



Utom:

Summoning the Spirit

Music in the T'boli Heartland

Program

I. A lute player by the hearth:

1. Call of the cicada (*Utom udel kuleng helet*)
2. Flying woodpecker (*Utom k'lelet moyong*)
3. Dance tune (*Utom nadal*)

II. Making play of work

4. Call of the cicada (*Utom kuleng helet*)

III. In the presence of the spirit

5. Gongs of the Lemlahak man
(*Utom k'lintang tau Lemlahak*)

6. Reed pipe (*Utom jeu*)

IV. The shamans flute

7. Song of the night bird (*Utom udel blila*)
8. Beat of the horses hoofs (*Utom legedeg kuda*)

V. Fiddler in the cave

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VI. The alluring lute dancer

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12. Beating the gongs slowly
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(*Utom s'magi sempehay*)
14. Sound of the wind (*Utom luk lenos*)

VIII. The singing poets: the seer & the seducer

15. Hymn of Lake Sebu (*Linson Tutul Sebu*)
16. Prized banana (*Soging Tundan*)

IX. The harp of heaven

- 17A. Lute (*Utom hegelung*)
- 17B. Child yearns for its dead mother
(*La Titilem la Tundan*)

X. Gongs and drums

18. Sendulug (*Utom sendulus*)
19. Fast tenintu (*Utom tenintu k'let*)

XI. Helisal: making happiness

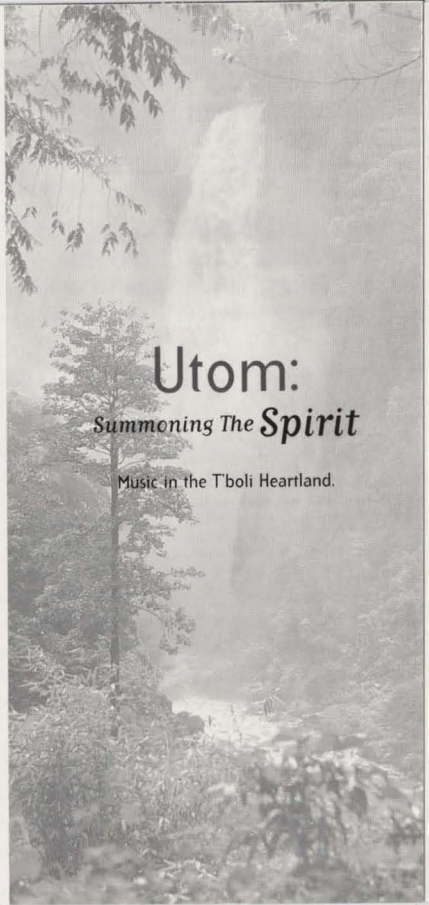
- 20 A/C. Continuously (*La helos*)
- 20 B/D. No head (*La kulu*)

In the mountains and valleys of Southwestern Mindanao in the Philippines live the T'boli, a group of about 80,000 indigenous people who live in small, scattered villages, and whose ancestral heartland is Lake Sebu. The T'boli have lived off the soils, the forests, and the waterways of their ancestral lands for countless centuries. Though once the custodians of their domain, the T'boli are increasingly living on the fringes of the dominant, lowland world. The story they tell of themselves is intertwined with many species of native wildlife, landforms, and spirits which animate and protect the natural world. The music they make is one way they tell their story.

In the village of B'kanko, amidst the hill-clad forests of Lake Sebu, an air of quiet pervades the moonlit evening. From inside his bamboo hut, Bendaly Layul, the lute player, strums a melody as his family settles down for the night. The melody is richly decorated with improvisations while imitating the warbling of a local bird. Everybody in the village knows Bendaly's melody and the many allusions to the bird he mimics. The hunters know its nesting and feeding habits: the weavers interpret its form and color into elaborate patterns on sacred cloth, and storytellers amuse the children with tales of the bird's mythic origins. The artful melodies and rhythms of the musician are part of a larger fabric of interconnected sounds, ideas, experiences, and sentiments... they are what the T'boli call *utom*.

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The sounds and images emanating from the natural world are interpreted as signs from the nature spirits. The call of birds and insects, the rhyme and rhythm of water and wind, as well as other natural events tell the T'boli when and how to heal or court, to plant or harvest, to build a house or hunt, or to hold a ceremony. Lute, zither, and flute players, and other musicians alike, translate these sounds into musical composition or *utom*. T'boli *utom* reflects their closeness to nature while facilitating memories and disseminating knowledge throughout the community.

As a popular social activity, the performance of *utom* also expresses and engenders happiness or *heligal* as the T'boli say. Happiness is as much about shared social experience as it is about personal gratification and joy. It comes from a sense of connection with others and from the knowledge that your happiness, and even sadness, will be understood and shared by others. *Heligal* is about empathy.

It was with a sense of anticipation and satisfaction that I set out to record T'boli *utom* for Mickey Hart's THE WORLD series. Ever since I began working with the T'boli in 1983, I had hoped to share my experience of their musical riches with other people. But as I prepared to return to Lake Sebu, my delight in the project became confused with feelings of sorrow and distress as the news of the cruel death of Swik Sabal, my friend and guide of many years, became known to me.

Swik, like many other young T'boli leaders, had long struggled against the rampant land-grabbing that has intensified throughout his homeland in recent years. He was gunned down on the night of July 13, 1993 while negotiating a peaceful resolution to a land dispute between his people and new settlers.

In recent decades, Lake Sebu has become a focal point for the collision of two different lifeways: those of the T'boli, and those of the settlers from the Philippine lowlands. For the settlers, the T'boli highlands is a frontier world promising a new life. Ironically once themselves victims of land dispossession many of these frontiersmen were driven from their own lands by large scale landowners and agricultural corporations. The choice T'boli lands are now occupied by the settlers as well as large corporations. Therefore, loss of land has diminished traditional lifeways so closely linked to the rhythms of the nature. What now remains of that connection to the land for many T'boli are their artistic expressions: their weaving, their tales, their fine beadwork and embroidery, and their *utom*.

In listening to T'boli *utom*, the spirit of nature, the power of instrument and voice, and the vitality of people in communion can be heard against the background of loss and deprivation in a world of increasing environmental and social degradation.

How are the T'boli responding to all this?

Some, like Swik Sabal, become advocates for education and cultural activism and participate in local government in the struggle against disempowerment. The artisans, once completely dependent on the land for survival, now create new artistic forms to earn a living and express their cultural identity. Musicians, singers, and dancers now form cultural groups carrying the message of their struggle to wider audiences.

Some of those individuals are heard on these recordings. They are not professionals, but nevertheless are artists in their own right. They live as farmers, craftsmen, hunters, weavers, or healers. Their involvement in the making of this CD is part of their effort to empower themselves and have their message heard beyond their community.

I. *The lute player by the hearth.* (Tracks 1, 2, and 3)

Just before daybreak, in the cool mist of morning, Bendaly began to prepare his lute (*hegelung*) before his family awoke. Sitting by the warm hearth, he set the lute frets in beeswax and gently tested their tuning. The lute is very pleasing and soothing to hear upon waking, he would say. Dawn has always been one of his favorite times for playing; it is a moment for contemplation. His father, a chieftain, taught him to play the lute and advised him that playing in the early morning calmed the mind, and made one alert and better prepared for the demands of leadership. Equanimity appears to be a trait possessed by adept lute players and chieftains alike.

Bendaly's *utom* mimics the sounds of insects and birds found within earshot of his house near the rainforest. "Call of the cicada" (*Utom udel kuleng helef*) imitates the droning sound of the insect, while "Flying woodpecker" (*Utom k'lelet moyong*) portrays undulating flight and the hammering sound produced by the bird as it searches for food. "Dance tune" (*Utom nadal*) recreates the shuffling rhythms of the dancer. Bendaly, like most T'boli musicians, makes his own instruments from materials found in the environment. Therefore, the spirit of the object from which the material is taken — trees, bamboo, etc. — inhabits the instrument. The spirit is always near.

II. *Making play of work.* (Track 4)

Daily, T'boli women collaborate in repetitive tasks such as pounding and preparing rice for their meals. This kind of activity is mostly done in pairs, each woman alternately pounding the rice in a wooden trough with large pestles. The women create interlocking rhythmic patterns to increase their coordination and lighten their labor. The uniquely coordinated skill they acquire in producing these rhythms is often adapted to the playing of other instruments, such as the bamboo zither. Lendungan Simfal and Ihan Sibanay are skilled in this type of performance. "Call of the cicada" (*Utom udel kuleng helef*) is another version of the *utom* performed by Bendaly. While it alludes to the unrelenting and

shrill calling of the cicada at sunset, it also evokes the creatures mythical and allegorical meanings, such as those inscribed in this fable:

"The cicada, whose father is the sun and whose mother is the moon, is indolent and dependent upon others. As the sun sets, it cries for fear of losing its father who disappears over the crimson horizon. Left behind with feelings of abandonment, the cicada is anxious about his survival and attempts to end his life with an endless, longing cry."

III. *In the presence of the spirit.* (Tracks 5 and 6)

Lendungan Simfal is a leading bamboo zither player from the Lake Sebu region. The story of how she acquired musical knowledge and skill is illuminating. Not atypical of gifted T'boli musicians, it illustrates the sources of musical inspiration and the fine attunement between musician and spirit. Lendungan's story centres on the visitation of her spirit guide, the spirit of bamboo. Her descriptions of the effects of his presence during performance are compelling:

"The spirit never disclosed his name but the shaman said that he is Lemugot Mangay, the celestial deity, the messenger of God (*Dwata*). He revealed the utom to me when I was still small; he took care of me and still often comes to me. If at night he touches the edge of my zither, it will sound beautiful. When he is beside me, it is as though there is a force directing my fingers and my soul is at peace. When he comes to my side the sound from the zither resonates up into my elbows. But if he is not with me, it is difficult to even pluck the strings. The spirit that visits me is the owner of the utom I play. He comes from the bamboo groves, just as the owner of the lute comes from the forest."

The first utom, "Gongs of the Lemlahak man" (*Utom k'lintang tau Lemlahak*), was inspired after hearing the gongs of Sabanay Lugan from a nearby village. Her composition is a tribute to this renowned musician. "Reed pipe" (*Utom ꞑeu*) is modeled on the musical conversations of children playing the rice reed pipe (*ꞑeu*) as they ward off preying birds while guarding over the family's rice fields.

IV. *The shaman's flute.* (Tracks 7 and 8)

Galang S'bagung is one of the most remarkable musicians in the region. He is a shaman and hunter from the Ubo people, an ethnic group closely related to the T'boli, who live deep within the rainforests beyond Lake Sebu. Galang possesses an extensive repertoire of flute utom based upon the sounds of birds that surround his forest community. His affinity with birds has become legendary. On one occasion, when Galang had the opportunity to travel

abroad with me and several T'boli to an international music festival, he amazed visitors at wildlife sanctuaries with his uncanny ability to attract birds through the haunting tone of his flute.

In Galang's utom, one can hear the call of his birds embedded in richly brocaded melodic and rhythmic patterns. The T'boli possess a complex system of augury, particularly that related to bird calls. "Song of the night bird" (*Utom udel blila*) mimics the doleful and alarming tune of the night bird, for its call forecasts murder in the village.

Though largely replaced as the chief means of transportation in the highlands, the horse still occupies a central place in T'boli folklore. Wealth, potency, and authority are symbolized by the horse, and ritual fights are still held during grand wedding ceremonies. Galang's creation, "Beat of the horses' hoofs" (*Utom legedeg kuda*), imitates these insistent rhythms that were once a common feature of the T'boli soundscape.

V. *Fiddler in the cave.* (Tracks 9 and 10)

During a trek into the rainforest with Galang and several other companions, we sought shelter in a shallow cave on the side of a wooded ravine from the deluge of the afternoon monsoonal rains. After the rain stopped, Galang began to play his flute, attracting the attention of a bird perched in a tree near the cave's entrance. Sol Ayaw, one of our companions, responded to the bird's company with his version of "Call of the cicada" (*Utom udel kuleng heleꞑ*) and another utom that represents a particular bird sound, "Cackling mnaul bird" (*Utom tkak mnaul*).

VI. *The alluring lute dancer.* (Track 11)

At home, in the conviviality of musicmaking in the evening, people respond to musical performance with shouts and calls of encouragement. Ganay Delikan — decked out in her finery of brass chain-mail girdle, rows of anklets, bracelets, and beaded jewellery — performs her enticing courting dance. Her skill as a lute player and dancer has won her fame within the Lake Sebu area, and she is often called upon to perform at festivals and ceremonies. Her former husband, a chieftain of her village who was married to five wives, once flew into a jealous rage and smashed her lute into pieces. Now she lives as a flourishing, independent woman, partly the result of the rewards earned through her performances.

The medley of utom Ganay performs here are dance favorites. "Concealed touch" (*Utom semigot*) refers to the dancers' manner of attracting the attention of another by covertly touching the feet. "Mother of Daddang" (*Utom Ye Daddang*) is a tribute to the famous (but flirtatious) dancer, Ye Daddang, whose life came to a tragic end after committing adultery. Ganay ends with "Lute dance" (*Utom hegelung nadal*).

VII. *Summoning the people.* (Tracks 12, 13 and 14)

The mighty suspended bronze gongs celebrate the gathering of people. They are used to summon people over long distances and are associated with thunder, storms, and the supernatural powers of the folk hero Tudbulul (also called *Semgulang*). During moments of communally shared joy, happiness (*heligal*) is expressed through the pounding of the gongs. Audience members help by holding the gongs, their penetrating sound resonating through the bodies of the assistants. While up to five gongs are normally played by two people, Danilo Kasaw, the gong player on these recordings, is renowned for his ability to play all gongs alone. His talent is admired by many.

"Beating the gongs slowly" (*Utom s'magi batul*) contrasts with the upbeat feel of Danilo's other *utom*. "Beating the gongs criss-cross" (*Utom s'magi semŋeŋay*) (which refers to the technique of crossing the hands while playing) and "Sound of the wind" (*Utom luk lenos*). The criss-cross pattern adorns the giant python whose mythical association with the folk hero Tudbulul gave him the name *Semgulang*. More generally, the criss-cross symbolizes the importance of social exchange, barter, and gift giving and gift taking among the T'boli.

VIIIa. *The singing poets: the seer.* (Track 15)

VIIIb. *The singing poets: the seducer.* (Track 16)

Perhaps the most famous living T'boli singers are Mendung Sabal and Ye Gas. Mendung is celebrated for her spiritual knowledge and performance of the famous T'boli epic *Tudbulul*, named after the folk hero. Of all the vocation stories of renowned musicians, singers, and shamans, Mendung's is one of the more exceptional. Her story begins with her initiation as a shaman and singer. When still a young woman, she became gravely ill after a snakebite. A spirit appeared and offered her the knowledge and skill needed to sing the Tudbulul epic. Mendung lay unconscious for days while the spirit revealed the epic to her, word by word. The spirit warned Mendung that if she forgot one word of the epic, she would die. This epic is sung from dusk until dawn over three or four nights. Mendung's "Hymn of Lake Sebu" (*Lingon Tutul Sebu*) centres on the creation of this sacred site, the T'boli custodianship over the lake, and its spiritual importance.



Hymn of Lake Sebu

Oh, Lemugut Mangay (celestial spirit) what splendors did you conceive in our myriad arts.
The gongs sounded atop the mountains and the chimes (*klintang*) followed in procession.
happiness (*heligal*) lasted for eighteen years.

This was the beginning of our arts.

We gathered this time.

Because of Meginsung (supreme deity).

At that time, Boi Henwu (the first woman) said to Lemugut Mangay: 'How pitiful we are.'

Let us bathe in pure water, let us open the spring from the earth.

The takul leaf covered the spring source and once removed, the clear waters flowed.

Boi Henwu returned to the water seven times to wash her face, and on the eighth, she bathed.

That is how Sebu began, the waters that we safeguard.

The fish were abundant and the boatmen began their catch.

while teful birds flew playfully over the lake.

This was the beginning of Lake Sebu when boatmen fished and teful birds flocked together.

This is where it all began, the Sebu of our inheritance.

Lemugut Mangay is the celestial owner of the lake.

Kludan, the guardian of its source, and Bewong Klangaw, the caretaker.

How splendid is our lake, no one can claim it or take it away, neither can we afford to lose it.

Lemugut Mangay, the owner of the lake, was the first to behold its source.

Tudbulul, the one who gave us knowledge,
sculptured the surrounding rock giving form to the lake.

Tudbulul bestowed the lake upon us.

He gave us a place to play and a place to bathe.

The lake came from Tudbulul who now lives in (the mythical) Lemlunay.

Meyafa, the mountain spirit, is the source and giver of the water that we swim in and the land we inhabit.

He gave shape to the dust; he danced the mountains into being
from the stones brought forth by the eagle.

This was the origin of the mountains surrounding Lake Sebu:

Te Tofuk we own, the Te Lili is ours.

Here is our place, Tebowow (the lake island).

where our ancestors ascended (into the heavens).
from whence Boi Henwu touched the sky before it was cut down.

That is my song.

My spirit guide taught me to sing this remarkable story without interruption.

I dreamed this song when I died, when my spirit left my body and my pulse stopped beating.

A snake had bitten me, it licked my footprint and yet we could not find it anywhere.

This is my story, and I cannot compose anymore, there is nothing more to say.

I learned this song (*and the Tudbulul epic*) from the spirit owner and I cannot disobey her instructions.

There are eleven songs in the Tudbulul, they include: The Tale of Tudbulul.

Tudbulul Drowns, Tudbulul Smites his Women,

Tudbulul Slashes His Wrist, The Wake of Tudbulul.

Tudbulul's Soul Yearns, Tudbulul in a Trance.

It would take many nights to sing them all.

Ye Gas' sensual beauty and risqué songs are known throughout the T'boli territory. The most popular of all her songs is "Prized banana" (*Soging tundan*). It expresses the discontentment of a beautiful and ambitious young woman as she discovers the flaws in one suitor after another. Each of her lovers is likened to various species of bananas. Ye Gas, now in her fifth marriage, composed the song during her first years of married life. This recording took place during a long night of celebration. The gathering was rendered helpless with laughter at the hilarity of Ye Gas' metaphor.

Prized Banana

Oh, banana, banana, the prized one, this is my last kiss for you.

On Saturday we will talk, for you promised that when the moon rises you would take me away.

Oh, Inday (a girl) this is what you hope for: Oh, Manong (a boy) this is what you are waiting for.

Let your left hand write your name, photograph my portrait, my whole body.

When we meet at the edge of the village let us signal each other.

Brush your hair to left while waving goodbye (and I will know where to meet you).

But as we sit here by the window with the table between us, I wonder if you really know my worth.

For I will cost you a racing horse. And if my want cannot be fulfilled, then I say we must abandon our desires.

We will kiss without relish and halfheartedly shake hands.

At the new moon, you will only have my necklace and this handkerchief that I place in your hand as a remembrance.

O banana, banana shaped like a fish, let us go to the shops in Marbel (provincial town) and ride a tricycle.

This is the right man to follow, with boots, trimmed hair, and a fine build, not too tall and not too short.

However, as the day becomes night, you realize that the journey has been in vain,

and your only reward are painful knees.

For his words are boastful and empty.

Oh, banana, banana of average size, our date is at eight o'clock.

On the fifth of the month if you do not meet your promise,

then I will know you do not love me and that my love should be given to another.

The money you gave me will come to nothing.

There will still be no reward because you did not fulfil your promise.

Oh, banana, banana of foreign breed, do not be so downhearted.

You should not be sad for you still lay down at my pillow.

You still rest on my mat and you still sit on my mattress.

And you still lay your head on my lap. If you pass by my house at noon, I will be waiting by the door.

Just give me a sign, wave your handkerchief.

Our sign will remain unseen, a secret sign. Do not be afraid to die.

I thought you were the (brave) son of a chieftain. I really depend on you, don't ever be so sad.

Oh, banana, banana so long and thin, a man should aspire to marry if he is wealthy,

he who owns many horses, buffaloes, and venerable gongs.

He wears a kris and gold teeth crafted by a Muslim.

They are nicely capped and neatly braced with the sign of a heart inscribed in gold.

He is the one I would give myself to, this Man from Mekulen.

His complexion dark and gleaming, he is attractive and desirable.

He wears a watch, clothed in black and with slanting eyes,

he seems so suitable to marry.

But I have thought about it at least eight times and I see that he is not fit to give myself to.

For he is boastful and yet in festive company he withdraws and retreats in a corner of the room.

How embarrassing it is when people laugh at him and the feasting just passes him by.

There is no reward in admiring him after all.

IX. *The harp of heaven.* (Track 17)

One of the more common, yet beguiling, instruments among the T'boli is the bamboo mouthharp (see booklet back cover photo). Its simplicity and softness-of-tone belies its power of persuasion, for not only is this a favorite courting instrument, but it is said to charm the celestial deities like no other sound. Part of its appeal comes from the mix of vocal and instrumental qualities. The T'boli use speech tones as well as melodic and rhythmic patterns derived from bird and insect calls to compose utom for this instrument. Messages may be concealed in musical composition, hence its use in courting. Arturo Bulang illustrates the subtle qualities of this instrument in "Lute" (*Utom hegelung*) and "Child yearns for its dead mother" (*La Titilem la Tundan*).

X. *Gongs and drums.* (Tracks 18 and 19)

In large social gatherings like weddings and harvest feasts, the shared excitement prompted by these occasions calls for the playing of resounding and vigorous instruments such as ensembles of drums and gongs. The largest T'boli ensemble – a row of horizontally-laid small gongs (*k'lintang*), a large suspended gong (*b'lowon*), and a large wooden drum (*blabad*) – is an adaptation of the Muslim Filipino *kulintang* ensemble. The two utom, "Sendulug" and "Fast tenintu" (*Utom tenintu k'let*), are compositions based on Muslim Filipino (*Magindanao*) rhythms, and are played by a trio consisting variously of Ye Juni, Ye Jewe, Awey Meyen, and Blahing Mil. The rippling sound of the gong row ensemble is sometimes likened to the sound of waves gently lapping against the shores of Lake Sebu.

XI. *Heligal: Making happiness.* (Track 20)

After gong and drum performances, a dancer will often emerge from the crowd and challenge the drummer to a dual. The drummer takes up the challenge with a smaller, more resonant instrument called the *t'nonggong*. Drummer and dancer attempt to outdo each other with engaging and amusing displays of skill and stamina, while the rambunctious crowd encourages their rivalry. Dancers donned with a multitude of bells and clanging brass bracelets add to the din. The drummer, Blahing Mil, and dancer, Myrna Pula, engage in the contest with the compositions "Continuously" (*La helos*) and "No head" (*La kulu*).

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This recording is dedicated to the memory of Bert Sabal.

To all my T'boli friends who have helped me over the years — especially Myrna Pula, Mendung, Ganay, Datu Sabal, Augustine, Minandro, Jimi, Joey, Bendaly, Galang, Sol, Sabanay, Lendungan, Blahing Bil, Danilo, Agatha, Eugene, Feli, Ma Simbalod, Genlal, Ma Andal — and to my wife, Tess....
tey bong s'lamat.



RCD 10402



THE WORLD





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Executive Producer:
Mickey Hart

This collection of field recordings (made by producer Manolete Mora in 1995) captures the music of the T'boli people, a group whose ancestral heartland is Lake Sebu on the Philippine island of Mindanao. "Utom," the translation and interpretation of the sounds of the natural world into musical composition, reflects the T'boli people's closeness to nature. The utom on this collection are performed on lute, bamboo zither, flute, fiddle, various forms of gong, mouth harp, percussion, and voice.

20 Tracks
Total Running Time: 67:07

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