founded in 1987–88 by Tuvan musicologist Zoya Kyrgys alongside *xöömeizhi* and folk musician Gennadi Tumat. For a discussion of the professionalization of amateur artists into folk musicians, see Kyrgys, 2002; Suzukei, 2007; van Tongeren, 2002.



“ranks as one of the world’s strangest forms of music-making” (1991: 56). Having spent several years conducting research in Soviet Central Asia in the 1970s, Levin was one of the first American researchers to visit Soviet-era Tuva when he arrived there in 1987 with the goal of studying Tuvan music. Levin recalls:

In the mid-1980s, I [began] conspiring to travel to a part of the Soviet Union that had aroused considerable curiosity in the West, but that was diplomatically closed to foreigners from what were then called in the Soviet political lexicon — ‘Capitalist Countries’ .... The off-limits destination that interested me was Tuva — a small autonomous region in south Siberia. And the specific object of my interest was the musical practice known in English as throat-singing, in which a single singer can produce two or more pitches simultaneously by selectively amplifying harmonics or overtones that are naturally present in the voice. I was able to cut through the red tape that barred ‘capitalist foreigners’ from traveling to Tuva, and, on assignment from National Geographic Magazine, I went there in 1987 to study and record throat-singing, thus becoming the second American to be allowed to conduct field research in Tuva<sup>1</sup>.

Central to Levin’s plan was his relationship with Russian-Sakha folklorist and musicologist Eduard Alekseev, who helped to organize the necessary sponsorship from the Union of Composers for Levin, along with photographer Karen Sherlock, Buryat ethnographer Dashinima Dugarov, and Tuvan folklorist Zoya Kyrgys. Together they would participate in what came to be known as the Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition.

News traveled fast of the “*Xöömeizhi* from America” who was collecting songs of throat-singers<sup>2</sup>. Levin’s Tuvan hosts were “excited and wary at the prospect of American visitors venturing off the beaten track” (Levin, 1991: 57). In preparation for the arrival of the expedition, the Tuvan government had repainted the entire village of Teeli (Bai-Taiga) and organized a number of folkloric concerts in Teeli’s regional House of Culture. The government even staged a fake wedding. Levin explains: “The choreographed performances of these amateur groups

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<sup>1</sup> Levin, “Why Music Matters,” 24th Faculty Presidential Lecture at Dartmouth College (28 February 2012). The first American researcher, according to Levin, was biologist Katherine Wynne-Edwards, who visited Tuva to study the Siberian dwarf hamster.

<sup>2</sup> Levin explains: “A melody or two from me has become a standard part of our yurt visits. My performance often turns into an impromptu jam session with fellow musicians” (Levin, 1991: 60). Levin had previous experience with reinforced harmonic singing when he participated in David Hykes’s famous Harmonic Choir founded in 1975 (Levin, 2006: xviii).



did not offer the sort of musical authenticity that stirs ethnomusicologists. We are more interested in the rough edges of music—the unpolished, spontaneous performance that signals new musical creation, the cracked wispy voices of old people offering reminiscences of their society’s past” (Levin, 1991: 57–58). In an interview for the *Tuvinskaya Pravda* newspaper, Levin explained:

The goal of our expedition was to gather material for a record, which will be made by the firm ‘Melodiya’ in the USSR and USA. To this end, we needed traditional singing without manipulation or arrangement. The greatest interest in the world calls for pure folk melodies. We also liked the singing of Gennadi Chash from Shagonar, who participated in the folklore festival in USA, and construction worker Mergen Mongush from Kyzyl. We made video camera recordings of them on film. Music is a living organism that constantly changes. What we recorded today may be forgotten in a year .... I think that we have fulfilled our task and in a year will release a scholarly recording with text in English, Russian, and Tuvan languages with notated transcriptions .... I am sure that the materials from the expedition will promote the singing art of the Tuvan people.”<sup>1</sup>

Levin similarly recalled folklorist Alekseev’s reaction to a performance by a musician in a yurt: “It’s not authentic .... It’s been influenced by professional cultural workers who come here and think they can improve Tuvan folk music by polishing it up. But these traditions have evolved and changed slowly over centuries. The people themselves know what the music should sound like” (Levin, 1991: 60). Alekseev’s reaction reveals three things: his view that *xöömei* is an age-old cultural practice that changes very slowly, that the arrangement of *xöömei* was an unwanted act of outside interference, and his belief that Tuvan people felt the same way. For Levin and Alekseev, the 1987 expedition was, in common parlance, a bust.

In 1988, the Second Republican Festival of Throat-Singing took place in Kyzyl (the first had been in 1981). One of the festival’s events was the “Conference on the Problems of Developing *Xöömei*,” during which Sundukai Mongush, a master *xöömei* performer from the Dzun-Xemchik district, posed a question regarding the Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition:

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<sup>1</sup>Levin, interview in *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 8 September 1988 (“‘Xoomeizhi’ iz Massachusettsa” [*Xöömeizhi* from Massachusetts]). Translated from Russian by the author.



Sundukai Mongush: Will we see in Tuva the work of American professor Theodore Levin?

Zoya Kyrgys: The work of last year's expedition [1987] was not accepted due to the lack of natural conditions for the performers, so this year we will undertake another expedition, where recordings will be made under conditions in which *xöömei* performers live day-to-day (Kyrgys, 1988: 3).

Kyrgys's answer supports Levin's statements that 1987 expedition was overly "staged," and that the real goal of the expedition was to collect raw and un-arranged folkloric material from rural performers for whom *xöömei* (and other sonic-musical practices) were part of their "day-to-day" lives. Levin and Alekseev had greater success on their second visit in 1988. The expedition recorded about 500 melodies of throat-singing, lullaby songs, folk tales, and legends. Forty-two minutes of this material were edited and produced for the Smithsonian Folkways album *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia* (1990, see Figure 2)<sup>1</sup>.

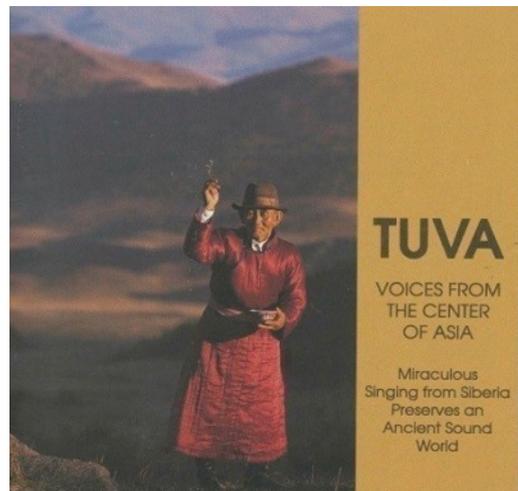


Figure 2. The album *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia* — "Miraculous Singing from Siberia Preserves an Ancient Sound World"— featured a photograph of Tuvan musician *Idamchap Xomushku* taken by Karen Sherlock (1990, *Smithsonian Folkways*, produced by Ted Levin, Eduard Alekseev, and Zoya Kyrgys).

Рис. 2. Обложка альбома «Тува: голоса из центра Азии. Чудесное пение из Сибири сохраняет древний мир звука». На фото изображен тувинский музыкант Идам-чап Хомушку, фото Карен Шерлок (1990, *Smithsonian Folkways*, продюсеры Тед Левин, Эдуард Алексеев и Зоя Кыргыз).

## AUTHORITY AND PERESTROIKA

What was the Soviet-American expedition really about? And what implications did it have for *xöömei* and the people who sang it? The expedition, it turns out, was driven mostly by the aesthetic agendas of Levin and Alekseev, which Kyrgys supported<sup>2</sup>. For the previous quarter century, researchers and specialists had been developing, improving, and modernizing Tuvan *xöömei* by cultivating

<sup>1</sup> The remaining materials have since been deposited in the archives of the Tuvan Institute of Humanitarian and Applied Economic Studies (formerly called TNIIYaLI and also TIGI) in Kyzyl.

<sup>2</sup> The aesthetic agendas of this folkloric expedition were also influenced by a folk revival movement active in the Soviet Union since the 1960s. See, for example, Levin, 1996. See also Alekseev, 1986 and Kyrgys, 2002, 2008.



competence in musical instruments, forming ensembles, making the music more interactive, and crafting an arranged aesthetic based on Tuvan folkloric themes. Levin and Alekseev sought something different—a raw, traditional, “non-Soviet” aesthetic.

This aesthetic was evident in the singing of an older generation of *xöömeizhi*, such as Sundukai Mongush (b. 1926; Media example #2), Fedor Tau (b. 1929), and Marzhymal Ondar (b. 1932), but also in a younger trio called Ensemble Amyrak (in Tuvan, “Beloved”)<sup>1</sup>. As the liner notes to the album describe, Amyrak demonstrates an “attempt to carry forward traditional music in the context of contemporary performance conditions, including the concert stage, recording studio, and television” (see Figure 3)<sup>2</sup>. In contrast to earlier state ensembles, Amyrak typically performed with one *doshpuluur* (plucked lute) or on multiple *demir xomus* jew’s harps, as they do in “Medley of various throat-singing styles” (Media example #3) included on *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia*. Amyrak also was one of the earliest examples of a smaller, more intimate three- or four-person ensemble, a model that would become the norm in the post-Soviet era (with the addition of more instruments). Building on the trends of *xöömei* under *Perestroika*, Amyrak had an ambiguous relationship with institutions, which allowed the group to be “professional folk musicians” or “village amateurs” depending on the situation. Instead of self-conscious folkloric cultivation, Amyrak’s performances embodied the “authentic” regional amateurism that Levin and Alekseev sought and promoted. Indeed, Levin brought Gennadi Chash, Ensemble Amyrak’s leader, to the United States to perform in 1988, making him the first *xöömeizhi* soloist to do so<sup>3</sup>. In their review of the concert, *The New York Times* reported that:

[t]he most exotic sounds, to an American ear, came from Gennadi T. Chash, a singer from the Tuva region near Mongolia. Mr. Chash can vocalize both a fundamental tone and its upper overtones—harsh lower tones, which he produces in either a nasal baritone or a subterranean bass topped by clear,

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<sup>1</sup> The Ensemble Amyrak trio included Gennadi Chash, Mergen Mongush, and Evgeni Oyun. The ensemble also performed as a quartet with the addition of Kara-ool Tumat.

<sup>2</sup> Levin, Kyrgys, Alekseev, liner notes, *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia*, 1990: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Contrary to certain claims (see Levin 2006: 235, fn. 13), Chash was not the first Tuvan musician to perform in the United States. That honor likely goes to Vladimir Soyan, who performed *xöömei* as part of Igor Moiseyev’s Russian Festival of Music and Dance in New York City in 1976. See Christopher S. Wren, “The Russians are Coming—With Dancing Eskimos,” *The New York Times*, 27 June 1976. Also Vladimir Soyan, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 22 June 2013.



flutelike harmonic, connected and trilled as smoothly as a *bel canto* singer's best register. In one piece, he plucked a *xomus* (jew's harp) to add a third note between vocal lines<sup>1</sup>.



Figure 3. On the left, *xöömei* Ensemble *Amyrak* (Mergen Mongush, Kara-ool Tumat, Gennadi Chash, and Evgeni Oyun). On the right, Gennadi Chash, *Amyrak*'s leader (Karelina, 2009: 390).

Рис. 3. Слева — ансамбль «Амырак» (Мерген Монгуш, Кара-оол Тумат, Геннадий Чаш и Евгений Оюн). Справа — Геннадий Чаш, солист ансамбля (Karelina, 2009: 390).

The significance of ethnomusicological work by Levin, Alekseev, and Kyrgys during the Joint Soviet-American Musical-Ethnographic Research Expedition appears to be twofold. First, after decades of isolation from non-Soviet foreigners, the presence of an American academic carried considerable cultural capital and bolstered the prestige of local traditions. The goals of the expedition helped re-orient Tuvan music towards its “rougher edges.” Second, that re-orientation suggests that Levin, like the ethnographers and musicologists who visited Tuva earlier in the twentieth century, was a cultural producer alongside the other members of the expedition and the musicians with whom they collaborated. If we accept that music is a cultural production involving multiple actors, including musicians, consumers, promoters, and record producers, then we understand that Levin and his colleagues promoted and re-oriented the aesthetics of *xöömei* and Tuvan traditional music. In privileging certain aesthetic qualities over those that had come before, Levin worked to disrupt a Soviet teleology of folk music aesthetics and replace it with something different.

<sup>1</sup> Jon Pareles, “Music from the Villages of the Soviet Union,” *The New York Times*, 8 July 1988.



Most fundamentally, the *Voices from the Center of Asia* project seemed to show that some of the aspects of Tuvan culture that were thought to have been lost during the Soviet cultural enlightenment projects of the twentieth century could be recovered—or, more precisely, that the value of Tuvan music seemed to be in indirect relation to modernization and professionalization. The irony, of course, is that the very forms of institutional cultural mediation that worked to document, construct, and elevate Tuvan traditional music to its status in the 1980s were subsequently erased from the equation so that Tuvan traditional music could reemerge—at least on the discursive level—as an “authentic” and unmediated cultural form. While the producers and musicians involved in the project should be lauded for their diligent efforts at documenting, recording, and contextualizing diverse and varied examples of *xöömei* singing styles, in addition to other sound and music-making practices, *Voices from the Center of Asia* had the effect of shaping international perception and expectation of Tuvan music as derived from an “ancient” and nomadic “sound world” whose ethnographic authenticity had the effect of imbuing subsequent Tuvan world music projects with new forms of meaning and value in the global marketplace.

## ***II. CIRCULATING & REPRESENTING TUVAN CULTURE***

Long before *Voices from the Center of Asia* was released in 1990, images and sounds from Tuva had been circulated internationally as early as the 1930s. While lacking in ethnographic context, many of these representations produced and perpetuated exotic stereotypes of Tuvan people as pre-modern nomads. The isolation and inaccessibility of Tuva in the hinterlands of the Soviet Union further worked to mythologize Tuva within the global imagination and establish expectations of Tuvan musicians when they began to tour internationally in the early 1990s. The next section traces the case study of American physicist Richard Feynman (1918–1988) and his quest to reach Tuva beginning in the 1970s, showing how he and others worked to forge intercultural connections with Tuvan people and build international networks of fans and enthusiasts of Tuvan traditional culture and *xöömei* throat-singing. On the other hand, this section also suggests that the popularization of Tuva had the effect of essentializing Tuvan people as modern-day nomads within the global imagination of Western desires and expectations.



THE QUEST FOR TANNU TUVA

Tannu Tuva probably first entered the global imagination through its quirky postage stamps. Minted between the years of 1934 and 1936, the stamps came in seventy different varieties, “more than the rest of western Europe and the U. S. combined,” reported journalist Andrew Higgins (Higgins, 1995). The stamps came in odd shapes—diamonds, triangles, rectangles—and depicted the traditional cultural and economic life of Tuvan nomads, including images of yaks, reindeer, and camels alongside traditional sports like horse racing, wrestling, and archery (see Figures 4 and 5)<sup>1</sup>. Representative of Tuva’s period of accelerated socialist modernization, some of the stamps depicted dramatic juxtapositions of technology and nomadic life that, in some cases, were fictitious<sup>2</sup>.



Figure 4. Postage stamps from the 1934 Registered Post Series featuring images of traditional economic activities alongside their rapid modernization during the Tannu Tuva era (1921–1944): a woman milking a yak (5 kopeks), a man lassoing a reindeer (15 kopeks), and a man driving a tractor (4 kopeks).

Images from Friends of Tuva website: <http://www.fotuva.org/stamps/index.html>

Рис. 4. Почтовые марки с 1934 г. представляли картинки традиционной хозяйственной деятельности тувинцев в Танну-Тува наряду с модернизацией эпохи 1921–1944 гг.: женщина доит яка (5 коп.), мужчина ловит арканом оленя (15 копеек), мужчина за рулем трактора (4 коп.).



Figure 5. Released in 1936 for the Jubilee of the 15th Anniversary of the Proclamation of the People’s Republic of Tannu Tuva, these postage stamps depict the three traditional Tuvan sports of horse racing (50 kopeks), xuresh wrestling (4 kopeks), and archery (5 kopeks). The remaining stamps depict a camel chasing a train (30 kopeks) and a nomad’s yurt at a festival (3 kopeks). Images from Friends of Tuva website: <http://www.fotuva.org/stamps/index.html>

Рис. 5. Выпущенные в 1936 г. в честь 15-летия провозглашения Республики Танну-Тува почтовые марки изображали три вида тувинского традиционного спорта: спортивные скачки (50 коп.), борьбу хуреш (4 коп.), стрельба из лука (5 копеек). На остальных марках изображены: гонка верблюда за поездом (30 коп.) и юрта кочевника на фестивале (3 коп.).

<sup>1</sup> The original Tannu Tuva stamps were released as the Registered Post and Air Mail series (1934), the Landscape and Zoological series (1935), and the Jubilee and Jubilee Air Mail series (1946). See Blekhman, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> For example, there were never any train tracks in Tuva until 2011, when the first railway extension to Tuva began construction. See, for example, the announcement *Predsedatel’ Pravitel’stva ...*, 2011.



Although the stamps from the 1930s allegedly represented life in Tannu Tuva, they were, according to Higgins, “designed in Moscow, printed in Moscow, franked in Moscow and sold abroad by a Moscow state trading firm to earn hard currency for Moscow” (Higgins, 1995). In other words, Tuvan people played a minimal role in shaping the stamps’ representations, and foreign audiences, not Tuvans, were the intended consumers (see Blekhman, 1997). Because Tuvans were a largely unknown population group from an obscure country in Inner Asia, the stamps were often the only representation of Tuvan life for the people who bought them.

As the stamps circulated among international collectors, they inspired fascination with Tuva as a twentieth-century “Shangri-La” in the global imagination. One young boy was especially captivated. In the 1930s, decades before he became a Nobel prize-winning physicist, a young Richard Feynman became aware of the postage stamps from Tannu Tuva during conversations with his father in Queens, New York. In a video-taped interview for a documentary film about his life, Feynman recalls:

I knew that there was this country when I was a kid that my father explained to me was an independent country, [and] they had these interesting stamps. I think he had shown me on the map where it was. And it was a purple area in the middle of some big green thing in the middle of Asia somewhere! And as time went on, I never heard of it again. And it’s supposed to be an independent country so it must have disappeared somehow...<sup>1</sup>

Feynman grew up to make important discoveries in quantum electrodynamics, which launched his prestigious career as a professor at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. Still, he never lost his boyhood interest in Tannu Tuva. He remembers fondly a 1977 dinner conversation on world geography with his friend Ralph Leighton, in which Feynman asked a provocative question:

‘OK, so what ever happened to Tannu Tuva?’ And [Ralph] said I’m making up a country that doesn’t exist. ‘Oh yeah?’ I said. And I got out the encyclopedia and we looked it up on a map and sure enough there’s Tannu Tuva and where was it? Just outside of Outer Mongolia in the middle of Central Asia in the depths of Russia far away from anything. And it was no longer an independent country—it was part of Russia! And we saw that the capital was—this is what did it—the capital was K-Y-Z-Y-L. My wife, and I

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<sup>1</sup> Feynman, quoted from the documentary film “Tuvans Invade America” (1994, Friends of Tuva). See also “Richard Feynman: The Last Journey of a Genius” (1988, NOVA).



and he, at the same time, grinned at each other because any place that's got a capital named K-Y-Z-Y-L has just got to be interesting...<sup>1</sup>

This conversation referred to the “absorption” of Tuva by the Soviet Union in 1944, when the nominally independent republic in the geographic heart of Asia literally disappeared from world maps. More important, the conversation inspired a quest by Feynman and Leighton to find out what had happened to the isolated Tuvan republic (see Figure 6):

[So] we decide[d] it would be fun to go there because it's so obscure and peculiar .... It's just the fun of having an adventure to try to go to a land that we'd never heard of—to find out what it's like and discover [things] as we went along .... We didn't have any deeper understanding of what we were doing—if we tried to understand what we were doing we'd go nutty!<sup>2</sup>

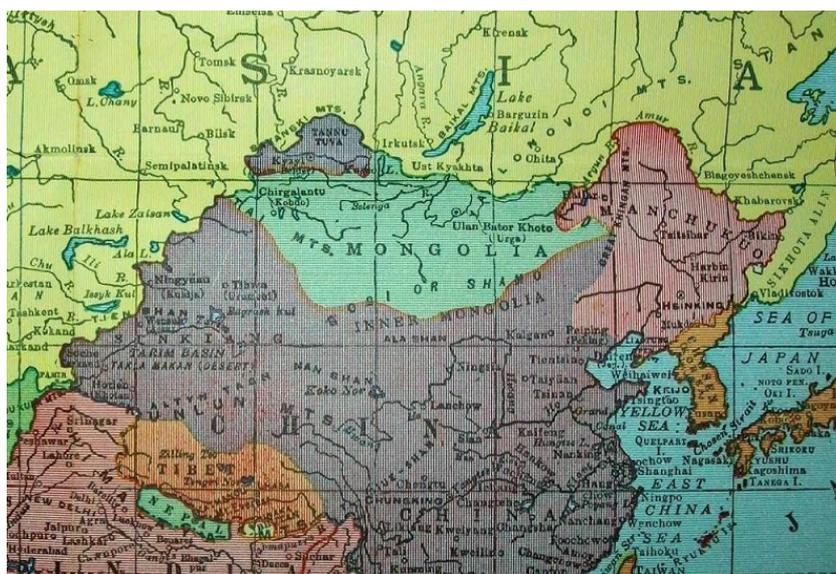


Figure 6. Map of East Asia showing independent country of “Tannu Tuva” (northwest of Mongolia) with a capital city called Kyzyl, circa 1938. Map originally in Goode’s World Atlas, Rand McNally (1938), reproduced from the Internet Map Archive, <http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/photolib/maps/index.html>

Рис. 6. Карта Восточной Азии показывает независимую страну “Танну-Тува” (к Северо-Западу от Монголии) со столицей под названием Кызыл, 1938 г. Карта была издана в Goode’s World Atlas, Rand McNally (1938), воспроизведено по варианту Internet Map Archive: <http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/photolib/maps/index.html>

But Feynman and Leighton faced a problem. Apart from a few quirky stamps and isolated references to Tuva in maps and books, there was little information (especially reliable information) about it available in the United States in the 1970s. The Soviet Union had severely restricted travel into the USSR by foreigners, as well as the export of information from it. Information

<sup>1</sup> “Tuvans Invade America,” 1994.

<sup>2</sup> “Tuvans Invade America,” 1994.

about the political changes that led to Tannu Tuva's disappearance from world atlases—its quiet “annexation” or “absorption” by the Soviet Union in 1944—was not easily accessible in the West<sup>1</sup>. The little scholarly information that was available consisted of ethnographic accounts of travelers to the Sayan-Altai mountains (for example, Carruthers and Miller, 1914; Maenchen-Helfen, 1992), Soviet anthropological accounts of nomadic pastoralism from the pre-Soviet era (Vainshtein, 1980), and the rare philological or linguistic handbook. This limited information about Tuvan people and their cultural practices likely worked to mythologize Tuvan people as nomads isolated deep in the heart of Asia.

Faced with this paltry information, Feynman and Leighton set about trying to learn everything they could about Tuva (see Figure 7). In addition to consulting the few sources described above, Feynman and Leighton relied heavily on the then-recently published *Tuvan Manual* (Krueger, 1977) written by John Krueger at the University of Indiana. As Leighton later wrote, “the *Tuvan Manual* became our Bible” (Leighton, 1991: 36). The 261-page manual contains two passing references to Tuvan throat-singing, the more specific of which stated:

A characteristic and specific feature of Tuvan music is the so-called two-voiced or “throat” singing commonly found among native Tuvans and hardly observed anywhere else. The singer sings in two voices. With his lower voice he sings the melody and accompanies it at the same time with a surprisingly pure and tender sound similar to that of the flute (Krueger, 1977: 79).

This reference piqued Feynman and Leighton's interest in Tuvan throat-singing. Using the *Tuvan Manual* to cobble together a letter in Tuvan language (as Leighton explained, “for Feynman, communicating with native people in their native language was a priority”), the two men eventually reached Tuvan

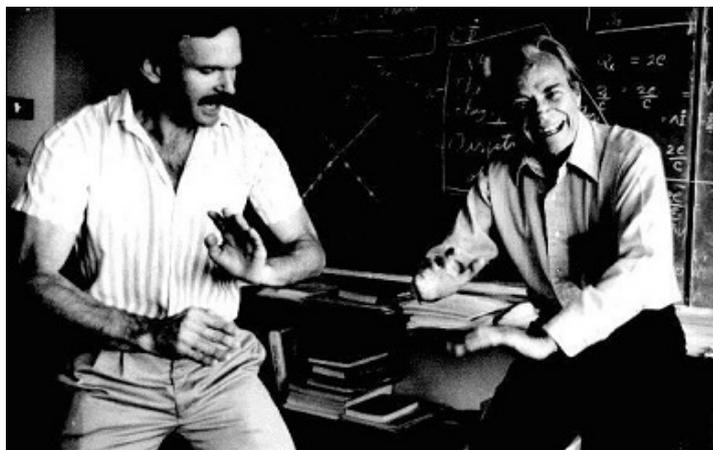


Figure 7. Ralph Leighton (left), founder of Friends of Tuva, and Nobel laureate Richard Feynman photographed during an imaginary drumming ritual. Photo courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, personal archive.

Рис. 7. Ральф Лейтон (слева), основатель Общества друзей Тувы, и лауреат Нобелевской премии Ричард Фейнман сфотографированы во время воображаемого барабанного ритуала. Фото из личного архива Ральфа Лейтона.

<sup>1</sup> For more perspectives on the “absorption” of Tuva, see Rupen, 1975, Aranchyn, 1982; Lewis, 2001.



folklorist Daryma Ondar, who worked at TNIIYaLI.<sup>1</sup> The three men wrote letters back and forth; in one, Ondar indicated that there had been recordings made of Tuvan throat-singers.

### HEARING THE POSTAGE STAMPS

Feynman and Leighton continued to pursue their interest in Tuva, and in *xöömei* in particular. A few years after they struck up a correspondence with Ondar, they got in touch with Russian/Soviet anthropologist Sevyan Vainshtein, whose monograph *Nomads of South Siberia* (Vainshtein, 1980) had been recently translated and published in English. Feynman and Leighton also received an LP entitled *Iskusstvo Narodov SSSR: Melodii Tuvy* (*Искусство народов СССР: Мелодии Тувы*, “Art of the Peoples of the USSR: Melodies of Tuva,” 1978) from a colleague who was returning from a research trip in Moscow (see Figure 8)<sup>2</sup>. Leighton remembers their first experience listening to the record, which included hearing for the first time the guttural timbres of Tuvan *xöömei*, *kargyraa*, and *sygyt* (Media examples #4 and #5):

Richard [Feynman] was holding a 12-inch phonograph record called *Melodii Tuvy* .... As euphoria set in, Richard took the record out of its jacket. I went over to the record player, dusted it off, cleaned off the needle, carefully placed the record on the platen, and took a deep breath. When my hand stopped shaking, I placed the needle carefully on the record ....

We were in shock. Tuva, isolated in the center of Asia—that little lost land of enchanting postage stamps—had transcended our wildest dreams. The sounds on the record were stunning: how could two notes be produced simultaneously by a single singer? At first the higher ‘voice’ sounded like a flute, several octaves higher than the fundamental tone. Then came even stranger styles of *höömei*, the most bizarre of which was the ‘rattling’ style, which sounded like a long-winded frog .... It took us several days to recover (Leighton, 1991: 61–62).

And the thing is, when we first put the record on, it was a performance in the *sygyt* style by Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak .... After hearing that, we were just mesmerized. We were just like: ‘Oh my God! This is amazing!’ And we did kind of interpret [*sygyt*] as sort of like a whistle. I don’t recall [Feynman] ever

<sup>1</sup> Daryma Ondar played an important role in connection with “discovering” and recording Tuvan throat-singer Xunashtaar-ool Oorzhak in the 1960s while working at TIINYaLI and shaping *xöömei* in the 1970s and 1980s. See Kuular and Sundui, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Ondar Darynma and Vyacheslav Shchurov organized this recording project in Tuva in the late 1960s.



saying: ‘Oh, of course, I know how he did that! It’s that harmonic series and he simply isolated separate harmonics out of the harmonic series and that’s what he’s doing.’ He didn’t analyze it in the physical sense and I’ll bet he could have .... He was listening to it from the cultural side. And just blown away by it emotionally. ‘Oh my God—we’ve got some sounds from Tuva!’ ....



Figure 8. The original cover of the LP *Iskusstvo Narodov SSSR: Melodii Tuvy (Tyva Ayalgalar)* (“Art of the Peoples of the USSR: Melodies of Tuva,” *Melodiya D-030773*, ca. 1968-1971) and the cover of one of the reprints from 1978.

Рис. 8. Оригинальная обложка альбома «Искусство народов СССР: Мелодии Тувы (Тыва аялгалар)» (*Мелодия D-030773*, Москва, 1968-1971) и репринт альбома в 1978 г.

[It] was an emotional experience, and we were so excited to get this audio description to complement the images in the postage stamps ....

You see, the stamps were our only image of Tuva. We only had a couple other photos and they were of a car on a street in Kyzyl in front of the Parliament building out of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia .... No nomads! Because the Soviets wanted to show the world how advanced Tuva was. But we also had photos taken in 1929 from Otto Maenchen-Helfen’s book—now that was the Tuva we wanted to see. And we wondered: is that still alive?<sup>1</sup> When we heard throat-singing on the *Melodii Tuvy* LP, it made us think: yes it is! At this moment, Feynman was so close to Tuva—he was in Tuva with his imagination<sup>2</sup>.

The distribution of *Melodii Tuvy* outside the Soviet Union was very limited. Given the scarcity of this and other sound recordings from Tuva, it is no surprise that *xöömei*’s unusual guttural timbre was intriguing and mysterious to Feynman, Leighton, and the other international enthusiasts who managed to hear it<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Maenchen-Helfen, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Leighton, personal interview, Tiburon, California, 17 April 2014.

<sup>3</sup> In Finland, for example, the *Melodii Tuvy* LP was played on a radio program in the late 1970s called “Pororumpu ja balalaikka” (Saunio and Immonen, 1979: 246–249), which prompted jazz musician Ilpo Saastamoinen to become one of the first foreigners to learn to sing *xöömei* and incorporate it into his music on an album called *Pohjantahti* (Polydor, 1986). See: *Kurkkulaulajan äänen kannattaja “Höömei”* [Throat-Singers Voice of *Khöömei*], Newsletter of the Finnish Throat-Singing Society (2007), <http://www.kurkkulaulajat.fi/>



## ASSEMBLING COMMUNITIES OF FASCINATION

At the time that Levin was visiting the Tuvan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1987–1988, Feynman and Leighton were planning a trip of their own. Unfortunately, Feynman's struggles with cancer led to his death in 1988, only a few days before an official invitation was finally arranged for him and Leighton to visit (Leighton, 1991: 219). Leighton, though, followed through on the visit as planned:

So when Feynman died, I thought—well, OK, I'll still go [to Tuva] .... But that whole adventure was about doing it together. That's why it was such a huge disappointment to go there but without him. It was just kind of empty .... If Feynman had been there, he would have charmed them to get us out into the countryside to see a real yurt and meet a real shepherd and that kind of stuff<sup>1</sup>.

Leighton's visit led him to write the often hilarious, sometimes emotional book *Tuva or Bust!* (Leighton, 1991), which chronicles Feynman's and Leighton's goal to visit Tuva as well as Leighton's experiences there. In addition, after Feynman's death, Leighton founded Friends of Tuva, an organization that became a primary collector and disseminator of information in English about Tuvan history and culture, including *xöömei*, between 1991 and 1999. By 1993, there were said to be Friends of Tuva in every U.S. state, as well as in Canada, Europe, and Japan (see Figures 9 and 10), and *Tuva or Bust!* had been translated into Japanese (1991). Friends of Tuva annually distributed three or four newsletters per year to several thousand members, including travel narratives of foreign tourists to Tuva in the early post-Soviet era; information about the concert tours of traveling Tuvan musicians; and films, exhibitions, newspaper articles, and stamps. Friends of Tuva even inspired similar groups in other countries, including the Finnish Throat-Singing (Kurkkulaulu) Society founded in 1997 and the Tuva-Japan *Khöömei* Association<sup>2</sup>.

Together, *Voices From the Center of Asia*, *Tuva or Bust!*, Friends of Tuva, and other published material and organizations launched a groundswell of global interest in Tuva—a fad that peaked in the early to mid-1990s and waned in the 2000s. Sound recordings, meetings, newsletters, classes and other things served to collect, produce, and circulate knowledge and mythologies about Tuvan people and cultural practices. But there was another, equally instrumental

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Leighton, personal interview, Tiburon, California, 17 April 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Sauli Heikkilä, personal communication, 11 August 2014; see also Makigami, 2013.



player in that process: the Tuvan musicians who, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, traveled, performed, and made sound recordings in Europe, North America, and Japan.



Figure 9. Leighton and Feynman designed this custom California license plate to attract the attention of anyone on the public roadways who might be able to share information about Tuva. Touva is the French spelling for Tuva, commonly used in the postage stamps from the 1930s. Photo courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, personal archive.

Рис. 9. Лейтон и Фейнман придумали этот автомобильный номерной знак штата Калифорния, чтобы привлечь по пути внимание кого-либо на дорогах, кто может поделиться информацией о Туве. Touva — это французское написание для Тувы, которое широко используется на почтовых марках 1930-х годов. Фото из личного архива Ральфа Лейтона.

торое широко используется на почтовых марках 1930-х годов. Фото из личного архива Ральфа Лейтона.

Figure 10. Members of the Oklahoma chapter of Friends of Tuva and “Tuva Astronomy Organization” pose on Mount Feynman near Checotah, Oklahoma. Followers of Feynman’s achievements in the field of physics also connected with each other through the Friends of Tuva organization. Photo courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, private archive.



Рис. 10. Члены местного отделения Общества друзей Тувы в Оклахоме и «Тувинской Астрономической Организации» около горы Фейнман рядом с г. Чекота, Оклахома. Последователи Фейнмана в области физики связывались друг с другом через посредство организации друзей Тувы.

## PRESENTING & MARKETING TUVAN MUSICIANS

As members of the Tuva Ensemble began to tour internationally in the early 1990s, their performances were often perceived as shocking, titillating, and exotic by Western audiences. Many Tuvan performers were understood to be representatives of Tuva’s ancient nomadic culture, which seemed to clash with their Soviet-style performances of theatrical nomadic folklorism.

The first Tuvan musicians to travel abroad in the late 1980s and early 1990s consisted of various lineups of the Tuva Ensemble. The ensemble’s most notable visits were made to Amsterdam in 1991 and 1992, during which they recorded



one studio album and one live concert album. Both albums were produced by Bernard Kleikamp on the Paradox/Pan Ethnic Series label (see Figure 11). The albums' aesthetic attributes included fast-paced tempi, theatrical staging and delivery, and elaborate ethnic costumes—in short, a version of the nomadic folklorism that was preferred by audiences during the late Soviet period in Tuva<sup>1</sup>. Cover art on the albums, *Tuva: Voices from the Land of Eagles* (1991) and *Tuva: Echoes from the Spirit World* (1992), drew on Scythian animal-style art in bronze<sup>2</sup> and statues of “stone men” (*kizhi közhee*)<sup>3</sup> with inscriptions in Ancient Turkic (Orkhon script) — both artifacts from past civilizations that ruled in the Sayan-Altai mountains where Tuva sits.

While the musical aesthetics of the early touring ensembles were heavily influenced by the Soviet folkloric aesthetic, the throat-singing of solo artists seemed to international audiences to stand out as something different. Those audience typically perceived the sounds coming from the throat-singers' voices as shocking. In an interview, Bernard Kleikamp recalled audience reactions during the performances of the Tuva Ensemble in Amsterdam in the early 1990s:

I have seen people literally with their mouths wide open or eyes popping out while watching the Tuvans throat-sing. I've seen

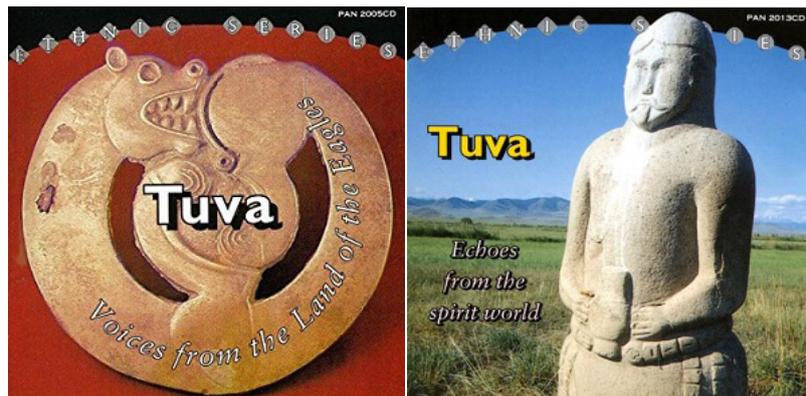


Figure 11. *Tuva: Voices from the Land of Eagles* (1992) and *Tuva: Echoes from the Spirit World* (1992), both released on Paradox/Pan Records and produced by Bernard Kleikamp. Photo courtesy of Bernard Kleikamp, Pan Records, via personal communication, 10 August 2014.

Рис. 11. Обложки альбомов «Тува: голоса страны орлов» (1992) и «Тува: отголоски мира духов» (1992). Оба выпущены на Paradox/Pan Records, продюсер Бернанд Клейкамп. Фото любезно предоставлено Б. Клейкампом автору данной статьи 10 августа 2014 г.

<sup>1</sup> Certainly, there were exceptions to the Soviet folkloric aesthetic on these albums; for example, Kaigal-ool Khovalyg's more intimate performance of “Bayan Dugai Koshkarlimni” (vocals, *igil*) on *Tuva: Voices from the Land of Eagles* (1992).

<sup>2</sup> “Scythian bronze plaque from the eighth century B.C, excavated in Tuva, showing a panther biting its own tail, coiled around yin and yang, symbolizing male and female; beginning and end, which is still characteristic for Tuva nowadays” (Kleikamp, liner notes, *Tuva: Voices from the Land of Eagles*, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> “Stone man from the Turkic period (6th-12th centuries) found near Bizhiktig Khaya (‘Written-on Rock’) on the flood plain of the Barlyk River in western Tuva. Statues of stone men are thought to be tombstones, and this one is the largest in Tuva” (Kleikamp, liner notes, *Tuva: Echoes from the Spirit World*, 1992).



people in the audiences who were totally amazed and flabbergasted, who couldn't comprehend what was going on! And that was part of the magic. And it was helped by a couple of very skilled publicists, who created a hype .... If you don't create good publicity you can't create a hype. In the newspapers, the Tuvan concerts read like an adventure story!<sup>1</sup>

There certainly was much "hype" in the representations of various smaller lineups from the Tuva Ensemble as they toured Canada and the United States in the early 1990s. Newspaper articles described the singing of the traveling "Throat Singers from Tuva," as one lineup of the musicians were called during their tour, as "ancient, unearthly singing" (Wilson, 1993) whose "mesmerizing" sounds were "astoundingly pure" and "seemed to come directly from another world" (see Figure 12). One reviewer in San Francisco put it this way:

Imagine a lone horseman on the windy steppes of central Asia, trotting lazily alongside his herd of reindeer .... The music native to these nomads comprises a wide range of styles and moods. Undoubtedly the most astonishing is the khoomei [sic] style—the 'throat singing' that utilizes overtones to produce voicings in two or even three distinct registers when the mouth, tongue and velum are positioned in a certain way (Fleming, 1993).

The Tuva fad of the 1990s and the Tuva Ensemble's performances combined to create and reinforce expectations of Tuva as a mystical land of nomads. But for many, including some of the Tuvan musicians themselves, the Soviet folkloric model of staged and theatricalized nomadic singing left something to be desired. So it was no surprise when a small group of innovative musicians broke away from the Soviet folkloric model and teamed up to creatively re-imagine the musical aesthetics of Tuvan folk music. The aesthetics were at once new and ancient; they seemed fresh but also more clearly, more honestly connected to pre-Soviet Tuvan nomadic pastoral culture, at least as that culture was popularly imagined.

### ***III. INVENTING TUVA'S WORLD MUSIC SOUND***

While the Tuva Ensemble did much to redefine the musical aesthetics in the post-Soviet era, it continued to reflect certain aspects of Soviet folkloric music, including a strict rhythm within an unaccented metrical structure and a melody with a unison group sound. Young Tuvan musicians sought something

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Kleikamp, personal Skype interview, 20 August 2013.



Figure 12. Promotional photo for the “Throat Singers of Tuva” during their first tour in the United States — (from left to right) Anatoli Kuular, Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, and Kongar-ool Ondar (1993). Photo by Clark Quin and provided courtesy of Ralph Leighton and Friends of Tuva, personal archives.

Рис. 12. Промо-фото для «Певцов горлового пения из Тувы» во время их первого турне в США: (слева направо) Анатолий Куулар, Кайгал-оол Ховалыг и Конгар-оол Ондар (1993). Фото Квин Кларк, любезно предоставлены Ральфу Лейтону и Обществу друзей Тувы, личные архивы.

altogether different. In 1992, a small group of innovative Tuvan musicians, who would later call themselves Huun-Huur-Tu, assembled in a London studio and made recordings that would become the group’s first album, *60 Horses in My Herd* (1993, Shanachie). That album is one of the first post-Soviet music projects made by Tuvan musicians that strays significantly from the Soviet-style aesthetics of the Tuva Ensemble<sup>1</sup>.

#### A CHANCE ENCOUNTER IN SIBERIA

Huun-Huur-Tu’s story begins in March 1992 in Novosibirsk, Siberia, three months after the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Trevor Goronwi, a British-Welsh sound engineer and former member of the rock band *This Heat*, met a young Tuvan musician named Albert Kuvezin by chance at a vodka bar. According to Goronwi, Kuvezin “seemed like somebody who was prepared to stick his neck out and do his own thing in a culture that wasn’t historically very welcoming of that”<sup>2</sup>. As the two conversed about various musical interests, it dawned on Goronwi that Kuvezin’s awareness of a “Western aesthetic” stood out from other musicians he had met in the former Soviet Union, especially from its ethnic republics. Goronwi explains:

Albert seemed to have some obscure musical interests, and I thought: ‘Wow—you’re interesting! How do you even know that this stuff exists let alone are you able to have quite an informed opinion about it?’ You see it

<sup>1</sup> Due to space limitations, this article does not discuss a number of other examples of aesthetic models for presenting Tuvan music in the world music industries. See, for example, Sainkho Namchylak’s *Out of Tuva* (Les Editions de la Bascule, 1993), *Uzlyau: Guttural Singing of the Peoples of the Sayan, Altai, and Ural Mountains* (Pan Records, 1993), and *Shu-De: Voices from the Distant Steppe* (Realworld Records, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014.



was a bit of a cultural wilderness at the time and, even at this festival, a lot of the participants were really not the sort of people I could relate to. It was often a futile thing for me to talk to people from the former Soviet Union about Western rock music, because they just weren't aware of most of it. I mean there was a real divide at that time. People really weren't aware of anything beyond Elton John, Queen, Deep Purple, the Beatles, and Led Zeppelin. But Albert was different! Albert showed an awareness of lots of what you might call a 'Western aesthetic,' which was very rare in the former Soviet Union in 1992 and if anybody showed any awareness for a 'Western aesthetic' it was always very mainstream.

We saw each other a few more times during those five days of the festival, and at some point he gave me his phone number, and I said, 'OK, well I'll give you my phone number, too!' In 1992, just months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the thought of somebody from Tuva giving me his phone number and saying 'I'll give you a call'—I mean it was like meeting somebody from a *distant galaxy* and exchanging things on the odd chance that you're going to meet up again!<sup>1</sup>

Several months later, after Goronwi had returned to London, he received a telephone call from Kuvezin. Kuvezin, along with several other Tuvan musicians, was returning from a performance at the International Eisteddfod festival in Wales. At that time, the group of Tuvan musicians were calling themselves "Kungurtug" (or "Koongoortoog")<sup>2</sup>. In addition to Kuvezin, the group consisted of brothers Sayan and Alexander ("Sasha") Bapa, who had played together with Albert in the large Tuvan state ensemble Ayan, and Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, a star musician from the Tuva Ensemble. The four men had previously met in Tuva and recorded some Tuvan songs with a decidedly rock-inspired aesthetic<sup>3</sup>. Now, on their way to London, they were looking for a place to stay, and Goronwi had a large flat and plenty of floor space. Goronwi recounts the events that followed:

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> "Kungurtuk" (as it is commonly transliterated) is the name of settlement near an eighth-century Uighur fortress called Por-Bajin. Por-Bajin was built on an island in Lake Tore-Xöl, in a remote region of southeastern Tuva. See, for example, Arzhantseva et al., 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *The ReR Quarterly* (vol. 4, no. 1), RéR: 0401, 1994. Koongoortoog: Track [Kizhi bazhyn]. From the liner notes, the song was "performed by Kaigal-Ool Khovalyg (voice), Albert Kuvezin, Sayan Bapa, Alexander Bapa. This piece is taken from a cassette and is used by permission. At time of going to press further information has not yet reached us." Special thanks to Morten Abildsnes, personal communication, 2 August 2014.



Basically, the Tuvans stayed in my home [in London] for about two weeks. It was clear that this was precious time for them—being on their own in the U.K. for two weeks in 1992—and they saw this as an opportunity to try and do something for themselves. As things turned out, at the time I had access to this 24-track recording studio [the Watershed] and there was a weekend when it wasn't booked. The studio was very ill-equipped and a bit run down. We recorded everything on secondhand 2-inch analog tape—everything was ramshackle! There were a lot of very inappropriate condenser microphones—the kind of thing you would normally use as overheads for cymbals on a drum kit. We had to make do with what we had available, and the studio itself was in an old coach house. The controller room was upstairs, the studio was downstairs, and there was no video link, so there was no visual communication. I basically went downstairs and got [the musicians] set up and positioned the microphones as appropriately as I could, and then went back upstairs and that was it. It was rough and ready! It really was. There was no fine tuning to the recordings at all<sup>1</sup>.

The Tuvan musicians had previously developed new arrangements of a number of “old songs and tunes of Tuva,” as they later described on the front cover of *60 Horses in My Herd* (released after the group changed their name from Kungurtug to Huun-Huur-Tu)<sup>2</sup>. In an interview, Kuvezin recalled some of the roles the musicians played in negotiating the process of recording the album:

It all happened in London [in 1992], where we met up with Trevor Goronwi and he recorded us in his friend's studio. Alexander (Sasha) Bapa directed the process—he was like the producer, who was saying ‘this is good, this is not good’<sup>3</sup>. Sayan [Bapa] and myself, we were the arrangers. This is how

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Sasha Bapa described the meaning of the ensemble's name: “Huun-Huur-Tu means the vertical separation of light rays that you often see out on the grasslands just after sunrise or just before sunset .... Tuvans call their open countryside Huun-Huur-Tu because they are awed by the beauty of its light. Our ensemble used the name because the music we perform is rooted in that countryside and because the light rays on the steppe remind us of the separate lines of sound in throat-singing, except that in throat-singing, you're working not with light rays, but with sound rays” (liner notes, *60 Horses in My Herd*, 1993: 2).

<sup>3</sup> In an interview for *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7-8), Kuvezin expanded on Sasha Bapa's role in the formation of Huun-Huur-Tu: “[Sasha] was a kind of producer and manager of the band and actually .... In the beginning he spent his own money to create projects .... He found money for travel, for example we came to England on his own money. For maybe three years while the band was growing slowly, he paid all [the] musicians like a kind of salary. He bought all [the] instruments, all [the] costumes ....”



Tuvan ‘traditional’ music was born. The paradox is that today Huun-Huur-Tu is considered to be the classic example of Tuvan traditional music, but, in actuality, Huun-Huur-Tu is fusion music! It did not exist like this in the past. Even 20 years ago [in the early 1990s], people were not playing this way. We came up with this ‘traditional’ Tuvan music—it was Kaigal-ool [Xovalyg], Sayan Bapa, Sasha Bapa, and me ...<sup>1</sup>

Myself also, I was interested only for rock music at that time, but then he [Sasha Bapa] pushed me to study *kargyraa* singing and also he helped me with some Tuvan music, some cassettes, like moral support; it’s very important, moral support<sup>2</sup>.

### THE EXPERIMENTAL-AMBIENT AESTHETIC

In many of the tracks on *60 Horses in My Herd*, Huun-Huur-Tu performs Tuvan traditional songs using an aesthetic approach that was completely new for Tuvan music. It was expansive and ambient—a “fusion,” as Kuvezin called it, most likely inspired by some of the experimental rock and jazz that Kuvezin and the Bapa brothers had been listening to in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Kuvezin has noted the influence of Led Zeppelin on his work, and Sayan Bapa has pointed to jazz artists such as Weather Report and Frank Zappa<sup>3</sup>. The aesthetic of *60 Horses in My Herd* is characterized in part by the sparse use of non-metrical percussion produced by ritual and material objects of Tuvan traditional Tuvan culture, which previously had not been used in music performances. Percussion instruments include a *xapchyk* rattle made from a dried bull’s scrotum and filled with knuckle bones from sheep, *shyngyraash* bells (traditionally used as horse tack), a *tun* conch shell horn used in connection with Buddhist ritual, and a *düngür* shaman’s frame drum (see Figure 13).

In recording *60 Horses in My Herd*, Sasha Bapa played these instruments in free meter to create a minimalist, ethereal, almost haunting ambience. That ambience appeared alongside minimalist guitar, played by Kuvezin; *igil* (horsehead fiddle), played by Kaigal-ool Xovalyg and Sayan Bapa; and Kuvezin’s distinctive basso-profundo style of *kargyraa* throat-singing called *kangzyp*. We can see how these elements come together in Huun-Huur-Tu’s arrangement of

<sup>1</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7-8).

<sup>3</sup> Yat-Kha, liner notes *Re-Covers* (2005, Sony/BMG International); Levin, Süzükei, 2006: 223-224.

an old Tuvan folk melody called “Mezhegei” (see Figure 14; Media example #6).

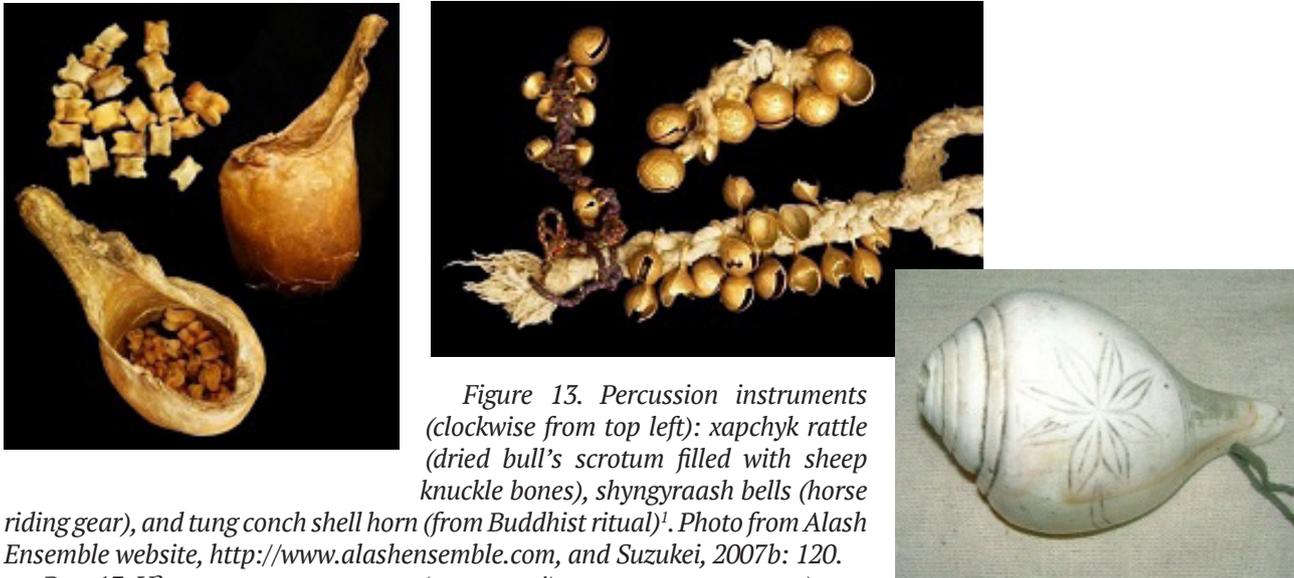


Figure 13. Percussion instruments (clockwise from top left): xapchyk rattle (dried bull's scrotum filled with sheep knuckle bones), shyngyraash bells (horse riding gear), and tung conch shell horn (from Buddhist ritual)<sup>1</sup>. Photo from Alash Ensemble website, <http://www.alashensemble.com>, and Suzukei, 2007b: 120.

riding gear), and tung conch shell horn (from Buddhist ritual)<sup>1</sup>. Photo from Alash Ensemble website, <http://www.alashensemble.com>, and Suzukei, 2007b: 120.

Рис. 13. Ударные инструменты (по часовой стрелке сверху слева): по-гремяшка хапчык (высушенная бычья мошонка, наполненная косточками-бабками овец), колокольчики шыңгырааш (украшения конной сбруи), и раковина туң (буддийский ритуальный предмет). Фото с сайта ансамбля «Алаш», а также из книги: Сузукей, 2007b: 120.



Figure 14. Melody and lyrics to the Tuvan folk song “Mezhegei”<sup>2</sup>.

Рис. 14. Мелодия и текст тувинской народной песни «Межегей».

“Mezhegei” lyrics:

*Ulug-Xemge tavangailaan*

Oh, my high slopes, my steep slopes,

*Ulug-Iiim, Kadyr-Iiim.*

Stepping their feet into the Ulug-Xem [River].

*Urug chashtan oinap ösken*

Oh, my big valley, Mezhegei,

*Ulug shynaa Mezhegeiim*

Where I, as a child, grew up playing.

<sup>1</sup> Photo from Alash Ensemble website, <http://www.alashensemble.com>, and Süzükei 2007b: 120.

<sup>2</sup> Aksenov, 1964: 82–83; my transnotation and translation. “Mezhegei” was collected and transcribed by Saryg-ool et al. (1947: 13–14), Munzük et al. (1956: 9), and Aksenov (Aksenov, 1964: 82–83). Huun-Huur-Tu’s version deviates from Aksenov’s in terms of metrical pulse where each phrase of the melody is extended from 12 beats to 13 or 14 beats.



To be sure, “Mezhegei” and the entire album’s experimental-ambient aesthetic was shaped by Kuvezin’s use of guitar — an idea for which he takes credit<sup>1</sup> — and Sasha Bapa’s minimalist percussion. However, the aesthetic was also informed by Kaigal-ool Xovalyg’s technique for playing the *igil* in a manner that recalls his teacher, the famous Tuvan musician Kara-Sal Ak-ool<sup>2</sup>, and by subtle studio reverb and overdubbing. Goronwi recalls his role as the studio engineer and sound mixer:

Most of the album was recorded live. I didn’t direct what they did at all, I was just there to record it. Although, I do remember there were one or two overdubs—Kaigal-ool did a vocal overdub on the track called ‘Mezhegei,’ as far as I remember. There was a little bit of reverb and possibly a little bit of delay [added] as well. There was one track where Kaigal-ool was asking for some distant reverb like it’s coming off a distant mountain or something like that. But it wasn’t overdone<sup>3</sup>.

In sum, Huun-Huur-Tu’s *60 Horses in My Herd* created an innovative aesthetic model for presenting the “old songs and tunes” of Tuvan music, one that stood in sharp contrast to the Soviet folkloric aesthetic. Building on Ted Levin’s work in the late 1980s, Huun-Huur-Tu’s new model worked to frame throat-singing in a fresh way—one that was more evocative of the “ancientness” of the Inner Asian steppe from which Tuvan music is said to have originated. Goronwi, for one, found his experience with Huun-Huur-Tu transformative:

Those guys were really special. After hearing them record, I just thought, ‘Wow! This is some of the best stuff I’ve ever heard in my life!’ I’ve always been involved in quite left-field music and then suddenly I’m presented with this traditional music. I remember thinking, this is like listening to music

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<sup>1</sup> Kuvezin takes credit for this idea in *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7–8). In one review of *60 Horses in My Herd*, a critic wrote of the musical accompaniment that the “persistent, Velvet Underground-like drone-strum guitar is a highlight” (Steven Rosen, “CDs from around the world carry emotional power,” *Denver Post*, 4 February 1994).

<sup>2</sup> For an example of Ak-ool’s *igil*-playing style, see Alan Lomax’s radio archives of Tuvan music made in Moscow in 1964: <http://research.culturalequity.org/home-audio.jsp>.

<sup>3</sup> Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014. In a review of *60 Horses in The Musical Times*, Jonathan Stock writes: “[t]he quartet of Tuvan performers have assembled folk material and perform it in an innovative ensemble context. For instance, the song ‘Mezhegei’ combines various singing styles—throaty, growling bass reaching down to G below the bass stave and distant tenor—with the sounds of the guitar, bells and *igil* traditional fiddle” (Stock, 1994: 301).



from Mars! It was not like anything I'd ever heard before. I like ancient, I like edgy, and this was both. And to this day, it's the most extraordinary sudden exposure to something unusual and something hitherto unknown—I mean, really special<sup>1</sup>.

### THE NEOTRADITIONAL-GROOVE AESTHETIC

By 1993, Huun-Huur-Tu had settled firmly into being an ensemble, but only after Kuvezin had parted ways based on creative differences. “I left Huun-Huur-Tu because I wanted more experimentation,” Kuvezin explained in an interview; “I wanted more expression, more rock n’ roll. They didn’t want this energy”<sup>2</sup>. Anatolii Kuular, who had been part of the Tuva Ensemble and had toured the United States with Kaigal-ool Xovalyg as part of the Throat Singers of Tuva trio (1992–1993), was invited to join Huun-Huur-Tu in Kuvezin’s absence. Throughout their subsequent tours and a studio recording that produced their second album, *The Orphan’s Lament* (1994), Huun-Huur-Tu began to expand their aesthetic model in new directions that marked an even greater departure

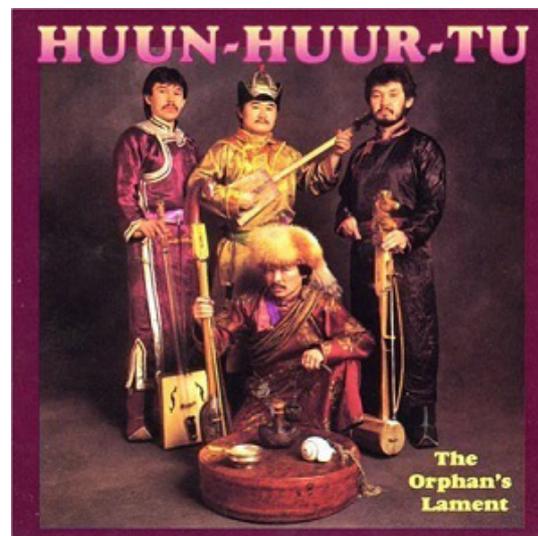
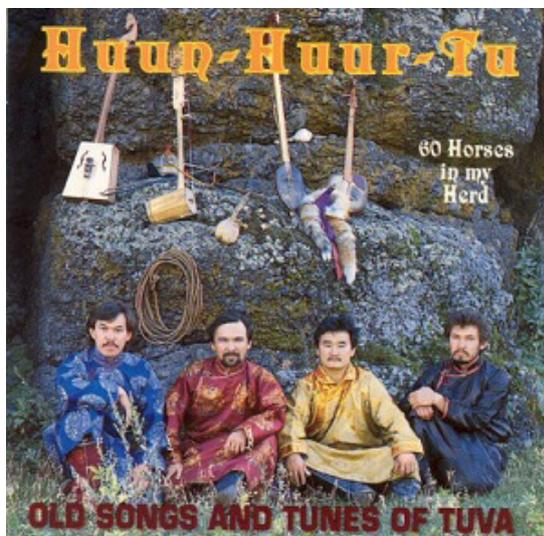


Figure 15. Cover art from Huun-Huur-Tu’s first two solo albums released on the Shanachie record label: *60 Horses in my Herd: Old Songs and Tunes of Tuva* (1993) and *The Orphan’s Lament* (1994); both albums produced by Alexander Bapa and executive produced by Ted Levin. Photo courtesy of Shanachie Record Label, via personal communication, 11 August 2014.

Рис. 15. Обложки двух первых сольных альбомов группы «Хун-Хурту», изданных лейблом Shanachie record «60 коней в моем табуна: старые песни и мелодии Тувы» и «Плач сироты» (1994). Продюсер альбомов — Александр Бапа, исполнительный продюсер — Тед Левин. Фото предоставлено Shanachie Record Label 11 августа 2014 года.

<sup>1</sup>Trevor Goronwi, personal Skype interview, 11 April 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.



from Soviet folkloric aesthetics (see Figure 15). This new direction might best be characterized as a neotraditional-groove aesthetic. Two different arrangements of the same Tuvan song, “Eerbek-Aksy,” show how this aesthetic took shape in contrast to the Soviet folkloric model.

That model is evident in a performance by the Tuva Ensemble. Following its European tours in the early 1990s, the Tuva Ensemble fractured. Its star performer, Gennadi Tumat, took the opportunity to form a new group, Ensemble Ay-Kherel. In the Netherlands in 1995, Ay-Kherel worked with Bernard Kleikamp to record *Gennadi Tumat: My Homeland Ovür* (2000, PAN records). One of the album’s songs is “Eerbek-Aksy,” and was recorded by several of Ay-Kherel’s members, including Gennadi Tumat (*doshpuluur* plucked lute, *xöömei*), Nadezhda Kuular (vocals), and Stanislav Danmaa (*limbi* side-blown flute). The group’s approach is consistent with a Soviet folkloric aesthetic—a strict rhythm within an unaccented

Figure 16. Melody and lyrics for the Tuvan song “Eerbek-Aksy” (top stave) with comparison of metric subdivisions used in recorded performances by Ay-Kherel (middle stave) and Huun-Huur-Tu (bottom stave)<sup>1</sup>.

Рис. 16. Мелодия и текст тувинской песни «Ээрбек-Аксы» (верхняя строка) в сравнении с метрическими отрывками, используемыми в записи выступлений ансамблей «Ай-Херел» (средняя строка) и «Хун-Хурту» (нижняя строка).

metrical structure, subdivided mechanically at the level of the eighth note by the *doshpuluur*. Equally typical of the Soviet-era style is the performance of the melody with a unison group sound (Kuular using her idiosyncratic vibrato) and with the *limbi* following in line with the melody (see Figure 16).

Huun-Huur-Tu also recorded an arrangement of “Eerbek-Aksy” on *The Orphan’s Lament* (1994). This arrangement, in contrast to Ay-Kherel’s version, employs a more hybridized and “groove-ful” aesthetic. Most significant is Sayan Bapa’s technique of

<sup>1</sup> Aksenov, 1964: 113, where the song is called “Een Kurug Kagbaan-na Men;” my transnotation and translation. “Eerbek-Aksy” is based on an old Tuvan folk song called “Een Kurug Kagbaan-na Men,” which was collected and transcribed by Saryg-ool et al. (1947: 39), Munzuk et al. (1956: 50), and Aksenov (Aksenov, 1964: 113). Ay-Kherel performance is from track #11 on *Gennadi Tumat: My Homeland Ovür* (2000, PAN records); Huun-Huur-Tu performance is from track #4 on the *Orphan’s Lament* (1994, Shanachie).



playing his *doshpuluur* using a syncopated rhythm, which, while decelerated, has a much stronger metrical drive created by accenting beats one and three. Moreover, Sayan Bapa uses a finger-plucking technique on metrical pulsations of strong and syncopated weak beats that conveys the sonic image of a horse's gentle and undulating trot. As Sayan Bapa described in a published interview, his *doshpuluur*-playing is "syncopated, yes, but like a horse galloping .... Swing gets around the world, you know. It didn't just come from Africa"<sup>1</sup>. Alongside the *doshpuluur* riffs, Sasha Bapa plays on the *syngyraash* bells and *düngür* drum in the recording. Huun-Huur-Tu had created another new aesthetic: the neotraditional-groove aesthetic (Media example #7).

"Eerbek-Aksy" lyrics:

<i>Eerbek-Aksyn, Saiyr-Aksyn</i>	Eerbek-Aksy and Saiyr-Aksy [Rivers]
<i>Een kurug kagbaan-na men,</i>	I did not leave them deserted and empty
<i>Erge kara ezhikeide</i>	I left, letting my beloved
<i>Eeledip kaggan-na men</i>	Manage the household
<i>Oorargan Saiyr-Aksyn</i>	Saiyr-Aksy with deep ravines
<i>Okta kurug kagbaan-na men</i>	I did not leave it forever
<i>Ortun kara kulugurnu</i>	I left, letting my true love
<i>Olurtup-la kaggan-na men</i>	Dwell there

As Huun-Huur-Tu developed their newest aesthetic in further projects, they added *kengirge* drum sounds as well as a *duyuglar*—a pair of horse hooves that are struck together to evoke the sounds of a trotting horse (see Figure 17). These new sounds appear in Huun-Huur-Tu's updated rendition of "Eerbek-Aksy," which they released on a more recent album, *Ancestors' Call* (2010, World Village). Meanwhile, in a conversation with Ted Levin that appears in the liner notes to their third album, *If I'd Been Born an Eagle* (1997), Huun-Huur-Tu spoke about their emerging neotraditional-groove aesthetic:

It's impossible that people who spend so much time around horses—one of the most rhythmic animals alive—would not have absorbed their sense

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<sup>1</sup> Ruffin Prevost, "Central Asian throat singers bring their ancient art to region," *Billings Gazette*, 17 October 2007.



of rhythm. Horses have a harmonic rhythm. People who ride horses absorb the horse’s rhythm physically into their bodies, and this rhythm is reflected in music. It’s not like a metronome, that is, it’s not stable; rather, it’s alive, and the rhythms change, the lengths of the phrases change. The music is continuous, but it doesn’t break down into square phrases. Melodies can be elongated—they’re a function of the length of a singer’s breath. You can hold notes for as long as your intuition tells you they should be held. The phrase lengths of our melodies are based on a singer’s intuition, not on preserving a strict metric sense in the music. For example, the way we use the *doshpuluur* hasn’t been heard recently in Tuvan music. It’s been used mainly as an accompaniment to throat-singing. But the *doshpuluur* must have once been played the way we’re doing it—that is, as if representing a horse. It could have been used rhythmically, or as a solo instrument, or even harmonically. We’re trying to recover a sense of what might have been<sup>1</sup>.

Albert Kuvezin observes that the effect of the *doshpuluur* riffs, and of Huun-Huur-Tu’s aesthetic more generally, on how people perceive post-Soviet Tuvan music has been significant. “Many of the rhythms and grooves we came up with ourselves in the studio .... For example, the riffs we played on the *doshpuluur*, people usually say how much it sounds ‘traditional’, but how could it be ‘traditional’? It was quasi-popular! It’s contemporary!”<sup>2</sup> In a published interview, Kuvezin also claimed: “We came up with this style—this aesthetic, and now today this is how everyone plays [in Tuva]!”<sup>3</sup> Although Kuvezin had already parted ways with Huun-Huur-

Tu by the time they developed their neotraditional-groove aesthetic, his observations



Figure 17. Tuvan *doshpuluur* (plucked lute), *kengirge* drum, and *duuglar* (horses hooves)<sup>4</sup>.  
 Рис. 17. Тувинский дошпулуур (щипковый музыкальный инструмент), кенгирге (барабан) и дуюглар (копыта лошади).

<sup>1</sup> Liner notes: *If I’d Been Born an Eagle*, 1997: 3.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *Folk Roots Magazine* (Lusk, 2000, vol. 21, no. 7-8).

<sup>4</sup> Photo from Alash Ensemble website, <http://www.alashensemble.com>



about its impact were prescient; Huun-Huur-Tu's nomadic minimalism has since come to dominate Tuvan music as it is played in Tuva and around the globe<sup>1</sup>.

#### IV. REEVALUATING TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN POST-SOVIET TUVA

Tuvan musicians who were traveling abroad were doing their own self-searching and aesthetic renegotiation. When musicians from the Tuva Ensemble returned from international tours in Europe and the United States, they were interviewed about their experiences engaging with foreign audiences regarding Tuvan culture. Those interviews suggest that presenting Tuvan music on world stages had brought Tuvans face-to-face with outsiders' expectations of their music, which usually centered around some idea of nomadism. The musician's interaction with global audiences also prompted further inquiry into how Tuvan history had been presented during the Soviet era. More than anything, it became clear that foreigners placed a high value on throat-singing as a distinctly Tuvan cultural form<sup>2</sup>. This foreign interest in throat-singing was reinforced by new foreign affinity groups, such as Friends of Tuva, which gathered and disseminated historic and ethnographic knowledge about Tuvan peoples that was not easily available in Tuva. Musicians Kongar-ool Ondar, Sayan Bapa, and Kaigal-ool Xovalyg said as much after their return from their American tour in 1992–1993:

The 'Friends of Tuva' live in practically all the states. They have a genuine interest in our country, its culture, and, in particular, throat-singing.... They have literature about the Center of Asia. For example, at the beginning of this century, the [Austrian] Maenchen-Helfen visited our area and has written a book about it, rich with illustrative photographs. [Inside] there is a photograph of the Chadana *xüree* [Buddhist] (temple), of which practically nothing remains today .... There is a great opportunity here for us to learn a lot more about Tuvans of the past<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Most recently, the Tuvan *xöömei* and Mongolian *xöömii* trends have circulated to Inner Mongolia (China), where a number of musicians draw from both Mongolian and Tuvan folk songs, musical practices, musicians, and instrument-builders to construct a new traditional music scene. Both China (2009) and Mongolia (2010) have designated Mongol *xöömii* as objects of "intangible cultural heritage" with UNESCO, while, as of 2017, the Russian Federation has not (yet) achieved this designation for Tuvan *xöömei*.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, archives of Steve Sklar's online *xöömei* discussion forum from the early 1990s, available at <http://www.khoomei.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Marina Kenin-Lopsan, "V Gostyx U Druzei Tuvy" [Visiting the Friends of Tuva], *Tuvinskaya Pravda*, 25 March 1993; my translation.



What emerged from Tuvan cultural officials' desire to regulate *xöömei*, and from Tuvan musicians' realization that their fans expected something particular from their music, was a sort of self-searching. As Tuvan musicologist Valentina Suzukei writes, Tuva's post-Soviet national cultural renaissance offered the opportunity to re-examine the "gains and losses" from Tuva's period as part of the Soviet Union (Suzukei, 2007b: 392). Many scholars tried to "make ancient" the Tuvan people, and "to present them [historically] in as significant a way as possible—mention was made of golden ages, scientific achievements and famous names" (Mongush, 2006: 284). One such name was General Sübedei, a respected military strategist in Genghis Khan's thirteenth-century Mongol Empire, whose ethnicity is linked with modern-day Tuvan people (*ibid.*: 285)<sup>1</sup>.

Between 1992 and 1999, Huun-Huur-Tu released four solo albums on the Shanachie label. Huun-Huur-Tu's membership changed repeatedly over this period, which significantly shaped their aesthetic approaches (see Figure 18)<sup>2</sup>. For example, after Kuvezin left the group following the release of *60 Horses in My Herd*, and Sasha Bapa after *The Orphan's Lament*, new member Alexei Saryglar helped solidify Huun-Huur-Tu's new rhythmic energy. Likewise, Andrei Mongush and Radik Tyulyush were influential in invigorating the ensemble with younger talent.

There was also someone behind the scenes who was helping shape Huun-Huur-Tu's music: Ted Levin. Levin was an executive producer of Huun-Huur-Tu's first three albums, during the period when Huun-Huur-Tu's aesthetics were first taking shape. He was also the author of the albums' ethnomusicologically-informed liner notes, which were organized as interviews and conversations with the band members about their aesthetic choices. Levin's involvement, though, should not be taken as evidence of control over Huun-Huur-Tu's music; Huun-Huur-Tu embraced Levin's effort to "de-Sovietize" Tuvan music, but their music was their own. Levin's influence likely was more subtle; in his liner notes, for instance, he gave a poetic voice to Huun-Huur-Tu's imaginative re-formulation of Tuvan history from the perspective of "new nomads". Levin's liner notes were significant for another reason: they brought to light and legitimized the project of re-asserting and sharing traditions. Levin helped write a narrative

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<sup>1</sup> Sübedei's name appears on many Tuvan consumer products, including a brand of vodka.

<sup>2</sup> Huun-Huur-Tu's aesthetics were also shaped by their tours in the United States, where there was a conscious preference placed on an academic chamber music performance model (Ralph Leighton, personal interview, Tiburon, California, 17 April 2014).



Huun-Huur-Tu Ensemble Membership, 1992-2017

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005-2017
Kaigal-ool Xovalyg														
Sayan Bapa														
Alexander Bapa														
Albert Kuvezin														
Anatoli Kuular														
Alexei Saryglar														
Andrei Mongush														
Radik Tyulyush														

Years	Album title (label)	Producers
1993	<i>60 Horses in My Herd</i> (Shanachie)	Sasha Bapa, T. Levin
1994	<i>The Orphan’s Lament</i> (Shanachie)	Sasha Bapa, T. Levin
1997	<i>If I’d Been Born an Eagle</i> (Shanachie)	Sayan Bapa, T. Levin
1999	<i>Where Young Grass Grows</i> (Shanachie)	Sayan Bapa, Niall Maccaullay

Figure 18. A chart representing the changes in membership of the Huun-Huur-Tu quartet from 1992-2017 (above) and a list of Huun-Huur-Tu’s first four albums (below). Instrumental roles vary, but a typical arrangement would include Xovalyg on igil, Sayan Bapa on doshpuluur or guitar, Saryglar on kengirge or duyuglar, and Tyulyush on byzaanchy or shoor (end-blown flute).<sup>1</sup>

Рис. 18. Диаграмма, представляющая изменения в составе квартета «Хун-Хурту» в 1992–2017 гг. (выше) и данные первых четырех альбомов группы (ниже). Инструменты (с небольшими вариациями): К. Ховалыг (игил), С. Бапа (дошпулуур, гитара), А. Сарыглар (кенгирге, дуюглар) и Р. Тюлюш (бызаанчы, шоор — продольная флейта).

in which Huun-Huur-Tu’s work was not a mere exotic curiosity, but rather a worthy and valuable contribution to the global soundscape. “At the same time that the members of Huun-Huur-Tu have devoted themselves to learning old songs and tunes,” Levin wrote in 1993, “their performances reflect the values of innovation as much as tradition” (liner notes, 1993: 3).

Alongside promoting Huun-Huur-Tu’s world music projects, Levin continued to conduct extensive ethnographic research in Tuva and the greater Altai

<sup>1</sup> Data assembled from album liner notes, the ensemble’s website, and other sources representing approximate time frames of transition in group membership. See, for example, Levin, Süzükei, 2006, Karelina 2009, and the liner notes from Huun-Huur-Tu’s albums (1993, 1994, 1997, 1999). Sholban Salchak also performed with Huun-Huur-Tu on the album *Mother Earth! Father Sky!* (2008, Jaro Medien).



Mountain region in the 1990s and 2000s alongside Tuvan musicologist Valentina Suzukei (and others) that led to the production of a number of influential ethnomusicology publications and recording projects<sup>1</sup>. Drawing on some of the musical-theoretical ideas of Suzukei (“drone-overtone sound organization,” “timbral listening”)<sup>2</sup>, and on several musicians from the Tuvan ensemble Huun-Huur-Tu (namely, Kaigal-ool Xovalyg, Sayan Bapa, and former member Anatoli Kuular) as his guides, Levin argued that the context for Tuvan traditional music had been lost somewhere during the fifty-year-long Soviet project to dismantle it and the unexpected Tuvan world music craze in the 1990s. Especially problematic was Western fascination with *xöömei* throat-singing. The goal of Levin’s project, evocatively titled *Tuva, Among the Spirits: Sound, Music, and Nature in Sakha and Tuva* (1999, Smithsonian Folkways, see Figure 19), was not just to suggest new ways of listening to Tuvan traditional music but also to recapture the lost contexts of *xöömei* and other sonic-musical practices through a kind of sound art provocation (Media example #8). The concept of a “Turkic sound ideal” is performed through this recording project by including musicians from Sakha-Yakutia (another Turkic-speaking republic in northern Siberia) and actively embraced by many Tuvan musicians in an effort to reclaim and revitalize indigenous epistemologies of sound-making and listening<sup>3</sup>.

### RECEPTION OF HUUN-HUUR-TU IN TUVA

Bolstered by the ethnomusicological projects, Huun-Huur-Tu’s music evolved throughout the 1990s and early 2000s to include a newer experimental-ambient aesthetic that sought to conjure the original context for Tuvan music in the rivers, mountains, and streams in Tuva’s countryside<sup>4</sup>. International audiences found their music relatable and honest, but also just weird enough to still be exotic. One reviewer referenced the “stillness and natural rhythms of old Tuvan music” (Van Tongeren, 2002: 107), while another said that Huun-Huur-Tu created a

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably among these publications was Levin and Suzukei’s monograph *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond* (2006), published in Russian as *Muzyka Novyx Nomadov* (2012).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Suzukei, 1989, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the politics of aesthetics in this and other ethnomusicological field recording projects conducted in Tuva in the post-Soviet era, see Bearhs 2014 and forthcoming work.

<sup>4</sup> For an example of the outdoor experimental-ambient aesthetic, listen to the evolution of Huun-Huur-Tu’s song “Ödugen Taiga” from *The Orphan’s Lament* (1994) to *Ancestor’s Call* (2010) in Media example #9.



Figure 19. Left: the album cover of *Tuva, Among the Spirits: Sound, Music, and Nature in Sakha and Tuva* (1999, Smithsonian Folkways, produced by Ted Levin); Right: Sound engineer Joel Gordon records Anatoli Kuular singing a style of throat-singing called *borbangnadyr* next to a stream in the Tuvan countryside (from liner notes to *Tuva, Among the Spirits*, 1999: 10).

Рис. 19. Слева: обложка альбома «Тува, среди духов: звук, музыка и природа в Саха и Туве» (1999, Smithsonian Folkways, продюсер — Тед Левин); справа: звукорежиссер Джоэл Гордон записывает Анатолия Куулара, исполняющего горловое пение в стиле борбангадыр рядом с речкой в сельской местности в Туве (из примечаний во вкладыше к альбому, 1999: 10).

sound that “manages to sound utterly ‘foreign’ yet accessible to audiences” (Winders, 1997: 40–41). Huun-Huur-Tu’s music was also perceived as providing a glimpse into the world of nomads. Jon Sobel of *Blogcritics Magazine* said that the musicians managed to “emulate biological rhythms in song: heartbeats, breathing, a brain drifting in dreamland, and not least (for a nomadic people), a horse’s trot” (Sobel, 2014). Huun-Huur-Tu’s music, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* crowed, “will ride into your brain and leave hoof-prints up and down your spine”<sup>1</sup>. As popular music scholar Jonathan Stock writes, Huun-Huur-Tu is an example of the “progressive preservation of indigenous musical traditions through the international market” (Stock, 1994: 301).

Huun-Huur-Tu’s international success gave rise to other Tuvan ensembles and inspired those ensembles to emulate (or at least draw from) the group’s innovative approaches. Ensemble Chirgilchin, for example, was founded by Sasha Bapa in 1996 after he left Huun-Huur-Tu in 1994<sup>2</sup>. Chirgilchin (in Tuvan,

<sup>1</sup> The *San Francisco Bay Guardian*’s critical reception of Huun-Huur-Tu is listed on the back of the group’s 1994, 1997, and 1999 albums.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Leighton cited Sasha Bapa’s parting with Huun-Huur-Tu as being caused by irreconcilable creative differences with the other members of the ensemble (Leighton, personal communication, May 2014).



“mirage” or “miracle”) was comprised of younger musicians—Aldar Tamdyn, Mongun-ool Ondar, and Aidysmaa Kandan (later joined by Igor Koshkendey, who married Aidysmaa)—and released their first album, *The Wolf and the Kid*, in 1996 (Shanachie). The tracks “Homudal” and “Konturei” [Kongurei] feature an aesthetic inspired by Huun-Huur-Tu’s experimental-ambient approach—unsurprising given that they were both arranged by Sasha Bapa and, in the case of “Konturei,” accompanied by Bapa on guitar. Likewise, Ensemble Alash, which was founded by Kongar-ool Ondar<sup>1</sup> and included a number of his students, also emulated Huun-Huur-Tu’s neotraditional-groove aesthetic on their first album, *Alash* (2007). As Albert Kuvezin later explained:

Through these early recordings, Huun-Huur-Tu started a renaissance for Tuvan music. [My band] Yat-Kha did this also, but we had fewer followers. And this ‘traditional’ sound spread beyond Tuva—to Xakassia, Altai, and to different regions of Siberia and Mongolia. Now it’s everywhere. In Bashkortostan, there is a group that sings rock and does *ödläü* [throat-singing], also now in Sakha-Yakutia, in Kalmykia<sup>2</sup>.

Sasha Bapa’s California-based record label and concert tour agency, Pure Nature Music, was influential in forming and shaping a number of these world music projects across Siberia and Central Asia. In addition to Chirgilchin, those groups have included the Xakas group Sabjilar, the Altai group Aiaiym, the Kyrgyz group Ordo Sakhna, and the Kamchatkan group ELVEL<sup>3</sup>. In addition, Sasha Bapa has organized throat-singing camps, in conjunction with Chirgilchin, which took place over multiple years in California in the mid-2000s<sup>4</sup>.

Huun-Huur-Tu’s emergence, aesthetic innovations, and international success

<sup>1</sup> During the first tour of the Throat Singers of Tuva in the United States (1993), there was a bifurcation among the musicians that led to Huun-Huur-Tu forming without Kongar-ool Ondar. Kongar-ool returned to Tuva and launched a throat-singing training program for youth at the Republic Arts High School in Kyzyl (Ralph Leighton, personal communication, 17 April 2014). Kongar-ool toured again in the United States later in 1993 along with one his students, Bady-Dorzhu Ondar (b. 1984), and they gave numerous performances together, including one on the Chevy Chase Show (3 October 1993). Kongar-ool’s throat-singing performances were more consistent with the Tuva Ensemble aesthetic and theatrical showmanship of Gennadi Tumat. See Süzükei 2011 for a discussion of Kongar-ool’s influence in post-Soviet Tuvan music education.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Kuvezin, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 4 June 2012.

<sup>3</sup> See Sabjilar’s album *Syr chome* (1999) and Aiaiym’s album *My Altay* (1999), both produced by Sasha Bapa on the Pure Nature Music label (previously available on www.purenaturemusic.com; last visited 18 August 2010, website now defunct); Sasha Bapa, personal communication, 18 August 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Aldar Tamdyn, personal interview, Kyzyl, Tuva, 27 July 2011.



signify several important things. First, throughout Huun-Huur-Tu's more than twenty-year career, the group has forged and normalized innovative aesthetic approaches to Tuvan music. These experimental-ambient and neotraditional-groove approaches were fashioned mostly in the group's first four albums, and reflect the influences and imaginative vision of its original members. There is the ambient sound of minimalist experimental rock (Albert Kuvezin and Sasha Bapa); the decelerated tempo and simplified sound (Kaigal-ool's influence on *igil*-playing styles of Ak-ool Kara-Sal); the "groovification" of the *doshpuluur* (Sayan Bapa); and the addition of unconventional Tuvan percussion instruments and arrangements (Sasha Bapa). These aesthetics are evident not only in Huun-Huur-Tu's music, but also in the group's liner notes and stage talk. And while Huun-Huur-Tu's repertoire has remained fairly consistent, the group has subtly altered existing, and experimented with new, interpretations over time, particularly as new members come and old ones leave.

Second, underlying Huun-Huur-Tu's success is a tacit approval of their musical aesthetics. Those aesthetics are best understood as a conscious rejection of the Soviet folkloric model. On the one hand, the group's creative quest "to recover a sense of what might have been" (liner notes, *If I had been born an Eagle*, 1997) involved forging an aesthetic sensibility that was more experimental and avant-garde than their representation would suggest. On the other hand, Huun-Huur-Tu, with the inestimable help of ethnographer, musicologist, and executive producer Ted Levin, gave agency to their forebears; they remembered, recovered, and reinvigorated songs of the Tuvan past. The group's innovation has worked to codify an aesthetic approach to Tuvan music that is fresh while being (or rightly perceived as being) traditional, ancient, and nomadic—but certainly also Soviet.

Third, Huun-Huur-Tu had great success in the 1990s and 2000s as both a post-Soviet Tuvan world music ensemble and as an influence for a younger generation of Tuvan musicians and ensembles. The large-scale Tuva Ensemble model has shrunk in popularity over the past 20 years while Huun-Huur-Tu's aesthetic approaches have become popular, even expected. To be sure, many vestiges of the Soviet folkloric aesthetic are alive and popular in Tuva today, particularly in the performances of the Tuvan National Orchestra, whose members include many of the musicians in Tuvan traveling ensembles, and in the work of Tyva Kyzy (an ensemble of female musicians who challenge the taboo against women performing *xöömei*). But for international audiences, Huun-Huur-Tu's sound has become synonymous with post-Soviet Tuvan music, and in Tuva, it has become accepted as an appropriate, agreeable way of presenting Tuvan traditional music.



More than anything, Huun-Huur-Tu's neotraditional nomadic minimalism is a musical language for voicing a revised narrative for post-Soviet Tuvan music. That narrative's galloping rhythms and evocative soundscapes of birds and nature on the open steppe suggest not just a type of music-making, but *a way of being in the world*. The "nomadic sensibility" of Huun-Huur-Tu's music continues to be expressed and stabilized in post-Soviet Tuvan music by both local and international participants.

## CONCLUSION

This article has addressed a few of the many forces which, together, worked to reshape musical aesthetics in traditional music productions during Tuva's period of transition from Soviet state socialism to global market capitalism in the final two decades of the twentieth century. This period of transition and uncertainty enabled creative and collaborative experimentation with, and explorations of, Tuvan traditional music and identity by actors and interest groups based mostly in Tuva but also in Europe, North America, and Japan<sup>1</sup>. As a new aesthetic model for Tuvan "world music," Huun-Huur-Tu's "neotraditional" music projects resonated with both international and local Tuvan audiences, and their aesthetic model became stabilized as the *sine qua non* of Tuvan traditional music by the early 2000s—that is, as something now *expected* in Tuvan traditional music performances. That aesthetic remains influential in shaping the work of a younger generation of Tuvan musicians.

Huun-Huur-Tu, alongside the ethnomusicologists, producers, musicians, and promoters who collaborated with them, created a dominant aesthetic model for how Tuvan traditional music could be presented, marketed, and made accessible to the world. However, many other musicians and artists have chosen other paths. Music scenes in Tuva today—whether traditional, popular, or experimental—have moved considerably beyond the historic moment of transition in the 1990s and require new forms of analysis that go beyond the scope of this article but are examined in my forthcoming work. Suffice it to say that the traditional music scenes in Kyzyl today are vibrant and constantly reinvigorated by younger generations of Tuvans, many of whom come from the countryside and draw extensively from actual sonic-musical practices of

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the history of Tuvan affinity groups in Japan and Finland, see Makigami, 2013 and Kurkkulaulajan äänen kannattaja "Höömei" [Throat-Singer's Voice of "Xöömei"], 2007. See also Friends of Tuva website: <http://www.fotuva.org/>



rural mobile pastoralists and hunters. The success of Tuvan music has also prompted a new wave of interest in indigenous music across Siberia and Inner Asia, most notably in Inner Mongolia (China), where a number of ensembles of traditional musicians have recently formed, and whose musical instruments, arrangements, aesthetics, and *xöömei* throat-singing styles draw considerably from Huun-Huur-Tu and Tuva's rich nomadic sonic-musical culture.

Ultimately, the transformations in ideologies and aesthetics in Tuvan traditional music aesthetics during the 1980s and 1990s share a kinship with what Svetlana Boym described in her influential book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) as the distinction between “cultural memory” and “national memory.” Whereas cultural or collective memory “offer[s] us mere signposts for individual reminiscences that could suggest multiple narratives,” national memory “tends to make a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections” (Boym, 2001: 53). As multiple forces, each acting with different intentions, worked to disassemble and reassemble notions of traditional music in late Soviet and post-Soviet Tuva, the narrative moved from experimentation to a relative state of fixity, and hence from cultural to national memory, within the span of a few decades. The history and particularities of the contemporary traditional music scene in early post-Soviet Tuva have generated, in the words of Caroline Humphrey (2002), a nuanced but coherent “political imagination” for Tuvan people in the Russian Federation, one which continues to shape a sense of Tuvan self-recognition as a singular and valued contributor to the global soundscape.

### MEDIA EXAMPLES

To access the media examples referenced in the article, visit the author's website and navigate to Research > Media: [www.robears.com](http://www.robears.com)

Media example #1: The Tuva Ensemble performing at “Xöömei-92,” the First International Symposium of Traditional Throat-Singing of the People of Tuva, Kyzyl (1992, from “Tuva TV Volume 2” distributed by the Tuva Trader).

Media example #2: Sundukai Mongush performing “Tespeng Khoomei” from the *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia* (1990, Smithsonian Folkways 40017).

Media example #3: Ensemble Amyrak performing “Medley of various throat-singing styles” from *Tuva: Voices from the Center of Asia* (1990, Smithsonian Folkways 40017).

Media example #4: Xunashtar-ool Oorzhak performing “Reka Alash” in the sygyt style (1968, Melodiya D-030773).



Media example #5: D. Damba-Darzhaa performing “Artyy Saiyr” in the kargyraa style accompanied by A. Laptan on *byzaanchy* spike fiddle (1968, Melodiya D-030773)

Media example #6: Huun-Huur-Tu performing “Mezhegei” from *60 Horses in My Herd* (1993, Shanachie 64050).

Media example #7: Ay-Kherel performing “Eerbek-Aksy” (recorded in 1995 from *Gennadi Tumat: My Homeland Ovür*, 2000, PAN 2090) followed by Huun-Huur-Tu performing “Eerbek-Aksy” (from *The Orphan’s Lament*, 1994, Shanachie 64058).

Media example #8: Anatoli Kuular performing *borbangnadyr* next to a stream and then xöömei on horseback from *Tuva, Among the Spirits: Sound, Music, and Nature in Sakha and Tuva* (1999, Smithsonian Folkways 40452).

Media example #9: Huun-Huur-Tu performing Ödugen Taiga from *The Orphan’s Lament* (1994, Shanachie 64058) to *Ancestor’s Call* (2010, Green Wave Records 468108).

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