

Navajo Songs from Canyon De Chelly  
New World 80406-2

(Recorded at Chinle, and Canyon De Chelly, Arizona, September 1975)

This album offers ceremonial and social music of the Navajo Indians from the Four Corners area of northern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico, and southeastern Utah. As members of the largest Indian nation in both population and land area (160,000 people by Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates, and 25,000 square miles of reservation land, roughly the size of West Virginia), many Navajos still speak only their native language, and most others, although they may be bilingual and bicultural, still cherish their songs, dances, and rituals. Woven into the fabric of everyday life, Navajo songs not only reinforce ancient beliefs but also serve as entertainment.

*Chorus:* Frank Jishie Jr., Raymond K. Yazzie, Sam Yazzie Jr. (rattle), Sam Yazzie Sr. (leader and drummer).

Many of the songs of this album are found in the Navajo *Ndaa'* or Enemy Way Chant (*Anaa'ji'*), often called the Squaw Dance. (See also Huenemann pp. 3-72, for details on contemporary Navajo singing, and McAllester for the fullest description of the Enemy Way.) The Enemy Way is used as a healing ceremony to purify Navajos, especially warriors, who have come in contact with the ghosts of non-Navajos. It is usually held many times from spring to fall in various locations on the reservation and incorporates public night dancing. In recent years returning veterans of the United States Armed Forces have been purified in this manner.

Track 1

Riding Songs (*yik'aash*)

The Riding Songs, which number in the hundreds, not only accompany horseback riding but also serve as warm-up songs for the night dancing of the Enemy Way. These songs, often called Sway Songs because of the body movement of the singers, follow the beginning sacred Squaw Dance songs. Although only four songs are presented here, the warm-up period may last more than two hours, with the pitch of the songs gradually rising. Originally, on this and all songs on this album except the Corn-Grinding, Shoe Game, and Badger songs, the leader would accompany the chorus on a pottery water drum, but sometimes in social settings, as in this case, he might use a small, cylindrical double-headed rawhide drum. The form is standard for all four songs (except for song 3, which omits the B ending). It begins with a formulaic introduction common to most Riding Songs, *hei yei yei yei yaagha*, followed by ABCB sections with internal paired phrases sung entirely in vocables, not words. Songs 1 and 4 have similar motives. The vocal style is tense and nasal, with rhythmic pulsation. Other vocal features in Navajo music are initial and terminal glides, and descending slides between some pitches.

Track 2

Spinning Songs (*iich'oshi'*)

After the warm-up the women choose their partners to begin the Spinning Dance. According to the late Sam Yazzie Jr, in a 1977 interview: "You just dance in one place

with a partner, and the man always stands on the left side and the lady on the right . . . and after you dance with the lady you have to pay, pay for dancing. If you don't pay you lose a hat, or . . . lose a horse, so you have to pay—each dance. So you go around in a circle. After each song stops, then you go the other way.” In this set and the other sets of Squaw Dances, which may last an hour or more, dancers may enter and leave the arena at any time. These four songs are again sung in vocables.

### Track 3

#### Two-Step (*joo'ashi'*)

Literally meaning "two walking," the Two-Step also involves partners dancing together within a larger group and reversing directions between songs. The Two-Step, combined with the Skip Dance (see below), accounts for many new compositions. The first song of the two features a terraced descending melody reminiscent of Plains Indian music (New World 80343-2).

### Track 4

#### Skip Dance (*ahildi ahi'*)

Sam Yazzie Sr. explained that the Navajo Skip Dance and the Two-Step were relatively new to the Squaw Dance. He believed that a singer named Archibald Sandoval, from Lukachukai, first learned songs from other tribes and transformed them into the Navajo Skip Dance about seventy years ago. Others followed, starting a trend toward composing Navajo songs based on Plains and Pueblo music, and even on American popular songs. These three Skip Dances have no translatable texts.

### Track 5

#### Corn-Grinding Songs

Historically, men sang these songs to help work along while women ground corn for food, and also to imbue the cornmeal with a sacred quality that made it fit for ceremonial use. The instruments are a hand rattle and a ceremonial basket (sometimes called a wedding basket) turned upside down and beaten like a drum by the leader. The texts ordinarily treat a variety of subjects, from the beauty of the growing corn to the relationship of mother and child. Songs 5 and 6 of this set have words dealing with mundane matters such as mud getting in the meal and the need for finishing the work.

### Track 6

#### Potato Song (*Bilaga'ana Ni'masiitsoh*)

Singer: Kee Chee Jake

Sung strictly for enjoyment, a free translation is: "A White man planted some big potatoes. When he saw the white blossoms he said 'Hallo, Jaani'" (Huenemann, p.46). It means that he thought of Navajos (Ja'ani') as seasonal agricultural workers. The form for this and many other social songs is a short introduction, followed by AA (repeated refrain in vocables) and BB (verses in Navajo), ending with A (refrain with cadential marker).

#### Moccasin Song

A Squaw Dance song for the Face to Face Dance (form: introduction, AABA), this again has translatable words only in the B section. They speak of a husband making pretty moccasins for his wife to go walking.

#### Shi'naasha'

Probably the most famous of all Navajo songs, and of historical value because it was composed when the Navajos were released in 1868 from four years of internment at Fort Sumner, New Mexico. The text expresses the joy of the people to be returning to their homeland. Unlike the case in many other Navajo songs, almost every syllable is translatable. The Navajo word *ho'zho'ni'* ("beauty"), which occurs several times, is heard frequently in the texts of longer ceremonial songs.

#### K'adnikini'ya'

A ceremonial song used to close the last night of the Squaw Dance, and also composed during the time of the Navajo exile at Fort Sumner. Although the song is in the familiar form (introduction, AABA'), the word *k'adnikini'ya'* ("I'm leaving") from A and the phrase *hozhon'go* ("beautiful" or "holy") *k'adnikini'ya'* are a litany in B, the verse section.

#### Track 7

##### Gift Songs (*i'dil'a*)

These songs are performed for more than an hour during the second and third mornings of the Enemy Way while the medicine man is distributing gifts, primarily of food and yard goods, to the onlookers. Kee Chee Jake chose just four from his repertoire. Each song in this set is faster than its predecessor.

#### Track 8

##### Gift Songs

These five Gift Songs, sung by the chorus, are similar to those in Track 7. By contrast, however, the tempo for the first four songs is unwavering, while the last song is much faster to signal the ending.

#### Track 9

##### Bluebird Song

*Singer:* Lena Clark

"Bluebird said to me, 'Get up, my grandchild. It is dawn, it said to me (Huenemann, p.58). This text reinforces the Navajo belief that one should wake at dawn and rise to greet the sun. The Bluebird Song is not only used in social settings but also is performed just before sunrise in the *Ye'ibicheii* winter Nightway ceremony. Lena Clark learned this song from Laura Wallace.

#### Track 10

##### Slow Round Dance (*naazhnota'ha'*)

##### Fast Round Dance

Toward evening on the last day of the Squaw Dance, sets of slow and fast Round Dances alternate for an hour or two. The dancers lock arms in a circle and move clockwise, then reverse direction on a musical cue. Each set here has four songs.

Track 11  
Fast Round Dance

Even though they were recorded in different sessions these Fast Round Dance songs of the chorus are exactly the same tempo as those sung by Kee Chee Jake on Track 10.

Track 12  
Shoe Game Songs

In Navajo tradition, these songs are to be sung or played only in the winter or the Navajo will suffer misfortune and bad weather. In the original Shoe Game, the night animals, who wanted only nighttime, played against the day animals, who wanted only daytime. Fortunately, the game ended in a tie, and we now have both night and day. Today these Shoe Game songs, which tell of the animals and the giant, are featured in the gambling game in which members of two teams try to keep their opponents from finding an object hidden in a shoe or moccasin.

Track 13  
Badger Song

In this simple piece, one three-part melodic unit is repeated three times. The song tells of the badger with his striped face, who lies down and says "Ow." —*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. Ms. Heth has produced several albums for New World Records:

80246-2 Songs of Earth, Water, Fire and Sky. Music of the American Indian

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

80337-2 Songs and Dances of the Eastern Indians from Medicine Spring and Allegany

80343-2 Powwow Songs: Music of the Plains Indians

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*Dine'Ba'aliil of Navajoland, USA.* Canyon 6117

*Music of the American Indians of the Southwest.* Folkways FE 4420.

*Music of the Pueblos, Apache and Navaho* Taylor Museum of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Matrix KCMS 1204-5

*Music of the Sioux and the Navajo.* Folkways FE 4401.

*Navajo Gift Songs and Round Dance Songs.* Indian House IH 1505.

*Navajo Round Dance.* Indian House IH 1504.

*Navajo Skip Dance and Two Step Songs.* Indian House IH 1503.

*Navajo Sway Songs*. Indian House IH 1501.

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#### **Navajo Songs from Canyon De Chelly**

1. Riding Songs (2:14)
2. Spinning Songs (5:44)
3. Two-Step (3:37)
4. Skip Dance (6:22)
5. Corn Grinding Songs (6:04)
6. Potato Song, Moccasin Song, Shi'naasha', K'adnikini'ya' (4:17)
7. Gift Songs (2:17)
8. Gift Songs (4:01)
9. Bluebird Song (1:10)
10. Slow Round Dance, Fast Round Dance (3:44)
11. Fast Round Dance (3:59)
12. Shoe Game Songs (3:24)
13. Badger Song (0:42)

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