



# Smithsonian Folkways

## **An Introduction to the Music of Mongolia**

### **A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson**

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#### **Summary:**

Students will be introduced to the music of Mongolia through several activities looking into different aspects of Mongolian music. Students will be introduced to the sound of the Morin Khuur (horse-head fiddle), the techniques of Khöömei (throat singing), and given an opportunity to play a traditional Mongolian song with western instruments.

#### **Suggested Grade Levels:** 9-12

**Country:** Mongolia

**Region:** Asia

**Culture Group:** Mongolian

**Genre:** Throat Singing

**Instruments:** Band, Voice

**Language:** Mongolian

**Co-Curricular Areas:** Social Studies

**National Standards:** 1, 2, 5, 6, 9

#### **Prerequisites:**

- Band/Orchestra: need to be able to play four parts
- Choir: piano accompaniment needed

#### **Objectives:**

- Introduction to the sound of the Morin Khuur and a brief description of the instrument
- Describe the sounds of the Morin Khuur and relate it to similar sounding western instruments
- Attempt throat singing, through the various phases outlined in the video
- Keep the pulse in their feet or hands
- Play and/or sing “Behind the Mountains”

#### **Materials:**

- “The River Herlen” by Khongorzul and Baterdene from The Silk Road: A Musical Caravan (SFW40438)  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/khongorzul-and-baterdene/the-river-herlen/central-asia-islamica-world/music/track/smithsonian>
- Smithsonian Folkways Throat Singing Video  
<http://s.si.edu/central-asian-videos>

- Picture and description of the Morin Khuur
- “Behind the Mountains” arrangement (attached)
- Optional: “The Horse-head Fiddle and the Cosmopolitan Reimagination of Mongolia” by Peter K. Marsh. 2008, Routledge.

**Lesson Segments:**

- 1. Introduction to Mongolian Music: the Morin Khuur (horse head fiddle)** (National Standard 6)
- 2. Mongolian Throat Singing** (National Standards 1, 6, 9)
- 3. “Behind the Mountains”** (National Standards 2, 5, 6, 9)

**1. Introduction to Mongolian Music: the Morin Khuur (horse head fiddle)**

- Listen to “The River Herlen” recording.
  - Ask students to listen for instrument type (i.e. string, brass, etc)
- Have students give descriptions of what they imagine the instrument to look like.
  - Show pictures of the Morin Khuur and give a brief description of the instrument
- Ask the students if, according to pitch range, etc, they can relate the Morin Khuur to any western instrument (i.e. Cello).

**Assessment:** Compare recordings of the Morin Khuur and other western instruments the students related the Morin Khuur to, and ask the students to identify the instrument(s) in each recording.

**2. Mongolian Throat Singing**

- Play the Smithsonian Folkways throat-singing video.
  - Ask students if they can hear the overtones produced in the singing
- Have students break up and go to a private place in the room.
  - Show the video again, this time stopping after each phase is explained.
- For every phase, have the students attempt the techniques outlined in that phase.
- Ask students if they felt they were successful at throat singing.

**Assessment:** Are students able to emulate the beginning phases of throat singing?

**3. “Behind the Mountains”**

- Discuss the original instrumentation of “Behind the Mountains”.
  - Voice
  - Yatag (Zither)
  - Morin Khuur (horse-head fiddle)
  - Ikh Khuur (great horse-head fiddle or horse-head bass)

- b.** Discuss that this is a more contemporary instrument integrated into the culture  
in the 1960s. See Marsh, pg. 64.
  - i.** Show pictures of horse-head fiddle used in Lesson Segment 1
- c.** Have students play the piece.
  - i.** Break down parts as necessary
  - ii.** Note that the melody can be sung or played by a soloist or small group

**Assessment:** Students will play and/or sing song with correct pitches, rhythms, and style.

# Behind the Mountains

Mongolian

Traditional  
Arr. Brennan Baglio

Part 1

Ca ni ma la

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

The first system of the musical score consists of four parts. Part 1 is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'Ca ni ma la'. Part 2 is a melodic line in treble clef. Part 3 is a bass line in bass clef. Part 4 is a bass line in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 2/4.

P1

la ca jo

P2

P3

P4

The second system of the musical score consists of four parts. Part 1 (P1) is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'la ca jo'. Part 2 (P2) is a melodic line in treble clef. Part 3 (P3) is a bass line in bass clef. Part 4 (P4) is a bass line in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 2/4.

Part 1: to be sung or played by solo or small group of instruments such as violin, flute, etc.

Part 2: to be played by group of instruments or piano. Instruments could include violin, viola, clarinet, guitar, etc.

Part 3: to be played by group of instruments or piano. Instruments could include cello, trombone, etc

Part 4: to be played by solo or group of low instruments such as string bass, bass guitar, bass trombone, etc.

Behind the Mountains

9


P1  *weh* *yeh*


P2 

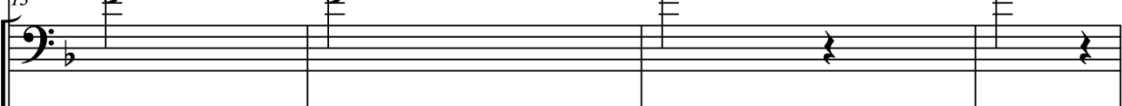
P3 


P4 

13

P1  *la* *ca* *ja* *la*

P2 

P3 

P4 

Behind the Mountains

17

P1

la \_\_\_\_\_ oh \_\_\_\_\_

P2

P3

P4

21

P1

\_\_\_\_\_ teh \_\_\_\_\_ leh \_\_\_\_\_

P2

P3

P4