

Alash

Teacher Resource Guide

Lotus Blossoms



About Alash

ALASH are masters of Tuvan throat singing, known as *xöömei* (*her-may*), a remarkable technique for singing multiple pitches at the same time. What distinguishes this gifted trio from earlier generations of Tuvan throat singers is the subtle infusion of modern influences into their traditional music. One can find complex harmonies, western instruments, and contemporary song forms in Alash's music, but its overall sound and spirit is decidedly Tuvan.

Trained in traditional Tuvan music since childhood, the Alash musicians studied at Kyzyl Arts College just as Tuva was beginning to open up to the West. They formed a traditional ensemble and won multiple awards for traditional throat singing in international *xöömei* (*her-may*) competitions, both as an ensemble and as individuals. At the same time, they paid close attention to new trends coming out of the West. They have borrowed new ideas that mesh well with the sound and feel of traditional Tuvan music, but they have never sacrificed the integrity of their own heritage in an effort to make their music more hip.



About Tuvan Throat Singing

The tiny Republic of Tuva is a giant when it comes to mastery of the human voice. The ancient tradition of throat singing developed among the nomadic herdsman of Central Asia, people who lived in yurts, rode horses, raised yaks, sheep, and camels, and had a close spiritual relationship with nature. Passed down through the generations but largely unheard by the outside world, *xöömei* (*her-may*) is now the subject of international fascination and has become Tuva's best known cultural export.



The Tuvan way of making music is based on appreciation of complex sounds with multiple layers. The throat singer amplifies some overtones while screening out others, so that ***a careful listener can hear two, three, even four distinct pitches emanating from one singer's mouth.*** The importance of sonic complexity is illustrated by an anecdote about a respected Tuvan musician who was demonstrating the *igil* (ee-gill), a bowed instrument with two strings tuned to two different pitches: When asked to play each string separately, he refused, saying it wouldn't make any sense. ***The only meaningful sound was the combination of the two pitches played together.***

Tuvan Throat Singing includes a variety of styles, each associated with a different sound in nature. In the sygyt (*suh-gut*) and xoömei (*her-may*) styles, the singer starts with a fundamental pitch which then splits into the original tone plus one or more higher overtones that **may sound like birdsong or whistling wind**. The singer may embellish the highest note by varying the shape of his vocal tract, producing a mini-melody in the top range while the other pitches remain fixed. In the growling kargyraa (*kar-gee-rah*) style, the singer produces a deep guttural undertone below the fundamental pitch as well as overtones above. **More complex throat singing styles create rhythms or quickly changing harmonics to imitate the sounds of bubbling water or a trotting horse.**



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