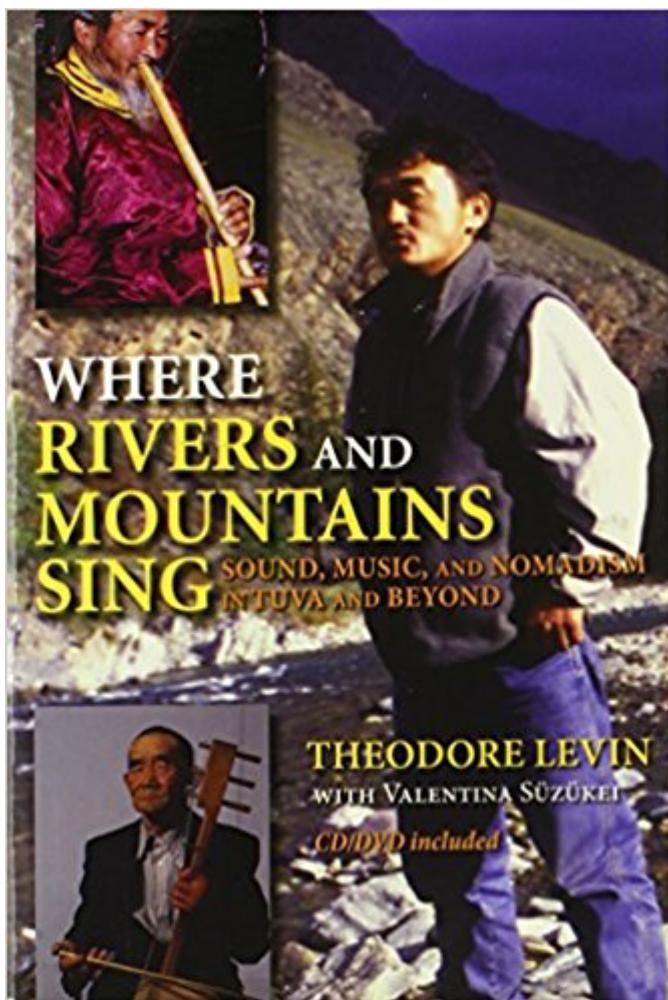


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# Where Rivers And Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, And Nomadism In Tuva And Beyond



## Synopsis

Theodore Levin takes readers on a journey through the rich sonic world of inner Asia, where the elemental energies of wind, water, and echo; the ubiquitous presence of birds and animals; and the legendary feats of heroes have inspired a remarkable art and technology of sound-making among nomadic pastoralists. As performers from Tuva and other parts of inner Asia have responded to the growing worldwide popularity of their music, Levin follows them to the West, detailing their efforts to nourish global connections while preserving the power and poignancy of their music traditions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Entertaining, fascinating, and well written, it depicts important issues in the globalization of indigenous music." •Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, Georgetown University"Thanks to his wonderful innate taste, his tremendous linguistic skills, and his curiosity and passion to share what he discovers, Ted Levin has given us a window into a world of traditional music we might never otherwise know." •Yo-Yo Ma"This is a complex, informationally-dense book that fits well into recent trends towards aural phenomena." •Nina Fales, Journal of Folklore Research"A vivid picture of music in inner Asia today•both the ancient traditions and the way they're rubbing up against the modern world.... After reading this immensely readable and thought-provoking book, you'll never listen to throat singing the same way again." •Simon Broughton, editor, Songlines and Rough Guide to World Music"No other writer could extract such a melange of philosophy, acoustics, and aesthetics from one man's vocalization over a running stream•or report with such canny

insight on how that individual must negotiate his life as a 'star' in the West." •Michael Church, BBC World Service "Always readable, with issues and ideas presented in an immediate style, rich in personal vignettes and ethnographic detail, and brought to life by the fabulous double-sided DVD/CD, *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing* is a gift for teachers and students."

•Ethnomusicology "This is a perceptive book and a comfortable read.... [Levin] beautifully presents his central ideas regarding the spiritual and ecological music making in Inner Asia with enchanting and captivating storytelling.... A welcome addition to reading this text is the accompanying CD/DVD, which includes musical examples illustrating the stories and further draws readers into the telling of his story. These audiovisual examples not only function to help in understanding the book itself but are useful for class teaching on Inner Asian music." •Asian Music

*Where Rivers and Mountains Sing* is the account of a journey through the rich sonic world of Inner Asia, where the elemental energies of wind, water, and echo, the ubiquitous presence of birds and animals, and the legendary feats of heroes have inspired a remarkable art and technology of sound-making among nomadic pastoralists. Collaborating with Tuvan ethnographer and folklorist Valentina Sāzākei, Theodore Levin explores the spectacular "throat-singing" of Tuvan and Mongolian herders, the spirit-summoning seances of shamans and dream-inspired rhapsodies of oral epic reciters, and the affecting virtuosity of fiddle and lute players whose instruments narrate stories and legends without words. Like the Australian Aboriginals and their much-celebrated "songlines," Inner Asian pastoralists traditionally evoked detailed images of landscape through singing, and sound and music form part of a spiritual relationship with the natural environment that has endured in the face of formidable social and political challenges. As performers from Tuva and other parts of Inner Asia have responded to the growing worldwide popularity of their music, Theodore Levin follows them to the West, and describes their soul-searching efforts to nourish global connections while preserving the power and poignancy of music rooted in an authentic tradition. The book is accompanied by a DVD and CD that illustrate the music and musicians discussed in the text. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Before Ralph Leighton published "Tuva or Bust" a quarter of a century ago, the literature on Tuva available in English was "a bit sparse". If you really persisted you might have turned up Vainshtain's "Nomads of South Siberia" for which the research was done in the 1930s. After Leighton's connection with that far off Russian republic (it "joined" the USSR in 1944), he and his friends got "Journey to Tuva" re-published as well, O. Manchen-Helfen's account of his rare visit to Tannu Tuva

between the world wars. And until Theodore Levin brought out this volume, that was it. But starting with a surprise appearance in the Rose Bowl Parade of 1992, Tuvan singers rocketed from total obscurity to world fame. By now, some millions of people around the world have heard their music, even if everyone did not exactly know where Tuva might be. A number of groups have brought throat singing and other styles of Inner Asian music to auditoriums and seminars from California to Crete. Who are these guys? (and a few women too) That's what this book is about. And it's a very good one. Levin explores the possible origins of Tuvan music, noting the tendency to mimic the sounds of nature that surround herders on the steppes and in the mountains of Tuva, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, and the Altai regions of Siberia. He draws a division between cultures which produce pitch-centered music (most) and timbre-centered music (Tuva). There are detailed sections on how much Tuvan musicians mimic nature or the sounds of animals and how they merge themselves into the sonic feelings of their surroundings. I found discussion of "spiritual landscape" very interesting. Tuvan music is also linked to shamanic practice. Since Tuva re-connected to the outside world in 1992, we've seen the rise of fake shamans, in it for fame and fortune, beguiling New Age groupies no end. Musicians tend to present the music they think audiences want to hear. Only a few resist the temptation to abandon traditional music culture. Yet, can you blame Tuvan musicians, who come from a poor country ravaged by alcoholism? They may feel close to their land and to their heritage, but the demands of music consumers lead them to commercialize their sounds. Music is one of Tuva's only exports. All these topics and more are dealt with in a very readable, interesting style (though some of the discussion of sound mimesis can be heavy). If some people say the book is academic, I would say that that is a positive quality in this case---you can learn a lot and think about many related topics. A great CD accompanies the book. If you are at all interested in a remote part of the world and its music, if you would like to know more about Tuva, past and present, you need go no further.

### Best book about tuvan Music & Culture

The ethnographer author of *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God*, who took us on a musical journey to Uzbekistan, truly enters new sonic territory with this account of traditional and developing Tuvan musical arts, including his fostering (as executive producer) of the group Huun-Huur-Tu. More than associating the various forms of throat singing with ambient environmental sounds, Tuvan music is based on timbre, not pitch, on relative intervals, not absolutes. Such a radical alteration of musical perspective requires new ways of listening, and here Levin helps us with a

most interesting and well-written book and CD and, on the flip side of the disk, DVD. Instead of a deadly tedious textbook with some artificial, meaningless taxonomy and pages of scores, we are presented with a fascinating, lucid exploration that made me re-listen to my collection of Tuvan and Manchurian music with more appreciation and understanding. This book expanded my mind.

The book is a great contribution to the study of the unique Central Asian tradition of overtone singing. Both professional ethnomusicologist and lay person will find in this book plenty of useful information, photos, maps, transcriptions, audio recordings and DVD files, you name it. Both Theodore Levin and Valentina Suzukei are professional ethnomusicologists and international experts of this fascinating tradition. If you already know this tradition, you would know the names of the authors, and the brilliance of the international sensation from Tuva - the ensemble "Huun-Huur-Tu", but if you are a new person in this sphere, you are going to enrich your knowledge with the unique musical culture that will change your perception of the human musicality. Highly recommended.

It was a very good book with a lot of information but it does skip around but overall it's still a good book. I recommend book!

loved it

Great book well written

The DVD/CD that accompanies this book is outstanding, even though about half of the DVD's content is comprised of scenes of ambient noise from rivers, drives along California freeways and the like, there are tremendous performances of Tuvan vocal and instrumental music. The book is highly informative, but too frequently reads like a scholarly treatise, following questionably relevant tangents at the expense of the core subject matter. Levin has admirably dedicated his professional life to bringing Central Asian music to the attention of Westerners, but his work suffers because he is more of a professor than an author. When Levin sticks to Tuva, Tuvans and Tuvan music, a lot of light is shed, but the portions of the book on mimesis, mimicry and imitation, among others, remind me too much of my university musicology days where I'd have to struggle in inventing something, ANYTHING, to fill up the pages on that term paper. Parts of the book unfortunately read like that and go beyond the scope of what I wanted to know about Central Asian music.

Nonetheless, between those gaps lies everything I wanted to know about the music, so in that sense, the book was worthwhile.

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