

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

INDIAN MUSIC

BULLETIN NO. 19,  
1928.

The music of each ceremony has its peculiar rhythm and also have the classes of songs which pertain to individual acts; fasting and prayer, setting of traps, hunting, courtship, playing of games, facing and defying death. An Indian can determine once the class of the song, its meaning, and its use. The music, but that of the song, is different. In structure, the Indian song follows the outline of the words, and obtains in our own music a short melodic phrase, which we denominate a "melodic line," repeated over and over again, grouped into clauses, and correlated into periods. The range of songs varies from one to three octaves.

Some songs have no words, but the absence of the latter does not impart the definite meaning; vocables are used, and when added to a melody they are never changed. Occasionally both words and vocables are employed in the same song. Plural singing is generally in unison on the plains and elsewhere, the women using a high, shrill, falsetto tone an octave above the male singers. Among the Shoshone and other southern tribes, however, "round" singing is common. Men and women having clear resonant voices and good musical intonation compose the choirs which lead the singing in ceremonies, and are paid for their services. Frequently two or three hundred persons join in a chorus, and the carrying of the melody in octaves by soprano, tenor, and bass voices, produces harmonic effects.

Songs are the property of clans, societies, and individuals. Clans and societies have special officers to insure the exact transmission and rendition of their songs, which numbers alone have the right to sing, and a penalty is exacted from the member who makes a mistake in singing. The privilege to sing individual songs must sometimes be purchased from the owner. Women composed and sang the lullaby and the spinning and grinding songs. Among the Pacific men joined in singing the latter and beat time on the floor as the women worked at the mortar. Other songs composed by women

and those sung to send to him, by the will of the singer, strength and power to endure the hardships of battle.

On the northern Pacific coast, and among other tribes as well, musical contests were held, when singers from one tribe or band would contend with those from another tribe or band as to which could sing the longest and loudest.



## INDIAN MUSIC

(EXCERPT FROM THE HANDBOOK OF AMERICAN INDIANS,  
BULLETIN 30, BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY.)



NDIAN MUSIC is COEXTENSIVE with tribal life, for every public ceremony, as well as each important act in the career of an individual, has its accompaniment of song. The music of each ceremony has its peculiar rhythm, so also have the classes of songs which pertain to individual acts; fasting and prayer, setting of traps, hunting, courtship, playing of games, facing and defying death. An Indian can determine at once the class of a strange song by the rhythm of the music, but not by that of the drumbeat, for the latter is not infrequently played in time differing from that of the song. In structure, the Indian song follows the outline of the form which obtains in our own music a short melodic phrase built on related tones which we denominate chord lines, repeated with more or less variation, grouped into clauses, and correlated into periods. The compass of songs varies from one to three octaves.

Some songs have no words, but the absence of the latter does not impair the definite meaning; vocables are used, and when once set to a melody they are never changed. Occasionally both words and vocables are employed in the same song. Plural singing is generally in unison on the plains and elsewhere, the women using a high, reedy, falsetto tone an octave above the male singers. Among all Cherokee and other southern tribes, however, "round" singing was common. Men and women having clear resonant voices and good musical intonation compose the choirs which lead the singing in ceremonies, and are paid for their services. Frequently two or three hundred persons join in a choral, and the carrying of the melody in octaves by soprano, tenor, and bass voices, produces harmonic effects.

Songs are the property of clans, societies, and individuals. Clans and societies have special officers to insure the exact transmission and rendition of their songs, which members alone have the right to sing, and a penalty is exacted from the member who makes a mistake in singing. The privilege to sing individual songs must sometimes be purchased from the owner. Women composed and sang the lullaby and the spinning and grinding songs. Among the Pueblos men joined in singing the latter and beat time on the floor as the women worked at the metates. Other songs composed by women were those songs to encourage the warrior as he went forth from the camp, and those sung to send to him, by the will of the singers, strength and power to endure the hardships of battle.

On the northern Pacific coast, and among other tribes as well, musical contests were held, when singers from one tribe or band would contend with those from another tribe or band as to which could remember the greatest number or accurately repeat a new



song after hearing it given for the first time. Among all the tribes accurate singing was considered a desirable accomplishment.

Among the Baffinland Eskimo grudges are settled by the opponents meeting by appointment and singing sarcastic songs at each other. The one who creates the most laughter is regarded as the victor. The Danish writers call these controversial songs "nith songs."

In ceremonial songs, which are formal appeals to the supernatural, accuracy in rendering is essential, as otherwise "the path would not be straight;" the appeals could not reach their proper destination and evil consequences would follow. Consequently, when an error in singing occurs, the singers stop at once, and either the song or the whole ceremony is begun again; or, as in some tribes, a rite of contrition is performed, after which the ceremony may proceed. Official prompters keep strict watch during a ceremony in order to forestall such accidents.

The steps of ceremonial dancers follow the rhythm of the drum, which frequently differs from the rhythm of the song. The drum may be beaten in 2-4 time and the song be in 3-4 time, or the beat be in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time against a melody in  $\frac{4}{4}$ , or the song may be sung to a rapid tremolo beating of the drum. The beat governs the bodily movements; the song voices the emotion of the appeal. The native belief which regards breath as the symbol of life is in part extended to song; the invisible voice is supposed to be able to reach the invisible power that permeates nature and animates all natural forms. The Indian sings with all his force, being intent on expressing the fervor of his emotion and having no conception of an objective presentation of music. The straining of the voice injures its tone quality, stress sharpens a note, sentiment flatters it, and continued portamento blurs the outline of the melody, which is often further confused by voice pulsations, making a rhythm within a rhythm, another complication being added when the drum is beaten to a measure different from that of the song: so that one may hear three rhythms, two of them contesting, sometimes with syncopation, yet resulting in a well-built whole. It has always been difficult for a listener of another race to catch an Indian song, as the melody is often "hidden by overpowering noise." When, however, this difficulty has been overcome these untrammelled expressions of emotion present a rich field in which to observe the growth of musical form and the beginning of musical thinking. They form an important chapter in the development of music. Apart from this historic value, these songs offer to the composer a wealth of melodic and rhythmic movements, and that peculiar inspiration which heretofore has been obtained solely from the folk songs of Europe.

Drums vary in size and structure, and certain ceremonies have their peculiar type. On the northwest coast a plank or box serves as a drum. Whistles of bone, wood, or pottery, some producing two or more tones, are employed in some ceremonies; they symbolize the cry of birds or animals, or the voices of spirits. Pandean pipes, which

occur in South America were unknown in the northern continent until recent times. In the Southwest, notched sticks are rasped together or on gourds, bones, or baskets, to accentuate rhythm. The flageolet is widely distributed and is played by young men during courtship; it also accompanies the songs of certain Pueblo ceremonies. Rattles were universal. The intoning of rituals, incantations, and speeches can hardly be regarded as of musical character. The musical bow is used by the Maidu Indians of California and by the Tepehuane, Cora, and Huichol tribes of the Piman stock in Mexico. Among the Maidu this bow plays an important part in religion and much sorcery is connected with it.

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