

**Sántha, István – Somfai Kara, Dávid: *Türkistan Sesleri. Epic Soundscape of Northern Turkestan. Észak-Turkesztán epikus hangképe.***

Ankara. TürkSoy. 2022. (CD + 58 p.)

**Sántha, István – Somfai Kara, Dávid – Lukács, József: *Sibírya Sesleri. Siberian soundscapes. Szibériai hangképek.***

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**Sántha, István – Somfai Kara, Dávid: *Altai-Saian-Baikal Shamanic Soundscapes. Altaj-Szaján-Bajkál Sámán hangképek. Anthropological field tapes serial 1. Antropológiai terepszalagok 1.***

Budapest. Trottell records. 2021. TR117 LP.

**Sántha, István – Somfai Kara, Dávid: *Northern Turkestan Soundscapes. Észak-turkesztáni Hangképek. Anthropological field tapes serial 2. Antropológiai terepszalagok 2.***

Budapest: Trottell records: 2021. TR 124 LP.

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## BOOK REVIEW

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In the early 1990's, the international music market was suddenly filled with the new horde of artists and musicians from the East. To a large extent, this happened due to the melting of the Iron Curtain and the weakening of the Soviet Union. Hidden treasures of musical culture from the Soviet Republics got worldwide recognition in a very short period. They quickly became a commodity of the Western music market, hungry for new exotic music kinds. The curiosity of the Western public was bottomless. World Music shops in Europe's capitals were booming. Stages presented musicians from the countries considered enemies up to just a couple of years before that. Musicians from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other twelve republics flooded to Western stages when the Soviet Union fell apart in pieces and was on the brink of economic disaster. This period was inspirational for the World Music market, defining its dynamics for years. Probably the most significant public discovery of that period became the otherworldly musical phenomenon — overtone music from Southern Siberia and the various genres of Central Asian music.

The wow effect of performances of the Tuvan and Mongolian overtone tradition, especially *khöömei* throat singing, opened the way for the then rather “esoteric” music styles. Ethnographic recordings of authentic folklore and exotic music kinds were in demand among specialists, musicians, and the broad public. Extreme listening to the yodeling of the Pygmy, the throat games of the Inuit, and the prayers of Tibetan monks' became a must for music collectors. Even in 2023, the Tuvan stage group Huun Huur Tu remains an eminent leader representing Central Asian nomadic culture in the Western music market.

This hype was heated up by adventurers, researchers, media, and music producers, who rushed off to Siberia to learn about the potential for cultural research and business. Many big and small labels for the commercial market released numerous albums and collections. Brands included Real World, Music Network, Ellipsis Arts, Shanachie, and Smithsonian Folkways, to name but a few. In the formerly communist Soviet Union itself, a new music market was emerging.

The Silk Road Folklife festival in 2002, organized by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, and Yo-Yo Ma's concert tours with Silk Road musicians brought much attention to the geographical area, which was so important for Europe in the early Middle Ages but was hardly known to Western audiences at the turn of the 21st century.

One country in Europe was probably less impressed by these findings. The Magyar remained aware of their origin in the forests of the Urals and South Siberian plains. Hungarian researcher Vilmos Diószegi studied the roots of Hungarian culture in Urals and Siberia in the 1950's and 60's in the Soviet Union when such research was impossible. Recordings of Mongolian music by the musicologist Lajos Vargyas were released by Hungaroton Records in 1980 (in 1990 on CD). His album included a few examples of throat singing, recorded secretly since the authorities tried to keep this music secret. The Magyars are known for their nostalgia for their roots behind the Urals. An encounter with the music, language, and culture of their ancestors has for them a different meaning than just another exotic experience as it was in the 90's for much of the Western public.

The two reviewed albums and booklets result from many years of research by a group of Hungarian researchers of music and shamanism in Siberia and Central Asia. They followed the footsteps of Diószegi, who inspired them strongly by his adventurous travels in the 1960's when shamanism was taboo in the USSR. István Sántha and Dávid Somfai Kara, the main contributors of these collections, started their research in the late 1980s in Buryatia, Kyrgyzstan, and other parts of the Turco-Mongolian cultural universe. They published their recordings on cassettes, released in Hungary in small quantities for the hard-core lovers of authentic traditional music.



Apart from collecting music, and sounds, the two researchers were interested in studying the history of Hungarian migration, specifics of the Hungarian language, the ideas of Turanism, and the problem of the Hungarian language as of Turkic or Ugric origin.

For the recordings, the makers applied a method which they call Road Trip Music or, specifically in this case, Turan Road Music. They deliberately use the term Soundscape (Epic Soundscape, Siberian Shamanic Soundscape) instead of Music to underline the importance of the immediate surroundings for the motivation for performance by the musicians. The editors deliberately sought for the real-life situations with endemic noises. The recordings were made naturally as the events unfolded along the journey. They claim to avoid theatrical setups as much as it was possible.

The first album bears the title *Siberian Soundscape*. The CD is supplied with a booklet of extensive Hungarian, English, and Turkish descriptions. This description presents the mission and the story of the album. The main issue raised in the booklet is the search for Hungarian identity as rooted in various archaic oriental sources and influences, especially from the shamanistic cultures of the Urals, Siberia, and Central Asia. Inspired by the early journey of Friar Julianus in the 13th century up to the more recent fieldwork of Diószegi in the 1950–1960's, the makers undertook their passionate journey to the land of forefathers to study the local shamanism firstly, but then turned to more general cultural issues such as music and language. They found traces of the origins of Hungarian culture spread throughout Eurasia. This album captures what the makers call the Soundscape of the living nomadic shamanistic culture among the peoples of the mountainous region of the Altay and the Sayan mountain in Southern Siberia. This area is considered the cradle of Turkic civilization and is the most interesting for ethnographers and linguists.

The authors note that all the selected recorded musicians learned their skills in a traditional oral way. This is an important note for the modern listener since the recordings date from no later than 2002, but the album is released in 2021. The atmosphere of the album is typical for field recordings. It has no sterility of the studio and has sounds and noises of the surroundings included. Some recordings are taken from cassettes, others from DAT and minidisc originals. So, the quality of sound varies throughout the album.

Recordings are presented in regional blocks. The first part of the album contains recordings made by Dávid Somfai Kara. It begins with the epic (throat)singing epic singer (*khai*) from the Altay region. We listen to Arzhan Kozerekov, who became a shaman in a “classical” way by the calling of the spirits. He belonged to the young generation of epic singers. Unfortunately, he died at an early age. The other piece is from Ermek Kalkin, son of the famous epic singer Alexei Kalkin, whose portrait is on the back of the album cover. The next performer is the late Piotr Argudaev, a renowned epic singer and zither (*chatkhan*) player from Khakassia. Also, we listen to the late Andrei Tchüldüm-ool a storyteller (*toolchi*) and violin (*igil*) player from Tuva. The last two performers were the absolute masters of their art, and these recordings are invaluable contributions, as their recordings are rare.

The next block of tracks consists of recordings made by István Sántha and József Lukács in the Western Baikal region. There are a few vocal and instrumental pieces from the Tofas also. Tofa is a small Turkic group on the brink of total assimilation. Probably there are less than 1,000 Tofa's. They live on hunting and reindeer herding. We hear shaman Pavel Ungushtaevev and other vocal pieces. The last block is dedicated to Western Buryat music. We listen to flute music from Nagalyk village; typical Buryat instruments accompany the singers, just as the lute (*chanza*) and the cello (*morin-huur*).



To sum up, this album expresses the inevitable movement in time. The researchers enter into the coordinates of the space-time continuum to capture the moment with all its beauty and mystery, only to document a fracture of the alleged cultural-historical unity dating back thousands of years. Released 18 years after the recordings, this album gains significance from a historical perspective also. The format of the limited edition of vinyl record adds a special value to the soundscape, as the carrier's technology defines how we consume music and sound material. Vinyl playback suggests focused listening and studying of linear notes, which emphasizes the educational and aesthetic value of the recordings.

The second album is a collection called Epic Soundscapes Northern Turkestan. Most of the tracks are relatively new performances recorded between 2017 and 2019. The album includes Kirghiz, Bashkir, Karakalpak, Uzbek, Kazakh, alongside Russian music from the area. This region is called Northern Turkestan by the authors. This geographical entity doesn't correspond to any existing national borders but points to a geo-historical cultural continuity between the Urals in the North and the Tien Shan Mountains in the South. People in this area mostly adopted Islam, though they followed a nomadic lifestyle until very recently (such as the Kyrgyz and the Kazakh), and have kept their animistic beliefs commonly alive. Moreover, these peoples and cultures are reviving after the failure of Soviet communism.

Bashkir recordings present trademark musical styles like the performance with flute (*kurai*), and vocal genre of ling songs (*uzun-küy*) in their authentic expression. An illustrative recording of Bashkir flute (*kurai*) play from Ghaliymian Taghanov dating back to 1931 is added to the album as a reference. The Russian music is represented by the old believers choir recorded in Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan), where the editors recorded a number of the Karakalpak epic styles including educating songs (*terme*) and a song from a healer (*baksy*). Instrumental music of the Karakalpaks is represented by cello (*kobyz*) and two corded lute (*dutar*).

Uzbek music is presented by Ali Sher Navai's poetry sung by Hasan the son of great composer Yunus Rajabi's. This song is accompanied by long neck lute (*tanbur*). There is a recording of the Kazakh epic styles called "*jirau*." Bolatbek Erdawletov performs it with lute (*dombra*) accompaniment. Kyrgyz music is represented by fragments from the Manas epos and folk songs with lute (*kobyz*) accompaniment. The album is closed with a fragment from a Kyrgyz-Kypchak epic song titled Kurmanbek.

The album introducing the epic soundscape of Northern Turkestan includes inlay sheets with photographs that complement the atmosphere of the recordings. Unfortunately, there are no captions, which may be the only drawback in otherwise thorough descriptions compiled by the makers. The motivation, the method, the knowledge, and the personal approach of the makers are well explained. Reading the notes adds to the overall listening experience, raises curiosity, and makes these albums an essential source for studying the musical culture of the regions. It is impossible to fit the subject of thousands of years of history, thousands of kilometers of land, and immense cultural heritage into two albums with a few paper sheets. Still, the makers succeeded in touching upon the essential musical styles, instruments, and sounds — shamanic songs, various vocal styles, epic recitations, instrumental timbres and intonations, environmental sounds, and languages of various ethnic subgroups, all provided with details and explanations. In my perspective, the choice of a Road Trip method, inspired by the feats of Hungarian past researchers, gives a rather poetic character to the final result. This makes it different from many "neutral" ethnographical publications presented for the consumer on the music market.

