

Indian Music

by Veronica Davis

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INDIAN MUSIC

BY

VERONICA DAVIS

THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF MUSIC

IN

MUSIC

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1920

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.....June 21,.....1920..

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

.....Veronica Davis.....

ENTITLED.....INDIAN MUSIC.....

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF.....Bachelor of Music.....

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.....Theory.....

Bibliography

Musical Quarterly

- "Study of Indian Music" April 1915 Frances Denmore
"Idealization of Indian Music" July 1915 Charles Cadman
"Two Summers with Blackfeet Indians of Montana" 1916 Vol. 2
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Etude

- September 1917
June 1906
Vol. 18
January 1918
December 1913
"Indian Story and Song" Alice Fletcher
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Indian Music

To study Indian music is to study a crude but cultivated art.

"Indians who have acquired education are particularly desirous of preserving traditions and the music of their tribes and are in a position to perform their melodies in primitive style and at the same time form some conception of their value from an ethnological point of view."

The purpose of this thesis is to arouse more interest in this art which may mean much to the future American music. The technical structure has been rather extensively dealt with so this thesis will dwell more upon the aid and pleasure music of the Indian may afford us.

Four reasons are given by Miss Frances Densmore to justify the extensive study of Indian music; "first, that songs of a vanishing race may be preserved; second, that our composers may have native themes for use in distinctly American compositions; third, that the analysis of Indian songs may, perhaps, throw some light on the problem of the intuitive lines of musical expression; and last, but not least, that, through his music, we may learn the better to understand the Indians." (April Musical Quarterly 1915)

To appreciate and understand Indian music we must first study the environment and personal life of the Indian.

Let us approach an Indian camp as does Arthur Nevins in "Two Summers with the Blackfoot Indians of Montana".

"There are one hundred fifty wigwams - called lodges by

the Indians - pitched in an oval shape. The white material from which these lodges are made is decorated by crude drawings, representing different animals, such as the deer, the snake, buffalo, and many others. These decorations done in reds, blacks and yellows, each signify a society to which the owner belongs. These societies are of a religious character.

The village is gay with life. Indians bedecked with their gorgeously beaded buckskin costumes, their striking colored blankets carelessly thrown about them, are singing and dancing."

From five o'clock in the afternoon on into the late night one can find ample opportunity to hear Indian music. They love to sing, and song to them is the most potent outlet of their emotions.

As evening comes and darkness follows they gather around the campfire. Moments of silence ensue out of which emanate a faint murmuring tone from some individual. Gradually this tone increases and is taken up by others until the volume is deemed sufficient to introduce a theme. The drums come in with their syncopated beat. The singing grows until a squaw rises and dances, elevating herself on the toes, then stamping the earth with her heels. She is soon joined by another squaw going thru the same movements. The music becomes more and more agitated and crescendoing until with accompaniment of rattles a brave arises, with knees bent forward, rigid lightening of muscles and body more flexible, sways up and down to a savage cry that punctuates the steps of his dance. Other braves arise dancing in different attitudes but with legs always in strained tension. Around the squaws they hop and glide, the music now heaving in frantic weirdness; guttural cries turn to whoops and suddenly a war cry pierces the air. The dance is ended.

"Music envelops the Indian's individual and social life like an atmosphere. There is no important personal experience where it does not bear a part, nor any ceremonial where it is not important to the expression of religious feeling." (Alice Fletcher: "Indian Story and Song")

Music is the medium by which the Indian communicates with the unseen. In hunting, fighting, playing games, planting, gathering healing herbs, wooing, mourning, in fact, every experience of life the Indian sings.

Indian singing is always in unison; and the natural soprano, contralto, tenor and bass moving along in octaves brings out the overtones and produces harmonic effects. The Blackfeet are so primitive that even a two-part harmony is most distressing. When such a song is sung in their presence they will ask, "Why a few of the people sang so poorly".

The most remarkable discovery was made when many voices sang in unison, singing in perfect accord, the appoggiaturas, gracing quarter, half and whole tones with greatest ease. "Close and continual observation has revealed that the Indian, when he sings, is not concerned with the making of a musical presentation to his audience. He is simply pouring out his feelings regardless of artistic effects. To him music is subjective; it is the vehicle of communication between him and the object of his desires." (Indian Story and Song)

Certain peculiarities in the Indians' way of singing make it difficult for one of our race intelligently to hear their songs or truthfully to transcribe them.

The continual slurring of the voice from one note to another produces an out-of-tune impression. Then the custom of singing out of doors to the accompaniment of the drum, against the wind, and out-door noises tends to strain the voice, robbing it of its sweetness.

Another difficulty is to search through the quavering pulsations of the tones and reach the real theme. The use of appoggiaturas, coated by a throaty tremolo is distracting. ✕

The problem of the American composer is to find a way of reproducing the spirit and color of the music without the aid of these characteristics.

"Melody is merely the skyline in music. The notes the Indian sings are the smallest part of his music." (Loonis: "Etude" June 1906)

Some Indians have exceptionally good voices and like to sing but they prefer to beat a drum. The Indian is naturally endowed with a fine physique and possesses a big voice. He sings for hours and even for days at the dances without tiring. Bull Plume sang from eight o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the evening with only a half hour off for lunch without losing his voice; and his vocal output came from the throat with every suggestion of his vocal chords becoming frayed, ripped and torn to pieces. They use calamus root for the throat which increases carrying power of voices marvelously.

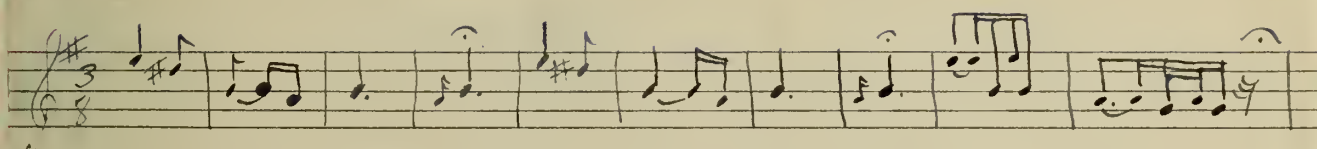
They can separate their tones by a contraction of the glottis so that, without the use of words or syllables, short note values may be given corresponding to eighth or sixteenth notes with

perfect distinctness.

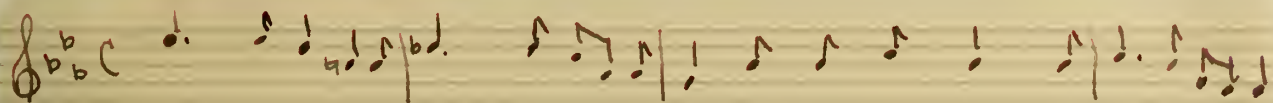
A few Indians have become excellent performers on different instruments. They have only two common native instruments - the flute and the drum, - but wherever the Indians have come to the white race to be educated they have eagerly formed mandolin and guitar clubs and Denison Wheelock has an Indian band which ranks with the best American and Italian bands.

The flute is made of tin pieces of cedar hollowed out, glued together with pine and tied with sinews. The performer blows into it from the end. It has a scale of from four to six tones and semitones are produced by cross fingering. At intervals and between phrases the performer blows a trill or tremolo on the lowest tone.

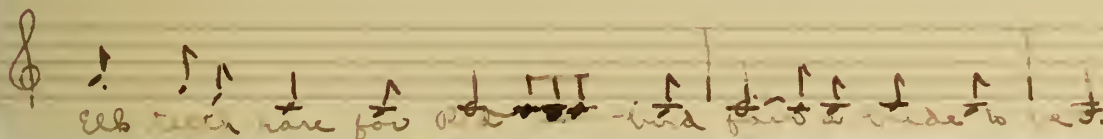
The best flute song recorded is a melody played by John Turkey Legs, a northern Cheyenne. The vocal text is entitled "Pakoble, the Rose".



Another example of the flute song is that of the Red Willow Pueblo Indians. The text is a farewell. Pa-pap-poon must not marry away from her tribe. The song of the lover was confided to Mr. Thurlow Lieurence and recorded with promise that his identity should never be made known. Pa-pap-poon is one of the beautiful daughters of the present chief of Red Pueblo Indians whose name is whet-ta-cali (Bow Hawk).



Sietz-e-a-wa Sietz-e-a-wa like a cloud he comes a god bringing



The melodies played on the flute are more transcribable than songs which are sung.

In order to understand and to transcribe songs more easily our people have arranged certain forms of analysis by which to govern the music.

The interval of the fourth is found to be very prominent especially among love songs, night songs, wolf songs, and traveling songs. The Indian takes many ways to reach it but after becoming familiarized with the style, one learns to anticipate this interval as a resolution of a given phrase.



A song very seldom covers a greater range than an octave and quite often less (see table below). The closing note frequently is found to be on the fifth of the key but the general tendency, especially in the more modern songs, is to the keynote. The keynote is in nearly all cases the lowest note of the song.

Songs covering over an octave	16%
Songs covering the octave and less	84%
Songs ending on fifth	31%
Songs ending on third	15%
Songs ending on keynote	54%
Songs in which the keynote is the lowest tone	88%

In many instances the tempo of the drum appears entirely independent of that of the voice. The drum and voice usually coincide on the first beat and the closing measure - sometimes on the first beat of each measure.

It is said there are different ways of ending songs and the character of the song may be told by the way it ends. The "stop short" is used in songs such as the grass dance, buffalo dance, crow-owner's society songs, and the style in which "the tone dies away gradually" is used when singing war songs and similar songs.

Another interesting table has been worked out by Miss Frances Densmore according to the age of songs, - those believed to be from fifty to one hundred years old and those less than fifty years old.

"The chief differences among the songs are a general reduction in compass of songs with an increase of harmonic form and accidentals; a more direct attack (shown by the increase of songs beginning on the accented part of the measure); an increase of songs beginning in 2/4 time, and also in songs without change in time. We find a change in the drum beat from a rapid and somewhat tremolo beat to a quarter note value and an increase in the proportion of songs in which tempo of the voice and drum is the same."

In transcribing songs for the "piano scale" it has been noted that the intervals of the second and minor third are sung too small. In this connection Professor Max Meyer, of the University of Missouri, has said:

"The result of our experiments made in Berlin was that the major third, fifth and octave are preferred a little larger than theoretical intervals; the minor third, on the contrary, a little smaller. We may therefore state it as an established law that the smaller musical intervals are preferred diminished --- that the larger musical intervals are preferred enlarged, and that the point where the curve of deviation passes zero is situated between the minor and major thirds."

Group I. Songs between fifty to one hundred fifty
years old

1. Ceremonial songs used in Hunka and Spirit keeping ceremonies and the sun dance	15
2. Songs concerning personal dreams	22
3. Songs concerning sacred stones.	20
4. Songs used in treatment of the sick	16
5. Songs of Dream societies named for animals.	19
6. War songs (or Wolf songs) including those of Miwataisi and Kaugi Yuka societies.	56

Group II. Songs less than fifty years old

1. Songs of military societies	32
2. Songs of buffalo hunt - with council and chief songs. . . .	16
3. All songs not otherwise classified	
a. Songs of various dances and games	
b. Songs in honor of individual.	43

The renditions of a song by a good singer are usually uniform in every respect. The Indians are very sensitive about a matter which comes as close to their hearts and if a man sings a song who has had a bad life-record, even though he has a good voice and renders the song correctly, they will have nothing to do with him. Certain songs had to be rejected by Frances Densmore because the Indians said the man who sang them "had killed a man and his records in other matters were not good." This fact had caused trouble among the Indians who said, "they would have nothing to do with the work if So-and-So was connected with it".

Like the white race, the Indian has certain standards of evaluation for "good singers" and "good songs". In the older songs those considered best were composed in dreams. In this we have what we call inspiration.

It is a custom that songs connected with ceremonial acts shall be sung only by those who have received the dreams, or who have inherited or purchased the right to sing them.

Xatho Watonin gave a description of the ancient war ceremony in the Omaha reservation - ritual observances and fourteen songs. He died, as his tribe believes, in accordance with that old tradition that anyone who recites ritual observances will suffer dire punishment.

Let us take up the Indian musician from our own standpoint of standard. These standards are generally known to be (1) intonation, (2) quality of tone, (3) range of voice, (4) memory, (5) interpretation.

(1) Intonation - Good singers among the Indians keep the

pitch of their tones approximately that of the tones of a diatonic scale, and in songs recorded the pitch of accidentals is practically the same in every rendition of the song.

Mrs. Holding Eagle sang four songs in 1912. In 1915 she repeated these songs and the pitch and metronome speed of all the songs was the same in both records.

(2) Quality of tone - The Indian cultivates and greatly admires a pronounced vibrato; a falsetto tone is also considered a mark of musical proficiency. A peculiar nasal tone is always used in love songs. Another quality of tone is that used in songs of hopeless illness and in the "wailing songs" after death. To these may be added the crooning tone of lullabies.

(3) Compass of voice - An extended compass is admired among Indians. The best musician is the one who has largest compass (and who knows the most songs by rote).

(4) Memory - No one has attempted to exhaust the number of songs which could be sung by a good singer. Odjit sang eighty songs all of one type, and undoubtedly he remembered many others of different kinds.

(5) Interpretation - Among Indians, as among white musicians, there must be a convincing quality in the singer's rendition of a song. Into this quality there also enters the personality of the singer. It is required that a good singer carry with him a full confidence in himself, and do his work with authority.

Indians are not only good performers but they are good listeners. They appreciate idealized song even though the piano cannot encompass their split intervals and portamentos. Indian

song is far from a spontaneous outburst of melody; there is around it dignity and control which pervade the whole life of the race.

It is really true that no primitive race is more music loving than the American Indian. The average Indian boy will show a preference for a musical instrument over any school study, and girls in the government schools have an aptitude for playing the piano and singing without a bit of urging from any one else.

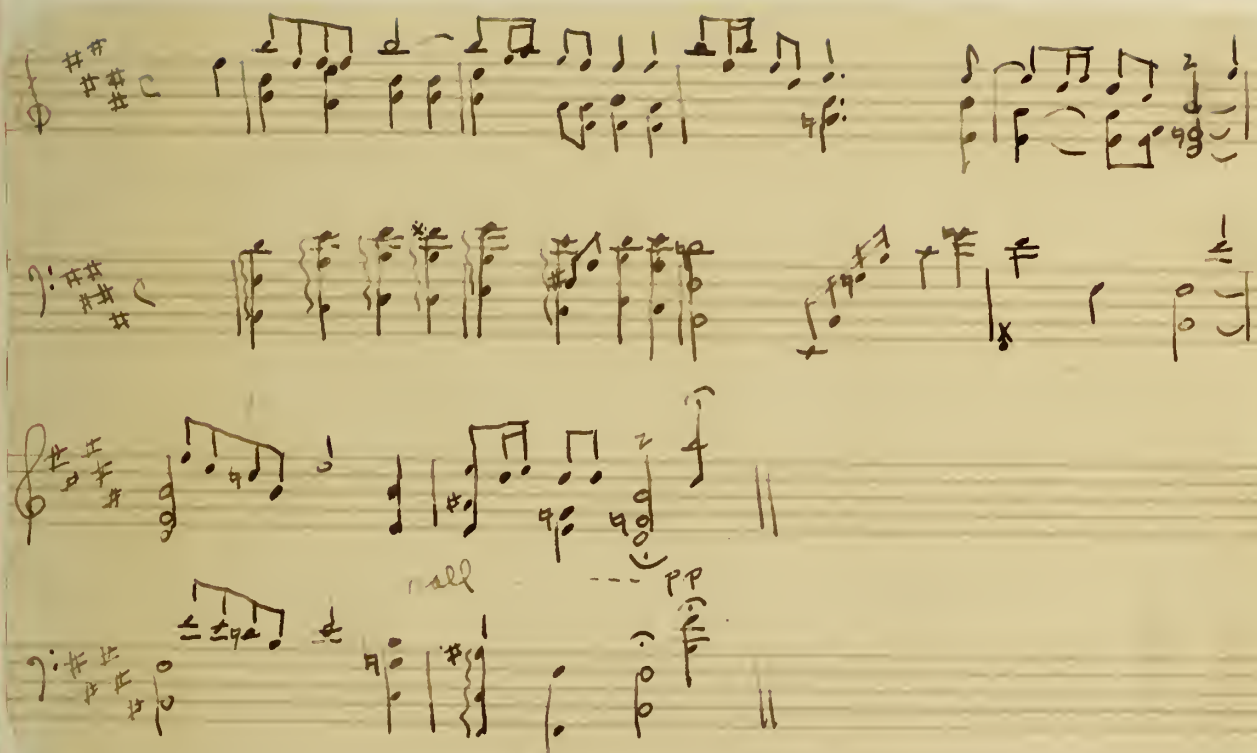
Some think that Indian music is not meant to be idealized, yet Cadman says, "It is as much the heritage of America and Americans as the music of the barbaric hordes of Russia is the heritage of cultured Russians and Russian musicians. We could mention several ingenious members of the Russian school of music whose veins are without a drop of blood of those wild tribes and who have, nevertheless, caught and reflected the lilt, the life and the love of the strange and elemental peoples that make up the great Russian Empire. -----Unfortunately such a parallel cannot be drawn for America, yet it is evident that our composers have some justification for idealizing the only existent form of folk-song indigenous to American soil."

There is, however, great danger of over-idealizing or over-treating the themes. The MacDowell "Indian suite" is an excellent example of correct treatment. MacDowell has given us charming music, and produced the color and atmosphere which should go with it.

"It is the best orchestral illustration extant, I think, of what may and what may not be done to Indian folk tunes. It serves to show, too, that it is possible to write music which reflects the oddities, the characteristics of Indian rhythm and melody and at the same time to create something that may be analysed freely

as music." (Cadman in "The Idealization of Indian Music" - Musical Quarterly July 1915).

Many melodies in the Omaha and Winnebago country were at one time played on a native flageolet or flute. Cadman made several records of songs and flute love calls, and he used one in vocal and orchestral manner for an episode in an Indian grand opera "The Land of the Misty Water". It is here written out for piano and on account of its gaiety is written in the key of B.



It is not necessary to use Indian music just for the sake of using it. That would not be idealizing it. If the thought to be carried across is a story of the early times or is a picture of Indian life then their music should be used and used correctly.

"Let every composer in America try to write music which is good music, whether it smacks of an European conservatory or of

the broad, free reaches of the Far West. The essential thing is to make music which shall calm, shall inspire, shall call forth pure and ennobling thoughts, shall fill the needs of the present hour, but shall also point to the next hour as presaging something finer, something higher to strive for." (Jadman, Musical Quarterly July 1915)

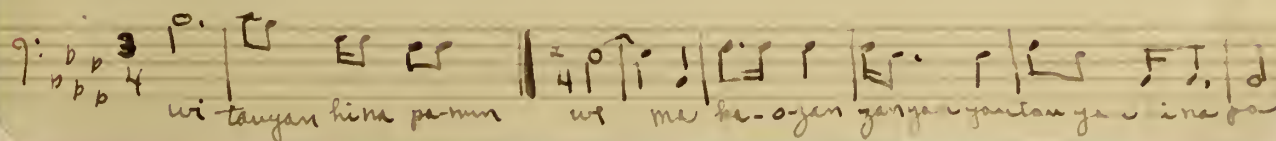
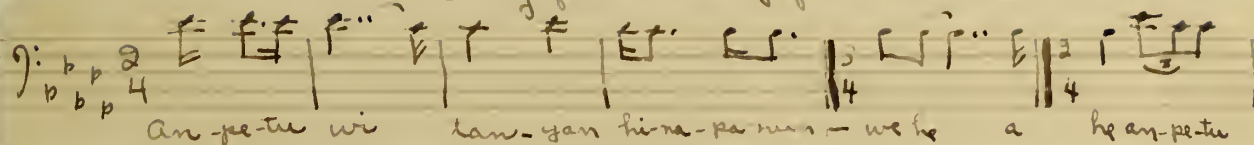
In the study of Indian music it is impossible to pass by the ceremonies. We will describe one, the Sun Dance, which is probably the most important, and merely name the others.

The Sun Dance is the only tribal gathering of a religious character and was held every year at the full moon of midsummer. Tribes traveled for miles to attend.

It was held in the center of a circle of tents. The opening of this circle faced the East. Not far from this was the tent of the Leader of the Dancers. The council tent stood close by where the Chief and leading men met to transact the business of the tribe.

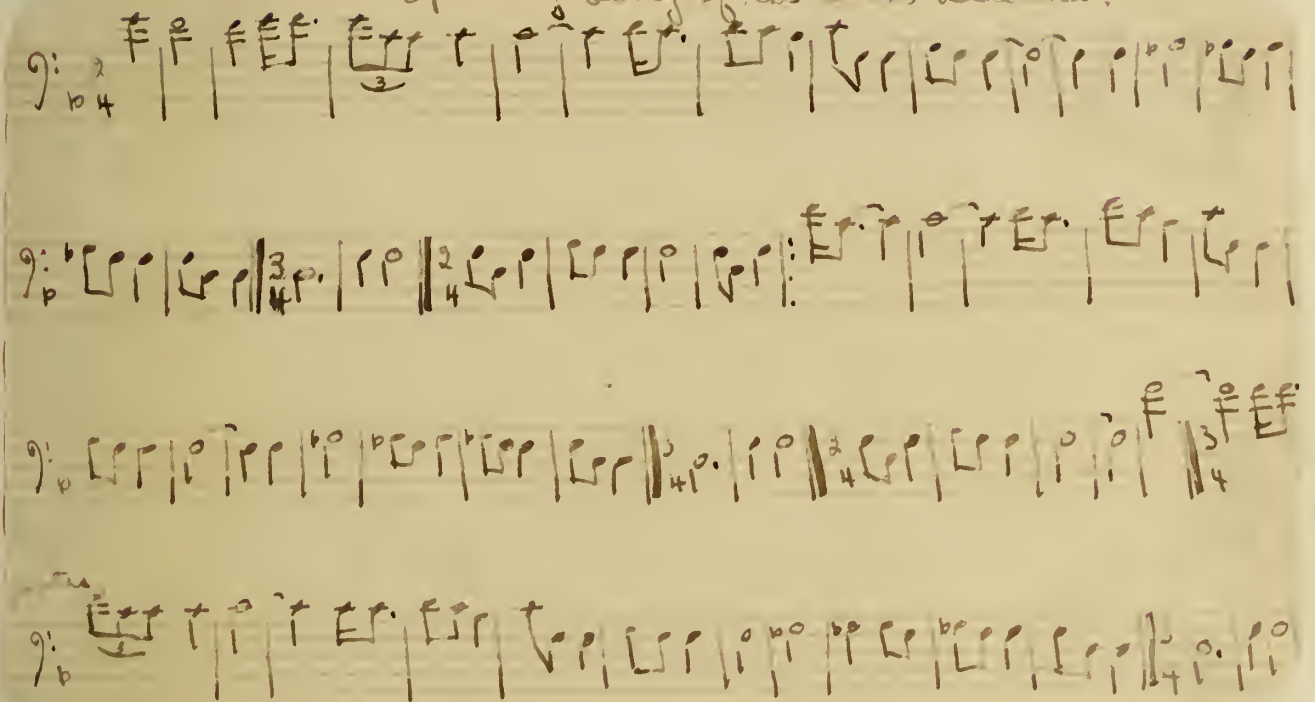
A month before the Sun Dance the medicine men prayed for fair weather, burning sweet grass, and offering their pipes to the sky, the earth and the cardinal points. It is said the efforts of the medicine men were always successful, and that the oldest men could not remember the falling of rain during a Sun Dance

Song for securing fair weather.



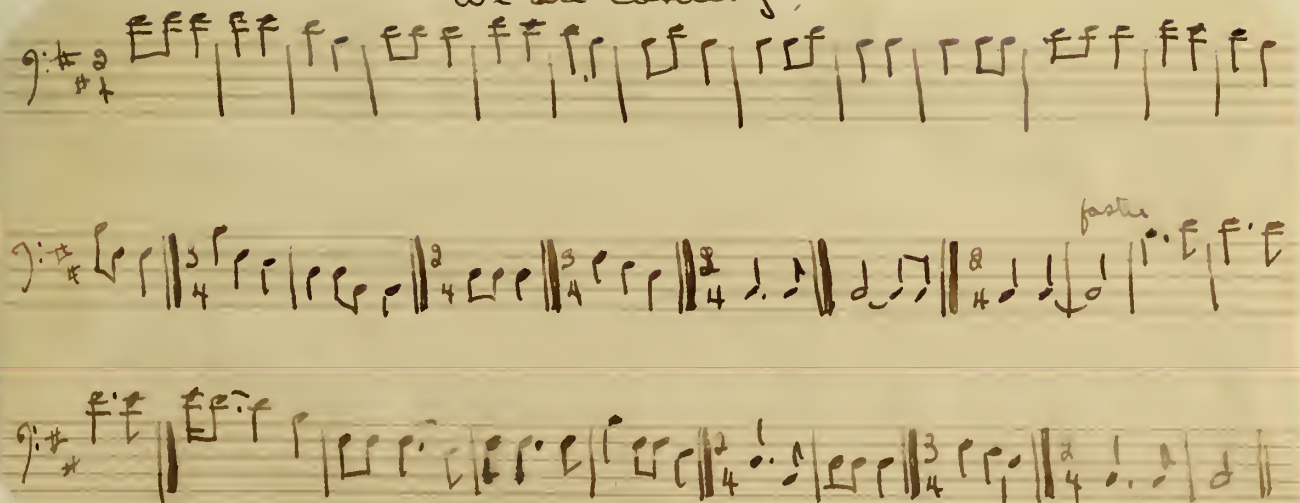
The dance begins by erecting a sacred pole to the Sun God. Hundreds of Indians surround this and at a given signal the most inspiring of all Indian songs is sung.

Opening song of the Sun God.



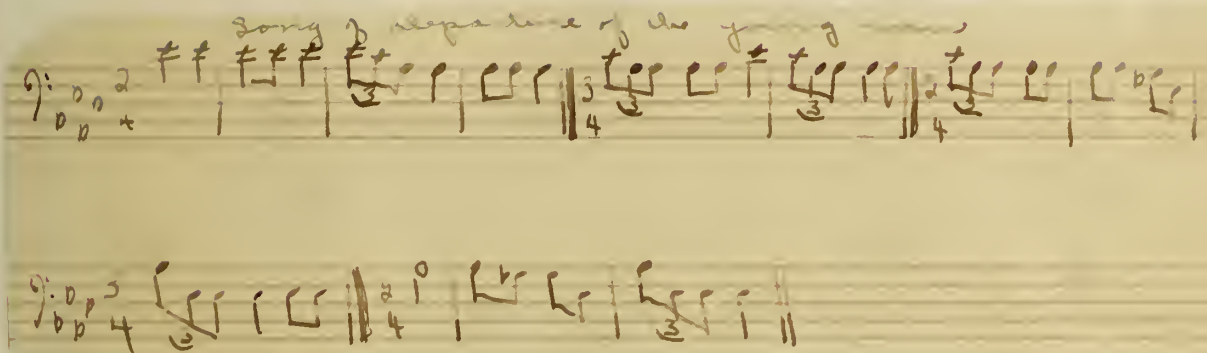
Every act is accompanied by singing. Before the dance each military society holds one or more dances. This song is a "chief song".

We are coming.

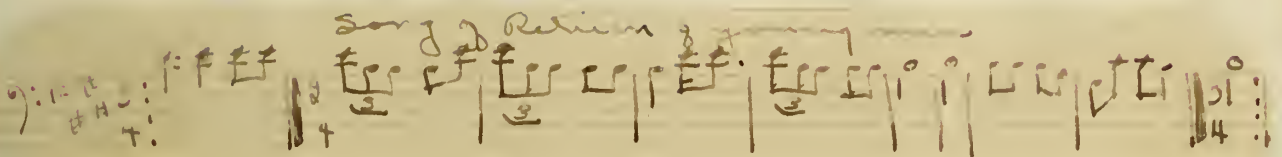


This song is also one of the braves' dances and is supposed to be over a hundred eighty years old.

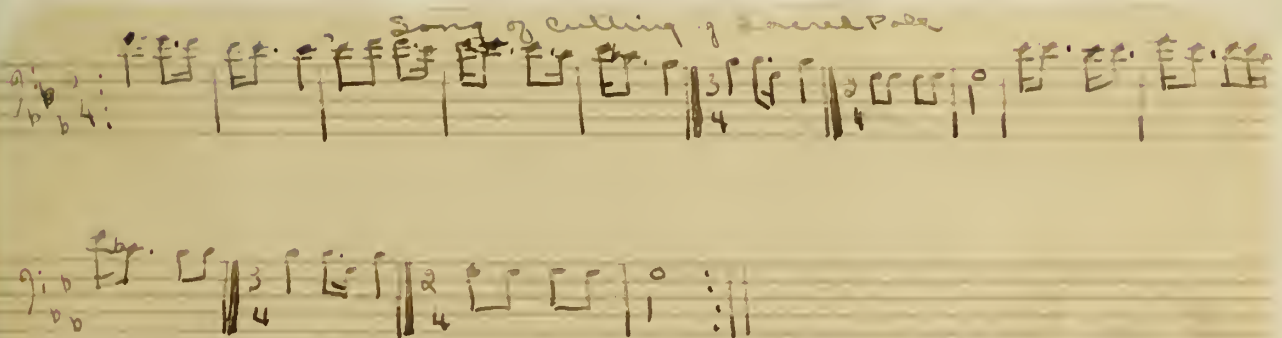
When the young men go out to select the tree for the sacred pole they sing this song.



They sing when they return

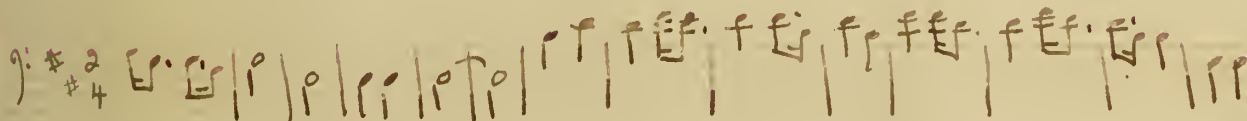
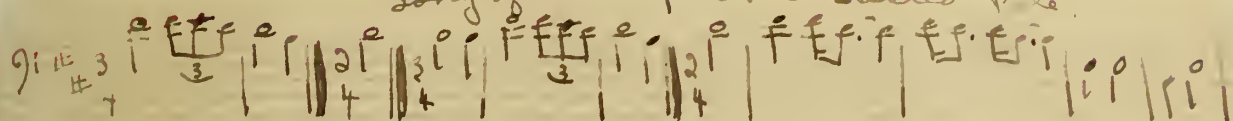


When the four virgins cut the selected tree they sing the song for cutting the sacred pole.



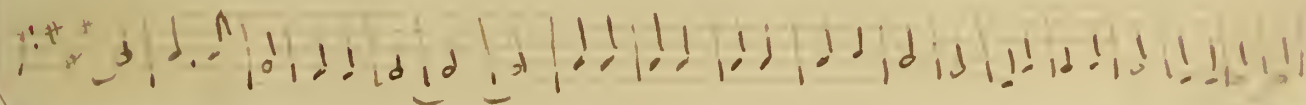
Songs of carrying home the pole were songs of victory.

Song of Victory over Sacred Pole



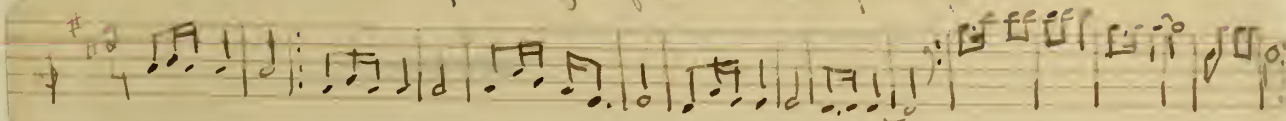
As the Intercessor painted the sacred pole he sang the following song:

Song of Painting the Sacred Pole

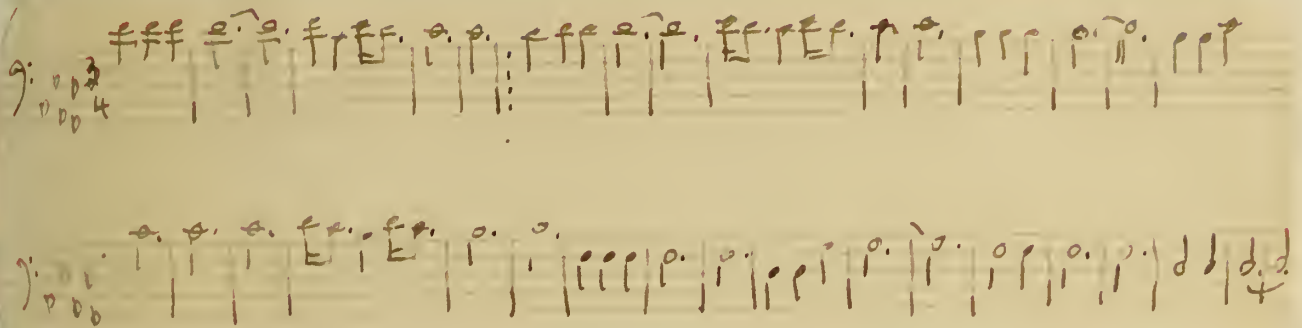


There are several songs sung after raising the pole.

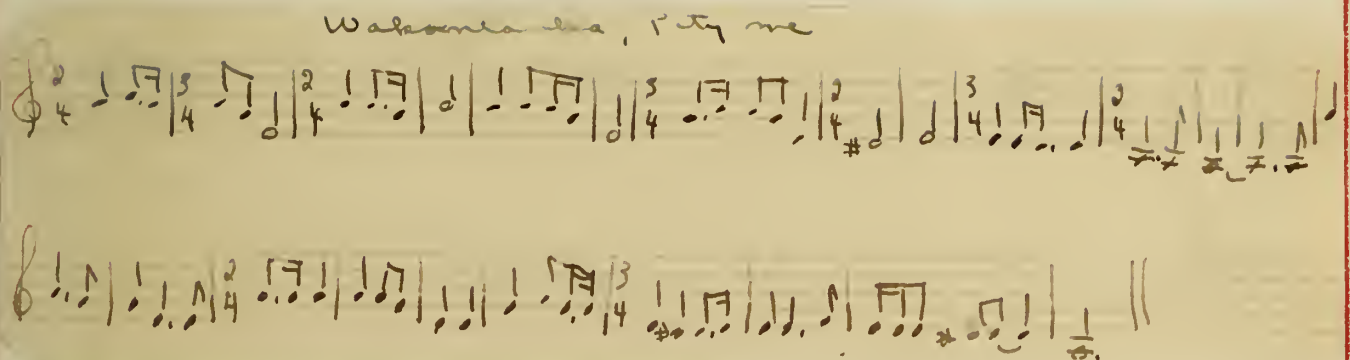
Song sung after raising the pole



The opening prayer of the Sun Dance proper was sung.



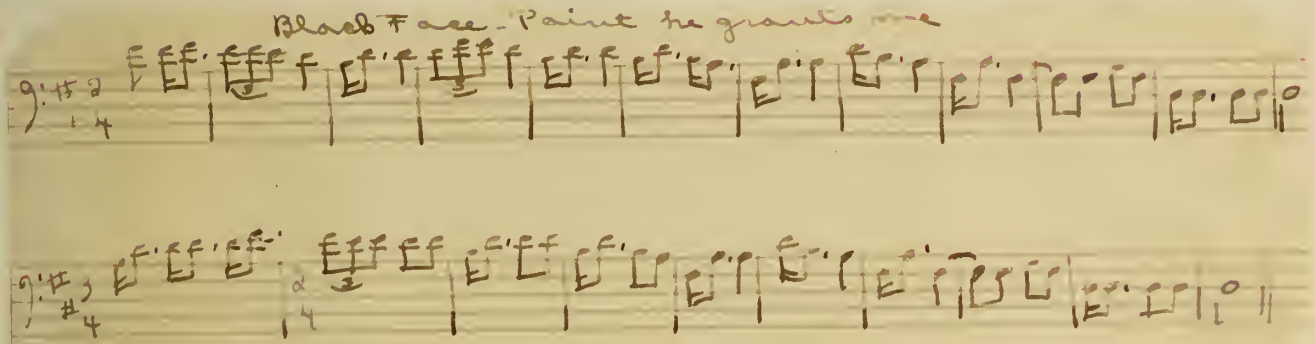
Women whose relatives were fulfilling vows made the year before often sang while their relatives were going through the requirements of their vow. Tase na skawin (White Robe) sang the following song without preparation while her brother was suspended from the pole and two hundred cuts made in his arms.



There was rejoicing and mourning at the Sun Dance. Certain groups would mourn for the death of some chief which had occurred during the last year. The relatives of those who took part in the Sun Dance provided feasts and little groups were seen feasting here and there in the camp while at the same time songs of lamentation could be heard.

For two days the men danced without food. All night they

danced with only a few intervals of rest in which the Intercessor sang unaccompanied by the drum.



During the second day the men, one after another, fell from exhaustion and were carried over to the shade where they gradually revived.

After the people reached home the boys of the tribe re-acted the Sun Dance. A fine was exacted from any boy who did not do his part correctly. Thus the boys of the tribe were trained in their play to become the men of the future.

The distinctly tribal life of the Teton Sioux may be said to have closed when the last dance was held in 1881 and the last great buffalo hunt in 1882.

Other ceremonies are:

1. Coming of White Buffalo Maiden
2. ceremony (ceremony of a man who took some child under his protection)
3. Heyoka Kaga (ceremony performed by a man who had dressed of thunderbirds) the greatest honor which could come to a man.

Ceremonies are not the only cause for songs. There are:

Sicux love songs

Game songs

Dirges - in religious ceremonies

Songs of military societies

Chief songs (1. songs of praise not sung by chief and

(2) songs voicing thoughts of the chief and sung
by them

Dream songs

War songs

Dance songs

Ghost songs

Burlesque songs

Council songs

Children's songs

A few of those who have helped to preserve Indian music
are:

Natalie Jurtis

Carlos Troyer

Charles Wakefield Cadman

Frances Denmore

Arthur Nevin¹

Thurlow Lieurance

¹
During the last night of the Sun Dance the opera "Pocahontas" was suggested to him by a story of the Indian religion. It was first performed at Berlin Royal Opera House, April 23, 1910.