

Song Title: **IKO IKO (AKA JOCK-A-MO)**

Rating: **YES: Caution**

REVIEWERS' NOTE

This song is admissible with the following requirements:

- 1. All ensemble members should understand the history of the song, the [Mardi Gras Indians](#),* and the [possible meanings](#) of the lyrics, a mélange of Cajun/Acadian/Creole/African dialects (see song history and lyrics sections below)**
- 2. Performances must not include exaggerated accents, nor attempt Mardi Gras Indian costuming**
- 3. MC content providing context regarding the Mardi Gras Indians should be provided where possible**

***The "Mardi Gras Indian" tribes of New Orleans are, in fact, the oldest cultural organizations surviving from the original African tribes which were brought into New Orleans during chattel slavery.** Mardis Gras Indian culture is influenced by both ancestral enslaved Africans and the friendship forged with Native Americans, those who escaped or were newly freed. The tribes are particularly noted for preserving African "dress art" and musical heritage in the New World. They have not received the value, recognition, or economic benefit they deserve. [Mardi Gras Indians: Culture and Community Empowerment](#)

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What year was this song written?

The song, under the original title "Jock-A-Mo", was written and released in 1953

Who wrote the lyrics?

Joan Marie Johnson, Rose Lee Hawkins, Barbara A. Hawkins (Dixie Cups) and James "Sugar Boy" Crawford.

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

James Crawford Jr: New Orleans R&B legend James "Sugar Boy" Crawford was born in New Orleans on October 12, 1934. He grew up singing in his Baptist church choir, additionally learning piano and playing trombone in the Booker T. Washington High School marching band. His song "Jock-A-Mo" became a standard at the New Orleans Mardi Gras, but Crawford disappeared from public view. In a 2002 interview for Offbeat magazine he described how his career came to an abrupt halt in 1963, after a severe beating at the hands of state troopers incapacitated him for two years, forcing him to leave the music industry. In 1969, he decided to sing only in church. In 2012 he made a guest appearance singing gospel in an episode of the HBO series Treme. He died one month before the

episode aired. James "Sugar Boy" Crawford was also Inducted into The Louisiana Music Hall Of Fame.

Joan Marie Johnson, Rose Lee Hawkins and Barbara A. Hawkins: Collectively known as the Dixie Cups. The trio consisted of sisters Barbara Ann and Rosa Lee Hawkins; plus their cousin Joan Marie Johnson, from New Orleans. They first sang together in grade school. Originally, they were to be called Little Miss and the Muffets, but were named the Dixie Cups just prior to their first release. Barbara was born October 23, 1943; Rosa Lee Hawkins was born September 24, 1944; Joan Marie Johnson was born January 15, 1944

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

None found for any of the lyricists.

Who is the composer of this song? Same as lyricists

Please provide a link to the original song lyrics.

Depending on who performed the song and when:

[Sugar Boy Crawford - Jock-A-Mo Lyrics](#)

[The Dixie Cups – Iko Iko Lyrics](#)

[Dr. John - Iko Iko Lyrics](#)

[Justin Wellington - Iko Iko Lyrics](#)

[The Grateful Dead – Iko Iko Lyrics](#)

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

"Iko Iko" is a much-covered New Orleans song that tells of a parade collision between two tribes of Mardi Gras Indians and the traditional confrontation. Crawford's version of the song did not make the charts. The story tells of a "spy boy" (i.e. a lookout for one band of Indians) encountering the "flag boy" or guidon carrier for another "tribe". He threatens to "set the flag on fire". Crawford set phrases chanted by Mardi Gras Indians to music for the song. Crawford himself states that he has no idea what the words mean, and that he originally sang the phrase "Chock-a-mo", but the title was misheard by Chess Records and Checker Records president Leonard Chess, who misspelled it as "Jock-a-mo" for the record's release. Everyone has recorded it a little differently, but no one who recorded it knew what it meant. Crawford had heard the phrases at parade battles, and the Dixie Cups said they had heard their grandmother sing it. The origin of the words or what they once meant may never be known.

There are as many guesses about the meaning and origin of the words to this song as well as the many versions of it. The lyrics of the original versions of this song vary, but are both based in New Orleans Mardi Gras lore. The first version was written by a native New Orleans musician based upon what he heard the African American Mardi Gras Indians chant in their carnivals. The Dixie Cups made their own version based upon what they heard their grandmother sing.

Some say the phrases are of Cajun or Acadian dialect. Cajuns are of French, Native American, and African American descent, and have been around Louisiana since the 1700s. Others, like Dr. Evershed Amuzu, say that they are almost strictly of African descent. Many Africans who had been kidnapped were sold through New Orleans – a major port. Many formerly enslaved lived in New Orleans, the city becoming one of the earliest racially integrated towns in the South, and home to

some of the first communities of formerly enslaved and “free people of color.” Furthermore, the African American Mardi Gras Indians developed their unique and beautiful tradition as a form of respect to the Native Americans, who were thought to have aided escaped enslaved people in the area. Haitian influences are also possible, coming from the chattel slavery.

Several consistent lyric themes emerge, such as “Listen! At the rear [or back]!” When the Indians and their troops march, they do so in parade fashion, with a line of elaborately dressed Indians. A number of their shouts and cries are communications, such as the elaborate ritual when two Indian tribes (come face to face in the street. The respective kings call to — or more accurately, “playfully” taunt — one another, with each calling chants such as “Hum BOW (you bow)” and “Won’t Bow. Don’t know How.” Therefore, a calling to the party members at the back would be a very plausible explanation.

Please see these references:

[Mardi Gras: A Brief History of "Iko! Iko! Jock-a-mo Fee No Nay"](#)

[Who are New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians?](#)

[Mardi Gras Indians: Culture and Community Empowerment](#)

What did you learn about the history OF THE SONG?

The song was originally written and released in 1953 as a single by James "Sugar Boy" Crawford and his Cane Cutters, as Jock-A-Mo, but it failed to make the charts. The song first became popular in 1965 by girl group The Dixie Cups, who scored an international hit with "Iko Iko". In 1967, as part of a lawsuit settlement between Crawford and the Dixie Cups, the trio were given part songwriting credit for the song.

Artists who have performed the song include but not limited to:

Scottish singer Natasha England

The Belle Stars

New Orleans singer and pianist Dr. John

The Grateful Dead

Cindy Lauper

Sia

Justin Wellington

The most popular/well known version was done by the Dixie Cups. The lyrics have changed somewhat depending on who performed the song, probably because each artist had their own interpretation of lyrics they wanted to sing and record.

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqOrlar_gGk (Crawford)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuC519ni1aE> (Dixie Cups)

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme? Unable to locate.

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized racial/ethnic group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors, jargon, or message? And/or does the song present a sanitized/idyllic or false narrative

regarding the American South and the life of the enslaved or newly freed OR of other marginalized racial/ethnic groups and their history? No

Please explain your reasoning for the answer above (do not enter n/a) and indicate if your group feels the song should not be performed by Sweet Adelines.

While the lyrics have had various interpretations, none have been demeaning.

Please supply the links to any sources you used for this section of research.

I have included a link that speaks to the Mardi Gras Indians and their Culture and Community Empowerment. [Mardi Gras Indians: Culture and Community Empowerment](#)

Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY**. They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. **Please refer to the Music Choices section of [Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) for details and strategies related to these factors.**

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage, related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. [Please see instructions here.](#)

Age: No

Disability: No

Gender: No

Religion: No

Sexual Orientation: No

Visible Physical Differences: No

Other? No

Are there any adjustments to the lyrics that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms?

I did not identify any lyrics that might be addressed.

Please supply the links to any additional sources you used for this section of research.

<https://www.bing.com/search?q=iko+iko+lyrics&form=ANNT11&ref=5ee327ddc9c14a9a93175a7a6494d38e>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_%22Sugar_Boy%22_Crawford

<https://music.apple.com/ca/artist/james-sugar-boy-crawford/277577995>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqOrlar_gGk

<https://showbizworth.com/2021/04/23/james-sugar-boy-crawford/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dixie_Cups

<https://www.songfacts.com/songs/the-dixie-cups>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/arts/music/joan-marie-johnson-a-founder-of-the-dixie-cups-dies-at-72.html>

