

Dance — Agnguaq

AGNGUART'SKUK! – LET'S DANCE!



Photo: The Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers perform.
Dancing Forwards workshop, Kodiak.

Dancing was a favorite activity at Alutiiq winter festivals. Moving to the rhythmic beat of skin drums, Alutiiq men reenacted hunting scenes and women danced in praise of ancestors. Performances were held in the men's house, a large single-roomed structure built and maintained by a wealthy chief. Here men also met to discuss politics, repair their tools, and prepare for war. In the winter, Alutiiq people transformed this building into a ceremonial center. Here families gathered to celebrate the events of the year and give thanks to animal spirits for sustenance. In preparation for dancing, people decorated the men's house elaborately with hunting gear and animal skins. Paddles, harpoons, sea otter pelts, and even kayaks were tied together and suspended from the ceiling. Guests arrived in their finest clothing and sat according to their social position along the walls. Men sat on benches and women and children on the floor. As masked dancers appeared, the audience swayed and a person in the corner pulled on a rope to rock the gear hanging from the ceiling. This mimicked the movement of the ocean, adding ambiance to the dance.

Today Alutiiq dancing groups continue the performing tradition. Dressed in ceremonial regalia, they celebrate and perpetuate the traditions of their ancestors with joyous songs and movements inspired by the wind, waves, animals, and history of Kodiak.