

## KEVIN LOCKE

### THE HOOP DANCE – A DANCE OF RENEWAL

The Hoop dance, a tradition among the Plains Indians, is a celebration of the annual rebirth of nature that occurs every springtime. The spiritual significance of the dance begins with the hoops themselves; these are made of either wood or reed and total 28 in number, each one of them representing a day in the lunar cycle. As noted by Kevin Locke in *The Spirit World*, published by Time-Life Books, the hoops are symbolic of the “great hoop of life, where they sky meets the earth, and all of the hoops that exist within that sphere.” The hoop dance is a breathtaking expression of Kevin’s belief in the oneness of humankind. In the amazingly complex and acrobatic Lakota Hoop Dance, Kevin whirls within twirling hoops, explicating an indigenous view of the world as hoops intersect and grow into ever more revealing designs that show the way of life. Forming rapidly changing patterns with hoops while dancing to powwow drums and singing, Kevin depicts the natural yet visionary process of life emerging from the darkness of winter into the bright exuberance of spring. One after another, images of renewed creation appear as flowers, butterflies, stars, the moon and sun and eagle circles, calling forth the love, courage and intelligence of our hearts. The hoops represent unity, while the four colors of the hoops (black, red, yellow and white) represent the four directions, seasons, winds, and the four human races. All 28 hoops interlock to form an interdependent sphere in which all beings have vital and essential roles to play. Kevin learned the hoop dance, which had nearly died out, from Arlo Good Bear, a Mandan Hidatsa Indian from North Dakota. “We were doing a couple of performances in New York City and we were rooming together and he said, ‘I’m going to teach you the hoop dance. I’m going to give you four lessons. I will give you one lesson now and the rest later. After I give you these lessons, you are going to be on your own. And it is going to take you a long way.’ And then he got out his hoops and he made some designs and the whole thing took about 15 minutes. And the next day he took off and I took off. “A few days later, Arlo’s mom called and said he had died in an accident. So I went to his funeral. And after I returned home I had a very vivid dream – several vivid dreams – and I saw him, dancing with the hoops a very beautiful, a very powerful dance, making all of these designs, so fluid and

spontaneous.” Kevin later came to believe that the dreams were the promised lessons, being communicated from the next world. “They were not mechanical lessons. The message I got was that this is a way that you can connect the past with the present, the present with the future, and the spiritual world with the material world.” He then began to teach himself the hoop dance in much the same way he taught himself the flute, by studying ancient dance forms and symbols, then gradually working out the footwork and the movements of the hoops. “There are certain standard designs that everybody does, and Arlo showed me those and made sure I knew them that first night,” he said. Now Kevin is renowned as much for the hoop dance as for flute, and for his willingness to teach both arts. Performances end with the dramatic movement The Hoop of Many Hoops, symbolizing the sun, the moon, the earth – all light, all life, and the human spirit reaching toward realization that everything is interconnected. The Hoop of Many Hoops, says Kevin, is also a depiction of the old Sioux prophecy that one day in the future all peoples, friends and enemies alike, shall sit down together in peace, united in a single great circle by the common bond of their humanity.

### **ABOUT THE INDIGENOUS FLUTE**

Kevin Locke makes his music with the drum, the flute, and the rattle, along with his singing voice. In order to explain the underlying meaning of the music he is creating he describes the instruments as “counterpoints to the powerful, elemental forces of the thunderstorm.” The beat of the drum is the thunder that “shakes the human heart out of its slough of despondency.” The melodies of the flute (its six holes representing the four cardinal directions, along with the earth and the sky) are the “wind that purifies and breathes life into the heart.” The sound of the rattle represents refreshing rain, and the voice is the lightning whose jagged streaks, as described in *The Spirit World*, Time-Life Books, “illuminate the heart and charge it with energy and enlightenment.”

To the Lakota/Dakota Nations, located on the northern plains of Maka Wita (Earth Island), the flute is the essence of the wind, especially Niya Awicableze, the Enlightening Breath, that first

waft upon which the meadowlarks return to the northern prairies. Drawing upon a vast repertory of Lakota and Meskwaki courting songs and prayers, the flute sings the beauty of the land and echoes the wind as it rustles the grasses and leaves, scales the buttes and mountains, skims the surface of lakes and streams. The Lakota flute voices seven notes: four represent the directions, the fifth represents the heavens, the sixth represents the Earth and the seventh represents the place where the six come together: each person's heart. Kevin performs with many handmade cedar wood flutes, including a rare instrument made nearly a hundred years ago by Poweshiek of the Mesquaki nation.

On the northern plains, where no hollow plants sufficient in size and strength were available, indigenous flutes were made of red cedar wood. Cedar has great spiritual importance among native peoples, making it doubly significant that this soft wood is the medium of transcendent music (olowan). To fashion a flute (wi'ikijo), the craftsperson removes the red heart of the wood and is then obliged to put his/her own heart into the instrument.

"It is so hard for people to relate one to another because we all come from different backgrounds. But no matter where we come from, we can all connect with music."

- Kevin Locke