MEN OF DHARAMSALA
Randy Bellous, executive producer
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<td>9:09</td>
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<td>2</td>
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*live performances at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts
Men of Dharamsala

Dedication to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

When one meets the Tibetan monk Tenzin Gyatso, otherwise known as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, one is impressed by his dual presence. Not only does he invariably come across as humble, kind and funny, but he also projects power, almost luminescence, that inspires love and worship in his followers.

The Dalai Lama maintains that he is a simple monk. He stepped down as the leader of the Tibetan government in exile in order to force democratic elections. But His Holiness remains a teacher and the spiritual leader of Tibet and the Tibetan Buddhist community around the world. His devotees perceive him as the current incarnation of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva (Sanskrit), which literally means the “Lord who looks upon the world with compassion.” Practicing Tibetans revere His Holiness as a living god whose every action and thought is meant as a teaching to help all sentient beings reach enlightenment.

His Holiness celebrates his 80th birthday in Los Angeles on July 6th, 2015. We dedicate this album to him as a birthday present. The Dalai Lama has lived in the small hill station called McLeod Ganj, perched above the town of Dharamsala in Northern India since the sixties, after he and his family and government fled Chinese-occupied Tibet in 1959. His Holiness and his industrious Tibetans transformed this sleepy British hill station into a bustling refugee camp, which continues to evolve.

The Dalai Lama is a “Man of Dharamsala,” living in exile, continuing to lead, to teach and to inspire. His insistence on non-violent protest instead of armed rebellion comes from his
The Potala Palace, winter home of the Dalai Lamas before 1959, Lhasa Tibet
deep understanding of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, and expands upon examples set in the 20th Century by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. It is our hope that the Tibetan people may regain their freedom, both inside their own country of Tibet, and wherever they live in the world. His Holiness received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

**Tibetan Opera**

Lama Thangtong Gyalpo, the creator of Tibetan opera, lived from 1385 to 1464 (until 1509 in another account). He tasked himself with building bridges across the major rivers in Tibet. Many felt he built the bridges to help people reach pilgrimage sites more easily, that the motivation for his venture was entirely altruistic. At the same time, these bridges improved communication across the country. Several of these bridges remain to this day.

Like many of the great figures in Tibetan history, Thangtong Gyalpo is larger than life. He needed funding to fulfill his mission, so he created Tibetan Opera. Thangtong Gyalpo’s opera performances celebrated the great characters in Tibetan mythology, culture and religion and lasted as long as two weeks. He and his opera troop sold tickets and used the income to built bridges.

Thangtong Gyalpo was a scholar, physician, architect and highly realized lama. At first, the story goes, his opera troop consisted of himself playing drums and cymbals, and seven women (all sisters of each other, who were part of his bridge labor force. As they do today, women did a high percentage of the manual labor in Tibet). These women demonstrated excellent ability as singers and dancers, and when people saw them perform for the first time some thought they must be goddesses come to earth. Tibetan opera’s first name was “Ache Lhamo,” which means “sister goddesses.” By the 18th Century, Tibetan opera had spread all across the country and was an integral part of the fabric of Tibetan culture.

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1Thangtong Gyalpo is also known as Tsundu Tsangpo, which translates as “excellent persistence.” Singing bridges into existence was hard work, especially in the 15th century. Isn’t it ironic that Tsundu Tsangpo could create an artform to support a massive and coordinated construction project? This is the reverse of what we know in the modern western world where industry sponsors culture.
a cave shrine to Thangtong Gyalpo in Lhasa, Tibet
Tibetan Opera is about good and evil and about how one can better navigate good and evil once one possesses a deep understanding of Buddhist philosophy. Evil

often seems to have the upper hand in the beginning of these dramas, but in the end compassion wins, defeating the effects of evil. Six hundred years later, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts carries on this proud legacy.

**Nechung Monastery, Lhasa and Dharamsala**

Since Thangtong Gyalpo’s time, the Dalai Lamas, important monasteries, wealthy individuals and members of the Court supported Tibetan opera and dance in the major cities in Tibet. Principal among these was Nechung Monastery, in Lhasa. Before fleeing the Chinese, the Tibetan State Oracle made his home at Nechung Monastery, just below Drepung
Nechung Kuten (Ngodub), the current Tibet State Oracle, at Nechung Monastery in Dharamsala
Monastery on the outskirts of Lhasa. Tradition maintains that Guru Padmasambhava, who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th Century, won a magical battle with Pehar, a powerful indigenous demon. In winning the battle, Padmasambhava transformed Pehar into a protective Nechung spirit charged with protecting the Tibetan state.

This Pehar spirit inhabits a succession of Nechung oracles when called upon by the state. The current oracle, a wise, friendly and generous man named Ngodub, lives in Dharamsala at the new Nechung Monastery founded in exile. His title is Nechung Kuten, often referred to as Kuten-la. When we approached him about recording Nechung monks performing special prayers (pujas) in his monastery as part of a recording project with the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, Ngodub-la readily agreed.

The great Tibetan oracle poured tea and his eyes lighted up as he explained the ancient tradition of opera and dance patronage at the Nechung Monastery in Lhasa, and how it was a great opportunity (and appropriate) to continue this tradition in our recording. Our executive producer Randy Bellous joins us in thanking Ngodub and the monastery’s talented Kusho Dorjee for making this collaboration possible.

These pujas are unique to Nechung Monastery, performed nowhere else. We open our album with Chinbep Puja, a blessing of the environment, recorded at night in the main hall of Nechung monastery. As are all the practices and performances on this album, this is one take. We open with cymbals and the ritual vajra bell symbolizing the union of compassion and the wisdom of emptiness, followed by the magnificent voices of the monks of Nechung. Tibetan oboes, rattle drums made from human skulls and general pandemonium ensue before we return again to the monks chanting their blessing.
The next music recorded in Nechung Monastery is *Rime Soldep*, track 5, which offers a puja to the Four Lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug. *Zandang Palri*, a puja that is part of the Great Monlam Prayer Festival and dedicated to Guru Padmasambhava, follows on track 7. The Nechung monks offer a *Losar Puja*, with blessings for the Tibetan New Year, on track 10. And the monks conclude in track 16 with *Gyun, Chak Sumpa*, a refuge puja, dedicated to the three jewels of Tibetan Buddhist practice, the Buddha (the eternal enlightened teacher), the Dharma (the teaching) and the Sanga (the assembly of practitioners, past, present and future). As you know, we recorded this in the main hall of Nechung Monastery. You will hear a dog’s bark during this refuge puja. This is one of my favorite moments in the album. In Tibetan Buddhist tradition all sentient beings are related. Every creature has at one time been your mother in a previous incarnation and hence worthy of love and respect. The dogs who hang around Tibetan monasteries are appreciated as monks from the monastery who have come back for a visit in another form.

**The Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts**

Hidden from the outside world for centuries, between the Himalayas to the south and the forbidding Taklemakhan Desert to the North, the country of Tibet and Tibet’s culture and religion remained largely unchanged since the Middle Ages. But starting in 1949 when the Red Army invaded Tibet to “liberate the people,” most of Tibet’s 6,000 monasteries were destroyed with dynamite and aerial bombardment. Political and religious expression has been systematically repressed by the Chinese government, which means that much of the native Tibetan cultural landscape was in danger of dying within a generation. Thanks to the importance His Holiness placed on the preservation of unique Tibetan traditions, the first institution he established after his escape to India in 1959 was the Tibetan Dance and Drama Society, now called the **Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts**, or “**TIPA**.”

His Holiness acted swiftly to preserve what he could during this cultural genocide. The Dalai Lama started TIPA so the surviving opera and dance masters, costume and instrument makers, could teach future custodians of the song and dance dramas instigated by Thangtong Gyalpo in the fifteenth century.
In the last fifty years, TIPA became one of the most important ambassadors for Tibetan culture. International tours have introduced Tibetan opera and dance around the world. Additionally, TIPA trains performers who later teach in Tibetan
schools in India and elsewhere in the diaspora, enabling the rich traditions to survive. The great Norbu Tsering served as TIPA’s opera master for decades. He was born near Lhasa and was known as an extraordinary performer in Tibet. He taught all the operas in TIPA’s repertoire, and remained with the company until he passed away in 2014. Norbu Tsering’s intense gaze and extraordinary memory will be greatly missed.

Our friend Francois Cossery introduced us to TIPA, and especially to two young performers, Tsering Youdon and Tsering Lodoe. Tsering Youdon serves as this album’s Associate Producer, and she now lives in California with her family.
Tsering Lodee sings many of the opera songs on this recording and helped us with logistics in India and introduced us to many of his friends who performed for us. Lodee now lives in the United States as well. Both Youdon and Lodee live the life of modern Tibetan exiles. To survive, they live in the west, while spreading the culture and teachings of this magnificent country.

Dawa Dolma (standing), Nyima Tashi (sitting) prepare their costumes before a performance

a proud TIPA craftsman shows off his Tibetan lute
Jamyang Dorjee served as Director of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts and encouraged this project. Many thanks also to Tenzin Lhaksam, Secretary of TIPA, who continued to work with us so generously. Our “US Team,” executive producer Randy Bellous, Associate Producer Tsering Youdon, Assistant Producer Jacob Horowitz, Mastering Engineer Steve Hoffman, and our friends Tenzin Sangpo, Rinchen Lhamo and Dhondup Namgyal, enabled us to turn generous support from Stratton-Petit Foundation, Nechung Monastery, Jacques Farasat and Lynne & Tom Tillack into music. A special thank you also to John Taylor and Dianne Dubler, who introduced us to Tibet. We are grateful.

We recorded our TIPA musicians in the main concert hall. Tsering Lodoe remembers working with other musicians (he was 7 years old at the time) to build portions of this auditorium and several dorm buildings. TIPA is a community effort and a community success; everyone contributes. Even the local McLeod Ganj monkeys participated, as they demonstrated during our recording sessions, banging furiously on the roof of the concert hall when the music pleased or displeased them (we were never sure which). This made for some interesting retakes.
We open the TIPA section of this recording in track 2 with Toenpa Kyap, singing **Great Eastern Sun**, a nomad song about the greatness of a Lama (His Holiness the Dalai Lama by implication) in the Amdo language from the northeast part of Tibet. Amdo is the region of greater Tibet where the Dalai Lama was born. The nomads have arguably been the least oppressed of the Tibetans under Chinese rule these past fifty years since they are nomadic (herding yaks and other grazing animals) and tend not to congregate in large numbers. Toenpa Kyap left TIPA shortly after this recording. He returned to Tibet, got married, and we have heard no news from him since.

Track 3 is **Gyalue Namthar** followed by **Ringa**. These songs originated when Thangtong Gyalpo (our founder of Tibetan opera) and his initial troop of seven women traveled to the Tsang region of Tibet, early in his bridge building days. “Gyalu” is the oldest male member of a family. Tradition says that the audience was captivated, and the oldest man of the village stood up and joined in the dance. Thangtong Gyalpo enjoyed this interaction and incorporated this “old man character” with his geriatric slower body rhythm into the stage purification dance. To this day, “Gyalu’s opera song” is part of the opening of every Tibetan opera performance, and the dancer wears a costume indicating the Tsang region. Penpa Tsering sings the song in this track and is accompanied by Tsering Lodoe singing the chorus. **Gyalue Namthar** is a stage purification dance song, meant to prepare the stage, the environment and the audience to receive the opera. Later in our album, Tsering Lodoe sings another **Gyalue Namthar** in track 15, with different words, and as a solo performance without choral accompaniment.

The second part of track 3, **Ringa**, is from another section of the stage purification dance. In this section, soloist Sherab Wangmo is joined by her fellow dakini goddesses as chorus, offering the music and the performance to all the Buddhas.

Track 4: **Rangyul Rangla Mayna** is a modern Tibetan folk song written and performed by Jamyang Choeden (known as Jack to his friends). This song yearns for freedom for Tibet and calls Tibetans to unite for the cause. The Tibetan government in exile has tried numerous approaches for a better life for Tibetans in Tibet. The current demand is for

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2 “Namthar” means “opera song” in Tibetan, so the title of the first part means “Gyalu’s opera song.” To some western ears, this style of Tibetan opera resembles Native American song. One is tempted to connect the two practices and remember the Bering Strait theory of migration from Asia to the North American continent, assuming that Tibetan music and Native American music could have a common ancestor. Recent linguistic scholarship has challenged the traditional date of this migration from about 10,000 years ago to much earlier. Evolution and variation in Native Americans languages suggest to some scholars that the migrations may have gone both ways between Asia and the Americas, and that they may have begun as early as 40-50,000 years ago. This makes it less likely that the musical traditions are closely related, fun as the speculation may be.

3 The first and second parts of track 3 are from different performances, but we unite them to illustrate the stage purification ritual. Sherab Wangmo and her dakinis performed in the TIPA concert discussed below in Nangsa Woebum, track 6.
autonomy within China (which might be easier to negotiate) rather than complete independence from China. “Rangzen” (the “Rangyul” in the title) implies complete independence, and speaks to a time when the Tibetans had greater hopes that the Chinese might leave their country.

Track 6: **Nangsa Woebum** is the title character in an opera. Nangsa Woebum is a kind and virtuous young woman trapped in a family of vicious in-laws. The singer in this track (Penpa Tsering) plays the role of a beggar and street performer who is entertaining Nangsa Woebum. The beggar is actually a high lama in disguise, with a pet dancing monkey who performs in conjunction with the beggar’s narratives. Nangsa Woebum is drawn strongly to the beggar’s dharma message, and this scene depicts a turning point in Nangsa Woebum’s life, wherein she attains greater spirituality and compassion. This track was recorded in a special live performance in the TIPA auditorium for Tibetan government officials and foreign dignitaries. Yet two thirds of the hall was filled with local people from McLeod Ganj, gathered to enjoy and celebrate this living Tibetan musical tradition.

Track 8: **Ayr-sha** is the name of a mountain pass, and this song celebrates the majesty of nature. The singer alludes to a snow lion (an auspicious magical
the Yarlung Tsangpo River, east of Lhasa. This mighty river flows from holy Mount Kailas past Lhasa and north of the Yarlung Valley before descending through the famous Tibetan Grand Canyon (Yarlung Tsangpo Gorge) to become the mighty Brahmaputra as it flows into the Indian Ocean though the Bay of Bengal.
creature in Tibetan cosmology) coming to visit the village, and welcomes the snow lion to their midst. The snow lion is a symbol in this song for His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Track 9: **Drelkar** is a famous spoken performance that contains standard passages and areas for improvisation. The Drelkar character is ostensibly a street singer who performs in exchange for food or money. These characters are thought to be auspicious because their often ribald commentaries are filled with wisdom, Buddhist philosophy and prayers for all sentient beings. Drelkar performances are often the highlight of an evening; they can be viciously funny and R-rated… think “Saturday Night Live,” with a second level of serious philosophy. Drelkars are popular at weddings and other important ceremonies. This particular performance, by Penpa Tsering, isn’t particularly risque but focuses rather on his personal belongings in a way that symbolizes his wish for success, happiness and the light of the dharma to come upon his listeners.

Toenpa Kyap returns to sing **Homage to the Lama** in track 11. This Amdo folk song is in fact a song in praise of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Toenpa Kyap accompanies himself on guitar. Tsering Lodoe plays the lute.

**Tashi Shoelpa** (track 12) is another live recording. Tashi Shoelpa is a white mask dance, and remains a TIPA
audience favorite. It originated during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Some accounts suggest it was performed at his enthronement in the mid seventeenth century and there is speculation that the white mask represents Thangtong Gyalpo himself, the creator of Tibetan opera. This is an auspicious offering of dance and in modern times is used to welcome a highly realized person or lama, or other revered guests.

Tsering Lodel sings tracks 13, 14 and 15. The first is **Dopoe Namthar**, or “Dopo’s song” which comes from the opera *Drowa Sangmo*. The character singing is a stone carver (a dopo) who has been enlisted by an evil queen to murder her step children, the prince and princess of about nine and ten years old. This song is honey-tongued, as Dopo tries to lure the children into a trap so he and his accomplice can hurl them over a cliff. He fails because rather than begging for their lives the children offer each of themselves in order that the stone carver might spare the other one. This inspires Dopo to change his mind. His accomplice is not equally convinced, however, and throws the boy over the precipice. The story continues with myriad plot twists (including the boy’s salvation by his mother who assumes the form of a bird and rescues him from his bone crushing descent) and the entire opera takes a full week to perform in its entirety. One can imagine three of Wagner’s Ring Cycles back to back to give an idea of the scope of this drama.
Track 14 is **Norsang Yab Ki Namthar**, from the opera *Prince Norsang*. The character singing is the king addressing his son, prince Norsang. The king sings a song to welcome his son to his residence. The prince had been summoned for an audience because his father wishes to send him to fight in a war. This is one of Associate Producer Tsering Youdon’s favorite operas, full of high drama, great singing, complicated love stories, etc.

Track 15 repeats **Gyalue Namthar** as discussed above, this time with Tsering Lodo as soloist and no chorus.

Track 17 is **Amdo Glory**, a haunting Nomad song offered again by Toenpa Kyap. Imagine the singer on a long journey through beautiful open countryside high on the Tibetan plateau where the elevation averages 15,000 feet above sea level. Amdo nomad songs express enormous joy and freedom. The singers “swing” the rhythm, in a way that can remind one of American jazz. And the wide open spaces inspire high-pitched vocal gymnastics that are sporting as much as they are reverent.

Track 18 is the last take we recorded in Nechung Monastery, with two monks playing Tibetan Long Horns. How could we resist? These ritual horns, which telescope out to about fifteen feet in length, were also used to communicate from one monastery to another across vast Tibetan valleys. Within the confines of Nechung Monastery, they
are powerful enough to rattle one's bones. They can sound like the call of a bull elephant. Some scholarship suggests that these horns originate in the eleventh century and were played for Atisha, the great Buddhist scholar visiting from India, who was responsible for a Renaissance of Buddhism in Tibet.

--Tsering Youdon and Jamyang Wangchuk
a village in the Yarlung Valley
Winter rainstorm, Yarlung Tsangpo River
MEN OF DHARAMSALA

Musicians from
The Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts
& Nechung Monastery

Executive Producer: Randy Bellous
Producer and Recording Engineer: Bob Attiyeh
Associate Producer: Tsering Youdon
Assistant Producer: Jacob Horowitz
Mastering Engineers: Steve Hoffman & Bob Attiyeh

With generous support from
Stratton-Petit Foundation
Nechung Monastery, Dharamsala
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Jacques Farasat
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