

Poetry for the Native American Flute

Playing Native American Flute behind a poetry reading is a particularly good combination. Here are some poems and readings that I love to work with in these situations. Ideally, the poetry is read in the cadence of call-and-response with spacing to allow for intervening flute music. A few readings have been very slightly modified to fit the situation.

Where Everything is Music

We have fallen into the place
where everything is music.

The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and if the whole world's harp
should burn up,
there will still be hidden instruments
playing, playing

This singing art is sea foam.
The graceful movements
come from a pearl
somewhere
on the ocean floor.

Poems reach up like spindrift
and the edge of driftwood
along the beach
wanting, wanting

They derive from a slow
and powerful root
that we cannot see.

Stop the words now.
Open the window
in the center of your chest,
and let the spirits fly
in and out!

-- Jalaluddin Rumi, 13th century Persian poet, founder of Mevlevi order / Whirling Dervishes of Sufi tradition.

Moral Law

Music is a moral law.

It gives soul to the universe,
wings to the mind,
flight to the imagination,
and charm and gaiety
to life and to everything.

-- Plato, 428-348 BCE

Zen "No" Poem - great for memorial services

Behold she was here a while ago.
Now she is no more to be seen.

She flies over the mountains
Her voice echoes through the valleys

She has vanished to this land of Nowhere

--Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki - Zen and Japanese Culture, 1959

Without

The silence of nature within.
The power within. The power without.

The path is whatever passes - no end in itself.
The end is grace - ease - healing, not saving.

Singing the proof
The proof of the power within.

-- Gary Snyder

The Soundless Sound - Silence

Music is the art of hearing the soundless sound,
the art of hearing the music of silence -
what the Zen people call the sound of one hand clapping.

When you are utterly silent,
not a single thought passes your mind,
there is not even a ripple of any feeling in your heart.

Then you start, for the first time,
hearing silence ...

Music helps you from the outside to fall in tune with the inner ...
Listening to great music you suddenly become silent - with no effort.

Falling in tune with the music you lose your ego with no effort.
You become relaxed, you fall into a deep rest.
You are alert, awake, and yet in a subtle way drunk.

-- Osho

The Gift

We all sit in the orchestra of Tao.
Some play their fiddles,
Some wield their drum sticks.
Tonight is worthy of music.

Let's let loose with compassion.
Let's drown in the delicious ambience of love.

-- Hafez, (Khwāja Šamsu d-Dīn Muḥammad Hāfez-e Šīrāzī), 1325/6 - 1389/90, Persian lyric poet and Sufi master

from Earth Prayers from Around the World, 1991

Within the circles of our lives
we dance the circles of the years,
the circles of the seasons
within the circles of the years,
within the circles of the seasons,

the circles of our reasons
within the cycles of the moon.

Again, again we come and go,
changed, changing. Hands
join, unjoin in love and fear,
grief and joy. The circles turn,
each giving into each, into all.
Only music keeps us here,

each by all the others held.
In the hold of hands and eyes
we turn in pairs, that joining
joining each to all again.

And then we turn aside, alone,
out of the sunlight gone
into the darker circles of return.

-- Wendell Berry, Earth Prayers from Around the World, 1991.

Poem

In our souls everything moves guided by a mysterious hand.
We know nothing of our own souls
that are un-understandable and say nothing.

The deepest words of the wise man
teach us the same as the whistle of the wind when it blows
or the sound of the water when it is flowing.

-- Antonio Machado

The Invitation

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.
I want to know what you ache for,
and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are.
I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love,
for your dream, for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.
I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow,
if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become
shriveled and closed from fear of further pain!
I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own,
without moving to hide it or fade it, or fix it.

I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own,
if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the
tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful,
to be realistic, to remember the limitations of being human.

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true.
I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself;
if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul;
if you can be faithless and therefore trustworthy.

I want to know if you can see beauty even when it's not pretty,
every day, and if you can source your own life from its presence.

I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine,
and still stand on the edge of the lake and shout to the silver of the full moon, "Yes!"

It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have.
I want to know if you can get up, after the night of grief and despair,
weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done to feed the children.

It doesn't interest me who you know or how you came to be here.
I want to know if you will stand in the center of the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied.
I want to know what sustains you, from the inside, when all else falls away.

I want to know if you can be alone with yourself
and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.

-- by Oriah Mountain Dreamer, copyright © 1999 by Oriah Mountain Dreamer.

The Song of the Stars

We are the stars which sing,
We sing with our light;

We are the birds of fire,
We fly over the sky.

Our light is a voice;

We make a road for spirits,
For the spirits to pass over.

Among us are three hunters
Who chase a bear;

There never was a time
When they were not hunting.

We look down on the mountains.

This is the Song of the Stars.

-- Algonquin Poem, contributed by John DeBoer [jdeboer@woh.rr.com]

For Drumming:

A beat is like a footstep.
It begins a journey.
Beats are beginnings.

You don't need an interpreter to understand a groove.
You don't need to speak a peoples language to dance to their drum.
There is a whole world out there making music.
I listen, my mind open and my ears ready.

They say a drummer is never without a drum.
A percussionist can play on anything.
But like any artist, my true instrument is myself.
My song is my soul.

Create your own path.
Keep on walking and don't look back.

-- Bashiri Johnson

We are the Stars

We are the stars that sing.
We sing with our light.
We are the birds of fire.
We fly across the heaven.
Our light is a star.

-- Passamaquoddy tribal prayer, from Chants and Prayers by Stan Padilla

It Was the Wind

It was the wind that gave them life.
It was the wind that comes out of our mouths now that gives us life.
When this ceases to blow, we die.
In the skin at the tips of our fingers we see the trail of the wind;
it shows us where the wind blew when our ancestors were created.

-- Anonymous Navajo poem,
from page 69 of Washington Matthews, Navaho Legends, The Navaho Origin Legend, The
Story of the Emergence, The American Folk-Lore Society, Houghton, Mifflin and
Company, London and Leipzig, 1897, 299 pages, hardcover.

Cherokee Blessing

May the warm winds of Heaven blow softly upon your home;
May the Great Spirit bless all who enter there.
May your moccasins make happy tracks in many snows.
May the rainbow always touch your shoulder.

Apache Blessing

May the sun
bring you new energy every day;
May the moon
softly restore you by night;
May the rain
wash away your worries;
May the breeze
blow new strength into your being;
May you walk
gently through the world and know
its beauty all the days of your life.

-- contributed by Larry Hurst at Flute Haven 2010

Advice from a Tree

Long version, off the web:

Dear Friend,
Stand Tall and Proud
Sink your roots deeply into the Earth
Reflect the light of a greater source
Think long term
Go out on a limb
Remember your place among all living beings
Embrace with joy the changing seasons
For each yields its own abundance
The Energy and Birth of Spring
The Growth and Contentment of Summer
The Wisdom to let go of leaves in the Fall
The Rest and Quiet Renewal of Winter

Feel the wind and the sun
And delight in their presence
Look up at the moon that shines down upon you
And the mystery of the stars at night.
Seek nourishment from the good things in life
Simple pleasures
Earth, fresh air, light

Be content with your natural beauty
Drink plenty of water
Let your limbs sway and dance in the breezes
Be flexible
Remember your roots

Enjoy the view!

-- Ilan Shamir, from *Advice from a Tree: Guided Journal*, published by Your True Nature, 1930175035 / 978-1930175037, 120 pages, 1999.

Short version, from poster seen at Breitenbush, OR:

Stand tall and proud
Sink your roots into the Earth
Be content with your natural beauty
Go out on a limb
Drink plenty of water
Remember your roots
Enjoy the view!

The Song Of Hiawatha

By the shores of Gitche Gumee,
By the shining Big-Sea-Water,
Stood the wigwam of Nokomis,
Daughter of the Moon, Nokomis.
Dark behind it rose the forest,
Rose the black and gloomy pine-trees,
Rose the firs with cones upon them;
Bright before it beat the water,
Beat the clear and sunny water,
Beat the shining Big-Sea-Water.

At the door on summer evenings
Sat the little Hiawatha;
Heard the whispering of the pine-trees,
Heard the lapping of the waters,
Sounds of music, words of wonder;
"Minne-wawa!" said the Pine-trees,
"Mudway-aushka!" said the water.

Most beloved by Hiawatha
Was the gentle Chibiabos,

He the best of all musicians,
He the sweetest of all singers.
Beautiful and childlike was he,
Brave as man is, soft as woman,
Pliant as a wand of willow,
Stately as a deer with antlers.

When he sang, the village listened;
All the warriors gathered round him,
All the women came to hear him;
Now he stirred their souls to passion,
Now he melted them to pity.

From the hollow reeds he fashioned
Flutes so musical and mellow,
That the brook, the Sebowisha,
Ceased to murmur in the woodland,
That the wood-birds ceased from singing,
And the squirrel, Adjidaumo,
Ceased his chatter in the oak-tree,
And the rabbit, the Wabasso,
Sat upright to look and listen

All the many sounds of nature
Borrowed sweetness from his singing;
All the hearts of men were softened
By the pathos of his music;
For he sang of peace and freedom,
Sang of beauty, love, and longing;
Sang of death, and life undying
In the Islands of the Blessed,
In the kingdom of Ponemah,
In the land of the Hereafter.

-- Excerpts from The Song of Hiawatha, sections 3 and 4, in Kalevala meter, Henry W. Longfellow, 1885

Allow

There is no controlling life.
Try controlling a lightning bolt,
containing a tornado. Dam a
stream and it will create a new
channel. Resist and the tide
will sweep you off your feet.
Allow and grace will carry
you to higher ground. The only
safety lies in letting it all in -
the wild with the weak; fear,
fantasies and success.
When the loss rips off the doors of
the heart, or sadness veils your
vision with despair, practice
becomes simply bearing the truth.
In the choice to let go of your
known way of being, the whole
world is revealed in your new eyes.

-- Danna Faulds, from *Poems from the Heart of Yoga*, Morris Press, 1997,
ISBN 978-0-9744106-0-9

Stream Music

Stream music is
downhill music
with such fluency
that I stop my
walk to listen
on the bridge.

Water races over
rocks, melody
changing with
each moment.

Nature weaves
itself into my
awareness until
I too am humming,
my voice and a
nearby crow's
mingling so easily.
there seems to be
no fixed boundaries
here in the woods,
thrumming with
the earth's slow
heartbeat.

-- Danna Faulds, from *Limitless - New Poems and other Writings*, Peaceable Kingdom
Books, Greenville, VT, 2009.

Love

Love is...

the glue that holds us together
unfettered and free, unconditional and open
a heart's purest expression that can be shared
the ultimate vulnerability and knows no bounds
eternal beyond the physical and intellectual awareness
the essence of who we are and what we are meant to be
freely given to be embraced, nurtured in its infancy and relished in its maturity
a beacon lighting the way to wholeness and completion of spirit
the undercarriage of faith and hope

Love...

seals the holes and cracks of life and living
blossoms in all seasons
inflates and grows with no limitations
enables great feats of courage, strength, endurance
heals all wounds
enables us to forget and put away the past
answers the questions that seem to have no answers
enables us to experience the authentic essence of soul
 nestled inside a fragile physical body

Love - God's greatest gift enabling forgiveness, compassion, empathy and reaching out beyond yourself

Love, so simple, so complex, so easy, yet so hard. It requires us to let go and accept who "we" all are without reservation

Love is the essence that, when we die, releases into the universe and settles like fairy dust on those we shared it with. It stays working its magic forever.

Love is our final companion on our journey home. Love, pure unadulterated love.

Love just "IS." It is the essence of "I AM."

-- Patricia B. Smith, Ph.D., written February 4, 2007, contributed at Flute Haven 2010

Notes

Notes soar like eagles riding the thermals high above the earth.

Notes giggle in laughter and joy like children at play.

Notes cry releasing pain, sorrow, and longing for healing and peace.

Notes dance in your ears reminding you of the joy and delight of life.

Notes softly caress your being lulling you gently to sleep.

Notes for all moods, emotions, experiences in life's journey,
and just for being closer to God and nature.

Notes sing through the night carrying love, respect, respite, and joy to others.

Notes transport our souls to their new home after death.

Notes welcome the birth of new life into a world of potential, hope, and growth.

Notes reflect our soul's deepest desires and secrets that words cannot convey.

Notes are the heart and soul of our soul's expression to others.

Notes from within, beyond the mind, beyond the physical into our inner recesses
and back out into the universe.

Notes, notes, notes.

So much from just six holes.

So beautiful from nature's instrument of wood.

Even in death, nature's trees communicate to us through notes.

So simple, so beautiful, so heartfelt.

Just simply notes from the soul - our soul, nature's soul, and God's soul to us all.

-- Patricia B. Smith, Ph.D., written 2006, contributed at Flute Haven 2010