

Tékeni – Two Worlds, Many Borders: A Look at Classical Native Music through Indigenous Eyes

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Abstract: In this paper, I look at a variety of works by classical Native American composers as they apply to dichotomies of classical versus traditional, oral versus notated, Indian versus European, indigenous versus colonial, as well as the continued discussion on how scholarly research can reflect indigenous scholarship incorporating several theories and stylistic choices that several modern ethnomusicologists use as they help reclaim and reflect the indigenous viewpoint. Employing a concept of twinness taken from the Mohawk creation story as well as work on complementarity and duality by ethnomusicologists Diamond, Cronk, von Rosen and Browner, I extend the metaphor as I employ the contributions of the Delorias, Little Bear, Smith and Wilson to look at how we may negotiate the borders between indigenous and empirical scholarship, old versus new theories, and classical versus native concepts as revealed in the compositions themselves. Using fieldwork, analysis and questionnaires, this paper addresses the question of musical borders reflected in contemporary classical Native American music as I consider the work and interviews of composers Chacon (Navajo Dine), Archambault (Kichspirini), Nakai (Navajo/Ute), Davids (Mohican), and Quincy (Choctaw). In addition, I reflexively look at my own compositions and performance experience as an ethnomusicologist, performer and composer of Mohawk descent.

Résumé : Dans cet article, j'aborde diverses œuvres créées par des compositeurs classiques amérindiens qui invitent à repenser les dichotomies entre classique et traditionnel, oral et écrit, amérindien et européen, autochtone et colonial, et qui permettent de contribuer aux discussions en cours sur la façon dont la recherche universitaire peut refléter les savoirs autochtones tout en incorporant des théories et des choix stylistiques utilisés par certains ethnomusicologues modernes afin de rétablir et de refléter le point de vue autochtone. Partant du concept de gémellité emprunté au récit de la création mohawk ainsi que des travaux sur la complémentarité et la dualité menés par les ethnomusicologues Diamond, Cronk, von Rosen et Browner, j'élargis cette métaphore à l'aide des contributions des Deloria, de Little Bear, Smith et Wilson afin d'examiner comment négocier les frontières entre la recherche autochtone et empirique, entre les théories anciennes et nouvelles, et entre les concepts classiques et autochtones tels qu'ils sont révélés dans

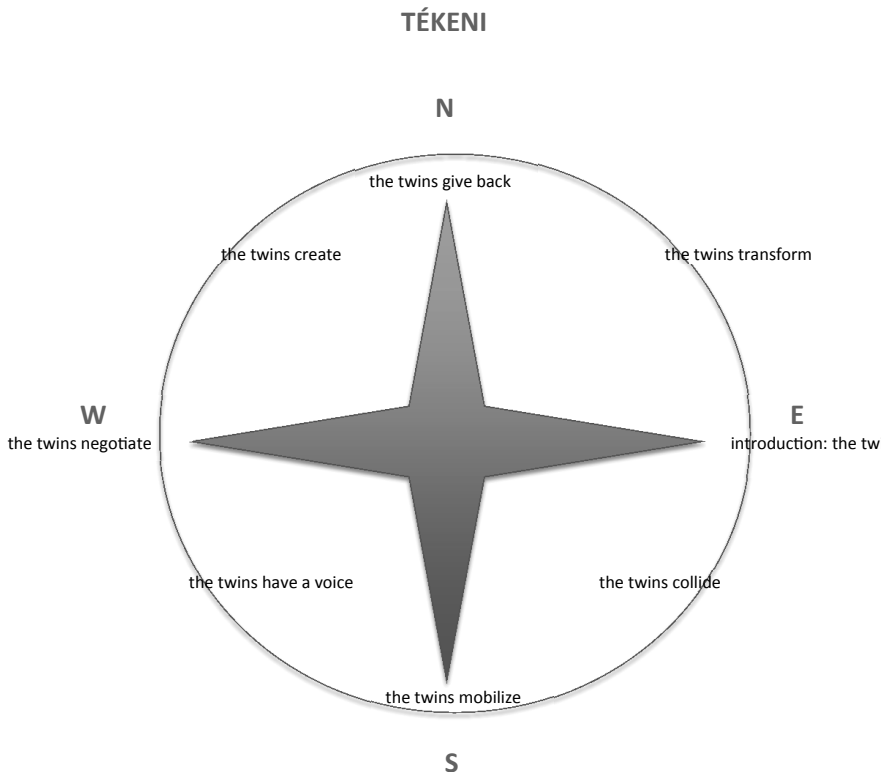
les œuvres elles-mêmes. Cet article utilise la recherche de terrain, l'analyse et les questionnaires pour aborder la question des frontières musicales reflétées dans la musique contemporaine amériendienne, en étudiant les œuvres et des idées des compositeurs Chacon (Navajo Dine), Archambault (Kichéspirini), Nakai (Navajo/Ute), Davids (Mohican) et Quincy (Choctaw). De surcroît, je porte un regard réflexif sur mes propres compositions et mes interprétations musicales en tant qu'ethnomusicologue, interprète et une compositrice d'ascendance mohawk.

ÉNSKA (1): Introduction, the Twins

The Kanienkeha or Mohawk word for two is *tékeni*. This word did not exist prior to colonial contact because it wasn't necessary. If someone needed a blanket, they traded a blanket for something of equal value. There was no concept of two blankets in exchange for one musket, for example. The word two was invented out of colonial necessity by the Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois), taken from the creation story in which Sky Woman gave birth to twins (*tehnikhen*, from which came the word for two: *tékeni*). (The word now used for one, *énska*, comes from the word for Sky Woman, the first person [Porter 2008:81]). Each twin was given half the world's power. One had an easy birth and the other came out fighting, killing his mother in the process. This second twin was jealous of the first and often caused trouble. Mohawk elder Tom Porter wrote, "We don't like to refer to them as good and evil. We just say one made all these nice things that help us: and one always made the mischievous things, the one that was always like a prankster, rather than say 'the evil one'" (70). According to Oneida elder and linguist RayTaw^{te}'se John (2008), many elements in our language and in the creation story represent a balance of male and female energies; the understanding of the twins as good and evil is a Christianized concept, as complementary energies are necessary for our development. "When we count, we are recounting the Creation story," says Porter (2008:81). The Haudenosaunee have been able to retain their value system while creatively and resourcefully adapting to the needs that developed through contact and modernization. From a cultural perspective, a dissection of the word *tékeni* provides us with more information about a worldview that has often been misunderstood. The syllable *te* in Kanienkeha means a duality and balance, *ke* stands for beings, and *ni* represents each particle of spirit which some elders interpret as DNA (John 2008). With this etymology, it can be defined as the balance between two beings or particles of spirit working together.

My goal is to look at how Indigenous theory and research techniques

may be used to explain classical Native music. I create a theoretical model based on the concept of twinness reflected in the sub-headings that signal how this paper unfolds. Example 1 (shown below) uses a circle to show the flow, continuity and connectedness of each part of the process, which is not linear as one may go back and forth between “stages” in the process. Reminiscent of the Plains Indian medicine wheel, the twins are introduced in the East, where the process “begins.” “Énska (1): Introducing the Twins” represents the continued understanding and search for cultural knowledge; “Tékeni (2): the Twins Collide” asks how different worldviews co-exist; “Áhsen (3): the Twins Mobilize” as they learn who they are and what they need; “Kaié:ri (4): the Twins Have a Voice” as they become part of a global community; “Wisk (5): the Twins Negotiate” as they define expectations; “Ià:ia’k (6): the Twins Create” continuing innovation in a modern times; “Tsiá:ta (7): the Twins Give



Example 1: This Tékeni graphic is loosely based on the Plains Indian medicine wheel in that it begins in the east and moves in a cyclical nature through the different directions, illustrating the cyclical process of development that this paper takes the reader through.

Back” to future generations; “Sha’té:kon (8): the Twins Transform” creating new methodologies. In addition, I examine some methodologies in use among modern ethnomusicologists in their attempts to reclaim and reflect an Indigenous viewpoint in the domain of academic scholarship.

I also reflect on ways that the “twinness” of my own experience influences my study of Indigenous classical music. As an “insider” to this research, being a cellist and composer of Haudenosaunee descent, and a former advisory board member to the First Nations Composers Initiative (FNCI), I performed classical Native music premiered between 2006 and 2007 at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in a concert series dedicated to contemporary classical chamber music by Native American composers. My Kaniienkeha name is *Ieriho:kwats* which means “she learns deeply by going back to her roots,” and I have indeed been fortunate to go back to my heritage, including the study of my language and participation in culture-based healing and revitalization projects. I wear the turtle clan and participate in Longhouse ceremonies. Raised in multicultural suburban and urban environments, I have a conservatory training with a career as a cellist, composer, full professor of music at Montgomery College in Maryland, and a scholar pursuing a doctoral degree in ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland. As a result, I have often felt caught between two worlds, frequently called upon to cross borders of understanding. It is often through music that I am able to express this juxtaposition of worlds – what Leroy Little Bear (Blackfoot), former director of the Native American Program at Harvard University, calls “jagged worldviews colliding” (2000:85). It is part of what fuels my interest in the classical Native genre.

The term “classical Native” was coined by Howard Bass, the former program director of NMAI, and Georgia Wettlin-Larsen, former program director of FNCI, as a title for programming at NMAI featuring works by Native American composers. The composers discussed in this paper are writing as part of this relatively new genre. Exploring levels of “twinness” or complementarity, I employ various methodologies of Indigenous scholarship as I look at what makes this new genre classical European, what makes it Native American, and where those borders may intersect. Two of the primary works I use for examples in this paper are works that I commissioned and premiered for the *North American Indian Cello Project (NAICP)* at the NMAI. I use them to illustrate the viewpoints of both Indigenous scholars and non-Native ethnomusicologists who have devoted themselves to the ethical, political, economic, social, historical, critical, and philosophical treatment of Indigenous scholarship. Research compiled in this paper comes in part from fieldwork questionnaires distributed in 2007 and 2008, soon after the second

series of performances at the NMAI (which featured works by composers who are mostly based in the United States).¹

Tékeni (2): Two Worldviews, Twins Collide

Little Bear describes the Aboriginal worldview as being “animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion, where interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is a more important referent than time”; it is in contrast to that of Western Europeans, which is “linear and singular, static, and objective” (2000:82). He points out that “the philosophy, values, and customs of Aboriginal cultures differ from those of Eurocentric cultures” (77) – hence his characterization of the encounter between the two ways of knowing as “jagged worlds colliding.” The differences may also be understood in terms of the complementary Haudenosaunee “twins.” As an ethnomusicologist, I was initially trained in “Western” research strategies, including classification, comparison and comparative evaluation (Hall 1992:276-320); as an Indigenous person, I give primacy to concepts of interrelationships, time, space, and respect. For me, the creative articulation of these disparate perceptions are expressed using musical sounds and composition, as I wrote a piece for cello, voice and percussion, about the experience of living in – and often between – two worlds. The work “In Two Worlds” (1722/2006) by J. S. Bach and D. I. Avery is notated using the notes and phrasing of the *Sarabande* from “Bach’s Fifth Suite for Solo Cello in c minor”; I augment some of Bach’s rhythms and add notated parts for Native American rattle and hand-drum, along with a part for Plains Indian falsetto style singing. The composition epitomizes the concept of “classical Native” in that the two musical sensibilities co-exist, and yet it is clear what part is “classical” and what part is “Native.” They do so without sacrificing or privileging one over the other. Each part can exist on its own as an individual piece of music with powerful musical statements. In co-existence, I think they sound beautiful and carry strong emotional weight, which to me raises many questions including how to live in two worlds, the possibility for mutuality and respect, and identity. In this work, two seemingly disparate musical traditions, whose musical sounds and concepts are not interlaced, can co-exist.

In my more recent works, I explore how sounds may be integrated on various levels in several ways: by experimenting with instrumentation such as playing the cello like a drum, or having chamber musicians play rattles in addition to their Western instruments; by using a concept of musical scrims in which one musical fabric shows through another like pentimento; by starting

with an Indigenous melody that provides an essence or memory that becomes unrecognizable in its application; and by working with audience/performer expectations by planting performers in the audience or incorporating group participation in a classical chamber composition. As a performer, I am struck by the variety of Western and Indigenous techniques, sensibilities and sounds employed by classical Native composers. I value both styles of research techniques as I organize material in both circular and linear fashions. I carry tobacco and library books in the same bag, and have performed a Women's Stomp Dance and Bartok in the same concert. I hope that I may continue to work at balancing both worlds and I look forward to co-existence and integration, as the word *tékeni* and my Haudenosaunee worldview promise. This complementarity has often been appreciated in ethnomusicological studies of Native American music, and it is interesting to be part of the trend toward Indigenous methodological approaches, as well as having a place in which I may further understand the conflicts and intersections of Indigenous and European styles of learning.

David Locke said of the work of David McAllester, the anthropologist and Native music specialist: "David showed that it was possible to develop a cross-cultural understanding and that our field of ethnomusicology should aspire to see and hear and engage with the performance arts of other cultures from their points of view" (quoted in Marquard 2006; see also Frisbie 1986). McAllester was one of the first (as early as 1954) to incorporate what might be termed "Indigenous methodologies" in the research of American Indian music, in that he presented musical transcriptions in two modalities: Western notation and a graphic notation to be used by Rimrock Navajo singers (1954). Today, rather than depending primarily on standard Western notation, many ethnomusicologists who specialize in Native American music include recordings or internet access to recordings as part of their research (Vander 1997; Diamond 2008). The recordings complement transcriptions, lend an additional sense of authenticity, and give immediate aural experience of the work, as well affording accessibility to an audience beyond academe. By integrating standard Western notation and its musical analysis with the immediate experience (through audio recordings) of the subtleties in singing styles and forms, the sounds of stomping and beating of rattles, or the diverse vocal timbres, these scholars have modeled ways in which western technology and Indigenous musical conceptualizations can complement one another.

Several ethnomusicologists have presented concepts of complementary, bi-musicality, and/or twinness in their works. Diamond, Cronk and von Rosen's use of the Anishinabe concept of complementarity or twinness in terms of First Nations music looks at the indispensable relationship between

two parts, rather than ambivalence or resistance between two seemingly disparate cultures (1994).

Choctaw ethnomusicologist Tara Browner uses Indigenous approaches similar to those of some composers I discuss in this article. Applying culture-based analysis in her work on North American Indian powwow music, she incorporates interviews, language and concepts directly from the musicians and performers, asserting “the Native right to define and interpret their own culture for outsiders” (2000:214). She defines terminology through an Indigenous voice, and proposes a means of writing about Native music that is acceptable to both Indians and non-Indians, writing for both academics and natives and privileging neither: “Writing for two sets of readers – academic and Native – requires fluency and respect for multiple musical languages, and the ability to navigate a political minefield. In the past, most writings on Indigenous American music have been aimed at a non-Indian audience” (Ibid.:215). Browner provides both Western European and Indigenous vocabularies for Native musicians to choose from, as well as transcripts for editing; she places herself within the narrative rather than above it, presenting Indigenous responses to the western analysis. Her approach presents interpretations and material from both realms as equally valid; she sees “Indian and Western musical conceptualizations as a duality rather than as oppositional stances, [and] a meeting place between the two can be created, something that a Navajo friend of mine (also an academic) calls the Middle Way” (Ibid.:231).

ÁHSEN (3): Ethnomusicology and Indigenous Research, the Twins Mobilize

Little Bear wrote of the importance of understanding the differences in Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews as “a starting point for understanding the paradoxes that colonialism poses for social control” (2000:77). Although Indian mistrust of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists has been the well-known result of misrepresentation, misunderstandings and exploitation (even if unintentional), the question of decolonizing the disciplines and their methodologies may not be rooted in misrepresentation. In 1969, Vine Deloria, Jr., the Native American author, historian, and activist, wrote, “Anthropology carries with it some incredibly heavy baggage. It is, and continues to be, a deeply colonial academic discipline, founded in the days when it was doctrine that the colored races of the world would be enslaved by Europeans, and the tribal peoples would vanish from the planet” (Bilosi 1997:211). After years of anthropological fieldwork on reservations, Indigenous scholars such as Deloria

began to address the need for tribal guidelines in anthropology, compensation and appropriation, self-determination, sovereignty, and the importance of serving the community. Mistrust lingers as the difficult academic twin often still prevails.

One solution that some ethnomusicologists and Indigenous scholars have proposed is revisiting older texts to correct biases, add new theoretical concepts, or reassess music studied by earlier researchers. McAllester did this in his own work: he studied the Navajo over the course of several decades, regularly updating, expanding, and changing theoretical understandings of his research. Herndon and Heth were Native American pioneers, and there are now many scholars of Indigenous descent publishing in the field of ethnomusicology, including Hamill, Perea, Bissett Perea, Robinson, and Chretien; there are also many Indigenous scholars in related fields. Training Indigenous researchers and scholars is now encouraged in ethnomusicology programs for students interested in studying the music of their Aboriginal communities. Meanwhile, work on “reciprocity and reflexivity, using devices such as collaboration and dialogic writing” (Becker 1991:394) can be seen in the collaborations by ethnomusicologists Charlotte Frisbie and David McAllester with Navajo practitioner Frank Mitchell (Mitchell 1978); research on the songs and dances of the Lakota by Ben Black Bear, Sr. and R.D. Theisz (1984); and interviews on the musical experience of five Shoshone women by Judith Vander (1996 [1988]).

Ethnomusicologists have developed a range of other useful concepts such as a critique of power structures or problematization of objective versus subjective relationships (Laurel Sercombe, Franziska von Rosen, and David W. Samuels in Browner 2009), or the varied approaches described in the recent collection of essays, *Opera Indigene: Re/presenting First Nations and Indigenous Cultures* (Karantonis and Robinson 2011). Aboriginal elders continue to correct mistakes of the past through their own cultural revitalization programs, consultations, research projects, interviews, curriculum development, classes, conferences, and writings. These elders serve as specialists, often in collaboration with scholars from inside and out of their communities. Just as sending a copy of one’s dissertation or book “back” is no longer adequate (Becker 1991:394), I would argue that the consults, edits, suggestions, and re-writes with our collaborators and consultants may also no longer be enough. An Indigenous perspective of knowledge dissemination involves checking with elders in addition to a circle of teachers/specialists. Taking it a step further, in most Indigenous societies, one also checks with, and acknowledges, one’s ancestors. In my case, I summon ancestral guidance that is received through dreams, people, old recordings, teachings, or apparent “coincidences.” Shawn Wilson writes that as an Aboriginal researcher, you are “answerable to *all your*

relations when you are doing research” (2001:91).

Vine Deloria, Jr. wrote of the damage done by anthropological research to certain Indian communities in terms of respect, responsibility and cultural sovereignty. It is reason enough to argue that traditional cultural specialists (often elders) should review interpretations, analysis, and representations of material, even studies done with “insider” collaboration. Deloria observed:

Many Indians have come to parrot the ideas of anthropologists because it appears that the anthropologists know everything about Indian communities. Thus many ideas that pass for Indian thinking are in reality theories originally advanced by anthropologists and echoed by Indian people in an attempt to communicate the real situation. (1969:80-82)

Out of necessity, the first twin corrects or learns from what the second twin has done.

Many Aboriginals are concerned with researchers’ sometimes self-serving agendas for publication and institutional advancement, over a concern with serving the Indigenous community. As applied ethnomusicology expands, projects that closely involve Indigenous participants and that are fashioned in response to requests by Native communities are more congruent with Indigenous value systems and self-determination. Many projects have been designed to aid revitalization in Native communities, such as Victoria Lindsay Levine’s work with Choctaw music (1993), or recent repatriation projects led by Aaron Fox in Alaska and among the Hopi (Fox 2012). Some scholars have represented their material through the worldview and language of the culture for which it was written, such as David W. Samuel’s attention to the Apache language, storytelling, song and worldview as metaphor and powerful points of entry for analysis (2004), or Steven Feld’s use of traditional knowledge of birdsong as a metaphorical and sonic entrance to an Indigenous Kaluli worldview and the connections between sound, memory, nature and ceremony (1990). Given the current trends in applied ethnomusicology, the complementarity of the twins may prevail if balance and checks remain essential.

KAIÉ:RI (4): Globalization, the Twins Have a Voice

As I present my research on contemporary classical Native music, whose definitions are explored through fieldwork and analysis below, I look at

aspects of shared Native American sensibilities in relation to cultural sounds, instruments, revitalization and preservation, colonization, and worldviews. Although the primary sense of collective identity for most Indigenous groups is local, on the level of the community, tribe, or Native nation (Strong 2005:255), I am looking here at an emerging global movement of Indigenous people, a relatively new designation in North America (Neizen 2003). Historian Philip J. Deloria discusses the rewriting of tribal histories, leaving us to wonder how one might do justice to the variation among hundreds of tribal and community histories while at the same time reaching for general patterns concerning such things as colonialism and empire in North America (2004:11-12). Only recently have historians turned toward cultural analysis as a possible ground for considering Indian-non-Indian relations in broad terms. Further stating the case for a larger Indigenous framework, Linda Tuhiwai Smith explores the concept of sovereign nations as part of an international shared community (Smith 1999).²

This introductory research explores how Indigenous methodologies that foreground cultural advocacy, revitalization, and education can be articulated using Indigenous language and cultural metaphor. I use biographical material, personal interviews, musical compositions, storytelling, accountability and relationality, language, personal experience and a variety of theoretical approaches. I consider ten North American Indian composers, five of whom I worked with closely as part of the NAICP, and with whom I continue to consult on questions of representation. It is my hope that this work will serve the Native classical community of musicians as well as the rich world of contemporary classical music, and Indigenous ethnographic scholarship.

These are some program notes I wrote in 2007 for the Smithsonian's second week-long concert series featuring classical Native musicians:

The first Classical Native program was at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in November 2006 thanks largely to the vision of Howard Bass and the First Nations Composers Initiative. For the first time I was performing with talented Native American musicians who shared a socio-political and spiritual perspective. Our music, though each very unique, perhaps came from a similar place – one of being with nature, with conflict, with reclamation, with community, with intelligence and with spirit. The Classical Native program, as I understood it, was not just about exploring the rich contributions that Native people are making to the world of contemporary classical music, but also a meeting ground for Native musicians

to explore our world as living artists; thus, collaborations, deep respect, and rich musical friendships began. (Avery 2007).

During the classical Native programming, questions began to surface, such as “how do we define ourselves?” “What makes classical music *Native*?” and “what makes Native music *classical*?”

I sent out questionnaires to a small contingent of composers and performers who were involved in the first two series at the NMAI,³ and who expressed interest in research in this field and in my collecting some of the comments that were made throughout the week. Many of us had the feeling that we were part of history in the making and hoped to see the information disseminated and pursued, thus situating composers and their music in a larger public arena. I issued questionnaires to the composers who were involved in the NAICP at that point, including R. C. Nakai, Raven Chacon, George Quincy, Tim Archambault, and Brent Michael Davids.

I also acknowledge the first composer of classical Native music and a pioneer in the field, Dr. Louis W. Ballard (1931-2007). Firmly established in the world of European classical music, he was a strong advocate for Aboriginal perspectives. He supported the study and composition of Native American music through scholarly writing and research; wrote symphonic and operatic commissions along with other musical scores and publications; and worked in education curriculum development. Ballard wrote, “It is not enough to acknowledge that American Indian music is different from other music. What is needed in America is an awakening and reorienting of our total spiritual and cultural perspective to embrace, understand and learn from the Aboriginal American what motivated his musical and artistic impulses” (2004a). My research is inspired by his mission to disseminate Native American music of many genres and his desire to understand the impulses that inform it.

The composers I contacted either directed me to their personally written websites or emailed me biographical material to be incorporated into program notes. Some of them represent themselves with a strong Indigenous emphasis, by including kinship and community ties, clan, values, and graphics⁴ tied to their Indian communities, while others follow a more Western version by listing public accomplishments from a resumé. Most combine the two paradigms but introduce their tribal lineage before anything else.

Aboriginal composers are often introduced as anomalies (Deloria:2004), but as the biographies attest, Indians have been active for some time in contemporary classical music. Ballard (Cherokee and Quapaw), often called the “father of Native American classical music,” is known for melding Native American melodies, rhythms and instruments with classic Western

orchestral music. His symphonic, operatic and chamber works have been performed by leading ensembles throughout the world. He served as musical educational specialist for the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools nationwide, and his composition guidebook, *Native American Indian Songs* (2004a), remains a standard text.

R. Carlos Nakai (Navajo Ute), a premier Native American flute performer, has recorded and traveled around the world performing classical works with major orchestras, including those of Philadelphia, Buffalo, Tucson, and the California Symphony Orchestra. He provided me with this information from his website:

[Nakai] brings a unique artistry to performances in the symphonic and chamber music traditions. His melding of the Native American flute with European classical music requires an artistry that understands two disparate musical traditions while mastering the technical demands of both. (2012)

Raven Chacon (Navajo Dine) is a well-known composer of chamber music and a performer of experimental music, having studied with James Tenney, Morton Subotnick, and Wadada Leo Smith. His website states:

Raven Chacon is a sound artist with a wide understanding of classical music instruments, but less so of some of the people who play them. He has worked as an educator, performer, junk-builder for Discovery Channel, and as a non-spiritual advisor. He carries the burden of an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in Music Composition, and takes advantage of it by playing in many bands for free (including: the Death Convention Singers, Tenderizer, Mesa Ritual and KILT). Raven currently co-operates the Rio Grande Satanical Gardens performance space in central NM as well as the *Sicksicksick* micro-record-label. He hides out anywhere between Albuquerque, NM and Los Angeles, CA with stations at Phoenix and the Navajo Reservation. (2012)

George Quincy (Choctaw) was born and raised in Oklahoma. He earned two degrees at The Juilliard School, where he later taught and became musical advisor to Martha Graham. He is published by Foxborough Jr. Music in New York City, and his works are recorded on both the *Albany* and *Lyrichord* labels. He has written many operas and vocal works whose libretti often reflect his desire to correct historical inaccuracies. According to his website:

Throughout his childhood, his Juilliard years and later, Mr. Quincy believed his lyrical gift was rooted in his Choctaw blood while his analytical talent came from his white Western education. His music presents an emotional and cultural fusion of classical and Choctaw in a personal artistic journey. (2012)

Timothy Archambault (Kichespirini) studied music theory at Brown University and holds a Bachelor's degree in architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design. As a Native flute performer, he has recorded on the *Opus One* and *Lyrichord Classical* labels. According to program for the NMAI classical Native program of 2007:

His repertoire consists of early 20th-century American Indian flute music and new compositions by American Indian composers. Tim was the first flute player in history to perform the old "warble" technique in new classical compositions. As a Hereditary Senator of the Kichespirini Algonquin First Nation, he is currently working on re-establishing its musical heritage through community-based instructional websites in conjunction with North American ethnomusicologists. (Archambault in Avery 2007)

Brent Michael Davids (Mohican) has won numerous awards and commissions; his music has been performed by the Kronos Quartet, the Miro String Quartet, the Joffrey Ballet, and the New Mexico, Phoenix, and Mankato Symphony Orchestras. Most recently, the Dakota Music Tour featured a full concert of Davids' orchestral works with the Dakota drum group Maza Kute. His work ranges from pieces for symphonic orchestra fully notated in Western style, to works for string quartets notated using Indian symbolism and a graphic notation of his own invention. He holds degrees in music composition from Northern Illinois University and Arizona State University. His biographical website states:

When American composers are described as "native" the definition is not usually as accurate as when applied to Brent Michael Davids, an American Indian and enrolled citizen of the Mohican Nation. He has consciously and deliberately focused on his Indigenous heritage, honoring its unique qualities in a contemporary setting. He blends Eurocentric techniques of classical music with Native

musical traditions in a way that is never glib or facile, but rich in resonance. (Davids 2012b)

As their biographies show, the composers speak of fusion or melding of musical worlds that are part of a complementarity, perhaps in response to the “jagged worlds colliding” of which Little Bear spoke. Chacon, in particular, uses humour to describe his life, as when he calls his MFA training a burden. Several composers have worked with educational initiatives, reflecting their sense of responsibility to the community.

Other classical Native composers who were not part of the Smithsonian concerts but whom I mention throughout this paper have studied at such places as the Cleveland Institute of Music, Northwestern University, University of Tulsa, Manhattan School of Music, and the University of Toronto; they have worked with renowned composers and conductors such as Darius Milhaud, Donald Erb, Helmut Lachemann, John Cage, Charles Wuorinen, Henry Brant, Chinary Ung, Bela Rosza, Michael Tilson Thomas, Peter Maxwell-Davies, and Dennis Russell Davies; and their works have been performed worldwide by ensembles including the Baltimore and San Francisco Symphonies, with commissions from the Canada Council for the Arts, Glenn Gould Foundation and the Ford Foundation (among others).

WISK (5): Defining Expectations in Classical Native, the Twins Negotiate

An interest in establishing but also questioning the cross-cultural validity of definitions has been familiar territory for ethnomusicologists. When I began my research, I decided to focus on how we define ourselves as Classical Native musicians, concentrating on what, for us, made the music we were composing and performing *classical*, and what made it *Native*.⁵

During interviews, impromptu discussions, and panel discussions, and in the analysis of the answers to a questionnaire that I circulated, I found that the responses addressed issues of stereotypes, notation, technique, training, and elitism, as well as European and Native American expectations. Are the borders fluid? Can both twins travel freely across these borders without colliding?

In response to the first question, “What makes classical Native, *classical*?” R. C. Nakai, Navajo Ute flutist wrote:

The ambiguous, non-specific and Eurocentric term “classical”

refers to music that conforms to certain established standards of form, complexity and musical literacy as exemplified in the Western European discipline of theory and practice. Classical Native could be defined as Amerindian Indigenous music that is inclusive of and incorporates certain standards of expression from the Western European discipline of theory, practice and technique peculiar to solo or group harmonization in technical works performed in mixed ensembles of instruments of Native ensembles and European orchestra. (Questionnaires 2007)

Raven Chacon, Navajo Dine sound artist, doesn't like the term classical Native because it "sounds a bit too much like 'noble savage'" (Ibid.). For George Quincy, "classical" was "the old Choctaw music I heard when I was growing up" (Ibid.).

I went to Juilliard to study piano ... when I decided to become a composer, all that old music came back to me and I knew what my roots were and I knew what I wanted my music to sound like. I never studied composition for that reason; I wanted to have my own sound indicative of Choctaw, not European classical. (Quincy 2012)

Tim Archambault provided a lengthy definition of classical music that I excerpt as follows:

a broad term that usually refers to music produced in, or rooted in the traditions of Western art, ecclesiastical and concert music, encompassing a broad period from roughly the 9th century to the 21st century. European classical music is largely distinguished from many other non-European and popular music forms by its system of staff notation... Classical Native embodies the musical complexities of North American Indian music traditions within a written form of notation. (Questionnaires 2007)

Brent Michael Davids prefers the term "concert music,"

because "classical" gets confused between music designed for concerts and the period of the classical era. Concert music is anything intended for concert presentation, no real stylistic or genre stipulations for me. I suppose one largely defining feature

might be some type of musical notation, but that isn't always the case. (Ibid.)

Nakai's "non-specific Eurocentric term" for classical music is reflected in his hybrid compositional style that incorporates traditional Native chant and flute melodies, jazz harmonies, and improvisational directions with standard notation and classical forms. Chacon's questioning of the term "classical Native" can be seen as he challenges conventions of notation and instrumentation in his work. Quincy's definition took a twist as he spoke of the traditional sounds of his youth and his fear of losing the Choctaw sounds of his heritage if he engrossed himself too much in the European forms. Archambault's description of classical in Native American music as embodying "the musical complexities of North American Indian music traditions within a written form of notation" is exemplified in the imagery and sounds reflected in some of his fully notated scores. Brent Michael Davids defines the classical of "classical Native" music as that "intended for concert presentation," and his music is often represented in musical notation.

Many of the composers challenge elitism and stereotypes as they negotiate their place in the world of contemporary music. Nakai is interested in "bridging traditions," and sees himself as a cultural ambassador when he introduces classical Native compositions to his fan base – primarily Native flute aficionados and new age music followers. He bridges traditions, in part, by incorporating new age styles, jazz harmonies and classical orchestration with traditional Native American flute and chant melodies, while using contemporary chamber music instrumentation and notation. His concerts are often formal affairs, from box office, to printed programs, attire, demeanor and concert hall setting. His programming, however, is far from conventional, with improvisation that breaks the usual bounds for both Native flute and classical chamber music. Nakai's perspective on the classical Native genre is somewhat reactionary, even as he challenges audiences by presenting music that is accessible, and in its hybridity privileges a commercial style of writing over a modernist approach to contemporary classical music.

Raven Chacon is at the top end of the scale in terms of challenging elitism and stereotypes with his unusual sounds and invented instruments. His piece "Yellowface," performed in the First Nations Composers Initiative concert at the Montgomery College World Arts Festival in 2007, was written for yellow balloon, voice, microphone and live electronics. Wearing a dress shirt and black jeans, Chacon presented a formal demeanor typical of a "downtown" chamber music event, but as he set up on the floor and

began singing into a yellow balloon while manipulating live electronics to capture the nuances of breath and sound on microphones placed inside the balloon, it became clear that this was not your usual chamber music selection. Reminiscent of John Cage's experimental electronic works and Laurie Anderson's performance-art events, this work was not notated, but had a very intentional musical structure with specifically developed source material. Raven's vision to expand and test boundaries is apparent not only in his compositions, but also in his choice of venues and programming. As a speaker, he is articulate and equally unconventional.

In many ways, George Quincy is at the opposite end of the continuum from Raven Chacon in terms of expectation for classical music composition and presentation (with Nakai, Davids, and myself, perhaps somewhere in the middle). His works are staged and performed in conventional chamber music venues by some of New York City's finest chamber ensembles, and recorded by independent chamber music labels. His music is fully notated and his orchestration employs dense instrumentation, extreme registral changes, and rich harmonies. As is typical in modern music performances, he is often asked to introduce his piece or to take a solo bow from the audience. As a pianist, he sometimes performs his own work as part of an ensemble under the direction of a conductor. His concert attire is formal black, but a red tie or a red feather in his lapel adds an unexpected Native touch. The topics and libretti of his chamber operas treat Native themes, such as his retelling of the Pocahontas story in his opera *Pocahontas at the Court of King James I*.

Archambault's career as an architect has led him to challenge spatial relationships on stage and to look at the aural implications of those relationships. In his 2007 work "Anoki" for solo violoncello and Algonquin disc rattle, he requests that the rattle player be quite a distance from the cellist, arranged according to acoustics in the hall. In one concert, the disc rattle player was situated, stage right and approximately ten feet behind the performer, and in another the disc rattle player was situated on the balcony and walked slowly downstairs to the back of the hall where she completed the piece.⁶ In addition to questioning boundaries of space and sound, Archambault employs Native instruments like the Algonquin disc rattle and Native flute within fully notated compositions.

Davids is a prolific composer of symphonic and chamber works. His scores often incorporate classical chamber music conventions, from orchestration to notation, but add unusual instrumentation or theatrical elements, such as the quartz crystal flute, powwow emcee and Native dancers of his *Powwow Symphony* (2011). Attired in formal black, he often adds his

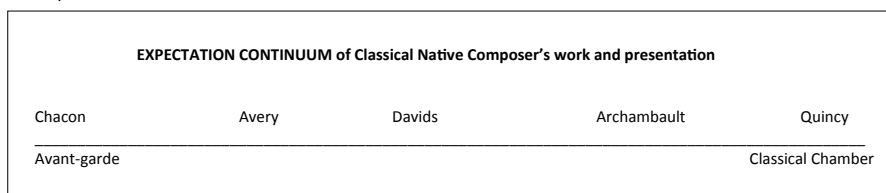
signature top hat with hand-crafted Indian beadwork on the rim. His work is performed on Indian reservations and concert halls, always with a serious concert ambiance. Davids defies expectation through instrumentation and themes, yet meets it with skillful technique, concert settings and promotion.

In my own work, I try to break concert/audience expectation by including audience members or planting performers within or around the audience, and by including Native instruments and language, and imitated sounds. For example, my piece entitled “Fringe” (2007) includes the narration of a poem written by Mohawk/Tuscarora poet Janet-Marie Rogers, and I teach a stomp dance melody to members of the audience to sing with rattles as they dance in a circle around the chamber musicians who are playing a fully-notated score. In this work, I am asking everyone involved to question the concept of marginality and boundaries by locating the fringe sonically with the audience. Most of my concerts are in formal concert settings and I often wear black concert dress, accessorized with Indian jewelry or a ribbon shirt, but I break with concert expectation in the way in which I engage the audience through spoken explanations of the music and culture, and by having them participate.

In Example 2 (shown below), I place the composers in a continuum based on conventional expectations of compositional techniques, instrumentation, source material and topics, concert demeanor, and concert venue. I label one end “avant-garde” as having the least amount of conventional expectation; the other end I label as “classical chamber” as it meets more conventional expectations.

Current definitions of contemporary concert music by non-Native critics, philosophers and composers use the terms “modernist music” and “new music”⁷ to describe newly composed works. They have not come up with a widely accepted definition of modernist music, in part due to the variety of categories encompassed (atonal, serial, minimal, spatial, avant-garde, experimental), the difficulty of defining modernism itself, and the hybridity often apparent within it.⁸ I explore several definitions and their pertinence for classical Native composers.

Example 2



Modernist music as it reflects cultural, political and social issues

Alex Ross, former music critic for *The New Yorker*, says that “new music” is “twentieth-century classical composition... a largely untamed art, an unassimilated underground” whose composers have “infiltrated every aspect of modern existence” from politics, economics, revolutions, emigration and “deeper social transformations that reshaped the landscape in which composers worked” (2007:xii-xiii). Similar to ethnomusicologists Herndon and McLeod’s concept of “music as culture” (1981 [1979]), Griffiths discusses the idea that modern music is a reflection of society. He cites the German philosophers Adorno and Hoffmann on “composers, as members of society, who could not avoid dealing in their music with society’s tensions, and inevitably, in increasingly complex and divided societies, increasingly complex music would arise” (2006:97). Here we see that some non-Indigenous thinkers drew attention to the reflection of modern life portrayed in the music of our time.

While both Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinkers see social issues reflected in the music of our times, the actual “issues” of Indigenous composers reflect their very different history. Aboriginal composers identify the legacies of colonialism as they explore current issues of identity (Avery, “In Two Worlds”), politics (Davids, *Last of the Mohicans*; Ballard, *Incident at Wounded Knee*), land and cultural reclamation (Archambault, “Anoki;” Ballard, “Katicina Dances”), the environment (Croall, *Caribou Song*), retelling and correcting historical information (Avery, *Manahatin*; Ballard, *Portrait of Will Rogers*; Quincy, *Pocahontas at the Court of King James I*), language revitalization (Croall, *Noodin*). They incorporate sounds of the past with those of the present (Chacon, “Yellowface;” Nakai, “Colorado Summer”), balance between two worlds (Davids, *Powwow Symphony*), and they address spirituality (Avery, “Ohen:ton Kariwatekwen”: Croall, *The Four Directions*). Many of these overlap in several categories, and many also address Native concepts of materialism, humour, and hope for future generations.

New soundscapes and a break from traditional technical expectations

Boulez defines contemporary music in more technical terms than those above. “Contemporary music implies an approach involving new instrumental techniques, new notations, an aptitude for adapting to new performance situations” with no “standard forms” like that of Beethoven or earlier composers (Boulez and Foucault 1985:7,10). John Cage shocked the music world with his philosophies and work as an experimental composer, and his description of music as random noise (1939). As mentioned earlier,

unconventional instrumentation, sounds and forms are of particular interest to Indigenous composers. The composer, performer, author, and teacher William Duckworth says of new music that its “composers focus on elements beyond melody and harmony” and “incorporate a multitude of new sounds into their music” (1999:xvi). Their work reflects life, he says, and new music is an “aural portrait of the twentieth century” for future generations (Ibid.:xxii).

New sounds using newly invented instruments (such as those of Chacon and Davids), the use of Native instruments, and new performance techniques all abound in classical Native music. Examples are Croall’s composition with wind sounds using branches fanned in the air, or blown through mouthpieces removed from the instrument; Chacon’s use of plucked quarter-tone double-stops on the cello that sound like electronically manipulated powwow drums; or my use of *col legno* on the cello to depict percussive drum rhythms, and key clicks on woodwinds to depict rattle sounds. A variety of instruments and twentieth-century performance techniques are applied in Native composition to accommodate the diversity of timbres that are part of the Indigenous composer’s soundscape.

Hybridity

Martin Stokes, in his “Music and the Global Order,” writes about hybridities of interaction and exchange:

All music is, of its very nature, hybrid. In this view, all music bears the mark of interactions and exchanges between as well as within groups, and to declare otherwise is absurd. Purity of musical expression is not possible. Even in societies in which extraordinarily strenuous efforts are made to disavow their social, cultural, and historical entanglement with others, an exception often is made for music. (2004:60)

Stokes’ comment resonates with Little Bear’s observation that “No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again” (2000:85).

“Classical Native” music may be considered a hybrid form like all classical music that has been influenced by other musical forms.⁹ However, many of the composers discussed here have worked hard to position themselves as vibrant composers of contemporary classical music, and they may not appreciate the

term “hybridity” applied to their work in that it may seem to lessen their status as serious composers. That being said, classical Native music by its very nature has many influences. Three of the five composers talk about fusion of musical traditions in their biographies, and it can certainly be heard in the work of all the composers, from the narrative works of Avery, Croall and Davids, the film scores of Chacon and Davids, the chamber music of Davids, Nakai, Tate, and Quincy, the storytelling of Ballard, Croall and Quincy, and the use of melodic source material in orchestral works by Avery, Ballard, Davids and Tate. Given this research and my experience in contemporary music and ethnomusicology, I define contemporary music of the twentieth and twenty-first century as sound, with intention, that reflects the physical, psychological, spiritual, cultural, and intellectual world of its creator/composer and those who participate in and with those sounds.

The definition of “classical” in most of the questionnaire responses emphasizes European classical training, the use of notation and instrumentation, and elements of style that differentiate the music from traditional, popular or folk music (categories as problematic as “classical”). All the composers discussed here have written for typical orchestral instruments in standard notation and have incorporated Indigenous instruments and sounds into their works. They have also written music that reflects modern life, experimenting with form, notation, sound, harmony, melody, pitch and other technical aspects taken from historical European classical music. Many of the composers gave questionnaire responses that might situate them in the public and conservatory sphere of acceptable musical practice, concentrating on training, written traditions, and instrumentation. Definitions by the non-Native philosophers, critics, composers and conductors lean more toward the idea of breaking from European “classical” forms, instrumentation, sounds, and styles; and they tend to stress expressive content. Although many North American Indian composers have used experimental elements in their music, it is important to note that some – perhaps in order to establish themselves as viable musicians in the world of classical music – have emphasized older, Eurocentric definitions of classical music.

Philip J. Deloria looks historically at activities that were perceived as “anomalies” for Native Americans and sees them as unexpected means of opening up new ways of thinking. He writes, “Indian performers used expectations to gain entrée into positions in which they were able to participate in shaping the particular form of the modern” (2004: 14). To illustrate, he cites the 1910 concert tour by the Indian String Quartet during which they performed a program called “Sweetest Music of the Masters and Wild Melodies of the Primitive Indian” while wearing either tuxedos or full Indian regalia (207-9).

Similarly, the contemporary artist Arvel Bird performs Indian melodies mixed with Scottish songs on the violin and wears a costume that is both Native and Celtic in design. After a *North American Indian Cello Project* recital in Maryland, I was asked by an audience member, “where are your feathers and why aren’t you playing real Indian music?” Surely, I did not meet his expectations of what Indian music should sound like, nor did I dress appropriately. Although most of the contemporary composers I write about resist a romanticized Indian presentation of their music, most use some sort of Indian marker to present themselves on stage, such as noting kinship ties or tribal affiliation in program billing, introducing themselves in their language, or wearing First Nations jewelry or hair styles. Some composers, however, resist such modes of self-representation. Raven Chacon may use Navajo symbols in his notation, but he will not explain them to you; he may refer to Navajo chant in a piece of music, but will never sing it outright. Becenti, a Navajo composer referred to the textures and dynamics of Beethoven and the dissonance of Stravinsky when describing his “Cello Suite,” before acknowledging the Navajo cadences or rhythms clearly present in the music (personal communication, 3 November 2008). The twins negotiate borders of authenticity and representation in a modern world.

The second question I posed to the composers¹⁰ was: “How do you define Native in the context of classical Native? What makes classical Native music, ‘Native’?”

Nakai comments on Native culture and its integration with European musical form:

Native refers to Indigenous expressions in the context of ceremonial, social, spiritual or personal music and derivations thereof that are peculiar to an individual’s or group’s cultural expressions significant to their traditions through time immemorial... Classical Native is an expression of an Indigenous Amerindian composer, arranger or instrumentalist who applies the usual practice of the Western European discipline to derivations of songs, melodies, portions of sacred music traditions or innovations utilizing Native and European instruments. This activity builds upon the premise of culture and tradition which conveys an inclusive ingenuity of a Native composer into works representative of artistic and thought-provoking endeavors that may be representative of one or more Indigenous Amerindian communities. (Questionnaires 2007)

Raven Chacon replied to the questionnaire, “The only native element of the concert is the blood of half of the performers/most of the composers. This is enough for me.” He says, “other than the instruments and notation used, my music does not have much to do with classical music. This is the music that follows more the tradition of American Indian music” (Ibid.). He does not see American Indian music as relating to classical music and resists creating sounds that are recognizable as either Native *or* classical. He never directly quotes melodic material from his Navajo tradition but encourages improvisation within determined forms. The trickster-like play that Chacon seems to love in his performances and compositions is reflected in occasionally contradictory comments. During a festival panel about classical music at Montgomery College in Maryland (part of the 2007-8 World Arts Festival program that featured contemporary Native American Music), he said that not only does he not write classical music, he doesn’t even like it; but he has great respect for the instruments. Despite the provocative comments, I find Chacon’s music to be well within the definition of contemporary classical music in terms of notation, innovation, instrumentation and theoretical discipline (Ibid.).

Quincy described “Native” as involving “the feeling of the music that harks back and forward to our roots” (Ibid.), while Archambault said:

Native is another broad term that originated late at the end of the twentieth century to define the Indigenous/aboriginal peoples of the Americas. One of the contested issues with the term Native is that it does not distinguish between anyone born in the Americas before or after the European conquest. This results in anyone being Native and the loss of the tribal names and identity specific to American Indians prior to European contact... The term Native in the context of Classical Native music would refer to all of the particular music produced by Indigenous tribes of the Americas before and after European contact which is written within a notational system prior to being performed. (Ibid.)

For Brent Michael Davids, “Native” means “any Native writing concert music, creative Native concert music. It might have what are traditionally seen as Native influences, or it may not” (Ibid.). Like Chacon, he considers personal heritage to be the defining factor, not compositional style.

Most of the composers resist sounding “Native” by avoiding direct melodic references, pentatonic scales, and the stereotypical sound of the “tom-tom” (Deloria 2004:14), but several have experimented with notation incorporating

symbolism from their ancestral history, such as the Algonquian birch bark song scrolls studied by Archambault, or the graphic notation designed by Davids for the Kronos Quartet in “The Singing Woods” or his feather-shaped score for “Mohican Friends.” Chacon uses Navajo symbols in several of his works, including “Táágo Dez’a” for solo cello and voice, and several works on his chamber music CD, *Beesh Naalnishi*, the cover of which features real dirt from the Arizona earth (originally placed inside the spine of the jewel case). The twins negotiate places of resistance.

There are many iconic sounds, often “translated” for new instrumentation, that might be identified as the Native elements in classical Native music. Sounds of the drum are depicted by the *col legno battuto* rhythms in my own “Decolonization,” the dense double stops by Becenti in his “Suite for Solo Cello,” and the quarter-tone stops in Chacon’s “Táágo Dez’a.” The water drum is heard in Quincy’s “Choctaw Nights,” and the Native flute in Nakai’s “Whippoorwill.” Musical themes from powwow music are heard in Warren’s “Songs and Dances of the Three Sisters” and Davids’ *Powwow Symphony*.

What seems to be important to most of the Native composers who answered the question about the term *Native* in classical Native music is the expression of worldview and culture in terms of values. Croall, for instance, writes about global climate change in her piece *Messages (Mijidwewinan)*, and teaches children Odawa values through storytelling in her piece *Stories from Coyote*. Specific traditions are expressed in Davids’ “Ancestor Giveaway” for chorus, and in my chamber piece “Ohen:ton Kariwatekwen” (which includes a recitation of the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving address). Many works incorporate several of these elements within one composition, such as Chickasaw composer Jerod Tate’s flute concerto, *Tracing Mississippi*, recorded by the San Francisco Symphony. He says it is “a remembrance of the old country my family lived in and incorporates traditional songs and dance rhythms, along with American Indian percussion instruments” (2012). Many of the composers have created new soundscapes combining traditional Native American musical elements within fully-scored symphonic and chamber compositions. Works may incorporate primarily contemporary classical elements, whether they be instrumentation, as in the symphonic compositions of Ballard, Croall, Davids and Tate, or the chamber music of all of the composers; and concert performances are part of classical music programs held at symphony halls, university recital halls, and performing arts centres. European musical notation or musicianship is employed as composers incorporate musical forms, dynamics, tempi, metric modulation, orchestration and other compositional devices. I believe that Chacon’s statement about Native blood being “enough” depicts his worldview and cultural values. He stresses the importance of creative freedom and individual expression

not bound to a specific premise of Native expectation, while recognizing his connection to his Navajo family, ancestry and culture. It makes clear the need to be free of Eurocentric and Indigenous stereotypes, allowing for artistic freedom and innovation apart from expectation. Clearly questions of terminology, representation and politics are still being explored as we attempt to define classical Native. The twins continue to define and redefine their position.

Native musicians in all genres, from rock and roll, jazz, reggae, hip-hop, pop, to classical, are part of the process of decolonization, dispelling stereotypes and representing Indians as living, innovative artists, and often they have cultural, political, economic and social agendas. In their ground-breaking new book, *Opera Indigene: Re/presenting First Nations and Indigenous Cultures*, editors Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson write about Indigenous artists' use of new music as an interface to extend cultural practices that are relevant to the lives of Indigenous artists and the audiences themselves (2011:12). As can be learned from this book and the compositions highlighted throughout this article, the concert works in this genre express more than the music itself. Sonically and intellectually disciplined and aesthetically interesting, this musical style may be differentiated from other contemporary classical categories in much more than the blood quotient of the composers. Inherent in the soundscape of North American Indian music are specific sounds or sentiments that are symbols of pride, customs, values, and lineage. These sounds are diverse and have included bird songs, Plains falsetto style singing, Haudenosaunee bone rattles, hand and water-drums, country slide and blues guitar, electronic distorted powwow drums, and traditional Indian source material – to name a few.

I also see vital issues of relationship to community as inherent in Indian music – what we say musically and how it is interpreted, along with our individual voice that is part of the greater whole in our communities and in “global Native America.” The concept of relationship often goes beyond self-determination and Indigenous representation to embrace social responsibility for the greater good of all. This can be seen by the fact that most of the composers are involved in community service, composer residency programs, and education, as well as archival and recording projects.

The diversity of definitions and points of view of the composers with whom I have worked reflect not only our individual personalities and artistry, but the values and traditions of many North American Indian nations. As a group we are able to publicly dispel stereotypes through the composition and performance of contemporary classical Native music, and show ourselves as a creative and modern people dedicated to our communities. We are accustomed to crossing borders.

IÀ:IA'K (6): Classical Native, the Twins Create

In this section, I explore two works with attention to the composers' vision as reflected in the way the composers represent and define themselves in the classical Native sphere. One is a work by Raven Chacon that I premiered; the second is one of my own compositions. I will also look at some approaches that address cultural themes and reflect old or new soundscapes.

Several classical Native concepts are illustrated by Chacon's composition "Táágo Dez'á," which means three sides or points.¹¹ He describes it: "Written in 2007 for singing cellist, each song is different in the way that the performer is directed to learn them. Respectively, she will learn by using guided improvisation; by ear; or by reading standard notation. It is also important that she interpret the songs to accommodate her style of playing." This work explores three methods of notation: standard; images for improvisation; and oral (where the cellist listens to a pre-recorded CD). These methods are both musical experiment and a political statement on the role of linguistic, pictorial and aural modes of transmission. In my analysis of the piece, I consulted with elders and musicians, drew from my own experience as the performer of "Táágo Dez'á," and referred to Indigenous language and metaphoric concepts. I focus on three Indigenous concepts to illustrate the importance of relationship, sovereignty and experience to the process of what we might call Indigenous creativity. By relationship, I refer not only to collaboration and reciprocity, but the concept of being in relation to a variety of aspects of creating music including the actual sounds, instruments, composer, performer, culture, inspirational connections, history, values and audience. By sovereignty, I mean the boundaries and concepts brought forth through Indigenous values that permeate the musical work. By experience, I refer to concepts of time, technique, process and product that illustrate an Indigenous worldview, beyond Western notions of time, particularly in music, but also as an example of experiential Indigenous performance events.

Song One, subtitled "*like a chased animal*," is notated in both Navajo Dine graphics and Western notation as seen in Example 3. The specific meanings of the graphics were not revealed to me, the performer, but I was asked in the notes in the score to "interpret the graphics in any way," but in "the same way during rehearsals and performances... particular graphics should be performed similarly throughout the song, not by improvisational methods, but rather the content should be decided upon after becoming familiar with the adjacent measures." These directions require that I create a relationship to the piece as both a composer/improviser and as a performer/cellist, and that only through being in relationship with its specific Navajo Dine symbols

Táágo Dez' á (2007) by Raven Chacon (Navajo Dine)

1. like a chased animal

\sharp = approx 1/4 sharp
 \flat = approx 1/4 flat

90

col legno

mf

single ricochet

mp

mf

15^{ma} shrik

5

sul pont

yah - ah

mp

(vib.) glide fingernail against string

louder than last time

9

mf

port.

port.

port.

mf

I. 15^{ma}

II.

III.

IV. ord.

11

ah - ah' - yah' - ah

yah' - ah' - ah' - yah

mp

15

sul. pont.

port.

port.

Example 3: Musical excerpt from *Song 1* of *Táágo Dez' á* by Raven Chacon

and musical notation am I able to contribute and thus complete or share the work. The process requires that I get to know parts of Chacon's world, while bringing in my invited interpretation of that understanding. In this section of the piece, there is a balance between Chacon's world as an Indigenous composer and my role as an interpretive cellist/ performer. There are also limits to how far either of us may go. We are "twins" in the dual roles each of us plays in the creation of a performance of this work. In a sense, there are three or more points of reference in the process of experiencing this piece: Chacon's notation and directions in which he claims his Native sovereignty and compositional prerogative; my interpretation and performance with which I endeavour to respect his sovereignty; and the audience's experience of the work. The score notes for this section state, "The feeling of time is very loose and free. When something is not possible, pitch can be sacrificed to make it possible." Again in relationship with the performer, Indigenous values are determined by the composer, who makes time flexible and pitch a secondary consideration, in contrast to the dominant priority in classical contemporary performance that stresses accurate pitch and very specific rhythms. Chacon encourages a collaborative process, beyond the performer interpreting the work, by encouraging the performer to contribute specific musical ideas to the musical event; he claims sovereignty by setting parameters of performative creativity that are very different from those of the European tradition. The relational understandings vary from performance to performance as my personal relationship with the piece and myself change over time.

Performing Chacon's work brought to mind the work of Shawn Wilson who, in his *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, notes that it can be more effective to tell a story than to explain the context, background or meaning of a story to people from another culture, but that too much explanation can be seen as disrespectful to people of the same culture (2008:7). Taw[^]te:se' Ray John, the Oneida elder, educator, musician and linguist, gives the example of his grandson learning about a hot stove. "You can explain it until he's blue in the face, but once he gets near that stove, he feels the heat and will learn. Of course, you stay with him and don't let him get hurt, but only through the experience will he really learn" (2008).

The second song in Chacon's piece, "shy, for a singer," subtitled "I am looking for my grandfather..." was to be learned by ear and made into my own version, thus incorporating the Indigenous value of oral transmission as a viable means of "notation." The pre-recorded CD enclosed in the back of the score is never actually played in performance. When asked about his creative process in making the CD for this work, he explained that he recorded himself on guitar and voice, as he sang from part of a recording of a woman singing a traditional

song called “Looking for my Horse.” Afterwards, he digitally deconstructed his version of the recording by applying pitch-shifting and time-stretching and reduced it from 16-bit to 4-bit. This deconstructed recording of an old Navajo song was then put on a CD to be further filtered and interpreted by the performer. Again Chacon notes in the score for this movement that “pitch is less important than other parameters of the music,” which I took to mean an emphasis on sound textures, the sounds of the Navajo language for which he supplies a specific (untranslated) sentence, accents, dynamics, tempo, and form. In the process of learning this section and especially in its performance, the music serves as an amplifier of intention and an underlying ambiance for the exploration of feeling and expression. Once again, as a performer, I was asked to be in relationship with the sounds in a different way – not only through interpretation, but in direct relationship and experience. As the performer, I experienced being shy and looking for *my* grandfather rather than trying to transmit the composer’s view. During a rehearsal with Chacon coaching, I remember crossing a “threshold” from trying to get all his ideas and notes “right” to an experience of looking for my grandfather and ancestors, asking them to come into the room, and feeling my physical voice become tentative with feelings of searching for those who came before me and may remain lost. “Looking for my grandfather” and *shyly singing* are open to a variety of interpretations based on history, culture, and lifestyle, all apart from artistic training. The intention is more important than musical technique. The process and experience is more important than a technically perfect end product.

The emphasis on process resonated with something I was told in an interview with Sadie Buck, Seneca elder, musician and cultural specialist from Six Nations Territory. She said:

For Haudenosaunee people, and a lot of traditional people that I have heard, it’s not the end product, it *is* the process. ... The end product never has to be perfect. I mean if you can get it perfect, all the better, but if it’s not perfect, that’s ok, because they did the process; because for Indigenous people, the purpose is to get it done, it’s practical, it’s functional. So it doesn’t have to be the prettiest thing in the world, as long as it works, because everything has a job. So if you’re creating a song for the seeds, if it works, if the seeds grow, then that’s the job, it’s done, it’s finished, you don’t have to have to be the prettiest song in the world, whatever your definitions of pretty are, by your culture or by people. (Interview, 16 July 2011)

She went on to say that “you can kill intention, through training, to have a perfect note. Don’t train out of you what presence you bring to it.” In Buck’s collaborative opera, *BONES*, the emphasis was on the process not the product – the intention, not the sounds (Ibid.).

The third movement of “Táágo Dez’á” is fully notated, and Chacon combines sounds and concepts that may be considered ancient, such as percussive drum-like sounds and Navajo syllables, with sounds that are extremely “modern,” like densely-plucked chords on the cello. In exploring the concepts of tradition and innovation – often seen in Native American arts as oppositional—I apply the Kanienkeha (Mohawk) concept of *now* or *non:wa* that refers to three modes of perception—the now of the past, the present, and the future—toward understanding the intersection of innovation and tradition in classical Native music. When I asked Sadie Buck about her concepts of modernity, she said:

I guess for me “modern” is relative. Today I’m modern, tomorrow I’ll be modern til tomorrow, yesterday I was modern for yesterday, because I still sing the same songs they sang two thousand years ago. So, how come I’m not modern? I am modern. I’m here, I’m there. This is the way it is. So what do we think is changing? Sure we don’t wear buckskin anymore, but does that make a difference? Culture is in your mind. It’s what you make it as a people. So we’re not stuck in having to stay in a leather outfit. Even now when we go to longhouse, our outfits are the same form as our original outfits, but they’re made of cloth. (Ibid.)

In the last section of Chacon’s piece, I pluck fully notated unison, quadruple stops that incorporate quarter-tones, while singing various Navajo sounds and syllables. The quality of the percussive plucking is reminiscent of distorted, electronic powwow drumming found throughout Chacon’s electronic music inventions. Although he weaves traditional values and sounds with twentieth century musical techniques in all three movements, I focus on the idea of interwoven material here. I pronounce syllables from the Navajo Dine language, singing them using tritones and *portamento*. I play steady percussive beats on the cello incorporating quarter-tones and slides. Fully notated in Western European notation, this movement sounds contemporary while invoking an ancient Native sensibility without making any specific Indigenous utterance. It fuses pieces of old and new to create something to be played for the future. To Sadie Buck, the fusion of small pieces taken from various Aboriginal sounds is one way of getting “a traditional essence in a

contemporary song” (Ibid.).

In my own piece, “Decolonization,” written in 2006 for solo cello and voice, I experimented with melodic fragments from “American” music, including a Yuman healing song, a Haudenosaunee women’s stomp dance, a Cherokee peace chant, and newer Western songs such as early American blues, the U.S. national anthem, and Christian plainchant. I wrote it after hearing a talk by Mohawk elder Tom Porter in 2006 at the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk community as part of a language and cultural immersion program, when he addressed the question “How do you decolonize the colonized?” His lecture mixed storytelling, humor, compassion, myth, history, and current solutions to the issue. In “Decolonization,” I too mix a variety of thematic elements, and ask many questions through the music: questions of borrowing and appropriation, questions of what is considered “old,” or “American,” for instance. Missionary and European influences act as melodic fragments interrupting each other – colliding, as it were. Musical Example 4 shows one section of this through-composed piece that employs a Haudenosaunee women’s stomp dance transcribed by Kurath (2000 [1964]) played in an up-beat tempo with *detaché* bowing, interrupted by Jimi Hendrix’s version of “The Star-spangled Banner” played using *sul ponticello* and *glissandi* to emulate guitar distortion. The intent of this section is to depict the distortion of values, of representation, of government treatment, and of identity in an attempt to activate a decolonization of our imaginations and to try to answer Tom Porter’s question. The sonic intensity of the national anthem, interrupted by what in contrast seems to be a melodically pleasing stomp dance, is ironic because

Example 4: Musical excerpt from *Decolonization* by Dawn Avery

The musical score consists of three staves of music in bass clef, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff begins with the instruction "slightly slower playful arco" and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second staff includes the title "Iroquois Women's Stomp Dance, Kurath & Star Spangled Banner" and features dynamic markings of *f* and *mp*, along with performance instructions "sul pont" and "ord." The third staff also includes "sul pont" and "ord." markings and dynamic markings of *f* and *mp*. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

the stomp dance was once considered “savage” by colonial administrators and banned by church and government residential school policies.¹² Additional irony lies in the fact that responses to Hendrix’s 1969 Newport Folk Festival and Woodstock performances were varied and extreme: some were shocked and saw it as blasphemous; some saw it as a protest against the war in Vietnam, while others saw it as support for the war. Following a performance of my piece, an elderly gentleman who was unfamiliar with Haudenosaunee stomp dances and Jimi Hendrix’s music,¹³ said to me, “Wow Dawn, that’s really political.” Even without the knowledge of the pieces from which I borrowed, he understood the political intention.

Although not all classical Native works are so blatantly political, I think they all contain political, social, and historical undertones that set them apart from other works of contemporary classical music. We create in relationship to our history and the world around us, as music critics and philosophers have said of new music composers as a whole.

Many Native composers have set themselves apart by writing pieces that deal with Aboriginal cultural, historical and traditional topics. Examples include one of the earlier classical Native pieces by Ballard, *Incident at Wounded Knee*,¹⁴ and his *Koshare* ballet based on Hopi legends. More recently, Croall wrote *Stories from Coyote* (2000), based on traditional Indian trickster narratives and scored for orchestra and Native storyteller, as a teaching tool for children’s audiences.¹⁵ It was premiered with narration by Jeff Legacy. Quincy’s operetta *Pocahantas at the Court of King James I* (2007), recounting the visit of Pocahantas from an Indigenous perspective, was premiered by the Queen’s Band ensemble in New York City and released by Lyrichord in 2008. Davids’ *Powwow Symphony* (1998), scored for orchestra and a comic Master of Ceremony, “introduces orchestra music to Indian audiences in a familiar way, and brings an understanding of the powwow to audiences already familiar with orchestra music” (Davids 2012a). Jerod Tate (Chickasaw) describes a chamber piece written in 1994 and scored for solo timpani, strings, and piano as follows: “The music of ‘Oktibihah’ is based on a Chickasaw Snake Dance song (directly quoted at the beginning) and follows the story line of the creation of Lake Oktibihah in the old Chickasaw Nation, Mississippi” (2012). An essential connection to the land is depicted by Indian artists in paintings, weavings, pottery, storytelling, poetry, short story, film, jewelry, and music.¹⁶ Living close to nature and concerned with the land, Croall often composes works that incorporate sounds of nature by playing European classical instruments in innovative ways. She creates sonic and visual expressions of wind with clarinets, for instance, or by having percussionists wave branches for instrumental accompaniment.

Experimenting with sonic borders, composers often employ a mixture of Native and non-Native instruments or idioms. Echota Tsalagi composer Ron Warren wrote “Songs and Dances for the Three Sisters” (2007) in honour of the three sacred creations – beans, corn and squash. It is scored for cello, rattles and non-operatic voice, and incorporates powwow rhythms and songs. Archambault’s “Anoki” (2007), a short piece in which the cello part is reminiscent of Bach’s Prelude in G major, recalls the hunting traditions of the Algonquin by scoring for Algonquin disc rattle and solo violoncello. My own *Manah-atin* (2006) is an Indigenous version of the sale of Manhattan, scored as a Native flute concerto with Western flute ensemble and narration taken from a speech by the Wappinger Indians (Wappinger Nation 1841). Davids uses Native American instruments and instruments of his own design in his work *The 1920 Last of the Mohicans – Suite* (2003) scored for full orchestra, electric guitar, Indian flute, crystal flutes and assorted percussion (and written as a new soundtrack for the 1920 film of the same name). All these works combine rich sounds from Euroamerican and Native American cultures to create a new complementary soundscape.

Ties to nature, tradition, social responsibility and kinship are emphasized in many classical Native composers’ works and are often the purpose behind their writing. The works often serve a function beyond “sonic utterance” – they are tools for education, revitalization, and knowledge. “Not only are songs ‘texts,’ but they are also active sites that can and do bring about change,” says Tate. “I view them as valid Native texts for serious study in a variety of academic venues, from the classroom to national conferences” (2012). Moreover, the commissioning, programming, and recording of classical Native works has brought recognition and success to composers and their communities. Although pieces of music may stimulate dialogue and inspire a desire for change, it is not probable that the compositions in and of themselves bring about change. But I believe that they are important in that, through them, we as creative people may serve to repair, even if in the smallest way, centuries of mistrust, misunderstanding and abuse. The twins remember where they came from as they forge ahead.

TSIÁ:TA (7): Composing for Future Generations, the Twins Give Back

Beginning with Ballard and his creation of the first Native American band program for children and his development of curriculum and educational materials teaching Native American music in the classroom, it has been important to Aboriginal composers to help young American Indians find

a voice in music, including classical composition. Davids was the first composer to develop a composer residency program for native youth, called the Grand Canyon Music Festival's Native American Composer Apprentice Program (CANOE), in which he, Tate and Chacon have been composers in residence. Tate was also composer in residence for the Chickasaw Summer Arts Academy and the American Composers Forum/Joyce Award community outreach program. Student works have been performed and recorded by the ETHEL string quartet (2010). I have been privileged to direct the Native Composers Project, a culture-based project in which students compose an original song in their language and traditional song style, arrange a contemporary version of that song, then compose a string quartet using their song as thematic material. Works from this project were released as a CD¹⁷ to raise funds for Tyendinaga language revitalization programs. All of these programs¹⁸ provide classical composition instruction for American Indian students and feature their works in public performance and recordings.

SHA'TÉ:KON (8):Methodologies, the Twins Transform

In the drive for Indigenous peoples to control their reality through self-determination, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, renowned researcher and professor of Maori and Indigenous education, specifies a non-sequential development that is an important aspect of Indigenous research and representation. She talks about Indigenous goals of self-determination in research as involving a circular process “of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization” (1999:116). She sees these processes as being incorporated into practices and methodologies. In relation to classical Native music and performance, transformation can be understood as the spark of interest to create original pieces of music; decolonization as the process of learning to use the tools of creativity and musicianship to present Native perspectives on issues that are central to one's history and life; healing as composers apply their own Indigenous knowledge to their compositions; and mobilization when one creates pieces of music, shares those works, and sees oneself as a creative being. My research on classical Native music is done with both accountability and relationality in mind, as I consult and collaborate, serve, collect data, develop theory, and explore Aboriginal linguistic and metaphorical perspectives. The twins continue their cyclical journey across many borders, in relationship to each other and to creation itself. 🍀

Notes

1. IRB Application: #07-0678, University of Maryland, College Park. Responses to questionnaire henceforth referenced as (Questionnaires 2007).
2. I refer to this global concept of a shared Native American sensibility by employing a variety of terms, including Native American, First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal, Indian, North American Indian and Native, all capitalized as adjectives that describe “belonging to a specific people.”
3. Although I issued similar questionnaires to audience members, this study focusses on the Indigenous agenda of self-determination as Native composer participants begin to define “classical Native.”
4. The Aboriginal graphics found on Raven Chacon’s website serve as links to the rest of his page. Brent Michael Davids’ website’s front page shows an all-American diner whose windows serve as links.
5. I hope to issue additional questionnaires to other North American Indian composers, such as Jerod Tate, Barbara Croall, Juantio Becenti, who were not part of the original NAICP, and also to review audience reactions by similar questionnaires.
6. The first performances were at Montgomery College and NMAI in 2007 with Steven Alvarez playing the Algonquin disc rattle and me on violoncello. The second performance referred to above was at the North Dakota Museum of Art in 2012, with Thirza Defoe on disc rattle and me on cello.
7. From an historical perspective, the term “new music” is presumed to have come from the German “Internationale Gesellschaft fur neue Musik” (The International Society of New Music), while the term “contemporary music” comes from the English title for its counterpart organization, the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) Definitions of contemporary art music by Adorno, Duckworth, Ross and Griffiths refer to music from the turn of the twentieth century through the present and include the expression of modern existence through sounds that can be differentiated from the musical eras preceding it.
8. Examples of hybridity can be heard in Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” with its jazz influences in a classical piano concerto; or folksongs used in various works by Bartok.
9. This is demonstrated by the nationalist borrowings of Beethoven, Dvorak, and Tchaikowsky, the folk song settings of Smetana, and Brahms, or the “oriental” and jazz influences heard in Debussy.
10. I will not attempt to address the highly charged political question of what it means to be Indian or “Indian enough”; nor am I able to address each tribe’s definitions and requirements.
11. I commissioned the work as part of the North American Indian Cello Project, with a grant from the First Nations Composers Initiative project supported through the Ford Foundation’s Indigenous Knowledge, Expressive Culture grant program of the American Composers Forum.

12. “It is observed with alarm that the holding of dances by the Indians on their reserves is on the increase...I have, therefore, to direct you to use your utmost endeavours to dissuade the Indians from excessive indulgence in the practice of dancing. You should suppress any dancer...” sent by the Deputy Superintendent General, Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 1921 (quoted in Longboat and Avery: 2010).

13. I quickly remedied that by providing him with a complete set of Hendrix recordings.

14. Premiered in 1974 by the Minnesota Orchestra and performed in 1999 by the American Composers Orchestra in New York.

15. Also arranged for chamber orchestra.

16. As Diamond puts it, “The expression of that *physical* experience of the landscape is so central to [Indigenous] philosophy, music, culture” (1994:19).

17. “Tahatikonsonhtóntie Raotirenná’shòn: Songs for the Coming of Faces” (Okenti Records, (n.n.). 2012).

18. The Banff Centre for the Arts has also organized programs in Aboriginal arts since the mid 1990s. The Aboriginal Women’s Music program, directed by Sadie Buck, was one of the first of these and is regarded by many as one of the most effective means of empowering creative Native women.

TSÍOHTON (g): Closing the circle, the Twins Give Credit Where Credit is Due

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