

Native Music Study By Ethnomusicologist

The University of Alaska has appointed ethnomusicologist Dr. Thomas F. Johnston to supervise a program to discover what makes Eskimo, Athabascan, Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian music unique and different from each other and from the rest of the world's musics.

Work has commenced with field visits to tape-record songs and dances at Point Hope, Minto, and Nenana, the recordings then being written down (music and words) by a team of Eskimo and Indian students from the linguistics and music departments.

The immediate goal is to produce the first set of school music books for young native schoolchildren, to whom *Mary Had A Little Lamb* is less relevant than songs about whales, seals, huskies, and caribou.

At the Northern Cross-Cultural Educational Research Sem-

inar on campus recently, before an audience of Alaskan and Canadian native and non-native educators, Dr. Johnston pointed out that native singing and dancing is an important part of language use and of cultural identity, that the unique

(Continued on Page 6)

Music . . .

(Continued from page 3)

rhythms and tunes are more interesting than middle-class White school music, and that it is time to stop substituting environmentally irrelevant Mother Goose recorded material for the genuine, live, local songs and dances which the children know exist but which is ignored by ethnocentric and culture-bound White teachers.

The appointment brings the University's Music Department into the mainstream of efforts to recognize natives' cultural rights and to train native students in methods of finding and preserving those rich elements of the folklore heritage which, due to a century of misguided missionization and 'education,' have nearly been lost.

Fortunately, there has of late been a resurgence of interest in the genuine songs and dances, especially on the part of politically conscious sections of the native community, and this, combined with governmental efforts such as this appointment, will help to reverse the loss.