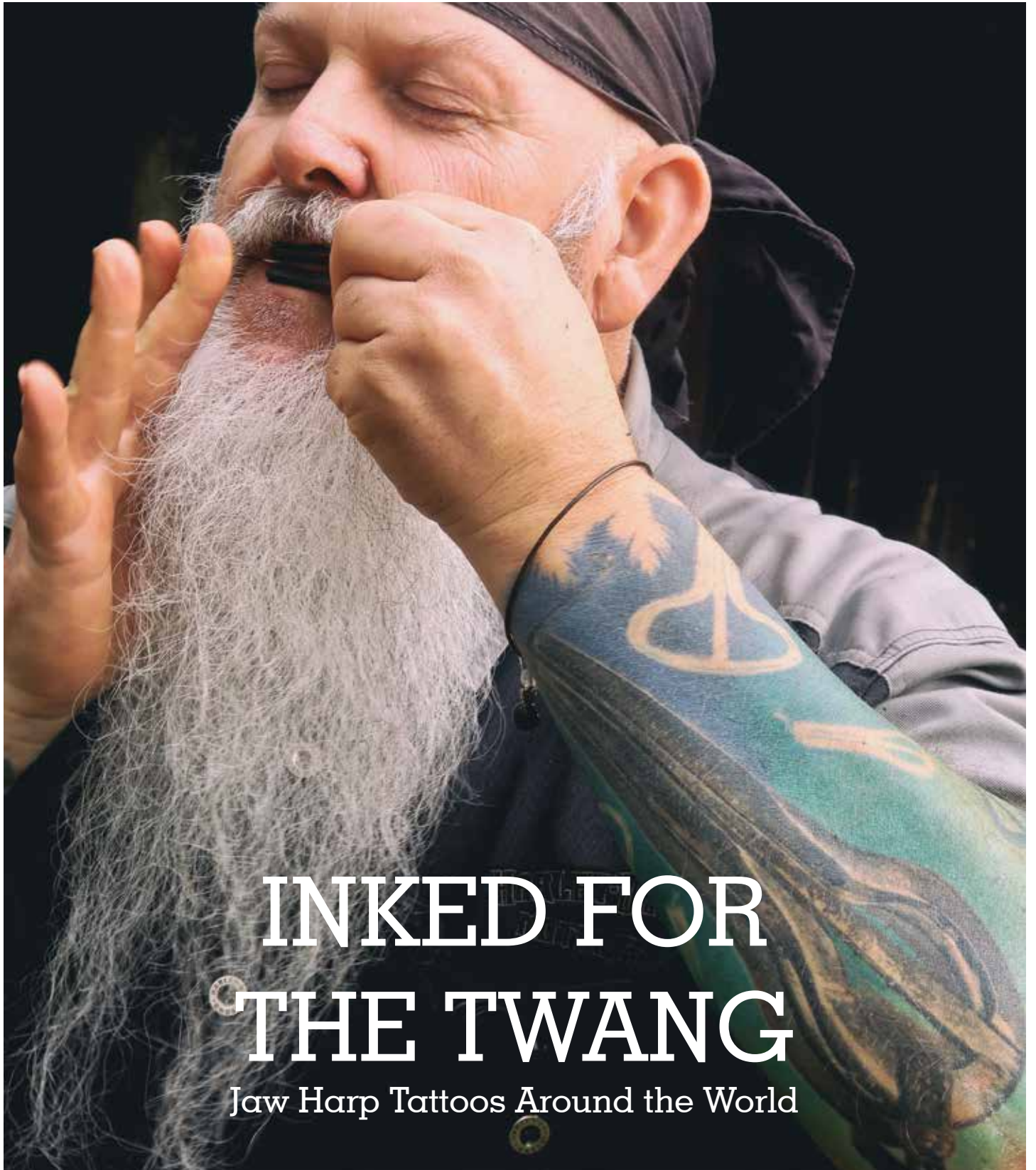


BOING


ISSUE 003
2-2024

Newsletter of the International Jew's Harp Society



INKED FOR
THE TWANG
Jaw Harp Tattoos Around the World

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EDITORIAL



Áron Szilágyi

Editor in Chief

As the year comes to a close, we find ourselves reflecting on what an exciting journey it has been for jaw harp enthusiasts worldwide. From intimate gatherings in Tyrol to vibrant festivals and competitions in Mongolia, Prague, and Sicily's legendary Marranzano World Festival, jaw harp has proven its extraordinary ability to connect kindred spirits across the globe. These events are a meeting ground for unique individuals who share a passion for their favourite instrument. Some even wear their love for the jaw harp on their skin, as showcased in our feature article exploring the world of jaw harp tattoos. For those bitten by the travel bug, the jaw harp offers the perfect excuse to explore. Shi Tou's wonderfully illustrated article takes you to the land of the Yi people in China. Join Sören Birke on his fascinating journey to Yakutia, detailed in his travel diary.

So, why not wrap up your year with a dose of inspiration? Dive into these stories of jaw harp activities and let them ignite your own passion for adventure and music!

My Opinion from Franz

Hypes of the Jew's Harp

At the beginning of the 1960s, I was given a Jew's harp by a pastor from Molln. In the 1970s, it became popular in my brother's alternative circle of friends, who lived near Molln, to accompany the drumming sessions with the Jew's harp. At the time, we were sure that the Jew's harp only existed in the area of Molln. It was only when I happened to experience the 2nd International Jew's Harp Festival in Yakutsk in 1991 that a completely new understanding of this instrument opened up, in the sense of: Wow, there are people in many different cultures of the world who actually take this instrument seriously! Since then, a lot has happened in connection with globalization and the travel of lovers of music and local instruments.

I began to understand that Jew's harp playing has experienced ups and downs in its history, times of great popularity with musicians and audiences, but also times of disinterest and decline. Why is that? Other instruments such as piano or violin were more or less equally popular over the years. It certainly played a major role that for these instruments there exists a huge repertoire of compositions and that these instruments are taught by professional teachers. All this hardly applies to the Jew's harp.

We know nothing about the popularity of the Jew's harp from the time of the earliest finds, a good 2,000 years ago. However, it can be assumed that the Jew's harp was a continuous part of the ethnic music repertoire of the peoples of Asia, probably without much hype. In the Middle Ages, the Jew's harp was a popular pocket instrument among the common people, at least in Europe.

A first hype that crossed social boundaries is documented in the Romantic period. This heyday of the Jew's harp in

the German-speaking world lasted from about 1750 to 1850. The Jew's harp was increasingly taken seriously as a virtuoso instrument. In 1818, 34 masters, 14 assistants and 6 iron rod-blacksmiths produced 1.5 million Jew's harps a year in Molln. Sales were carried out via Vienna, Pest and Trieste, with direct sales to Poland, Russia, Germany and Turkey.

Father Bruno Glatzel played for Emperor Joseph II in April 1764, and his pupil Johann Georg Albrechtsberger composed concertos for Jew's harp, mandora and string orchestra around 1765. Outstanding musicians such as Franz Paula Koch (1761-1830, Salzburg), Heinrich Scheibler (1777-1837, Krefeld), Justinus Kerner (1786-1862, Ludwigsburg) and Karl Eulenstein (1802-1890, Heilbronn) gave solo concerts on the Jew's harp, including in front of personalities such as King Frederick the Great and King George IV, Jean Paul, Goethe, Herder, Klopstock, Lafontaine and Rossini. The repertoire consisted of folk melodies, popular melodies (e.g. arias and dances from





operas by Mozart, Weber), chorales, pieces composed especially for the Jew's harp and free fantasies.

The decline of the Jews' harp began with the invention of the harmonica in the middle of the 19th century. While there were only 7 harmonica makers in Vienna in 1833, there were already 120 in 1856. In addition, there were changed socio-political conditions. The Jew's harp sank into the insignificance of hobbyism for a good 100 years.

It was not until the 60s of the 20th century that the Jew's harp experienced a renaissance again, which continues



to this day. Interestingly, this renaissance took place at the same time in the United States, Europe, and Yakutia/Asia without them knowing about each other. In 1961, the LP "Sonny Terry's New Sound: the jaw harp in blues and folk music" was published by Folkways Records in the US. In 1968, the LP "Khomus" by Ivan Alexeyev was released in Moscow by Melodiya, and in 1971 the LP "La Guimbarde par John Wright" by Le Chant du Monde in Paris. It was the musicologist and Jew's harp aficionado Fred Crane who brought the various threads together, published the first issue of the Jew's Harp Journal in 1982 and organized the first International Jew's Harp Festival Congress in 1984.

The International Jew's Harp Society has been in existence since 1998 and almost every year traditional Jew's harp cultures experience a renaissance. This happened in the 1990s in Norway, Austria, Italy, Sakha-Yakutia and Japan; in the 2010s in the Baltics, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, India and Indonesia; and in the 2020s in Taiwan, China and Mongolia.

So, what are the conditions which promote a hype about the Jew's harp? I think that in the 18th/19th century it was a successful combination of the socio-political context of Romanticism, very talented musicians on the Jew's harp and adaptation of the playing technique to the dominant culture (e.g. the development of the "Wechselspiel"-technique), that made it possible for this minority instrument to flourish. Ethnic minorities and exotic instruments have better opportunities for development in societal phases of emotional dominance, such as in Romanticism; and Romanticism was one of the very successful exports of Germany.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the renaissance of the Jew's harp was partly determined by a new appreciation of cultural traditions and a revival of ethnic folk music after its abuse during fascism, rediscovered by ethnomusicologists and popularized by the hippy movement as well as by experimental artists.

In my opinion, a mixture of interest in ancient folk traditions, insubordinate-alternative inclination and a spiritual-esoteric component played a role in both hypes.

Dear reader, your opinion on this idea is welcome!

Franz Kumpl, President of the IJHS

REGULAR MEETINGS OF BAVARIAN-TYROLEAN JEW'S HARP ENTHUSIASTS

By Ulrike Töchterle & Sigrid Bruckner Juen
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This is the fourth time that enthusiastic Jew's harp players from Bavaria, South Tyrol and North Tyrol have met, twice in Innsbruck, once in Münster and most recently at the "Museum Tiroler Bauernhöfe" in Kramsach (Austria). The gathering was founded by participants of the seminar for pocket instruments, which takes place every year in Schönberg and is organised by the Tiroler Volksmusikverein (Tyrolean Folk Music Association). The connections formed there have created a community of friends centered around the Jew's harp, dedicated to reviving its role in folk music and preserving the rich tradition of this unique plucked idiophone. There is archaeological evidence of the first Jew's harps in Tyrol as early as the 13th and 14th centuries. Although an old, rusty Jew's harp can still be found in many households in the Alpine region today, it was almost completely replaced by the harmonica in the 20th century. Especially the unique playing style, practiced only in the Austrian-Bavarian region and enabling melodies to be performed with multiple tuned Jew's harps, is a tradition that must not be forgotten! Jew's harp meetings, which take place several times a year, are announced on the homepage of the Tiroler Volksmusikverein (link see below).

The next and 5th meeting (Maultrommelstammtisch) will take place on 22.02.2025 from 11:00-16:00 hours at Happinger Hof (Happinger Str. 23-25) in Rosenheim, Bavaria.

Further links:

Medieval Jew's harp playing:
<https://www.ensembletempus.net/>

Archaeological Jew's harp finds in Tyrol: <https://www.uibk.ac.at/archaeologien/forschung/arbeitsgemeinschaften/musikarchaeologie/maultrommeln/>

Announcements Jew's harp meeting: <https://tiroler-volksmusikverein.at/veranstaltungen/>



Meeting in Innsbruck 25-05-2024



Meeting in Innsbruck 03-08-2024



Everyone is welcome!

Impressum

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Become a member! See details on the last page!

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08th December 2024



Marranzano World Festival in Sicily

Interview with Luca Recuperato,
festival director

Luca, what was this year's theme for the MWF and why?

This year's theme was "Ciuri di Canna", which in Sicilian means "Flowers of the Reed." We wanted to celebrate the extraordinary richness of traditional wind instruments, focusing particularly on reed flutes and aerophones from the Mediterranean, India, and other distant cultures. This theme was chosen to highlight the deep cultural connections and mutual influences that unite the musical traditions of these diverse regions. The Sicilian "friscalettu", a virtuosic block-flute was under the spotlight, together with other aerophones from Sicily and flutes from around the world featured in concerts with artists such as Nino Sergio, Nour Eddine, Pejman Tadayon, Carmelo Salemi, and Mysticos, intertwining Mediterranean and Middle Eastern sounds, culminating in the legendary Indian flute, the bansuri, with maestro Hariprasad Chaurasia joined by Debopriya Chatterjee and Niccolò Melocchi.



An important theme coming this year to the foreground has been the link between traditional musical instruments and the safeguarding of natural environments, that has been highlighted by staging many events away from the city and around Etna.

Which cultures and types of sounds of the jew's harp were represented?

As always, the Murrano World Fest provided a platform for jew's harp players and traditions from around the world. This year, we featured several international guests, each with their own unique style. The Ukrainian refugee in Italy, vargan maker and player Yevhen Svatowsky has been guest in residence, together with the younger Amaury Le Barde from Brittany focusing on traditional dances for guimbarde. Also from France hailed the "cosmic" electro-organic style of Ataya. This diverse lineup was complemented by the essential presence of Sicilian murrano players, who have always been a cornerstone of the festival, embodying a vibrant and evolving tradition. The MurranoNite was highlighted by the Hiram Salsano 4tet from from Cilento, with Catello Gargiulo, Marcello De Carolis, and Oreste Forestieri, who brought the energy of southern Italy to the stage, integrating the "tromma de li zingari" with cane flutes, frame drums, battente guitars and more, stirring



the international public into a contagious stomp dance party.

Was there a particular response from the public?

The response from the public at this year's edition was overwhelmingly positive. One of the most memorable moments was the dawn concert featuring the bansuri, performed by maestro Hariprasad Chaurasia, Debopriya Chatterjee, Niccolò Melocchi, and Sanjai Sansa Banik. This event was a first for the festival and provided a deeply moving and unforgettable experience. Many attendees highlighted the fascinating discovery of lesser-known instruments and the opportunity to experience an immersive, multicultural musical journey. Enthusiasm was also reflected in the strong participation in the side events, such as workshops and musician meet-and-greets, especially the masterclass led by Chaurasia, which was highly successful: a week devoted to the bansuri, immersed in the natural beauty of Femminamorta, with participants from all over the world sharing in this unique experience.

Plans for the future?

For the future, we want to continue exploring themes that bring together the musical traditions of different cultures, celebrating the idea of Sicily as meeting point for different cultures of the world. Our goal is to expand the program with new international collaborations and include lesser-known and more innovative musical practices. We aim to further enrich the festival with educational initiatives and projects that give a modern reinterpretation to traditional instruments. We want the Murrano World Fest to increasingly become a point of reference for musicians, enthusiasts, and scholars from all over the globe: a place where musical roots and innovations meet and blend in an engaging and boundaryless dialogue.

We cannot yet unveil the themes for next edition, but we will certainly work also to reinforce the bond between MWF and IJHS. ■

Jaw Harp Tattoos Around the World

by Áron Szilágyi



The jaw harp isn't just a quirky musical relic—it's a soulful muse for tattoo enthusiasts worldwide. From minimalist designs to vibrant cultural tributes, these tattoos tell tales of devotion, tradition, and the twang that resonates within. Discover the inked passion behind the jaw harp.

Inked for the Twang

Tattoos have long been a form of self-expression, carrying stories, passions, and identity in every line of ink. From intricate sleeves that tell life stories to minimalist symbols etched with profound meaning, tattoos are deeply personal—a declaration to the world of what resonates most within. For some, it's their love of music, and for a unique group of individuals, that love centers on our small, ancient instrument: the jaw harp.



Lahiru, Sri Lanka

We all know that jaw harp players are a breed apart. Known for our devotion to the craft and often a bit eccentric in the best way, and we are deeply connected to our instrument. And for some, that connection is so profound, they choose to etch their passion permanently onto their skin. But why? What drives someone to immortalize the humble jaw harp in ink?

At its core, the jaw harp is more than just an instrument; it's a bridge between cultures, a portal to ancient traditions, and a

unique voice that speaks directly to the soul. For many players, it's not just about the music but about identity. The jaw harp is often seen as an extension of one's personality: quirky, resonant, and undeniably individual.

When you meet someone with a jaw harp tattoo, you're often encountering someone with a story to tell. Some ink their favorite instrument to honor a mentor who introduced them to the jaw harp. Others choose bold, symbolic designs to celebrate the universality of the instrument across cultures. And then there are those whose tattoos are purely whimsical—a playful nod to the



Heloisa Helena Rodrigues, Brasil



joy this tiny instrument brings into their lives.

From minimalist black lines to intricate, full-color masterpieces, jaw harp tattoos are as diverse as the people who wear them. But the common thread is passion. These tattoos are not just body art; they're badges of devotion, symbols of a love that resonates far deeper than the surface of the skin.

I've received some truly remarkable images and heartfelt stories of jaw harp tattoos from across the globe. I'm sharing these in this article. Yet, I know this brief glimpse barely scratches the surface of the incredible diversity and creativity found in the thousands of jaw harp tattoos and designs worldwide.

So, if you ever spot a jaw harp tattoo in the wild, take a moment to ask about it. Chances are, there's an incredible story behind that ink—a story of connection, culture, and the irresistible charm of one of the world's most fascinating instruments.

Photos:

- 1 - Rohan Gear, New Zealand
- 2 - Bruno Oliveira, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
- 3 - Frederic Riman, Krakow, Poland
- 4 - Mike Sieber, Berlin, Germany
- 5 - Unknown. Viktor Belov-Shchus collection, St. Petersburg, Russia
- 6 - Unknown
- 7 - Unknown, Georgia

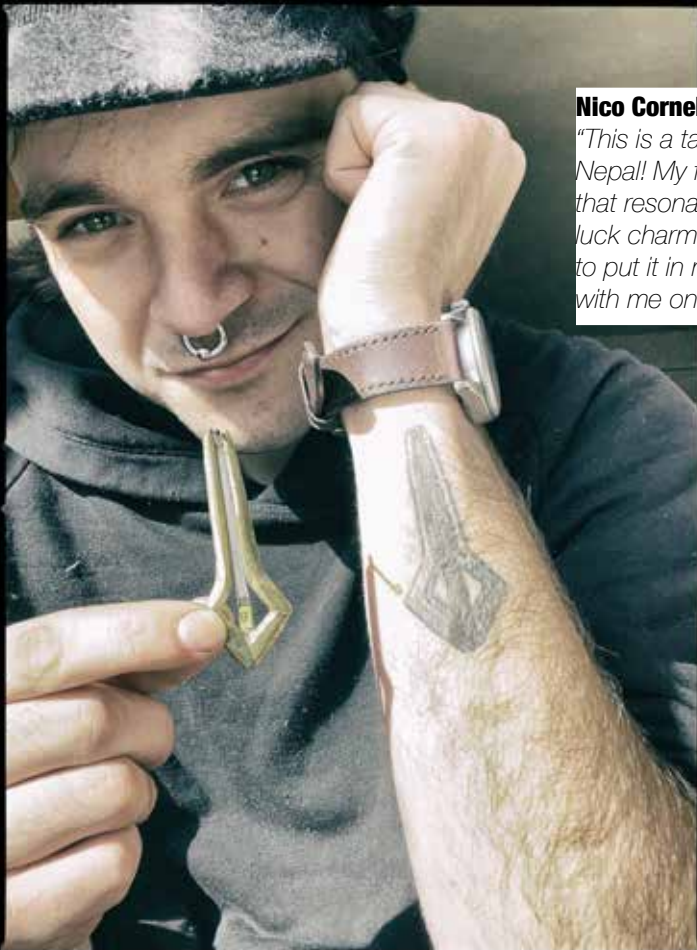
Bruno Feytis, Bordeaux, France (the lead picture of this article on page 10)

"I discovered the jaw harp about ten years ago and was instantly amazed by how such a simple instrument could produce such mesmerizing sounds. I bought one, started playing, and soon realized it was more than just music—it was a healing tool and a journey, blending sound, breath, and vibration.

I later created Ataya, a one-man live techno-trance project where the jaw harp takes center stage. I love making people dance, connect, and release joy through this unique blend of ancient sounds and modern rhythms.

Last summer, during my first European tour, I decided to get a tattoo of the first jaw harp I ever made with my friend Yvy Barbier, a talented maker and player. This moment marked both the creation of a cherished instrument and the forging of a deep friendship.

On my 34th birthday, I got the tattoo during a busking festival in Ferrara, Italy—a powerful symbol of my dedication to this music. That same night, I played one of my best gigs, making the day unforgettable."



Nico Cornelius from Eugene OR, United States

"This is a tattoo of my favorite murchunga jaw harp from Nepal! My friend tattooed it on me years ago. It's the jaw harp that resonates with me the most and I consider it my good luck charm. I carry it with me all the time, and when I forget to put it in my pocket I can rest assured that I'll always have it with me on my wrist!"



Andrew Kozak, Kyiv, Ukraine

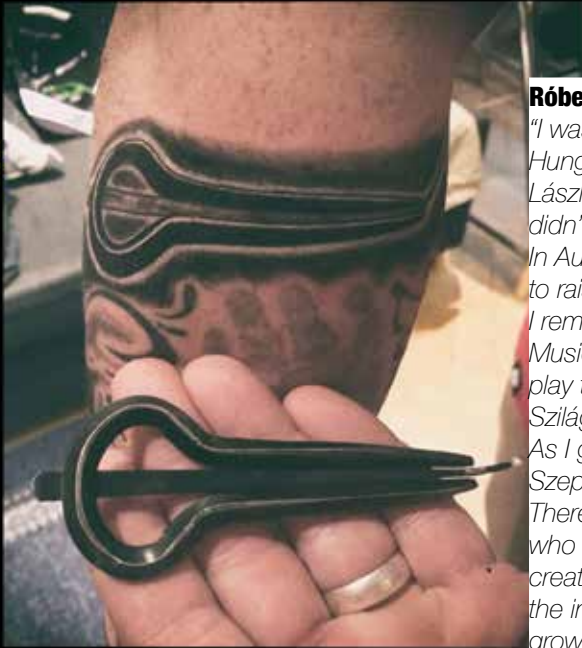
"This is a photo of the original size of my first musical instrument, which I made with my own hands, and which opened for me the magical world of shamanic, musical instruments, crows are my totem symbol in the Slavic tradition, that's why I decided to make this tattoo in memory about that!"

Kris Jacobsen, Edmonton, AB, Canada

"I love wood and I love harps (likely a stinging mechanism), and I wanted a harp to show people when I would ask if they had any at antique shows/malls etc. I took the picture, surprisingly a silver harp appears the best! Olive wood cutting board for background. The tattoo has my dad's initial sign on it as my brother and I got our first harps in memory of him years after he died.

On a sad note my tattoo artist is not working ever again because he had a mental incident and a little girl lost her life."





Róbert Hriňo, Szepesi, Slovakia

"I was born in 1978. During my primary school years in Szepesi, in Upper Hungary, I encountered the jaw harp for the first time. One of my classmates, László Remák, brought it to school. I managed to play it, but at the time, it didn't spark much interest in me. This remained the case until August 2014. In August 2014, my son Maxim was born. From the very beginning, I wanted to raise him with music—that was my decision! But where should I start? Then I remembered the jaw harp. I ordered my first one for just 5 euros from the Musicer website. After that, I started searching online for videos about how to play the jaw harp. The first one I watched was an instructional video by Áron Szilágyi, which helped me quickly learn the basics. As I got better, my friend Zoltán Dobos and I founded a group called the Szepesi Jaw Harp Players. We performed at local events and festivals. There's also a fun story connected to my jaw harp journey. My brother-in-law, who is a tattoo artist in Scotland, visited us while on a trip home. I asked him to create a jaw harp-themed tattoo for me. By that time, I had grown so fond of the instrument that I had started collecting them—and my collection has been growing ever since. The tattoo was completed, and I'm very proud of it. One of my most memorable experiences was participating in the Global Vibes Song music video in 2020. In 2023, I also competed in the OpenMajk23 competition."



József Kardos, Hódmezővásárhely, Hungary (also the front cover of this edition of BOING)

"Living on a farm in southeastern Hungary, I work as a potter, crafting clay bells. My passion for the Jew's harp began in the 1980s when a motorcycling friend introduced me to the instrument. After buying one at a local shop, I played folk tunes for fun but eventually set it aside.

Years later, I joined a Jew's harp circle led by István Juhász, which reignited my interest. This led to founding the Révülés Jew's Harp Trio, where I performed for a decade. Music has always been central to my life, from rock band stages to personal recovery—after a major heart surgery, my first act was playing the Jew's harp.

Five years ago, I commemorated my love for the instrument with a tattoo of a Yakut khomus, purchased from Nikolay Shishigin in Kecskemét, followed by many others made by Zoltán Szilágyi.

For me, the Jew's harp is a symbol of creativity, resilience, and life's rhythm."



Porky Miller, Waseca, MN, United States

"I've played the didgeridoo for over a decade. After learning circular breathing and improving my skills, I wanted to master beatboxing through the didge. Researching and watching Airtist on YouTube inspired me. Eventually, I found a beginner model at a local store. After some practice—and a few injuries like a chipped tooth and a bloody tongue—I upgraded to a quality instrument. A few years later, I became the lead organizer of the North American Jaw Harp Festivals, hosting events in 2017, 2018, and 2019 with a small team, including Jamie Bebb and Neptune Chapotin. We've paused but plan to return in 2025. Jamie began crafting harps, sending me one of his first for feedback. This tattoo represents that harp. We became business partners in 2021 when he launched The Harpery. The tattoo artist, Amanda Kendall, deserves a mention!"



Kai Schiller, Berlin, Germany

"Today I got my first tattoo, a dotwork by Alex Subkoff (instagram: @feathercatcher.art) - thank you so much!
It had to be a khomus of course - the jew's harp is a fundamental part of my life, and so the decision to perpetuate it on my skin was just logical."

Rossano Randazzo, Sicily, Italy

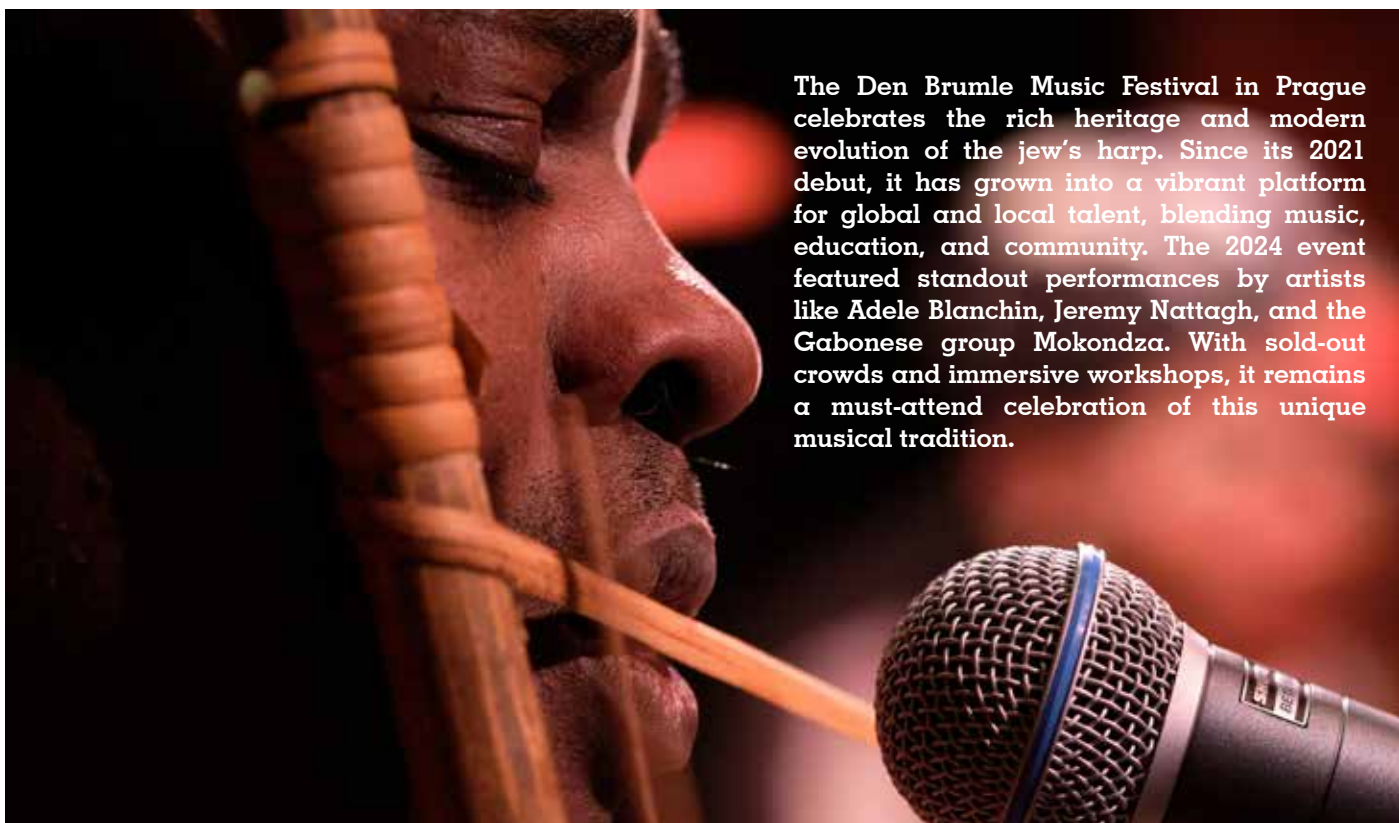
"The meaning behind the tattoo: the jaw harp has been not only an instrument but also a travel companion. Especially during my solo trips in nature. It helps me center myself, detach from my thoughts, appreciate solitude, and become more in tune with my body.
I got this tattoo after returning from a trip to northern Spain. I had spent a week in the semi-desert area of Bardenas Reales, with only a notebook, a camera, and my jaw harp."



DEN BRUMBLE MUSIC FESTIVAL

TEXT BY RADOSLAV FULIER

PHOTOS BY PATRIK JURSA



The Den Brumle Music Festival in Prague celebrates the rich heritage and modern evolution of the jew's harp. Since its 2021 debut, it has grown into a vibrant platform for global and local talent, blending music, education, and community. The 2024 event featured standout performances by artists like Adele Blanchin, Jeremy Nattagh, and the Gabonese group Mokondza. With sold-out crowds and immersive workshops, it remains a must-attend celebration of this unique musical tradition.

Den brumle is a music festival based in Prague, Czech Republic. The event, which the zealous local jew's harp players now, after its fourth year, started to name "traditional", was born amid the covid crisis in 2021. Therefore, already the very first year of this gathering of Czech jew's harp enthusiasts tested the strength and the sincerity of the intent to create a unique national event.

The intention, vision of the event is very clear from the beginning – to create a fully-fledged, full-size complex music festival dedicated to various aspects of jew's harp. To integrate fun, education and the community in a safe space into one complex unit. Very humble, we started from the scratch. Yet, each year we proceed closer to materialize our vision.

Firstly, with regard to music, we aim to bring the best out of the jew's harp world scene to the Czech Republic and send the message about the best of the domestic scene to the outside world. In the Czech Republic, there is definitely a lack of awareness of the diversity of world's jew's harp traditions and the variety of possible jew's harp use in the music. The festival should signal to the locals that there is much going on in the jew's harp scene and the instrument still lives a busy life and is developing every day. Secondly, we strongly support the female artists. There are countries where the jew's harp is considered a purely "female" musical instrument. And others, where playing the jew's harp is a "male" affair. In our country, male players are much more visible. However, in our opinion, this only distorts the fact that there are so many female players in the Czech Republic! So the presumption that jew's harp playing is not very widespread among the Czech women, is false. Likeable, the opposite is true, Czech women play a lot. That is why we try to provide females with the opportunity to proudly present their piece of work on stage. We also support young/beginner players and instrument makers in their efforts by providing workshops, presentations and instrument market as a platform, where they can meet and share with other players and customers to develop their skills.

The highlight of the festival is a live music concert of foreign and domestic performers. We think that the only proper way how to experience the best jew's harp players as well as to absorb the essence of foreign music tradition is to see the performance and to meet the artists by person. Remaining a rather small familylike event, close contact between audience and performers is possible. On the other hand, the number of spectators is rising steadily. In 2023 it exceeded 200 persons and was sold-out. A big contribution to this was the Hungarian group Zoord, which, as it turned out, is well-known in the Czech Republic jew's harp community and attracted a lot of spectators.

This year, the event was held on 30 November at Kampus Hybernská, which hosted all the festival seasons. The headliners of the festival were Adele Blanchin and





Jeremy Nattagh, a French multiinstrumental acoustic duo. Adele is a long-term performer and a well-known jew's harp and didgeridoo female player, who also sings. She abounds with positive female energy. Together with Jeremy, a very skilled professional handpan/drum player they created a soothing atmosphere filled with peace and love. Therefore they instantly became the darlings of the audience. This French duo was complemented by an electronic music pioneer - Meisterjaan from Estonia, who has been active for more than ten years now. His performance was very different from the previous. Electronic based, much more straight-forward, yet playful and very complex. The use of simple repetitive jew's harp rhythms and modular synthesizer, as well as glittering 70's style outfit created a retro party feeling. The end of performance was quite unique, since Meisterjaan and his spouse Simona played one Vietnamese dan moi by their two mouths put on the each opposite side of the instrument. This is called a double-mouth technique and is very intimate and uniting.

A very special performance featuring traditional Gabonese mouth bow mungongo was presented by a group called Mokondza. The band includes Tembo, his son Mbela and Kuma (those are the traditional Gabonese names) who now live in France and the Czech Republic. Two of them are former members of a better known band called Mbeng N'Tam, which toured the world. Mungongo is considered to be about five thousand years old and is a sacred instrument in bwiti traditional spiritual movement, which still being practiced in Gabon

and Cameroon. Certain musical compositions, usually having a hidden secret meaning and symbolism, are performed exclusively by the individuals initiated in compliance with bwiti traditional proceedings. The same applies to a white and red facepaint and traditional Central African folklore clothes, which are used during ceremonies. Performing such a ritualistic music and fully understanding its meaning remains closed to the outsiders, who are only allowed to watch. Nonetheless, to reveal partially the secrets of mungongo to the audience, the performance was started by a 15-minute presentation on the bwiti spiritual tradition and the use of mungongo in ceremonies by Tembo, who is a senior n'ganga – medicineman. The performance itself consisted of playing mungongo with local percussions, dancing and chanting.

The two other performers in the festival were soloists. Varganum is a complex experimental music project by Nikolai Sobolev, who is a skilled jew's harp player now living in Slovakia, well-known to the IJHS member (he is a member himself). By virtuoso playing the jew's harp Varganum creates a stream of sound that captivates you, sweeps you away and transports you to other dimensions. Like a mysterious party hosted by aliens, where the sounds of jaw harps mingle with unusual effects creating an atmosphere that is both enchanting and trance-inducing. Czech Technofolklyra, who started-out the festival was a nice surprise. Her rather simple electronic based music combined with beautiful mystic chants and ethnic elements created an interesting



contemplative atmosphere, when one could immerse into his inner world for a few minutes to tune up for the experience which was about to come.

The educational and craftsmanship aspects of the festival were materialized in workshops focusing on various theoretical and practical aspects of jew's harp, including playing techniques. This season, there was a very intensive breath playing techniques workshop led by Nikolaj Sobolev. Also a DIY workshop on producing Balinese genggong led by Meisterjaan was held. This workshop turned out very well since all the participants were able to produce a playable instrument. Both events were fully filled.

Den brumle derives from a dedicated jew's harp fans. What is the story of folks that make the audience of the festival? During the last five years, I spoke to dozens, even hundreds of Czechs asking about their experience with the jew's harp. Among them were my colleagues, friends, neighbors as well as music, artisanal and hobby event attendees. Even random individuals I met by chance. Based on these conversations I came to a quite surprising conclusion. Jew's harp, called „brumle“ or „grumle“ in the Czech Republic, is an instrument familiar to a vast majority of Czechs regardless of social status or education. Most of the asked persons had stated that they had heard the sound of jew's harp before. Many of them have a relative or friend who played to them. A small part of Czech population even played the instrument personally. Some of them play regularly and they managed to develop their own specific style. Of course, social networks also play a determinative role in raising awareness of jew's harp. Overall, jew's harp is perceived positively by absolute majority of population.

In contradiction to what was said about the overall status of the instrument there is very little publicity given to the jew's harp. Generally speaking the mainstream culture and media consider jew's harp as being something anachronistic or even weird. In Moravia, the eastern part of the country, the situation is slightly better, as the jew's harp is known especially thanks to its occasional appearance in present Moravian folklore music events. For the people outside folklore community, it is a means of shamanic or meditation practices, a funny musical

instrument that is used almost exclusively by new-age or modern hippie subculture or in historicizing music and events to boost the feeling of antiquity. Truth be, those are the events where one can encounter jew's harp quite regularly, much more often than at a folklore event. It is thus not surprising, that the core of the Den brumle festival audience comes from mentioned subcultures. Another interesting group of jew's harp and festival fans comes from music therapy professional community. Music therapy has a long history in the Czech Republic and is taught at a prestigious state university of Olomouc city. Therefore it enjoys a great respectability and widespread publicity. Also a number of musicians, either professional or amateur, attended last year's festival. A very specific group of supporters are the immigrants from the states or regions where jew's harp remains a part of modern culture like Sakha-Yakutia, Tuva, Mongolia and few others. These people are not affected by the local jew's harp paradigms and bring a unique view on the jew's harp. When performing with jew's harp, they greatly help to broaden the Czech population perspective and feelings about the instrument. Czechs are always curious and eager to discover new things from abroad.



Den brumle festival aims to create a platform which can serve as a connecting point for all the described jew's harp fans as well as curious individuals and to offer to all of them a chance to absorb the jew's harp inspiration and know-how regardless of the level of the knowledge and skills. This platform should be modern, open to everyone and bring the world's best performers and significant personalities to Prague. The philosophy of Den brumle develops from the ancient Czech concept, according to which the jew's harp is folk instrument, an instrument of masses and therefore the event is set in a pleasant welcoming atmosphere and positive mood. It is informal and party-like, yet professional. This is done also in order to catch the interest of the public to promote the beauty of jew's harp music and its beneficial effect on the human physical and psychical health. ■



Remembering
Gorkharam

Text and photo by Neptune Chapotin

Master Gorkharam, a beloved Morchang maker from Rajasthan, has passed, leaving behind a legacy of finely crafted mouth harps. His workshop, set in the desert, was where his rhythmic hammering shaped gentle, resonant sounds. Today, his son Viraram and grandson Junjaram continue his craft, preserving his artistry and warmth.

Earlier this year we lost Master Gorkharam, one of India's elder Morchang makers. A blacksmith who forged Mouth Harps in the desert of Rajasthan, Gorkharam was a jolly figure with cheery cheeks and a wispy grey beard, wearing at all times a signature mustard-yellow turban lightly darkened with soot from his forge.

When I first visited Gorkharam in 2012, he was sitting on the ground in the deep shade of his workshop with a round tray of Morchangs at his feet. Tools and bits of metal lay scattered in soot-saturated dust as he worked on perfecting the final touches of a batch of Iron Morchangs he had produced especially for the World Harps Collection. Carefully testing each one for its desired quality of sound, he held them up to the bright daylight, making light adjustments to the gaps by tapping their frames with a square hammer over a heavy iron anvil.

Gorkharam worked alongside his son Viraram in a simple workshop with a splendid view and a fresh airy breeze amidst the desert heat, under a rudimentary shade structure built of branches and gunny sacks perched high on a little hill beside their house.

During Gorkharam's final years, it was Viraram who typically handled the heavy hammering, filing, and forging, leaving the final touches for the perfect sound to the hands of the Master.

Gentle, responsive, and warm in tone, Gorkharam's Morchangs are always such a pleasure to play.

Now it is Viraram who continues to produce the same line of Morchangs along with the help of Gorkharam's fifteen year old grandson Junjaram, who also has already become quite skilled at producing his own unique little Morchangs with delightful sounds.

On my third and most recent trip to visit the makers of Rajasthan in November 2023 after a gap of more than a decade, I was grateful for an opportunity to observe

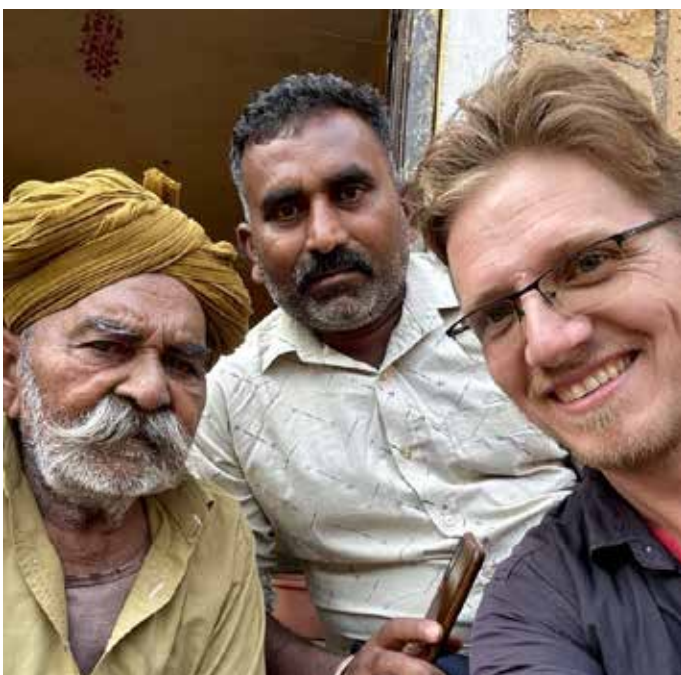




Gorkharam at work a few more times. With desert hands weathered from a lifetime of blacksmithing and his characteristic wholesome smile lingering behind his arching mustache, this time he was working on setting the tongues into a brand new batch of Brass and Stainless Steel Tailless Morchang.

One evening, we spent a peaceful moment sitting together on the front slab of his house at sunset, overlooking the street in silence listening to the evening sounds of village life. Gently smoking on a leaf-rolled bidi and letting it repeatedly die out before relighting it again, this pause with a view at the end of the day was Gorkharam's daily routine, perched watchful and thoughtful in the evening light.

Remembering Gorkharam's masterful skill and his cheerful, humble presence after a life of action and daring adventure, we are fortunate enough to be left with his Morchang, his legacy. ■



The Yi Tribe's Jew's Harp

THE EMBEDDED CODE IN CULTURE SOUNDSCAPE

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY SHI TOU
TRANSLATED BY YIBO





The jew's harp, an ancient "living fossil" of music, resonates deeply within the Yi tribe's cultural soul. A tool for love, memory, and connection, its melodies encode emotions that words often cannot. Reverberating through history, it bridges the sacred and the personal, weaving sound into the fabric of Yi identity.



The jew's harp is an ancient instrument, often referred to as a musical "living fossil" of humanity. It played a vital role in early human history, a time when poetry, music, shamanism, and dance were intertwined. With its ability to mimic speech and convey messages, the jew's harp holds a unique place in human culture. Its distinct vibrations can imitate natural sounds—like birds, animals, or the rustling wind through trees—enabling people to express their emotions, whether working in the fields or on mountaintops.

Since ancient times, the jew's harp has been deeply connected to love stories. Young lovers would encode their affections into the sound, using the jew's harp to communicate. As the reeds resonate and the sound waves travel, those familiar with its "code" could quickly decode the message. In the Qing Dynasty's book "Illustrated Customs of Indigenous Tribes", it describes how Taiwan's indigenous people used the jew's harp in courtship: "The unmarried ones pluck the harp to woo each other. Holding the bow at their lips, they emit sounds through their teeth, exchanging calls and responses. If the two are in harmony, they become husband and wife." Another text, the "Classic of Poetry" from 7th-century BC China, compares sweet talk to the sound of the jew's harp with the phrase "Clever words are like reeds."

For the Yi people in China, the Jew's harp holds a special place in our hearts, with its three reeds symbolizing the father, child, and mother. The Yi jew's harp produces sounds that bridge speech and music, creating a celestial resonance. It celebrates joy, expresses homesickness and sorrow, conveys love, and even relieves loneliness.

Historically, every Yi woman carried a Jew's harp. Among the different subgroups of the Yi tribe, the instrument is known by various names. In total, there are 36 different types of bamboo and copper jew's harps in Yi culture. In the Liangshan Yi dialect, it's called "Luo Guo" (ㄌㄨㄛˊ ㄍㄨㄛˊ) or "Huohu" (ㄏㄨㄛˊ ㄏㄨˊ); in the Chuxiong Yi dialect, it's known as "La Pa"; the Sani Yi people calls it "Mo Xian"; the Limi Yi people refers to it as "Duo La/De"; and in Guizhou, it's known as "Mao Qu." While it was once a shamanic tool, over time, the jew's harp became an instrument played mainly by women, representing motherhood and femininity. One ancient folk song, "The Jew's Harp that Talks", passed down for thousands of years, expresses a profound longing for a mother, likening her to heroes while lamenting the passage of time and her inevitable aging.

Due to cultural norms, the Yi people tend to be reserved in expressing emotions. Interestingly, there are no words for "I love you" in the Yi language. Instead, emotions are encoded in music, particularly in the sounds of the jew's harp, where linguistic codes are deeply embedded in its melody and the cultural soundscape of Yi tribe.



Shi Tou: Yi Tribe Jew's Harp Maker, Performer and Collector

As a child of the Yi tribe, I grew up in a Yi village in China, deeply immersed in our culture and influenced by my mother's jew's harp. Later in life, I had the opportunity to attend school and was exposed to cultures beyond the Yi tribe. After graduating from university in 2008, I moved to the city and adopted a busy lifestyle. Gradually, I began to feel lost and disconnected from my roots. This led me to quit my job and embark on a search for my cultural identity, with the jew's harp becoming a lifelong passion.

In 2010, I began looking for traditional jew's harp makers and performers from different ethnic groups. After extensive research, I learned about one of the greatest jew's harp makers of the Yi tribe in China, E Di La Se. Since childhood, I had listened to his story as a maker and performer on the radio, so I decided I would find him! I drove alone across the country for three days to his county and went straight to the county's Cultural Office. I spoke with the director and expressed my desire to find the maestro. The director was surprised, knowing most university graduates would prefer to spend their energy looking for jobs or romantic interests instead. Still, he agreed to take me to the maestro the next day.

We set off early, stocking up at the local market. The journey was long and weary, especially during this rainy season. After five hours of driving and two hours of hiking, we finally arrived at the maestro's village, utterly exhausted. Yet, I was filled with excitement—I had found the person of my dreams! However, since we came from regions with different Yi dialects, we could only partially understand each other. In fact, I was met with silence and suspicion because the maestro's family couldn't comprehend why someone from far away would seek to learn a craft that their own children had long abandoned.



The entire village gathered, slaughtering and preparing a feast to welcome the director, who was well-known in the county. Meanwhile, I felt alone, rejected, and sad. Nevertheless, I remained determined to learn the craft of jew's harp making.

That afternoon, the courtyard was filled with villagers celebrating, toasting drinks, and singing. As night fell, people began to leave, and soon only the director and





From that day on, I herded sheep during the day while the maestro taught me the art of jew's harp crafting every early morning and late evening. I stayed at his house for two months, learning the entire process of making jew's harps. We were both extremely pleased, and our relationship flourished. As our hearts grew closer, we began to share thoughts on everything. My maestro became both a mentor and a friend. Whenever his children returned to the village from hard labour work in the city, he would say I was just another one of his children. Now, we are like a family, all because the jew's harp truly connected us.

Together, we made a promise to pass on the Yi people's tradition of crafting jew's harps through our generations. My maestro, E Di La Se, is now a designated inheritor of the "Intangible Cultural Heritage" of the Yi tribe jew's harp in China. Our journey is just beginning! We share a strong bond and a long path ahead. Whenever I have the time, I rush to his house to continue learning and exchanging cultural ideas for the love of the jew's harp. ■

I remained at the maestro's house. The director, half-drunk, suddenly remembered my purpose: to learn the craft! He discussed with the maestro the possibility of taking me on as an apprentice. Although the maestro verbally agreed, I sensed his reluctance—perhaps because he didn't know me well. The next day the director departed, leaving me alone at the maestro's house. I tried to communicate that I genuinely want to learn the art of making jew's harp. "The old artisans in my hometown who crafted jew's harps have all passed away!" I explained. Despite my efforts, I still encountered resistance, so I engaged him in various discussions about crafting jew's harp throughout the day.

After a week of helping on his farm—feeding pigs and cooking—the maestro slowly began to initiate conversations with me. During the busy harvest season, I spent long days working in the fields and even offered to help herd his sheep. At first, he didn't have trust and followed me closely as I herded. Then, one day in the mountains, while we were with the sheep, he turned to me and in a serious tone, announced he would accept me as his apprentice. I was over the moon!





The Voice of the Great Steppe

About the Khel-Khuur Competition-Festival in Mongolia

*Text and photos by
Dmitry Byastinov*

At the invitation of the head of the Society of Mongolian Nomadic Khomus Players Ayush Munkhchimeg, I visited the First National Competition-Festival “*Hel-Khuur*” in Mongolia from July 30 to August 6 this year. This event was the first competition-festival “*Khel Khuur*” in the history of Mongolia.

Today, thanks to archaeological excavations, the world is making more and more new discoveries about the rich history and culture of the peoples of the Great Steppe. One of such discoveries, which gave the world and musicology a unique find, occurred in 1989. In the area of Morin Tolgoi (Horse’s Head), the archaeological team, when opening a burial of the Xiongnu era, found there an ancient bone khomus (“*yasyn khuur*”, *idioglotic*). The approximate dating of the archaeological find dates back to the 2nd-3rd centuries BC, which allows it to be attributed to the ten oldest musical instruments of this type in the world.



Before participating in this Mongolian competition-festival, we did not attach much importance to this find. However, after the competition, I got the impression that, perhaps, for 2500 thousand years, the performance on this instrument existed in the steppe part of Asia continuously? Due to the availability of other materials, thanks to the Great Silk Road, the material of the tool was gradually transformed into bamboo? Due to the current growth of interest in this musical instrument in Mongolia, we cannot say with certainty that this is so, but one of the tasks of this competition-festival, I think, is precisely this.

Bamboo khomus, in Mongolian “*khulsan khuur*”, is still part of the mass culture of the Mongolian people. During the competition, performance on “*khulsan khuur*” was quite often demonstrated by both soloists and ensembles. On this trip, we were able to see not only the unique musical instrument of the nomadic people of the *Xiongnu*, but also had the good fortune to meet the performer and maker of musical instruments (“*khulsan khuur*”) - 82-year-old Mrs. Tserenmaam (or Tselengmaam).

To the layman, the work performed by Mrs. Tserenmaam may seem to be nothing more than a demonstration of

sound production, but she has been playing the “*khulsan khuur*” for more than 70 years. In the past, all Mongolian children in the steppes were the main helpers in the household, and Mrs. Tserenmaam was no exception, in order not to fall asleep while grazing sheep, she played this instrument - and so it went on day after day. This is how the 1000-year-old repertoire of “*khulsan khuur*” was honed, and we have yet to work on the study of this richest repertoire. The motives for performing at the “*khulsan khuur*” at the competition-festival were based on the motifs of national Mongolian songs.

In terms of the existence of the Mongolian “*tumor khuur*” (iron khomus), historical references are just beginning to form. Thanks to the head of the Society of Mongolian Nomadic Khomusists, Ayush Munkhchimeg, in 2019, the world of khomus learned about the performer of the “*tumor khuur*” Bizyaa Khuuhenduu, who demonstrated a bright manner of playing, rich in overtones, on the Mongolian “*tumor khuur*”. Later, Mrs. Ayush Munkhchimeg introduced us to other Mongolian performers on “*tumor khuur*”, representatives of the same generation as Bizyaa Khuuhenduu, but from other regions (aimags) of Mongolia. The approximate age of the performers ranged from 80 years and above, but the most interesting thing is that their main work in the repertoire was always a composition called “*Camel*”. Perhaps Mrs. Ayush Munkhchimeg in her research stumbled upon one of the local performing traditions, which is extremely important for its further study and revival. During the competition-festival, this style and manner of playing was demonstrated by a young and



promising performer Batnyam Batbayar on “*khel khuur*” (the general name of musical instruments in the form of khomus).

Since our cooperation with Mrs. Ayush Munkhchimeg, we have always been working to preserve traditions both in the performance and in the manufacture of musical instruments. And the past competition was no exception, the main requirement of Ayush Munkhchimeg when drawing up the competition Regulations was to continue working in this vein. Thanks to this, the contestants were as clear as possible how to prepare for their competitive performances, which is an important factor and confirms the competence of the organizer. During the International Congress-Festival of Khomus (trump) in Molln, Austria in 1998, the highly respected Frederick Crane touched upon the problem of the possible loss of original styles of performing on khomus among peoples due to cultural globalization. In their competitive performances in Mongolia, the overwhelming majority of participants presented their performances, inspired by traditional Mongolian songs. And I think that in terms of reviving their traditional musical culture, they are moving in the right direction.

The Museum and Center of Khomus of the Peoples of the World is the only institution in the world that has state support, continuously engaged in research, popularization and preservation of this unique musical instrument. Unfortunately, there are no other similar institutions in the world with such a status, but we would be glad if similar cultural centers appeared in other parts of this vast world; that in the vastness of the Great Steppe there must be such a cultural center with state support. This is facilitated by the species diversity of “*hal khuur*”, preserved national traditions, archaeologically confirmed ancient instruments, and, finally, a lively interest and love for the instrument on the part of the younger generation. ■



SAKHA YAKUTIA

OUR TRAVEL JOURNAL

PART 1

by Sören Birke and Mareike Bader

In the depths of winter, we embarked on a bold journey to Yakutia, Siberia, where the delicate sounds of the khomus thrive against the harsh backdrop of the frozen tundra. This travel journal recounts how a shared passion for music and cultural exchange overcame geopolitical tensions, subzero temperatures, and logistical challenges. From Berlin to Moscow and beyond, we met kindred spirits, immersed ourselves in Yakutian traditions, and discovered the enduring power of the khomus—a beacon of peace in turbulent times.



In autumn 1999, a few mouth harp enthusiasts and I gathered in Mareike Bader's kitchen to establish the "Berlin Jew's Harp Friends' Circle." How did that happen? I, Sören Birke, can't quite recall when I first heard a Jew's harp in my life. Simply put, for at least 30 years, the Jew's harp played no role in my life whatsoever. I'm a harmonica player. It wasn't until I started exploring the history of the harmonica that I stumbled across the Jew's harp. Today, I understand the nearly 3,000-year history that led to the harmonica. (1) In the history of instruments with free-reed tongues, the Jew's harp plays a central role. However, the historical connections between the Jew's harp, sheng, organ, harmonium, harmonica, accordion, shruti box, and many others remain largely unexplored. This is an area ripe for pioneering musicological research. I had the good fortune to curate and organize two festivals on this topic in Berlin. The festival "ZUNGENSCHLAG" took place twice, in 1996 and 1999, which set everything in motion. It was through this that I met my friend and musical partner, Gerd Conradt. He is a filmmaker and a passionate khomus player. (Khomus is the Yakutian name for Jew's harp) (2) Gerd spent some time teaching German in Yakutia and coordinated the concert tours of Spiridon Shishigin and Ivan Alekseyev in Germany, which led to the creation of CDs and films. Together, Gerd and I formed the duo "Prussian Blue," an improvisational performance act, also using Jew's harps. We performed at the "6th International World Jew's Harp Festival and Congress" in Amsterdam in 2006 (3) and at the "7th International World Jew's Harp Festival and Congress" in Yakutia in 2011. (4) (5) This is where my connection with Spiridon Shishigin became increasingly close and warm. We became friends, a long-distance friendship spanning over 10,000 kilometers. Spiridon regularly came to Berlin for concerts and workshops I organized.

In 2014, Spiridon encouraged me to organize the "9th International World Jew's Harp Festival and Congress" in Berlin in 2022. (6) How was I supposed to do that? Without funds or a network? But I was determined to make it happen. Over eight years, I saved about 50,000 euros through my business and found perfect partners in Franz Kuml and Aron Szilagyi from the "International Jew's Harp Society." Just months after the COVID lockdowns, this festival brought around 120 Jew's harp players from all over the world to Berlin. After this festival, Spiridon renewed his invitation for Mareike and me to come to Yakutia. Could a dream come true? We started planning a trip for March/April 2024. Spiridon's daughter, Maria "Masha" Shishigina-Palsson, lives with her family in Delitzsch near Leipzig, and she helped us prepare for the journey, acting as our guide. We were set on going in the winter. How do people live in temperatures as low as -50°C? Has playing the khomus become so significant because of this? Images danced through our minds: endless, inhospitable landscapes, ice, snow, cold, darkness outside. People sitting by a fire, listening to the delicate, otherworldly sounds of the khomus a peaceful moment. But the world rarely grants such peace. We had just emerged from the pandemic, and new crises were shaking this longing for peace. Since February 2022, there has been war. We wondered: can we travel to a country that is currently at war with the West? Does Russia's invasion of Ukraine mean we shouldn't go? What has changed? Skepticism. We had looked forward to fulfilling this dream for so long. All those years of projects, exchanges, fascination with another culture, the love and friendship with Spiridon Shishigin. Should we let the resurgence of centuries old hostilities, disputes, and geopolitical power struggles stop us from taking this trip? We made our decision: we had to go, now more than ever. We are musicians and cultural managers. In times like these, we have a different mission. Who, if not us, can carry the hopeful spark of understanding through what we do? We get to know others, and they get to know us. For a brief moment, we do things together peacefully, listening. Music and the khomus are older than any war, and both will remain after the war. For us, that is the light in the darkness of this time. Music brings people together. We want to go to Yakutia, to Siberia, to the Yakuts, a Turkic people. How do people live there? Why is there such a strong khomus tradition there?

Part of our preparation includes needing a visa. The Yakutian government provided us with an invitation for a cultural project. Mareike works as a DJ professionally. As DJ Clarice (7) and Sören Birke Project (8), we are heading to Yakutia for a cultural exchange, exploration, and concert project. With this invitation, our passport, and a photo, we go to a Berlin-based visa agency. Everything goes smoothly. After nearly three weeks, we receive a visa, a humanitarian visa. It's different from tourist or business visas - a humanitarian visa, perfect for our trip.

We will meet many people and want to bring gifts. We're advised to bring chocolate, ham, and souvenirs. We end up with a suitcase full: four kilos of Black Forest ham, vacuum-packed in small portions, Berlin souvenirs, bags with Berlin motifs, patches, pencils, Berlin teddy bears, Berlin T-shirts for Ivan and Spiridon, bottle opener magnets, and around 40 chocolate bars and CDs from me. It feels like we pack half a year in advance. What does one need for such a trip into the cold? No one can give us solid advice on what we'll actually need. On the hottest day of summer 2023, we go to an outdoor store to buy warm clothing rated for -30 degrees Celsius, long underwear, and really thick socks. The salespeople are overwhelmed by our questions, they know nothing about Siberia. Well, we don't know either; we'll have to find out. Are we packing too much or too little?

A few weeks before the trip, Masha tells us she'll be traveling to Yakutia earlier to accompany a team of photojournalists from Iceland. Alright, so we'll be flying to Yakutsk on our own. A few days before departure, it's just another day in Berlin. It feels like Berlin doesn't want to let us go: work piles up, the Ukraine war fills the news with debates on sanctions and speeches about strengthening the military, fear of Russia stoked, and the German Foreign Ministry

issues travel warnings. Friends shake their heads when we tell them about our plan. The propaganda machine is in full swing, and we're warned of the possibility of being detained upon arrival at the Moscow airport. But we're determined. March 14, 2024, 4:00 pm. We've made it! The last important phone call, the last email answered, farewells said to everyone, a bottle of vodka on the kitchen counter. We raise a glass. We snap a selfie and send it via WhatsApp to Spiridon: "We're coming to Yakutsk."



The Journey

Day 1 - March 15, 2024

Short night's sleep. It's still dark in Berlin. We drive to the airport in a carshare. The streets are empty, so we arrive quickly. Unexpectedly, we run into friends from Thess-Berlin, the Berlin music network that Mareike and I co-founded years ago. They're flying to Thessaloniki, Greece, for another cultural exchange project. Once again, we're met with headshakes about our travel plans. We hear the phrase, part serious, part ironic "...you guys must have a death wish."

We check in: two very large suitcases, two smaller ones, and two backpacks.

First stop: Istanbul. We spend a few hours at what will soon be the world's largest airport, an architectural marvel and a vibrant crossroads of countless cultural currents. Just sitting and watching the world pass by, time flies.

Late in the afternoon, we land in Moscow. From the gate, we head to the baggage carousel, where all our suitcases are already waiting. A short line at passport control. Someone advised us not to smile during the inspection. So, we don't smile. Neither does the young officer. He asks our reason for entry. We're issued a residency slip, which we must not lose, as it will be required for registration and departure. Everything is quick and straightforward. We have crossed the Russian border.

Past the automatic sliding door, we're welcomed. The international jew's harp network is in action. Irina Bogatyryova is there holding a handmade sign with a khomus drawing on it. We're thrilled. We don't know each other personally yet; Spiridon arranged everything. Irina takes the metro with us to our hotel. We check in and agree to meet at Irina's musical instrument shop the next day. Our hotel is near Pushkin Square, right in the center, not far from Red Square. It's winter. Piles of snow remnants and grit cover the streets. We go for a walk. The streets are full of people, usually in pairs, trios, or groups of four, chatting together. They're heading home or to theaters or cinemas, whose entrances are brightly lit. Giant light installations illuminate the squares everywhere. We get our first impression of the overwhelming size of this city. Everything is scaled up by a factor of five compared to what we're used to: buildings, streets, squares, the bustling traffic.

In our hotel's basement, there's a small, cozy restaurant. Quiet and friendly, the staff explain the kitchen's

recommendations with subtle enthusiasm. Wow! First delights: borscht, bacon, steak, tea. We've arrived. Exhausted from the day, we sleep soundly.

Day 2 - March 16, 2024

The sun is shining in Moscow. After a hearty breakfast, we head into the city, making our way to Irina's instrument shop. Google Maps guides us on a 40-minute walk past churches, historic wide streets, a large government ministry, people going about their daily lives.



The shop is on the third floor of an old building with tenants offering various creative services, and there's even a psychotherapy practice. We step inside and are amazed. "Shelves filled to the ceiling" with wonderful musical instruments. Two shelves are packed with jaw harps. Irina introduces us to her husband, Sergei, who runs the shop. She herself is a children's author and a talented jew's harp player.(9)

A few minutes later, a friend joins us. Roman, a doctor who has been a passionate jew's harp player for several years, arrives. A first session begins, and it's magical. We are just getting to know each other, yet we listen attentively and leave space for each other's, playing a delicate, cautious, beautiful moment. We take a selfie and send it to Spiridon, who is pleased we've arrived safely in Moscow. I get to try various instruments and find a frame drum that really excites me. It has a deep, warm, penetrating sound, made with white-brown goat skin by a craftsman in the Urals. I imagine that this kind of drum might be played by a shaman. I decide to buy it. But how will I bring it back to Berlin? Sergei promises to wrap it carefully for me, and I'm to pick it up on the return trip.

With a warm "Goodbye," we head out again. We plan to go to a café with Roman and Irina. On the way, we need to exchange some money. Due to sanctions, it wasn't possible to exchange rubles in Berlin, and credit cards don't work, as service has been suspended. We were allowed to bring euros in cash for the trip. At the bank, the staff handles the exchange very kindly and efficiently. Irina helps us with translation. She and Roman are wonderful, warm hosts. At the café, we learn about the current situation for jaw harp players in Moscow and Russia. The war has disrupted the scene. Some players have left Moscow to avoid being drafted, and there are fewer gatherings and concerts. People keep in touch over social media, but everything feels slow and uncertain. Irina is preparing an exhibition of historical jaw harps in Novgorod and hopes to reunite with many players there. Despite the current enormous challenges, the commitment to jaw harp music remains strong. We're encouraged by this, express our gratitude, and wish them strength and energy. We'll meet Irina and Roman again on our return. Little do I know that a surprise awaits me at that time.

Day 3 - March 17, 2024

The day has arrived. Today, we fly to Yakutsk. After a leisurely morning, we head to the airport around 3 p.m. The cheerful, young, and very friendly hotel team has called us a taxi and wished us well for our unusual journey. After nearly an hour's drive through Moscow, we arrive at Vnukovo Airport. At check-in, we find out that our flight has been delayed; instead of departing at 7:40 p.m., we'll leave at 1 a.m. We're given a voucher for food and drink. Even at the airport, the food is delicious, warm and freshly cooked. Five more hours of waiting. We have books with us. I'm reading "A Short History of Russia" by Mark Galeotti and learn that the Slavs called the raiding Scandinavians "Rus", likely derived from "Ruotsi" the Finnish word for Sweden. Following trade and pillaging routes, they established the Kievan Rus, intermingled with the Slavs, and eventually became Russians. This is how Russia's multi-ethnic history began on the eastern edge of Europe more than 1.100 years ago.

The departure is delayed again by another hour. We remain patient and well-cared for. And then finally, we board a Boeing 737-800. It's packed, with every seat taken. With us are cheerful Yakuts. Families and people who work in Moscow. There's a bit of a struggle over the overhead compartments, but somehow, everything fits and comes along. It all feels like a bus ride. Moscow - Yakutsk, 6,000 km / 800 km/h / 6.5 hours of flight.

Day 4 - March 18, 2024

In the airplane. Sleep. Eat. Sleep. Wait. The sun rises, and out of the airplane window, we see an unbelievable landscape: huge, meandering, frozen rivers. An endless wilderness map, a scene of nature with unknown actors. We're flying toward Yakutsk. In this vastness, only a small dot of civilization, a pinch of salt made up of houses, roads, and power stations. People here are living in an ocean of forests, mountains, snow, and permafrost? Finally, we arrive in Yakutsk. We land. By now, due to the 6-hour time difference, it's already midday here. It's a small airport. No jet bridge. We step out of the plane. Blue sky, bright sun, biting cold -minus 24 degrees Celsius. What does it feel like? Wonderful. Clear air. The cold tingles on our hands and cheeks.

A small baggage hall... and there, through the glass windows, we see Spiridon and Gera, his wife. Through the windows, there is already a lot of warmth and joy. Finally, we see Spiridon again! Our four suitcases are there. Fast. We go outside. Hugs, joy, flowers, our first selfie together. We're a bit tired, but full of energy and excitement for what's to come.



From the airport building, it's only a few steps to the car. Everything is white and ice-cold. Spiridon is driving a Toyota SUV. We set off for Pokrovsk, a place 80 km away from Yakutsk. Spiridon and Gera live there in a self-built wooden house on the banks of the Lena River, with the sunrise visible from the kitchen window. Arrival. Spiridon performs a Yakutian welcoming ritual with us in his self-built Yakut summer house. The stove is lit. Welcoming words and peace wishes are murmured, and some baked goods and horse milk are thrown into the fire for the gods. He shows us typical Yakut items found in such a house: birch bark containers for milk and whey, or for gathering berries, furs, and animal trophies. Above the stove, there is a traditional Yakut clothes drying rack.

We will experience such a welcoming ceremony several more times. Even in closed homes and shops, a bowl is lit, symbolizing a stove, filled with a mix of herbs and juniper. Even if the dense smoke makes our eyes water and our clothes smell of juniper for hours, the warmth, attentiveness, and openness of the host are irresistible. When he waves a horsehair whisk with small bells over our heads and shoulders, a mysterious atmosphere sets in. The murmured wishes for happiness and health bring peace and a sense of togetherness. It's a beautiful, old ritual still practiced today.

Then, food. The table is full of homemade delights. Pirozhki, bread, meat, with cucumbers, tomatoes, salads, salamat, and a soup full of energy... mmmhh, then tea, with bread and homemade jam. Spiridon's wooden house has its own magic. It exudes security, protection, and coziness; it creaks, it breathes, it's overheated. Outside it's -26°C, inside it's +26°C. We'll have to get used to this. Ahh, that's how it works... this is how one lives here in constant frost. Inside, it's hot; outside, you wear warm clothes. So you don't actually freeze. But what do you wear? Our suitcases are full of warm clothes. Too warm for indoors? Not enough for outdoors? It's a constant experiment. The air is very dry. We have bloody noses. Our bodies will need to adjust to this. Will we experience -30 to -50 degrees?

fWe need to register. A shabby office with a friendly woman in uniform. A two-page A4 form with small-printed questions and little boxes one for each letter. I can't make sense of it, Mareike understands a little, and Spiridon finds it too complicated. We leave our passports and head to the school where Spiridon is the director. Three teachers are waiting to run a craft workshop for Mareike. We thank them for waiting; our flight was delayed. In the hallways, many children with open, curious eyes. A constant cheerful "Zdrastvuyte." A little boy asks me, "Are you Sören Birke? A khomusist?" "Yes" I say. We shake hands. Wow, they've been expecting us. Mareike tries a sewing machine for the first time, attempting to make a key pouch in the shape of a Yakut summer house. There's cheerful excitement among the four women. Spiridon waves me over, leading me from the school, across the snow-covered schoolyard, to another building, a workshop for practical training. A man shows me knee fiddles he's crafted, a traditional Yakut instrument. He explains that two horsehair strings are stretched over the soundboard and played with a bow, also made of horsehair. I get to try it. It sounds... unusual.

Spiridon takes a strand of horsehair and tries to break it. It holds strong. I hear for the first time: "Yakut horses are full of strength and energy." These horses are vital for the Yakuts. They drink mare's milk, eat the meat, and know its health benefits. These animals live outdoors year-round, even at -50 degrees. Their coats are thick and resilient. This breed is 40.000 years old and once roamed alongside mammoths.

We pick up our passports. The registration went through successfully; the woman in uniform knew her way around the forms.

The sun begins to set. The sky turns dark blue-violet. We head to a spot by the Lena River. The far shore is just a narrow black line. How wide can a river be? This feels like an inland sea over 10 kilometers wide, covered by a 2-meter-thick ice layer. You feel the urge to walk across it. We drive closer, spotting tiny black dots in the distance moving on the ice. What is that? Those are cars on an ice road. We get closer, drive onto the Lena, and can hardly grasp its scale. The car feels like an ant; just walking a few steps across the cleared section, you realize the vastness. Walking across isn't possible. Nearly chest-high ice slabs, stacked and frozen in place, form insurmountable waves in front of you. I take a few steps in this frozen surf, sinking into crusty snow. Yet, I raise my arms in excitement. We've arrived. Finally, in Siberia. A selfie with Spiridon.

The sun has already dipped below the glowing horizon. The deep blue sky fades into the black of night. We drive back to the house. Another spread on the table, with different, even more homemade delicacies. Then frozen fish, vodka, and a first khomus to try, gifted by a young blacksmith. Spiridon shows me his very first khomus made by the blacksmith Felix Komissarov. Afterward, we improvise a piece together. We fall into bed, exhausted. Jet lag. I wake up at 3 a.m., go to the bathroom, and look out the window. A clear, starry night, almost a full moon. I can't resist. I step outside briefly in my pajamas. Wow! Siberia at -28 degrees.

Day 5 - March 19, 1924

Get up. Shower. Fried eggs. Cucumbers. Cucumbers in the winter? Juicy, full, round taste. How is that possible? With Japanese greenhouse technology, the Yakuts produce a welcome addition to the table. Amazing.

A sunny morning. Blue sky, -24°C. The plan for today: a trip to the Lena Rocks. From photos I've seen, they didn't seem so spectacular at first, but for the Yakuts, it's a pilgrimage site. Only when you stand before them do you understand why. Over 40 km long, a chain of uniquely shaped rock fingers stretches along the Lena River, about 80-120 meters high. The river has been working for millions of years, leaving traces that stir the imagination. A spiritual place for stories, images, shapes, gods, faces, people, and faith. The Lena Rocks are a UNESCO World Heritage site. Fairy-tale-like.

The first long drive through an endless snow landscape and along the Lena has been worth it. Alexander, Spiridon's brother-in-law, is our driver. Could I have driven? No, or maybe? It's definitely intense, every few meters the surface changes, sometimes a pothole-ridden concrete road, sometimes a normal road, then something hacked out of snow and ice on a frozen river. The average speed is 70 km/h. More isn't possible. The car has to endure a lot. We are jolted along the way. At each regional border, we stop. There's always something, sometimes something different each time. A marker for the specific place. Something tall, more or less shaped. Each region has its own significant marker. The place for a ritual. With pancakes and some vodka, they are called upon for a safe journey ahead. It still has a nostalgic feeling for me. Only on our big journey to Oimyakon do we experience the deeper meaning and necessity of this possibly very old ritual. With the pancakes, you must form a small circle with 3, 5, or 9 pieces. If there aren't enough pancakes, you can split one. Then, horse milk or vodka is dripped over them, and you eat a small piece and take a drink. During this, you wish yourself and everyone else a safe journey.

A quick stop in a small village at a school. We need to use the restroom. Spiridon has been friends with the school's director for many years. Proudly, the director shows us his bright, warm school, full of cheerful and friendly children.



After the tour, we all plan to take a photo together. It's a new building with classrooms for music, art, mathematics, natural sciences, languages, sports, and crafts. In several rooms, I see chess boards, both table and floor versions. I stop at a chalkboard and am startled. I had to ask for clarification and make sure. Yes, it's exactly what it looks like. 32 photos of young men in uniform, fallen in the last two years of the Russia-Ukraine war. Men who attended this school as children and probably ran joyfully through these school halls just like the children here today. The chalkboard is an informational board without pathos or decoration. Throughout the entire trip, I remained puzzled about how the Yakuts deal with this war. A brother war between Russians and Ukrainians, inflated into a global race for power, values, and influence. Perhaps because the Yakuts have had to survive in an uncontrollable nature for 1,000 years, they have a different relationship with death? They are hunters. In World War II, they were in high demand at the front lines as snipers against the Germans.

Yakuts - children, adults, and seniors alike -celebrate on the frozen Lena River, set against a stunning backdrop of cliffs. It's the opening ceremony of the "Children of Asia" mini-Olympics for young athletes from across Asia. Everyone is dressed either in sports attire, thick outdoor wear, or festively in traditional Yakut costumes, ready at any moment to take photos or be photographed. The Yakuts love capturing moments. Every encounter is a historic one worth recording, to immediately share on social media or update their WhatsApp statuses. This way, we sometimes arrived at places we'd never been before, but people already knew us. Yakuts are constantly seeking new experiences, always in touch with others, or in friendly competition, sharing their achievements on social media—whether it's sports, blacksmithing, darts, sewing, cooking, khomus playing, crafting, or photographing nature, flowers, animals, ice phenomena, and more. They are masters of capturing daily joys, warmly greeting each other and spreading laughter over the internet.

The Yakuts are also photo professionals. When someone says "photo," everyone knows how to pose, what posture to take, and what expression to make when the photographer calls out, "Raz, dva, tri!" And they hold the pose if multiple pictures are needed, each person's phone getting a turn. Afterward, photos are edited and shared immediately with those who couldn't be there. The speed and fun are contagious: "Photo!"—click—posing—click—adjusting clothes—click—setting faces—click—looking into the camera—click—"Raz, dva, tri!"—click—done. Naturally, we are popular subjects for photos and have to quickly learn the ropes to avoid looking overly out of place. Selfies work too! Is this a new ritual, a way of confirming community connections?

The Yakuts don't formally say goodbye in such moments or in everyday interactions, whether in person or after a phone call—it would be like a kind of ending, a "death" of the connection for them. Everything stays open and in the flow.

After the Olympic flame was lit at the foot of the Lena cliffs to be carried by torch to participating countries like Mongolia and China, we were invited on a snowmobile ride. On the left was the frozen Lena, on the right the cliffs, with a brisk wind blowing—wonderful. We saw wolf tracks in the snow. My face was bright red from the cold, as I saw in the photos later.

Back at Spiridon's house, Gera welcomed us with a delicious meal. We thanked Alexander for his skillful driving through ice, snow, oncoming traffic, and roads without clear beginnings, ends, or edges. There were no markings, often rough patches, and dips that tested the car's suspension. Alexander told us he was a professional driver for 40 years without a single accident or breakdown. After the meal, I played the duduk for him. Then he set off on foot to walk about 50 minutes home in -26 degrees, excited for the exercise - his form of sport.

Spiridon brought out vodka, frozen fish, and his khomus, and we experimented with two or three pieces to improvise together. I played duduk or blues harmonica, paying attention to harmonizing our tones. It worked; it flowed and sounded good. We were ready for tomorrow's concert at Spiridon's school. Meanwhile, Gera shared her passion for darts with Mareike, teaching her some basics. Later, during our travels, Gera entered a darts competition and won.

Day 6 - March 20, 2024

I wake up early. Where am I? Pokrovsk is a small town, or rather, a rural village. Spiridon says that he prefers living here in the countryside over Yakutsk. Here, there's the beautiful wooden house with a vegetable garden, the Lena River, and it's not far to go fishing or hunt ducks. He does a lot of things himself, always busy with something—organizing heating, water supply, and food production. The evening before, he gave me his recipe for making bacon. I type it into my phone as a reminder:

“Spiridon’s Bacon Recipe”

500g pork back fat, cut into small pieces, rubbed with salt and garlic

Wrap in plastic wrap, then

Refrigerate for 2 days, then eat or freeze

The Yakuts love fat. Everything stays attached when cooking or frying. When you boil horse bones, you get a mineral-rich jelly. The horses are pure nature. They keep the Yakuts healthy and fit for the cold.



Pokrovsk has about 2,000 residents. Spiridon is a math teacher and the principal. About 300 children attend his school. When we arrive, there's an excited, lively atmosphere. The school hall is full. The students have prepared a program - dances, singing, a khomus ensemble, a recorder ensemble, and a master performing a traditional Yakut skill game with sticks, which is hard to explain or even replicate. Everyone is passionately involved. We are amazed. For me, it's especially wonderful to hear the khomus in the ensemble play. It has a distinctive, buzzing charm, powerful and floating. Later, Spiridon tells us that each child is guided to the right course based on their preferences, allowing their talents or just a love of participation to unfold. No one is forced into anything. Role models inspire the desire to join in. The khomus, as the national instrument, is at the forefront of this.

We leave Pokrovsk and move. By noon, we're in an apartment in Yakutsk. Spiridon's sister, Agniya Spiridonova Zhirkova, greets us with a traditional welcoming ceremony. While herbal incense burns, she speaks words of blessing, purification, and well-wishes. She cleanses each guest's aura with a horsehair whisk. She is the mother of Tuyara Zhirkowa. Tuyara and I met in Berlin at the “9th Festival.” She and Erkin Alekseev performed a fantastic concert. Spiridon's sister is a teacher of the khomus. We have a quick meal and then need to go. We head to a huge cultural center. We stand in front of a 5x3-meter poster board. Spiridon shows us the announcement for our concert the next day.

This afternoon, a photo exhibition by Icelandic photographer Ragnar Axelsson is opening at the cultural center. (10) Striking black-and-white photographs depicting life in the cold—people in the struggle for survival. Masha has been overseeing the project and is planning to open the exhibition. We arrive just in time. I'm urged to hurry. On the way, I get my duduk ready to play. Coming from a dark hallway, we enter a brightly lit foyer with about 200 guests, and the event begins. We see Masha on stage. She waves from a distance. There is great joy that our shared journey is beginning. Masha speaks about how Europeans are discovering her country and culture and how important cultural exchange is to her. She is an ambassador for her culture, driving projects that promote exchange between Europe and Yakutia. Mareike and I are introduced and welcomed with warm applause. Spiridon and I begin our khomus-duduk piece. The guests are thrilled.

In the evening, another more elaborate “Blessing Ceremony” takes place. It is held at the entrance to two houses that are connected. These houses were built in traditional Yakut architectural style. One is a winter house and the other a summer house, linked together. The winter house is lower and more compact, where people huddle together

in the self-generated warmth by the stove. The summer house is vaulted and high, like a large tent, offering cooling and shade for the hot summer months. Our hostess calls upon the spirits of the upper, middle, and lower worlds, whose connection is symbolized by a very large wooden pole called "Serge," which stands in every village. The gods reside above, the animals and humans in the middle, and the "unbeings," demons, and monsters below. The people are protected by a good mother goddess. The Yakuts have lived with nature religions and shamanism for centuries. Seventy years of communism, despite prohibitions, have not been able to drain this spiritual source. Later, I learn that powerful shamans were killed under Stalin, and the bloodlines were interrupted as a result. Nevertheless, you can feel how deeply the Yakuts are connected to this spiritual tradition. Through this connection, they experience themselves as a strong community and remain open to the world and the universe. The wish for peace and happiness for all people is a living prayer.

Our hostess is very familiar with shamanic rituals and the necessary Yakut instruments, though we do not learn if she is a shaman herself. Being a shaman is a challenge. (11) As intermediaries between humans and spirits, shamans are mystics, doctors, counselors, and have a special relationship with nature and the universe. A shaman must be in good physical and mental health to fulfill the demands of their role in the community. A male Yakut shaman is called "Oyon," and a female shaman is called "Uduyan." (12)(13)

The Jew's harp, the "khomus", is the female counterpart to the male shaman drum. The sounds of both instruments lead into the spiritual world. Special words and songs manifest wishes for life. The rituals performed with them ward off misfortune, heal the sick, and invoke good fortune for hunters, travelers, workers, and lovers. During these rituals, kumys (mare's milk), bread, or pancakes are offered, and horsehair and herbs are burned. The first sip and the first bite belong to the spirit of fire. The ritual we experience lasts nearly an hour. We are touched and impressed. Mareike is attributed special powers and abilities. ■

Continuation of the Diary in next edition of Boing.

(1) Book „Maulhobel, Zaubharfe, Schnutenorgel - Eine Kulturgeschichte der Mundharmonika“

<https://www.kulturkaufhaus.de/de/detail/ISBN-9783940863140/Birke-S%C3%B6ren/Maulhobel-Zaubharfe-Schnutenorgel>

(2) Gerd Conradt, Maultrommel-Festival Berlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbOi4yeVGdw>

(3) Mundton, 25 Min. Ein poetischer Bericht vom 5. Internationalen Maultrommelfestival Amsterdam, 2006.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqMGUTzC_yo

(4) Thousands of Khomus (Jew's harp) players at the Ysyakh festival - Yakutsk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxlXswOM1M8>

(5) Band from Germany at 7th International Jew's Harp Congress Festival 2011 Yakutsk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nzE4VTBaXs

(6) 9TH INTERNATIONAL MAULTROMMEL JEW'S HARP FESTIVAL & CONGRESS BERLIN | 27-30 July 2022 Festival Film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzddG95iUSY>

(7) DJ Clarice

<https://www.djclarice.com>

(8) Sören Birke Project

<https://www.soerenbirke.com>

(9) Irina Bogatyryova and Volodya Yurev

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5_8VYhvHtk

(10) Ragnar Axelsson

<https://rax.is/>

(11) Movie about contemporary Yakutian shamans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmSwIF5Cl3s>

(12) Albina Degtyareva

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIDeBjacgtE>

Айархаан // Albina Degtyareva

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0vLTEwVlg8>

(13) Юлияна Кривошапкина "Dance of the Hands", Yuliyana Krivoshapkina

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5rJrrxEQFU&list=RDKkYm0kxny8o&index=4>



OVERSTIMULATED IN TAIWAN

Post-Taiwan Spectacle Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that's caused by an extremely joyful or vibrating jaw harp event held in Taiwan — either being part of it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, severe jetlag, many new friends and uncontrollable thoughts about the event.

I had every intention of finishing this issue of BOING magazine before leaving for the Taiwan World Jaw Harp Festival. But, as fate would have it, around 1 a.m., just four hours before my departure for the airport, I hit a wall. Exhausted, I gave in and left the task unfinished, feeling a twinge of guilt for not wrapping it up in time.

Once in Taiwan, I was swept up in a whirlwind of excitement that lasted two weeks. It turned out to be my longest stretch abroad (excluding my studies and a crazy trip in India). The festival itself was a blast.

I just got back home, still buzzing with the echoes of ancient vibrations, and couldn't resist adding this quick note to the magazine. The Taiwan World Jaw Harp Festival in November was phenomenal, and in the next issue of BOING, you can look forward to an in-depth review. Some of our editors attended, and we can't wait to share our experience with you.

For now, it's time to shake off the jetlag, recover from my PTSD, and reconnect with reality.

In the meantime, check out the festival highlights on Instagram and Facebook through the links below!

<https://www.facebook.com/jawharpistsparadise>
<https://www.instagram.com/jawharpistsparadise>

Photo credit: This image of the main organiser of the festival, Hungying Lin is taken by 青育

Áron Szilágyi





GLOBAL VIBES

By Áron Szilágyi

Global Vibes is a jaw harp festival, a vibrant, one-day celebration of music, art, and cultural exchange. Held annually in Kecskemét, Hungary, it offers a unique journey through traditions and innovation, uniting performers and participants from across the globe in a shared love for this ancient instrument and its modern expressions.

Every year between Christmas and New Year's Eve, the city of Kecskemét, Hungary, becomes the epicenter of jaw harp enthusiasts from all around Hungary and Eastern Europe. The Global Vibes festival is much more than a gathering of players—it's a celebration of the jaw harp's cultural depth, artistic versatility, and ability to bring people together. Hosted in the stunning former Municipal Cinema, home to the Leskowsky Instrument Collection, the festival offers a blend of tradition and innovation in one of the city's historic venues.

The roots of Global Vibes date back to 2005, when I organized the first Hungarian Jaw Harp Festival in Kecskemét. This inaugural event was graced by legendary players such as Anton Bruhin, Spiridon Shishigin, and Professor Fred Crane, setting a high standard for quality and community. For years, the festival thrived as an intimate gathering focused primarily on solo performances in a theater setting.

A turning point came in 2009 when my band, Navrang, celebrated its 10th anniversary with a special concert in Tiszakécske. The festive atmosphere of the concert, combined with the presence of friends and musicians from around the world, inspired a new vision. By 2011, the festival was moved to Kecskemét, where it was rebranded as Global Vibes and transformed into a broader, more inclusive event.

Since then, Global Vibes has become a dynamic and evolving festival, rooted in the jaw harp but open to all forms of artistic expression. It's a vibrant, free-spirited day where musical styles, art movements, and cultures come together.

This year's festival on 27th December promises to be one of the most memorable yet. My current band, Zoord, will mark its 10th anniversary with a special concert and performance. Other highlights include ancient barbarian music by Fandyr, a mesmerizing act by Alexei Chichakov from the Altai Republic, and performances by Dom Martin and Ataya from France. A shaman will lead a ceremonial fire-lighting ritual in front of the venue, and renowned performers Nikolay Sobolev and Istók Pável will take the stage. Adding a layer of cultural enrichment, István Sántha will present soundscapes from the Amur region, while Krisztián Almási will share his field recordings from Yakutia.

The spirit of Global Vibes lies in its inclusivity and creativity. Whether you are a seasoned jaw harp player or a curious newcomer, the festival welcomes you to embark on a journey through space and time, exploring the rich heritage and modern reinventions of the jaw harp. Over the years, it has drawn attendees not only from across Hungary but also from around the globe, creating a vibrant, international community. ■

<https://globalvibes.doromb.com/>







News from the Mekka of the Khomus

By Dmitry Byastinov

These days, in the mecca of khomus, the city of Yakutsk, a decade dedicated to khomus was held. As you know, in 2011, by decree of the President of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) E.A. Borisov, Khomus Day was established. This event is celebrated today not only in Yakutsk, but also in various parts of the world, which indicates its growing popularity every year.

Traditionally, on this day, the one-of-a-kind Museum and Center of Khomus of the Peoples of the World, supported at the state level, sums up the results of its activities. Since this year, khomus and khomus music have become an important part of the program activities of the National Ysyakh Olonkho. Last year, in the fall, on the basis of the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), it was decided to create separate tuulge (sites) dedicated to khomus and khomus music within the framework of the future Ysyakhs of the Olonkho. Previously, such cultural sites were built at the expense of the budgets of the Olekminsky, Verkhnevilyuytsky and Oymyakonsky districts, but from this year their construction will be carried out at the expense of the budget of the republic.

This year, Ysyakh Olonkho was held in the Amgala ulus, and for the first time a separate cultural site was erected at the expense of the republican budget within the framework of this holiday. The site is a well-built concert stage with a symbol of khomus, spectator seats and a ritual place "kholumtan". The appearance of such cultural venues in various districts will contribute to the growth of public interest in khomus and khomus music.

The next national holiday Ysyakh Olonkho will be held in the Neryungri district.

One of the significant events of this year was the entry of the Museum and Center of Khomus of the Peoples of the World into the Union of Museums of Russia. This decision was made at the general meeting of the Union within the framework of the International Forum of United Cultures, held in St. Petersburg. Joining this authoritative union will open up new horizons for us for joint museum projects in the field of collection and exhibition activities.

A highlight of this year's celebration of the Khomus Day was the invitation as a guest of honor from China – the "Virtuoso Khomus Player", the most famous performer on the Chinese musical instrument "kouxian", a bright representative of the small Yi people – Mrs. Ma Guoguo. She, together with other outstanding virtuoso khomus players of the world, such as Spiridon Shishigin, Albina Degtyareva, Yuliyana Krivoshapkina, Varvara Stepanova and Naryana Renanto, held a joint concert called "Chamber Concert of World Khomus Stars". This event has become one of the exceptional events in the world of khomus this year, since meetings of such high-class masters on the same stage are quite rare.

These days, the craftsmen of the national musical instrument khomus also did not go unnoticed. Universally recognized masters Nikolay Ilyich Potapov – Dabayar Uus and Roman Ilyich Gotovtsev – Myndyr Uus were awarded personal scholarships of the Head of the Republic Aisen Nikolaev. Throughout the year, they will receive financial support from the Government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).

The celebration of the Khomus Day was held in a solemn atmosphere at the State Opera and Ballet Theater named after D.K. Sivtsev - Suorun Omolloon. This significant day became a meeting of all generations of khomus players, blacksmiths and teachers. The hall was overcrowded with khomus worshippers. Magnificent music of the Yi people, performances by virtuoso khomus players continuing local traditions, as well as compositions by powerful blacksmiths and young talents sounded from the big stage.

A special atmosphere of the holiday was added by a video greeting from our President of the International Jew's harp Society Franz Kumpl, who congratulated all khomus players, blacksmiths and enthusiastic teachers on this significant event, filled with the spirit of unity and creativity.

Concluding my article, on behalf of the entire staff of the State Museum and the Center of Khomus of the Peoples of the World, I would like to congratulate the esteemed Franz Kumpl on his anniversary. Dear Franz, we sincerely wish you well-being and good health!

Sincerely, Dmitry Byastinov.





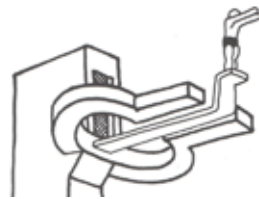
The International Jew's Harp Society (IJHS)

The International Jew's Harp Society (IJHS) is a non-profit organisation established at the 3rd International Jew's Harp Festival and Congress in 1998 in Molln/Austria, with the aim of bringing together as many of the enthusiasts for the instrument as possible.

The International Jew's Harp Society is a globally acknowledged authority that reflects and represents the ancient and diverse traditions, the colourfulness and the future of the Jew's Harp. Our Society is a global organisation that functions as an umbrella for players, researchers, makers, enthusiasts, and dedicated festivals.

Not only does the IJHS organise international congresses that involve players from around the globe, but also publish an increasingly acknowledged Journal, a blog and an online newsletter.

Visit our website jewsharpsociety.org and follow us on our [Facebook page](#) !



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