

# Good research paper on central asian throat singing music

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Throat singing, also known as harmonic singing, is a style in which the vocalist simultaneously produces more than one pitch by reinforcing certain overtones and undertones of the fundamental pitch. The singer employs different vocalization techniques, taking advantage of the resonance characteristics of the throat, to produce two or more notes at the same time. Precise movement of the lips, jaw, tongue and the larynx enables the singers to produce special harmonies.

Throat singing originated from the Turko-Mongol tribes of the mountains of Altai and Sayan in southern Siberia and western Mongolia. These communities are located in Central Asia and extend towards East Asia. They cover portions of three geographical areas, i. e. China (Tibet and Inner Mongolia), Mongolia and Russia (Khakassia, Tuva and Altay). It is widely believed that south western Mongolia was the origin of throat singing. Currently, it is practised all over the country and Mongolia still practises throat singing more than any other country in the world. The style most commonly practised is known as Khoomii, which can be further categorized depending on the body parts used when producing the sound. Tuva people are found in southern Siberia. They borrowed this culture from their neighbour, Mongolia, and developed into masters the style. They use a wide range of vocalization and can produce up to four pitches at the same time. The most commonly used styles within this community include Kargyraa, Sygyt, and Khoomei. Other styles also used are Chylandyk, Ezengileer and Dumchuktaar. The Republic of Altai and Khakassia border Tuva to the west and northwest respectively. They practise a form of throat singing known as khai. This style is mostly used for performing poetry. Several variations of

khai have emerged like sybysky, sygyt and homei. In addition to this style, the people of Altai and Khakassia also use kargyraa, and khoomei styles. The chanting practised by Buddhists of Tibet has also been categorized as a sub-genre of throat singing. The monks use low pitches in their chants. They do throat singing during prayers and other ceremonies, and this normally involves more than one monk chanting at any given time. Tibetan use throat singing styles such as Gyuke (lowest pitch), Dzoke and Gyer. Apart from the Central Asian communities, the other notable regions where throat singing has been practised for centuries include northern Canada and southeast area of South Africa. The original inhabitants of northern Canada, the Inuits, practised throat singing. This was exclusively done by women while their men were out hunting. They also practised it to sing their babies to sleep. The Xhosa community of South Africa use a throat singing style known as eefing.

Throat singing, as practised by the people of Central Asia, involves the production of two or more pitches at the same time. The vocalist begins with a low drone. He then manipulates his vocal tract, breaks up the sound while amplifying the overtones. These are heard as new pitches, while the low drone continues at low volume. The people of Central Asia were nomads who resided in yurts, reared sheep, yaks and camels, and rode horses.

Traditionally, throat singing was done outdoors. The vocalist used his voice to interact with the sounds of the natural world. He mimicked the blowing wind, camel growls, bubbling streams and whistling birds. Throat singing was exclusively practised by men and it was a taboo for women. This taboo is, however, breaking down and women are also coming out as excellent throat

singers.

The people of Tuva developed the most varieties of throat singing. These styles have become wide spread and are practised by most of the communities in Central Asia. The most commonly used styles are Sygyt, Khoomei, Kargyraa, Borbangnadyr, and Ezenggileer. Khoomei is the most popular style of throat singing in Central Asia. It means throat in Tuvan language. The sound produced is of middle range with airy whistle like overtones floating above the fundamental pitch. It has been compared to the sound produced by wind swirling among rocks. The Sygyt style is the one with the highest pitch. Its fundamental tone is middle ranged and has strong piercing harmonics similar to whistling sound. It has been described as the imitation of gentle summer breezes, or the songs of birds. Performing Sygyt requires thorough practise. It involves raising the tongue to seal the gums, behind the teeth. A hole is left behind the molars on either side. Sound is produced and directed between teeth to the front of the mouth. Meanwhile, the lips form a shape like a bell and sound directed through the opening. The pitch can then be manipulated by the singer depending on his experience. The Kargyraa style is a deeper throat singing style. The growling sound produced is similar to the chants made by the Tibetan Buddhists.

In this style, the vocal folds and the vestibular folds are manipulated in such a way to create two sources of sound connected together. This is made possible by constricting the larynx to bring the vestibular folds together, then making them vibrate. The undertone produced in the process is half the frequency of the pitch produced by the vocal folds. The mouth cavity is shaped differently to produce sound of desired pitches at the same time.

This sound produced by this style has been likened to the howling of winds in winter and the cries of a mother camel which has lost her camel. Kargyraa can be categorized further into two sub-types: Dag, for mountain, and Xovu for steppe. Dag is deeper with more nasal effects. On the other hand, Xovu has a higher pitch with more tension at the throat and little chest resonance. Borbangnadyr combines the Sygyt, Khoomei, and Kargyraa styles. A trolling effect is then added with harmonics rapidly changing. The sound produced is similar to that of a bubbling stream. Ezenggileer also combines the three basic styles. A pulsating rhythm is added producing a sound similar to a trotting horse. The word means stirrup in Tuvan language.

Throat singing music of Central Asia is made wonderful by the overtones and undertones that disclose the musical nature of each sound. When the voice splits in the process of throat singing, two different sounds are produced and an experience of an unusual sensation of a pure wave emerging from the sound is felt. The vibration of a column of air or a string produces natural sound. The pitch of the sound is affected by the length of the air column or string and by the frequency of the vibrations. The fundamental frequency is produced when the string or the column of air vibrates as a single column. This frequency is audible and defines the pitch of the tone. At the same time, smaller segments of the air column and string are vibrating at a faster rate than the fundamental frequency. The pitches of these higher frequencies are rarely heard clearly because the fundamental frequency is more powerful. In combination, however, the fundamental frequency plus the smaller vibrations define the timbre and the quality of sound produced. The pitches produced by the higher frequencies are referred to as overtones or

harmonics.

In throat singing, the vocalist articulates the vocal tract so that one of the zones of resonance coincide with the desired harmonic. The amplitude of the sound is, therefore, increased making it perceptible. The sound produced by throat singers can be described as diphonic. The methods to produce diphonic sound has been summarized into two categories: a single cavity method, and two cavities method. In the single cavity method, the tongue does not move. It remains flat without touching the palate. This leaves the vocal tract like a continuous tube. The diphonic harmonic is produced by appropriate manipulation of the mouth and the lips. It is normally weak and is masked by the fundamental frequency. The vocalist, therefore, uses his nasal cavity to reduce their intensity. In the two cavities method, the tongue is raised dividing the vocal tract into two resonators with different resonance. The harmonic can then be tuned to produce two perceptible pitches simultaneously. Three possible variants of this technique exist. The first is employed in the Khoomei style. To get the desired harmonic, the tip and the body of the tongue move forward (high pitch) and backward (low pitch) along the palate. The second is used in the Sygyt style. The tip of the tongue is fixed behind the upper teeth. The body of the tongue rises to the desired harmonic. In the third variant, the desired harmonic is achieved by the movement of the root of the tongue. Lower harmonics are obtained by moving the base of the tongue towards the posterior wall of the throat. When the base is moved forward, higher harmonics are produced.

Throat singing plays many roles in Central Asian communities. The people from this region were pastoralist and originally made and performed throat

singing music in their pastoral settings. The performances were mostly solo. The music was for entertainment and also connected these people spiritually to their environment. The spiritual connection is achieved by the symbolic imitations of nature. Those who listen to the songs associate the sound produced to sounds of nature, while the performer temporarily assumes the position what he is imitating. Contemporary performance of throat music has evolved so much that it now involves bands, a stage and audiences. Newer musical instruments have also been employed to accompany the performance. The Tibetan Buddhists believe that throat singing music has a spiritual and healing power. They believe that through throat singing, one is able to broaden the volume of the energy center of the brain and is ushered into the spiritual world. They also believe that it normalizes the functions of the breathing systems and the heart, and enhances spiritual power and gives one a peaceful soul.

Until the 20th century, the throat singing practising communities of Central Asia were isolated from the rest of the world by travel restrictions and its remote location. In the 1980s, physicist Richard Feymann visited Tuva and became a fan of throat singing. He brought the group Huu-Huur-Tu to America, an act that played a major role in the exposure of the style to the larger world. Currently, throat singing competitions are held during music festivals, drawing hundreds of competitors and fans to enjoy themselves. The practise has achieved wide acceptance and its pioneers have put measures to keep the culture alive and vibrant.

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