Continental Divide: 3. Vision quest

Traditional Arapaho (Eagle Song), Peter Bird (seeker),



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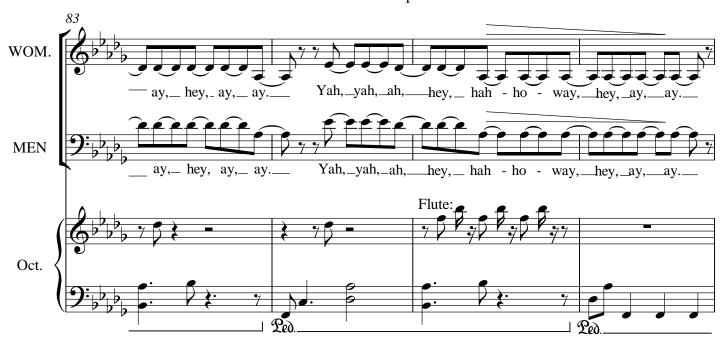




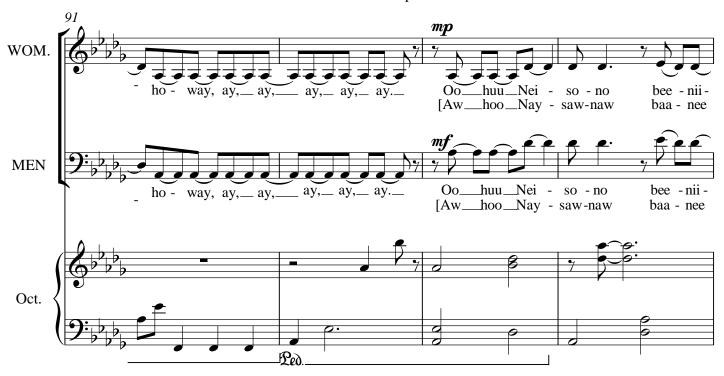










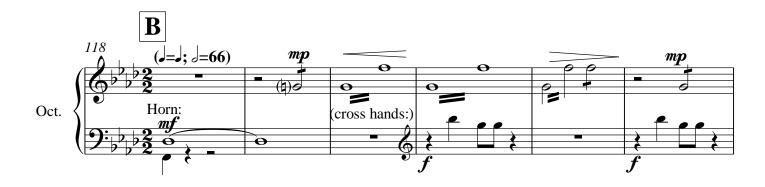








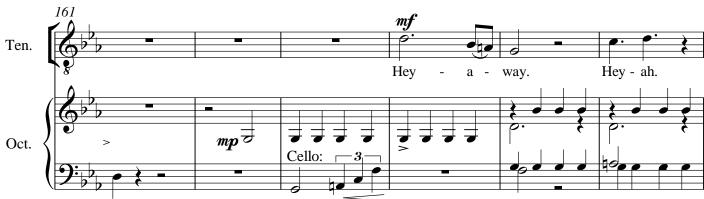






*Two mountains in the Front Range of Colorado; now often called Longs Peak and Mount Meeker.



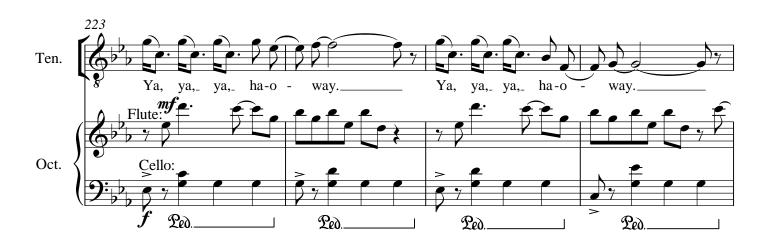


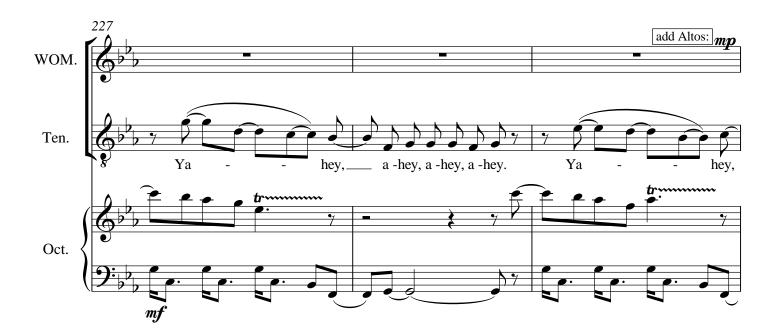




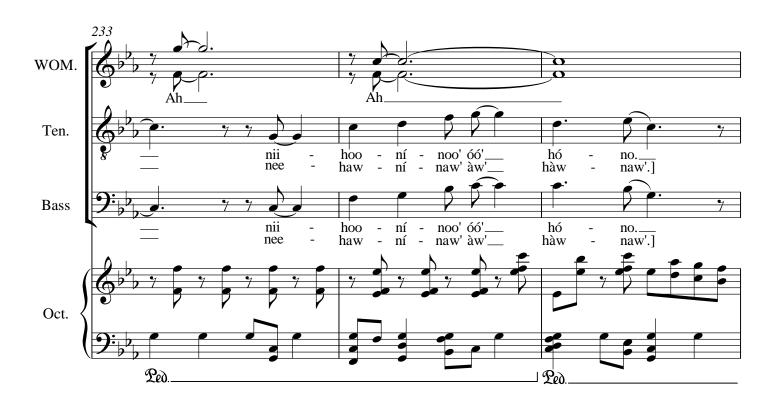
















Notes on "Vision Quest"

Source: A web page (http://www.clarabaker.us/AmericanIndian/samNobleMuseum.htm) by Clara Baker, Cheyenne-Arapaho Technology & Innovation Training Center, offers recordings from the collection of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. They present a skilled southern Arapaho singer and songmaker whose legal surname may be Lawrence. He mentions that he is a grandson of Chief Kou'cuuyuu Henéécee (Scarred Buffalo) on his mother's side, a grandson of Henéécee Níitóuuhu (Howling Buffalo) on his father's side, a nephew of Gloria Yuranga, the father of Nicholas Lawrence, and an uncle of Warren Sanke, Sr. He introduces and sings four traditional eagle songs. The text of the verse in the first eagle song means, "My father gave me the song of the eagle." Later, he comments that, "Arapahos aren't stingy; they're not stingy people about their songs. Anyone can sing them as long as they use them in the proper way, and show the proper respect to that song. Anybody can use that song."

Performance practice:

- 1. A good way to warm up before rehearsing this piece is to sing natural Bb-minor scales up and down (omitting Gb), and beginning each note mid-way between two drum beats.
- 2. Many singers will have to strain to reach the high and/or low F's in Eagle Song. Falsetto may be used. It is natural to sing the high notes with a tight, strained tone, and to sing the low notes with a soft, woofy tone. It is also acceptable to quietly drop out during extreme pitches; others will sing them.
- 3. Many American Indian singers use a pulsation ornament which is a bit slower (about 4 Hz; adjusted to equal 1, 2, or 4 cycles per beat) and deeper (~50 cents) than European vibrato. Recordings of authentic performances are the best guide. If the chorus is large, the director may wish to request a bit less of this ornament.
- 4. Most singers should sing the indicated vocable syllables most of the time. However, some individual variation is normal (except in the meaningful verses).
- 5. Because the musicians symbolically represent the Arapaho nation during the Eagle Song segment, it would be proper for them to observe the Arapaho tradition of standing for this song (up to rehearsal B). Of course, the cellist must sit to play. And, as the audience is typically mostly composed of other tribes, they are not expected to stand.
- 6. Because of the strong leadership of the drum, it is probably not necessary to conduct during the Eagle Song segment. (The drum varies in dynamic, but never in tempo, until rehearsal B.) Conducting is needed for the rest of the piece.

Philosophy of this piece:

Some may object that it is incorrect to add other instruments or non-melody notes to a traditional song like Eagle Song. I see these songs as analogous to the European liturgical plainchants that were codified 14 centuries ago under Pope Gregory I. Some churchmen were probably offended in the 9th century when these began to be accompanied and harmonized, and in fact this debate still continues. But 12 centuries of beautiful (and still sacred) music have resulted from those innovations.