

PERFORMING STYLES IN MONGOLIAN CHANT

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DURING a mission sponsored by Unesco, I had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with some traditional types and styles of singing in Mongolia. The Mongols have an extraordinarily complex and developed musical tradition, and some

Song celebrating the Winner of an Archery Contest

$\text{♩} = 192$

Hé he hjo hoho ho hjo hō i hihī-hi hī hāhāhā
 hihjo ho hohoho ho ho hohohoho ho hā he hehehe
 he he heja-ha-ha-ha ha-ha ha hjo hō hi he Njuh-ha-jā hī hehe
 he he hī hī ho hō hoho ho ho ho ho ho ho ho ho
 ho ho ho he he he hjo - oj hu he hehe he hjo hō hō hāhāhā hī
 hīoj hju hu huhuho hī hō hōhōhōhō hō hō hjo
 ho hōhōhō hō hōhōhō hjo hobbmaho hohoho ho ho ho ho ho
 ho hahaha hahaha ha he ja hahaha ha ha ha ha he ho hu
 ha hu ha hī hō hehe he he hī he he he he
 hu ha ho ho ho hu ha hī hō hō hō hjo - oj hu he
 he he hje hī hō hī hī hī hī hī
 hō hō hō hō hī hjo hohoho ho xō xō

$\text{♩} = 184$

Fig. 1

of its types are of great interest for ethnomusicologists. I want to present to you two styles of singing which are closely associated with certain types of songs.

The first is called "long chant" and ranks with the most archaic and most developed types of the Mongols. It is a song in stanza form with a free, *rubato* performance having long sustained notes: just like repercussions, ornamented by *fiorituri*, and giving the impression of an instrumental style. They are produced by a particular setting of the larynx. But its most impressive feature is its wide range. Some singers extend the compass of songs by using the falsetto extremely vigorously. Thus a voice can range over as many as three octaves.

Two examples are songs of one of the most eminent singers, Mr. Dorzhdagva, who was 63 years of age when these recordings were made. The first is a chant for praising the winner of the traditional archery contest (Fig. 1). It has no text, but is performed with syllables lacking a meaning. Its musical style, however, is the same as that of the "long chants." Mr. Dorzhdagva's second song, on the other hand, is a true "long chant," of which we give a short excerpt (Fig. 2) illustrating the highest pitch of his singing (the lowest being at the end of Fig. 1). He is accompanied on the *marinhur* (fiddle) by Mr. Bojan.

Excerpt from a "Long Chant," accompanied by the Marinhur

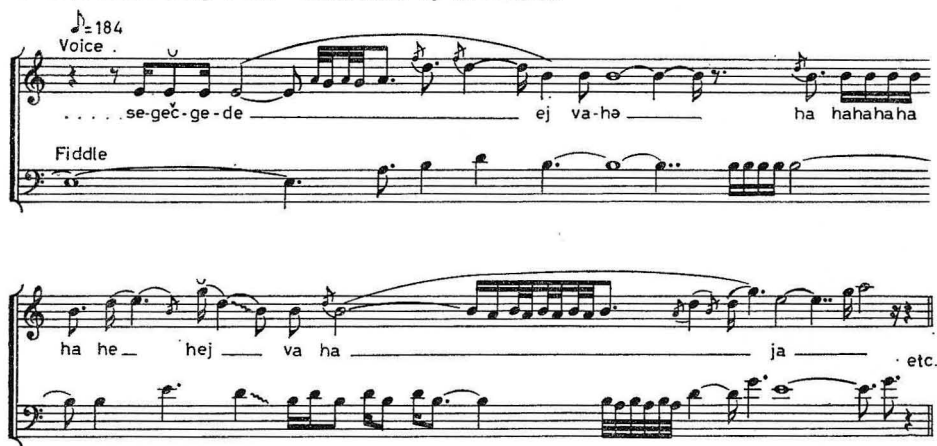


Fig. 2

A further "long chant" was performed by a *khalkha* woman, then another genre of song with the same sort of flourishes by a *darkhat* woman.

Now we come to the most interesting and most curious type, a two-part vocal performance given by one and the same man (Fig. 3).^{*} The essence of it is a sonorous drone produced in the throat by the pressing of the air through an extremely strained larynx, while the upper partials are sounded in the mouth. Thus a melody is produced as by the jaw's-harp, with the difference that here, even the drone is produced by the human organ and not by an instrument.

This style of singing is, according to what I heard, general in Eastern Mongolia, which is the region richest in archaic traditions, but it can be found elsewhere as well. My record was made in the capital, from Mr. Borig, a young man aged 23.

^{*} Nine different recordings were played, of approximately the same duration by the same singer.

Two-part singing ("hö-mi") by a single voice



Fig. 3.

We have a description of this manner of singing in a Soviet publication on the music of the Tuvins, who are neighbours of the Mongols both in and outside Mongolia, on the Soviet-Mongolian borders. In Europe, on the other hand, there is one element which can be thought of in connection with it. This is a formula in the Yugoslav epic chants, according to which a man sings with two voices from a single mouth. This formula appears in German variants of the Ulinger ballad ("Lady Isabel and the Knight"), as the seducer "was singing a three-voice song" ("auf drierlei Stimmen"). The question arises as to whether this should be compared with the Mongolian style of singing as an allusion.

I have taken the liberty of presenting to you this style of singing, together with that of the long chant, in order to offer you an opportunity of having a first audible impression of the Mongolian types of singing which represent an unparalleled achievement of the human musical tradition.

Dr. F. HOERBURGER (Regensburg, Germany) said the general principle of instrumental imitation was world-wide. There were three common reasons for it: (1) disguising the voice for magical purposes; (2) replacement of an instrument by the voice; (3) humorous imitation. He asked which of these applied in the case of the Mongolian examples.

Dr. VARGYAS replied that no reason had been supplied by the singers. It was taken quite seriously and certainly was not regarded as humorous. The style was well developed and the music was performed while riding horses in the desert. Regarding a suggestion by Mr. J. MONTAGU (London) that it was an imitation of the sound of the jew's-harp, because the instrument itself could not be played while riding on horseback, Dr. VARGYAS said the jaw's-harp was indeed used by the Mongols, but he had no evidence to confirm such a supposition.

Dr. S. HOFMAN (Tel-Aviv, Israel) commented on the remarkable range and technique and suggested that oto-laryngological studies would be useful. Dr. VARGYAS agreed. He said he believed the technique was to some extent inspired by the language.

Prof. S. BAUD-BOVY (Geneva, Switzerland) asked about the relationship between voice and instrument in the "long songs." Dr. VARGYAS replied that the instrument was expected to follow the voice exactly or, in self-accompanied items, to supply an antiphonal response.

In reply to a question from Prof. SEEGER (Los Angeles, U.S.A.) about the role of improvisation, Dr. VARGYAS said it was general in the "long songs." Even in the text, meaningless syllables were inserted whenever desired. Falsetto was used by some singers, but not by all.