Anthropology
ISSN: 2332-0915
OPEN ACCESS Freely available online
Review Article

Navajo Gospel: A Struggle in Faith, Culture and Style

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ABSTRACT

The clash, history, cooperation and integration of cultures and societies create unique offspring in music. With outside American, Spanish and other indigenous influences, many Navajo people over the last 70 years have enjoyed listening to, writing, performing and recording American country gospel music. The language and historical music of the Diné, country music and folk, Christian religion ethos, its influence on the music, and the Navajo culture combine to create new listeners and projects as well as a unique style.

Keywords: Culture; Societies; Language

INTRODUCTION

Recently, I had the opportunity to work as studio manager, engineer/producer, and custodian. Two Navajo bands wished to produce CDs for various purposes. One country band hoped to have viable CDs to sell at various clubs; a musical couple wished to distribute CDs to church elderly. In both cases, the projects contained country/western songs, whose style includes aspects such as guitar, bass, light drums and "twangy" vocals reminiscent of Garth Brooks, the Oakridge Boys, Faith Hill and/or Ricky Skaggs. Navajo lyrics permeated both bands' styles, to either cater to Navajo patrons or reach that stratum of the Navajo Nation that only understood Diné bazaad. While recording the bands, we remarked the unusual congruency the bands had with the country and gospel styles. Musically, the context remained very consistent and indistinguishable from any country band from Nashville to Spokane. However, Diné is a tonal language and its meanings depend on tonal inflection and context. There are also additional sounds in the alphabet foreign to English. In light of this, one asks what effect the Navajo language has on the performance and composition of so-called "Navajo Gospel" and "Navajo Country". A second issue is apparent when one considers the apparent philosophical schism in the Navajo people between what some of them refer to as the Navajo Way traditional Navajo philosophy) and the Jesus Way (Christianity). How does this affect the performance of the related music as well as the spiritual or aesthetic experience? Diné bazaad as a language identifies with the Navajo Way in particular, and many Navajos identify the Jesus Way with outside oppression and thus often perceive it as detrimental to their culture and nationalism [1]. Those who do Navajo-language gospel run into criticism from both white and Navajo cultures for appearing to blend aspects of both "cultures" and thus tainting each. This tension becomes most evident in those cultures whose components necessarily encompass both, in musical and cultural terms.

CONCERNING THE NAVAJO ETHOS

Unlike any other major tribe in the United States in language or culture, the Diné come from the Athapaskan (also spelled Athabaskan) language group. As such, they are related to the Athapaskan peoples of northern and western Canada and Alaska, and to the Apaches [2]. While the divisions between the Athapaskans and Navajos are formidable – even hostile – by comparison, Apaches are considered more of a "brother" tribe, designated more by geography and political autonomy than by culture and language.

RELIGIOUS AND MORALITY CONSIDERATIONS

The Navajo religion has interesting overtones. For one thing, "religion" seems to be a misnomer in the culture. Most Navajos and anthropologists recognize it as a way of life or integrated philosophy instead of necessarily a spiritual creed. In fact, a better rendering of the dine bazaad word often translated "religion" is way or path. It permeates their lives and the life of the Navajo Nation and is inextricably involved, more like Confucianism than in the same way religion may drive the actions of a Muslim or Christian. Much of what the Navajo sees of life is unquestionably foreign to the worldview of the prevalent American culture, and not the least is the relationship of mankind to the land, community and the divine. There is a reason Navajos greet "ya'at'ééh" or "it is good," according to Goossen; in some circles, it may imply "walk in Beauty" in concept if not literally [3]. It is the same overall concept according to Navajo culture. Traditionalists believe one is "in Beauty," that is,living harmoniously with "Beauty," or is out of it. If one is out of absolute "Beauty," one must be in Evil. There is no other choice. In this one thing, at least, the traditional Navajo is not far from the Christian gospel ethos, which believes one is either in perfect harmony with God (perfect Beauty personified), or hostile to Him:in "Evil."

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Received: February 01, 2021, **Accepted:** February 16, 2021, **Published:** February 22, 2021

Citation: Ballard J (2021) Navajo Gospel: A Struggle in Faith, Culture and Style. Anthropology. 9: 229.

While the stories and religious beliefs of other native tribes had uncanny parallels to those of the European immigrants, the traditional Navajo beliefs are more unique and have tenets to be surmounted from the proselytizing Christian missionary's point of view. For instance, while Lakota revere the presence of personalities in "Wakan Tonka" or "The Great Mystery," such omniscient personalities seem to be less obvious in the Navajo pantheon. However, there are some similarities with European myths and religions, such as the parallel between Coyote (universal in North American tribes) and Loki, the mischief-makers' that is not to say that the Navajo did not believe in a universal Creator entity or entities: however, it seems to be much more distant and nebulous than others. It certainly does not seem to be personal or interactive in the same sense or degree of the Christian Jehovah. The traditional Navajo seems fully aware of and appropriately revere the more anthropomorphic "gods" much in the same way. Rather than an overarching power over the universe, these "gods" are more in line with the anthropomorphic "heroes" of European polytheistic tradition: powerful and immortal. They are not to be confused with the European pantheon, but have more in common with the legends of "superhumans," saints, kami, or angelic beings from both Western and Eastern traditions.

THE CONFLICTS

To fully understand the history of the Navajo, one must immerse oneself into extensive books on the colonial/Indian conflicts and into the Navajo culture itself. This paper is more concerned with the legacies that such military, religious, and cultural conflicts left on the Diné. Commentaries on the history itself and the assignment of cause-and-effect, blame and praise are numerous and go beyond the scope of this article.ii However; there are some aspects that should be noted concerning zones of cultural interaction and the ethnic result. The Spanish "conquest" or claim of ownership in the Americas spread several types of culture throughout a large geographical area, not the least of which was present- day American Southwest and northern Mexico. As the Navajo absorbed the best of the cultures of the Anasazi and their descendents to metamorphose into what was becoming uniquely "Diné," so did they absorb – willingly and unwillingly – aspects that the Spanish imposed upon them. As the English changed into Americans through absorbing aspects of the Six Nations cultures, the Spanish changed culture through interaction with the New World cultures. Even today, the "Navajo taco" is a uniquely Diné version of its better-known Tex-Mex counterpart: both are ultimately derived from that juxtaposition of Spanish and New World nations. The views of the Navajo toward the Spanish were utterly opposed to those of "los ricos" of New Mexico. The New Mexican wealthy ranch owners of the time saw nothing wrong in enslaving or trading captured Navajos. The local Church could do or did nothing about it and the government generally didn't bother, unless the Navajo nation became too much of a nuisance. This conflict influenced both sides culturally until both become removed from its antecedents one hundred years before. The change was probably more remarkable in the New Mexicans: Spanish who became New Mexicans were divorced from a faraway government, not to mention some distantly remembered cultural heritage in Western Europe. A similar thing happened withthe advent of the Americans, as the United States assimilated what is presently the American Southwest. This included the land of the Navajos as defined by tradition, between four significant boundarypeaks and loosely encompassing the area near the Four Corners [4]. Defeat and enforced incarceration by colonials caused a sudden impact of the European culture, including that which was changing into the industrial and political Eastern United States.

THE GOSPEL ELEMENT

The most significant "Christianization" of the Navajo occurred during the increases promulgation of middle-class values and economy in the booming era after World War II. Many Navajo veterans came back to the reservation unwilling or unable to re-assimilate into the traditional way and found themselves more open to the Eastern- supported missions and by extension, the American path. This, and other, environments were inevitable. Dolaghan and Scates indicated that:

"...people living in a healthy culture with a tightly knit social structure are typically slow to accept the gospel. This is because their felt needs are being met relatively well in most areas of life. But when a society is in the process of rapid change and the old assumptions are being questioned, people find themselves in a state of tension and frustration". During this period, the most successful missionaries found converts among the natives, particularly those proponents of the evangelical Protestant, Latter Day Saints and the Native American Church (NAC). It is significant that many of the most flourishing movements either downplayed or actively discouraged cultural elements associated with the Gospel in its basic form. The most successful churches on the reservationswere and continue to be begun or led by native pastors and many (particularly the peyotic movement of the NAC) incorporated traditional methods, values, and even spiritual elements into the Christian creed, melding them into new philosophies, if not outright new religious doctrine. Clerical immigrants founded Christian missions in America upon good intentions as well as opportunities to preach the Gospel. The relationship between the missionaries and potential native converts was tenuous due to the confusion of the Gospel with imbedded European-American culture. Indeed, missionaries had a very difficult time separating the basic doctrines of the Gospel from what they had grown up, been educated, and sent with. Missionaries tended to put down traditional values without explaining the rationale behind teaching the "new" ideas. As such, they found difficulties in passing beyond the barrier of traditionalism vs. the "new." For example, child mortality on a reservation may have been high. In response, well-meaning missionaries imposed laws of medical practice upon the natives overtly or incidentally in the name of Christianity. While there may be nothing wrong with such laws, the naiveté with which such laws were imposed often created resentment as natives resist a perceived subjugation of traditional values in the name of the presented agent: that is, the "Christ" of the Gospels or the "Jesus Way", who is personified subjectively by both missionaries and natives. While initially written off by the missionaries as pagan idols, the Navajo "gods'" multiple meanings within the Navajo Way were not necessarily the demons the missionaries thought them. The Navajo did not conceive of these beings as superceding the creative force, for the beings too were created and thus separate from it. Much like Teutonic gods, they were things to be aware of, to "pray" to for intercessioniii, to respect and to appreciate as founders of the Navajo Way. Danny Smiley, a Navajo Christian pastor, sees parallels even in these divine anthropoids. In his view, the story of Monster Slayer anticipates, parallels or recalls the triumph of Christ over Death.1 He is not the only one to envision a Christian Navajo Nation who nonetheless enjoys the applications, pride and benefits of the Diné heritage Jimmy Bowling, a missionary,

Moved to Window Rock from West Virginia, and administered a Christian school near there. In an interview with the author, Rev. Bowling reiterated his words to Tony Levinson, "My theology is not to take the culture or tradition away from 'em, but to put Christ into that. They'll always be an Indian, but I want them to die a Christian Indian. And that is not the mentality of a lot of people or denominations. Other folks want to make them a Nazarene or a Methodist or a Baptist. That's certainly not my mentality. Not at all. I just want them to be Christian". For many, the question is not an issue of "religion," be it a cultural aspect or a viable perspective on the metaphysical. Levinson continues: "Christianity represented a way out of the reservation's poverty and struggle"(2003, 259) How a Navajo may approach it or what he or she does with it beyond that point contains variables better assessed by theologians than anthropologists or sociologists. However, the community 1C.S. Lewis' Abolition of Man details the principle that the Gospel permeates – through myth, legend, foretelling or filtered rumors – all cultures. See also Hebrews 1:1 (NIV). Ethos developed by church culture and the Christian gospel resonate with the Navajo culture's sense of interconnectedness.

THE NAVAJO LANGUAGE

Stanford PhD Karletta Chief is a Navajo who has influences from and in both Diné and belagana (American) worlds. As a former Miss Navajo Nation, she has a passion for presenting diné bizaad to the world. She introduces it on her website: The Navajo Language is a very complicated language because it is more condensed than language of the Indo-European Family. It is also a very descriptive and very specific. Vincent Craig, the Navajo comedian, once compared it to "mental television" because one word can describe physical features, movement, 1st/2nd/3rd person, and singular, plural (2), plural (3 or more). A Navajo noun is often a verb transformed into a noun so that it is never left void of character. It is also very different from other languages in its grammatical and phonetical structure which may be difficult for one to grasp". The picture aspect of the Navajo language is best demonstrated in the way they live. It provides an imagery that dealswith the feelings and the experience, rather than requiring the listener to interpret subjectively the abstract concepts of English. One Navajo language web site stated it very well: "Their view of life, which is that everything they do and that happens to them is related to the world around them, is very apparent in the way they speak. For example, a Navajo would not say, "I am hungry," but instead would say, "Hunger is hurting me." It has been said that inNavajo, words paint a picture in your mind" [5].

SOUNDS OF THE NAVAJO LANGUAGE

The tonality of Navajo is a particularly interesting aspect with regards to music. For the rising and lowering, length and tonal production natures are directly related to context, meaning, and, arguably more important in Navajo culture, nuance. Probably the most difficult aspect of diné bizaad beside its tonality is the unique sounds not found in English or many other languages. For example, examine the chart below as to various ways to use the vowel "a:"

As it is, the chart demonstrates eight ways to say the vowel "a" and applies to other vowels as well.

One technique common in diné bizaad is the use of glottal stops, indicated by the apostrophe. An additional problem is the Combination of several consonants with this glottal effect: a difficult paradigm for native English speakers. According to Goosey, the easiest way to consider these consonants is to form the consonant with only mouth air, then expel it at the same time as a glottal stop.The list below shows some examples of such consonants:

Working with Navajo musicians, my most "entertaining" time was when Floyd and Doris Tsinnyjinny and their friends tried to teach me how to pronounce the difficult

"Ł" sound. It is produced by shaping the tongue into an English "l" shape, then raising the tongue so that the sound is produced out of the sides of the mouth, not the back.

Even if one succeeds in producing the sound by itself, having the glibness of tongue to voice it in the middle of a word (much less a sentence) is much more difficult. Add to that the occasional opportunity of voicing the ł with a glottal ending and the continuous switching from unfamiliar sound to unfamiliar sound and the near-impossibility of learning diné bizaad by a non-native speaker becomes clear. At this point, we haven't even touched upon the grammar, meaning, syntax and nuance. These points are less relevant to thispaper, which deals in the execution, tone, flow and sounds of thelanguage as they relate to music more than the composition. Although the grammar naturally has an impact on the rhythm, an in-depth study of its effects on songwriting is beyond the scope of this introduction.

AMERICAN WESTERN AND TRADITIONAL GOSPEL

The style of music commonly referred to as "Country-and-Western" or "C&W" is a commercial variant of American folk music. The roots of this music is mainly found in both Celtic- and Afro-American traditions and the "branches" range from bluegrass and folk to C&W and rock. The earliest proponents and developers were the psalmists of the earliest settlers, which metamorphosed to the shaped-note singers and itinerant preachers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Parallel to this was the "entertainment" aspect, which eventually included mostly easily handled and transported chording instruments such as the violin and guitar. This "team" of American music produced a musical style common to "gospel" and C&W. Gospel and C&W are inextricably linked musically. The things that differentiate between gospel and country are the context, much in the same way that types of black gospel and R&B differentiate. In both cases, the musical style is consistent to an original "folk" or cultural element. The adaptation and application of Christian elements in the lyrics and setting(s) define the context for performance. A pianist may play a country solo based upon "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." In a bar, without the recognition of the song and the import of its lyrics, a listener may define it as "country." Conversely, take a country blues instrumental and play it for an offertory and the appellation "gospel" may be accurately applied. In both cases, the actual music remains the same: the context indicates the genre. Since musical elements in modern gospel are found in C&W, examining the musical elements that make it up is worthwhile. C&W invariably has guitar as its initial chording instrument. Variations may include various piano styles, such as "honky-tonk," "boogie" and "stride" style, although these should be considered jazz influences rather than integral parts.

Others add banjo, acoustic bass, harmonica or variations on different instruments. However, these are also variations within the genre and may be included or omitted without changing the overall designation of what constitutes C&W. Melodic structure is usually based directly or peripherally upon the pentatonic scale (usually do-pentatonic) and the tuning and structure of the base instruments in fourths and fifths contribute to both the pentatonic sound and the preponderance of harmonic fourths and fifths. The rhythm is usually in simple meter of three or four – almost never compound in its basic forms – and the form may be either simple (usually in its earlier "acoustic" forms) or complex.

THE CULTURES

One interesting adaptation of the American lifestyle by the Navajo was the cowboy culture. Although the Navajo are excellent horsemen, the culture itself associated with the cowboy made its incursion into the Navajo mien increasingly over the last century. Today, the rodeo – especially the competing elements – is a regular part of the Navajo life. This includes aspects such as the cowboy hat, jeans and long-sleeved shirt. Naturally the music from the lifestyle – in itself a blend of American, Spanish and native cultures – permeated it and growing acceptance of the one naturally included an acceptance and even enthusiasm for the other. KTNN, the Navajo Nation radio station, plays C&W and gospel regularly as part of its format, but its DJ announcesin a mixture of Navajo and English. This is a "dialect" of Navajo that is becoming very popular among the younger Diné. On a practical basis, there is no Navajo equivalent for certain English words and that English word is actually and literally inserted ina stream of this Navajo dialect. Old Navajo would substitute an entire phrase describing a single word. For example, "army tank" is often translated as "chidínaa'na'íbee'eld[-htsoh bikáá' dah naaznilígíí:" literally, "a car that they sit up on top of that crawls around with a big thing with which an explosion is made." Much of the new Navajo is similar to other blends of trade and culturally influenced languages, such as "Spanglish," a dialect mixing Spanish and English in the American Southwest, or "Sheng," a blend of Swahili, English and urban slang centralized in Nairobi, Kenya. The imposition of Western culture (with both meanings: European traditional as well as the distinctively Western culture of the cowboy) was unavoidable by the Navajos and symptomatic of the Indian conflicts throughout the West. However, in this case it is a retrospective appreciation as Western music has been absorbed into the Diné culture on a social, if not completely ethnically defining basis. "Considering the small number of Indians and the tremendous impact of Western culture on their lives during the past two or three centuries, it would is surprising if their music had remained uninfluenced by that of the West." Gospel is included in this collection of cowboy style. The culture that brought us a new perspective on nineteenth century chivalry, contests of strength and skill and stock handling, also has respect for the Creator (usually in a general theistic sortof way). As the Christian gospel and philosophy permeates C&W music, so does it happily supplement the theistic notion of a vague Creator engendered by the Western cowboy culture? Add to this its natural heritage from the rural, itinerant country church ofthe traditional U.S., and the music will have elements commonto both sides. The "gospel" story in this case is far removed from the mainline churches of the mainstream culture, and grows fromthe culture of rural America. It includes a healthy hymnology and psalmody, but also encourages "inspirational" poetry set to music. This "poetry" manifests itself in many ways, but contain new perspectives on life, creation, and God's imminent and active role in every aspect of living. While the thrust of the Gospel (capital "g") and its message of salvation through the sacrifice of God's Son remain constant, American gospel music has been influenced by the geography and ethnicity of every people in which it has developed. Hence, the vast differences in the Shaker tunes of Pennsylvania, the bluegrass gospel of Kentucky and the black spirituals and gospel of the South and Upper Midwest. This is no different in the Southwest culture where the influences as mentioned earlier include Spanish, American and Native American cultures. One unique aspect to the American West is the so-called "cowboy poetry." The subject is usually reflective and lends to solo work. It may be, and often is, merely recited or it may be set to music. Cowboy poetry, with its simplicity in form, subject and scheme, is arguably best set to music that supports a single instrumental accompaniment with a solo voice.

Some common elements in gospel and C&W include:

- Theism
- Guitar-driven accompaniment
- Pentatonic (and diatonic) scales
- Harmonic intervals of fourths and fifths

Finally, while many "gospel" songs are sung as a single voice with accompaniment, a significant part of much gospel music is the emphasis on both a cappella and accompanied vocal harmony. Probably the most common is the male quartet, born out of presentational singing by professional or itinerant church leaders. Female vocals would most likely be present in bluegrass styles while solo male singing is often found in the Western cowboy variation.

ASSIMILATION OF THE GOSPEL SOUND

Some authorities do not believe that the Indian musical style was influenced by American style to any significant extent (Nettle, 1960, 164).viii However, the melodic elements, vocal styling and even harmonic implications from the melodies indicate that there is much in the Native American music that crosses over into the C&W, gospel and other American folk styles. The Navajo musicians I have worked with have several things in common. Primarily, they love their music and enjoy playing it. Second, the appreciation, love for and skill in western music alone are highly valued. They recognize the cultural appreciation many Navajos have for C&W and gospel and enjoy performing and listening to it. An often-confusing issue in gospel and corporate church worship is the fine balance between the aesthetic and the spiritual. This line is fuzzy in both American and Navajo cultures, and the most advanced musician (or minister or shaman) best recognizes where the line is between the aesthetic and true worship. George Herzog, commenting in 1936 on the Navajos alone, says: "A single mistake in a single song of many hundred that form an essential part of Navaho (sic) Indian curing rituals invalidates the whole performance so that it has to be repeated, from the beginning, after due purification. The question we might like to raise – how far is it the esthetic (sic) sense and how far the ritualistic sense that is outraged – is meaningless for the Navaho and may not become clear to him at all." This appreciation crosses cultural boundaries as well as religious ones. Probably the main reason this project began was the common ground of music in the first place and the mutual aspects of living in the Southwest: The Navajo involved recognized that the studio

Engineers had appropriate appreciation for them as individual musicians as well as culture from which they came.

NAVAJO MUSICIANS AND COMPOSERS

Danny Smiley is also a singer-songwriter, specializing in writing and singing gospel with Navajo lyrics. Reverend Smiley, as noted above, believes that there is no conflict between Navajo culture and the Christian message. This includes the music. Navajos enjoy the contemporary sound of country, western and related gospel styles. Smiley has taken advantage of the limitations in the music style the musician community (Navajo musicians, Redcliff Sound and the author) performs, developing a type of "Navajo Gospel" and has written original tunes within this genre.

Floyd and Doris Tsinnyjinny work within church ministry, as well. In our recording session, the goal was to provide a CD of traditional hymns and folk gospel tunes to elderly or otherwise incapacitated church members. In the Navajo Nation, the elderly lean heavily toward Diné as a first language, and as an early generation of Diné who follow the "Jesus Way," they are very limited regarding listening or supplemental reading resources. The first project was very much an experiment as the session engineers – though experienced in producing C&W – had never dealt with the ideas incorporating both Navajo language and the musical style. On the other hand, the Tsinnyjinnys, while comfortable with diné bizaad as a first language, had never recorded before and had a very limited budget for spending much time in the studio situation. A third band, The Bar N, was a Navajo C&W band which had hopes of expanding their live performances and enhancing the band's income through CD sales. Playing primarily on the Navajo and Apache reservations, they play both "covers" of popular American, English-language tunes and Navajo language songs, as well.

CULTURAL RESPONSE

The response to the first two of these acts has been extremely positive on the Reservation. Reverend Smiley is in demand throughout the Four Corners area, as well as other locations throughout the U.S. and the world. The Tsinnyjinny's have plans to produce a second CD, again gospel style with Navajo-language lyrics. This time both clients and engineers are more familiar with both Navajo and gospel CD production. The nuances inherent in music performance are expected to be better recorded with band and session musicians and the Navajo language better reproduced by engineers who are more familiar with the language. The music itself is not that far from Navajo traditional music. The common elements include the high solo voice of the lead singer and the apparent preponderance of fourths and fifth intervals. "The melodic range is wide, especially among the Navaho, and the melodic intervals tend to be large: major and minor thirds and perfect fourths and fifths predominate, while leaps of an octave are not rare." Notice the highly pentatonic nature of the melody as transcribed [6]. Although assigning any frequency or series of pitches into "notes" as laid down by traditional Western music is vague, the same may be saidof any folk melody. In this case, we see at least one common thread between Navajo and American traditional music.

This pentatonic scale is common in C&W tunes, as well as the root folk melodies that influenced both C&W and gospel. This may Explain the affinity that Navajo musicians have for the simple, yet highly versatile and effective sound that C&W has in its melodies. The musicians' perspective is probably more highly tuned than the average Navajo just as it is in any other society, but is still a good indicator as to the receptivity of the target audience. Such as scale, with its characteristic intervals is evident in an original melody by Smiley, recorded and transcribed by Ballard (2007).

Notice how this melody – original but typical of gospel and Country/Western styles – caters to the elements of Navajo traditional melodies shown above. The pentatonic scale is evident, and the skips of major and minor thirds, fourths and fifths predominate this aspect, as well. It seems there is similarity between Navajo and American scales. Even the avenues of resolution and high points are similar. In McAllester's transcription, the contours of the pentatonic scale in the song may be shown as follows (ornamented or repeated notes are omitted in the reduction):

5-1-1-1-6-6-8-8-8-3-3-3-3-1-6-6-3-3-3-2-1-3-2-2-3-1-1-1

5 1 6 8 3 1 (6) 3 2 1

"Dooládóó" has the same notes, in similar contour:

3-5-3-5-6-5-2-3-2-1-3-5-5-6-5-3-5-5-5-8-8-6-5-3-1-2-3-2-1-3-5-5-6-5-2-3-2-1

3 5 3 2 1 5 5 8 5 3 (5 6 5) 2 1

Both tunes have a similar tessitura, ranging a single octave. "Dooládóó" never goes below scale degree "1" although the McAllester transcription does. Both tunes have a high point inthe middle of the song, on the octave ("8"). The songs also begin on a strong 5 ("Dooládóó's" beginning "3" is ornamental) and end on modified scale degrees 3-2-1. The use of the pentatonic scale ensures intervallic similarity between both songs.

CONCLUSION

Aside from the idea that the universal aspect of the Christian Gospel is trans- cultural, the gospel music style itself is not averse to the Navajo Way or traditional musical pieces. As the Navajos embrace C&W and gospel music styles, the issue seems to be one of compatibility with the gospel message, and usually, the Western culture that it is perceived to represent. A significant number of Navajos seem to consider the Christian Gospel a threat to the Diné culture itself, rather than a threat to the more philosophical perspective of the culture. Different Navajos have shown how culture and religion do not necessarily need to be antagonistic, but can coexist where they are not directly at odds.

The musical styles are even less of a conflict, once one gets past the point where cultures seem to collide. The adoption of C&W and gospel music – as styles – into Navajos language and culture produce a third entity that neither many Navajos nor Americans could foresee. The initial research on this project indicates interesting similarities in both traditional and "popular" Navajo music and further work with Navajo performers; producers and composers will likely support the idea that this "third entity" is not a native compromise to the popular music industry, but a compatible incorporation of American traditional music.

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