

Atuutet – SONGS

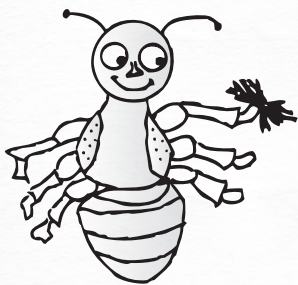


Singing is a favorite pastime in Alutiiq/Sugpiaq communities. People of all ages enjoy sharing a tune or learning a melody from an Elder. In addition to expressing emotion, songs are a form of storytelling. They record community history and express values. There are many different types of songs. Today people share everything from country and western tunes to Orthodox hymns, but they also remember traditional verses sung for hunting, curing illness, praising ancestors, dancing, and visiting. Many of these songs once helped Alutiiq people obtain assistance from the spirits that influenced life on earth. Powerful Alutiiq whalers sang songs to control the movement of an injured whale. Hunters learned animal songs to attract game. Shamans used songs to drive away illness caused by evil.

Kas'aq amlesqanek atuutnek nallun'ituq. - THE SPIRITUAL LEADER KNOWS MANY SONGS.

In classical Alutiiq society, singing was also a central part of winter festivals. The host of such gatherings hired a spiritual leader (*kas'aq*) to guide the festivities. Well versed in traditional songs and ceremonial etiquette, this person used songs to move guests from the everyday world into a mystical realm. With singing, people welcomed spirits to the gathering, honored them, and appealed for aid. Alutiiq people also sang to venerate ancestors. A forebearer might be memorialized with a mask and a specially written tune. Men also paired masks and songs to tell stories—to remember a great hunt, to recount a battle, or to share family history.

Neresta, the song presented below is about a louse that annoys a group of steam bathers. Today, the Kodiak Alutiiq dancers perform a comical rendition of this song, with washing and scratching motions.



NERESTA

*Neresta taarimallria /
Taairipaguarluni /
Inggim yaamat ciqiluki, /
neresta atunguaruarluni.*

*The louse whisked himself. /
He whisked himself long and hard [showing off] /
The baby louse [nit] splashed water on the rocks. /
And the louse sang to his little self [for the heck of it].*



*A Kodiak Alutiiq dancer performs with hand motions.
Alutiiq Museum Archives. Photo by Sven Haakanson, Jr.*