

Morin Khuur



SIMK100

The Morin Khuur, also known by the name “Horse-head Fiddle”, is the most important musical instrument of Mongolia and considered a symbol of the nation. Its sound is described as expansive like the wind in the grasslands. It also imitates the neighing of the horses that are typical of this country. Therefore the scroll is always carved in the form of a horse’s head. The wooden sound box has the form of a trapezoid and is decorated with intricate patterns. The long narrow neck has only two strings, similar to the Erhu. It is an interesting fact that one string is “male” with 130 hairs from a stallions’ tail and the other one is “female” with 105 hairs from a mare’s tail. Traditionally the strings are tuned a fifth apart but nowadays a fourth is quite common.

The musician places the Morin Khuur upright on his lap or between the legs. The bow is strung loosely with horse’s hair, the fingers of the right hand tighten it while playing. In that way he can create subtle sound nuances. The fingers of the other hand play the main string without using frets. The modern type of Horse-head Fiddle is made with synthetic hair and is also used by Mongolian musicians.

There are some legends that tell the birth of the Morin Khuur. One says that a shepherd received a magical winged horse as a gift. On his back he would fly to meet his beloved. Out of jealousy another woman had the wings of the horse cut off so it fell from the air and died. The grieving shepherd carved a fiddle with a horse head from the bones of the animal. He covered it with its skin and used the horse’s hair for the strings and the bow.