

Culture

■ TRADITIONAL ART

Mongolian Khuumi Masters Present Traditional Music in New Ways



National Hoomii competency (D.Tserendavaa, second from left)

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OVER the last two weeks four of the greatest overtone singers in Mongolia have been holed up together rehearsing classics and collaborating on new works for an unprecedented *khuumi* concert on April 7 and 8 at 6 p.m. in the auditorium of the Art Gallery, located in the courtyard of the Palace of Culture. N.Sengedorj, D.Tserendavaa, Odsuren, and Ganbold, the four masters, have

stage for the first time as Durvun Berk, the rare instance when a player rolls the four different faces in the game of ankle bones, or here, when four masters present different sides of Mongolian overtone singing.

All the performers are well-trained in the history and techniques of overtone singing, with many numerous recordings and international tours to their names. Yet each musician possesses a voice distinctive in timbre and style. By combining their unique voices, the singers hope to create not only a unique sonic experience, but also an innovative cultural experience. In anticipation of the concert they have worked together to compose original

khuumi songs that arrange traditional melodies and texts in new ways. The four are interweaving their voices and knowledge to "put the public inside the world of overtones," according to Johanni Curtet, one of the organizers of the concert.

Curtet, a French ethno-musicologist pursuing a doctorate in the subject, has spent the last four years studying overtone singing in France and Mongolia. On Sunday, April 8, Curtet will be lecturing on his research at 2 p.m. in the Art Gallery. With his friend and colleague Ts. Otgonbaatar as guide and translator, Curtet spent the summers of 2003 and 2004 traveling around Mongolia recording *khuumi* performed by more than 135 singers. It was during this research that he first met Tserendavaa, who then became his teacher, as well as Sengedorj, Odsuren, and Ganbold. He returned to Ulaanbaatar in the fall of 2006 to continue his research, and then with Otgonbaatar, a marketing manager, he founded the organization Route Nomades to bring Mongolian traditional musicians on tours to France. Their concerts were such a success that they decided to put on performances in Mongolia as well.

Curtet praises the singers lavishly for their skill, their wealth of knowledge, and the particular artistry with which each singer infuses his music. In addition to singing their new songs together, the four performers will sing individually, improvise, and may even have a kind of sing-off, in which each performer tries to best the others. Here in Mongolia, where overtone singing is a familiar sound, they have done something new by bringing together four famous, accomplished singers, and pushing them to collectively reinvent their art. The combination of Sengedorj, Tserendavaa, Odsuren, and Ganbold is likely to be the catalyst for music that is traditionally grounded yet innovative, a concert of interest for *khuumi*