

Xöömii masters as living instruments

Lee Campbell

Mongolia may have economic wealth in its mineral resources but its cultural wealth is in its unique traditional form of overtone singing, or Xöömij. The audience at the 'Dörvön Berk' concert in the Art Gallery Stadium in Ulaanbaatar last Saturday and Sunday evenings were spellbound by living instruments – the Xöömij masters: Nanjidiin Sengedorj; Dashdorjiin Tserendavaa; Baatariin Odsuren and Nerguin Ganzorig.

The Xöömij masters performed 12 songs while seated in a ger and played handmade instruments made of animal skins to bring the authenticity of the countryside to Ulaanbaatar's urban audience.

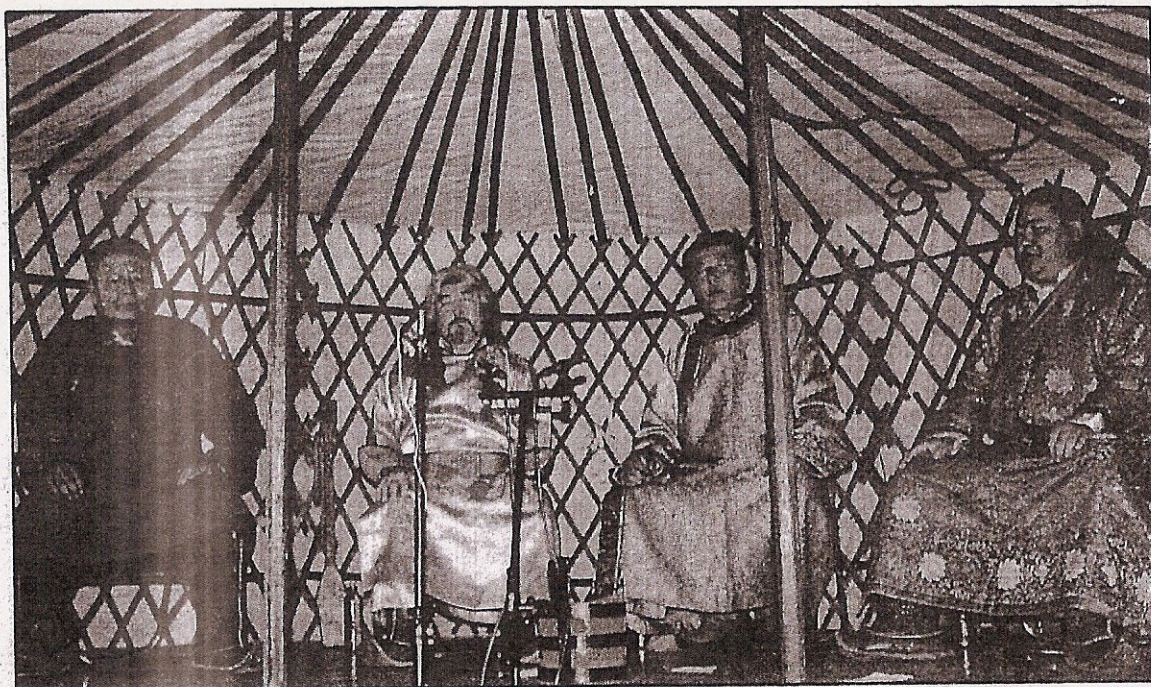
Each master brought his individ-

ual talent to the concert led by Nanjidiin Sengedorj with his three styles of Xöömij and demonstration of the tovshuur (lute) and tsuur (flute), the latter a rare instrument from Altai area played by only a few people today. Baatariin Odsuren, the only academic teacher of Xöömij in Mongolia, showed his range of notes with 12 styles of Xöömij and his skill with the ekel (fiddle); toshuur and mouth harp.

Dashdorjiin Tserendavaa, who leads a nomadic life in Xovd Aimag, sang seven styles of Xöömij, including xosmoljin Xöömij where the words and melody are sung simultaneously.

The youngest of the group, Nerguin Ganzorig, sang a new composition – Ekh Oron – taken from a poem by Sh. Dulmaa.

The softness of the love song 'Ser Khargain Suudert'; the strength and



Xhoomi masters perform in the in a ger during the 'Dörvön Berk' concert in the Art Gallery Stadium

energy of 'Temeen Jingiin Alkhaa

(Caravan Footsteps) and the harmony and rhythm of Altai Magtaal (a song of praise for the Altai Mountains) demonstrated the four masters' range and virtuosity in Xöömij techniques.

Canadian resident in the audience, Erin Smith said she felt privileged to have attended the concert and "it was a once in a lifetime treat."

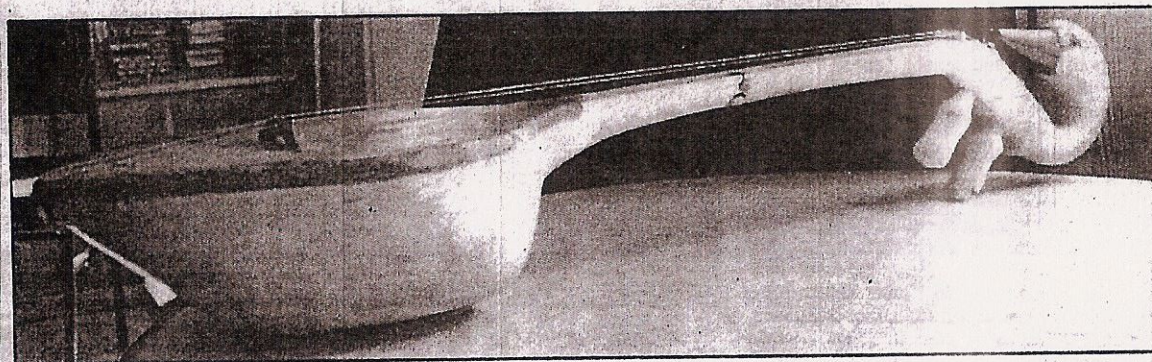
She said: "Hopefully it will pave the way for other Xöömij singers to come together in a new generation."

Ethnomusicologist and the catalyst for the event, French doctoral student, Johanni Curtet echoed her views and said the concert would reinvigorate Xöömij as a traditional Mongolian art form and encourage younger musicians to develop into Xöömij masters

like the four in the concert.

The appreciation of the rare event, the four singers have never performed together before, was demonstrated when the singer's families and others in the audience presented many bouquets of flowers to the group. Presentations made at the end of the concert to the singers and Mr Curtet and his Mongolian counterpart, Tsend-Ochirin Otgonbaatar were a fitting finale to the Dörvön Berk' concert.

Alliance Francaise, Mongolia, 'Routes Nomads' (a project promoting Xöömij masters singing) and several other organizations sponsored the concert with aims to take the group on a tour of France and to show a deeper side of Xöömij to the world.



Hand made instrument