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## BUDDHIST RITES FROM THE MONASTERIES OF BHUTAN

Volume 2: Sacred Dances and Rituals of the Nyingmapa and Drukpa Orders from Nyimalung and Tongsa

This volume is dedicated to Her Majesty the Queen Mother of Bhutan. Recordings and notes by John Levy. Photographs by John Levy excepting where otherwise indicated.

“Of the whole enormous area which was once the spirited domain of Tibetan culture and religion. . . now only Bhutan seems to survive as the one resolute and self-contained representative of a fast disappearing civilization.”

This second volume contains the music of rituals in which dancing plays an important role (Side A, Bands 3, 4 and 5, Side B, Band 3) and parts of two dance rituals (Side A, Bands 1 and 2) where the dancing is all-important. In both cases, masks are worn by the monks who dance.” Sometimes these masks represent animals, each of which symbolizes an aspect of a deity. Sometimes the masks are human, representing aspects of a deified sage. Both categories form part of the annual festival of spiritual renewal. For all the monks, both dancers, musicians and those who chant, these rituals are a support for meditation. This is quite unlike anything we know in the West. Though we cannot witness these often spectacular movements, the music itself is of great interest and beauty, and ranges from the mystical (Side B, Bands 2 and 3) to the terrifying (Side A, Band 1) and the poetical (Side A, Band 2). A further example of processional music for two shawms is also included.

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Recorded at the Nyingmapa Monastery, Nyimalug.

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At Nyimalung (Sun-Place), in the Valley of Chume in the Bumthang District (Eastern Bhutan), there is a private monastery, the most important of its kind in Bhutan. The monks belong to the Peliing Sect of the Nyingmapa (Old Order). Peling is a typically Tibetan abbreviation for Pema (Padma) Lingpa, a famous Lama of Bhutanese origin, from whom the present royal dynasty descends. He lived in the 13th century and his order spread throughout Bhutan and Tibet. The tradition became weak in Bhutan but three generations ago, it was brought back to Bhutan by Lodpon Chodrak from the Lhalung Monastery, its centre in Tibet, in the Southern Rocky Province. It is said that even before the Chinese entered Tibet in 1950, the tradition was already better preserved at Nyimalung than at Lhalung. Since its renewal, there have been four presenters, including the present incumbent. The Abbot is Tibetan. Pema Lingpa is one of the most important of the 108 Terton (revealers of 'hidden texts'). Among his revelations were the two dances of which I give parts. They belong to the category known as Peling Terchham (Chham means ritual dance).

### TRACK 1. PELING SHACHHAM, DEER DANCE

The dancers wear deer masks. The instruments are: 2 thigh-bone trumpets, played only at the beginning, along with the whistling, to drive away evil spirits, 2 large drums, which discretely support the beautifully played pair of cymbals that continues throughout the dance.

### TRACK 2. DRAMITSE NGACHHAM, THE DRUM DANCE OF DRAMITSE

This dance is said to have been revealed to Pema Lingpa in a vision of the heavenly paradise (called the Copper-Coloured Mountain) of Guru Padmasambhava in which the animal-headed attendants of the Guru danced in his honour. The dance was subsequently performed for the consecration ceremony of the new temple at Dramitse in eastern Bhutan, in the 13th century. Dances usually fall into four parts, all joined, an Introduction (Tonchham), two Intermediary Sections (Dzuchham) the second of which is given here, and a Finale (Buchham). There are sixteen dancers, wearing the masks of different animals and each, with one exception, plays a small double-sided drum (Nga chunku), struck with a hooked stick, and in this second Intermediary Section, struck on the frame and not on the membrane. The exception is the dancer who holds a pair of small cymbals with a deep boss. These cymbals, a fairly old copy of another pair, said to have been discovered in a mountainside and kept in the treasure of the monastery, have the remarkable property of producing two notes that form a major third. The other instruments, played by monks who are seated, are 2 long trumpets and 2 large drums.

In making the recording, I placed the two microphones in the centre of the circle formed by the dancers, who slowly moved round, sometimes in one direction, sometimes in the other. Note the effect of the major third of the cymbals against the raised tonic of the long trumpets (F-C E), forming a major seventh to western ears excepting when the trumpets play the lower tritone, forming an eleventh (B-C E). And towards the end, the perfectly calculated cries of one of the dancers, steady the first time at a minor seventh, and falling from the major seventh of the cymbals the second time, leading, as the piece began, to the cymbals playing alone.

In a live performance, which the monks also did for me, there is a clown (Volume 3, Side B, Bands 1-3). I asked one of the monks if the presence of a clown dancing face to face before him and making sometimes hideous sounds and gestures, did not disturb him. He replied that it could be disturbing, but that it was all part of the thing - the clown is also a monk!

TRACKS 3, 4 & 5 LAMA NORBU GYAMTSEO, lit. JEWEL OCEAN GURU (Padmasambhava), a long rite that is performed in the 5th lunar month from the 10th to the 13th day during the Tsechu (Skr., Amitayus) Festival of Sacred Dance in honour of Padmasambhava. It lasts on each of these days from 3 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Lama Norbu Gyamtsho is one of the texts 'rediscovered' by Pema Lingpa at Lhodrak Mendo Senge Dongchen (Lion-headed Medicine Rock) in Tibet, concealed originally by Padmasambhava. I have a copy of the text, block-printed in Tibet, but it is quite impossible for even a scholar to find the exact portions given here, which I selected on musical grounds alone. But I took photographs of another text, in which the manner of giving the vocal line is notated (Photo 3). These three excerpts, together with the excerpts from another Nyingmapa rite (Volume 3, Side A, Bands 1-3) will give an idea of the considerable difference in style of the Nyingmapa and Drukpa Orders, though I did not hear enough of either to allow of any definite conclusions. Briefly, though, short, repeated notes are sometimes played by the long trumpets of the Nyingmapa, and not, to

may knowledge, of the Drukpa. The chant of the former sometimes glides up and down in partamento, but not the latter; and while the Nyingmapa 'monotone' chant is more flexible than that of the Drukpa, the latter have melodies that have a more extended scale. Again, the manner of playing the percussion instruments is different, c.f. after the beginning of Band 4, and before the entrance of the wind instruments. Finally, the Nyingmapa shawms have different tunes and are played in a more brilliant and 'creative' manner, c.f. Band 5, towards the end of the long instrumental interlude.

In this rite, the dancer-monks wear masks that portray the nine aspects of Guru Rimpoche, as Padmasambhava is called in the Tibetan world. All nine appear in photograph no.4; and no.5 gives a close-up of four of these maskers. Photograph no.6 shows the clown referred to above, carrying as usual in his right hand a phallus which is no doubt highly symbolic...but he is a clown and he uses it in a manner that is both lewd and very funny. But note in particular to the extreme right of the line of musicians the small cymbals I refer to in the notes to Band 2. These three pictures were taken by Anthony Aris in 1972.

At the beginning of Band 3, it is the frames of the large drums that one hears being struck. In Band 4, there is an interesting chant shortly after the beginning (C Db E Db C). At 4.10 minutes from the beginning, the monks snap their fingers, a mudra (gesture of the fingers and the hands), though during all the rites, there are other mudras that are silent. In Band 4, there is another interesting chant (CDFC).

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The first four Bands were recorded in one of the smaller temples in the spacious Tongsa Dzong, which consists of several monasteries within a single outer wall. One has therefore a more intimate atmosphere than that of the huge central temple at Thimphu, and this intimacy, very appropriate to the music, is reflected in the recordings.

The rite is SONDEB LEU DUNMA, Sevenfold Supplications to the Guru (Padmasambhava). The monks did for me the most important of these seven supplications and added the last piece, Mon Tshik, Word of Prayer, since it is always played at the end of this and several other rites, and contains a splendid tune in the middle. Sondeb Leu Dunma is common to both the Drukpa and the Nyingmapa, though the monks at Tongsa, being of the establishment, belong to the Drukpa Order. The fourth piece, I was given to understand is exclusively a Drukpa chant.

Accompanying the few monks who chanted (this music has the quality of chamber music) were 2 shawms, held almost horizontally, 2 long trumpets (to the right of the microphones, and not to the left, as in Thimphu), a pair of cymbals, 2 large drums, struck with a hooked stick, a hand-bell and an hour-glass pellet-drum (whose player is a virtuoso). The cymbals, the shawms and the long trumpets all have a personal name given, as is the custom, after their donors'.

TRACK 6. LAMA KUSUM, ENTREATY TO THE THREE BUDDHA-BODIES.

## ENTREATY TO THE THREE BUDDHA-BODIES

I entreat the threes superior manifestations of the past, present and future:/  
I entreat Padmasambhava of Uddiyana;/  
I entreat the Dharmakaya, Samantabhadra:/  
I entreat the Sambhogakaya, the Five Buddha-families:/  
I entreat the Nirmanakaya, the protectors of the three families:/  
I entreat the further manifestation: Garup Dorje.

## TRACK 7. CHENDREN, INVITATION.

In both this and the next piece, the shawms play notes that imitate such vocables as kyu ru ru and di ri ri. The manner of sounding the long trumpets, in this and any other Chendren, Invocation or Calling Down of a Deity, is known as tselgyap, lit. to perform with skill, i.e. to play forcibly, which is interpreted as meaning, “the long trumpets to be tuned high and played loud.” Band 3, I know to be a dance, I think that this chendren is danced also. The monks who dance hold a pellet-drum in their hand. For the recording, they remain seated, and a single, very skilled player sounded the pellet-drum.

## INVITATION

E ma ho:/  
To Samye in Mechung./  
Came the excellent threefold doctrine./  
Sakyamuni Buddha’s Tantric Doctrine of the Great Vehicle/  
Came to this realm of samsara (birth and rebirth)./  
We entreat the precious doctrine:/  
We entreat Padmasambhava.

## TRACK 8. ZHENG SHIK PEMA (the Tibetan pronunciation of Padma), RISE UP, PADMASAMBHAVA.

In this piece the pellet-drum players would normally dance, but in this recording they remained seated, and only one monk played (see Band 2 above). With the entrance of the orchestra, the words, already little more than a whisper, become inaudible.

## RISE UP, PEMA

Rise up, Padmasambhava and your host of dakinis!/  
Take thought (of us), you who have withdrawn into the ten directions and the three times (past, present and future). In your capacity as the great Lord Padma Thotreng (holding a string of skulls) we beg you to come from the abode of the dakinis, possessed of knowledge. Your handsome locks swish - shik se shik!  
Your precious trinkets jingle - si li li!  
Your ornaments of human bone clatter - thro lo lo!  
Words and music are sounding - u ru ru!  
From the tutelary gods comes the sound of hum - di ri ri!  
The five classes of dakinis dance and swish,; shik se shik!  
The strutting warrior-attendants dance and stamp - thrap se thrap!  
The goddesses and dakinis gather like a cloud - thrip se thrip!

The eight classes of religious protectors are about their work - kyuk se kyuk!  
The sound of a thousand whispers is heard - si li li!  
On the right are the male divinities - sha ra ra!  
They are spread throughout all the sky - tab se tip!  
There is a smell of sweet incense - thu lu lu!  
The secret speech of the dakinis is heard - di ri ri!  
The strutting warrior-attendants' song of strength is heard - kyu ru ru!  
The song of HUM is heard - sang se sang!

Look upon us and upon all the six classes of being with compassion, we beg you, and come to this place!

(A dakini is an attendant goddess.)

TRACK 9. MON TSHIK, WORDS OF PRAYER,  
Unaccompanied chant.

WORDS OF PRAYER

E ma ho!

Victorious Samantabhadra, in your state of motionless bliss;  
and the sixth buddha of the five families, Vajrapani;  
Boddhisatvas working for the six classes of beings;  
Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, Nirmanakaya;  
and the Buddha lineages - we entreat you all!  
The famous protectors of the quarters - yakshas with faces like meteors;  
wise and clever king of the nagas;  
the lord of the gods, Indra, this company possessed of knowledge, we entreat.  
We entreat Padmasambhava of Uddiyana!

TRACK 10. BO GO GYALING, "TIBETAN SHAWM"  
(see Vol 1, Side B, Band 9).

The two musicians play on their shawms a folk-song from the Tongsa Valley called Bem. Bem means sheep; it also seems, from the text of the same song I recorded in Tongsa, to refer to their wool. This music, anyway, is beautiful.



**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](mailto:nick@lyrichord.com) Web: [www.lyrichord.com](http://www.lyrichord.com)

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