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By David W. Samuels.

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The *Precious Cargo* exhibition opened at the Marin Museum of the American Indian (MMAI) and continues to travel under the auspices of the California Exhibition Resources Alliance (see http://www.calhum.org/programs/programs_cera.htm), although the website currently has no information regarding *Precious Cargo*, nor does the MMAI website. However, the second venue that hosted the exhibition, the Grace Hudson Museum, has an excellent section on *Precious Cargo* at <http://www.gracehudsonmuseum.org/events.html>, including a downloadable student workbook and teacher workbook.

Suggestions aside, the catalog is a welcome addition to the slowly growing corpus of serious scholarship and documentation of the vast and extensive California basketry traditions and is certain to be a “must-have” reference work.

Suzanne Griset
Arizona State Museum

Putting a Song on Top of It: Expression and Identity on the San Carlos Apache Reservation. By David W. Samuels. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004. 270 pages. \$39.95 cloth.

Despite the dense, somewhat jargon-laden theoretical introduction, which the author himself confesses betrays its origins in his dissertation, this book ends up being a lovingly detailed and eminently readable account of how the author discovered the power of language and song to evoke both past and present identity at the San Carlos Apache Reservation in southeastern Arizona. Samuels had a running start toward his fieldwork at San Carlos, since he had spent a summer working there at age fifteen and had made frequent visits after that to visit friends at the reservation. Both because of this familiarity and, one guesses, because of his own predilections, he ended up spending his seventeen months of official graduate fieldwork not as a student of the traditional ceremonial aspects of the reservation, which still exist and have been partially documented, but instead as a participant-observer in a San Carlos country-rock band, teasing out what that experience could show about how the songs selected eclectically from “mainstream culture” are performed, sometimes translated, and always reinterpreted to have special meanings to the people at San Carlos, helping them to feel their Apache identity, even when speaking or singing in English.

Both in style and to some degree in content, this book is closest to the work that is often quoted by the author, Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), in which the use of language and specifically local place-names becomes the key to understanding the thinking of the Western Apaches in the reservation at Cibecue, Arizona. The latter is a highly personal book in which Basso presents himself as the slow learner who only gradually grasps what he is being shown about the culture. Place is also important in Samuels’ book; in fact, because of

the importance of place and the colorful place-names described, it is regrettable that no map is provided of the area under discussion. It is a tribute to the vividness of the writing that one wants to know the geographic relationship among all the places and people we meet in the course of the book.

Samuels' principal technique in each chapter is to present an event—whether a conversation, a rehearsal, a local gig, or the Battle of the Bands at the White River Apache Reservation—and from it explore the hidden and often ambiguous meanings of certain of its details. His overall point is that the fluid identity of these resilient Apache people, living in and with their memories of a fraught and complex history, is often captured as much in the ambiguity of their joking plays on words, the emotion of the songs they recreate and make up, and their conversations about them as in any ceremony preserved from the old days. As he puts it late in the book: “All expressions of identity, including those based in tradition, take place within the clash of languages and practices that define the contemporary reservation community” (233).

By the end of the book we are familiar with a cast of characters that encompasses several decades of life at San Carlos—most vividly the members of the country-rock band, the Pacers, and their salvaged and patched equipment (recounted in great detail in chapter 7). In slow increments, from the anecdotes, the conversations, the detailed descriptions, and his analysis and interpretations of them, we gain a picture of what Samuels means when in his introduction he speaks of a discourse-centered approach to cultural forms, one in which there is a cultural continuity of affective response to certain forms of discourse. This response is brought out most clearly in the anecdote that gives the book its title, “Putting a Song on Top of It,” which was the phrase used by the twelve-year-old winner of an Apache talent contest in describing the connection with Apache history felt by her and her audience when she used Indian sign language (Plains Sign Talk) to interpret the contemporary song “Hero” by Mariah Carey. He quotes the girl: “When Indians go through hard times, from *reading* history you get the idea that the Indians would have lost faith. . . . But when you put that song on *top* of it, it makes it seem like they *would* have faith, if they had that *song*” (180). He moves from this anecdote to his theory about added meanings, embodied in the Apache word *bee nagodit'ah* (adding-on). Besides normal interpretation, he writes: “Adding-on is . . . a process of response, refiguration, and recontextualization” (182).

Despite the book's title and the story of the band that is at its center, the book is not primarily about music, but more about communication in general, of which music is a part. Nonetheless, music plays an important role, and at least some of the author's descriptions of it raise questions. In his brief description of traditional songs at San Carlos, for example, he presents a textual explanation of the two distinct parts of these songs—the first, which is strongly contoured with wide intervals, and the second, which consists of just two notes a minor second apart. The example, which is structured just like the ceremonial songs of several other Apache groups (compare Anne Dhu Shapiro [now McLucas] and Inés Talamantez, “The Mescalero Apache Girls' Puberty Ceremony: The Role of Music in Structuring Ritual Time,” 1986), is clearly set up as a refrain and verse, with a refrain repeated six times, sung to the first part

of the tune, and two different versions of a verse, sung to the second part. Samuels's explanation, however, focuses only on the text and the subtle humor of its verse, ignoring the fact that almost all traditional Apache songs are structured in this same way. In other words, his focus on the particularities of this text glosses over its comparability to other songs. With only four short musical examples in the whole book, it is clear that musical detail is not the author's goal. In fact, what he states about language in his final chapter is also true if one substitutes the word *music*: "Studying the social life of language [music] is qualitatively different from studying language [music]" (259).

It is, then, really the social life of popular music at the San Carlos Reservation that is most tellingly recounted in this book. Dozens of songs from several genres of popular music are named, and detailed accounts are given of how several of them are performed, danced to, and modified by both band members and audience. The emphasis is on the meanings constructed around these songs and how they illustrate the ambiguities and tensions of Apache life in the late-twentieth century. Most intriguingly, more attention is paid to the reactions of the audience than in most books on popular song, and this yields good information on the multiple meanings particular songs can have in this—or any—society. Despite his avoidance of a purely musical description, Samuels does provide new illuminations of the relationship between text and music, as illustrated particularly in his chapter 5 recounting of songs written by his friend Boe Titla.

The culminating incident of the book is the Battle of the Bands and its aftermath for the Country Pacers (chapter 7). Samuels is a good storyteller, and the images of this contest are vivid. What is refreshing is that his frame of reference is a group of Native American bands, and it is in this single event, if not before, that one finally understands the range of options for meaning that songs can hold for their Native American performers and their audiences. Told in the voice of the nervous lead guitarist that Samuels was, this could be the narrative of any struggling young rock band—but its setting and its special significance to *this* group of people make it refreshing to read.

After reading the book through, one can return to that daunting introduction with specific examples in mind and make much more sense of it. Thus, a statement such as "Rather than an empirical continuity of material form, what counts as iconic in many cases on the San Carlos Reservation is the continuity of the feeling evoked by expressive forms" (11) can now be illustrated by the story of the Mariah Carey song, or that of the Battle of the Bands. The anthropological jargon comes alive, and one begins to understand the ambiguity, the multiformity, and the effectiveness of expressive forms on the San Carlos Reservation.

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