

***Singing Story, Healing Drum: Shamans and Storytellers of Turkic Siberia.* By Kira Van Deusen. (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. Pp. 205, photographs, index, ISBN 0-7735-2616-1)**

Lynn Whidden

Volume 28, Number 2, 2006

Les noces en vrai
Wedding Realities

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/014994ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/014994ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Whidden, L. (2006). Review of [*Singing Story, Healing Drum: Shamans and Storytellers of Turkic Siberia.* By Kira Van Deusen. (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. Pp. 205, photographs, index, ISBN 0-7735-2616-1)]. *Ethnologies*, 28(2), 237–238. <https://doi.org/10.7202/014994ar>

Singing Story, Healing Drum: Shamans and Storytellers of Turkic Siberia.

By Kira Van Deusen. (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. Pp. 205, photographs, index, ISBN 0-7735-2616-1)

Singing Story, Healing Drum includes narrative, music, poetry and descriptions of shamanic practice as practised by the people of the Turkic republics of Tuva and Khakassia in south Siberia. The author visited these areas six times between 1993 and 2002, which explains why the book is authoritative in content. Yet it is communicated in storytelling fashion. The author does not hesitate to use the first person, to interject her own thoughts and feelings about the Turkic shamans, their land, lives, beliefs and narratives. She avoids imposing outsider theory and lets the words of the shamans speak for themselves. There are, though, several startling references to western science, for example, as an explanation for why they consider genetic ancestry important. Van Deusen postulates that perhaps shamans are seeing their own DNA structures (141). On the other hand, these references do provoke thought and are generally well integrated into the text.

They also support Van Deusen's presentation of shamanic practice as a vital process, contexted in a long history. She skilfully places shamans in contemporary life, mentioning, for example, the present role of women in storytelling and as shamans; the role of local narratives in fostering an ecologically sound approach to land use; the many contacts with the West and spread of ideas such as "ecotourist shamanism"; and the negative effects of politics, particularly postwar Soviet, on local practices.

In the introduction the author positions herself and her goals clearly in relation to the material. I would like to know as much about the shamans and storytellers with whom she spoke; we have their names, but in many cases, few details. But we are introduced to this remote area through an excellent variety of photographs of faces, scenes, and artefacts.

Van Deusen discusses Tuvan overtone singing, which by now many westerners have heard. She presents other unique approaches to singing from this area, such as the Asian predilection for minute timbral alterations in contrast to the western emphasis on melodic-rhythmic variety. While she ably discusses all of these sound concepts with words, there are some instances where I would like to see more detail. Perhaps

diagrams (not necessarily music notation) would help us to understand and appreciate some quite different approaches to song and sound.

Overall, the author convincingly shows that the shamanic tradition is a functioning, adaptive worldview, and helps us to understand how it endures as a parallel, unofficial system, even in the face of giant industrialized state systems. As I read, I was struck by the continual similarity with the practices and beliefs of Canada's northern peoples. Even the details of the narratives resonate, for example, the love of stories about orphans and how they overcome adversity. I am delighted that this book was part of my 2004 summer reading.

I recently discovered that Van Deusen has a lively website (<http://www.kiravan.com>). It provides a summary of shamanism that would be useful before reading *Singing Story*, *Healing Drum*. Or, if checked after reading the book, as I did, it answers questions about the author, her background, and contains several glorious colour photographs.

Lynn Whidden
Brandon University
Brandon, Manitoba

Regard sur... la Jeunesse au Québec. Par Madeleine Gauthier, dir. (Sainte-Foy, Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval et Éditions de l'IQRC, 2003. Pp. 155, ISBN 2-89224-342-4)

Cet ouvrage s'adresse autant à un public général qu'à un public spécialiste intéressé par la culture et les sociétés. Publié dans le cadre de la collection « Regards sur la jeunesse du monde » aux Presses de l'Université Laval, en coédition avec l'Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture (IQRC), ce collectif rassemble neuf textes qui tracent le portrait de la jeunesse au Québec. Sous la direction de Madeleine Gauthier, professeure et responsable de l'Observatoire Jeunes et Société de l'Institut national de la recherche scientifique Urbanisation, les treize auteurs qui contribuent à cet ouvrage sont des professionnels, des professeurs, des agents de recherche ou de liaison, ou des étudiants qui travaillent dans le vaste champ des sciences sociales. À travers les neuf textes présentés, nous explorons les différentes sphères qui permettent d'appréhender les réalités qui encadrent la jeunesse au Québec.