Ladies Social (nighttime ceremonial dance) kwe-niimi’waad

This month I would like to talk about a part of the dance that I haven’t covered as much as I’d like. We call it the “social” or the “night dance” which is the portion of the ceremonial dance that happens after the afternoon session. After we’ve completed the daytime dance we will usually break for supper. The ladies will prepare food for the people attending the dance. After this is when we will start our social dancing. It should be noted that even if you did not come to the daytime, you are more than welcome to attend the nighttime. Dishes could be brought out during this time, however most of the ceremonial things have been completed. After people have been fed and the tables cleared. The singers will start with a few open songs, when the ladies are ready, they will let either the drummers or the drum keeper know that they are ready to begin. Once this is done, on some drums they will sing various number of songs dedicated for the Ogichidaakweg or the ladies of the drum. When I was growing up it was only the Ogichidaakweg that would dance to them, and they were the ones who invited people up to dance with them. They would offer the partner a quilt to dance with them, and in return they would give them a blanket in exchange the following song. This is a basic understanding of how the nighttime dance works. When dancing the ladies can choose whoever is in the audience.

Nowadays, it has become that all the ladies in attendance to dance during these songs. Yet sometimes the drummers will leave a song or two solely for the Ogichidaakweg. Also, it has been common place for the exchange to happen from other people that aren’t ladies on the drum, but ladies in attendance. Please be prepared if you plan on attending to bring enough gifts for any number of songs you might be asked to dance. The gifts have become slightly different over the years where I have received many things from a flower, blanket, and money. All is correct to bring when you attend the social. Something important to keep track of when there are a lot of people at the dance is that you should keep track of who gave you what and make sure that you give them something in return. It can turn into an awkward situation when the person remembers and you may not.

A drum keeper was asked some years ago during this time of the dance that people not smoke in the dance hall. The main reason for this is because of the people in attendance who may be negatively affected health wise by the smoke itself. Because of this sometimes we will take a break during the night so that the dancers and singers who need a break can step outside for a bit. People may wonder what type of songs we dance to. They aren’t all round dance songs, sometimes they sing more of an “intertribal” song that everyone can dance to. Some places that you attend will have a late lunch for those still around. The ladies will prepare some small snacks and beverages to help people keep busting a move.

A last few important things to note is that these nighttime dances can last a very long time. I remember one a long time ago that went all the way to sun up, that was the longest I have ever attended since. The ladies will keep an eye on everyone to determine how tired people are so that they know when to begin ending the dance. With some ceremonial drums you know when they end because they will sing a traveling song. Last thing to note is that this is largely a Minnesota ceremonial dance practice that our relatives in Wisconsin tend not to have evening dances. To me these are the fun times and you see happiness in people when they dance and socialize. For those of you that have never been to one of these I invite you to come and attend one, everybody is welcome no matter if you are native or not to join us for a night of fun, laughs, and good old MLB round dance songs. Miigwech, hope to see you there.