

A Special Report from Tuva Brian Grover Heart Sounds International/JPUSA

Last Spring some of you may have seen me at events with Dave & Lisa singing unusual sounding songs and asking for support to work with cultures literally on the other side of the world. It is with overwhelming gratefulness that I am happy to report that the generosity of Hope in Transit supporters provided funding for well over 2/3 of the total financial need and made the trip viable. Thank you for enabling me to engage with the Tuvan people at a critical time in the emergence of the Gospel and empowerment of indigenous culture.

Tuva is a long way away, an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation forming Mongolia's northwest border with Russia in the geographical center of Asia. To reach this land that is 11 time zones away from my home in Chicago takes 3 or 4 days of travel on a combination of international jet liners, regional aircraft, trains and cars. For the first 12 days of August I partnered with a team from Heart Sounds International (the ethnomusic arm of Operation Mobilization) to offer technical support and audio/video documentation of the first ever public Christian concert series to feature local and indigenous music. The last half of August was undefined going into the trip, but the hope was to connect with traditional musicians and introduce them to musicians in the churches as well as spend time with the Nomadic herders.

Life for indigenous Tuvans is similar in many ways to the experience of Native Americans in the states. Living under a dominant Caucasian culture that looks down on their traditions as backward and primitive, a severe lack of viable

opportunities, and marginalization which is the fodder for an epidemic of depression, substance abuse, and a whole range of social ills. Due to the very closed condition of the Soviet Union when it existed and the very remote location of Tuva, the Gospel has only come there in any significant way in the last 2 or 3 decades, and then often in ways that didn't engage the indigenous population. Most Tuvans are fairly stand offish to foreigners; they have endured a lot of propaganda and trickery over the years and so do not easily trust folks they don't know, especially when they seem to be emphatically trying to convince them of something. The fact that I am not only aware of Tuvan traditions, but have actually



taken the time and effort to learn the difficult techniques involved in singing their music goes a long way in building a rapport. When they see that I respect and love their culture they are willing to risk building a relationship with me; well, to be honest, they are usually so excited about it that they want to adopt me as a nephew or cousin.

When the Tuvans realized I was an authentic Khoomeizhi (their term for a person who sings in their polyphonic traditional style, often called 'throat singing' in the US) they insisted that I must perform in the public concerts. When the indigenous Christians saw me perform they all wanted me to come to sing at their churches. This enthusiasm was not some mere carnival novelty; for the indigenous Tuvans had often been told by the Caucasian Christians that not only were their traditions inferior but that they were outright demonic. For me to come as a person who discovered Tuvan music as a Christian and recognized that it could be used for the glory of God and had even learned to perform it was hugely significant. There is a well established way of introducing a throat singing solo that is

a vagabond thread

comparative in nature; when I offer my singing in this style the mountains echo in reply, or when I offer my singing in this style the deep forests answer back, etc. I worked with some of the Tuvan Christians to craft an introduction in that form that I would be able to say in Tuvan; Khoomeimni salyriemga byrgan meeng churem doldulyptar (When I offer my throat singing God's spirit fills my heart). When I would say this people's interest was piqued and as I sang the liberation of people's spirits was so intense that one could almost see the shackles lifted from them.

The festival was successful in opening the door to allow the indigenous Tuvans to praise and walk with God in the gifts and talents He created them with, even if they are very different from the Caucasian Christians. In addition to me there were indigenous Christians from other regions that traveled to Tuva to take part in the festival and share their own unique indigenous forms of worship songs. Additionally, putting on the festival brought the churches together, whom normally keep to themselves, to work side by side. I did make it out to the Nomad herders and connected with my music friends, but much of my time in Tuva after the HSI team left (right after the festival) was spent visiting the various groups of indigenous believers, sharing from my experiences and encouraging them in the path God has laid before them. There is still much to do, but a strong foundation has been laid.

Thank you so much for making this trip possible! The interaction you enabled me to have with the Tuvans is uniquely impactful as there are not many Caucasian Christians that can praise God with worship music in authentic traditional Tuvan style throat singing. It is also

an honor for me to partner with Hope in Transit (and their supporters) who have been doing similar cross cultural ministry for many years.

Please pray for God's encouragement to the indigenous believers in Tuva for confidence and creativity to worship and serve God in the culture and traditions He has given them, pray that the churches would continue to overcome the distrust and fear resulting from years of oppression to be able to partner together to more effectively work for God's kingdom, pray for God's clear direction for my future involvement in Tuva as well as a means for funding that involvement.

Thanks again for your support and interest in the ways God has called us to serve Him.

brian grover

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Jesus People USA

