HEALING SONGS
OF THE
AMERICAN INDIANS

From the Smithsonian-Densmore Collection of the Archive of Folksong, Library of Congress

19 songs with descriptive notes from 7 tribes
Edited by Charles Hofmann

Recorded on location by Dr. FRANCES DENSMORE for the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution
Notes by Charles Hofmann

FRANCES DENSMORE AND THE MUSIC OF THE AMERICAN INDIANS

Frances Densmore's reputation as a pioneer in the study of American Indian music is well known to those who followed her career through the six decades of intensive study, research and collection. One must go to her more than twenty publications and miscellaneous reports issued by the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution as well as to her contributive writings through the years in order to understand the scope of her more than half century of work. Her tireless scholarly efforts met with a success seldom gained by those who devote their lives to specialized subjects. At the beginning of the present century, Dr. Densmore chose a career off the beaten path and continued it until the end of her life at age 90 in 1957.

Dr. Densmore began to record American Indian music in 1907 and through the years built up a collection of over 2000 examples representing many tribes in North America. The total collection is unique, one of the great recorded treasures of the American people. During recent years many of these examples have been made available by the Archive of Folklore of the Library of Congress in long-playing discs, duplicates of the original cylinders. It is from these discs that the present album of Healing Songs originates.

In correspondence with me through the years (there are over 1000 letters in my files from Dr. Densmore) she expressed a great desire to make available a recording containing examples of songs used for the treatment of the sick among American Indians, a representation from diverse tribes. To fulfill this wish for her through the cooperation of the Library of Congress and Folkways Records brings her original idea of presentation to completion and makes available in an album one of the important aspects for the study of Indian music. With these and other recordings now available from the Smithsonian-Densmore Collection we are able to understand how she preserved the past, recorded observations in the present and opened the way for the work of others in the future.

The listener is referred to a complete bibliography in Newsletter #7 of the Society for Ethnomusicology (April 1956), to Dr. Densmore's survey The Study of Indian Music (Annual Report, Smithsonian Institution, 1941, pp. 527-550: Washington, 1942) and to the Bulletins of the Bureau of American Ethnology noted in the following descriptive notes.

Charles Hofmann, who has specialized in the study of ethnic and folklore music for many years, is the editor of several albums issued by Folkways Records including his own collection "War Whoops and Medicine Songs," "Hopi Katsina Songs," and the present album from Frances Densmore. At present he is an instructor in the Department of Education at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. For many years he has been heard in his original broadcast series "Exploring Music."

Some Notes from DR. FRANCES DENSMORE on the Use of Music in the Treatment of the Sick by American Indians

Two methods of treating the sick were used by the American Indians in early days and are continued to some extent at the present time. One method involves the private ministrations of a doctor or medicine man and the other a public ceremony, conducted by a number of doctors, attended by many people, and often continued for several days. Music is an important phase of each method and consists of singing by the doctor or his assistants and the shaking of a rattle or beating of a drum. The songs used in these treatments are said to come from supernatural sources in "dreams" or visions, and with them come directions for procedure and a knowledge of the herbs to be used.

I have known the Indian doctors in many tribes, from British Columbia to Florida and without exception they were quiet, conservative men and women, constituting a definite type and respected in their several tribes. They prepare themselves for their calling by a fast in which they receive their "dream" or vision, and they live strictly in accordance with the requirements of that dream.
Indian doctors were primitive psychologists. They studied their patients and did not always consider it necessary to give medicine. In one group it was believed that personal jealousy might cause illness, and in another tribe the patient was sometimes told to "get up a dance and have a big time" and he would be well again. There has been also a distinct feeling that such a treatment deserved a fee. A Menominee doctor said, "The medicine will not work unless they pay for it." In this case there was no fixed fee but the patient was required to give what he was able - tobacco, a handkerchief, about four yards of calico, as example. Some Indian medicine men have received as much as $100. for their services.

It has been said that primitive treatment of the sick is characterized by affirmation. I have found this practice less frequently in the words of the songs than in the doctor's speech before beginning the treatment. At that time he often tells the source of his power and sometimes relates his former successes. The source of his power is generally a bird or animal known to have great strength, or something in nature that is connected with great vibration, such as the wind or the "great water" when it is seething and in motion, or a mountain shaken with mysterious "spirit power." An example of affirmation occurs in a ceremonial song of the Chippewa Midewiwin containing these words - "You will recover, you will walk again. It is I who say it. My power is great. Through our white shell (emblem of the Minewiwin) I will enable you to walk again."

There are differences of custom between tribes and between individual doctors, but the prevailing characteristic of Indian healing songs is irregularity of accent. Sometimes this takes the form of unexpected interruptions of a steady rhythm and sometimes there is a peculiar rhythmic pattern throughout the melody. The rhythm is impressed on the mind of the patient and the rhythmic pattern holds his attention and, in some instances, may be somewhat hypnotic in effect. Certain healing songs are sung many times and some doctors have songs for beginning and ending a treatment. Such details of procedure are in accordance with the instructions received by the doctor in his dream. Throughout my study of 14 groups when healing songs were recorded, the total number of songs in this category has been 197.

These example will show the close relation between music and medicine among the Indians and the deep faith of these primitive peoples in the healing powers of music. The white man has developed his own methods of musical therapy, but in isolated places the Indian doctor still sings the songs that come to him in dreams, while his patients listen and recover.

(Portion of manuscript sent to Charles Hofmann in 1943)
Two classes of native doctors treated the sick among the Chippewa, both using songs in their treatment. One class comprised the older members of the Mide wiwin who used the songs and secret herbs of that organization. This was the organization (Grand Medicine Society) of the native religion of the Chippewa (Mide: Grand Medicine). Members of the second class did not always belong to the Mide wiwin. They claimed to receive their power in personal dreams and gave demonstrations to impress the people with that power. Both classes used affirmations, one affirming the great power of the Mide wiwin and the other affirming the power of their own supernatural helpers.

Songs of the second group are presented here, recorded by Dr. Densmore at White Earth and Wabacing, Minnesota. One of the singers (Main gans) treated the sick in the manner that will be described; the other was familiar with the custom. Such a doctor treated the sick by singing, shaking his rattle, passing his hands over the body of the patient, and apparently swallowing one or more tubular bones which he afterward removed from his mouth. Each of these actions was considered indispensable to the treatment. There is a similarity in the melodic pattern of these three songs. This adds to their interest as they were attributed to different sources.

Sung after a demonstration with the tubular bones and the treatment which followed. The words refer to the dream in which the doctor received his power. After the second rendition a sharp, hissing sound was made by the singer who said that the Chippewa doctor makes such a sound as he breathes or "blows" on the person whom he is treating. After the third rendition there is recorded a shrill whistle which he is said to make when the bones issue from his mouth.

Recorded by Ki miwun (Rainy), at Wabacing, Minnesota, 1909.

Main gans (Little Wolf) said that he sang three songs when treating a sick person, the melody being the same in the first and third songs. He sang the first song after he had looked at the sick person and decided that he could help him. The words are translated: "I am singing and dreaming in my poor way over the earth, I who will again disembark upon the earth." Then he sang a song which indicates that he received his power from a bear; the words being, "The big bear, to his lodge I go often." His third song is presented here and, as stated, the melody is the same as in the song which preceded his treatment.

Recorded by Main gans (Little Wolf), at White Earth, Minnesota, 1908.

This is evidently the song of a man who received his power from the great turtle (mikinak). The form of the words suggests a lengthy conference
with the turtle and, perhaps, a return to the turtle for the renewing of his power. The story of the dream, like the name of the medicine man who received the song, has been lost, but the melody and words remain a tradition among his people.

Recorded by Ki miwun (Rainy), at Waba cing, Minnesota, 1909.

mikinak Turtle,
niwi tabimu I am sitting with him.

For additional information and transcription of songs see Densmore: Chippewa Music (Bulletin 45, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1910) and Chippewa Music II (Bulletin 53, 1913).

SIOUX

All treatment of the sick among the Sioux was in accordace with dreams. No one attempted to treat the sick unless he had received a dream telling him to do so, and no one ever disregarded the obligations of such a dream. Each man treated only the diseases for which his dream had given him the remedies. A prominent medicine man named Shooter said, "A medicine man would not try to dream of all herbs and treat all diseases, for then he could not expect to succeed in all nor to fulfill properly the dream of any one herb or animal. He would depend on too many and fail in all. That is one reason why our medicine men lost their power when so many diseases came among us with the advent of the white man."

Side 1, Band 4: A Buffalo Said to Me

The singer claimed that a buffalo appeared to him in a dream when he was ten years old and said "Rise and follow me." The buffalo led him on a path that did not touch the earth. There they traveled until they came to a lodge filled with buffalo. This song was given to him in that lodge and by it he received power to treat the sick.

wahi nawa pin kte I will appear,
wanna yanka yo behold me,
tatan ka wan a buffalo
hema kiya said to me.

Recorded by Tatan ka-ohi tika (Brave Buffalo) at Standing Rock Reservation, South Dakota, between 1911-1914.

Side 1, Band 5: Song of the Bear

The singer recorded nine songs used in his treatment of the sick and these songs were received when a bear appeared to him in a dream, taught him the songs and revealed the herb that he used with it in his treatments. The following song was given four times when administering the herb and said that the patient was generally relieved after taking six doses of the medicine. A dream of the bear, with the accompanying knowledge of an herb, was considered especially fortunate as the bear is a strong, healthy animal, and digs roots with its claws.

Recorded by Wanbl - waha cunka (Eagle Shield) at McLaughlin, South Dakota, 1912.

mina pe kin wakan yelo My paw is sacred,
pezi huta o ta yelo herbs are plentiful,
mina pe kin wakan yelo My paw is sacred,
ta ku iyu ha o ta yelo all things are sacred.

Side 1, Band 6: Behold the Dawn

This is probably the oldest of the recorded songs for the sick. The song had belonged to the singer's father, Crow King, a famous singer and medicine man. Crow King sang it every morning as he was required to do by one of his dreams. In a dream it was also required that no one should pass behind him. If anyone did this accidently his teeth chattered and he became unconscious, much effort being necessary to restore him.

Recorded by Tatan ka-ohi tika (Brave Buffalo) at Standing Rock Reservation, South Dakota, between 1911-1914.

an pao wan A dawn
hina pelo appears,
wanwan ka yo behold it.

For additional information and transcription of songs see Densmore: Teton Sioux Music (Bulletin 61, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1918).

YUMAN

The Yuman songs were recorded on a reservation on the California side of the Colorado River opposite the town of Yuma in Arizona. The singer was said to have such "medicine power" that neither cold nor heat could harm him. It was also said that he secured fish when the people were in need of food. In his dreams he visited the spirit land "where they have melons the year round." If he came and went among the spirits they paid no attention to him and he did not understand their language.

In his treatment for the sick the singer used four songs that his father received in a dream. Both the singer and his father had power to treat men who had been shot in the chest. The words were claimed to be in a "secret language." With the singing of each of the four songs the singer had a different "intention." The first song (not included here) is given about 25 feet from the patient, then the singer rushes toward the patient and moves in circles around him. He then sang in both the patient's ears, blew in his eyes and ears and tapped the top of his head. The rush toward the patient causes the patient to regain consciousness,
Charles Wilson, Yuman medicine man

Side 1, Band 7: Second Song When Treating the Sick

The singer said his "feeling" was that the hemorrhage would cease. The song mentions a small insect that lives in the water and has power over the fluids of the body. It is believed this insect will respond and exert its power to aid the sick man.

Side 1, Band 8: Third Song When Treating the Sick

The singer now believes that the patient will regain the power of motion and the song mentions a lively insect that gives its aid.

The fourth song of the series (not included here) concerns the patient's ability to regain the power of speech and mentions a certain buzzard that "flies so high that it is out of sight." The buzzard has great power in itself and also exerts an influence over the insects mentioned in the preceding songs, increasing their power. It is said that "each of the insects does his best, but it is the buzzard whose great power gives the final impetus and cures the sick man." The confidence in the singer's own mind was the more interesting as he did not "absolutely promise" to cure a sick person when undertaking a case. It was said, however, that he "had never lost a case."

Recorded by Charles Wilson at Yuma Reservation in California, 1922.

For additional information and transcription of songs see Densmore: Yuman and Yaqui Music (Bulletin 110, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1932).

NORTHERN UTE

These songs are from a collection of 114 with 25 singers, recorded by the Northern Ute whose home is on a high plateau on northeastern Utah close to the Rocky Mountains. The singers were chiefly members of the Uinta and White River bands.

Side 1, Band 9: Healing Song of Little Green Man

The singer claimed that he was entirely independent of material means in his treatment of the sick, not even using a rattle nor wearing "charms." The source of his power was a "little green man," seen first when he was a boy and seen by him at intervals ever since. Years ago he fell asleep in the mountains and heard the little green man singing the songs that he used in his treatment. There were nine songs, one of which is given here. The singer claimed, "I always tell the sick person that he will get well because I know it is true. We believe that if a doctor begins a case which he is not sure that he can cure, he will certainly fail." When he was treating a sick person, the little green man told him what to do, and he sang five times in one evening.

Recorded by Teddy Pageets at Whiterock, Utah, 1914.

Side 1, Band 10: Healing Song of the Eagle Spirit

The singer believed that she was aided by supernatural power in her treatment of the sick, but also gave herb medicines in connection with the treatment. She said that she usually sang these songs when the sun was at a height corresponding to about ten o'clock in the morning. A spirit "represented by an eagle" appeared to her about four years prior to the time of recording and told her what to do. A request for her services was brought to her by a messenger who gave her a downy eagle feather. She held this in her hand while treating the sick person, and believed it increased her power. The roots of various herbs were used in her medicines and she "prayed to the eagle" when administering them. Like Teddy Pageets (in the previous song) she said the patient was certain to recover after her treatment.

Recorded by Mrs. Washington at Fort Duchesne, Utah, 1916.

For additional information and transcription of songs see Densmore: Northern Ute Music (Bulletin 75, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1922).

PAPAGO

The Papago are a desert people whose early home was chiefly south of Tucson, Arizona, extending into Sonora, Mexico. They are an industrious people, an agricultural tribe, being expert basket weavers and pottery makers. It is the belief of the Papago that major illnesses are caused by what might be termed psychic causes. These are of several sorts and there are medicine men who treat each. The sick person does not decide to whom he will go for treatment. Instead he must go to certain men who send him to the medicine men whom they consider best fitted to treat him. If his condition does not improve they send him to another. Songs are con-
nected with various forms of illness and are the property of the medicine men who treat those illnesses. Material remedies are not always used. Certain illnesses are attributed to the action of "bad medicine men," others to spirit animals or birds, and others to spirits of the dead while some are supposed to be caused by accidents or injuries. For some injuries a cure is provided by a spirit animal or bird of the sort that caused the injury. Among the Papago fifty songs were recorded as used in treatment for the sick.

Side 2, Band 1: Sandy Loam Fields

The first two songs (Bands 1 and 2) are part of a series of five such songs received from the singer's grandfather and were used in treating persons suffering from "deer sickness." The village mentioned in the first song is that in which the songs originated. The song is a gentle, pleasing melody which would be acceptable to a sick person. These songs are in pairs, or "parts," each having the same melody but the words being different.

"Sandy Loam Fields, on top of those lands Elder Brother stands and sings. Over our heads the clouds are seen, downy white feathers gathered in a bunch.

"After hearing these songs the women gather on Sandy Loam Fields, their heads decorated with clouds of feathers."

Side 2, Band 2: Out of the Mountains

The next song is third in the series and the melody has firmness and vigor instead of the gentleness of the preceding songs.

"That bird comes out back of Frong Mountain, it stretches its arms trying to reach Cokwigan Mountains (in Mexico)."

Recorded by Jose Panco at San Xavier Village, near Tucson, Arizona, 1920.

Side 2, Band 3: Song to a Little Yellow Wasp

In the country of the Papago there lives a wasp that makes a small, straight hole in the sand. In the words of the following song a snake speaks to a wasp that is digging its hole in front of him and throwing the dust in his eyes. This is one of the rattlesnake medicine songs that was sung with a certain degree of loudness.

"Little yellow wasp, you throw dirt in my eyes. I do not know what to do with you. All I can do is to make a long-drawn breath, hoping you will die in four days."

Side 2, Band 4: Song of the Dawn

It was the belief of the Papago that illnesses might be caused by the spirits of Apache killed in war or by spirits of dead Papago. Songs were given by the spirits for the treatment of these illnesses which appear to have been nervous in character.

"It has been a long time since the light began to show, my brother, Just look, my brother, Toward us the bows are brightening (referring to shafts of light above their heads like long bows.)"

Recorded by Rafael Mendex at Vomari village, Arizona, 1920.

For additional information and transcription of songs see Densmore: Papago Music (Bulletin 90, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1929).

MAKAH

The Makah, a branch of the Nootkan tribe, live on the Northwest Coast in northwestern Washington, bordering on the Pacific Ocean and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, near the end of Cape Flattery. These Indians obtained most of their food from the sea, their principal food being the meat and oil of the whale. They receive their songs in "dreams" which gave special power and they had songs for success in hunting whales and all forms of fishing, as well as songs to calm the sea when rough weather interfered with their endeavors. The aid of unseen power as well as the use of herbal remedies are used by the Makah in treating the sick. The medicine men who treated the sick seldom gave remedies and sang their own songs, either alone or with relatives or friends of the sick person. Such men were believed to have very powerful tumanos (spirit helpers).

Side 2, Band 5: A Path on the Mountain Peaks

The singer told of the origin of the songs he used in treating the sick, one of which is a legend stating that a mysterious Form resembling a man appeared, then moved away, the singer following it. The Form went through the bush, across the prairie and through mountain to a prairie on the other side, beyond which he saw another mountain. Halfway across the prairie the Form held out its right hand toward him and extended its first finger and as the singer took hold of the finger it fell off and the feather from the right side of the headdress fell to the ground. The singer used the finger in his treatment of the sick and the feather enabled him to fly to the top of another mountain, the feather also gave him power to be a successful whaler. His power was said to be so great that he could restore the dead to life. This is one of the songs given the singer by the Form.

Recorded by James Guy at Neah Bay, Washington, 1926.

For additional information and transcription of the song see Densmore: Noota and Quileute Music (Bulletin 124, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1932).
Eagle Shield, Sioux doctor

Brave Buffalo, medicine man of the Sioux

**MENOMINEE**

The Menominee is one of the few Indian tribes now living in the locality where they were first visited by the white men, three centuries ago. The present home of this Algonquin tribe is in central Wisconsin, adjacent to that of the Chippewa. The Menominee medicine lodge is practically the same as the **Mide wiwin** (Grand Medicine Society) of the Chippewa. As in many tribes, two methods of treating the sick are used by the Menominee, one depending on the help of "spirits" and the other using herbal remedies. Persons using either method are designated by a term meaning "one who has dreamed of sickness and its cure." The method is in accordance with the instructions received in a dream. He or she who has conferred with spirits is commonly called a juggler, while he or she who treats the sick with herbs is called by a term meaning "herb person." Every home has its simple remedies but in case of serious illness or accident the first procedure is to send for a "dreamer." The treatment of the sick by a juggler is primarily an exhibition of magic to impress and mystify the relatives of the sick person. He erects a tall, slender tipi that shakes as though in a strong wind, while the people hear the sound of spirit voices, while the juggler is bound in the tipi. Two songs connected with such a demonstrated were recorded, the second of these is presented and the words were said to refer to the spirits summoned by the juggler.

**Side 2, Band 6: Song of the Juggler**

"The inside of my house is full..."

Recorded by Cawunipinas in Wisconsin, 1928.

**Side 2, Band 7: Healing Song from the Spirit Women**

Each juggler had his own source of power. Four of the "spirit women in the east" gave two songs to a juggler named **Name konimit** (Feathers) who lived to be more than 90 years of age. The first of these songs is presented and is one which began a treatment. It is a soothing melody and mentions the mud turtle which was considered a source of "strong medicine."

"I am going into the mud turtle's house..."

Recorded by David Amab in Wisconsin, 1928.

**Side 2, Band 8: I am Rewarding You**

**Side 2, Band 9: The Heavens Help You**

This singer received his songs in a dream and also used herbal remedies. He related the dream in which he received his power and recorded three sets of songs. The dream was concerning a bird with a white head that stays high in the air. These are the two songs next following.

"The power above said, It is I who am now rewarding you that you will live to old age."

"The heavens speak and help you, and others will depend upon you for help."

Recorded by Louis Pigeon in Wisconsin, 1929.

For additional information and transcription of songs see Densmore: **Menominee Music** (Bulletin 102, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1932).

Photos courtesy of Bureau of American Ethnology - Smithsonian Institution.
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