

BIOGRAPHY

The whistling of the high-mountain wind creates eerie overtones and postmodern statement. The repeated thrum of a string against wood and hide turns into a meditative, evocative figure straight from the avant garde. The descendents of isolated Siberian herdsman make serious, strangely universal music out of some of the planet's quirkiest acoustics.

The Tuvan acoustic quartet Huun Huur Tu prove that Tuvan music can take plenty of intelligent innovation. Using traditional instruments and drawing subtly on 20th-century composers, funky rhythms, and the palette of electronica, Huun Huur Tu transform ancient songs into complex acoustic compositions.

As they began touring in the West seventeen years ago, Huun Huur Tu almost single-handedly introduced the outside world to the boundless wealth of Tuvan traditions, thanks in great part to their superior musicianship. Hailing from the high pastures of the Altai Mountains in south central Siberia, the musicians have spent decades honing the overtone singing, instrumental approaches, and vibrant songs of their home.

Yet the group also had the musical savvy and the chops to take their traditions far from the slopes and valleys of Central Asia. They made groundbreaking traditional recordings that put their home on the map. They toured the world, gaining fans and inspiring overtone singers. They've wowed audiences in both Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa, eliciting surprised remarks after one festival show in Kenya that they played with the same "soul" as local musicians. They sparked a boom in Tuvan and other throat-singing, lute-strumming ensembles from Central Asia that have been the mainstays of global music festivals.

Being the first (and arguably the most skillful) has its advantages. Well-established as "world music" masters, Huun Huur Tu has long been involved in pushing the envelope and digging deep into their roots to find new possibilities. The most recent member to join the group, Radik Tyulyush, a third-generation throat-singer, talented multi-instrumentalist, and conservatory trained composer, added a dose of youthful energy and rhythmic complexity recalling good old American funk.

In 2011, Huun Huur Tu collaborated with prominent Russian composer Vladimir Martynov, who drew on the works by the visionary early 20th-century avant-garde poet Velimir Khlebnikov to create *Children of the Otter* (forthcoming as a DVD on GreenWave), a 70-minute piece for chamber orchestra, choir, and Tuvan ensemble.

Martynov's background in Russian Orthodox music, other non-Russian music from Central Asia, as well as his embrace of everything from mid-century minimalism to rock operas to Renaissance polyphony, made collaboration easy and inspiring for Huun Huur Tu. While the quiet influence of minimalism can be felt in the group's newest approach to "Chyraa-Khoor," a traditional Tuvan song, but with a contemplative Philip Glass-esque undercurrent.

Another, similarly harmonious collaboration with a very different kind of musician came when the group worked with producer Carmen Rizzo (Niyaz, Seal, Paul Oakenfold, Ryuichi Sakamoto). By working closely with Rizzo on *Eternal* (GreenWave, 2009), the members of Huun Huur Tu got a taste of how to create electronic soundscapes around traditional material. This experience, along with their role as the heart of a new kind of chamber orchestra, has guided much of their music following that project.

“Gradually, over the years, the sound has shifted,” reflects former manager and co-producer of their 2010 release, *Ancestors Call*, Vladimir Oboronko. “It’s become more sophisticated, more-dimensional, and much more relevant to current music sensibilities. Huun Huur Tu is innovating indigenous Tuvan music under the subtle influence of the music of 20th and 21st centuries, and the result is both contemporary music that belongs to the whole world and a fresh take on the traditional music of their beloved Tuva”