

PO'PAY

CAST

Po'pay	Baritone
Ku-tsa-yi (sister to Po'pay)	Soprano
Fray Pedro, a priest	Tenor
Wise Mother, a <i>bruja</i>	Alto
Antonio de Otermin, Governor of New Mexico	Tenor
An army captain	Baritone
Two Franciscan Brothers	Tenor and Baritone
Conixu	Bass

Men's chorus, including soloists:

Tupatu	Tenor
Malacate	Tenor
Catiti	Baritone

Women's chorus, including soloists:

Wife	Soprano
5 Women	Soprano, mezzo and alto

Children's Chorus (*including short solos*)

Synopsis

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Ku-tsa-yi sings about the arrival of the Spanish (the “Shiny Helmets”), how originally they were few, weak and friendly, only becoming cruel when their number increased and they grew stronger and new priests arrived. (“Then the whippings started”). She remains convinced, however, that her brother Po'pay will free them from the oppressors' yoke and restore the old ways. A crone enters and questions her naivety, telling the story of how Po'pay was whipped by the Spanish in Santa Fe and how, while she was healing his wounds, she foretold that Po'pay would one day lead all the Pueblos. But she warns Ku-tsa-yi that “the path of peace will not be his path.” Ku-tsa-yi does not understand: she is sure Po'pay would never resort to violence. The Crone warns her not to underestimate Po'pay's hatred of the Spanish.

Scene 2 - part one

The Governor's office in Santa Fe. An army Captain and two Franciscan brothers bicker about the allocation of native slave labour, each saying their cause is more deserving. The Governor points out to the Franciscans that the drought has dangerously reduced their food supplies and that the Natives were needed to cultivate more crops, telling the Captain "take them from their fields by force if you have to." He turns on the Brothers and chides them for their cruelty towards the Natives who are the labour force for a new church building, but only because it slows down the process when too many are punished for refusing to abandon their old ways. Work is also frequently interrupted for religious observances. "Sing your interminable psalms to them if you must while they work, but get the church finished and convert them afterwards. Then you can whip them as much as God requires."

Scene 2 - part two

As this conversation finishes and the Captain and Brothers are dismissed, a young nobleman recently arrived from Spain enters and introduces himself to the Governor ("Just what we need, another noble here to feather his nest"). He has recently taken holy orders and wishes to be known simply as Fray Pedro. He announces that he is there for the spiritual care of the Natives, hinting that he knows they are being mistreated. The Governor realizes he could dismiss the views of a simple brother, but the son of a nobleman cannot be so easily put aside. He cautions Fray Pedro to "tread carefully."

Scene 3

We meet Po'pay for the first time, alone on stage finishing his ritual morning prayer. A group of Pueblo elders enters. Conixu enumerates familiar grievances at the hands of the Spanish (the "*Castyilash*"). Po'pay retells the story of his whipping in Santa Fe ("I was one of the forty-seven"), how the God Po'se yemu sustained him, and the prophecy of the *bruja* who cleaned up his injuries. ("You are the one who will lead us.") Po'pay is unsure of what she means ("As my wounds slowly faded, I pondered her meaning"), and when the Puebloans try to spur him into action he publicly recommends patience ("Does not a stream flow around the rock until it is mighty enough to move it?") but when they leave, he pulls Conixu aside: "We must be careful...trust no-one".

ACT TWO

(There is an extended musical introduction to indicate that time has passed since Act 1)

Scene 1

The scene opens with Ku-tsa-yi, alone, expressing her concern for the turn events are taking ("My mind is no longer my own"). Po'pay enters and she tells him of her concerns: after all, a few years earlier some Pueblos had tried to fight back, but had been easily defeated and the leaders severely punished, as Po'pay knew only too well. She reminds him of the happy days they had together as children ("Then your heart was open") and asks him to examine his motives: "do not let the scars on your back be a map to the past". He tells her of his dream of uniting all the Pueblos to push all the foreign invaders out of their land so that the old gods can once again be worshipped in freedom. When she points out that his vision cannot be achieved without loss of life, Po'pay replies "Who is to say whether the swift blow is worse than the slow suffocation of the oppressors' boot?" Ku-tsa-yi counters "Who is to say which is the greater threat, the one that surrounds us or the foe within?" Their impasse is unresolved, since they are interrupted by Pedro leading a group of Pueblo children he has been teaching. Po'pay instantly leaves when he sees him.

Scene 2

Pedro enters surrounded by Pueblo children who tease him. Ku-tsa-yi looks on: it seems that she and Pedro have become friendly. When the children leave they converse, but Ku-tsa-yi is still unsettled by her conflict with her brother and she challenges Pedro “we have been worshipping the Great Mother since before your Haysus was born.” Encouraged by his reply (“I am beginning to understand that”), as a metaphor for what the cruel treatment of the Pueblos could lead to, she tells him the story of a young man who sought the advice of the village sage concerning his inner dilemma: “sometimes it is as if there is a battle inside me between a coyote and an eagle. I don’t know which will win”, and the old man’s answer: “which ever one you feed.” This story moves Pedro to reveal his own internal struggle about how the cruel treatment of the natives has made him question the methods of his fellow priests: “When the blood flows so freely I don’t see God’s love, I see only pain and degradation. Is this truly God’s will?” Afraid he has said too much, he leaves quickly.

Unobserved, Po’pay has watched the end of their conversation and when Pedro leaves, he confronts his sister: has she betrayed them? He accuses her of being in love with a “Whiteskin”. She answers that she is not so consumed with hatred that she cannot see where there is good. (“Pedro is not like the others, his eyes have been uncovered”). Po’pay sings that while it is true his heart is too infrequently softened by love (“Perhaps then my heart would beat to a gentler drum”), their fates are “where they should be, in the hands of the Gods”.

Scene 3

Council of the Elders. Po’pay’s plan to send out runners with knotted ropes to all the Pueblos that were sympathetic to their cause is revealed. Each day a knot will be untied until the runners’ destination is reached, and then each recipient will continue to undo the knots until they are all gone: at dawn on the next day, a synchronized attack with superior numbers will ensure success. Po’pay theatrically shows the scars on his back and exhorts the crowd: “Never again will we bear such marks on our back: it is time to let the snake loose!” The act finishes with the chorus taking up that refrain.

ACT THREE

Scene 1

The Governor’s Office in Santa Fe. He is meeting again with the brothers and the Captain. Pedro is also there. The discussion concerns Pueblo religious practices: the Franciscans believe they are evil, akin to Devil worship, whilst the Captain is more concerned that their religion makes them sullen and harder to control. In rare agreement, both suggest tightening the screws. However, Pedro, who has been an observer up to this point, tries to persuade them it would be a mistake: the Pueblos were spiritual people “not beasts to be harnessed or animals to be trained...when we tell them how to pray with the whip it only drives them further from God.” He points out that Europeans are considerably outnumbered. His arguments are dismissed with insults questioning both his vows and his loyalty. When the Captain insinuates that Pedro is engaging in a sexual liaison with a Pueblo girl (“I heard you like your meat a little dark”) and reveals that she is Po’pay’s sister, the Governor is alarmed (“It doesn’t matter whether you have bedded her or not...Po’pay will suspect that you have.”) He tells the Captain to arrest the usual leaders quietly, but not Po’pay. He tells the Brothers to refrain from further mistreatment, but only to reduce the risk of inflaming them still further. He warns Pedro to stay away from Ku-tsa-yi.

Scene 2

Some of the women from the Pueblo tease Ku-tsa-yi about her friendship with Pedro, hinting at a romance, which she coyly denies. One suggests that she could use his obvious affection for her to leverage some relief from the Spanish. A female servant at the Governor's palace enters, telling of Spanish patrols making new arrests.

Scene 3

Against the orders of the Governor, Pedro seeks out Ku-tsa-yi, not sure, given the tension caused by the latest crackdown, whether she would want to see him. She wonders out loud why she trusts him but not the other priests, and Pedro acknowledges that their religions have more in common than he had been told. They sing a tender duet that hints at growing affection between them ("The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me"). She gives him a token of the Great Mother to remind him "of their conversation."

Interlude depicting the battle

Scene 4

Po'pay receives the news that the Rebellion has been successful. Ku-tsa-yi joins them, relieved that the battle is over, but, fearing for Pedro, distraught when she learns that all the priests have been killed. Po'pay does not understand. She explains how his hatred and lust for revenge is now matched by that of the foreigners: the Spaniards will only return with greater numbers and ferocity ("with their iron weapons they will sever us from our land and our gods.") As Po'pay protests, Ku-tsa-yi notices one of his lieutenants wearing the token she had given Pedro. When finally forced to admit that Pedro was indeed among the killed priests, Ku-tsa-yi declares that she will never forgive Po'pay: "You have betrayed me - you have betrayed us all." It is Po'pay's turn to be devastated: "the first sweet sip of victory is turned sour and bitter." Left alone, he rues the path he felt impelled to take: "I have forgone a sister's love for this: Tomorrow we shall take feathers and corn pollen and offer them in freedom to the gods."

Scene 5 [Twelve years later]

Po'pay has disappeared, and although there has been a period of relative peace, the return to the old ways has not ushered in the Golden Age they were promised. The drought has not ended and some wonder if they should not have slaughtered so many Europeans, especially the priests. The women sing: "The old ways are fading. The drum hesitates and the dancers falter...Has the Great Mother left us?" They look to Ku-tsa-yi, who has been silent up to now, to be "the singer to weave new melodies...the poet to breathe new life." Her aria reveals that she is unable to fulfill that role. As the music comes to a close, Spanish soldiers are seen in the distance.