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Dr. Louis Ballard

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Fairbanks, Alaska

March 14, 1978

Series: Potlatch series

Jeff Kennedy said Dr. Louis Ballard gave a workshop at the University of Alaska Fairbanks on March 14, 1978. Ballard promoted the teaching of Native American music in schools to Native and non-Natives.

Louis Ballard said his basic premise is that American Indian music, resources and culture have validity in the American school system. This validity is based on the fact that the songs and dances were created over a period of some five million years when the culture began. One reporter from Russia asked after traveling across America where the music of the people was that spoke about their land. Ballard said the answer is with the American Indian. He said in Phoenix very few people know that Camelback Mountain has a song composed about it. They have in the Southwest the Gallup Indian Ceremonial, powwows, stage performances of Native American performing arts and craftsmen.

Potlatch song by the Nootka tribe on Folkways Records

Jeff Kennedy said Ballard praised students at the University of Alaska for reviving and sharing Alaska cultural values. However Dr. Ballard said it is too late. Cultures have died at the hands of missionaries and do-gooders. More harm has been done in the name of good in the history of the world. Totem poles were burned by the thousands with first European contacts. He said the bloodstreams mix well. He said Joe Lewis was part Cherokee and very proud of it. Many runaway slaves were embraced by the Indian tribes. In South America there are whole communities which are descendants of the original slaves. The music is enriched by this. There is a diversity of music and culture undestroyed and very much as it was before European contact. He focuses on these for the schools and himself as a person who composes. Native songs all have characteristics that can be codified. They have musical characteristics and artistic principles which can be crystallized as rules. The music has been studied and examined for many years. Eskimo music has been codified, but is in the process of being collected. It is the least understood.

Song by Cody Bearpaw

Louis Ballard asks if music makes men more sympathetic to his fellow man. He said the listening of music as an observer will not. You have to learn it and live it before any change can

take place in your attitude. He said Hitler listened to music but it did not make him more humane. He talked about Alaska villages not wanting roads to keep away the encroaching cities.

Singers from Chesterfield Inlet in Canada's eastern Arctic perform a song

Louis Ballard said close examination of another people is going to change nothing. You must learn to live and love like the other people. He said when you learn a song from the Native people and sing it then this is still observing. In the tribal culture 75 percent of adults were music makers and participated in the performance. In our society only three to five percent of the people are music makers. We are observers. Curt Sachs cites the importance of Indian music as returning music to the ear where it belongs and not on paper. He insists that Indian music be learned by ear just as it has been over the centuries. He talked about the oral tradition and the retention of knowledge. As adults we learn sophisticated things by ear, but we rely more and more on machinery. He advocates a greater involvement in the schools and teachers bringing music into their own lives.

Louis Ballard sings an Athabascan song by the people known as the Navajo. Ballard talked about the song and its history. He learned from an elderly lady that it is a women's song. He translates the song. He said the Navajo population has come back. When some of their members returned after the war they had to have a purification ceremony. They went through the beauty way chant. He said Americans have not grasped the concept of beauty and talked about the American destruction of the land. He believes this would never have happened if Americans had the Navajo concept of beauty.

Song from Savoonga