

## ON THE WARPATH, 1942

WILLARD RHODES

THE grim realities of war have struck the North American Indians with a sharp and sudden impact. Though the ideology of German National Socialism and the sequence of events which led us to the present are still unknown quantities in the mind of the average Indian, the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor gave concrete meaning to the situation. Immediately Indian men of fighting age proceeded to recruiting stations to enlist in the various military services. The spirit of these warriors is succinctly expressed by some unknown Sioux folk poet in the words of one of the new songs, crop of 1942.

The President, the flag, and my country,  
These things I stand for.  
So saying the Sioux boys went as soldiers.

Last summer I visited the Oglala band of the Teton Sioux on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Here I observed at first hand the effect of the war on the contemporary music of this tribe. The Sioux were formerly a militaristic people who gloried in the bold and daring exploits of their fearless warriors. It was not surprising, therefore, that in my quest for new music I should find twelve war songs to record which had been inspired by the present conflict. Three of these are frankly remodeled versions of words and melodies that did duty in World War I, which in turn were probably based on old tribal war songs. The remainder, however, are new and stand in their stark beauty as memorials to the creative vigor and innate musicality of the primitive Sioux composer. Though the words, melodies, and rhythms tend to fall into familiar patterns, it is important, in judging their originality, to remember that there is a culturally determined framework within which these folk composers create. Traditionally limited to a melodic style with rare instances of heterophony, conventionalized rhythmic formulas, and an accompaniment of drums and bells worn by the dancers, the song maker's margin for novelty is narrow.



1. A plus or minus sign over a note indicates a slight raising or lowering of the pitch of that particular tone. Inasmuch as the tonic tone, D, is sung consistently flat throughout this song, only the initial appearance of the D has been so marked. In the melodic cadence which occurs at the end of each phrase, F functions as a leading tone in relation to D. This results in an interval that is neither major nor minor, a neutral third which is fairly common in primitive music.

2. At this point the women join in the refrain of the song. While the men continue singing with a "pulsating tone," indicated by dots above or beneath the notes, the women vocalize the phrase very legato with a meaningless syllable, *he*. The sharply timbred voices of the women singers is highly suggestive of the tone quality of a reed instrument.

The musical score is written on five staves. The first staff is labeled 'd = 88' and 'leader'. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The melody is written with eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the staff, the lyrics 'Yo-o he-e' are written. The second staff is labeled 'chorus' and 'sung a major third higher'. It continues the melody with the lyrics 'yo-o he-e ya he-a he-e a ha-a ha-a he-a ta-a he'. The third staff continues the chorus with the lyrics 'he-a he-a he-a o!'. The fourth staff continues the chorus with the lyrics 'ko-wa-ka ta o-te-hi he ko-wa-bli ka-pa he-na ya-a we-to he-e he-e yo!'. The fifth staff is labeled 'Variant 1' and 'leader'. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The melody is written with eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the staff, the lyrics 'ba-li-hi ai-ya yo la-ko-ta hok-si-ta ne-ya pe-to he-e he-e yo!' are written. The sixth staff is labeled 'chorus' and continues the melody with the lyrics 'he-a he-a he-a o!'.

(Translation of the Text)

Over there lies danger.

Wise Eagle (General MacArthur), you are still there.

Brace yourself and take courage.

That is what the Sioux boys say.

1. The departure of the leader in the opening phrase from the tetratonic scale on which the melody is built appears accidental and not intentional. It may have resulted from a certain nervousness before the microphone or difficulty in getting the song started. Such accidental variations, recurring with consistent frequency would be incorporated eventually into the structure of the melody. In the succeeding repetitions of the song the opening phrase is extended and elaborated as shown in Variant 1. Here an ornamental tone, E, lying outside the basic tetratonic scale is introduced.

2. Throughout this song the rhythm of the drum follows that of the voice by a small fraction of a beat. Rarely do the beat of drum and voice coincide.

The song in honor of General Douglas MacArthur, Example No. 3, was composed by Thomas Tyon and Henry White Calf the day before I

left Pine Ridge to express appreciation of the heroic endurance and bravery that had kindled the imagination of the Sioux.

The songs collected last summer are customarily sung at the big community dances given on the eve of the departure of a group of volunteers or inductees. Some of them are in honor of an individual, a common practice being for a family to "commission" a singer of established reputation to make a new song honoring the departing member. They are all cast in the familiar form and style of the popular *Omaha Songs*.

### III

The romantic approach to Indian music of Edward MacDowell, Arthur Farwell, Richard Burton, Charles Wakefield Cadman, and Thurlow Lieurance in the early years of this century has been reason enough for modern composers to shy at anything connected with Indians, to regard the material as suspect. But the musical revolution and experimentation of the twenties is behind us. For many of our leading composers the effort to translate the soul of America into sound has become secondary to their desire to write good music. This more realistic attitude and less fevered approach prompts one to suggest that the time has arrived when the composer can safely reconsider American Indian music as a source of material. The interest of this material is not however confined solely to its musical values. The light which it throws upon the intricate process of musical creation and the insight it gives into the conventionalization of musical and poetic clichés is highly suggestive and invites further study.