

The
Native American
Flute

A Love Story

by

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"New web site"
SILVERMOONCREATIONS.COM

Special Thanks

To the Mother/Father God, creator of all, who is the source, course, and goal of life, I Thank you.

To Jeannie Hart, my apprentice, helper, financial manager, and personal angel. For the many years of loyalty to the love of the Native flute, I Thank you.

To the many family and friends who have been the foundation of who I am, my eternal appreciation, I Thank you.

The Native American Flute A Love Story

Origins

The Native flute is a tradition that reaches back to the earliest days of Indian civilization. It's beginnings are now obscured by time, but stories are still told by the Native Elders.

One such story is told about a brave who went deep into the forest in search of food when he heard a sound that was bird-like but strangely unfamiliar. Upon investigation he found a hollow branch which had holes made by a woodpecker. The wind blowing through was creating a beautiful sound. When he touched the holes with his fingers the sound changed.

Some accounts of the story have Great Spirit appear in the form of a bird or other animal spirit and instruct the brave in the way of making his own flute. Others leave

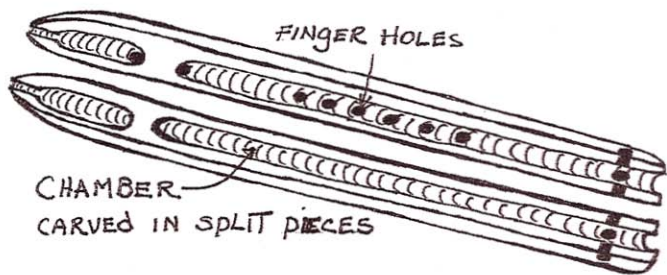
the ingenuity up to the Indian after his amazing discovery. In another story there was a lost boy who was starting to despair of ever finding his way home. While sitting down to pray, the Great Spirit came to him and taught him the way and purpose of the courtship flute. In every account I have heard the flute was a benediction to the people by a higher power.

Even though obscure in one sense, the Native flute has become the sound representative of the Indian culture.

The flute was mainly used by the Plains Indians as a courtship instrument, but whenever the media or movie industry wishes to portray Natives in general the flute is used as the background music to set the mood of their story. Consequently most of us have grown up with the sound of the Native flute, and upon hearing it always recognize its origin, but know very little about its appearance or usage.

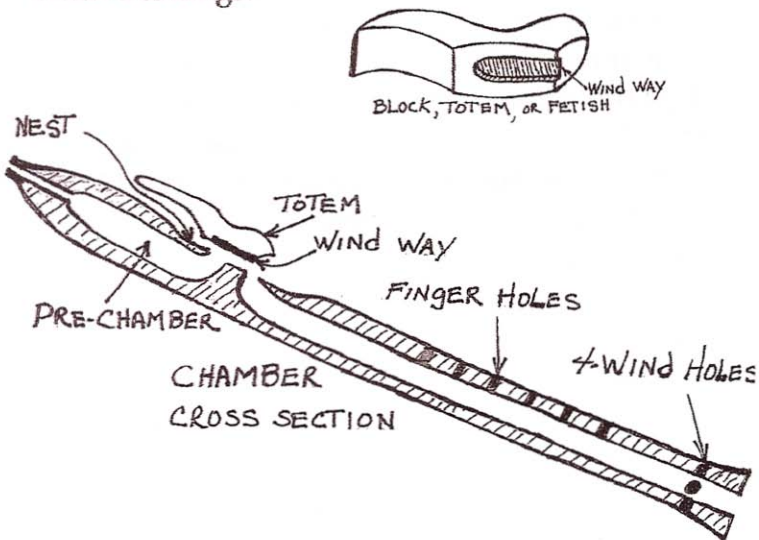
Construction and Ritual

The long ritual of making the courtship flute was very involved and the council of the elders would be sought before making one. After locating a suitable branch, preferably cedar, it was split and each half was carved into two half chambers separated by the width of a finger. First a short chamber near the blowing end which focused the air up through a hole to the flattened outside called the nest. Then the long fingered chamber which also had a hole to the nest. The two holes coming up to the nest on either side of the separation provide air to create the whistle. Sometimes the whistle would be made with a Whistle plate to focus the air, but most of the time the air pathway would be carved in the bottom of the fetish or totem. When properly carved the two halves were joined together using tree resin or wax and permanently tied with rawhide at various places to hold the halves together and create



an air tight seal. Next the nest or flattened area above the separation was created to receive either a fetish with its carved air path of a fetish with whistle plate. This was all tied together with leather lacing and aligned to direct the air creating the whistle. The fetish or block or totem would be carved in the shape of an animal that was significant to the maker as his clan or totem animal.

Finally the finger holes were cut using the width of the finger as spacing, six holes for the fingers plus four more at the end of the flute as tuning and to honor the four directions. Today the five note pentatonic scale is most widely used, with the third hole from the nest down as an additional note. This extra note is not in sequence for the five note scale, but is commonly used in Native tunings.



When the task of constructing the flute was accomplished a period of time was spent in prayer composing his love song. When the time was right this song would be played as a love offering. I have heard differing accounts of how the maiden was to respond, in some situations she would come over and cover the four directional holes to show she accepted his offer. Sometimes the arrangements were completed by the mother or grandmother after the two had shown their willingness to come together. This ritual goes to the roots of our culture, the Native flute is the oldest wooden flute from North America, but more important it was used as a tool for opening the heart in love to another person.

Function and Relationship

The Native flute is unique among other types of flutes. It is technically a "flageolet" or whistle flute like the recorder, but being a

two chambered whistle flute it is in a category of its own. The first chamber acts to pressurize the air before it is channeled up to the whistle. By changing how hard you blow the pitch is changed, this gives the Native flute its expressive swelling sound.

The fetish and wind way must be carefully positioned and fit snugly to direct the air without leakage. If the air is misdirected, or if there is a loose fit, the sound quality will be affected. Before playing it is important to insure the fit and focus, and re-tie if necessary. This may need to be done if an excessive amount of moisture builds up under the fetish. Moisture can obstruct the air flow. Usually a blast of air blown through the flute, or drawing air back through will clear the moisture. If it doesn't clear stand the flute on the blowing end to let it drain or re-tie after cleaning.

Playing

The best method of learning to play the Native flute is simply to spend time practicing playing it in a meditative way, to gradually develop a relationship. Just like meeting a new friend, time and patience make the best progress. Be relaxed in a prayerful attitude, don't rush from one note to the next. Spend time with each note to feel it become as expressive as possible, carefully adjusting your fingers to cover the holes accurately. The instruction I remember fondly from my teacher was to become centered, then "to breath through and let the heart speak." The Native flute isn't elaborately mechanized like the silver flute, but it is filled with the humble purity of its ancient origins.

For the first flute players each song had to represent an individuals unique expression of loving feelings. Thus there was always variety in the love songs, as

different as each individual who played.

In preparation to play just blow through without covering the finger holes.

Experience how the sound changes by blowing both softly then harder. Get a feeling for how much air it takes to create a uniform sound. Next cover the top three holes (closest to nest) with the three main fingers of the left hand, and the right on the bottom three holes. This can be reversed if it feels more comfortable. The fingers should be as flat as possible so the softest part of the finger tip sinks in the holes. If there is a tiny leak a distorted sound will result. Blow with a steady soft pressure until the lowest note becomes clear and full. By increasing the air pressure the note will jump to the next octave up, blowing softly will drop the note back to the low note.

The pentatonic scale skips the third hole from the top to play the scale in sequence, this hole is kept covered to play the scale.

To play the scale start with all holes covered then open one at a time from bottom to top leaving the third hole covered. A mirror may be helpful in fingering the scale in the beginning. Repeat the scale over and over until your fingering becomes more confident. Be patient and remember it is your new friend, when you are more familiar it will sing for you.

As you progress experiment with multiple openings and a variety of sequence combinations. You will feel an attraction to certain notes followed by others, as you choose their sequence they become your own songs. Breath is very important to play with feeling, visualize your breath as a stream of loving feelings.

It is common for traditional flute player to play with a vibrato or trembling effect, this is similar to the way your voice is made to waver. Also the tongue can be put to the roof of the mouth to vibrate as you blow

into the flute to create an interesting effect. Experience is the best teacher and a little time spent on a regular basis will produce good results.

Care and Tying

The tying of the fetish to the flute takes care to get it secure. (Note: As of this revision all Silver Moon Flutes are now what is called plate-less flutes with the air path carved in the fetish instead of using the whistle plate. Many of my previous flutes used the plate system. I have changed to attain more purity in the sound and simplicity of adjustment.) The air path carved at the bottom of the fetish lines up with the back of the hole in the nest that has a beveled edge, there should be about 1/4 inch space opening. Hold the fetish and flute with one hand while starting the leather tie with the other. It may be helpful to use a rubber band around the pieces to

add pressure and hold them in position before tying with the leather strap. The first time you take off the leather tie notice the way it is tied and use this system, or develop one of your own. Before playing check tightness and alignment, a leaky or misdirected fetish will not produce a full sound.

The finish I use is olive oil with an application of wax. The oil does tend to dry over time which will pale the color somewhat. Simply rub a little on every now and then to add richness to the appearance, this will also help the flute to mature and season. You may clean with fine steel wool or 220 or finer sandpaper from time to time.

The collective Open Heart

The Native style flute can offer a very personal way to express our deepest feelings just like in the original usage. I believe its magic can expand beyond its origins as a catalyst for the union of two souls, into a medium for expressing love for Mother Earth and all her children. Each open heart contributes to the collective open heart. When that collective becomes the majority many things will change in a positive way. When we practice opening the heart and emotions, we tear down the barriers that block their expression and come closer to our true nature of peace.

May your new Silver Moon Flute be blessed, I have made a determined effort to create a quality instrument based on the designs of my Native brothers. I have great respect for the traditions that gave birth to such a loving practice. May their ways be given honor and respect.

Kokopeli

Kokopeli is the most famous of the Native flute players. He was known as a deity of fertility among the ancient tribes. He was always seen with a hump back in which some reports say he carried seeds. Most of the cave drawings show him with a large erection, and antenna like head decorations. His presence has been discovered from Canada down into south America.



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Beginnings

I learned the way of the Native flute in 1987 from my teacher Woodrow Wotoko Haney of Tulsa Oklahoma, recognized by many to be a master of the Native flute. I consider myself to be blessed to have had his kind instruction, and have endeavored with each flute I've made to be worthy of his trust.

I have presently made over 3500 flutes with the goal that each new flute would be better than the last one.

Randy Haislip

Silver Moon Creations

Love
Always
In all ways
Randy
& I

