

New Year's Songs

OMAKA TECA OLOWAN



New Years Powwow, St. Francis (SD), 1975. R.D. Theisz Collection

Like other social dance songs, the songs referred to as the New Year's Songs resulted from the efforts of Lakotas to celebrate events and have a good time while not attracting the bad will of government officials. Severt Young Bear, Sr. recalls the origins of this song category which is not a time-honored Lakota song:

The first New Year's dances I heard about were held some-time after the First World War. Here in Porcupine they went to the (BLA) superintendent and said, "You outlawed dancing and singing, but we want to honor the new year, so we want to put on a masquerade for good health and so the cattle will grow fat in the spring and our horses will be strong and all the garden produce will grow well for the next district fair. We want to honor the new year. So the superintendent said, "All right, that's very good of you Indian people." So they allowed us to dance and they had three or four nights of New Year's powwows. Lots of people made pledges to dance as masqueraders, almost like for a Sun Dance. They pledged for good health for the people for one year, or that nobody in the family would have anything bad happen to them. They would get ready for the New Year's masquerades and the honoring giveaways. These masqueraders didn't have to be the sacred "heyoka" dreamers, the sacred clowns.

They have masquerade dances during New Year's evening where men dress as women, with scarves, a woman's plastic face, with makeup and a dress, stockings,

and high-heeled shoes. They put on a big bosom or really big rear end. Or some lady will dress up as a man with a suit or a cowboy with boots and a big hat and rope, or an old farmer with bib overalls and big work shoes. Then sometimes the old year with a big sign will dance in as an old man, and the next year will dance in as a baby with diapers and a bottle and chase the old year around during the night and then finally chase it out at midnight. I think the purpose is to have fun by doing something opposite to the normal way of dressing, acting, and dancing.

[SEVERT YOUNG BEAR, SR.]

Just before the stroke of midnight, then, the infant new year chases the aged old year out the door signifying that the new year had arrived. All the people in attendance shake hands, hugs and kisses are given, and, after a short prayer, the singers will prepare for the two New Year's songs. Both of the New Year's songs follow the Rabbit Dance format. Dancers dance in couples; the medium tempo, accented duple drumbeat begins; and the head singer begins the first of the two songs.



New Year's clowns St. Francis (SD), New Year's Powwow, 1986. Photos by Tom Teegarden

NEW YEAR'S SONG I

LAKOTA	ENGLISH
Omaka Teca wana wahihuniye. Wiyuskinyan, waunci kta wahiyelo.	I have arrived at the New Year. Joyfully, I have come to dance with you.



*New Year's clowns St. Francis (SD), New Year's Powwow, 1986.
Photo by Tom Teegarden*

NEW YEAR'S SONG II

LAKOTA	ENGLISH
Omaka Teca ki wahihuni cana, Taku tewahila wanice. Tuwe sece k'un, heya hinanjin ca ohiyokipiye.	When I have arrived at the New Year, There is nothing that I cherish. Whoever (name of person) stands saying this, so there is Happiness.

The good feelings shared by all, due to the occasion of what everyone hope will be a happy new year, is evident as dancers, singers, and spectators enjoy the moment.