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Úvod do indiánskej hudby v Spojených štátoch amerických

An Introduction to Indigenous Music in the United States of America

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Abstract

An important part of American musical history involves the Indigenous and their music and traditions. Although we do have some historical perspectives, they can be difficult to document because of the traditions being passed on by word of mouth, by song, and also because of secrecy involving particular rituals. Writings of some Europeans who had interactions with the Indigenous cannot always be trusted either, as they can be very biased, especially in the area of music. It is also likely that these traditional Native American Indigenous people contributed greatly to the history of music in the United States with the greatest influence coming from the Cherokee and Navajo tribes. In this article, we will examine through various tribes traditions of the Indigenous in music. Through their narratives and song, some of the interactions between regions can be traced. In this paper we discuss the musical manifestations of these tribes.

Keywords: Courting Flute. Indigenous People. Indigenous. Navajo. Cherokee. American Indians. Native American Music.

Historical Perspectives

In a paper such as this, and with the variety of Indigenous instruments, dances and rituals, not to mention the numerous tribes, it is not possible to cover every instrument, dance and ritual, nor is that my aim. While my aim in this paper is to give an introduction to some of the musical and cultural aspects of the Indigenous, I believe that it is difficult to separate those aspects from the historical perspectives and the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. While traditional narratives are the most important, it is also necessary to trace the history back to the Incas, Aztecs and the Mayans, and the effects of the arrival of the Europeans. The arrival of the Spanish (15th century) in what would now be Central America and along the Pacific Ocean side of what is now South America, played an important role as the Spanish moved North through Mexico and into what is now the Southwestern United States, eventually resulting in

the displacing or actual destruction (in some cases) of the various tribes that had lived in those places. The map in Figure 1 shows the location of the Aztec, Mayan and Inca cultures. (today Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru).



Figure I. Ancient Civilization Trunk:. Kellog Institue for International Studies

It is true that there were events involving interactions between the Indigenous and Europeans which were sometimes positive and other times resulted in absolute displacement or destruction of the tribes and colonization of land that rightfully belonged to the Indigenous. Even worse, on his journeys across the Atlantic, Columbus was know to make stops on the islands around South America, take natives with him back to Spain and enslave them. Of course that is not to say that only the Spanish were to blame for this colonization, enslavement, etc; as numerous wars were common between the various Indigenous tribes themselves. It is safe to say that wars were a regular occurrence.

In the Inca civilization, (in what would be the area of Peru today), we can see a tradition of song for recounting history. With the Aztecs (ca. South and Central America), we see the tradition of carving symbolic pictures into musical instruments indicating how, when, where, and by whom they were played (Kilroy-Ewbank, 2023). Although this paper does not largely deal with archaeological, iconographical, and linguistic sources, they too played a part in the Indigenous historical record.



Figure II. Aztec Musical Instruments. From Both, Music Song and Dance among the Aztecs- a short introduction

Briefly, with the arrival of the Spanish in the area which is marked on the map Inca in about 1498 (Columbus made four trips across the ocean, none of which involved discovering what is now the USA), the Spanish moved North from the area marked on the map, and through what is today Mexico, up into what would be the Southwestern United States, colonizing along the way. On the other coast of the United States, the English and Dutch also had interactions with the Indigenous from their „so-called“ first arrival. (it is suspect that the Mayflower, arriving in 1620 in what is now Plymouth Massachusetts was actually the first landing of pilgrims on the Atlantic coast and the first encounter with natives). There already was one colony well established as of the 1500's.

In the case of the Mayflower, at least for a period of time, there was a coexistence with the Wampanog tribe who had lived on those lands for centuries before. As Paula Peters, a member of the Wampanoag tribe said „The Wampanoags saw the English settlers as a threat and had good reason to do so. (Seay, 2019)“. Still, the end result was the same, that being the Indigenous lost their land to the new settlers one way or another, and eventually were displaced and moved onto Indian reservations as early as the late 1700's. Those locations were called by various names well before the early 1850's, when „reservations“ were officially established. Much more could be said about interactions between natives and the Europeans, but suffice it to say that there were treaties established at the beginning but eventually wars erupted. History tells us that the natives were largely pushed out of the land they had lived on for centuries, as more and more settlers arrived from Europe.



Figure III. From *Indigenous People in Masseurhusses: A Library Guide*

At least according to some sources, there were musical interactions between the arriving pilgrims and the various tribes, but for the purposes of this paper, despite the efforts of the new arrivals to „educate“, the natives were still able to maintain their own traditions in music, dance and storytelling. Tracing musical development in the 1700s in the USA is again very difficult because of the lack of readily available information. (Roberts, 2016, Garland encyclopedia, p 367). We can say for sure that the tradition is carried on, and still is today, by song, and storytelling. (Roberts, 2016, Garland encyclopedia, p 367). According to Roberts, the one thing that remains true is that the primary instrument for making of Indigenous music was the human voice, and those pieces for voice(s) could take the form of a solo piece, responsorial songs, in which the leader and chorus take turns, unison chorus songs and multi-part songs, some with rattles and/or drum accompaniment. However, those instruments were truly used as an accompaniment to the voice, and the voice(s) were the most important element. Sometimes those instruments were needed to keep the rhythm of the singers together with the leader (s), but the voice remains primary.

The musical instruments of the indigenous were made of a variety of materials. There were also symbolic uses associated with the materials from which the instruments were made. For example, eagle bone whistles are played during the Sun Dance to invoke the strength of the eagle, and during the ceremonies of the Native American Church, to call the spirits. Some warrior societies also used eagle-bone whistles during specific communal dances, though only sparingly and with deliberate intentions. In a dance such as the Apache Crown Dance, these extra musical effects contribute to the symbolic purpose of the dance, in that case, to protect the community from disease and enemies (Suing, 2008).

Although each Native American group can be characterized by their own distinct genres and styles, certain aspects of style can be found with similarities

among native groups who would have been neighboring tribes. These similarities are even further expanded upon when music and instruments are shared between each tribe, making it easy to find certain characteristics in frequent use. Melodies usually consist of a scale simpler than the classical eight-pitch scale of eastern culture, often finding itself in the pentatonic or tritonic scale.

As far as vocal quality, I will be citing musical recordings of dances and songs, because vocally they are very specific and not easy to describe. Higher timbres were specifically for male vocalists where falsetto is common. Vocal vibrato, when it occurs, is a rapid pulsating of different pitches as a more ornamental effect. Rhythmic patterns often can be found in meters of two or three and account for the vocal rhythms and syncopation in order to incorporate it into the pattern. Call and response patterns are common in vocal parts and ostinato may be included in the percussion part as well.

One could surely say that much of the music we will listen to was well outside of the colonists experience. As far as the harmonic elements, the Pentatonic and Tritonic scales form the foundation. A pentatonic major scale on D, would consist of D, E, F-sharp, A, and B. A tritonic scale would include three notes in an octave and could be for example E, G, A, and E. When singing, there were „vocables“ or syllables that were used. Examples are Yah, Weh, Heh, Wah, Ha, Ho, and Hoi. These syllables are sung in various combinations dependent on the songs. Songs can be composed of all vocables or combined with words in a native language. The meaning of these vocables depend on which tribes or which genre of music is being used. (Sitkonski, 2021).

One Puritan minister, Thomas Thorowgood, tried to make connections between the Hebrew, Yahweh, (native Yoweh), and the Hebrew Jehovah, (native Yo-he-wah), along with the word Halleluyah. He was attempting to make the case that American Indians were descended from the lost tribes of Israel. It goes to the bias I mentioned earlier and why much of what was written by colonists cannot be trusted, particularly when it comes to music. There is no historical evidence to support his conclusions (Sitkonski, 2021).

Another instrument to be mentioned is the courting flute. As Suing writes, „*Common to the people of the Northern Plains, along with most of North America, is the courting flute. Folklore states that flutes were traditionally played by men to sway the affections of women as reflected in the English translation for the instrument; however it is played by both men and women in modern times. The courting flute is traditionally used strictly as a solo instrument*“ (Suing, 2008).

The drum can be used in secular and sacred music, all dependent on the particular circumstance. Drums used for personal spiritual practice or for personal playing are smaller so that the common practice is to hold the drum in one hand and the drumstick in the other. For larger communal gatherings such as a powwow, the large drum would be set in the center of the group, and many

would be able to strike the drum. Drumsticks used are long enough to allow numerous singers to be involved (Suing, 2008).

The interdependence of the human voice and the drum is reflected in the language used to refer to those who play the drum, as they are traditionally called „singers“ and not drummers. Hence the voice of the drum is joined to the voice of the singer(s) to create the song. As there are numerous song types, I would like to cite the „Sun Dance Song“ as being particularly interesting (see bibliography for watching and listening example).

This particular ritual requires preparation, and that process may take over a year. The community erects a large pole symbolizing a connection to the divine. In general, the Sun Dance is about reconnection to the earth. Some participate to increase spiritual power but also can participate for healing, spiritual insight, or to express gratitude for surviving difficult conditions. The Sun Dance began as a Lakota tribe tradition, but is no longer exclusive to that tribe. The Cheyenne, Arpaho, Crow, Blackfeet, Cree, and Wind River Shoshoni also have a Sun Dance. „Each tribe would camp in circular form with a sheltered circular area prepared for dancers. A large cottonwood tree would become a central pole. The bark of the cottonwood would be fed to horses and when cut, the wood has a five-pointed star like a rustling tree praying or singing to the wind. Once placed on the dance site, the cottonwood was decorated (see illustration below). It is apparent that music and drumming played a large role as accompaniment to the dancing.



Figure IV. Sun Dance wood engraving by Jules Tavernier and Paul Frenzeny in Harper's Weekly, January 2, 1875.

The ceremony would begin at sunrise the day after the site was prepared. Each dancer would be guided by a mentor. There are numerous dances including the Jump Dance, Stomp Dance, and Crown Dance, with music that utilizes the vocables heard in the following musical example of the Sun Dance Song. (see bibliography)

I was fortunate to be able to ask the Reverend Rachel Taber-Hamilton, (Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Everett, Washington USA), who is a member of the Shackan First Nation tribe, about several questions that arose. One was about the „Sweat Lodge“ which is usually performed before a „Sun

Dance“, but she relayed to me that there is secrecy around the music used for this rite. Additionally, I was unaware that there are native American hymnals as well. She writes, „*texts of Indigenous hymns are printed in the language of the people and generally are special order, such as the Dakota, Onieda, Navajo or Yupiq hymnals. Additionally, the music is not printed but transmitted through oral tradition, just as drum songs and stories are. There is also a Hawaiian hymn book*“ (Taber-Hamilton, 2023).

Another example I would like to use for listening is the Apache Crown Dance. „Crown Dancing is a very old and sacred dance tradition. According to Apache belief, the dance was taught to the Apaches by the mountain spirits as a means of healing. The Crown Dancers are the Gaan or mountain spirits. Apaches believe that Usen, the Creator, sent the Gaan to the Apache to teach them to live in harmony. There are five Crown Dancers, including four masked dancers representing the directions of North, South, East, and West. The fifth dancer is the clown, who protects the others by driving away evil spirits with the sound of his humming bull-roarer, a thin piece of wood suspended from a string and swung in a circle. The dancers are not allowed to talk to one another, so they communicate with their sticks during the dance. Only properly trained men can dance the Crown Dance. Crown Dancers play an important part in many Apache ceremonies such as the Sunrise Ceremony, which commemorates the growth of a girl to womanhood. The dance is also performed in healing ceremonies and as a social dance“ (KY Arts Council).

Finally, the „Courting Song“ as described above, uses the flute as a solo instrument. „Throughout history, many ancient musical instruments were more than just a means of producing pleasing sounds. They often had a deeper cultural or spiritual significance that was expressed through their construction and use. Flutes have been in use in the Americas since before 4000 BCE and their uses are as varied as the nations of Native Americans that used them. However, the “courting flute” or “love flute” as it is also known, seems to be a rather common feature of the ancient Native American culture“ (Rodriguez, 2018).

Round Dance.

The image shows a musical score for a 'Round Dance' in 4/4 time, marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The melody is written on a single staff in G major (one sharp). The lyrics are: 'Ha ha yah ha ha e yah ha ha yah ha ha ha e ha yah yah ha ha yah a yo ha yaha yo yah ha ha e yah ha o yo a ha yah e ha ha yah a ha ha yah e ha ha ah yah ha a yah e yah ha yah ha yah yah ha a o o yo ha a o o yo ow yo how o.' The score includes several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a group of notes) and a final instruction 'Repeat ad libitum'.

Figure V. Musical example of Round Dance

There are three principal Native American melody instruments, and the courting flute has an interesting history as it was also used as a means of transmission of signals in the night. The other two instruments are the Apache violin and of course the voice being the primary instrument. Not mentioned in this article is the very beautiful Apache Harmonica (see bibliography). The Apache tradition is not to use all of the instruments at the same time, but of course with the passing of time it is difficult to say in every case how these instruments may be in use in various tribes and situations (Wapp Jr, 2018). In the bibliography there is a beautiful Lakota Love Song.

Conclusion

In the United States, the current primary educational system, at least in some places, is paying attention to our musical roots as I learned from so many online sources I was able to investigate. I must admit that when I was in primary school so many years ago, there was little if any attention being payed to Native American history or music for that matter, and all along, efforts were made to „re-educate“ the Indigenous people. Of course in the current political climate, there are those who would deny the actual history of the Indigenous in favor of a „Romaticized Once Upon a Time“ version where a single Indigenous person met the arriving Pilgrims, taught them how to build a fire, and all went happily on their way. Reality tells a different story. The incredible wealth of music, dance, and culture should be a source of pride, and the preservation of this art should not be left just to the Indigenous, but become much more widespread.

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Figure I. *Ancient Civilization Trunk*. Kellogg Institute for International Studies. 29.10.2023. Dostupné z: <https://kellogg.nd.edu/about/outreach-initiatives/k-12-resources/traveling-trunks/ancient-civilizations-trunk>

Figure II.. Both, A. *Musical Instruments, Music Song and Dance Among the Aztecs- a Short Introduction*. 1.11.2023. Dostupné z:

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Figure III.. *Indigenous People in Massachusetts: A Library Guide* (Library of Congress). 2.11.2023. Dostupné z: <https://www.robbinslibrary.org/indigenous-people-in-massachusetts-a-library-guide/>

Figure IV.. Jules Tavernier and Paul Frenzeny. *Sun Dance*. Wood Engraving in Harper's Weekly, January 2, 1875. Public Domain. 1.11.2023. Dostupné z: <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/17823/native-american-sun-dance/>

Figure V. WIKIPEDIA. *Apache Crown Dancers with Large Headpieces and Body*. 20.11.2023. Courtesy the National Park Service. Dostupné z: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Figure VI. KILROY-EWBANK, Dr. L. *Introduction to the Aztecs*, 20.11.2023. Dostupné z: <https://smarthistory.org/introduction-mexica/>

Listening and Watching

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