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Dr. Louis Ballard and Jimmie Toolie compare musical instruments and songs

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

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Series: Potlatch series

Jeff Kennedy said since this week's potlatch is concerned with Native American musical instruments he will begin with drums.

Drums by Peter LaFarge

[00:05:59] Dr. Lois Ballard came to the Interior of Alaska in mid-March. The American Indian educator and composer gave classes in teaching Native American music in schools. He believes it is important for all Americans to learn about their common heritage. He believes Native American music is valid an art form as classical music from Europe. Ballard begins by introducing musical instruments of the tribes of the lower forty-eight.

Louis Ballard said they have some drums. Jimmie Toolie from Savoonga is also present in the studio. Ballard and Toolie play two different kinds of drums. Ballard said his is an elk skin drum with a sheep skin beater. He said it was made by a Yakima Indian drum maker. He plays the drum. He said whenever it is cold he has to heat up the drum. It gives it more resonance and keeps it from cracking. He said it is similar to the Dakota Sioux and other tribes in the continental United States.

Jimmie Toolie plays his drum. He said that they used a walrus stomach for the cover of the drum. They use the drum for Eskimo dance. They use a little bit of water on the drum so it won't break when it gets dry. It sounds different when it has water on it. If the water is too cold it doesn't sound good. He beats on the drum. He described preparing the walrus stomach. One stomach can make two drums.

Louis Ballard said he will sing a song with his drum. It is a dance society song from North Dakota. He said translated it means the dance society is very good. The composer is unknown. There is a deer hoof rattle attached to the drum sticks. Ballard sings and drums.

Lois Ballard said that was an Arikara song from North Dakota.

Jimmie Toolie said he will sing the pulling song. Toolie drums and sings.

Ballard asked if the song had any words. Toolie said no. Ballard said Eskimo music has similarities in terms of its makeup and composition. He said it is composed by a person. Some of

the songs have words and other songs have no words. These type of songs are called vocables. They are derived from the language. The songs may be just a few days old or ancient ones composed by someone who is now dead. A great many forms of songs exist in Native America. The music of the Native people is mainly vocal music. The accompaniment is various. They use rattles, idiophones, membranophones, chordophones, and flutes. He talked about rattles. He has a cow horn with pebbles inside. It is used by singers to accompany his song. Materials are found in the singer's environment. He talked about the deer hoof rattle. They are made from the dew claw. Another rattle was made from metal from tin cans. In the southwest sea shells are used. They are cut and hung on a belt. He demonstrates the shell rattle. Some rattles are made by dried cow hide. Ballard said all of these things should be part of our education process. The school children should know about them. The Native languages, customs, dress, foods and ways of life have beauty in them.

Ballard asked Jimmie Toolie if the young people are learning the songs. Toolie said some of them are. Bally said he saw Toolie's performance at the Native Arts Festival and he liked it very much. Toolie introduced Karen Aya. Ballard said he was very proud of her performance. He said the discussion of Indian music and performance arts is pertinent to the educators and to the mainstream citizens. He talked about the need for music programs to educate children and discussed the EXCEED program. He said this information is our American heritage and folk heritage. As an American this material can broaden the student's perspective. He believes the educated student will have more respect for other cultures. He said it is a smaller world every year. He talked about flutes of the old culture. He described a courtship flute and played it. He said they have been found in several different tribes. Indian music is a vital living tradition if it is encouraged and kept alive. He thinks it is important for the young people to know these songs.

Song by Buffy Sainte Marie.