Native American Culture

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**Abstract**

Every nation and society has its own native culture that makes it different from the rest. A cursory observation of human culture will evidently reveal that human society tends to evolve along factional lines, and each faction has its own traditions and norms that are followed by the members. There are various elements that distinguish one group or culture from another. Music is one of the main elements that can be focused on, if one were to attempt to decipher the cultural practices of a group. A numbers of stories related to the origin of native flutes attest to this fact. History provides insights into how different tribes that play various songs on Native American flutes. Somewhere in the world, at some places, melodies of hope, unity and peace are being played.

**Introduction**

Music is linked to the gods, who represent various forms of music. Some natives follow a certain god representing a certain type of music, while certain groups depict association to other gods. According to researchers, Kokopelli was the first god of the Columbian natives who lived in the western United States. Kokopelli was a flute playing wanderer. A figurine of Kokopelli was found by researchers of the Pithhouse People in the 16th century. In the ruins, many evidences have been found that point towards a figure sitting on a horse. As per the oral traditions, Kokopelli was a source of multiple wondrous needs for his people i.e. food, rain, dance music etc.

**Discussion**

Most scholars claimed that a close relationship exists between music self-expression. Oral traditions mean the tradition of an ancestor is passed on in the stories of their time to newer generations. A large percentages of these stories are related to dance, music, gestures, art and facial expressions. A few researchers believe that oral traditions were the main source of passing the native culture from one generation to the next.

A study of native cultures reveals that people used to believe that music and self - expression are tied to several health benefits. According to these researches, music helps in lowering blood pressure, maintains a normal heart rate, releases stress and lessens anxiety. Various instruments find their way onto the list of the oldest musical instruments, but indigenous flutes are, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the oldest musical instruments. After an evacuation, the world’s oldest flute was found in a cave, and researchers who found it named it “***Hohle Fels***”. When the experts tried to find the materials it was made up of, they came to know that Hohle Fels is made of the bone (wing bone) of a Griffon vulture. After lot of research, experts claimed that the Hohle Fels flute is around 43000 years old.

Different areas have different instruments (flutes), and these were discovered in areas inhabited by particular tribes. Flutes are one of the most famous instruments that depict Native American Culture. In North America, one of the oldest known flutes found was named L’Anse Amour on a coast that is now Labrador in Canada. Like the Hohle Fels, it was also made up of a large bird’s bone, and as per the researches this flute is around 7,600 years old. Native American culture has taught us another thing and that is that it is hard to keep the native culture and its elements in its original form. At present, the existing wooden Native American Flute was found in the Great Plains, where the tribal people used to live. The museum of Italy has this flute on display. This existing wooden flute has seven holes, a flue, a block and a slow air chamber. It is around 200 years old.

Traditional Native American flutes are made up of different kinds of woods, including stone, bamboo, river cane, clay and bone. At present plastic, glass, old gun barrels and ceramics are used to make flutes. Every tribe has its own unique flute that represents the culture of its native tribe. Hopi tribe has a unique bell shaped flute that is being used at Tribal ceremonies. Though this fact cannot be denied that there are various designs of flutes, but the basic purpose of the flutes that represents Native American Culture is self-expression. To-honoO’Odham people has a traditional flute that consists of three holes having no fetish on it and the people of this tribe used to play it while sitting on horses, as these people are known to have been masterful horse riders.

It is a bitter reality that because of conflicts with Euro-American settlers Tribal Nations they were forced to leave their home lands and travel to far off reservations that affected the traditions of making and playing flutes. Scholars claim that during the 19th and 20th century, restrictions on the Tribal people forced them to abandon practicing their cherished and age old cultures. These Tribal people were forced to adopt Euro-American farming lifestyles so that they could contribute to making their land more productive. Tribal people used to be punished by the supreme authorities for practicing their old customs, and that was the time when the flute culture almost died. According to archeologists, only a few Native Americans devoted their lives to playing and teaching the flute and kept it alive.

***Belo Cozad*** (who belonged to the Kiowa tribe) was the most famous tribesman whose efforts for keeping the native flute alive deserve mention. Belo used to travel by train and spent decades of his life arranging concerts and classes for teaching the flute to the new generation, so that they could pass on the Native American Culture to the next generations. He taught the flute to thousands of Native American people and many of them became legendary flute players, who created great records of playing flute in history (Abel,et,al,2018). Belo recorded a large number of native flute songs for the Library of Congress in 1941, when he was 87 years old. Records show that the Native American flute experienced a resurgence in popularity in the 1960s, mainly because of the great interest of the American public in folk music. 1980 was recorded as the time of New Age music. At present many artists use American Flute much like a contemporary instrument in their music. In some of the remaining tribal cultures, oral tradition is still used for learning the flute. Through oral tradition one generation teaches songs and traditions to the next one.

**Conclusion**

So as a whole, it could be concluded that the flute is being presented as one of the basic instruments that can help us understand the cultural values of different tribes. Native American tribes have always used flutes as a way of expressing their feelings. Even today, there are thousands of people for whom the flute is more than just a musical instrument, as it is directly associated with their ancestors. People who learn the flute and are in love with it, treat it with non-toxic oils which protect the wood. They are taught how to hold the flute, as placement of fingers is important for learning it well. Different holes present different notes. It won’t be wrong to say that rhythm, vibrato and embouchure were of great importance for the Native American tribes. Flute Circle is also a well-known organization of musicians for focuses on Native American Flute and teaches the art of playing flute to many for educational and recreational purposes.

References

Abel, K. (2018). The Educative Spirit-Home: A Thought Experiment to Educate Through Native American Women's Art.