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KUAC Chinook Radio Series: Inupiat Music part 1, Tom Johnston, Village Health Aides

Part 1:

Chinook Echoes

Professor Tom Johnston from the University of Alaska Music Department shares some Inupiat music samples. Johnston says the environment is reflected in the music through the dance motions and stories told through these movements. Dances can imitate movements of animals or birds; some are about folklore and heroes or tell the story of a hunt. There is traditionally no written history; instead things were passed on orally. The songs are like the library of the Eskimo people, they contain much of the past. There is a great amount of old songs that tell the stories of their ancestors. The dancing of the Eskimos of northwest Alaska is full of humor via comic masks, jokes, and other fun. Neighboring villages would host “inviting-ins” in which the dance team of one village would prepare its rehearsals, fur costumes and drums and invite in the dance team, friends, singers, dancers and drummers of the neighboring village. These pairs of villages that have this mutual entertainment where they all have fun and feast each other to create good social relations. There are two classes of songs in Northwest Alaska. One is a sayuun class which has fixed motions known to everyone that are assigned to the dance and song and everyone must learn the movements because it is a specific dance and song for a specific story. The other class is the atuutipiaq that has totally free motions so you can just get up and improvise. This is mainly for the inviting-ins so the visiting teams who may not know the local dance stories can still participate by doing free motions. That’s why it’s called the Inviting-In Dance. Johnston explains that the drum rhythm in the song sample he is about to play is very interesting. It starts off with a basic pulse in each measure of 5 beats, and then it moves to 7 beats, then back to 5 beats. Johnston demonstrates this beat. Johnston then plays a sample of music by Herbert Kinneeveauk of Point Hope. Johnston notes that halfway through the tempo and volume level increase, which ups the level of excitement and is a customary way of performing dance songs in Northwest Alaska. Most of the sayuuns have real words and most of the atuutipiaqs have the vocals with nonsense syllables. Another type of music is the Game Songs. Children play different games such as juggling with pebbles and hopping games. The next sample Johnston shares is one of Dinah Frankson at Point Hope performing the Pebble Juggling Song. It has a fast rhythm to accompany the fast toss of pebbles into the air and being caught again. Grandmas teach the song and game to the children. Another kind of Game Song is String Figure Game Songs where the grandparents will cleverly manipulate string with their fingers to look like objects while singing this song. Another String Figure Game is when they twist a loop around the foot or head, stick your finger in the loop and sing half of the song while twisting the string. Then stick your finger in the hole and the other half of the loop, twists in time to the other half of the song. So when you pull your finger suddenly out of the loop it’s back to where it was, with no twists, because you twist the opposite direction for the second half of the song. If you sing the song long and have too many twists, it means your finger will get trapped. So you have to pull your finger out with a big “whoop” and all the children are very surprised and wonder where all the twists have gone. The way Eskimo children learn from the elders is through watching; sensory perception. It’s not abstract through books. So by watching these games and the drift of sea ice, etc., the children learn very skillful spatial orientation. This is important because out on the featureless tundra and sea ice it’s easy to get lost and many people die this way every year. The ice floe breaks off and people don’t see the group of hunters ever again. So they try to teach the children spatial

orientation. There are many words in the Eskimo language for upness and downness and hereness and thereeness and insideness and outsideness. And you find these words in songs such as the String Figure Song where the string is going all these different directions. So they learn these words and the outdoor skills for figuring out where they are so they can find their way home again. It's incorporated into the music. The interview ends with a children's song from Northern Canada.

Part 2: Chinook Patterns

This program is a continuation of their look at Native health services. This program focuses on the community health aide program, which is one of the first to be taken over by Nonprofit Regional Corporation. It used to be administered by the Indian Health Service but as a result of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act the Regional Health Authorities are pushing for more IHS services. The Community Health Aide program is one of the more successful ones, with about 200 health aides working in the villages to serve about 50,000 people in a direct, one-on-one basis. Their duties range from first aid and accidents (one of the biggest problems in rural Alaska), to examining patients, reporting symptoms and treating them. They are also involved in health education programs. Paul Sherry, the Director of Health Services of the Tanana Chiefs Health Authority, describes the role of a health aide from an administrator's point of view. Most of the regional corporations involved such as Tanana Chiefs, have health aides work under the supervision of a physician, usually by radio or telephone contact. Health aides also have a manual that gives guidelines for the services they should provide. Health aides have different levels of training and are asked to defer areas in which they're not proficient to a physician, whether that means flying the person out of the village if need be. Some health aides have upwards of twenty years of experience in their work and some have several years of medical training with professionals, which means they can handle a rather wide range of problems. When the health aides are chosen by their community they receive around thirteen weeks of training over the period of a year from the Indian Health Services in Anchorage. Tanana Chiefs is responsible for supplemental training at least on an annual basis, though hopefully more frequently, as well as continuing education. They also focus on training for alternative health aides, which the Indian Health Service has thus far been unable to provide in the past. The health aide is usually someone from the village that is selected by the village council and employed by the Tanana Chiefs. This can be a difficult way to run a health service because sometimes they train an aide and later the council wants to change their health aide. However, the positive aspect of this is that they have employed someone the community can trust and count on when specific situations come up. The community health aide position is unique in that the person is full-time responsible for the health of a number of their relatives and friends. Knowing the specific health issues and problems that people get into in the village is something that takes many years of experience. This is why there is a large amount of reliance on the radios, because it can be hard to be in charge of situations that involve family and friends or when they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation in terms of working with a patient in a public setting, because it is not like going to a private clinic or a hospital. The people in the village need to rely on the skill and discretion of the health aide. The health aide relies on the radio to get directions from the doctors. All this talking going on means it's hard to keep

things confidential in a small community. This is the case in the town of Eagle and its neighbor down the Yukon River, the village of Eagle, were made famous by John McPhee in his book "Coming into the Country" who observed that people liked to listen in to the medical problems on the satellite system and that the hospital in Fairbanks is 380 miles away by road and an hour and twenty minutes by air. He tells of a time when an emergency radio message from the village was sent out it was sent through multiple channels (the wording on the tape is rather unclear) as far away as Hawaii before finally reaching Fairbanks, still, in a matter of hours a plane had arrived to fly the patient out. Not all radio messages are that urgent. Ethel Beck is the alternative health aide in Eagle and her sister Bertha is the full time aide. Ethel came to Fairbanks to get the extra training the Tanana Chiefs provide and told about more routine uses of the radio. If a patient would come in with something minor like a cold and they check and see nothing major is wrong, they would just give him some medication, but if their examination reveals something more serious like a white patch in their throat or an earache, then they report it to the doctor. They do the same thing with any symptom they aren't sure of and the doctor tells them what to do and what to give. Sometimes the doctor will recommend flying the patient to receive more specialized medical care. This happened just the other day when Bertha saw a patient complaining of frequent numbness on his right side. She reported it and the doctor told her to send him into Fairbanks. Ethel says that they do not just dump their patients onto a doctor and forget about them. They frequently call to check up on them and see how they're doing. They don't have to, but they feel the need to follow through. It can also be helpful to the doctor to know what the health aides know about the medical history of the patient. In Eagle, it's so small that you know everyone and you can tell if a person is in pain or if he isn't. Even in small, close communities people can sometimes feel too shy to tell the health aides they have a problem. Not long ago, some typically shy people had problems they wouldn't have normally shared, but they were drinking and that gave them the extra nerve they needed to come and tell their problems. In the past, Ethel says most people have not had a problem coming to her, perhaps because of her older age, status as a good citizen who doesn't drink, ability to listen carefully to their issues and who tries to help them as much as she can. Ethel makes sure her patients know that their issues will not be spread around the community and that it is their duty to keep information confidential.