



# Smithsonian Folkways

## **Having Our Say: The Music of the Mardi Gras Indians**

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### **Summary:**

This unit is intended to introduce students to the culture and music of Mardi Gras Indians, an important African American phenomenon that takes place in New Orleans. Students will examine the tradition and its culture-bearers, listen to and analyze Mardi Gras Indian music, and examine the multiple cultural influences that have contributed to the tradition. Students will gain experience in listening, movement, and performance, which will enrich their sense of the musical and cultural complexity of this phenomenon.

**Suggested Educational/Grade Level:** C/U

**Country:** USA

**Region:** Southern United States

**Culture Group:** African-Americans & those with African-American/Native American Heritage

**Genre:** Folk

**Instruments:** Voice, Drums, Tambourines, Cowbells, Agogo Bells, and other items that may be played in percussive fashion (i.e., Bottles, Woodblocks)

**Language:** English

**Co-Curricular Areas:** History, Sociology, African-American Studies, Art, African Studies, Linguistics, Native American History

**National Standards:** N/A

**Prerequisites:** General knowledge of Atlantic slave trade  
Familiarity with rudimentary music terminology

### **Objectives:**

- Introduction to Mardi Gras Indians and some aspects of their tradition
- Listen to Mardi Gras Indian music, understand its form, influences, and more
- Learn from culture-bearers

## Materials:

### Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

1. “Sew, Sew, Sew” from *Blues Routes: Heroes & Tricksters: Blues, Jazz, Work Songs & Street Music*; SFW 40118, Track 113.  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=38811>
2. “Two-Wa-Bac-A-Way – The Indian Race” from *Music of New Orleans, Vol. 1: Music of the Streets: Music of Mardi Gras*; FW02461, Track 201.  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=5190>
3. “Red, White, and Blue Got the Golden Crown” from *Music of New Orleans, Vol. 1: Music of the Streets: Music of Mardi Gras*; FW02461, Track 202.  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=5191>
4. “Little Liza Jane” from *You Are My Little Bird* by Elizabeth Mitchell; SFW 45063, Track 101.  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=46424>
5. The additional media materials listed at the end of this unit are vital components for the full development of the lectures and activities. They complement the materials of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings and are readily available for purchase.

## Lesson Segments:

- Lesson 1: Who are the Mardi Gras Indians?
- Lesson 2: Mardi Gras Indian Music Making
- Lesson 3: Musical Influences

## Lesson 1: Who are the Mardi Gras Indians?

1. Ask students what they know about Mardi Gras celebrations, and draw them into a discussion of the sights, sounds, and atmosphere that transpires in one American city known for its Mardi Gras festivities: New Orleans.
2. Introduce the Mardi Gras Indian *Mardi Gras Day* celebration as one important celebration of that holiday. Play the following selections as examples of the Mardi Gras Indian parade environment.
  - “Sew, Sew, Sew”  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=38811>
  - “Two-Wa-Bac-A-Way – The Indian Race”  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=5190>
  - “Red, White, and Blue Got the Golden Crown”  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=5191>

3. Ask students to discuss the meaning of “Mardi Gras Indian” in terms of:
  - Population group
  - Geographic location
  - Other factors, such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age
4. Show photographs of Mardi Gras Indians’ costume patches and suits, accessible on the internet. Expect confusion as students come to terms with African Americans costumed as Native American Indians.
5. Describe “*Mardi Gras Indians*”
  - African-American Mardi Gras participants who call themselves *Indians*, while parading through the streets of greater New Orleans’ African-American neighborhoods dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments.
  - These New Orleans “Indians” wear elaborate beaded and feathered costumes, called *suits*.
  - Suits are designed to mimic Plains Indian dress (a point of distinction should be made between these “Indians” and Native Americans). These suits consist of feathers and sewn together panels onto which images have been beaded. The suits can weigh as much as one hundred pounds and may also consist of crowns or headdresses that reach several feet in height.
  - Most New Orleans Indian tradition-bearers belong to lower socioeconomic groups, yet with their meager earnings they purchase thousands of dollars-worth of materials that are required to create an elaborate suit.
  - In some instances, suits take a year to complete, and as soon as Mardi Gras festivities are concluded, many New Orleans Indians begin creating a new suit.
  - To don a suit and participate in a parade is called *masking*. Mardi Gras Indians mask on Mardi Gras Day, St. Joseph’s Night (March 18), and three Sunday afternoons during the spring called Super Sundays. They also make appearances at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and other cultural events. Their activities happen year-round.
  - Indians form social groups known as *gangs* or *tribes* that function as brotherhoods. The leader of a tribe or gang is called a *chief*.
  - Indians also gather together on Sunday afternoons for what they call “Indian Rehearsals.” At the rehearsals they sing Mardi Gras Indian songs, dance, and fellowship. This may be seen as a modern-day extension of festivities held by blacks on Sunday afternoon in Congo Square, New Orleans, many years ago.
  - The Mardi Gras Indian tradition has been a mainstay in the city for more than a century.

6. Have students view the video of “All on Mardi Gras Day” (DVD referenced on Page 14).
7. As a review of film “All on Mardi Gras Day,” describe further Mardi Gras Indian cultural practices. Prompt students to provide information about each topic while filling in points not immediately brought forth.
  - A. *Beading & Art Work*
    - i. In the beadwork by Indians, Native American iconography is a presence, as are other images which may be contemporary, such as those from Hurricane Katrina.
    - ii. The beading style and technique is West African in origin, however, rather than Native American.
    - iii. Process of beading is often said to be spiritual in nature, with those who bead indicating that they enter a trance-like or meditative state while doing so. They sew beads onto cardboard that has been cut into a specific shape needed for the costume. After beading for hours, the hands may bleed or become numb.
    - iv. Show photos of beaded patches. If photos are not available, images may be acquired using Google search.
  - B. *Parading* (especially for New Orleans Indian tradition- bearers and those dwelling in the neighborhood)
    - i. Occurs on Mardi Gras and St. Joseph Night (the night before St. Joseph’s Day, thus, March 18) and is most often not seen by outsiders. Indians dress in full costumes and parade in the following “formation.”

Spyboy and/or Scouts

1<sup>st</sup> Flag Boy

2<sup>nd</sup> Flag Boy

3<sup>rd</sup> Flag Boy

**Big Chief**

(may or may not have a queen)

2nd Chief

(may or may not have a queen)

3rd Chief

(may or may not have a queen)

Council Chief

(may or may not have a queen)

**Remaining Tribe Members & Musicians**

- ii. Not all tribe members will hold a leadership position.
- iii. Multiple individuals may occupy any one position except for the position of First Chief, which is solely held by an individual.

- iv. A description of Indian tribe leadership positions may be useful.

**Spyboys and/or Scouts** – The lowest-ranking position and those in this position run ahead of the tribe to see if any other tribes are near or approaching. If they spot rival or approaching tribes, they pass this information on to the *flag boys*. This position is often held by young men in their late teens or early twenties.

**Flag Boys** - Flag boys are ranked one level above *spyboys* and *scouts*. They carry huge flags that are raised in the air to pass messages that have been passed to them by the spyboys or *chief* to the other tribe members who may be some distance away. Positioning the flag in a certain manner may indicate that there is another tribe approaching. *Flag Boy* positions may be held by young men in their twenties.

**Chiefs** – Big (First) Chief is the highest ranking position in the tribe and is responsible for the tribe's leadership. The *First Chief* may provide financial support for tribe activities or solve disputes between tribe members. The chief also decides who may be a member and will recruit new members to the tribe. There may be a second, third, or fourth chief but these designations are not meant to imply a succession plan for the first chief position. Additionally, a *Council Chief* position may be occupied but is merely meant to show respect to a former first chief.

**Wild Man** – The wild man is responsible for the protection of the chief. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, meetings between tribes were violent and protection by a *Wild Man* was necessary. They would carry hatchets or other weapons. Currently the *Wild Man* controls access to the chief and determines who may have “council” with the chief.

Roles for women: Until recently, most leadership positions were filled by men. Women who participated were designated as queens. The appearance of the queen was very important because her “good looks” enhanced the status of her respective chief. Queens are usually wives, daughters, girlfriends, or other female acquaintances of the chiefs. After Katrina, the population that practices the Mardi Gras Indian tradition moved to other locales and some did not or were not able to return to New Orleans. As the Indian population dwindled, more women began to fill positions that were once occupied by men. Currently, tribes may be led by a Big Queen who assumes the same responsibilities as a first chief.

- v. These parade routes are not published and the Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans make few, if any, details of the parade public. They also do

not seek permission or permits from the government to have such gatherings.

C. Parading for Non-Culture Members (Super Sundays & Cha Wa)

- i. Super Sundays are gathering of all tribes city-wide. Each area of the city of New Orleans (Uptown, Downtown, and West Bank) will hold its own gatherings, giving those from other areas the opportunity to visit tribes from different areas of the city. The Uptown Super Sunday is held on the Sunday closest to St. Joseph's Day.
- ii. Whereas the routes of the parades for the culture bearers are not published, the routes for Super Sundays are published and parade permits are sought from government. A police escort, whose expense is covered by the Mardi Gras Indians, leads the parade procession.

D. Indian Rehearsal (Culture & Non-Culture Bearers Participate)

- i. Not rehearsals in the traditional sense where one's performance is critiqued.
- ii. These events are held in local clubs and Mardi Gras Indians do not attend dressed in full regalia. They gather to sing, play, dance, make fellowship, and drink.
- iii. Music-makers in some clubs are on a stage instead of being integrated into crowds as they are in parades.
- iv. Although alcohol is served, children may be present at rehearsals. In addition, other actions that are ordinarily deemed inappropriate in the presence of children may occur, (e.g. violence, profanity). However, children are expected to refrain from exhibiting this behavior.
- v. Everyone is encouraged to participate in the singing and dancing, including club patrons who are not Mardi Gras Indians.
- vi. In the Mardi Gras Indian culture, songs are structured so that they are easy to learn.

**Assessment:**

1. As homework, students should use Youtube or any other media source (pamphlets, NOLA.com, etc) to view material created to attract visitors to New Orleans.
2. In another class session, students should break into small discussion groups and answer the following questions. These questions are intended to inspire dialogue about issues that New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians currently face regarding the use of their "culture."
  - A. Do you feel it is problematic (morally or legally, for example) if mainstream culture utilizes a minority culture's "products," including music, for its own purposes? For example, Mardi Gras Indians are not included in New Orleans' mainstream Mardi Gras parade but are used in advertisements to draw tourists to the city for such events.
  - B. If someone uses your cultural products (e.g. music or artwork) should they always seek permission to publish, print images, or distribute musical recordings of it, especially if the representation or reproduction

occurs in public space? Currently, some of the New Orleans' Mardi Gras Indians are seeking to copyright their suits, making it difficult for those who take photographs during parades to utilize those photographs for profit.

3. Each group should select a spokesperson to provide a summary of responses. Encourage participants to speak up even if they do not agree with the perspective that may be most popular.

## **Lesson 2: Mardi Gras Indian Music Making**

1. Discuss the following general characteristics of Mardi Gras Indian Music.
  - A. Mardi Gras Indians emphasize tradition in their music and musical practices but they want song leaders to put their own “stamp” on any song in their repertoire.
  - B. There are a few songs common to all tribes, including, “Indian Red,” “Sew, Sew, Sew” and “Two-Wa-Bac-A-Way.” Spelling variations are also common (e.g. “Two Way Pock A Way”).
  - C. The vast majority of the traditional repertoire includes a litany of call-and-response exchanges between a song leader and chorus, which can last anywhere from a few minutes or an hour or more.
  - D. New Orleans' Mardi Gras Indian music may be placed into one of these style categories:
    - *Traditional music* categorized as that heard during street parades or other street performances. Songs primarily consists of a litany of call-and-response exchanges between a leader and chorus. Instruments are primarily percussion instruments.
    - “*Mardi Gras Indian Funk*” is Mardi Gras Indian music that blends with funk-style electronic instruments, rhythms, and texts, including verse-chorus form. This music peaked in the 1970s.
    - *Contemporary Mardi Gras Indian music* includes traditional music recast and incorporated into jazz and hip-hop idioms.
  - E. Vocables are common and may be used for onomatopoeic effect, without having specific meanings in their own right. However, some may have linguistic links to the French or Spanish languages.
  - F. Songs are structured with repeated rhythmic motives, melodic motives, and other factors that facilitate learning with ease as well as performance in the parade and club environment.
  - G. Source materials for text include a multitude of sources (e.g. spirituals, folk tunes, current events, etc.)

Explain to students that “Sew, Sew, Sew” (the first recording sampled) is a traditional song where the subject of the text addresses the angst involved in getting the sewing of a suit complete by Mardi Gras day. As the example is played, students should listen closely and note the melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, form, and text.

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=38811>

To make analysis easier, suggest that students draw a chart (see below) with the attributes listed on one side and comments on the other.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Song: Sew, Sew, Sew</b>
Sound (Instrumentation, vocal quality, etc.)	Instrumentation – Drums, tambourine. Vocals – singing, hollering, and effects. Energetic style.
Melody (Range, scale, motives, etc.)	Melodic motive is repeated in the chorus response. Leader improvises lines that fit the melodic motive.
Harmony	No chord changes.
Rhythm (Motives, influences, etc.)	Instruments repeat a rhythmic pattern or vary it.
Texture (Homophony, heterophony, etc.)	Heterophony.
Form (ABA, song form, blues, etc.)	Introduction – Exchange of call lines, call-and-response between song leader and chorus.
Text (Subject matter, verses, etc.)	Leader improvises lines. Vocables can be heard.

2. Start a discussion about the song by asking one student to volunteer their thoughts on the “melody” of the music. Another volunteer should address “rhythm,” and so on.
3. Continue further discussion of selected attributes:
  - A. Instrumentation**
    - i. Ask students what instrument(s) they hear on the recording and which are playing the motive that provides the rhythmic foundation of the song (tambourine and drums).
    - ii. Describe the different instruments that Mardi Gras Indians typically use. The list may include, but not limited to: drums, tambourines, bottles tapped with sticks, cowbells, agogo bells – anything else that can be played in a percussive manner.
      - a. All sorts of drums are used; however, the tambourine is the most important instrument. Note that the use of bongos and congas is controversial because some Indians feel that they are not “Indian.”
      - b. Tambourines in Mardi Gras Indian culture have a special status. The owner of the tambourine may decorate the head with imagery, paintings, or decorations of things that important to them. They sometimes attach pictures, or write quotes on the tambourine head. Note that during the evacuation for Katrina, this was the only instrument many Indians were able to save due to its size.



- iii. Show pictures of Mardi Gras Indian tambourines. If not readily available, images may be acquired through a Google search.

## B. Form (Introduction & Song Body)

### i. *Introduction*

Leader: I remember one morning, I remember well

Response: Yay-O & Other “Hollers”

Leader: I say, Cootie-Fay La Don (inaudible), I remember one morning, I remember well

Response: Yay-O & Other “Hollers”

Leader: They had two spy boys running and they had big queen raising hell

Response: Ooh Ay O (With Variants)

Leader: Somebody, Somebody write my momma, tell my dad

Response: Ooh Ay (With Variants)

Leader: Tell ‘em I Chief White Cloud, that Mardi Gras Morning, don’t you make me mad

Ask students to note prominent features of the introduction:

- Call-and-response between a leader and chorus
- Instruments providing their own “response” to the leader’s call
- The presence of vocables.
  - Standard Mardi Gras Indian vocable phrases include “*Cootie Fiyo*” and “*Cootie Fay*”. There are no meanings of these phrases when performed, and linguists have not been able trace its roots or linguistic origin.

### ii. *Body of Song*

a) Replay the segment of the earlier example and ask students about the significance of this portion of the song.

- Call attention to the call-and-response between leader and chorus.
- Ask “What is the rhythmic foundation?” The rhythmic foundation is based on a motive. Ask students to clap the motive along with the music. Then have students stand and walk the beat, clapping the motive. Next, ask students to clap the rhythm and sing chorus refrain (“Somebody got to Sew, Sew, Sew”). Note the challenge that this may cause due to the polyrhythmic nature of the music. This will give students a tactile experience of polyrhythm.

Example of rhythmic notation:



- Convey the importance of *performance*. Young Mardi Gras Indians typically learn by doing, via oral tradition, rather than through formal curriculum. Everything is performance-based.
  - Student performances require (1) a song leader; (2) those who will sing the chorus refrain; and (3) those who will play instruments.
  - Demonstrate the rhythm, as represented on Page 11. Have the singers and percussion play along or clap the rhythm. Keep this rhythm going.
  - Sing the chorus refrain (see Page 11) and then have students sing it back.
  - Rehearse this as a group, referring back to the recording as necessary. Establishing this rhythmic foundation is crucial.
  - The role of song leader will be the most difficult to learn. The student in this role should learn the first five “calls” that the leader sings by singing along with the recording.

Lyrics:

*I sewed, sewed, all night long*

*I sewed, sewed, all night long*

*I sewed that morning, til’ the break of dawn*

*I took ‘em up and I brought ‘em down*

*Say my big chief got a golden crown*

- Song leader, chorus, and musicians should rehearse together continuously until the ensemble “gels.” Refer to the recording as necessary.
- To increase the number of “calls” available to the song leader, have the leader improvise five more lines that fit the melodic motive of the song. The student may not be capable of “on the spot” improvising, so allow him/her some time to compose lyrics.
- Rehearse the newly-composed lyrics with the group.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the song "Little Liza Jane".

- System 1:** Labeled "Chorus Refrain". The vocal line (treble clef) has lyrics "Some-bo - dys Got to Sew, Sew, Sew". The percussion line (percussion clef) shows a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes and rests.
- System 2:** Labeled "Refrain". The vocal line has lyrics "Some-bo - dys Got to Sew, Sew, Sew" followed by "Some-bo - dys Got to". A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a "3" above it. The percussion line also has a triplet of eighth notes marked with a "3" above it.
- System 3:** Labeled "Refrain". The vocal line has lyrics "Sew, Sew, Sew". The percussion line has a triplet of eighth notes marked with a "6" above it.

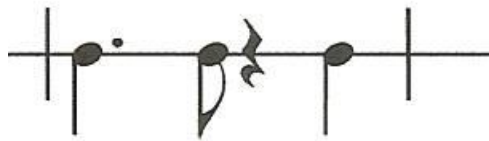
*Body of Song (3.B.ii) continued...*

- b) Ask students to listen to the following examples and note how they differ.
  - Play children's song "Little Liza Jane" <http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=46424>
  - Play Track 8, "Little Liza Jane" from *Lightening and Thunder* by the Golden Eagles Mardi Gras Indians.
  
- c) Ask students to explain the differences they heard. Note how Mardi Gras Indians have appropriated this traditional folk song:
  - The traditional recording of "Little Liza Jane" is meant to accompany a children's game. This indicates that Mardi Gras Indian song sources are multiple, including children's singing games and pre-existing Mardi Gras Indian songs.
  - **Sound** - Instrumentation in the Mardi Gras Indian version includes drums, cowbell(s), and tambourines. Vocals consist of "hollers" and singing.
  - **Melody** - The song body of the Mardi Gras Indian version begins with a call by the leader "Hey Little Liza" and a response from the

crowd (chorus) “Little Liza Jane.” This is then followed by another call by the leader “Hey Little Liza” and the crowd (chorus) responds “Little Liza Jane.” The chorus will sing the same responsive refrain (melodically and rhythmically) throughout the entire performance. The vocal lines of the song leader contain improvised text that is overlaid onto a basic motive pattern.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff, labeled "Leader's Call", features a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It contains two phrases of the call: "Hey Lil' Li - za". The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes. The bottom staff, labeled "Chorus' Response", also has a treble clef and one flat. It contains two phrases of the response: "Lit-tle Li - za Jane". The melody is more rhythmic, featuring eighth notes and quarter notes. The lyrics are written below the notes.

- **Rhythm** – The introduction does not have a steady beat. But the rhythmic foundation of the song body appears to be a repeated motive.



- **Form** - The Mardi Gras Indian version begins with an introduction which is a litany of call-and-response between the song leader and the crowd which is then followed by the body of the song.
- **Text** – The song leaders’ text is improvised and is not related to the traditional text of the song. The only item retained intact is the chorus response (see transcription above) which is repeated throughout the whole song. In this version, the style seems to have sexual overtones.
- Explain that this comparison demonstrates some additional features of Mardi Gras Indian performance and composition practices:
  - 1) Sources of song material (text) are multiple;
  - 2) Lyrics may be juxtaposed in any manner and lyrics taken from multiple sources may be blended to create something unique;
  - 3) Subject matter(s) of the text are at the discretion of the song leader;
  - and 4) Song form and duration are at the discretion of the leader. A song leader may add an introduction or omit it.

### Extension: Mardi Gras Indian Funk

1. Play example of “To-Wa-Bak A Way – The Indian Race” and ask students to note form, melody, rhythm, & instrumentation.  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=5190>
2. Play example of “Two Way Pak E Way” from *The Wild Magnolias*, CD1, Track 3, making note of form, melody, rhythm, & instrumentation.
3. Pose question to students as to what forms of African-American music may have influenced the Mardi Gras Indian music (Funk & R&B).
4. Most notable differences between the two versions are that:
  - Wild Magnolia’s version was recorded in a studio and the other is a part of an interview recording by Samuel Charters (although the singing takes place on the street). Note: neither version is recorded in its true performance context.
  - The influence of funk and R&B is demonstrated in the Wild Magnolia’s version.
5. Ask students how the Wild Magnolia’s version demonstrates the influence of Funk & R&B. Instrumentation includes instruments used in Funk & R&B: electric instruments (guitar, bass, keyboards), drum set, clavinet, conga drums, other percussion, sound effects, and whistles.
6. Note that the refrains on the Wild Magnolia’s versions vary between “Two Way Pak E Way” and “Hey, Pak E Way.” Both phrases may be used as titles but refer to the same song. In Mardi Gras Indian music, just as in popular music, hooks or refrains are often the titles of songs.
7. Wild Magnolia’s version is a litany of exchanges between a leader and chorus.
8. Ask students whether they can figure out what this phrase might mean in the context of the Mardi Gras Indian parade environment? (It means, “Get the Hell Out of the Way!” Some linguists propose the origins of this phrase may be the French language.)
9. Play example of the “Hey, Pocky A –Way” recorded by the Wild Tchoupitoulas Tribe on their CD, titled *Wild Tchoupitoulas*, and ask students to note the instrumentation and form of the selection.
  - Instrumentation is that of funk music & includes electric guitar, electric bass, clavinet, tambourine, congas, drum set, shakers/other percussion, and piano.
10. Ask students how the text of this version differs from the previous Wild Magnolia’s version? Replay if necessary and note that: 1) verses have been created - the song is not just a litany of call & response lines; 2) there is a 16-bar form; 3) verses and choruses are alternated with interludes between them; 4) there is no song leader and everyone sings verses, with the exception of improvised calls at the end of song; and 5) the version is designed to fit a recorded format – song is just 3 minutes and 57 seconds.

**Assessment:** Ask students to write a brief two page essay on how they think musical factors/characteristics exhibit the beliefs or facilitate the practices of the Mardi Gras Indian community. Some suggested threads of discussion include:

- Facilitating building community.  
All allow music making to become community activity. Mardi Gras Indians view activities (parading, singing, and dancing) as community- building and fellowship. During parades participants in singing include those in the neighborhoods where the Mardi Gras Indians parade. Characteristics such as, textual and melodic, and motivic repetition allow the music to be learned easily and remembered year to year.
- Mobility  
The playing of small percussion allows for mobility and give the Mardi Gras Indians the ability to share their music with whomever they desire in their respective neighborhoods.
- Music Education  
See Community Building
- Promoting History and Lore  
Song lyrics being vehicles of teaching younger generations about Mardi Gras Indian lore and history.

**Additional Materials: CDs (MP3s), Video (DVD), and Readings**

CD: *Wild Tchoupitoulas*

Artist: The Wild Tchoupitoulas Mardi Gras Indians  
Mango(Island Records) 1976

CD: *Lightning and Thunder*

Artist: The Golden Eagles Mardi Gras Indians  
Rounder Records - 1988

CD: *The Wild Magnolias/Thy Call Us Wild - 2 CD Set*

Artist: The Wild Magnolias Mardi Gras Indians  
Universal Music France – 2007 SSC 3068

CD: *Indian Blues*

Artist: Donald Harrison, Jr.  
Candid Productions  
1992 Re-release 2003

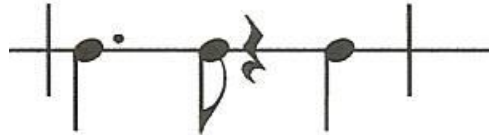
DVD: *All on Mardi Gras Day*

Royce Osborn  
Spyboy Pictures, 2008

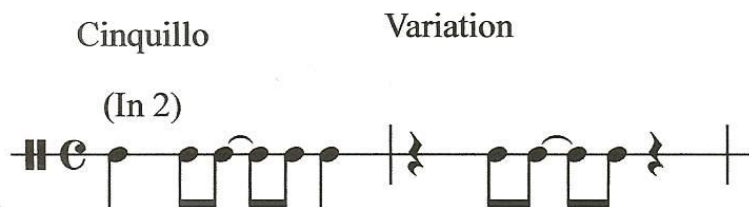
1. [http://www.amazon.com/Up-From-Cradle-Jazz-Orleans/product-reviews/1887366911/ref=sr\\_1\\_19\\_cm\\_cr\\_acr\\_img?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1](http://www.amazon.com/Up-From-Cradle-Jazz-Orleans/product-reviews/1887366911/ref=sr_1_19_cm_cr_acr_img?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1)*Up From the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II* Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2009  
Chapter 17: In Search of the Mardi Gras Indians  
Chapter 18: Willie Tee and the Wild Magnolias  
Chapter 19: Big Chief Jolley and the Neville Brothers
  
2. *The World That Made New Orleans*  
Ned Sublette  
Lawrence Hill Books, 2009  
Pages 293 - 311

### Lesson 3: Contemporary Mardi Gras Indians

1. Discuss the influences on Mardi Gras Indian Music from other cultures or geographic locations.
  - A. Note that influences from other cultures are evident in New Orleans' Mardi Gras Indian music. Review one rhythmic pattern from "Sew, Sew, Sew" and ask students to clap the pattern as review.



- B. Note that the above represents a tresillo (triplet) pattern, a traditionally Cuban rhythm. Other Mardi Gras Indian songs may be based on other Cuban rhythmic patterns, including cinquillo. Clap the cinquillo rhythm.



- i. Play "Two-Wa-Bac-A-Way – The Indian Race"  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=5190>
    - ii. Ask students if they know which instrument is playing the cinquillo pattern. (Tambourine)
    - iii. Clap the cinquillo pattern and have the students join in.
    - iv. Sing the chorus refrain and clap the cinquillo pattern and have students join in. Note this will be difficult to do given the similarities of the patterns.
    - v. Discuss how/why Cuban influence may have crept into Mardi Gras Indian music by considering the geographic location of New Orleans. Discuss the significance of New Orleans as a port city, where port trade has facilitated historical cultural exchanges with different cultural groups from around the world, including Caribbean peoples to the south and east.
      - Show a map of the Caribbean region to geographically contextualize cultural exchange.





Map of Caribbean and Southeastern U.S.

- Provide a brief timeline of the New Orleans territory.
    - 1718 – 1764 Controlled by France
    - 1764 – 1803 Controlled by Spain
    - 1803 – Brief French control but soon sold to the US in the Louisiana Purchase
  - Although New Orleans has operated under both Spanish and U.S. control, the city has retained a strong French influence through both language and culture.
  - When the Haitian Revolution occurred, those living in Saint Domingue (the island where the Dominican Republic and Haiti are located before it split into two countries) fled the country with their slaves and went to Cuba.
  - They were expelled from Cuba in 1809 because many refused to acknowledge the Spanish leadership of Cuba and wanted to maintain their French culture.
  - Pose the following question to students: “Where would these French-speaking and acculturated refugees go with their slaves?” (Answer: New Orleans)
  - This new slave population, with their knowledge of Spanish rhythms from Cuba, mixed with the existing New Orleans slave population and influenced New Orleans musical forms.
- viii. African timelines are also present in Mardi Gras Indian music.
- Define a musical “timeline” as a unit of beats that are not equal in length. It is common among musicians in certain African cultures and those in the African diaspora to utilize these timelines to orient their musical sense of timing.



**Assessment:** Divide students into discussion groups and ask them to peruse the Harrison album and pick a track that they would like to discuss and analyze. Each song should be analyzed in terms in musical elements but also in terms of the following:

- How does one assess Harrison's homage to Mardi Gras Indian culture (e.g. is this jazz with Mardi Gras Indian influence or Mardi Gras Indian music influenced by Jazz?)
- How did Harrison change Mardi Gras Indian songs to fit the Jazz idiom?
- Did Harrison do anything to make the Jazz idiom fit the Mardi Gras Indian music style?
- What other influences are heard (e.g. Afro-Caribbean, timelines)?
- How does the inclusion of melodic instruments change the performance (e.g. ranges of melody lines become larger; there are repeated melodic motives; instrumental effects are utilized where vocal effects do not occur)?

Each group will lead the class discussion for the tune they have chosen.