

Elements of a Pow Wow

The Arena is the area inside of the Pow Wow circle where the dancers move in a circular pattern. There are certain times when dancers or spectators may enter the arena. During competition dances, only the dancers are allowed to enter the arena. Judges will be standing and walking just outside the dancers to observe movement for competition.

Grand Entry is the parade of dancers, which marks the beginning of each Pow Wow session. The dancers enter to the sound of the Drum, and gather to create the Circle.

Invocation is a time-honored tradition that calls upon the Creator, the Great Spirit, to bless those who have gathered to participate in the ceremonies.

The Drum is a descriptive term used to identify a particular group of singers, i.e., the Southern Drum, The Morning Star Drum, the White Eagle Drum, etc.

The Songs

Flag Songs are patriotic songs sung in a Native language, and accompany the raising of the American Flag and eagle staff over the dance arena. During this song, all motion is at a stand still and all are quiet.

Honor Songs are specific songs which are sung to fulfill requests to honor an individual's accomplishment or such other auspicious occasion. The song itself, sung by a particular group of singers, may be one of tribal, family and individualistic significance.

Veteran's Songs are Memorial Songs to honor the men and women who have defended and fought for their people in various wars. The singers sing a special honoring song to which only veterans, and sometimes their family, may dance. All other spectators stand in silence.

The Dances

The Men's Grass Dance. Grass dancers can be recognized by their multi-colored fringe that is often made out of yarn. Their flowing, sweeping movements resemble the tall swaying grass in the breeze.

The Men's Fancy Dance. Known for their stamina, high jumps and quick footwork, fancy dancers literally dazzle. Their outfits are constructed of two multi-colored bustles (work around the neck and back), matched beadwork and whips which are held to emphasize the elaborate gestures of these spirited dancers.

The Gourd Dance is a social dance primarily for men but with women participants. The dance is one perpetuated by the Cheyenne, Kiowa and Comanche and taken up by many other tribes. Dancers wear red and blue robes draped about the shoulders. Other attire are the beaded and fringed sashes, mescal bead bandoleers worn over one shoulder and the dancer carries a gourd rattle and feather fan. The songs and dance is one where the movement is either stationary or with little foot movement. The dance circle is generally clockwise, are social in nature and solely for the enjoyment of the dancers and singers. From time to time monetary or material gifts are given at the feet of the dancer.

The Straight Dance – Southern Traditional. The traditional style of dancing and dress of the Plains Tribes of Oklahoma. Absent are the colorful feathers of the fancy dancers; the Straight dancer, in keeping with the traditional warrior society, mode of dress is distinguished by a roach headdress with generally one Eagle feather, cloth or buckskin leggings with leggings with breechcloth, and an otter skin trailer down the back. The overall dance is one of smoothness and dignity.

The Men's Northern Traditional Dance. Telling of former glorious wars or hunting expeditions, these

dancers preserve the “old ways” of dancing. Through a combination of graceful and dramatic gestures, the traditional dancer tells his story. These men wear exquisite beadwork and feathers that are usually designed after an individual’s particular Nation.

The Women’s Traditional Dance. These dignified women are admired for the respectful manner in which they carry themselves. Their feet never completely leave the ground, symbolizing their close connection to Mother Earth. Regalia worn range from intricately sewn ribbon-work cloth dresses to beaded hide dresses. Most are covered with cowrie shells, elk teeth, silver and other decorative objects. Some women will dance clockwise and others will stand in one place, turning to either side from time to time.

The Jingle Dress Dance. Based upon a Ojibwa man’s dream, the Jingle Dress Dance is revered as a healing dance. Cones shaped from chewing tobacco lids are positioned upon masterfully designed dresses. Traditionally, 365 cones have been placed on the dresses to represent the days of the year.

The Women’s Fancy Shawl Dance. Compared to the movements of the butterfly; these dancers wear a brightly colored shawl over their shoulders. Beadwork and accessories match the multi-fringed shawls, creating a splendor of spinning and fancy footwork.

The Intertribal Dance. Inter-Tribal is a general term referring to an open Pow Wow dance or song that can be joined by anyone, all tribes and spectators. You will see dancers in street clothing participating in the dance on the Pow Wow arena.

The Round Dance is typically held after the opening ceremonies. It is a circular dance, which represents friendship and symbolizes equality to one another.

The Snake Dance. A series of social songs and dances depicting serpentine movement and then emulating the buffalo. Strictly a social dance not to be confused with dances performed by other tribes of the Southwest.

The Blanket Dance. Blanket Dances begin by placing a blanket near the Drum in order to collect tokens of appreciation for a specific singer or dancer. Donations are used to assist in the reimbursement of expenses. The audience may participate in this dance regardless of whether they are wearing Indian dress or not.