

The first Americans, the American Indians, have for centuries valued music as an integral part of their lives. Creation narratives, migration stories, magic formulas, and ancient ceremonial practices tell of music. Archaeologists have found Indian musical instruments and pictographs of singing and dancing from as early as 600 AD. and from areas as far apart as the mounds of the Southeast and the cliff dwellings of the Southwest. Musical styles differ within tribal groups and among individuals. The variety of the music is infinite.

The value of the music to the peoples was largely overlooked by most early writers: the travellers, the missionaries and the soldiers.

In the first three quarters of the nineteenth century numerous songs were transcribed from memory and published in encyclopaedias and music anthologies around the world. In the last quarter of the century musicologists began collecting and analysing Indian music. These early collectors provided material for theories on “primitive” music.

The importance of American Indian music is found not in its impact on modern scholarship and composition but in the traditions and values it expresses to and for the Indian people. This oral tradition has survived solely because the music was too important to be allowed to die. The emphasis in this recording is on musical value: the music of the first Americans can speak for itself.

1. Butterfly Dance (*San Juan Pueblo*)

Recorded at San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico, September 1975

Singers: Herman Agoyo, Anthony S. Archuleta, Cipriano Garcia (bells), Jerry Garcia, Peter Garcia (drums), Steven Trujillo

The Butterfly Dance of San Juan Pueblo, a Tewa-speaking village on the Rio Grande some twenty-five miles north of Santa Fe, was performed only the second time in recent years on Easter Sunday 1975. The dance is associated with the war priest and warfare as the following narrative, collected and translated by Alfonso Ortiz, will illustrate.

A pair of twin boys who lived in an ancestral Tewa village had been endowed with special powers, blessings and virtues by the spirits. The evil elders regarded them as a threat to their own rule. They determined to bring the two boys before them in a *kiva* ceremonial chamber (a large chamber, often underground, in a Pueblo Indian village, used for religious ceremonies and other purposes) to shame them in a test of magic, thus destroying them. Because they were so young the elders believed they could not do much, nor could they have many powers.

Unknown to the boys the supernatural spirits were looking after them. The elder of the twins said to his brother, “Younger brother, let us go down to the river and see what we can find to help us tonight.”

They went to the river and began picking some green plants they found growing there. Suddenly, although it was January, a beautiful butterfly appeared. The elder brother saw it first and said, “Look, younger brother, a *powanini* (butterfly). Whoever heard of a *powanini* being around at this time of the year? It must have much power. Maybe it is meant for us. Let us chase it.”

The twins chased the *powanini*, but every time they would get close to it it would just barely escape them. It kept going, and they kept chasing it from limb to limb, leaf to leaf, and twig to twig. Still the butterfly eluded them. It led them west across the Rio Grande, across the foothills, and on up to the top of the sacred mountain of the West, *Tsikomo*. Then it disappeared around a large rock near the top of the mountain.

The boys rounded the rock thinking that maybe by this time the *powanini* would be so tired that they would catch it. Lying there exhausted, bathed in perspiration, was the chief of the yellow *Oxua*, the ancestral spirits of the West.

“You children of an ash heap,” he said to them. “You have worn me out.”

“No, our elder, it wasn’t you,” they answered. “We didn’t do anything to you. We were just chasing a butterfly.”

“You don’t understand anything,” he retorted. “I was that butterfly.”

The chief of the yellow *Oxua* then took the twins to the bottom of the lake where the spirits had their village, and there the boys were told how to prepare for the contest that night. They were told what would happen and how they would emerge victorious from that contest with the village leaders. All the spirit people wanted to get rid of the evil village elders and install the boys instead, one as summer priest and the other as winter priest.

And so, with the great powers they had received from the spirits, the twins won the contest and became the first winter and summer priests of that village.

The butterfly in this story is the symbol of elusiveness, of always getting away in the nick of time. It is a quality desired of a warrior.

The *Butterfly Dance* is vigorous and demanding. It is a ceremony primarily for young people, who have to ask the priest for permission to hold it. The girls choose their male partners and song they like best. Then the couples rehearse in the *kiva* for two weeks before the performance in the plaza. On the day of the ceremony each couple dances once, in turn, to the chosen song. The dance is one of the few times in traditional Tewa ritual when the spectators display favouritism toward individual dancers. In volunteering to dance, the girls obligate their families to throw gifts to the crowd when it is the girls’ turn to dance. The competitiveness of the dances and the favouritism shown by the spectators are in direct contrast to most Tewa rituals, in which the group performance is paramount and no individual is allowed to stand out.

The costumes are beautiful and elaborate. Two distinguishing elements are a long straight row of feathers worn by the women down their backs to symbolise the butterfly’s wings and a white chalcedony hatchet, called the “great man axe”, carried and brandished by the man during the dance.

There are nine *Butterfly Dance* songs performed in a set order. The song on this recording is the first one, the war priest’s song, and is considered the most beautiful.

The instruments used are a double-headed cylindrical rawhide drum played by the lead singer and a set of bells worn behind the knee of the male dancer. The ululation heard partway through the second section is performed by a singer patting his mouth with his hand. This is the signal for the girls’ families to throw gifts.

2. Alligator Dance (*Seneca*)

Recorded in Salamanca, New York, October 1975

Singers: Leslie Bowen (leader), Herbert Dowdy, Sr., Avery Jimerson, Johnson Jimerson, Marty Jimerson, Richard Johnny-John

Dancers: Alvina C. Cooper, A. Eileen Jacobs, Fidelia Jimerson, Vera Jimerson, Cecil Johnny-John, Kevin Johnny-John, Lyford Johnny-John, Michael Johnny-John, Brian Mohr, Theresa R. Seltron

The *Seneca* are one of the Six Nations of the Iroquois, located in New York State and on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. The social dances of the Iroquois are performed after large ceremonies in the longhouse or purely for entertainment. Many social dances are associated

with mammals such as the rabbit and racoon or birds such as the duck, robin and pigeon. The *Alligator Dance* may have come to the Seneca from the Southeast through intertribal contact. Of the dances and songs on this recording the *Alligator Dance* is the only one consistently done indoors.

The male and female partners link elbows in a double-file semicircle moving counter-clockwise around the singers, who sit on two benches facing each other. The men dance nearer the centre of the circle, the women on the outside. At the refrain the men swing their partners around in place, each couple making a small circle.

The instruments used are the water drum, hand rattles made from steer horns, and bells on the legs of the male dancers. The drum is a wood cylinder partly filled with water and covered with a split-cowhide head fastened by a hoop wrapped with brightly coloured cloth. The drumstick is a carved piece of hardwood. The leader of the song plays the drum, while each of the other singers plays a hand rattle.

The vocal style is partly unison, partly responsorial. The leader begins, the chorus echoes the first phrase, and then they sing in unison, with a nasal, sometimes pulsating quality.

3. **Eagle Dance** (*Northern Arapaho*)

Recorded in Los Angeles, October 1975

The Los Angeles Northern Singers: Colin Bearstail, John Eaglesfield, Stewart G. Headley (leader), Joseph Seaboy, Bill Vermillion, James Young

Although the *Eagle Dance* and the *Rabbit Dance* (Track 4) have marked similarities, they represent two different types of Northern Plains music. The Los Angeles Singers have members from the Sioux, Arickara, Hidatsa, and Northern Arapaho tribes. Organisations of Indians devoted to performing traditional music are common in large cities and represent a major force in keeping Indian music and cultural values alive.

Good singers among the Plains tribes (Northern and Southern) are expected to have loud voices, to know many songs and to be able to learn new songs quickly.

To the Arapaho *eagles* are especially important birds. In the past their capture was accompanied by a four-day ceremony that included prayers, fasting, and the singing of eagle songs.

The Arapaho words in the *Eagle Dance*, “Nesana ganinena hiyehi hidiba”, mean “Our father, the great eagle, gave us this song, to the people.”

4. **Rabbit Dance** (*Northern Plains*)

Recorded in Los Angeles, October 1975

The Los Angeles Northern Singers: Colin Bearstail (leader)

The *Rabbit Dance* is one of the few dances of the Plains in which men and women are allowed to dance together. The women choose their partners. The couples hold hands crossed in front of them and dance in a clockwise circle around the drum. It is a social dance and a time for merriment.

The English words give some idea of the joking and interplay that goes on:

Hey sweetheart, I always think of you.
I wonder if you are alone tonight.
I wonder if you are thinking of me.

The song begins with the leader. He is seconded by the chorus and all sing in virtual unison until the end of the song. This song is repeated four times in the same manner. In common practice several *Rabbit Dance* songs would follow each other in the same dance.

5. Gar Dance (Creek)

Recorded at Medicine Spring ceremonial ground (Tsalagi Abihka), Sequoyah County, Oklahoma, August 1975

Singers: Jobie L. Fields, Van Johnson, Archie Sam (leader), Eli Sam (drum), Cedo Screechowl, Robert Sumpka, Luman Wildcat, Squirrel Wildcat

Shell shakers: Sonja Fields, Levana Harjo, Evelyn Screechowl, Eliza Sumpka (leader), Leona Wildcat.

The Creek Indians now residing in Oklahoma are descendants of people who formerly lived in the Southeast, primarily in Georgia and Alabama. The Creek and other members of the so-called Five Civilised Tribes (Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Seminole) were forcibly removed from their homelands east of the Mississippi to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) during the 1830s. Despite the hardships and loss of life suffered during and after their removal, these Indians re-established their town governments and ceremonies in the new land.

The Medicine Spring ceremonial ground lies inside the Cherokee Nation close to the border of the Creek Nation. The founders were Natchez (one tribe of the Creek Confederacy), but Creek, Seminole and Muskogee Creek have been influential members since the beginning. Animal Dances like the *Gar Dance* have always played an important part in ceremonies at this ground. The *Gar Dance* is named after a fish of the south-eastern United States. The gar is covered with hard, smooth, sharp diamond-shaped scales and has a long beak with large teeth. The Indians of the area eat the fish. In former times they also used its scales to arm their arrows and its teeth for ritual scratching.

Leg rattles, a water drum and a hand rattle accompany the singers. The leg rattles are worn by the women dancers tied around the calves of their legs. The water drum is a small keg over which a tanned buckskin is stretched and made taut by a hoop slipped over the top. The drum contains about two inches of water that is sloshed against the drum head from time to time to keep it wet and properly tuned. The drum is played with a hardwood drumstick. The hand rattle played by the leader can be made from various material, such as a gourd, a terrapin shell or a coconut shell.

The *Gar Dance* has a characteristic seven-beat pattern, three plus four, occurring four times, followed by a refrain.

6. Women's Brush Dance (Yurok)

Recorded in Crescent City, California, November 1975

Singers: Loren Bommelyn, Frank A. Douglas, Aileen Figueroa (leader), Sam Lopez, Ella Vera Norris, Walter Richards Sr., Florence Shaughnessy, Hector Simms, Oscar Taylor

Dancers: Carl James, Carole Korb, Casbara Ruud, Frederick W. Scott Jr., Sheryl Steinruck, Lisa Sundberg

The Yurok Indians live in northern California, from Trinidad on the coast north-east to the junction of the Trinity and Klamath rivers. Their economy was, and still is to some extent, based on the redwood forests and the ocean. Shell money and dance regalia are among their principal treasures.

The *Brush Dance* was formerly a curing ceremony for a sick child and lasted several days and nights. On the last night the male and female dancer donned their finest costumes, the men carried their otter-skin quivers filled with arrows and dancing concluded the ceremony. Today the Brush Dance is done primarily for entertainment and public exhibition. The music, the costumes and the reverence for the dance however, have not been lost.

The only instrumental accompaniment is the abalone-shell disks sewn on the female dancers' costumes. These dresses and aprons are necessary performing instruments.

7. Ribbon Dance (*Navajo*)

Recorded in Chinle, Arizona, September 1975

Singers: Frank Jishie Jr., Raymond K. Yazzie, Sam Yazzie Jr. (rattle), Sam Yazzie Sr. (leader, basket drum)

The Navajo tribe is the nation's largest in population (over 100,000) and occupies the largest reservation. Their land in northern Arizona, north-western New Mexico and south-eastern Utah, ranges from desert to mountains. Many Navajo still speak only Navajo and still participate in ancient religious ceremonies. Their music has many different styles to fit almost every occasion.

The *Ribbon Dance* – recently adapted for public demonstration – is just one example from one of the many ceremonies. It is a dance of the Mountain Way or Mountain Chant ceremony.

The ceremony is performed in the winter to cure people who have mistakenly eaten bear or porcupine, or people who have had trouble with their throats. The *Ribbon Dance* is part of the *Fire Dance* held on the last night of the nine-day Mountain Chant. The *Fire Dance* is so named because it takes place around a ceremonial fire and uses firebrands. It is held in a brush corral and is therefore sometimes called the *Corral Dance*. On this last night a variety of different dances and exhibitions takes place. As many as twenty different dance groups with their medicine men are present and compete at the ceremony each group performing its speciality. The dances take place at the request of the patient or according to the specialities of the groups represented. The *Fire Dance*, then can contain different dances on different occasions.

“Ribbon Dance” is probably an expression coined recently to describe the movements and paraphernalia of the dance. Men and women dance back and forth in two lines, weaving in and out. They carry a skeleton framework of reeds, held together with ribbons, from which eagle plumes are suspended.

The instruments are a hand rattle and a ceremonial basket turned upside down and beaten like a drum. The leader sets the tempo with the basket drum, and the other singers and the rattler follow him.

8. Stomp Dance (*Cherokee*)

Recorded at Medicine Spring ceremonial ground (Tsalagi Abihka), Sequoyah County, Oklahoma, August 1975

The *Singers* and *shell shakers* are the same as those in the *Gar Dance*.
Eli Sam (drum), Leona Wildcat (lead shell shaker), Luman Wildcat (leader)

The Cherokee once occupied a large territory in the south-eastern United States. In the 1830s the government forced them to march from their homeland to Indian Territory. This infamous “Trail of Tears” caused poverty and death. The Cherokee were split into two geographically

separate groups, The North Carolina Cherokee managed to stay behind and buy back some of their former land, while the Oklahoma Cherokee had to start anew in an alien land.

Some Oklahoma Cherokee still practise their old religion. The *Stomp Dance* is the culmination of the day's activities at the ceremonial ground. The name is given both to a musical-dance-ritual event and to a separate dance within that event. The *Stomp Dance* usually contains a variety of different dances with their accompanying music. The ceremony begins with a friendship dance or other opening dance, is followed by a series of stomp dances and closes with an Old Folks or a Morning Dance. Animal dances like the *Gar Dance* or other dances like the *Doublehead* may be interspersed with the stomp dances throughout the evening.

After dark on the night appointed for the dance, members of the ceremonial ground, friends and visitors assemble around the sacred fire. The fire-keepers call for the dancing and singing to start and the ancient ritual begins. The dance and song around the sacred fire invoke the Creator in prayer and worship.

The caller or organiser chooses the dance leaders, consulting with each in turn. He then moves to the east side of the fire and gives the call for the designated man and his helpers to come out. In a *Stomp Dance* the men enter from the west side of the ground and begin walking around the fire counter-clockwise. The shell shakers and other women take their places alternately between the men, and the singing begins.

9. Oklahoma Two-Step (*Southern Plains*)

Recorded at the sixth annual Kihkah Steh Powwow, Skiatook, Oklahoma, August 1975

Singers: Jack Anquoe (lead singer for Two-Step), Henry Collins, Bill Grass, James Kimble, Lionel Le Clair, Ed Little Cook, Oliver Little Cook, Morris Lookout, Adam Pratt (head singer), Joe Rush, E.R. Satepauhoodle, Harvey Ware, Chris C. White

The singers in this piece represent a number of Oklahoma tribes: Pawnee, Ponca, Sac and Fox, Quapaq, Osage and Kiowa.

The *Oklahoma Two-Step* is the Southern Plains equivalent of the *Rabbit Dance* (Track 4). The women choose their partners, who then dance beside them, the couples holding hands crossed in front. All the singers sit around the bass drum with a chorus of women behind them. The only other instruments are the bells on the legs of the male dancers. The dancers start in a double-file semi-circle moving clockwise around the drum. During the course of the dance the movements change and include patterns from among the following: serpentine figures, circles, separating and converging symmetrical lines and one double line ducking under the other. A climactic moment occurs toward the end of this recording when all the dancers rush to the centre to salute the drum. On the whole, the Two-Step builds from a slow warm-up to an excited finish with yells and applause from the dancers.

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