

An Udmurt Flute

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Abstract: The article gives a complete description of the *uz'ygumy*, the Udmurt traditional flute. Published articles by Russian researchers and new field material recorded during expeditions between 2004 and 2009 are used as the main sources. For the first time the process of manufacture of the instrument is observed, the territory of its existence is outlined, preferable sizes of the instrument are given, the way of playing and repertoire of executed folk tunes are described.

Keywords: end-blown flute, manufacture, methods of playing the instrument, repertoire, Udmurt, traditional musical instruments

Today, there are separate articles devoted to this or that musical instrument, although the culture of Udmurt traditional instruments is still generally poorly investigated in Russian ethno-organology.

The investigation of Udmurt musical instruments began in the middle of the 20th century with the greatest attention paid to chordophones. The oldest Udmurt musical instrument the *krez'* (*zyther*) is especially distinguished among them (Buch 1882; Belyaev 1989; Gippius, Eval'd 1989; Golubkova 1978, 1989, 1992; Karpov 1989; Kungurov 1992). The sound is produced by strings stretched between two fixed holders. A musical collection of folk

tunes performed on the *kubyz* (violin) was published in 2004 (Nurieva 2004, 2005; Pchelovodova, Demeter 2011; Pchelovodova 2012). There is much less information about Udmurt aerophones. Significant information about them appeared after field expeditions between 2004 and 2009 (Pchelovodova 2010). This article is devoted to a complete description of the Udmurt traditional flute, the *uz'ygumy*, based on materials from published and field sources.

The instrument was named after the umbellate *uz'ygumy/gumy* plant (*Angelica*) from which it is made and it is an archaic musical instrument of the Udmurt (photo 1). This is an end-blown labial fricative flute 50–80 cm in length with a whistle hole but no finger holes. The *uz'ygumy* produces only natural sounds that depend on the material and the size of the instrument. A musician can modify the sound pitch of the instrument by closing the lower hole with a forefinger, tightening the lips and changing the blowing force. There are some similar musical instruments in the traditional cultures of the Finno-Ugric people (the Komi have the *otika pöl'an*, the Mari the *shiyaltysh*, the Karelians and Finns the *siirtotulppaiset huilut*, and the Hungarians the *tilinkó*) (Chistalev 1984; Gerasimov 1996; Leisiö 1983; Vargyas 2005), the Turkic people (the Tatars and the Bashkirs have the *kuray*, the Chuvash the *shahlich*) (Makarov 2006; Chuvashi 1970), the Slavonic people (the Russians have the *travyanaya dudka / kalyuka*) (Kiryushina 1989), the peoples of Siberia (the Tuvinians have the *murgu*, the Altais the *shoor*) (Suzukey 2007), the Scandinavian people (the Norwegians have the *spaltefløyta*) (Sevåg 1973), the South American Indians (Izicowitz 1935) and many others. Probably one of the reasons for the popularity of the instrument is the simplicity of its manufacture. All these instruments are made from the stalk of umbellate plants such as *Angelica*, *Reed*, *Rhubarb*, etc.



Photo 1. *Uz'ygumy*. Novyy Untem, Kez district, Udmurt Republic.
Photo by Irina Pchelovodova, 2004.

The data from written sources

The first data on the *uz'ygumy* appeared in an article by Soviet researchers Evgeniy Gippius and Zinaida Eval'd titled “On the Study of the Poetic and Musical Style of Udmurt Folk Songs” (Gippius, Eval'd 1989). In the article authors describe the *uz'ygumy* and the *chipchirgan* (a natural trumpet), which hadn't been mentioned previously. Music samples of traditional folk tunes written at Evgeniy Gippius's request in 1936 were published only in 1989. Two folk tunes (wedding and recruiting) were presented there.

In 1989 the editors added the article “Information about Udmurt Folk Musical Instruments” by musicologist Viktor Belyaev (Belyaev 1989), which the editors thought had been written at Evgeniy Gippius's request. The value of the work consists in the attempt to classify Udmurt musical instruments. Viktor Belyaev divides them into percussion instruments, stringed instruments and wind instruments, which are sub-divided into families of trumpets (*chipchirgan*), flutes (*uz'ygumy*) and clarinets (*byz* (bagpipes)). Some

more music samples were published in the *Udmurt Folk Songs* collection by Irina Travina (Travina 1964). However, the author does not give the characteristics of instruments.

Between the 1970s and 1990s new works were published containing descriptions of construction, methods of playing and the technical possibilities of the Udmurt flute (Vertkov, Blagodatov, Yazovitskaya 1975; Golubkova 1978, 1989, 1992; Karpov 1989; Kungurov 1992). All publications reported that the *uz'ygumy* had disappeared from tradition. Only the works of modern ethnologist Elena Popova, devoted to Udmurt and Besserman¹ children's game culture, contain information on the *uz'y gumy shulan*, a whistle made from angelica 15–50 cm in length (Popova 2005).

The field ethnographical materials

The expedition materials of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature at the Udmurt Federal Research Centre of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Science (below UIIYaL FITs UrO RAN) from 2004–2009 have shown that the tradition of playing the *uz'ygumy* isn't lost but survives in practice. Modern field ethnographic materials have expanded knowledge about the Udmurts end-blown flute. These data have allowed us to specify an area where the instrument is spreading and to reveal some varieties of Udmurt flute.

We recorded the playing of an *uz'ygumy* for the first time in the north of the Udmurt Republic in 2004–2005² and then again in 2007³. The instrument was 49 cm in length with a whistle hole and no finger holes. As material for the instrument the player Evgeniy Khudyakov (1939–2009) used a rubber hose (photo 2). He considered that the traditional material (umbellate plant stalk) was too short-lived and impractical. Therefore he used modern materials such as a rubber hose, plastic and aluminium tubes.

But Khudyakov had tried to keep the traditional form of the instrument. Thus he made the top part of the instrument from a wide tube and for the bottom part used a narrower tube. When making the *uz'ygumy* from a plant stalk Khudyakov used human measurements to find the length of the instrument, depending on length of the arm 78–82 cm, with the width of the instrument corresponding to the width of the thumb.



Photo 2. *Uz'ygumy* player Evgeniy Andreevich Khudyakov. Novyy Untem, Kez district, Udmurt Republic.
Photo by Irina Pchelovodova, 2004.

The other players (Aleksey Semyonov, 1938 and Nikolay Chupin, 1925) had shorter instruments, 40–60 cm in length. In rare cases the *uz'ygumy* had finger holes, but no more than two and cut roughly.

In 2008 data, the *uz'ygumy* was fixed in the south of Udmurt Republic for the first time⁴. The construction of the instrument was similar to the previous examples mentioned. The flute was cut from

between crosspieces of a plant and was 40–42 cm in length with no finger holes. The performer, Anatoliy Bykov (b. 1938), preferred instruments made from a fresh, not dried, plant stem because the sound is more sonorous (photo 3).



Photo 3. *Uz'ygumy* player. Anatoliy Dmitrevich Bykov. Chutozhmon, Malaya Purga district, Udmurt Republic. Photo Irina Pchelovodova, 2009.

The Siberian Udmurt living in the Tomsk region of Russia also had similar a instrument, also known as a *uz'ygumy*⁵. Vasilisa Perevozchikova (b. 1929) said that the instrument had been made from *chushni* (*Anthriscus sylvestrus*). At the upper end of the instrument there was a whistle plug while the other end was closed by the plant's natural crosspiece. Probably, there were also finger holes.

All performers have their own methods of playing the instrument. When playing the *uz'ygumy* musicians put it to their mouths in such manner that the whistle hole is in the bottom part of the tube, or more rarely above. Air is blown into the hollow tube of

the instrument and the bottom part is closed. In the south of the Udmurt Republic one performer, Anatoliy Bykov, demonstrated different ways of playing the flute. Thus he created melodies through the mobility of his lips and by changing the instrument position.

As has been said before one of the reasons for the popularity of the instrument was the simplicity of its making. As a rule the Udmurt flute was mainly used by shepherds. In addition, playing the *uz'ygumy* accompanies young people's outdoor festivals, returning to village after haymaking, and when searching for honey. During the Great Patriotic War the *uz'ygumy* was the only musical instrument in villages.

It was possible to play *uz'ygumy* solo or in an ensemble. Performers held competitions with the best performers estimated on skill of playing. Only male shepherds and young guys could play the instrument. In traditional culture grazing was men's work and so women didn't play the *uz'ygumy*.

Each musician has his own repertoire, for example Evgeniy Khudyakov performed only dance (*ekton gur*) and chastushka tunes. Sometimes he played in ensembles with an harmonica if the key of the instruments concurred. Masterly *uz'ygumychi* (player) Ivan Shabalin (1902–19??) from Selty district in the Central part of Udmurt Republic played different melodies such as dance tunes (*ekton gur*), work tunes (*pur kel'an gur*, tunes performed during timber rafting), ceremonial tunes (*kuno gur*, 'guest tune'), borrowed melodies (*dzh'uch gur*, 'Russian tune') and also his own melodies. It is possible to play song melodies on the instrument as well as improvisations.

At a preliminary stage of our research we can say that Udmurt end-blown flute is a culture phenomenon that occurs in all Udmurt groups. We can distinguish two types of *uz'ygumy* according to construction (design). The first type is the open end-blown flute with a whistle hole and without finger holes (or with no more than two). The length of the instrument depends on the length of the

musician's arm. However the length of the instrument could be shorter depending on the desire of the performer to tune to a specific range. The second type is the closed end-blown flute with a whistle plug and probably with finger holes too.

In conclusion, let us observe that today the *uz'ygumy* is not present in living tradition. We must acknowledge the fact that transmission of playing has been interrupted. Nevertheless, the *uz'ygumy*, its making and playing, have continued in the repertoires of some folklore ensembles in Udmurtia, such as Aykay, the Udmurt state theatre of folk songs and dances; the folklore and ethnographic ensemble Chipchirgan; and the folklore ensemble Soroka ('magpie') from the Republic's musical college. One of the present masters and makers is Evgeniy Bikuzin.

Notes

- ¹ The Besserman people are ethnically a group of Udmurt with a strong Turkic influence.
- ² Folklore and ethnographic expedition of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature in 2004: Kez district of Udmurt Republic. Participants: T. Vladykina, A. Mutina, I. Pchelovodova, A. Nikulin, E. Lozhkina, T. Vladykina. In 2005 Kez district of Udmurt Republic. Participants: I. Pchelovodova, A. Nikulin.
- ³ Folklore and ethnographic expedition of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature in 2007: Glazov district of the Udmurt Republic. Participants: I. Pchelovodova.
- ⁴ Folklore and ethnographical expedition of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature in 2008: Malaya Purga district of Udmurt Republic. Participants: I. Pchelovodova.
- ⁵ Folklore and ethnographical expedition of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature in 2006: Chainsk district of Tomsk region. Participants: I. Pchelovodova in the delegation from Udmurt Republic.

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