

## Elements of Continuity in Kwakiutl Traditions

The Kwakiutl once consisted of approximately thirty autonomous groups usually identified as “tribes,” inhabiting the Pacific Coast in southwestern Canada and the far northwest edge of the continental United States.<sup>1</sup> Each tribe had its own territory, winter village, and seasonally-related sites which were associated with communal kin groups (*numaym*), myths, and emblems (known as crests) related to totemic figures. Before their first meeting with Europeans, these tribes may have simply shared the same winter village, but since contact tribal units have experienced several mergings and splittings, a process that has continued well into the twentieth century.

Intertribal relations among the Kwakiutl were not stabilized on any Kwakiutl-wide basis until 1900 when potlatching, with its attendant social alliances, relations, and social hierarchy, was adopted by all groups. A *potlatch* is a ceremony given by a chief (usually) intended to display the status and prestige of the giver. As an elaborate and extensive series of activities—in former times conducted over a period of several weeks or even *months*—and accompanied by constant feasting, a potlatch may be planned to honor the marriage of a chief’s son or daughter, to bestow a name upon a member of his family, or to lend weight to other communal functions. The central activity of the potlatch is the presentation of gifts, a process which amounts to demonstrating how wealthy one is by practicing a highly public display of self-impoverishment (and which frequently demands reciprocal gift-giving from rivals—a key point). All aspects of the potlatch ceremonial are prescribed in minute detail and are intended to enhance the status of the principal participants. At the potlatch the chief bestows gifts upon those in attendance, and an event is deemed successful if the gifts are accepted in an appropriate manner. Before the twentieth century, the potlatch was sometimes a highly charged affair in which ancient grudges and rivalries surfaced, sometimes violently. Such was its central importance in tribal life. As explained by Helen Codere:

In the early days of the historical period, which is well reported upon from about the mid-1800s, the picture is one of fairly close and dependable alliances between neighboring tribes, but more infrequent and even strained relations beyond such clusters of neighbors. However, even relatives in neighboring tribes were not safe from the type of head hunting that took place on the occasion of the death of some close relative and was designed to both honor the deceased and to “let someone else wail” (Boas 1921: 1375), and acts of blood revenge in which the aim was to kill either a person of social rank equal to that of the deceased or several persons of lower rank in the offending group (Boas 1966: 109).<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately by about 1850 such violent practices began to ebb. By the end of the nineteenth century both internal and external violence had ceased, and within this environment Kwakiutl culture flourished, developing and refining its most distinctive manifestations, particularly those connected with the potlatch.<sup>3</sup>

From the earliest contacts, relations between Europeans and Natives have had a mixed impact, in some cases stimulating, in others stifling, the cultures of Indian groups. In order to remain competitive with American traders, the British established Fort Langley on the Fraser River in 1827 and Fort McLoughlin on Milbanke Sound in 1833, placing them in close proximity to the Kwakiutl. Being an industrious people, the Kwakiutl soon took an active part in the trade. By 1843 the Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Victoria, which became a major trading post and attraction for Native people in the region and even north of Kwakiutl territory. The position of the Kwakiutl facilitated trade with the company as well as with those tribes passing through their area of influence.

In 1849, because of the concentration of coal deposits, the Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Rupert on Beaver Harbour. Even though the coal was mined for only a brief time, the post was maintained until the late 1870s when it was sold to Robert Hunt. In time this site became the largest Kwakiutl settlement and center of regional ceremonial activity. Because of the general prominence of this settlement and the great quantity of information recorded by Robert Hunt's son, George, together with the famous work of Franz Boas, Kwakiutl culture and history have been widely recorded, although the records have tended to reflect the biases of the Euro-Americans at Fort Rupert. (Only with the relatively recent work of Ida Halpern have the Kwakiutl become known to the outside world from a somewhat more insider-informed perspective.<sup>4</sup>)

During the period of maritime fur trade, iron and steel replaced the native materials in tool production. After Fort Rupert was established, the indigenous-style robe was replaced by the Hudson's Bay blankets for use in potlatching, and by the 1880s, white-style clothing became the preferred mode of dress. As one might surmise, the Kwakiutl became increasingly assimilated into and dependent on the Canadian economy. This development led to a period of great prosperity for the Kwakiutl between 1900 and the mid-1920s. Wealth became widespread primarily because the old organization of production, knowledge of local resources, and industrious habits complemented the new opportunities, particularly those of the commercial fishing industry and its inherent seasonal characteristics.<sup>5</sup> As in precontact days, the Kwakiutl continued their food gathering activities and other seasonal occupations, which now yielded cash income. This substantial cash flow was used to purchase Euro-Canadian goods, particularly in the great quantities required for potlatching.<sup>6</sup> Although the Kwakiutl prosperity suffered a setback in the 1920s and 1930s, it recovered with the boom in the fishing industry during World War II.<sup>7</sup>

## Traditions and Continuity of Style in the Performing and Visual Arts

Kwakiutl painting is noted for its exuberance and flamboyance. Kwakiutl artists have been quick to borrow ideas that appealed to them, but have always felt free to interpret and modify (see Figure 1). Flat painting is done on almost any suitable surface, including boxes, chests, canoes, paddles, screens and housefronts. Typical of the Northwest Coast region, the principal colors were black and red; and black, red, and green have remained to this day the preferred colors for most paintings. The Kwakiutl are also renowned for their development of theatrical arts in conjunction with the potlatch and winter ceremonials. High ranking groups, aided by spectacular graphic art production and a flare for the dramatic, display crests, demonstrate inherited dances, and sing songs. Compared to their northern neighbors, the Nootkan people (with whom they have had long contact), the Kwakiutl artists, since the late nineteenth century, have consistently displayed more surface elaboration in all aspects of their ceremonial art.

Kwakiutl artists were prolific sculptors inspired by the active ceremonial life of their tribes and their rich mythology. Artisans carved massive, functional house posts representing the owners' ancestors or the creatures with which they interacted, similar in design to their famous totem poles. (Totems are animals symbolic of social standing, and a record of the relationships, accomplishments and acquisitions for a family that displays them. Since poles are carved from great northern cedar trees, it is not surprising that cedar wood and bark are important elements among the ceremonial objects and regalia.<sup>8</sup>) Human forms were naturalistically proportioned, except for the exaggerated size of the head. Human arms and animal appendages were commonly carved separately and attached to the figures to extend their power or express action. Each new crest on a totem pole required a new song, which once acquired was then owned by an individual or family.

By 1900 many villages had large totem poles attached to or standing in front of houses. Totem poles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became progressively more elaborate with attached parts and finely detailed painting. This trend continued until mid-century when a reaction to this flamboyance led to a renaissance of traditional and less complex techniques. By the 1980s several artists reinstituted the gaudier style of the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> The Kwakiutl sense of drama in sculpture and painting also found an outlet in the masks that were used to depict mythical creatures. Some masks covered the face while others were carried on the back, covering the dancer's torso. Many involved moving parts imitating snapping jaws as well as undulating fins and tails.<sup>10</sup>

The closing years of the nineteenth century saw a decline in the traditional art forms of many of the North Pacific Coast peoples. Drastic changes in economic climate, decreased population, and the effects of missionary and government intervention had eroded the motivations for making traditional art.



Figure 1. Drawing of Kwakiutl sculpture showing characteristic design features. (Courtesy of Hilary Stewart)

Unfortunately in some tribal groups almost no art or craft work was produced, and what little was created had changed drastically from previous forms. The Kwakiutl, on the other hand, uniquely, saw their art traditions—including dance and music—continue and even flourish into the present generation.

In the middle of the twentieth century traditional Pacific Coast Indian art was “discovered” by non-Native artists and critics. Exhibitions of Native American artifacts in prestigious museums came to be highly regarded, whereas formerly authorities had denounced Native craftwork as backward and without merit. Lavishly illustrated books and catalogues were published, depicting the masks, rattles and boxes that had long been categorized as grotesque curiosities. Artists like Mungo Martin and Willie Seaweed, who had been producing art for traditional use since the early part of the twentieth century, were still artistically active in the 1950s as their children were just starting to follow in parental footsteps.<sup>11</sup> Despite the official prohibition of ceremonial activity from 1884 to 1951, potlatching, dancing, and singing continued almost unabated. As Holm states:

It is surprising that the Kwakiutl people have managed to retain many of their ceremonial traditions when their active and persistent participation in those traditions brought them, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

overt Canadian government opposition. Canadian federal legislation, the Indian Acts of 1885 and 1915, prohibited winter ceremonies and potlatches. In spite of the efforts of missionaries, Indian agents, and police to abolish the institution of the potlatch and the accompanying dance dramas, the Kwakiutl continued them almost without interruption.<sup>12</sup>

Even during the most severe suppressions of the 1920s, these ceremonies continued, although more furtively and modified to accommodate the required level of secrecy.<sup>13</sup>

## Dances

Considerable modification of dances took place during the 1940s with technical advances in communications and increased outside contacts associated with World War II.<sup>14</sup> However, the basic structure of the ceremonies and many of the individual dances survived from before the war. By the 1980s there were two major ceremonial complexes in Kwakiutl life. By far the most important is the *ʼceqa* or Cedar Bark Dance, designated the “winter ceremony” by anthropologists. (The native term has never been satisfactorily understood by outsiders, but it seems to imply “acting” or “making manifest the powers of the spirits.”) Typically the festival is held in the winter and is roughly analogous to winter ritual complexes of other North American Pacific Coast people, which include demonstrations of supernatural power or contact with supernatural beings. Although quite unusual, *ʼceqa* performances can occur at any time, given the appropriate circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

Historically these dances descended from guardian-spirit power dances, which reenact the first contact of an ancestor with a supernatural being and relate his acquisition of power and privilege. Even in the modern Cedar Bark Dance, such features as the use of rattles to soothe the dancers, constant references to the motivating spirits, and the use of emblems understood to be sacred (such as red-dyed cedar bark and eagle down) are still apparent.<sup>16</sup>

The second Kwakiutl ceremonial complex, the *haʼsela*, has been erroneously referred to as the “summer dance,” perhaps because of its seeming opposition to the Cedar Bark Dance. The Kwakiutl sometimes refer to it as the Weasel Dance in deference to the dancer’s headdress. Although ownership of the *haʼsela* was considered a valuable privilege, the whole ceremony was understood as being foreign in origin (i.e., from the Bella Coola and Oowekeeno) and somewhat less prestigious than the *ʼceqa*. Unlike the Winter Dances, the *haʼsela* represented the appearance of figures that had the lower status of *numaym* crests, rather than supernatural beings.

Traditionally the *haʼsela* was never held simultaneously with the *ʼceqa* and never in the same house. But by the mid-twentieth century the two ceremonies had been modified to the point that they followed one another in the same house, on the same evening, with the same dancers. The Cedar Bark Dance usually preceded the Weasel Dance.<sup>17</sup>

## Music

The music of the Kwakiutl Indians is related to strict social rules, which pertain directly to the performance and ownership of songs. Ida Halpern states:

Songs are literally “given,” for they are “owned” by individuals or families who have paid for them in full. The songs then assume hereditary importance according to established tribal laws. Therefore, the collector who is permitted to record this music receives not only a great personal privilege, but an actual gift.<sup>18</sup>

Since the first contact with Christian missionaries, Native people have been reluctant to relinquish, or even share their ceremonial songs. So emphatic was this sense of ownership that no chief or member of his family would sing a song belonging to another. Doing so would have been considered theft and would have generated considerable shame and scorn. Appropriately a chief could inherit a song, acquire it by marriage, or commission it for some special ceremony. Traditionally songs were composed by tribal songmakers and were conceived in states of spiritual trance, in visions and dreams, although, as we shall see, the method of song-making is by no means vague or haphazard. The members of the tribe believed that in learning a song, dance, and ritual they could reproduce the originating vision. A strict oral tradition was adhered to in the teaching of these songs. Not only was it incumbent on tribal elders to pass songs on to subsequent generations, but to do so with absolute accuracy. If a singer were to make a mistake, the consequences could be serious.

There are three basic types of Kwakiutl songs: love songs, children’s songs, and ceremonial songs (including totemic crest songs, potlatch songs and songs associated with the secret and highly prestigious Hamatsa society). Love songs, crest songs and some Hamatsa songs exhibit a hauntingly lyrical quality, while potlatch songs are declamatory. Kwakiutl songs are largely characterized by recitative-like singing, with fixed pitches for each text and no improvisation. The pitch vocabulary for each song is small, concentrating on a single tone, but the notes are combined within an asymmetrical rhythmic organization. All song types can create great drama by means of the impeccable sense of timing shown by their performers.

In general, the rhythm in most Kwakiutl songs is complex. Indeed, the rhythms of the music of all of the Northwest Coast Indians are among the most complex of Indian styles in North America. The songs are dominated by three or four durational values and often contain true rhythmic polyphony. The Kwakiutl’s use of jagged rhythms have been compared to the “steady, yet broken beat of the sea,” an appropriate simile since the tribe is known for its fishing skills and knowledge of the sea.<sup>19</sup> The rhythms in Kwakiutl songs contain a great deal of contrast, including triplets and syncopation as well as repetition. Constant drumbeats precede and underlie but do not strictly coincide with vocal melodies.<sup>20</sup>

The range of most Kwakiutl songs, a major sixth, is wider than other Northwest Coast tribes (the Inuit range remains under a perfect fifth, and that of the Salish rarely exceeds a minor sixth), with some special songs attaining an octave or more, yet it is still restricted compared to other North American Indian songs.<sup>21</sup> The most common intervals used are the minor second and major third, unlike many North American Indian tribes whose songs contain mostly major seconds and major thirds. The melodic movement of a majority of Kwakiutl songs is undulating, with 55% of all melodic movement being downward. This characteristic of Kwakiutl music has been characterized by Natalie Curtis as imitating the cry of a seagull, suggesting another reference to the natural world of the Indians.<sup>22</sup> Curtis goes on:

To the white man there hovers over this music a spirit of the wilder elements of nature, sublime, sometimes destructive, mysterious, and awful, like the whirl of the Thunderbird's wings.

Although Curtis may be indulging in a flight of romanticization to some extent, the inherent somberness of much Kwakiutl music is unmistakable. The Kwakiutl terms for "love song" and "mourning song" are identical. Both types are characterized by falsetto voices and fast vibrato, meant to imitate crying. The themes of both love songs and mourning songs center around pain, longing, and sadness; the love songs rarely speak of the joy of love as one might expect. This somber nature of love songs can be seen in the following young man's love song text:

Whenever I eat, I eat the pain of your love, mistress.  
 Whenever I get sleepy, I dream of your love, mistress.  
 Whenever I lie on my back in the house, I lie on the pain of your love, mistress.  
 For whenever I walk about, I step on the pain of your love, mistress.<sup>23</sup>

Even songs which the Kwakiutl sing to their children and those which children sing to themselves, while different in character from love songs, exhibit a sober maturity. In children's songs, children are often referred to as "slaves" or "old dogs" while the parents are referred to as "slave owners" or "dog owners."<sup>24</sup> The language of children's songs is quite simple, and many contain vocables which are only used in children's songs, in a sort of baby-talk of vocables. Children's songs commonly look toward and even predict the future, as can be seen in the text of the following, sung by a boy to his father:

I am born to be a hunter  
     when I come to be a man, o Father,  
     ya ha ha ha  
 I am born to be a sea hunter  
     when I come to be a man, o Father,  
     ya ha ha ha

I am born to be a canoe builder  
     when I come to be a man, o Father,  
     ya ha ha ha  
 I am born to be a board splitter  
     when I come to be a man, o Father,  
     ya ha ha ha  
 I am born to be a worker  
     when I come to be a man, o Father,  
     ya ha ha ha  
 That you may not be in need of anything you desire, o Father,  
     ya ha ha ha<sup>25</sup>

Whereas everyday language dominates love/mourning songs and children's songs, the language used in potlatch and other ceremonial music is more elevated. The texts of such songs include phonetic distortions which are used to make the words and music conform. They are exceptionally difficult to transcribe into Western notation (as can be seen in Figure 3, where no precise text underlay has even been attempted). Unusual contractions of words and vocables may also occur. Many ceremonial and potlatch songs are sung in a dialect of the Rivers Inlet, largely because of its central location among the Kwakiutl tribes.<sup>26</sup>

The themes of ceremonial songs may center around the creator or "transformer"; they ask the creator for special favors, or thank him for favors granted. Common themes for potlatch songs include discussions of grease feasts (which have to do with a highly valued type of candle oil), previous potlatches, and the lives of their leaders. When singing about their chiefs, Kwakiutls may choose to praise his good deeds, compare him with rival tribes' chiefs, ask him for favors, or even (though rarely) offend him. In this excerpt of a song which belongs to James Sewid, one of Ida Halpern's friends and informants, the chief is very highly praised:

What are we going to do with our Chief:  
 Yay-ee-Yah! Ah-Yee Yah-Ah!  
     *[repeat first two lines four times]*  
 The people will also come  
 From the tribe of Comox  
 To pay their respects to our Chief.  
 Yay-ee-Yah! Ah-Yee-Yah-Ah! . . .  
 They say our singing is still too weak  
 They say our singing needs more strength  
 To boast the name of our great Chief.  
 Yay-ee-Yah! Ah-Yee-Yah-Ah!  
 Wee-Way-ee! Wee-Way-ee! . . .<sup>27</sup>



## Vocables

Vocables are used in almost all Kwakiutl songs. The vocables are integral parts of the songs, and thus cannot be changed or omitted when singing. Although these vocables have been referred to as “meaningless syllables” used to “keep the stressed syllables on stressed musical beats” and to “fill in the rest of the melody” when the text ends,<sup>28</sup> the syllables represent more than mere filler to the Kwakiutl, and cannot be separated from the songs in which they appear.

Vocables contain part of the meaning and content of the song and are often abbreviations of words referred to in the songs or representative of an animal sound. Tom Willie, an informant of Ida Halpern, explains the sequence of composition:

- IH: Mr. Willie is explaining how a song is made. You said that first come the syllables, is that right?
- TW: Yes. The syllables is first always, first in every song. Then, when the syllables is finished, you repeat that syllables on and on again. And after that, they finish the syllables, make the words of the songs. After the words of that song, they start making the songs.
- IH: So actually the syllables you make up and you get your inspiration from the syllables, from nature? Where do you get the inspiration for the syllables?
- TW: Well, the oldest people know how to make songs. Some of them people dreaming about what the songs they want to make are. Sometimes they get it from his dreaming . some of them make songs out of rain blowing, you know blowing. When you hear that blowing you sing it. And when you lay down in the boat and when you hear the water dripping in the side of the boat, it's like singing.
- IH: So after you have your words then you make the music, the melody to it?
- TW: Yes.
- IH: Then the melody combines with the rhythm, the beat, or the beat goes independently?
- TW: The beat goes its own way.
- IH: You put great importance in the beat?
- TW: Yes, we can put any kind of beat beside this beat because men find this beat for these words. We try to put different kinds of beat but we can't sing pretty good to that.
- IH: I see, you have the music, you have your song, then you try to find a beat that will fit and the beat is the last thing that comes in?
- TW: Yes.<sup>29</sup>

From this transcript and other confirming conversations with informants, Halpern noted that a stable beat was a primary consideration for Kwakiutl performers. But in regard to compositional technique, syllables or vocables are the seeds from which a new song grows.

## Singing Method

Tom Willie explained the typical Kwakiutl singing method to Halpern as follows:

- TW: Well, one man start a song and all those singers come forward after the first one, on the first verse and the second verse.
- IH: And after the third verse he tells what the next verse will be again as a solo, alone, and then they are following in?
- TW: Yeah.
- IH: You see we found that, and we were just wondering if that is only in the Hamatsa's or always like that, but is that custom with other songs?
- TW: All these songs; doesn't matter what. Kasella songs, Potlatch songs, Women's Dance songs, they're all the same thing.
- IH: Who established, are you taught these rules and regulations, who teaches you that?
- TW: My Granduncle Weber in Kingcome. My father used to be good on the songs, used to be good on the songs, used to make songs, used to be a song-maker.
- IH: And the leader tells them also when they have to go higher and lower?
- TW: Yes.
- IH: How does he say that, or does he start singing it or what?
- TW: Well, he just talk you know
- IH: He makes a sign, or what .
- TW: With a sign sometime . Indian syllables are "beni"
- IH: Is lower.
- TW: Lower.
- IH: And what was the word for higher?
- TW: "Iki" is higher.
- IH: So they make the movement with the hand?
- TW: Yes, they move the hand. [*He moves his hand, fingers spread and pointing up.*]
- IH: Higher or lower. That is like our conductors doing it.
- TW: Just like that. [*He moves his hand, fingers spread and pointing down.*]<sup>30</sup>

Willie's testimony reinforces what one might have already suspected about the method of preserving traditional Kwakiutl songs given the importance of Kwakiutl ritual and presence of outside forces for change, namely, that the teaching of songs follows a fairly fixed and uniform procedure and that a combination of verbal and physical clues—a kind of lining out or call-and-response, hand signs, and directional words—are employed to assure conformity. Also, according to Tom Willie, microtonal pitch level variance within the performance of a song is consciously controlled and is not to be heard as an error. Halpern explains:

This raising or lowering of pitch continues several times in a song, often three or four times. This rise or fall may, in our system, amount to only a half tone altogether or as much as one and one half tones.<sup>31</sup>

\* \* \*

Following are two transcriptions of Kwakiutl songs. Because songs are owned by the Kwakiutl, they are seldom recorded or transcribed. While it is difficult and perhaps sacrilegious to force standard Western notation on the music of the Kwakiutl, doing so can help a wider audience to understand and appreciate its beauty. Halpern has recorded and transcribed hundreds of other Kwakiutl songs with their permission.

### **Love Song (As sung by Billy Assu)**

Kwakiutl love songs are social songs and not usually sung as part of the potlatch. The melodic range of love songs is wider than most potlatch or Hamatsa songs (as large as a twelfth). Melodic and rhythmic patterns of the love songs are not as complex as those of potlatch songs.<sup>32</sup>

Billy Assu, the singer/owner of this song, explains its origin: "An old song which belonged to Chief Gayutlalas, the Chief of Village Island. Henry Bell married the daughter of Gayutlalas. Arthur Joseph from Kingcome made this song. It is a love song, one of the cry love songs of lost love."<sup>33</sup>

As is typical of Kwakiutl love songs, this one opens with a brief introduction, the melodic content of which is never heard again. The song is strophic, with each verse beginning with the same melodic section (section A). A is never altered as are some of the following sections. (In section C, for example, some notes are added in varied repetitions and others are altered chromatically.)

The song is accompanied by a single drum. The beat used to accompany is not closely related to particular intervals or sections. Rather, the drum repeats one of the following rhythms seemingly at random: eighth note/quarter note, eighth/quarter/eighth, eighth/quarter/two eighths. The beat of the song is allegedly quite important, yet not to be repeated at regular intervals in tandem with the melody. The importance of the independent drum beat is stressed by Ida Halpern's informant reports.

### **Chief's Party Song (As sung by Billy Assu)**

The "Chief's Party Song" was written for a potlatch. Billy Assu says, "This song belongs to Chief Assu; made by himself. Last time he had a party he made that song. He gave away many things."<sup>34</sup> The accompaniment to the song is one single drum, which beats continually throughout the song, on each eighth note. The voice pulsations on the quarter notes are in keeping with the drum beat (thus the quarter notes appear subdivided).

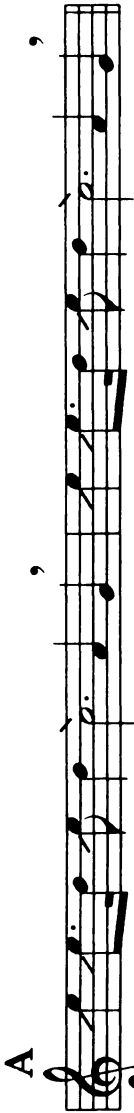
Form: Intro/AB/AC/AC"/AD/AE

Introduction

yo ya ya



A



li lo dli ka lo me gak ho  
clis sa a lalka wolis to la  
tsen a li tlk kwala ya ya ...

I wish I could get  
the sunshine, how  
far is my love

B



[ A music repeats ]

li lo dli ka lo me gak ha  
tudta wa ka ge gep tsa  
mi son yi ya ya ya ...

I wish I could get  
the stars for hand-  
cuffs for my love

C

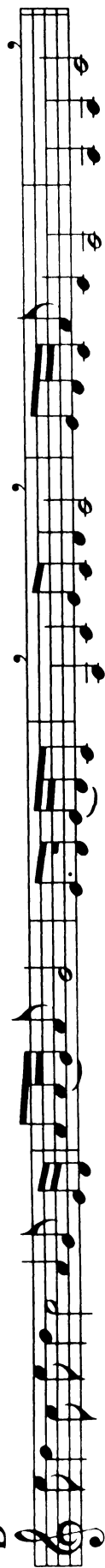


[ A music repeats ]

li lo dli ka lo me gak ha  
muk wala kan di kwa lok kun  
gi ya ya tli sale sune ya ya ya ...

D

I wish I could get  
the moon to see where  
I can go for my love



[ A music repeats ]

li lo dli ka la me gya kwa  
kye ka yo la ka kwa wol  
dla lan son gi ya ya ya

E

I wish I could get a  
steamboat to use as a  
canoe for my love

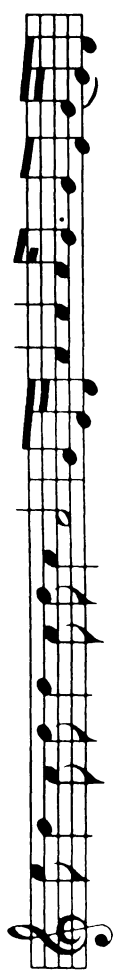


Figure 2. “Love Song” of Billy Assu. Translation and transliteration by Ida Halpem. Music transcription by Nancy Teskey.

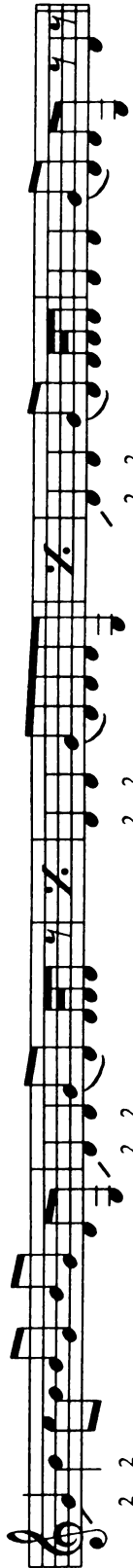
Form: ABACADAE

A

Musical notation for section A, consisting of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final cadence. There are two '2' time signatures below the staff, indicating a 2/4 time signature.

wo a ye ya a wo ho ya a  
[last time only] a ya a ye ya a wo ha ye ya a

B

Musical notation for section B, consisting of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final cadence. There are two '2' time signatures below the staff, indicating a 2/4 time signature.

ha la zi ama hey glugh ya wik yeli sa/ya ya wenk ha lisa/gwa ya gi loyaw dam zi yas ha/ola gi laq wik gla wal ki laq wik/ma man  
luthelouqwa/sis omp kas awekgha gewalagh tle yutla/walas as zi yutl has giyakhama

the big man start to a moving/his mind is moving/that what he always do/really a prince's man/really full of everything/from his father the call  
his big name/as well as the chief

C

Musical notation for section C, consisting of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final cadence. There are two '2' time signatures below the staff, indicating a 2/4 time signature.

ha la si magiglugh yawikyelisa/ya ya wenk ha lisa/gwa ya gilouq dam zi ya ha

the big man is standing up/his mind makes him to work/he always do a big thing/really a prince's man

**D**

ha la si magiglugh yawikyelisa / ya ya wenk ha lisa / gwa ya gilouq dam zi ya ha / wekmanmun lutl helouq / sis omp kas awagha gwaleaghtle  
yutla / kumk ho las zi yatla gikagama ya

the big man is standing up / his mind makes him to work / he always do a big thing / really a prince's man / really full of everything / the father make  
his only name / all the people always come together

**E**

ya ha wekmanmun lutl helouq / sis omp kas awagha gwaleaghtle yutla / kumk ho las zi yatla gikagama ya

big thing really a prince's man / really full of everything / the father make his only name / all the people always come together

- = slide up to note
- = two voice pulsations on note
- = rhythm uneven; within the time of two eighth notes; unevenness varies with each repetition

Figure 3. “Chief’s Party Song” by Billy Assu. Translation and transliteration by Ida Halpern. Music transcription by Nancy Teskey.

The preponderance of fourths in the potlatch song is typical, as is the range, which covers an eleventh. Also typical of potlatch songs are the sustained tones which begin the piece, intervallic expansion and repeated patterns. The sustained tones are usually sung with syllables, and the patterns are sung with words. Though many patterns are repeated, they are usually varied either melodically or rhythmically.

## Recent Developments

Few Kwakiutls in the 1980s learned their native language at home; English has become the vernacular. However, children continue to be instructed in Kwakiutl language, ceremonial dancing, associated mythology, and the conventions of traditional art in primary school programs, which have been active since the late 1970s. The success of these programs has been twofold. Not only have they increased cultural awareness and provided a positive Indian identity for Kwakiutl youth, they have complemented the continued use of native speech in ceremonial singing and dancing.<sup>35</sup>

Potlatches are still held for traditional reasons, including the initiation of dancers, name-givings, transfers of title, wiping off shame, memorials, and weddings. Most life cycle observances such as baptisms, marriages and funerals first take place in church and may be followed by a more traditional Native ceremony, including appropriate potlatching. Potlatch ceremonies are also held in conjunction with activities such as a totem-pole raising or the opening of a community building. (Other recent adjustments in Kwakiutl ceremonial traditions include the use of their “bighouses” for nontraditional activities: community functions, the reception of dignitaries, and fundraising dance performances for tourists.)<sup>36</sup>

In 1978, the National Museum of Man in Ottawa, returned several pieces of Kwakiutl ceremonial art that had been originally confiscated from Village Island as a penalty for holding a potlatch in 1921.<sup>37</sup> Two museums were constructed to house the artifacts: the Kwagiulth Museum at Cape Mudge and the U’Mista Cultural Centre at Alert Bay. These institutions have provided a focus for systematic community attempts to document and revitalize cultural life by recording oral histories, producing language and culture curricula, preparing exhibits, organizing and administering classes on cultural topics, including traditional songs and crafts, and assisting potlatch planning.

Kwakiutl traditional ceremonial life continues to thrive. Perhaps because the Kwakiutl people have long displayed wide tolerance and flexibility towards outsiders and new things, they have discovered a successful model for cultural continuity while embracing selected ideas and concepts of others. In the face of overwhelming external pressure they have not compromised their own beliefs. Nowadays, with a supportive, or at least relatively benign, Federal government, they are growing in strength. Clearly the continuity of Kwakiutl traditions has been maintained more effectively than in most other Indian groups. The Natives



are fully aware of the relatedness of their arts and their values, because the ceremonies and dances to which they are often tied were not significantly disrupted in the repressive period from 1884 to 1951. They have successfully avoided cooptation or have turned the commercialization of their art to tribal advantage. Because the songs in particular are highly valued and individually owned, they have apparently escaped the enervating decay that widespread recording, abuse or displacement from ritual format have caused in many other Native groups.

The Kwakiutls use their potlatches to sustain ancient customs and relationships, their painting, sculpture, masks, robes, and blankets to visually remind themselves and others of their creative heritage, and their music to verbally relay the culture's values, morals, and traditions. Sound, sight, touch and motion reinforce each other in ceremonial synergy. Each performance of a song "is a symbolic reenactment of crucial behavior patterns upon which the continuity of a culture hangs."<sup>38</sup>

## NOTES

1. This article represents the combination and reworking of several topical papers by Nancy Teskey and Gordon Brock, originally written for a seminar conducted by Brenda Romero at the University of Colorado-Boulder in 1993.

2. Helen Codere, "Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture," in *Handbook of North American Indians* 7, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 359.

3. *Ibid.*, 361.

4. *Ibid.*, 363. See also Ida Halpern, liner notes for *Kwakiutl Indian Music of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Ethnic Folkways Records, 1981), Album No. FE 4122, which includes reports of fieldwork dating from the late 1940s to the 1970s.

5. Harry B. Hawthorn, C.S. Belshaw, and S.M. Jamieson, *The Indians of British Columbia: A Study of Contemporary Social Adjustment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 109-110.

6. Codere, "Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture," 363-364.

7. *Ibid.*, 364.

8. See Hilary Stewart, *Cedar: Tree of Life to Northwest Coast Indians* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984).

9. Bill Holm, *Smoky-Top: The Art and Times of Willy Seaweed*, Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum Monographs 3 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 618.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 378.

13. Philip Drucker and Robert F. Heizer, *To Make My Name Good* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 47-52.

14. Holm, *Smoky-Top*, 5-24.

15. Franz Boas, *Ethnology of the Kwakiutl* (Washington: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1921), 1073.

16. Holm, *Smoky-Top*, 379.

17. *Ibid.*, 384.

18. Halpern, liner notes for *Kwakiutl Indian Music*.

19. Natalie Curtis, *The Indians' Book: An Offering by the American Indians of Indian Lore, Musical and Narrative, to Form a Record of the Songs and Legends of Their Race* (New York: Dover, 1950), 298.

20. Bruno Nettl, *North American Indian Musical Styles* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1954), 8.
21. Ibid.
22. Curtis, *Indians' Book*, 298.
23. Boas, *Ethnology*, 348.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 346.
26. Ibid., 350.
27. James P. Spradley, *Guests Never Leave Hungry: The Autobiography of James Sewid, A Kwakiutl Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 36.
28. Bruno Nettl, *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), 173.
29. Halpern, liner notes for *Kwakiutl Indian Music*, 12.
30. Ibid., 11.
31. Ibid., 5.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Gloria C. Webster, "Kwakiutl Since 1980," in *Handbook of North American Indians* 7, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 388.
36. James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, *Anthropology: The Cultural Perspective* (New York: John Wiley, 1975), 579-597.
37. Webster, "Kwakiutl Since 1980," 389.
38. Alan Lomax, *Folk Song Style and Culture* (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968).

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