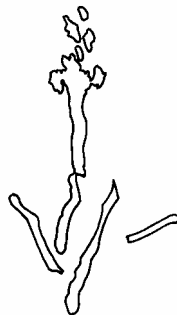
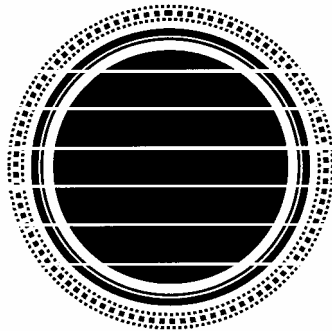


# VARIATIONS ON NATIVE CALIFORNIAN THEMES

For Solo Guitar

\*

Composed and with introduction by  
Theo Radić



*Syukhtun Editions*

## INTRODUCTION

We Americans have taken so much from the indigenous peoples of the continent that it is next to impossible to give to them. Whatever the gift, given with whatever compassion, it can only be deficient in relation to the centuries of taking from them, which the founders of our nation regarded as a destiny that was manifest. These variations for solo guitar are an attempt to *give* to the First Nations of California from whom everything has been taken. Giving cannot be the returning of something that was stolen, as the government “gives” land allotments to Native Californians, or “gives” fishing rights in a river where they have fished for thousands of years. Giving comes from the heart, and although I have borrowed native melodies, hopefully it has been to return them with interest in these variations.

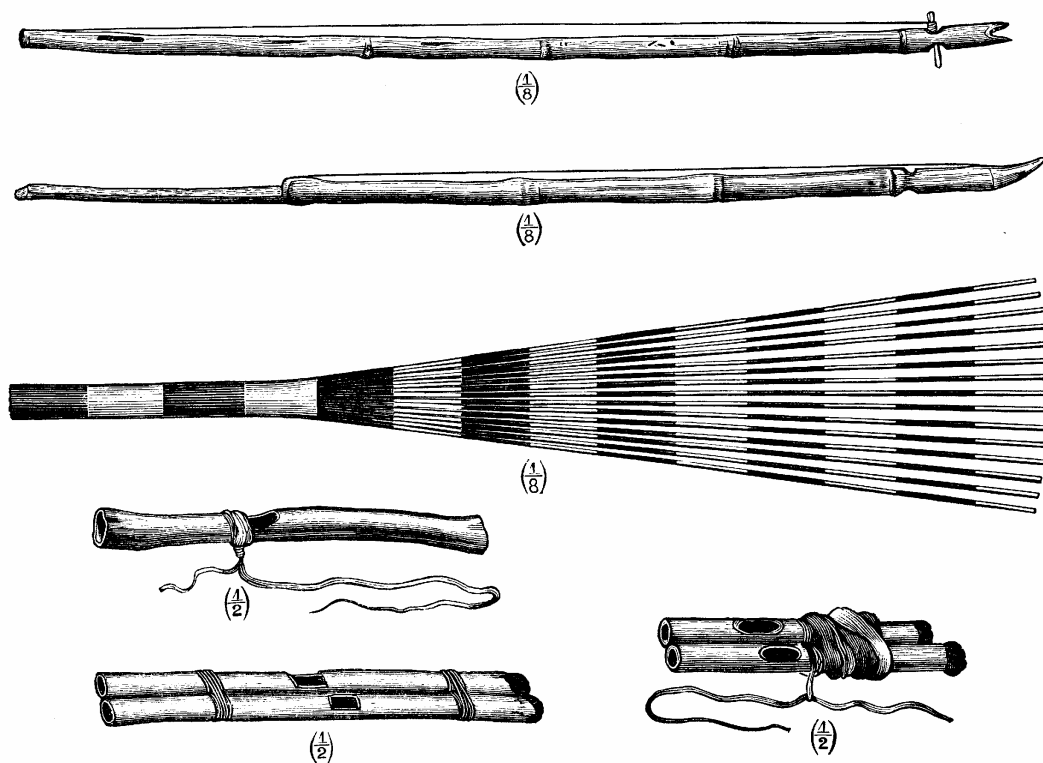


Figure 33. Cornstalk guitars (Yo-kuts), baton (Hu-pa), bone whistles.

(from *Tribes of California*, reprinted by permission of University of California Press)

As a guitarist I have often wondered if the origin of plucked-string instruments like the harp and kithara were bows used for hunting or for battle that gave off an enchanting tone when the strings were plucked, inspiring their makers to create a musical instrument to accompany their chants about battles and hunting exploits. In the ancient musical traditions of Native California, the flute is widespread, but a lyre-like instrument is very rare. However, in various Californian tribes a “musical bow” was used in which one sees

the earliest beginnings of a lyre. One such "musical bow" was described by Thomas Jefferson Mayfield, a white man who, as a child in 1850, was adopted and grew up among the Yokuts in California's San Joaquin Valley:

*They placed one end of the back of this [bow] against their teeth and thumbed the string like one would a guitar, raising and lowering the pitch with the mouth much as a Jew's harp is played. When the men were hunting they sometimes used to go along with their bows strung and play them in the same way as they did the musical instrument, using an arrow to strike the string.*<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes the player of the musical bow would hum along with the vibrating string, but he was the only one who could hear it well. This small fact can lead one off into a big speculation: the natural evolution of this instrument, unhindered by the trespasses of advancing civilization, could very well have led to a Native American lyre as those that developed in Europe, Africa and Asia. In his *Tribes of California* Stephen Powers included images of Yokuts "guitars" (see previous page) which could be the very same "musical bow" described by Mayfield. The snapped string ending "War Chant" evokes this dual nature of the string as bow-string and lyre-string.

The place that Music holds in Native America is supreme. This is for the obvious reason that native musicians are obliged to get their songs "right" because they are the Law. Mistakes in composition and performance could bring ruin to the crops, famine and destruction to the community. Shakespeare expresses the belief that society should be musically tuned like a string instrument in *Troilus and Cressida*. The "Acorn Chant" concerns a major food source for the Native Californians, and we can only imagine its ritual function in Huchnom society over 125 years ago when Stephen Powers first wrote it down in musical notation. "Song of the Mountains" is based on two bars of musical notation in *Malki News* from Morongo, California, jotted down by the Cahuilla/Serrano musician Ernest Siva, to whom it is dedicated. It was sung to him by Luiseño elder Margaret Holly, and concerns five sacred mountains of southern California. I have stood on the summits of three of these, and the main mountain of the song, Mount Baldy, is a permanent part of my life. It was called Muuyullpah by Mrs. Holly. I watched the sun go down behind it my entire youth, and my mother still does.

"Kekhhual's (Old Blind's) Song" and "Acorn Chant" ("sung by Ukasuka, a woman") were notated by Stephen Powers in the 1870s on his trek through California, at the time of the Ghost Dances. Powers' book *Tribes of California* is a treasured classic and provides warmth, humor and psychological insights into the various individuals he met, traits that are often absent in works by anthropologists on the subject. The fugue based on Kekhhual's song is a study in counterpoint, especially between Native Californian music (of which I know little) and that of Johann Sebastian Bach. Half and quarter notes in the original "Acorn Chant" have been replaced by eighth and sixteenth notes in the initial statement of the theme, but go back to the original form in the canon. Acorns were a major food source of the Native Californians, and acorn mush is still prepared today in

---

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Summer: Traditional Life Among the Choinumne Indians of California's San Joaquin Valley*, Thomas Jefferson Mayfield, Heyday Books, Berkeley, 1993. Images on previous page: *Tribes of California*, Stephen Powers courtesy of University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976.

the traditional manner. In fall they always looked forward to the trek away from the villages to the acorn camps. “Everyone was given a task. The little boys climbed high in the oaks and helped the men, who were holding long poles and moving slowly down the hill, shaking the trees, and knocking down the acorns. The women and the older boys followed, raking the fallen acorns, first into huge piles, and next into their large carrying baskets. [...] This they did every day, until all the baskets were full, and it was time to return home.”<sup>2</sup> The sound of acorns hitting the ground is evoked in the pizzicato and staccato measures of the “Acorn Chant”.

*Song of the Hüch'nöm*

*Sung by old Kekkhoal (blind).*

Ifi-hi-o he-he-o hi-hi-o he-he-o he-o he-o, ma-tinne  
 him-ai-na ma-tinne himaina tohi-e tohi-e he-o he-o.

*Dancing Song of the Karok.*

*Klamath River.*

Hinnowe no-hinno o-hin-no hinnowe o-hin-no nohinno  
 Hinnowe no-hinno o-hin-no hinnowe o-hin-no nohinno

*Religious Song of the Ballo-Kai-Pomo:*

*Konkau Dancing Song:*

Un-no win-no un-no win-no un-no winno un-no  
 win-no un-no win-no un-no winno un-no winno  
 un-no win-no un-no win-no un-no win-no.

*Dancing Song of the Ballo-Kai-Pomo.*

*Potter Valley.*

Ho-pil-pili wela haiyu ha-a-a. Ho-pil-pili wela haiyu ha-a-a.  
 a-nu-sa a-nu-sa awe hilli haiyu ho-pil-pili wela haiyu ha-a-a.

*Acorn Song (Hüch'nöm)*

*Sung by Ukasuka, a woman.*

Ya-a he-le ya-no hi-lo, ya-a he-le ya-no hi-lo.  
 Ya-a he-le ya-no hi-lo li-mo he-le ya-lo hi-lo

(Stephen Power's notations, reprinted by permission of University of California Press)

The themes of "Gambling Chant", "Hunting Chant", "Love-magic Chant", "War Chant" and "Puberty Chant" were among the "songz" gathered by Jaime de Angulo decades ago in his research into the music of northern Native California. De Angulo could not write standard musical notation, and invented some amazing techniques (decipherable only to himself) to record changes of pitch to help him remember, for he knew most of the songs by heart and sang them with great pleasure, though he was not a Native Californian. The texts of these songs in translation can be as varied as "let us two make love with our legs entangled," "digging the earth, only rotten turnips do I find," and, "you are scornful, but your skirts are too short." The words of the Achumawi puberty chants, like the one in this album, are more often than not of "shocking crudeness", as Jaime de Angulo wrote in his introduction to *La Musique des Indiens de la Californie du Nord*, Paris, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> *Sandspit: A Redwood Northcoast Notebook*, Book II, Francesca Fryer, 1998.

Ethnomusicologist/composer Peter Garland researched, assembled and translated this valuable material and published it as *Jaime de Angulo: The Music of the Indians of Northern California*. De Angulo recorded many of these chants on “an ancient Edison wax cylinder apparatus.” In his preface Peter Garland wrote, “de Angulo really liked the music himself, and obviously loved to sing the songs.”



Jaime de Angulo with Achumawi  
medicine man Old Blind Hall  
(courtesy of Soundings Press)

Jaime de Angulo was born in Paris of Spanish parents. He lived a picaresque life, including stints as a cowboy, cattle rancher, horse-tamer, linguist and cross-dresser. He survived a very dramatic suicide attempt after cutting his throat from ear to ear in Berkeley. Ultimately, he was a linguist who contributed to the knowledge of certain Northern Californian languages, as well as some in Mexico. The field work done in Mexico was due to the auspices of Alfred Louis Kroeber. When de Angulo was nonchalant about responsibilities concerning the Mexican field work, Kroeber was outraged over his ingratitude and never again trusted this quirky man. Many of his ideas about introducing phonetic spellings in English, or about poetry, or about art in general, cannot be taken seriously. However, Jaime de Angulo made a considerable contribution to Californian ethnography, not least of which are his records of native music, which have been one of the main sources for the variations for solo guitar in the present

album. “We have a Pit River Indian staying with us. He sang last night, for my Edison phonograph an old war song, to sing while you waft on a stick the strung ears of your enemies, sing their vengeful souls into appeasement. ‘Wah-e-ho, Waho-ho-ho.’ They call it a *triumph* song, and the tune is as near a dirge as can possibly be. It starts on a high key, then it drops, unaccountably, into a minor key, and trails off...and that’s all.”<sup>3</sup>

De Angulo was a friend of the very unique Californian composer Harry Partch, who constructed totally new instruments for his music, and Henry Cowell, an initiator of the American experimental music tradition. Cowell and his colleagues were some of the first American musicians to be genuinely interested in Native American music. Peter Garland composes in this tradition, and has been a life-long student of Native American music.

<sup>3</sup> Jaime de Angulo to Cary de Angulo (Jaime’s wife), Fall, 1925, *The Old Coyote of Big Sur*, Gui de Angulo (Jaime’s daughter), Stonegarden Press, Berkeley, California, 1995

Borrowing these songs as I have done in the present collection was in fact common practice, as Jaime de Angulo describes:

*It's important to recall that an Indian who, during a trip, learns a song that pleases him among another tribe – war song, dance song, or other – will have no scruples about taking it back home and introducing it there as a gambling song. Thus it happens that a group of Indians in a visit to a distant tribe, are invited to a gambling match. Very innocently, they begin to sing, and the others burst out laughing: "But that's our song! It's not a gambling song at all. It's a hunting song!"<sup>4</sup>*

This is the case today at modern pow-wows, where such exchanges of songs occur regularly. Oddly, the most populated region of North America at the time of Columbus, Native California was left entirely out of George Catlin's epic two volume work *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*. Catlin was briefly in California on his "last rambles" as an aging adventurer. His ship sailing from South America had a brief port-of-call in California before continuing northward to the Nayas Indians of Queen Charlotte's Island in British Columbia. Only in a vague comment does Catlin refer to Native California. If he had only known of the incredible diversity of cultures in such a small area, he surely would have investigated further. In a similar manner, Peter Garland notes this irony: "In California today, more is known in music (composer's) circles about Indonesia or India than about the state's own Indian culture." This is the case for generations of Californians in general, still shamefully ignorant of the many cultures that formed the personality of their homeland.

Today many of the songs recorded by anthropologists long decades ago on wax cylinders, aluminum discs or tapes are now being sung again in ceremonies, often by native people who do not understand the words they sing. These variations for solo guitar have been years in the making, and despite my temporal and cultural distance from the peoples from which they sprang, and the occidental musical tradition which formed them, I feel a certain closeness to the singers, as if the very moment that Stephen Powers heard the old blind singer Kekhhoal sing over 125 years ago has been preserved in the fragrant cedar sound box of my Paulino Bernabe guitar.

**Theo Radić**  
**Stockholm, Sweden**  
**July 22, 2003**

---

<sup>4</sup> Jaime de Angulo: *The Music of the Indians of Northern California*, edited by Peter Garland, Soundings Press, Santa Fe, 1988 (source of de Angulo's field notes on the following page).





Tolowa couple from *Tribes of California*  
(by permission of University of California Press)

## Notes on the tribal names

**Luiseño** is a Spanish term derived from mission San Luis Rey in southern California with which these Tadic speaking people were associated. They are also known as Payomkawichum, “people of the west”. Today their descendants most often use “Luiseño” to refer to themselves.

**Achumawi** means “dwellers on the river” (*ajúm:á* is “river”), but it originally referred to a few families living midway up Pit River. Today this northern Californian people refer to themselves as Pit River people.

**Shasta** refers to another northern Californian people as well as to a sacred extinct volcano in their homeland. Alfred Kroeber states that this name is “veiled in doubt and obscurity. It seems most likely to have been the appellation of a person, a chief of some consequence, called Sasti.” (*Handbook of the Indians of California*)

**Yuki** is a term that refers to three related dialects (Yuki, Huchnom and Coast Yuki) and the people speaking them. Kekhhoal’s song was sung in Huchnom. The name Yuki is from the Wintu language: *yuke*, “enemy”.

**Karuk** means “upriver”, referring to the Klamath river of northern California, contrasting with their word *yurúk*, “downriver”, which also refers to their Yurok neighbors downstream.

**Modoc** is derived from this northern Californian people’s name for Tule Lake: *Moatak*. They called themselves *maklaks*, “people”, and offered ferocious resistance to the US army in the Modoc War in 1872-73.

**Huchnom** means “tribe outside (the valley)”, referring to Round Valley. (See also “Yuki” above.)