Kyrgyz Wind Instruments

*Surnai* – a reed woodwind with a double cane reed. The traditional surnai is a wooden pipe 40-65 centimeters in length with 6-8 playing holes and a bell. The sound is derived with the help of a special device in the form of two sharpened reed plates pressed together and attached to the narrow end. The air stream makes the thin plates vibrate, producing a sound that is bright and a little bit sharp. The timbre of the surnai reminds one of the goboi, to which it is close in construction. The kamysch surnai, more simple in design, is a reed pipe about 25 centimeters in length with 3-4 playing holes. It is made by cutting off and sharpening one end of a single pipe reed of cane. The range of the surnai is slightly more than one octave, with limited variation within that range. However, the brilliance of timbre and loud sound made the surnai useful in ancient times for heralding public events and making public announcements – from military events to festivals.

*Sybyrky* – a variety of a wooden wind instrument, which might be compared to a cross flute. The principle material used in manufacturing the sybyrky is the wood of an apricot tree, a barberry bush, wild reeds or brass. The body of the instrument is a pipe closed at one end. The average length is about 50 centimeters, with various numbers of playing holes (up to 6 or 7). The sybyrky differs from the cho’or by its greater flexibility, wider range (about three octaves) and more even timbre along all ranges. The dynamic characteristics of the instrument enables the musician to perform brilliant, diverse and technically complex compositions from the traditional folk music repertoire.

**Cho’or** – the most ancient Kyrgyz folk instrument and related to the category of woodwinds in which sound is produced from vibrations of the air stream. The Kyrgyz cho’or, really a variation of a woodwind instrument, has an even-in-diameter wooden pipe (made of reed, brass, etc.) with a different number of holes located in various configurations. The size of the instrument fluctuates from 40-100 centimeters. The cho’or could be compared to a flute with a range between one and one and a half octaves. The unusual color of its timbre changes substantially depending on the pitch: a bit rude and harsh in the lower register; bright and transparent in the upper part of the range.

**Chopo cho’or** – made of clay and one of the most ancient of the Kyrgyz folk instruments. Related to the European ocarina, it has one or two playing holes. It is not difficult to play simple melodies on the traditional chopo cho’or, which has a range limited to five notes. The chopo cho’or has been gradually modified from a children’s toy into an instrument with one of the finest timbres and artistic capabilities of any folk instrument. Modern chopo cho’ors are chromatic instruments with a few playing holes, and a range that is slightly more than an octave. These are transposing instruments of different size, which means different tonal ranges. Chopo cho’ors work well in solo and ensemble compositions, and their unique timbre contributes to the beauty of any ensemble of Kyrgyz folk music.