

MCM 3001

Mongolia

Living Music
of the Steppes
*Instrumental Music and Song
of Mongolia*

MUSIC OF THE EARTH





Mongolia

LIVING MUSIC OF THE STEPPES
Instrumental Music and Song of Mongolia

Track Listing

Instrumental Music and Song of Mongolia

1. Instrumental Ensemble:
THE BLUE SILK OVERCOAT 1:54
2. *Bogĭno duu*: A LEAFY TREE 1:27
3. *Bogĭno duu*: THE RIVER OF
ULIASTAY 2:06
4. *Bogĭno duu*: THE SNOW-CROWNED
ALTAI MOUNTAINS 4:01
5. *Urtĭn duu*:
THE HALLOWED ROAD 2:43
6. *Urtĭn duu*: SÜNDER MOUNTAIN 5:26
7. Song of Praise:
ALTAI MOUNTAIN PAEAN 4:28

Mongolian Musical Instruments and *Köömiy*

8. *Morin khuur* Solo:
JONON QARA'S RUN 1:57
9. *Köömiy*: SHILEN BÖÖR 1:42
10. *Köömiy*: FULL MOON 1:01
11. *Amankhuur* Solo: TO RUN LIKE
FLOWING CAMEL'S WATER 1:37
12. *Shudraga* Solo:
COPPER AND STEEL 1:23

13. *Zuur* Solo: THE FLOW
OF THE EVEEN RIVER 0:46
14. *Khuuchir* Ensemble Medley: AYI NAN
AYI and TWO HEARTS 2:07
15. *Bıshur* Ensemble:
BISHUR APPEAL 2:04
16. *Yatag* Performance: A BELOVED,
OTTER-COLORED HORSE 4:40

Songs and Narratives of Mongolians in China

17. *Morin khuur* Solo:
DÜNGSHANG GÖÖGÖÖ 3:54
18. *Urtĭn duu*: DÜGÜRENG ZAAAN 2:11
19. Epic Poem:
THE TALE OF JANGGAR 3:23
20. Song from the Xinjiang Uygur
Autonomous Region:
OYRAD UN DAGUU 4:20
21. Narrative: HOLBOG-A 3:57

Total time 58:00

Non-English musical types and styles are indicated by italics. Titles are in capital letters. Because these are field recordings, there may be some extraneous noise despite the high fidelity utilized.

Field Notes

by Haruo Hasumi

Living on the Steppes

Mongolia is a land of song. The steppes and the great Gobi Desert extend under the stunning blue sky with perpetually snow-capped mountain ranges in the distance. Winter brings -50° C cold, while summer temperatures top 40° C. In this severe natural environment, the Mongolian people have led nomadic lives dependent on hunting and livestock-raising, utilizing the

grasslands for their herds of horses, cattle, camels, sheep, and goats. The men also hunted as their livestock-tending allowed, mainly during the winter and spring but also in summer and autumn when necessary. Nomadic shepherding, however, is and has been the most vital aspect of the Mongolians' livelihood for over 1,000 years.

Mongolian customs, habits, and ways of thinking are, therefore, pervaded by the nomadic, elemental, daily quest for meat and milk. Mongolians, for example, worship the god *Ovoo* with offerings of beef and sheep meat, fermented cow and horse milk, and prayers in order to be granted plentiful bounties. In this way, people and livestock have co-existed and depended on each other in Mongolia.



Sounds That Echo Across the Sea of Grass

Mongolian music must have arisen from the only sounds heard on the Mongolian steppes—the sounds of nature, the voices of people, and the sounds of animals reacting to humans and humans reacting to animals.

In spring, for example, when the herds bear their young, a mother occasionally either rejects its baby and refuses to nurse or dies leaving an orphan. The coaxing cries and music with which the Mongolians then endeavor to re-establish nursing is virtually 100% successful. Specific cries for each type of animal—"toig, toig" (sheep), "chaig, chaig" (goats), "obb, obb" (cattle), and "bobs, bobs" (camels)—are repeated up to thousands of times, eventually acquiring fixed melodies and rhythms which then evolve into songs with words.

The Mongolians also play such instruments as the horse-head fiddle and *limbe*

*Milking horses:
The wife milks while the husband
restrains the baby horse.*

(transverse flute) or sing long and short songs and *köömiy* (see below) while approaching mother animals with their young. The mothers then accept the babies for nursing. Astonishingly, nursing mother camels may shed tears while listening to human songs, instruments, and *köömiy*. Because livestock provide the basis for Mongolian survival, such efforts to retain every head in the herd are vital. Similarly, the use of distinct calls, quiet music and songs at milking time also improves milk production.

Mongolian folk music is, therefore, not simply entertainment for the stage or social occasions, but is a functional part of daily Mongolian life. Even the



singing of Norobbanzad, the queen of Mongolian song, is known not only for its artistry but for its practical value as well. Distinguished since childhood for her skillful singing, Norobbanzad has rescued a great many young sheep, goats, cattle, and camels in her homeland on the Gobi. In addition to 200 long songs (*Urtin duu*) and countless short ones, her broad repertoire includes songs related to shepherding that are never heard on a stage.

Köömiy master Tserendawah, from the Hovd region, also rescued many young livestock with his vocal technique. *Köömiy* treats the voice as an instrument by using the glottis to produce two simultaneous tones. Although commonly called "throat singing," *köömiy* may come from the belly, chest, throat, lip, nose, or nasal cavity. Tserendawah, who has recently revived the *hosmol* (doubled) style, also adds words to *köömiy* performances. The existence of so many types of *köömiy* may be due to the need to provide individualized soothing and coaxing to a variety of animals.

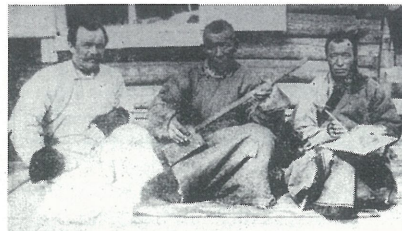
Many Mongolian tribes have

characteristic styles. *Urtin duu* (long song) is created by extending the entire song. Some styles are relatively simple. Others are more difficult, due to the turns of melodies and phrases and to the singer's wide vocal range (as much as four octaves in some cases). Mongolian *Urtin duu* singers also commonly use falsetto.

Mongolian Instruments

The most well-known musical instrument of Mongolia is the *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle). Originally simply called *khuur* and lacking the horse-head ornamentation, the instrument later acquired human skulls or dragon-head adornments. According to Mongol tradition, instruments with dragon-heads belong to royalty and aristocracy while those with horse-heads signify the folk.

The *khuuchir* is a two-stringed Chinese fiddle (*erb-hu*). The four-stringed type is called *sibu* ("having four ears"). The *shudraga* or *shanz* is similar to the Japanese *shamisen* or a three-stringed banjo played with a plectrum. The *yatag* is a zither, but the traditional Mongolian version has



From left: Russian trader, Burdukov; famed narrator, Parchin; scribe, Majar. Parchin narrated many epics and tales accompanied by the *tobshuur* (seen here).

been lost, and the instrument in current use is related to the Korean *kayagym*. The *tobshuur* is a stringed instrument mainly found in western Mongolia.

Wind instruments include the *limbe*, *bisbur* (a shawm), and *zuur* (a recorder used to accompany *köömiy*), and jew's harp. Percussion instruments, such as drums, *dora*, and bells exist but were not generally used by herdsmen and, until the early 20th century, were only for royal or religious ceremonies.

In recent years, the piano, violin, accordion, and other European musical instruments have become

more common in Mongolian music.

Across Turbulent Seas

Mongolia today is tossing about on a rough sea. In the past few decades, such traditional songs as the *Urtin duu* have been in danger of extinction, perhaps due to the difficult singing methods they require or because they don't fit the pace of modern life. But the strong, age-old Mongolian folk traditions, firmly rooted in the shepherding culture, cannot be extinguished so easily. For one thing, the social impact of Perestroika has led many young people to reassess their national culture and to rediscover folk song. This is truly fortunate, and is probably related to the Genghis Khan revival*. For Mongolians, whose country has long been divided between different nations, the

*Genghis Khan Revival

From The 1921 revolution until recently, Genghis [also: Gingis, Chinggis] Khan was reviled in Mongolia as a barbarian aggressor, a view that was enforced by the former Soviets and collaborative Mongolian authorities. The recent surge of democratization has permitted a renewed idolization of Genghis Khan.

revived status of Genghis Khan confirms their identity as a once powerful people. Now that “all things Mongolian” are of renewed value, such essential Mongolian songs as the *Urtin duu* appeal to the people’s hearts above all. When these frenzied times eventually calm down, the melodies of the horse-head fiddle and the *Urtin duu* will resound again across the steppes and under the blue heavens.

For the past year or two, Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, has been an incredible city. Concerts of Western classical and operatic music — by Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Mussorgsky, and others — and of lighter music have become common. Rock and jazz bands perform, and popular music is also acquiring a following. Buddhist temples overflow with young and old men and women, and shamanism has enjoyed a revival. Song, dance, and music ensembles have formed everywhere, reviving the

hitherto forbidden *toam*, a masked dance representing a crusade against enemies of Buddhism. Dances modeled on shaman rituals are also frequently seen. Nunneries have been reconstructed and populated by formerly communist women.

In this atmosphere, fieldwork in Mongolia was difficult beyond description. In fact, it was virtually impossible, due to government opposition. The general population was very amiable toward us, and I learned much from these people, but our attempts to document folk songs, narratives, shaman ballads and performances were stopped at every turn. Since about 1990, audio and video recording have become more accessible, thanks to the waves of Perestroika that finally broke on Mongolian shores. This is certainly a happy development, and we can anticipate the collection of much material hereafter.



The Selections

This collection is intended to introduce listeners to a wide variety of Mongolian instruments and narratives in addition to the *morin khuur*, *köömii*, and *Urtin duu*, and to the music of Mongolian tribes living along the Mongolia-China border.

Instrumental Music and Song of Mongolia

1. KHÖKHE TORGON ČAMČA (THE BLUE SILK OVERCOAT): Instrumental ensemble performance featuring the *shudraga*, *khuuchir*, and *yatag*. Famed *shudraga* and *khuuchir* performers are accompanied by a young person.
2. *Bogino duu*: NABČITAI MODU (Short Song: A LEAFY TREE): In this land of extreme cold, green foliage is seen only during the life-affirming summertime, and the singer’s voice also overflows with joy.
3. *Bogino duu*: ULIJASTAI YIN GOUL (Short Song: THE RIVER OF ULIASTAY): The people of the arid

Mongolian land depend on rivers for their livelihood. The sight of the river is a life-affirming blessing in itself.

4. *Bogino duu*: ZULAI ČAGAN ALTAI (Short Song: THE SNOW-CROWNED ALTAI MOUNTAINS): Because of their closeness to God and extreme value as a water source, the high mountains were once worshiped by Mongol tribes as “Blue Heaven.” Although this is a recent piece and not an actual folk song, the lyrics reflect traditional Mongolian sentiments.

Singer: Jargalsaiban
Tracks 1-4 recorded in Ulaanbaatar,
April, 1991

5. *Urtin duu*: ERKHIM TÖRÜ (THE HALLOWED ROAD): A famous Mongolian “long song” (*Urtin duu*) about how a stable state ensures stable lives for the people, this song is used to open state events and parties, as well as weddings.

Singer: Norobbanzad
Morin khuur: Tsogbadraf

6. *Urtin duu*: SÜNDER AGULA (SÜNDER MOUNTAIN): The mountain, once the Mongolians’ livelihood, was an

object of faith. This song is from western Mongolia.

*Singer: Tuvshinjargal
Morin khuur: Tsogbadraf
Köömiy: Ganbolt*

7. Song of Praise: ALTAI YIN MAGTAGAL (ALTAI MOUNTAIN PAEAN): There are many, orally-transmitted epic poems in Mongolia, and such narrations are always preceded by a paeon to the Altai Mountains. This paeon is sung before western Mongolian epic narratives.

*Performers: Yavghan, Bold, Shara
Tracks 5 through 7 recorded in Ulaanbaatar*

Mongolian Musical Instruments and Köömiy

8. *Morin khuur* Solo: JONON QARA YIN YABUDAL (JONON QARA'S RUN): A narrative fable of the origin of the *morin khuur*, accompanied by the instrument. The beautiful, sad story involves ill-fated young lovers, a magnificent winged, black horse, and the emergence of the *morin khuur* from its death.

*Performer: Nergüi
(Ömunü, Gobi Province)
Recorded in Ulaanbaatar*

9. *Köömiy*: SHIILEN BÖ ÖR: Mongolian folk love song.

Köömiy: Tserendawab, from Hovd

10. *Köömiy*: ARBAN TABUN U SAR-A (FULL MOON): Mongolian *köömiy* version of a song popularized in the 1950s by the singer Odonguwa, and also known as "Tryst in Ovoo."

*Köömiy: Tserendawab
Recorded: Hovd Province*

11. *Amankhuur* Solo: TEMEE TESHEE (TO RUN LIKE FLOWING CAMEL'S WATER): Mongolian jew's harp solo.

*Performer: Gonbdash
(Dorno, Gobi Province)*

12. *Shudraga* Solo: GANG TEMÜR (COPPER AND STEEL): Mongolian folk song.

Performer: Dandram

13. *Zuur* Solo: EVEEN GOUL UN URUSKHAL (THE FLOW OF THE EVEN RIVER): *Zuur* composition about a river in western Mongolia.

*Performer: Narantsog
(Hovd Province)*

14. *Khuuchir* Ensemble Medley: AYI NAN AYI, KHOYAR SEDKIL

(TWO HEARTS): Two love songs.

*Performers: Baldan,
Baatar (Dorno, Gobi Province)*

15. *Bishur* Ensemble: BISHUR YIN URIA (BISHUR APPEAL):

Mongolian folk song. The *bishur* is a trumpet-shaped shawm.

Performers: Sambalhundeb, Indü-reb

16. *Yatag* (Zither) Performance:

KHÖGERKHÖN KHALIU (A BELOVED, OTTER-COLORED HORSE): Mongolian folk song.

Yatag: Narantuya

Accompaniment:

Chuluunkhüül, Tsogzolmaa

Tracks 11-16 recorded in Ulaanbaatar

Songs and Narratives of Mongolians in China

17. *Morin khuur* Solo: DÜNGSHANG GÖ ÖGÖ Ö Folk song from eastern Mongolia about a great hero, Dungshang göögöö, known as Yüden göögöö on the Mongolian side of the border.

Performer: Chi Bulag

18. *Urtin duu*: DÜGÜRENG ZĀAN:

Dügüreng Zaan was a wrestler who was hated and finally murdered by the Han because he defeated one of their wrestlers. People have kept his memory alive through Inner Mongolian long song.

Singer: Gereltii

*Accompaniment: Jaabon
Tracks 17 and 18 recorded in
Saitama Prefecture, Japan*

19. Western Mongolian Epic Poem: JANGGAR (THE TALE OF JANGGAR): The hero, JangGar, has a brave comrade, Hongor Baatar, and this excerpt tells of the deeds of the latter's child, Hoshon.

Narration: Badamjab

20. Mongolian Song from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region: OYRAD UN DAGUU:

From a Mongolian tribe that has lived for hundreds of years isolated in the Western China Xinjiang region.

*Singer: Jamcha
Tracks 19 and 20
recorded in Ürümqi.*

21. Narrative: HOLBOG-A:

From the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. *HolboG-a* means to alliterate, or to join and link events and poetry. This form is often used for social commentary. This example is a celebratory piece.

*Performer: Dorjirinchin
Recorded in Höbböt*

Credits:

Original Japanese Version

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Director: Masaya Murakami
Recordings and Notes: Haruo Hasumi
Audio Mixer: Yoshinobu Asao
Planning: Katsumori Ichikawa

English Language Series

Producer: Stephen McArthur
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Editor: Mark Greenberg
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Acknowledgments:

Amy Yellin

Editor & Translator's Note

These notes have been translated, for the first time, from the original Japanese and edited as judiciously as possible for an English-speaking audience. In translating and editing these notes, we have attempted to preserve the authors' original tone, as well as the essential information. Some references aimed at a Japanese audience have been eliminated but little else. The fieldworkers who recorded these selections represent a variety of disciplines and approaches, and this is reflected in the notes. Some, for example, are more musicologically detailed, while others present the point-of-view of an enthusiastic traveler learning about new cultures and peoples.

Translating always presents challenges, and these are amplified when the material being translated itself contains many terms from yet another language. Often, the Japanese fieldworker attempted to preserve original terms, such as the names of people and musical instruments, through direct transliteration into Japanese. Since transliteration involves capturing one language's

sounds in another's alphabet, it is subject to unavoidable inaccuracies. These are compounded when a second transliteration—as here, from Japanese to English—occurs. Some terms can be checked by using recognized authorities and references, and we have done this wherever possible by following spellings used in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980 edition) and the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986 edition). We also appreciate the assistance of Mr. Yuji Ichihashi, at the Victor Company of Japan, and the original writers in reviewing our work and making suggestions.

Some spellings, however, have remained problematic, especially the names of people and some places. In those cases we have followed standard Japanese-English transliteration practice and have attempted to be as consistent as possible. We have also followed Western practice, rather than Japanese, by placing surnames second.

Non-English terms are in italics.

— MG and TN

