

RECORDINGS IN NATURAL CAVES

RUSSIA – TUVA

Cave near Mören

Mören, Naryn

RIC56 United States 1998

CAVE SPIRITS

WD – Ethnic – Siberian Folk – Vocal

Comp: (Traditional)

Perf: Sayan **BAPA** (vocal)

Prod: Ted Levin & Joel Gordon

Prod. Co: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Rec. Eng: Joel Gordon & Ted Levin

Rec. Date: Spring 1996

Liner Notes: (23-page booklet) Ted Levin & Joel Gordon

Time: 0:56

CD: TUVA, AMONG THE SPIRITS: SOUND, MUSIC, AND NATURE IN SAKHA AND TUVA

Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD 40452 (Tk 15)

Notes: This track is described in the liner notes – “For Tuvans, caves are sites of spiritual power, for they are orifices through which humankind can contact spirits residing inside the earth. There are many legends about the special power of singing and musical instruments performed inside caves. To experience this power ourselves, we journey to a cave near the Mongolian border situated high on a stony escarpment. This recording features not only Sayan Bapa performing throat-singing called *kargyraa* but also the sound of water dripping from the roof of the cave into the microphone.” Gordon also talks about the “super-reverberant acoustic of the cave where we recorded track 15.”

Regarding Tuvan music – “Traditionally music from Tuva was only a solo effort. The musician's intention was usually to emphasize timbre and harmonics over rhythm. The performances were often in places of natural acoustics such as caves, cliffs, rivers, and so on. The performer would often take long pauses to allow nature its own chance to converse back.” (Anon. 2013)

In his book Ted Levin tells a Tuvan legend about caves and music – “Many legends speak of the power of music performed in caves. Valentina Süzükei recorded one such legend, about a young shepherd who was herding his animals in a place known by the toponym Eder-Kuilar (“Singing Caves”), whose name refers to the phenomenon of wind blowing across the mouth of a cave and creating ambient sound. In the legend, a shepherd wandered into the eponymous cave, where he encountered a man throat-singing to the accompaniment of an unknown and enchanting instrument. Begging the man to let him play the instrument, the shepherd picked it up and started to accompany his singing. He fell into a trance from the sound of his own music, and only many years later emerged from the cave to find all his loved ones gone. Becoming an itinerant musician, he wandered the countryside, muttering, ‘Return, return, return to me, my loved ones’ (*egider, egider*), and that’s why the local people started to call his instrument, *egil*.” (Levin & Süzükei 2006)



Then referring to his earlier trip to Tuva when he recorded this album – “During a trip to the south of Tuva in the spring of 1996, I first heard spirit-calling performed in the bone-chilling cold dampness of a cave. The visit to the cave had been the idea of Kaigal-ool, who proposed including it in a project to record throat-singing and other types of Tuvan music in natural acoustic environments in which, according to the members of Huun-Huur-Tu, they were meant to be performed. Kaigal-ool had heard about a particular cave in the vicinity of Mören, a small settlement near Naryn, not far from the border with Mongolia, which was reputedly inhabited by spirits... Hidden in the steep face of a rocky hill known as Ak-Xaiyrankan, or ‘White Sacred Mountain, the cave was said to be difficult to find, and we were advised to take along a local guide;” (Levin & Süzükei 2006) The cave did prove difficult to find and their first guide failed, but with a second guide eventually they found it and did this recording, although we don’t have all the details because the [Google.fr](#) site omits pages 35-36, which tell the end of the story. Have to buy the book.

For a short discussion of the music see under World Music – Russia - Tuva.

Ref: Anon. n.d., Tuvan People, Music, [Altaic Wiki](#)

Anon. 2013, Music in the Tyva Republic, [Wikipedia](#)

Cave Spirits; Tuva, Among the Spirits LP, [Smithsonian Folkways](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

Huemann, Michael 2006, Tuva, Among the Spirits, CD Review, 3p, [BlogCritics](#)

Levin, Theodore & Süzükei, Valentina 2006, *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing – Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond*, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, IN, p. 30-36, [Google.fr](#)

Tuva, Among the Spirits CD, [Discogs](#)

Tuva, Among the Spirits CD, Cave Spirits, [CDUniverse](#) (◀AUDIO SAMPLE)

Tuva, Among the Spirits CD, Liner Notes pdf, [Smithsonian Folkways](#)

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