

his particular inspiration for the song are always known and remain associated with his composition.

6. The Berry-picking Songs

Summer in southwest Alaska brings a profusion of wild berries, such as cloudberry and blueberries, which are industriously gathered and stored in cold chambers beneath ground until winter. At that time they provide necessary nourishment and vitamin C, and in some cases are the only source of certain nutrients. Berry-picking songs are used mainly by women and older children, who often travel far in boats to find productive berry patches. Berry-picking songs are frequently about the tundra and its many small lakes, all of which possess descriptive names in order to aid geographic location.

The songs are generally structured in short repeating sections, and proceed in a 2/4 rhythm. The melody often emphasizes the three notes of a major triad, but the 5th at the top is sung flattened. The range of such songs is narrow, making them suitable for young voices. Like most of the Yupik song categories, the melodic and rhythmic features of the style in question are determined in part by function and by the needs of the singers to whom the style belongs. Although all Yupik songtexts are concerned with aspects of the environment and with subsistence, each style exhibits its own discrete subject-matter emphasis. Although there are musical commonalities linking all song styles, each style possesses features suited to function. Dance songs may feature a complex and asymmetrical 5/8 rhythm, travelling songs may feature a symmetrical 2/4 suited to back-and-forth rowing, and berry-picking songs possess musical characteristics within the capabilities of children, such as repeating sections and short range.

7. The Story Songs

Yupik story songs are sung by children, or by elders for children, and generally occur within a long story in which the song serves a magical overcoming function. This overcoming is necessary because, in Yupik folklore, the divisions within a story follow a format which includes a block or obstruction. First there occurs a lack, such as lack of food or of a wife. Second, the hero must leave home to resolve the lack. Third, a block is encountered in the form of a storm, mountain, or mon-

ster. Fourth, the hero sings a magical song to overcome the block (music being thought to embody a degree of supernatural power). Fifth, the hero is able to resolve the lack. Sixth, the hero starts back on a lengthy and eventful journey home. Seventh, home is reached and reunion occurs.

Many of the short songs which occur within stories are so ancient that their meaning has been lost, and all that remains are apparent nonsense syllables, which, however, were once real words. Those story songs which remain comprehensible to the Yupik, are frequently about local species of birds and small animals, usually endowed with a humanized quality. In the long stories featuring story songs, the song is generally sung by one such humanized bird or animal to another, as, for instance, when the wandering ptarmigan bird sings to the widowed squirrel with orphan children and asks to marry her.



Plate 5: Children at Chevak learn use of feathered dance fans.

Some songtexts within stories appear to be rather bloodthirsty, for many mention blood, severed body parts, stomach contents, and cannibalism. Two possible origins for this come to mind. First, the culture is one in which much time and effort is spent in skinning, carcass-cutting, and the division and storage of raw meat from game animals. Second, aggression is a strong taboo in Yupik society, and the bloodthirstiness within stories may be a harmless compensatory outlet.