

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 038

SO 005 546

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TITLE Indian Music.  
INSTITUTION Minneapolis Public Schools, Minn.  
PUB DATE 71  
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29  
DESCRIPTORS \*American Indian Culture; American Indians;  
Bibliographic Citations; Cultural Activities; Dance;  
Ethnology; \*Music; \*Musical Instruments; \*Social  
Studies; Vocal Music

ABSTRACT

American Indian music is the topic of this curriculum unit from the Task Force on Minority Cultures. After a brief introduction explaining the importance of music to the Indian people, there are sections on: 1) the instruments, which provides a description of each instrument, including the type of materials used in its construction, how the instrument was made, and how it was played; 2) the dances, with the significance given for each; and, 3) the songs, under what circumstances they were sung and by whom. A short annotated bibliography is given listing books on the songs and stories of the American Indian. Other documents in the series are SO 005 534 through SO 005 551. (OPH)

ED 073038

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INDIAN MUSIC

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Minneapolis Public Schools  
Task Force on Minority Cultures  
Winter, 1971  
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### HOW THE INDIANS MADE MUSIC

Music was an important part of the Indian people. They sang songs. There were songs the Indian mothers sang to their babies in the cradleboard to help them go to sleep. There were songs for children. Mothers taught songs of childhood games, and legends passed down from the beginning of the Indian people. Other songs were sung while the people worked, songs for weaving, cleaning skins, making clothing and moccasins, grinding corn or building homes and canoes. The people had honor songs of praise to men for their brave deeds, and victory songs for a successful battle. Many songs were prayers to the Great Spirit, Maker of All. There were songs sung to welcome the four seasons, to give thanks for good planting, rain, a good harvest, or a successful buffalo or deer hunt. Songs to be sung before a man-child went to seek his vision, and enter into manhood. Love songs the young men played on his courting flute to the maiden he chose to marry. There were special songs for the dances. The Shaman or Medicine Man sang his special songs for the good health of his people. Singing was a part of the Indian people's whole being from birth until the last moments of his life.

### THE FLAGELOT OR FLUTE

The Indian people tell us the flute is as old as the world. There have always been flutes just as there have always been young men to make them. The flute was the only melody producing instrument the Indian people had. Flutes were made by the young men. Love songs were composed, and played to the maiden the young man had chosen to marry. The flute was also used as a warning signal. When an enemy war party was near a young man went through the village playing a warning song on his flute, hoping the enemy would think it only a young man playing a courting song.

Young men made their flutes from a straight stick of soft wood, sumac, cedar or boxelder. It was usually 25 inches long, and  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch in diameter. It was first split into and the pith removed. Six finger holes were made on the top; spacing depended on the finger span of the person making the flute. On one end of the open flute the young man carved a mouthpiece, and an adjustable block for changing the pitch of the flute. The two sections were then glued together with a glue made from the thick muscular tissues of the neck of the buffalo or bull elk, that had been boiled for several days until a jelly-like glue resulted. It was then tied together with strips of wet sinew and set aside to dry. The young man decorated his flute in his own creative designs. The completed flute had a clear mellow tone.

### THE BIG TWISTED FLUTE

The Big Twisted Flute, however, was made by men who had dreamed of the Buffalo, and was by far the most elaborate and versatile. Carved of two grooved cedar halves, it was glued together and bound by thin rawhide lashing. The flute was equipped with five finger holes and an air vent covered with an adjustable block for changing pitch in the shape of a headless horse. It was decorated with red on the interior of each hole. Long in form, painted, and bearing the carved body of the horse. The Big Twisted Flute was the dangerously powerful instrument of love. Only, however, when supplied with magic music, were flutes to be feared. Otherwise, they might be played by men in the privacy of their tipis for the enjoyment of themselves and friends. It was pleasant to hear the flute's sound in the evenings as old men reminisced with love songs.

The plaintive minor key and the lilting, whistling tone gave the music of the flute a significance in courtship. Flutes were expensive and when supplied with magic formula for love, the Dreamer could expect to receive for his fee a fine horse. Highly valued and much respected, The Big Twisted Flute was the Sioux's highest musical achievement.

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Hassrick, Royal B. THE SIOUX, LIFE AND CUSTOMS OF A WARRIOR SOCIETY, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1964, pp. 146-147.



### OJIBWA WATER DRUM

The Ojibwa water drum is unique. It is the principal instrument in the performance of the Ojibwa Grand Medicine Ceremony, and is called Mide Drum. It differs from other drums in that it contains water which is very important as the water controls the sounds and enables the drum head to function properly. The size of the drum is also important. A hollowed-out basswood log from fifteen to sixteen inches tall is selected. The frame is tapered at both ends to give it a more uniform shape. The drum head must be wet to function properly; because it is alternately wet and dry, special care must be used in the selections of the untanned deerskin used for the drum head. Rawhide strips are wrapped around a hoop and tightly fitted over the drum head and frame. The drum-maker then drills a small hole near the middle of the frame. A removable plug is made to fit the hole. Water is poured into the drum and the pitch of the drum can be changed by raising or lowering the water level. To determine the amount of water needed, the method of trial and error is used. The drummer will start with a small amount and add more until he is satisfied with the tone.

The water drum is also tuned to the singer's voice. Tuning takes a great deal of time and patience. One method of tuning the drum is to tighten the head. Also the amount of water on the underside of the skin drum head will change the sound as too much water hinders the vibrations and too little detracts from the flexibility. The head must be damp, but not too wet.

The men who play the drums are honored men of their clan. The drum sticks which they use are made by the players so that each stick fits the hand grip of the drummer.

## DRUMS

The drummers and singers were men of honor. Most significant was the human voice, and songs accompanied by drumming.

Drums were made with care and patience. There were many kinds of drums, the single or double headed hand drums, and the large dance drum played by several drummers and singers. Drums were usually round except for the square drums made by the western Indians in California and Washington.

The single headed drum was started from a green willow sapling. A straight branch was formed into a perfect circle, tied with buckskin, and hung to dry. After days of drying, a piece of wet untanned deer-skin was laid over the frame, holes cut into the overlapping sides, and laced onto the frame. When the lacing was completed the drum-maker drew the rawhide lacing as tightly as possible and tied the ends into knots. Rawhide was fastened to make a crosspiece of leather to serve as a handgrip for carrying the drum.

Large double-headed drums were cut from hollowed logs and suspended from the ground by four decorated sticks. The drummers and singers used this drum for public ceremonies and dances. To sit at the drum was an honor, acquired through great deeds, and many years of apprenticeship. Not just anyone could sit at the drum or sing.

Some drum beaters were made by covering the end of a short stick with a deerskin pad. Many of these were decorated, depending on the status of the owner in the community. Among the warrior societies the beaters were decorated with porcupine quillwork.

Before the drums were played they were warmed over a fire to give them a richer tone, or as the Indian people say; To make the drum sing better.





### BELLS

Using handmade tools of bone or rock, the Indian people worked with copper, to fashion bells by cold hammering and grinding. The bells were strapped in rows and hung around a dancers knees or ankles. They gave a musical beat to the dancer, singer and drummer.

### STRINGED INSTRUMENTS

The only stringed instruments known among the early Indian people was the musical bow on which notes were produced by stroking a thong stretched on a bow.

## WHISTLES

The Indian people made whistles from wing bones of eagles, hawks, geese, and other birds. But a whistle made from an eagle's wing bone was the most highly prized.

The sound from the whistle was exactly like that of the bird whose wing bone had been used. Whistles were worn attached to a thong around the neck and were used for various purposes.

The small eagle bone whistle was decorated with quills and eagle down, and used during the Sun Dance, the greatest and most important ceremony of the Plains Indians. The Sun Dance is a religious ceremony in which the Indian man fulfills a vow made to the Great Spirit. The dancer blows on the eagle bone whistle during the entire ceremony, looking at the sun and its course from its rising to its setting.

Other whistles were used in dances. If a leading dancer liked the drummer's songs, he blew the whistle, which usually hung around his neck, and the drummers would play and sing the song one more time.

There were long tubular whistles of ash wood, the lower tapered end carved, shaped and painted to portray a crane's head and open beak. There were also whistles of pottery. Whistles were made of the natural materials found in the area of the maker, and decorated and shaped for the task they performed.

### THE MORACHE

The Mo-rah'-tche is a ceremonial scraping stick of the southwest Indians. It is sometimes called a goo-aj'-jos. The notched morache is scraped with another stick and used with a gourd to give it more sound and tone quality.

### The Bear Dance

In the spring, the Cheyenne Indians of Montana perform the Bear Dance. A small hole is dug in the ground, and a basket turned upside down is placed over the hole. The singer places a notched stick on the bottom of the basket and rubs another stick or bone over the notches as he sings the traditional bear songs and the dancers perform the ceremonial Bear Dance. The bear was held in great reverence and admired for its strength. Many legends were written about the bear. The bear was also the totem of some tribes and, therefore, could not be killed.

## RATTLES

Rattles were considered sacred objects used in religious rituals by the medicine men, and some ceremonial dances. Rattles served as emblems of organizations or officials.

Rattles were made of gourds, buffalo and deer horns, bark, turtle shells, rawhide, hoofs, the dewclaws of the deer, or carved from wood, depending on the natural materials available in the area, and the skill and workmanship of the maker.

The Woodland people made rattles out of gourds, that were first dried out, the pulp removed and pebbles or shot inserted through a hole cut for the mounting of a handle. Other rattles were made of birch bark, shaped and sewn together with sinew.

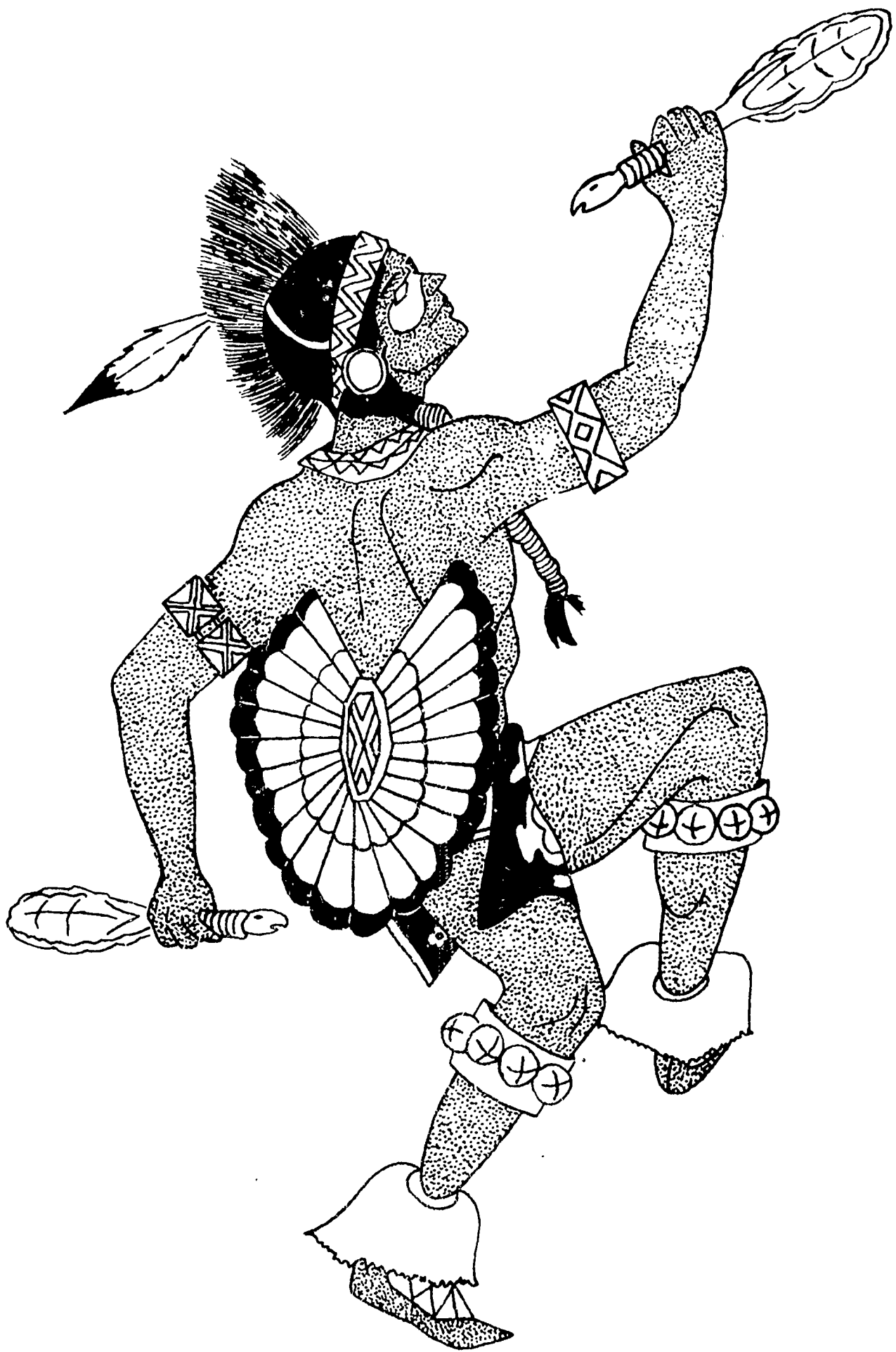
Some rattles were made of deerhide, first soaked and filled with sand to dry, then equipped with a wooden handle, filled with pebbles, decorated with appealing designs, and an eagle down feather.

Dewclaw rattles were the cut claws of a deer, attached in rows on a stick wrapped with deerskin. These rattles were carried or attached to a dancers leg or used by Medicine Men or by Shamans in the curing of the ill.

The Plains Indians made a wooden form in the shape of a pear, globe or open ring. Wet rawhide was stretched over the frame and dried. Pebbles were inserted through the hollow handle.

The Winnebago people used shells or birds' beaks strung so as to rattle against each other when shaken.

Leg rattles were made by stringing small animal bones to dangle across tortoise shells. These were then attached around a dancers knees or ankles.



## THE BUFFALO DANCE

Each spring and fall the chief and Shaman decided the time of the buffalo hunt. This was a ceremonial affair, and needed "medicine" to insure a success. Buffalo dances were given before and after a hunt. The Indian people felt if they did not show respect to the buffalo, the animal would be offended and go into hiding.

A crier went through the village proclaiming the buffalo hunt. Men who belonged to the Great Buffalo society appeared at the "Mystery Lodge." These were outstanding warriors, who came to perform this very special dance. Each member brought with him his mask, the head and horns of a buffalo, and his favorite bow with blunt arrows or lance.

George Catlin, famous painter and authority on the life and customs of the American Indian described the North Dakota Mandan Indian Buffalo Dance, as a dance that went on for several days; "When one becomes fatigued of the exercise, he signifies it by bending quite forward, and sinking his body towards the ground; when another draws a bow upon him and hits him with a blunt arrow, and he falls like a buffalo - is seized by the bystanders who drag him out of the ring by the heels, brandishing their knives about him; and having gone through the notions of skinning and cutting him up, they let him off, and his place is at once supplied by another, who dances into the ring with his mask on; and by this taking of places, the scene is easily kept up night and day, until the desired effect has been produced, that of "making buffalo come."

The above Catlin writings are depicted in the film TAHTONKA, a Sioux Indian word meaning "Great Buffalo." The film is on file at the Audio-Visual Education Office, Special School District #1, Minneapolis Public Schools, 877 N.E. Broadway, Minneapolis, Minnesota.





OKICIZE CLOWAN

Sioux War-Song

Sung by: Tasunk-Hinsa (Sorrel Horse)  
Mahpiya-Tatank (Sky Bull, meaning Buffalo-Bull)  
Mato-Wanantuya (High Bear)

This is a war-song well known among the Dakota people. It is an old song and was sung by the Dakotas when fighting for their land. It is now sung by chiefs on various occasions, sometimes at the opening of ceremonies or of councils.

The melody is also used with different words, a Wopils Olowan, meaning a song of thanksgiving, is a gathering of people for social festivals or ceremonial dances. It is an occasion for the giving of presents. At some time during the dance or ceremony an announcement is made that a gift is to be made, and summons by name the person honored to receive the gift. The person receiving the gift expresses his thanks with quiet solemnity and passes his hand in blessing over the giver. Many may give presents one after the other on the same occasion.

If blankets or robes are given at a dance, it is customary for the parents to make the gift through their children. The parent spreads the gifts upon the ground and the child in the finest moccasins and traditional clothing dances around the gifts while a song is sung by the drummers and singers.

The person receiving the gift returns thanks with a song. Visitors from other tribes sing in the thank-offering of their people.

This song was frequently sung on such occasions; it is still used by many of the bands of the Dakota today.

OKICIZE OLOWAN

WAR-SONG

Kolapila takuyakapi-lo!  
 Maka kin mitawa yelo!  
 Epinahan blehem:ciye-lo!

Comrades, kinsmen,  
 Now have ye spoken thus,  
 The earth is mine,  
 'Tis my domain.  
 'Tis said, and now anew I exert me!

7 7 7

hi ye ha hi ye hi ye

hi ye ha ha hi ye ... hi ye

hi ye ha hi ye ... hi ye

hi ye ha hi ye

hi ye a ... ye oi

ko - la pa - ka kai - ku - ya - ha - pi - lo  
 Com - rades kins - men, now have ye spo - ken thus,

ma - na - si ni - ta - wa ye - lo  
 the - earth - is mine. tis my do - main

ti - si na - han ble - hem - ci ye!  
 tis said and now a - new I ex - ert me!

yo!

The Indian Book, by Natalie Curtis, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1968.

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The Indians are the authors of this volume. The songs and stories are theirs; the drawings and title-pages were made by them. The work of the recorder has been but the collecting, editing, and arranging of the Indians' contributions.

Glass, Paul. Adapted SONGS AND STORIES OF THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS, Grosset, 1968.

A selection of stories and songs of the Yuma, Mandan and Teton Sioux, Pawnee, and Papago Indian tribes with a capsule history of each tribe. A simple musical accompaniment with drum beat notations is provided and an explanation of the song's significance in tribal customs.

Hoffman, Charles. AMERICAN INDIANS SING, Library ed., 1967.

Mr. Hoffman shows the importance of music in both the daily and the ceremonial lives of the major North American Indian tribes. Twelve songs are transcribed for singing, other music is on the accompanying record. Specific ceremonies are illustrated and explained; includes the Sun Dance, False Face Society, Snake Ceremony, Green Corn Dance, and others.

Hoffsinde, Robert. INDIAN MUSIC MAKERS, Marrow, 1967.

The examples of Indian music in this book come from the Ojibwa, also known as the Chippewa, of northern Minnesota.

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