



# SONG- PRINTS

THE  
MUSICAL  
EXPERIENCE  
OF FIVE  
SHOSHONE  
WOMEN

JUDITH VANDER

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*The Musical Experience of  
Five Shoshone Women*

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*For Emily, Angelina, Alberta, Helene, and Lenore*

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour

(Blake 1982:490)

## *Preface*

The purpose of this book is to present the songs and musical experience of five Wind River Shoshone women: Emily Hill, Angelina Wagon, Alberta Roberts, Helene Furlong, and Lenore Shoyo. Each possesses her own songprint—a song repertoire distinctive to her culture, age, and personality, as unique in its configuration as a fingerprint or footprint. Five central chapters focus on the life histories, songs, and musical roles of these five women, allowing them to express in their own words thoughts about songs: issues of meaning, musical process, and musical perception. The principals range in age, almost by decade, from seventy to twenty, and their respective songprints and changing musical roles thus provide historical perspective on many aspects of twentieth-century Wind River Shoshone life. In-depth discussion of individual, cultural, and historical contexts, along with less exhaustive genre analyses and occasional analytical comments, help shed light on the songs and songprints.

The idea for this book and the selection of these five women stem from my first summer field trips on the reservation in 1977 and 1978. At that time I was gathering information on ceremonial music for my master's thesis. Although most of my interviews were with the male musicians who traditionally drum and sing ceremonial songs, I was curious to learn whether there might not be special or separate songs for women. (I knew from readings that women stayed in a small, separate dwelling during menstruation and after childbirth; did they have songs for these occasions?) Older women unanimously said, “No,” to special songs in the menstrual hut and “No,” to any separate songs for women. But a seed was planted: What sort of involvement did Shoshone women have in music?<sup>1</sup>

Music itself eventually led me to all five women. I observed the two youngest (Helene and Lenore) singing and drumming with their family drum groups during the powwow. Alberta was always part of the group of women singing for the Sun Dance. Angelina introduced herself to me and

1. See Koskoff 1987 for analytical discussions of the cultural identity and musical activity of women in many cultures.

asked for a copy of a Library of Congress tape that she heard I had; her father had been one of the singers on this tape. And I came to know Emily through her younger sister Millie, who proudly confided that her older sibling was a good singer with a large repertoire.

My research methodology for this study has been both pragmatic and eclectic and is based, essentially, on two different models. Adhering to the scientific ideals espoused by ethnomusicologists, I have tried to divest myself of ethnocentric prejudices and to seek an unbiased viewpoint. In traditional fashion I have been a participant observer over a long period of study, beginning in 1977 and 1978 and continuing in the summers of 1979–82, as I gathered material for this book.

During these years I attended the many important communal occasions that occurred during the summer. These included the Shoshone and Arapahoe powwows, Shoshone and Arapahoe Sun Dances, a variety of feasts and Giveaways honoring people for their accomplishments and in memory of dead relatives, and funerals of several Shoshone friends and their relatives. From the start I tried to help in some capacity. During my first summer I simply worked in the kitchen for the feasts that conclude all of the above occasions. This became a habit in the summers to come. I joined in a Handgame after the 1977 Sun Dance; Handgame soon became a yearly pleasure for me. I quickly realized that Shoshones appreciate participation in social events and activities. That I was not an Indian did not seem to matter. By 1978 I had acquired a shawl and moccasins, prerequisites for dancing in the powwow with my friends. I joined in some of the powwow games that year as well, playing on the winning tug-of-war team and the losing Shinny team. I signed up for the Handgame tournament during the 1979 Shoshone powwow and played on Alberta's team. In 1979 I traveled with Emily's sister, Millie Guina, to one of the largest powwows, Crow Fair in Montana, where we camped and enjoyed all the powwow "doings." I also attended the 1979 Ft. Hall Festival in Idaho, camping near Alberta and other Shoshone friends. My extended fieldwork through December 1979 allowed me to attend the Halloween dances and one of the holiday dances between Christmas and New Year's Day. As I became better acquainted with the five women and their families, I followed Shoshone customs concerning the Giveaway ceremony, participating in the dance, receiving gifts, and helping out with financial assistance to the family putting on the ceremony.

While attending the 1977 Shoshone Sun Dance and the three practice sessions and ceremonies that preceded it, I learned many Sun Dance songs. Consequently, I sang with the women in 1978 and every summer after

that, gradually enlarging my knowledge of the ceremony and its musical repertoire. I extended my Sun Dance experience by camping on the Sun Dance grounds in 1979 with Emily's sister, and in 1982 with Alberta's family. All in all it was a long, intense, exciting period of my life—a second cultural childhood with growing pains.

Over the years I have taped many songs at some of these occasions. These experiences and songs were my introduction and indoctrination into Shoshone culture, music, and society. The bulk of my work for this book, however, has taken place in private taped sessions with the five women.

Again, following scientific methods, I concerned myself with such things as sample size and representation. Did I record enough songs from each woman? Did the proportion of different song genres in my sample accurately reflect those in the elusive "complete" repertoire? Of necessity, sensitivity and pragmatism tempered these considerations. The actual selection of songs I have recorded follows both the choice and conscience of each woman. Thus, although four of the five know Peyote songs, none felt comfortable to sing them for me.

But it is precisely on the issue of sample size that this study departs from scientific methodology, for my analysis rests on the songs of only one woman in her seventies, one in her sixties, one in her fifties, one in her forties, and one in her twenties. Each woman is unique. In this regard I have followed a second model—that used in Western art and literature. When Cézanne painted a pear or Rembrandt a self-portrait as an old man, the picture depicted one of a kind—a particular pear, a particular old man. And yet at the same time there is an evocation of something larger than the individual; there is something of "peariness," something of old age itself. In like manner, although I have worked intensively with only five individuals, and although I well know how Emily differs from other seventy-year-old women, and Lenore from other twenty-year-old women, their songs and musical lives suggest something larger than themselves. "No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*" (Donne 1952:441). The tension between the individual or the particular and the general or broader abstraction, integral to Western art and literature, is embraced in this study. However, aware of the dangers of oversimplification inherent in this approach, I also point out some of the idiosyncratic characteristics of each woman and how she differs from her peers.

Although I remain sole author of this book, it has been a collaborative effort. The collaboration is very evident in the text itself. As much as possible I allow the women to speak for themselves with the hope of



preserving their distinct voices and some of the nuances of meaning that disappear when reshaped and spoken by me.<sup>2</sup> Consistent with this attempt to preserve the distinctive speech of each woman is the choice of all five to use their own names. (All interviews were conducted in English, since even the oldest Shoshones on the reservation today are completely fluent in English.)

My approach to writing this book closely parallels and reflects my method of conducting research. In essence I asked for the performance of songs, which then became a springboard for a great variety of questions: Why did you choose this song? How did you learn it? Where? Why do you like it? What makes it a good song? Did you like the performance of it? Why? My questions ranged from the particularities of a song and its performance to discussions of genre and to broader questions about the particular occasion for which the song is performed. In some places I have stitched together conversations on the same topic that may have actually occurred on different occasions. I also draw on and interpolate passages from my own log notes, always set off by brackets and indicated by a date followed by quotation marks. Although written in a fragmentary style, they often convey both information and feeling-tone of the moment. Finally, I have taken the liberty in a few places to include my own response to and interpretation of events I have witnessed. While not wishing to intrude, I feel that my viewpoint can serve as a foil to the Shoshone perspective.

Angie, Alberta, Helene, and Lenore have all reviewed the final draft of their chapters. Emily received a first draft in 1984. Her health then seriously declined, and she entered a nursing home in 1986. When I visited with her in the summer of 1986, I became painfully aware that her ability to see and hear was failing. I decided not to give her the final draft of her chapter at that time, for it seemed an empty and futile gesture. Emily died on January 14, 1988, after this book had gone to press; her chapter has not been altered, however, to reflect this fact.

My working relationship with the five women is long-standing. I interviewed Emily during the summers of 1977–82. I lived with her in 1982 and visited her in 1983 and 1984. I did not see her in 1985 when I stayed at the reservation because she was in a nursing home in Thermopolis. In 1986 we spent time together in the newly established nursing home on the reservation. My payment to Emily was always food, usually a large pot

2. "Is paraphrase possible? . . . Dwight Bollinger has spent most of his career showing that this is virtually impossible and that almost any change in a sentence — whether a change in word order, vocabulary, intonation, or grammatical construction — will alter the sentence's meaning, though often in a subtle way" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:136).



of homemade stew and side dishes that she and her half-sister Dorothy enjoyed. When I lived with Emily, I bought groceries and paid her rent. I also assumed responsibility for providing her with transportation. Although I met Angie in 1978 and visited her after the death of her husband in 1979, I did not work with her until the summer of 1981, when I stayed at her home. We worked together intensively in 1981 and 1982. I had a long interview with her in 1983, and in 1984 she allowed me to make a copy of a 1952 photograph of her and her late husband. I called on Angie briefly in 1985 and 1986. Angie received payment for all interviews and for rent and food while I lived with her. Alberta and I became friends in 1977 and 1978. Our first interviews took place in 1979 and continued in 1981 and 1982. I resided with Alberta and her family during part of the summer of 1982 and was her guest again in 1984. In 1986 we sat together and sang for the Shoshone Sun Dance. Alberta received payment for all interviews and for rent and food in 1982. Whenever necessary I also provided her with transportation. I met Helene in 1977. A teacher by nature and profession, Helene responded enthusiastically to interviews. We worked on many occasions each summer from 1977 to 1981. I lived with her in 1982 at her home in Crowheart while the Crowheart Powwow was in progress. I paid Helene for rent and food while lodging with her. Initially, Helene and I swapped songs and information. She sang songs and answered questions about Shoshone music, and I gave her guitar lessons and taught her children's songs appropriate for her Head Start students. After I formally began work on the research for this book, I paid Helene for interviews. I visited her in the summers of 1983–85; in 1986 we could only chat by phone since she was living in Nevada. I met Lenore in 1977 and had my first singing lessons around the drum with her and her sisters in early July. I recorded songs from Lenore with various members of the Shoyo family drum group in 1977–81, 1983, and 1984. I interviewed her in 1978, 1979, 1981, and 1983. In 1983 the Shoyo family and I presented a joint lecture-demonstration at the Plains Indian Museum in Cody, Wyoming. I took pictures of Lenore in 1984 and visited with her at her home in 1986. I paid Lenore and her sisters for all interviews and private song recording sessions.

Above and beyond these working arrangements with the women were the personal friendships that developed as the years passed. Our gifts to one another—shawls, beadwork, dress fabric, photographs, books, and music tapes—expressed the growing bonds between us. It is my hope that this book captures some of the enthusiasm for the work we shared together and reflects my deep respect and regard for all five women.

Before plunging into the mosaiclike details of each woman's repertoire

and musical life, let me suggest in broad strokes some of the overall findings of this study. First, there are no special song genres for women. I come to this conclusion from my interviews with many Shoshones, not just the five women in this book. While tiny lullaby-ostinato patterns exist, for the most part there are no lullabies. Second, all five women document a strong musical role for women in social, religious, and ceremonial contexts, one that is both differentiated from and complementary to the male musical role. In this century there has been an enlargement of female musical roles, including movement into what were formerly and exclusively male domains. Third, historical perspective reveals a continually evolving balance and synthesis of change and continuity.

Change is very evident in a comparison of the five song repertoires. That the oldest woman sings 147 Ghost Dance songs and 2 War Dance songs, whereas the youngest sings no Ghost Dance songs and 59 War Dance songs, tells us something not only about the demise of the Ghost Dance religion but about the changing musical role of the younger woman: only since the early 1970s have Shoshone women disregarded an older taboo that prohibited them from singing and drumming War Dance songs at the drum. Yet, while there are striking differences in the song repertoires and musical roles of all five women, there is great constancy and continuity in matters of musical process, perception, and meaning—such things as song learning, recall, composition, conceptualization of music in linear-spatial terms, criteria for a “good” song, and notions of the relationship between sacred power and song. The repetition of similar statements by all five women in each chapter documents this.

The balance between change and continuity is not only over time but also within each woman. Each perceives herself as a traditional person, and yet, in one way or another, each has crossed invisible cultural boundaries and participated in cultural change. The recognized traditional status of each woman and her family and, in several instances, the strong support of male family members are important factors in the community acceptance of new musical roles for women. Community acceptance, in turn, buttresses each woman’s strong self-identification with traditional mainstream Shoshone life.

Because much of this study rests on the song repertoire of each woman, it is essential to say a few words on the elusiveness of such repertoires in general. Like all natural processes subject to the element of time, song repertoires are continually building up and breaking down. Old songs fall into disuse, erode, and are eventually forgotten. New ones are learned. At the center is a stable core of songs that, for whatever reasons, are learned

and retained for a lifetime. There are also varying relationships to songs, including the passive recognition but inability to sing one, the ability to sing one if someone else starts it or it is heard, and the ability to sing with no outside assistance. Forgetting-learning and passive-active are two continua through which songs pass and that place limitations on song collection. One taps into a repertoire at a certain point in someone's life and receives a musical profile for that particular time, but not for a lifetime.

Even within the limitations of tapping into the songs of the five women during several years of work, I have not recorded all the songs that they knew and could sing at that time. Also, the proportion of songs recorded from each repertoire varies. Several factors account for this. I have known and worked with all five women for unequal lengths and amounts of time. Then, too, because we all have different personalities and lives, my relationship and work with each of them has been different. I am part of a variable that I can neither totally control nor standardize. Nevertheless, I do believe the songs recorded and transcribed (213 by Emily, 32 by Angie, 80 by Helene, 93 by Lenore) are reasonable representations of their repertoires.<sup>3</sup> (Alberta's recorded performance of only 14 songs is a special case that I discuss in her chapter.) In each chapter I will present a liberal sampling from this large collection of recordings and transcriptions.

There are fourteen distinct song genres represented in the five repertoires: Ghost Dance, Sun Dance, Peyote, Flag, Honor, War Dance (both the Traditional or Straight War Dance and the Fancy War Dance), Round Dance, Forty-nine, Crow Hop, Handgame, and Shoshone ceremonial songs together with hymns, country-and-western songs, lullabies, and children's songs. I classify the first eleven genres, which are Indian, into three basic categories: songs for social occasions (powwows, community dances, and Handgames), songs for religious occasions (Ghost Dance, Sun Dance, and Native American Church), and songs that accompany ceremonies unique to the Shoshone (Pointing Stick, War Bonnet, Chokecherry, and Giveaway).<sup>4</sup> (There will be no further mention of the Pointing Stick ceremony, last performed in 1968.

3. The issue of repertoire size remains uncharted and needs more data for comparison. See Nettl for a brief discussion of this topic, with specific reference to the repertoire size of Plains Indian singers (Nettl 1983:286, 287).

4. Descriptions of Wind River Shoshone ceremonies with accompanying musical transcriptions and analyses are in Vander's 1978 master's thesis. Willard Rhodes's 1951 recording of the following ceremonial songs is on file at the Archive of Folk Culture in the Library of Congress: three War Bonnet songs, one Giveaway song, AFS 14,618B; and a Pointing Stick song, AFS 14,619A. War Bonnet, Chokecherry, and Giveaway songs are also available on *18 Shoshone Songs*, Indian Records IR 1165. (The latter is also on file at the Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University.)

In 1985 the sole caretaker with complete knowledge of the ceremony died, leaving behind no inheritors.) These last ceremonies, while religious, do not have the larger scope and structure of a religion per se. For this reason I classify them separately from Ghost Dance, Sun Dance, and Native American Church songs. Actually, religious feelings, associations, and meanings may touch any of the pieces Shoshone sing.

The five women have all felt comfortable talking to me about the Sun Dance and its music and, in varying degrees, the Native American Church and its music. I include this material in each chapter. However, because they and many Shoshones feel sensitive about the actual songs performed at Sun Dances, I have not included in this book musical transcriptions from this religious repertoire, although I have, in fact, recorded all five women singing representative examples. For the same reason I omit two ceremonial songs that I have also recorded. My inclusion of Shoshone Ghost Dance songs that used to accompany this religious dance is a special case. (The last religious performances on the reservation of this dance took place in the 1930s.) Emily, to my knowledge, is the only person on the reservation today who believes in this religion. Between 1977 and 1979 I recorded Emily and the late Dorothy Tappay, Emily's half-sister, singing seventeen Ghost Dance songs. They discussed at great length the meaning of the religion and the songs they sang for me. By 1980 both women found it physically difficult to sing. Unexpectedly, Emily brought out tapes that she and Dorothy had made over the years and allowed me to make copies of them. Thus, in the summers of 1980 and again in 1981, I acquired an additional 130 songs. Emily worked intensively with me in 1981 and 1982, going over the translation and meaning of the song texts. In this way I was entrusted with the preservation of a precious piece of Shoshone cultural history. This book along with an earlier publication (Vander 1986) are part of the fulfillment of my obligation to this material and to Emily.

Today, Shoshones only consider Ghost Dance songs with Shoshone texts, Sun Dance songs, and Shoshone ceremonial songs as indigenous to their culture. The rest are part of a large repertoire shared by many tribes on the Northern Plains. However, the oldest two women remember older Shoshone songs no longer in currency. Their repertoires include Shoshone Wolf Dance songs (the older term for Traditional War Dance songs), Shoshone Women's Dance songs (the older term for Round Dance songs), and Shoshone Handgame songs.

Song genres in and of themselves are not the principal subject of this book. Nevertheless, their profiles emerge and build as we move from woman to woman and songprint to songprint. Therefore, if one wished to focus on

a particular genre rather than a particular woman, one could read the book selectively according to song genres (see index). Furthermore this book is not meant to be an anthropological study of women per se. But as with song genres, a wealth of material—in this case the biographical background that surrounds the music and musical experience of each woman—accrues from chapter to chapter and provides much relevant information in this area.

## *Acknowledgments*

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## *Note on Orthography*

(Correspondence with English vowels are only approximate.)

<i>a</i>	as in father
<i>ä</i> (æ)	as in bat
<i>e</i>	as in pay
<i>ē</i> (ə)	as in above
<i>i</i>	as in elite
<i>ī</i> (i)	as in sit
<i>o</i>	as in no
<i>ó</i> (ɔ)	as in law
<i>u</i>	as in lute
<i>ü</i> (u)	as in put
<i>ai</i>	as in Thailand
<i>oi</i>	as in noise
<i>E, I</i>	final whispered vowels
<i>~</i>	nasalization
<i>ʔ</i>	glottal stop
<i>ʒ</i>	as in garage

Accent generally falls on the first syllable and every other syllable after that.

(See Shimkin 1949a and Shimkin 1949b for Wind River Shoshone linguistic analysis.)

