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American Indian musics, past and present

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The history of American music begins with American Indians, who were the original inhabitants of North America. Their distant ancestors migrated from northeast Asia across the Bering land bridge and settled in the Americas some 15,000 years ago. Through time, Native Americans developed extraordinarily diverse lifeways as they adapted to a wide range of environments and climates. The first sustained contacts between Native Americans and Europeans began in the late fifteenth century, and by the early seventeenth century, Europeans had established permanent colonies in North America. Indian–White relations before 1800 were characterized by conflict over land, fraudulent treaties, and a steadily increasing imbalance of power. Native American social and economic conditions deteriorated during the nineteenth century, as the people were removed from their homelands, confined to reservations, and subjected to aggressive but unsuccessful acculturation programs. Misunderstanding and prejudice continued in the twentieth century, but Indian political activism since the 1960s resulted in legislation that supports tribal self-determination and religious freedom. Since the 1970s, Native Americans have experienced cultural renewal, and Indian identities remain strong and vibrant.

American Indians are the heirs to an enduring musical heritage that is as impressive in its modern richness and variety as in its historical depth and continuity. Each of the more than 200 tribes now in existence has its own historic musical culture, with unique repertoires, styles, instruments, theories, and practices. American Indians also compose, perform, and listen to a wide spectrum of recently developed native musics, as well as European and American art, popular, and folk musics. Indeed, given the complexity of contemporary musical life, it is appropriate to ask what it is that makes American Indian music distinctively Indian. This chapter commences to answer that question through an introduction to Native American musics in both historical and contemporary perspectives. It begins with a survey of the historic musics found in different regions of Native North America,

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followed by a more detailed exploration of the musical culture of one particular Indian community and its efforts to preserve a traditional repertory. The third section considers historical dynamics in Native American music, including pantribalism, syncretism, new musics, and musical revitalization. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the unique contributions American Indians have made to the musical life of the United States.

A musical map of Native North America

In a global sense, American Indian musics are distinctive in their nearly exclusive emphasis on singing rather than instrumental music, in their unique approach to song texts (which tend to feature vocables or non-lexical syllables rather than words) and in their tangible connection to spirituality. Some indigenous systems of musical notation have been documented, but the vast majority of American Indian musics are preserved and transmitted through oral tradition.¹ Beyond these broad similarities, the many discrete tribal repertoires in existence constitute a musical mosaic that eludes generalization. For this reason, scholars have developed a hypothetical map of Native North America that facilitates a concise survey of the musical styles, genres, and instruments found among American Indians (cf. Nettl 1954). The musical map is based on cultural and geographic relationships; each area on the map includes many separate, discrete tribes that are similar to one another in certain aspects of language, economy, social structure, material culture, and religious orientation. The musical map places the native peoples of the United States and Canada in six main areas: Eastern Woodlands, Plains, Great Basin, Southwest, Northwest Coast, and Arctic.

The Eastern Woodlands

The Eastern Woodlands area extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River, and from New Brunswick to the Gulf of Mexico. The tribes within this vast region may be divided into three musical subareas: the Northeast (e.g. Haudenosaunee-Iroquois, Wabanaki, Delaware), Southeast (e.g. Muskogee-Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw), and Western Great Lakes

1. The term musical notation is used loosely here to include any kind of formal mnemonic device for remembering song texts or the number and order of songs in a ceremony, including pictographs and notched sticks; for information on these kinds of systems in Native North America, see Collaer 1973, Densmore 1910, Dewdney 1975, Fenton 1950, Newcomb 1956, Rafinesque 1954, and Vetromile 1886.

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region (e.g. Chippewa, Menominee, Potawatomi). The major language families of this area are Iroquoian, Algonkian, and Muskogean. Today, Eastern Woodlands Indians perform traditional musics in many contexts, such as the seasonal thanksgiving ceremonies of the Iroquois Longhouse, the annual Green Corn ceremony of many southeastern tribes, private curing rituals, and folkloric demonstrations.

Eastern Woodlands singers generally use a moderately relaxed and open vocal style, emphasizing the middle and lower tessitura. In some north-eastern styles, vocal pulsations are used to articulate phrase endings, while in the southeast, special vocal techniques such as rapid vibrato or yodeling may be used. Aspirated attacks and releases as well as vocal glides are common throughout this area. Most Eastern Woodlands song texts consist primarily of vocables (syllables that do not carry lexical meaning), although some lines of lexical text may be heard in communal dance songs, curing songs, and other genres. Some dance songs from this area are performed as solos or duets by one or two head singers, but most feature antiphony or call and response. The leader sings a short melodic phrase to which the dancers respond in unblended unison, the women doubling the men at the octave in some songs. Within Native North America, the use of antiphony is unique to the Eastern Woodlands.

Eastern Woodlands songs employ a variety of strophic, sectional, and iterative forms. The songs in strophic form often begin with an introduction, which may be performed as a solo by the head singer. Frequent metric changes within songs, syncopation, and *sforzandos* are rhythmic characteristics in this area. Various scale types are used in the Eastern Woodlands, although there is a predilection for anhemitonic scales with four, five, or six pitches. Communal dance songs from this area tend to employ melodic contours that descend or undulate with a descending inflection, usually with an ambitus of an octave or more. However, certain genres, such as medicine songs, feature a predominantly level melody with a narrow range and a scale of three or fewer pitches.

Many kinds of idiophones and drums are indigenous to the Eastern Woodlands. The most widespread idiophones in this area are container rattles, which are made of cow horn, tree bark, gourds, turtle shells, or coconut shells, depending upon the tribe and musical genre. Among some southeastern tribes, the head women dancers, called shell-shakers, wear leg rattles made of clusters of turtle shells, or more recently, evaporated milk cans. Water drums, double-headed hand drums, and cylinder drums accompany certain traditional styles from this area. As is the case

throughout Indian America, drums are always played with a drumstick, rather than with the performer's hand. Other instruments from the Eastern Woodlands area include flageolets, flutes, and whistles, which are played as solo instruments.

The Plains

The Plains area reaches from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and from south-central Canada to Texas, including tribes of the Northern Plains (e.g. Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Lakota), Southern Plains (e.g. Comanche, Kiowa, Osage), and Prairie (e.g. Winnebago, Prairie Potawatomi, Sauk and Fox). The predominant language families in this area include Algonkian, Siouan, and Caddoan. The primary context for the performance of Plains music today is the powwow; other contexts include communal religious ceremonies such as the Sun Dance, individual ceremonies such as medicine bundle rituals, social dance events, and personal prayer songs.

Plains singers employ a tense and nasal vocal quality, emphasizing the high range in the Northern Plains style and a somewhat lower range in the Southern Plains style. Singers from this area use heavy vocal pulsations on sustained tones, particularly at cadences and phrase endings, which may be further articulated by portamentos. Plains singers also perform extramusical vocalizations, such as stylized shouts or cries, to embellish dance songs. Plains song texts may be composed entirely of vocables, or may include some lines of lexical text framed by and interspersed with vocables. Songs from this area are performed in unblended monophony; in mixed ensembles, the women usually sing one octave higher than the men.

The musical structure most typical of the Plains area is a kind of strophic form known among music scholars as incomplete repetition form. This form originated in songs associated with men's ritual organizations, but it is now used extensively in powwow songs. In incomplete repetition form, the strophe contains two sections. The first section begins with a short solo, known as the lead or push-up, which is sung by the ensemble's leader. The other singers then repeat or vary the lead; this is called the second. The lead and second together constitute the first section of the strophe. The second section of the strophe, called the chorus, consists of two or more musical phrases sung in unison. The chorus is repeated once, completing the strophe. A strophe having two phrases in its chorus might be diagrammed as follows: AA' BC BC. The strophe as a whole is repeated several times during the performance of a particular song. At the conclu-

sion of the song, the final two phrases of the chorus may be reiterated as a coda; the singers call this the tail.

Plains songs in incomplete repetition form begin in the highest part of the singer's vocal range and descend by steps, cadencing on the lowest pitch at the end of the chorus. Scholars use the term terraced descent to describe this kind of cascading melodic contour. Songs of this type exceed an octave in range and tend to employ anhemitonic four- or five-note scales. A drum supports the underlying pulse of the song in steady duple beats, but the tempo of the drumbeat differs from the tempo of the song, which enhances the rhythmic complexity of the performance. At certain points in the song, the drummers alternate strongly accented beats with weak beats. These are called honor beats or heart beats; they are performed to show respect for the dancers or to honor the memory of a person invoked by the song text.

The most common musical instrument played throughout the Plains region is the single-headed frame drum, which resembles a large tambourine without jingles; this drum is played with a padded stick. A large bass drum, also played with padded sticks, accompanies powwow songs. Wind instruments from the Plains area include the end-blown flute, or flageolet, generally played as a solo instrument, and whistles made of metal or eagle bone, which are used in powwows as well as in certain ritual contexts. Container rattles made from gourds, or more recently, from aluminum salt shakers, as well as bells, tin jingles, and similar items sewn onto dancers' outfits, exemplify the kinds of idiophone used in Plains music.

The Great Basin

The Great Basin area stretches from the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains to the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range, and from the Fraser River to the Colorado River Basin; tribes from this area include the Ute, Paiute, and Shoshoni. Uto-Aztecan is the major language family of this region. Some contexts for the performance of Great Basin music include seasonal first-fruits ceremonies such as the Ute Bear Dance or the Paiute Round Dance, life-cycle rituals such as the Washo Girl's Puberty ceremony, shamanistic healing rituals, hand games, and storytelling.

In the Great Basin area, the preferred vocal quality is open and relaxed, emphasizing the middle part of the singer's range. Singers in this region do not employ vocal pulsation in traditional genres; instead, the singers ornament vocal lines through a range of special breathing techniques, such as aspirated attacks and releases. Communal dance songs in traditional

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genres are performed in moderately blended monophony and are unaccompanied, which is rare among Native North Americans. Another distinctive feature of music from this region is the structure and style of song lyrics. Songs performed in the context of storytelling involve unusually long, detailed lexical texts, while songs from seasonal ceremonials employ subtle imagery and an aesthetic sense that is comparable to haiku poetry. As in other American Indian musics, vocables may be interspersed within or between words, or may constitute the entire song text.

Music from the Great Basin typically features short melodies with a narrow range (smaller than an octave); scales with three, four, or five notes are common. Melodies tend to undulate, sometimes with a descending inflection. Most songs have a limited number of different rhythmic values, but singers perform barely perceptible rhythmic variations through the use of special breathing techniques. A variety of iterative and strophic forms are used in Great Basin music. Most seasonal Round Dance songs employ a form that scholars call paired phrase structure, which is unique to this area. In paired phrase structure, each phrase of melody and text is sung twice and alternates with one or two other phrases. A song of this type might be diagrammed as follows: AA BB CC AA BB CC, etc.

Compared to other areas of Indian America, relatively few instruments are used in historic genres of Great Basin music. The most distinctive instruments from this region, such as the musical bow, have been associated with shamanistic curing rituals. Shamans more commonly accompany curing ceremonies with whistles as well as different kinds of rattles, including container rattles made from gourds or rawhide and strung rattles made from deer dew claws suspended from sticks. Other idiophones from the Great Basin include striking sticks, used to accompany hand game songs, and notched rasps, played with an inverted basket resonator to accompany the Ute Bear Dance. Historically, the most common drum in this area was the shallow, single-headed hand drum. In the north-eastern part of the region, where Plains influence is strong, the flageolet is played as a solo instrument and eagle bone whistles are used during the Sun Dance.

The Southwest

The Southwest area covers New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California. Two main musical subareas coexist in the Southwest: Pueblo (e.g. Hopi, Zuni, Rio Grande Pueblos) and Athabascan (Navajo and Apache). Most native languages spoken in this area derive from the Tewa, Tiwa,

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Towa, Keresan, Uto-Aztecan, and Athabascan language families. Southwest Indians perform music in the context of communal agricultural ceremonies such as Hopi kachina dances, curing or life-cycle rituals such as Navajo Chantways or the Apache Girl's Puberty Ceremony, Catholic feast day observances among the Eastern Pueblos, tribal fairs, and informal domestic activities.

Pueblo singers cultivate an open, relaxed vocal quality, emphasizing the lower tessitura; ceremonial songs are performed by large choruses, singing in precisely blended monophony. Pueblo ceremonial songs have long, intricate poetic texts, framed by and interspersed with vocables. By contrast, Athabascan vocal style is tense, nasal, and exploits the singer's full vocal range. Athabascan singers embellish melodic lines with subtle vocal ornaments as well as with stylized shouts that are imbued with symbolic significance; group singing features unblended monophony. The structure and content of Athabascan song texts varies according to musical genre, but most songs combine vocables with lexical text.

Pueblo ceremonial songs are composed on a large scale and are systematically integrated with both choreography and sacred space. These songs tend to have five main sections, the overall plan of which may be diagrammed as AABBA. Each section contains a number of discrete musical and textual phrases, and is articulated by patterned pauses as well as by introductory and cadential formulas. Pueblo songs, which feature a moderate tempo, usually have a range of an octave or greater and employ several scale types; they are among the most rhythmically complex styles in Native North America. Athabascan songs usually employ strophic or elaborate sectional forms with complex phrase designs, involving interwoven melodic motifs. They tend to feature a relatively fast tempo, wide range, and impressive melodic variety.

The Southwest area has a rich assortment of musical instruments. Certain genres of Pueblo ceremonial songs are accompanied by a large, double-headed barrel drum, made from the hollowed trunk of a cottonwood tree and painted in bright colors. Pueblo container rattles may be made of gourds or tortoise shells, and commercial sleigh bells or tin tinklers sewn onto dance outfits add another layer of sound to performance. Athabascan musicians use several different kinds of drums, depending upon the performance context. One of the most distinctive Athabascan drums is the water drum, made of a clay or iron pot with a buckskin head; this is played with a stick bent into a hoop at the distal end. Athabascan musicians employ many idiophones, including basket drums (made of a

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shallow basket inverted on the ground and played with a drumstick made from yucca leaves), container rattles made of rawhide or gourd, and notched rasps. Bull-roarers and various kinds of whistles are used in both Pueblo and Athabaskan rituals. Unique to the Southwest is the Apache fiddle, which has one or two strings and is made from a two-foot long hollow stalk of the century plant; the fiddle and bow strings are made of horsehair. The Apache fiddle is played as a solo instrument for entertainment.

The Northwest Coast

The Northwest Coast area extends from the panhandle of Alaska to northern California, but includes a narrow strip only about one hundred miles wide between the Pacific Ocean and the Cascade Range or coastal mountains of Canada. The indigenous peoples of this area include the Tlingit, Kwakiutl, Quileute, and many other groups. Some of the major language families of the Northwest Coast area are Salishan, Wakashan, Haida, and Chinookan. Northwest Coast musical performance contexts include ceremonies honoring ancestral spirits, gift-giving Potlatch feasts, seasonal ceremonies honoring game animals and fish, initiation rituals such as the Nootka Wolf Dance, shamanistic curing rituals, and regional dance festivals.

Northwest Coast singers are known for their dramatic, emotional performance style, and songs tend to rise in pitch over the course of performance. The preferred vocal quality in this area is moderately relaxed and open, and singers emphasize the lower vocal register. Singers from this area employ a variety of vocal ornaments, including turns, grace notes, and aspirated attacks and releases. Most songs are monophonic, but some examples of part singing have been recorded that appear to predate the influence of European music. In some Northwest Coast tribes, songs are learned and often performed in association with stories; these song texts emphasize vocables, using only a few words to evoke the full story. Among other tribes, song texts typically alternate a fully texted stanza with a vocable refrain.

Songs from the Northwest Coast area emphasize sectional and strophic forms with long, complex phrases. Most songs have a range of about an octave, and anhemitonic scales with four, five, or six notes are most common. Melodic lines tend to move by step in undulating shapes with a descending inflection. Rhythmic structures in Northwest Coast music are among the most complex in Native North America; meters tend to change

frequently within a song, and the meter or tempo of the drumbeat may differ from that of the singers in certain genres. In many Northwest Coast songs, melodic rhythms derive from speech rhythms, producing a declamatory effect.

Northwest Coast music is perhaps best known for its spectacular carved and painted musical instruments. These include both strung and container rattles made of wood, horn, or shell in a great variety of forms. Container rattles from this area are usually carved to represent birds such as the hawk, kingfisher, grouse, crane, or raven. Raven rattles are especially numerous and significant; they symbolize Raven, the principal culture hero in Northwest Coast mythology. In the past, painted wooden box drums were played by Northwest Coast peoples in certain religious ceremonies. Many aerophones are indigenous to the Northwest Coast, including wooden whistles, flutes, horns, and reed instruments, which are unique to this area of Native North America.

The Arctic

The immense Arctic area includes the arctic region from Alaska to Greenland, most of Alaska except for the coastal areas, and much of Canada. The region is inhabited by many separate but related peoples, known collectively as Eskimos in Alaska and as Inuit in Canada. The predominant language family of the area is Eskimo-Aleut. Some of the contexts in which Arctic musics are performed include traditional games (Blanket Toss, string games, juggling games), religious festivals (such as the Messenger Feast and Bladder Festival), song contests, storytelling, shamanistic healing rituals, and all aspects of hunting, from launching a boat to harpooning a sea mammal.

The Arctic vocal style is moderately tense and nasal; group songs are monophonic, the women singing an octave higher than the men. Song texts consist of both vocables and lexical phrases. Arctic singers are known for their use of grace notes, vocal pulsations on sustained pitches, aspirated attacks and releases, and other melodic ornaments. Extended vocal techniques are a special feature of a genre known as vocal games, which are common throughout the Canadian Arctic. Vocal games involve the combination of intonation contours, rhythmic patterns, and vocal sounds either inspired or expired (Nattiez 1983). They are performed by two people, usually women, singing separate motifs that are superimposed on one another in a rapid canon. Vocal games are heard in a variety of contexts and are intended primarily for entertainment, but they entail a competitive