



Smithsonian Folkways

Modern Ritual and Contemporary Play: Music Traditions of the Inuit, Apache and Pacific Northwest Native Americans

A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson

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Summary:

Music of the Coastal Native American regions spans a geographically and musically vast landscape of indigenous tradition. These songs can be categorized by their function as songs of ritual, of community/dance/courtship music. Performance traditions have changed over time due to the influence of European colonizers. Two contemporary examples are used below to highlight this marked transition.

Suggested Grade Levels: 6-8, 9-12

Country: United States, Canada

Region: North America

Culture Group: Inuit, Apache

Genre: American Indian

Instruments: Shakers, Drums, Voice

Language: English, Other

Co-Curricular Areas: Social Studies

National Standards: 1, 2, 3, 6, 9

Prerequisites: None

Objectives:

- Listen to and perform a ritual song from the Native American tradition
- Improvise melodic variations using syllables
- Learn to dance the traditional Rabbit Dance
- Compare and contrast the musical elements of the traditional version of Rabbit Dance with a New-Age version of the same song
- Watch the Inuit Throat singing video and participate in a verbal discussion and/or written response

Materials:

- “Devil Dance, Crown Dance” Anthology of North American Indian and Eskimo Music, Folkways Records, CD2, track 12

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/anthology-of-north-american-indian-and-eskimo-music/album/smithsonian>

- Image of Apache forked crown
- Hand drums, rattles/chimes/shakers
- Arrangement
- Rhythm sticks/drums/shakers
- Video: “Inuit Throat Singing Demonstration” Karin and Kathy Ketter, from Smithsonian Global Sound

Lesson Segments:

- 1. Singing Songs of Ritual** (National Standards 1, 2, 3, 6, 9)
- 2. Community Music: The Rabbit Dance** (National Standards 6, 9)
- 3. Musical Competition** (National Standards 6, 9)

1. Singing Songs of Ritual

- a. Take a moment to give some background on the ritual of the song “Devil Dance, Crown Dance”.
 - i. Nine day initiation rite for adolescent girls into womanhood in the Western Apache Tradition
 - ii. The ceremony calls for a group of masked dancers to impersonate the mountain-dwelling super-naturals
 - iii. The dancers wear elaborate forked headpieces
- b. Prepare to listen: Ask students to listen for repeated sections and to raise a hand when they hear the repeat; listen once through “Devil dance, Crown dance”
- c. Write up the syllables used in the song (hay, ya, na) and invite students into a circle on the floor with several drums and rattles/bells; use the arrangement to play and sing the song, using the written text
- d. Perform the song again, this time with the recording and take turns improvising syllabic variations of the melody using the syllables provided and rhythmic improvisations

Assessment: The students will sing and play the song from the arrangement without the teachers help and participate in the improvisation exercise.

2. Musical Competition

- a. Before watching the video, ask students to listen for the function of this type of song and to try to recognize an element of the singing technique that is familiar to them
- b. Watch video (2 min 40 sec)

- c. Invite students into a discussion of this kind of music. “Did you like the music?” “Where do we see competition through music in our culture?” (American Idol, fiddle competitions, Battle of the Bands, etc.)
- d. Ask students what they think the function of the song is and if there is a familiar technique: Function of song is entertainment and a competitive game between partners; the component of breath control and support is something the students recognize from singing/playing band instruments (Also written response possibility)

Assessment: Students can show their knowledge by participating in a discussion/written response of the video.

Extensions:

~ *Native American Music Unit Introduction*: Story and Thought Activity: To introduce the Native American idea of function in music (Music as Ritual, Community and Entertainment), recite traditional “Quileute” story from *Spirit of the First People*

“On what is now known as the Olympic Peninsula there lived an old man who was the last head whaler of the Coastal People. In his old age his wife gave birth to a son. This was their first child and the only one in the tribe who could inherit the father’s whaling position.

As soon as the boy turned twelve, the old man wanted to take him to sea to teach him how to whale. People from the village protested, saying that the boy was too young; but the father, knowing that he was aging, felt he could wait no longer. One morning they gathered their crew and went out to sea.

When they spotted the first whale, the crew brought the canoe up to it, and the old man, poised beside his son in the bow, sent his harpoon into the whale’s back. As the rope played out, the coils grabbed the boy’s leg and pulled him into the water. A long time passed as they searched frantically for him. The stricken father was blaming himself for not listening to the village people, when suddenly the boy surfaced, barely breathing, but still alive.

Plucking him out of the water, the old man and his crew rushed back to the village. There the people expressed great anger at the old man’s actions. For four days and nights the boy lay unconscious. Then he arose from his bed singing a beautiful song. At the end of the song the boy told the people what happened when he was underwater:

“The whale told me to crawl down the rope to him. As I did this, a bubble of air from his blowhole surrounded me. Then the whale began singing a beautiful song. I hung on and listened. When we started toward the surface, we came through different layers. Each layer was a different color and had a different song. Each song was more beautiful than the last. Then, when we surfaced, I fell asleep.”

The whale gave the boy not only his life, but also the gifts of song and color for his people. Before this time the world had neither music nor color. Guided by his experience, within four months, the boy assembled his own crew and brought back the largest whale ever seen. He had become the head whaler of his town.”

Discussion Option: Themes - Importance of song and oral tradition to the Coastal Native American people, the emphasis on function over aesthetics in Native American music. Beverly Diamond addresses another theme regarding Native American stories and writes “Legends may encourage listeners to use their minds and to make ethical decisions for themselves...Your individual answer will tell you something about your own views of community and your attitudes toward individualism.”

References:

Native American Music. Marcia Herndon. Norwood, Pa. : Norwood Editions, 1980
(call number ML3557.H56)

Moving Within the Circle: contemporary Native American music and dance. Bryan Burton. Danbury, CT: World Music Press, 1993.
(call number ML3557.B8 1993)

A Guide to Native American Music Recordings. Greg Gombert. Fort Collins, Co: Multicultural Publications, 1994.

Diamond, Beverley. Native American Music in Eastern North America. Global Music Series. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.

Ryan, Esme, and Willie Smyth. Spirit of the First People: Native American Traditions of Washington State. Seattle: University of Washington P, 1999.

Album details and liner notes:

“Anthology of North American Indian and Eskimo Music” Smithsonian Global Sound