Preface

The study of Native American music in the United States has always met with resistance, either on the part of scholars or on the part of Natives. A growing awareness that mainstream scholars are in danger of invading the religious privacy of a people, insofar as Native American music is often a sacred cultural expression, gives both insiders and outsiders pause. Today we are likely to experience not only ethical qualms with regard to religious privacy when we approach Native music, but also a gnawing sense that earlier analysts have not understood complex and dynamic ways in which Native forms, such as stories and songs, manipulate natural forces or sources of power.[1] It has been our ethnocentric bias to think of those "primitive" belief systems as existing only in the psychological realm, without a link to material "reality" as perceived in Western thought.

Having convinced ourselves that the West has been won for Rationalism and Science, we have failed to notice the treasures existent in Native ways of being and thinking. Insecurity and perhaps even a residual tendency to name all unknowns as Evil have prevented us from seriously grappling with Native systems of thought, leading us to mistrust what we fail to understand and cannot control. It is not too late to reverse historical trends, and to acknowledge that we are ignorant, if not spiritually immature, and to begin to demonstrate respect for Native traditions as we study them. It is clear that major breakthroughs in mainstream understanding can only come about through Native informing, but we must prove to be capable of comprehending before we are entrusted with sacred knowledge.

We need also to be aware of other biases allied to, if not inherent in, the contemporary Western conservatory culture that prefers musical complexity, exceptional speed, and the acts of the virtuoso soloist. Such preferences may reflect or symbolize an outdated ideal of the "rugged individualist" who overcomes all obstacles, or the captive capitalist worker who functions like a well-tuned machine. It is possible to overlook the high incidence of tendonitis or carple tunnel syndrome among professional Western performers, but when easily fifty percent of the student performer population suffers from bodily aches resulting from physical and psychological stress incurred in trying to become technically perfect, can we turn away from the implications? In other settings, where the demands for musical execution are less extreme, the ideal for groups of individuals is to join in—more accurately, perhaps, to attract spiritual involvement. Once a basic ostinato permeates the mind/body of the group, personal creativity and spontaneity express themselves in many ways. Among several African musics, for example, gradual shifts in rhythmic emphasis are undertaken by one person; these variations occur along with the established

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ostinato, and a resultant pattern is formed. To (or within) this conversation, another individual might add a different but simultaneous pattern, forming a new resultant, and the process can continue for hours—as entertainment, or religious expression, or spiritual communion. Differing levels of rhythmic complexity are accommodated in group inclusive formats.

Among Native Americans complexity is focused in a matrix of relationships between the human and the Unseen worlds and not solely in the hands of a star performer. Large group song participation is a less central concern than in Africa, and there is almost no improvisation. Rehearsals make up a regular part of Native American musical life. Because songs are interjected into holistic, communal, ceremonial contexts that often include physical and spiritual preparation, dance, perhaps fasting, and always feasting, the stress that attends the Western virtuosic soloist is largely removed. Texts are frequently elaborate and words are usually of the utmost importance, reinforcing symbolic religio-cultural images, which act as sympathetic prayer magic. Even when songs are made up entirely of vocables, the vocables often are not consistently the same throughout the song, and the net effect is one of a carefully planned formal structure.[2] (The advantage of vocables lies in their accessibility, allowing inter-tribal participation, but the repetition of tunes and words serves a different religious function than in the African forms discussed above.)

Native songs conform to a variety of formats. Sometimes songs are ostinato-like, and, if so, they are likely to be strophic forms utilizing different words in successive stanzas. Songs are generally performed in single units or bipartite forms; they can encompass a fair bit of elaboration, seemingly the result of accompanying dance choreography. Native Americans commonly repeat entire songs in ceremonies where the number of repetitions is ritually defined (for example, when a song must be sung four times in order to engage the Unseen forces that are being invoked from four directions). At other times repetition of a song occurs in a mantra-like fashion, accompanying an aspect of dance or ritual.

Calling attention to a perspective akin to many Native Americans, Stephen Wild has discussed the non-developmental character of Australian Aboriginal Warlbiri songs as determined by a world view in which the sacredness of the natural world is taken for granted: "In the Dreamtime the basic patterns of nature and culture were laid down, and the Warlbiri attempt to maintain these patterns."[3] Linda Hogan says that Native Americans have defined the sacred as "that which can only be destroyed."[4] Clearly, the margin of human interaction with the environment as a sacred entity is a narrow one, requiring much care and attention. It is an offense to carve out the land (although anything might be possible after great contemplation and the blessings of the Unseen forces). So one notes that Native American songs are not developmental either, and their presence in ceremony requires careful preparation. The older the song, the greater its primal power, being closer to the ancient time in which the sacredness of Nature itself was greater. Because of their respect for the time-tested, there is no strong urge

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to sing new, "original" songs, at least within traditional categories, unless they are given by the Unseen in dreams or visions. To mainstream Euro-Americans, so-called new Native compositions often seem much like last year's. Respectful repetition seems to us a poor substitute for novelty. We fail to appreciate Native Americans' profound awareness of the Biblical axiom "there is nothing new under the sun" and the positive implications in it for becoming better acquainted with the constant spiritual essence which envelops us all.

One can hardly blame American Indians for not wanting to study Western musics, especially in a university or conservatory, and few programs attempt to create a receptive atmosphere in which Native scholars might be nurtured to interact with non-Natives, to give or take what they see fit, when they see fit to do so. But perhaps there is hope. In my training, largely with Charlotte Heth at U.C.L.A., and in the Pueblos of New Mexico, I have learned to bring Native culture members to give class presentations whenever possible. I have sought to impart cultural sensitivity to my students, within the limitations of traditional university formats. Some of the articles in this volume grew out of my graduate seminar in American Indian music in the spring of 1993, where each student studied a particular group. Steve Mullins' paper was his transcription project, part of a larger study of the Hopi world view and music. Nancy Teskey and Gordon Brock focused their attention on the Kwakiutl (or Kwagiutl) of the Northwest American Pacific Coast, and have combined elements of several papers for their essay, which emphasizes cultural continuity. Along with focusing on the Navajo world view and music, Bruce Cook has developed his paper on culture-sensitive ways of teaching Western art forms to Navajo students from his personal experience.

Tara Browner, herself of Choctaw heritage, and recently come to the ethnomusicology faculty at U.C.L.A, is emerging as a accomplished scholar of Native American music. Her paper is informed from the inside, based on field work, the sort of which is largely absent in the papers which grew out of my seminar. Susan Dominguez's paper seeks to highlight the role of a mixed-Lakota woman, Zitkala-Sa, during an earlier era, when Native Americans had not yet crystallized their feelings about the use of ceremonial songs by outsiders, but when one individual woman with clear pan-Indianist goals made an impact.

All of these papers together point to new and more dynamic ways of looking at and listening to Native American musics. In all instances it is clear that the music is a key element in ceremonial expression, placed in a special category, believed to hold the power to bring change, and requiring gatekeepers to prevent the misuse of that power. We take our place here, in honoring age-long practices from which we have already learned so very much.

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ENDNOTES

1. See Barre Toelken's "Enlightened Fieldwork" in *Parabola* 20 (Summer 1995): 29-38.

2. Vocables are words like "heya, heyana," with no concrete meaning, although they might have concrete connotations in specific contexts.

3. Stephen A. Wild, "Warlbiri Music and Culture: Meaning in a Central Australian Song Series," in *Problems and Solutions, Occasional Essays in Musicology Presented to Alice M. Moyle*, edited by Jamie C. Kassler and Jill Stubingron. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger Pty. Ltd., 1984:197.

4. In *Everything Has a Spirit*, a video production on American Indian Religious Freedom, co-produced by Ava Hamilton and Gabriel Dech, in conjunction with Channel 12 in Denver, Colorado, 1992. Script by Linda Hogan.

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