



American Indian Music

Wading Into the Mainstream on Moccasin Strings

By Brent Michael Davids ©2004

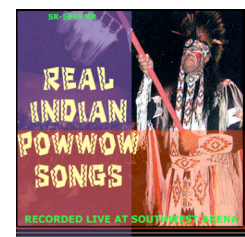
About the Author: Brent Michael Davids is a Turtle Clan Mohican and internationally celebrated as a composer. A twice degreed-professional, Brent is a master of both American Indian music and Western European composition. Davids is awarded from the NEA, Sundance, ASCAP, Rockefeller, and Meet the Composer, among others. Hallmark, ABC, NBC, Sundance, National Symphony, Chanticleer and Kronos Quartet have utilized Brent's talent, and his "Native America Calling" theme remains an industry staple on many radio stations across the Country.

I seriously debated with myself about the subtitle for this paper; I kicked around some other choices, such as "Cutting Toothpicks in the Lumber Mill," or "The Latest Wrinkle in an Old Warshirt." One conveys the monumental task of cherishing something even minutely American Indian while the massive machinery of the music industry rips obliviously onward. And the other the frustration of remaining largely invisible in the so-called "American" music scene. What is truly "American" about American music when it does not scan nor span the Indigenous music of the continent? Does "No Child Left Behind" mandate American Indian music textbooks? When American Indian languages have no word for "music," what really are we talking about? Do American Indians compose new music, or do they "jam" on flutes, guitars and drum songs? Can non-Indians capture, preserve, or compose Indian music? Could a non-Indian ever win in the "American Indian" GRAMMY category? Exactly what are the similarities and differences between Indian music and non-Indian music? These and many other questions are familiar ones when chewing on American Indian Music in its comprehensive entirety, the whole enchilada. The good news is that while digesting these difficult questions some effective discussion may suggest answers from this presentation. That is my hope.

This paper's purpose is to suggest an approach for developing an authoritative understanding of American Indian Music that challenges the tendency of the mainstream toward uniformity.

What is American Indian Music?

Why is comprehending American Indian music a big deal? When one can walk into any major bookstore-turned-coffee-bar and pickup a powwow CD, what else is there to understand?! Well, there is a considerable dilemma to diagnose over that latte -- a *musical schism* -- not mentioned in the liner notes. Ferreting out Indian music by auditioning a disc from the "American Indian rack" is akin to looking for love by eating a piece of chocolate. It does not satisfy the reality of the quest.



There is a significant difference between American Indian music from within, and what is outwardly seen by Westerners

"The hallowed dollar is a cheap substitute for cultural values lost to greed and ambivalence in post-modern America. Economic worth has displaced traditional cultural values defining self-worth. Self-worth is gauged by buying power. The acts of buying and owning reinforce self-worth within consumer society" (R. Cronk, 1996. "Consumerism and the New Capitalism").

The "consumption assimilation effect" is no longer shaping non-Indian culture alone, but some Indian musicians are now misrepresenting it as the authentic traditional music

Obviously, American Indian music is made by American Indians. But, the difference is "as wide as the ocean" between what stirs American Indian music from *within*, and what Indian motivations are *outwardly* seen by Westerners. The world markets care little for such complexity, considering authenticity to be more a foggy nuance than an essential element. However, if Indian composers and musicians want their voices to be heard in a wider arena, and if others want to discover a truly meaningful American Indian Music, a restorative change must occur. Helming this shift in a river of misunderstandings is absolutely vital for a genuinely American Indian music to stay the course. In this mass communication age, misconstruing and twisting our music into something less than authentic is a blunder that can no longer be ignored.

Historically, we remember the major culture clash when visitors with a hard driving philosophy of land "ownership" forced the indigenous people to give up their air, water and in many cases their lives in favor of a tunnel vision philosophy. Today, it is no different for mainstream music. Judging our lives in terms of a music "product" -- fixed into a solid form such as compact discs that can be bought, sold and owned -- is the rule, not the exception. Displacing our vibrant cultural values for what can be purchased and owned is the new battleground of assimilation into the mainstream. I call this impact on culture the "Consumption Assimilation Effect" or CAE.

Effects of this consumer acculturation can be seen on Indian life in ways that *appear* traditional to the mainstream. Standardized wood flutes, flute books with standardized fingering charts, and "no-name" American Indian racks at the record shops are all an indication of this assimilation. Of course, American Indian flutes are *not* in standard tuning and are performed *without* standardized fingering. In fact, there is no standard pitch reference at all for Indian music. CAE is no longer shaping only non-Indian culture; some Indian musicians themselves are now misrepresenting it as the traditional and authentic way of doing music. A recent illustration is an American Indian celebrity claiming he, as with "all Indian music," composes in a "minor key," when in truth American Indian music is neither major nor minor. Major-Minor tonalities are a development of European culture, and are not indigenous to the American continent.

The CAE problem is compounded by the way the retailers determine what products have so-called "integrity;" the simplistic test to determine integrity is: if you can *name* the artist, the product is *authentic*. Within the marketplace bubble this thumbnail test may appear logical, but from an Indian viewpoint it is misguided reasoning. Simply naming an artist as

The “consumption assimilation effect” encourages a misguided policy allowing self-proclaimed Indians who look Indian to be perceived as authentic

Born in California, 1937, Don Buchla was one of the pioneer inventors and developers of the modern synthesizer, along with Robert Moog. Educated in physics, physiology, and music, his work includes the development of instruments for biofeedback and physiological telemetry, and design of high level music composition languages. In 1962 Buchla developed a voltage-controlled synthesizer after the demand from Avant-Garde composers Morton Subotnick and Ramon Sender. (Intuitive Music, 2003. “Techno Guide”).

The overall environment today is honeycombed with many unhealthy types of objectification, and ownership mongering. Indians are not immune.

a measure of authenticity, creates a situation where if something looks Indian, it must be Indian. Unlike the self-determination of American Indian governments to determine their own members, this market policy allows “self-proclaimed Indians” who *look* Indian to be *perceived* as authentically Indian.

For the west also the CAE factor tends to reduce music to a position of absolute entertainment, rather than upholding the vital voicing of culture. This *schism*, between music as entertainment and music as culture, leads to unnecessary posturing equally visible within newer cultural trends such as, for instance, electronic music. From its nitty-gritty beginnings, pioneered by champions such as Buchla and Moog, electronic music has since degenerated into a clash of old and new within itself. Composers such as Carl Stone trumpet the concept of electronic music *for its own sake*, ridding itself of any perceived ties to acoustic instruments, while hip-hop dance tracks favor the commercial success of *imitating* acoustic instruments using electronic “drums” and looped rhythm tracks. Electronic music is split between those who posture against any music that might be influenced by CAE *whether it is or not*, and the CAE proponents themselves. For the most part, American Indian music has neither commented upon, nor divested itself from, this musical schism; in more cases than not, Indians doing electronic music have ventured uncritically toward the “consumption assimilation” camp. While Indian musicians create culturally meaningful lyrics, their use of the electronic medium *itself* either caters to CAE or rejects it as a foil to voice their frustrations. But, on the whole, few American Indian advancements are being made *intrinsically* in electronic music.

The CAE in music should come as no surprise however; the overall environment today is honeycombed with many unhealthy types of objectification, compartmentalization, subjugation and ownership mongering. Indians are not immune. We can easily mention just a few of these problems and observe the rampant call for remedies, such as in the objectification: *of women* (and the fight for women’s equality), *of sex* (with the explosion of web porn, and the government tyranny against gay lifestyles), *of youth* (by selling “coolness” to the MTV generation), *of the world* (with its “man vs. nature,” and “the natural vs. the supernatural” schisms that do not conceptually exist within traditional Indian life), *of race* (and the fight for civil rights), *of the disabled* (and the struggle for equal services and access), *of animals* (and the battle to protect wild-life & habitats against abuse and pollution), and even the objectification *of ourselves* (with low self-esteem, body shame, eating disorders, depression, and growth of the psychoanalysis industry).

Indian cultures see music as a non-fixed process, like giving birth; when music is performed it is newly reborn each time

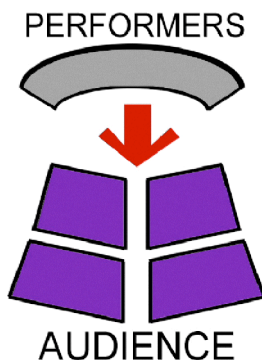
While the mainstream succumbs to consumption assimilation, the American Indian perspective reminds us that consuming fixed music is simply the consumption of stale leftovers of the process

Indian “music-ing” is a generative process, birthing out the creation of life itself by performing. The generative process of “music-ing” stands in direct opposition to the “consumer assimilation effect”

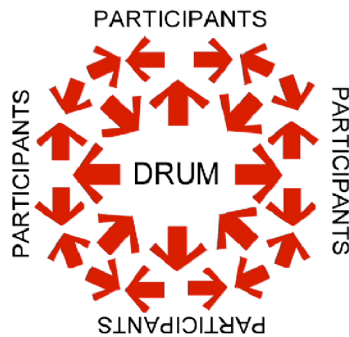
In some important ways, the consumption assimilation effect exists in *direct opposition* to traditional American Indian values. Indian cultures are based on exclusively oral traditions which are non-fixed, in contrast to the written languages of the west. First, it is important to understand that Indian cultures see music as a *process*, 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 it is performed it is *newly reborn* -- it is not considered the same song. This stands in direct contrast to written music that assumes songs are fixed once written and codified.

Second, because the Indian music *process* is not fixed, whatever is recorded or written down is considered a “leftover” of the genuine music process. From an American Indian point of view, fixed music cannot be considered genuine but remains, simply, the *result* of a music process. It is the *process* that is vital, not the leftover. Music is never a noun for American Indians, it is always a verb; “song” becomes “song-ing” and “music” becomes “music-ing.” While the mainstream succumbs to the “consumption assimilation effect,” the American Indian perspective reminds us that consuming fixed music is simply the consumption of stale leftovers.

Third, rather than existing as a reactionary principle, the American Indian perspective is proactive and pragmatic. “Music-ing” is considered a *generative* process, not a static one. In other words, what an Indian talks about by “song-ing” moves life in that same direction; what is sung about happens. What is *spoken about* begins to really *occur*. When “song-ing” occurs, life is *generated* by the process; in this way, Indian “music-ing” is a *generative* process, birthing out the creation of life itself by performing. The generative process of “song-ing” stands in direct opposition to the consumer assimilation effect, which has as its foundation a static reality of fixed objects that are bought, sold and owned.



To quickly see the contrast between the product-driven mainstream and the process-oriented Indian cultures, we need look only as far as a concert hall and a powwow, both major performing venues. For this illustration, the concert hall shows the separation and fixed nature of western music while a powwow shows the process and relational nature of Indian music-ing. In a concert hall, the audience and orchestra are kept in separate spaces, and the activity is directed from the orchestra to the audience which remains seated, silent and motionless. The performers all wear black to hide any individuality, and the general philosophy is to create “sound” in the hall. It is the physical sound that is the important aspect of the performance, not the audience nor the performers.



At a powwow, however, the performers and participants are often sharing the same spaces, and there is a high level of interactivity between the two groups almost to the point of non-distinction. People walk, talk, and move all around the venue at will. The performers wear all manner of bright colors which accent their individuality, and the general philosophy is to create positive and interactive “relationships” in the venue. It is the relational process that is the important aspect of the performing, not the sound of the music. A powwow involves what westerners might call “music,” but focusing on that “leftover” alone -- as if music-*ing* was a fixed product -- would be a distortion of a powwow’s true reality from an American Indian perspective.

Cultural difference itself is not the problem. Lack of tolerance, or the mobilization of cultural identity to favor one group's access to power and privilege against another, is. The focus on the principles of emancipation and tolerance breaks the immobility and imposed voicelessness created by the distinction of 'insider' and 'outsider' which came with the 'Cultural Relativism Debate (Alison Lazarus, 1999. "The Principle of Emancipation")

Indian music can only be originated by Indians, but understanding Indian music in a wider sphere cannot be restricted to the insider-outsider question

The Insider vs. Outsider Question

Being “inside” or “outside” a group is sometimes measured in slippery ways. Rightfully so, most Indian people would readily identify a protected tribal sovereignty that respects a people's right to self-determination as being an inside perspective. And, the insider-outsider consideration may exist as a useful tool for discussing particular concerns, but is not itself a template for discovering solutions to those concerns. It is simply the awareness of a problem: How do we understand another culture when we are not from that culture?

In the areas of cultural *knowledge*, the insider-outsider question remains an ambiguous rascal. Individuals may self-identify as *insiders* but in other circumstances be *outsiders*, effectively blurring the boundaries. Therefore, framing the understanding of American Indian music as an *insider-outsider* question will have limited results. Again, Indian music can only be originated by American Indians, but understanding Indian music in a wider cultural sphere cannot be restricted to the insider-outsider question. Doing so, limits the capacity of both affiliations to comprehend a larger set of factors and may stunt the growth of mutual knowledge and cooperation. As a continental divide, the insider-outsider formation is static and reductionist by overly-abbreviating the multitude of ways that individuals define -- and redefine -- themselves in relation to changing cultural knowledge.

We can easily see instances where the insider-outsider question, *as an applied approach*, provides limited insight into issues of cultural misunderstanding and conflict. For example, *outsider* state governments are now attacking the recognition process of tribal sovereignty out of a reactionary fear of losing land and revenue, while the *insider* sovereign tribal governments struggle to remind the states of the enormous Indian sacrifice to which the states owe their current land and wealth.

And in the west, *outsider* “music theory” courses in universities teach principles of music as if they universally apply to all cultures. In truth those courses merely elevate principles of Western music and completely obscure the *insider* positions of most non-Western music traditions. Course descriptions in university catalogs should read “MT101 Western Music Theory,” not simply “music theory” as if that applies to all music, everywhere. Similarly, the singularly monolithic category “World Music” is an impediment to understanding the consummate diversity of non-Western traditions.

The Generative Collaboration Approach

The “generative collaboration” approach brings non-Indians into a meaningful collaboration with living, changing, vibrant cultures in ways that remain dynamic

Many of the effects of the Age of Reason persist today... Enlightenment thought failed in many respects. It tried to replace a religious world view with one erected by human reason... it found reason so often accompanied by willpower, emotions, passions, appetites, and desires that reason can neither explain nor control... Most thinkers came to realize that cool and calculating reason is insufficient to explain the variety of human nature and the puzzling flow of history (Compton's Encyclopedia)

For Indians, what westerners call “music” is seen as a tiny component of a greater process of communication involving all life

Just as American Indian life is a proactive *generative* process, not a static one, we might call collaborations between Indians and non-Indians the “generative collaboration” approach. This approach brings non-Indians into a meaningful collaboration with living, changing, vibrant cultures in ways that remain dynamic. By avoiding the disjointed attitude of insider-outsider debates, discussion remains focused on the living interests of the Indian music practitioners, and avoids getting bogged down in static theories. In this way, generative collaboration promotes a more immediate and continuous understanding of the issues; the collaboration remains flexible and adjusts itself according to the needs of the people involved. Generative collaboration brings non-Indians into a direct dialogue with the expanded American Indian meaning of “music-ing.”

For the west, the compartmentalizing effects of the enlightenment still plague most of the arts today, which tends to separate one art form from another. The Age of Reason thinkers boxed art forms into individualized categories. But from an Indian view, it seems the west suffers from an added disjoining effect. To Indians, even the vast umbrella of western “Arts” *itself* becomes a narrowly defined box, ignoring many of the more expansive realities. In fact, Indian languages have no word for “art” nor “music” at all, in the way these have been so narrowly defined in western life. For Indians, the concept of “music” fails to account for the massive variety of human nature that exists well outside that western box.

By comparison, Indians have alternative *process-oriented* concepts, similar to the O’odham’s “nei” or the Yaqui’s “sewa,” which encompass major realms of living experience; for Indians, what westerners call “music” is seen as a tiny component of a greater process of communication involving all life. We might call this process “music-ing innumerable” for its vast range of existence. The music-ing innumerable process is considered more as *talking* that occurs between humans, non-humans and a more extensive array of life than the westernized music categories.

By knowing both the originator and the process, American Indian music-ing respects the self-determination inherent in the originator's activities

Of course the western music as product definition devalues music originators themselves by fixating on the *leftovers* of their vital process; in addition, the needs of the marketplace outweigh the needs of the originators. In stark contrast, American Indian “music-ing innumerable” highly values both the originator and the activities. By knowing the originator and the process, American Indian music-ing respects the self-determination inherent in the originator’s activities. Also, American Indian music-ing can create products and leftovers as well. A major difference, though, is that the products created are not market driven; Indian music-ing results in byproducts that reflect the more genuine process of self-determination. In music-ing, a true and diverse American Indian voice is heard.

Valuing music using the marketplace test for authenticity (products that “look” Indian), clouds rather than clarifies who Indians are and what we do

Illustrations of this musical dichotomy -- product valuation vs. music-ing valuation -- are not difficult to find. We need only look as far as Santa Fe, NM. Early traders in Indian rugs requested the geometric Persian designs so frequently that Navajo weavers were market-pressured into producing only those designs; all other possibilities were suppressed. The Santa Fe style rug is a distorted valuation forced into mass production, while the genuinely Navajo designs were suppressed and even halted. Valuing music by using the thumbnail authenticity test of the marketplace (products that look “Indian”), clouds rather than clarifies who Indians are and what we do. Who the weavers are and their integral process is completely ignored by a *weaving as product* reasoning. It is no different with music-ing.



Conceptually separated from the concert activities, the physical “sound” rules supreme, superseding the players and the audience. As a “product,” the sound skews the value of a concert away from the participants

We can revisit the orchestra vs. powwow example for another illustration. In the western concert hall, the “sound” itself becomes the preeminent value of music; conceptually separated from the other activities of the hall, the sound rules supreme, superseding the players and the audience. The ultimate value of a concert rests in the physical *sound* of it, which in turn logically leads to judgments regarding the “ugliness” or “beauty” of the sound. The emphasis is on a *product* of the concert, the sound; this skews the value of a concert away from the participants. While at a powwow, the sounds do not reign supreme; the *relationships* of the participants *to each other* determine the worth of a powwow. Some singers may be better voiced than others, but the value is not placed on the sounds they make. If “good” relations take place, it is a “good” powwow, regardless of the sounds emanating. The process of enacting a powwow -- *the doing of it* -- is the intrinsic value of a powwow, which in turn values deeply the participants and their activities. Powwow music-ing does not conceptually orphan the participants, as the music as product philosophy does.

The process of doing a powwow is the intrinsic value of it, which in turn values deeply the participants and their activities. Music-ing does not conceptually orphan the participants, as the “music as product” philosophy does

Historical Brainwork

It would be erroneous to say the current schism is wholly a contemporary one born of modern consumerism. From the advent of Darwin, thinkers have attempted to use the theory of evolution as a model for understanding not just physical life changes. “Social Darwinism” first belittled, then shuffled off to the side as “primitive” and “inferior,” the American Indian viewpoints. The mistake of this simplistic cultural development is its reliance on faulty ethnocentric assumptions. As the supposed bearers of “civilization,” westerners have fascinated themselves with the “primitive” Indians, but they have looked at us through a set of their own presuppositions; they have gazed at us through “primitive” spectacles that reveal more about their own culture than ours.

It follows that when we think in terms like ... “the religions of primitive peoples,” we are likely to be conditioned to think of a stage in the evolution of religion prior to the present, prior to our own, and therefore inferior... we have probably inherited a set of images and attitudes which ... will introduce inaccuracies and will mislead us, perhaps without our even knowing it (Sam D. Gill, 1982. “Beyond the Primitive”)

When the western reliance on concrete religious concepts was questioned by Enlightenment thinkers, the perceived stability of “civilized” society began to crumble under a rational microscope. A cataclysmic void of *uncertainty* split the foundation. In response, western images of mysterious “cavemen” and noble “savages” *solidified* to bolster up the rubble left by the uncertainty. Fascinating western icons and evocative western myths grew up like weeds to fill the void. Exercising these grand myths, an assumed superiority stomped all over the Indians like a march -- a mythic disorder projected onto us with a tough boot-kick of self-denial. You see, only non-Westerners succumb to myths and myth-making according to the west; westerners are “civilized” and above all that. At least that is the story westerners tell themselves, denying their own mythic activities. And, western attempts to remedy this disorder have been “outward” in behavior, by “acting out” the indoctrination and assimilation of so-called “primitive” peoples into so-called “civilized” society. Historically and today, the residue of this “primitive-minded” *land-of-make-believe* has affected Indians in many ways.

The western study of history tends to uphold written history as “fact,” while treating the history of oral traditions as “myth” or make-believe stories

One central CAE obstacle, is the western tendency to uphold written history as the grand master of *fact*, while treating the history of oral traditions as unreliable *myth* or make-believe stories. There is a mistaken perception that “fixed” *written* history is somehow more trustworthy than the *oral* traditions of American Indians. But, it is illogical to think of written history as unerring fact, given the inherent inaccuracy of the task itself. The activity of doing history is always a contemporary one, tormented by inconsistency, errors of perception, and rationalization of existing power structures.

Written history may, at times, erroneously use *new* cultural yardsticks to measure *past* events, also known as *cultural fallacy*. Historians may champion a view of history coming from an unreliable account, or a corrupted source. Historians might perceive historical questions as *polar opposites* or the “flip sides of the same coin,” when more than two options exist, known as a *false dichotomy*. Historians sometimes inaccurately apply group statistics to an individual alone, as with the *gambler fallacy*. Historians suffer inaccuracies through misused quotes that alter the original intent, known as *quoting out of context*. And, historians may cite a particular cause for an observed result, but there may be many other, and potentially greater, causes not cited, known as *faulty causal significance*. In most ways, written history *is analogous* to the study of oral history; the task cannot escape the flocks of scattered perceptions and ambiguous fallacies.

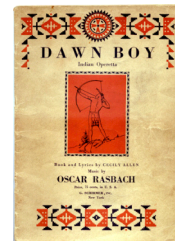
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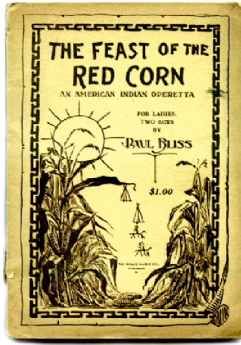
In many ways, we know the Enlightenment shaped western music, conceptually dividing it up into neat compartments. Also however, this western rift affected American Indian “art-*ing*,” directly and indirectly. It is easy to see the direct “consumer assimilation effect” on Indian life, such as Santa Fe rugs (assimilating the Persian designs), Eskimo stone carvings with flat bottoms (the traditional rounded bottoms are meant to be hand held, not set on shelves), Navajo Kachinas (*hint*: Kachinas are Hopi, not Navajo), and sand paintings glued to fixed boards (sand paintings are temporary and meant to be destroyed); there are many examples such as these.

For many American Indianist composers, Indian melodies were considered a primitive or authentic version of what the unknown roots of the European musical tradition would be. A sort of musical Darwinism, this concept cast Indian music as a preliminary stage in the ultimate progress and perfection of the art that resulted in the European classical tradition (Mark Clague, 1998. “MHM 408508 Listening Guide”)

But indirectly, when westerners became interested in Indian “music,” hordes of pseudo-Indian works were composed by non-Indians. An entire movement occurred that we now call “the American Indianists” featuring Indian operas, songs, piano works, sheet music, and all manner of music composition -- all created by non-Indians. The American Indianist movement was plagued by a major error of reasoning however. By uncritically applying the insider-outsider mindset as a proactive tenet, Indianists had succumb to “musical Darwinism.” Rather than attempting to meet Indians *on Indian terms* -- as a collaboration of “music-*ing* innumerable” -- these Indianist composers mistook their appropriation of Indian life as discovering the “primitive” precursor to their own “civilized” life.

Spurred along by the written transcriptions of Alice Fletcher, Ruth Underhill, Francis Densmore, and others from the late 1800s into the early 1900s, Indianists were busy squeezing Indian songs into print and *codifying* what they thought was the true Indian “music.” Because of their overriding philosophy of fixed music, of course, they





The “reservation roundup” period ended in 1879-80, when Standing Bear invoked the 14th amendment, refusing to live on a reservation against his will. So, the US started the “Indian Boarding School” period

American Indians created an alternate approach to deal with the unconditional oppression being forced onto them -- a “relational” approach. Ghost dancing was “music-ing innumerable” of the first order

Some modern movements that speak against the Enlightenment residue such as the work of the late John Cage

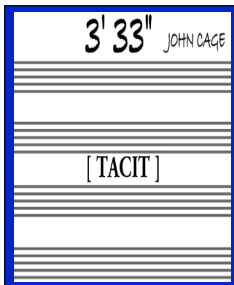
grossly misunderstood most of what Indians were *really* doing. Therefore, we could never call Charles Wakefield Cadmann’s famous composition “From the Land of Sky Blue Waters” (with an Omaha tune transcribed by Fletcher), an “Indian song” -- it is not. “Sky Blue Waters” is a *Cadmans* song. Plagued by the “consumer assimilation effect” however, Indianist misappropriations taint the public waters of authentic Indian music-*ing*. Indianists pee in the pool.

While the Indianists were busy gathering Indian songs (as one might pick a bushel of apples), Indians themselves were fashioning a *unique* response to land theft and cultural assimilation. America’s reservation roundup period effectively ended in 1879-80, when a Ponca Medicine Man and Head Chief successfully sued General George Crook and the US Army for violating his constitutional rights. The 14th amendment was first instituted to protect Black civil liberties, and had never been invoked by an Indian before. By citing the 14th amendment, Chief Standing Bear refused to live on a reservation against his will. He won the case. So, without a legal leg to stand on, the US started the Indian Boarding School period; if the US could no longer kill nor imprison Indians legally, it could still assimilate them. And, children are easier to assimilate than adults.



From an Indian perspective though, Indians created an *alternate* approach to deal with the utter metamorphosis being forced unconditionally onto them -- a *relational* approach. Enacting the Ghost Dance ceremonies, American Indians sought revelations and enlightenment, often connecting with the dead, to renew the Indian world. Losing their freedom and identity as free-roaming agents under non-Indian oppression, led Indians into a hopeless situation contrary to their traditional way of life. Attempting to find a meaningful *process* for survival and dignity in the face of genocide, their response was the ghost dance. Ghost dancing was “music-ing innumerable” of the first order, a *process* with total dedication to the ritual, along with the unmitigated allegiance to right relations with their *inner* selves and with *all others*. Ghost dancers put 100% of themselves into the *relational process*, directly opposing the “ownership” credo of their oppressors. The full dedication to a relational process continues to shape Indian life, even today.

Similarly, the schism of “music-ing innumerable” vs. “music as product” seems, still, a fifty-fifty proposition. There are modern movements that speak against the Enlightenment residue such as the work of the late John Cage, for example, that encouraged the idea that *life itself is music* and not for sale.



When David Tudor first premiered Cage's work 3'33" (that calls for the performer to sit at the piano and play "tacet"), the resultant audience unrest *became* the "sounds" of the music. Where the audience was expecting piano sounds, they received instead the sounds of their own discomfort. Cage had flip-flopped the concert perception on its head, by switching the sound *product* into a recognition of the musical *process*. However, the music as process strains in the west remain largely underground, while CAE expounders rush to "cash in" on music products as much as possible.

Native American musicians have pressured the GRAMMY's for years to allow indigenous music to be judged... Finally in 2000 Best Native American Music of the year was awarded [but since] has been awarded but not shown [on TV]. Grumbling from Native Americans for both air time and expanded categories have gone unheard. GRAMMY has stood and listened like a doctor listening to a patient he knows is going to die. Angelia Bibbs-Sanders, a VP of NARAS said unless Native Americans didn't start joining in greater numbers the category would go the way of the Dodo bird (Native American Times, 2004. "The Whisperer")

Today, music industry executives and CAE artists, are lining their pockets as a justification of their own musical worth. Even major awards, like the GRAMMYs, are designed to award whichever recording artists are profusely bought and sold, as if consumer popularity divulges artistic merit. American Indians are buying into this game too. Rather than honing their personal skills as composers, some Indians act more like contestants on *American Idol* -- low on training, high on hype. While many Indian professionals continue pushing for more GRAMMY "diversity" (with multiple Indian categories instead of just one), those same professionals continue to *ignore* the lack of categories in their own NAMMY awards (which render *invisible* many Indian composers outside the marketplace). While the GRAMMYs give multiple awards to *film composers, concert composers and classical composers*, those categories have *never existed* for the NAMMYs since their inception.

CAE is significantly impacting which Indian musicians continue in the music field, and which ones become invisible

The GRAMMYs and the NAMMYs both suffer from the CAE schism as well. By using the marketplace as a measure of authenticity (if you can name the artist, the product is authentic), it is conceivable that a non-Indian might someday win an "Indian" GRAMMY, just as non-Indians may someday win NAMMYs. When American Indian music-*ing* is considered a product, it can be removed from its maker; and, it is highly probable that a non-Indian (who becomes proficient at the superficial trappings of Indian songs) might someday win in the "American Indian Music" category, market-driven by current GRAMMY and NAMMY standards. Or, perhaps the sole GRAMMY category will go the way of the Dodo bird as expressed by a VP of NARAS, regarding the overall lack of interest in the current American Indian GRAMMY category.

But whatever happens, it seems the CAE -- *consumer assimilation effect* -- is having a greater and more prevalent impact on which Indians continue in the music field, and which ones become invisible. Though I doubt many Nashville producers, Indian recording companies, or NAMMY judges, would name this distinction, there is a substantial and eloquent

difference between an Indian who plays guitar, flute or sings with an orchestra as a performer, and the American Indian composer who writes every single note of that orchestra composition.

The “consumer assimilation effect” works “from within” Indian life to wreak havoc on beginning composers, without having developed the thick skin of our seasoned composers. The CAE is not “student friendly”

Often, the genuine Indian orchestra composer remains anonymous while the Indian celebrity performer takes the bows; this illustrates the cash-cow prowess of the Indian pop stars to render the Indian orchestra composers invisible. The “consumer assimilation effect” works from within Indian life to wreak havoc on beginning composers who have not developed the thick skin of seasoned composers. The consumer assimilation effect is not “student friendly.”

Choosing an Approach

A new model is needed for evaluating “meaning” in music, and for determining what is “quality music.” Interestingly, the American Indian “music as process” approach works both for Indian and non-Indian music

We can see, even today, how the vitality of American Indian life affirms its ability to conduct good relations in a process of “music-ing innumerable.” American Indians have persisted, and these proven relational methods remain fruitful even today. Contrarily, the western ownership and consumer methods remain useless to the process of music, and are moreover limited to the music as product scenarios. Music as product has already reached its pinnacle of success for valuing music; there is no new territory to explore. It has reached a meaningful dead-end. A new model is needed for evaluating meaning in music, and for determining what is quality music. Interestingly, the American Indian generative collaboration approach works both for Indian and non-Indian music alike.

- **How should we look at composition?** By affirming and even championing a generative collaboration process as an artistic standard, we can achieve a greater understanding of music’s genuine meaning; in this way, we form a living relationship with the composer that reveals a unique community and avoids the insider-outsider quagmire.
- **Where does composition come from?** By utilizing a generative collaboration process as an artistic standard, we gain a greater historical context for approaching the quality of music; in this way, we participate in highly-integrated cultural understandings that are inherent in the process itself. In order to know composition, we must be related to the process ourselves; pure objectivity in music is a myth.
- **Who is a composer, and what is composition?** Using a generative collaboration process as an artistic standard, one cannot remove the composer from the product; in this way, the generative collaborative approach is the rule not the exception. In order to approach the composer and the composition, one must engage in a genuine relationship.

- **How can we determine “quality” in music?** We must admit that quality is “subjective” in all cases, and admit that good craftsmanship only goes so far toward determining quality. Quality is measured through the *meaning* of music, not the objectified craft of it. Music may be well crafted but what is the music saying? Is there any meaning, or is it simply music for music’s sake? Where are the relationships in the process? Is there a community involved? There is always a purpose beyond the western definition, so what lives beyond the obvious musical considerations? To determine quality, a generative collaboration is the key process. Quality cannot be determined individually -- it cannot be accomplished alone.

The Power of Association

The need to unite is essential both for understanding music and for determining musical quality. Without an effective Association for composers, Indians have been historically left to their own wits and courage as individuals and tribal communities

The need to unite is essential both for understanding music and for determining musical character and quality. It is rare to find such meaningful associations as “music-*ing* innumerable” outside American Indian ceremonies. But even more a concern, is the increasing spread of the “consumer assimilation effect” both inside and outside of Indian life. Without a prominent and effective American Indian Association for music composers, Indians have been historically left to their own wits and courage as individuals and members of tribal communities. The lack of strength in a united music association has been a sad state of affairs for American Indian music. But, with the promise of the FIRST NATIONS COMPOSER INITIATIVE (FNCI), there is the potential for a meaningful and powerful association that may encourage the schism to begin healing.

There are certain qualities to look for in an American Indian composer association; qualities that can make or break an organization.

- **Respect for Indian Self-Determination:** policies that support tribal communities to determine their own members, are the foundation of Indian Self-Determination. How the association works with individuals, families, and communities should be respectful and encouraging.
- **Understanding and Knowledge:** the association should assist staff and members-at-large in self-development and learning, and create a supportive environment to encourage both. Understanding and knowledge exists only in generative collaboration, so good communication and sharing should be highly valued.
- **Communication:** networking, including web access, for the association should be inclusive and inviting for everyone; how the association develops its networking and communications should be transparent and easily understandable by everyone.

- **Innovation:** a successful Indian composer association should develop a framework that supports innovative thinking and encourages creative problem solving skills. With a CAE foe that strives to “box” American Indian music into fixed products and marketable categories, thinking outside the box should be highly valued within the association.

Association of Who Exactly ?

Of course, the core of any American Indian music association must be a respect for Indian self-determination. A healthy association may see a diverse interest from its members and a variety of personalities and levels of dedication at any given time. Remember, it is the process of enacting generative collaboration that brings all participants together and fosters genuine understanding in music. Associations may have several levels of commitment from its members. Here are some suggestions for the development of FNCA.

- **Community-Identified Indian Members:** Indian self-determination is the guiding principle of Indian recognition; only other Indians from within specific Indian communities can determine who is an Indian. Indians themselves must shape a composer association, and their participation is absolutely critical for success in all areas of interest.
- **Biological Indian Members:** Some Indians are biologically Indian but unrecognized by any specific community. Many circumstances exist that may create this situation, including non-Indian adoption cases, and varying degrees of tribal separation. These members cannot speak as Indians necessarily, without tribal recognition, but are nonetheless important for any American Indian association.
- **Indian “Influenced” Members:** Many non-Indians have an interest in, and are influenced by, American Indian life and music. These members may contribute much to the field and support an Indian association in many interesting ways. Quite often, members such as these have a knowledge base that makes collaboration along many paths a rewarding trip.
- **Collaborator-At-Large Members:** Indians, non-Indians, organizations, schools, and venues are all potential members at-large. If we can imagine any intriguing collaboration, we are that much closer to making it a reality. A vibrant and diverse membership opens the door to many exciting possibilities.

Where to Go From Here

This presentation merely touches the surface of the potential for success of an American Indian music association such as FNCI. There is an endless list of possible objectives and goals. Here are some beginning suggestions for FNCI.

- **Web Presence:** an interactive and knowledgeable web site.
- **Daily Operations:** respectful, supportive and fun.
- **Longevity:** attention to financial commitments and support.
- **Newsletter:** calendars, reviews, innovations, news, listings.
- **Networking:** connections on professional and social levels.
- **Collaborations:** projects, seminars, workshops, consortiums.
- **Acknowledgments, Recognitions, Awards:** kudos!
- **New Program Development:** innovative ideas put into action.
- **Commission Opportunities:** foster and sponsor new works.
- **Student Programs:** programming activities such as FNCI's "Composer Apprentice National Outreach Endeavor" (CANOE) to encourage the next generation of Indian composers.

Wading Into the Mainstream

Comprehending American Indian music is a nebulous task, from its process oriented beginnings to its current consumeristic schism. However, the relational importance of Indian music can never be overly stated or emphasized; "being related" is the one solid moccasin string, pulling against the flood waters that hurl Indian music to market at breakneck speed. Healing the schism cannot be left to the consumer-driven marketplace; a new vision for American Indian music must be developed and set in motion by Indians ourselves. With the assistance of meat-and-potato organizations such as the American Composer Forum, and the Ford Foundation, the new vision is close to becoming a reality. New generations of American Indian composers are appearing on the horizon; Indian music has everything to do with being related and stands in opposition to the consumer assimilation effect so prevalent today. Greatly needed in today's world, FNCI affirms its potential as a beacon of hope and a source of strength for American Indian Music.