

Straight Dance by Jan Hackett

Sometimes called the "Southern Traditional" and often referred to as the "Old man's" dance the Straight Dance finds its roots in the warrior societies of the Hethuska. The outfit is comprised of many pieces and care must be taken to coordinate the various parts. The dance clothes combined with the graceful and stately movements of the dancers come together to create a stunning dance style.

Let us discuss these items as a dancer gets ready to enter the arena. The first item put on by most dancers is a pair of leggings. You will find two distinct styles of leggings, the first style is made of trade cloth with elaborate ribbon work on the inside of the flaps. The ribbon work is exposed by holding the flap open with the garters and bells that are worn just below the knee. This style of leggings are found commonly among the Osage, Fox and the Ponca. The other style of leggings are typically made of white or natural leather and have a tab extending downward from just above the knee. The inside of the tab should be covered with trade cloth and edge beading finishes the tabs nicely. This style of leggings is typical of the Kiowa and Comanche.

The next item will be the trailer and apron set, these are generally made from trade cloth, although you will sometimes find other types of materials being used. When making your apron and trailer keep in mind that the color red is reserved for the oldest son. The better apron and trailer sets will have elaborate Osage style ribbon work. If you wear trade cloth leggings the ribbon work should coordinate with the apron and trailer set.



The next item to be put on is the ribbon shirt, the colors and patterns used in this traditional shirt are endless. The one rule is that the ribbon on the shirt matches the color of the neckerchief and scarf set.

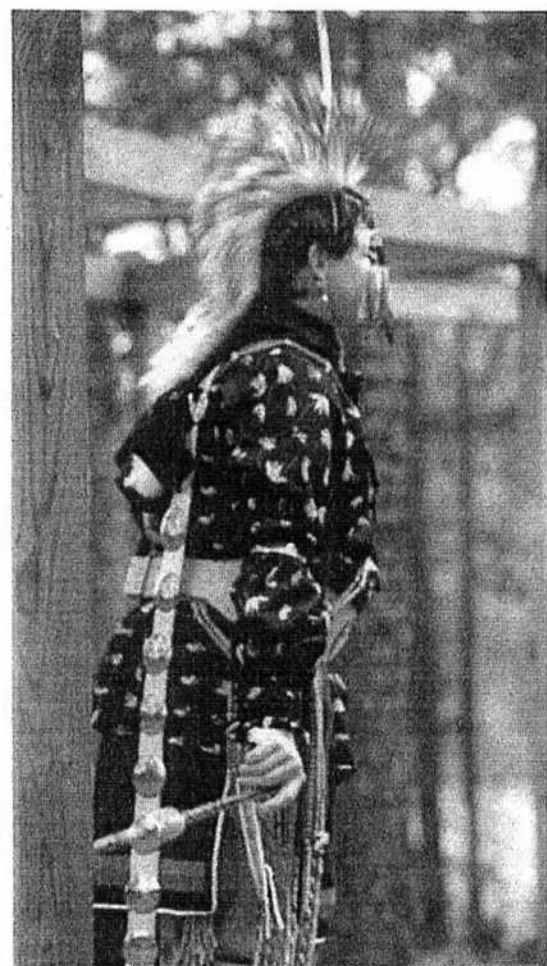
The next item to be put on is the bandoliers, there are two of them one worn over each shoulder. The items used in the construction of bandoliers varies greatly, you will find bone, horn, pony beads, old shell casings, brass beads, silver beads and more. Usually attached to the bandoliers at the shoulder blades is the scarf "set" (note some dancers attach them directly to the ribbon shirt) the important thing to remember here is that the color matches the ribbon on the shirt and neckerchief. The scarves will sometimes have conchos, feathers, plumes or other adornments attached to them. Some dancers will have a ball of sweetgrass tied in the center of the scarves and then attached to the shirt or bandoliers. You must be cautious of this as some will say this is a peyote sign, while others say it is to keep the dance clothes fresh.

The next item to put on is the choker, the materials used in its construction should match the materials used in the bandoliers. There is generally four rows in the choker and a conch shell in the center. Next we add the drag or otter strip, it attaches around the neck and hangs down the back touching the floor. Probably the most common is a full otter skin or a simulated otter strip mounted to broad cloth and decorated with beading, feathers, mirrors, rosettes and more. The other common drop/drag is conchos or silver hair plates mounted to a piece of leather. The ends of the drag or otter will sometimes be adorned with horse hair and peyote beading. Once the drag and choker are in place it is time for your neckerchief and slide. The slide is typically made of German silver and the color of the neckerchief is the same as the ribbon on the shirt and scarves.

The next piece of the outfit to put on is the assumption belt, it is made from yarn using the traditional finger weaving process. The belt should be long enough that the ends hang to your knees. You will see the belt worn in two manners, the ends of the belt hanging at both knees. The other way is with both ends hanging from the right side. On top of the assumption belt will be a heavy leather belt. There are many different ways to decorate this leather belt the most common being conchos or a large piece of loom beadwork. One note of interest here is the belt covers the bandoliers in the back but not in the front.

At this point it is time for your garters, they are worn just below the knee on the outside of the leggings. A simple over hand will hold them in place and the ends should touch the ground. The garters are made in the same fashion as the assumption belt and with the same materials. It is now time to add your "noise" makers. With cloth leggings sleigh bells mounted to heavy leather are worn on top of your garters. If you choose to wear Kiowa or Commanche style leggings it is acceptable to wear deer hoof clackers or bells. Add a pair of plains style moccasins that are partially beaded and you are just about ready for the Grand Entry. Southern Cheyenne style moccasins are popular among dancers but watch out for those dusters.

It is now time to put on your German Silver arm bands, they are worn just above the elbows helping to keep the sleeves of your ribbon shirt in place while dancing. Often you will see ribbons hanging from the arm bands. These ribbons should match the ribbon found on the shirt and hang down to your waist.



The roach is the last item to put on, it is made of porcupine guard hair along with a row of deer hair on the outside and or inside. The shortest hairs are used at the back of the roach and gradually get longer towards the front they should stand upright from the base. A more prized roach is one made of turkey beards and deer hair. You will sometimes see dancers with a white hankie worn as a head band. This is another item that some say is a peyote sign and some say it is just to keep your face dry. The roach is attached with the use of a spreader and roach pin, the spreader is made of German Silver and has one socket for a single eagle feather. The roach pin attaches the roach to the head through the spreader. In days past a small braid of hair would be pulled through the hole in the spreader and the roach pin pushed through the braid keeping the roach in place, and some dancers still use this method today. The scalp feathers attach at the base of the roach and are secured around one of the roach ties and hair. At one time the way these feathers were cut and decorated showed your family or society associations, today most dancers simply wear them. If you are inclined to wear ear rings this is the time to put them on.

The last things you need are hand held items. A fan is always a must and you will see flat and loose feather types. Some dancers carry a pouch of white deerskin, with beaded decoration or other types of bags. You will see some dancers with a tail stick, it originated as the badge of office for Tail Dancers in the Hethuska. The tail stick is the one item you are not aloud to make for yourself. It is the custom that someone else presents it to you. Often times an experienced dancer will present you with your tail stick but family members and close friends have been known to do

this also. If you have not been given a tail stick then a mirror board is what you should carry.

The art of Straight dancing is in the many parts that make up the outfit and the slow majestic movement. Often times the greatness of a dancer is in the little and unnoticed things. A powerful sense of pride combined with a exactness with songs and dance etiquette is the mark of an outstanding Straight dancer.

