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Overtone Singing: History, Development, and Influence in Contemporary Music

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It is believed in Tuvan tradition that all things have a soul or are inhabited by spiritual entities. The Tuva, indigenous peoples of Siberia and central Asia, developed Khöömei, a sacred throat singing technique, to establish contact with these spiritual entities and assimilate their power through the imitation of natural sounds (Cosi and Tisato 3). The Tuvan people believed the ethereal two-toned sound is the way the spirits of nature prefer to use to reveal themselves and to communicate with other living things. Polyphonic overtone singing or throat singing is an elaborate voice technique that is most identified with parts of Central Asia, but it is also practiced in northern Canada by the Inuit Women and by the Xhosa people of South Africa where the technique takes on various styles and meanings. This vocal style not only holds significance in cultural tradition but over several years the technique has found its way to the West, inspiring many contemporary artists. This paper will study the physical and traditional techniques of polyphonic overtone singing and reveal the influences present in American contemporary music that spawned from the traditional throat singing practices of the Tuvan, Inuit, and Xhosa peoples.

According to Marie-Cécile Barras and Anne-Marie Gouiffès, “overtone singing is a vocal technique by which a single source produces two melodic pitches simultaneously. One of the pitches is the generally stable fundamental, which serves as a sort of drone; the other results from the shifting emphasis of different harmonics” (1). This singing technique not only is a distinctive art form, but it requires one to utilize parts of the human throat, nose, and mouth that previously may have not been exercised.

The ability of the human voice to sing two notes simultaneously can appear to some listeners to be a supernatural phenomenon. The resulting sound can produce the “same astonishment we feel when we see a rainbow, emerging from the white light, or a laser beam for the first time” (Cosi and Tisato 4). However, this vocal phenomenon can be accomplished by the average human with the correct mouth form, tongue placement, and sufficient practice. In order to achieve a fundamental tone in throat singing the singer learns to articulate the vocal tract so that one of the formants (usually the first or the second) coincide with the desired harmonic, giving it a considerable amplitude increase and making it perceptible (Cosi and Tisato 6). The second tone, also identified as a diphonic harmonic, can be achieved through various methods. For clarity, two methods suggested by Cosi and Tisato will be discussed: single cavity method and two cavities method. These methods are simply characterized by the use of the tongue or non-use of the tongue.

In the single cavity method Cosi and Tisato found that the “tongue doesn’t move and remains flat or slightly curved without touching the palate. In this case the vocal tract is like a continuous tube. The selection of the diphonic harmonic is obtained by the appropriate opening of the mouth and the lips“ (6). When utilizing this method, the formant’s frequency raises if the vocal tract is lengthened when singing the vowels, a and i, and its frequency can also be lowered if the vocal tract extends with the vowels a and u. Cosi and Tisato explain, “Opening the mouth controls the 1st formant position. The movement of the tongue affects the 2nd formant and allows the harmonic selection in a large frequency range” (6).

In the two cavities method the tongue is raised just enough to divide the vocal tract into two main resonators. Each one is tuned to a particular resonance (Cosi and Tisato 7). When utilizing this method, it is possible with adequate control to eventually be able to tune two separate harmonics and clearly sing two or more pitches at once. There are three various styles that best exhibit this technique. The first corresponds to the “Khomei style of the Tuvan: to select the desired harmonic, the tip of the tongue and the tongue body moves forward (higher pitch) and backward (lower pitch) along the palate” (Cosi and Tisato 7). The second style is characteristic of the Sygyt throat singing style of the Tuvan people and can be achieved by the tip of the tongue remaining fixed behind the upper teeth while the tongue body rises to select the harmonics. In the third style “the movement of the tongue root selects the diphonic harmonic. Shifting the base of the tongue near the posterior wall of the throat, we obtain the lower harmonics. On the contrary, moving the base of the tongue forward, we pull out the higher harmonics” (Cosi and Tisato 7). The advantages of the two cavities method is the ability to sing harmonics in the 2nd formant that create the best and clearest audibility. When mastering throat singing one will discover that performing a slight movement of the lips in all the methods aforementioned is beneficial to adjusting the formant’s position.

Overtone singing is not solely practiced in Tuva culture but is “acknowledged in places beyond Mount Altai, in Central Asia, among the following populations: Mongolian...Khakash, Altaian, and among the Bashkirs (West of the Urals)” (Barras and Gouiffès 61). This section of the paper will primarily focus on the throat singing tradition of the Tuvan people called Khoomei. The ancient tradition of throat singing, Khoomei,

was developed among the nomadic herdsman of Central Asia. This included “people who lived in yurts, rode horses, raised yaks, sheep and camels, and had a close spiritual relationship with nature” (Bubley). Today Tuvan throat singing is commonly performed in concert halls. However, it was Tuvan tradition for throat singing to be done outdoors and “singers often used their voices to mimic and interact with the sounds of the natural world: whistling birds, bubbling streams, blowing wind, or the deep growl of a camel” (Bubley). Texture and polyphony are essential elements considered in the creation of traditional Tuvan music. Bubley expounds on this idea:

The Tuvan way of making music is based on appreciation of complex sounds with multiple layers or textures. To the Tuvan ear, a perfectly pure tone is not as interesting as a sound which contains hums, buzzes, or extra pitches that coexist with the main note being sung.

Tuvan instruments are designed and played to create multi-textured sounds as well. This can be heard in many Tuvan songs where the complex textures of Khoomei often alternate with a simpler melodic use of the voice. Not only did nomadic herdsman practice this vocal tradition but Tuvan cowboys did as well “accompanying themselves with stringed instruments, either plucked or bowed and performing songs to the rhythms of horses trotting or cantering across the open land” (Bubley).

Unfortunately, not all were welcomed to practice the Tuvan throat singing tradition. Women were discouraged from practicing throat singing due to “custom and superstitious belief that such singing can cause infertility” (Bubley). Therefore, Throat-singing in Tuva is almost exclusively practiced by men. However, recently more women

are breaking free from these customs and have ventured to become talented throat singers.

Khoomei is the generic name given to all throat singing styles in Central Asia and is the easiest technique to learn and the most practiced in the West. This style is comprised of “three major basic throat-singing methods called Khomei, Kargyraa, and Sygyt. [There are also] two main sub methods...Borbangnadyr and Ezengileer and various other sub styles” (Cosi and Tisato 11). Khoomei is a soft-sounding style, with clear and mild harmonics above a fundamental that’s usually within the low-mid to midrange of the singer's voice. In Khoomei style, there can be two or more notes clearly audible. Compared to Kargyraa or Sygyt, the stomach “remains fairly relaxed when singing Khoomei, and there is less laryngeal tension than harder-sounding Sygyt” (Sklar). The tongue “remains seated flatly between the lower teeth and the selection of the desired harmonic comes mainly from a combination of different lips, tongue and throat movements” (Cosi and Tisato 11).

Sygyt means “whistle” and sounds similar to a flute. It has its roots in the Khoomei method and has the same range for the fundamental. This style is characterized by a strong, even piercing harmonic and can be used to perform complex and very distinct melodies. Cosi and Tisato observe, “Sygyt is sung with a half-open mouth and the tip of tongue placed behind front teeth as if pronouncing the letter “L.” The tongue tip is kept in the described position, while the tongue body moves to select the harmonic” (11). This technique is similar to the Khoomei method. However, the difference is in the focus on timbre and the execution of a good quality of sound specifically at low frequencies. The ideal sound to be achieved is called "Chistii

Zvuk," Russian for clear sound, and one must learn how to filter out lower unwanted harmonic components in order to achieve it (Sklar).

Kargyraa means "hoarse voice" and is explained as a style that produces an extremely low sound resembling the roaring of a lion, the howling of a wolf, the croaking of a frog, or all these mixed together (Cosi and Tisato 12). This singing style is similar to the process of clearing one's throat before speaking except in this case it is deep and continuous croaking. Cosi and Tisato explain, "this hawking must rise from the deepest part of the windpipe; consequently low tones will start resonating in the chest. Overtones are amplified by varying the shape of the mouth cavity and the position of the tongue" (12). Kargyraa is linked to vowel sounds in that the harmonic executed corresponds with the articulation of a particular vowel by the singer. Sklar explains, "in addition to various throat manipulations, the mouth varies from a nearly closed 'O' shape to nearly wide open. Except for the throat technique, this style is vaguely related to Western overtone singing styles that use vowels and mouth shapes to affect the harmonic content." There are two major styles of Kargyraa: Mountain (dag) and Steppe (xovu). Both feature an intense croaking tone that is also very rich in harmonics. Mountain (dag) is usually "the lower of the styles in pitch, and often includes nasal effects; this can sometimes sound like "oinking." It should feature strong low-chest resonance, and not too much throat tension. In contrast, Xovu (Steppe) Kargyraa is usually sung at a higher pitch, with more throat tension, less chest resonance, and generally a raspier sound" (Sklar).

The two main sub-methods in Tuvan throat singing tradition, Borbangnadyr and Ezengileer, primarily serve as ornamentation or effects to be used in the styles

previously mentioned. Borbangnadyr is “a combination of effects applied to one of the other styles. The name comes from the Tuvan word for ‘rolling,’ because this style features highly acrobatic trills and warbles, reminiscent of birds, babbling brooks, etc.” (Cosi and Tisato 13). In comparison, Ezengileer is the utilization of a rhythmic effect. Coming from a word meaning “stirrup” this method features “rhythmic harmonic oscillations intended to mimic the sound of metal stirrups clinking to the beat of a galloping horse” (Cosi and Tisato 13). The most common element is “the ‘horse-rhythm’ of the harmonics, produced by a rhythmic opening-and-closing of the velum which is the opening between the pharynx and the nasal sinuses” (Sklar).

Overtone singing and the tradition of Tuvan throat singing in particular has risen to popularity over the years especially in the West with the display of unique talent and steady prominence of professional Tuvan throat singer Kongar-ool Ondar, the Alash Ensemble, and the all-female Tuvan singing group, Tyva Kyzy. Kongar-ool Ondar committed his life to sharing throat singing with audiences around the world inspiring artists in the West to become immersed in the singing tradition of his homeland.

Kongar-ool Ondar was born in 1962 near the Hemchik River in western Tuva and as a young boy began to learn the fundamentals of throat singing from his uncle. Ondar’s reflects on his childhood stating:

As I am a Tuvan, I believe that throat-singing is in my blood...When I was a boy, I would go every summer high into the mountains to stay with one of my mother’s uncles. There, in the evenings in the camp, I would hear the old man sing to himself. He would have a few drinks of arak — the local brew made from

fermented goat's milk — and sing two, three or even four notes at once. Later, at school, I sang and sang and sang, until I got it, too. (“Kongar-OI Ondar”)

Ondar immersed himself in the singing tradition inspired by the deep cultural roots it possesses. He explains:

Throat-singing is a tradition of Tuva that is very old, it is inspired by the beautiful landscape of Tuva, which is full of sounds — the windswept open range with grazing livestock, the mountain forests full of birds and animals and the countless streams tumbling out of the mountains onto the open range to form mighty rivers. Our throat-singing has been passed down for countless generations. It is the immortal part of ourselves. (“Kongar-OI Ondar”)

Tuvan throat singing became Kongar-ool Ondar's life as he formed a Tuvan Ensemble in the mid-eighties touring around Tuva and neighboring Soviet republics. Within a few years Ondar's reputation “began to take on an international scope after having well received performances in Europe and winning the UNESCO-sponsored International Festival of Throat-Singing” (Woo). Several people began to spread the news about Ondar's remarkable vocal style, and he found favor particularly among a select group of savvy musicians leading Ondar to find himself in high demand for a diverse range of globe spanning projects: “In 1993 alone, he performed and recorded with The Kronos Quartet, for their album Night Prayers; Ry Cooder, as well as Frank Zappa, the Grateful Dead's Micky Hart, The Chieftains and Johnny ‘Guitar’ Watson” (“Kongar-OI Ondar”). Collaborating with these artists and others including Willie Nelson allowed Ondar's fame and talent to spread throughout the West. Ondar was known

“for his captivating stage presence, [and] he was nicknamed ‘the Groovin’ Tuvan’ by the Western musicians with whom he played” (Fox).

In the year that followed, “Ondar joined forces with San Francisco artist, Paul ‘Earthquake’ Pena, to record a groundbreaking blend of throat-singing and blues in a documentary titled *Genghis Blues*” (“Kongar-OI Ondar”). This documentary was important to the world of music because it further aided in bringing the extraordinary traditional singing style to the West and influenced various artists to become familiar and eventually incorporate overtone singing into their artistry. After going on tour with Pena, Ondar returned to his homeland “to sing for an audience that included Tuvan leader Sherig-ool Oorzhak and former Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, who afterward named Ondar a National Artist Of Russia” (“Kongar-OI Ondar”). According to Woo, “His talent was so extraordinary that when he sang for Yeltsin in 1994, the Russian leader looked into his mouth in search of a device that could produce such music.”

Kongar-ool Ondar was able to reach regions with his voice far beyond his homeland performing throughout Europe and the United States including New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, and the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Ondar continued to perform and teach his craft, launching a throat-singing academy in Tuva, until his untimely passing at the age of fifty-one from a brain hemorrhage (Woo). Although his time on earth was unexpectedly shortened, Kongar-ool Ondar was successful at making his mark in music history. Through his recording, performance, and teaching of classic Tuvan throat singing, Ondar helped revitalize a tradition that had been largely extinguished during the Soviet era and played a major role in

popularizing the Central Asian vocal art in the West. Dartmouth College ethnomusicologist Theodore Levin graced Ondar with the title "Liberace of Tuvan Music" and recalls his significant influence writing, "More than any other Tuvan, Ondar has implanted throat-singing in the sphere of American popular culture" (qtd. in Woo).

Named for the Alash River, which runs through the northwestern region of Tuva, the Alash Ensemble are a trio of master throat singers, experienced with traditional Tuvan instruments and deeply committed to traditional Tuvan music and culture. Alash remains grounded in this tradition while expanding its musical repertoire with new ideas from the West. The Alash Ensemble's official website reveals, "Being fans of western music and believing that traditional music must constantly evolve, the musicians subtly infuse their songs with western elements" (Bublely). This approach creates their own unique style that is new, yet true to their Tuvan musical heritage.

Since childhood, all members of Alash were trained in traditional Tuvan music. They were first exposed to the throat singing tradition by their families and later became students of master throat singers. In the late 90s, as students at Kyzyl Arts College, the trio formed a group called "Changy-Xaya and soon became the resident traditional ensemble on campus" (Bublely). During this time the talented ensemble also learned about Western music, practiced on hybrid Tuvan-European instruments and listened to new trends coming out of America. Alash was eventually able to create "a new musical identity under the guidance and mentoring of master throat singer, Kongar-ool Ondar" (Bublely). It was at this time the ensemble created a musical style that featured "a mixture of the old and new by incorporating instrumentation into their traditional Tuvan throat song arrangements" (Bublely). They introduced the guitar and

sometimes even the Russian bayan (accordion) into their arrangements, alongside their traditional Tuvan instruments. This eclectic mixture of instrumentation allowed the Alash ensemble to experiment with new harmonies and song structures.

After participating in several Tuvan throat singing competitions and touring across their homeland, Alash Ensemble introduced their unique vocal style to the West on an inaugural U.S Tour in 2006 (Bubley). The ensemble's contemporary, yet traditional Khoomei performance impressed their audience and resulted in the tour being an immediate success. Chris Richards of the *Washington Post* praised the ensemble's performance:

The Alash Ensemble's opening set was utterly stunning. With a single, sustained breath, each member's voice would glide over the music's loping rhythms as they plucked and bowed an array of stringed instruments, one of which was made from a horse's skull.

In addition to a successful tour, Alash gained popularity among Western musicians leading to collaborations with diverse artists such as “jazz ensemble Sun Ra Arkestra, the beatboxer Shodekeh, and the bluegrass/fusion/jazz band Béla Fleck and the Flecktones” (Bubley). These collaborations enabled throat singing to gain a wider Western audience. The Kennedy Center described the group's influence in music: “The Alash musicians never sacrifice the integrity of their heritage in an effort to make their music more hip for an American audience. Rather they look for contemporary ideas that mesh well with the sound and feel of traditional Tuvan music” (“Alash Ensemble”).

Customarily, women have been prohibited or discouraged from performing throat-singing. Tyva Kyzy (Daughters of Tuva) is the first and only female group that performs all the styles of Tuvan khöömei (throat-singing). The talented all-female group was artistically driven and founded in 1988 by Choduraa Tumat, who studied music in Kyzyl (Tuva) and Ulan-Ude (Buryatia) (Tongeren). Tumat masters nearly all styles of Tuvan throat-singing and plays various “traditional instruments: doshpuluur, chadagan, khomus, igil” (Tongeren). A collective of enthusiastic young ladies were brought together to break the age-old taboo on women singing with throat techniques, and Tumat was faced with the complicated task to adapt the male songs for female voices. A sound explorer with a PhD in artistic research, Mark Van Tongeren further explains Tumat’s plight: “The core questions she asked herself were: ‘how is a female throat-singer’s performance different from that of men?’ and ‘what special styles are particular to female throat singers?’” Tyva Kyzy has been able to answer those questions over the years creating a repertoire that combines new and traditional Tuvan songs. The group was also given an implicit blessing by khöömei master, Oorzhak Khunashtaar-Ool, who witnessed women doing throat singing at a young age, and “encouraged the group to spread female khöömei, shortly before he passed away in 1993” (Tongeren). Tyva Kyzy has made this their mission as they tour around the globe providing a great opportunity for fans and for those who have never heard them to witness the versatility and evolution of Tuvan music performed live by an all-female group.

The three throat-singing members of Tyva Kyzy mastered performing all of the textural and traditional styles of Khoomei including Sygyt, and Kargyraa, and they even

create further varieties. Tyva Kyzy also plays many of Tuva's traditional musical instruments including:

[T]he two-stringed horse-headed fiddle *igil*, the musical instrument that is most revered and most difficult to play among all Tuvan instruments; the two-or three stringed *doshpuluur*, a long-necked lute; the four-stringed fiddle *byzaanchy*; the table zither *chadagan*; the *khomus* or Jew's harp, made of metal, bamboo or wood; and the *dunggur* or shaman's drum. (Tongereren)

Currently, *khöömei* is still considered to be a male dominated practice. However, Tyva Kyzy are pioneers for performing this traditional technique as an ensemble. The group promotes "confidence and talent in women of all ages by teaching in Tuvan schools and leading international throat singing workshops" (Tongereren). Tyva Kyzy is presently changing the history of throat-singing and creating a promising future for the next generation of female throat-singers in Tuva and around the world.

When referring to throat singing the expression is commonly associated with the singing tradition used in Tibet, Mongolia, Tuva and surrounding regions in Central Asia. However, throat singing is practiced in several other parts of the world. One of these places is North America among the Inuit peoples. Here throat singing is not only a significant part of their cultural heritage, but it is only performed by women. According to Bruno Deschênes, "The Inuit have developed a particular type of throat singing that is different from its Mongolian and Tuvan counterparts, one that does not produce extra notes." The throat singing tradition of the Inuit is distinct from other cultures yet the values behind the technique are just as significant.

The Inuit live in the most northerly parts of North America, from “Alaska all the way to Greenland, and some are also found in the Chukotsk Peninsula in northeast Siberia” (Deschênes). Known previously by the name of Eskimos, which was the name given to them by the Algonquin American Indian people, “the Inuit have adopted their new name from the word *inuktituk*, which means person in their language” (Deschênes). Living almost exclusively by fishing and hunting, the Inuit have developed their own distinctive way of life and rich cultural traditions. However, a large part of their customs and way of life was lost after contacts with Western civilization since the beginning of the 20th century. Deschênes explains, “These contacts with Western civilization had, like in all other cultures around the world, major influences; in particular through Christianization. Today, no one follows the traditional life of living in igloos; and much of Inuit traditions can only be found in museums.”

In the Arctic land two types of singing are commonly found: traditional songs generally accompanied by hand drums and dancing; and throat singing, usually done by two or more women facing each other. The main regions where throat singing is found in northern Canada are “in the north of the province of Quebec - where it is called *katajjaq*; on Baffin island - called *pirkusirtuk*; and in Nunavut - called *nipaquhiit*” (Nattiez 34). Ethnomusicologists suggest that being able to maintain their language has helped the Inuit maintain that particular tradition. In many regions, throat singing was forbidden by Christian priests for several decades. Presently, the religious ban has been lifted, and the practice has been resurfacing in the last 20 to 30 years (Deschênes). In places such as Alaska and Greenland, throat singing has completely disappeared. Fortunately, following the growing interest in this type of singing there are

communities around Canada that are bringing throat singing back to tradition. In “September 2001, the Throat Singing Conference, which took place in Puvernituk, Nunavut,” was held for the first time. Here one could hear different types of throat-singing from different regions of Canada (Deschênes).

Inuit throat singing is traditionally considered to be vocal games or breathing games. After observing the way they use “the voice, the throat, deep breathy sounds, rhythms, and its similarity to Mongolian and Tuvan throat-singing, it is now called throat singing” (Deschênes). Ethnomusicologists suggest calling the traditions vocal games due to the fact the Inuit do not use only the throat; they also use regular voice. Inuit throat singing is “a traditional game the women employed during the long winter nights to entertain the children, while the men were away hunting (sometimes for up to a month or more)” (Deschênes). The games are generally done by two persons, but sometimes one can find four or more performers singing together. Inuit throat-singing is done the following way:

[T]wo women face each other; they may be standing or crouching down; one is leading, while the other responds; the leader produces a short rhythmic motif, that she repeats with a short silent gap in-between, while the other is rhythmically filling in the gaps. The game is such that both singers try to show their vocal abilities in competition, by exchanging these vocal motives. The first to run out of breath or be unable to maintain the pace of the other singer will start to laugh or simply stop and will thus lose the game. (Deschênes)

The vocal game usually lasts between one to three minutes and the winner is the singer who outlasts the largest number of people. Usually, most singers “stand straight,

facing one another and holding each other's arms and often may incorporate dance movements while singing: balancing on one foot and switching from right to left” (Deschênes). The sounds used include voiced sounds as well as unvoiced ones, both through inhalation or exhalation. This allows singers to develop a breathing technique somewhat comparable to circular breathing used by some players of wind instruments. Inuit throat singing can often consist of words and meaningless syllables. When words are used, no particular poetical meaning or regular meaning are assigned to them. These words can simply be “names of ancestors, a word or name meaningful at the time the games are taking place, or other common words” (Deschênes). The meaningless syllables are meant to portray sounds of nature like cries of animals or birds and other sounds of everyday life. In some regions, throat songs may recount a story of some sort, though in Northern Quebec, no stories are recounted. Inuit throat singing is not only an art but also a way to get together, socialize, and have fun. Inuit throat singer, Evie Mark, describes the unique tradition: “It’s nothing serious. Throat singing is a way of having fun. That's the general idea, it's to have fun during gatherings. It is also a way to prove to your friends around you or your family that if you are a good throat-singer, you're gonna win the game” (Deschênes).

In the past 20 years there has been a revival of throat singing among the Inuit after being banned by priests for almost 100 years (Prasad). This tradition is attracting the younger generation as much as the elder population with the driving force being the need of the Inuit to express themselves through a method that is solely their own. Experimental vocalist Tanya Tagaq and 26-year-old Evie Mark are in the forefront of

this movement reviving their cultural tradition by combining the fundamentals of Inuit throat singing with other musical genres and elements of Western music.

Tanya Tagaq grew up in the Arctic territory of Nunavut in northern Canada and later, by the force of the Canadian government, her family was relocated to a remote island town called Cambridge Bay that's inaccessible by road. Tagaq saw the effect of "Canadian attempts to systematically dismantle Inuit culture as her family was forced to move further away from their Inuit homeland and Tagaq was sent to a residential school – a system created to forcibly assimilate indigenous children into Canadian culture" (Berman). Tagaq's mother was born and raised in an igloo in Pond Inlet, a pristine area above the Arctic Circle, and introduced her daughter to their culture's tradition of throat-singing, known as "katajjaq, while she was attending college in Nova Scotia" (Berman). Tanya Tagaq reflects on this moment stating, "During my childhood, everyone was trying to throw away Inuk culture. So it was not until I was at university in Nova Scotia, and homesick, that my mother thought to send me tapes of traditional throat singing. I woke up" (Berman).

Tanya Tagaq learned the art of Inuit throat singing alone, often practicing in the shower. The young vocalist summoned the courage to begin performing her self-taught, solo version of katajjaq in front of audiences, "accompanied by a DJ providing electronic backdrops and soundscapes for her to respond to" (Prasad). Tagaq's unique rendering of this traditional music was soon embraced by adventurous listeners across Canada, as well as the country's many arts organizations and festivals that took the initiative to promote her bold sounds.

Tagaq's vocals range from the "raw and guttural to the refined and soaring" showcasing her talents in settings as diverse as orchestral music, electronica, spoken word, pop, and hip-hop (Prasad). According to Berman, "Onstage, Tagaq doesn't so much sing as plug herself into the Earth, transforming herself into a mood-ring manifestation of a ravaged planet squealing in pain with each oil-drill jab and earth-scorching heat wave." Joined on stage by regular bandmates drummer Jean Martin and violinist Jesse Zubot, Tagaq's improvisational approach allows her to push boundaries in an exploration of tone, timbre, texture and ultimate human expression. Tanya Tagaq's unique talent began to catch the ears of many across the globe eventually inviting opportunities of collaboration with artist such as "Bjork and Washington-based Kronos Quartet" (Berman). Tagaq collaborating with an elite circle of artist and "continuously touring for over a decade" has brought an awareness to Inuit throat singing in particular and steadily inspiring Western listeners and musicians to express themselves in broader ways (Berman). Tanya explains the meaning of her performances stating, "my music isn't necessarily solely based on interpreting the land at home. It's also about everybody's experiences" (Prasad). There is a rising interest in throat singing as it is being witnessed in concert across the world with listeners becoming inspired by the freedom the vocal technique conveys. Tagaq confirms this peaking interest claiming, "I think people are looking for sounds that aren't from a city. People that are born and raised in cities know there's something inside of them that's missing—the peace of being on the land. I'm providing a bit of equilibrium and bridging a gap" (Prasad).

Tanya Tagaq utilizes exquisite vocal improvisations that bridge traditional roots with contemporary culture. Immersing herself in the sacred tradition of her Inuit ancestors has allowed Tagaq to use her developed throat singing talent as a vehicle for primal, personal, and political expression. Tagaq reveals, “When I started, it felt like I was flushing out all the pain...It has taken me 40 years to have a true pride in who I am” (Berman).

Inuit throat singing is being revived throughout the culture and the younger Inuk generation are excitedly grabbing ahold of the tradition to prevent another piece of their identity from being lost. 26-year-old Evie Mark is “an Inuit throat singer, seamstress, and filmmaker hailing from Ivujivik, Nunavik and currently residing in Montreal, QC” (Gray). Mark, being half white and half Inuk, was the object of bullying from her Inuk community for being “different from her friends.” This resulted in Evie Mark becoming inspired to prove that she identified with the Inuk culture and “that [she] was as much Inuk as they were” (Deschênes). After learning the Inuktituk language to prove she belonged, Mark was still having difficulty being accepted by her friends and soon found interest in the rich cultural tradition of Inuit throat singing called, katajjaq. Evie Mark explains her interest in throat singing as a child stating, “There were a lot of elders who would throat-sing. It would amaze me. How could these two old women create such unique kind of, like out of the world type, of sound? How could they create such spiritual sound? I wanna learn to; so it became one of my goals, as a young girl” (Deschênes). Mark began to learn throat singing around 11 years old after approaching her language teacher at school for lessons on the Inuit vocal tradition. Mark reflects:

Right after school, me and my best friend went to her house and she was surprised to see us. She thought we would go there in a month or a in week, but surely not right after school and she taught us a very well-known song. For the longest time, I kept practicing it on my own and until I get an itchy throat or I would start coughing. It was difficult. (Deschênes)

After much practice Evie Mark achieved the distinct Inuit sound she'd been longing for and part of her identity felt complete. Mark explains, "It's as if it was in my blood. I found what I was searching for. It was there all along" (Deschênes).

Fearing that she lost her skill after losing interest for ten years, Evie Mark eagerly returned to practicing and performing her throat singing skills and quickly gained a solid following. The young singer recalls, "The more I throat-sing, the more people got interested. It was evolving, developing really fast. I throat-sang for the first time in a public place at a multicultural week. And from there my profession just started evolving" (Deschênes). Mark showcases her Inuit throat singing in tours across Europe and festivals hosted in her homeland of Canada. In turn, she inspires the younger generation, especially those that are Inuk, to be more informed of their cultural tradition and provide an element of self-identity to those that are lost in Western culture.

Mark explains the effect throat singing has on the younger generation today:

Young people are very interested in it because we are sort of going, to me, through an identity crisis. I'm going through an identity crisis. I don't really know who I am in a sense. When they are introduced to something that will make their characters stronger, they go for it, like throat-singing. They grab it, they're hungry for it. And I guess I can say I was one of them. It's like craving

for something that will make your identity stronger. It brought my attention to who I am, to my identity, to my culture. (Deschênes)

Evie Mark is an artist to watch as she continues to evolve as a performer sharing the Inuit tradition, katajjaq, around the world in hopes of revealing more knowledge of her culture with the world and giving the youth hope of cultural identity. Mark reveals her mission, “Although I am half white, I consider myself a true Inuk. I am able to say we are Inuit people, I am an Inuk person, this is where we come from. So I am able to share knowledge and say this is who we are” (Deschenes).

South Africa is rich in culture, food, music, and tradition. Among the Xhosa people located in the southeast of South Africa one will discover the rich tradition of overtone singing called “umngqokolo.” According to Lucia, “two common forms of umngqokolo as overtone singing are found in the Xhosa culture: ordinary umngqokolo and umngqokolo ngomqangi” (152). Similar to Inuit throat singing tradition, umngqokolo is only performed by women. Umngqokolo has a sound quality somewhat “similar to the Tuvan kargiraa, and both forms can be characterized by the performer using gruff tones well below the normal female register by using forced voice back in the throat” (Lucia 152). Lucia further explains the technique of Umngqokolo writing, “These deep tones are then used as fundamental notes; they are rich in overtones and, the singer uses shaping of the mouth to select and amplify overtones for the performance of melody as in playing the umrhubhe bow” (152).

The two forms of overtone singing in Xhosa culture can be identified by either the tongue being lifted (ordinary umngqokolo) or the tongue remaining down (umngqokolo ngomqangi). Lucia, aids in differentiating between the two forms writing,

“In ordinary umngqokolo, the performers tongue is lifted towards the front of the mouth and the performer uses three or four fundamentals. The overtone melody is faint and appears to be resonated between the tongue and hard palate” (154). However, the second method, umngqokolo ngomqangi, differs not only in technicality but it has only been attempted by one woman, Nowayilethi Mbizweni. Lucia further explains, “Nowayilethi Mbizweni maintains that she is the only person to perform umngqokolo ngomqangi. Nowayileth says she got the idea from a method of playing the umqangi beetle. In this style the overtones are resonated apparently at the back of the mouth” (154). This secondary method of overtone singing by Mbizweni resembles the playing of the umrhubhe bow.

Often in umngqokolo, the main purpose of the singers is to produce melody. Therefore, the melody overtones are derived from whichever fundamental is most convenient. For example, “the overtone A” may be derived from fundamentals F or D, C may be derived from F or F’, and D” may be derived from G or D” (Lucia 152). This results in the creation of a complex rapid sound. Traditional throat singing of the Xhosa often accompanies traditional call-and-response or group songs and is utilized to commemorate joyful occasions such as parties and ceremonious dances (Levine 85). The Xhosa tribe is the only culture in Africa witnessed thus far to incorporate throat singing. Research is continuing to be done in other countries within the continent with hopes of discovering the use of overtone singing amongst other cultures and tribes.

Overtone singing is commonly practiced in almost every continent including Central Asia by the Tuvan, North America by the Inuk, and in South Africa by the women of the Xhosa tribe. The globalization of throat singing specifically to the West

was initiated by master throat singer Kongar Ol Ondar, and his appearance in the film *Genghis Blues* piqued the interest of several contemporary music artists. The award-winning documentary served as a vehicle to bring throat singing to the forefront in the United States, inspiring listeners and musicians to experience using the vocal style themselves and aim collaborate with Master throat singing artists.

At a time when Tuvan throat singing was unknown in the United States to all but a select group of devoted fans, Kongar-ol Ondar, captured the attention of Western audiences “in 1993, when he was invited to participate in that year’s Rose Parade in Pasadena, California“ (Kaminsky). Already a musical superstar in Tuva, Ondar mesmerized Western audiences with his bellowing, rich, harmonious notes and ignited a national interest in the art of throat singing. Ondar’s unique talent and presence was suddenly in high demand across the country leading to several collaborations with popular artists of the west including “Frank Zappa, the Kronos Quartet and Ry Cooder, who was moved to include Tuvan throat singing in his score for the 1993 film *Geronimo*” (Kaminsky). Throat singing steadily gained popularity as Kongar Ondar shared his Tuvan culture with significant appreciative audiences while also nurturing it at home.

Following his increased exposure, Ondar was presented with an opportunity by “American music producer David Hoffner to create a Tuvan-American pop fusion album, entitled *Back Tuva Future*” (O’Toole 7). This album featured Western musical elements with the use of guitars, synthesizers, and most notably, the Tuvan throat singing style in the pace and style of American rap. Contrastingly, the album also included a “bluegrass track that features the famous country singer Willie Nelson, who

duets with Ondar on a song about patriotism” (O'Toole 7). This album is the direct result of the Westernization of Tuvan throat singing and plays a significant role in the increased popularity and usage of the vocal style in the United States.

Throat singing has a sacred and spiritual foundation for every culture that practices it. The Tuvan culture traditionally performed solo in pastoral settings, the Xhosa tribe include it in traditional dances and celebrations, and the Inuit use the technique to connect with each other, embracing it as an integral part of their identity. However, throat singing has evolved with its increased inclusion in contemporary performance and the additional elements of a band to accompany, an audience to witness, and a stage to project from.

Overtone singing has become a popular method of vocalization amongst many contemporary singers and musicians. Lalah Hathaway and Diamanda Galás, are two prominent artists who have creatively included the vocal style in their performances and album works. Resulting in increased opportunities for fans to experience creative renderings featuring the style and experience music in a way previously unattempted. Diamanda Galás started out as a classically trained pianist, performing in public at age 14, and she soon discovered that her voice was her greatest asset. Presently, Galas performs with a voice that spans “several octaves, delving into techniques from throat-singing to keening wails, infusing her performance with such fervor that it's a wonder she doesn't collapse; she's also addressed serious social topics in ways few musicians have dared” (Anderson). Galás, has a background in avant jazz and blues and uses a collection of intricate vocal techniques including overtone singing, to express serious

social issues in her performances. Anderson describes her singing style writing, “Galás is also a multiphonic singer, meaning she can sing several pitches at once. It’s an arduous technique to master. For Galás, it’s almost intuitive.” Galás uses throat singing almost as second nature, and the technique proves to be an impactful method of self-expression every time she performs for audience. Galás expressed in an interview that her ability to overtone sing is sort of a mystery even to herself stating:

I don’t know what I’m doing really. It’s just that I can feel the resonance in the sternum, and then the nose, and then once that goes, you can somehow get higher notes from that first note. Then you’ve got like three of ‘em going. So then it’s more a sensation, and you have to have the correct sensation, you have to be very relaxed to do it. (Anderson)

Galás allows her pain to flow through her music as she employs a wide array of vocal techniques including multiphonics, vocal double-stops, and vibratos. Audiences instantly become captivated by Diamanda Galas’ honest lyrics and raw emotion conveyed through her throat singing techniques. Diamanda Galás creative use of overtone singing leads her to being recognized as a modern “classic,” and “as one of the most original artists musical culture has produced in the last 30 years” (Anderson).

Grammy winning jazz artist Lalah Hathaway shocked the music world after showcasing her ability to use a vocal technique similar to that of overtone singing during a performance video of the song “Something” alongside New-York-based band Snarky Puppy. Approximately six minutes into the video, Hathaway is heard executing what seems like three notes simultaneously creating an effect similar to that of overtone singing (“Snarky Puppy feat”, 06:12 - 06:27). After reviewing the performance,

many were unsure if what Hathaway did could be identified as overtone singing at all.

The following was expressed by a viewer:

Lalah's technique is a vibration of the "false vocal folds" (also called "ventricular folds"), which are two fleshy parts either side of the vocal folds that can be drawn together to create extra notes (or noise!). It's these that create the Tuvan/Tibetan/Inuit throat singing "growls", as well as death-metal screaming and rock distortion. But what Lalah is doing is a much lighter, breathy contact. (qtd. in barsandchords)

Although Hathaway may not be using an identifiable method of throat singing, she is using a method of overtone singing that allows her to replicate an instrument while singing two notes simultaneously. According to Wolfgang Saus' excerpt on overtone singing, "Lalah Hathaway sings two simultaneous notes at different intervals (06:12) on the Snarky Puppy's live DVD/CD – *Family Dinner – Volume One*: Two times major second, minor third and major third, matching the musical context. She can obviously control both tones separately" (Saus). This exhibits her exceptional skill as a vocalist especially in the area of multiphonics. Hathaway attempts to offer insight on the impressive moment in her performance and how she achieved it:

The hook was that I was able to sing multiple chords at once. On the video you can see me realizing, in the moment, how to control that process. It took six minutes to get to that point, but it was an incredible, expansive experience. I went to a different place vocally to be able to manipulate those chords. People are still trying to figure out how I'm doing it. And I don't even know. It's just something I've been doing since I was 12–13 years old. (Trakin)

Lalah Hathaway not only uses an uncommon style of overtone singing in many of her solo performances but she also provides a fresh use of the vocal style, impressing listeners and inspiring young vocalists to attempt the same feat. Hathaway continues to share her natural gift of multiphonic production with the music world and owes her recent Grammy win to the stylistic rendering of her gift. Hathaway reveals, “I was hopeful this year about winning, mostly because of the multi-phonic component of what I was able to do, which I don't believe has ever been done in popular music” (Trakin).

In conclusion, overtone singing is a method of vocal expression that can vary in style, tradition, significance, and execution for different cultures that utilize it around the world. The Xhosa tribe use a unique style of overtone throat singing to express celebratory moments and dancing traditions. The Inuit presently utilize throat singing to gain a stronger culture identity and connect with others within their culture. In Tuvan culture the throat singing style, khoomei, remains a treasured tradition amongst the people and is the most popular style of overtone singing performed throughout the world. Pioneered by Kongar Ol Ondar and now a mission carried out by Tuvan throat singing ensembles, contemporary vocalists, and musicians, throat singing continues to gain exposure across the world and is steadily becoming a common sound in contemporary music.

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