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THE HEART IS FIRE

The world of the
Cahuilla Indians
of southern California



Deborah Dozier

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PROLOGUE

Note

Throughout the text of this book, initials of speakers precede their comments. In alphabetical order by last name, they are:

DA Dolores Alvarez
AA Anthony Andreas
DD Deborah Dozier
JM JoMay Modesto
KS Katherine Saubel
AS Alvino Siva

This version of the Cahuilla creation story is a translation by Katherine Saubel of a recording made by a shaman, Perfecto Segundo, more than half a century ago. The text in italics has been added for clarity, since the story, which initially took an entire night to relate, has been greatly edited.

The story goes like this. There was night, only darkness. When they were going to appear, the night shook, the night vibrated. The night rang and then it quieted down. And then they appeared, just out of nothing. Just out in mid-air they hung. There was nothing to hold them up. They were just suspended in the air. Then they disappeared. That is when they say it was a miscarriage. And then it happened again. They appeared like they did, and they disappeared. And then they hung again, suspended in air. Then the thing they were suspended in dried. Then they moved. They moved and they stretched. They grew and they stretched some more.

In this way, the two gods, Mukat and Témayawet, were born from an embryo formed by primordial forces associated with darkness and the night, Tookmeoot and ?amna?a. Mukat and Témayawet argue with each other about which of them was born first. Then they climb to the top of the centricle of the world. They draw the earth from their hearts, then the ocean and the sky. They connect the earth and the sky by fixing the centricle in the middle.

And then Témayawet asks again, “What are we going to do now?” And Mukat says, “You should know but you don’t. So now we will create the people.” Then they started to create the people. They did not get them out of their mouths, but they worked them from the mud. It was in the dark that they did all this. Témayawet created his creatures in a hurry and carelessly. Then he was finished. Mukat made his people slowly, everything was done slowly and everything was done perfectly. It was not like Témayawet had created his people, with webbed

When they were going to appear, the night shook, the night vibrated.

And they shook, their hearts shook. They quivered from their power. Then they brought out the sun.

feet and webbed hands, with two faces—one in the back and one in the front. Mukat created them beautiful, just the way they are now with their hands, their feet, their eyes—everything beautiful, perfect.

And then Mukat said, “I wonder why Témayawet is finished. I wonder why he has done everything so quickly?” And then Témayawet told him, “How are we going to know? How are we going to see what we are doing? This is all in the dark. And so our hearts will bring out the stars and we will spray them up to the sky and then we will have light. And we will do this now.” They started to shake. Their powers shook them. They vibrated, they thundered, and then the stars came out of their mouths. “Now we shall create the sun rays. Now we shall create the rays—the gray, the white rays of the sun.” And they shook, their hearts shook. They quivered from their power. Then they brought out the sun.

When everything they had done was complete Mukat knew that Témayawet’s creations were not too good. When the light shown on them, then Témayawet knew that he wasn’t doing things the right way. The people were not formed the right way. Mukat told Témayawet, “You were older and yet you didn’t do a very good job with your creatures, with your faces that look both ways, with their stomachs both ways, their hands all closed and webbed.” It wasn’t like the hands that Mukat made, with the fingers, the toes. “You said you were older,” he said. “How are they going to carry? How are they going to carry their baskets? How are they going to carry their load, when they have a back on each side?” Mukat said, “When they gather or when they get and go and carry their game, they will have no place to carry it.”

Then Témayawet said, “This way, when they go, they don’t have to turn around, they don’t have to do anything. Just do it both sides, both ways, and it will save them a lot of time.”

But Mukat said, “Well, look at my creatures. They can close their fingers when they are going to carry water or hold something in their hands. They can turn around, they can look around, there is nothing in the way. They can carry anything on their shoulders.”

Then Témayawet said, “Our creations won’t die, they will live forever.”

And Mukat said, “No, they will crowd the world.

That cannot be. We will have people to cure illnesses, but everyone must die.”

When he sees how fine Mukat’s creations are, Témayawet is ashamed of his own. He goes underground, taking his creatures with him, causing great earthquakes. But Ménill, the Moon, stays with Mukat.

Ménill stayed with him. Moon Maiden, he called her. The Moon Maiden took care of the creations. She took them and showed them games, how to make this from that, painted them and colored them. She put designs on them and made them dance. She just trained them in everything she could find. Then she would sing the songs to them. They would dance and they would kneel down and touch down. It was all of them together, not just one or two. She would make them do this.

But these beings were not ordinary people. They were beings that were supernatural. They had strength, they had power. And then there was the Moon Maiden. Then Mukat passed by Ménill, the Moon Maiden. The story says that Mukat overshadowed her. Moon Maiden had the feeling that something bad had happened. She could feel it. She felt bad. She never said a word to anyone, she didn’t tell him she was going to leave them. But in the night, she left and went up to the sky. She never told anyone, she just left without telling them where she was going. The next morning, they looked for the one that she took care of. They looked for her. They cried. They went here and there and looked for her but they couldn’t find her. There was a pool of water. They looked and saw her in the water, and they all jumped in there. But she disappeared. They saw her reflection from the sky. They looked up and saw her. They called her down. They told her, “When you were here we were happy. Everything was beautiful and wonderful and we miss you. Come on down.” She just smiled at them.

Mukat becomes a menace rather than a help to his people. He has already put death into the world, and now he gives poison to the rattlesnake. He invents the bow and arrow and tricks people into shooting at one another. The souls of the dead wander, lost, to the four directions, until a super being comes and shows them the way to Telmikhail, the land of the dead, and he shows the people the mourning rituals for the dead. The people become angry with Mukat.

The Moon Maiden took care of the creations. She took them and showed them games, how to make this from that, painted them and colored them. She put designs on them and made them dance.

They gathered together and they talked about how he was probably going to destroy us. They discussed this among themselves and decided they were going to get rid of him before something drastic happened to them. That was not just a few people, there was a lot of people at the time. They all agreed to do away with him.

The rituals for mourning the dead come from the Cahuilla creation myth. It concludes with an elaborate description of the death of the creator god, Mukat. No one now living is able to retell the myth in the traditional manner in the Cahuilla language.

At the beginning, the words are different. The ancient words that tell this story are different, it is deeper than what we are saying now. The ancient words were said before. "My children, my creatures, my created beings," he told each and every one, "I guess I am going to die," he said. He said, "My heart is getting cooler, my hands are getting colder." He was getting worse when he said this. Then he sang this song, "I guess I am going to die."

Mukat's long death scene takes up a major part of the myth. Much of Cahuilla ritual life connected to mourning and burial ceremonies is included in this part of the story. In his death song, Mukat enumerates all of his acts of creation and recites the names of all the plants and animals he has created. He teaches the people the sacred traditions that they are to live by.

"I feel it. I feel it. I am going to die." He was getting weaker and weaker. He said this to his creatures. Then he started to sing the song. He sang this and explained to them. He was saying this as he was singing this. His creatures sang with him. And they were singing for him as he was lying down and getting worse and worse.

Mukat is dead. This is where it ends. He is singing the song. "It is dropping on me, he is falling on me. It is getting old on me," he says, as he sings. "It is getting old on me, it is getting old on me. It is falling on me. It is singing, naming all the plants, falling on me. It is dying on me." This is where it ends.

The people burn Mukat's abandoned body. From Mukat's ashes, all the food plants grow—acorns, squash, chia, sage, all the food of the Cahuilla. In his death, Mukat has given his people their way of life, their laws, customs and ceremonies, and their food.

BIRD SONGS

ANTHONY ANDREAS: A lot was written about the creation songs and the other songs, deer songs, whatever. But they didn't survive, I think, because they were ritual. Bird singing has survived longer than our other traditions. I think the reason why it survived—not so much of it was mentioned in the early writings of the anthropologists—is because anybody could sing the bird songs.

Only certain persons could sing the ritual songs. The bird songs—well, if you were interested in bird songs, you could learn. You didn't have to be chosen. You had to have the desire.

When I was growing up I said, "I would like to sing those songs," but I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would be singing them. I just wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to sing with Joe Patencio and Bert Levi, be a part of it, never thinking they would die. I was an adult already, but before I was thirty. I never thought beyond that, that I would be singing. There was a lot of singers, they have all died.

DD: What is a bird singer?

AA: Well, what is a bird singer? It is a person who sings bird songs. Anybody could be a bird singer. Some know more than others. I have seen guys when I was growing up, early twenties, late teens, they would argue about a certain song. They would get into arguments about similar songs. One would sing it different than the other. They would both accuse each other of singing it wrong. "My grandfather taught it to me like this." "My father taught it to me this way, he was a bird singer and he knew all the songs." "Well, so did my grandfather," and so on. I used to ask them why they were arguing. I couldn't figure it out. Maybe it was the drinks or something.

But I learned later on, Joe Patencio told me, no

I made my own little rattle out of a milk can and would sit in there. My mother would say, "Get away, you are throwing them off..." But they would tell her, "No, leave him alone. That is the way he is going to learn."

—Alvino Siva

From what I understand, these are social songs sung at a time where lineages or the tribes get together for a festive occasion.

—Anthony Andreas

matter how a person sings the songs, they are both right. It is how they learned it. If you are singing these songs, well, whoever is going to sing with you will sing it your way. When you sing with them, you are going to sing it their way. It is so simple. Nobody is wrong and everybody is right. It is how they learned it. I have heard so many criticisms—“You don’t know to sing it, you don’t sing them right.” Well, what is the right way? That is how I learned them.

DD: How did bird singing begin?

AS: Well, before I go into how it started, I will start with how I got into it. They had bird singing at the time in Palm Springs at the ceremonial house, but I don’t remember going. My mother probably would have taken me, but I don’t remember being there. But every summer, after school, we would come up here, move to Morongo or move over here to Banning. My father would work on the fruit and my mother would work in the fruit shed. So this one year we came. I think I was six years old, five or six, because I wasn’t in school yet. We were over there at the Gilman Ranch and there was a regular Indian village. There were Indians from all over. Not only Cahuillas—Luiseño Indians, everybody.

Everybody was there. They were all working in the fruit. Every Friday night, somebody would start singing bird songs. It was about five different bird singers and each one of them had a different style of bird singing. It was all the same, it was just different clans, I guess—I can’t describe it. But I know there was a guy by the name of Martin, he sang the songs. Then there was a guy by the name of Garcia, Chris Garcia, he would sing. And there was another, two, three more singers that would sing. Well, Friday evening at about six, they would get together and start singing. This is how I got hooked on it. I would go over there and listen. Then I started dancing and singing with them. I got to the point where I would make my own little rattle. They all had their own rattles. I made my own little rattle out of a milk can and would sit in there. My mother would say, “Get away, you are throwing them off,” because I didn’t know, see. But they would tell her,

“No, leave him alone. That is the way he is going to learn.” I finally picked it up.

Oh, I guess I was about seven then, six, seven years old. But I started over here. Joe Patencio, I knew him. When I was about seven I think Joe was about twelve or thirteen already. We would play together, because I was big for my age. Then we started singing. I would go to his house and we would sing the bird songs laying in bed. A lot of times, we would make mistakes. Joe’s father was a singer. He would laugh and he would correct us. That was clear on up until I went into the service, I was singing with Joe. Joe wasn’t a head singer yet, when I left for the service at about twenty. They had the older singers still alive.

See, when you become a singer, you don’t just say, “I am going to sing this song.” You tell the people—you feed the people—then you say, “Okay, I am going to sing. This is going to be my song.” Then you sing, whether it is bird songs or a ceremonial song. Whenever you have to come out, they would say, “You are coming out,” see? You don’t have that anymore, it is all gone.

AA: From what I understand, these are social songs sung at a time where lineages or the tribes get together for a festive occasion, for whatever reason.

And this was about the only time that the women could join in and really be part of it—let their hair down, so to speak. Most of the other rituals were all handled by men. This was the time too that women could make fun of the men. Tease them if they made a mistake in their dance step or in the song. I remember some of them, they are passed on now, they used to tease me too, when I first started singing by myself. It was very frightening. When Joe Patencio and Bert Levi were still alive, I could sing with them. When they died, everybody expected me to sing. I didn’t think I was going to sing, until I was encouraged to sing. They were told by Joe Patencio to help that young boy. I was already thirty. That was young to them, I suppose. So I started singing.

If I made a mistake, the women would laugh right away. It was just fun. A lot of guys didn’t like

And this was about the only time that the women could join in and really be part of it—let their hair down, so to speak.

—Anthony Andreas

I think criticism is a sincere form of flattery. I used to get a lot of criticism.

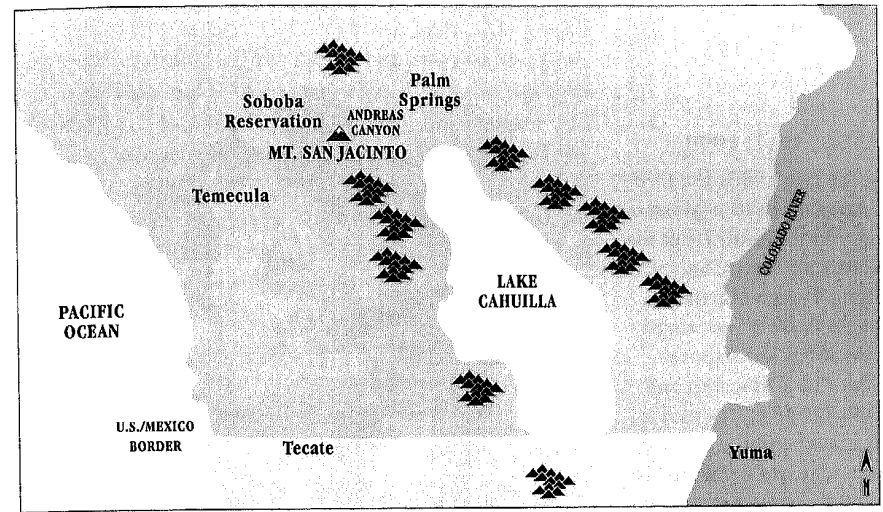
—Anthony Andreas

criticism. They'd say, "Oh, I'm not going to dance tomorrow, I'm not going to sing tomorrow." "How come?" "Well, they made fun of me." That's all part of it. If you can't take criticism from women, then you had no business being there. Right? And a lot of women helped me, too. I think criticism is a sincere form of flattery. I used to get a lot of criticism.

I don't get so much teasing anymore because most of my audience is younger. I used to get teasing from the older ones, who are passing on now. There is only a few left now. There is Laura Holmes. She keeps me in place.

AS: Then when I got into these songs, I wanted to know how it originated, how the songs came about. So this old man, Mariano, that is Joe Patencio's father, he wouldn't really just sit down and tell us everything and how it was kept and whatever, he just said our bird songs started way back with our creation stories.

When they killed Mukat, everybody was in turmoil, everybody just went their ways. When you hear about the creation I think it was nothing but Cahuillas, but everybody else was there. Everything that Mukat had created. So when he died, they just dispersed. They went to the four winds. What Cahuillas were left, they said, "Let us look around and listen to the people that are talking Cahuilla and let's get them together, let's get our people together. So they did that, they got all the Cahuillas together. They said they went around this continent three times. These songs they sang, these bird songs. That is why the songs are so ancient you can't understand them. Some of them you can understand. Some of the songs are singing about the land, and it parallels the migration of the birds a little bit too. The songs are not only about birds, you have the animals in them. He said, "This is what we sang when we landed here in that area, Palm Springs." That is where those songs came from I guess, from when they were moving. The songs can be sad or they can be joyous, you know. It tells us of the movement of the people, actually, but it sounds like the movement of the birds. They compare it to the birds, that is why they are using bird names in there.



AA: It is my understanding that the migration started in Palm Springs, after the death of the creator, Mukat. According to what I was told and understand, the people got sad and confused. They didn't know what to do. They went to look for another place to live. It was a terrible thing they did, causing Mukat's death. So they went southeast to Yuma. That's why a lot of the songs, I think, are in that language. Maybe they traded songs, too. What I understand, from what Joe Patencio said, there was some songs we sang in the Yuma language. Then we went down into Mexico and, of course, there was a lot of hardship. It was a harsh land, a lot of desert. I think they decided to come back. Where they originated from was the best place of all. But they didn't come back by the same route. In fact, they went towards Tecate and through Temecula and through this way. Then once we got close to home, through Soboba. We were so anxious to get home that we flew over the San Jacinto Mountains. There is a hill at the mouth of the Andreas Canyon where my clan landed. Joe Patencio's clan kept going and they skated by the spa and caused the water to come up. Well, that's what he told me. Now whether he was making it up or not—I didn't ask him if it was true or not. He told me that, and it sounded good to me. How the other clans arrived, I don't know. Some

Bird song map

Shown here are some of the places mentioned by Anthony Andreas as being part of the migrations that inspired the bird songs.

Robert Levi, 1990

In the late 1980s the bird singers received a Master/Apprentice grant from the California Arts Council. Here, Torres-Martinez singer Robert Levi sings bird songs with apprentices Mark Macarro and Luke Madrigal, two of a new generation of young men who are dedicated to preserving the art, known affectionately as "singing birds."

Photograph: John Bishop



say they came through the pass here from Soboba this way.

DD: So the bird songs are specifically about the migration, about the route, about the time, or their adventures on the way?

AA: Well, I don't understand all the songs. I just know the story behind those songs. That's what I told you. There are certain things that happened on the way that is recorded in these songs. The different people they meet on the way, but they are birds. They are different birds. In the songs, they become birds. There is this other song, the return song. "The ground is beautiful because they are coming closer to the home. They are recognizing their home place." That is why they fly over. They are so anxious to get home, they fly over the San Jacinto Mountains.

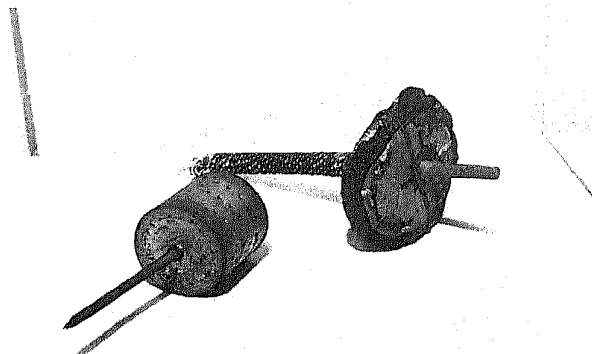
DD: And being birds, that is not so hard.

AA: That is right. When I was growing up, I didn't know that story. They used to call them "birds." That's how we grew up. I didn't ask why they called them birds. No one asked that. Then when Joe Patencio

told me this story, it kind of made sense. My grandmother didn't tell me much, but that it was a journey. They never went into what specific things they did or... But Joe Patencio went a little farther and said we went to Yuma and met those people there. But they were birds in the songs.

DD: Now other Cahuilla versions of the migration include travels all the way down into South America and over to New England and...

AA: Oh yeah. Well, I don't know. After the death of Mukat it could very well be that others have taken off from this very same migration and went farther. Maybe these particular people didn't go as far. I can't say.



Rattles from the old days

The use of a gourd as a sound chamber for a rattle is common, but a host of other materials have been used as well. In this photo you can see a rattle inspired by designs from prehistory. A small tortoise shell has been wrapped with copper wire to create a fabric in the spaces where the tortoise's head and other appendages protruded. A stick has been worked and added as a handle. In the old days, plant fibers or leather thongs were used to make the fabric element of the rattle. The 20th century offered another favorite material for rattles, evaporated milk cans. Anthony Andreas and Alvino Siva both remember finding milk cans as children and making rattles much like the one shown here.

Photograph: Deborah Dozier

There is this other song, the return song. "The ground is beautiful because they are coming closer to the home. They are recognizing their home place."

—Anthony Andreas

Bird Songs

Saturnino Torres
at age 76, 1990

Born in 1913, noted
Cahuilla elder from
Torres-Martinez
Saturnino Torres has a
message for Cahuilla
children:

“Work hard. Keep away
from drugs. Try and learn
as much as you can about
our culture. Don’t let it
die completely.”

Photograph: John Bishop



Bird Singers, 1990

Boys begin their bird-singing apprenticeship while very young, learning the bird songs little by little, taking a more prominent role in the group as their skills and technique improve. In bird singing, as in most other aspects of Cahuilla culture, the eldest bird singer in the group is the lead singer. Each geographic area has its own group of bird singers. The most prominent elder bird singers are Saturnino Torres, Robert Levi, Alvino Siva, and Anthony Andreas. This group of bird singers at the Malki Fiesta features (left to right) guest singer Paul Apodaca, Ernie Siva, Mark Macarro, Alvino Siva, Saturnino Torres, and Luke Madrigal.

Collection of Malki Museum

And all these migrations could have been at the same time, is what I’m telling you. But this is the only part that I know of. I’m not saying that is it, maybe there was more in between that we have forgotten. Maybe these bird songs are the ones we know now, it could be the tail end of the journey. I can’t say.

DD: Tony, how long have you been singing on your own?

AA: Since '75, 1975.

DD: What is the future of bird singing?

AS: At first, Will Austin, Joe Patencio, and I said, “Hey, we are going to be losing these songs. We have to do something.” So I started continuing the singing. I sang by myself at the Malki Museum for about, I guess, three years. And then I got my nephew Robert Levi into it. His father was a singer. He didn’t really follow it. He didn’t sit with his father and learn all the songs. His father’s songs are a little different than Joe Patencio’s songs. Anyway, so, I got him to go and then somebody—I think it was Paul Apodaca—said, “You people can get a grant given to you for teaching apprentices.” So Robert said, “Let’s see if we can get us some boys.” So we got three or four boys and we got a grant. But what I am running into now, you know, it does—well it does take many years to become a singer. You don’t become a singer just overnight. You can’t say, “I know these songs.”

DD: Have you taught a lot of singers, too?

AA: Well, I don’t exactly teach them. If they want to sing, they listen. I have never sat down and taught anybody.

DD: So it is not a formal education process?

AA: No. I should, but I don’t. They just learn it by listening to me. Some boys have learned since they were this high. Now they are adult, 25 years old.

DD: Does someone have to be invited to sing or can they just come out of a desire to sing?

AA: They just sit down sometimes, hey, they are here.

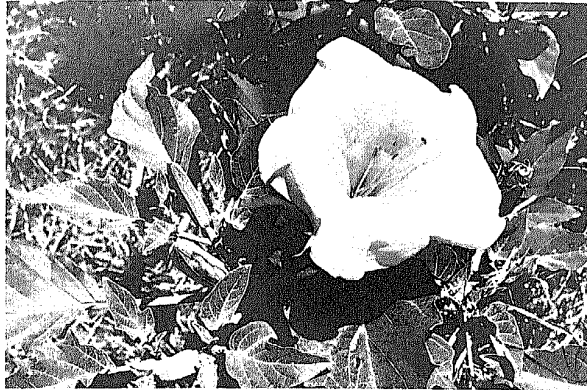
DD: You start with kids that are two or three years old?

AA: Yeah. At 18 they are over the hill, especially the girls. I have two boys who were young. Now they are in their twenties and they sing with me.

AS: I remember this old man, Perfecto Segundo, would

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to become a singer. You
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—Alvino Siva



Kiksawva'al (Jimsonweed, Thorn-Apple)

Datura meteloides

This deadly beauty is well respected by the elders as the source of a powerful drug used in prehistoric and historic times during the transition from boyhood to manhood. The recipe for extracting the drug is no longer known. Elders sadly shake their heads and relate the stories of young people who didn't understand the power hidden in each part of the plant and died experimenting with it.

According to Alvino Siva, after the shamans had prepared the potion which caused hallucinations, disorientation, and paralysis they administered only one drop to the initiates who were to participate in the ceremony. It was used as a memory aid for the boys who had to learn large amounts of material during the ceremonial period.

Photograph: Deborah Dozier

say that when they were teaching the kids the songs, they would give them this dream weed, Jimson. They would put it in their cups and the kids would get drunk and then they sing the songs to them. There must be something in there that works on your memory so the kids won't forget the songs. I might do that, try that myself. But they said just a little bit. When you brew it, just put your finger in it and then put it on the tongue. That is enough right there. Don't drink it.

DD: I know many Indian and non-Indian kids have died from trying to use that plant.

AS: Oh yeah, because they don't know what it is all about.

DD: Isn't the bird the major hero or another animal is the major hero talking about how to overcome difficulty, how to overcome adversity? This was a method of passing down what? Physics, chemistry...

AS: And history.

DD: And cosmology...

AS: Yes, they sing about the stars, they sing about the seven sisters. They sing about the spider that is supposed to be in the stars. The spider is a tarantula. This one portion where it says, "They are climbing, those seven sisters. They are climbing." Then, "They are leaving, they are going." The one that follows is telling, "They have climbed. They are gone, they are there now."

And then the next one says, this is towards the morning, the song says, "These are the ones, the first that he had put there." Up there, it says, there is a blue streak that is the seven sisters. There is a blue dot and that is the spiders. That is what the song is about. But a lot of them now want to interpret it different, but I am just interpreting it by what the old people say to me. So I go by what they always told. Now Tony's songs, I don't know what his songs are about. His are altogether different. Anyway, they supposedly started that way from years back, millions of years back, I guess, from as long as we have been here.

These were just for joyous occasions. But they had different songs for a death. Then afterwards you can sing bird songs.

Yes, they sing about the stars, they sing about the seven sisters. They sing about the spider that is supposed to be in the stars. The spider is a tarantula.

—Alvino Siva



Cahuilla bird singers and bird dancers, c. 1990

This is Anthony Andreas' group of bird singers and dancers from the Painiktum clan. Everyone is invited to join in this dance.

*Photograph: George Piquino
Collection of the Malki Museum*

DD: Which is why there is the restraint against singing bird songs for a year after a death?

AS: Yes. This is a restriction against you singing if someone in your family has died. Close family, maybe like my brother or my sister. Then you don't sing for a year.

DD: How many bird songs are there?

AS: When I came back from out of the service and we would be singing together, Joe would say to me, "What is next?" I would think and I would think, "This is next," and I would sing him the song and he would say, "No. That is another group." He would tell me there are three groups of those songs. Who knows how many songs?

You can sing from seven o'clock in the evening until six or seven o'clock in the morning and just take maybe a half-hour or forty-five-minute break at midnight for coffee—to get coffee and pie, whatever, you know. And you sing one song for maybe three, four minutes. That is a lot of songs.

How you can keep those songs in sequence is the big question. How can you remember that this comes and then this one next, see?

I can probably sing maybe four or five hours now, but then I am kind of... Nobody else knows either whether I am singing in the right sequence. If they ask me to sing and I listen to my recordings, the main one I got is a tape with just a few words of the song. On my little cassette like that, I have to plug it in my ear and I will push the button and it will play the beginning of each one of them. I never counted how many songs I have.

AA: You learn just by memory. To the old songs there is no meaning. I mean the meaning has been forgotten. But they go with a story. A story about the migration. These songs were taught to those singers. A certain part of the series. It is all in category. There is a pattern and a system to all these songs.

DD: So you have to go in the proper sequence?

AA: Yeah.

DD: And if you get out of the proper sequence, do you have to back up to where you were doing it right and go again?

AA: No. Maybe that was done before, but I know Joe

You can sing from seven o'clock in the evening until six or seven o'clock in the morning... And you sing one song for maybe three, four minutes. That is a lot of songs.

—Alvino Siva



Cahuilla Women Dancers, 1976

These women are dancing at the Andreas Ranch in Andreas Canyon, traditional home of the Painiktum clan. The women are from the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. Beautiful ribbon dresses were adopted by the women at Agua Caliente in the 1900s. The tradition was abandoned by the 1930s but recently they have again become fashionable.

Back: Eugene Segundo, Jr.

Center (left to right): Lois Segundo Lewis, Annette Segundo Guzman, Cindy St. John, Michelle Andreas

Front: Paula Andreas, Anna Patencio, Ronette Saubel, Lorena Saubel, Leila Saubel

Collection of the Malki Museum

Patencio used to skip around. He would start off with a certain series, and then after a while, he would just skip around.

DD: How do you keep all this knowledge recorded?

AA: I got a little crank here... [He points to the side of his head.]

DD: You have memorized the sequences and all the words...

AA: Just the beginning parts. After the first couple of hours, I just skip around too. If you sing one song, you have to be thinking about the next two, what's the next two. They almost sound alike. Sometimes I can't remember the next one, so I go to the one after that. Later, if I want to, I come back and pick that one up after a break. I gotta take a ten-minute break. I usually sing anywhere from a couple of hours to all night.

I have taped five one-hour tapes. But I don't sing them all. I have these written down. My grandmother had a book. A lot of those... the only thing is that I remember the tune. So I would look at these words that she wrote. Pretty soon I would get the tune. As I was growing up, I would do that. I got this book in the early sixties. I was always trying to figure out what the songs were. I got about half of them figured out. With the help of Joe Patencio, I learned a lot of songs that I never sang before. I had heard them, so it was easier to pick them up.

DD: So did your grandmother write down the whole song, or just the first line?

AA: The first line, because if you wrote the whole song it would take a whole page. So she would write just the first line. You sing each line three times.

DD: So there is a formal structure for these songs?

AA: Yes. And you have to remember it too. Sometimes I will forget. You sing that verse three times, and you go up high twice, then you do it again three more times, go up high twice, then three more times, then after the last two you quit.

DD: So for each song there is one phrase, and you repeat it three times in a lower voice, twice in a higher voice, three times in a lower voice, then twice in a higher voice?

AA: Um-hmm. Sometimes I can cut it short if I want to

You sing that verse three times, and you go up high twice, then you do it again three more times, go up high twice, then three more times, then after the last two you quit.

—Anthony Andreas

I stayed in the service, because I would think everything was going to be the same when I came back, I would just fit back in. No way. When I came back, everybody was dead—gone—that knew anything.

—Alvino Siva

cut it short and do it two times instead of three. It is up to the lead singer. The ones who sing with me know when I am going to do it. It is just automatic. They are just ready for it if I extend the music one more time.

AS: Yeah, and this is what the old people knew. See, Joe knew that. Oh heck, yes. Maybe I would have if the war hadn't come along. But I stayed in the service, because I would think everything was going to be the same when I came back, I would just fit back in. No way. When I came back, everybody was dead—gone—that knew anything.

DD: During the twenty years you were in the service, did you sing at all?

AS: Well, yes. When I was alone, I would sing and try to keep up remembering the songs.

DD: So how did you just start singing again after the war? Were there groups existing still?

AS: Joe was the only one. Joe Patencio was down here. This was another thing. When the last Patencio died, the older Patencio, which was Albert, they burnt the ceremonial house. This was the place where Joe would sing all night. He told me, "Now that my house is gone, I can't sing all night." So they would invite him, like they do me now, send him to Idyllwild, and maybe he would go sing for an hour, an hour and a half, two hours. I went with him to Soboba, down to Palm Springs. Then we would sing here at the fiesta. At the fiesta sometimes we would sing for three hours, maybe four hours. But we never did sing all night. I was just getting back into it when all of a sudden, Joe just died. He asked me, he used to say to me, "Come on down and stay with me for maybe a month and we will sing all these songs. Not only the bird songs, but the ceremonial songs." What we call our war dance songs. He knew those. He would say, "We will sing and we will record them together." I never had the chance to go.

DD: So what do you have to do to prepare for a bird singing engagement? If someone is going to have a party, they call you up and ask if you would come and sing? Do you get paid for this?

AA: No, I don't charge anything. In fact, I was told never

to charge. I could accept donations if people wanted to. Usually, people will feed me and my group. But I don't charge. If I am asked to sing—sometimes I go to the Colorado River and sing in Parker, Needles, Mojave—but they will give me some money. In fact, one time I sang and they gave me two packs of cigarettes. That meant more to me than the money because it was symbolic. The smokes, the cigarettes, were symbolic.

DD: So when the day of the singing comes, do you have a special outfit that you wear?

AA: No, we never did that.

DD: Then you travel light? You grab your rattle and go?

AA: Have rattle. Will travel. Yeah, I have been asked to sing at Summerton, Arizona for the Papagos—Yuma, Needles, Parker, and other places. Rincon, Pala, I sang there.

DD: How many people sing in your group?

AA: Well, right now there is sixteen of us. There is four male singers, four teenage boys, three teenage girls, and five under five years old.

DD: Do you meet regularly for practice?

AA: No. We only meet when we go to do a performance. I do a lot of performances, too, for non-Indian functions, for private parties, different functions. Historical functions. Like in Indio we did one. Now there, we dressed up. We have a costume for performing. The girls have a long dress. I wear a ribbon shirt and a cowboy hat. For lack of a costume, that's what we wear. The reason I wear a handkerchief around my neck is that I look at the old pictures and the men had their cowboy hat, or a hat of some sort, and a handkerchief around their neck. That's the closest I can identify with having any costume.

The girls, the dress they wear is similar to what the women wore in the early 1900s. The beadwork. Of course, it is fixed up more now, more colorful. But it is based on that. You will find that with other dance groups from other states. They all say that it is based on the costume worn in those days, but they just fixed it up. I'm sure that if the Indians had then what we have now, they would have used it.

DD: Your rattles are so beautiful! They look like they are one of a kind.

I don't charge. . . . One time I sang and they gave me two packs of cigarettes. That meant more to me than the money because it was symbolic. The smokes, the cigarettes, were symbolic.

—Anthony Andreas

If you harvest [the gourds] too soon, then hang them up to let them mature and season, they don't get the same sound as when you let it ripen right on the vine.

—Alvino Siva

AS: I have a rattle here. This belonged to my father. It is cracked so I just keep it now. See the crack right there? Listen [shakes the rattle].

DD: Oh, it has a dull sound to it!

AS: This is what I use when I go perform [he shows a sky blue rattle]. I was going to put a design on that one, but I never did finish [shakes rattle].

DD: Wow. Beautiful, Alvino. I see you used some modern materials in construction, like acrylic paint and...

AS: [Laughs] Yeah. I should go out and gather some materials. See this little one here? I use this one when we do our ceremonial singing. This is the bottom half of a gourd, see? This one has a pretty good sound to it. I think that the reason was that it was vine-ripened, that makes a good sound. If you harvest it too soon, then hang them up to let them mature and season, they don't get the same sound as when you let it ripen right on the vine. So that is the main thing.

It grows all over the Southwest, in New Mexico. They are growing wild in Mexico. This was this fellow up in Anza that grew these. They are like melons.

AA: Yeah, it's a special gourd. There is only one kind. I don't know what the name is. Anyway, you get the gourd. You pick the one that has a good shape. It has to be round, because sometimes they lie flat on one side and get three-sided, or one side is flat. A good size is about four or five inches across.

I cut the neck off. I get a knife and clean out the inner part. Then I get a long screwdriver and clean out what is inside. I will get some pebbles and put in there. Then I boil it.

DD: What are the pebbles inside for?

AA: It holds it down, if it is boiling... It [boiling] helps—if it is kind of flat on one side, the water helps to puff it out a little bit. Maybe not all the way, but it helps. I boil it for an hour. Everyone does it differently. I know Alvino does it differently, and others too. I will take out the pebbles and let it dry out a couple of days out in the sun. Then I get it back, and by that time the inner part has loosened up. You can get a screwdriver and scrape around in there.



That stuff in there dulls the sound. You have to get them all out. If I can't get them all out, I usually use broken glass and put it in there and shake it. There must be a better way than breaking glass. I don't know the way they did it in the old days. I used to get these little tacks at the hardware store, not thumbtacks, but little brads. I would put them in there and they would really clean it out real good.

AS: After I boil it [shakes rattle] and it softens that thing in there, then you can really scrape. But, you have to be careful because a lot of times you can get it too thin on one side or maybe the whole thing, and then it will just crack. So what I did with this to prevent that, I sprayed it with urethane. That is what I got on there [shakes rattle]. Modern Indian. They didn't have that years ago, so they had to be careful how they scraped it.

AA: Each gourd has a different tone. Sometimes you think you got a nice gourd, but when you get it finished, it's not a good sound. I have a few I play that have a good sound. I have others that are either too loud or too dull. The thickness of the gourd matters too. You put holes in it to get the sound to come out.

AS: And you can't tell how it is going to sound until it dries completely. On my other one, I was in a hurry to use it, so after I cleaned it out to where I thought it was thin enough, I put it in the oven to help dry it out. It came out pretty good.

Rattles by Alvino Siva

Photographs: Deborah Dozier

Years ago, they used the resin from the mesquite. . . . But I use modern methods. I went down to the hardware store and got some Elmer's glue and put it on there.

—Alvino Siva

AA: After that, I would get some seeds from the palm tree. I have to cure those. When you pick them, they have the fruit on them. I put the seeds in there without the handle, or I will get the handle and I kind of tape it and see if I need any more seeds. I play it a little bit [to hear] if it sounds just right, or I will take some seeds out. If I got the right amount of seeds in there, I will glue the handle on.

AS: The volume comes in the size. The bigger it is, the more [shakes rattle]. And then I found out, also, that what makes a lot of difference is the size of those little palm seeds. If you use the bigger seeds you will get a different sound altogether. I got a whole bunch of those seeds divided into the different sizes.

Then you get your little handle on there. Years ago, they used the resin from the mesquite. It is just like glue and [you] put it on there. But I use modern methods. I went down to the hardware store and got some Elmer's glue and put it on there [laughter].

AA: Well, if they had Elmer's glue in those days, they would use it. All of the tools I use are modern-day tools. I use it to make the holes, to shape it. I use a file, I use a knife.

One guy told me, "Hey, this is not an authentic Cahuilla gourd rattle." I said, "How come?" He said it was modern paint, it was acrylic and all that. I said, "Well, I am a Cahuilla Indian. I made that rattle, and if the Indians had this paint then, they would have used it." He said that I was right. He did say this isn't a traditional Cahuilla design. I told him that it was if I made it, because I am Cahuilla. It's like tamales or tacos, you know. Oh, that's Mexican food. Yeah, if a Mexican makes it. But if an Indian makes it, it's Indian food.

Then the handle is made out of cottonwood root, because it is lighter, easier to carve. But you can never tell. You have to find a cottonwood tree that has already fallen. So you have to go up the creek looking for one. Sometimes they are no good, they have worms. But you can't see it from the outside until you scrape it. It is a trial-and-error thing.

DD: Your handle looks different, Alvino.

AS: This one here, this is cedar, because cedar is light. Almost all of my rattle handles are made out of

cedar. If you are going to shake it a long time, you want to have it light, see?

DD: So you put the handle on and then you paint it, varnish it?

AA: Then I paint it or varnish it.

DD: Do you have colors that you prefer or are there standard colors?

AA: I use any color I feel like using at the time.

AS: If you want to put designs, you can put designs on. But years ago, they didn't have no paintings. Only these modern Indians do all that stuff now.

Well, I am a Cahuilla Indian. I made that rattle, and if the Indians had this paint then, they would have used it.

—Anthony Andreas



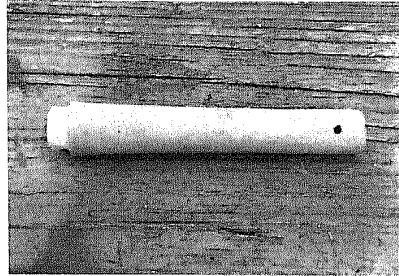
Three gourds

These gourds will eventually become rattles if they make it through the long process of transformation; at any stage of the process the gourd may crack or be punctured by a slip of the hand, rendering it useless. Tending the gourds while they are still on the vine, turning and repositioning them regularly as they grow so that they do not flatten or dent, creates the proper round form.

Cleaning the gourd

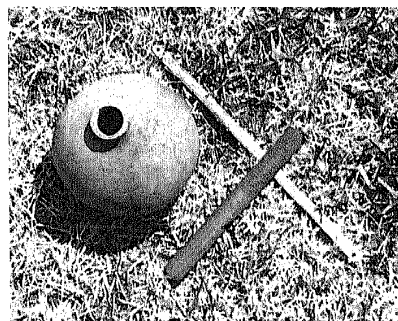
The tough fibers which form the interior of the gourd must be removed. Failure to remove enough of the material results in a dulled sound which does not carry. This is perhaps the most tedious, time-consuming, and critical step of the process, and the step at which many gourds are ruptured and discarded.

The sound chamber is created by submerging the cleaned, weighted gourd in boiling water for an hour or so. This process softens any fibers remaining inside so they can be scraped away. The softening also permits the reforming of any portion of the rattle which is not perfectly round.



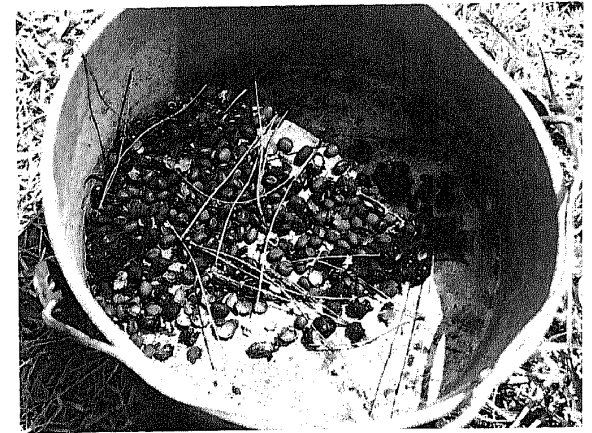
Carving the handle

Although the handle might seem like the least important part of the rattle, it connects the sound chambers of the rattles to the bodies of the singers, who must accompany the songs with rhythmic punctuation for many hours at a time with only a few short breaks. The handle must be well-balanced, light, porous, and comfortable to the touch to prevent fatigue in the singer's hands and arms. Cottonwood and cedar are preferred by many rattle makers.



Dates

These dates from the California fan palm, *Washingtonia filifera*, wait to be cleaned. The black, sugary flesh will be removed, the seeds will be allowed to dry, and the translucent, fibrous membrane which covers the seed will be rubbed off. The clean date pits are sorted by size and those with imperfections are discarded.



Finished bird song rattles

These three rattles, made by Anthony Andreas, combine acoustic excellence with perfect, modern form and artistic execution.

Photographs: Deborah Dozier