

Tibetan monks to perform prayers Chants promote peace, happiness for all life

By Ming Rodrigues
Emerald Contributor

Their first U.S. tour in 1987 met with unusual critical acclaim. A sacred musical tradition was being "discovered" by the West and a rare and illuminating event was exposed to the general public for the first time.

The Gyuto monks are back this year and on Sunday, Nov. 10, they're staging a one-night performance at the Hult Center.

It takes a leap of imagination to describe the chanting of the Gyuto monks as song, or even as music.

Described by The New Yorker as "a sort of deep, pebbly growling, a note and a half below the bottom of most bass ranges and approaching the frequencies of garbage disposals and earthmoving machinery," the sobering, otherworldly sounds of the buddhist monks from Tibet have been developed over hundreds of years, ever since the Gyuto Tantric University was founded in 1474 with 30 monks.

But the shows raise a question — why the public performance of what could be viewed as esoteric rites?

These chants are not designed as entertainment, but as prayer. The Dalai Lama, spiritual leader-in-exile of the Tibetans, approves the public performances because they draw attention to the persecution of Tibetans by the Chinese.

The monks also hope to raise funds from their tour to build a larger monastery at Dharmasala, the largest settlement of Tibetan refugees and the seat of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile.

After the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese in 1959, the Dalai Lama and the monks fled to northern India where they re-established the Gyuto Tantric University, which specializes in the study of higher forms of meditation.

Their monastic training includes a type of multiphonic chanting, in which each monk sings a chord containing two or three notes simultaneously. And while the average range of



Courtesy photo
The Gyuto monks of Tibet will visit the Hult Center on Sunday, Nov. 10. Tickets are \$10 and \$15; limited student discounts are available.

the human voice is about two and a half octaves, the monks' voices span six.

Each chant has a different significance, but the basic chanting purpose is for peace and happiness for every life, not only human life. Thought

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— Pat Cusick,
Hult Center
assistant marketing director

to arise only from the throats of people who have realized selfless wisdom, their sound emanates from "samadhi"—a trance-like state of pure con-

sciousness that is undisturbed by the trials of life, experience, and thought. It is "samadhi" that is capable of being communicated to the hearer.

The chants are also accompanied by various instruments: horns, bells, small trumpets—and even drums made from human skulls. But that isn't meant to be offensive or spooky, instead it's meant to show the impermanence of life.

On their third trip outside Tibet since the order was formed, the Gyuto monks second tour in 1989 resulted in the recording of their sacred chants and the release of their album — The Gyuto Monks: Freedom Chants from the Roof of the World — under the guidance of Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart.

"The Gyuto monks are one of the many unique performances in this season's world series program," said Pat Cusick, assistant marketing director of the Hult Center. "Through these diverse performances, we hope to bring an awareness and appreciation of the different cultures of this world."

Tickets, selling for \$10 and \$15, can be purchased at the EMU Main Desk or by calling the box office at 687-5000. Limited student discounts are available.

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