

What is the Sound of this Oscillation?

Relationality and Raven Chacon's score For Zitkála-Šá

Over the last fifteen years, composer Raven Chacon (Diné) has created a score and subsequent publication titled *For Zitkála-Šá*. In this work, the artist strengthens and builds upon the web of relationality which is at the core of Indigenous Feminist praxis. Chacon and his collaborators use “the score” as a means of expanding the artistic, theoretical, and relational spaces in which the work and its kin reside. Oscillation, a key

concept/method in the work, is synonymous with unsettling - a refusal of the static forms and false binaries which predicate colonial power.

I perform from the inside out: Ever-living on dreams of currents from all the rivers as well as the moon's bright active nightlife come alive when it's time to perform. There are long perspectives that round up when I rosin my violin; this is where I give my take on the lay of the land. Creating sonic reflections of so much that flies, falls, or settles is love. - Laura Ortman, Arenas of Waves¹

An exhibition of overwhelming scale, the Whitney Biennial is an art event which captures the attention and criticism of the contemporary art world every two years. The 80th iteration, titled “Quiet as its Kept”, was no different - sixty-three artists and collectives, mostly living and early-mid career, were exhibited together in a multi-story beast of a

¹ Laura Ortman, *Arenas of Waves* in *For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p 17

museum - the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. The curatorial aim was, as usual, to assert a unifying theme in which to survey their choice of the most important artists currently working in the context of the United States. Adrienne Edwards, the co-curator along with David Breslin, said about the show, “The Biennial[...] forms an assembly or an ensemble or a chorus for these times[...] There’s sort of this syncopation and this evolution into the presentation that is meant to convey the times in which we live. So precarious, in flux, unstable but also dynamic.”² The cohesiveness of the show as a whole, the exhibition design and so many other elements are perennially up for debate and criticism. Nonetheless, within the walls there were undeniably exceptional works by artists whose work needs to be seen and studied.

² Edwards, Adrienne, “Whitney Biennial, Quiet as Its Kept.” Whitney Museum of American Art, April 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GG_-O33829c&t=279s.

Like being inside an IRL simulation of the attention economy, the works in the 2022 show strove to be seen and heard, remembered and remarked upon. But there was one work, *For Zitkála-Šá* by Raven Chacon, which stood out in spite of or perhaps because of its simple form: thirteen sheets of off-white, letter-sized paper, simply framed and displayed in two rows on a black wall. On the adjacent wall and holding its own despite the cacophony of competing sights and sounds was a powerful three-channel video installation titled “Three Songs” (2021), also by the artist, in which Native American women sing and stand in places which hold the memory of historic colonial violence. These two pieces in synergy with one another created a pool of charged stillness in which focused presence was required and also possible in order to take in the complexity of the work amidst the noise and the spectacle (Figure 1).

There is something exciting in your sonic work where what might be considered cacophony or noise is really the depiction of the liminal spaces where the ragged edges of all this is life-affirming is so phenomenally profuse, wild, and impossible to commodify or tame. These sensorial spaces are a part of my doctoral focus and is what made it natural for me to say yes to you. - Cheryl L'Hirondelle (Cree/Halfbreed), Where the Ragged Edges of All That Is³

Put simply, *For Zitkála-Šá* is a series of 13 scores written for specific First Nations or American Indian women currently working in musical performance or sound art - they are Laura Ortman, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Suzanne Kite, Barbara Croall, Jacqueline Wilson, Autumn Chacon, Heidi Senungetuk, Ange Loft, Joy Harjo, Carmina Escobar, Olivia Shortt, Candice Hopkins, and Buffy Sainte-Marie.⁴ The title of the work is a

³ Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *Where the Ragged Edges of All That Is* in *For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p 25

⁴ 12 scores are counted in the monograph *A Worm's Eye View from a Bird's Beak*, with the 13th no longer being shown due to the well

dedication to a Yanton Dakota woman working in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Figure 2). Zitkála-Šá was a composer, writer, editor, teacher and political activist. The catalog to the exhibition states;

several of her works chronicled her early struggles with identity; as an orator, many of her speeches brought awareness to the systemic oppression of Native people. As a composer and musician, Zitkála-Šá taught violin, later writing the libretto and songs for *The Sun Dance Opera* (1913), the first American Indian opera.⁵

documented controversy around the alleged “pretendian” Buffy Sainte-Marie. See Kaur, Harmeet. “Buffy Sainte-Marie Is the Latest Public Figure Accused of Being a ‘Pretendian.’ Here’s Why That Matters.” CNN, November 29, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/29/entertainment/buffy-sainte-marie-cbc-indigenous-questions-cec/index.html>. Leo, Geoff, Roxanne Woloshyn, and Linda Guerriero. “Who Is the Real Buffy Sainte-Marie?” CBCnews, October 27, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/buffy-sainte-marie>.
⁵ Breslin, David and Adrienne Edwards, editors. *Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet As It's Kept*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art. 2022 p. 72

This woman's work inspired Chacon for so many reasons, "[...] importantly, [that she was] a trusted leader to many tribal communities[...] fighting the encroachment of the United States of America."⁶ Chacon admittedly struggled to find a form that would appropriately honor her legacy. Considering an orchestral work at first, he finally decided to directly connect Zitkála-Šá to the web of relations through which he saw her lineage living and thriving, women whose work had influenced him and/or with whom he had collaborated. The scores effectively function as portraits of the artists for whom they are written, reflecting their work back to them in what becomes a call and response of sounds, ideas and relationships.

⁶ Chacon, Raven. *For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p. 7

I was taught to go out into the woods (often in fasting ceremonies) to listen to the birds, as the elder who made my first cedar flute was taught. The birds are the "first singers" who taught humans how to sing and make up songs. - Barbara Croall (Odawa), Listen to the Birds⁷

Raven Chacon is a Diné composer, artist and musician with deep roots in a spectrum of musical cultures and practices. Born in 1977 at Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation, in what is known as Arizona, Raven grew up in Chinle, also on the Navajo Nation, later living in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Studying classical piano, building instruments, studying composition, film and art at the University of Mexico and the California Institute of Art, composing and performing experimental/noise music in multiple projects and collaborations, releasing records on his label Sicksicksick Distro, collaborating in a contemporary art group Post

⁷ Barbara Croall, *Listen to the Birds, For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p. 41

Commodity, and developing curriculum at the Native American Composer Apprentice Project make up an incomplete but telling list of his accomplishments to date. In 2022, the same year that *For Zitkála-Šá* was exhibited at the Whitney Biennale, Chacon received the Pulitzer Prize for Music for his composition *Voiceless Mass*, and a year later he was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. Following this he had his first solo exhibition - a mid-career retrospective which spanned the Atlantic, taking place in both New York and Sápmi/Northern Norway - which included a monograph published with Sternberg Press. These biographical details and professional accomplishments point to an artist who has worked exceedingly hard and received much deserved recognition and opportunities as a result. It is in the work *For Zitkála-Šá* specifically - both in the scores themselves and the book which documents the process of collaboration with the musicians to whom he dedicated the pieces - that it is clear how

he reaches out to other artists to join forces and build webs of relationality through which sounds and ideas can resonate with increasing clarity and power.

The scores which make up *For Zitkála-Šá* and the book of the same name are windows into relationships or varying depth and endurance - between the composer, the performers to whom the scores are dedicated, the audience and Zitkála-Šá. Within the book, there is a dedication “To all of the Grandmothers”, an introduction, then the visual score and the written instructions. After each score, there is a response from the woman for whom the piece was written, which are quoted throughout this text. At the end of the book, Raven responds back to each of the women’s writing. Lastly are biographies and a photograph of Zitkála-Šá. The graphic scores themselves, each on an off-white letter-sized page, are made up of marks, precise and yet obviously made by a pen on a page (Figures 3-5). The visual aspects of the scores are made up of solid

shapes such as diamonds, rhombuses and parallelograms, squares, circles and triangle as well as empty forms, lines of varying qualities, sometimes in repeating patterns or with slight variations. Each score also has a set of written instructions, which support the performers interpretation. The composer gives the artists ample space in which to be creative and use the score as a vehicle for agential expression of their practice, theories and guiding themes.

Visual scores are symbolic forms that performers can read and interpret. Lakota geometric designs fit well into the expected notion of score reading, where there is an original set of ideas attached to the symbols. They do not have to be explained or verbalized in language. Neither is it necessary for the meaning to remain permanent. The interpretation can change over time and can develop over a lifetime, just like stories. The scores do not have to be trapped by the original interpretation. - Suzanne Kite (Oglala Lakota), Wógligleya: Designs⁸

Raven is an composer with extensive classical training as well as a long history of making conceptual art, installation, video, noise and visual art. This range of motion and the broad set of method, mediums and modes of making are tangible in the wide open space of the score and the breadth of interpretive space that the performers have to move within. With Zitkála-Šá and her life's varied struggles, the creative practice and the

⁸ Suzanne Kite, *Wógligleya: Designs, For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p. 33

complexities inspiring the work, the need for ample space is imperative in order to honor her legacy. In the introduction to the book, Raven frames the primary question posed by the scores: “If we see Zitkála-Šá as a woman who oscillated between two worlds, the question becomes: *What is the sound of this oscillation?*”⁹ Having stated this foundational query framing the interpretation of the work, it can be understood that continual movement between worlds, across seeming binaries and boundaries and out into a liberated space are prerequisite for their enaction.

Articulating another core question within Raven Chacon’s overall practice, Katya García-Antón and Stefanie Hessler write: “One of the core questions guiding Chacon is how to relink political affect and change, or, put differently, how we can imagine and put into practice new systems beyond

⁹ Raven Chacon, *For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p. 8

those reliant on extraction, accumulation, and dispossession?”¹⁰ Raven’s work isn’t solidly in one place, or it moves between contexts and changes as is needed to reflect the people, places and political contexts present. This way of working is inherently relational and reflects an embodiment of Indigenous Feminist praxis. This commitment is seen across the whole of Raven’s career. As Dylan Robinson and Patrick Nickleson write, “In the score for *Journey of the Horizontal People* (2017), Chacon notes his preference that the string quartet that performs the work contain a female-identifying player who will serve “as a *guide* when all others are lost.”¹¹ Therefore, in order for this piece to be performed, there needs to be some gender diversity in whatever ensemble is playing it, and it brings attention to these differences and how they play out in the

¹⁰ Katya García-Antón, Stefanie Hessler, “A Worm’s Eye View from a Bird’s Beak,” in *Raven Chacon: A Worm’s Eye View from a Bird’s Beak*. London: Sternberg Press, 2024. p. 8

¹¹ Dylan Robinson, Patrick Nickleson, “Notational Relations”, in *Raven Chacon: A Worm’s Eye View from a Bird’s Beak*. London: Sternberg Press, 2024. p. 92

dynamics of the group. *For Zitkála-Šá*, however, is available for anyone to perform, within the open-ended parameters of the instructions.

A score can be understood quite broadly, especially within the art world, where it tends to mean an open-ended set of instructions for an action. Within the world of music, however, a score is quite specific. Western music traditions have set forms of notation which dictate key, tempo, register, dynamics, and any number of other qualities that music can have. Orchestral scores, (Figure 6) which are the way that composers create for a large classical ensemble, have very rigid codes which are considered necessary for their legibility and function. One of the structures is to denote musicians in order of hierarchy within a section - 1st violin, 2nd violin, etc. Additionally there are instruments which are much more likely to have solo parts which are meant to stand out from the other musicians whose identity is expected to remain subsumed to

that of the group. The composer is at the top as the author, the conductor next after that as the interpreter of the score and leader of the ensemble, then the first violin who is often named, and down from there. There is something almost martial about the chain of command in this form of music. While these are not universal assessments of value across Western classical music, they are implied - despite all musicians being necessary in any given composition, there is a hierarchy in which some people are named and others are not.

A graphic score, however, refuses these power dynamics. Most graphic scores do not require fluency in Western musical notation, and can be interpreted more freely. There are still parameters which make the composition distinct from others, but it is more likely to be a piece of music that people across a range of experience and instrumentation could access. Graphic scores have something in common visual poetry, which instead of relying on a particular language and

alphabet, accesses the poetics of various kinds of mark making. These form are not only a different kind of poetry or musical composition, they seem to come from wholly different worlds. Someone with a classical poetry education may not have a clue what to do with a visual poem, much in the same way that some professional musicians are not trained in improvisation. Of course there are experimental forms that use traditional notation - this isn't a sweeping statement, but an observation and articulation of a pattern. Repetition and variations on a theme are aspects which can be seen across musical traditions and forms. But within some systems of music there are ossified assumptions about power and where it belongs in a musical ecosystem.

Musicians reading scores are also interpreters. Raven Chacon's scoring presents a different system of approaching composition and performance. The performer is brought into the music in a unique manner. The paper feels like land, even

sandstone. There is orientation according to direction. What appears to be the title is also the key to the map. It is in graphic symbols. - Joy Harjo (Creek), I Turned East After the Rain¹²

Some of the reasoning for Raven's use of graphic scores can be understood through this statement by the artist: "...what I am fundamentally interested in are the dynamics of the musicians in a context: who they are, where they are geographically, the specific site in which they are performing, and the history of that site and its surrounding geography."¹³ While he uses techniques across both traditional western notation and graphic scores in his compositions, there is a freedom within graphic scores well suited to conveying the particular concerns that he brings to his creations and collaborations. Given that the artist is broadly concerned with the specifics of context, the way he implements scores allows

¹² Joy Harjo, I turned East After the Rain, *For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p. 81

¹³ Raven Chacon, "Contrary Motions: Raven Chacon in dialogue with Michael Nardone," OEI, no. 98-99: "Aural Poetics" (2023):41

more of a conversation back and forth with performers and the places they reside - there is feedback built into the system. As Dylan Robinson and Patrick Nickleson write, “in Chacon’s varied artistic practice, the score is multiply coded. It requests nonmusical action; it is a form of transcribing the world as it is and extending other possibilities; it is a matrix for reflection on existing relationships and calling forth new ones.”¹⁴ It is not difficult to see how political agency and action can be mapped onto this description. The score is not only a tool used to convey a musical idea, but also a means of enacting a decolonial struggle, one that is not only authored by the composer, but generated from within a dynamic web of relationships with musicians and their contexts. In the case of *For Zitkála-Šá*, there is the lineage of the ancestor for whom the work as a whole is named, the composer and his own

¹⁴ Dylan Robinson, Patrick Nickleson, “Notational Relations”, in *Raven Chacon: A Worm’s Eye View from a Bird’s Beak*. London: Sternberg Press, 2024. p. 93

context, including the dedication to “all of the Grandmothers” at the beginning of the book and the 13 Indigenous women named and reflected in the score, which is expressed through their kinship structures as well as their musical skill, plus whomever may choose to interpret and perform the score besides the musicians for whom they were written. All of these connections are made, or if they already existed, are reinforced both on the level of kinship as well as art historically.

Raven’s score encourages me to create my own ideas, just for myself. Here, I develop a greater sense of agency in the process of interpreting a score. How do I want this to sound? What song will come out today? How will it differ tomorrow, or the next day? Then it becomes interesting to think about the processes of transposition as acts of sovereignty. - Heidi Senungetuk (Iñupiaq), Tavluḡun atuutit: Chin Marking Music¹⁵

¹⁵ Heidi Senungetuk, *Tavluḡun atuutit: Chin Marking Music, For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p. 65

If traditional western musical scores assert hierarchies, Chacon's score challenges them. By creating the score for a specific woman, he reflects his careful observation of the nuances of her style and the concerns and questions her music addresses. Additionally, the book is not only a place for the collection and publication of the scores and the context of their making, but also a place for the back and forth conversation with the musicians, where they can articulate in written words how they are working with the score. There are widespread false assumptions that Native musicians primarily work within traditional musical forms such as drumming and singing. When a person like Raven is both classically trained and working in more experimental forms of composition, the false binary of western music/Native music is upended and revealed to be an oppressive and obsolete imposition of settler colonial silos. Many of the women for whom the scores were written are musicians in orchestras, and their inclusion in this work is

proof that these either/or categories are constructed and not essential. From Robinson and Nickleson;

the false binary between Indigenous resurgence (privileging the specific Indigenous values held by our communities) and Western artistic practices and epistemologies has often reified commitments to mutual exclusivity. Mutual exclusion is, here, itself one of the most pernicious structures of settler colonialism that takes all of us out of relationship.¹⁶

Zitkála-Šá and the Native musicians of her generation first became acquainted with classical music in federally run boarding schools where it was employed in the curriculum as a means of cultural suppression. She and others would go on to use their instruments as tools of resistance, repurposing that

¹⁶ Dylan Robinson, Patrick Nickleson, "Notational Relations", in *Raven Chacon: A Worm's Eye View from a Bird's Beak*. London: Sternberg Press, 2024. p. 86

which was meant to eradicate as a weapon to fight assimilation.

- Jacqueline Wilson (Yakama), *An Unapologetic Phrase*¹⁷

With the pernicious qualities of hierarchy and false binaries, there is an equally oppressive assumption of stasis in the score as it has been used in western music. When the musical piece is composed, it is put down on paper in such a way that the musicians can repeat the composers ideas with such detail that there is very little, if any, space for personal expression and co-authorship. The musicians are instrumentalized, so to speak, for the purpose of recreating the music as it was heard in the composers head with exactitude. Their lives, histories, families and homes do not come to bear on the performance in any way, they speak with the voice of the composer, repeating his ideas alone. After the composers death, there will be no changes made to the score. It is a permanent and unchanging document that will be performed

¹⁷ Jacqueline Wilson, *An Unapologetic Phrase, For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p.49

faithfully, sometimes across centuries, the same way wherever it is performed with only the inflection of the conductor and the technical skill of the ensemble coming to bear on it.

In *For Zitkála-Šá* we see a very different musical ontology in action. The artist has framed the work with the question cited earlier - If we see Zitkála-Šá as a woman who oscillated between two worlds, the question becomes: *What is the sound of this oscillation?* In music, oscillation can refer to the actual movement of sound waves, made visible as an upward and downward curving line of varying intensity by certain technological instruments. It is also used in a more broad sense of a state of constant movement back and forth. It is understood that Zitkála-Šá is a person whose life was one of oscillation, and that for any Native person living within settler-colonial occupation, there is a continual movement between the two ontologies, to varying degrees. An exploration of antonyms of the word *oscillate* revealed the opposite word

settle, linking the two as binaries. If the traditional western musical score is *settled*, then the graphic score *unsettles*, which can be understood as indelibly connected to, if not synonymous with, decolonization. From this place it can be seen that the work Raven's compositions are doing in *For Zitkála-Šá* is not only one of building relational webs, but also of refusing those constructed by settler-colonialism. Settler-hetero-patriarchy attempts to destroy worlds in which change is constant, difference is strength, and power is something which is held and used collectively. Raven Chacon and his collaborators prefigure worlds in which those qualities are inherent and which insist upon survivance, defined by Gerald Vizenor as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction,[...] renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."¹⁸ It is not the specific forms of classical or experimental or traditional Native music which are in conflict

¹⁸ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1999, vii

with one another. As Robinson and Nickleson say, "[...] we do not need to abandon 'the score', but to reckon with how it has historically led us to foster relationships of exclusion, extraction, and hierarchy."¹⁹ This is the work that Zitkála-Šá began, and it continues through her lineage as is alive in Raven Chacon, Laura Ortman, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Suzanne Kite, Barbara Croall, Jacqueline Wilson, Autumn Chacon, Heidi Senungetuk, Ange Loft, Joy Harjo, Carmina Escobar, Olivia Shortt, Candice Hopkins, and Buffy Sainte-Marie. It also moves through the performers into the ears, minds, bodies and spirits of the audiences and the performers who will continue to bring these pieces to life for generations to come.

This ongoing endeavor to destroy the oppressive hold of gendered and colonial violence is the territory and material of Indigenous feminist praxis. The pedagogical work of

¹⁹ Dylan Robinson, Patrick Nickleson, "Notational Relations", in *Raven Chacon: A Worm's Eye View from a Bird's Beak*. London: Sternberg Press, 2024. p. 92

theorist, writer, and educator, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Mississauga Nishnaabeg), creates and protects space for young Native people to come together on the land to learn and heal together. Her description of a class in which the toxic stereotypes about Indigenous women, men and 2 Spirit people are laid bare for the baseless, insidious construction that they are. In the process, Simpson writes:

People bring up stories of grandmothers chopping wood, hunting, trapping, and fishing, and of grandfathers cooking, sewing, and doing childcare. We talk about binaries and fluidity around gender and how in Indigenous contexts it is often important that we all have a baseline of skill and knowledge about how to live. Oftentimes someone will bring up a relative who didn't fit so easily into the colonial gender binary, and we talk about how the community, the church, and the state responded and responds to this. We talk about how

we gender the land in English and if this is the same in their languages.²⁰

Terror and desire, the seed of the oppressor and the egg of the oppressed, antagonisms of the soul, woman/creature of mixed blood[...] This dichotomy of realities and cosmogenies, this violent breeding and birthing that eventually brought me into being. In this liminal space, I exist[...] In the spiral of time, in the in-betweenness of it all, my voice is the wound and the cure. - Carmina Escobar (Mestizo), The Pulling Forces²¹

These spaces of learning generate and hold the medicine for healing the intergenerational trauma that has been borne by all beings who have lived (and so often died) against occupation, and for decolonization. The antidote to these poisons of hierarchy, rigid permanence and false binaries is the

²⁰ Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. "Endlessly Creating Our Indigenous Selves." In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, 83–94. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. p. 88

²¹ Carmina Escobar, *The Pulling Forces, For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p. 89

original, ontological realm of relationality. Lindsay Nixon (Cree-Métis-Saulteaux) has theorized this dimension within the cultural sector as Indigenous Relational Aesthetics (IRA). In reference to the theory of Relational Aesthetics posed in the 1990's by French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud, Nixon's theory is not a contemporary innovation of western art, but an invocation of the knowledge of Indigenous ancestors translated for the frame of the art worlds. The essential qualities of Indigenous Relational Aesthetics are, as Nixon writes:

[...] creating, curating, and facilitating aesthetics of (Indigenous) love that inadvertently address intra-community differentiation within Indigenous art communities; forging new pathways in community-engaged curation that break away from Canada's institutional arts and culture sectors, thereby activating the communities where one stands; and disrupting colonial understandings of material

cultures—ontologies that Kim TallBear has called (Indigenous) new materialisms—and thereby expressing an aliveness extended to art itself.²²

This articulation insists that there are drastically different ways of being, making, and working within the worlds of contemporary art. Nixon's research on histories of Native co-curation within communities of marginalized Native women and 2 Spirit artists has shown that even within Native art scenes there are repetitions of settler-colonial logics, and that Indigenous Feminist interventions have the power to reveal and disrupt these forms of settler-hetero-patriarchy wherever they appear.

Everything is a transmitter, and everything is an antenna ready to receive the vibrations that match the many things that are tuned into the same frequency. As people, we can be tuned into

²² Lindsay Nixon. "Towards an Indigenous Relational Aesthetics: Making Native Love, Still." In *In Good Relation : History, Gender, and Kinship in Indigenous Feminisms*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020. p. 196

*one another, and all objects have a frequency that can be matched. Maybe this is how we find our best friends, allies, and community in life: by simply attuning to the frequency that is already vibrating, waiting to be received. - Autumn Chacon (Diné), Quit Your Job – Become a Pirate Radio Operator Today*²³

For Zitkála-Šá is an expression of this onto-epistemology - by honoring the legacy of an incredibly wise, courageous and resourceful ancestor, Raven Chacon links the flow of power inherent in this relationality into the webs which sustain his practice. This power has and will continue to support the creative force of decolonization, survivance and love within Chacon's community and beyond. Again from Nixon;

To be a relational critic is to extend principles of ethical relationality, kinship, and love in order to promote

feminist change within the art industries through one's

²³Autumn Chacon (Diné), *Quit Your Job – Become a Pirate Radio Operator Today, For Zitkála-Šá*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 2022. p.58

writing [...] Further, the practice of IRA within the field of art criticism hinges on making kin beyond the limits of production and the industry, and on finding new ways to grow capacity, community, resources, and mutual respect, ensuring the industries we work in are more equitable by enacting a positive relationality with one another. In real time, this means my arts writing derives from my relationships.²⁴

The clarity of Nixon's vision aligns beautifully with the practice of Indigenous Relational Aesthetics by Chacon and his collaborators, past, present and future. With IRA being a theory held and lived within Indigenous Feminist praxis, the web is strengthened again. This agential love has the potential not only to sustain but also repair the tears wrought by colonial violence. This energy, knowledge and power oscillate across

²⁴ Nixon, Lindsay. "Towards an Indigenous Relational Aesthetics: Making Native Love, Still." In *In Good Relation : History, Gender, and Kinship in Indigenous Feminisms*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020. p. 203-204

time, from ancestors to descendants and back again, rooted wholly in land and kinship. As this world-building/world-remembering grows into more and more cultural spaces, whether the capital A Art world, classical, experimental or traditional Native American and First Nation music, poetry or art criticism, the felt sense of dynamism and relationality becomes undeniable and contests the dominance, naturalness and validity of settler-colonial occupation with its toxic individuality, power-over, and self-declared permanence.

The score is a map that can guide us to return to places deemed lost - by following these maps, their continued existence is revealed, affirmed and experienced. The sound of this oscillation across terrains and between worlds is the sound of unsettling, the sound of decolonization, the sound of Indigenizing. While so much has undeniably been lost, there are places in which the web may be rewoven in forms that remember and honor those losses. With connections catalyzed

and relationship supported, there is strength for the people, the critters, the land, air and water to draw upon for the continuation and intensification of both resistance and healing.

Music, art and writing nourish the collective imagination, which is necessary for the re-emergence of worlds other than those of the status quo. The more directly we can sense, feel, visualize and participate in this expansion of imaginative capacity, the more effectively we can bring it into being. Culture needs tending, just as relationships do, and what this looks like is very context-specific. *For Zitkála-Šá* succeeds in tending relationships across realms, those of ancestors and history, kinship and community, land, culture, art, theory and political change. It embodies the love that guides Indigenous Feminist praxis, prefiguring the worlds most needed in this time and place.

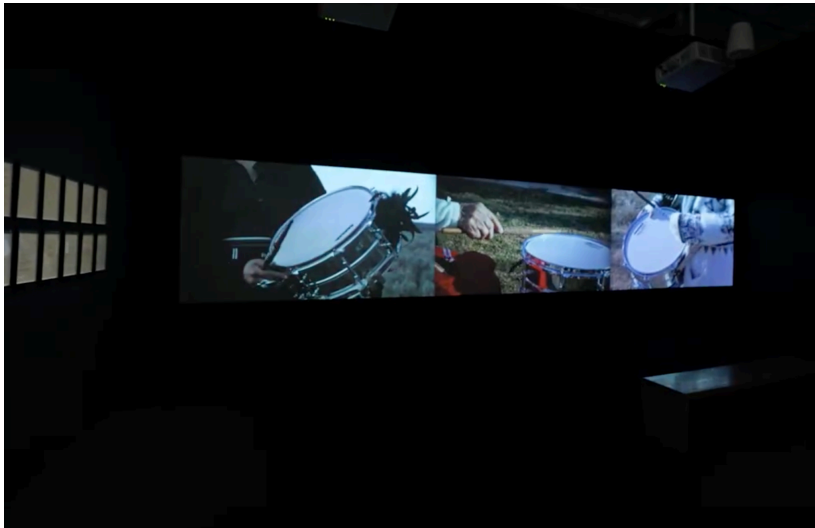


Figure 1. Installation view of *For Zitkála-Šá* and *Three Songs*,
Quiet as it's Kept, Whitney Museum of American Art, New
York, 2022

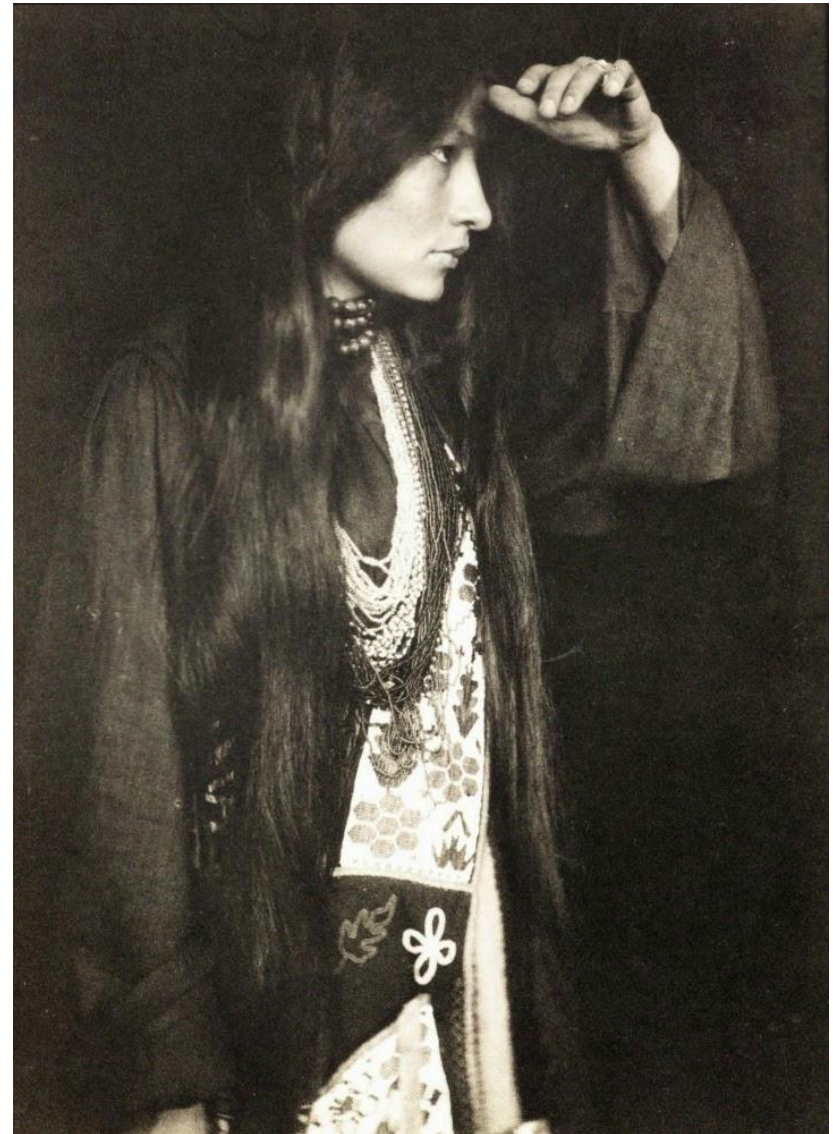


Figure 2. Zitkála-Šá (1876–1938), source unknown

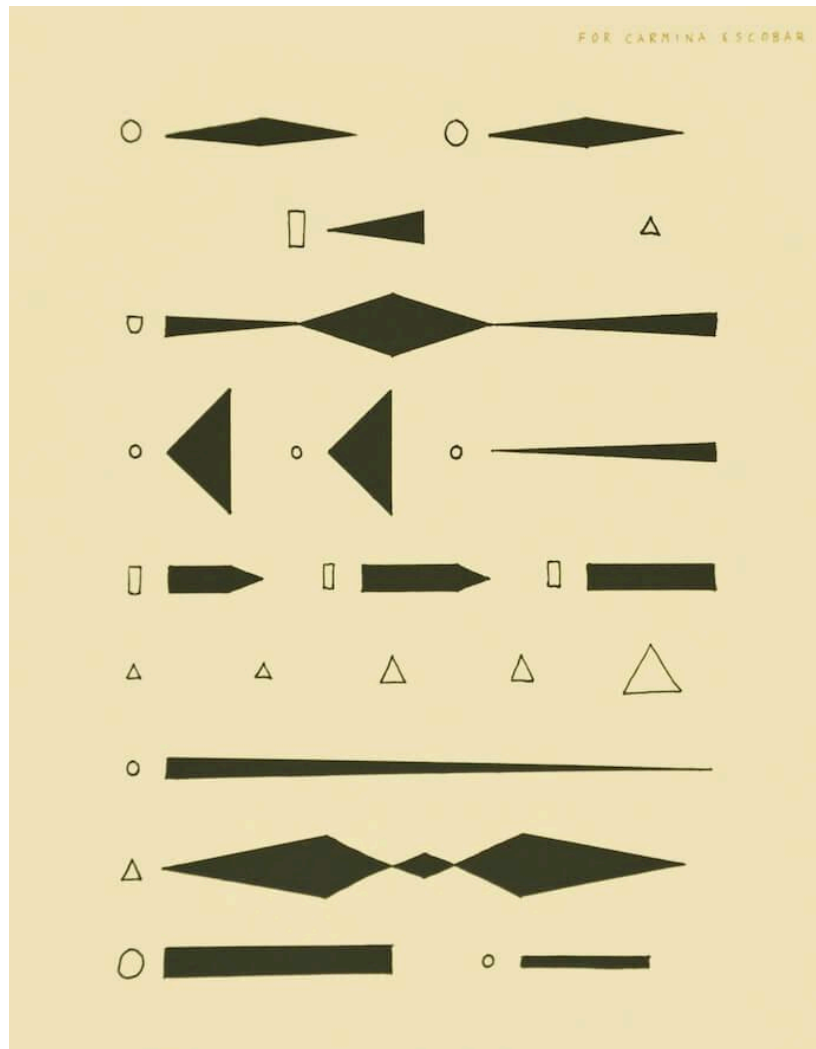


Figure 3. "For Carmina Escobar" from Raven Chacon's *For Zitkala-Šá*

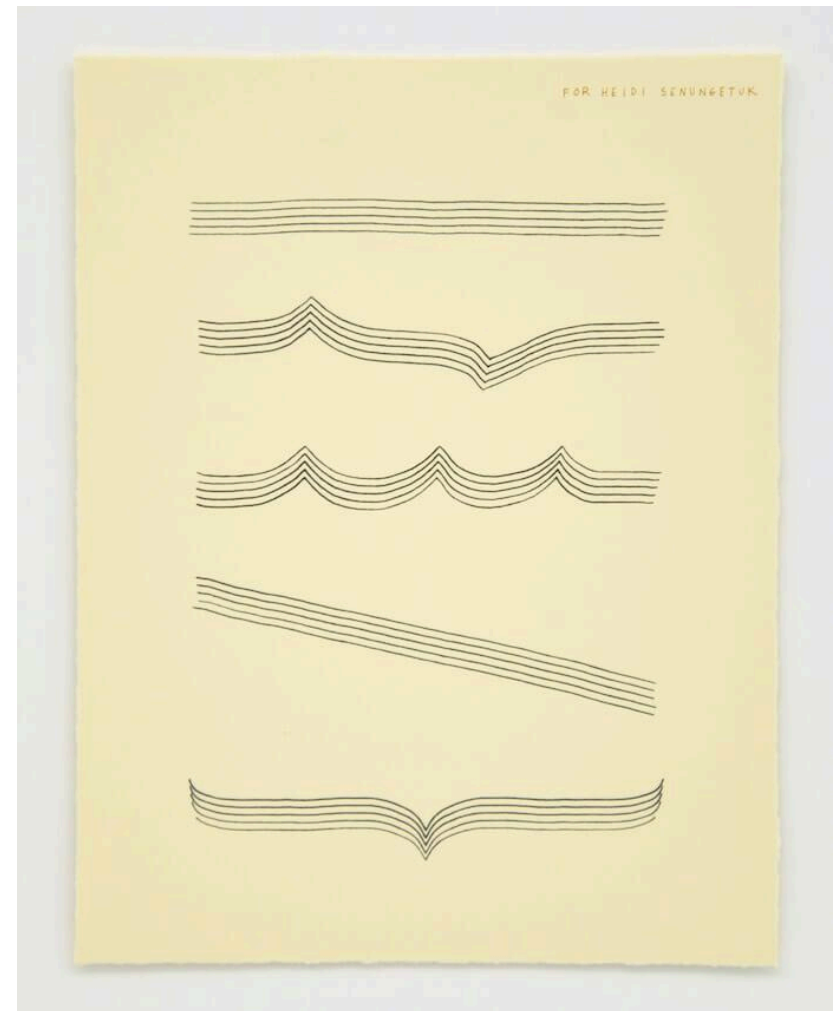


Figure 4. "For Heidi Senungetuk" from Raven Chacon's *For Zitkala-Šá*



Figure 5. “For Jacqueline Wilson” from Raven Chacon’s *For Zitkala-Šá*

FULL SCORE

Orchestral Suite No. 2

in B minor for flute, strings and continuo

BWV 1067

edited by
Fabrizio Ferrari

J.S.Bach (1685-1750)

Ouverture

Flute

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Continuo

Harpsichord

*editor's realization

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Low resolution sample

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Figure 6. Excerpt from Orchestral score of Bach's Suite No. 2



Figure 7. Still of Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache) bowing violin with pine bough, performing For Zitkála-Šá - Laura Ortman, by Raven Chacon, April 13 2019, <https://vimeo.com/335900464> accessed Aug 22, 2024

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