



(LYRCD 7181)

TIBETAN RITUAL MUSIC

By Lamas and Monks of the Four Great Orders

NOTES

Tibet has always been a land of mystery. Separated from India by the Himalayas and from China by the Kunlun Mountains, its high situation in Central Asia, some three miles above sea level, has placed it geographically apart. The country's isolation and its own way of life have enabled the development of a truly original and important culture, but have traditionally made contact with that culture unusually difficult.

The Tibetans are a people of Mongol descent and speak their own language of the Tibeto-Burmese group. They are at heart nomads and most of them live as such in yak hair tents on the high bare plateaux, following a pastoral way of life. Agriculture is possible only on the floors of the lower valleys. The Tibetan peasant is very fond of singing and dancing and the country has a rich and varied folk music. More sophisticated forms are found among itinerant musicians and in the very few towns that Tibet can boast. The distinctive culture, however, arose from the contact between the native tradition and the Buddhist religion, which began to reach Tibet not later than the seventh century, chiefly from India, where it was already mixed with Tantrism – the cult of the female energy of the primordial male. It was the blend of Buddhism, or Lamaism as it has been called after Lama: “Superior One,” a title properly used only of incarnates, abbots and other monks of high degree. In the monasteries, which became the great centers of learning and artistic culture, the ancient beliefs and disciplines flourished and a body of liturgy was created. Its music, designed to help man on his way to Enlightenment, is the highly distinctive

music of Tibet, with a ritual style unlike that of any other high civilization. It employs both chanting and instrumental playing and occupies over half the waking hours of its red-robed devotees. The chanting, executed with exceedingly deep and constricted voice, embraces the repetition of canonical texts and the invocation of the gods. The instrumental music provides interludes between the chanted portions of a service. Though wind and percussion only, the instruments create an ensemble richer and more varied than that found in Buddhist ritual elsewhere. The few westerners who have heard the awe-inspiring sounds in their own setting have never failed to be deeply impressed.

When, some eight years after the Chinese annexation of Tibet, the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, many Tibetan lamas, monks and others sought refuge in the border regions. Some of these regions, like Ladak or "Little Tibet" (part of Tibet until 1840) and the independent Kingdom of Sikkem, have long been Tibetan in race, language, culture and religion, while others, like Darjeeling, Ghoom and Kalimpong (all part of Sikkim until 1835), have a strongly Tibetan tradition. All these regions in which the present recordings were made, belong to the Ethnic Tibet, which is thus far, larger than modern political Tibet.

TRACKS

1. OFFERING TO THE SAVIOR COMPO - performed by Gelugpa Order (10:00)
This choral orchestral service is given at the monastery of Tharpa Chholing (Gelugpa Order), Kalimpong, on the 9th, 19th and 29th of the month. There are five sections, alternately instrumental and choral (with drum and cymbals accompanying), the instruments being: 2 shawms (rGyaling), 2 long trumpets (dung): handbell (dribu) and hand-drum (darmaru): cymbals (rolmo) and frame-drum (rNga).
2. INVOCATIONS OF GOMPO - performed by Kagyupa Order (2:35)
A stanza to invoke a deity, here chanted without accompaniment by mongs of the Sganga-Ngon Monastery (Kagyupa Order), P'hiyang, Ladak.
3. A BUDDHIST PRAYER - performed by Gelugpa Order (8:34)
The opening of the daily morning service (Gelugpa Order) said to have been in use for about 400 years, is here chanted by youths under His Holiness Dardo Trulku Rinpoche in Kalimpong. There is an important change of rhythm after about six minutes.
4. OFFERING TO THE GURU DRAKMAR- performed by Nyingmapa Order (6:10)
Chanting and instrumental music offered to the divine aspect of St. Padma Sambhava, Eighth Century founder of Tibetan Tantrik Buddhism, at the monastery of Entchi (Nyingmapa Order), Gangtok, Sikkim. The nine sections are alternately instrumental and choral (with cymbals and frame-drum accompanying). The instruments, thirteen in number and forming an unusually varied ensemble, are shawms (rGyaling), 2 long trumpets (dung), 2 conches (dung0dkar), 2 short trumpets(rKangling); handbell (drilbu) and hand-drum (damaru); 2 pairs of cymbals (rolmo, silnyen), frame-drum (rNga).
5. GLORIFICATION OF THE PAST BUDDHA - performed by Sakyapi Order (18:40)
An unaccompanied chant sung daily at the opening of the morning service (Sakyapi

Order). It is here chanted, as it was formerly chanted in Sakya, West Tibet, at the Guru Monastery, Ghoom, in the presence of the Grand Lama of the Order. There are marked changes of tempo at about eight, nine and seventeen minutes.

CREDITS

The recordings were all made on location on Nagra equipment.

Recordings and notes by Peter Crossley-Holland

Digitally mastered by Mikhail Liberman, LRP Productions, New York City

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Lyrichord Discs Inc.

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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