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Native American Choral Music: Strategies for Celebrating and Incorporating Music of Indigenous People

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NATIVE AMERICAN CHORAL MUSIC: STRATEGIES FOR CELEBRATING AND INCORPORATING MUSIC OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

by

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Language usage is fluid and evolving, representing past and present people groups. During my discussions with my Indigenous composer colleagues, I've found that they hold varying preferences regarding how they wish to be addressed and the terminology they prefer. Because of this, I use the terms Native, Native American, First Nations, Indigenous, American Indian, and First Peoples interchangeably.

This document will discuss the historical exclusion of Native American music in the Western art forms, specifically the choral tradition, and provide solutions to incorporate it in modern choral performances. Considering first the wars, disease, displacement, colonization, and missionization, it is no surprise that Native music is underrepresented and scarcely preserved. Additionally, missteps in initial attempts to record the music of American Indians further widened the gap between musicologists and culture-bearers. With laws now in place meant to protect Native culture and spirituality, the twenty-first century is an opportune time to help instigate the reclaiming of Native art. Reclamation is accomplished by finding composers affiliated with Native communities who are qualified to write about those communities, commissioning them, and performing their works.

The four composers chosen for this document claim Native heritage, participate in their tribal culture, and compose choral music influenced by those connections. There

will be a brief biographical sketch of each composer followed by a discussion of how each composer is tied to their community and how that connection informs their music.

Finally, I will give recommendations for the commissioning process and suggestions for further research. Commissioning works of ethnic composers is a unique procedure that requires sensitivity to secular vs. sacred music, verifiable source materials, and programmability. I will also suggest further investigation into language study, dictionaries, orthographies, and anthologies.

DEDICATION

To my Jesus for carrying me through the good but especially the bad.

To Dr. Peter Eklund for your guidance, patience and support on this journey. Thank you for extending grace when I needed it. I am deeply grateful for your dedication to helping me succeed. Thank you for believing in me.

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To my Native friends: Thank you for the discussions, zoom calls, phone conversations, and advice. Thank you for your commitment to the preservation of cultural art, and for trusting me to research and perform your music.

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INTRODUCTION

During my graduate studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, I was honored to serve as the NY Choral Consortium's Diversity-in-Action Intern updating and expanding Dr. Marques Garrett's list, "Beyond Elijah Rock: Non-Idiomatic Music of Black Composers." The project piqued my interest in researching music of historically excluded people groups. This opened the door to a 100-hour research project on underrepresented composers as a Research Fellow with the Institute for Composer Diversity. After completion of this research project, I was asked, "What would you like to research next?" to which I replied, "I have long had a fascination with Native American culture. Perhaps Native American Choral Music?" The response I received was something I'd hear over and over in the coming years, "There is none."

This ignited a spark in me to find Native American music for choir. Yet it seemed the more I searched for examples, the more I instead found people under the impression that Native American choral art does not or *should not* exist. Some fall prey to the belief that Native music needs to be "primitive" to starkly contrast technical Western styles, while others believe that it must be monophonic and unaccompanied to be culturally "correct."[1] Some believe that harmony should not be added to traditional melodies, some are against transcribing Native songs, and others assume that all Indigenous music is sacred and thus off limits for non-tribal people. As a result, finding Indigenous cultural art is no easy task, especially in the realm of choral music.

First, there is not an abundance of recorded history to draw from. The lack of transcriptions and written history makes Native choral music a relatively new concept

[1] Smith, Kelly Lyn, "From Pejuta to Powwow: The Evolution of American Indian Music" (Thesis, The College of William & Mary, 2020).

that varies greatly from composer to composer based on their differing tribes, histories, regions, spiritualities, and experiences. Second, the existing music of Native Americans is largely marginalized in choral circles, as evidenced by the lack of Native representation both in mainstream choral textbooks and on concert stages. Through discussions with Native composers, I was delighted to discover that Indigenous choral music does exist. Furthermore, there are culture-bearers who specifically write for choir and support their art being presented in this form. Additionally, I have found a tremendous appetite in the Western choral community for music that pays homage to the Native ancestors whose heritage we admire and whose land we inhabit.

This document will discuss the historical context and cultural implications of Native American choral music, a topic that has received limited academic attention. It will introduce Native composers who support their art being presented in choral form. This will be the first scholarly work to propose that this choral music exists, is of cultural value, and should be performed.

CHAPTER 1

Ethnic Music as Cultural Art

If we are to explore Native American choral music for the entirety of this document, it seems logical to begin by defining what that is. So then, what is Native American music? Is it any music containing elements the composer claims are Indigenous? If so, the door is open for anyone to write whatever they wish without proving that elements have a confirmed tribal source. Could we define Native American music as any music written by an American Indian? Then, such broad parameters invite the risk of potentially mislabeling music "Indigenous" despite it being written in a completely Western style. Then, is Native American music simply any music written in a traditional Native style? Perhaps, but we would consequently need to define that style. Attempting to create an exhaustive list of elements that make something sound like it is from a certain culture reinforces stereotypes and leads to broad generalizations (e.g., "It has a pentatonic scale and a flute and therefore sounds Native to me"). Stylistic elements vary based on tribe, region, history, and spirituality. Those variations would lead to unmanageably wide parameters. As we pursue our original question, "What is Native American music?" the answer can easily lead to anything one wants if they claim American Indian descent, which in turn leads to race-based art.

Race-based art refers to artistic work created with a primary focus on the racial or ethnic identity of the artist or the subject matter. Race-based art often seeks to explore and express themes related to racial identity, cultural heritage, and the experiences of marginalized communities. However, there are dangers associated with race-based art. One of the main risks is the potential mislabeling or misinterpretation of art, particularly

with music, when the composer's ties to the culture they are representing are not thoroughly vetted.

Race-based art can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes and the perpetuation of harmful narratives about certain racial or ethnic groups. For example, if a composer creates a piece of music inspired by a culture they are not a part of and that music does not accurately represent the inspiring culture's musical traditions, it can result in a distorted and misleading portrayal of that culture.[2] The result is further marginalization of that culture.

Instead of adopting a race-based approach to art, a more constructive method is to explore how racial identity and cultural identity are connected and how one's experiences inform their art. Cultural identity is shaped through self-perception of shared experiences rather than being an innate, physical trait and it goes beyond one's direct racial profile. By focusing on individual experiences and perspectives of artists, rather than categorizing them based on race or ethnicity, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of cultural expression.

Instead of attempting to define Native American music, perhaps a better option is to adopt the term, “cultural art.” Such a change in focus highlights the blending of art, culture, and identity. Cultural accuracy becomes the supreme concern, and attention turns to how closely composers are tied to their communities and how to verify it. I define cultural art as, “Music, dance, literature, theatre, visual art, or ceremony created by someone affiliated with a community about that community.” Cultural art holds the

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[2] Davids, Brent Michael, “Cultural Appropriation in Classical Music?,” New Music USA, November 21, 2019, https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/cultural-appropriation-in-classical-music/.

power to express cultural identity and reflect tradition. It also plays a role in teaching history and fostering community. Any composer who has valid connections to their tribe can write music that is considered cultural art.[3] It is then up to conductors, performers, and academics to investigate and evaluate traceable source materials, ties to communities, and overall music quality. If original sources are impossible to verify, the researcher must look closely at the culture-bearers' ties to customs and understanding of musical style and language. In some cases, researchers choose whether or not to trust a composer's representation of their cultural group based on their other works and experiences, rather than tangible evidence of authenticity. Researching and performing cultural art is no simple task: it requires investigation of the artist, the art itself, and the broader cultural context.

Within the body of existing choral works, many pieces written by non-Natives claim to be Native-inspired. Unless traceable source materials corroborate the authenticity of such works, they are not considered works of cultural art.[4] Though an internet search for Indigenous choral pieces may yield many results, the music found is often written in a Western style, does not cite verifiable sources, or is not written by Natives. Programming such pieces runs the risk of spreading misrepresentations of Native cultures, undermining efforts to promote authentic Indigenous voices in the arts.

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[3] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum, "PUREART: 7-Step Guide Programming & Performing Cultural Art with Confidence," 2023, https://www.linthicumblackhorse.com/mosaic.

[4] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum, "Cultural Appropriation and How to Recognize It," 2022, https://www.linthicumblackhorse.com/mosaic.

Challenging Ethnocentric Perspectives on Music

Although music is often heralded as a "universal language" that transcends culture and language, this is not necessarily true. While it is true that music is a universal phenomenon present in all societies, it is relative, meaning, we can experience it together but do not interpret it the same way.[5] This is because the meaning we attach to sounds is culturally informed, shaped by our upbringing, beliefs, and experiences. This cultural variability in the interpretation of music makes it difficult to establish a universal understanding of it.[6]

As we explore the idea of music as a cultural phenomenon, it becomes evident that evaluating other cultures based on our own can be dangerous. Such evaluations often stem from ethnocentrism, the belief in the superiority of one's own culture, and can lead to misinterpretations and misunderstandings.[7] Instead, it is crucial to approach the study of music from diverse cultures with a mindset of cultural relativism, acknowledging that each culture has its own unique values, beliefs, and practices that shape its music and its interpretation. This perspective allows for a more nuanced and respectful understanding of music's role in different cultures.

One good way to sidestep evaluating other cultures according to the standards of our own is to engage in fieldwork with the culture in question. Through fieldwork, one can understand how a people group conceives of, produces, and consumes music by

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[5] Fessenden, Marissa, "Why Music Is Not a Universal Language," Smithsonian (Smithsonian.com, February 26, 2018), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-music-not-universal-language-180968245/.

[6] Lavoie, Gab, "Music Is NOT the Universal Language!! | Social Theory Analysis," www.youtube.com, October 9, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mt2ebVEhfU.

[7] Rockwell, Elizabeth, "Ethnomusicology, Ethnocentrism, and the Other" (Master's Thesis, West Virginia University, 2021).

spending time with them in daily life and social activity. Fieldwork prioritizes the process of music rather than the product. Music is not an object, an end goal, or an arrival point.[8] This approach encourages an ethnographic perspective, which seeks to understand cultural practices from the perspective of those within the culture, rather than imposing external standards or judgments. Through fieldwork, researchers can gain a more holistic and respectful understanding of music in different cultures, avoiding the pitfalls of ethnocentrism.

The perspectives on music in various cultures often differ from Western viewpoints. One such difference is the significance music plays in everyday life. Music is not just a part of Indigenous culture; it is their culture. In American Indian tribes, music is seen as more than entertainment; it is the embodiment of emotion, a medium for storytelling, a form of prayer, and a means of communication with ancestors.[9] In many tribes, drums represent the heartbeat of Mother Earth. Their use in Indigenous music is central to bringing communities together, honoring ancestors and Elders, and passing down songs and stories to younger generations. Similarly, the flute holds great cultural significance, sometimes signifying the wind, often used for healing, and meditation.[10]

Additionally, in contrast to Western societies, where music often serves as a "thing" that is consumed, in Indigenous communities, music is not perceived as a fixed noun but as a living, breathing entity. American Indian tribes often conceptualize music

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[8] Rice, Timothy, "A Little Bit of History," in *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 16–26.

[9] Conteno, Jeanette, "Indigenous Music: The Heartbeat of Culture and Influence in Modern Music," PowWows.com, October 25, 2023, https://www.powwows.com/indigenous-music-the-heartbeat-of-culture-and-influence-in-modern-music/.

[10] "The Importance of the Native American Flute," www.indians.org, n.d., https://www.indians.org/articles/native-american-flute.html.

as a form of creation rather than replication.[11] Rather than aiming to recreate a piece of music exactly as it was performed previously, many tribes believe that each musical rendition is a unique re-birth.

Mohican composer Brent Michael Davids explains, “Indigenous cultures see music like giving birth so that each new song event is a new creation. The song being sung might be a time-honored song, but when performed it is newly reborn; it is not considered the same song.”[12] This perspective emphasizes the living nature of music, where each performance revitalizes the song, making it a unique and fresh experience, distinct from previous renditions. In contrast, Western perspectives on music often emphasize fidelity to notated scores, prioritizing the reproduction of a piece exactly as written.

In conclusion, to avoid viewing music from cultures other than our own through an inherently ethnocentric lens, it is essential to engage directly with culture-bearers, ask questions, and study diverse points of view. This approach allows us to move beyond our preconceived notions and biases, fostering a respectful appreciation of music and culture. The goal is not to completely change our cultural lens but to increase understanding of someone else’s. It is important to recognize that this is a lifelong process that requires dedication, time, and study.

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[11] Davids, Brent Michael. “Cultural Appropriation in Classical Music,” NEWMUSICUSA.

[12] Ibid.

A Case for Native American Choral Music

Before we delve into the lack of recorded Native American history, the reasons for the underrepresentation of their music, missteps in early preservation efforts, effective ethnomusicological research methods, and effective approaches to analyzing this music, perhaps we should address a fundamental question so many have asked me: "Does Native American choral music even exist?" Unlike Western traditions, Native Americans did not organize themselves into choirs or perform in the traditional Western sense. This raises the question of whether it is appropriate or even possible to adapt Native American music, particularly vocal music, into a choral format.

A common concern is whether traditional (i.e. pre-colonial) Native tunes *should* be arranged for modern choirs, and if such processes weaken cultural authenticity. It is important to remember that artistic expressions often take on new forms as they are shared with broader audiences. I have been told by some that because tribes did not originally organize themselves into choirs, other musicians have no right to do so either. This focus on the presentation of art runs the risk of detracting focus from the art itself.

Many artistic expressions take on different forms as they are shared with others. For example, blues music, originating from African American communities of the deep south, has transformed in style and interpretation as it has spread globally, appearing in virtually every genre and form imaginable.[13] Irish folk music has also arranged for various ensembles and contexts over the years while retaining its cultural essence.[14]

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[13] "Blues Music History: The Influence of Blues Music from the 1920's to 2000's - Blues Chronicles.com," Blues Chronicles, July 9, 2023, https://blueschronicles.com/blues-music-history-the-influence-of-blues-music-from-the-1920s-to-2000s/.

[14] Sameh, Eman,"The Global Influence of Irish Folk Music - ConnollyCove," ConnollyCove, March 12, 2024, https://www.connollycove.com/irish-folk-music/.

Another example is spirituals, which were originally sung by enslaved African Americans as a form of expression and communication.[15] These songs were not initially intended as choral arrangements but have been adapted into choral settings that retain their cultural significance and are often performed by choirs around the world.

When we criticize the means through which art is expressed, we sometimes overlook that musical forms are vehicles to express culture, they are not culture itself. So yes, Native American choral music does exist, as much as Irish choral music, African American spiritual arrangements, or Blues choral music exist. Choral settings of Indigenous songs do not replace the authenticity of cultural art but are rather a tool used to express it.

Despite efforts that have been made to collect, notate, and share cultural art, Native music is still marginalized in choral circles. Out of the twenty-plus choral conducting resources on my shelf, only one mentions a Native American composer. Many of the pieces found through a Google search for Indigenous choral music lack identifiable sources, are not authored by Natives, or are composed in a Western style, thus not considered authentic cultural art.[16] The scarcity of authentic Native American pieces is attributed to challenges in preservation and notation, and reluctance among some tribal members to share their cultural music with non-Natives.[17] Some believe that since this music was passed down to them orally, it should only be shared that way with

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[15] Curtis, Martin V. and Lee V. Cloud, "The African-American Spiritual: Traditions and Performance Practices," *The Choral Journal* 32, no. 4 (1991), https://www.jstor.org/stable/23548375.

[16] "Singers.com - Native American Choral Sheet Music Arrangements," www.singers.com, accessed March 27, 2024, https://www.singers.com/sheet-music/native-american/.

[17] Densmore, Frances. *The American Indians and Their Music,* (AmazonClassics. 2022), 107.

others. Those who share this point of view oppose the notation efforts of their cultural music.[18] This concern often stems from a desire to preserve the integrity of Indigenous cultures and their artistic practices.

Choral arrangements of Indigenous songs can serve as expressions of cultural art; they need not replace cultural authenticity. They function as vehicles for cultural expression, illustrating that culture is a shared and continually evolving creation that goes beyond individual ownership. I have discovered that incorporating Native American music in choral settings serves as a gateway for non-Indigenous people to learn about and enjoy Indigenous history and traditions. This approach resonates with my educational and artistic objectives for my ensembles.

The Harmonization of Traditional Melodies

Some musicians believe that adding harmony to traditional melodies can detract from their authenticity and cultural significance. They posit that harmony dilutes the original melody, making it less recognizable or distinctively ethnic.[19] They also point out the risk that adding harmony can lead to cultural appropriation, where the original meaning or context of the melody is lost or misrepresented in the process of harmonization.[20]

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[18] Bobadilla, Michelle McCauley, "Classical music educators are often overconfident in written music notation." Facebook, Accessed February 25, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/michelle.mccauley1

[19] Povel, Dirk-Jan and Erik Jansen, "Harmonic Factors in the Perception of Tonal Melodies," *Music Perception* 20, no. 1 (2002): 51–85, https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2002.20.1.51.

[20] Townsend, Bryan, "Non-Western Harmony," *Non-Western Harmony* (blog), November 6, 2011, https://themusicsalon.blogspot.com/2011/11/non-western-harmony.html.

While some argue that harmonizing traditional melodies can dilute their authenticity and cultural significance, others, like musicologist and historian Charles Burney (1726-1824), contend that harmony is an intrinsic component of music, similar to light and heat in nature. He says, “Harmony seems a part of nature as much as light or heat, and to number any one of them among human inventions would be equally absurd.”[21] Burney's perspective suggests that harmony is not a human invention but a fundamental aspect of the natural world, present in all sounding things. He goes on to write that because harmony is a scientific proportion present in every aspect of nature, it should not be viewed as a human addition but rather a natural outgrowth of any sounding thing. This implies that adding harmony to traditional melodies is a natural evolution rather than a distortion of the original music. Furthermore, when approached with sensitivity and understanding, harmonization can be done in a way that respects and preserves the cultural integrity of the music, especially when the composer engaging in harmonization is a culture-bearer.

The entire debate around adding harmony to Indigenous music might be irrelevant because there is growing evidence to suggest that Natives sang in harmony, and some even transcribed their melodies with harmony. This position is strengthened by the recent discovery of Omaha Native Francis La Flesche’s transcription of a children’s song in 1894 (see figure 1).

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[21] Burney, Charles. (2010). *A General History Of Music, volume 1,* 1789 ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 164.

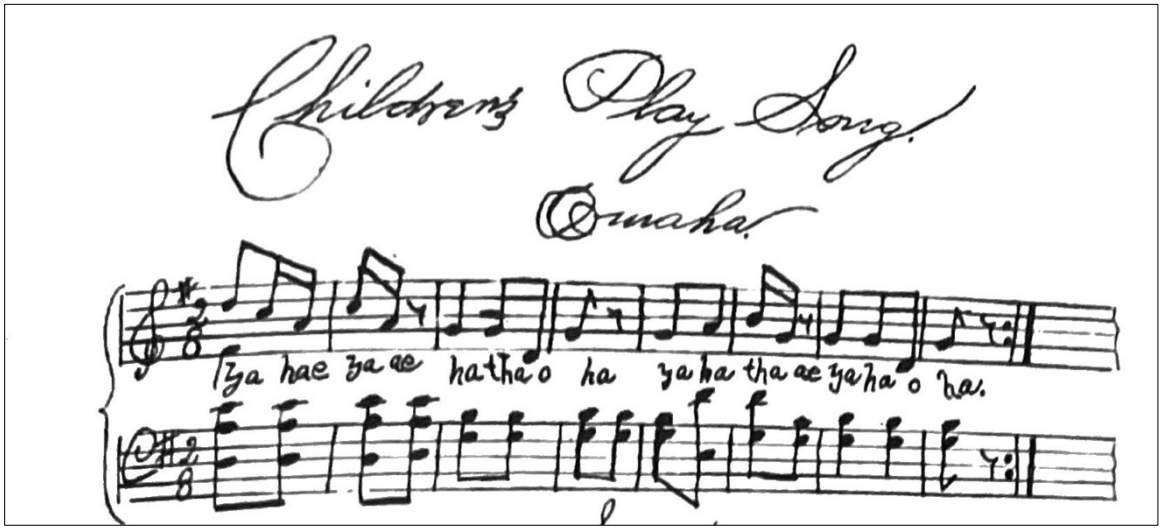

Figure 1, La Flesche, Francis. *Children's Play Song.*1894. In Fannie Reed Griffen *Oo-Mah-Ha Ta-Wa-Tha,* 69, Zea Books, Lincoln: NE, 2022.

La Flesche is believed to be the first Native American to transcribe a traditional song, and interestingly, he did it with harmony.[22] The song was written down in a letter to his daughter, indicating that it was a personal and intimate gesture rather than a formal publication. This adds a layer of authenticity to the work, as it was not intended for public consumption but rather as a way to preserve and share cultural heritage within his family. This challenges assumptions about the absence of harmony in Native music and suggests that harmonization may not be an imposition but rather a continuation of established practices. The discovery of La Flesche's transcription has the potential to revolutionize the way Native American choral literature is viewed. The fact that the very first Native transcription was written with harmony challenges preconceived notions about the simplistic nature of Native American music and the "proper" treatment of traditional melodies. The La Flesche transcription gives veracity to Native melodies' place in the broader canon of choral music.

[22] Fannie Reed Giffen, *Oo-Mah-Ha Ta-Wa-Tha*. 69. Zea Books, Lincoln: NE, 2022.

One of the main advantages of adding harmony to traditional melodies is the potential to enrich the musical experience. Harmony can add depth, texture, and complexity to a melody, enhancing its emotional impact and creating a more dynamic and engaging listening experience. Additionally, harmony can provide a means of musical expression that allows for greater creativity and experimentation, enabling musicians to explore new musical ideas. Ultimately, the decision to add harmony to traditional melodies should be made with careful consideration and respect for the cultural origins and significance of the music in question.

Having established the existence and value of Native American choral music, as well as the legitimacy of harmonizing native melodies without compromising authenticity, we now shift focus to examining its historical exclusion and underrepresentation. We will discuss how such a large cultural body of work has been excluded from the vocal (specifically choral) canon. We will also explore the reasons behind its limited recognition and dissemination.

History of Written Language in the Western World

One of the challenges of finding the cultural art of the First Peoples is the limited amount of recorded history that exists. Since the arrival of the Paleo-Indian people to North America (via the traditionally theorized land bridge in about 12,000 BCE), tribes passed their culture to their descendants via storytelling and aural communication.[23] This aural tradition remains prevalent among Native American tribes, contributing to the limited recorded history of these peoples compared to other civilizations.

In contrast, the development of written language in the Western world began in the Stone Age, with pictorial representations used to convey meaning. Some of the oldest known forms of writing are associated with cuneiform script, characterized by shaped characters pressed into clay tablets. This script was used by languages such as Sumerian and Akkadian, dating back over 4,600 years.[24] Examples of early written language include cave paintings found in various locations throughout modern-day France, dating back to around 17,000 BCE.[25]

During the Bronze Age, several civilizations began developing more sophisticated forms of written language. In Mesopotamia, the Sumerians refined cuneiform script around 3200 BCE, which used wedge-shaped characters to represent words and syllables. Similarly, in Egypt, hieroglyphic writing emerged around 3100 BCE, featuring intricate

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[23] *Encyclopedia Britannica,* s.v. "American Indian," accessed April 4, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian

[24] The Editors. "The World's Oldest Writing - Archaeology Magazine," Archaeology.org, 2016, https://www.archaeology.org/issues/213-1605/features/4326-cuneiform-the-world-s-oldest-writing.

[25] Tu, Lucy, "What's the World's Oldest Language?," Scientific American, August 24, 2023, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/whats-the-worlds-oldest-language1/.

symbols that represented objects, ideas, and sounds.[26] The evolution of written language developed across various cultures through the Iron Age and literacy especially increased in Europe in the fifteenth century with the invention of the printing press.

The limited recorded history of Native American tribes can be attributed to their isolation from the Western world, which hindered the development of advanced writing systems. Without exposure to the written language of other civilizations, Native American tribes did not develop similar systems of writing. Contact and interaction with other cultures play a crucial role in the development and preservation of language and historical records. The lack thereof led to the limited recorded history of Native American cultures that exists today. [27] Cultural isolation had a profound impact on the linguistic development of Indigenous tribes.

The Impact of European Settlement on Indigenous Languages

The loss of Indigenous cultures and Native American languages in America is significant with efforts ongoing to measure its extent. Gregory Anderson, President of Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, told National Geographic in 2009 that Oregon currently has five language families, most with just a few speakers each. Two hundred years ago, Oregon had 14 language families, which is more than all of Europe has combined.[28] Upon Columbus' arrival to the Americas, scholars estimate that there were over 15 million speakers of 2,000 indigenous languages across the Western

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[26] Brunner, Hellmut and Peter F Dorman, "Hieroglyphic Writing," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 21, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/hieroglyphic-writing.

[27] Niles, Judith. *Native American History* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 15.

[28] Koyfman, Steph, "What Was and What Is: Native American Languages in the United States," June 8, 2023, https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/native-american-languages-in-the-us.

Hemisphere. Currently, there are approximately 175 Indigenous languages still spoken in the United States, and without restoration efforts, it is estimated that only around 20 languages may survive by the year 2050.[29] European settlement, marked by disease, warfare, and forced assimilation, has been devastating to Native American languages, leading to the extinction of many languages and the marginalization of those that remain. Despite these challenges, efforts to reclaim and preserve Native American languages have been ongoing since the Civil Rights era.

Forced displacement, cultural blending, boarding school assimilation practices, wars, famine, and persecution all contribute to the lack of First Peoples' written language that we see today. Several tribal relocations occurred in the 1800s, the largest being the Trail of Tears which happened between 1830 and 1850. Throughout the removal process, some tribes took in others, resulting in cultural mingling. As a result, languages blended together. Other tribes were persuaded to reject their customs and instead adopt those of the settlers.

Some Elders hesitated to pass their language on to younger tribe members due to persecution. Others, fearing that oral traditions would be completely lost in the age of modern literacy, hesitated to record their histories, sacred songs, and ceremonial information in interviews.[30] However, during the revitalization projects of the 1960s and 1970s, many eventually agreed that documenting their oral language might be the only way to help develop written language for future generations.

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[29] Koyfman, Steph, "What Was and What Is: Native American Languages in the United States."

[30] Wheeler, Winona, "Cree Intellectual Traditions in History," in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region* (Athabasca University Press, 2010), 47–61.

Indigenous languages were intentionally supplanted by settlers and the American government for almost a century, especially in assimilation boarding schools where the motto was, "Kill the Indian; Save the Man."[31] Natives suffered severe persecution for speaking their languages until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 which granted them legal protection to freely use their languages in public. Persecution and forced assimilation are contributing factors to the lack of written and spoken language of American Indian tribes. This has led to the lack of written history we observe today.

Overall, the lack of a written language among many Native American tribes is a complex issue. It is not attributable to any single cause but rather to a combination of historical, spiritual, and social factors. These factors include colonization, forced displacement, and deliberate suppression.

Misconceptions Surrounding Early Translation Work

Many people mistakenly assume that numerous Native American tribes had written languages as far back as the seventeenth century because of Native "translations" of books created by settlers. Efforts such as John Eliot's translation of the English Bible into Massachusett and Algonquin in 1663 have fueled these misconceptions. The Massachusett and Algonquin did not have written languages, dictionaries, or syllabaries at the time of Eliot's work. Eliot essentially created English transliterations, (written representations of something in a foreign tongue in one's native tongue), by writing down

[31] Browner, Tara, *Music of the First Nations: Tradition and Innovation in Native North America (Music in American Life),* (University of Illinois Press, 2022), 1-2.

sounds he perceived and circulating them in pidgin form to various tribes.[32] Although significant and commendable, this process did not lead to the development of written language for either tribe, nor did it constitute genuine translation work.

Similar instances of impermanent translation work can be found with other Native tribes, such as the work of French Jesuit missionaries with the Huron-Wendat people in the early 17th century that resulted in an orthography written in Latin script. However, the spoken language died in 1972 with the passing of the last Native speaker, and the written language has been facing revitalization attempts ever since.[33] Instances like the John Eliot and Jesuit missionary translations contribute to misconceptions about Native language work, as they did not lead to the development of lasting written languages for these tribes.

A comprehensive examination of language preservation, (or lack thereof), across hundreds of Native American tribes would require extensive scholarly treatment. Therefore, for this discussion, we will focus on the language preservation efforts of the tribes associated with the choral composers highlighted in this paper: the Cherokee, Cree, Chickasaw, and Lakȟóta tribes. Because of the diverse histories of the hundreds of Native American tribes, the extent to which their languages have been preserved varies. It is important to recognize the history of the other languages not addressed in this paper, highlighting the need for further research and documentation of the linguistic heritage of other tribes.

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[32] Strong, Robert, "You Speak Arrows (Toward the Translation of America, 1630-1676)", *Modern Language Studies* 45, no. 1 (2015), https://www.jstor.org/stable/24616768.

[33] Steckley, John, *Words of the Huron* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 1–22.

The Cherokee Syllabary

The Cherokee tribe is the first to have developed a fully written language. Tribal leader Sequoyah famously began developing a Cherokee syllabary after he observed European Americans writing letters to one another in the 1810s.[34] The Cherokee language is polysynthetic, which means that it forms words by combining small linguistic units ("morphemes"), each representing a distinct meaning, into a single word. Sequoyah was inspired to construct a syllabary of eighty-five syllabic sounds, which led to the creation of the Cherokee alphabet. Because the syllabary was written by a Cherokee native speaker for the Cherokee people, the notation system was easy for them to learn quickly. The Cherokee National Council formally accepted the syllabary and began printing their newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix,* in 1828.[35] Song quickly followed, and in 1829 a Cherokee hymnal was published that contained Cherokee words to Christian hymns.[36] For many years before Indian removal, the Cherokee lived alongside English and Scottish missionaries. As a result, Christian hymns were and still are a significant piece of Cherokee culture.

Sequoyah's work with the Cherokee language was significantly disrupted by the "Trail of Tears," which refers to the forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation from their ancestral lands in the southeastern United States to present-day Oklahoma from the 1830s to the 1850s. This traumatic event, driven by the Indian Removal Act of 1830, resulted in

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[34] Chrisomalis, Stephen, "Sequoyah and the Almost-Forgotten History of Cherokee Numerals," The MIT Press Reader, March 18, 2021, https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/sequoyah-and-the-almost-forgotten-history-of-cherokee-numerals/.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Mullins, Jonita, "Cherokee Hymn Book Reflected Love of Music," Muskogee Phoenix, April 19, 2015, https://www.muskogeephoenix.com/news/cherokee-hymn-book-reflected-love-of-music/article_6cb39d77-7668-5a82-840f-988b2ff23624.html.

the displacement of thousands of Cherokee people and had profound impacts on their culture, including language work. Since the Cherokee people were focused on survival and adapting to their new environment in Oklahoma, it was difficult to prioritize language preservation efforts.

Despite these challenges, the Cherokee Nation persisted in preserving their language and culture. Today, the Cherokee syllabary remains in use, and efforts continue to revitalize and promote the Cherokee language among tribal members. The legacy of Sequoyah's work endures as a testament to the resilience and determination of the Cherokee people to preserve their language and cultural heritage. The written Cherokee language spread quickly and accurately as a result of Sequoyah's work and is still used today.

While the Cherokee tribe was the first to develop a written language, many tribes still do not have one. The reasons are multifaceted. One significant factor is the diversity of Native American languages. When settlers arrived in North America, they encountered over 500 distinct tribes, each with unique language and cultural practices. Understanding the wide variation among Indigenous languages can be challenging for modern researchers who tend to generalize tribal traits. In his language studies, Cherokee composer Ron Warren has discovered that some native languages are more different from each other than Mandarin is from English.[37] Some tribes did have forms of symbolic or pictorial communication before European settlement, but they were not standardized writing systems like the Cherokee syllabary.

[37] Warren, Ron, Personal conversation, September 23, 2022.

Additionally, the development of a written language requires a combination of factors, including the existence of a formal education system, access to writing materials, and a perceived need or desire to preserve the language in written form. The Cherokee had a strong oral tradition and a complex social and political structure that likely contributed to the adoption of a written language. Many other tribes did not.

Cree Syllabics ᓀᐦᐃᔨᐣᐃᐧᐃᐣ[38]

Shortly after the Cherokee, the Cree tribe also developed a written language. In contrast to the Cherokee syllabary which is phonetically conceived, Cree writing originated as a pictographic system. Plains Cree, similar to other Algonquian languages, is characterized by its polysynthetic nature, featuring intricate derivational and inflectional morphology. Over time, the shaped syllabics developed into Latin scripted consonant/vowel pairs which allowed for the same basic characters to represent similar sounds across different dialects, even if pronunciation varied slightly. This adaptability made the writing system more accessible to a wider range of Cree speakers, regardless of their specific dialect, and helped standardize the written form of the language across different communities.

The development of the Cree syllabary has been long attributed to Wesleyan Methodist missionary James Evans in 1840.[39] Evans is said to have created a syllabary that could accurately represent Cree sounds using the existing pictural shape system.

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[38] "Cree Syllabics," www.omniglot.com (Online Encyclopedia of Writing Systems & Languages , March 16, 2023), https://www.omniglot.com/writing/cree.htm.

[39] Strong, Walter, "The Contested Origins of the Cree Syllabics," Newsinteractives.cbc.ca (www.cbc.ca, June 2, 2020), https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/a-question-of-legacy-cree-writing-and-the-origin-of-the-syllabics/.

Each sign in the Cree syllabary was written facing four different directions, indicating the attached vowel, and diacritics were used to indicate additional vowels. Evans used the Cree syllabary to print a Cree hymnal and other Christian materials in 1841. However, while it is confirmed that Evans created the typeset to print the hymnal, there is no proof that he created the syllabary itself.[40]

Others credit the Cree syllabary to Calling Badger, a Wood Cree from Saskatchewan, and claim that it was already in use before the arrival of Christian missionary James Evans in 1840.[41] According to the legend, Calling Badger received a divine vision in which he was shown the symbols of the syllabary and their meanings. He then shared this knowledge with his people, thereby gifting them with a written form of their language.

The Calling Badger legend was recounted by old Chief Fine Day of the Sweetgrass First Nation in the 1930s. The story goes that long before Evans came along, Calling Badger was on his way to a sacred society meeting one evening when he and two singers encountered a bright light, causing them to fall to the ground. From this light, a voice called out to Calling Badger by name. Shortly after this encounter, Calling Badger fell ill and was believed to have passed away. During his wake, however, his body remained flexible, contrary to the stiffness of a deceased person's body. Against tradition, the people agreed to the widow's request to let the body sit one more night. The following day, Calling Badger's body was still flexible, and as the old people began rubbing his

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[40] Strong, Walter, "The Contested Origins of the Cree Syllabics," Newsinteractives.cbc.ca (www.cbc.ca, June 2, 2020), https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/a-question-of-legacy-cree-writing-and-the-origin-of-the-syllabics/.

[41] Ibid.

back and chest, his eyes opened. He recounted his journey to the Fourth World, the spirit world, where he was taught many things. Calling Badger revealed symbols on birch bark that were to be used for writing down the spirit languages and for the Cree people to communicate among themselves.[42]

This legend explains the origins of the Cree syllabary as a gift from the spirit world passed on to Calling Badger to benefit his people. The Calling Badger legend highlights the deep connection between language, spirituality, and identity in Indigenous cultures. It also challenges the notion of Indigenous peoples as passive recipients of European influence.

Indigenous linguist Chris Harvey suggests that the creation of Cree syllabics likely involved collaboration between Indigenous Cree-speaking people and English missionaries, particularly James Evans, at Norway House. The unique symbols of Cree syllabics may have been influenced by shorthand writing systems of the time but were adapted to suit the needs of the Cree language. Harvey emphasizes the importance of recognizing the collaborative nature of the creation of Cree syllabics, highlighting it as a beautifully ethnic story of different nations coming together to create something innovative.[43]

Regardless of how the written language came about, the Cree syllabary had a profound impact on its tribes. Before the introduction of written Cree, education and knowledge transmission were primarily oral. With the introduction of the written

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[42] Stevenson, Winona, "Calling Badger and the Symbols of the Spirit Language: The Cree Origins of the Syllabic System," *Oral History Forum/Forum d'Histoire Orale*, 20–24, accessed March 29, 2024, https://www.academia.edu/7869561/Calling_Badger_and_the_Symbols_of_the_Spirit_Language_The_Cree_Origins_of_the_Syllabic_System.

[43] Strong, Walter, "The Contested Origins of the Cree Syllabics," Newsinteractives.cbc.ca

language, Cree people were able to document their stories, histories, and cultural practices, preserving them for future generations. The written language also played a key role in fostering literacy and education among the Cree because it allowed for the creation of textbooks and educational materials in Cree.

By the early twentieth century, an amalgamation of Cree, French, and English was spoken by many members of the community. This blend of languages, known as *Mechif,* became the dominant language in Cree communities, and everyone was expected to speak or learn it. Similar to modern challenges in language, new words for objects introduced through colonization had to be created, often borrowing from French or English.[44] This linguistic fusion is considered the creation of a new Indigenous nation, known as the Metis Nation.

The Cree language is characterized by its diversity, with various dialects spoken across different regions of Canada, including Western/Plains Cree, Northern/Woodlands Cree, Central/Swampy Cree, Moose Cree, and Eastern Cree. While some types of Cree are mutually intelligible, others are more distinct and difficult to understand between regions. The imposition of English-only schooling had a significant impact on Cree-speaking children. For example, in the early twentieth century, Cree children were pressured to speak only English in schools, leading to a suppression of their language and a sense of shame associated with speaking Cree in public settings.[45]

Despite the absence of written records prior to contact with European settlers, the Cherokee and Cree writing systems played pivotal roles in preserving culture. Both were

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[44] Iseke-Barnes, Judy M., "Politics and Power of Languages: Indigenous Resistance to Colonizing Experiences of Language Dominance," *Journal of Thought* 39, no. 1 (2016): 51–55.

[45] Ibid.

developed to represent Indigenous languages, with the Cherokee syllabary created by Sequoyah in the early nineteenth century and Cree syllabics evolving from a pictographic system. One key difference is their underlying principles: the Cherokee syllabary was conceived phonetically, while Cree syllabics pictorially represent consonant/vowel pairs. Additionally, the Cherokee system has a fixed set of characters for specific syllables, whereas Cree syllabics can be modified or extended to accommodate variations in pronunciation across different dialects. Both writing systems have been crucial for preserving and promoting their respective languages.

The Chickasaw Language *(Chikashshanompa')*

The Chickasaw tribe, like many others, has a rich history of oral tradition, but a much shorter history of written language. The Chickasaw language–*Chikashshanompa'* – was the primary language of the Chickasaw people for many centuries and is part of the Muskogean language family. The Muskogean tribes are a linguistic grouping of Indigenous peoples in the southeastern United States, primarily in areas now encompassing Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Mississippi. These tribes are grouped based on similarities in vernacular, and all of their languages are part of the Muskogean family. The Muskogean language family includes six languages that are currently spoken: Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee, Koasati, Mikasuki, and Alabama. Also formerly part of the Muskogean family are the extinct Apalachee, Houma, and Hitchiti tribal languages.[46]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American ethnologist John R. Swanton led efforts to document and preserve Muskogean languages, including

[46] Scancarelli, Janine, and Heather Kay Hardy, *Native Languages of the Southeastern United States* (U of Nebraska Press, 2005), 69–71.

Chickasaw. Swanton conducted extensive studies on the Muskogean tribes, focusing on their languages, politics, and social structures. In his writings, Swanton emphasized the importance of language as a key element in cultural transmission and preservation among Indigenous tribes. He believed that language served as the primary medium through which cultural traits were borrowed and perpetuated.[47]

Chickasaw is an agglutinative language, meaning it forms words by adding prefixes, suffixes, and infixes to a root word. In agglutinative languages, root words and morphemes remain unchanged. This allows for the creation of complex words by adding multiple morphemes together.[48] This characteristic allows for the creation of complex words with layers of meaning. In Chickasaw, these affixes are added to a base word to convey various grammatical and semantic information, such as tense, aspect, mood, and possession. The Chickasaw language has been written down and uses a Latin script writing system with 16 consonants and 9 vowels.[49]

The first Chickasaw dictionary was published in 1973 by Reverend Jesse Humes and his wife Vinnie. It was commissioned by former Chickasaw governor Overton James who was passionate about restoring the cultural independence of the Chickasaw people. Both Vinnie May and Jesse were Chickasaw citizens and Native speakers who had learned English as a second language during their childhood. Their deep understanding of both Chickasaw and English allowed them to create a dictionary that catered to the needs

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[47] Swanton, John Reed, United States. Congress House, and Jay I Kislak, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 1946).

[48] Foster, Niki, "What Is Chickasaw?," Language Humanities, January 31, 2024, https://www.languagehumanities.org/what-is-chickasaw.htm.

[49] Ibid.

of English speakers seeking to learn Chickasaw. They based their dictionary on Webster's Dictionary, adapting and translating English words and concepts into Chickasaw equivalents.[50] Although Jesse passed away just as the first draft was completed, Vinnie May persevered, completing the project in memory of her husband. This pioneering work, titled "A Chickasaw Dictionary," was published in 1973, marking a significant milestone in the revitalization of the Chickasaw language.[51]

The second Chickasaw dictionary was published in 1994 by linguist Pam Munro and Chickasaw speaker Catherine Willmond. It has over five hundred pages of Chickasaw-to-English and English-to-Chickasaw translations. In addition to its extensive word translations, the dictionary includes a preface that provides historical context, as well as an explanation of the fundamental structure of Chickasaw words.[52]

The current state of *Chikashshanompa'* mirrors that of many other indigenous languages in the United States. Less than twenty languages spoken by tribes in the U.S. are expected to survive the next century. In 1994, there were fewer than 1,000 fluent speakers of *Chikashshanompa'.* Today, there are fewer than seventy-five speakers, with the majority being over the age of fifty-five.[53] Recognizing the value of their language, the Chickasaw Nation has implemented various programs and services to revitalize it,

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[50] "Language | Chickasaw Nation," chickasaw.net, accessed March 29, 2024, https://chickasaw.net/Our-Nation/Culture/Language.aspx#:~:text=The%20Chickasaw%20language%20is%20an%20oral%20one%2C%20meaning..

[51] Humes, Jesse, and Vinnie May, *A Chickasaw Dictionary* (Ada, Oklahoma: Chickasaw Nation, 1973).

[52] Munro, Pamela and Catherine Willmond, *Chickasaw, an Analytical Dictionary: Chikashshanompaat Lisso Toba'chi* (Norman, Oklahoma : University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

[53] "Language | Chickasaw Nation," chickasaw.net.

including community language classes, camps, clubs, and digital learning resources like the Chickasaw Language Basics app.

Comparing the three languages discussed so far, the Cherokee syllabary is unique in its direct representation of spoken syllables, providing a precise and efficient way to write the language. The Cree language, based on pictural representations of speech, offers more flexibility to accommodate dialectal variations. The Latin-based alphabetic Chickasaw writing system, while different from syllabaries, has enabled the formalization and preservation of the Chickasaw language in a script familiar to many.

The Lakȟóta Language (*Lakȟótiyapi)*

The Lakȟóta people are among the Native American tribes commonly grouped under the umbrella term "Sioux," The term "Sioux Nation" is a misnomer that originated from seventeenth-century French trappers and missionaries who adopted the last syllable of the Ojibwe term *nadowessioux*, which meant "snake-lesser."[54] This name was derived from the Ojibwe term for their major enemy, the Iroquois, whom they called *nadowewok*, meaning "snake."[55] However, the Lakȟóta people refer to themselves as Oceti Sakowin, meaning "The Seven Council Fires," which comprises seven tribal divisions speaking three distinct dialects: Dakota, Nakata, and Lakȟóta.[56] These divisions include tribes like

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[54] Native American History, "Sioux Tribes History | Lakȟóta Dakota Nakota | Native American Documentary," *YouTube*, July 19, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCHZTn5Bk3o.

[55] "Sioux Is Not Even a Word - Lakȟóta Times," Lakȟóta Times -, March 12, 2009, https://www.Lakȟótatimes.com/articles/sioux-is-not-even-a-word/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CNadowessi%E2%80%9D%20means%20little%20serpent%3B%20%E2%80%9CNadowessioux%E2%80%9D%20means%20two%20little.

[56] Knudson, Nicolette, Jody Snow, and Clifford Canku, *Beginning Dakota:Tokaheya Dakota Iapi Kin: 24 Language and Grammar Lessons with Glossaries* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2011).

Mdewakantun, Wahpetun, Wahpekute, Sisitun (Dakota), Ihanktunwan, Ihanktunwani (Nakata), and Titunwan (Lakȟóta). The term "Sioux" is a pluralization of the French language, which pluralized the Ojibwe word *nadowessioux* and later shortened it to *Sioux*.[57]

The Lakȟóta people were originally located in the Great Lakes region of the United States. They began their westward migration around the seventeenth century, eventually settling in the Great Plains region. They managed to avoid significant European contact and removal until the early nineteenth century, maintaining their nomadic way of life on the Plains.[58] They were eventually placed on reservations in isolated regions in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and Nebraska, as well as several reserves in Canada. Today, the Lakȟóta language, (*Lakȟótiyapi),* can be heard beyond the Plains region, as many Lakȟóta people have settled in major cities across the country.

Lakȟótiyapi, initially spoken only, began its transition to a written form Sioux tribal groups encountered missionaries and anthropologists in the nineteenth century. In 1834, Episcopal missionaries Samuel W Pond, Gideon H. Pond, Stephen R. Riggs, and Dr. Thomas S. Williamson devised a Dakota alphabet.[59] This system was later adapted for the Lakȟóta dialect by Jesuit Reverend Eugene Buechel, and further refined by ethnomusicologists Franz Boas and Ella Deloria. Missionaries taught either Riggs's or

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[57] "Sioux Is Not Even a Word - Lakȟóta Times," Lakȟóta Times.

[58] Black Hills Visitor Magazine, "Native American Culture & the Black Hills until 1759," Black Hills Visitor, September 13, 2012, https://blackhillsvisitor.com/learn/native-american-culture-the-black-hills-until-1759/.

[59] "Dakota Language Resources," Pond Dakota Heritage Society, 2024, https://ponddakota.org/resources/dakota-language-resources.

Buechel's orthography depending on their affiliation. In 1976, a Lakȟóta alphabet system was introduced by linguists Dr. Allen Taylor and Dr. David Rood, marking another step in the development of written Lakȟóta.

Lakȟótiyapi has a history of recording and translation, including the use of the Latin alphabet due to translations of the Bible. Lakȟóta tribal member George Sword contributed significantly to this history by writing two hundred and forty-five pages of text in Lakȟóta using the English alphabet between 1896 and 1910.[60] His work demonstrated Lakȟóta language patterns, recurring themes, and the open sharing of dreams and visions among the Lakȟóta, which became an integral part of their cultural tradition.[61]

In the late twentieth century, two orthographies emerged which aided the preservation and promotion of the Lakȟóta language.[62] The first orthography was developed by Albert White Hat Sr., a respected Lakȟóta educator and spiritual leader. It is known as the WHSO (White Hat Senior Orthography). His recordings and translations of Lakȟóta ceremonial songs laid the foundation for the orthography, which was published in 1999 and officially adopted by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe (RST) in 2012.[63]

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[60] Red Shirt, Delphine, *George Sword's Warrior Narratives* (U of Nebraska Press, 2016).

[61] Shaw, Delphine, "George Sword's Warrior Narratives: A Study in the Processes of Composition of Lakȟóta Oral Narrative" (Dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2013), http://hdl.handle.net/10150/311217.

[62] Lakȟóta Language Consort, "History of Lakȟóta Orthography," *www.youtube.com*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLuc9-YuuwM.

[63] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum,"Lakȟóta Sioux Traditional Music: Orthographies, Phonetics, Structure, and Notation in the 21st Century," 2023, 3–5.

White Hat's experience in developing his Lakȟóta orthography reflects a tension between Western education and Lakȟóta empowerment. The orthography he created is a product of Lakȟóta educators from South Dakota reservations, deviating from international linguistic standards.[64] While some scholars criticize this orthography, Albert White Hat, drew on years of experience teaching Lakȟóta and saw it as a significant achievement in self-determination. White Hat's approach to language teaching combines Lakȟóta heritage with Western methods, aiming to preserve the living essence of the language. His written documentation incorporates oral history from Elders, is written by an insider (himself), and is based on years of experience teaching the Lakȟóta language on the Rosebud reservation. For White Hat, teaching grammar without philosophy is akin to teaching a dead language; *Lakȟótiyapi* is alive, embodying a history that must be shared.[65]

The second orthography, known as the LLCO (Lakȟóta Language Consortium Orthography), was developed by the Lakȟóta Language Consortium (LLC), a non-profit organization founded in 2004 by Jan Ullrich and Wil Meya. Despite controversy surrounding the LLC's leadership, both the WHSO and the LLCO have made significant contributions to Lakȟóta language revitalization.[66] The RST's adoption of WHSO represents a major step towards language standardization, but the lack of a comprehensive dictionary poses a challenge. In contrast, the LLC has produced a wealth of language resources, including a dictionary and pronunciation guide, but has not

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[64] White Hat, Albert, and Jael Kampfe. *Reading and Writing the Lakȟóta Language = Lakȟoṫa Iyapȋ Uŋ Wowapȋ Nahaŋ Yawapȋ*. Salt Lake City, University Of Utah Press, 1999. 10.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Lakȟóta Language Consort, “History of Lakȟóta Orthography,” www.youtube.com.

received official recognition from a Siouxan Tribal council. Both orthographies remain integral to the ongoing efforts to preserve and promote the Lakȟóta language.[67]

William-Linthicum Blackhorse, a Lakȟóta-Sioux composer, has made singing in *Lakȟótiyapi* more accessible with his creation of phonetic diagrams for the Lakȟóta language in 2022. These IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) diagrams assist singers and researchers in accurately pronouncing Lakȟóta words. They include the complete character alphabet for both the WHSO and LLCO orthographies, arranged with vowels at the top, consonants with diacritics in the middle, and consonants without diacritics at the bottom. A diacritic is a symbol added to a letter to indicate a different pronunciation, stress, tone, or other phonetic feature. In the context of writing the Lakȟóta language, diacritics are used to represent specific sounds that may not exist in English or other languages, helping to ensure accurate pronunciation. Blackhorse based his diagrams on hundreds of hours of listening to recordings of songs and Elders, researching orthographies, and personal experiences. He acknowledges the presence of multiple dialects within the Siouxan language family and chose symbols that closest match the Lakȟóta phonemes while adhering to IPA standards of the 20th and 21st centuries.[68] He acknowledges that IPA is not a definitive science and often requires auditory examples for accurate reproduction of sounds.[69]

Among the Indigenous languages examined in this paper—Cherokee, Cree, Chickasaw, and Lakȟóta—Lakȟóta stands out as the most Western in its linguistic

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[67] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum, "Lakȟóta Sioux Traditional Music," 3–5.

[68] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum, "Lakȟóta Sioux Traditional Music," 6.

[69] Thomason, Sally, "Language Log: Why I Don't Love the International Phonetic Alphabet," itre.cis.upenn.edu, January 2, 2008, http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/myl/languagelog/archives/005287.html.

features. Unlike the other languages, which are characterized by polysynthetic (words formed by stringing together morphemes, each with a single meaning) and agglutinative (words formed by adding affixes to a base) structures, Lakȟóta exhibits more analytical traits akin to Western languages. It relies more on word order and individual words to convey meaning. This means that in Lakȟóta, each word typically carries its own specific meaning, rather than being composed of multiple morphemes. Additionally, Lakȟóta's orthography, or writing system, is more standardized and developed compared to the other languages discussed, which may reflect a greater influence from Western language conventions. These features suggest that Lakȟóta has undergone a different linguistic evolution compared to other Indigenous languages, leading to a structure that is more familiar to speakers of Western languages.

This distinction is particularly evident in Lakȟóta's relatively standardized grammar orthography, and IPA diagrams, which have been developed to a greater extent than those of the other languages discussed. Furthermore, the timeline of contact with European settlers plays a significant role in the linguistic outcomes of these tribes. Eastern tribes like the Cherokee, Cree, and Chickasaw faced substantial language and cultural loss as they negotiated with settlers to remain on their ancestral lands or were forcibly removed.[70] In contrast, Lakȟóta's delayed contact history, particularly in the Plains region, may have allowed for a more preserved linguistic heritage, contributing to its comparatively standardized form today.

[70] MICA, “The Contact Period: When Europeans Began Colonizing the Americas and Native Americans First Came into Contact with Them | about Indian Country Extension,” Indian Country Extensions, November 28, 2022, https://www.indiancountryextension.org/the-contact-period-when-europeans-began-colonizing-the-americas-and-native-americans-first-came-into-contact-with-them.

Various programs and initiatives today focus on preserving Native American languages, a result of a long journey marked by legal milestones and funding victories that restored sovereignty to tribes. Challenges abound as these languages are distinct, they lack a single protolanguage like the Indo-European family, they rely on oral tradition, and few written records exist from before the 1800s. Despite these challenges, efforts persist, with organizations like Native Languages of the Americas, and Our Mother Tongues using internet technology to support language survival. For example, the Chickasaw Basic Language app is a free learning application available on all Apple devices.[71] Enduring Voices, a program of Living Tongues, provides training and technology to tribes like the Winnemem Wintu for language documentation.[72] Additionally, projects like the revival of Shinnecock and Unkechaug languages on Long Island and educational efforts by tribes like the Arapaho in Wyoming and the Comanche in Oklahoma offer hope for the future of these languages.[73] While many efforts are dedicated to reclaiming and preserving Native American languages, a comprehensive discussion of all these initiatives is outside the scope of this paper.

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[71] "Language | Chickasaw Nation," chickasaw.net.

[72] "About - Enduring Voices Project, Endangered Languages, Map, Facts, Photos, Videos - National Geographic," Travel, October 7, 2010, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/about-enduring-voices.

[73] "Indian Languages Revived," *Listen and Learn* (blog), April 13, 2010, https://www.listenandlearnusa.com/blog/indian-languages-revived/.

CHAPTER 2

The Noble Savage and the Vanishing American

As established, the amount of written history about American Indians is limited to what exists from European settlement to the present. Within the written history that does exist, unbiased data must be sifted out from tokenized Native culture that was spread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Falsified Native culture began in literature and then spread to music and film, skewing people's perceptions of true Indigenous culture.

This false romanticization of Native Americans in early American literature was characterized by the portrayal of Indigenous peoples as the "Noble Savage," a concept that idealized them as innately good, pure, and close to nature.[74] This perspective denies Natives their humanity and fails to present them as the nuanced, complex, and flawed human beings they are. It exoticizes Indigenous cultures, presenting them as mysterious and undomesticated, which further dehumanizes them.

In the post-Revolutionary era, Native American populations in the East had greatly declined due to disease, warfare, and the destruction of native food sources. As a result, few people had first-hand experience with Native peoples in the East, leading to a perception that the only real Indians were those living on the untamed Western frontier.[75] This frontier was viewed as mysterious and exotic, similar to how the Orient and the Far East were perceived by Europeans.

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[74] Perin, Jodi,"The Myth of the Noble Savage:The Myth of the Noble Savage.," *Transforming Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (January 2002): 63–64, https://doi.org/10.1525/tran.2002.11.1.63.

[75] Rounds, Dorothy, "The Noble Savage," *The Classical Outlook* 38, no. 6 (March 1961): 65–66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43936088.

While some early American writers attempted to incorporate Native American characters and themes into their work, their portrayals were often distorted by cultural stereotypes and misconceptions. For example, James Fenimore Cooper's portrayal of Native Americans in his Leatherstocking Tales, while sympathetic in some respects, still perpetuated stereotypes of the "Noble Savage" and the "Savage Warrior." Similarly, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Hiawatha" presented a romanticized and idealized version of Native American culture, blending elements of various Indigenous traditions into a single, one-dimensional character.[76]

As the United States expanded into Western territories, accounts of the geography, animal life, and Indian tribes in these regions became more widely available through newspapers and literary sources. Works like the History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, 1804-6, and John Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809-11, presented an image of Native Americans as people still adhering to ancient and unbroken traditions. Despite calls for cultural emancipation, American literature was largely influenced by European ideals, leading to a view of originality as a reordering or purification of these ideals in a New World context.[77] The portrayal of Native Americans as the Noble Savage by Enlightenment thinkers became a common characterization in literature on both sides of the Atlantic, despite the lack of actual familiarity with Native history or society by these European writers.

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[76] Somers, Jacob Matthew, "The 'Noble Savage' in American Music and Literature, 1790-1855" (Master's Thesis, Marshall University, 2017).

[77] Bordewich, Fergus M., *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997).

Overall, the false romanticization of Native Americans in early American literature reflected a desire to mythologize the past and create a national identity rooted in a nostalgic view of the country's history.[78] This portrayal overlooked the diversity and complexity of Indigenous cultures and contributed to the marginalization and erasure of Native American voices and experiences in the literary canon.

Before the 1800s, Native Americans were depicted in literature through a lens of contradictory images, resulting in poems that could be categorized by their position as primitivist (glorifying primitive cultures as pure and authentic), or anti-primitivist (rejecting the idea that primitive equals less advanced).[79] Some works, such as the "Fragment of an Indian Sonnet" (1797) and "The Warrior's Death Song" (1797), portrayed Indians as stoic warriors or noble heroes facing death defiantly. In contrast, pieces like the broadside "The Columbian Tragedy" from 1791 or the anonymous "On the Emigration to America, and Peopling of the Western Country" (1782) depicted Natives as bloodthirsty sadists or as refusing to become civilized.[80] These poems tended to be overly sentimental, failing to capture the complexity of Native American life.

Authors and thinkers, inspired by Enlightenment ideals, saw Native Americans as living in a natural state unaffected by civilization, contrasting with what they saw as flaws in European society. This portrayal was often used as a critique of European social and political systems because it highlighted the perceived corruption of European society.

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[78] Cissoko, Jamal,"Native American Literature Timeline," www.youtube.com, September 15, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJdelaDtuAU.

[79] Folland, Thomas, "Modern Art, Colonialism, Primitivism, and Indigenism: 1830–1950 – Smarthistory," smarthistory.org, March 15, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/reframing-art-history/modern-art-colonialism-primitivism-indigenism/.

[80] Somers, Jacob Matthew, "The 'Noble Savage' in American Music and Literature."

However, it also contributed to the myth of the "Vanishing Indian" or "Vanishing American," suggesting that Indigenous peoples were destined to disappear as a result of progress and civilization.[81]

During this period, the prevailing perception was that Native Americans were a dying race, destined for extinction due to their refusal to abandon their traditional customs. Writers recognized the literary potential of this perceived extinction, portraying the Indian as a sympathetic character facing an inevitable demise.[82] This theme became a staple of American literature in the first half of the nineteenth century, with poems like "The Dying Indian" by Philip Freneau.[83] The imagery used to describe the Indian's fate often drew from nature, likening their disappearance to the melting of snow or the evaporation of morning dew before the advance of civilization.[84]

In the 1820s, there was a significant shift in how American Indians were portrayed in literature, marked by a surge in works depicting them as dying or vanishing. Between 1824 and 1834, over a hundred poems and around forty novels featured dying Indians as subjects or secondary characters, leading to what literary historian G. Harrison Orians called the "Cult of the Vanishing American."[85] This theme became pervasive and dominated characterizations of Native Americans in literature until the Civil War.

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[81] Bordewich, Fergus M. *Killing the White Man's Indian : Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*.

[82] Murray, Elsie."The 'Noble Savage,'" *The Scientific Monthly* 36, no. 3 (March 1933): 250–57, https://www.jstor.org/stable/15370.

[83] Davis, Rose M., "How Indian Is Hiawatha?," *Midwest Folklore* 7, no. 1 (1957), https://www.jstor.org/stable/4317617.

[84] Dippie, Brian W.,"American Indians: The Image of the Indian, Nature Transformed, TeacherServe®, National Humanities Center," nationalhumanitiescenter.org, n.d., https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntecoindian/essays/indimage.htm.

[85] Orians, George Harrison, *Cult of the Vanishing American*, 1935.

The success of Native American themes in literature also coincided with a time of intense debate and conflict over Indian removal policies, particularly in the 1820s and 1830s. As the government forcibly removed Native American tribes from their ancestral lands, literature sentimentalizing the fate of the Vanishing American served as a form of cultural justification for White Americans. By portraying Native Americans as noble but ultimately doomed to disappear, these narratives reassured Americans that the violent upheaval of Native American societies was both inevitable and necessary for the progress of civilization.

To many American writers and the majority of the population, Indian society was seen as a static civilization that had not progressed beyond a hunter state (savagism) and would inevitably be replaced by White (agrarian) civilization. The literature of this period often framed the conflict between savagism and civilization as a central theme and metaphor, if not the explicit plot.[86] The Vanishing American theory offered no hope for Native Americans unless they could be civilized. Even authors who admired the nobility of the Indians agreed that their fate was tied to the destiny of American progress; whether noble or ignoble, the Indians would be supplanted by White civilization and its perceived benefits.

Native American Culture Portrayed in the Romantic Period

The emergence of Romanticism from Europe in the early nineteenth century provided American writers with a new artistic language and style to elevate the depiction

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[86] Bordewich, Fergus M. *Killing the White Man's Indian : Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*.

of Native Americans.[87] Romanticism emphasized imaginative and emotional themes, heroism, nature, regional customs, and the treatment of the past. The Romantic fascination with the "otherness" of Native Americans contributed to an exoticized portrayal in both literature and music.

James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans,* written in 1826, is a prime example of how early American literature often presented a distorted and damaging view of Native Americans. One of the most glaring misrepresentations in Cooper's novel is the portrayal of Native Americans as either good or evil, with no nuance or complexity.[88] The "good" Indians, like Chingachgook and Uncas, are depicted as noble and heroic, embodying the Noble Savage archetype. On the other hand, the "evil" Indians, such as the Hurons, are portrayed as bloodthirsty savages, lacking any redeeming qualities. This dichotomous portrayal fails to acknowledge the complexity of Indigenous cultures. Furthermore, the novel's romanticization of the frontier and the White settlers' interactions with Native Americans glosses over the violence and displacement that Indigenous peoples experienced during the colonial period.[89] By portraying these interactions as exciting adventures, Cooper's novel obscures the harsh realities of colonization and the devastating impact it had on Native communities. While the novel may be a work of fiction, its influence on shaping public perceptions of Indigenous peoples should not be overlooked.

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[87] Cissoko, Jamal, "Native American Literature Timeline," www.youtube.com, September 15, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJdelaDtuAU.

[88] Wallace, David Shane, "Copway's Homage to Cooper: Redefining the 'Vanishing American,'" *James Fenimore Cooper Society Miscellaneous Papers* 29 (May 2012): 17–24.

[89] Ibid.

Custer's Last Stand is another example of romanticized Native history portrayed as a monumental struggle between civilization and barbarism. This famous battle, which took place in 1876, is often seen as a poignant story in the narrative of American imperialism, reinforcing belief in the inevitable victory of the American nation. The orthodox Christian view of American history is often intertwined with this narrative, depicting Custer's Last Stand as a divine mission to return Indians to reservations, justified by the belief that they should remain there as they were considered savages.[90] Even though the location is remote, Custer's battlefield still attracts 250,000 annual visitors, highlighting its lasting significance. Situated ninety miles from the nearest city, the site's remoteness adds to its allure, making it a place that inspires fantasy about the "Wild West" of America's past.[91] The yearly anniversary gala event at the battlefield celebrates Custer's glory and the slaughter of hundreds of Indians, reflecting a perspective that views the massacre as a justified act to keep Indians on reservations where they were deemed to belong.

Native American Themes in Folk Music

The idealized image of the "Romantic Savage" in literature and poetry did not immediately carry over to music. This delay was not due to the unpopularity of the literary archetype, but rather the slow development of art music and the changing musical tastes in the early nineteenth century. While art music struggled to find its footing in America, vernacular music, aimed at entertainment and salability, thrived.[92] American

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[90] Bordewich, Fergus M. *Killing the White Man's Indian : Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*. 1997. 26-28.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Levy, Alan Howard, "The Search for Identity in American Music, 1890-1920," *American Music* 2, no. 2 (1984): 70–75, https://doi.org/10.2307/3051659.

folk music, circulated via sheet music, catered to a wide audience and often drew inspiration from popular literary themes, including the noble savage archetype.[93] Native American themes began to appear in vernacular music, reflecting a growing interest in nostalgic, nature-centric themes in American popular songs.

American folk music's embrace of Native American themes reflected a broader cultural fascination with the Indigenous peoples of America. These themes often portrayed Native Americans embodying the noble savage archetype, facing the relentless advance of civilization with dignity and stoicism. The songs evoked a sense of longing for a vanishing way of life, resonating with audiences who were grappling with the rapid changes of industrialization and westward expansion.[94] While folk music embraced sentimental and romanticized depictions of Native Americans, early Romantic Western art music aimed to uphold more lofty ideals of musical excellence.

Despite the superficial Noble Savage imagery in folk songs, there was often a disconnect between the musical and rhetorical language used and the actual cultural context of Native Americans.[95] The poetic texts of these songs often employed high-flown language reminiscent of chivalric poetry, while the music followed traditional Anglo-European styles popular in parlor music of the time. Combining ornate poetry with Western musical styles does not authentically represent Native American culture. This incongruity suggests that the inclusion of Native American themes in parlor songs was

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[93] Somers, Jacob Matthew, "The 'Noble Savage' in American Music and Literature."

[94] Levy, Alan Howard, "The Search for Identity in American Music," 70–75.

[95] Jindra, Lucas, "Native American Influence on American Music," Music 345: Race, Identity, and Representation in American Music, September 21, 2023, https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2023/09/20/native-american-influence-on-american-music/.

driven more by commercial interests and cultural trends than by a genuine understanding or appreciation of Native American culture. Early examples of Native American themes in folk music portrayed native songs as simplistic, lacking sophistication in melody, rhythm, and structure, with no instrumental accompaniment or vocal variation, reinforcing this perspective.[96]

From 1880 to 1930, a unique blend of artistic, social, educational, and academic interests merged, leading to a flourishing of literature on American Indian music. Composers, educators, and scholars of American Indian descent also began actively contributing to the body of written works on native music during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[97] "Indianist" authors and composers were intrigued by a way of life they believed was fading, focused on significant legislative changes and military conflicts, and desired a national identity that set their country apart from Europe.

American parlor music was primarily used for entertainment and personal enjoyment rather than as a vehicle for education or social change. While folk music sometimes touched on themes of loss and nostalgia, they did not typically engage with the social or political issues facing Native Americans. Instead, they often relied on stereotypes and clichés, with characters like the Indian maiden reduced to exotic and hyper-sexualized figures. Music publishers even produced musical parodies with American Indian themes, reflecting a superficial and often racist portrayal of Native

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[96] Levine, Victoria Lindsay, and American Musicological Society, *Writing American Indian Music : Historic Transcriptions, Notations, and Arrangements* (Middleton, Wis.: Published For The American Musicological Society By A-R Editions, Inc, 2002), xxi–xxii.

[97] Ibid.

Americans.[98] Despite the ongoing struggles of Native tribes in the West, songs about eastern Indians failed to address the realities of Native American life, showing that their value in folk music had become purely symbolic.

Native American Themes in Western Art Music

While folk music had a history of engaging with Native American themes, Western art music was slower to embrace them. The absence of Native American themes in art music during the early nineteenth century can be attributed to several factors, including cultural biases, aesthetic standards, and inconsistent portrayal of Native culture during that time.

One reason for the delayed appearance of Native American themes in art music was the lack of a coherent view of Native American culture in early nineteenth-century America. Societal ambiguity was mirrored by the inconsistent and conflicting policies implemented by the government towards Native American tribes. However, as the American public's interest in things "American" grew throughout the 1800s, songwriters began to draw on native subjects as part of a broader effort to reflect America's emerging national identity.[99]

During the middle to late Romantic period, American composers started finding inspiration in their interpretations of Native American culture for their music. Edward MacDowell, Amy Beach, and Antonín Leopold Dvořák were notable composers in the mid-nineteenth century who engaged with Native American themes. MacDowell

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[98] Hallowell, A. Irving, "The Impact of the American Indian on American Culture," *American Anthropologist* 59, no. 2 (April 1957): 201–17, https://www.jstor.org/stable/665220.

[99] Levy, Alan Howard, "The Search for Identity in American Music." 70–75.

incorporated Indian themes in his compositions, notably his orchestral Suite No. 2 Op. 48, called the "Indian Suite." It is often criticized for its simplistic and primitive portrayal of Native American music. This stark contrast can be seen when compared to his complex and nuanced compositions of Western music.[100] Amy Beach, inspired by La Flesche's transcriptions and Fletcher's ethnomusicology research, wrote a String Quartet based on Native American themes.[101] However, because of its delayed publication and limited public performance, Beach's String Quartet is not considered a significant contributor to the development of an American national style based on Native American music.[102] By the time of its premiere in 1942, the Indianist movement initiated by MacDowell in the 1890s had already ended.

Antonín Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 "From the New World," drew upon what he perceived to be Native American and African-American musical elements, yet his interpretations reflected stereotypes prevalent in Eurocentric views of the time.[103] His use of pentatonic scales and rhythmic motifs, often associated with Native American melodies, lack direct Native American influence and are more closely related to European and Czech folk music.[104] Dvořák's use of American themes was considered

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[100] Linde, Aaron, "MacDowell vs. Ballard: A Comparison of American Indian Identity in Classical Music," Music 345: Race, Identity, and Representation in American Music, September 20, 2019, https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2019/09/19/macdowell-vs-ballard-a-comparison-of-american-indian-identity-in-classical-music/.

[101] Burjess, Stephanie J., "Finding the 'Indian' in Amy Beach's Theme and Variations for Flute and String Quartet, Op. 80 " (Master's Thesis, University of North Texas, 2007). 32.

[102] Block, Adrienne Fried, "Amy Beach's Music on Native American Themes," *American Music* 8, no. 2 (1990): 141, https://doi.org/10.2307/3051947.

[103] Chapman, John, "Dvorak and the American Indian," *The Musical Times* 107, no. 1484 (October 1966): 863, https://doi.org/10.2307/953317.

[104] Ibid.

innovative at the time but did not represent Native American cultural art because he did not have genuine connections to Native tribes or authentic source materials.

As the popularity of Native American themes in literature declined, so did their importance as subjects in both folk and art music.[105] The decline of Native American subjects in vernacular music coincided with their perceived tragic and inevitable decline in American society. By the mid-nineteenth century, the musical style and language of "Indian songs" were considered outdated, replaced by more lively and rhythmic tunes characteristic of minstrel songs and sentimental ballads, which Steven Foster popularized.

It is crucial to recognize that these romanticized portrayals of Native American culture in literature and music do not constitute true cultural preservation or representation. Instead, they perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce notions of Native Americans as exotic and vanishing people.[106] True cultural preservation and representation require authentic engagement with Native American communities, respect for their diverse cultures and histories, and recognition of their ongoing presence and contributions to American society.

By 1950, there was a significant shift in perspective towards Native American music, thanks to the groundbreaking work of ethnomusicologists such as Franz Boas (1858-1942), and his contemporaries like Jesse Walter Fewkes, Edward Sapir, George Herzog, and Helen Heffron Roberts. Their efforts helped to challenge and change the

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[105] Wammer, Atle, "Musical Performance or Spectacle? Documenting Native Music and Ritual," Music 345: Race, Identity, and Representation in American Music, September 21, 2022, https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2022/09/20/dance-or-spectacle-documenting-native-music-and-ritual/.

[106] Luu, Chi "What We Lose When We Lose Indigenous Knowledge | JSTOR Daily," JSTOR Daily, October 16, 2019, https://daily.jstor.org/what-we-lose-when-we-lose-indigenous-knowledge/.

prevailing evolutionist views.[107] Additionally, scholars like Otto Abraham and Erich von Hornbostel developed a system of transcription in 1909 that aimed to avoid Eurocentric biases in notating non-Western music.[108] This marked a significant departure from earlier practices and contributed to a more nuanced understanding of Native American music among scholars and composers.

Missionization and Indigenous Culture

Just as romanticized portrayals of Native Americans led to inaccurate representations of their music, the process of missionization, involving religious conversion, also distorted Westerners' views of Natives. The missionization of Native Americans was primarily carried out by English, Spanish, and French colonizers, beginning in the fifteenth century. These missionaries viewed Indigenous beliefs and practices as "primitive" and sought to Christianize Native tribes by imposing Western religious beliefs, languages, and social norms on them. Some groups established outposts where they provided food, education, and shelter in exchange for conversion. Missionaries used coercion, intimidation, and sometimes force to compel Natives to abandon their beliefs in favor of Christian ones.[109] Diverse practices, expressions, ceremonies, and worldviews were banned, aiding the erosion of Native identities and cultural autonomy.

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[107] Lewis, Herbert S., "The Passion of Franz Boas," *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 2 (June 2001): 447–67, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2001.103.2.447.

[108] Levine, Victoria Lindsay, and American Musicological Society, *Writing American Indian Music : Historic Transcriptiions, Notations, and Arrangements*, xxvi.

[109] Smith, Andrea, "Decolonization in Unexpected Places: Native Evangelicalism and the Rearticulation of Mission," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010): 569–90, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2010.0007.

From a Christian viewpoint, the ways of the First Nations were seen as archaic and simple. It was believed to be God's will for settlers to ameliorate the First People's land.[110] The settlers believed themselves divinely appointed to improve the land and convert its inhabitants. With the missionization of the First Peoples came a process of forcing them into what was orderly and proper, as seen by the Puritans.[111] Their worldview and religious values validated efforts to organize Natives around a Eurocentric idea of what a Godly and civilized society looked like.[112] Because of their belief that God approved of organized societies, forced displacements and supplanting of "pagan" and "savage" culture resulting in a structured community was justified.

The missionization of Native Americans not only led to the erasure of traditional (i.e. pre-colonial) beliefs and practices but also promoted a misguided view of Indigenous cultures. By imposing European religion, language, and social norms, missionaries encouraged a homogenized view of tribal cultures. Furthermore, cultural blending and assimilation hindered efforts to record and preserve Native culture.

From the Judeo-Christian perspective, the concept of "taking dominion over the Earth" is often interpreted as a position of authority or stewardship granted to humans by God. This view suggests that humans have a special role in managing and using the Earth's resources for their benefit.[113] In contrast, many Native American cultures view

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[110] Pearce, Roy Harvey, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind,* (University of California Press, 1988), 3-6.

[111] Pearce, Roy Harvey, "The Ruines of Mankind: The Indian and the Puritan Mind," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13, no. 2 (1952): 210. https://doi.org/10.2307/2707611.

[112] Somers, Jacob Matthew, "The 'Noble Savage' in American Music and Literature," 4.

[113] Smith, Andrea, "Decolonization in Unexpected Places: Native Evangelicalism and the Rearticulation of Mission," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010): 569–90, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2010.0007.

humans as a part of nature, with a deep interconnectedness and interdependence with the natural world. This was not seen as a lowering of humankind, but an equally valuable relationship between man and nature as man with other men.[114] This perspective emphasizes harmony with nature rather than dominion over it.

It is important to note that discussing Native American culture and the Western world comparatively involves painting with a broad brush, and I do acknowledge the vast diversity within each. Nonetheless, overarching trends can be observed: The Eurocentric perspective places high value on logic, reason, empirical data, and individuality over community. In contrast, Native American perspectives prioritize imagination over reason, and often focus more on the community than the individual.[115] Connection to nature significantly influences Native American music and literature, setting it apart from Eurocentric counterparts. It is important to recognize that while these differences exist, Native American societies were not primitive; they simply had different cultural values than the European settlers who colonized America.

Early Ethnographical Methodologies

During the nineteenth century, there was a growing recognition of the need to collect and preserve data about cultures perceived to be at risk of extinction. This awareness marked the beginning of a tradition known as salvage ethnography. Salvage ethnography has fueled the desire to memorialize cultures in case they become extinct. It tends to be driven by external interests and agendas, rather than the needs and

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[114] Lee, Scott, "Introduction to Native American Literature," *YouTube*, August 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEamjFCO7Wg.

[115] Ibid.

perspectives of the communities themselves.[116] One key issue is that this methodology often views Indigenous cultures as static and dying, focusing more on preserving artifacts than on understanding the living cultures themselves.

The salvage ethnography approach emphasizes the collection of data as a primary goal, often at the expense of a deeper understanding of the cultures being studied. Instead of seeking to understand the complexities of tribes, the focus is on gathering as much information as possible.[117] This can lead to a fragmented view of the culture, where individual data points are collected without necessarily understanding their broader context or significance. It results in limited ideas about how different aspects of a culture function together rather than holistic understanding.

Another method used by early researchers who studied Native American music was comparative ethnography, which was used from the beginning of ethnomusicological study. When Ethnomusicology emerged as a distinct discipline in the early twentieth century, primarily through the work of scholars like Curt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel, it sought to study music in its cultural context. Therefore, ethnomusicology was initially rooted in comparative methodologies because it aimed to understand the otherness of musical practices worldwide. However, this approach often led to the misrepresentation of non-Western music. Comparative ethnomusicology tended to view folk music as more primitive compared to Western art music, reflecting Eurocentric biases.[118] Scholars have since critiqued this approach for oversimplifying non-Western

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[116] Gruber, Jacob W., "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology." *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 6 (December 1970): 1291. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1970.72.6.02a00040.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Nettl, Bruno, "Comparison and Comparative Method in Ethnomusicology," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 9 (1973): 148–61, https://www.jstor.org/stable/779910.

music, neglecting the complexity of all musical traditions. The comparative framework emphasized differences rather than similarities, highlighting exoticism and otherness in non-Western music.[119] As ethnomusicology evolved, scholars like Alan Merriam advocated for a more holistic and culturally sensitive approach, focusing on understanding music as a meaningful part of human life rather than as an object of comparison.[120]

While comparative ethnography and salvage ethnography were foundational approaches in the field of ethnomusicology, they are problematic when applied to cultural art music. Comparative ethnography runs the risk of imposing Western standards and hierarchies on works of cultural art, while salvage ethnography highlights quantity over depth of meaning. By prioritizing historical and contextual study, involving members of the studied culture, and viewing it as an entity rather than isolating music as an object, researchers can conduct valuable and ethical research into musical traditions within the proper cultural contexts.

Participatory and community research methods are particularly advantageous over salvage and comparative methodologies when studying Native American cultures, as they prioritize the needs and interests of local peoples over institutional priorities and agendas. These methods involve engagement with culture-bearers, observation, and planning, emphasizing open dialogue and mutual understanding.[121] Participatory and community

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[119] Ibid.

[120] Nettl, Bruno, "Alan P. Merriam: Scholar and Leader," *Ethnomusicology* 26, no. 1 (January 1982): 99–105, https://www.jstor.org/stable/851406.

[121] Hurtig, Janise, "Community Writing, Participatory Research, and an Anthropological Sensibility," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (March 2008): 92–106, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2008.00007.x.

methods begin with free, prior, and informed consent from community members, ensuring that the research is conducted ethically and respectfully.[122] Unlike traditional methodologies, which may prioritize scientific knowledge, funding, and professional interests, participatory approaches co-produce solutions that are meaningful to the communities in questions, ensuring that both parties benefit from the research. This not only leads to more meaningful research outcomes but also supports the preservation of social and cultural values and the self-determination of Indigenous communities. Overall, participatory and community research methods prioritize local voices and empower communities, making them more effective and ethical approaches for studying Native American cultures.

Early Anthropological Fieldwork Efforts

In the late 1800s, with fascination for Native American culture growing in the United States, it naturally followed that anthropologists and musicologists were drawn to tribal research.[123] Some early anthropologists were warmly received by the tribes, while others experienced hostility. Sometimes this resentment was because of how materials were collected and used. Early researchers were instructed by the newly-formed Bureau of American Ethnology to bring collected materials to their headquarters, where it was copyrighted and handled as property of the United States government.[124] The intention was not only to collect and preserve ethnographic materials of these tribes but also to

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[122] Tucker, Connie, "Good Science: Principles of Community-Based Participatory Research," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 11, no. 2 (2004).

[123] Browner, Tara. *Music of the First Nations,* 2.

[124] Ibid.

treat it as a commercial commodity. As a result, Natives became hesitant to share their culture with anthropologists, musicologists, and ethnomusicologists.[125] Since then, researchers have shifted their approach to one that invites Native involvement and regulates the collection of intellectual property.

Francis (Frank) La Flesche (1857-1932), was the first Native American anthropologist. La Flesche occupied a unique position as both an insider and outsider to both Native and European American worlds.[126] His father, Joseph, was the son of a French trader and an Omaha mother, and he was the last chief of the Omaha tribe, although his conversion to Christianity and support for assimilation made him a controversial figure. Despite his father's Christian beliefs, Francis participated in traditional Omaha ceremonies, such as the Wa-Wan, peace pipe ceremony, and the buffalo hunt.[127] La Flesche advocated for Native American people through his political and ethnographic work, which ultimately led him to move to Washington, DC. The move solidified his legacy as an Indigenous anthropologist ally but also separated him from his community.

Francis received his education at a mission school on the reservation until its closure in 1869. He then continued to educate himself by reading the Bible aloud to his father. As a young child, Francis participated in Omaha ceremonies, but his father's refusal for him to undergo the tribal honor of ear piercing marked a shift away from his

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[125] Vogt, Evon,. "The Acculturation of American Indians," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol 311 (May 1957): 137-146. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1032361

[126] Mark, Joan, "Francis La Flesche: The American Indian as Anthropologist," 497–510.

[127] Graber, Katie, "Francis La Flesche and Ethnography: Writing, Power, Critique."

participation in all practices except the annual buffalo hunt, which ceased by 1876 due to the disappearance of the buffalo.[128]

La Flesche's motivation stemmed from a desire to safeguard customs he feared would vanish, leading him to engage in salvage ethnography. He grew up in a family transitioning towards White customs, but he felt a strong connection to the traditional Omaha customs and rituals practiced by his mother, Tainne.[129] Francis occupied a marginal position within his family due to being part Caucasian and the son of his father's second wife.[130] This sense of ostracism due to his mixed heritage and family dynamics made him more determined to protect and record the customs of his Omaha family. He felt the Omaha ways were disappearing which intensified his efforts to preserve his cultural heritage.

In 1878, Francis helped linguist James Owen Dorsey gather legends, folklore, and information on Indigenous languages among the Omaha people. Dorsey noted Francis's unique position as interpreter and guide, fluent in both English and Omaha. The following year, Francis traveled east with his half-sister Susette, Ponca chief Standing Bear, and Omaha journalist Thomas H. Tibbles.[131] This journey, which aimed to raise awareness about Indian welfare, brought him to the attention of Senator Kirkwood of Iowa, who helped him secure a job as a clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. During this trip, Francis also met Alice Fletcher, a pioneering

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[128] Mark, Joan, "Francis La Flesche: The American Indian as Anthropologist," 510.

[129] Giffen, Fannie Reed, *Oo-Mah-Ha Ta-Wa-Tha (Omaha City)*, 70–71.

[130] Graber, Katie, "Francis La Flesche and Ethnography: Writing, Power, Critique."

[131] Mark, Joan, "Francis La Flesche: The American Indian as Anthropologist," 500.

anthropologist, beginning a collaboration that would influence his future work in anthropology and ethnomusicology.

Francis's collaboration with Alice Fletcher further shaped his anthropological work.[132] Fletcher in many ways represented the epitome of European Victorian civilization that Joseph La Flesche had urged Francis to embrace. However, Fletcher's activities in studying and recording Omaha culture and rituals provided a vindication of Francis's Omaha heritage and his mother's traditions.[133] By allowing himself to be adopted by Fletcher, Francis not only found a new mother figure who represented both sides of his conflicted identity but also gained a collaborator who shared his passion for preserving Native American culture and traditions.

Alice Cunningham Fletcher (1838-1923) was a trailblazing anthropologist, social scientist, and ethnologist whose pioneering work laid the foundation for modern studies of Native American culture.[134] Her interest in Native American culture was sparked during her studies with Frederic Ward Putnam at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, where she developed a deep appreciation for the richness and complexity of Indigenous cultures.

Alice C. Fletcher was the first White ethnologist to live among Native Americans in the 1880s.[135] She described observing a Native American ceremony, detailing her initial fear upon entering the tent and hearing the drumbeats and shouts. She notes the

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[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Hough, Walter, "Alice Cunningham Fletcher," *American Anthropologist* 25, no. 2 (April 6, 1923): 254–58, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1923.25.2.02a00080.

[135] Ibid.

women's colorful attire and describes the scene as weird.[136] Fletcher's use of language suggests a sense of othering between herself and the ceremony, portraying Native Americans and their music in a frightening light. She later spoke of her distress and confusion caused by the visuals and sounds of the ceremony, initially interpreting it in a negative light based on stereotypes of Native Americans.[137] However, she eventually realized the beauty of the music when the Native Americans sang to her when she was ill. Fletcher's experience demonstrates the challenge of understanding and appreciating music from other cultures because preconceived ideas can hinder appreciation and lead to misrepresentation.

Fletcher's most significant fieldwork took place in 1881 when she lived among the Sioux tribe on their reservation. Accompanied by an interpreter and a journalist, she immersed herself in their culture, documenting their music, dances, and games. This experience marked the beginning of her lifelong commitment to the study of Native American traditions. She would go on to do fieldwork with a variety of tribes including the Omaha, Pawnee, Cheyenne, Winnebago, Ponca, Nez Percé, Arapaho, Oto, and Chippewa.

Perhaps her most significant achievement was the publication of *The Omaha Tribe,* a book that is still considered the most comprehensive study written about a tribe.[138] She published it in 1911, in collaboration with Francis La Flesche. The first

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[136] Christensen, Rachel, "'Othering' Native American Music," Music 345: Race, Identity, and Representation in American Music, September 21, 2023, https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2023/09/20/othering-native-american-music/.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Hough, Walter "Alice Cunningham Fletcher," *American Anthropologist* 25, no. 2 (April 6, 1923): 254–58, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1923.25.2.02a00080.

volume explores the tribe's origins, early history, governmental structure, spiritual beliefs, and food-gathering methods. The second delves into the language, social customs, music, religion, warfare, healing traditions, and funereal practices of the Omaha Indians.[139] Fletcher studied the Omaha tribe for twenty-nine years before writing *The Omaha Tribe,* and as she stated in the forward, "Nothing has been borrowed from other observers; only original material gathered directly from the Native people has been used, and the writer has striven to make so far as possible the Omaha his own interpreter."[140] Fletcher's collaborative research with the Omaha tribe established her as one of the leading ethnomusicologists in history.

Among Fletcher's noteworthy contributions was her pioneering work on Native American music. Fascinated by the music and dancing of the tribes she studied, she transcribed hundreds of songs and presented several essays on the subject at the Congress of Musicians in Omaha in 1898. These essays formed the basis of her books *Indian Story and Song from North America,* and *The Hako: A Pawnee Ceremony.*[141] Fletcher championed an approach to American Indian music that emphasized its emotive and expressive qualities over technical analysis.[142] She recognized that Native Americans did not conceptualize their music in a systematic or theoretical manner, but viewed it as a living expression of life, nature, and spirituality.

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[139] Fletcher, Alice, Francis La Flesche, and Smithsonian Institution. Bureau Of American Ethnology, *The Omaha Tribe* (Lincoln: University Of Nebraska Press, 1972).

[140] Fletcher, Alice, *The Omaha Tribe*, 7.

[141] Fletcher, Alice, *Indian Story and Song, from North America* (London: D. Nutt, 1900).

[142] Fletcher, Alice, "Indian Songs and Music," *The Journal of American Folklore* 11, no. 41 (April 1, 1898): 85–85, https://doi.org/10.2307/533214.

Fletcher's research laid the groundwork for future ethnomusicologists, most notably Frances Densmore (1867-1957), who built upon her work and further advanced the study of Native American music. Densmore's journey into the world of Native American music began when she learned about Fletcher's work with the Omaha Indians while studying in Boston. Inspired by Fletcher's dedication, Densmore reached out to her, initiating a mentorship that would launch her career.[143] Under Fletcher's guidance, Densmore conducted her first fieldwork among the Chippewa of Grande Portage in 1905, marking the beginning of her extensive research with various tribes across North America.[144] Fletcher's influence on Densmore extended beyond their initial correspondence, as she provided guidance and support throughout Densmore's career. Fletcher's pioneering efforts in transcribing and preserving Native American songs laid the foundation for Densmore's work, inspiring Densmore to record over 2,400 songs from numerous tribes.[145]

Densmore's collaboration with the Bureau of American Ethnology, which began in 1908, allowed Densmore to access resources and technology, such as the graphophone, that enhanced her ability to document and study Native American music. She quickly became the most prolific early musicologist to collect and notate the music of American

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[143] Hofmann, Charles, "Frances Densmore and the Music of the American Indian," *The Journal of American Folklore* 59, no. 231 (January 1, 1946): 45–45, https://doi.org/10.2307/536558.

[144] Patterson, Michelle Wick, "Frances Densmore Chippewa/Ojibwe Cylinder Collection," *Www.loc.gov* (National Registry Library of Congress, 2003), https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwriqfbUOQtmiAQA8IRXNyoA;_ylu=Y29sbwNiZjEEcG9zAzIEdnRpZAMEc2VjA3Ny/RV=2/RE=1713221333/RO=10/RU=https%3a%2f%2fwww.loc.gov%2fstatic%2fprograms%2fnational-recording-preservation-board%2fdocuments%2fFrancesDensmoreChippewaMusic.pdf/RK=2/RS=bhNxmmb3oQ0iTisvUd8lZhB4w7Y-.

[145] Hofmann, Charles, "Frances Densmore and the Music of the American Indian," 45.

Indians. Her data collection far surpassed Alice Cunningham Fletcher's. Densmore's tribal recordings led her to analyze the melodic and harmonic structures of their music more deeply than Fletcher had. This in turn led to the study of tribal language and inflection.[146] She approached cultural art in a formulaic way, often attempting to organize Native melodies into charts and graphs.[147] This comparative and mechanical approach does little to capture the essence of folk music and has proved an ineffective way to transcribe cultural art.

After years of comparative ethnomusicology, in which she attempted to classify Native American music within the Western framework of pitches, rhythms, and notation, she expressed doubts about the existence of a universal tonal system.[148] Her questioning the notion of a universal tonal system challenges ethnomusicologists to approach their studies without Ethnocentric bias, marking a shift in the discipline from comparative analysis to a more nuanced understanding of diverse music on its own terms.

While Densmore's work sometimes lacked cultural context and her translations were not always accurate, her meticulous transcription and recording work remain invaluable resources for scholars in the field. Her work was an important first step in the process of notating the cultural art of American Indians, even if some of it lacks the perspective of a Native who understands the syntax of language and the role of each song

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[146] Ibid.

[147] Densmore, Frances, *Teton Sioux Music* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, 1918), 50–59.

[148]Archabal, Nina Marchetti, "MPR: Song Catcher Frances Densmore," americanradioworks.publicradio.org, 1977, https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/densmore/docs/archabal.shtml.

in Native culture.[149] Modern researchers seek the help of informed people with cultural ties to the tribe in question to gain a fuller understanding of a piece before attempting to notate it.[150]

Modern ethnomusicologists build upon the work Densmore did while engaging in collaborative and participatory methodologies. These approaches involve working closely with the community being studied, incorporating their perspectives of their own music traditions.[151] They also recognize the dynamic nature of music and culture, acknowledging that traditions evolve over time. By engaging in dialogue with the community and allowing them to guide the research process, ethnomusicologists can gain a more nuanced and accurate understanding of music traditions, avoiding the pitfalls of comparative methodology and salvage ethnography.

Since the 1950s, the use of written transcriptions to document Native American music has waned, as improvements in recording technology have made high-quality recordings more accessible. Recordings have become the primary source for academic research on Native American music, with transcriptions now mainly used for analysis.[152]

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[149] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum, "Lakȟóta Sioux Traditional Music," 19.

[150] Warren, Ron, Personal conversation, September 23, 2022.

[151] Widdess, Richard, "Involving the Performers in Transcription and Analysis: A Collaborative Approach to Dhrupad," *Ethnomusicology* 38, no. 1 (1994): 59-79, https://doi.org/10.2307/852268.

[152] Levine, Victoria Lindsay, *Writing American Indian Music,* xxvi.

CHAPTER 3

Challenges in Native American Music Analysis

Transitioning from a historical discussion of Indigenous ethnomusicological research, we can now explore how to apply the gathered research to analyze Native American music. When analyzing music, scholars are often inclined to automatically dissect it theoretically, evaluating musical elements like scales, harmonic structures, and rhythmic patterns. Frances Densmore fell into this trap, filling pages with charts and graphs attempting to fit Native American music into theoretical frameworks, focusing on scales and the number of songs per ceremony using drums.[153] While such analysis is often helpful and necessary to understand the technical workings of a piece, it does not explore the essence or significance of music within its historical and cultural context.

Consider, for example, Gregorian chant. If analyzed solely in terms of common practice Western art theory, it would be perceived as rudimentary and simplistic given its monophonic lines and stepwise melodies. However, a deeper understanding of the text, the liturgical purpose of the chant, the spaces it was intended for, and the desired effect dictates our interpretation of it. A closer look reveals the repetitive and scalar nature of the chant complements the meditative atmosphere conducive to the worship settings it was composed for. To strip Gregorian chant of its historical and cultural context to analyze it solely in terms of melody, harmony, and form would be reductive, and it would ignore the spiritual and cultural significance of the music. The analysis of music, particularly from a culture different from the researcher's own, must go beyond

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[153] Densmore, Frances. *Teton Sioux Music*, 50–59.

theoretical dissection and include a more holistic approach that considers historical and societal factors.

Comparative methodology is another ineffective way to analyze Native American cultural art because it perpetuates an "otherness" and assumes a Western Eurocentric bias.[154] Native American art is deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts, traditions, and spiritual beliefs that may not have direct parallels in Western art traditions. Attempting to compare Native American art to Western art using the same criteria overlooks and misinterprets the unique purposes behind Native American artistic expressions. Moreover, such comparisons can perpetuate stereotypes and misconceptions about Indigenous cultures, reinforcing colonial perspectives that prioritize Western norms and values.

To truly appreciate and understand Native American art, it is crucial to approach its cultural contexts with sensitivity and recognize its distinctiveness rather than trying to fit it into preconceived Western frameworks. Ethical and scholarly study of Native American music involves engaging with Native communities, seeking their perspectives and permissions, and acknowledging the cultural significance of the music. It also entails understanding the music's ceremonial or social contexts, its role within the community, and the meanings attached to it.

Notation and Transcription

While oral tradition remains fundamental to the transmission of Indigenous music, notation is a helpful tool in preserving songs for a broader audience. Music notation serves as a bridge between oral traditions and contemporary preservation

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[154] Bruno, Nettl, "Comparison and Comparative Method in Ethnomusicology," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 9 (1973): 148–61, https://www.jstor.org/stable/779910.

methods, enabling ethnomusicologists and educators to document and analyze cultural music. Notation and transcription are related concepts but differ in their scope and purpose. Musical notation refers to the standardized symbols and markings used to represent music on paper. It includes elements such as pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and articulation. Musical transcription involves the process of listening to a piece of music and notating it in written form. Transcription is often used in ethnomusicology and other fields to document and analyze music from oral traditions or non-Western cultures that may not have standardized notation systems.[155] While musical notation is a widely-used system for communicating music, transcription is a specific method used to capture music that is not already notated. By notating melodies, scholars take an important step toward safeguarding valuable details that may be lost in oral transmission alone.

In ethnomusicology, transcription plays a crucial role, despite its controversial nature within the discipline. Western urban society places a special emphasis on written music, a departure from many societies where music is shared orally. Transcribing music is a central task for ethnomusicologists; they devote considerable time and effort to transcribing music from various cultures.[156] Many ethnomusicologists take immense pride in their transcriptions which are often the result of years of fieldwork. Transcription involves two main approaches: descriptive notation, which describes the sounds produced in a specific performance, and prescriptive notation, which specifies how a piece should be performed.

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[155] Nettl, Bruno, "I Can't Say a Thing until I've Seen the Score: Transcription," in *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts* (University of Illinois Press, 2005), 75–90.

[156] Ibid.

An example of descriptive transcription in ethnomusicology is seen in Béla Bartók's work with Eastern European folk songs. Bartók, like many outsiders attempting descriptive notation, aimed to capture every detail of the music he heard. However, his approach led to overly detailed and complex notations that proved challenging to interpret without cultural context. Making sense of descriptive notation and ensuring accurate performance often requires assistance from a cultural insider who is familiar with the stylistic nuance of the music in question. While descriptive notation is valuable, it often necessitates cultural expertise and context for the accurate transcription and interpretation of music from various traditions.

Prescriptive notation is focused on giving instructions to the performer. It represents a shift in how notation is used, moving from simply representing music to mediating its performance.[157] The most typical example of prescriptive notation is a conventional music staff; musicians can read and play the music written on it without having heard the piece of music before. This type of standardized notation is useful for conveying notes, rhythms, dynamics, tempo, and articulation with reasonable consistency between performers. Another example of prescriptive notation is IPA, which helps ensure uniformity among performers singing in secondary languages.

It is important to note the limitations of Western notation and acknowledge that both systems discussed in this document are hard-pressed to accurately reflect sounds or ideas created in real-time. Both written instructions and standardized sets of symbols and rules have difficulty conveying subtleties of dynamics, timbre, and ornamentation often

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[157] Kanno, Mieko, "Prescriptive Notation: Limits and Challenges," *Contemporary Music Review* 26, no. 2 (April 2007): 231–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460701250890.

present in works of non-Western musical art.[158] IPA for example, offers limited flexibility in symbol choices and does not account for vocal inflection at all.[159] Notation systems, designed primarily for codification of pitch and rhythm, encounter difficulties when confronted with complexities of non-Western languages, unique ornamentation, and non-conventional rhythmic combinations. As if pitch bends and triphthongs on a single pitch were not tricky enough, try convincing highly trained singers to disregard note beam implications and "strong" beats altogether! Despite these challenges, both descriptive and prescriptive transcription are essential tools for preserving and understanding diverse musical traditions.[160] Both have value in ethnomusicology among researchers and performers, though they can never fully capture the richness of a live performance.

In addition to research and preservation purposes, deviation from standard musical notation can be an artistic choice. Brent Michael Davids, a Mohican composer, uses both conventional and unconventional notational techniques in his compositions. For example, his 'The Singing Woods,' composed in 1994 for String Quartet, is written with Western notation and graphic elements that evoke the imagery of nature.[161] The first movement, representing the autumn wind, uses the edges of leaf shapes for staff notation,

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[158] Jarmulowicz, Katya, "Misrepresentation of Indian Music," Music 345: Race, Identity, and Representation in American Music, September 18, 2023, https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2023/09/18/a-counterproductive-study-of-indian-music/.

[159] Thomason, Sally, "Why I Don't Love the International Phonetic Alphabet," itre.cis.upenn.edu.

[160] Van Farowe, Annika, "Native American Music and a New Approach to Anthropology," Music 345: Race, Identity, and Representation in American Music, February 20, 2018, https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2018/02/20/native-american-music-and-a-new-approach-to-anthropology/.

[161] Brown, Sally et al., "Brent Michael Davids," *Indigenous Appalachia*, October 1, 2022, https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/indigenous-exhibit/32.

following the contour of the leaf it is on. The score also includes the sun and birds to indicate the sky realm of certain musical sounds. The depiction of the third movement's spring rain forms images of thunder and lightning. 'The Singing Woods' is a musical reflection on the cycles of life, where the woods metaphorically sing the seasons of the Earth into existence. This composition is inspired by Davids' Mohican heritage, and symbolizes connections between nature and humanity, inviting listeners to contemplate the eternal song of the seasons as our own.[162] Brent Michael Davids' use of unconventional notation draws inspiration from sound patterns in nature, and is a creative choice intended to enhance the performers' and audience's experience.[163] Davids' approach to notation has artistic significance and demonstrates the application of non-Western notation for purposes outside academia.

Suggested Method for Notating Cultural Art

I recommend an approach I call, "Notation Plus." This method involves using Western notation as a base, supplemented by additional composer notes and markings that clarify performance instructions. For instance, we could use written directions in the score to indicate desired tone qualities, and curved lines to indicate pitch bends. We could also incorporate extra symbols indicating aleatoric effects alongside musical notation with specific notes in the score providing context about tribal traditions or ceremonies. Fortunately, I have found contemporary composers are more than willing and able to provide such detail in their scores, most do not even have to be asked. Some provide

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[162] Ibid.

[163] "The Singing Woods: An Interview with Brent Michael Davids | Brooklyn Public Library," www.bklynlibrary.org, accessed March 29, 2024, https://www.bklynlibrary.org/calendar/singing-woods-interview-20220406.

pronunciation guides in the form of audio files of tribal Elders speaking the text on their websites.[164] I am overjoyed when a composer includes details of how to perform a piece beyond the notated pitches and rhythms on the page and consider it a sign of deep cultural understanding.

Additionally, I encourage including Native performers in the transcription process. This partnership approach is promoted by ethnomusicologist Richard Widdess as a result of his work with Indian music and musicians. His research suggests that transcription is particularly beneficial when used as part of a collaborative and dialectical inquiry involving the musicians themselves.[165] Performers, through their firsthand experience with the music, are best suited to address issues related to how the music is executed and interpreted, and the act of transcription can lead to questions that performers themselves may not have considered. Despite their individual limitations, transcription and dialogue can together provide more insights than either method alone.[166] Widdess' collaborative approach between ethnomusicologist and culture-bearer stands as a testament to a successful partnership that results in a greater understanding of musical traditions.

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[164] "Andrew Balfour | Cypress Choral Music," Cypress Choral Music , 2023, https://cypresschoral.com/composers/andrew-balfour/.

[165] Widdess, Richard, "Involving the Performers in Transcription and Analysis: A Collaborative Approach to Dhrupad," *Ethnomusicology* 38, no. 1 (1994): 59-79, https://doi.org/10.2307/852268.

[166] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

Why Now?

The passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978 marked a significant milestone in recognizing and protecting the cultural and spiritual rights of Native American communities. The Act grants Native peoples the freedom to practice and protect their traditional religious ceremonies and practices, including music integral to their sacred rituals.[167] This legal acknowledgment has paved the way for increased respect and appreciation for Indigenous music as an essential component of their cultural identity, safeguarding it from exploitation, appropriation, and suppression.

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) was needed to protect Native American religious traditions because they were consistently oppressed by US governmental policies. Persecution of Native Americans reached its peak in the late nineteenth century when policies like the Indian Religious Crimes Code, and the Dawes Act of 1887 were implemented.[168] These policies sought to eradicate the traditional spirituality that is deeply embedded in Native American culture.

The Indian Religious Crimes Code of 1883 criminalized traditional Native American religious practices.[169] This legislation outlawed customs, dances, and ceremonies making them a crime by the Court of Indian Offenses, with authority to

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[167] Michaelsen, Robert S., "The Significance of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LII, no. 1 (1984): 93–115, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lii.1.93.

[168] Purcha, Francis Paul. *Americanizing the American Indians* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973).

[169] Gooding, Susan Staiger, "At the Boundaries of Religious Identity: Native American Religions and American Legal Culture," *Numen* 43, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 157–83, https://doi.org/10.1163/1568527962598322.

impose penalties of up to 90 days imprisonment and withholding government rations.[170] The intent of the Code was to eliminate traditional Indian culture on reservations, which led to the alienation of sacred rites and ceremonies from their social context and intolerance for Indian religious beliefs in many aspects of society.[171] For instance, the Sun Dance, a significant ceremony for many Plains Indian tribes, was banned by the government due to its perceived barbaric nature. The Ghost Dance, practiced by the Paiute, and the Potlach, celebrated by several Canadian tribes, was banned as well. Despite amendments in 1933 to lift the ban on Indian dances, the effects of this law persisted, driving many ceremonies underground until its repeal in the 1970s.[172]

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) ensures the freedom to practice spirituality and religion for Native American cultures and upholds the right not to engage in any spiritual practices whatsoever. Spirituality and religion are not universal in all Native American cultures.[173] The AIRFA acknowledges and respects the diversity within indigenous communities, affirming that individuals have the autonomy to choose whether or not to participate in spiritual activities.

The Dawes Act of 1887 was another governmental attempt to erase Native American practices, religions, customs, and identity by breaking up tribal lands and

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[170] "Religious Crimes Code of 1883 Bans Native Dances, Ceremonies," Investing in Native Communities, 2024, https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/events/religious-crimes-code-of-1883-bans-native-dances-ceremonies/.

[171] Prucha, Francis Paul, *Americanizing the American Indians*.

[172] "Religious Crimes Code of 1883 Bans Native Dances, Ceremonies," Investing in Native Communities.

[173] FFRF, "Brent Michael Davids: American Indian Atheists?," *YouTube*, September 21, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enb-tAGI6pI.

encouraging assimilation into mainstream American society.[174] This policy aimed to eliminate traditional communal landholding practices and replace them with individual land ownership, effectively eroding tribal sovereignty and cultural cohesion. The Act permitted the federal government to divide tribal lands, aiming to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society by incentivizing farming and agriculture.[175] Only those who accepted the division of lands could become US citizens, leading to the loss of over 90 million acres of tribal land, sold to non-Native citizens.[176] Each Native American family head was promised 160 acres of farmland or 320 acres of grazing land, comparable to the Homestead Act but with key differences. To receive their allotment, Native Americans had to enroll with the Office of Indian Affairs, now the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and be listed on the Dawes rolls.[177] However, the legislation proved harmful and ultimately led to loss of tribal identity, land loss, forced assimilation, and inaccuracies and omissions that resulted in further loss of tribal benefits.[178] Many tribal members lost land and money due to underpayment for their land, lack of financial literacy, and issues with inheritance, especially for children who grew up in boarding schools and were unfamiliar with farming.

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[174] Stuart, Paul, "United States Indian Policy: From the Dawes Act to the American Indian Policy Review Commission," *Social Service Review* 51, no. 3 (September 1977): 451–63, https://doi.org/10.1086/643524.

[175] Ibid.

[176] National Park Service, "The Dawes Act (U.S. National Park Service)," www.nps.gov, July 9, 2021, https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Stuart, Paul, "United States Indian Policy," 451–63.

In 1879, U.S. Cavalry Captain Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, which became a model for over 100 similar schools across the country. These schools were part of a government policy aimed at assimilating Native American children into mainstream American culture. At these schools, children were persecuted for speaking their languages, using their Native names, practicing their spiritualities, and wearing tribal clothing.[179] Additionally, the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Haircut Order was implemented in 1902, mandating that Native American men with long hair could not receive rations.[180] The cutting of hair has historically symbolized submission and defeat, while different hairstyles indicate tribal affiliation, life stages, and participation in various events.[181] This order, along with other assimilationist policies, aimed to erase Native American cultural practices and languages, forcibly replacing them with Western norms. The boarding schools forced Indigenous students to adopt new Anglo-American names, speak only English, and wear Western clothing.[182] This systematic erasure of Native American identity caused significant trauma and disconnection from their cultural heritage, making it challenging for them to reintegrate into their communities after leaving the schools.

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[179] Bess, Jennifer, "'Kill the Indian and Save the Man!' Charles Eastman Surveys His Past," *Wicazo Sa Review* 15, no. 1 (2000): 7–28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1409586.

[180] Little, Becky, "Government Boarding Schools Once Separated Native American Children from Families," HISTORY, November 2, 2018, https://www.history.com/news/government-boarding-schools-separated-native-american-children-families.

[181] Wolf, White. "Elders Talk about the Significance of Long Hair in Native American Cultures (Videos)," White Wolf, n.d., http://www.whitewolfpack.com/2013/08/elders-talk-about-significance-of-long.html.

[182] Bess, Jennifer, "'Kill the Indian and Save the Man!" 7–28.

The Dawes Act, the 1902 Haircut Order, the Indian Religious Crimes Code, and boarding school policies were among the many oppressive measures that forced Native American rituals underground for decades. The suppression of Native American religions led to a significant loss of cultural practices and knowledge, as many ceremonies and rituals died with the Elders, were forced underground, or abandoned altogether.[183] The subdual of Native American religions during this period reflects a broader pattern of cultural imperialism and religious intolerance in American history. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act, passed in 1978, allowed Native Americans to openly practice their traditional ceremonies.[184]

The AIRFA affirmed the inherent right of Native Americans to practice their traditional religions, including the use of sacred sites, objects, and ceremonies. It required federal agencies to accommodate access to and use of these religious practices on federal lands and prohibited the government from interfering with these practices unless there was a compelling government interest. The Act also required agencies to consult with Native American religious leaders in matters affecting their religious practices.[185]

The AIRFA is also significant in the context of the unique relationship between the U.S. Government and Native Americans. It stands out as an extraordinary measure by singling out the traditional religions of Native Americans for protection under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. This special attention is due to the historical classification of Indian tribes as domesticated dependent nations, with a relationship to

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[183] Gooding, Susan Staiger, "At the Boundaries of Religious Identity," 157–183.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Michaelsen, Robert S., "We Also Have a Religion". The Free Exercise of Religion among Native Americans," *American Indian Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1983) https://doi.org/10.2307/1184259.

the U.S. Government akin to a ward and guardian.[186] This positionality necessitates protection from arbitrary governmental actions and establishes a responsibility toward Native American tribes. The Act acknowledges the higher level of sovereignty enjoyed by Indian tribes over their affairs in comparison to other groups, restoring tribes' autonomy.

One of the most significant issues concerning Native American religious freedom revolves around sacred sites, which often have a significant public impact. Various tribes have appealed to the AIRFA in efforts to protect these sites, such as the Cherokee attempting to halt the flooding of the Tennessee River Valley, the Hopi and Navajo seeking to prevent a ski resort expansion, and the Lakȟóta and Cheyenne seeking more protected access to Bear Butte.[187] Despite these efforts, free exercise claims related to sacred sites have generally not prevailed in court, with the central question being the extent of access needed to protect religious practices.[188] The courts often consider whether the contested area is central and indispensable to the religion in question, using the terms centrality and indispensability to assess the significance of the site.

The broader implications of AIRFA are significant. It marked a shift in federal policy towards Native American religions, moving away from the suppression and assimilation policies of the past towards a more respectful and inclusive approach. It also set a precedent for recognizing the importance of cultural and spiritual rights in the broader context of human rights, influencing subsequent legislation and policies related

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[186] Michaelsen, Robert S., "The Significance of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act," 93–115.

[187] Ibid.

[188] Ibid.

to Indigenous rights both in the United States and internationally. Overall, AIRFA was a crucial step towards acknowledging and protecting the rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions of Native American communities.

The freedom to practice or not practice religion is a fundamental right for all Americans, crucial for societal harmony. However, Native Americans have faced historical and ongoing challenges in exercising this right.[189] To make meaningful progress, there must be a deeper understanding and recognition of the nature and importance of Native American religions. To uphold the principles of religious freedom for all Americans, Native Americans must be granted the same rights and freedoms to practice their beliefs without interference, as fairness and equality dictate.

The passing of the AIRFA was an important step toward protecting and preserving Native American music. Many traditional Native American religious practices are deeply intertwined with music, making the protection of these practices crucial for the preservation of their musical heritage.[190] The AIRFA's protection of Native American spirituality allows tribal members to share their spiritual songs with non-Natives more freely. This has not only helped to preserve these musical traditions but has also opened up opportunities for deeper study and appreciation of Native American music within academia and beyond.

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[189] Michaelsen, Robert S., "We Also Have a Religion'. *American Indian Quarterly*.

[190] Appold, Juliette, "Appreciating Native American Music | NLS Music Notes," blogs.loc.gov, November 4, 2021, https://blogs.loc.gov/nls-music-notes/2021/11/appreciating-native-american-music/.

Pioneering Native American Composers

Louis Ballard (1931-2007), a Quapaw composer who is called the “Father of Native American Music,” is often heralded as the first Native American to transcribe traditional songs and use them in large-scale compositions. Rather than presenting them monophonically, Ballard harmonized the traditional melodies, using them as complex themes in his larger works.[191] While recent research indicates that Francis La Flesche transcribed melodies before Ballard, thereby potentially being the first Native to do so, Ballard remains the first composer to effectively integrate Native themes into Western classical-style compositions, and retains the title, “Father of Native American Music.”

One of Ballard's most famous compositions is his "Incident at Wounded Knee," commissioned in 1973. It dramatizes the rebellion of the Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, a subject of historical and cultural significance. What made this piece particularly remarkable was that it was composed by a Native American composer, it used Native American melodies and was based on Native themes of procession, prayer, blood, war, and ritual, which added authenticity and depth to the music. This combination of subject matter, composer background, and thematic elements made "Incident at Wounded Knee" a groundbreaking work and it is still considered one of the first major Native American-inspired classical works. Its premiere in Warsaw, Poland, coincided with a controversial FBI occupation of the Pine Ridge reservation.[192] Despite the challenging subject matter, the composition was widely celebrated and later performed by

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[191] “Ballard, Louis Wayne | Encyclopedia.com,” www.encyclopedia.com, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ballard-louis-wayne.

[192] Ibid.

various American orchestras, including a notable performance at Carnegie Hall in 1999. Ballard experienced national acclaim for his music and educational materials which marked a significant milestone for Native visibility.[193]

Recently, “Sun Dance Opera” composer Zitkala-Sa (1876-1938) has been brought to the forefront of Native music research, and she has been credited as the earliest Native American opera composer. Although her work predates Louis Ballard’s, she has not received the same level of recognition, possibly because her contributions have been overlooked, forgotten, or mistakenly credited to others.[194]

Zitkala-Sa (born Gertrude Bonnin) had a prolific writing career, focusing mainly on autobiographical works, co-authored pieces, and retellings of Dakota stories, particularly those depicting life among the Sioux. One of her notable works is "Old Indian Legends," a collection of traditional folklore that was published in 1901. Additionally, she authored "American Indian Stories" in 1921, co-authored a pamphlet with Matthew K. Sniffen of the Indian Rights Association, and wrote “A Warrior's Daughter," published in 1902. Her advocacy work included "Oklahoma’s Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy of Graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes, Legalized Robbery" in 1923.[195] She contributed to various publications, including "An Indian Teacher Among Indians" in the Atlantic Monthly in 1900 and "Soft-Hearted Sioux" in Harper's Monthly in March 1901. Additionally, she wrote "Impressions of an Indian

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[193] “LWB Composer,” www.lwballard.com, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.lwballard.com/bio#woundedknee.

[194] Hemsworth, Kate, “The Native American Composer and Writer: Zitkala-Sa,” Owlcation, October 24, 2023, https://owlcation.com/humanities/Native-American-Poet-Zitkala-sa.

[195] Ibid.

Childhood" and "School Days of an Indian Girl," both published in 1900. Furthermore, she conducted research for the Indian Welfare Committee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.[196]

Although renowned for her literary prowess, she also made significant contributions to the field of music. Most notable was her collaboration with composer William F. Hanson on their work, "The Sun Dance Opera" in 1912. The opera is based on Sioux traditions and even features a Sun Dance Ceremony, although they were outlawed at the time. Zitkala-Sa assisted Hanson in writing the story, revising the music, designing costumes, and training performers to honor Sioux traditions. The opera incorporated Sioux melodies and chants, with some parts left open for improvisation.[197] Set in Pipestone Quarry near Yankton, South Dakota, the story revolves around a love triangle and features the outlawed Sun Dance Ceremony.

The opera premiered in 1913 at Orpheus Hall in Vernal, Utah, with a cast including Ute Nation members. Although it toured successfully, Zitkala-Sa was not credited for her work, and the 1938 Broadway production only credited William F. Hanson as the composer. This misattribution could be why Zitkala-Sa has been so long overlooked as the first Native American opera composer.[198] While this paper has provided a foundational understanding of Zitkala-Sa's contributions to Native American

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[196] Baiz, David, "Red Bird Sings: The Story of Zitkala-Sa," www.youtube.com, September 10, 2011, https://youtu.be/db4aQLSyKMg.

[197] Smith, Catherine Parsons, "An Operatic Skeleton on the Western Frontier: Zitkala-Sa, William F. Hanson, and the Sun Dance Opera," January 1, 2001, 1, https://www.thefreelibrary.com/An+operatic+skeleton+on+the+western+frontier%3a+Zitkala-Sa%2c+William+F....-a082092548.

[198] Demon, Tiffany, "A Story Worth Sharing: Zitkála-Šá & Her Sun Dance Opera," museum.bucknell.edu, May 30, 2023, https://museum.bucknell.edu/2023/05/30/a-story-worth-sharing-zitkala-sa-her-sun-dance-opera/.

music composition, further research into her life and works, particularly her opera is warranted. The misattribution of her work in the 1938 Broadway production proves the need for a more comprehensive exploration of her legacy, which unfortunately exceeds the scope of this paper.

CHAPTER 5

How Can Choral Musicians Incorporate and Celebrate Indigenous Art?

Choral musicians can authentically elevate and celebrate Indigenous music by actively engaging with composers who are not only qualified musicians but also have legitimate connections to Native communities. The key lies in seeking out and commissioning composers with firsthand knowledge and cultural insights. It is also beneficial to create performance opportunities that integrate disciplines when engaging with works of non-Western art. Incorporating storytelling, poetry, visual art, legend, and performance art with choral art creates a more holistic understanding and appreciation of Native culture.

In my experience, performances that incorporate visual and auditory elements tend to offer a more intellectually engaging experience compared to traditional concerts. For instance, I recently organized a First Nations Choral Festival that combined choral music with physical and mixed-media Native art, storytelling, Native poetry, and legend. The community's response to this multi-disciplinary and educational event was exceptional, with many attendees expressing appreciation for the various opportunities to learn while also enjoying the performance.[199] The inclusion of narrative and mixed-media elements not only enhanced the overall experience but also provided valuable teaching

[199] Burke, David, "Lincoln Concert Celebrates Native Music," *Great Plains United Methodist*, March 7, 2024, https://www.greatplainsumc.org/newsdetail/lincoln-concert-celebrates-native-music-18296134?fbclid=IwAR3qCR32E-IP0rfLl70CbNfFE5z4YAYTvmVdfPHyM2ZydEJ4-x0YU5Dz80o_aem_Ae3z23fBVe0oB86DyQQwH2-Co20iGS8Ul60g5z77uE0fqzjmX15QQ2aga69YkZ9yX-jI4zsNOMwm_DJ5oYl7GMAu.

moments for both the audience and performers. This suggests that audiences are interested in both enjoying beautiful music and gaining knowledge through performance.

Because of the vast diversity among tribes, I find it wise to independently research every tribe whose music I am planning to perform. This includes exploring their histories, noting how significant events such as the Trail of Tears affected each tribe, examining the status of their languages, and understanding the effects of legislation like the American Indian Religious Freedom Act on their cultural practices. This independent study provides valuable context for understanding and presenting the music of each tribe respectfully and accurately. It is often possible to engage in meaningful dialogue with the composers themselves. Asking questions, seeking guidance, and fostering a collaborative approach will not only enhance understanding of cultural context but also strengthen the authenticity and significance of the performances. In this way, choral musicians play a role in promoting diversity, inclusion, and a genuine celebration of Indigenous musical expressions.

Native American Choral Composer Case Study

When programming Native American choral music, it is important to prioritize the works of Native-born composers who possess authentic connections to their respective Indigenous communities. By doing so, we not only encourage genuine representation of their cultural heritage but also understand the traditions that shape their identities. This case study examines four Native American-born composers who have authentic connections to their Indigenous communities.

When deciding which composers to highlight, I engaged in a selection process guided by specific criteria aimed at suggesting accessible and versatile options for a

variety of choral ensembles. These include children's, community, church, and collegiate groups. Key considerations included the availability of multiple voicing options, minimal performing forces, and easily programmable lengths, typically ranging from two to six minutes. Furthermore, I prioritized composers who are currently living. Additionally, a strong online presence, demonstrated by at least a thousand views on multiple videos or posts about their music, as well as the provision of online perusal scores and/or audio samples on their websites further strengthen the suitability of these composers' works for examination in this context. The chosen composers also showcase a substantial body of work, each with ten or more choral pieces available on their websites.

Moreover, the four selected composers predominantly utilize preserved native languages in their compositions, minimizing the use of vocables. Vocables are various sounds from languages that are often partially lost, and they sometimes lack confirmed linguistic meaning.[200] The deliberate choice to use preserved languages demonstrates these composers' dedication to linguistic revitalization efforts. Each composer has formally studied their tribal language, and most have studied the languages of other tribes as well. The four chosen composers' websites and online writings offer supplementary resources that enhance the performance experience, including videos, audio clips of tribal elders pronouncing language elements, detailed historical context of traditions, and additional performance instructions.

Having outlined the criteria guiding our composer selection process, I am pleased to recommend four exceptional composers—Jerod Tate (Chickasaw), James E. Green (Cherokee), William-Linthicum Blackhorse (Lakȟóta-Sioux), and Andrew Balfour

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[200] Keillor, E. *Encyclopedia of Native American Music,* 409.

(Cree)—who meet these standards. In the following sections, we will discuss the musical and cultural backgrounds of each composer. We will also explore their community ties and how those connections shape their musical expressions.

Jerod Impichaachaaha' Tate

Jerod Impichaachaaha' Tate (b. 1968) is a classically trained Chickasaw composer who incorporates his culture into the music he writes. He was born a member of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma in 1968. As a child, Tate was exposed to classical music through his father, a pianist and vocalist. He inherited his love of theatre and ballet from his mother, who is a dancer. Tate studied piano and voice as a young child, spending much of his adolescence assisting with his mother's ballet and theatre productions. Upon completion of high school, Tate earned his bachelor's degree in piano from Northwestern University. Shortly before he was due to begin his master's degree in piano at the Cleveland Institute for Music, his mother requested that he compose music for her upcoming ballet. The concept was a collection of traditional Native American stories, and Tate was fascinated. Though he had no prior compositional experience, Tate found the process exciting and wrote with ease. The composition grew into a 4-movement, fully orchestrated ballet score called *Winter Moons.* It was an immediate success and ultimately launched his career as a composer. Tate then extended his master's study to include composition and graduated with two graduate degrees: one in piano, and one in composition.[201] Tate has completed commissions by musical organizations including the Canterbury Voices, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, University of

[201] New Music USA, "Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate: Native Composer," www.youtube.com, March 24, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9c84278I4Y&t=126s.

Chicago, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, South Dakota Symphony Orchestra, the American Composers Forum, the Philadelphia Classical Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, and more. The majority of his works utilize Native idioms. He has also written music for films and documentaries with Native themes.

Tate's compositional style expresses his Native culture in its melodies, rhythmic elements, and text sources. He frequently develops Native American themes in his works, particularly those of his own Chickasaw tribe.[202] His research of other tribes has led him to compose music in their styles as well. He has composed music in the style of many tribes including Cree, Paiute, Cherokee, Navajo, Creek, Comanche, Shawnee, Aleut, Lenape, Shoshone, Lakȟóta, and Pechanga. He frequently writes his own texts using preserved Native languages. He compares his musical approach to that of American Indian painters, who use European tools to create distinctly Indian art. Tate's use of European instruments with American Indian melodies, rhythms, and styles, creates, as he says, a "distinctly Indian" sound that reflects his heritage. This approach is similar to the way European classical composers drew from traditional folk music in their compositions.[203]

Tate's most famous choral works include, (in no particular order), *Shilombisho Ittayallittook, Iholba',Taloowa' Chipota*, *Oka' Aya'sha',* and *Talowa' Loksi'*. *Shilombisho Ittayallittook* tells the story of a young Native preparing to begin his warrior path. The musical source for *Iholba'* is a Chickasaw Garfish Dance song, and it is sung in

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[202] Keillor, E. T.J. Archambault, & Jojm Medicine Horse Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Native American Music of North America,* (Greenwood Press, 2013), 403.

[203] Sutton, Rebecca. "Art Talk with Composer Jerod Impichaachaaha' Tate". www.arts.gov November 19, 2019. https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2019/art-talk-composer-jerod-impichchaachaaha-tate

the original language. *Taloowa' Chipota* is a collection of songs based on Chickasaw melodies that are traditionally paired with stomp dances. *Oka' Aya'sha'* celebrates the Mississippi River, (called the "great river" by the Chickasaw), and its importance in the tribal identity of Southeastern American tribes. *Talowa' Loksi'* consists of 6 short movements which are based on traditional Chickasaw songs.

Tate composes symphonic, operatic, film, and chamber works as well. These are also works of cultural art. His orchestral work, *Shakamaxon,* is inspired by the Lenape Indian village and is dedicated to the descendants of Lenape Chief Tamanend. *Shell Shaker Opera* is scored for full orchestra plus harp and is based on Chickasaw stomp dancing ceremonies and the turtle shell legends that surround them. Scored for baritone, piano, and string sextet, *Standing Bear: A Ponca Indian Cantata in Eight Tableaux* is a chamber work that tells of the forced displacement journey of the Ponca Tribe in the Ponca language. Tate's research of the culture and historical context of each tribe precedes his compositional work.

Some cultural artists wish to present their art as is to let people enjoy and live through it. In conversation with Tate about this work, I discovered that he chooses not to disclose all of his cultural source materials.[204] Tate wants musicians to know that they need not be culture-bearers to perform this art. He welcomes people from all cultural backgrounds to perform his compositions and is supportive of Western choirs singing his choral works.

[204] Tate, Jerod, personal conversation, March 31, 2023.

James E. Green

James E. Green (b.1970) is another prominent composer of Native American choral art. He has dedicated much of his career to honoring his Cherokee heritage through his music. Raised in Creedmoor, North Carolina, James pursued his passion for music at Chowan and East Carolina Universities. In May 1993, he graduated with a Bachelor of Music in theory/composition from East Carolina University. Since then, James has held various positions in the choral music sector, including production manager and music copy editor.

One of the defining aspects of James's musical career is his deep connection to the Cherokee Nation. He has worked closely with MaryKay Henderson, director of the Cherokee National Youth Chorus, and Kathy Sierra, assistant director and language coordinator for the Cherokee Nation and Cherokee National Youth Choir. With their support, James has created and arranged music utilizing the Cherokee language. James firmly believes that the incorporation of the Cherokee language in music is essential for its preservation.[205] He views this integration as an effective method to ensure the language's continuity. He even studies lesser-known regional Cherokee dialects and uses them in his compositions.[206] His passion for keeping the Cherokee language alive fuels his compositional endeavors.

James E. Green takes great pride in his Cherokee heritage, although he faces challenges in proving his Native ancestry due to the complexities of how his ancestors were recorded on the Dawes Roll. His grandmother, Beatrice Banks Brodie, was

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[205] Green, James E., personal conversation, March 3, 2024.

[206] Ring, Natalie, "James E. Green," Fred Bock Publishing Group, August 16, 2022, https://www.fredbockpublishinggroup.com/fred-bock-publishing-group/.

Cherokee, but her race was listed as "black" on the census, likely due to marrying a black man at a young age.

Beatrice's father, Granville Banks, was listed as "black" in the 1880 census and as "mulatto" in the 1910 census under the name "Franville." On the 1910 census, Beatrice was also incorrectly listed as “mulatto” and misnamed "Veatris."[207] These discrepancies raise questions about their true identities and the clarity of communication between the census recorder and the subject. James's family has roots in Granville County, a detail that may have influenced the adoption of the name "Granville Banks" to conceal the unlawful living arrangement of a Cherokee on a non-Cherokee's property.[208]

Green’s quest to trace his Cherokee heritage led him to scrutinize the identity of his great-grandfather, Granville Banks, whose name and racial designation on the census raise intriguing questions. Granville, who was listed as "black" in the 1880 census at about 12 years old, appears to be an outlier in his family, both in terms of his last name and his race. His unique surname and the fact that he was recorded living in a structure where the Cherokee were not legally allowed to reside suggests a more complex story. The designation of "Granville" as his first name and "Banks" as his last name might not represent his true identity but rather a description of his living situation in Granville County. This theory proposes that "Granville Banks" could have been a pseudonym adopted to hide the fact that a Cherokee was living and working in a place where Cherokee were not permitted, making it more of a descriptor of his living arrangements

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[207] National Archives and Records Administration, ‘Franville Banks’ and ‘Veatrice Banks’ in the 1910 United States Federal Census,” 1910.

[208] “James E. Green Category,” Hinshaw Music, Inc., accessed April 3, 2024, https://www.hinshawmusic.com/product-category/james-e-green/.

than an actual name. This hypothesis reflects the lengths to which some individuals went to conceal Native ancestry during a time of significant racial and legal complexities.

Despite these challenges, James proudly identifies with the Cherokee Nation. His connections to his Cherokee heritage go beyond genealogical records; they are deeply personal and rooted in his family's oral traditions. Despite the ambiguity surrounding his ancestry on official documents, James's memories of his grandmother singing in Cherokee are powerful affirmations of his Native identity.[209] These memories not only connect him to his Cherokee roots but also inspire his creative work, making him a viable composer of cultural art. Furthermore, James has actively engaged with and received support from Cherokee leaders and community members in his musical pursuits, including collaborating on music that incorporates the Cherokee language.

Green's compositions are highly customizable, often with flexible voicing options and numerous accompaniment choices. Among his notable works is *Ocanaluftee*, an original secular piece that honors a Cherokee river. He has also created a Cherokee adaptation of the folk tune "Wayfaring Stranger," titled "North Wind," which holds significance as it was sung during the Trail of Tears.

Also inspired by the Trail of Tears is his adaptation of the Bahamian spiritual, "All My Trials." It is a poignant example of how music can transcend cultural boundaries and speak to universal experiences. While not originally a Native American piece, Green connected it to his own Cherokee heritage by recognizing its thematic resonance with the struggles of the Cherokee people, particularly the mothers, during the Trail of Tears. The

[209] Green, James E, personal conversation, October 21, 2022.

song's lyrics translate beautifully into the Cherokee language and represent a theme of struggle and loss.

In addition to his work with traditional tunes and original compositions, James also arranges hymns that hold significance for the Cherokee people. One such example is "Guide Me As I Walk Along," a Cherokee arrangement of a Christian hymn. In addition to his collaborations with the Cherokee Nation, James is a versatile composer who writes works of non-cultural art for instrumental and vocal ensembles, specializing in band music.[210]

William-Linthicum Blackhorse

William-Linthicum Blackhorse (b.1989) is a multi-ethnic composer who writes a wide array of themes stemming from his cultural, environmental, and spiritual influences, namely his Latino, Anglo, and Lakȟóta heritages. He is an American Indian Pipe-carrier in the traditional spirituality and medicine of the *Lakȟóta* of South Dakota, United States of America. As a *Lakȟóta Čhaŋnúŋpa Yuhá* (Lakȟóta pipe-carrier), he has spent years participating in ceremony and spiritual education with a desire to provide factual and honest information to the public.[211] In 2021, he launched his platform, MOSAIC, that consolidates the research and knowledge of traditional spirituality. Dr. Blackhorse learned from prominent chiefs and holy men, *wičháša-wákȟaŋ*, like Albert White Hat Sr., *Sičháŋğu Lakhóta*, among other spiritual leaders. As carrier of a two-

[210] Ring, Natalie, "James E. Green," Fred Bock Publishing Group, August 16, 2022, https://www.fredbockpublishinggroup.com/fred-bock-publishing-group/.

[211] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum, "Linthicum-Blackhorse, DMA," linthicumblackhorse.com, accessed April 3, 2024, https://www.linthicumblackhorse.com/.

spirited *čhaŋnúŋpa*, he has chosen to adhere to a spiritual calling giving a voice to other LGBTQ+ individuals and aspiring musicians in the Native American Indian community.[212]

Blackhorse is a versatile composer who creates music in diverse styles for a range of ensembles. While not all of his compositions are works of cultural art, he has gained recognition for his ability to infuse his Lakȟóta-Sioux heritage into his music. Blackhorse has a special affinity for using his compositions as a tool for educating others about his community's traditions and spirituality, making his music a powerful bridge between cultures. For this document, we will discuss some of his choral pieces which are works of cultural art.

Wakȟáŋtȟaŋháŋ Hótȟaŋiŋ Pe, also known as *Waka̱ŋta̱ŋhaŋ Hota̱ŋiŋpē,* is a sacred Sundance spiritual scored for TTBB choir with soloist (or small group), featuring Native powwow or bass drum, and optional flute. The *Wiwaŋg Wa̱ćipī*, or "Looking into the Sun Dance," is a revered ceremony of the Lakȟóta-Sioux people, with music that was widely shared until the era of Manifest Destiny led to its suppression.[213] Despite this suppression, these sacred dances have endured and are now being shared with broader audiences. The lyrics of the song speak of the Thunder Nation flying above, emphasizing their voices being heard.

Another Blackhorse composition, *As in A Dream - Haŋbleble* offers a musical narrative of his own spiritual journey leading up to and following his vision quest experience. The piece, scored for unaccompanied SSAATTBB, opens in a sweat lodge,

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[212] Ibid.

[213] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum,*Wakȟáŋtȟaŋháŋ Hótȟaŋiŋ Pe*, 2019, Choral Score, 2019.

where the listener is immersed in the sensory experience of the purification ceremony, with the sounds of steam rising from the water on hot rocks creating an atmosphere of ritualistic preparation.[214] As the music progresses, it transitions into ceremonial songs, including the sacred act of creating a ceremonial pipe, a pivotal element in the vision quest ritual. As the individual fortunate to have commissioned this piece, I can affirm its effective incorporation of extramusical elements, such as the steam sounds rising from the rocks and the howls of the wind. These elements contribute significantly to its significance, particularly when singers are briefed on the cultural purpose behind the sounds they produce.

As in A Dream - Haŋbleble then incorporates the ceremonial four directions song, symbolizing the quester's turning to each of the four cardinal directions to seek guidance and connection with the spiritual realm. The music resonates with the seeker's dialogue with the natural elements, with the wind responding to the entreaties for direction from the spirits. This interplay between the seeker and the natural world is a central theme in many Indigenous spiritual practices, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings. The work concludes with a message of gratitude expressed in the translation of the closing lines: "Being here with my relatives gives me life, and that is why I give you these offerings."[215] This sentiment encapsulates the essence of the vision quest experience, highlighting the importance of community, ancestral wisdom, and the sacred bond between humans and the spiritual realm.

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[214] Blackhorse, William-Linthicum, *As in A Dream - Haŋbleble*, 2023, Choral Score, 2023.

[215] Ibid.

Another Blackhorse composition, *Chaŋté Wašté Hokšíla*, is a Lakȟóta lullaby traditionally sung to young boys but now sung to all children. It has 2-part, 3-part, and 4-part scoring options, all with piano accompaniment. Blackhorse's arrangement preserves the innocence and beauty of the lullaby while also conveying the tragic events of a mass shooting that coincided with its creation, greatly impacting the composer.[216] The music takes listeners on an emotional journey, from serenity and innocence to anxiety and fear, ultimately ending with a powerful silence representing the voices of the lost.

William-Linthicum Blackhorse's choral arrangements preserve and honor Lakȟóta-Sioux traditions while sharing them with a wider audience. His music offers an immersive experience that goes beyond observation, serving as a gateway for active engagement with Lakȟóta culture. Blackhorse's compositions serve as a form of cultural ambassadorship that educates audiences, preserves the Lakȟóta language, and fosters appreciation for Lakȟóta traditions.

Andrew Balfour

Andrew Balfour (b. 1967), a Cree composer and conductor hailing from Winnipeg, Manitoba, serves as the artistic director of the vocal ensemble Dead of Winter. Born in 1967 in the Fisher River Cree Nation, located north of Winnipeg, Balfour was removed from his Cree family and adopted by a White settler family of Scottish descent during the "Sixties Scoop", a traumatic period of Indigenous child removal in Canada.[217] Raised in a musically inclined household—his adoptive father was a minister at All

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[216] Blackhorse, Wlliam-Linthicum, *Chaŋté Wašté Hokšíla*, 2022, Choral Score, 2022.

[217] Toller, Carol, "Choral Maestro Andrew Balfour Pursues His Indigenous Identity through Music," *The Globe and Mail*, May 10, 2019, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/music/article-choral-maestro-andrew-balfour-pursues-his-indigenous-identity-through/.

Saints' Anglican Church in Winnipeg and his mother was a violinist—Balfour's passion for music blossomed. Despite dropping out of Brandon University, Balfour found solace in choral singing and playing trumpet and trombone. His life took a tumultuous turn when he was arrested for vandalism in 1992, leading to a stint at Milner Ridge Correctional Centre. However, this experience also became a turning point, as Balfour began singing in an informal choir with fellow inmates, eventually founding the vocal ensemble Dead of Winter (formerly Camerata Nova) in 1996, marking the beginning of his composition career.[218] Balfour's journey of learning and reconnecting with his Cree cultural heritage took place in adulthood, as he was removed from his Cree family as a child. He used composition not only as a means to learn about but also to represent his Indigenous heritage.[219]

Since then, Balfour has become a prominent figure in the Canadian music scene, receiving a nomination for the 2023 Juno Award for Classical Album of the Year (Small Ensemble) for Nagamo, recorded with Musica Intima vocal ensemble.[220] He has been commissioned by renowned orchestras and choirs, including the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Chamber Choir, Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. In 2017, he was honored with a Gold Medal by the Senate of Canada for his contributions to Canada's Indigenous and music communities.[221]

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[218] Ibid.

[219] Balfour, Andrew, personal conversation, January 20, 2024.

[220] "Andrew Balfour | Biographies," nac-cna.ca, September 23, 2019, https://nac-cna.ca/en/bio/andrew-balfour.

[221] "Artistic Director and Resident Composer - Dead of Winter," deadofwinter.ca, September 9, 2021, https://deadofwinter.ca/about-us/composer-and-artistic-director/.

Andrew Balfour's original choral composition, *Qilak* draws inspiration from his journey to Baffin Island and collaboration with Iqaluit folksinger Madeleine Allakariallak. Scored for either SATB or SSAA, this unaccompanied piece features cluster chords that evoke the shimmering reflection of the sky in open water, as seen in the Inuit concept of *Tunguniq*.[222] The notes in the score explain that *Qilak* translates to "sky" or "heavens" in Inuktitut, reflecting the importance of the Arctic landscape to the Inuit people. The aesthetic of *Qilak* is influenced by Inuit throat singing and the vocal style of traditional Ayaya songs from Southern Baffin Island.[223]

Andrew Balfour's "Vision Chant" is an unaccompanied SSAATTB choral piece that delves into the Ojibway concept of *babamadizwin*, meaning “journey”. This work is an excerpt from the larger composition *Bawajigaywin*, commissioned by the Kingston Chamber Choir.[224] Drawing from Indigenous chant styles, "Vision Chant" is notable for its stillness and intensity, creating a musical narrative of a spiritual journey. The piece opens and closes with a soprano melody, which calls to one’s ancestors. The melody is initially fragmented and later appears in full and with harmony, symbolizing the journey's increase in complexity from beginning to end. Seeking solace, the chant calls upon Grandmother (*Nokomis*) and Grandfather (*Mishomis*).[225] Throughout the composition, the harmonic rhythm quickens and then gradually slows, leading to a conclusion marked by

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[222] Balfour, Andrew, *Qilak*, 2020, Choral Score, 2020.

[223] Ibid.

[224] Balfour, Andrew, *Vision Chant*, 2020, Choral Score, 2020.

[225] Ibid.

sustained whole notes, enhancing the sense of resolution and peacefulness at the end of the journey.

Jerod Tate, James E. Green, William-Linthicum Blackhorse, and Andrew Balfour are modern composers of choral music who incorporate their cultural heritage into their works, albeit from different perspectives. Jerod Tate's extensive experience living among and researching the Chickasaw, coupled with his status as a registered member of the tribe and active participation in tribal ceremonies establishes him as a trusted source for Chickasaw music. James E. Green's investigation into his Cherokee heritage has motivated him to conserve the Cherokee language and customs for future generations, which he has done primarily through music. Blackhorse's close ties to his reservation family, his childhood experiences with various tribes, and his scholarly work with the Lakȟóta language authenticate his work. As someone who practices Lakȟóta spirituality, he is seen as an authority on it and is trusted to create music that reflects its importance. Balfour's perspective as someone once removed from their family culture, who now sees the effects of legislation aimed at protecting Indigenous families is unique. His experiences fuel his desire to preserve and share his Cree culture.[226] The diverse and deeply personal connections that Jerod Tate, James E. Green, William-Linthicum Blackhorse, and Andrew Balfour have with their respective Indigenous communities authenticate their works of cultural art, each offering a unique perspective and contribution to the broader choral canon.

To those interested in exploring more Native American choral music, there are other composers beyond the scope of this discussion who write for choir. These include

[226] Balfour, Andrew, personal conversation, January 20, 2024.

but are not limited to Corey Payette, Lyz Jaakola, Brent Michael Davids, Russell Wallace, Ian Cussons, and Jennifer Stevens. I advocate for the exploration of their cultural artistry, alongside a growing list of other Native American composers who contribute to the choral canon. I look forward to researching their cultural art and compositions and intend to document them in future writings. As the list of Native American composers contributing to choral music continues to expand, research in this field will undoubtedly evolve, presenting exciting opportunities for exploration and analysis.

Commissioning Cultural Artists

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of preserving Indigenous languages and cultures. Many Indigenous communities are actively working to reclaim and revitalize their languages, recognizing them as integral to their identity and cultural heritage. This revitalization effort extends to many forms of cultural expression, including music, dance, storytelling, and visual arts.

One of the most effective ways to support this revitalization effort is to commission cultural artists from these communities. By commissioning Native artists to create music in their languages, we support the artists and contribute to the promotion of Indigenous languages and cultures. This support is particularly crucial for historically excluded communities, whose languages and cultural practices have been marginalized or suppressed. It is important to approach this process seeking verifiable source materials and being sensitive to the distinction between sacred and secular songs before commissioning arrangements of them.

Engaging with a culture that is not part of one's direct racial profile is educational and rewarding, but also presents some challenges. It requires a respectful and mindful approach. One authentic way to do this is through active listening and seeking out diverse perspectives. This can involve reading literature, watching films, and listening to music or podcasts created by members of that culture. Participating in cultural events, such as festivals or ceremonies (if invited and appropriate), can also provide valuable insights. Additionally, learning the history and context of the culture, including its traditions, values, and challenges, can deepen understanding and appreciation. It is crucial to approach this learning with humility, recognizing that one's understanding will likely be partial, and that cultural appropriation should be avoided.

Supporting the music of historically excluded communities benefits both the musician and the culture-bearer. For the artist, it provides an opportunity to share their culture and traditions with a wider audience, preserving and promoting their heritage. It also provides a source of income and recognition for their work, which is often overlooked in mainstream industries. For musicians, collaborating with Indigenous artists offers an opportunity for cultural exchange and helps ensure accurate representation in the music. It also provides a platform to amplify the voices of Indigenous artists, creating opportunities for ongoing dialogue, understanding, and future collaborations.

In conclusion, commissioning cultural artists, especially those from underrepresented communities, is essential for preserving and promoting diverse cultural expressions. In the context of Indigenous language preservation, supporting cultural art in the original languages is a powerful way to reclaim and revitalize Indigenous cultures. By working with Indigenous composers, non-Native musicians can challenge

misconceptions about Indigenous cultures, promoting nuanced and respectful portrayal in their music.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

Exploration of Native American music has uncovered a cultural art form fraught with historical challenges. Despite a lack of recorded history and written languages, Indigenous communities have persevered, combating romanticized history, and the loss of culture due to missionization to reclaim their musical heritage. These factors contributed to the disruption and erasure of traditional cultural practices, including music. Early attempts at notation often failed to capture the nuances of Indigenous music due to a lack of understanding of the cultural context, lack of collaboration with cultural artists, and failure to regulate the collection of intellectual property. Furthermore, how these efforts were carried out often lacked respect for the communities and their ways of transmitting knowledge.

Revitalizing Native American music will continue to involve significant language work with the over 500 federally recognized tribes, as well as potentially other tribes that are not recognized. This work includes developing writing systems such as syllabaries, dictionaries, and orthographies. Specifically related to music, these efforts involve reclaiming traditional songs, accurately notating them, and meticulously transcribing them.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of building trust between scholars and culture-bearers to accurately document and preserve Indigenous music. Such efforts go beyond mere preservation; commissioning artists is also a vital step towards true reconciliation. Commissioning cultural artists actively

involves Natives in the representation and celebration of their culture, empowering them to share their heritage in a way that is respectful and authentic. By commissioning cultural artists, especially those from underrepresented communities, the choral music community can actively contribute to the process of amplifying Indigenous voices.

Today, we have the opportunity to celebrate Native music in the choral art form, supported by a growing number of Native composers who write choral music such as Jerod Tate (Chickasaw), James E. Green (Cherokee), William-Linthicum Blackhorse (Lakȟóta-Sioux), and Andrew Balfour (Cree), whose compositions are connected to their respective cultures. They approach the task of preserving and sharing their cultural heritage with a profound sense of responsibility, not just to compose beautiful music but also to teach people about their traditions. As time advances, researchers will continue to study Native American choral composers, both existing and new, who use the choral art form as a vehicle to teach and celebrate Indigenous culture.

In the choral world, where diversity and representation are increasingly valued, the compositions of Tate, Green, Blackhorse, and Balfour are important contributions. Their works enrich the choral canon and offer fresh perspectives on cultures not commonly understood. Commissioning and performing such works allows the choral community to amplify Indigenous voices and promote cultural understanding and appreciation. By incorporating Native American choral music, choirs can promote diversity and inclusivity, creating a space where people from diverse backgrounds feel represented and valued. This not only enhances the artistic quality of choral performances but also contributes to the broader goal of building a more inclusive society. Through

music, choirs have the power to bridge cultural divides, promote empathy and understanding, and ultimately create a better world for us all.

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