

Hey Ah

Laurie Anderson

It was up in Canada and it was August, but very cold. I had been staying on this Cree Indian reservation for a few days, just sort of hanging around. One day, some anthropologists showed up at the reservation. They came in a little plane with maple leaves painted on the wings. They said they were there to shoot a documentary of the Cree Indians. They set up their video equipment in a tin Quonset hut next to the Hudson Bay Company. Then they asked the oldest man on the reservation to come and sing some songs for their documentary. On the day of the taping, the old man arrived. He was blind and wearing a red plaid shirt. They turned on some lights and he started to sing. But he kept starting over and sweating. Pretty soon it was clear that he didn't really know any of the songs. He just kept starting over and sweating and rocking back and forth. The only words he really seemed sure of were "Hey ah ... hey ah hey ... hey hey hey ah hey ... hey ..."

(Hey ah hey hey hey ah hey) I am singing the songs,
(Hey ah hey ah hey) the old songs ... but I can't
remember the words of the old songs,
(Hey hey hey ah hey) the old hunting songs.
I am singing the songs of my fathers and of the animals
they hunted down.
(Hey hey hey ah hey) I never knew the words of the old
songs.
(Hey hey ah hey hey hey hey ah hey) I never went
hunting.
(Hey hey ah ah hey ah hey) I never sang the songs
(Hey ah hey) of my fathers.
(Hey hey ah hey) I am singing for this movie;
(Hey ah) I am doing this for money.
(Hey hey ah hey) I remember Grandfather; he lay on his
back while he was dying.
(Hey ah hey hey ah hey) I think I am no one.
(Hey hey ah hey hey)