

~ The Dances ~

An Eastern Woodland legend has it that once there lived an old woman whose husband had died and whose son had been killed. She was all-alone with her son's small children to take care of. The people in the village looked down on her because she had so little. Word came to the village that Great Spirit was to visit. Everyone got busy sprucing up and preparing to make a good impression. Great Spirit did come, but dressed as a beggar. The people were rude and kicked him out of the village. Great Spirit was very disappointed and transformed into a thunderbird. He was about to destroy the village when He noticed a shabby longhouse in a corner by itself. He came to the old woman as a beggar and she took Him in, sat Him at the seat of honor and shared with Him the last of her food. He was very pleased and presented Himself to the village as Great Spirit. He also presented the old woman as head Clansmother. He wanted the village to honor her for her wisdom and her unselfish giving which is the Indian way. In this spirit, the Honor Dance is a dance of respect and recognition. It can be done to show respect for a chief, to show appreciation for a special deed, respect for elders, but today – great honor for our Veterans.

Men's Traditional Dance



Originally associated with Northern Plains, especially the Lakota's, traditional dance is now one of the most popular and widespread styles in the country. Its roots lay in the Grass Dance, which was shared by a number of tribes across the Plains. Traditional dancers are distinguished by a large single bustle worn on the back, and dance low to the ground with a lot of upper body movement.



Men's Fancy Dance

This very exciting style evolved in the early 20th century when traditional dance branched out. The Ponca's of Oklahoma are credited with popularizing Fancy dancing in the 1920's. The dancers wear two bustles, often brightly colored with dyed rooster hackles. This dance style involves very intricate footwork with lots of spins and body movement.



Men's Grass Dance

A Northern Plains style of dance, the Grass Dance assumed its contemporary form in the mid and late 1950's. In recent years it has become Traditional Dance; it has spread well beyond the Northern Plains. Modern Grass Dance suits are heavily fringed with yarn, which emphasizes a flowing dance style. Grass Dancers often make complicated moves while keeping one foot in the air with a great deal of upper body movement, especially the head and shoulders. Slow songs provide the best opportunity to appreciate the fluid movements of the Grass dance.



Men's Straight Dance

Popular among Southern Plains tribes, Straight Dance clothes are characterized by hand stitched ribbon work strips on leggings and apron as well as hand worked silver discs worn down the back is a clear sign that you've spotted a Straight Dancer. The dance style is a graceful, subtle combination of steps that is not as fast as Fancy dancing, but equally as complex.



Women's Traditional Dance

This category encompasses the traditional dance style of many tribes. You may see buckskin dresses with heavily beaded capes from the Northern Plains, or Southern Plains buckskin dresses with less beadwork. This style also includes cloth dresses made of wool, calico or satin. The dance style is reserved sometimes to the point of nearly dancing in place as the women keep time to the music by bobbing.



Women's Jingle Dance

Another northern dance style, Jingle dress originated in Canada. By the 1940's it had spread to the Northern Plains tribes of the United States. Jingle Dance dresses are immediately noticeable from the sound produced by the rolled tin cones that decorate them. The dress cones are usually made from the lids of snuff cans attached to the dress with fabric ties. Dancers keep one hand on a hip, and hold a large fan in the other.



Women's Fancy Shawl

Originally a Northern Plains style, the Fancy Shawl Dance as it looks today was popularized in the 1960's and 1970's. Like their male counterparts, Shawl dancers use spins, intricate footwork, and make use of the ribbons and fringes on their dance clothes to emphasize a fast-paced style of dancing.