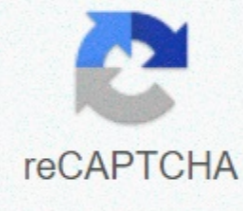




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Traditional african music songs

Music is very important in the lives of Indians. It is used for the oral transmission of their history and culture, plus educational, medicinal and festive purposes. While Native American tribes all use the same main instruments - drums, flutes, rattles and whistles - the construction and sounds of their instruments vary, as do sometimes the purpose of the instrument. Singing is popular in Native American cultures and is an integral part of the story goal of many Native American songs; it also helps in the preservation of Native American languages. Read on to learn about 10 Indian music traditions, from the purpose of specific instruments to the types of music and ceremonies developed over the centuries. Content Drums are the oldest instrument on earth, and the most important for Indians. Used in both sacred and secular music, numerous oral traditions refer to drum beats as the heartbeat of the earth, or the spirit of life. Drumbeats drive all Native American music, so it is considered essential that anyone who listens hears the sound of the drum. Furthermore, it is also crucial that drums accompany the human voice. In fact, the two are so closely linked in American Indian culture, those who play the drums are not called drummers, but singers [sources: Big East Native, Met Museum, Native Languages]. While different American Indian tribes build and use drums differently, most make them in a similar way, stretching finely tanned buckskin or elk skin over a wooden frame or hollowed out log. Such a building process combines the life of animals and plants, plus air, water and fire -- all elements of the earth -- resulting in an instrument that represents the circle of life [source: Big East Native]. Ad American Indian drums are usually large - two or three feet wide - and are normally played jointly by groups of men standing in a circle. Smaller, one-sided drums are also used by Native Americans, as are water vessels, which are made by stretching a moist, tanned skin over a small, wooden barrel or gourd filled with water. These smaller drums are sometimes called tom-toms by non-Indians; tom-tom is actually an old British term for a child's toy drum, not an American Indian term [source: Native Languages]. The Native American flute is considered one of the oldest musical instruments in the world, made after drums, rattles and whistles. Made over time from various materials including bone, bamboo and clay, plus numerous types of hardwood and softwood, American Indians eventually chose cedar as their favorite flute-making material. A softwood cedar flute, felt emits a more gentle tone [sources: Cedar Mesa, Wind Dancer Flutes]. Native American flutes have only two rooms - which is quite unusual - with a wall that separates the upper and lower rooms. Their length and number of holes, varies on which tribe she creates. All modern Native American flutes, however, are tuned to a specific pentatonic minor key and can only play notes in that key. If you want to play in a different key, use a different flute. Ad Indians used flutes for everything from entertainment, prayer and healing to courtship, perhaps the most popular use. In fact, many flutes are called Love Flutes or Courting Flutes, and American Indians have plenty of sacred stories about how the Love flute came to be used in courting. Whistles and rasps are often included in Native American music. Whistles are usually made of bone and have been around for thousands of years; bone whistles discovered in northeastern Arizona came from the Basketmaker period (300 B.C. to 300 AD) [source: Cedar Mesa]. The eagle-bone flute is the most common form of bone whistle, and other American Indian whistles were made from antlers, wood and the bones of other animals. Rasps are notches sticks that make noises when you scrape another stick against its notches. You also place the grater against the head of a drum to add resonance to the tone. The Utes call these instruments bear growlers because they use them to imitate the bear's voice. The Hopi use grating for their Turtle Dance; still other American Indians use its sound to imitate a frog that quacks for rain. Ad While whistles and rasps create interesting sound effects, that's not their main goal. Instead, their sounds are used to enhance the symbolism of a piece, based on the materials from which the whistle or grater is made, plus the purpose of the song. For example, an eagle-leg whistle can be played during a Tribe Sun Dance to invoke the power of the mighty bird [source: Sue]. A shaman is a person who is believed to be cured of physical and mental disorders in people who use certain instruments and articles. While many shamans are men, there are female shamans in some Native American tribes. Often, an Indian shaman will begin his work by getting into a trance-like state -- sometimes caused by drugs -- to the rhythm of the shaman's drums and rattles. In this state, the shaman is considered to mediate between the natural and spiritual worlds to heal people and, in some tribes, to influence weather, hunting and other activities [source: Mission Del Rey Southwest]. Ad The shaman drum - also called spirit drum, heart drum, healing drum and medicine drum - is generally a one-sided instrument that is laced in the four directions of the earth with a firm, natural handle on the back, leaving the shaman with free hand. A drumstick can also be used, and the shaman sometimes beats the drum from the bottom by hand holding its laces. A shaman rattle is often made of gourds and finished with a hand-carved handle [source: Mission Del Rey Southwest]. Although and rattles are the most popular instruments used by shamans, some tribal shamans use musical bows, rasps, deer hoops and striking sticks in their work, too. Powwows are actually a relatively new ceremony among Indians. Rarely before Europeans came to North America, this common ritual arose around the mid-19th century, when tribes were moved by the U.S. government and began interacting with each other and initiating cultural exchanges [source: Suing]. While powwows differ between tribes, they all usually begin with a Grand Entry of the color guard and dancers, then a welcome speech. After that, various dance performances are held, such as the Men's and Women Traditional Dance, the Grass Dance and the Jingle Dress dance. Often there are dance competitions and prizes are awarded. Ad The man instrument used in powwows is the drum. Powwow drums are usually large, two-sided drums, allowing multiple people to play each drum at once. The songs are usually rhythmically complex, with the singers using a slightly different tempo than the drumbeat. Powwow drums are revered and placed on a blanket or stand during the performance, then covered when not in use. Before a powwow, a spot of tobacco is usually applied to the drums in a sunrise ceremony, and no one can use drugs or alcohol near them [source: Suing]. Most powwows are open to the public and are a wonderful way for non-Native Americans to experience a bit of their culture. A chordophone is an instrument with one or more strings over a frame or sound box. You play the instrument by picking, rubbing, bending or slapping the strings. Guitars, harps and violins are common chordophones. Most chordophones used by Native Americans appeared after European settlers came ashore with their instruments, which native Americans copied, then tweaked, to come up with sounds that satisfy their musical sensibilities. Over time, the agreements of the Indians became native [source: Sue]. Ad Chordophone development and use varied by tribe. The Apache and Arctic Inuit mainly favored violins, while harps became commonplace in Latin American tribes. Guitars were widespread throughout America. The Apache created a one- or two-string chordophone from the hollow stem of an agave plant, which they called a violin in English [source: Sue]. A chordophone really native to Indians is the musical arch, which is a curved stick with a string stretched over the ends. The player can beat, pluck or rub the string to make music. Interesting, although the arch is indigenous, contemporary Native American music rarely makes us out of it [source: Sue]. Rattles are another popular tool used by Indians. The rattles are made in different ways. One is by filling dried gourds with or seeds, then inserting a handle into the opening. Gourd rattles are popular in the southwestern U.S. Another involves sticking a wooden handle through a turtle shell, filling it with pebbles, and then sealing the openings. Plains Indians often make rattles using buffalo horns. Other container rammelts are made of rawhide; the skin is sewn together, shaped and dried, then filled with pebbles. Deer hoof, or deer-toe, rattles are manufactured by threading the hooves on a piece of twisted fibers, often agave. You usually need 24 or 32 hooves to make a rattle. The hooves are first cooked, then removed from their cartilage and bone. After being formed and dried they are strung on the agave or attached to a stick in which holes are drilled. Deer hoofs make a clear sound and are usually only used during funerals and awakens [source: Kumeyaay]. Ad All cultures over time have created a form of a sweat lodge, or sauna, to cleanse their body, mind and soul. In Native American cultures, sweat lodges are generally small enclosures with hot rocks in the center. Participants crawl in, heated rocks are brought in and water is added to the rocks. As steam fills the lodge and participants begin to sweat, songs are sung to the beat of a sweat lodge drum, and prayers are said. The songs tend to be about forgiveness, healing and purification [source: Zango Music]. Typically, a round or oval double-headed drum is used in a sweat lodge. Round drums symbolize the universe, while the oval represents the elliptical path of the Earth's movement around the sun. Lodge drums are generally about 12.5 inches thick with one skin on each side. Unbleached rawhide is often used because it is more durable than bleached skin; the skin should be quite durable and able to hold its tension, otherwise the moisture in the lodge can cause it to flat quickly [source: Boehme Music]. Ad The tone of a sweat lodge drum is generally high, strong and far-reaching - a different sound than the typical drum. While Native Americans use instruments in most of their music, they rarely play instrumental pieces, as singing is considered the most important part of music, along with drumming. Musical genres favored by American Indians include lullabies, songs given to people by their guardian spirits, cured songs, ceremonial songs and those that accompany daily activities [source: Sue]. Not surprisingly, the different tribes have different vocal traditions. The Eastern Woodland Indians, for example, use special vocal techniques such as vibrato and yodell in some songs to make their sounds more expressive. The Plains Indians are known for the tense, nasal tone of their singing, as are the Navajo and Apache; those of the Northwest Coast and Great Basin use a more relaxed, open style. Within these two styles styles tend to prefer using the bottom or higher end of the vocal range [source: Sue]. Ad Both secular and sacred melodies form the repertoire of all Indian tribes. Secular music is used in songs honoring a person's life, in pieces of gratitude and in melodies used for common celebrations, among many others. Sacred music is used in dealing with things like mind-life and the elements of the earth. Overall, however, Native Americans observe the sacred and secular as intertwined and do not make the important distinction between the two that non-American Indians do [source: Encyclopedia Britannica]. Since drums are the primary instrument used by Indians, it is not surprising that they are used in both sacred and secular music. In both applications, it is crucial that the sound of the drumbeat is heard by everyone, as it is considered the voice that drives the music [source: Sue]. As with secular music, sacred music uses both large and small drums, although secular music tends to use larger drums. Recognized by its bright colors and rows of bold, woven patterns, Kente's canvas is more than a piece of fabric. Each kente canvas has meaning, which is conveyed by its colors, patterns and symbols. Aquarius. Native American Musical Instruments. Native American Encyclopedia. September 20, 2010. (July 25, 2011) Centre Theatre. Native American Musical Instruments. May 16, 2011. (July 25, 2011) World. The Native American Sweatlodge: A spiritual tradition. (July 29, 2011) East Native Drums. Big East Native Drums. (July 25, 2011) Music. Sweat Lodge Drum. (July 29, 2011) Mesa. About the Native American Flute. (July 25, 2011) Drum People. Native American Sweat Lodge Drums. (July 29, 2011) . Native Heart. (July 25, 2011) Britannica. Native American music. (July 25, 2011) . Native American Indian Gourd Rattles. (July 25, 2011) Del Rey Southwest. 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