

# WORLD MUSIC

## RUSSIA – TUVA

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WD-RU1 United States 1999

### CAVE SPIRITS \*

WD – Ethnic – Siberian Folk – Vocal – Recorded in Cave

**Comp:** (Traditional)

**Perf:** Sayan **BAPA** (vocal)

**Prod:** Ted Levin & Joel Gordon

**Prod. Co:** Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

**Sponsor:** Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies;  
Smithsonian Institution; Washington, DC

**Rec. Eng:** Joel Gordon & Ted Levin

**Liner Notes:** (23-page Booklet) Ted Levin

**Time:** 0:56

**CD:** TUVA, AMONG THE SPIRITS: SOUND, MUSIC, AND  
NATURE IN SAKHA AND TUVA (RIC#)  
Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD 40452 (Tk 15)



**Notes:** The Tuva Republic of Russia is located in southern Siberia north of Mongolia.

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.”

Furthermore – “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 to me, my loved ones’ (*egider, egider*), and that’s why the local people started to call his instrument, *egil*.” (Levin & Süzükei 2006) The 30-second audio clip gives a fairly good idea of the content of this high-pitched raucous screeching chant that goes up and then comes way down.

Referring to this recording Levin wrote – “Tolya and Sayan had reveled in the strong reverberation of voices and instruments inside the cave, and they had connected the strong reverb with the ability of sound to reach spirits. But their love of reverb was not limited to caves. Any natural reverberant acoustic space

and the spirits that dwelled there could be animated by the physical stimulus of sound. Cliffs, valleys, forests, and mountains are all imbued with the power to resonate – indeed to sing – in response to sounds made by humans as well as wind, birds, and animals.” (Levin & Süzükei 2006)

The full [liner notes](#) of this album can be downloaded on the Smithsonian Folkways Website. The black-silhouetted animals on the CD cover are petroglyphs from the cliffs on the bank of the Yenisei River in Tuva.

See also under Recordings in Caves – Russia - Tuva.

**Ref:** 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](#)

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

[caveinspiredmusic.com](http://caveinspiredmusic.com)