

## CURT CACIOPPO: WOMB OF THE SACRED MOUNTAINS



### III. Kinaaldá: the Rite of Changing Woman

Third in the Womb cycle, *Kinaaldá* traces a particular episode from the Navajo creation story, in this case, the rite of passage of the principal Navajo deity Changing Woman. *Kinaaldá* is in two parts, a Fantasy followed by a set of Theme & Variations.

The Fantasy narrates the events leading up to the actual first *kinaaldá* ceremony, which marked Changing Woman's coming of age. At the beginning, Changing Woman, on the threshold of adulthood, is in dialogue with the cloud colors that hover over the Sacred Mountains. First Man then appears, and helps her gather together her thoughts and feelings, addressing especially her expressions of loneliness. Along with First Man come *Nítch'i*, the Wind, and Talking God, one of the Holy People who created First Man and First Woman. Together they prepare the stage for Changing Woman's *kinaaldá*, in particular making mention of the Sun-Bearer, who will become her husband. After *Nítch'i* has purified the environs, a Medicine Song begins the ceremony proper. Following this, the "molding" takes place –the symbolic shaping of the initiate by a female elder of the tribe into a strong, tall, beautiful, fertile, wise and exemplary mother of the community. The initiate then dances in a joyous, sacred manner. Toward the end of Part I, Changing Woman's impregnation occurs, which will bring forth Monsterslayer and his twin brother Born for Water. Eventually the twins will make the world habitable for humans, all the diverse groups of which Changing Woman creates from her own flesh.

Part II starts with a Theme which represents Changing Woman in full flower (this also represents SUMMER). To describe briefly the program of the ensuing Variations:

Var. I - also Courante 1: every other variation is a "courante," representing the running that the initiate has to do 3 times a day as part of the ceremony;

Var. II - this is a maestoso in strong dotted rhythms (representing FALL) – the unisons between the inner parts toward the end represent the voice of Talking God;

Var. III - Courante 2 - this is a fast 12/8, something like a gigue or tarantella

maybe;

Var. IV - this represents WINTER on the reservation – it is all muted, and almost all the writing huddles above middle C;

Var. V - Courante 3 - I chose to write a fugue, and it is here that the highpoint of the whole quartet occurs;

Var. VI - the previous variation makes a segue into this one, which represents SPRING -- it is reminiscent of the 4th of my Pawnee Preludes ("Spring is Opening");

Reprise - the sixth variation leads directly into a restatement of the Theme, symbolizing Changing Woman's cyclical recurrence.

For a thorough discussion of the Kinaaldá ceremony, the study by Charlotte Frisbie, published by the University of Utah Press, is highly recommended:

