

Wednesday, March 14, 2007, 8pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## Gyuto Monks Tibetan Tantric Choir



*The Gyuto Monks extend their thanks to Meyer Sound for its generous support of their tour.*

*Cal Performances' 2006–2007 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.*

## Gyuto Monks Tibetan Tantric Choir

Venerable Lobsang Dorjee  
Venerable Nagwang Gelek  
Venerable Norbu Damdul  
Venerable Tenzin Norgyal  
Venerable Kunsang Raptan  
Venerable Ngawang Sherab  
Venerable Gedun Tsering  
Venerable Dakpa Gyaltzen  
Venerable Sonam Wangchuk  
Venerable Nawang Tenzin  
Venerable Lodoe Nima  
Venerable Thupten Donyo  
Venerable Lobsang Phuntsok

### PROGRAM

#### *ORDER OF THE RITUALS*

#### **Vajra Master Initiation from the Yamantaka Tantra**

To do any tantric practice, a meditator first needs to receive an initiation, a ritual empowerment. The highest tantric empowerments, like that of Yamantaka, the Slayer of Death, are quite complex. They lead the initiate deeper and deeper into the mandala, the symbolic world of the deity. The Vajra Master empowerment prepares the initiate to eventually become a Vajra Master—a perfect tantric teacher—in his or her own right and to initiate new disciples into the path.

#### **Consecration**

In Tibet, whenever a sacred object is made, it is consecrated to infuse it with the spiritual presence of the god or Buddha which it portrays. The consecration that the monks perform this evening will not only imbue the sacred images on stage with the divine presence, but the entire environment in which the consecration ritual is held.

#### *INTERMISSION*

## **Golden Libation Offering to the Combined Deities of All Tantras**

The Golden Libation is an ancient ceremony that Tibetans used long before Buddhism came to Tibet to offer food and drink to their gods. This Buddhist version of the rite invokes the deities of four classes of tantras and encourages them to support spiritual practice and promote the welfare of all beings.

## **Song of Praise of Mahakala**

Praising the deity you invoke is an important part of most Tibetan rituals. This prayer poetically enumerates the superhuman power and wisdom of the Six-Armed Mahakala, whose fearsome powers can demolish inner and outer obstacles to progress in meditation. Mahakala is chief of all the fierce Protectors of the Buddhist path. So great is his spiritual accomplishment, that some say he is a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara himself—the embodiment of the compassion of all Buddhas and Tibet's patron deity.

## **Propitiation of Mahakala**

To encourage Mahakala to use his awesome powers for the good of the spiritual community and the world at large, the monks visualize a panoply of offerings pleasing to this fearsome personality. Artists often include some of these special offerings in paintings of the protectors, such as offering bowls made of skulls, herds of black yaks, flights of black crows and packs of black dogs.

## **The Seven Signs of Dominion**

Tibetans think of Buddhas as conquerors—they have overcome the armies of their own errant thoughts and discordant emotions and initiated a state of inner peace that can spread far beyond the borders of their individual selves. The Seven Signs of Dominion, ancient Indian symbols of a universal emperor, reflect this belief. They are the wheel of universal rule, the perfect jewel, the perfect empress, the perfect prime minister, the perfect elephant, the perfect steed and the perfect general.

## **Remaining Steadfast**

Near the end of any important sacred ceremony, monks perform a special prayer. Called "Remaining Steadfast," this prayer focuses their minds on retaining the spiritual accomplishments that they have achieved through their ritual practice.

## Gyuto Monks Tantric Tibetan Choir

*“The Gyuto Monks allow us access into the realm of being. Their sound shows the depth of the human spirit’s compassion. It is one of the most extraordinary examples of extended voice on this planet.”—Mickey Hart*

*The monks of Gyuto have perfected a special type of chant in which each monk sings not a single note but an entire chord. “This remarkable, transcendently beautiful sound,” notes Robert Thurman, Chair of the Department of Religion, Columbia University, “is thought to arise only from the throat of a person who has realized selfless wisdom.”*

*“Some people may ask, ‘Why are they performing publicly what should be esoteric rites?’ Perhaps these people feel that secret teachings should not be turned into a theatrical spectacle. But they need not be concerned. The secret interior path and its processes are things which the ordinary eye cannot perceive.”—H. H. The Dalai Lama*

With the suppression of Tibet by the Chinese government, in 1959, Tibetan Buddhist Monks from the Gyuto Tantric University joined the Dalai Lama, in fleeing their homeland and setting up a government-in-exile in northern India. The Gyuto Monks have been chanting in their multi-tonal style since the founding of the Gyuto Tantric University in 1474.

After hearing the extraordinary multiphonic chanting of the Gyuto Monks in 1987, Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart resolved to bring the monks to America and make them available to a wider audience. This resulted in tours in 1988, 1991 and 1995. The sold-out, 22-city 1988 tour culminated with a remarkable performance before 5,000 at New York’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The performance was filmed and later released as a feature on the Discovery Channel, featuring Kitaro and Philip Glass.

The liturgical arts of Tibetan Buddhism, developing over many centuries in relative isolation on the high plateaus on their mountain-ringed land, are extraordinarily rich and unique. Many varied Buddhist traditions of India have

been preserved only in Tibet, and are therefore a cultural treasure of mankind. Distinct sects and traditions developed in Tibet and now coexist in exile: that of Gyuto Tantric College/Monastery is one of the most esoteric, complex and awe-inspiring. For 500 years, the Gyuto College prospered at the National Cathedral in Lhasa with 900 or more monks in residence. Now exiled to India by the Chinese annexation of Tibet, the Gyuto leaders have re-established a monastery near Bomdi-La, India.

Preparation for membership in a monastic order normally begins in childhood and requires many years of training. This training includes memorization of extensive liturgical texts, learning yogic techniques of meditation and visualization, and the cultivation of one or more liturgical arts—chanting, instrumental performance, dance, painting, mask-making and more. Often, one becomes the disciple of a specific revered master. Studies in history, philosophy, logic, arts and Buddhist scripture can continue beyond ordination in formalized collegiate settings, leading to the degree of *geshe*, equivalent intellectually and culturally to our PhD.

## Gyuto Tantric University

When a civilization sets itself on a decisive course, the results can be astounding. In the renaissance, the West set itself on science. Now, nations rendezvous in space, machines talk to each other across the globe and human beings live twice as long as their forefathers.

From 779, when Buddhism became the state religion of Tibet, until 1959, when its civilization was crushed by the Chinese army, Tibet set itself single-mindedly on spiritual development. Tibet’s music and art were inspired by meditation and designed to aid it. Her popular heroes were meditators, not ball players or movie stars. Cities erected statues of Buddhas, not soldiers. Great monastic universities—the largest housed ten thousand teachers and students—taught the theory, practice and history of human spiritual development.

## About the Artists

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In Lhasa, Tibet's capital, two schools ranked among the best of the best. Specializing solely in tantric meditation—the quick path to enlightenment—these small, elite institutions were demanding, even by Tibetan standards. To ensure a lifetime of committed practice, students typically enrolled as teenagers. For a student over 30 to be admitted, he first had to have a doctoral degree from another monastic university—in itself a 20-to-30-year program.

Located on the north side of Lhasa, Gyuto, or “Upper (Lhasa) Tantric (University),” was founded in 1474 by Jey Kunga Dondrub, a leading disciple of H. H. the First Dalai Lama. Starting with just 32 monks, by 1959 Gyuto had 900. When the Chinese invaded, only 90 of them were able to follow H. H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama into exile.

Gyuto soon found a home in northern India and expanded rapidly. Since the 1987 Chinese crackdown in Tibet, however, so many new refugees have flooded into India—and Gyuto—that the University has outgrown its small facility. A new monastery is now built in Dharamsala, India, for the 370 monks who now are part of Gyuto. It is to raise funds to feed and house these new students that the monks have left their mountain hermitage to bring their ancient traditions to America.

Two thousand years ago, the Buddha sat under a tree outside a small town in northern India and achieved enlightenment. In the 25 centuries since, Buddhists have developed innumerable meditation systems based on his earth-shaking experience. The most difficult and effective, Tibetans say, are found in books called tantras.

The tantras describe not just one Buddha, but thousands. Tibetans believe that every living being has the potential to achieve enlightenment. The vast number of tantric deities reflect the infinite variety of human temperaments and cultural conditions. Focusing on his or her own potential for enlightenment, a tantric meditator visualizes that he or she is one of these Buddhas. Such a Buddha is called a *yidam*, tutelary or archetype deity. By harnessing one's own self-image through mediating on a *yidam*, the tantric path aims at turning the deepest recesses of the psyche into an engine of enlightenment. Tampering with the foundation of the psyche can be dangerous, though—Tibetans do not practice tantric meditation without the guidance of an accomplished teacher. Training such highly skilled professionals, in fact, is the central goal of Gyuto Tantric University.

### **Gyuto Monks Tibetan Tantric Choir** **Understanding Tibetan Monastic Music in the 21st Century**

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Seaborg Room, Men's Faculty Club, 4pm

Learn more about Tibetan musical structure and theory in preparation for the evening's performance by the Gyuto Monks. Benjamin Bogin (Buddhist Studies, UC Berkeley), Keila Diehl (Anthropology, Stanford University) and Jessie Wallner (Ethnomusicology, Indiana University) will situate the monks' performance in the context of the history of Tibetan monastic rituals, including the cultural transformations that occur when a ritual is displaced from the monastery to the stage.

*Co-sponsored by Cal Performances, the Institute of East Asian Studies and the Center for Buddhist Studies, UC Berkeley.*