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Kashaya Pomo Dances

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Vana Parrish, currently a freshman at California State College, Sonoma, is the youngest daughter of Essie Parrish, the present Kashaya Pomo spiritual leader. The Kashaya Pomo (also known as the

Southwestern Pomo) are one of the seven Pomo groups of north-central California. The Kashaya reservation, occupying some 40 acres, is located in Sonoma County, 10 miles from Stewart's Point.

THERE are very few Pomo tribes which still uphold their traditional religion. The Kashaya tribe is one of these groups. Some of the dances that are done by the Kashaya people today are original dances that were started long ago by shamans other than the present-day Kashaya spiritual leader. The current shaman, and other elders of the tribe, encourage the younger people to uphold these original dances. One of the functions of all the dances we have now is to keep our spiritual leader alive and to keep her in good health.

We sometimes do these dances for the fun of it, and sometimes we do them for their spiritual aspects. Whether or not the dances are done for fun or for spiritual reasons, we have to follow rules that pertain to these dances. These rules pertain not only to the participants in the dances but also to the onlookers.

At the start of a four-night dance, the shaman's husband (who is the leader of the Feather Dance) goes around and announces that there is going to be a dance. The people prepare to go to the roundhouse to be there at the time that is set by the shaman. Everyone enters the roundhouse with a purification ceremony. This ceremony is for the women who have recently had their period (*k^hela*), or for men and/or women who have

been touched by a *k^hela* person (i.e., a menstruating woman). The leader of the purification ceremony takes the people around the fire and the center pole. After everyone has done this, they are ready to start the other ceremonies.

First, the shaman tells the people to pray. Then she speaks to the people and tells them about her dreams and what is to come in the future. She tells them what is right from wrong, even though they are adults, because, at times, they still need teachings as the younger ones do. She preaches for about an hour or longer. After she has done all of her preaching, she tells the people that it is time to start the dance.

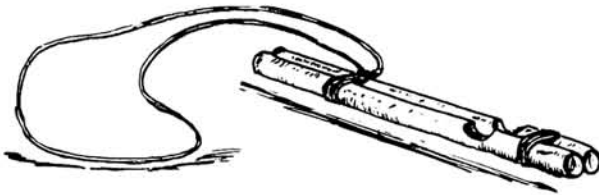
At the start of the dance there is first the Drum Song. This is followed by Sitting-Down songs which are sung while the dancers are getting dressed.

The dancers' regalia consists of fishing net, feather horns, flicker headbands, necklaces, feather skirts, (swim) trunks, a breechcloth, and hand ornaments. First, the net is placed on the head and tied. Then round discs which hold the feather horns at the back of the head are tied on the forehead. Next the necklace is placed around the neck. Then the flicker headband is put on, followed by the placing of the feather horns in the round discs. Now the men are ready to dance.

When the dancers are ready, they signal the singers. The singers start the main singing by standing up and singing a song four times for the dancers to practice dancing by. Then they sing the song again. This time the dancers come out from the practice area onto the dance area. Once the dancers are in the dance area, the Coming-Out Song is finished. The dancers turn around to the singers, and the singers start another song. Then the dancers trot around in a circle and at the high rise of the song make a line and dance by stomping each foot to the rhythm of the "rock" (that is, the singer who holds the rhythm). Some dancers (good ones) dance up to the onlookers and try to scare them or make them laugh. All the dancers then come back and form the original line by the center pole. They flick their heads the way a deer does.

There are numerous dances that are done by the dancers while they have their feather skirts on. Dances in which feather skirts are worn are called the Feather Dance. This dance is done in imitation of the deer—its movements and the noise it makes.

During these dances the men also do a dance called the Whistle Dance. They use a whistle which is made out of bamboo and has a hole carved into it near the top, as shown:



When the men are to dance the Whistle Dance, they are not allowed to drink water because the shaman believes that they will not be able to blow the whistle well or that they will get choked.

As a man is dancing, he can be the rhythm holder, or he can sing if there are no singers. The men when dancing are backed up by women. The women's apparel is made up of

long skirts with blouses to match. The women also wear flicker headbands and topnotches on their heads. The topnotch is made with feathers attached to a basket-like cap. The women have necklaces made of abalone shells. The women dance from side to side on the balls of their feet, and their hands move up and down to the rhythm of the song. The women hold scarves folded into triangle-shapes in the palms of their hands.

Both men and women have their faces painted with designs of the lightning, the moon, the sun, and other designs which were dreamed by the shaman. These designs, called Dream Designs, are done with clay or charcoal or a paint made up of herbs and berries. There is only one person who can put these designs on the faces of the dancers. This person is the one who takes over the leading of the dances if the shaman gets sick or if the shaman should die.

An important dance performed by the Kashaya is the Bighead Dance. The Bighead is a spiritual dance or ceremony that is brought forth by the shaman. The shaman is the only one who can choose the people to do this dance. She chooses a person when, in blessing a baby, she says in her prayer that that baby is chosen to dance the Bighead when it grows up. A person cannot get up and do this dance on his own. If this should happen, he or she would be "spooked" by the Bighead headdress.

In 1973, I witnessed a happening which involved "spooking." A man who was married to one of the shaman's relatives had been dancing this dance for about five years without having been blessed when he was a baby. The shaman knew of this and explained it thus: "This man is good enough to dance, since no one else will dance for me." The man's wife had told him that he was in danger of being "spooked" if he danced without having been blessed. The man ignored what his wife told him because the shaman had not told him that that would happen. (The

shaman did not tell him because it was the wife's place to tell him.) This man had the following experience and was frightened:

The shaman had been sick. One of her daughters (the person appointed to lead the dances if the shaman was sick) called the shaman's family together to do the dances for the shaman's life. (This daughter was the man's wife's sister.) The man was sitting in the dancehouse behind the center pole while the shaman was preaching. He and the husband of another of the shaman's daughters were waiting to do the Bighead Dance. As the shaman was preaching, the man saw an enlarged Bighead sitting on top of his own head. When the shaman stopped preaching the man did not say anything to anybody about what he was seeing because he thought it would disappear. But it did not. The man started to get up to dance but he still could see the Bighead sitting on top of his head. When he realized he was not going to get rid of it, he told his sister-in-law (the one who had called the family together) about it. She told the shaman about the incident, with a snickering laugh. The shaman told her, "It's no laughing matter!" and called together the man, the brother-in-law who had been going to do the dance with him, and the sister-in-law. She prayed for the man and gave all three of them a song to sing for when anything of this sort should come again. The man then was able to dance the Bighead Dance without fear of being "spooked."

Both men and women can dance the Bighead Dance. The dancers of today wear regular clothes. The dance costume consists of the Bighead headdress which both men and women wear, a clapper which both men and women use, and a handkerchief decorated with handmade crosses, which only women hold. The crosses are made of cloth.

Before putting on the Bighead, a person has to first pray four times; then, turn around; next, circle the Bighead around his head four times; then, turn around; next, raise the Bighead up and down four times; and then, turn around. After all this has been done, the Bighead is put on.

The Bighead Dance itself is danced just like the other dances, except that in the Bighead Dance it is necessary to dance around the fire twice. There used to be eight Bighead dancers, but now there are only four. When the dance is done with eight dancers, a group of four first goes out to dance, the other group of four waiting until the first group is through. The first set of dancers starts to come out by dancing slowly and going back and forth (east to west) twice. They then proceed with the dance, go around the fire twice, and then go to the north side of the dancehouse. There the dance is finished. The second group of dancers follows the same pattern as the first group, but instead go to the south side of the roundhouse. Both groups then dance, each on their own side of the roundhouse, and at the high rise of the song they change sides and continue dancing. Then, at another high rise of the song, they change back to their original sides, and there the dance ends. After repeating this pattern four times, the dancers dance around the fire twice, and then dance around the center pole twice. Then they walk around the center pole before removing the Bighead headdresses, which signals that the dance has ended.

At the end of the Bighead Dance, the dancers take a break for about 15 minutes. During this time, people are fed because some have come from far away and are hungry. This rule is what our old people have taught us in respect to other people who visit our place. During the break, people also visit with each other to hear the news from far away places.

During the 15-minute break, the singers take only a five-minute break, and then start singing the warm-up songs. When the singers are warming up, it is time for the people to get ready to come inside and be seated.

When all the people are seated the shaman talks a little to the people. She talks about the dreams she had the night before. These dreams are called prophecies—what the super-

natural has revealed to her. There is one rafter in the roundhouse where the shaman gets her spiritual speech from. It is under this rafter that she sits, and everything is revealed to her. From sitting under this particular rafter she knows who comes into the roundhouse drunk or doped up or mad. When she discovers such a person she tells someone to remove him or her until he or she is in a fit state.

The dances I have talked about in particular so far are the Feather Dance, the Whistle Dance, and the Bighead Dance. Another dance the dancers do is the *Lulumu*. The *Lulumu* is a Friendship Dance, which is done by single people in order to make friends with new people their own age. This dance is done with both young girls and young men. Sometimes a girl chooses her man partner; the man can refuse her if he wishes to, but if he respects her he is to accept. If a man refuses, the girl goes on to another man. A man has a chance to choose a girl, when it is his turn to do so.

The *Lulumu* has no costumes. It starts out with a circle formed by boy and girl, boy and girl, etc. When the circle is formed, the partners hold hands. One person swings the arm of the next person and that person swings the arm of the person next to him, and so on. The partners grab hands and go around the center pole swinging each other's arms. At the high rise of the song the man grabs his partner and swings her as hard as he can because it makes it more fun to dance when being swung very hard. When a person is being swung she has to turn her body to the right and then to the left. At the high rise of the song the man has to change partners with the man opposite him, and then on another high rise in the song he changes back to his original partner. At the end of this dance, the dancers circle the fire twice and then circle the center pole twice and then end with a last big swing of partners in the original circle formation.

The *Lulumu* (and the other dances) are slowly leaving us. Hardly anyone does the

Lulumu anymore—only the older people. The children of today are too modern. They want new ways; they want to dance the white way.

The last dance I am going to tell about is the Star Dance. This dance is done by the mothers or wives of the men who have gone into the service, and it is danced for the protection of their souls. The mothers that dance the Star Dance are the ones whose sons have come back from wars. This dance requires long skirts and blouses to match, and the star hoop with a cloth star tied to the hoop as shown:



The star has a white back and a different-colored front. There are also ribbons on top of the hoop. These ribbons are of all colors, except for red. The Kashaya people do not believe in red because it is said to be of the devil.

The dances I have mentioned were brought into being by a shaman of long ago and given to other shamans to carry on for the Kashaya tribe. The dances are done for the protection of the people, including keeping them in good health. These dances are done today, and some are being brought back because the children are anxious to do them. A lot of the dances have been brought back, and we dance them regularly now—even the older people. We do these dances now, and we hope to continue to do them in the future.

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