

Voice Across Cultures

THE MUSICAL JOURNEYS OF BOB EFFERTZ

A blue sky is spread out high and wide over the top of Fort Casey State Park's concrete bunkers, the Olympic mountains standing in the distance like an unfolded map. At the entrance to one of the bunker tunnels, a small curious crowd in shorts and sunscreen peer in, astonished. In the tunnel, Bob Effertz is singing. Accompanied by a didgeridoo player, Effertz sings in such a way that it sounds as if two people are singing in harmony together. One note is low, and the other high.

Bob Effertz is an ethnomusicologist who has traveled throughout the world to learn how different cultures express themselves through music. He co-authored *Asia Through the Back Door* with Rick Steves and a list of the countries he has traveled to includes India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Tanzania, Kenya, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru, Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, Greece, Turkey, Israel, and most of western Europe. He has studied tabla drums, Indian Kirtan singing, panpipes, didgeridoo, harmonium, hammered dulcimer, many different styles of national dances, and Middle Eastern drumming. "If I didn't love so many things, I might be really good at one thing," he says.

For Effertz, voice is the purest means of expression. He notes that in smoky Irish pubs, jam sessions can be going on in the corner and people will be yelling to be heard over it. "But as soon as someone starts singing, everyone gets quiet, and there's a dead silence, and they listen. Everyone gives that person a chance to sing, because it's such a personal expression." This past July, he set up a workshop on throat singing and a concert on Whidbey Island with a group of Tuvan throat singers.

Throat—or harmonic overtone—singing, is a kind of low, guttural drone which forces air around the tongue high in the

mouth, adding a high harmonic to the low drone.

Throat singing is prevalent throughout central Asia from Tibet to Tuva, a small Russian province north of Mongolia. It may also have gone over the land bridge to North America, where it became part of Inuit culture. "There's such a mix, always, with everything," Effertz says. "A nation is conquered, and the music moves into a new country. East to west, and west to east. Music is fusing so much but at the same time a lot of groups are beginning to preserve more and more of their traditional culture. Joy is the common denominator. People say voice is the finest and most expressive instrument there is, and I believe that's true."

—Jordan Hartt



Effertz at Centrum in 2006



Effertz at home on Whidbey Island

WHATEVER!

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Session 1: March 4-9, 2007

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Grades 7-9

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