

Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-Wow, by Tara Browner. Music in American Life Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. xii, 163 pp. Musical examples, figures, tables, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Thomas Vennum is senior ethnomusicologist emeritus in the Center for Folklife and Cultural Studies at the Smithsonian Institution. He is author of *The Ojibwa Dance Drum: Its History and Construction*; *Wild Rice and the Ojibwa People*; and *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War*.

Based on Tara Browner's own ten years as a powwow participant, *Heartbeat of the People* is an important and timely contribution to the literature on American Indian music and dance. The author, herself of Native heritage (Choctaw/Mohawk), offers a concise, useful introduction to the intertribal powwow, which she characterizes as "the most widespread venue for traditional Indian music and dance." She hopes readers will use the text as an "entry point" to investigate this cultural phenomenon. (Most powwows are within easy driving distance; Iowans can attend Meskwaki powwows near Tama and Ho-chunk [Winnebago] events in southwestern Wisconsin.)

Browner discusses, in turn, her mode of presentation, the origin and history of today's powwow, musical "styles and regalia," and song composition and performance. She concludes with chapters devoted to rich interviews from Lakota (Sioux) and Anishnaabeg (Ojibwe) families active as singers and dancers. Figures and tables interspersed throughout the text clarify the technical discussions.

Formally trained as a percussionist before becoming an ethnomusicologist, Browner targets both academic and Native readers. Of particular interest to students of music is her observation that, because of the powwow's pan-tribal nature, Indian singers use English as a *lingua franca* in discussing its music. Their choice of Euro-American musical terminology, she warns, does not always convey its Western meaning; *harmony*, for instance, for Indian singers describes how they adjust the respective strength of their drumbeats until all are equal.

The book derives its title from the centrality of the drum in American Indian music. The hallmark of this music is the near universality of an orally transmitted song repertoire accompanied by some sort of percussion, *always* provided by the singer(s). Powwow songs are invariably performed by a group of seated males (called a *drum*) surrounding a large drum. Because most song accompaniment is in a continuous, regular two-beat pattern, its analogy to the human heartbeat is pervasive in Indian belief. In the Ojibwe creation story, for instance, the first sound heard was that of a rattle, followed by silence, "and then came the heartbeat of the people and of life coming. That's what

the drum is, that heartbeat" (141). Thus Indian drums are accorded nearly anthropomorphic respect. At a powwow, the area around the drum is kept clear and clean. Many owners wrap their drums in blankets; some even hold occasional feasts for the instrument.

Because the drumbeat regulates the dance steps, singers constantly communicate with the dancers, who must remain attentive to such musical signals as tempo and dynamic changes. Occasionally in jest the singers may even attempt to throw the dancers off.

Dancers take special pride in their *regalia*. (Browner avoids the demeaning white term *costume*.) A typical outfit is assembled over time with items inherited, purchased, or made by family members. Photographs complement Browner's detailed descriptions of the regalia. She enumerates differences by region, gender, and category of dance style.

Browner notes the increasing secularization of the powwow, as non-Indian concepts of competition and prize money led to the arrival around 1950 of the "contest powwow," with judges, dancers wearing assigned numbers, and "dance-offs" in case of ties. This introduced a new figure, the "professional dancer," one who travels the national powwow circuit for income, particularly attracted by those reservations with casinos able to "up the ante." Browner traces the impetus for this to the nineteenth century, when "[white] audience demands of Wild West shows played an important part in the development of 'fancy' war dances that had previously not existed" (30). Citing the history of the annual Ann Arbor powwow, Browner documents how the event eventually moved out from under the control of the Native American Student Association and came under the University of Michigan financial umbrella as professional dancers expected more prize money than the gate and concession receipts generated.

Throughout the text one encounters Indian adaptations from the dominant society: dancers today practice to music from tapes and CD recordings; blow-dryers are used to tighten slackened drum heads; and drumsticks are fashioned from fiberglass fishing pole shafts wrapped with duct tape. Despite such innovations, Browner's informants show how central the powwow continues to be for Native Americans. As Norma Renton (Lakota) expressed it, "When I'm feeling depressed, or if I'm having a hard time, the main thing that will get me out of that is a pow-wow" (104).

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