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Foreword by Willard Beatty and Rene d'Harnoncourt

Notes by Willard Rhodes

# MUSIC OF THE SIOUX AND THE NAVAJO

RABBIT DANCE  
PEYOTE CULT SONG  
LOVE SONG  
SUN DANCE  
OMAHA DANCE  
FLUTE SOLO  
HONORING SONG

RIDING SONG  
SONG OF HAPPINESS  
SPINNING SONG  
CORN GRINDING SONG  
SQUAW DANCE  
SILVERSMITH SONG  
NIGHT CHANT  
(YEIBICHAH DANCE)

Ronald Clyne





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SIDE I

- Band 1. RABBIT DANCE Male  
chorus, Female Voice, Drum  
Band 2. (a) PEYOTE CULT DANCE  
Male Voice, Water-Drum  
Gourd Rattle  
Band 2. (b) LOVE SONG Male Voice  
Band 3. (a) SUN DANCE  
Male Chorus, Eagle-Bone  
Whistle, Drum  
Band 3. (b) OMAHA DANCE Male Chorus,  
Drum, Bells  
Band 4. (a) LOVE SONG (Solo Flute)  
Band 4. (b) HONORING SONG Mixed  
Chorus, Drum

SIDE II

- Band 1. RIDING SONG Mixed Chorus  
Band 2. SONG OF HAPPINESS  
Children's Chorus, Drum  
Harmonica  
Band 3. SPINNING DANCE Female Voice  
Band 4. SPINNING DANCE Female Voice  
Band 5. CORN GRINDING SONG  
Female Voice, Basket Drum  
Band 6. SQUAW DANCE Male Chorus,  
Drum  
Band 7. SILVERSMITH'S SONG  
Male Voice, Anvil  
Band 8. NIGHT CHANT (Yeibichai)  
Male Chorus, Gourd Rattles

# MUSIC OF THE SIOUX AND THE NAVAJO

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4401



# MUSIC

of the **SIOUX**



and the

# NAVAJO





Foreword by Willard W. Beatty and  
Rene d'Harnoncourt

Every ethnic group has developed some form of musical or rhythmic expression. Music is an essential and integral part of the ceremonial life of all peoples yet it is sometimes difficult for those raised in a different tradition to understand and accept musical forms which are unlike those with which they are familiar.

The music of the American Indians differs considerably from that of any other ethnic group. Though it possesses a basic similarity in the area north of Mexico it presents within this large framework a wealth of rhythmic and melodic subtleties, nuances which set apart the musical style of one tribe or group from that of another. These differences are plainly evident in the music of the Dakota (Sioux) and Navajo offered in this album. Because of the emphasis which many anthropologists placed on the collection of old ceremonial forms, many Americans think of Indian music as something which is dying out. Actually this is not the case. Throughout the Southwest Indian ceremonial music is in active and continuous use by most of the tribes, and throughout the Plains area a modern secular music has arisen which is vigorous and very much alive. New songs are constantly appearing among the various tribes and as the troubadours travel from group to group, visiting rodeos and other Indian gatherings, the more popular songs are passed from tribe to tribe and will be heard with minor adaptations around the campfires of tribes which are widely separated geographically.

The United States Indian Service believes that the American Indian has made a fundamental contribution to both art and music which the American people can ill afford to neglect. Much has been done in the last dozen years to arouse the interest of the general public in the arts and crafts of the Indians and much time has been spent in the recording of vital modern Indian music which should prove of interest to many Americans.

Professor Willard Rhodes of Columbia University has spent many summers traveling through the Indian Service and recording these modern songs. Out of more than 1000 such recordings we have selected the recordings of Dakota (Sioux) and Navajo music which are to be found in this album. We believe that these are entirely representative of the music of these two tribes.

It is recognized that not everyone will enjoy these songs but it is believed that for those who are interested in exploring a musical expression different from their own these records will prove unusually rewarding.



Introduction and Notes on the Recordings  
by Willard Rhodes

## THE SIOUX

Of the many and various tribes of Indians that inhabit North America none has appealed to the imagination of the white man more vividly than the Sioux. With his trailing war-bonnet of brilliant feathers, fringed buckskin leggings and shirt, and bow and arrow, the tall, handsomely proportioned Sioux warrior has become the symbol of the American Indian. His classic profile with its hawk-like nose, so accurately reproduced on the buffalo nickel of our currency, conceals beneath its dignified exterior a warmth of spirit and richness of feeling and thought which few white men have been privileged to share. Picturesque as is their physical appearance, it is the bold, indomitable spirit of this proud and adventurous people that commands our sympathy and admiration. It was not alone economic necessity and menacing pressure of the neighboring hostile Cree and Ojibway that prompted the Sioux to leave their woodland home at the headwaters of the Mississippi late in the seventeenth century and move out onto the tall-grassed plains of the West, where buffalo roamed in large hordes. A pioneering urge and a strong desire to occupy new land must have been dominant factors in their westward movement.

The acquisition of the horse from southern tribes who had acquired this domestic animal indirectly from the exploring Spanish conquistadores of the sixteenth century, effected momentous social and economic changes in the life of the Sioux, changes not unlike those which we as a nation have experienced in the twentieth century with the development of cheap automotive transportation. Hunting boundaries were extended and the economy of the Sioux, so dependent upon the buffalo for food, shelter, and clothing, entered upon a period of prosperity that was unprecedented in the history of the tribe.



For a long time contacts with white people were limited to a few explorers and traders who were welcomed for the attractive trinkets, guns, knives, and cooking pots which they brought as presents and mediums of exchange for furs and buffalo hides. In 1849 the Gold Rush to California brought a continuous stream of immigrants who cut a trail through the heart of the Sioux hunting ground. Alarmed by the menace of the advancing white man and governed by a code of ethics and tradition which the travelers ill understood, the Indians attacked and pillaged the wagon-trains, often killing and scalping members of these parties. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills and the subsequent influx of soldiers of fortune who took possession of that territory in violation of a treaty guaranteeing the Black Hills to the Sioux, provoked fresh outbreaks. In 1868 a treaty was negotiated by the Government with the Sioux whereby the latter agreed to cease hostilities and to settle themselves on a large reservation provided for them. Adjustment to the new life was difficult and was not accomplished without bloodshed. Most famous of the battles during this period was that of the Little Big Horn River in which General George A. Custer and his small force of 264 men were completely annihilated by a war party under the renowned chief Sitting Bull.

Today the United States Office of Indian Affairs is making remarkable progress in helping the Indians to become economically self-supporting and self-governing, thereby regaining a measure of their old freedom and independence. A modern program of education is preparing the Indian to deal with the problems of living in his own community. Day Schools established on the reservations serve not only the Indian youth but also the adult community in assisting the individual in his adjustment to a rapidly changing world. The cultural traditions and heritage of the Indian, so long frowned upon by the missionary and suppressed by the Government, are now being evaluated and reinterpreted in terms of modern living. After years of painful maladjustment and slow cultural death, the Indian is mustering his own native resources and strength to build for himself a future that in creative richness of life and freedom of spirit will approach the glories of his past.

**SIDE I, Band 1: RABBIT DANCE** (Male chorus, female voice, drum). The Rabbit Dance is a modern social dance which was introduced on the Sioux reservation sometime during the past fifty years. The popularity which it enjoyed at its inception, comparable to the initial success of some of our own passing dance fads, is explained by the fact that this is the first dance in which Sioux men and women danced together as couples.

Dancing is a favorite recreation of the Sioux and any meeting or social gathering may be made the occasion for a dance. Round and round a circle the couples dance with a shuffling step, two steps forward and one hesitating step backward. Weatherbeaten grandfathers and grandmothers, giggling adolescent girls, courting youths, and babies scarcely past the toddling stage join in the hypnotic, undulating rhythm of the moving circle as it rises and falls with the insistent, repetitive beat of the drum.

In the center of the circle (sometimes at the side) a group of male singers sit or stand around a large drum which provides the sole accompaniment to their rhythmic song. Each singer holds in his right hand a drum stick with which he forcibly beats the rhythmic pulse of the music. The song is started by a leader who sings the opening phrase alone. As he approaches the end of the first phrase the other singers take up the song, not by joining the leader but by starting the song anew from the beginning, while the leader finishes his phrase. Upon reaching the end of the opening phrase the leader joins in the melody with the male chorus and from that point on the song is sung in unison. The women often add their voices to the refrain of the song while dancing but they are never admitted to the chorus, that being an exclusive activity of the men.

The Rabbit Dance songs are the modern love songs of the Sioux, and though the melodies reveal little or no influence from the music of Western European culture, the texts give ample evidence of the impact of white civilization upon the native culture. The text of this piece is sung in Dakota, the language of the Sioux, with the exception of the initial word, "Dearie," which is sung in English. This patterned opening is characteristic of many Rabbit Dance Songs. The words, as in the Omaha Dance Songs, are not introduced until the melody has been set by singing it once through with meaningless syllables. The song is recorded here as sung by Lucy Randall, Paul High Horse, Oliver Standing Bear and Jonas Quiver under the leadership of Benjamin Sitting Up.

Dearie, I think the best of you,  
But you are bad.  
You fool me again and again.  
Give me back that picture,  
Then I will live away from you.

**SIDE I, Band 2(a): PEYOTE CULT SONG** (Male voice, water-drum, gourd rattle). The Peyote Cult, or Native American Church, represents a curious blending of Christian symbolism and beliefs with rituals and practices of native Indian religions. During the past century the religion has spread from tribe to tribe, adjusting its practice to the culture of the various tribes while adhering to a central core of belief and ceremony. At the night-long meetings of the Cult, the central feature of the service is the ceremonial eating of the peyote, the seed pod of a cactus imported from the Southwest which the Indians identify with the Supreme Being. The ecstatic trance induced by eating the peyote is supplemented by the hypnotic music which plays such an important role in the ceremony. The peyote songs, always sung by an individual singer, never by a group, are accompanied by a small gourd rattle which the singer shakes in a rapid tempo of regular pulsations while a drummer squate before him and marks the rhythm on a specially prepared water drum. Four being the sacred number, the songs are sung in sets of four, each song being sung four times. A few repeated hearings of peyote music suffices to impress the listener with the distinct vocal technique, melodic style and structural form which set these songs apart from other Indian music.



**SIDE I, Band 2(b): LOVE SONG (Male voice).** Love songs were sung by young men as an act of courtship. The words were of a personal nature and the aura of association which surrounded them carried a very special message to the Indian girl for whom they were sung. Among the stylistic features which distinguish these solo songs are the slow tempo, the nasal timbre of the voice, and the absence of strong accents and pulsating tone so predominant in music of the Plains area.

**SIDE I, Band 3(a): SUN DANCE (Male chorus, eagle-bone whistle, drum).** The traditional tribal religion of the Sioux was given its fullest expression in the Sun Dance, an elaborate ceremony which was held each year at the full moon of mid-summer. From far and near the bands and family groups of the tribe assembled to witness the fulfillment of vows made by their members to Wakantanka (Great Mysterious) and enjoy the social life which accompanied this annual rite. Vows varied in degree from mere fasting and dancing to self-torture effected by thrusting through the flesh of the chest skewers which were attached by cords to the sacred pole, then dancing until the weight of the body tore the flesh thereby freeing the dancer. With the government prohibition of the Sun Dance in 1881 the final chapter of the old Sioux culture was completed. In the period of acculturation which followed the Sioux, after a brief and tragic essay with the nativistic Ghost Dance religion, turned to Christianity and the Peyote Cult, seeking therein the spiritual support and meaning which their old religion had furnished them.

The Sun Dance Song recorded here opens with an introduction in slow tempo accompanied by a tremolo roll in the drum which leads to the more rhythmic dance. A whistle made of the wing-bone of an eagle, formerly blown by the dancers, is heard in the second section of the song.

**SIDE I, Band 3(b): OMAHA DANCE (Male chorus, drum, bells).** The Omaha Dance, so widely diffused through the tribes of great plains, has lost its functionalism and become a social dance. Formerly restricted to warrior members of the society it is today a vehicle for brilliantly costumed dancers who not only find emotional release in their exhibitionistic and individualistic dancing but provide entertainment for the on-lookers. Bells attached to the legs and ankles of the dancers, an essential part of their costumes, supply an exciting rhythmic accompaniment to the song. The Omaha song in this album was inspired by the recent World War II in which so many Indians of all tribes gave their lives.

From across the ocean  
The Japanese came charging.  
The President wanted our help  
So the Sioux boys went over there.

**SIDE I, Band 4(a): LOVE SONG (Solo flute).** The flute was used for love charming and serenading. This instrument has become a museum relic of the coast and its rarity among North American Indians today suggests that it may never have been as common in their musical culture as is generally believed. The technique of flute making and flute playing, more involved and intricate than that of drum making and drum playing as practiced by the Indians, would tend to limit the instrument to a small group of specialized musicians. The great flute makers and flute players are gone, and we are especially fortunate in preserving in this album one of the flute melodies played by John Coloff. The melody here presented has also been recorded as a love song with words. The upward interval of a sixth, the regular phrases, and the words, reflecting the influence of white culture, leads one to date the song in the last half of the nineteenth century.

**SIDE I, Band 4(b): HONORING SONG (Mixed chorus, drum).** This song may be heard throughout the year at any social gathering on the reservation. Since generosity is one of the four cardinal virtues recognized and stressed in the Sioux culture, public giving has become an institutionalized form for acquiring social prestige. Any act of generosity or bravery, either on a personal or social level, will prompt the singing of the Honoring Song as a token of public recognition.







## THE NAVAJO

The Navajo, numbering approximately 62, 000, is the largest Indian tribe in the United States today. Living on a sixteen million acre reservation that spreads over the desert, dry mesas, and waterless mountains of northeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico, and the southeast corner of Utah, the Navajos are one of the most vital and colorful ethnic groups in this country. Theirs is a colorful land, magnificent in its vast panoramas of sky and land, its fantastic rock formations, forbidding canyons, bright desert flowers, and wind-weathered pinyon trees. But it is a land in which the elements of nature conspire to resist and defy man in his effort to wrest a living from its soil.

Contrary to the popular belief that the Indians are a dying race, the Navajos have increased in numbers four-fold during the eighty years since they entered into a treaty with the United States of America. This phenomenal growth has created critical problems which the government must solve in the immediate future if it is to fulfill its obligations to the Dine ("The People" as the Navajos call themselves). An erosion cycle begun in 1880 and still in progress has ravaged the land until it can no longer support the tribe. In its semi-arid, impoverished condition thirty acres of land are required to support one sheep, one hundred and fifty for a horse. Under ideal conditions, after the land has been reclaimed, it is estimated that the present reservation can support a population of no more than 35,000. This means that many Navajos must leave the reservation and make their way in an alien society for which they are ill-prepared.

The shocking inadequacy of educational facilities is plainly stated in the Report of J. A. Krug, Secretary of the Interior, March, 1948: "In its Treaty of 1868 with the Navajo Tribe, the United States agreed to provide a schoolhouse and teacher for each 30 Navajo children. Yet today there are 24,000 Navajo children of school age (6 - 18 years) with total facilities available for not more than 7, 500."

While adhering tenaciously to their native religion and way of life, the Navajos have managed to adopt much of the technology of white culture. Agriculture, livestock (mostly sheep), and wage-work form the

basis of their economy. The weaving of rugs and the making of silver jewelry, two crafts in which they excel, account for little more than 10 percent of the Navajo income. The people want to rise from their present condition of poverty, unsanitary housing and living, acute sickness and ignorance. They want to become better ranchers, better farmers, better off-reservation workers, and better citizens in general. Through their leaders, they are demanding that the Government live up to its promise under the Treaty of 1868. (Report of J. A. Krug, Secretary of the Interior, March 1948).

Despite the hostile conditions that plague them, the Navajos have not lost hope. Sustained by their native religion which pervades their everyday living, they have demonstrated by their steadily increasing population growth a tremendous vitality and a will to live. Historical perspective leads one to predict that the Navajos, with proper treatment from the Government, will meet the present crisis successfully, adjust themselves to changing conditions, and build for themselves a future that is consonant with the ideals and beauty of their past.

### SIDE II, Band 1: RIDING SONG (Mixed chorus).

Until recent years the horse was the sole means of traversing the great distances of the reservation. This song and others of its type are sung while riding horseback to protect the rider from evil spirits which may assail him. Witchcraft is a constant source of social uneasiness and mutual suspiciousness.

SIDE II, Band 2: SONG OF HAPPINESS (Children's chorus, drum, harmonica). This song was sung by the women to sustain the morale and hope of the men during the confinement of the Navajo at Fort Sumner following their capitulation to Kit Carson in 1864. It is recorded here as sung by a group of Junior High School children at Fort Wingate Indian School. One of the boys, having discovered that he could play this native melody on his harmonica, joined the drummer in supplying an instrumental accompaniment to the song.

SIDE II, Bands 3 and 4: SPINNING DANCE (Female voice). The Spinning Dance is an old social dance in which the dancers spin circles within circles. The two songs presented here are sung by Julia Deal whose voice is one of the loveliest on the reservation. Though most of the ceremonial singing is done by the men, women have been and still are chanters. They find great enjoyment in informal singing as they follow their daily routine of home life.

SIDE II, Band 5: CORN GRINDING SONG (Female voice, basket drum). In maintaining his harmonious relation to the forces of the universe, the most commonplace acts of daily living assume a cosmic significance for the Navajo. Every man and woman knows and performs rituals, prayers, and songs of a personal nature. They may be directed to the planting of corn, the increase and care of sheep and horses, trading, and for general good hope. It is in this category that the Corn Grinding Songs belong. Before beginning the grinding of the corn, white



corn meal was offered to the gods, and was ceremonially thrown or sprinkled on the heads, front, back, sides and top, of the singer and the persons grinding. The Corn Grinding Songs are becoming rapidly obsolete and rare, as corn meal, once so laboriously ground, is disappearing from the domestic economy to be replaced by white flour from the trader's store.

**SIDE II, Band 6: SQUAW DANCE** (Male chorus, drum). The Squaw Dance was once an incidental element of the War Ceremony, a chant whose function was the purification of those who had been defiled by contact with the enemy. Today the ceremonial is used as a curative chant for those whose sickness is believed to result from contact with non-Navajos, and the Squaw Dance has become the chief attraction, drawing great crowds who travel long distances to participate in the social life that attends the event. This dance serves a social function not unlike that of the debutante ball or "coming-out" party in white society, for it is here that girls of marriageable age are brought to meet prospective husbands. The girls, often with coaching and urging from their mothers, choose their partners for the dance from among the eligible young men, and it is customary for the man to pay the girl for the dance.

The music of the Squaw Dance, like all other Indian music, is peculiarly perfect for the function for which it is intended. Without the natural setting of these songs much of their beauty is lost. A cool summer night in a pine forest, high in the mountains of Arizona, the picturesque circle of dancers which surrounds a huge bonfire, the outer circle of camp fires with horses and wagons, and automobiles and trucks of every description, make one acutely sensitive to the strange beauty of this music.

The Navajo distinguish between the old and new Squaw Dance songs. The songs recorded here are old ones. Squaw Dance songs are short and after a few repetitions it is usual for some leader to start another song. Thus the songs enchain themselves into fortuitous cycles which are not fixed and in which there is no organic relationship between songs. The Squaw Dance, because of its social and secular character, offers song-makers an opportunity in creative activity and originality which is denied them in most of the ceremonial music where great stress is placed on the accuracy of performance of chants as they were received from the gods.



**SIDE II, Band 7: SILVERSMITH'S SONG** (Male voice, anvil). This song is sung by Ambrose Roan Horse, one of the master silversmiths of the Navajo. He always works with a song in his heart, and often it is voiced to the accompaniment of his anvil. The song and its use is another example of the oneness of Navajo culture.

**SIDE II, Band 8: NIGHT CHANT** (Male chorus, gourd rattles). Navajo religion is an elaborate highly developed complex of beliefs, mythology, rituals, songs, and prayers, which pervades every aspect of Navajo life. It is through the living of their religion, and the careful observance and practice of fixed rituals and ceremonials that The People maintain a harmonious relationship with the mysterious forces of the universe and gain a sense of security. There are thirty-five major ceremonials, generally referred to as chants, most of which are directed toward curing sickness. These ceremonials, varying in length from two to nine days, are conducted by a medicine man known as a Singer. It is believed that the ceremonials and the esoteric lore of the Singer have been transmitted through an unbroken succession of Singers from the gods who gave ceremonial power to the first Navajos.

The Night Chant, popularly known as the Yeibichai (Grandfather of the Gods) is an important nine day ceremony which may not be performed until after the first killing frost. It is at this ceremony that boys and girls are initiated into the ceremonial life of the tribe by two masked dancers who impersonate the Grandfathers of the Monsters and Female Divinity. On the last night of the ceremony which is open to the public, Yeibichai appears with a company of masked gods and dances. After a wierd, unearthly call of the gods, the dancers shake their rattles with a sweeping movement from the ground to their heads, then whirl to the opposite direction and repeat the rattling. Following this formalized introduction, the dancers begin their rhythmic dance and song, accompanying themselves with the rattles. The hypnotic power of this music is cumulative as an endless profusion of Yeibichai songs follow one another throughout the night. Dance teams which have spent weeks and months in preparation for the ceremony compete with one another not only in the excellence of their singing and dancing, but in the introduction of new Yeibichai songs. The seemingly meaningless syllables of the songs are not without significance for the Navajos.

In comparing the Navajo Yeibichai Dance with the Sioux Omaha Dance one notes that the former is strictly formalized, the work of an ensemble, whereas the latter is highly individualistic and frenetic, providing for a large measure of originality on the part of each dancer. The vocal technique and manner of singing of the two tribes vary greatly. A distinctive feature of the Yeibichai songs is the dextrous alternation between normal singing voice and falsetto, which contrary to popular belief is rather rare in American Indian music. These particular melodies tend to employ even wider intervals than Plains tunes, displaying almost acrobatic feats in bounding back and forth between octaves, while the continual down-trend, so conspicuous in the Plains, is here counteracted by the bold upward leaps. (Helen M. Roberts, *Musical Areas in Aboriginal America*)



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