

[Sam Cronk, comp.]. *Sound of the Drum*. Brantford: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1990. 104 pp. ISBN 0-919775-233-3

Pat Deiter McArthur. *Dances of the Northern Plains*. [Saskatoon]: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1987. xii, 70 pp. ISBN 0-920571-02-6

Michael Asch. *Kinship and the Drum Dance in a Northern Dene Community*. [np]: The Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, Circumpolar Research Series, 1988. xi, 113 pp. ISBN 0-919058-73-6 (cloth), 0-919058-74-4 (paper)

Robin Ridington. *Trial to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988. 301 pp. and *Little Bit Know Something. Stories in a Language of Anthropology*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990. xv, 281 pp. ISBN 0-88894-628-7

Beverley Diamond

Volume 11, numéro 2, 1991

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014206ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014206ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Diamond, B. (1991). Compte rendu de [[Sam Cronk, comp.]. *Sound of the Drum*. Brantford: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1990. 104 pp. ISBN 0-919775-233-3 / Pat Deiter McArthur. *Dances of the Northern Plains*. [Saskatoon]: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1987. xii, 70 pp. ISBN 0-920571-02-6 / Michael Asch. *Kinship and the Drum Dance in a Northern Dene Community*. [np]: The Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, Circumpolar Research Series, 1988. xi, 113 pp. ISBN 0-919058-73-6 (cloth), 0-919058-74-4 (paper) / Robin Ridington. *Trial to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988. 301 pp. and *Little Bit Know Something. Stories in a Language of Anthropology*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990. xv, 281 pp. ISBN 0-88894-628-7]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 11(2), 158–162. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014206ar>

[SAM CRONK, comp.]. *Sound of the Drum*. Brantford: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1990. 104 pp. ISBN 0-919775-233-3

PAT DEITER MCARTHUR. *Dances of the Northern Plains*. [Saskatoon]: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1987. xii, 70 pp., companion cassette and video also available. ISBN 0-920571-02-6

MICHAEL ASCH. *Kinship and the Drum Dance in a Northern Dene Community*. [np]: The Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, Circumpolar Research Series, 1988. xi, 113 pp. ISBN 0-919058-73-6 (cloth), 0-919058-74-4 (paper).

ROBIN RIDINGTON. *Trial to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988. 301 pp. and *Little Bit Know Something. Stories in a Language of Anthropology*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990. xv, 281 pp. ISBN 0-88894-628-7.

Native teachings repeatedly demonstrate how “meaning” emerges from the coincidence of events. It might be particularly appropriate, then, to consider the coincidence of four recent books which concern Native music. Together they represent diverse perspectives: two emanate from Native cultural centres – one Iroquois, one Cree – while the other two were authored by two senior anthropologists whose association and concern about Native communities and Native music in those communities has been long-standing. Since none of the four emanates from the established Canadian musicological community, it would be easy for CUMS members to miss or bypass them. This would be unfortunate, for these volumes are a “must read” for anyone truly interested in learning about Native music.

Time moves through all four books. Both Asch and Ridington look retrospectively at their own research interests and modes; the historical dimension is not merely their own personal history, however, but the way in which expressive culture responds to specific historical moments, the way in which it reflects memory and vision. The Cronk and Deiter McArthur books, on the other hand, emphasize the panoply of many musics (and dances) which have been created, borrowed, and adapted by Native artists. Here, then, we see a richly textured music culture as it has grown and developed historically. All four books are a welcome change from representations which have frequently presented Native music in an ahistorical frame as if it emanated from a society frozen in the past.

The *Sound of the Drum* was compiled by Sam Cronk who served as guest curator for a remarkable exhibition and conference on Native musics organized and hosted in October, 1990, by the Woodland Cultural Central Centre on the Six Nations Reserve in Brantford, Ontario. It consists of personal statements

(collected in interviews by Cronk and several associates) by 20 individual musicians who are grouped according to the type of music they perform, as “traditionalists” (Margaret Paul, Mike Dashner, Jose Marcus, Cyrille Fontaine, Louis Thunderhawk), brass band member (Nancy Ireland), “Hymners” (Mercy & Dayton Doxtator, Earl Sault, Elin Sands), fiddlers (Lee Cremo, Clifford and Joan Tenasco), classical performers (John Kim Bell, Tara Browner), and “eskanye” singers (Richard Johnny John, Hubert Buck, Amos Key and Sadie Buck). They belong to twelve different nations from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Michigan, and Wisconsin – not surprisingly, the Iroquois Nations are the best represented.

While the variety of individual musical experience related in the volume is striking, the most compelling aspect, for me, lies in the tone and language of the statements. In his introduction, Cronk notes certain consistencies in this regard, observing that the language about music conveys “a sense of motion, of involvement and participation rather than passive admiration,” as well as “a fundamental interrelationship of music and the physical and spiritual worlds, a connection which is basic to their integrity as Native peoples” (p. 9). (The use of music to show respect and the respect for music are noteworthy.) The importance of feeling a oneness, a sense of community, a deep relatedness to all living beings is also reflected. But alongside the serious, this book has the best sense of humour of anything in print about Native music – not the least of its achievements.

By sub-titling the volume a resource guide, Cronk is reminding us of the primacy of individual participants and the centrality of Native voices, all too often forgotten or ignored in the huge quantity of printed material on Native culture authored by outsiders to that culture.

Saskatchewan Cree author Patricia Deiter McArthur adds another important Native voice to the chorus in her *Dances of the Northern Plains*. Based on interviews with elders, her own participation in contemporary events, and library research, the book is a clear explanation of “the significance of our ceremonial dances, how they have evolved, and in what forms they survive” (p. vii). Oriented primarily toward Cree youth who may not have had an opportunity to learn from their elders, the descriptions also communicate strongly across cultural boundaries. Like the *Sound of the Drum*, the book is richly illustrated; colour photographs (by Ted Whitecalf) of contemporary powwow dancers are especially noteworthy. Although this volume focusses less on personal experience, the sense of the individual is again apparent since names are carefully included with all photographs, stories are attributed to specific elders, and community-specific variants of dances are frequently cited.

Music and dance are integral to Native culture and while the latter is the primary label here, the author refers to the former throughout. The dances are described individually under the following categories: traditional ceremonies (the Sundance, Round Dance, Masked Dance, Bear Dance, Gift Exchange, Prairie Chicken Dance, and Horse Dance), dances of Okihcitwawak or the Worthy Men's Society (the Big Dog Society Dance, Buffalo Society Dance, and Victory Dance), traditional social dance (the Grass Dance, Moving Slowly or Round Dance, Tail Wagging Dance, and Tea Dance), and Indian Celebrations of the 80s (Men's Fancy Dance, Men's Traditional Dance, Women's Fancy Dance, Women's Traditional Dance, Owl Dance, and Music). As in other areas, the label, "social" dance, here refers to dances borrowed from other Indian Nations, and, hence, used for social rather than ceremonial purposes. The descriptive style and language often differs from academic ethnography; for example, the meaning of specific ceremonies is most often presented by means of story or myth. As in *The Sound of the Drum*, the positive emotional and spiritual impact of these ceremonies is in no way disguised.

Finally, it should be noted that this is but one of the music publications produced by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. They have issued a remarkable cassette series (including the popular Red Bull drum, Northern Plains Singers, Stoney Park Singers, Blackstone, and Elk's Whistle). Whitecalf is also working on a powwow video series.

Michael Asch's *Kinship and the Drum Dance in a Northern Dene Community* presents research conducted in Pe Tseh Ki (Wrigley), Northwest Territories in 1969 and 1970. In the intervening years, a period when Asch's primary professional attention focused on political and legal issues (see his *Home and Native Land: Aboriginal Rights and The Canadian Constitution* [Toronto: Methuen, 1985]), a more sophisticated political consciousness developed in the Dene community as a more considered interpretation of the relationship between social organization and expressive culture emerged in Asch's thinking.

Following descriptive chapters on the geography and history of the Pe Tseh Ki region and the economic life of the people there, he uses a structuralist paradigm to examine social structures, the social organization of the drum dance, the music of the drum dance preceded by a short description of kinds of music and instruments), and the relationship between these wherein he looks for the "meaning" of the event. In his music analysis, he records the Dene terminology for instruments, genres, and the two predominant rhythmic patterns. He looks at the organization of space, the identity (band, gender, age) of performers (singers, dancers, spectators), and the types of musical activity at the drum dance.

Individual songs are described with an emphasis on range, motivic structure and beat pattern. In the culminating chapter on the meaning of the event, he compares “successful” and “unsuccessful” events. The measure of success, articulated by the Dene, is the achievement of community solidarity. (Asch sees this as a strategy relevant to the particular historical moment of 1969 when he “saw the community as attempting to resolve its difficulties and to create a social life in highly changed circumstances through internal means alone” (p. 96). In the subsequent decades more attention has obviously been directed toward external causes, government policy, *etc.*) Success is achieved, he concludes, when participants are motivated to put aside personal disputes and to create a special world ruled by the “we rationale,” when the scheduling of the event is predictable and the competence of performers high, and when the activities achieve cooperation and participation. Like the others, this book also has illustrations and photographs; one hopes that the names of individuals so depicted will be added if a subsequent edition is issued.

Asch’s work is noteworthy for the consistency and completeness of the details he records, for the wholistic framework in which he contextualizes his musical analysis, and for his introspective comments on meaning, social organization, and musical analysis. He does not actually achieve the integration he sought, however; and perhaps this is a shortcoming of the structuralist paradigm itself which looks at the surface of sounds and events, placing emphasis on structures rather than interpretations, on isolatable phenomena rather than coincidences, or on strategies for responding creatively to circumstances.

Although I had read a number of Ridington’s earlier publications, especially several relevant to Native music study, nothing had prepared me for his amazing book *Trail to Heaven*. It resonated more deeply than anything I had read previously with the process of my own venturing into the conceptual world of First Nations expressive culture even though the region of northern British Columbia and nation (the Dunne-za, or Beaver Indians) were remote from my experience. He describes how he began his study of the Dunne-Za with anthropological paradigms firmly in place and how he shifted his style of thinking as he came to understand more about “knowledge” as defined by Native narratives and their intersections with personal experience. It dares to be metaphorically and structurally radical in order to become, as an object, a book which moves between these conceptual worlds. Ridington shifts from ethnographic description to personal narrative, mythic text, or the transcription of conversation, heightening the impact through the coincidence and differences among the various types of discourse by so doing. And he moves in circles, repeating passages at different points in time to illustrate how those passages

came to be re-contextualized and hence different in the meaning they held for him along his own pathway, his own trail to heaven. For me, these structures are brilliantly successful.

While this book is not *about* music, the “trail” he describes is a trail of song, story, and dreams, and one learns more about Native music from this book than from those which focus narrowly and ethnocentrically. Ridington has maintained an interest in music throughout his career although his approach has altered substantially both because of the teaching of the Dunne-za and his association with the late Howard Broomfield, a film-maker whose creative response to the sound world of the community accelerated Ridington’s “paradigm shift.”

Lest my comments imply that the book is narcissistic, it should be stressed that Ridington is one player in a book peopled with representations of wonderful human beings: the Chipesias, Saweh and Jumbie, and Charlie Yahey to name only a few.

As if to contrast the varied discourse styles of his “career” and “experience,” Ridington subsequently published a compilation of his anthropological writing, entitled *Little Bit Know Something*. The title, borrowed from one of his Dunne-Za teachers, contrasts starkly with *Trail to Heaven*, implying in a not-so-subtle critique his current attitude toward the two styles of knowledge.

What are we to make of the coincidence of these recent volumes relevant to the study of Native music cultures? Surely enthusiastic noises. The addition of a number of Native musicians to the corpus of published authors provides a much-needed perspective. (Previously this perspective was offered primarily by Charlotte Heth and Marcia Herndon, both, themselves, reflecting their experience in university circles as well as their heritage.) We may finally have hopes of laying to rest the colonial legacy in which a discourse of Otherness is produced primarily by Euro-American/Canadian men and women. The reflexivity of non-Native authors is equally positive, a move toward understanding and eradicating the mechanisms of racism and oppression.

Beverley Diamond