

Alash

Teacher Resource Guide Lotus Blossoms 2025



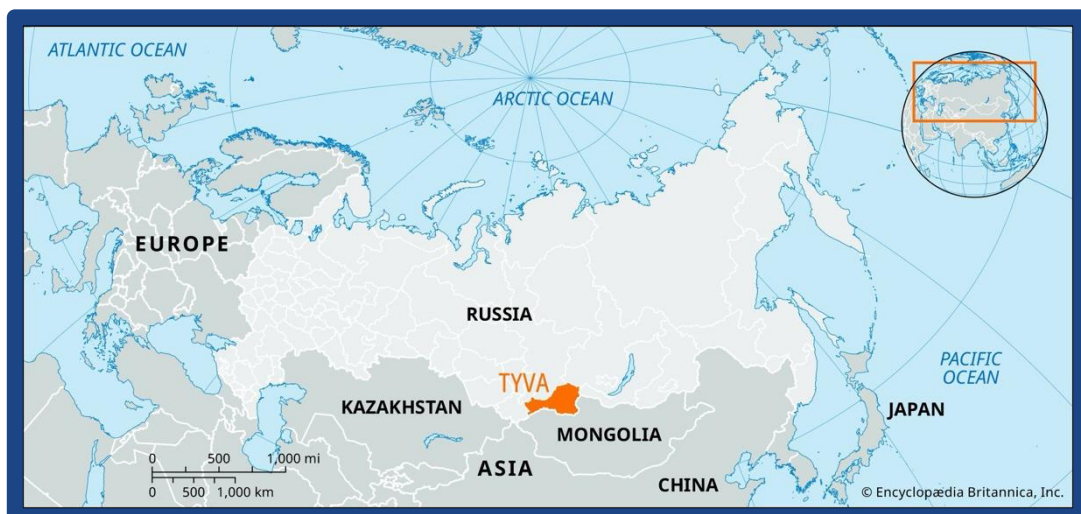
lotus
BLOSSOMS

About Alash

Alash are masters of Tuvan throat singing, a remarkable technique for singing multiple pitches at the same time. Masters of traditional Tuvan instruments as well as the art of throat singing, Alash are deeply committed to traditional Tuvan music and culture. At the same time, they are fans of western music. Believing that traditional music must constantly evolve, the musicians subtly infuse their songs with western elements, creating their own unique style that is fresh and new, yet true to their Tuvan musical heritage. The ensemble is named for the Alash River, which runs through the northwestern region of Tuva. The Alash River has also inspired a couple of Tuvan songs which carry its name.

Tuva

Tuva (sometimes spelled Tyva) sits at the southern edge of Siberia, with Mongolia to its south. Over the centuries, Tuva has been part of Chinese and Mongolian empires, and shares many cultural ties with Mongolia. The Republic of Tuva is now part of the Russian Federation. The majority of the population are ethnic Tuvans who speak Tuvan as their native tongue, while Russian is also spoken.



Tuvan Throat Singing

The ancient tradition of throat singing (xöömei in the Tuvan language) developed among the nomadic herdsmen of Inner Asia, people who lived in yurts, rode horses, raised yaks, sheep, and camels, and had a close spiritual relationship with nature. Throat singing traditionally was done outdoors and only recently was brought into the concert hall. Singers use their voices to mimic and interact with the sounds of the natural world—whistling birds, bubbling streams, blowing wind, or the deep growl of a camel. Throat singing is most commonly done by men. Although custom and superstition have discouraged women from throat singing, recently, this taboo has been breaking down, and there are now excellent female throat singers, too.

Tuvan throat singing includes a variety of styles, each associated with a different sound in nature. In the sygyt and xöömei styles, the singer starts with a fundamental pitch, which then splits into the original tone plus one or more higher overtones that may



sound like birdsong or whistling wind. The singer may embellish the highest note by varying the shape of his vocal tract, producing a mini-melody in the top range while the other pitches remain fixed. In the growling kargyraa style, the singer produces a deep guttural undertone below the fundamental pitch as well as overtones above. More complex throat singing styles create rhythms or quickly changing harmonics to imitate the sounds of bubbling water or a trotting horse.

Name	Description	Corresponding Sound in Nature
Xöömei*	Middle-range style with an airy whistle floating above the fundamental pitch	Wind swirling among rocks
Sygyt	High-pitched style with a sharp, high whistle floating above the fundamental pitch	Gentle breezes of summer, bird song
Kargyraa	Low-pitched style with a growling undertone below the fundamental pitch, as well as higher overtones	Howling of winter winds, cries of a mother camel after losing her calf
Ezenggileer	Adds a pulsing rhythm	Horseback riding, tapping of silver stirrups
Borbangnadyr	Adds a trilling or rolling effect with rapidly changing harmonics	Bubbling stream, rolling rapids of a river

Tuvan Instruments

The igil is a two-stringed instrument whose teardrop-shaped body is held between the legs and bowed like a cello. The igil is sometimes called a horse-head fiddle because the peghead of the instrument is often decorated with the carved head of a horse. The sound box may be made entirely of wood, or the face of the instrument may be goat skin stretched across the frame. The strings are made of horsehair. Unfretted, they are fingered very lightly, not pressed to the fingerboard. The tones of the igil are varied and rich, similar to a cello.



STEM Activity: Make Sprinkles Dance!

Did you know that you can see sound? Cover a bowl with cling wrap, secure it with a rubber band, and place a handful of sprinkles on the plastic. Now, get close to the bowl and hum. Notice how the sprinkles dance! How do the movements change as you get closer to the bowl or farther away? Does changing the pitch of your humming change the movement? This is because of sound waves!

Helpful Links & References

- <https://www.alashensemble.com/index.htm>
- [Styles of Throat Singing](#)
- [Alash performs “My Throat, the Cuckoo”](#)

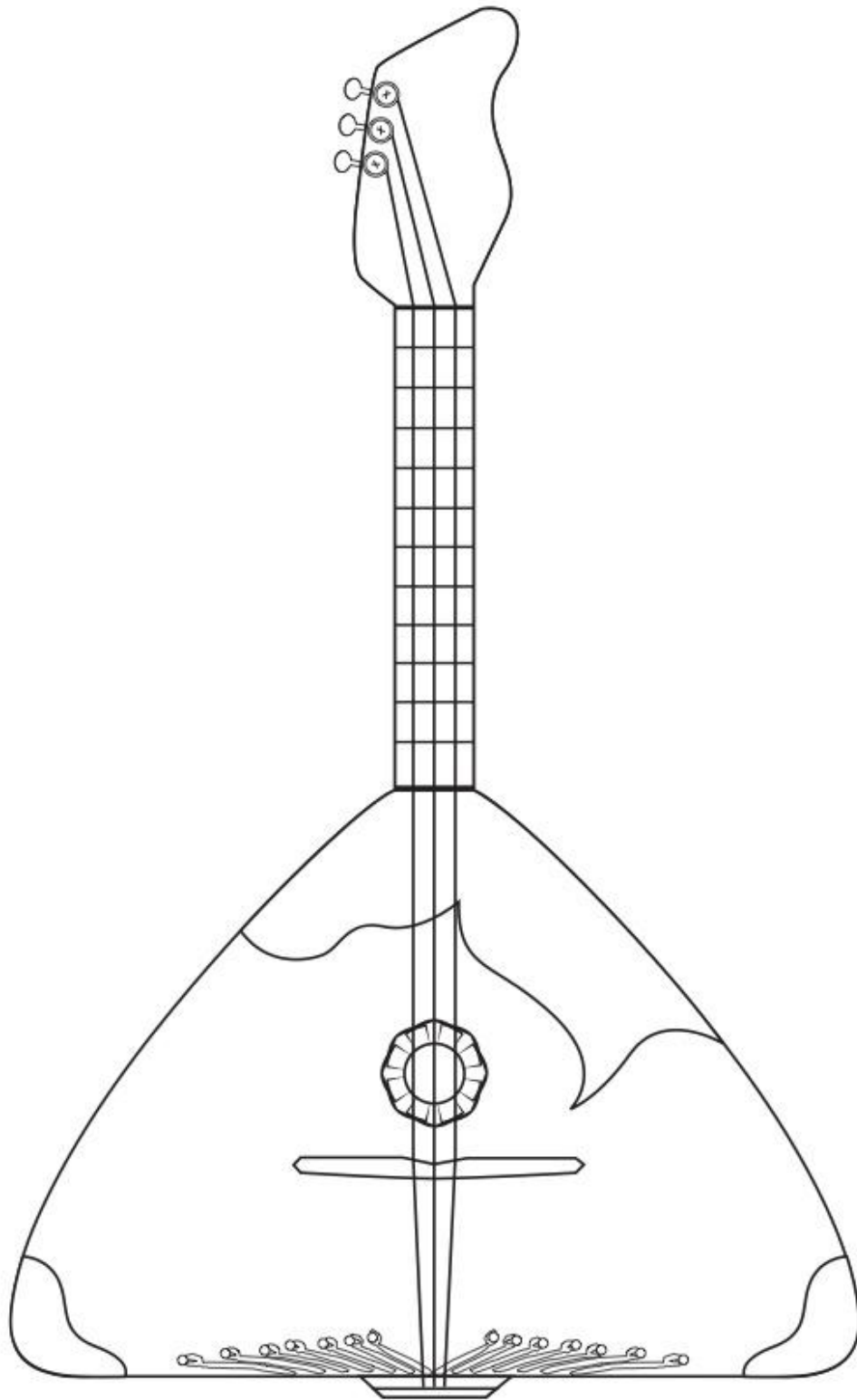
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See attached coloring sheets that may engage younger learners.



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