



THE JINGLE DRESS

The origin of the “Jingle Dress” and the “Jingle Dance” is attributed to the Ojibwa nation at the *Mille Lacs* Reservation in Minnesota around 1900. The original dress design and dance movements appeared in a dream to an Ojibwa holy man who incorporated both the dance and the dress into traditional Ojibwa ceremonies. In the late 1920s, the Ojibwa shared the jingle dress and dance with the Lakota people and it spread quickly westward among the Plains and Pueblo peoples.

Jingle dresses were originally made of solid fabric in basic colors – red, blue, green/yellow and black. Each dress was adorned with jingles on the sleeves and bodice. One, two, or three rows of jingles adorned the skirt. The jingles were made from chewing tobacco can lids, rolled into cones and sewn closely together onto the dress. The spiritual power of the dance and the dress is said to originate as an energy, which emanates from the sound of the cones that sing out to the spirits as the dancer moves in time with the drum.

Contemporary jingle dresses, introduced in the 1980s, are made from multi-colored fabric decorated with jingles. The jingle count on a child’s dress varies from 100 to 140 cones. The number sewn onto a woman’s dress varies according to the size and the cut of the dress. The contemporary dancer also carries a feather fan, and often wears an eagle feather or plumes in her hair.

The jingle dance was extremely popular for the thirty years between 1920 and 1950. Because it was associated with healing and prayer, it was subject to the efforts to suppress Indian religion and religious practice that began in 1921. The advent of the PowWow in the 1980s revived both the jingle dance the jingle dress. The contemporary style of the dance features intricate, controlled footwork as the dancers demonstrate poise, endurance and grace. Today, it is danced competitively at almost every PowWow gathering across North America.