

What is the significance of a Round Dance?

A Round Dance is a traditional Indigenous dance ceremony in which participants form a circle and move in a clockwise direction. This dance holds cultural and spiritual significance. Round Dance ceremonies originally were held for memorial purposes to honour late loved ones. Round Dances can also symbolize unity, community, and a connection to the land, ancestors, and the Creator. As of lately, Round Dances are also performed at gatherings, celebrations, and social events to bring people together and celebrate their culture.

When and where are Round Dances typically held?

Round Dances are primarily hosted during the winter months, often starting at dusk and concluding at dawn, particularly in Northern communities. They can be conducted indoors or outdoors, depending on the location and the preferences of the hosting community.

Participants do not need to be in attendance for the entirety of the Round Dance. Attendees are welcome to leave a little earlier or arrive a little later.

Why is a feast provided before a Round Dance, and what does the feast entail?

Round Dances typically commence with a traditional ceremonial feast, where elders smudge and offer prayers over the food. This feast serves multiple purposes, including honoring late relatives who have journeyed into the spirit world. During the feast, participants gather in a large circle on the floor, with elders having the option to sit in chairs. Traditional foods such as soup, Bannock, tea, fruit, and cookies are served.

Who can participate in a Round Dance?

Everyone is welcome! Round Dances are inclusive, inviting individuals of all ages from various cultural backgrounds to participate. This participation presents an opportunity to learn about Indigenous cultures, fostering cultural exchange and understanding. Indigenous communities frequently extend a warm invitation to guests, promoting respect among a wide range of people, regardless of their age, heritage, or cultural identity.

What should one wear? Are specific regalia or clothing required for the Round Dance?

The attire worn during a Round Dance can vary based on the specific Indigenous culture and event. Some participants choose traditional clothing, such as ribbon skirts for females and ribbon or appliqué shirts for males, while others opt for more casual attire. It is essential to respect the cultural preferences and guidelines of the hosting community. Regardless of attire, attendees should dress respectfully and appropriately.

What types of songs are performed during a Round Dance?

Round dance songs come in various forms, featuring diverse lyrics and melodies. They can include traditional songs, contemporary compositions, or social songs that tell stories, express love, or convey community messages. These songs are accompanied by drumming and singing.

Is there a specific protocol for participating in a Round Dance?

While protocols may vary among different Indigenous communities, a general approach is to engage in the dance with respect, humility, and a willingness to learn. Participants should follow the lead of the dancers and adhere to any instructions provided by the event organizers.

Dancing at the Round Dance:

- For dancing, gather in a circle and hold hands with the people on either side of you, with your left hand facing up and your right hand facing down. Individuals can join in anywhere in the circle and at any time during a dance.
- The circle moves to the left. This reflects the way the Earth moves around the sun. It is believed that when moving with the direction of the Earth, you are healing.
- Step to the beat of the drums. The drums can signify the heartbeat of Mother Earth.
- No need to worry about the specifics of the movement...but if you want to get advanced:
 - Step left with your left foot (which represents the male), then slide your right foot (represents the female) next to it. Your right foot, the female, stays close to the ground to represent how closely you are to the Earth.
- Dancing is optional! Everyone is still welcome to attend. Feel free to have a seat and watch.

Can women play the drum at a Round Dance?

In most Saskatchewan Indigenous Communities, it is a protocol that women do not play the drum. However, women are encouraged to stand behind the drummers and provide backup vocals. This practice is rooted in respect for the history and culture associated with Indigenous communities in the area.

How can I learn more about Indigenous Round Dances?

Learning more about Indigenous Round Dances can be achieved through attending events, participating in cultural workshops, or reading about the traditions and histories of specific Indigenous communities. Building relationships with Indigenous people and elders can also serve as a valuable source of knowledge.