

Songs And Dances of the Eastern Indians from Medicine Spring & Allegany
New World Records 80337-2

This recording offers ritual, ceremonial, and social music of Indians of the Eastern United States. It demonstrates remarkable similarities of style in the music of Indians from two distinct regions. Tracks 1-3 represent the Cherokee, Creek, and probably the now-extinct Natchez as well—all originally from the Southeast. Tracks 4-7 contain music of the Seneca (of the Iroquois Confederacy), from the Northeast.

The Indians of the Eastern United States have the distinction of being the first to encounter Europeans. As early as 1609 the English colonist William Strachey described the responsorial singing of the Virginia Algonkians. He mentions a groan by “the rest of the priests” at pauses in the invocation of the Chief Priest (Stevenson 1973: 401). He goes on to describe that their manner of devotion “is sometimes to make a great fire in the house of fields, and all to sing and dance about it in a ring with rattles and shouts, four or five hours together . . . and all singing very tunable.”

Two centuries later, in 1809, Major John Norton first suggested a comparison between the music of Northeastern and Southeastern tribes. He said, after witnessing a Cherokee dance:

In the dances [of the Cherokee] there is no great difference from those of the Shawanons [Shawnees] and the Five Nations [Iroquois Confederacy]. They dance round a blazing fire, the Leader singing and his followers keeping chorus. In some dances, there are singers besides, who are seated, singing and keeping time with a Chickicoo (a Gourd, with rattles inside) and Drum. When the Circle is complete, another is formed within it, and so in continuation till it resembles the Coils of a Snake. In some dances, at certain changes in the tune, the men turn to their followers (generally females, when enough are present), dance to each other, change places, then change again, until the air gives notice to proceed as before. (Klinck and Talman 1970: 55-56)

SONGS AND DANCES FROM MEDICINE SPRING

Recorded at Medicine Spring Ceremonial Ground (*Tsalaqi Abihka*), Sequoyah County, Oklahoma, August 1975.

The Singers: Archie Sam—Leader; Eli Sam—drum; Jobie I. Fields; Van Johnson; Cedo Screechowl; Robert Sumpka; Luman Wildcat; Squirrel Wildcat

The Shell Shakers: Eliza Sumpka—Leader; Sonja Fields; Levana Harjo; Evelyn Screechowl; Leona Wildcat

The Cherokee and Creek Indians were forcibly removed from their aboriginal homelands east of the Mississippi to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) during the 1830s. They regularly hold their ancient ceremonies outdoors around the sacred fires at Stomp Grounds throughout Eastern and Central Oklahoma. Because recordings are not allowed at religious dances, these selections were taped at a practice ground. That practice ground, Medicine Spring, is near the original sacred ground established after the removal known as the “Trail of Tears.”

The musical instruments used are a crockery water drum, coconut-shell hand rattle, and terrapin-shell leg rattles worn by the women dancers.

Track 1

Long Dance

At Medicine Spring (*Nuwoti* in Cherokee; *Uwiqe* Hiliswa in Creek) where the Cherokee, Creek, and Natchez first settled in Indian Territory (1839), the Long Dance is a prayer or supplicatory dance, asking the Creator for a blessing to give the participants the strength to live correctly and to dance all night. The dance begins some distance from the dancing square with responsorial shouting followed by unison chorus. When the leg rattles begin the “double shake,” the dancers enter the area around the sacred fire and begin to dance counterclockwise. Each section ends with “ya ho yo,” and the entire piece ends with a Stomp Dance.

Stomp Dance

Stomp Dance, the most common song form used by the Cherokee and Creek singers in Oklahoma today, denotes both a music-dance ritual and a separate dance within it. Here the Long Dance ends with a Stomp Dance, as does the Doublehead (Track 2). In a Stomp Dance, the leader controls the responsorial singing, choosing from the many songs in his repertoire, improvising each as he sees fit, stringing them together in a cycle, and interspersing them with shouts as structural markers. Resulting in a lively monophonic piece, the Stomp Dance ends with the Cherokee or Creek words for “thank you,” *wado* or *mado*, respectively.

Track 2

Doublehead Dance

The Doublehead Dance features two leaders, each heading a group of dancers. Starting on opposite sides of the fire, they perform intricate patterns—moving forwards, backwards, and in circles. The song itself is simple enough to allow the participants to focus on the dance. This version is responsorial using vocables only.

Stomp Dance

As in Track 1, this Stomp Dance ends a longer dance. In contrast to the relaxed pace of the Doublehead, this Stomp Dance, led by the late Eli Sam, offers a faster *coda*. Because Mr. Sam could no longer dance when this recording was made, the sound of the caller moving in a circle is missing.

Track 3

Bean Dance

Many of the Eastern tribes have songs and ceremonies that deal with growing or harvesting crops. The Bean Dance, led here by Archie Sam, is both a survival and a revival of those traditions. Mr. Sam pieced together this version from memory and from archival recordings, made by Mary Haas, of his uncle Watt Sam. The first part is a set of four songs, each introduced by the leader and followed in unison by the chorus. A set of shorter responses follows, and ideally, according to Mr. Sam, the whole should end with a Stomp Dance.

SONGS AND DANCES FROM ALLEGANY

Recorded at the Allegany Reservation in Salamanca, New York, October 1975.

The Singers: Leslie Bowen; Herbert Dowdy, Sr; Averv Jimerson; Johnson Jimerson; Marty Jimerson; Richard Johnny-John

The Dancers: Alvina C. Cooper; A. Eileen Jacobs; Fidelia Jimerson; Vera Jimerson; Cecil Johnny-John; Kevin Johnny-John; Lyford Johnny-John; Michael Johnny-John; Brian Mohr; Theresa R. Seltron

In contrast to the Southeastern tribes' outdoor ceremonies, the Allegany Seneca, along with other Iroquois people, prefer indoor performances. Although the religious setting of the longhouse is favored, no recordings are allowed there. To simulate this setting, the dances presented here were held in the Salamanca Community Center.

Perhaps because of the indoor setting, the musical instruments used are similar to but smaller than those of the Southeastern tribes; a cylindrical wooden water drum; steer horn hand rattles; metal ankle bells; a rawhide double-headed frame drum.

Track 4

Shake The Bush Dance

This dance is also referred to as “Shaking the Bush” and “Naked Dance” (Riemer 1980; 8; Spittal 1969). The leader, Richard Johnny-John, plays the water drum while the five chorus members play hand rattles. The cycle includes four songs, each with a leader-chorus introduction (AA) followed by unison chorus (BC). After each song is complete, the tempo slows, a tremolo marks the transition, the dancers change places, and the cycle resumes with a single introduction (ABC). Between songs there are slight pauses for all to regroup.

Track 5

Rabbit Dance

The Rabbit Dance, which is strictly a social dance, came to the Seneca from the West a generation ago (see 80246-2, Track 4 for a Northern Plains Rabbit Dance). Both the Seneca and the Cherokee have at times adopted music from tribes outside their areas, and each has reworked this music to fit local norms and requirements. This Rabbit Dance was transformed in the following manner:

1. In the Plains Rabbit Dance, the chorus repeats the leader's introduction every time the cycle is sung. Here, the cycle is modified so that the introduction is repeated by the chorus the first time only.
2. The drumbeat is duple instead of triple.
3. The direction of the dance is reversed from clockwise to counterclockwise.
4. Musical and vocal transitions between songs in the Plains cycle become transitions with no vocalization, only continuous drumming, in the Seneca version.

The hard skinned rawhide drum of the Plains was not replaced with the traditional water drum of the East, perhaps to underscore the notion that the Rabbit Dance is a borrowed song cycle. The timbre produced by this “hard drum” is a noticeable contrast to

the other traditional Eastern songs on this album. As in the Plains Rabbit Dance, men and women dance together in couples, engaging in merriment.

Track 6

Corn Dance

The Corn Dance, which can be either social or ceremonial, emphasizes the agricultural concerns of the Eastern Indians (see also Bean Dance, Track 3). The most complex of the four Allegheny examples, it combines both unison and responsorial singing with all the vocal and instrumental cueing techniques used in the other songs presented here. The Corn Dance cycle is introduced by a leader-chorus, solo-unison pattern underscored by the leader's hand rattle tremolo. The cadential formula "yo ho" ends each section.

The second section is responsorial and omits the solo-unison pattern; the chorus only listens to the leader and supplies the proper response as in the Stomp Dance (Tracks 1 and 2). The tremolo of the leader's rattle signals the first part of this responsorial section, changing to a regular pulse when the chorus first responds, and reverting to the tremolo only at a cadence or a repeat. On the second phrase, the dancers add the sound of their leg bells. The interplay of leader, chorus, hand rattles and bells continues until the "yo ho" ending. A hand-rattle tremolo marks the transition to the solo-unison third section. There are six sections in all.

In the Corn Dance, the lead singers (John Jimerson and Marty Jimerson) are also the lead dancers, as in the Cherokee examples, and the chorus is also the dance chorus. This complex interaction of song, dance, and instrumentation relies on specific structural devices, resulting in thin texture at points of emphasis or change in the music, and thick texture when everyone is immersed in the music/dance process (Heth 1979:134).

Track 7

Pigeon Dance

"A common dance with which to end an evening's dancing." Spittal calls this the (Passenger) Pidgeon Dance (Spittal). Similar in form to "Shake the Bush," the leaders continue the rattle tremolo instead of pauses between songs in the cycle. As in the Corn Dance, the song leaders are also the dance leaders. The spoken responses at the end are reminiscent of the Cherokee and Creek responses on Tracks 1-3. —Charlotte Heth

Charlotte Heth. a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, is an Associate Professor of Music and Director of the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA. She has written and edited several articles, books, records, and videotapes on American Indian music.

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1. Long Dance / Stomp Dance (5:31)
2. Doublehead Dance / Stomp Dance (9:58)
3. Bean Dance (5:59)
4. Shake the Bush Dance (4:41)
5. Rabbit Dance (6:55)
6. Corn Dance (5:53)

7. Pigeon Dance (5:54)

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Ms. Heth has produced several recordings for New World Records:

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80297-2 Songs of Love, Luck, Animals, and Magic: Music of the Yurok and Tolowa Indians

80301-2 Oku Shareh: Turtle Dance Songs of San Juan Pueblo

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80343-2 Powwow Songs: Music of the Plains Indians

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