

Styles of Songs

There are various styles of songs that are sung. It all depends on where and when a gathering is happening. The large drums usually perform at the larger powwow settings. People who use the smaller drums will usually sing at smaller gatherings and social events. It is common for a large drum group to perform at smaller gatherings and the hand drums and water drums have become a part of the powwow circuit.

The large drums are required to sing a variety of songs to fit the various dances that are being performed at the powwow. There are many different beats that each drum should know. These include straight beats, crow hops, sneak ups, round dances, side steps and various other double beats. Each of these songs have their own beat style and range of singing. The drum should be ready to sing any style of song at any time during the powwow or gathering. If the drum is not ready to sing a particular song then that song will be passed to another drum.

There are songs of honor that are sung at gatherings. The Flag Song is to honor the flags that are being represented. There are Veteran's Songs for all the veterans that have fought in all the wars and conflicts. There are also honoring songs for families or special events. With this song there is usually gift giving involved. When a family wants an honor song, they will approach the drum with a gift and sometimes a song that they want to hear. The drum can also choose an appropriate song when called upon for an honor song. During these songs it is required to stand up and remove any hats to pay respect for the song, the drum and the reason for the honoring.

Here in the Northeast, the Penobscot have various songs for all kinds of occasions. These songs all have a particular place and time when they are to be sung. There are times of ceremony and times of social gatherings. These songs are primarily sung with a hand drum, water drum or rattles. Occasionally there will be a large drum present when it is requested.

The Penobscot have ceremonial songs that should be sung only during ceremonial events. One of the songs is the Green Corn Dance. This song is an honor song for the Corn Mother and Her gifts to the Penobscot. Another ceremonial song is the Medicine Man Song. This song honors the medicine men and the warriors. Other ceremonial songs are the Eagle Song which honors the eagle and life and the Death Song to honor the deceased and the ancestors. There are other ceremonial times when songs are sung. These would include weddings, births and other special personal events.

The Penobscots also have a variety of social style songs. There are social songs for men, women and children. Social songs are songs that get everybody at the gathering dancing. These songs include a number of round dances and Snake Dance songs. There are songs for the children like the feather dance and songs for the elders to remind them of the old days. Social style double beat songs are often called mocassin songs. Singing and hearing social style songs is a sure way to uplift anyones spirits if they are feeling down.