

Tuvan Music & Culture Workshops for Grades K - 12

Presented by

ALASH

Throat Singers from Tuva





Who Is Alash?

ALASH is a group of three talented young musicians from Tuva who bring their fascinating music and culture to delighted audiences worldwide. In addition to traditional Tuvan musical training, they have all received classical Western musical training. Their music is infused with subtle Western influences, and yet remains true to its Tuvan heritage. Alash has a passion for educating future generations and for deepening the understanding between cultures. While on tour, they have taught at numerous educational institutions, from Tibbals Elementary School in Texas to Dartmouth University in New Hampshire. They share their knowledge with American youth, and bring their acquired knowledge back home to the youth of Tuva. The musicians are Bady-Dorzhu Ondar, Ayan-ool Sam, and Ayan Shirizhik.

What Is Unique about Tuvan Music?

Tuva's music is best known for the other-worldly sounds of throat singing, or *xöömei*. Throat singers accomplish the amazing vocal feat of producing multiple pitches at the same time, and they do so in a variety of styles. The effect is riveting and mind-expanding. Tuvan instruments support and complement the tapestry of harmonics. Instruments include the two-stringed, bowed *igil* with its complex and soulful timbres; the three-stringed, banjo-like *doshpuluur* with its galloping rhythms; and the resonant bass drum, the *kengirge*.

Where to Hear the Music

Listen to Alash's music and watch video clips on the Alash website: www.alashensemble.com

"When we play for young people, we're opening up an entire world for them that most of them probably didn't know existed when they came to school that morning. It's priceless to see the children's reaction when they hear our music. I think we've made lasting impressions on some youngsters. That's good for them and it's good for our people too."

—Bady-Dorzhu Ondar, member of Alash

High School Students Respond:

"I couldn't get over the sounds they were making with their mouths. When I walked in, I heard what I thought were instruments, but when I looked closely, there were no instruments in use."

"The music was very meditative. I felt my spirit dancing. I closed my eyes and used only my ears."

"Alash opened my eyes to a whole new world, to not only music, but to the human body's abilities."

"We get so caught up in local and national music that we lose out on the beauty of the music that other countries create. . . . My musical understanding and awareness was expanded."

Teachers Tell Us:

"The Alash Ensemble brought a magical and inspiring program to our small town. The students were delighted with this new kind of music and several students have been learning how to sing in the Tuvan style. Two students, aged 8 and 9, have honed their skills enough to sing in two styles of throat singing."

"Within minutes, Alash had the full attention of our middle school students. Students and teachers alike marveled at how the throat singers created what seemed like a full symphony with just four mouths. Everyone was engaged for the hour and beyond. We had a powerful lesson in geography, cultural traditions and aesthetics, and we even joined in a sing-along."

"I wasn't sure how students in our small, rural Ohio high school would react to Tuvan throat singing and the unusual instruments, but when Alash started playing and singing, you could have heard a pin drop."

"Students are asking, 'When are they coming back?'"

Workshops

ALASH will introduce your students to the awe-inspiring art of Tuvan throat singing as well as traditional Tuvan instruments, culture, and way of life. They create an informal and lively atmosphere in which young people learn about a rich cultural heritage that is virtually unknown in the West.

Single Session (45 minutes to 1½ hours)

The musicians work with students individually or in small groups.

- Mini-concert with explanations
- Demonstration of Tuvan instruments and throat singing
- Tuvan folk tales
- Q&A

Half-Day Visit

A morning or afternoon of four 45-minute sessions, allowing visits to additional classrooms or more time for individual and small group instruction.

Full-Day Visit

Morning session same as Half-Day Visit, followed by a concert in the afternoon.

Multi-Day Residency

All of the above, plus:

- More individual or small group instruction
- Students perform music with Alash
- Tuvan culture, history, geography, nomadic life
- Tuvan language and oral traditions
- Special projects (e.g., building a yurt, preparation of simple Tuvan foods)

For older and more advanced students:

- One-on-one instrument lessons
- Xöömei (throat singing) lessons



Alash workshop at Larry J. Mancuso Elementary School in York, PA, 2013. © Steve Davis, davisgraphical.com

Language

The members of Alash speak some limited English. They communicate best with American students through a direct, “hands-on” musical exchange. Communication is aided by the group’s American interpreter and manager, Sean Quirk, who studied music in Tuva on a Fulbright Fellowship. Now a resident of Tuva, Quirk is fluent in both Tuvan and Russian. He is proficient in Tuvan vocal and instrumental music, and is a member of the Tuvan National Orchestra. He is therefore in a unique position to bridge the cultures of his native and adopted homelands. Sean Quirk’s engaging manner makes him an ideal facilitator in educational settings.

Your Input Is Welcome

Alash can tailor their workshops to meet the needs and goals of your educational curriculum. They are always open to requests and suggestions from the hosting institution.

Facilities

The musicians bring their own instruments and can work with students in any classroom setting.

Workshop Fees

Workshop prices are negotiable, depending on the size and budget of your school. The fee will also vary according to whether room and board are provided for the artists.

Contact

For more information, to discuss pricing, or to arrange for a workshop, contact:

Sean Quirk

email: alashensemble@gmail.com

Tuvan Throat Singing

Because Tuvan music is unfamiliar yet beautiful, difficult yet accessible, it presents a unique and valuable learning experience for American students. Throat singing, with its complex harmonics and timbres, requires a subtle and somewhat different way of listening than Western audiences are accustomed to. Westerners are usually surprised at first by the unfamiliar sounds of *xöömei*, but they quickly fall under its spell and appreciate its expressive power. If they listen carefully, they begin to perceive additional layers of sonority that are enchanting to the ear and the imagination.

The Musicians

Masters of both vocal and instrumental Tuvan music, the members of Alash have studied traditional Tuvan music since childhood. All are graduates of Kyzyl Arts College in Tuva. They have worked together for 15 years, initially under the guidance and artistic direction of the celebrated throat singer Kongar-ool Ondar.* Following in their mentor's footsteps, they are now deeply committed to passing along their knowledge and love of music to the next generation. Alash has made numerous appearances and residencies at American educational institutions from elementary to graduate level.



Alash is unique in that all members have received training in Western classical music as well as Tuvan traditional music. They are not only performers but composers, improvisers, and arrangers of new and old Tuvan songs. Alash has engaged in many fruitful collaborations across musical genres, including joint bills with avant-garde jazz legend Marshall Allen and his Extra Special Terrestrial Guests, and a guest appearance on a Grammy-winning CD by Béla Fleck and the Flecktones. The group's musical versatility places it in an ideal position to work with musicians and students in the West.

*Left to right: Ayan-ool Sam,
Bady-Dorzhu Ondar,
Ayan Shirizhik*

Republic of Tuva

Alash's homeland is located in the geographical center of Asia, in Siberia along the northern border of Mongolia. At various times in the past, Tuva has been part of the Chinese and Mongolian empires, and it retains strong cultural ties to its neighbors to the south. In 1944 it became part of the Soviet Union, and it remains a member of the Russian Federation. Tuva's geographical isolation and later Soviet travel restrictions made its music a well kept secret until the lifting of the Iron Curtain in the 1990s.

Situated between mountain ranges, Tuva's physical geography encompasses both mountain taiga and steppe. With breathtakingly beautiful landscapes, it is known as the land of blue rivers and lakes. Since ancient times, shepherds, yak herders, and horsemen have used throat singing to imitate and interact with their natural surroundings, as well as to communicate and entertain each other.

* The late Kongar-ool Ondar was an internationally acclaimed master Tuvan throat singer. In the United States he is best known for his role in the film *Genghis Blues* about blues musician Paul Pena's journey to Tuva.