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Dr. Louis Ballard talks about teaching Native music and teaches a Navajo song

Jimmie Toolie teaches a song

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

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Series: Potlatch series

Jeff Kennedy said in mid-March Dr. Louis Ballard came to Interior Alaska to promote the teaching of Native American music in the schools. Kennedy said Ballard will talk about how and why he became an advocate of Native American music in schools.

Louis Ballard said when he first came to the American Indian Institute of Arts in 1962 he was the only music teacher and director there. He had eighty different tribes in his music classes. He was a product of the American music system. His methods classes had directed him towards an average American situation. He came to a school that had many tribes. His first Christmas he did a typical program. He then dragged out an Indian drum. He asked his students to sing for him and there was silence. Very few of them knew any Indian songs. He thought he was getting into an easier area. No one was using Indian songs in the schools at that time. He talked about typical songs used to represent American Indians in Hollywood. Ballard began to search for relevant material for his young students. He said he went to museums to look for materials. He went to the Rapid City Sioux Museum. He plays a piece that he found a song named Ghost Dance. The song was dedicated to a U.S. Major. He looked at the words in the music. He sings the Ghost Dance song in Sioux. He started collecting pseudo-Indian music. He was beginning to become known for his work. He talked about the ways not to write Indian music and how they should be written as a response to the culture.

Louis Ballard asked his class in the studio to learn a Navajo song. He explains the meaning of the words and instructs them.

Ballard said many of the Native teachers have been weaned away from their culture. He said the music department at UAF should be at the forefront of this. He talked about the different instruments in the Native cultures.

Jimmie Toolie of Savoonga teaches a song with Louis Ballard.