

Charlie Joseph

The Dlíigus or Children's Lullabies are a group of Lingít songs that are not owned by any clan. These songs might come from a certain family, but the composer is unknown. This means that anyone can sing them without asking clan permission. The children's songs might be used for berry picking to help make a child's chore easier or to help put babies to sleep. The lullabies shared by Charlie Joseph came from generations of parents and grandparents – and shared among communities. Charlie taught and recorded 12 of these lullabies because his daughter, Ethel, who was trying to teach the language, found that these songs were much easier for children to learn than the more difficult clan songs. Traditionally the songs were sung without a drum, but Charlie put a drum beat to them to help the children learn traditional rhythms .

In 1976, Charlie began to teach students at Sitka Native Education Program to sing and dance traditional clan songs. In 1980 they were ready to perform for the first Sealaska Elders Conference, held in Sitka. The elders arrived unsure about the change in song protocol that Charlie was making, but at the outset of the first day of the meeting, the students came out to sing and dance. Charlie apologized to the elders – he didn't want to offend them but felt that if the children didn't learn their traditional songs, they'd be forgotten. Then the children sang a Spirit Song, which you only sing at a ku.éex' and is considered highly sensitive. The spirit song is used to bring strength. The opposite clan will hold one hand up as a gesture to protect and help the other clan let go of its grief. The elders were so moved by the children's spirit song, that they lifted up their hands in response. After the performance, every elder stood up, one at a time, and gave a speech. They spoke from their hearts. A quote from George Davis would later be made into an entrance song: "We will again open this box that was put in our care for safe keeping. And they gave Charlie very special permission to teach these songs to children from different clans. Other clans trusted Charlie to keep their songs safe and bring them out at the right ceremonies and right time. He was expected to be a song box for different clans. They called him a shí daakeit. When Charlie spoke at the conference he talked about how the Lingít always placed the grandchildren high above themselves and passed the culture on to them "because we cherish you." Charlie died four years after the conference. He was age 94.