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Music Division - Recording Laboratory

FOLK MUSIC OF THE UNITED STATES

Issued from the Collections of the Archive of American Folk Song

Long-Playing Record L24

SONGS OF THE YUMA, COCOPA, AND YAQUI

Recorded and Edited by

Frances Densmore

Preface

The long-playing records of Indian songs, edited by Dr. Frances Densmore, make available to students and scholars the hitherto inaccessible and extraordinarily valuable original recordings of Indian music which now form a part of the collections of the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress. The original recordings were made with portable cylinder equipment in the field over a period of many years as part of Dr. Densmore's research for the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution. The recordings were subsequently transferred to the National Archives, and, finally, to the Library of Congress with a generous gift from Eleanor Steele Reese (Mrs. E. P. Reese) which has made possible the duplication of the entire 3,591\(^1\) cylinders to more permanent 16-inch acetate discs and the issuance of selected recordings in the present form. The total collection is unique and constitutes one of the great recorded treasures of the American people.

Dr. Frances Densmore of Red Wing, Minn., was born May 21, 1867, and has devoted a rich lifetime to the preservation of Indian music. Her published works include volumes on Chippewa Music, Teton Sioux Music, and Tiyacapa Cheyenne Music.

\(^{1}\) Certain of the cylinders transferred to the Library of Congress were made by other field collectors of the Smithsonian Institution, but the great bulk of them -- 2,385 to be exact -- were recorded by Dr. Densmore, and these have been designated as the Smithsonian-Densmore Collection.
Northern Ute Music, Mandan and Hidatsa Music, Papago Music, Pawnee Music, Yuman and Yaqui Music, Cheyenne and Arapaho Music, Choctaw Music, Music of the Indians of British Columbia, Nootka and Quileute Music, Music of the Tule Indians of Panama, and other related subjects. Now, as a fitting complement to these publications, Dr. Densmore has selected from the thousands of cylinders the most representative and most valid -- in terms of the sound quality of the original recordings -- songs of the different Indian tribes. With the recordings, she has also prepared accompanying texts and notes -- such as those contained in this pamphlet -- which authentically explain the background and tribal use of the music for the interested student.

This long-playing record, and the series of which it forms a part, is a valuable addition to the history, folklore, and musicology of our North American continent. Its value is increased for us with the knowledge that much of the music has, unfortunately, disappeared from the American scene. To Dr. Densmore, and other Smithsonian collectors, as well as to the Indian singers who recorded for them, we must be grateful for rescuing this music from total oblivion.

DUNCAN EMRICH,
Chief, Folklore Section.

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Phonetics

Vowels have the Continental sounds and consonants have the common English sounds except that--

- **a** is equivalent to English obscure **a**, as in the word **ability**.
- **c** is a sound resembling English **sh**.
- **tc** is a sound resembling English **ch**.
- **x** is a sound resembling German **ch**.

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Two distinct cultures are represented in this series of songs. The Yuma and Cocopa belong to a group of tribes known as the Yuman, whose early home was the valley of the Colorado River. On either side of the river are sandy stretches, high mesa rims and barren mountains, while beyond is an expanse of arid desert. This geographical region shut in the tribes of the Colorado River and made them a unit, so that their culture, or civilization, is different from that of the Pueblo or the tribes of California. This is seen in the form of their melodies, while the words of the songs often mention the crossing of high mountains.

The Yaqui are the principal members of the Piman family of tribes living chiefly in Sonora and Sinaloa, Mexico. Certain groups of these Indians live in Arizona and carry on their old customs but are not enrolled as United States Indians. The study of these interesting tribes was made in connection with the writer’s research in Indian music for the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, in 1922.

The Yuma Reservation is on the California side of the Colorado River, opposite the town of Yuma in Arizona. The United States Indian Agency and School are on a high promontory overlooking the river and are on the site of Fort Yuma which was established after California was acquired by the United States. The Yuma Indians were living in the region at the time but offered no resistance to the coming of the white man. The Cocopa live south of the Yuma, on the Colorado River, and the Mohave, the third member of the group, live above the Yuma on the river. The Mohave were included, to some extent, in the regional study but none of their songs are in the present series. The river civilization comes to a sudden stop with the Mohave, and above their country is the Eldorado Canyon, a bend of the river, and the vast gorge that culminates in the Grand Canyon.

The Yuma and Mohave songs were recorded near the Agency. In order to secure the Cocopa songs it was necessary to go to a small Cocopa village near the town of Somerton, in the extreme southwestern portion of Arizona. A few Cocopa from Mexico live in this village but are not enrolled as United States Indians. The Government maintains a day school for the children but since the school was not in session, it was possible to obtain living quarters and a place to record songs. It was necessary to take two interpreters from Yuma, as none was available who could speak English, Yuma and Cocopa. Accordingly, Luke Homer went to translate English into Yuma and Nelson Rainbow translated the Yuma into Cocopa. Homer had interpreted during the recording of the Yuma songs and was familiar with the writer's method of work, and Rainbow had recorded two songs, so he knew what was expected from a singer. Throughout this difficult trip the writer had the helpful companionship of her sister, Margaret Densmore.

The Yaqui songs were recorded at Guadalupe Village, not far from Phoenix, Arizona. I went to this small village, from Phoenix, almost daily during the week preceding Easter, 1922, and witnessed the native celebration of holy week. On the day before Easter a performance was enacted in which the Deer dance was an important feature. A portion of the songs were recorded the day after Easter by Juan Ariwares who led the dance, and several are included in the present series. Two other Yaqui recorded their songs, which show Mexican influence.

More than 160 Yuman and Yaqui songs were recorded but only 130 were transcribed. The remainder were studied and found to contain the same peculiarities. The most important songs of both groups are in cycles, some with dancing and some without dancing. Such cycles of songs embody and preserve the traditions of the tribes.

A peculiar musical custom was found among the Yuma, Cocopa and Yaqui which has not been noted elsewhere. This custom consisted in a brief pause between the first and second periods, or sections, of the melody. The singers said there was no prescribed length for this pause and in the renditions it corresponds to only a few units of the tempo. In these songs the first melodic period is long and its phrases are sometimes repeated in irregular order. The second period begins in a different rhythm and is short, often containing tones that do not occur in the first period. This peculiarity occurs in the following songs of this series -- A1 (Yuma), A9, A10 (Yaqui); and A11, A12, A13, A14 (Cocopa).
DEER DANCE

One of the principal cycles of Yuman songs is that concerning the deer. This was said to be the only cycle with dancing. A description of the dance was obtained and some of its songs recorded among the Yuma, and the dance witnessed among the Yaqui and its songs also recorded.

YUMA DEER DANCE SONGS

The Yuma cycle of Deer Dance Songs required one night for its rendition, each part of the night having its own songs. The dance, or cycle, was said to be based on a belief that the deer has power over certain animals that are mentioned in the songs. He met these animals in the course of a long journey which extended from the ocean to the Colorado River and the high mountains west of Phoenix "where the sun begins to shine in the morning." Men and women take part in the dance, holding hands and moving sidewise in a circle. The dancers do not sing. The songs are accompanied by pounding on overturned baskets, three baskets being generally used and four singers being seated at each. The leading singer at each basket strikes the basket with two willow sticks held in his right hand while the others strike the basket with the palm of the right hand. A leading singer starts the songs and the others join after a few notes. The baskets are bowl-shaped, such as are in household use. Alfred Golding, who recorded the songs of the Yuma dance, brought his willow sticks and bundles of arrow-weeds for pounding the basket, this being his custom when going to places where he was expected to sing.

The songs in the early part of the night concern the water bug that "draws the shadows of the evening toward him on the water." One song tells that "The water bug is dipping the end of his long body in the water and dancing up and down." The three following songs also belong to the early part of the night and tell of the journey of the water bug. The first of these contains a short pause after the first period of the melody, a peculiarity already described as occurring in certain songs of this series.

Al The Water Bug on the Mountain (Cat. no. 1166, ser. no. 60)*

Free translation:

Continuing this motion, the water bug came to a mountain called Avi’hertá’t. Standing on top of this mountain, he is gazing and he smells the breeze from the western ocean.

* The catalog and serial numbers following each song refer to entries in Bull. 110, Bur. Amer. Ethnol., 1932, already cited.
The Water Bug Sees a Fish  
(Cat. no. 1167,  
ser. no. 61)

Free translation:

While the water bug stands there, the ocean seems to draw nearer and nearer, and in the water he sees a fish traveling up and down with the tide. (This fish was said to be shaped like a sunfish but larger).

In the record of the next song the melody is sung through once, after which the phrases are slightly changed and sung in irregular order.

The Water Bug Stands upon the Fish  
(Cat. no. 1168,  
ser. no. 62)

Free translation:

Standing as in a dream, he came to the ocean and stood on the top of the fish, thinking that he was standing on the ground. Then he found it was moving and said, "This is something alive."

The Water Bug Wanders forever beside the Sea  
(Cat. no. 1169, ser. no. 63)

Free translation:

The water bug wanders forever beside the sea. After standing on top of the fish the water bug became black, this being caused by a disease that he took from the fish. Therefore he wanders forever on the shore of the ocean.

The four preceding songs, as stated, were sung in the early portion of the night. The next songs of the cycle state that the deer takes away the daylight, one song containing the words: "After the deer had been in the darkness a long time he asked the spider to have a road made for him in the darkness. The spider made the road and the deer is now traveling on it." The deer met various birds and animals and asked each to do something characteristic. The blackbirds, the buzzards, the raven and the howling coyote were among those who consented. The little blackbirds sang as they danced around the four corners of the sky, and the song which follows is that with which their dance was completed.
A5 The Dance of the Blackbirds is Completed  (Cat. no. 1179, ser. no. 73)

As the night progresses, the songs mention the redbird and the humming bird. Toward morning the owl "hooted and told of the morning star, he hooted again and told of the dawn." Four songs of the night-hawk complete the songs of this cycle that were selected and recorded by Alfred Golding, the first and second of the group being presented.

A6 Song of the Nighthawk (a)  (Cat. no. 1185, ser. no. 79)

Free translation:

The redbird requested the nighthawk to sing, and here he is singing and telling of the morning. He did not dance.

A7 Song of the Nighthawk (b)  (Cat. no. 1187, ser. no. 81)

Free translation:

The daylight is coming and I can distinguish objects around me.

The cycle closes with a song containing the words, "Now the sun is up and the nighthawk is enjoying the light and going from one place to another."

YAQUI DEER DANCE SONGS

The celebration of holy week in the Yaqui village of Guadalupe, near Phoenix, differed in many respects from that seen by the writer in the Yaqui village near Tucson, Arizona, the previous year. At that time the accompanying instruments consisted of drums and reed instruments while at Guadalupe they were more varied and included violins. In both villages the performance was a strange mixture of Roman Catholicism, paganism, and individual originality. On the day before Easter, at Guadalupe, a performance was enacted which may be described briefly as a religious procession or pageant in which the Deer dance was an important feature. The Deer dance was performed by four men, at intervals from noon to midnight. The accompanying instruments were four halves of very large gourds: one was inverted on the water in a tub and struck with a small stick, another was inverted on the ground and similarly struck, and the other two were used as resonators for small sets of rasping sticks. Juan Ariwares, who led the dance, recorded 15 of its songs on the day after Easter. Only three of the songs are in the present
series. The motions of various birds and animals are mentioned and the
next song concerns a little fly. The melody has a compass of only five
tones and progressed almost entirely by whole tones.

A8  The Little Fly   (Cat. no. 1275, ser. no. 85)

Free translation:

Brother little fly flies around and looks at the sun.

The two songs which follow contain the brief pause that character­
ises a few songs of this series. These songs were sung after midnight.

A9  The Summer Rains   (Cat. no. 1279, ser. no. 89)

Free translation:

In summer the rains come and the grass grows up,
That is the time that the deer has new horns.

A10  The Rising Sun   (Cat. no. 1280, ser. no. 90)

Free translation:

The sun is coming up,
It is time to go out and see the clouds.

COCOPA BIRD DANCE SONGS

The Cocopa songs, as stated in the Introduction, were recorded in
a small Cocopa village near Somerton, in the extreme southwestern por­
tion of Arizona. The songs of this dance were recorded by Numaˈwasoˈt, a middle-aged member of the tribe who learned them when acting as a
"helper" to the leading singer. In order to secure his services, a
Cocopa named Frank Tehanna traveled many miles on horseback, explained
the writer's work, and asked him to come to the Cocopa village and record
songs. At first Numaˈwasoˈt hesitated, but his objections were over­
come by Tehanna and he came to the village where he recorded 11 songs of
this dance. Five of his songs are here presented. The words were not
translated.

Numaˈwasoˈt said that when acting as a leader of the singers he
was seated and usually had two helpers on either side. He and each of
the helpers had a gourd rattle with which they accompanied the songs.
The dancers were young women, from one to five in number. They stood
in a row facing the singers, and when dancing they moved backward and forward a distance of about fifteen feet. As in other Yuman dances, each part of the night had its own songs and the singing began softly, gradually increasing in volume as the night progressed.

A11  Song in the Early Evening  (Cat. no. 1245, ser. no. 101)

The next song contains more ascending than descending intervals, a peculiarity noted with some frequency in Yuma and Cocopa songs but seldom heard in songs of other tribes. The syncopations in this melody are interesting, also the short rests which give crispness to the melody.

A12  Song at about Midnight (a)  (Cat. no. 1247, ser. no. 103)

The next song progresses chiefly by whole tones which comprise about two-thirds of the intervals.

A13  Song at about Midnight (b)  (Cat. no. 1249, ser. no. 105)

Next is one of the songs that are sung in the early morning. It was followed by a song concerning the Pleiades.

A14  Song concerning the Diver  (Cat. no. 1251, ser. no. 107)

Two additional songs of the early morning were recorded, only one being presented.

A15  Song in the Early Morning  (Cat. no. 1253, ser. no. 109)

(Disc-side B)

YUMA CA´KORAMU´S DANCE SONG

The songs of this dance were said to be part of a cycle "about the stars in the sky." The cycle required an entire night for its rendition. The songs in the early part of the night were sung softly and the singing gradually became louder as the series progressed, a custom that characterizes other dance cycles of the Yuman tribes. The words of the songs are obsolete and, as the people did not understand them, it was customary for the singer to announce the subject of a song after singing it. Katco´ra recorded five songs of this dance but only one is presented. This is a particularly fluent melody and was accompanied by the shaking of a rattle.
The meaning of the name of this dance was not ascertained. It was danced by unmarried girls and men, usually five to seven in number. There were more singers than in the Bird dance, the leader often having three or four men on either side, each with a gourd rattle. At first they were all seated, the singers in a row and the dancers facing them. When all was ready they sprang to their feet, the singers advancing and pushing the line of dancers backward. The distance thus traversed varied according to the wish of the singers and might be a few feet or a longer distance. In its action the dance resembles the Bear dance of the Northern Ute, songs of which are contained in long-playing record L25 of this series.

The songs of this dance were recorded by a young man known as Mike Barley who spoke no English and hesitated to sing the songs in the daytime. He said that he inherited them from his grandfather. The series required an entire night for its rendition, each part of the night having its own songs, but there was no narrative connected with it, the series being only for dancing. The words were in the "old language," and the first songs of the series were said to mention the evening and certain animals and insects, but beyond this the meaning of the words was not known.

In general character the songs of this dance are different from those of the Bird dance. They are spirited and the rhythm is more decided. Six songs of the dance were recorded by Barley but only one is presented. This melody has a compass of four tones and progresses chiefly by whole tones. The lowest tone of the compass is strongly accented.

The songs in this group were said to have been received from White Cloud who controls the lightning, thunder and storms. They were received in a dream by Charles Wilson who recorded the songs and gave the information concerning them. He said that White Cloud appeared to certain medicine men in their dreams and gave them power to bring rain or to cause a thunderstorm. Thus if a man with this power were with a war party, he could summon rain or secure a storm to conceal the warriors.

The narrative embodied in the Lightning songs concerns the journeys and demonstrations of White Cloud as a "wonder child." Wilson said, "He has only one bow and one arrow. He holds them in his hands and
whenever he swings the bow in any direction it lightens, and when he moves his body it thunders." In the opening song of the series White Cloud arrives in the sky and travels toward three mountains, to which he gives certain names, and he also meets Coyote who dances and sings a song. Charles Wilson recorded 13 songs of this series but only two are presented. The words of the songs were not translated. The following song is one of those sung in the latter part of the night.

B3 White Cloud Demonstrates His Power (Cat. no. 1206, ser. no. 50)

In the succeeding songs White Cloud continues his journey across the sky and comes down to the ocean where he sees the great waves throwing masses of mist into the air. He is now on earth and sings the following song.

B4 Song concerning the Ocean (Cat. no. 1211, ser. no. 55)

In the final song White Cloud says, "This is the beginning of the clouds, the high winds and the thunder. I alone can command them to appear." This final song does not, however, appear here.

YUMA SONGS USED IN THE TREATMENT OF THE SICK

The informant selected for this subject was Charles Wilson who recorded the Lightning songs. He was said to have such "medicine power" that neither cold nor heat could harm him. It was also said that he secured fish when the people were in need of food, and gave one or two fish to each member of a family, that all might be fed. In his dreams he visited the spirit land "where they have melons the year round." He came and went among the spirits, but they paid no attention to him, and he did not understand their language.

In his treatment of the sick Wilson used four songs that his father received in a dream. His father had power to treat men who had been shot in the chest, and Wilson had power to do the same. The words of the songs are in a "secret language." With the singing of each of his four songs, Wilson had a different "intention." His procedure with the first song which is not, however, included here, may be briefly described as follows: He began to sing when about 25 feet from the patient, then rushed toward the patient and moved in circles around him, then sang in both the patient's ears, blew in his eyes and ears, and tapped the top of his head. Wilson said, "When I rush toward the patient my full intention is that he shall regain consciousness."
During this second song of the series, Wilson said his "feeling" is that the hemorrhage will cease. The song mentions a small insect that lives in the water and has power over the fluids of the body. It is believed this insect will respond and exert its power to aid the sick man.

During this song, which is third in his series, Wilson has a "feeling" that the patient will regain the power of motion, and the song mentions a lively insect that gives its aid.

His "feeling" when singing the fourth song (not presented) is that the patient will regain the power of speech, and the song mentions a certain buzzard that "flies so high that it is out of sight." The buzzard has great power in itself and also exerts an influence over the insects mentioned in the preceding songs, increasing their power. It is said that "each of the insects does his best, but it is the buzzard whose great power gives the final impetus and cures the sick man." The confidence in Wilson's own mind was the more interesting as he did not "absolutely promise" to cure a sick person when undertaking a case. It was said, however, that he "had never lost a case."

YUMA SONG WITH CREMATION LEGEND

It is the belief of the Yuma, Cocopa and Mohave that if a man's body is not cremated his spirit will "wander around and talk to its relatives in their dreams." The origin of this ancient custom is contained in traditions and in series of songs which are similar in these tribes.

An opportunity to witness this rite of the Yuma occurred on February 13, 1922 when the writer was present at the cremation of Bernard Flame. The ceremony was given as it would have been given for a chief, since Flame had been a singer at cremations, singing with the leaders of the ceremony. Bernard Flame died in a sanitorium for the insane and his body was brought to the Yuma reservation for cremation. The wailing, the ceremonial speeches, and the entire procedure was in accord with tribal custom. The body was cremated in a frame or crib constructed of cottonwood longs.

The Yuma legend concerning the cremation custom required about nine hours for narration, with the singing of the songs, but it was condensed for the writer and 26 of its songs recorded by leaders in the
ceremony. Only one of the songs is here presented. The legend itself concerns the wanderings of a Wonder-boy who brings the spirit of his dead father out of the ashes of a fire, talks with him, and lets him return to the ashes. Later he brings back his father a second time. His father expresses the most tender concern for his welfare and tries to help him, but the boy is now resigned to the loss of his father and finally lets him depart "with dust and clouds and thunders roaring, going down into the earth forever." This foreshadowed the cremation and the memorial ceremony which is held a year after the cremation. At this memorial an image of the deceased is burned in a ceremonial manner, after which the name of the deceased is never spoken.

The legend also relates that the Wonder-boy, on his journey, met many birds and animals that made their characteristic sounds. One of these animals was a wild cat with striped body and shining eyes. The Wonder-boy called it Namé, which was the first naming of the animal. The song concerning it was sung by Peter Hammon, a recognized authority on old songs and customs, and it is the first song concerning a wild cat that has been recorded by the writer.

Song concerning the Wildcat (Cat. no. 1222, ser. no. 13)

COCOPA SONGS WITH CREMATION LEGEND

The translation of this legend and the words of the songs was made possible by the cooperation of two interpreters, Nelson Rainbow translating the Cocopa into Yuma, and Luke Homer translating the Yuma into English. Only one Cocopa knew these songs and, after some persuasion, he consented to sing them. This singer is known by the English name Clam, a name which he received when he lived by the sea in Mexico. The songs were accompanied by the shaking of a rattle and the words were in an obsolete language, the meaning of which was known only to the singer.

In explanation of the songs, it was said that in the beginning there were two beings who rose from the bottom of the earth. One caused light and created human beings, and the other was destructive. The songs here presented concern the death and cremation of the second who is referred to as Superman. Twelve of the songs were recorded by Clam, five being presented in this series. Each song was preceded by a brief description by the singer.

The Illness of the Superman (Cat. no. 1256, ser. no. 27)

In the first song of this group the Superman denies that he is ill although he is in a serious condition. It was said, "In doing so he set an example for wise men to follow, and to this day such men will never admit they are sick, though they may be in a dying condition."
The Superman Speaks (Cat. no. 1259, ser. no. 30)

Preceding the second song, Clam said, "At length the Superman grows drowsy, but rouses himself to express his love for his children.

The Four Corners of the Earth (Cat. no. 1260, ser. no. 31)

Continuing his talk to his children, the Superman says, "As I have said before ... I have in mind the four corners of the earth. Among these I may choose the place to which my spirit will go, but I have not yet chosen."

Coyote Comes to the Cremation of the Superman (Cat. no. 1262, ser. no. 33)

The Superman died, and, as the fire of his cremation burned brightly, Coyote traveled toward the place. It was said that this coyote was "one of the very wild sort that no one ever sees."

Coyote Makes a Request (Cat. no. 1265, ser. no. 36)

Coyote joined the circle of animals that stood close together around the cremation fire. He said that he wanted to find a place where he could stand and cry with the others, but it was his plan to seize the heart of the Superman.

The later songs of the series relate that Coyote seized the heart of the Superman, carried it to a mountain and ate it. He then became unconscious as the result of a powerful spell that was cast over him, and immediately afterward died. This accords with a similar legend of the Mohave related by Billie Poor, a Mohave living on the Yuma Reservation, who recorded two Mohave songs that are sung preceding the memorial ceremony in that tribe.