



A Guide for Non-Indian Spectators

POW WOV DANCE STYLES

The modern Pow Wow is a gathering, a social occasion, and a time for Indian peoples to come together to sing and dance, and to honor the heritage that has been passed down to them from their ancestors. Modern Pow Wow dancing is an entity unto itself. The different styles are derived from traditional dances of the various tribes (each tribe has their own origin legends), but the individual dances are not specific to any one tribe - though they are often associated with a particular geographical area. The dances fall into three basic configurations" the Grand Entry, Intertribal Dances and Contests. Keep in mind, there are more than 500 federally recognized tribes in the United States. The following descriptions are generic and not specific to one tribe.

THE GRAND ENTRY

Each session of the Denver March Pow Wow begins with a Grand Entry. The processional begins with the Heart Beat drum group carrying their drum and singing the Committee's song, "A Living Hoop". Following them is an Eagle Staff, the American flags, Indian Nation flags, and any other flags that are being displayed (e.g., the Pow-MIA flag, a state flag, the Pow Wow's own flag, etc) lead the way in the dance arena, followed in order by: the Denver March Pow Wow Princess, other visiting royalty, Living Treasures (70+), Golden Age Men, Senior Men, Men's Northern Traditional, Southern Straight, Men's Fancy, and Men's Grass, Men's Chicken followed by the Women, Teens, Juniors, and Tiny Tots. The Masters of Ceremonies announce each category as they enter the arena. Once everyone is in the dance arena and with the spectators still standing, the flags are raised to the accompaniment of a flag song. This is followed by a veterans' honoring song - the Victory Dance. There two Grand Entries on Friday and Saturday and one on Sunday. There is often a scheduled meal break between the end of one session and the next Grand Entry.

INTERTRIBAL DANCES

Intertribal dancing means: "Everybody dance!" During these dances, you may see all the different styles of Pow Wow dancers and all different age groups dancing together. You do not need to be in a dance outfit to participate. You will also be able to observe the essential nature of Indian dancing, which is simply that it is an individual activity, pursued in a group. Each dancer moves independently to the beat of the drum, creating a highly individual style. The one exception to this is the Two-Step, a "Ladies' Choice" dance, which is one of the few times that men and women have physical contact while dancing.

CONTEST DANCING

Contest Dancing is divided into many categories, depending on style, regional differences, and age. There are six basic categories of contest dances broken down into age categories. For the men, there are, Traditional

Dancing, Fancy Dancing, Chicken Dancing, and Grass Dancing. And, for the women: Traditional Dancing, Fancy Shawl Dancing, Jingle Dress Dancing, and Woodlands Applique. The following descriptions are the most common dance styles seen at the Denver March Pow Wow..

MEN'S POW WOW DANCE STYLES

Men's Traditional: The Men's Northern Traditional style of dance is the oldest form of dancing. Years ago, only the warriors were allowed to dance in the circle. The dance was a form of storytelling where each warrior acted out deeds committed during a battle or hunt. The Oklahoma men's traditional style of dance is referred to as the Men's Southern Straight.

Men's Northern Traditional dancers wear headdresses, referred to as a roach, on their heads. The roaches are made with porcupine and deer hair intricately woven together. Eagle feathers are worn on top of the roaches. A stick with eagle plumes attached at the end fasten the roach to the top of the head and a string around the neck fastens the roach midway down the back. Northern Traditional dancers wear bone breastplates, which were originally used for protection during battle or hunting. The rest of the outfit is comprised of an eagle feather bustle, matching bead work (cuffs, arm bands, belt with side drops, leg bands, moccasins), apron (front and back), the back of the apron has decorative "trailers", and chokers made of animal bones. The dancers wear angora fur and large bells around their ankles. Years ago, deer toes were worn around the ankles. Some dancers carry eagle wing fans, shields, or coup sticks decorated with eagle plumes and horsehair in their hands.

The Southern Straight dancers dress the same with two exceptions, they do not wear eagle feather bustles and they may wear otter fur caps with an otter trailer instead of a roach. They move around the dance arena in a rhythmic, elongated stride. They sometimes appear to be tracking-perhaps an enemy or game. It is sometimes referred to as the "Gentlemen's" dance.

The dancers wear parts of animals on their outfits to show respect for the animal and to embody the spirit of the animal as they dance.

Men's Grass Dance: Every tribe has their own origin legends of the different dance styles. The most well known origin legend of the Grass Dance comes from the Northern Plains Area. A young man was born without the full use of his legs. He longs to run, dance, and play with the other children. His parents consulted a Medicine Man and asked if he could help him in some way. The Medicine Man advised him to fast and seek a vision on the prairie. The young man left the village and did as he was instructed. As he sat in the hot summer sun on the prairie fasting and praying, the long swaying prairie grass mesmerized him. Soon he saw himself dancing in a similar manner. He went back to the village and the medicine Man interpreted his vision. The boy asked his mother to help him make an outfit to dance utilizing the long prairie grass. He showed his father how he would dance and a song was made for him. A celebration was held and he showed the village his style of dance, which was eventually called the grass dance. The old style grass dancers use a lot of shoulder, arm, and head movements and in the "old style" footwork it appears that they are stumbling. The grass dance style is easy to recognize by the striking outfits, which are covered from shoulder to ankle with long, thick, bright, multi-colored fringes made of yarn or ribbon. The dancers do not wear feather bustles like the traditional and fancy dancers.

Men's Fancy Dance: This dance style is the most contemporary. One of the origin stories of the fancy dance follows: When the "Wild West Shows" were popular in the early 1900's some featured Indian dancing, but the traditional and grass dance styles were considered too sedate. So the young dancers began to dress a little differently and to dance in a faster manner. Along with the new dance style came new songs.

Like the traditional and grass dancers, the fancy dancers wear headdresses, referred to as a roach, on their heads. The roaches are made with porcupine and deer hair intricately woven together. Eagle feathers are worn on top of

the roaches. The fancy dancers use a "rocker" to make the eagle feathers bounce back and forth in rhythm with the drum. A stick with brightly colored feathers attached at the end fastens the roach to the top of the head and a string around the neck fastens the roach midway down the back. Two bustles are worn, one is attached to the back with buckskin straps tied to the chin and chest and the other is worn at the waist. The dancers wear fully beaded capes and aprons with matching belts with side drops, cuffs, and moccasins. They also wear small bustles on their arms, which match the large bustles. They carry sticks decorated with brightly colored feathers and ribbons in their hands. The complete outfit is decorated with multi-colored ribbons to add movement to the dance steps. The dancers wear bells on the on the calves and white angora fur around the angles. Horsehair is sometimes added to the tips of the bustles.

Men's Prairie Chicken: This style of dance is the most recent style to make a resurgence in the powwow arena. Some Northern Plains tribes have clans with this name and only those clan members can dance this style. When the moon is full, the prairie chicken dances! The dancer imitates the movement of the Prairie Chicken's head, body, and scratching movement of its feet. One dancer from Canada, said his tribe dances this style to honor the Prairie Chicken. Many times it was their only nourishment during the long cold winter months and saved the people. The Prairie Chicken Dancers also wear a head roach; round feather bustles on their arms; one round bustle at the waist; and a string of bells from waist to ankle. In their hands, they may carry Eagle wings, fans, mirrors or coup sticks.

WOMEN'S POW WOW DANCE STYLES

Southern Buckskin/Cloth: These two dance styles are danced by women from the Oklahoma Tribes. Although the dress is different the dance movements are very similar. The Southern Buckskin/Cloth style of dance is slowly rhythmic and elegant as the women move gracefully about the dance arena, dipping and swaying to the beat of the drummers. The buckskin dress is decorated with beadwork and sometimes shells or silverwork. The dresses themselves are buckskin. The dresses may also have designs printed on the hem of the dress. The cloth outfits are skirts and blouses. The skirts are decorated with elaborated ribbon work. The design of the ribbon work identifies the woman's tribe or family. The remainder of the outfit includes matching headbands or crowns, hair ties, purses, moccasins, chokers, earrings and shawls. Women who have an Indian name will wear an eagle feather or eagle plume in their hair.

Northern Traditional: Each tribe has specific dress and dance styles, the following are the more typical ones seen at this powwow. The northern plains traditional dancers are sometimes referred to as "stationary" dancers. They stand on the outer edge of the dance arena. They barely move their feet and gently bend their knees and sedately move up and down in rhythm with the drum. The northwestern tribes dance around the arena moving their feet and heads in rhythm with the drum. The cloth dress and buckskin dresses are different but the dance style is the same for most of the northern plains tribes. The northern traditional buckskin dresses are elaborately decorated with beadwork. The yoke and sleeves of the dresses are completely beaded. The dress may also be decorated with porcupine quillwork, shells, elk teeth, or brass beads. The remainder of the outfit includes matching headbands or crown, hair tie, purses, moccasins, chokers, earring and shawl. Women who have an Indian name will wear an eagle feather or eagle plume in their hair.

Jingle Dress Dance: Every tribe has their own origin legends of the different dance styles. The most well known legend of the Jingle Dress comes from the Great Lakes Region. A Medicine Man was unable to cure his people of diseases that come west with the White man. In answer to his fasting and prayers, he was given a vision in which he saw his daughter and three of her friends dancing in dresses adorned with "jingles". They danced in a "side-Step" fashion around the sick person. In the dream, he was taught the healing songs. Upon awakening he instructed his wife and daughter how to make the dresses. He was able to heal his people by conducting the jingle dress ceremony. Originally, the cones were carved out of wood. The jingles are now made of chewing tobacco lids. The jingle dress dance performed at a powwow is now considered one of the intertribal dance styles. However, the actual ceremonial dances are not performed in public.

The jingle dress dance outfit is comprised of the jingle dress, matching beadwork (cuffs, barrettes, leggings, moccasins, purses, belts), and a fan. The "old style" jingle dress dancers do not carry a fan or wear eagle plumes or feathers in their hair.

Fancy Shawl Dance: This dance style is the most contemporary of the women's dance styles. Young women began wearing their shawls instead of draping them over their arms when dressed in their outfits. They wanted to dance to the faster tempo songs sung for the Men's Fancy Dancers. In the late 1950's when a few young women danced faster wearing their shawls, the older women of the tribe chastised them. However, as more powwows added competition dancing, the young women wearing their shawls and showing their fancy footwork began to beat the traditional dancers and jingle dress dancers. This prompted more and more young women to dance this style and it begrudgingly became accepted.

The Fancy Shawl outfit is comprised of matching beadwork-cape, hair ties, barrettes, earrings, belts, moccasins, and leggings. They tie otter or beaver fur to their braids and wear a color-coordinated scarf. Currently, most shawl dancers wear dresses and matching shawls with elaborate, colorful designs. Some people think that the "Fancy" refers to the shawl but it doesn't, it refers to the foot work. There's been a trend in recent years for fancy shawl dancers to wear outfits that have the designs appliquéd by sewing machine instead of the customary beadwork.

Whatever the style of dance, the outfits and accessories all display the tremendous amount of time, energy, and materials that the dancers put into them, reflecting both the pride in their heritage and the dedication to maintaining their rich tribal traditions.

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