

NATIVE
THEATRE
IN
CANADA

A Report Presented To

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

by

Native Earth Performing Arts Inc.

July 1993

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INTRODUCTION

Native Earth Performing Arts Inc. is Toronto's only professional Native Theatre company and one of only a handful across the country. Founded in 1982, it is currently under the Artistic Directorship of Floyd Favel, a renowned Cree Director, writer and teacher. Native Earth received much recognition and success in the 1980's under Artistic Director Tomson Highway, one of Canada's leading playwrights. Over the past decade, Native theatre in Canada has grown tremendously and has become an important voice for the Native community.

Native Earth Performing Arts decided to submit a report to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples on Native Theatre in Canada because it is, in a contemporary sense, a relatively young artistic milieu which is making great strides

It is perhaps true that many people outside of the artistic community do not understand the real value that theatre plays to society. And it is perhaps true that this lack of knowledge exists in the Native community in part because the discipline is so young. Therefore, it is the role of theatre practitioners to create their art and educate their communities.

Slowly, this is happening in Canada. We at Native Earth want the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to recognize the importance theatre plays to the Native community.

This report states the importance of Native Theatre, specifically of Native Earth, to the Native community and to the larger Canadian community. The report also explores the means by which Native theatre serves the communities, including its cultural impact. Recommendations are made as to how Native theatre can better serve its community.

Research material came from various sources, but very little has been written about Native theatre. Most information came from personal and telephone interviews. Almost one hundred interviews were conducted between April and June, 1993, but this is just a handful of the various artists and audience members with information to contribute.

Since there is no known Native theatre companies in the eastern provinces, in April 1993, a trip was taken to western Canada, specifically Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, to collect data on other Native theatres and to view some of their productions. Many interviews were conducted with various artists.

Chapter One covers the early history of Native theatre and the history and importance of Native Earth Performing Arts. Chapter Two deals with the importance of Native theatre, other existing Native theatres in Canada and the few Native theatre companies of the

st. Chapter Three discusses training and recommendations; the Symposium on Native Theatre held last May, 1993 and finally, interviews with various artists at the "Beyond Survival" Conference on their opinions of the importance of Native theatre and how it addresses the cultural issues of concern today.

It is hoped that the work of these many talented, committed people will be recognized for its worth so that their recommendations towards even greater work can be realized.

Native Earth Performing Arts appreciates the support of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in producing this important document.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

The following is a list of the personal and telephone interviews conducted between April and June, 1993. This list also includes the names of the participants in the symposium on Native theatre.

Acco, Ann
Albert, Darcy
Armstrong, Jeannette
Barnes, Herbie
Benson, Maxine
Blondin, John
Burning, Jack
Charlie, Debra
Colorado, Hortensia
Cullingham, James
Dallas, Dolores
Durand, Yves Sioui
First Rider, Amethyst
Goldstein, Shelley
Guss, Darrell
Henderson, Bill
Humber, Marie
King-Odjig, Alanis
Koochie
Lacroix, Denis
LaVallee, Pat
Linklater, Doris
Vince Manitowabi
Maracle, Lee
Matthews, Pamela
Melting Tallow, Robin
Mercredi, Duncan
Miguel, Muriel
Moses, Daniel David
Neilsson, Reidar
Norton, Sam
Ott, Allison
Preston, Jennifer
Rathbone, Paul
Slipperjack, Ruby
Strombergs, Vinetta
Taylor, Pat
Wheeler, Bernelda
Young-Ing, Greg

Adams, Evan
Alexis, Ruby
Andrews, Paul
Bell, John Kim
Benson, Neil
Bomberry, Elaine
Charlette, Kennetch
Charlton, Margo
Crowchild, Lee
Cunningham, Shane
Damm, Kateri
Favel, Floyd
Fisher, Jonathan
Greyeyes, Carol
Handley, Mark
Hill, Lynda
Kane, Margo
Kleist, Makka
Koostachin, Jules
LaRiviere, Wayne
Levine, Ira
Manitowabi, Edna
Maracle, Dennis
Mason, Tina
Mayo, Lisa
Merasty, Billy
Miguel, Gloria
Morriseau, Renae
Mosionier, Beatrice
Nolan, Yvette
O'Sullivan, Gunargie
Phalen, Lynn
Qamanig, David
Sheppard, Joecy
Sloman, Julieanne
Taylor, Drew Hayden
Van Fossen, Rachel
Wildcat, Laurie

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a list of recommendations as to how Native Theatre can better serve both the Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities.

- (1) Before any recommendations can be realized, more money must be made available from funding sources.

NOTE: Native Earth currently has access to the following government sources for funding: Employment and Immigration Canada; the Canada Council - Theatre Section; Ontario Arts Council - Theatre Section; The Toronto Arts Council - Theatre Section; Department of Communications; Metropolitan Cultural Affairs; Secretary of State - Native Citizen's Directorate; Ontario Ministry of Citizenship - Native Community Branch; and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Recreation.

- (2) Make the Native Theatre School a year round process
- (3) Conduct information sessions with funding agencies
- (4) Improve training and education systems:
 - (a) Create more apprenticeship programs
 - (b) Approach mainstream post-secondary programs to incorporate and recruit more Native students
 - (c) Create regular workshops, classes or coffee houses to stimulate and encourage on-going training
 - (d) Conduct workshops to keep artists up-to-date on current funding and available courses
- (5) Acquire our own space to perform, rehearse and train
- (6) Devise a plan to get the political organizations involved in the arts community
- (7) Create a "Native Theatre In Canada Newsletter" to encourage communication
- (8) Finally, conduct a Canada wide Conference on Native Theatre where theatre professionals can meet, dialogue, share experiences; discuss needs, barriers and resources; and to discuss all of the above.

CHAPTER ONE

NATIVE THEATRE IN CANADA

WHAT IS NATIVE THEATRE?

First of all, what is 'theatre'? There are many definitions of this term. For our purposes, we will concentrate on those terms that are relevant to this project. First of all, it is "a building, part of a building, or outdoor area for staging dramatic presentations or stage entertainments". The term also refers to the audience, the "theatrical or acting company" or the "quality or effectiveness of a dramatic performance." The most important elements we are dealing with are "dramatic performances as a branch of art" and "dramatic works collectively, as of literature, a nation, or an author" (Random House).

Next, what is the meaning of the term "Native"? This term also has a wide variety of definitions, including references to the place in which one is born, remaining in a natural state, found in nature rather than being artificially produced and a variety of synonyms, such as inherited, innate, inbred, congenital, autochthonous, aboriginal, real, genuine and original (Random House). The definitions we will focus on are "belonging by birth to a people regarded as natives, esp. outside of the general body of white peoples" and "of indigenous origin, growth or production".

So what, therefore, is "Native Theatre"? It has different meanings for different people. One critic, in reviewing a play by the Sen'klip Native Theatre Company, wrote: "Native theatre may appear to many people as mask dancing, pageantry, drums, music and storytelling, but for others it symbolizes live local history, mythology, spirituality and an educational resource" (Crockett 1992). Another view is that "Native Theatre in its modern form....fuses Western dramatic tradition and native story telling and ritual....it challenges the dominant literary traditions....through the establishment of cultural distinctiveness it stretches and breaks the boundaries of the 'accepted genre'" (Steinwall 4).

Kenneth Charlette, actor and founder of Muskigee Dramatic Arts gives his definition of Native theatre:

First of all, if we define theatre, it is a combination of three different things: communication, the spirit and the re-telling and re-showing of stories. If you put all three together you get the teaching and healing of a person. So, NATIVE theatre in its present stage, for me, is the healing of Native people, telling stories from the perspective of Native people, just like it has done for other cultures, other societies for thousands of years.

When you speak of Native theatre in the 'old' sense, there was a different style altogether. It had the same purpose. It was used for the re-telling of stories, for healing and for general entertainment too. It had all the aspects it has today, except in a different form. (1993)

Actress, Makka Kleist, who has had a long association with Native Earth Performing Arts Inc. [NEPA], believes that Native theatre speaks about "heart felt things....often it is bursting to say something or tell a story. There's a spirituality about it, because those involved have a deep sense of the work. Even if it has comic sections, there's something more behind it" (Kaplan 1987). But, on trying to define 'Native Theatre' she says that "maybe we should call it Theatre by Natives, Theatre Done by Natives....in Greenland, we have our own rules, we govern ourselves and we are the majority of the people, so it is not 'Native Theatre' there, it is just 'theatre'." She dislikes the term 'Native actor' in that sense, too, because she is an actor who happens to be Native. "I have a name." (Kleist 1993)

But it seems, most people, tend to agree with the definition given by Cree playwright, Tomson Highway: "Native Theatre is theatre that is written, performed and produced by Native people themselves and theatre that speaks out on the culture and the lives of this country's Native people" (Highway 29).

EARLY NATIVE THEATRE

Reidar Nilsson, Artistic Director of Tukak Teatret, a theatre company in Greenland, believes that "when Adam and Eve climbed down from the trees, or wherever they came from, and met each other, theatre started." The theatre historians say that theatre started in Greece, but referring to "Adam and Eve", he says that it was then that theatre started and mankind put on masks for the first time. Theatre can never, ever die. The only thing that it requires is one performer [actor] and one spectator. Nilsson also states that the fact that every culture uses masks, shows that every culture has its own form of theatre, digging into deeper rituals, the secrets of being, and through the masks and through this play, there is magic (1993).

Long before the arrival of the Europeans more than 500 years ago, and even long after their arrival, aboriginal peoples had their own unique forms of 'theatre'. These included a vast number of rites and rituals celebrating day to day survival (birth, puberty, marriage, hunting, war, victory, curing the sick, death), religious ceremonies, dances, songs and storytelling. These 'performances' had several functions, including to teach, share dreams and visions, tell stories and to entertain.

Some examples of these include the Shaking Tent Ceremony (Cree), the prairie Sun Dance, and the 'Spirit Quest' of the

ish. The Iroquois False Face Society performed rituals based on the battle of good spirits against the bad, the False Faces, who brought disease and destruction. Most of these have disappeared under white domination. In the late nineteenth century, many of these traditional performances were made illegal under the Indian Act. It was only in 1951, when the Indian Act was revised, that these ceremonial dramas were once again allowed (Preston 136).

It is believed that the earliest Native ritual dramas were those of the Shamans, or medicine men. These consisted of either "secret initiations" or "public performances to improve the community's well-being" which included rituals to improve hunting, change the weather or cure sickness.

The Inuit held religious dramas and spirit-plays. The Shamans held ritual dramas of certain religious ceremonies which endowed them with greater powers. The early Inuit spirit-plays were performed by the whole community. These were celebrations that enacted the ritual-myth of the death and resurrection of Sedna, a mermaid-like spirit. These theatrical performances included a ritual battle, harpooning and hunting, and a final resurrection. Special circular 'igloos' were built for these dramas with a special acting area with seats arranged according to social status (Courtney 22).

Mythology and history was passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth, creating a vast and remarkably distinct body of oral narratives. Essential to these oral traditions was the power of the word, whether spoken or sung.

Many people naively assume that theatre isn't part of the Native tradition. Kleist disagrees with this:

Theatre has always been a main part of all cultures. Story-telling is grand theatre. When you listen to a story-teller, you can be spellbound by what's being presented. Dancing and ceremonies are all part of ritual theatre; there is a set way of doing things which must be memorized and known like a script. It's all a way of creating images and sending out energies. (qtd. in Kaplan 1987)

At the centre of our mythology is the figure of the 'Trickster'. He/She is also known as the 'Raven' in British Columbia, 'Nanabush' or 'Nanabozho' among the Ojibway, 'Weesageechak' to the Cree and Saulteaux, the Micmac of Nova Scotia call him 'Glooscap', among the Tagish he is known as 'Crow' and, in other places across the country, she/he is referred to as Coyote, Bluejay, Old Man, Badger or Mink. "It is the 'Christ' figure of Aboriginal spirituality" (Wheeler 1992). As a comparison, Tomson Highway says that our Trickster "stands at the centre of our dream life, as opposed to the European context where the central figure

an agonized individual. European mythology says we are here to suffer; our mythology says we are here to have a good time" (Wigston 8). And so, through our Trickster's adventures and escapades, he teaches us lessons, teaches us morals and values and warns us of good and evil, usually in a humorous, but intelligent, manner.

The oral narratives of the Natives east of Georgian Bay found their way into print when the Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century recorded them in "Jesuit Relations" (Petrone 17). Impressed with these Native narratives, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, in his publication of "Algic Researches" in 1839, wrote "Some of these tales, which I have heard, are quite fanciful, and the wildest of them are very characteristic of their notions and customs. They often take the form of allegory, and in this shape appear designed to teach some truth or illustrate some maxim" (Petrone 18).

Charlette describes what, to him, might have been Native Theatre 500 years ago:

A community or family get-together to retell a story, a legend, a story of healing and from what I've been told, a lot of it was just sitting around a fire and telling a story, having people re-enact stories. They even used props, drums, and rattles. (1993)

Therefore, we may safely suggest that Native Theatre, from a traditional indigenous perspective, has been around forever, while Native theatre in the modern sense, has only begun in the last two decades.

TOWARDS A MODERN NATIVE THEATRE

European theatrical influence began in the north with the explorers and whalers. As well as earlier naval explorations, in the late nineteenth century the Arctic and northerly regions attracted the whaling industry. The whalers brought with them European melodrama, staging plays and operettas on the wooden ships that wintered over. These were undertaken primarily for morale-boosting purposes. Scottish whalers brought with them accordions, jigs and square dancing (Cowan 27). British whalers, during the 1750's, performed the 'play of Neptune', or the 'crossing-the-line' ceremony as they crossed the Arctic Circle. Further inland, European theatrical influence was spread by the missionaries, the fur traders and the voyageurs, each with their own particular styles.

WHY THE STAGE?

Native mythology plays an important role in the development of a more modern Native theatre. The traditional ways must combine

th contemporary methods in order to translate to today's society, changing way of life and still have meaning for the audience.

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, from the Cape Croker Reserve, is a writer of poetry, children's plays, fiction and orature, and has been devoted to the survival of her people's oral stories. Her play, "Quest For Fire", which originated from an Ojibwa legend, was transformed from an oral story into a theatrical form for the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group on Manitoulin Island. In her stories and plays, Keeshig-Tobias likes to think of the white man as the Trickster (Moses and Goldie 379).

Tomson Highway, prominent playwright and a key figure in the development of Native Theatre in Canada, believes that our mythology "is filled with the most extraordinary events, beings and creatures. These lend themselves so well to visual interpretation, to exciting stage and visual creation....this oral tradition translates most easily and most effectively into a three-dimensional medium". Highway adds that, being urban 'by choice', in order for these stories and myths to be relevant to his life and spiritual beliefs today, then our mythology has to be 're-worked' to the realities of city living (Highway 29).

Dolores Dallas, a Vancouver-based artist and actor, believes that today, the oral traditions are becoming very limited due to the separation of families and due to the children being taken away and put into a white environment where they are not able to learn their traditional ways. She believes that storytelling "was always theatrical...theatre will help them learn" (1993).

Alec Steinwall, who wrote a M. A. thesis based on Native Theatre in Canada, believes that "Although the place of these traditional performances in the lives of modern native people is rapidly changing, the attitude towards the event still remains tied to its cultural function, as a source of learning and spiritual values." (10)

Floyd Favel, playwright and Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts, feels that all of our forms of storytelling, including dancing and singing, are all related. "Theatre is another medium at our disposal....our culture will blossom in contemporary theatre" (qtd. in Wheeler 12). Favel wants to be able to pass on his culture to his children and grandchildren. "As an oral culture, we are always one generation from extinction, therefore I will do my small part toward our continuing survival as a distinct people" (Favel 24).

In an extensive study of Native Literature in Canada, Penny Petrone says that one of the most exciting recent literary developments has been in drama, especially with the writing of Tomson Highway, "Canada's most celebrated Native playwright". (172) This strong development in theatre "is not surprising, considering

at the inclination to theatricality, performance, and participation in a shared event is a legacy inherited from the past". (171)

NATIVE EARTH PERFORMING ARTS

BEFORE NEPA

In keeping with our definition of contemporary 'Native Theatre', we can theoretically say that its origin and evolution began in the late 1970's, most specifically, with the production of "October Stranger". This play, written by George Kenny (Ojibway) in collaboration with Denis Lacroix (Plains Cree), was based on Kenny's book "Indians Don't Cry". The late James Buller, founder of the Association for Native Development in the Visual and Performing Arts (or ANDVPA as we will henceforth refer), was determined to stage a play that was "written, produced, directed and performed by Native people". Indeed, the whole production team was Native, including the stage management team, who also designed the set. The actors included Marianne Jones (Beachcombers) and Shirley Cheechoo (who would later form the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group) under the direction of Lacroix (a graduate of the National Theatre School who studied acting and technical theatre). Buller had arranged for "October Stranger" to be performed at the Sixth International Amateur Theatre Association Festival in Monaco in 1977 as Canada's representative. This initial theatre group was called 'Kematewan'.

Unfortunately, the space in which they were scheduled to perform was very tiny and was of a typical European proscenium arch style which did not suit their needs. The show had to be re-blocked (re-choreographed) to suit the space. Often, the notion of a staged production in the European tradition can be a deterrent to a people whose spiritual and cultural heritage is oral, transitory, circular and oriented to the land rather than architectural structures (Souchotte 13). Also, according to Lacroix, they were not well-received because they "did not bring their feathers and their furs and their drums", they were not the stereotypical 'Indians' that were expected (Lacroix 1993).

Buller and Lacroix realized that their play did not fit in any of the festival's categories. This prompted them to create and organize the World Indigenous Theatre Festival. In 1980, their first Festival was held at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario and brought together many people of many cultures, attracting delegates from as far away as the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Scandinavia and the United States. The festival saw the emergence of a large pool of Native talent, including Spiderwoman Theatre from New York (a feminist theatre group of mainly Native women), Tukak Teatret from Denmark (Inuits of Greenland) and graduates of the Native Theatre School in Ontario. Due to its success, Buller and ANDVPA were again asked to organize another festival for the summer of 1982. Unfortunately, Buller died shortly before the festival opened.

It is important to note at this point that, Canada's first known professional Native theatre company was officially formed in

30. This Sioux Lookout [Ontario] based company was called "Northern Delights". Several soon-to-be-known artists were influenced and/or involved, in various ways, with this earliest company. [Please see 'Native Theatre Companies of the Past'.]

Earlier that year [1982], Lacroix and Buller were approached by Elizabeth McLuhan, a Curator, to do a show for the opening ceremony of Thunder Bay's new Centre For Indian Art. "Native Images in Transition" was developed in co-production with Kam Theatre Lab, a local theatre company known for its productions of issue-oriented musical collectives of particular significance to Northern Ontario (Johnson 283). The inspiration for this play came from Daphne Odjig's painting at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa entitled "The Indian In Transition". Lacroix, a strong believer that painters are some of the best storytellers, decided to use the images from the painting to develop a discourse on Native history and the effects that European colonization have had on Native culture and art. One of these images, for example, was of the residential schools. Bunny Sicard (married to the late James Buller's son, Ed, and an employee at ANDVPA) was brought in to assist in the writing and directing. The cast included Doris Linklater, Monique Mojica, Errol Kinistino, Jim Compton, Nancy Hindmarsh and Marc C. Hurst. After playing from October 2-4 at the Gallery, the company performed the show in the Kam Lab's usual performance venue, the Ukrainian Labour Temple, for three more shows.

NEPA - THE EARLY YEARS

Near the end of 1982, this small company of actors, directors and writers decided that there was a great interest and need to develop a Native Theatre company. The name, "Native Earth Performing Arts" was decided upon. (Lacroix had previously worked for a, now non-existent, Native theatre company called 'Red Earth Performing Arts in Seattle, Washington.) The term 'performing arts' was selected because it covers a broader scope of the arts, including dance and music. Their rehearsal space and performance venue would be the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. At their initial meeting, an interim Board of Directors was set up and included Billy Brittain, Mary Lou Fox, Tom Hill, Elizabeth McLuhan, Carol Rowntree, David Campbell, Helmut Fuchs, Barry Karp, Doris Linklater, Yvonne McRae and Bunny Sicard with Denis Lacroix as President.

In preparation for their next production, a grant application filed by Sicard stated the objectives of the company:

To help maintain and strengthen the pride and identity of Native peoples by providing a unique artistic platform for the expression of traditional and contemporary Native themes. And, to instill in all peoples a respect and appreciation by communicating on the highest level of

● excellence the cultural values and beliefs of Native People.

To provide a Native Performing Arts Company with international, as well as national, touring capabilities in a highly excellent manner. To mount productions on Native themes providing Native Performing and Production Artists an opportunity to demonstrate their talents in one company. (Preston 1992)

In the spring of 1983, Native Earth Performing Arts (NEPA) was awarded a touring grant and developed their second play "Who Am I?" or "Wey-Can-Nee-Nah". This was to be the beginning of a series of collectives that would emerge over the next three years. This production was developed with Sicard and Barry Karp directing, music by David Campbell, choreography by Rene Highway (brother of Tomson), set by Lacroix and production managed by Ron Cook. There were five actors in the cast. Rosa Sague played the young Native girl, brought up by non-native foster parents, in search of her identity. Her friend, played by Pazhekeezhic, invites her to a Pow Wow where she begins her search. Her foster mother (and Dancer) was played by Barbara Lavallee, while Ned Benson portrayed her foster father (and the Old Man). The Traditional Dancer was performed by Melvin John. The tour played to reserves in southern Ontario in April and May. The following June, 1983, Native Earth Performing Arts became incorporated.

The next production, "Double Take/A Second Look", marked the entrance of several key figures in the Native Theatre movement in Canada. Tomson Highway, a Cree from Brochet, Manitoba, armed with two degrees, one in music, joined the group as Musical Director. With him, came his nephew, actor Billy Merasty. Muriel and Gloria Miguel, with the latter's daughter, Monique Mojica (Kuna/Rappahannock), arrived from New York City's Spiderwoman Theatre while Maariu Olsen arrived from Tukak Teatret to conduct a mask workshop. The involvement of these two already established theatre companies would have a lasting effect on the company.

"Double Take/A Second Look" was a collective creation which explored the themes of loneliness, fear, domination, control, resentment, sexuality and stereotypical images of Natives. The four actors, Merasty, Mojica, Olsen and (Gloria) Miguel, Director Muriel Miguel, Highway and Jeffrey Thomas, the stage manager, all contributed to the set, lighting and costume design. As well as playing at the Native Canadian Centres in Toronto and St. Catharines, they performed at Guelph's Ontario Correctional Institute and the Walpole Island Reserve during the last several weeks of 1983, and in February 1984, they performed in New York City at the Theatre For the New City in conjunction with the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers Pow Wow.

In the fall of 1984, for a clearer approach to the traditional Native Trickster figure, Highway, Mojica, Linklater and a newcomer from Greenland, Makka Kleist (Inuit) participated in a mask and clown workshop conducted by Richard Pochinko and Ian Wallace of Toronto's Theatre Resource Centre, a theatrical group devoted to exploring new clown performance techniques. The resulting performance, directed by Wallace, was entitled "Clown Trickster's Workshop" and played at the Native Canadian Centre in September 1984. (For a full description of the "Trickster", read under "The Rez Sisters".)

Next, with Mojica serving as Artistic Director, the same cast, with the addition of Merasty, began a script development workshop on an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's "Waiting For Godot", under the direction of Muriel Miguel. Beckett's play is an absurdist drama that deals with the human condition in a world that has already undergone disaster. Two of the characters, Vladimir and Estragon, complain that "nothing is to be done", but the adaptation, "Give Them A Carrot For As Long As The Sun Is Green", implies that there IS something to be done. The play, consisting of a group of short scenes on street life, was re-written to reflect contemporary Native reality with an attempt at optimism, whereas Beckett's play is very pessimistic. "Give Them a Carrot" played at the Native Canadian Centre for seven nights from December 13-22, 1984, then at the Theatre Resource Centre from January 10-20, 1985.

"Trickster's Cabaret" marked the entrance of another influential figure in the history of Native Earth, actor Gary Farmer ("Pow Wow Highway"). The cast was rounded out by Mojica, Merasty and Kleist. In this collective creation, under the direction of Pochinko, with musical direction by Micah Barnes (The Nylons), each actor developed a different Trickster figure. Throughout December, 1985, "Trickster's Cabaret" played at the Native Canadian Centre, the Trojan Coffee House and the Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace.

NEPA - A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH - "The Highway Years"

The spring of 1986 was a critical turning point for NEPA. For the first time, they were awarded some major funding for a minimum period of five years through The Native Community Branch of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture. They moved into their own office space on Jarvis Street and with Tomson Highway as the Artistic Director, a new (and still current) mandate was announced:

To provide a base for professional Native performers, writers, technicians, and other artists.

To encourage the use of theatre as a form of communication within the Native community, including the use of Native languages.

To communicate to our audiences the experiences that are unique to Native people in contemporary society.

To contribute to the further development of theatre in Canada.

Elaine Bomberry, from the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario, joined the 'staff' as Administrator. (This position was later changed to General Manager.) About this same time, NEPA moved into their first 'real' office, a space on Jarvis Street. Bomberry's first day also coincided with the first day of rehearsals for their first scripted play.

THE REZ SISTERS

Tomson Highway wrote "The Rez Sisters" the previous winter when he was working at De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre on Manitoulin Island. It was subsequently workshopped, in February of 1986 at De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre, under the direction of Larry Lewis. Participating in this workshop was Gloria Eshkibok, Doris Linklater, Greta Cheechoo, Mary Assiniwe and Mary Green. Highway had plans of writing a cycle of seven plays, all based on reserve life, incorporating both the Cree and Ojibway languages and revolving around the world of Native Mythology. He explains the importance of "Nanabush" in the opening comments in the published script:

The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings, and events. Foremost among these beings is the "Trickster", as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. "Weesageechak" in Cree, "Nanabush" in Ojibway, "Raven" in others, "Coyote" in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, he teaches us about the nature and meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit.

Some say that "Nanabush" left this continent when the whiteman came. We believe he is still here among us - albeit a little the worse for wear and tear - having assumed other guises. Without him - and without the spiritual health of this figure - the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (Highway 1988)

"The Rez Sisters" depicts the story of the lives of seven Native women from the fictional Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, or Wasy. (Highway based Wasy on the Wikwemikong Unceded Reservation and on his own in Manitoba.) The oldest sisters are Pelajia

Technose, who wants to be Chief, and Philomena Moosetail, who dreams of a new toilet. They were played by real-life sisters, Gloria and Muriel Miguel. Monique Mojica played Marie-Adele Starblanket, the half-sister of the first two. Marie-Adele, mother of fourteen children, is dying of cancer. Her sisters are Annie Cook, a wanna-be country and western singer, and Emily Dictionary, a tough biker chick who is trying to deal with the tragic death of a lover. They were portrayed by Anne Anglin and Gloria Eshkibok, respectively. (Emily Dictionary is to be a pivotal character in the third part of "The Rez Cycle".) The gossip, Veronique St.Pierre, the half-sister of all of the above, was originally played by Margaret Cozry. Her "mentally disabled" adopted daughter, Zhaboonigan, was performed by Sally Singal. It is interesting to note that the only two non-native actors were Singal and Anglin.

The late Rene Highway, choreographer and dancer, portrayed the role of "Nanabush". This mostly silent character appears throughout, usually in the guise of the seagull and later, as the Bingo Master, "The Master of the Game". The playwright strongly recommends that this role be played by a male dancer, either traditional, modern or ballet. During the live Bingo game, Cheryl Mills played the Bingo Girl.

The women are bored with their lives until they receive news of the "Biggest Bingo In The World" to be held in Toronto. The dream of winning the \$500,000 jackpot is so overwhelming for the women, that they start a wild fundraising campaign to earn money for their trip to Toronto. It is a chance to change their lives, to win a way out of their tortured existences. They are simple, but important dreams. A dream of a new toilet, "white, spirit white"; a new stove, "the kind that has the three different compartments in the oven alone"; an island in the North Channel with "no more smelly, stinky old pulp and paper mill" and a chance to "buy every one of Patsy Cline's records". The women make their journey in a borrowed van, experience a flat tire, but make it to Toronto, as eager as ever. The audience is supplied with punch-out bingo cards and they join in the first game for a prize of \$20.00. The women continue to play the game, feverishly, and pocket a small sum of money. They return to the Rez (the reserve) and life goes on, except for Marie-Adele Starblanket, who danced her dance of death with the Bingo Master/Trickster.

The percussionist, musician David Tomlinson, provided the necessary rhythm and soundscape. With the use of more than thirty different instruments, the music served to signal the arrival of certain characters, established the mood and commented on the action.

"The Rez Sisters" was first co-produced with the Act IV Theatre Company (then one Toronto's alternative theatres) in the auditorium of the Native Canadian Centre. This original production was directed by Larry Lewis. Lewis is a graduate of the Master's

programme in Directing at York University and was the Co-Artistic Director of the Act IV Theatre Company. It was choreographed by Rene Highway. The Lighting Design was conceived by Patsy Lang, who has had a long association with Native theatre through De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig, Northern Delights and the Native Theatre School. Other members of the production team included Marilyn Bercovich, Set and Costume Design; Jennifer Stein, Production Manager; Joseph Boccia, Stage Manager (who now works on the popular television series, "Road To Avonlea") and Luanne Naponse, Assistant Stage Manager.

"The Rez Sisters" opened on November 26 and played to December 14, 1986. The first week of the run played to sparse houses, but during the second week, a member of the Toronto press gave the show an excellent review, so that by closing night, 200 people had to be turned away (Bomberry in Preston 1992).

"The Rez Sisters" took the Toronto theatre scene by storm. The Toronto Star announced that:

'The Rez Sisters' which has suddenly appeared, seemingly out of nowhere....is one of the most touching, exuberant, cleverly crafted and utterly entrancing plays in Toronto (and) is being staged not in any conventional theatre, but - of all places - at the Native Canadian Centre on Spadina Road. (Mietkiewicz 1986)

Liam Lacey of the Globe and Mail was impressed with this play featuring "seven of the most remarkable women you could ever hope to meet". He goes on to comment on the many interesting staging devices:

When a tire blows out, both the cast and audience are left in the dark, but by now the characters are so concrete and familiar, the lack of visual information doesn't interfere in the least....another comes when the group reaches Toronto for the bingo match. The audience participates in a warm-up game with the women (the winner collects a cash prize). (1986)

"The Rez Sisters" turned out to be so popular in 1986 that it was nominated for two major awards. At the 15th Annual Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Awards at the St. Lawrence Centre, "The Rez Sisters" received a \$2,000 award as runner-up for Outstanding New Play of 1986. Other winners that year included John Murrell for "Further West" (the top prize), Linda Griffiths for "Jessica" (this production featured actress Tantoo Cardinal and two of NEPA's top actors, Graham Greene and Makka Kleist) and Don Hannah for "The Wedding Script".

A short time later, Tomson Highway was presented with the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play (Drama/Comedy) of Toronto's 1986/87 Season. That same year, NEPA's production of

ria" (also written by Highway) was nominated for Outstanding Production in the Small Theatre Division.

This was just the beginning of a long life for "The Rez Sisters". For a play that had its roots on a small reserve up north, it had an incredible response. Requests came in from across the country and a nation wide tour was organized by Vancouver booking agent, Bernard Bomers. The five-city national tour was made possible by the generous support of the Touring Office of the Canada Council, the Department of Indian Affairs, the Ontario Arts Council, Metropolitan Toronto Cultural Affairs Division, the Toronto Arts Council, Kaaydah Schatten and EDPER Enterprises Ltd.

The 1987/1988 tour went to The Great Canadian Theatre in Ottawa (October 7-11), the Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg (November 4-21), the Factory Theatre in Toronto (November 24 - December 20), the Vancouver East Cultural Centre (January 6-30) and the Globe Theatre in Regina (February 1-6).

Audience response was positive. In Ottawa, one reviewer commented that "It's a fun evening of theatre, full of laughter, music, great stories and some of the most delightful down-to-earth characters one could hope to see on stage" (Crook 1987:E6). The Winnipeg Free Press said that the production "spurs laughter one moment, bitter rumination the next, but leaves you grateful for the pummelling" (McIlroy 1987). The Vancouver Sun called it "powerful, funny and genuine" (Dyck 1988).

For the national tour, Michel Charbonneau joined the company as Technical Director and played the part of the "Gravedigger" while Tina Bomberly came on as the Apprentice Stage Manager/"Bingo Girl". Patsy Lang designed the set and lights and Cheryl Mills designed the costumes.

During this time, NEPA received an invitation to be one of two plays to represent Canada at the Edinburgh International Festival in August, 1988. (The other play was "B-Movie: The Play", a very popular play by Toronto's Tom Wood.) Major funding for this project was supplied by the Department of the Secretary of State and the Department of External Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Communications (Ontario) and the Toronto Arts Council.

The company almost had to turn down the offer due to a lack of staff, but Patsy Lang stepped in and helped to organize. Three company members did have to decline the offer, so Shirley Cheechoo took over the role of Marie-Adele, Aidan Cosgrove played the Grave Digger and Steven Crouch took over Stage Management. The preparation for "The Rez Sisters", though, had been rushed and very tense, notes Highway. "We were nervous and excited - there was something very poignant about presenting the play so far from home and that our voice was being heard beyond Canada" (Crew 1998).

"The Rez Sisters" was performed eight times between August 15-20 and audience response was, again, enthusiastic. An instrumental newspaper, 'The Scotsman', called "The Rez Sisters" "A celebration - a great, sassy, comic, pulsing celebration of down-to-earth womanly life" (Lockerbie 1988). The Glasgow Herald commented that Highway's play "has wonderful moments of robust humour and some of deep feeling" (Fowler 1988). The Festival Times said that "the strong cast give vibrant and earthly performances that are alternately delightful, funny and introspective" (1988). Toronto Star's Robert Crew took in the Festival and in summing up the different responses to the two Canadian representatives, he said: "Scots cheer Rez Sisters, B-Movie gets yawn" (Crew 1988).

AFTER THE REZ SISTERS

Makka Kleist trained in Denmark and worked for five years with Tukak Teatret, touring Europe and North America. She moved to Canada in 1983 explaining that "I followed my intuition. I sensed a very exciting atmosphere in this city [Toronto], with a new theatre ready to emerge. I have not regretted it for a moment" (Toronto Star 1987). In Toronto, Kleist and Highway began talking about a one-woman show that he wanted to write and she wanted to perform. With the help of Director, Larry Lewis, they set about the task of creating drama to Highway's poetry and developing a script dealing with the concept of the affirmation of the power of women. "Aria" was originally workshopped at the Theatre Centre's Research and Development Seminar Series in October of 1984. On February 9, 1987, a press release was issued:

"Aria" is the "song of woman", at centre stage of which is this fabulous mythical Native diva. In this guise, the solo actress travels through the lives of all the icons that celebrate womanhood, and more: woman as grandmother, woman as mother, woman as fetus inside the womb, as child, bride, wife, as Earth Mother figure - in the classical, the Christian and the contemporary contexts - woman as competitor on the corporate ladder, as movie magazine sex goddess, as prostitute, as the horrifying "Woman of the Rolling Head" from Cree mythology and, finally, as the Earth, the ultimate Diva of all time. The piece affirms the power of the "feminine principle" inherent in the Earth as the ultimate source of the creative and pro-creative impulse; it affirms and reaffirms the necessity that we must regain our faith in her if we are to survive as a people, a survival very much in question at this time, a time in our history when the spectre of nuclear annihilation faces us square in the face. (Highway 1987)

"Aria" opened on Tuesday, March 3, 1987 at the Annex Theatre with Makka Kleist in the starring role. Portraying a myriad of characters over 90 minutes, Kleist "has a chameleon-like ability to

ange from toothless hag or drunken prostitute into a radiant young woman" (Crew 1987:D11). Ray Conologue, reviewer for the Globe and Mail, admits that he did not see "The Rez Sisters" and therefore finds it "difficult to find a context" for "Aria", although he does call it "a personal and uneven piece of writing". He adds that Kleist and Highway "have made themselves heard in the mainstream theatre community without sacrificing their own beliefs and priorities" (Conologue 1987).

The production team consisted of Patsy Lang, Lighting and Set Design; Sara Schilt, Costume Design (a graduate of the National Theatre School in Design); Michel Charbonneau, Technical Director; Alexandra Cumberland, Stage Manager and John Dalingwater and Elaine Bomberly (NEPA's Administrator) as Production Managers. Well-known Souix artist, Maxine Noel, created the pen and ink sketch that appeared in the poster and advertisements, while David Beyer created the graphic design for all printed matter.

In 1987, "Aria" was nominated for a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best Production in the Small Theatre Division. It went on to play at the Asia Pacific Festival in Vancouver from June 24-28 and the Aasivak Festival in Greenland from July 8-12. To the great loss of Native Earth, Kleist decided to remain in Greenland.

This production was made possible with the support of The Ontario Arts Council and Futures. Unfortunately, despite the growing success and popularity of Native Earth, the provincial government cut the budget of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, Native Community Branch just after its first season. Native Earth lost its core funding.

Despite this great loss, Bomberly stayed with Native Earth for seven months before she was put back on salary, while Highway, was without salary for a year and a half. "There was a lot of activity happening with Native Earth at the time", commented Bomberly, "plus we were just entering our fifth year of existence, which is crucial for core funding from the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council. So, once we got over that year, we would get core funding in place. We knew we had a good chance of getting core funding, things were looking good, so I stayed" (Bomberly 1993). During this time, Highway survived on royalties from "The Rez Sisters".

The 1987/88 season's first show opened on February 14, 1988, at the Native Canadian Centre. "New Song....New Dance" was a multi-media show conceived by Tomson and Rene Highway which explored the Native experience in Canada's urban centres. Writer/Composer/Pianist Tomson Highway created a modernistic piano score that was jazz influenced. Choreographer, Rene Highway, had devised new dances that combined traditional elements with modern dance. The other dancers included Alejandro Ronceria, a Native of Columbia, and Raoul Trujillo, a Genizaro Indian from New Mexico.

● have had much experience behind them. Rene Highway explained that:

The goal is to develop awareness in other performing arts. And the fact that this is a dance show, as opposed to a straight dramatic show, is in keeping with Native Earth's mandate to develop all aspects of native performing arts and the artists involved in them. (qtd. in Jung 1988:65)

Daniel David Moses is a Delaware poet and playwright. His first staged play, "Coyote City", was produced in the spring of 1988 when he was the playwright-in-residence. He explained how he first got involved in Native Earth:

I first met Tomson at the Association (ANDVPA) many years ago when I was doing volunteer work there, but I didn't really get involved with NEPA until the year he came back from Wikwemikong, where he was for a year. All the members of the board had gotten jobs out of town that year, and NEPA was about to fall apart, so he put out a call and got a whole bunch of new people in there and we picked it up and got it going. That was probably in late 1985 or early 1986. I started writing "Coyote City" the year before that because I had seen "Trickster's Cabaret" and I'd just been so impressed with the level of the acting and I figured it was about time I wrote something. I realized people had developed to the point where they could actually deal with what I write. My whole idea of the kind of writing that I do, is that it is meant to be heard. So, I don't see all that big of a difference in the medias for me. And it was something I had always intended to do anyway. My university writing training included all the media. (Moses 1993)

"Coyote City" followed a young girl, Lena, into the city to meet her boyfriend, Johnny, who has been dead for six months, in the Silver Dollar. Alanis King (now the Artistic Director for De-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group) played the part of Lena and Gordon Odjig played Johnny. The rest of the cast included Gloria May Eshkibok as Clarisse, Tina Bomberly as Boo, Margaret Cozry as the mother and Ron (Loon Hawk) Cook as the Priest. The production was directed by Anne Anglin ("The Rez Sisters"), Assistant Directed by Tomson Highway, lighting design by Jim Plaxton, Stage Managed by Pamela Matthews (Cree from the Sacnigo Lake Band in Northern Ontario) and the Production Manager was Cheryl Landy. "Coyote City" was part of the "From The Ground Up" National Festival of Canadian Theatre hosted by the Theatre Centre and Mixed Company in May 1988.

"The Sage, The Dancer and The Fool" marked the opening of the 1988-89 season. Created by the Highway brothers and nephew, Billy Merasty, it opened on March 5, 1989 to rave reviews. The press

lease described the show saying it "is about one day in the life of an Indian in the city, a sort of mini-Ulysses, except this time Dublin is Toronto and Leopold Bloom is a Cree Indian man! This innovative undertaking uses poetry (in both English and Cree), modern and Cree traditional dance, music and European Clown and theatrical techniques" (12 Jan. 1989). The show was performed by Kennetch Charlette, Alejandro Ronceria and Billy Merasty, in those roles, respectively.

RoncERIA, a dancer and choreographer from Columbia, explained that "The sage represents the mind, the dancer is the spirit and the fool is concerned with the material aspects of life". He added that "Despite the fact that it is a portrait of Toronto eating up Native people and suppressing their language, their culture and their religious beliefs, it is a very beautiful piece" (qtd. in Jung 1989).

In the review titled "Another Triumph for Highway", Ray Conologue stated that this show "is another demonstration of the vitality of Tomson Highway's theatre talent. The show works. And that, considering how difficult it is to tell an outsider's story without compromising his language or resorting to pathos, is a considerable achievement" (1989).

The play was nominated for a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best New Play in the Small Theatre Category.

The second play of Highway's "Rez Cycle" was mounted as a co-production with Theatre Passe Muraille and presented at their (TPM's) mainspace from April 21 to May 22, 1989. Featuring seven men, "Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing" was directed by Larry Lewis and featured, what would be referred to today as, an all-star cast: Graham Greene, Gary Farmer, Erroll Kinistino, Billy Merasty, Ben Cardinal, Ron Cook, Kennetch Charlette and Doris Linklater as Nanabush.

The promotional material described the play: "The flipside to "The Rez Sisters", this explosive new play tells the story of the anarchy brought about in the male community when Dry Lips Manigitogan, that Terrible Dictionary woman, Big Bum Pegahmagahbow and all the other women of Wasaychigan Hill Reserve start their very own hockey team, the Wasy Wallerettes. Nanabush is ever present in this rivetting adventurous journey into life on the 'rez'" (27 March 1989).

The Globe and Mail described "Dry Lips" as "emotionally riveting" and describes the characters:

So we have the community drunk, Pierre St. Pierre - an UNBELIEVABLY inventive and forceful clown performance by Graham Greene - trying to ransom back the skates he pawned for whisky, so he can be the referee at the first

women's game; the town's religious fanatic, Spooky Lacroix, who knits booties for his crucifix; and his protege, Dickie Bird Halkett, whom Spooky is optimistically training as a preacher in spite of the fact that Dickie Bird is mute. The trickster figure of Nanabush, played by Doris Linklater, has up till now been a comic sexual goddess, arraying herself with huge false breasts and buttocks. Suddenly she becomes Black Lady Halkett, Dickie Bird's mother. His muteness, we discover, is the result of fetal alcohol syndrome and the stress of being born in the Dickie Bird Bar, after which he is named" (Conologue 1989).

But, the play contained shocking and disturbing scenes with course language. At one point, a pregnant young woman is raped with a crucifix. But, Highway, as always, managed to fill the play with some absolutely hilarious scenes.

"Dry Lips" was the hit of the Toronto theatre season and was nominated for six Dora Mavor Moore Awards. It won four: Best Production; Best New Play; Most Outstanding Male Performance, Graham Greene and Most Outstanding Female Performance in a Supporting Role, Doris Linklater. The other nominations were for Larry Lewis, Best Director in the Large Theatre Division and for Gary Farmer, Most Outstanding Male Performance.

The play also won the Floyd S. Chalmers Award for the most Outstanding Canadian Play performed in Toronto in 1989.

"Dry Lips" went on to be produced at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and finally to the famous Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto. Makka Kleist explains the importance of this production:

One time, Tomson and I were walking around (while rehearsing "Aria") and we looked up at the wonderful Royal Alexandra Theatre and Tomson would say, "One day we'll be playing there." And we'd be laughing, it was like a joke. It was funny because were talking about all these great ideas, all these great plays that we were gonna do and all these beautiful native performers that we gonna work with. You gotta have those dreams, fantasies and you gotta think BIG. In 1987, I went home, after "Aria", but.....it was so amazing when I came back to Toronto in 1991, everything was going nuts! The guys were playing at the Royal Alex!! I didn't even know when I landed in Toronto, but everybody was talking about Native Earth and the great performance of "Dry Lips". It was the talk of the town. It didn't matter who I met, they'd say "you've got to see this great show!" So I felt SO proud even though I didn't have anything to do with it. (Kleist 1993)

The first Festival of New Native Plays and Playwrights, "Weesageechak Begins To Dance", was held at the end of the 1988/89 Season. Six new scripts were workshopped and presented as staged readings at Theatre Passe Muraille from May 12 to June 8, 1989. These new plays were "Deep Shit City", by Daniel David Moses [produced by Cahoots Theatre in 1991 as "Big Buck City"]; "Diary of A Crazy Boy" by John McLeod; Monique Mojica's "Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots" [produced by Theatre Passe Muraille and Nightwood Theatre in 1990]; "Three Indian Women" by Teressa Nahane; "Bones" by Ben Cardinal and Drew Hayden Taylor's "Up The Road".

This first festival was so successful that Native Earth decided to make it an annual part of their season. Preston pointed out that:

The script festival is important for several reasons. It provides writers with an opportunity to workshop their plays and gives both plays and playwrights exposure to the theatre community. Several of the scripts workshopped received full productions, some by companies other than Native Earth. NEPA also encourages all aspiring Native playwrights to submit works-in-progress or new play ideas to them. (1992)

In an introductory comment to the Festival, Tomson Highway wrote "Together, these artists should ensure a long, healthy future for Native Earth, for themselves as writers and, as a whole, for the on-going development of Native literature" (1989).

The 1988/89 also marked the departure of Elaine Bomberly and the arrival of Teresa Castonguay as General Manager. The position was advertised, but there didn't seem to any Native people qualified for the job. Later that year, Castonguay was able to hire Michael Johns, an Ojibway from Sault Ste. Marie, as an Assistant Arts Administrator. Elaine Bomberly, with her partner and mother, Rita, went on to form their own talent agency for native performers. "All Nations Talent Group" operates out of the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford.

The first show of the 1989/90 Season, running February 8 to March 4, was John McLeod's first play, "Diary of A Crazy Boy". One critic stated that "McLeod obviously has a lot of talent, and his script manages to be both funny and emotionally powerful" (Dickie 1990). The story concerns a teenage boy undergoing treatment at a psychiatric institute who calls upon the help of his shamanic Algonkian ancestral spirits as he struggles with his doctor for the freedom he desires. The play, directed by the Highway Brothers, starred Graham Greene as the Doctor Post and Kenneth Charlette as Darrell Shallfoe. The other cast members included Billy Merasty as Lurker, Richard Partington as Calvin Morris/Waiter, Jim Mason as

cle Bob, Herbie Barnes as Spirit Boy, Marrie Mumford as Ruby Shallfoe and Bruce Sinclair as Jerry Shallfoe.

The press release announced an important development in Native Theatre: "Within two days, two new Native plays will open! This heralds in a new era in Native theatre and culture, one that will see Native artists playing a more significant role in the cultural life of this country". It was at this same time that Monique Mojica's play "Princess Pocahontas and The Blue Spots" opened at Theatre Passe Muraille. Both of these plays were workshopped in the first Festival of New Native Plays and Playwrights.

"The Beavers" was the first - and to date the only - play produced by Native Earth that was written by a non-native. Highway explained that it was a tribute to the late Richard Pochinko, who, while he was Artistic Director of the Theatre Resource Centre, proposed the co-production. This musical, written by Ron Weihs, was performed at the Annex Theatre from April 20 - May 13, 1990. The music was by James Gray, Rene Highway did the choreography, and the directors were Cheryl Cashman and Tomson Highway.

The 'Program Notes' state that:

This production of The Beavers is dedicated to the memory of Richard Pochinko, under whose directorial guidance The Beavers was first developed. Richard, co-founder and co-artistic director of Theatre Resource Centre, was one of North America's leading exponents and teachers of modern clowning. The Pochinko technique is based on a fusion of the traditional European approach with the rich clown traditions of North American Native peoples. Theatre Resource Centre has been associated with Native Earth since its beginning, and for years it was Richard's dream that the two companies would co-produce The Beavers, to deliver a message of care and love for our Mother, the Earth. Richard, this is for you.

The 16-member cast included Gloria May Eshkibok as Pandemonia and Ian Wallace as Professor Philosophostophos. The press release described the play as:

A musical comedy loosely based on an ancient Aristophanes farce. The Beavers decide they've had it with the current Canadian political system and march to Ottawa to take over Parliament Hill. Rock, reggae, jazz, opera and much more. The songs and dances in the show are hilarious, witty and filled with under-the-belt political barbs. Greek classical comedy meets Indian humour! (Sept. 1989)

The season closed with "Weesageechak Begins To Dance II" which further developed three plays: "The Bootlegger Blues" by Drew Hayden Taylor, "Generic Warriors and No-name Indians" by Ben

rdinal, and Margo Kane's "Moonlodge". These works-in-progress were presented at the Factory Theatre Studio Cafe in June, 1990.

"Moonlodge" began as a series of improvisations with Floyd Favel in January 1990. After ten days further development with Leonard Fisher, it was mounted for the Women In View Performing Arts Festival in Vancouver as an oral storytelling performance. Next, it was workshopped at Native Earth's New Play Festival. Kane described the process:

In the development of "Moonlodge", the fact that it was an oral storytelling was very important. Without a written script, I told the story over and over, embellishing each character and scene anew every performance. It was a method not without its trauma. Also I have trained in a Western tradition that is very critical of dramatic work and I knew that storytelling did not quite measure up in that tradition. Coupled with my own lack of writing skills, I was fraught with anxiety. Always remembering that my intention was to write it down, I went through incredible fear at the mere thought of taking the next step. An invitation to workshop with a dramaturge at "Weesageechak Begins To Dance" was the opportunity I needed. (Kane 27)

Margo Kane's one-woman show "Moonlodge", directed by Floyd Favel, was staged in a full production from November 8 - December 2, 1991, at the Native Canadian Centre. The Moonlodge is the women's circle, where Agnes, a young Metis woman raised in non-native foster homes, rediscovers a link with her relations. Kane said in the program that "Moonlodge is a tribute to all of our grandmothers, mothers, sisters and daughters and an acknowledgement of their sacred position in this life" (1990).

One critic noted that "Moonlodge....a mere slip of a play....is a show that offers insight tempered with warmth, a totally satisfying evening that delights with almost every turn" (Berger 1990).

The crew included Jeffrey Trudeau as the stage manager, Denise Bolduc as the Production Assistant and Stephen Degenstein as the Production Designer. Degenstein was nominated for two Dora Mavor Moore Awards for Outstanding Set Design and Outstanding Lighting Design.

"Weesageechak Begins To Dance 111" was held at the Native Canadian Centre in December, 1990. The works presented were "Walking The Line" by Rebecca Belmore and Allen Deleary, "Dog Soldier" by Jack Burning, "Almighty Voice and His Wife" by Daniel David Moses (produced at Native Earth in February 1992) and "Diva Ojibway" by Tina Mason (to be produced by Native Earth and the Blyth Festival in 1994). Mason commented that she felt the workshop

very helpful in the development of "Diva" and that the actors, director and dramaturge gave her a good insight into the characters (1993).

"Son of Ayash" was adapted from the Cree/Ojibway legend of the hero, Ayash, by Jim Morris. It opened at the Native Canadian Centre on February 14 and played to March 10, 1991.

Director, Raoul Trujillo, in the program notes, describes his vision:

My motivation for creating the subtext, "The Journey of Dreams", in this the third working of what is perhaps the most ancient and most revered of Cree-Ojibway hero myths was by no means meant to disregard the legend but, rather, to call attention to its importance and its meaning. The legend of the Son of Ayash has, like that of Ulysses, survived a couple of millennia in oral tradition because of the value of what it has to teach us. And, as in the story of Ulysses again, it is the basic story of the life journey and the overcoming of evil and the fear of death, to be reborn into a new world of hope and promise. (1991)

The reviews were favourable. The Toronto Star stated "With this sophisticated and emotionally forceful presentation, Native culture can claim to have been given some justified theatrical status" (Chapman 1991:C2). The Canadian Tribune said that "Son of Ayash is a rare opportunity to enter into a rich world of imagination and meaning that many Canadians have long sought to destroy" (25 Feb. 1991).

The cast included Alejandro Ronceria, Shirley Cheechoo, Gloria Miguel, Jack Horne and Jani Lauzon. Director and Choreographer, Raoul Trujillo, utilized a combination of dance, theatre, music, Cree and English to tell the ancient legend in a new form. "Son Of Ayash" was also nominated for two Doras, one for Outstanding Sound Design (Marsha Coffey) and one for Outstanding Costume Design (Shadowland).

The 1991/92 Season opened with "Weesageechak Begins to Dance IV" and included such works as "Going Through Deja Vu", Billy Merasty's first play, which would later become "Fireweed"; Ben Cardinal's "Generic Warriors and No-Name Indians"; "Twentieth Century Indian Boy" by Mark Seabrook and Beatrice Mosionier's "Night of the Trickster". All of these plays would soon find full productions in the near future. The other plays workshopped were "Albeit Aboriginal" by Marie Annharte Baker, "School of Hard Knocks" by Leonard Fisher and "A Savage Equilibrium", co-written by Monique Mojica, Fernando Hernandez-Perez and Jani Lauzon. The public readings of the seven plays were held at the Native Canadian Centre from November 26 to December 1, 1991.

In February and March of 1992, Daniel David Moses would again see one of his plays produced, **"ALMIGHTY VOICE AND HIS WIFE"**. [The play had already received an initial production in Ottawa with Billy Merasty and Jani Lauzon.] This production featured Pamela Matthews and Jonathan Fisher and was directed by Marrie Mumford and Larry Lewis. The press release describes the play.

Almighty Voice and His Wife is the story of a 19th century renegade whose adventures have become an important part of Native folklore. A young Cree man who lived on the Saskatchewan prairies during the late 1800's - the generation after the Riel Rebellion when it's hard for any Indian to live happily ever after - Almighty Voice meets and falls in love with a young Cree girl named White Girl. When on the eve of his marriage he offers a cow (that is not his to offer) for the wedding feast, a series of exciting, amazing and ultimately tragic events follow. Daniel David Moses' play is a love story with an angry and liberating twist - he blends realistic and surrealistic styles with the antics of minstrels in a vaudevillian horror show to make the retelling of historical fact absolutely mesmerizing. (20 Jan. 1992)

The production team included Marsha Coffey, Sound/Music Design with Denise Bolduc assisting; Stephen Degenstein as Production Designer with Kent Monkman assisting; and Jeffrey Trudeau and David Osawabine in stage management. [Please see section under 'Training' for more information on Monkman and Bolduc.] Stephen Degenstein was again nominated for a Dora Award, this time for Set Design.

"Night of the Trickster", which was workshopped in November, 1991, opened at the Native Canadian Centre on April 16, 1992. Author of the novel **"In Search of April Raintree"**, Beatrice Mosionier commented that she was inspired by Tomson Highway to write for the stage and stated in the program that "As a novice playwright, seeing the words on the page, scenes only imagined, transformed into action - Wow! And then I wonder....do I thank those men who raped me because - they let me live? Or do I thank a Trickster?"

The story revolved around four women, all rape victims, who hatch a plot to eradicate rape from the face of the earth. The play, directed by Larry Lewis, featured Doris Linklater, Marrie Mumford, Gloria Eshkibok, Pamela Matthews, Ron [Loon Hawk] Cook and Jack Burning. **"Night of the Trickster"** was nominated for a Floyd S. Chalmers Award.

The end of the 1991-1992 season, also marked the end of **"The Highway Years"**. After six productive years, Tomson Highway decided to step down and concentrate his energies on his writing. On Wednesday, June 24, 1992, the final offering of the season was

● **DSE! A Fundraiser/Cabaret/Farewell Party!**". "Rose" is the musical-in-progress, the third part of the "Rez Cycle", by Tomson Highway. "Rose" features 'that horrible Dictionary woman', Emily, and her two buddies from their mad biker days in San Francisco. The evening presentation included some of the fabulous songs, not the script, sung by a chorus of notables, including the original Emily Dictionary herself, Gloria May Eshkibok. Also singing on stage was Teresa Castonguay, Native Earth's ex-General Manager, who, the previous April, began her new job at the Ontario Arts Council. The big event, held at the Opera House, was a great success. A very large group of faithful fans and friends filled the club to say farewell to Castonguay and Highway.

In the final newsletter of the 91/92 season, Highway expressed his thanks and appreciation:

I would like to tell you all how much it has meant to me personally to work with this fabulous community of artists these past six years. Many weird and wonderful things have happened to both the company and many of its artists in that time and it could not have happened without you: our fantastic audiences, our refuse-to-give-up membership, our artists and production personnel, our management team, our funders, our volunteers, the folks over at the Native Canadian Centre, the Toronto Native community and the Toronto theatre community, all of whom have given us so much support and faith. There remains, however, a tremendous amount of work to be done if we are to see "Native Theatre" as a permanent and integral part of this country's cultural life. Please continue to give the incoming Artistic Director, Mr. Favel, and his team all the faith and love that you are capable. He'll need it. From the bottom of my heart, thank you and thank you yet again. (Highway 1992)

NEPA - CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF GREAT NATIVE THEATRE

Native Earth Performing Arts celebrated their 10th Anniversary with the arrival of the 1992/1993 Season and welcomed in Floyd Favel as the new Artistic Director and Jennifer Preston as the new General Manager. Departing Artistic Director, Tomson Highway announced on June 1, 1992, that he has "every faith in the abilities and vision of both Favel and Preston to carry the work of this important company on to a greater stability and to establish it as a permanent presence on the Canadian Cultural Scene" (1992).

Favel has worked extensively with Native Earth in the past. He directed the company's acclaimed "Moonlodge" in 1990 and has directed various scripts during the annual "Weesageechak" Festivals. A Cree from the Poundmaker Reserve, Saskatchewan, Favel also serves as the Artistic Director of the Native Theatre School, where he also trained many years ago. He has also studied with

med director Jerzy Grotowski in Italy and with the renowned Danish company, Tukk Teatret.

Jennifer Preston holds a Masters Degree in Drama from the University of Guelph. She has been involved with Native Earth since 1989, writing the history of the company and in various volunteer capacities. She has also worked with Theatre Columbus and Theatre Smith-Gilmour and joined Native Earth in January 1992 as Administrator.

Native Earth opened its 10th season with the premiere of a new play, "Fireweed", by acclaimed Native actor, William Merasty. [Billy is his 'acting' name.] Merasty has been a major force in many of Native Earth's productions and makes his official debut as a playwright. "Fireweed" is subtitled "An Indigene Fairy Tale" and is 'a contemporary anti-hero's tale of descent, struggle and ascent.' On a flight back to Winnipeg to face a charge of "gross indecency", Peechweechum Rainbowshield reconsiders his life. He himself, who must deal with being Catholic, two-spirited and native, must also deal with the suicide of a brother and his attempt to finally secure him a headstone. It is about reclaiming one's birthright and securing a dignified place in society.

Peechweechum Rainbowshield, grieves for his brother Peesim:

I thought at first it was my imagination, aye? The sound of fireweed burning. Wapooogooneya. Maga, the next thing I knew, my whole body rilled up with fire, as if, as if I was thrown in burning water. I knew something, something terrible was happening to my brother. I felt him burn right through me, leaving me. He set fire to the church and then he walked....he walked right into it....I don't have to see all the way to Caribou Lake to know that your grave is still unmarked Peesim, way out in that corner, where they keep the suicides, and other crimes against nature. Where's that headstone?? Where's Peesim's headstone? (Merasty 1992)

The events in the play were very close to life for Merasty. In his program notes, Merasty extends his greatest thanks to his mother, Viola Marie Highway Merasty and the rest of his family who "have helped me along in this journey called LIFE".

The play featured Merasty in the role of Peechweechum. He also made a brief appearance as Peesim, the brother. Pamela Matthews played a variety of characters including Reena (a Spirit who also appears as the Stewardess and the Court Clerk) and Lanula Vi Rainbowshield, mother of Peechweechum. Newcomer, Vince Manitowabi, played a wide range of characters including the troubled Raven, Father Hadinuff, the Judge, Officer James Darveau and the elder, Eenoose Iskootee'oo.

Along with Merasty's writing debut, Maggie Huculak made her directorial debut with Native Earth as Director and Denise Bolduc made her debut as Sound Designer. They were joined by veteran lighting designer, Jim Plaxton, and set and costume designer Teresa Przybylski, both winners of several Dora Mavor Moore Awards. Jani Lauzon and John McCarthy helped with sound consultation and composition while Alejandro Ronceria was the Choreographer/Assistant Director.

The play had a successful run at the Native Canadian Centre from October 15 - November 8. The Globe and Mail said the play "spins around an axis of sensuality, tragedy and cornball humour....compelling....impressively energetic" (Lacey 1992:C2).

In keeping with the 10th Anniversary Celebrations, a Gala performance of "Fireweed" was held on October, 16, 1992. Prior to the performance, the audience was treated to drumming by the popular Eagle Heart Singers and a post-performance reception was held at L'Europe, complete with birthday cake.

The following November saw the beginning of the rehearsal period for the fifth **"WEESAGEECHAK BEGINS TO DANCE"** Festival of New Native Plays and Playwrights. This festival featured a new work by William Merasty titled **"These Days"**, Drew Hayden Taylor's **"Trials and Tribulations"**, a new play by Doris Linklater called **"Unsportsmanlike Conduct"**, a new development in Ben Cardinal's **"Generic Warriors and No Name Indians"** [which will open the 93/94 season], two plays by Playwright-In-Residence, Tina Mason, **"They Found My Nose At the Leland Hotel"** and **"Diva Ojibway"** [set for production in the spring of 1994] and Floyd Favel's season closer **"Lady of Silences"**.

A Native Earth Seed Show, **"Ancient Rivers"**, billed as "A Mythological Explosion Challenging the Boundaries of Performance Art", was presented at the Annex Theatre from December 4 - 13, 1992. It was created, choreographed and directed by Alejandro Ronceria and featured Michael Greyeyes, Alejandra Nunez and Ronceria. It was a 'multimedia' creation with original music composed by Edgardo Moreno, photography and slides by Jorge Lozano, lighting by Jim Plaxton and costume design by Teofilo Reyes.

A very unfortunate incident occurred during the early, early hours of February 6, 1993. After the fundraiser Groundhog Dance, the office was broken into and Native Earth suffered the loss of the proceeds from the dance. A dance was launched in April to try to cover the losses. It was called **"Please Don't Kick Us When We're Down"**. Fortunately, many people showed their support through private donations.

The final show of the tenth season was a 'Native Noir' story called **"Lady of Silences"**, by Floyd Favel. Favel called it a 'Native Noir' because it used the techniques of the film noir

...vies, and like these movies, dealt with forbidden love and its tragic consequences. The other inspiration for "Lady" was Jean Genet's "The Blacks". In Favel's program notes, he explained that his play "began a few winters ago as a good natured exploration by actors of their 'Indianness' and 'criminality' as perceived by society". This early workshop took place in Edmonton in 1991 and was followed by the "Weesageechak" festival the following year.

The action happens just after the murder of a blonde Caucasian woman outside of a seedy downtown bar. The suspects, four sullen urban Natives, are trailled to the bars and cafes of the town. Billy Merasty played 'Detective J.P. Belmondo, Homicide, Precinct 109', hot on the trail of 'Village', a womanizer, played by Vince Manitowabi. The women, Sheila, Ruth and Lisa, were portrayed by Carol Greyeyes, Columpa Bobb and Vancouver resident, Sophie Merasty, respectively, all of whom made their Native Earth stage debut.

Belmondo, a character based very loosely on "The Bad Lieutenant", makes a journey to the depths of his soul, totally losing all humanity. The antics of Merasty, as the Detective, are hilarious as he searches for clues in the murder:

I remember my tracks circled the body that morning,
around and around, till I was circling the block, then
the city, then the circle widened until I was
circumnambulating the world, which is round....it IS
round. Nothing escapes me!

The Globe and Mail presented a favourable review:

Favel makes intelligent use of the lush symbolism of Catholicism, with its historical impact on Native life, to enrich the stylized chants and monologues. And considering the limits of the space at the Native Canadian Centre, Kent Monkman's set and Stephen Degenstein's lighting are imaginative and effective. Monkman's costumes - Belmondo's vaguely satanic red shirt, tie and hat-feather, Village's leather and studs, the women's pink to red satin gowns, lots of jewelry on everyone - are enough to dress a set on their own. Like the production itself, the performance sometimes go too far over the top, but "Lady of Silences" is a bold, inventive look at important issues, and its failings are at least in the direction of energy and passion. (Kirchhoff 1993)

Directed by Favel, the production team included Kent Monkman, as Set and Costume Designer, and Pamela Matthews as Assistant Director/Dramaturge. Monkman and Matthews, who took on these duties for the first time, were sponsored by the Canadian Native Arts Foundation Education Program. Both found the experience very

uable and rewarding. Well-known singer/musician/actor, Jani Lauzon, took over the duties as Musical Director while the lighting design was created by Stephen Degenstein. Deborah Ratelle and Jeffrey Trudeau comprised the management team with John Kelly Cuthbertson as Technical Director.

Plans for next season are underway. The 1993/1994 Season will open with the sixth Festival of New Native Plays and Playwrights "Weesageechak Begins to Dance '93" followed by Ben Cardinal's "Generic Warriors and No Name Indians", directed by renowned Canadian theatre artist, Paul Thompson. The season will close with Tina Mason's "Diva Ojibway", a co-production with Blyth Theatre Festival.

IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE EARTH

Native Earth Performing Arts has enriched the lives of both the Native and non-native people who have been associated with the company, whether they are past employees, volunteers or just friends.

IMPORTANCE OF NEPA TO ITS PAST AND PRESENT EMPLOYEES

DORIS LINKLATER [ACTRESS]: Way back when "Northern Delights" [the first known Native theatre company in Canada] was working to produce plays, we were looking at training actors, we were looking more towards the physicality of theatre. But Tomson saw that it had to be more than that, you have to start with the writers, you have to start with the voice. And that's what he did, through Native Earth. He was able to do that, develop the stories. I really believe in that myself. Native Earth helped me quite a bit, especially in the training workshops in the early days.

DREW TAYLOR [WRITER]: Many years ago, when I was 21 or 22, I was working as a story producer for CBC Radio doing Native-oriented stories for the afternoon show. And I did a story about a play called "The Sage, The Dancer and The Fool", the original production nine years ago. So, I arranged an interview with the writer, a writer named Tomson Highway, went to see the show and that's how I started staying on the peripheral edge of Native Earth. I became seriously involved with Native Earth in the fall of 1988 when Tomson called me up one day and said 'Drew, what are you doing for the next twenty weeks?' I replied 'nothing much, why?' and he said 'We just got a grant for a Playwright in Residence, would you like to come and be our playwright in residence for twenty weeks at \$350 a week?' So I said 'yeah, okay, why not?' and that's how I got involved in theatre. That was about four years after the original "Sage" in '83 or '84. I was playwright in residence for 88/89 and ironically, that was when the second run of "Sage" happened.

What effect has Native Earth had on your career?

TAYLOR: It has completely shifted it in a completely different direction. I had never, ever been interested in being a playwright in my life. The theatre was a complete foreign animal to me, I had no concept of it and therefore no interest in it whatsoever. I only came to Native Earth out of sheer monetary need and a mild bit of curiosity, because my training prior to that had been in journalism and writing for television. So Native Earth has basically given me a whole new career, a whole new art form to explore.

And it's been good, obviously?

TAYLOR: Yes, I've had more success in theatre than I've had in my other careers in television and journalism and everything else. It welcomed me much better than any of the others have.

● is that?

TAYLOR: I don't know. Television is the medium of producers and story editors, movies belong to directors and I think theatre belongs to the writer and actor. I think the stories I tell translate better to stage than they do to screen or television, because the medium is much more intimate, it is much more sustained. In television, you have to change every minute to a new scene, a new time, new location; you don't have to do that in theatre. It's hard to say why I've been more successful in theatre, but it's a medium that appeals to me. Native Earth has workshopped three of my shows, "Children of the Moon", "Bootlegger Blues" and "Trials and Tribulations". "Children of the Moon" was my very first play. It was written while I was Playwright in Residence and was never produced.

ELAINE BOMBERRY (AGENT/ALL NATIONS TALENT GROUP): I bummed around for a about a year after I left Native Earth then I printed up some business cards that said 'Arts Administrator On Reserve' and did freelance work for a music video company and helped co-ordinate a dance show on the reserve and some casting consultation. I just knew I wanted to be involved in the arts. It wasn't until a group of actors pulled me aside and basically encouraged me to start an agency. These actors had worked with Native Earth and weren't getting any representation from any agency in Toronto, so they just said 'Do it. And we'll become your first clients'. These actors were Herbie Barnes, Gloria Eshkibok and Tina Bomberry and a few others. I also got encouragement from Drew (Taylor), Ben (Cardinal) and Kenneth (Charlette). Native Earth definitely inspired me and gave me the vision to pursue a career in the arts.

What effect did Native Earth have on your career as a writer?

DANIEL DAVID MOSES (WRITER): It allowed me to write about Native subjects and get productions, because I still think that most of the other theatres aren't interested. I think my writing would have developed anyway because this is what I decided to do a long time ago.

Do you feel there's a good sense of community among the theatre artists in Toronto?

MOSES: Well, yeah, particularly with the development that Cahoots Theatre is doing with the cross-cultural stuff, that's been really important, because I don't think that could have happened if Native Earth hadn't made such a good example of how to work between cultures. It's been really inspiring for the rest of the community to see what Native Earth has done. I think they see that there are ways to help people in other communities get training and get to the point where they can express themselves as artists.

What effect has Native Earth had on your career as an actor and your decision to work as an actor?

VINCE MANITOWABI [ACTOR]: It's opened up a lot of things within me that I was questioning myself as an actor. It unleashed some of the stuff inside of me that needed to come out, needed to be expressed. And it just allowed me the chance to do that, as a person, as a Native person and as an actor. I just finished "Lady of Silences", which was first done in Edmonton at Catalyst. "Fireweed" and the several plays in the "Weesageechak" festivals. Through the script development workshops I learned a lot about character studies for an actor, working together with different directors and basically learned a lot about the process. It was a good feeling to be welcomed in. I find there's a lot of support within the community.

How do you think Native Earth has inspired you or added to your career?

CAROL GREY EYES [ACTOR]: It's the first time I was actually able to do a play about something that I really understand. I can SOUND like a Cree from Saskatchewan, I can use that kind of accent....and all of those little phrases and all of those things that mean so much to you. And all of a sudden you can actually say them, you're not saying "My Lords, what ho!!" I prefer "Chaaa, I bought last time, it's your turn tonight, I'm sick of Blue, let's get Molson Lights! And hearing the Cree was really moving.

A lot of people look to Native Earth, because it is THE Native theatre. I've done a lot of workshops about drugs and alcohol with youth, and we always use drama. And you just get somebody going and they want to continue, they're dying to continue. But they are living in some little far-off place in Saskatchewan that's inaccessible, so you say, well there's really just the Native Theatre School in Ontario, and that's where everyone gets funnelled off to and then they go to Native Earth. And this is really the only Native Theatre company in Canada, other than Spirit Song, that I know of. But they're not REAL, like a real theatre company. They would probably be horribly offended if I didn't say they were real. This is a commercial theatre, this is pitting ourselves against the best. The best, essentially. Our ideas, our voices, our faces are as important as your story about some prairie woman on the farm or some guy in Montreal who's a drag queen. Our stories are just as important and our voices are just as important. We're willing to go head to head with people in Toronto where there's forty theatres, or something? The fact that a lot of people come....as I was saying, in terms of my career, a lot of people came to see the play because they want to know what Native Earth is doing. And every play that I've seen at Native Earth has always been really entertaining for me. And the production values are high, the quality of acting is high. Sometimes you go see a show at TPM or Tarragon and they're 'blahh', like really 'gak'.

How has Native Earth helped you personally?

● EYEEYES: Kept me off of welfare. But, seriously, I've been an Equity actor for ten years and I've worked for a lot of different companies. This is the first time I've worked with an all-Native company and it was a really supportive atmosphere. And of course, everybody has egos, but egos weren't a problem. I felt very supported as a performer, I felt that everybody was like a family. I felt that the energy was more towards having a good piece than being a star, being a brilliant writer or director. I really felt that....the difference is like day and night.

You mean between that and the [white] mainstream?

GREYEEYES: Oh yeah, yeah! Because it's so competitive and so stabbing in the back. This situation was really good, because we had different nationalities, we had Cree, Ojibway, Salish....it was good. And we also had a mix of people who were born on the reserve and people who were born in the city. It was really great. I really liked working with Native Earth.

HERBIE BARNES [ACTOR]: It introduced me to some really great people and great pieces, I think the shows that they do are fantastic. It's a great opportunity for Native artists to showcase their talent in Toronto. It set up a community, a lot more of a community than there is now. Back when I joined it was really a community, it was different than it is now. Now there's a lot of big names and the community is kind of gone from that. We all used to go out all the time, go to parties, it was so alive back then, and it's all changed. But a lot of us are working constantly. Whenever we get together, we don't really visit any more, it's all business, shop talk. All the time. But it's good. It creates a distance, too. It seemed that we knew each other a lot better back then. The dynamics have changed, it's not a bad change, it's just different.

What effect has Native Earth had on your career and your move into theatre?

JONATHAN FISHER [ACTOR]: They gave me a job. It looks good on my resume, having done a Native Earth show. It's a company that I respect for all it's accomplishments over the last ten years, especially Tomson's work. I did a piece with George Chang for the Cahoots Culture Bash called "Dances With Railroads". It was originally an eight minute skit, but we've been encouraged to develop it further. Floyd saw the performance and approached me about doing it for one of the "Weesageechak" festivals.

JACK BURNING [ACTOR]: Personally, it's opened me up and made me more receptive to other people. They got me started acting. I love acting, I never had any interest in it before. They also got me interested in writing. I've been thinking about writing another play, too. Another thing I really like about the theatre is that the plays show more of the hurt and the feelings of Native people,

They make the non-native people more receptive to us. It's like we're the spokesperson when you're up there. That's another way it's helped me, knowing that I can get up there and deliver a message. It's really important for that to continue. I think they're doing a great job and I hope they keep it up.

DAVID OSAWABINE [STAGE MANAGER]: Well, every show I worked on made me want to work more in theatre. I learned quite a bit at NEPA working with Jeffrey and everybody, basically about ASM-ing. And personally?

OSAWABINE: I met a lot of people, it was the first time I had lived in Toronto for any length of time. It exposed me to more theatre, especially NEPA, then I found out about the Banff Centre and all the other theatres in Toronto. I didn't even know about the Native Theatre School. Working in theatre is like working in a totally different world, it's hectic, it's exciting.

How has Native Earth enriched your life?

BILLY MERASTY [ACTOR/WRITER]: It gave me a place to vent my hostilities, my rage, my passion, whatever in a medium that, in a way, serves as purpose to do that on one level. It saved my life. That's a pretty big statement.

MERASTY: Yeah. Because arriving in the city from the bush and really not knowing what to do, trying to find my bearings, basically it was a hostile environment. It's one of the few places that willingly took me in as is, as this raw human being, right from the bush. It encouraged me and welcomed me. It gave me a sense of direction. It began my training in theatre, I had no experience, to speak of, only my life experience.

How has Native Earth enriched your life as an artist?

KENNETCH CHARLETTE [ACTOR]: Native Earth has opened up my eyes to better communicating with the rest of the world as well as to the Native community through theatre. Knowing Tomson's work especially, it has helped me put together my own style of writing with my own sense of being Native. I'm learning how to put it all together.

SAM NORTON [CURRENT OFFICE MANAGER OF NEPA]: As a person who wasn't at all interested in theatre arts, originally, I found myself 'rubbernecking' into all aspects of the theatre world around me. Beginning from the office point of view, then into every area of involvement, including box office, technical work, acting, script reading, etc., the whole realm of theatre arts sparked my whole hidden interests into the theatre scene. In short, I would just like to say that the impact was an interesting and culturally enlightening one.

DUL TRUJILLO [ACTOR/DANCER]: With the emergence of Native Theatre growing stronger especially in Canada, via the work of the late Rene Highway, Native Earth Performing Arts....and us numerous artists, we hope to infuse stages and theatres all around the globe with Native vision. (Trujillo 1991)

IMPORTANCE OF NEPA TO ITS NON-NATIVE FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES

BILL HENDERSON: [Board Member of Native Earth] I've been on the board for about five years now. Native Earth provides a voice for the Native community. It speaks to the Native community and also to the non-aboriginal community, showing them aspects of life in this country that otherwise they wouldn't see. Native Earth is also important because it produces professional Equity performances which are a training ground for the talent, whether that be the writers, the performers, the stage people and also the administrators.

How has Native Earth enriched your life?

VINETTA STROMBERGS [DIRECTOR]: My connection with Native Earth has been mostly going to shows, as audience and just supporting them. I'm like the audience that loves the work because I met the people, I love them, and absolutely, it's enriching. My connection with the play development area and what I've seen happen over the last few years, is important. I worked on Jack's play, which hasn't gone anywhere, but it was important for Jack to have a shot at it. Those first two years of Weesageechak, Tomson was struggling to find enough scripts to develop. He had to go out and talk people into giving at shot at writing. But now, because it's established and people know about it, they are writing in and the submissions are there. They can pick and choose. It's very different now. The first year, Tomson didn't even have six submissions and he was begging people to submit. The second year was a little bit better than that. Of the submissions, maybe four were really writers. A lot of young writers, and this is not just the Native community, come from a place of knowing about television and film and they don't know about theatre. When they write, there's a million different scenes and locations, and there's a plot line that's trying to fit in to a formula that they've already seen on television. Even though the subject matter is very personal, they don't know how to express that in a theatrical form. So that's the real value of those processes. Drew Taylor is a perfect example of that, he didn't know anything about writing for theatre.

I'm amazed at how many stories there are and that seems to be a cultural outgrowth of the storytelling aspects.

It's all very exciting. I'm honoured to have had a small part in it. I really look up to people like Tomson, Larry and Drew, and Paul Thompson as being the major driving forces; and Floyd now. I think it's great. We must keep on developing the talent in all areas. I think it puts a greater responsibility on Native Theatre

chool and I think Floyd is very aware of that, he seems to have a really clear vision of what that training should be. There's more roles than trained actors. We had problems trying to find someone for "Bootlegger", everyone was working. But Larry, he would just go out, grab someone from the community, and say, 'you're doing this role'. And the next thing you know, they've been bitten by the bug and then they seek to develop their talent. It's amazing. There are very few people right now that have the drive that Pam has, that Alanis has, that Jani has, that Tina has....you guys are the pioneers that really went out and broke the ground. That's very different from the ground that was broken by Gary Farmer and Graham Greene because they never went to the schools. They just ended up getting involved at TPM or wherever. You guys went and found the training, wherever you could find it, all that stuff that was discussed at the symposium. And through the influence of people like Larry, a lot of people have turned to directing as a further step. We're all servants to a vision.

The following is an interview with Maxine Benson and her son Neil, Toronto residents.

You've been going to Native Earth shows forever!

MAXINE: About four years. I think we've seen every play since "The Sage" at the Centre. If we missed one it was only by accident. Except we didn't see "Rez", but we have all the books and all the T-Shirts.

NEIL: I keep a scrap-book too. I keep all the good reviews.

What was your (Neil) first association with Native Earth?

NEIL: I saw the ads in the paper for "Coyote City" and I decided to go because it was something cultural, something I wanted to learn more about and see if I fit in with the community in Toronto. And I figured that was a good way to do it, through the arts. I figured I already had something in common with the people there. I figured the artistic side of life was already something we had in common. I always had an interest in people from other cultures, not just Native people. I've been interested in the black cultures and oriental cultures for a long time and it was just time to expand a bit and include somebody else. So, I liked what I saw and I just kept coming back. I find the standards very high and consistent.

MAXINE: And it's the first time he had stuck with that type of thing for so long. Usually, like he was involved with the Japanese Centre and that lasted a couple of years and something else lasted a year, this has been on-going all this time. And we think it will last with him for a longer time. And for us (her and her husband) because that's how we got started.

● Neil got you two going?

MAXINE: He went to one show and asked us if we would want to go to the next one, which was "The Sage", and we said 'sure'. And that's how we fell in love [with Native Earth]. The city needs it, it really does.

What do you learn about Native culture and why is it important that we do this?

MAXINE: The whole Native scene has always been so run down by other people, they don't realize what we've got here. People don't realize the potential. And if they go to see it, like we did, they would realize how brilliant people like Tomson, and the writers, the actors and everybody are. We got involved and we can't give it up now, there's no way.

And you [Neil] are a volunteer?

NEIL: For four years now.

MAXINE: I would like to also, but sometimes I can't. So I go to the fundraisers and the plays. I come out and give my money when I can. I feel that's the way I can help. If I can give some time, I do.

What made you decide to volunteer?

NEIL: I had made a few friends just through attending the plays, people like Tina Bomberly and Kennetch [Charlette], and they kept turning up in some of the shows and I thought this was even a better way to be closer to them. I would get to see them more often and meet more people. I do box office and ushering and work in the office for mail-outs....for four years.

MAXINE: And that, in itself, is a good indication of its popularity. And we're not the only ones. There's lots of people we see there time and time again that keep coming out, like Annie [Alcroft]. I haven't seen her for a while. I understand she wasn't feeling very well.

NEIL: I heard she was having a bit of trouble getting around for a while. She's quite old.

MAXINE: She's about 85. We've know her all this time, but she's been around even before we were, she shows up at the office and everywhere. But the three of us show up together all the time, with my husband, and we know the support. It would break my heart if anything happened, like if it had to stop for any reason. It really would, and he [Neil] would have a fit. Not because he's not working, I don't mean it in that sense, but because it keeps him busy and he's with people that he loves. Rather than just going to

any volunteering just to keep himself busy. He comes home and he's really happy, [to Neill] you are, I notice it as soon as you come home from the theatre. And I have to stop everything and listen to who's there and what's happening.

But it's amazing when you don't know anything about a culture and you start going to the shows, and seeing what's being turned out in the writing, the music, the acting. You realize what's there. Now if we could just grab a few thousand more people and just show them what we've learned from that. We tell people all the time. It's not always easy. My brother saw "Dry Lips" at the Alex and he didn't like it. He thought it was too showy. And I said yeah, but if you had seen it like we saw it, the first time in a small theatre, you would have loved it. They had to stage it differently on that big stage. There was no other way they could do it.

What did he mean it was too 'showy'?

MAXINE: Well, it was too glitzy, he said, for him. And listen to this, he's from Yuk Yuk's. He's the guy that owns Yuk Yuk's, Mark Breslin. That's too glitzy for him, what they did, and he comes from that type of business. And he doesn't smoke, he doesn't drink and look at the type of business he's in. The gutter business, I call it. It is! If you ever went there and heard the....And this was glitzy. I said, Mark, it wasn't. They did it on a huge stage, they had to do it. But we saw it the first time at Theatre Passe Muraille.

NEIL: The good thing about Passe Muraille was that Graham Greene has a very expressive face and in TPM, you're up close to him, you could see every little detail of his face. And at the Alex, we missed all those little things that he does.

MAXINE: We were pretty close to the front, though, we made sure of that. We've got to get some other people out, we'll get them out by hook or by crook. Because we talk about it all the time. Get them involved in the Native way of life to let them know that there's brilliant people out there. And that I recognize it....and I didn't even finish school! So we're gonna work on that. We're going to buy a block of tickets, and everybody gets a ticket, and they're going.

Too many people have bad thoughts. I mean, they've seen too many cowboy and Indian pictures, where the cowboys are the good guys and the Indians are the bad guys. And too many people still go by that, the stereotypes.

NEIL: Some people don't realize the good command of english that Native have today, they don't realize there's a sense of humour there, they don't realize that people have recovered from a lot of the social problems; they look back and laugh at themselves now....

MAXINE: All they think it is, is drinking and street people....they don't realize. And this is what we're trying to tell

people, but see that wall, you get more response from the wall. Until they go [to a show] and they say, gee, maybe they were right. So this is what's bothering me.

IMPORTANCE OF NEPA TO NATIVE AUDIENCE

SARAH BUNNETT-GIBSON (PEDAHBUN LODGE): Thank you very much for the wonderful evening our group from Pedahbun Lodge had at the play "The Sage, The Dancer and The Fool" at the Native Centre. All the residents enjoyed the fascinating way the play addresses current Native issues especially what it is to be Native in Toronto. The work that your whole company is doing is so important to furthering EVERYONE'S understanding of the power and conflicts of being Native in today's world. Keep up the energy! (Bunnett-Gibson 1989)

GUNARGIE O'SULLIVAN (ACTOR): When I went to NEPA I got the sense that it was a professional organization, professional set-up. I felt a sense of community, that you have a team. We don't get that here. You go to NEPA and there's always someone there.

ANONYMOUS: It is important what Native Earth is doing, any serious Native Theatre. It is so important that it be kept alive economically by the government, so you don't feel like you are out begging. It is real theatre art, it is a bridge from all of our cultures to the mainstream life.

SHANE CUNNINGHAM: The University of Calgary had a course called "Canadian Theatre and Drama" which spent some time on Native Theatre. This is where I learned a lot about Tomson Highway and Drew Taylor. I had heard quite a bit about NEPA and had read Highway's plays. I saw "Rez" in Calgary in 1990. What is impressive is that there used to be only "Ecstasy", and that was it! I truly believe that Tomson is one of the top playwrights in Canada. I also learned about NEPA through my sister who had worked on "Walsh" with Billy Merasty several years ago.

How is Native Earth important to the native community?

DARCY ALBERT: I really like Native Earth's shows. I've seen the majority of the productions, "Dry Lips", "Rez", "Lady of Silences". The productions are really political, which I really like. I really believe the shows have a definite impact on the people that have seen them. I ask a lot of people to go and see Native Earth productions who generally see normal, not normal, but mainstream plays and the message that Native theatre brings is a much stronger political message in terms of oppression and repression of Native people across the country. And I really think that's important, not only to bring the entire Native community a little bit more together, but just to address issues on that level, although I do feel that a lot of the time the issues of the two-spirited people are a lot more submissive than they could be. I feel that the

Issues of the two-spirited community aren't addressed enough. Although I do really appreciate and understand that there is a lot of representation within Native Earth. There's still a lot of denial towards the perception that two-spirited people have and where we came from and how we were historically, it's not acknowledged enough.

What is the importance of Native Earth to Native theatre in Canada?

JOHN KIM BELL: [Bell is the Founder and President of the Canadian Native Arts Foundation.] Well, it's probably the best professional native theatre group in the country, if not the ONLY professional native theatre group, no there are others, but it's the largest and the best.

NOTE: SEE QUESTIONNAIRE SECTION

IMPORTANCE OF NEPA TO NON-NATIVE AUDIENCE

JAMES CULLINGHAM [PRODUCER]: I think it's some of the finest theatre that's done in the country. I don't see a lot, but I think in a place like Toronto, it does an extraordinary service to get a sense of the culture out, not only to the general community but also showing the material at the Native centre. I think it means a lot to the folks from the reserves who live in Toronto. I think it makes a connection, from what I've seen. So, yes, I think it's valuable. I look forward to every production.

SHELLEY GOLDSTEIN [ACTOR]: I've seen quite a few Native Earth shows, "The Rez Sisters", "Dry Lips", "The Jaguar Project" and the last one, "Lady of Silences". It's very important to have a company like Native Earth because it's a necessary voice that has been repressed for far too long. And besides that, it's fun!! Was it Drew Hayden Taylor who mentioned "those fun-loving Indians"? Yeah, he was tired of always hearing the stereotypes of the poor struggling people and what a pity, this and that, so he said "those fun-loving Indians! Those witty clowns!" And in terms of the theatre group, there is a high quality of entertainment as well as the 'thought-provoking' messages.

JOECY SHEPPARD [CAMERA ASSISTANT]: I've seen almost every show at Native Earth. I think it's very important because, I guess, for people who want to know what's going on in the Native community, they should check out the theatre. The Native people's reaction and opinion to certain issues comes through in their shows. People can learn a lot. It also reveals the cultural diversity within the Native community. A lot of people think of Native people as one entity, that they're all the same, but through theatre they can see their great cultural diversity.

● EC STEINWALL: Tomson Highway and the whole Native Earth company have done much to deserve the acclaim they are receiving of late. Strict adherence to their mandate has resulted in largely uncompromised, exciting drama, and has established the company as a force in the national theatre scene. (24)

JULIEANNE SLOMAN (TEACHER): I saw "The Rez Sisters" when it came to Calgary a few years ago and that was the only show we've ever had in Calgary that had any Native content. People out here are so red-neck. They are so disillusioned. Even a lot of the other teachers I know are like that, and they're teachers! You'd be amazed! So, it's important what Native Earth is doing, telling their own stories, their OWN way, and dispelling all those disgusting stereotypes. Everyone should see the work that Native Earth does, it sure would open a lot of eyes.

MARK WEYMOUTH: After watching the production of "Lady of Silences", which I greatly enjoyed, I was greatly blessed and comforted during the night at its remembrance. I thought I would write a letter of appreciation and a few personal comments. Although I didn't understand all the Native issues and concerns, I appreciate the Native people's honesty, beauty, truth, love and spirituality....I sincerely thank you for this production. If this is like other productions, I will certainly come again. (19 April 1993)

QUESTIONNAIRES

During the last two weeks of the run of "Lady of Silences", a questionnaire sheet was available for any audience member interested in voicing their opinions.

A total of 65 questionnaires were returned. Out of these, only 7 responses, or 11% were from people of Native ancestry.

QUESTION: Is this the first show you've seen by Native Earth?

Of the Native audience, 4 of the 7, or 57% had come to Native Earth for the first time.

Of the Non-native audience, 23 of the 58, or 40% had come to Native Earth for the first time.

Of the total audience, 41.5% had come to Native Earth for the first time.

QUESTION: How did you feel after watching this production of "Lady of Silences"?

Responses from Native audience members who had seen a Native Earth production for the first time:

Many old hurts surface during certain segments, but I've been healing for twelve years and have learnt ways to take care of myself, but i still feel pain for many relatives who do not know the Sweetgrass Path.

Right now, I'm not really sure just how I feel. There're so many emotions going through my mind.

Shocked, sad.

A wonderful production. Many memories came alive from the moment the play began. It was a real pleasure and I will return.

Responses from Native audience members who have seen previous Native Earth productions:

Shocked, sad.

It's a wonderful buffoon nightmare. I felt grateful that this moment from our not-so-distant past was put forth for discussion.

Very hurt....the truth hurts....I'm still crying...mad....I'm gonna fight back.

Responses from Non-native audience members who had seen a Native Earth Production for the first time:

Better informed about Native feelings.

I was surprised at some of the scenes. I found it very true to life and was real impressed by the acting.

Curious as to how humour can be worked into a story where, right after laughing, I am shocked. I was, at times, wondering where to laugh and where it was to STRIKE me.

Overwhelmed by the talent involved and the structure of the piece.

I'd like to see more.

I felt touched. I also felt sad that Native people have to live that way.

PROFOUNDLY moved.

Floyd Favel's production certainly portrays the Native-white relationship in true light. However it does offer all of us hope. This is often revealed through his use of humour and sense of humour within the text.

Hesitant on forming an opinion on the production. I wasn't certain as to how we were to react. The issue was serious and real, but it was put forth in a way which also promoted laughter. I was uncertain about whether all who viewed it would see it in the same light.

Happy, excited, comfortable, blessed, joyful, positive in thinking.

I feel sad. And I really liked the show.

Angry; and very sad. The cultural genocide, and all it engendered, was made so explicit. It was so powerful.

Quite moved, but also somewhat confused.

I don't go out to see much theatre at all, and I usually expect more to be entertained than deeply, emotionally engaged by a performance (which is what happened this time). Although much of the show was clever and entertaining satire, there were a few moments (especially the very end) when I was surprised at how sad I felt. Still, I was confused about some of the play's content,

like the possible deeper themes or meanings behind the killing of the white woman.

Many things - touched, assaulted, a little overwhelmed, loved the blending of conventions, use of humour.

Greater appreciation of issues addressed.

Stunned. It was a very powerful play with a lot of complex thoughts and issues, as well as complex characters cropping in.

More aware. Reminded.

Felt like I had a lot to think about, a lot of thinking to do and a lot more to learn.

Guilty (social), exhilarated (theatre).

I really enjoyed the performance; yet, I was disturbed, for a lot of issues regarding Natives are still left unresolved by our government.

I felt just fine. It needs some work on the writing in order to show rather than dictate the points.

Responses from Non-native audience members who have seen previous Native Earth productions:

Somewhat confused. Have to think about it. Need time to figure this out.

Very moved.

I didn't always know what to feel - or felt several different things at once - not an easy play - nobody gets off easily, including the audience.

Feeling of extreme violence, gradual self-destruction. A stunned feeling.

Difficult to watch, but excellent.

Pensive.

Mixed.

Happy, sad, upset, frustrated with life in general for being so messed up, and disgusted by the treatment of Natives, but also hopeful that things might change.

It reminded me of my relationship with a Native man and the issues (class) that I experienced (pain), and also exposed issues I didn't understand. I remembered this relationship and all the context around it. I did not feel hurt or attacked.

Great! Love the mixture of seriousness and folly. Still think it's Toronto's best theatre!

Stimulated and entertained.

Quite a few feelings and thoughts. Not enough time to go into detail.

Many different feelings. Still thinking. Mixed.

I felt it was an excellent production in terms of script, acting.

Saddened by what was portrayed but hopeful that through these and other works, the attitudes do not need to prevail.

I'm basically a doer. Have done work in (non-native) solidarity with Natives. This kind of evening helps me slow down, sit still and listen.

Clever portrayal of the stereotypes and the realities. Very well done.

I was impressed with the growth in Native theatre, while at the same time, appreciative of the same qualities that seem to be at the core of Native theatre. Generously translated into our complex mix of cultures. Production standards continue to grow.

Saddened, awed, informed.

Strong acting.

I felt moved and aware of how much my race has oppressed Native peoples and forced them into this life....their lack of self pride.

I enjoyed the quality of the production, the lyric fluidity of the script and the tight group work of the cast.

Being blue-eyed with blonde hair, I felt bad to be a descendant of such cold, callous people of the past. I also could feel the anguish the girls were going through. Very explosive.

I enjoyed it and was touched by it. I enjoy following the development of the actors over time.

I felt "spaced out" because it was such a gripping account of what I've observed to be reality. (I come from the North.) I kept going over the lines in my head. I've seen it in "real" life.

Stunned and sad.

Very stimulated by the sophistication and artfulness of the detective story parody. Underneath I felt thoughtful and emotional about the issues that were raised about Native self-perception and racism.

Thoughtful.

Felt that there are so many deep psychological issues for so many of us. The style has changed. I look forward to seeing how the company grows. [Note: This person does not elaborate on how many shows he/she has seen by Native Earth.]

I felt amazed and awed at the work I saw tonight. There may be much that I didn't understand.

Intrigued and also satisfied and pleased with the performance.

Both exhilarated and depressed!

It felt great to see new work coming from Native Earth, to see new talent, and to see such an effort coming from the community to make a change. [Note: This person has seen "Dry Lips" and "Fireweed".]

QUESTION: Did you learn something about Native issues and concerns? [Out of the non-native audience responses, fifteen just answered 'yes' and one 'no'.]

Responses from Native audience members who had seen a Native Earth production for the first time:

Nothing I haven't experienced or learned along my journey, but I surely love the medium of performing arts as one way to meet people.

Yes, I know Native issues and concerns. It was hard listening and seeing stereotypical Indian behaviour from Native people. We all hear it but never talk about it.

Responses from Native audience members who have seen previous Native Earth productions:

Yes. Always learning.

Internalized racism caused by fear of our shames needs to be addressed.

Responses from non-native audience members who had seen a Native Earth production for the first time:

I learned that some have the feeling of being automatically "guilty until proven otherwise".

Yes. It's hard for me to explain what I actually learned.

The play gave me insight into the Native outlook.

Definitely. It seems to me that "Lady of Silences" is almost brutally honest about problems Native people now face among themselves -- not the causes but what they (you!) are left to deal with.

Not much I haven't learned from my Native friends.

Their pain.

Yes. Anger may be unavoidable and crucial to the elimination of self-hatred. As a gay man I understand this. Also the humour was stylish, necessary and healing, because healing, for all of us, is where we must go.

Not really. It just confirmed some of the research I have done in the past in my criminology courses. I focused my essays on the Native population whenever I could.

Mostly I was entertained by "Lady of Silences" and was greatly blessed by it's remembrance.

Yes....the despair and anger.

Nothing I didn't already know, really; but the play wove together so many things so fluidly.

Yes. The issues are more complex than I knew before and the Native people's own concerns about them are much deeper than I imagined.

Yes, this play suggests to me that the effects of Christian oppression against Native beliefs have yet to be completely healed.

Yes - a tangled web - blame is not a solution.

Some, although I need to go away and think about it some more. The play is so powerful I can't think right now.

How painful....

Yes, but not enough.

Yes, the way any group learns to reflect the hatred of the dominant group.

I grew up in Ontario among the Ojibway and the Northern Cree. As a child I was aware of some of the concerns of Native people, and it saddens me that some things never change.

I suppose, but I didn't come to be taught something, rather to experience something. Yes, I experienced some of Native people's concerns.

Responses from non-native audience members who have seen previous Native Earth productions:

Yes. Also a lot about myself.

I was already familiar with some members involved in the production. I was also already familiar (though somewhat) with some Native issues (boarding schools, "blonde and blue", etc.).

I am already quite aware, so I would have to say no, but some things I was already aware of were presented in a different light.

This was real in Latin America too; history of colonization and relationships within that context.

For sure. Prejudices and how hard it is to be a member of the Native community because of these.

The play reinforced things I've already heard and seen in other plays and articles.

Intolerance to mixed couples. True?

Yes, I learn a little bit more each time I see a Native play.

Always, but hard to put in words.

A lot of suspicions confirmed.

Yes. I learned that shame is something Native people struggle with. Also, the play illustrated very clearly the conflict between embracing and reflecting one's Native heritage.

No, but it reinforced my knowledge of the oppression, pain and stereotyping Natives suffer.

A different side of familiar issues was presented. The noire/cigarette/fedora/farce style of the piece was an interesting vessel for these issues (white, brown, light, dark, welfare, alcohol, etc.) to be seen.

I know issues and concerns and follow with interest. It makes me very angry and frustrated that what is being done is so minor.

I knew about the issues and concerns - it was how they were presented that impressed me. These concerns were not glossed over. But I did learn that Natives can look at these concerns squarely in the face and say them, both good and bad.

Yes, about the Native man-white woman relationship (if there is such a generic thing) and it's connection to Native self-image, male and female.

Yes, I learned that young Native people feel how I feel about growing up in a world that I didn't create that f--- me up too, and I think we all have to teach each other and ourselves about what lies the stereotypes are. They are not us, me, you. (Excellent, thank you!)

Yes, especially about self-hatred, which seems to be the key issue here in this play.

Not directly. I am quite familiar with Native issues, etc. but I also learn new, smaller things all the time.

QUESTION: Do you have any suggestions as to how Native Earth can better serve the community?

[Eighteen of these responses had no suggestions but merely urged Native Earth to keep up the good work.]

Responses from Native audience members who had seen a Native Earth production for the first time:

Take your show on the road, come to Northwestern Ontario.
(James Bay Cree)

Continue to act as a catalyst to bridge and to enable non-Indians to have opportunities to see Native life.

Responses from Native audience members who have seen previous Native Earth productions:

Continue with courage and love.

Education is important. Keep provoking the Anishnabe.

Responses from Non-native audience members who had seen a Native Earth production for the first time:

Can't think of any. More plays are always enjoyable.

It would be good to get some of the performances out into the non-native communities, outside Toronto, though perhaps you are already doing this. Also to Native groups where they live -- probably you are doing this. We went to an 'assembly', mainly of non-natives, at the Cape Croker 'Reserve' last September. A play like this would have been a great addition to the speaking.

Perform at schools if the group already doesn't.

Make themselves better known. I found out about the production when I walked by the centre, but I have lived here for five years and this is the first I've heard of Native Earth.

Continue making plays. Hand out and distribute THE FACTS on native realities. Do street theatre.

Take the performance to other locations outside the Native Centre and the Native community.

Not yet, but I'm definitely coming out to see more of your shows.

Community awareness (I know, easy to say). Would love flyers and information sent to: G. McGiverin, Orangeville District Secondary School, Orangeville, Ontario. L9W 2G7. Thanks.

Can't say. Haven't been exposed to it much. Introduced to this play by a friend who took a Native studies course.

Go to schools and religious organizations.

I think it would be a great idea if some of your actors visited schools and reserves. My school has a large Native population and would benefit from such role models.

Continue your work. Maintain ties with successful artists. (Which community?) Perhaps a matinee series for school kids?

Responses from Non-native audience members who have seen previous Native Earth productions:

It's great for theatre. Enjoyed every production I've been to here. Carry on with courage.

Book shows into actual theatre spaces as often as possible. I have seen some problems arise in the main corridor/s of the Native Centre which have disrupted shows in progress in the Centre's auditorium. [Note: This person has seen EVERY show since "The Sage, The Dancer, and The Fool".]

More art exhibits, advertising, etc.

I feel that things are great the way they are. Just keep up the same way - Native people should continue to use these means as a way of educating ignorant white people. [Note: This person adds: "I am white, but I am not ignorant".]

Get into high schools. The potential for solidarity and growth is there! I'm a teacher, I'll be in touch.

What you do is always very good, very strong. Maybe more works for children and teens.

Take the plays further afield. Get lots of money!! Ha. [Note: This person adds "Thanks from a chagrined white".]

Continue the quest and hopefully find a ground to celebrate the pride and joy that is this earth.

Plays like this should be seen by more white people, so they can feel the Native people's pain and begin to rectify past oppression.

Take the shows to the people. The Native Centre is a wonderful venue, yet more areas, towns, provinces, need to hear your voice.

Keep up the good work. "Break the silence!" I really liked the idea of meeting afterwards to discuss the play etc. (at 410 AD). This should be something that should continue.

I would like to see Native Earth travel in Northwestern Ontario so that Native young people could see role models

(actors, writers, etc.) You would have to be careful of the material presented so that Natives would see it is an indictment of society and not of Natives themselves.

Visit high schools with productions like this.

To answer this I need more information on what the group has done. (Note: This person has seen "Lady" TWICE, "Trickster", "Ayash", "Rez" and "Dry Lips".)

Teach each other and ourselves about what lies the stereotypes are. They are not us, me, you.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Do you have any recommendations or suggestions as to how Native Earth can better serve the community?

JENNIFER PRESTON: We need more funding SOURCES with large amounts of money so that we can workshop, train, tour, etc., and realize our recommendations.

MAKKA KLEIST: Just by continuing to do good theatre. That, itself, will be a link. Just by doing our work well. I don't think we should worry ourselves about having the back row. Our task is to make good theatre. Whoever wants to see it, welcome. That is the way we can bridge the communities. We need that form to express ourselves because many of us won't get into the Mainstream Theatre. We LOOK as we do, so therefore, we have to create our own form. We need more organized, quality, high level professionalists. We need more clever theatre, so we can be the alternative for the mainstream.

TINA MASON: I think Native Earth should tour through other parts of the country instead of just Ontario. They should go to Manitoba and Alberta and maybe even towards the Mic Mac side. Try to cover nationally. That would be more beneficial to the native people especially in dealing with different issues.

BILL HENDERSON: I think, obviously, we would like to do more in the way of training and workshopping. I don't know that we actually need to have a lot more productions, and we don't need money to have a theatre. We certainly don't need a mortgage! I think, from my point of view, if we were going to anything more, it would be in the area of training and in workshopping productions rather than formal productions.

DREW TAYLOR: Produce my plays!!! But seriously, Floyd was toying with the idea of creating a children's company. He came to see "Dreamer's Rock" when it was done last fall, and I remember him saying to Jennifer, 'how come we aren't doing shows like that? How come a white theatre company is producing this play?' I think a children's theatre company might be an interesting idea. I really don't know what else they can do.

KENNETCH CHARLETTE: Where do I begin? There's tons of things more that they could do, but of course, it all boils down to funding. Like for instance, starting out own theatre, a house, right here in Toronto where all of our productions can be done, so, first of all, we need our own space. Second, I think we should take advantage of the talents of Tomson Highway and do workshops with writers. I myself, getting into writing, find that I have to go to other places to learn. Third, I'd like to see more Director's workshops. Fourth, I'd like to see a move into screen writing and film.

ARNECKI (CRITIC): One problem is the venue. With all the crowing about new theatres like the Elgin, Winter Garden and Pantages, the fact remains that for struggling, gifted companies like these the lack of a decent space is worse than ever - and largely because so much money and effort has been poured into the big commercial showcases. (Review of "Beavers" 1990)

DANIEL DAVID MOSES: I think touring could be useful if we could have a separate style of production that is cheaper to tour with. I mean, our emphasis so far, has been on being professional and spending all that money that all the regular professional theatres spend on production values. I think our strength is in the stories we tell and the performances themselves. I think it would be possible to create a cheaper touring version of shows and actually get it out to the (Native and non-native) communities. Because we are aware of having communities outside of the city that that's an opportunity for us to think about ways of communicating with those people out there. The bigger theatres, well, they could do it too, but they're sort of obsessed with maintaining what they have here in town.

VINCE MANITOWABI: Well, first of all, the style of the plays needs more of a human factor, it's too surreal for a lot of people to understand. It has to have more of a connection to the way we live, the real us, not some image to play on. But, I think from those talking circles, it would help if there was more of those kind of workshops.

JONATHAN FISHER: I don't know. I think it's really good now, like with what Floyd has done for "Lady" by getting Kent Monkman as a designer, and getting people from all other fields involved, the technical aspects too.

CAROL GREYEVES: Better? By having an apprentice program, definitely, definitely, definitely. The big problem is writers, we need writers. Get them trained, get experience. And, I know we can't do more than two shows, but we must keep cranking them out, the more shows we do, the more experience we get, writers, actors, directors, designers, everybody. It's a matter of putting in TIME and learning how to do it. You do it by putting in time and more time, it's got to keep carrying on, so that people will keep getting better and better and we'll get broader audience and reach more people. Maybe we could do weekly workshops or cabarets or coffee shops, to try out new scenes or monologues, get some feedback. It would be a very good idea. I would say to have different kinds of workshops, an apprentice program, anything, so that people are always being trained. It was great that we had a dramaturge and an assistant director on "Lady", we sure needed one! Thank you John (Native Arts Foundation).

BILLY MERASTY: They should produce more shows. I think Native Earth has done all that it can do. What would be really nice would

● be accepted into the money world, the corporation world, to be totally part of Canadian culture. Native Earth should be part of this cultural fabric that Canadians and Torontonians boast of belonging to. Native Theatre shouldn't be small theatre any more, it should be part of the mainstream money. The past ten years, Native Earth has developed into a theatre company that's to be contended with, but at the same time, they're not a money-making theatre, well, very few of the theatre companies in the city are money-making. Being a Native theatre, we should be part of this mainstream cultural fabric that Canada should boast about and not be just put up with. And we need our own space, for rehearsal, for everything. We need to have shows throughout the whole year. We need more administration people, but it all boils down to money. I just say that we have to continue doing what we are doing. They're doing a real good job.

HERBIE BARNES: Interesting. There's a whole clump of the Native Theatre community that hasn't been trained. We need to find ways of getting funding for education, like the playwright-in-residence, maybe we should have an actor-in-residence for one year, and paid him and trained him and sent him off to other theatre companies that would work with him, and send him to school for a year. That would really help. There's so much. Or even have a teacher-in-residence where they would hire a teacher for a year. Like maybe I would go in and teach improv or the mask work that I do and that way you would have your actors that can stay around who are not frenetically looking for work. We should workshop a lot more, there's different people now than when Tomson was there. Like when I'm out in Winnipeg, there's a group of people I can call up and we get together and work on things, like mask work or scene work. That doesn't happen here, it's very competitive. We've got to re-establish that community through the creative stuff. For example, we could study Pochinko Clown for an afternoon. But you couldn't have it as a drop-in centre because too many times people will not be able to make every session, you'd end up having to re-cap every time. You'd have to have a structured class where you have to be there all the time. Like the Director's workshop. You need commitment and good teachers.

FLOYD FAVEL: I don't know. Native organizations and governments have no cultural mandate, which is stupid, because every country in the world, every government has a cultural mandate except the Natives, and maybe Ethiopians and Somalians. An artistic mandate should be a part of a culture. They don't give to Native Earth, the Native businesses, the A.F.N. (Assembly of First Nations), they don't give any money.

Sometime in the future, in about 5 or 10 years, my hope is that we have a theatre some place in Western Canada, where the community can support your theatre, some place where we are supported and rooted within the urban and rural communities, first by language and culture. It's really hard to do that in an urban metropolis if

● are looking towards support in language and culture. We need people's understanding.

I want money so we can hire a full-time dramaturge and another associate director and we want the Native governments to give us full operating funds so that, therefore, we can concentrate all our time on creating theatre that is opposed to nickel and diming non-native organizations which basically get their funding from resources which come from unceded native land. Now this is silly. It doesn't make sense. Asking for what is yours already. It is a very stupid system actually, so what I am proposing is approaching native organizations to get full operating funds so we can work. Then we can bring in people like "Spiderwoman", every month a workshop, more director's workshops, so there's always something happening. So we have more people in films, more people in theatre, more people in radio.

For example, there are 600 reserves across Canada, and if each reserve gave us \$100, that is like over half a million. \$100....that's nothing. That's one day expenses for a Chief. \$100 a year, you break that down, \$100, divide it by 10, that's \$10 a month, \$8 a month. We're not asking for much. If we use that kind of logic, I'm sure the Native politicians would listen. What's \$8 a month from each reserve? Break that down by 30, that's like 50 cents a day. That's all we ask.

Why would each reserve give you \$100?

FAVEL: We would offer apprentice programs for their potential students, they could fly them in, they can put them up and they could work on a professional show as an apprentice. At the same time, we can fly in a guest instructor to teach music, dance. So half their day is apprenticing, half their day is class. Maybe they can even perform in a show once a week or something. So there's always apprentices, so that the cast is double. And set designers. That is why they should do that. It is employment. Sounds silly but I think it can work.

So, I find a lot of people, they want to just survive on their own little projects. They should be just thinking of creating opportunities for ten or twenty more. As long as there's opportunities for others. That's what we're doing. Everybody should be doing that. All our Native Artistic Directors.... Margo is doing that....we should be creating opportunities for people. It is possible to survive. That's what I think.

VINETTA STROMBERGS: My perspective is primarily based on my knowledge of De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig and Native Earth. And what I see is that they have both served in developing playwrights, and in developing playwrights they have got people involved in acting. So I am not sure which one comes first. Obviously you need the actors in order to develop the play and you can't develop the play without

the writing that emerges from the community. The demands of the writing require specific kinds of acting ability. It seems to me that De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig has developed the actors more, even though they've also developed the playwrights. But that is also an outgrowth from the play development program which is basically Weesageechak, which Tomson started. But Larry is such an important part of that too. I don't know which comes first, or which is more important. I think they really work hand in hand, and it's something that I totally believe in. Again, when you look at the companies around the world that have recognition in terms of quality work, the vision comes from a combination of the actors, who gain a respect, and the writing team, who gain recognition as being the original playwrights. So the whole partnership between Larry Lewis and Tomson Highway has developed both of those. If we didn't have Tomson, we wouldn't have all the people we have now. I mean, any Native actress worth her salt has probably done "The Rez Sisters". Before that, what was there? Rita Joe....as a role to play and be challenged with. "Rez" challenged many communities across this country to develop Native actresses. The original production had two non-native actresses, excellent actresses; I'm sure it was a challenge to them, but now, we have enough Native actresses to fill those roles. And now that's followed with "Dry Lips". And also part of that development is someone like Makka, because she worked with Tomson on "Aria". That again created a wonderful woman's role. De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig even did it with three women. So, I don't know which comes first, the writer or the actor. Native Earth provides a role model, and De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig, touring, opens it up to various communities and that all pays off to people who want to come to Native Theatre school. It has been a very important element, too, what I know of it historically. I see the list of achievements and the people that have come out of there that have been inspired to go on and create companies and do original work; it's very important. That goes on a more National basis. As I understand it, every Native company in Canada started with somebody came to Native Theatre School first.

Do you think Native Earth should tour?

STROMBERGS: I don't think they should tour just for the sake of touring. I think that there should be a way for excellent shows to tour, so when you have something like "Rez", it was really important that toured nationally and internationally. It brought recognition and attention and again, it provides a role model and therefore a desire for people to follow in those footsteps. But to automatically say, yes, every year we will tour a show, I think that's a backward approach that puts the energy in the wrong place. However, when you have a wonderful show, it should have the option for touring. The economics right now don't make sense to do it the other way, whereas De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig, because it is situated in a smaller location, its mandate is to tour and take it to all the communities. It can't have long run in one place. But I think, for Native Earth, once there is a hit show, to remount and then tour it

tionally and internationally. I don't think they should be mounting productions specifically for touring.

CAROL GREYEVES: The Chief of their band is the first chief they've had who's ever been concerned with anything other than economic development. Actually, the chiefs before him who were always talking about economic development and trying to buy land and investing all this money in treaty...we've won a lot of land claims and they've put the money in an industrial park and stuff and not a cent has been seen. The whole thing has been a disaster and finally we get a guy who's not always concerned with economic development, which has always been their push, he believes in education. And he believes in the people of the band as the resources. Get them educated, get them doing something they do really well, like Michael Greyeyes, the ballet dancer, who's from our band. The Chief pushes art. He had a dream of turning an old residential school into a school for the arts. He himself was a teacher and he noticed that so many people are talented, visually, musically and just artistically talented. They were so discouraged in the regular school system they tend to drop out and become non-contributors to society. He really felt that it would be wonderful for Native people to be around other Native people and to foster their skills. He had that dream even before he was Chief, when he was Educational Counsellor for the Band. Now he's the Chief, and did other things, for instance, he had a writer's conference, and that's never been done before. He invited Native writers from all over Canada and the United States and it was held under a big top, in the middle of the afternoon. And there were all these guys, big guys standing around who you'd think would never have anything to do with poetry. But the place was packed and these guys sat there and listened and listened and listened. They were just fascinated with it. It just says to me so much about people need to see a reflection of their own reality in the arts and everywhere.

MARGO KANE: If I can create an administrative structure and have that supported, then we can become a resource centre for Native artists that we want to include in our work. And we can assist them to develop to write their own applications, we can work on a group application. We are working at a level where we need some solid administrative support, money to have an office, to be able to train somebody to be the Artistic Director and the Manager, put them on a salary, so we can (get them to) create the work. The Native Arts Foundation didn't give us anything at all, which for me, just says that they don't yet fully understand the importance of supporting administrative systems. We need to take a serious look at our organizational structure, a serious look at our communication skills, we need to develop those things based on real traditional understanding where people in the circle listen to each other and they resolve differences and they make informed choices....all those good things that the community should really begin to address. I think we are just maturing now to where we can do that. So we have a real need to communicate to not only the non-

...tive communities but the Native communities.....about that importance.

And I see that we can only do that by having funding that encourages us, that assists us, in the development and training of our arts administrators, directors, tour managers, all the technical needs that are required in creating performance in theatre.

Also money to bring us all together to assist us in coming together and possibly coming up with a National mandate.

And net-working with others so we can communicate, share our journeys, our experiences about what we've been confronting in each of our communities across the country. So we need developmental money so we can dialogue, we really need to talk to each other, we need to show our work, we need to be able to travel back and forth. We need to communicate. And it's been growing, there's more need for that. I think it's time that some moneys were allowed to go in that direction.

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CHAPTER TWO

IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE THEATRE TO NATIVE COMMUNITIES

DOLORES DALLAS (ACTOR): Storytelling was always theatrical as far as I'm concerned, the oral presentation is becoming very limited now. I think it has a lot to do with the separation of the families, the children being taken away and being put in to a white environment, not learning their traditional ways....theatre will help them learn.

MAKKA KLEIST (ACTOR): In daily life, you go to school, you learn math, geography, but nothing about dreams. Nothing about how human beings are inside, our feelings which we had in our original culture. We learned about it everyday through stories and theatre, and I think it is so important to get it back into our lives. We can adapt to 1993-1994, but I think it is very important that we keep doing theatre, because we have something important to tell, important, funny, fabulous, stories to tell. We have to do theatre, also, because it is really important for other people, all the young people, the children, that they learn "we can do this, we are good". It is important that we do that.

SHANE CUNNINGHAM: Through my training and acting experience, I've learned more about myself, my culture....my identity. But, I am not a 'native actor', I'm an actor who happens to be Native.

FLOYD FAVEL: And also because everybody around there speaks Cree. A lot of our shows had Cree in them and everybody understood....it is very difficult to do a play in Cree. I would love to do Cree in my place but my audience would be severely limited. We need to have that real sense of expression of our people. Even Rhonda and Carrie, they didn't speak the language, but they understood everything, even the sense of humour.

DREW TAYLOR: I use Ojibway peripherally in some of my plays, for example, in "Toronto At Dreamer's Rock", the first and last few pages are done in Ojibway, there's a couple phrases in "Bootlegger", but primarily it is not a major force in my work because I'm not fluent in the language, so everything I do, I have to get my Aunt to translate.

But, by doing this you've learned some of the language?

TAYLOR: I've learned different elements of it, for instance, in the sequel to "Someday", "Only Drunks and Children", I've tried to put that whole element of trying to learn your language into the scene where the sisters are drunk and one's trying to learn. And they actually screw up one of the words when they are counting and get to number 8, or something, she mispronounces it so that it has a [sexual] meaning.

ROL GREY EYES: A long time ago we did a play called "The Young Poundmaker" which was commissioned by Poundmaker's Band. People just came, there were so many Indians at that play, it was unbelievable, and most had never gone to see plays before....and they loved it. They all came and they laughed, we had full houses every night. It was an Anniversary celebration and they had a memorial pow-wow and then they commissioned a play on Poundmaker. But, unfortunately, they got a white guy to write the play. So there was some controversy about that. Gordon Tootoosis was in it, Tantoo Martin [Cardinal], it was a while ago. And Floyd's cousin caused all this controversy, who's now the Chief! It is funny....But, there is a real need for this. When I was in Saskatoon, they are just crying, Twenty-fifth Street Theatre is just crying to co-sponsor something with Native Earth. Because there's so many Native people in Saskatoon, more and more, and they're everywhere, not just in the streets, but they're tellers in the bank, managers, they're solidly in the middle class. So they really need something. Floyd and Tomson were saying that they could do "The Rez Sisters" in Cree, or "Dry Lips" in Cree, because it would be one of the few places that would understand it. What a difference to hear something in your own language.

HERBIE BARNES: One of the things I've really changed on is that I really thought that all theatre should blend and that instead of having Native theatre....I'm not a Native actor, I'm an actor who happens to be Native, right?....I really try and avoid doing Native roles, like the role that Daniel Day Lewis did in that thing [Last of the Mohicans], there was no character in that. The difference between that and what Graham did in "Dances", there was humour in what Graham did, and he showed the person rather than the whole nation, so it's not a stereotype. So, I truly believed, up until a couple of weeks ago, that what we should do is become a theatre, period. But I talked to someone in an interview and he made an interesting comment on how we need to keep Native theatre, whatever it is, because we're not sure of what it is, alive. The same way that we need to keep Japanese theatre, and Italian comedy, and all these different things, alive. We can't lose the art form. So I've changed my view-point. It is very important to keep Native theatre because it shows a view-point, it shows a culture, it shows something different. It's really important what everyone is doing because they are showing a side of the Native people that the general public don't get to see. We need to understand each other more and the best way to do that is through our theatre. People learn through entertainment better than they learn from reading and often, formal education. It's really important.

MONIQUE MOJICA [ACTOR/PLAYWRIGHT]: What is remarkable is that across great geographical and cultural distances, theatre has become an instrument of recovery. We are reclaiming the power of the word. We can approach the preservation, recognition and continuation of our cultures with de-colonized minds. (Mojica 1991)

BOCHIE: I think it's important because you have to teach the public, society about us; it's a teaching tool. I'm very interested in theatre but, to me, what I'm trying to learn is telling stories through my sculpture. But I think we need to get the Elders more involved. I mean, here in Vancouver, when I see a play, they don't even smudge it, they should do a little offering. It seems that ever since Chief Dan George passed away, the elders are holding back what they know....they must know a lot, but it seems, for some of them, nobody asks them. Maybe they just need to be asked. We need to get closer, keep more in touch. And even seeing shows that are directed by non-native people, they seem to get white-washed; they don't really know how we feel.

What do you think is the importance of Native theatre?

BEATRICE MOSIONIER (WRITER): Well, two things; to tell our stories and to be in control of telling our stories and, of course, to give jobs to actors.

Why is it so important that we have our own Native theatre, theatre produced, directed, performed, written....everything done by Native people?

MARGO KANE: I found that with doing the version of "The Tempest" with the Nakai Players (Yellowknife, January 1991), that I considered that after all these years of doing projects with the community that they would have generated a community development plan....that there would be some kind of rapport developed....as opposed to them always just deciding what they wanted to do, and to hell with the Native community's point of view, which is what they did any number of times. They didn't seem to take serious consideration of the Native community's point of view, because they wanted to do what they wanted to do. So I went in thinking that after all these years, about ten years they've been together, surely they had worked the bugs out, developing within the community and working it out together, it takes a long time. I looked forward to playing "Ariel" in "The Tempest", they called it "The Blizzard", it was supposed to be a Northern and Aboriginal adaptation of "The Tempest". Well, the script apparently had been only adapted to Northern images, no Aboriginal politics was understood, never mind adapted into the script. They were doing it on the spot. Their own non-native community was also really uptight with them because it was disorganized, they hadn't planned far enough in advance...organizationally they were falling down in their own yard. In terms of the Native community, all these people didn't want to be involved. There was a small number of performers, four Native, one non-native, that I was to work with as the Spirits and as a consultant, and I did that. They were trying to do this Euro-centred costume design, they hadn't even bothered to learn about what the people wore in the Northern climate, so I ended up going through all the material, looking through all these books, doing the research....I was paid as a consultant, and not very much

As it turned out, I ended up designing the masks, helping consult on the costumes, doing any number of things that were not in my job description as a performer and as a choreographer. They hadn't done their homework and I felt all this responsibility to make it work. I was burnt out from the experience. Then they tried to claim all these brownie points for what they did, and I just said, absolutely not. I put my foot down. And if you're going to write an article for the Globe and you're going to quote me, then I want it on the record that I was not happy with the development of the project and the way things went. And that should be included in the article, because it's only through constructive criticism that we're going to be able to work with non-native companies who want to produce our work, who want to represent our work, who want to include us in their quota of ethnics and multi-cultural people. If we don't have any power of say in anything, then they can do whatever the heck they please. They can manipulate and exploit what we have...but we're prepared.

Why is Native theatre important in Canada?

DANIEL DAVID MOSES: We as Native artists have the opportunity of actually bringing Canada's history out of the dark. The way the powers- that-be have operated, they've always told us that Canada is a boring country and all it's history is boring. I mean, you just got to begin to look at the stories, and you realize there's some amazing things that have happened in this country. Our perspective, as Native artists, we can tell a lot of that story that mainstream artists probably don't have the ability to deal with. I think people are aware that they've been kept in the dark about what the country's about.

JEANETTE ARMSTRONG [WRITER/TEACHER]: In Canada, it is one of the most available community forms of soliciting responses from audiences in relation to words. So for the writing school, it is a very important area to concentrate on. Basically because, if there is Native theatre available, more people in the community, Native and non-native, will go to see that play before they will pick up a book. That, from the writing sense, makes it important to develop writers to be able to produce and to be able to meet the need of that audience. We could use community theatre in every community. There's a lot of room there and I don't think it's competitive.

HANAY GEIOGAMAH: The American theatre community at large must lend Indians a helping hand in the same manner that the national theatre family in Canada is currently doing for Natives there.
(Geiogamah 1991)

● IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE THEATRE TO NON-NATIVE COMMUNITIES

DORIS LINKLATER (ACTRESS): I was taking training wherever I could. Native Earth in the early days and then, when I went to Tukak, I got some more training, and I learned the discipline and the respect for the art that you must have. There isn't enough acknowledgement for all these people, especially people like Keith Turnbull, who helped start the first professional Native theatre, and Larry Lewis, for all the work that he's done. They've done a lot in terms of Native theatre. They should be acknowledged formally.

TINA MASON (PLAYWRIGHT): I think that it is like the old ways when we used traditional stories as a way of teaching children and reaching out to people, including old people, by using quizzical stories and riddles and I think it still works the same way. Instead of people going to lectures or going to school to learn more, it is more satisfying, more entertaining and enduring to see a play.

MAKKA KLEIST: The mainstream theatre, non-native audiences, I feel that our stories have stuck with them somehow, they are beginning to think new thoughts. I think maybe we have been a part of that development. Many have these images of stereotypes, they expect us to behave in certain ways and, maybe, if they see theatre they might say, "Oh, that is not at all what we thought they were."

Question: They have images of these 'Hollywood' Indians.

KLEIST: Yes. The important thing is to DO theatre, not because we want to be a bridge in some way, not because we want the non-native community to understand us, not because of anything but doing theatre. We do theatre for all people. We don't create theatre just for native people; you don't think that way when you do theatre, you just do it because the story is great.

Why do all these non-native theatre companies pick up all your work?

DREW TAYLOR: Well, I kind of like it, the more people do it, the better. For example, "Dreamer's Rock" has been produced four times already and it's being produced three times this summer. It's had about seven productions in four years. Now, something like that, I don't think it has so much to do with being Native, I just think it's a very good story. It's an adolescent story, with three boys, that can translate into any culture. Turkish, Israeli, whatever. They just happen to be Native, looking at Native problems. A show like "Bootlegger", it's beyond me. I think it's one of my weakest scripts, yet I won an award for it and two companies are producing it this summer. In terms of that, I think there happens to be a vacuum of comedies that summer stock theatres want to produce.

There seems to be very little out there, everybody wants to do this serious, over-dramatic stuff. I published this silly comedy and people are just going for it.

VINCE MANITOWABI: I think it is like any other show that we do when there is non-native audiences, they seem to hold back their laughter, they don't enjoy themselves as much, I don't know what it is, whereas when we went to the reserves, there was boisterous laughter from all the Native kids. Even the (Native) adults enjoyed themselves. The non-native audience didn't seem to understand, but I think they learned something. We went away with some good feelings after the teachers talked to us. They gave us comments like 'we were glad to have your group' and 'it was a real learning experience', 'the stories were really colourful and they gave good messages'. The general reaction was positive.

Why has this play ["Toronto At Dreamer's Rock"] been so popular for Theatre Direct?

LINDA HILL (DIRECTOR): First of all, they had an amazing response from the first tour, partly because, as a TYA company with a long history touring in the metropolitan area, they accessed a lot of schools and had a very big response from their boards indicating that it was something that other schools would want to see. It was all, in a way, based on demand. This present tour is part of a circuit of Children's Festivals that happen across the country. But I think, they, unlike some other companies are recognizing the cultural diverse make-up of Toronto and the need for children of diverse cultures to see their experiences reflected on stage. And whether or not the population is made up of Native kids, or South Asian or Chinese or whatever, the play speaks about 'difference' and what it means to be straddling two cultures and trying to, in your teen years, ground yourself in your own cultural identity while surviving and moving towards the future. And that's a message that's really important for kids of any colour. They've had a lot of success with that. They did reach a lot of Native kids, but certainly not in the same way that, for instance, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig would, but the play moved beyond a specific culture into other cultures.

JAMES CULLINGHAM: I've seen pretty much every show since "Diary of A Crazy Boy". It was great. Although I didn't get to see "Rez". I've done a lot of travelling already and I've been in Native communities across much of the country before I started seeing theatre, and that's one of the reasons why I wanted to see theatre. It's not all good. I've seen a couple of shows that I didn't think were very good. But that's good, because the shows are taking risks. I mean, the easy thing would be to hit a certain level and just stay there and do it over and over again. But I get a sense that Native Earth isn't doing that. And that's good. I just saw Floyd's new show ["Lady of Silences"] and I quite liked it. I mean it wasn't perfect, it's got some flaws, but I thought it was quite

venturous and enjoyable. I went with two thirteen-year-olds, my daughter and her friend, and they really liked it. And they're still talking about Billy Merasty for obvious reasons.

So what do you think about the style?

CULLINGHAM: I don't know if there's a unity in the style. I mean, Margo Kane's play is obviously very different from Floyd Favel or Drew Taylor or Tomson. I think the style's very powerful. I think that if there's anything that unites it all, it's humour. And quite graphic pain which I think is very courageous and the combination of the two. And of course, Tomson is probably doing that better right now than any other writer on the face of the planet regardless of what culture they're from. But it seems to be a constant. And Drew's stuff is fabulous. Especially in "Someday". It's a very painful story about a woman who lost her child and rediscovers her. But it's hysterically funny at the same time. I don't know quite how they do it. And I think that's unique, it's unique to the culture, at least from what I've observed. I mean, you go on the reserve and it's got real problems, obviously, but people aren't JUST depressed about it....you know. So I dig it, I look forward to it. I'll probably keep doing it.

MAEV BRENNAN [CRITIC]: Performances such as "Sookinchoot" at Sen'klip invite non-natives to enter their exciting world and share in the experience, a tremendously exciting one if you are open to it.

How do you feel the non-native audience is affected by Native Earth's shows?

KENNETCH CHARLETTE: I think it's a double-edged sword. The non-native community is being educated, their eyes are being opened. But, also, some of the non-native community refuse to open their eyes to the issues that Native Earth brings forth. Generally speaking, they come from a society that was partially responsible for some of the repression and consequently, they don't like that. The guilt. But response has been good.

What kind of feed-back did you get from "Dry Lips" at the Alex?

CHARLETTE: Generally, there was a really good response. Most people that I talked to commented on how well it was produced. I almost got the sense of being patronized (they were surprised) that Natives were capable of putting together such a show. The content of the show really opened their eyes to a lot of issues, it was a "smack in the face", so to speak. These people had no concept of what reserve life was all about. Overall, it was a good response.

And the Alex staff?

CHARLETTE: They treated us great. I mean, they were taking a big gamble. The Mirvish's are business men.

COMPARISON OF AUDIENCE RESPONSES

DANIEL DAVID MOSES: One night, during "Kyotopolis", there was a guy sitting on one side and there were a couple of girls sitting behind me somewhere who were laughing all the way through it and I thought 'Oh great, this is wonderful, they're getting the jokes'. When the lights came up at the end, I noticed the person on the side was a CBC guy who's worked a lot with Native people and the girls in the back were Native girls. The majority of the audience was non-native, that was sort of the feeling, there were a lot of students and I think a lot of Alumnae, and they're mostly white middle class people.

How did that audience respond to the show?

MOSES: Everybody found it very interesting. People had a lot to say about it but I think, finally, there was too much that was strange for them. They didn't quite know HOW to react. Partly, I wrote it to be a little perplexing, when I revise it this summer I'm going to make it appear to be easier to understand.

SHANE CUNNINGHAM: The Native people watching the show ["Dance Me Born"] didn't SAY a lot, a lot of it hits home, it leaves them thoughtful and pensive.

What kind of response [to the tour of "20th Century Indian Boy"] did you get from the reserves in Ontario?

DAVID OSAWABINE: Mixed. Some shows were for little kids, and I thought it should have been done for high school kids. But the high school kids, there were Native and non-native. Some of the white guys were really touched by it, some felt anger, some relief towards the end. The Native students really enjoyed the show too. We put our evaluation forms at the shows and generally, they like the show, and that more people should see it. One girl came and saw the show three times and even brought her parents and her other friends. In Thunder Bay we played in the Youth Correctional Centre and the audience very attentive, which I didn't expect. Then we played at the Adult Correctional Centre and they were great, too. Before the show we had a Sweetgrass Ceremony with the inmates, there were a lot of Nishnawbs there, they appreciated it so much that one of the inmates gave Jerome his coat.

JOHN BLONDIN: The Native audience was somewhat shocked and mobilized more than the non-native. I guess the truth about one's situation struck harder to the native audience than the other. The native audience saw a lot of themselves in that play that hurt. The non-native audience appeared to be more sophisticated. In general,

the performance was educational for the non-native audience, whereas it was revealing for the native audience. (Blondin 1992)

LEE CROWCHILD (RED THUNDER CULTURAL SOCIETY, CALGARY): The hardest part is trying to get through to the 'unconverted', the ones who don't know who Natives are, they have preconceived ideas. "The Rez Sisters" was really new to them.

CULTURAL ISSUES OF CONCERN AND THE ARTS COMMUNITY

There are many cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal people today. What are some of these issues and how are they being addressed by the Aboriginal arts community?

KENNETCH CHARLETTE: The first issue, I think, is the sense of identity. I don't think the bigger issues get handled properly by the general theatre community for fear of reprisal from the funding bodies.

MAKKA KLEIST: It apparent in the total failure of the European school system in re-educating [assimilating] people, which is so painful, that sometimes one can only bear so much pain, and can't go any further. But because the school system is failing, isn't working, it doesn't give the kids the pride....the purpose to live and to give whatever they have. I think art comes in there. I think art is the way to create some pride and integrity within all the young people because, our society is so competitive, here in Canada, the USA, Europe, the capitalistic countries....so competitive. You have to compete in everything at school, in math, for example. You don't get to feel that you have something valuable, that you have something unique. I see it how it goes in Norway, too, with kids. Like in sports, for instance, whatever you compete in, you create 99.9% losers instead of creating 100% winners. In art, we don't compete. In art, you are whatever you do, and in art, if you learn your skills, if you develop your gifts, you are who you are and you are unique....and it is not a competition, you give of yourself. If you can see what you can give, and see who you are, it is doing something, it is creating a better circle. You don't lie about how to be a human being or what a human being is like inside. Theatre can make a big difference. It helps. It does give people straight backs, open chests. It gives you the spine. It is so important what we are doing. It is important what Native Earth is doing, any serious Native Theatre. It is so important that it be kept alive economically by the government, so you don't feel like you are out begging. It is real theatre art, it is a bridge from all of our cultures to the mainstream life. That is what has been missing all the time. That is why we see all the young people abusing themselves....which ends many times in death. It is an important work that should be supported economically by the government. We are doing social work, I mean by doing theatre, we do a lot work that the government doesn't know how to do, the schools don't know how to do it. It is important.

TINA MASON: I think there's got to be more focus on addressing these issues. In terms of racism, I think there should be more of a positive side to it. Like instead of pointing fingers at people there has to be more concentration on how the person should deal with it themselves, individually, instead of blaming it on somebody

se. Through theatre I think you can do that, you can deliver the message in a way that people can actually enjoy the themselves, be entertained and not feel like they're being preached at. I think that it is a very good medium for that.

JORDAN WHEELER (WRITER): As more and more Aboriginal artists find their voices, more and more Aboriginal people will re-awaken from that dark age. For Aboriginal people, art is not to be set aside for observation, art is for the community, and the artist is an integral part of the community. (1991)

RAOUL TRUJILLO: It's important as artists to be true to our Native voice, to keep this at the root of our work and not give in to the use of language, movement, image or sound purely from an intellectual point of view. When that happens, we become part of a culture whose art is seen as an imitation of life instead of an integral part of it. (1991)

JOHN KIM BELL: [President of the Canadian Native Arts Foundation] Something I pointed out in my report is that the cultural community has aspirations and needs which are separate and different than, say, the Native social service sector, the Native general public, the Native political sector, the Native business sector. The arts sector has it's own needs and aspirations. And often it is maybe the Native politicians in our communities which don't support us. So the artistic community, we shouldn't be answering to the Chiefs. In the mainstream, you have the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the National Endowment of the Arts (?), and they're all set up at arms length from many politicians, for two reasons. The first thing is censorship. The second thing is, is that art and the directives of art should be driven by artists themselves and not by Native businessmen, not by social service agencies, Native politicians or government agencies. Art expresses National identity, art bears witness to culture and art is that which survives culture. When assimilation was attempted aboriginal people were able to go back and look at the material culture which survived but that aboriginal culture was different than the one that lives now. Nevertheless, we as a people are able to go back and find out who, in fact, we actually were and what we actually did from art that existed in our culture. So art survives culture, bears witness to culture, all kinds of stuff.

How does art relate to theatre? Why is it important that we take our art, our culture, our storytelling and translate it to theatre?

BELL: Art helps to express our Native identity, our national identity, our psychological identity, our feelings, our cultural identity, it helps to question society, it helps to question ourselves. It also helps to break down stereotypes and build bridges to the non-native society.

One of the great benefits will be, is that art, which breaks down the socio-economic boundaries and cultural boundaries, it's things

What non-native people can come to and kind of enjoy and begin to understand us is that, because it serves as a crucial communication device, and a lot of non-native people don't come to the political meetings, a lot of non-native people don't come to the friendship centre meetings, but they will come to theatre and art. And so art serves as a communication device and what we want to project is strength, beauty, power, love, character

How has the Canadian Native Arts Foundation supported you?

ANONYMOUS NATIVE ARTIST: They haven't helped me at all. For example, and this is just an example, the Karen Jameson dance company. She has a reputation for dealing in appropriation for a long time so, when she wanted to do this project she was stopped by the Museum of Anthropology head, Michael Ames, who turned her on to the Git'san people, to get some Native people involved to develop it and work with her. She really was into more cultural appropriation and all kinds of things. I felt disturbed that their support of her company to the tune of 30-35,000 dollars was a slap in the face. (I don't consider her work that great either). I wanted an explanation and I did get one that I was satisfied with, but, I was not satisfied with the fact that moneys go to non-native productions and companies and they go to the non-native organizers. If they are going to do a co-production then there should be equal representation in decision-making, with the director, the administrator. They should be training some administrative staff, or a support staff. They said that all that money was delegated to the Native artists but it just wasn't them writing it up, it looked like a white organization got the moneys. Still, all kinds of people are jumping on the bandwagon because doing native work is, not only trendy, it is important. But we must be conscious of putting the funding into the hands of Native people. I saw the Jameson piece and found it artistically confusing, I didn't find it that interesting or creative. And I wonder, how much input did Native people have in, for example, choreography decisions? Why is it from a non-natives point of view once more?

Our own people don't understand the importance of theatre. They have been so colonized. Also they're grappling with other priorities such as economic development, health and welfare, some major, major priorities. They leave out the artists and the cultural people. I see that as a problem in really communicating to our people the value of the artists' vision and the voice of writers and musicians and singers....so our own people need to have an understanding.

For instance, our politicians, our own Native politicians are so colonized and live within that system so much, that oft times they think that, for instance, that the Native Arts Foundation is representative of all Native creative cultural people in this country and that is not the case. And they are kind of shocked when they hear, when I say "no". There are a variety of different approaches being practised by people across this country...the

N.A.F. is only one perspective, one voice and there are many voices
● include when you're talking about the arts. Our own politicians,
our own educated people that are dealing with Native issues....do
not understand that.

OTHER NATIVE THEATRE COMPANIES

DE-BA-JEH-MU-JIG THEATRE GROUP

The ideals and aspirations of a gathering of talented young visionaries and artists in 1984 put Manitoulin Island on the Canadian Theatre map. The world's largest fresh-water island is the home of, according to Native legend, the Great Spirit, Manitou and the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group. De-ba-jeh-mu-jig is an Ojibwa-Cree word meaning "storyteller", and this is exactly what this group of talented people have been doing for the last nine years - telling the stories of the First Nations People.

De-Ba-jeh-mu-jig is a community based non-profit organization presently located on the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on a peninsula on the eastern end of the Island. It was founded by Shirley Cheechoo, a well-respected member of the West Bay community, where De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig was originally located. West Bay is described as "the cultural centrepiece of Manitoulin" where "Manitoulin's only professional theatre troupe....is tucked in a little spot along highway 540". This journalist added that "De-bah-jeh-mu-jig does much to cultivate cultural talents in the West Bay area and throughout Manitoulin" (Melton 1988). Founder, Cheechoo, is well known for her painting, music and acting ("Spirit Bay") and, in the past few years, her popular one-woman show, "Path With No Moccasins". She presently runs an art gallery, Kasheese Studio, with artist and husband, Blake Debassige.

Since 1984, 'De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig' [or 'De-Baj' as it is commonly called] has spawned a large pool of talented writers, actors, technicians, directors and designers...the list is endless. Over the past summers, they have produced full-length plays entirely in the Ojibway language, most notable being "Lupi - The Great White Wolf". De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig produces two new plays each season which tour the province's communities, reserves, Friendship Centres and Festivals. The stories are traditional as well as contemporary and mainly deal with the issues and concerns of the Native communities. Consequently, many of the plays focus on positive self-image, race relations, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide as well as local history and the stories of the Elders.

De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig's present goals and objectives are as follows:

GOALS:

- (1) To provide knowledge of Canada's First Nation through workshops and theatre.
- (2) To develop, produce and tour plays by and about people of Native ancestry.

(3) To develop Native Theatre as an art form and business.

(4) To present performances and entertainment that appeals to people of all ages. To educate about Native traditions and culture and, in doing so, share information on current issues and concerns relevant to the Aboriginal People of Canada.

(5) To provide training and employment in the Performing Arts for Native people: therefore giving hope to Native actors, playwrights, designers, technicians and administrative personnel who endeavour a future in the arts.

(6) To study and promote interest in the arts focusing on theatre, literature, drama, dance and music relative to the Native experience.

(7) To provide facilities for educational instruction in theatre arts.

OBJECTIVES:

(1) Hold and facilitate development workshops in the following areas: mime, mask and movement, dance, music, audition skills and writers workshops.

(2) Develop plays of Native origin that convey a unique and distinct understanding of Native culture. Additionally, to produce plays that are unique to Manitoulin Island.

(3) Establish a direct fund-raising campaign through annual events and festivals.

(4) Encourage skill development of young actors, i.e. casting inexperienced players with accomplished veteran actors.

(5) Hold and establish an annual stock production every summer to coincide with the peak tourist season of July and August.

(6) Tour plays annually to communities and schools across Canada particularly Native communities in the Northern Region.

(7) Conduct theatrical workshops in schools and communities, promoting and developing interest in arts, specifically theatre.

(8) To train personnel in all aspects of theatre arts, including:

Administration -> tour-co-ordination, management, accounting, artistic direction, public relations.

Artistic -> acting, performance, direction, set, costume, lighting and sound design.

Technical -> stage, production and tour management.

Apprenticeships -> on-the-job training, as well as sponsored credit courses will achieve these objectives.

(9) To access all available government funding to promote and further the goals and objectives set by De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group. (De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig 1992)

Their first show was written and produced by Shirley Cheechoo and Billy Merasty for the 1984 Spirit of Sharing Festival on Manitoulin. "Respect the Voice of the Child" was a fascinating story of a young girl whose medicine gifts made her an outcast in society.

In 1985, with Tomson Highway as Artistic Director, and Larry Lewis as Director, they began to workshop new plays.

"Shadow People" by Shirley Cheechoo, became the group's second production. This play featured Graham Greene, Gary Farmer, Doris Linklater, Mary Green and Rene Highway. It was a grim and devastating tale of teenage suicide and was sponsored by the Native Drug and Alcohol Abuse Program.

Their third production was "A Ridiculous Spectacle In One Act", written by Highway. It is an hilarious clown show that tells a silly rendition of how Manitoulin Island got its present name.

"The Rez Sisters" was work-shopped in February, 1986 with Gloria Eshkibok [the infamous and original Emily Dictionary], Doris Linklater [Nanabush in the future "Dry Lips"], Mary Assiniwe, Greta Cheechoo and Mary Green. Later that year, in the spring, Tomson Highway left De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig to become the Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto where the original production of "The Rez Sisters" would take the city by storm. Larry Lewis would become the next Artistic Director of De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig.

In 1987, for the first time, the company brought a traditional story to the stage. "Ayash", by Jim Morris, a traditional story from the Thunder Bay region, played to standing ovations all over Manitoulin Island.

In preparation for the next season, a Script Development Workshop was offered to people of First Nations ancestry to develop

leas for new plays that have themes of Native lifestyles. Larry Lewis had invited people from across the continent to submit two-page summaries of their work and a committee, including Highway, would select promising scripts. One of these was "Nothing Personal", co-written by Shirley Cheechoo and Alanis King [from Wikwemikong].

Aimed at a mature audience, "Nothing Personal" is "a penetrating but at the same time, a shallow view of some very bored lives", comments Lewis, "it's very, very funny, "Nothing Personal", but it's also very painful" (qtd. in "Renowned").

The summer of 1988 saw two plays go on stage at the South Baymouth Community Hall in West Bay in July. "Nothing Personal" [featuring Gloria Eshkibok as 'Carrie' and King as 'Juicy'] and Tomson Highway's "Aria" [which was first produced by Native Earth], were both designed by Blake Debassige. "Aria", a humanist one-woman piece, sings an extraordinary song in homage of womanhood. The Right Honourable Lily Munroe [Ministry of Citizenship and Culture] attended the opening. The West Bay theatre troupe was then invited to perform at the World Juniors Arts Festival in Sudbury at the Cambrian Foundation Hall at the end of July.

The next production, "Nanabush of the Eighties" marked the first provincial tour for De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig. This all-Native country and western musical was written by Alanis King, Shirley Cheechoo and new-comer, Kennetch Charlette. The fall production was described as "Nanabush of the 80's: A world gone awry. A spiritual journey through a dream landscape where the characters come face to face with their obsessions bargaining with the Mephistophelean Nanabush for the realization of their dreams. None are" (The Manitoulin Recorder, 1988).

The story includes Angel [played by Cheechoo], the leader of the Silver Water Band, who is obsessed with making the big time; Elvis [Charlette], the compulsive gambler; Delores [King], his alcoholic wife; Gordie [Monty Ban], who believes he is God's gift to women while beating his wife, Jane [Eshkibok], the victim of a repressed educational system who has a voice envied by all; and finally there is Mark, or Nanabush [Gordie Odjig].

The Department of Native Studies at Trent University invited director Larry Lewis (a former Trent undergraduate) and the company of "Nanabush of the '80's" to perform on October 24, 1988. The show was part of a fund raiser for the Elder's Conference '89 and was also a chance to share Native Theatre with the general. The "Bimisay", a university publication, said that "Judging by the cheers and the standing ovation of the 300-plus crowd, we feel Nanabush was a success with the University area community" and that the group is "highly professional...the individual actors all have a wide range of experience which they bring to the group" (Bourgeois 1988).

● Shortly thereafter, while performing in San Francisco at the American Indian Film Festival, they were presented with the Spirit of the Festival Award for their positive portrayal of Native people.

De-ba-jeh-muh-jig made the move to its own office/rehearsal space in Wikwemikong, under the Artistic Direction of Larry Lewis. The Board of Directors was comprised of Rose Marie Trudeau, President; Joyce Sprack, Vice-President; Lois Miller, Secretary; Rennie Mastin, Treasurer; Shirley Cheechoo, Ex-officio; and Jennifer Bilsbarrow, Jane Story, Clara Trudeau, Genevieve Jock and Thomas Scott. The Theatre staff included Clayton Odjig, Tour Coordinator; Jeffrey Trudeau, Bookkeeper; Velma Armstrong, Administrative Assistant; Audrey Debassige, General Manager Trainee and Ross Armstrong, Production Stage Manager.

"The Rez Sisters come home to Manitoulin" was the announcement in the Manitoulin Expositor after its opening on August 3, 1989 in Wikwemikong. "The Rez Sisters came home last week to loud applause and a standing ovation. Featuring, for the first time, a full Native cast....[who] performed superbly [and] gave the show a distinct local flavour while rendering a universal reflection of life on a reserve" (Story 1989). Story also reported comments like: "I've never seen actresses with such energy and commitment"; "I found it incredibly positive especially as a feminist piece with these women coming together for a common cause. I could feel the comradeship of the actresses"; "It is a play with great production values. It brings a level of theatre of quality that would never otherwise be seen by communities in the North"; and "the play's director has made it in Toronto, but continues to work with people that he cares for. It is a commitment to the arts in a context that would otherwise be forgotten." This was just the beginning of a 37-stop provincial tour!

The cast of the "The Rez Sisters" included Justine Eenoose as Pelajia Patchnose, Rose Marie Trudeau as Philomena Moosetail, Audrey Debassige as Annie Cook, Gina Gasongi Simon as Marie-Adele Starblanket, Gloria Mae Eshkibok as Veronique St. Pierre (a different challenge from 'that horrible Dictionary woman'), Sheri Jacko as Zhaboonigan Peterson, Poky Fox as Emily Dictionary and Gordie Odjig as Nanabush. Gordie's brother, Clayton, was the percussionist.

Several of the cast members made their stage debuts in "Rez". In fact, five of the seven women had never been on stage before. Justine Eenoose commented in her bio that she "has always had an interest in acting and is proud to be making her professional debut...at such a tender age" [she was 63 at the time]. Gina Simon, a painter, writer and photographer, explained that "this new experience, acting, has allowed [me] to display talents [I have] always wanted to strengthen and explore". Sheri Jacko, 17, enjoyed being a part of "Rez" and "learned a lot from the character of

aboonigan". Audrey Debassige, a graduate of the business program at Cambrian College, will be joined De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig as General Manager Trainee immediately after the tour and Poky Fox, who has four children and two grandchildren, made her stage debut as the "tough-as-nails biker chick."

A very talented crew was assembled for this production. Alanis King, Assistant Director, was on her way to the National Theatre School in Montreal. Ross Armstrong, Stage Manager, had previously been a volunteer at fundraising events but would become a full time staff member of De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig as trainee for the position of 'Technical Director Production Stage Manager'. Kenneth Charlette played a number of 'roles' for this production: Production Manager, Technical Director and Lighting Designer, the latter of which he did for the first time. Deborah Pitawanakwat, Costume Designer, is one of Canada's leading Native fashion designers. Wayne Trudeau, Set and Poster Designer, is an experienced painter who has also designed logos, posters, jackets and t-shirts professionally. Vinetta Strombergs (who is current General Manager of the Native Theatre School) was the acting coach and Victoria Manitowabi was the Wardrobe Mistress.

For this production, De-ba-jeh-mu-jig was generously assisted by the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, the Ministry of Skills Development (Futures Program), Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, Canada Employment and Immigration, Dr. Lilly Oddie Munroe and the Ministry of Culture and Communications and Heritage Canada (Manitoulin Island Heritage Region Project). "Rez" was also produced with the generous support of the communities of Wikwemikong and West Bay and the people of Manitoulin Island. They gave special thanks to the Wikwemikong Heritage Organization, the Wikwemikong Nursery School and Education Committee and the participants and sponsors of the Crazy Bingo Betty Bingo Marathon fundraiser in which approximately thirty dedicated people played bingo for fifteen hours (De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Program 1989).

Just as "The Rez Sisters" concluded its long provincial tour, rehearsals began for the next production, Drew Hayden Taylor's first stage play, "Toronto at Dreamer's Rock". This was to be the beginning of a long history of this very successful play, which, to this day, like "Rez", is still being produced across the country. Drew Hayden Taylor is an Ojibwa from the Curve Lake Reserve and has been writing for film and television for many years. His credits include "The Beachcombers", "Street Legal" and numerous documentaries and articles on Native arts and culture.

De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig's premier of "Toronto at Dreamer's Rock" took place on the Sheshegwaning Reserve, Manitoulin Island on October 3, 1989 under the direction of Larry Lewis. The cast included Dwayne Manitowabi as 'Rusty', Jeff Eshkawkogan as 'Keesic' and Herbie

Barnes as 'Michael'. [This was the beginning of Barnes' long association with De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre.]

Dreamer's Rock is a real place on the Birch Island Reserve, a powerful sacred site where many people still go for guidance and traditionally, where young boys were taken to fast on a Vision Quest. Ojibwa Storyteller and Educator Mary Lou Fox, explains that "On top of the rock is an indentation in the shape of a human body, where people lie down in a comfortable position. Young people, at puberty would come to the place with their sacred things....[it] was known as the Path of the Thunderbirds because during a storm, this was where the thunder was the loudest and the lightning flashed the brightest" (qtd. in TDR Program). Taylor instructs in his production notes that "Care should be taken in the depiction of such a sacred place" (Taylor 10).

The story follows 16 year old Rusty, an aimless, frustrated teenager on his way to becoming an alcoholic, as he arrives at Dreamer's Rock to be alone, listen to his walkman, and have a beer. To his disbelief, Keesic appears, his counter part from 400 years ago. Keesic, dressed in traditional clothing, only speaks Ojibwa, at first, and Rusty thinks it's either a dumb practical joke or the beer. Keesic is amazed and confused at his new surroundings, but at the same time explains that "This is the Place of Dreams, you can never be alone here." Eventually, Michael appears. He is the persona from the future. He examines the two other boys carefully, beginning with Keesic: "Pre-contact, no doubt. I'd say late woodland period." He touches Rusty's jacket: "Standard outfitting for the 20th century aboriginal. Denim. Once referred to as 'jean'." Soon they feel more comfortable and talk, sharing knowledge about themselves and speculating on their purposes in life from their three distinct perspectives. The issues discussed include the despair of Native youth, suicide, alcohol, the sorry state of the planet, the loss of the Odawa language, to name a few. But it is not all hopeless and gloomy. Michael claims that much progress has been made. Michael and Rusty eventually end up arguing and out of their differences, Rusty tries to define his identity. In the process, he inadvertently finds his own power and discovers a sense of direction and pride. (Taylor 1990)

The tour of "Dreamer's Rock" included communities, high schools, public schools and Friendship Centres in many parts of Ontario, including Iroquois Falls, Cochrane, Kapuskasing Sucker Creek, Espanola, Fort Frances and Sudbury. Audience response was positive everywhere they played. It is a play that relates to all teenagers, not just Native youth. The problems they face are similar, their loves are similar and their dreams are similar. The play appeals to people of all ages, of all cultures.

One review said that "Dreamer's Rock" was "a little more than the audience expected" and that "the play raises more questions than it answers. It offers no solutions because, at this point in

me, there are no easy answers" (Earle 1989). Another review said that Taylor's writing is "amusing and well-paced but never skirts the issues." She added that the cast was "disciplined, approaching their parts professionally and seriously. They understand the importance of this play and perform it with enthusiasm and gusto" (Story 1989).

There was a tremendous feed-back from the tour. Peter Boyko, Principal of Espanola High School wrote that:

You held the attention of almost one thousand students and gave them much to reflect upon. The script is very much in tune with the struggles of adolescents and of first nation adolescents in particular.

Your performance was culturally enlightening for everyone. Many students have commented on how accurate your portrayal of the modern adolescent was and that you made them think about things.

I would strongly recommend your performance to any adolescent group for the social messages contained in the play as well [as] the awareness of the cultural struggle First Nation people are experiencing. Congratulations on a fine performance. (Boyko 1989)

Bill Morgenstern, a Native Education Consultant for the Fort Frances-Rainy River Board of Education complimented the actors on their strong performances and added:

The discussion after the play was well thought out and meaningful.

Every student who viewed these two fine performances went away with a better understanding of the historical consequences of "western migration", a respect for Native "survival skills", and the importance of obtaining a "meaningful" education.

I am sure each Native student in the audience left the performance with a bit more pride in who they are. Thank you for this excellent show. (Morgenstern 1989)

Vice-Principal of Kapuskasing High School, Joffre Ribout, wrote:

I was impressed, as were our students, with the quality of the production.

The group even took time out of their busy schedule to go into one of our classes and speak to the students.

● We would certainly be pleased to host your group again.
(Ribout 1989)

The District Manager for the Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, Francois Ranger, expressed his satisfaction of the performance at L'Ecole Publique Jeanne Sauve in Sudbury:

I want you to know that I thouroughly [sic] enjoyed the presentation. The actors were absolutely charming and a joy to watch. A very important message is communicated in a playful and entertaining fashion.

I am sure that the play must appeal to children, teenagers and adults alike. I enjoyed the idea of the audience sitting in a circle around the stage, creating a greater feeling of closeness. The three young men in the play deserve much praise and encouragement for the work and effort that was required of them. They all have talent and charm and I hope they use it wisely.

Ranger expressed his concern, though, that more people should have seen the play:

My only regrets, is that theses plays were not seen by a large audience. I did not see any publicity in the Sudbury area for either one of the plays, and there was no media coverage for the two presentations in Sudbury.

There are many theatre goers in Sudbury who support year round presentations by the Sudbury Theatre Centre and le Theatre du Nouvel-Ontario. I am convinced that these people would appreciate the opportunity to see such excellent plays. (Ranger 1989)

The final play of the 89-90 Season, was also written by Drew Hayden Taylor. "Education is Our Right" was written as a direct response to cut backs in funding for post-secondary education to Native peoples. Pierre Cadieux was the Federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs when he made the announcement. But, as we follow 'Ebenezer Cadieux' to the fictional central Ontario reserve of Otter Lake, we come to realize that the scenes are based on real events. Some of the other characters we meet are the 'Spirit of Knowledge', 'Want & Ignorance', the Spirits of 'Education Past', 'Education Present' and 'Education Future' and people of all ages and backgrounds. We visit a variety of other places and time periods, including a vision of the future, which we hope will never come to pass. These issues are still being discussed today.

"Education is Our Right" had its Premiere in East Main, Quebec on February 4, 1990 under the direction of Larry Lewis. The cast, appearing in multiple roles, included Deborah Anwhatin, Bruce Armstrong, Jack Burning and Mark Seabrook.

A series of short plays were produced for younger audiences, kindergarten to grade eight, and toured to schools in Ontario. The plays were from 35-50 minutes in length and were followed by a 10 minute question period to discuss the material.

"The Thunderbird Children", by Esther Jocko, is a story about the mixing of blood between the Aboriginal Peoples and the Thunderbeings. It is a story about the two youngest Thunderbird children who tire of bringing the rains and want to become human. The young audience is asked "Are you afraid of the thunder?" They come across Mother Earth, who is about to give birth to two infants, so they follow her to her clean lodge. There, the spirits of the Thunderbirds enter the infants' bodies as they are about to be born. They are welcomed and honoured by the Anishnabek. The Thunderbird children mix their powers with the First People, raising a beautiful, strong and mighty people. We encouraged our audience to wonder if 'maybe they have something powerful and special hidden within themselves, too?' The play was performed at the 1991 Earth Spirit Festival for the Children's Theatre Division. The cast included Gloria May Eshkibok, Clayton Odjig, Gregory Fisher and Crystal Shawanda.

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias is the author of "Word Magic", about a young girl who steals and the Native way of handling the situation. The promotional material described the play. Karen is a bright girl who likes school, but she has a secret...she has been stealing little things, usually to give as gifts to others. How should she be punished? and how will she learn her lesson? Her Aunt Edna knows how important it is for her to save face and make honourable decisions in her own heart. "The old people, long time ago, would try to put words on things. It wasn't easy but it helped them to feel better. When they felt better, they could do something about their troubles. Some people called that Word Magic."

Another Drew Taylor play, "Talking Pictures" (or "Pictures On the Wall"), is about the need for respect for the sacred sites of the Anishnabek. Two grade seven students, Jack and Jill, head off to the petroglyphs to dig up arrowheads for a school cultural project, but they find more than they bargained for. Two Spirits rise out of the rock to teach them about respect, honour, tradition and most important, about themselves. It is this learning that they take away with them, not the precious arrowheads. Instead of stealing the sacred objects, they find something precious of their own to leave behind.

Vince Manitowabi [brother of Dwayne and son of Edna] got his start in theatre through De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig in this series of short plays. He toured with the company to the northern reserves and schools and felt that the general response to the plays was positive. The teachers in the schools expressed their gratitude to the actors for sharing their 'colourful' stories. Manitowabi noticed that there was a total different reaction from the Native

audiences than there were with the non-natives. On the reserves, they got a very boisterous laughter from the kids; the adults enjoyed the show as well. But, the non-native audiences did not seem to understand, they seemed reluctant to laugh. However, the teachers at these schools assured the company that their students did learn something from the productions. Manitowabi is grateful to De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig for his introduction to Native Theatre. Since then he has gone on to the Native Theatre School [1992] and has performed in recent productions at Native Earth (Manitowabi 1993).

In keeping with their mandate to train and develop young actors, a Young Company was formed in the summer of 1990 with the assistance of the Theatre Ontario Youth Training program. Six young people were chosen to study voice, movement and acting over the summer under the direction of Vinetta Strombergs. As well as afternoon rehearsals for "First Love", they were exposed to various theatrical disciplines, performed Improv Comedy Cabarets for the community and eventually presented the new play "First Love" by young actress, Diane Debassige. Debassige, 17, appeared in "Daughters of the Country" and "Loyalties" and made her debut as a playwright in this play about drug and alcohol abuse. Six teenagers get themselves into trouble over the course of a weekend. The play focuses on the power of friendship and the difficulties facing young people growing up on a reserve: low self-esteem, the generation gap, first love and betrayal.

In preparation for De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig's summer season, Drew Taylor did a workshop of "Bootlegger Blues" at Native Earth Performing Arts' "Weesageechak Begins to Dance II" in early June, 1990. This workshop was directed by Larry Lewis and featured Herbie Barnes, Kenneth Charlette, Justine Eenoose, Gloria Eshkibok and Arlinda Stonefish.

Up to this time, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig felt that they had been doing productions that showed mostly the problems and concerns of Native people. This time, it was decided to tackle the problem from the inside looking out while using more humour to get the message across. In this way, they were hoping to provide fun family entertainment for all and show that laughter is the best medicine. They were concerned that non-native people most often see and hear the bad side of Native people, without realizing the unique and particular humour that is inherent in the First Nations people.

"The Bootlegger Blues" is a comic tale of an elderly, good, Christian Ojibwa woman, Martha, who is in charge of the fundraiser for the reserve for a much needed organ for the Church. She is instructed to buy beer for the pow-wow, an idea that she is not too happy with, but it seems that it would, otherwise, be a good way to raise money. Plans backfire, situations get complicated and she finds herself in the compromising position of having to sell 145 cases of bootleg beer (Taylor 1991).

"Bootlegger Blues" was produced by De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig in the summer of 1990 and premiered on the Wikwemikong Unceded Reserve on August 2. Directed by Larry Lewis, it toured Ontario for two months with the following cast: Justine Eenoose as Martha [her second stage appearance, but this time playing a much younger woman of 58!]; Gloria Eshkibok as her daughter Marianne; Dwayne Manitowabi as her son, Andrew, or Blue; Jani Lauzon as the friend, Angie; Billy Merasty as Marianne's common-law husband, David and Clayton Odjig as Noble, the dancer. This was Clayton's acting debut.

Included in the play is the title song "Bootlegger Blues", by Native musician Gary Williams, from the Curve Lake Reserve. His band is very popular today and have played at many fundraising functions for Native Earth. The crew included Jeff Trudeau in the position of Stage Manager. Jeff would soon go on to Stage Manage many of Native Earth's productions, "Path With No Moccasins" and many other shows.

Cheryl Mills, who also did costumes for "Ayash", "Aria", "Nothing Personal", "Nanabush of the Eighties" and "Rez", would again do the costumes and props as well as assist Kenneth Charlette with the set design. Charlette had expressed an interest in set design and De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig was glad to offer him his first opportunity. He also acted as the lighting designer. A special costume designer, Judy Bagshaw, was brought in to aid in the design of costumes for larger women. In this way, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig is attempting to break another stereotype, the casting of a large woman in a role where she actually wins the heart of a man.

Taylor, in his acknowledgments in the published book, expresses his thanks to Ed Peters; Vinetta Strombergs; everyone who helped in the workshop; Audrey Debassige for letting him stay at her house during rehearsal; his aunt, Anita Knott, for again helping with the Ojibwa translations [and also teaching him more of the language, he later reveals] and to his mother and family "who provided so much material for this story without actually doing anything - just being themselves [those who are still talking to me]" (Taylor 1991).

In June of 1992, "Bootlegger Blues" won the Canadian Author's Association Literary Award for Best Canadian Drama.

"Bootlegger Blues" is a popular play and has been produced by the [late] Awasikan Theatre in Winnipeg and in the summer of 1993 will be produced by TWO separate theatre companies. The Lighthouse Festival Theatre in Port Dover, Ontario will stage "Bootlegger" from June 22 - July 10. This production will feature De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig alumnae Herbie Barnes Clayton Odjig, Doris Linklater and Toronto newcomer, Columpa Bobb. Arbor Theatre in Peterborough will also stage "Bootlegger" this summer on the Trent University Campus. Taylor is working on a sequel called "Only Drunks and Children". It was recently work-shopped by the Canadian Stage Company in Toronto.

The fall of 1990 brought back ["Word Magic"] well-known poet/storyteller Lenore Keeshig-Tobias with a traditional story. She is a member of the Chippewas of Nawash, Cape Croker and the oldest of ten children. In 1983 she graduated from the Creative Writing Program at York University (Petrone 164).

"Quest For Fire" ["How Trickster Brought Fire to the People"] concerns the Trickster's desire to alleviate the sufferings of his people. It was written for young audiences and toured Ontario during November and December of 1990.

The cast included Levi Aguonie as the Father/Trickster, Wionna Wesley as the Mother/Blueberry Sister, Diane Debassige as the Older Sister/Blueberry Sister and Mark Seabrook as the Boy. It was directed by Lewis and designed by Cheryl Mills.

The story begins when "the sweetest little boy in the world [is] bored almost to tears" (Keeshig-Tobias 86). His mother, too busy with her own affairs, leaves the house instructing the older sister to entertain him. She decides to relieve his monotony by telling him a story that she had heard at school. The boy's imagination starts to go wild and his sister gets caught up in the story with him. They become players and with the two other actors, the story comes to life. The Trickster and other mythical creatures race about the room in a frenzy until the Trickster reaches the top of a big mountain. He realizes that he'll need help from his Blueberry sisters if he is to get fire for the people. But, where are the Blueberry sisters? The Older Sister explains:

"Blueberries are fragile little creatures. They can get crushed real easy. Trickster's Blueberry sisters always travelled with him. So they had to find the safest way to travel. And that was in his stomach."

The Trickster stands up (he had been squatting, "defecating"), straightens up, arches his back, steps over his business and then looks down at his Blueberry sisters:

"Sisters, sisters, I need your help....I have to get fire for the people."

After much coaxing and desperation from the Trickster, the Blueberry sisters decide to help him get fire. (Keeshig-Tobias 86)

"Quest For Fire" played at the Native Canadian Centre in Toronto in November, 1990. Actress/singer Jani Lauzon was part of the audience and commented that:

I was forgiving at times at the noticeable lack of experience the actors occasionally exposed. Experience

comes only from experience and their willingness to 'jump into the fire' made my heart glow. I felt a passionate affection for my heritage. Filled with pride I was now aware of the importance of the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group's survival as a motivating voice in their re-kindling of the spark, that will rise to a flame, never to be extinguished. (Lauzon 90)

The arrival of 1991 brought the remounting of "Toronto At Dreamer's Rock" for a National Tour of Canada from January to July. This production was directed by Herbie Barnes, who also played the role of 'Michael'. Levi Aguonie portrayed 'Keesic' while Glen Gould was 'Rusty'.

The show was presented for the Aboriginal Ministers' Conference in Whitehorse, Yukon and for the Northern Lights Festival with an audience of 1000 people. The Sudbury Star said that "...so compelling are the portrayals that disbelief is willingly suspended as the audience is drawn into that rocky place where spirits dwell" (Sudbury Star 1991).

The tour brought the play to Toronto for a brief run. The production made its Toronto premier at the Factory Theatre Studio Cafe until it closed on February 3, 1991.

In a review of this production, Wagner suggests that De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig has "become a leading developer of native Indian theatrical talent". He praises Taylor's "charming" play which he says "derives a substantial punch from the raw enthusiasm of the obviously inexperienced cast" (Wagner 1991). He also believes that under the humorous surface of the play, is a more serious link to "future hopes for Native self-government."

NOW Magazine commented that the performers acting abilities lacked polish and were "variable, making up in energy what it sometimes lack[ed] in experience" but, in response to the play itself, he said "Taylor presents a vital discussion about the continuity of a culture and ends up celebrating its survival in the present as well as the future. In doing so, he's hit upon one of the truest uses of theatre - to involve the intellect while engaging the feelings" (Kaplan 1991:41).

In the fall of 1991, Andrey Tarasiuk, the Artistic Producer of Theatre Direct Canada (a theatre for young audiences), decided to produce "Toronto at Dreamer's Rock" for its school tour. Lynda Hill, a graduate of the Ryerson Theatre School, was chosen to direct. The cast included Jonathan Fisher, Tim Hill and Jeffrey Eshkawkigan. Lynda Hill commented that Theatre Direct, recognizing the cultural diversity of Toronto schools, had accessed many schools and had an amazing response (Hill 1993).

The Toronto productions lead to Taylor being named the winner of the 1991 Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Children's Play Award. This award was presented at a ceremony at the Tarragon Theatre on February 24, 1992 and netted a prize of \$10,000.

"Dreamer's Rock" has continued to play in various venues throughout the country, most often with Theatre Direct Canada. On September 28, 1992, "Dreamer's Rock" played at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. It was again directed by Lynda Hill with Tim Hill [no relation] in the cast. They were joined by Levi Aguonie and newcomer, Spencer Rowe. Cheryl Francis was the stage manager, Shadowland provided the costumes and set while Marsha Coffey created the sound design.

Theatre Direct picked up "Dreamer's Rock" for the third time to perform in the country-wide Children's Festival. Under the direction of Lynda Hill, the cast included Tim Hill, Jonathan Fisher and Levi Aguonie. They performed in Calgary, Vancouver and Winnipeg. Most recently, "Dreamer's Rock" performed at the July 1993 Earth Spirit Festival with Tim Hill, Herbie Barnes and newcomer, Sid Bobb. As Drew Taylor notes, "Dreamer's Rock" has had at least seven productions in four years (1993). As Jonathan Fisher says, it is "the show that will never die" (1993).

Taylor believes that there are possibilities in theatre that are do not work in television. For example, on the stage, he can more accurately depict Native people. He still tells the story of getting a memo from a producer at the CBC for an episode of "Street Legal" that he had written. The memo requested him to make a revision on a character and "make him more Indian" (Story 1989).

Since "Dreamer's Rock", Taylor has gone on to write many more plays and television dramas and, in 1993, has his first film script ready for production called "Motorcycles and Sweet Grass". At only 31 years old, he has won many awards for his work.

Esther Jocko's "Lupi, The Great White Wolf" was the 1991 summer production (Jocko's last play for De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig was "The Thunderbird Children".) It was based on a story given to her by Annie Migwanabi. The story describes how a tribe of Ojibwa were compelled by a powerful evil force to flee their ancestral home and settle at what is now known as Birch Island, home of the Whitefish First Nation.

Press releases describe the show: "A magnificent legend comes to life before your eyes in an outdoor evening setting. Night time descends, the loon's cries pierces the air, and the eerie and foreboding tale of Lupi, The Great White Wolf unfolds. Amidst tipis and campfires, thunder and lightning, a reign of terror is released upon an Ojibwa village" (De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig 1991).

The play centres around the marriage of young Nohngose [Star] Nimke [Thunder] which angers the Old Woman, whose young mute grandson was refused by Nohngose's Father, even though his was the biggest dowries. The Old Woman seeks revenge on the Chief's village by turning her grandson into a great white wolf, who terrorizes the community, killing the children and eventually the newly married couple. The plot grows deeper because Old Woman and her grandson, we learn later, were the only survivors of a war waged by the Chief [Nohngose's father] many years before. "The play is meant to convey the many levels of morals in life, and the audience is encouraged to contemplate within himself as well as within the play, the complex reasons for human behaviour. Those reasons are rarely simple, moralistic answers" (Mombourquette 1991).

The August 1st, 1991 premiere of "Lupi" was directed by Larry Lewis. He teamed up with an incredible technical team which included Marrie Mumford, Associate Director; Linda Leon, Costume and Set Design; Marsha Coffey, Sound; Hugh Conacher, Lighting; Jeffrey Trudeau, Stage Manager; Sheila Kinoshameg, A.S.M.; Wilfred Fisher, Technical Director; Timothy Hill and Billy Shawanda, Design Assistants; Mary Lou Manitowabi, Seamstress and the poster design was by Blake Debassige.

In an interview with Jane Story of The Manitoulin Expositor, Marsha Coffey, sound designer, commented that "because I am not Ojibwa, culturally I have to work from my own musical place but I welcome as much input from the community and am very open to influence" (Story 1991). She added that she was working closely with local musician, Leland Bell, to help her with traditional Native songs. Over a three week period, Coffey composed music and created a soundscape, made up of a lot of natural sounds (because it was outdoors) that would form the backdrop for the play. Coffey has an impressive list of credits, including many original productions at Native Earth. She has been nominated for several Dora Awards, including one for "Son of Ayash", has composed music for the late Rene Highway, the Toronto Dance Theatre and Tukak Teatret in Denmark. Larry Lewis, an old colleague and friend, prompted her to work in Wiki for the first time.

The original cast included De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig stage veterans Gloria May Eshkibok (as the Chief's sister), Justine Eenoose (the Old Woman) and Clayton Odjig (as the Chief) who perform along side young local talent to share their expertise. These enthusiastic young actors include Jonathan Fisher (in the title role of Lupi), brother Gregory Fisher, Jonathan Debassige, Rona George (as Nohngose), Bruce Naokijig, Joey Osawabine, Leroy Peltier (as Nimke), Crystal Shawanda and Ruby Trudeau.

"Lupi, The Great White Wolf" opened in Wikwemikong on August 1, 1991. Jane Story had complete praise for the performers and technical crew alike, saying that the music, costumes and lighting

all melded to make the show a stage spectacle". She also interviewed Norman Walford, the Executive Director of the Ontario Arts Council after the opening performance. He totally enjoyed the show and felt that "Lupi" was "fulfilling the goals of the Arts Council [which financially supported production] to bring the community together to take pride in its heritage. Lupi certainly does that and all those who helped create Lupi can be proud" (Story 1991).

The entire play was performed in Ojibwa and included a scene breakdown in the program. It was also directed in a way that you did not need to know the language to understand and enjoy the show. In fact, many of the members of the cast did not speak the language themselves and found it a challenge to learn and perform the piece. The Ojibwa translations were done by Justine Eenoose and Violet Naokwekijig. Story commented, after opening night, that "for many in the audience, particularly the elders who have seen their language used less and less, it was encouraging and comforting....it was inspiring to see the language spoken in such a way" (Story 1991). After their performance in Midland, during the tour, the Penetanguishene Citizen said, in an article titled, "Ojibwa Play Enchanting", that "the non-Ojibwa speakers in the audience under the stars at Sainte-Marie among the Hurons on Monday did not need translation....the physical acting and the story were clear enough" (21 August 1991).

Audrey Debassige, the tour co-ordinator, explained that seven [out of twelve] of the cast members were between the ages of 10 to 14 and none of them could speak the language fluently. "That's what makes this play so incredible", she told the Wawatay News, "...the kids in this production not only had to learn their lines, they had to learn a language....And they're all first time actors. That was one of the purposes of the play, to inspire young people to become interested in their language" (Mombourquette 1991). Artistic Director, Larry Lewis, told the Sudbury Star that one of his biggest ambitions had been to direct a play in its entirety in the Native language. "Lupi" had become that reality (Simon 1991:9).

After playing in Wikwemikong and West Bay, "Lupi" then toured the province, beginning in Curve Lake on Tuesday August 13. The show then travelled to Toronto and performed before 530 people at Earl Bales Park in the outdoor Skylight Theatre. The show was a spectacular event, very haunting and mystical, with a cool breeze swaying the looming trees in the background. The show was well received. Throughout August, "Lupi" travelled across Ontario as far as Heron Bay, ending with Treaty #3 communities near Kenora and Fort Frances. Audrey Debassige reported that all but two had been performed outdoors. The Souix Lookout performance was forced indoors but "even the arena could not extinguish the play's intrigue" (Mombourquette 1991). There were 23 people as part of the touring group, including parents and volunteers, who helped with the set and getting everyone fed. Most nights were spent tenting

It, although in Souix Lookout, they bedded down in the studios of Wawatay TV, who sponsored their performance.

Shirley Whittington, Information Officer for the Sainte Marie Among The Hurons Historic Site, told the "Citizen" that "Lupi" was "absolutely enchanting....It is our hope to attract that calibre of Native Theatre again. It is so close to what we are all about here. They perform to such a high standard" (21 August 1991).

This premiere production was generously funded by a wide variety of organizations: Ontario Arts Council, The Canada Council-Theatre Section, Employment and Immigration Canada, The Wikwemikong Development Corporation, Ministry of Skills Development, Ministry of Northern Development & Mines, Canadian Native Arts Foundation, Ontario Heritage Foundation, The McLean Foundation, George Cedric Metcalf Foundation and the Sir Joseph Flavelle Foundation.

De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig's next production was Drew Hayden Taylor's "Someday". It was developed into a Christmas play from a short story that he had written for the December 24, 1990 issue of the Globe and Mail. It examines the consequences of what is now known in Canadian History as "The Scoop Up", which made the removal of native children from their homes and communities, especially in the 50's and 60's, a common occurrence. Children's Aid Society and government policies made this all possible. Taylor directs our attention to the negative impact that aggressive government policies have had on the First Nations People. A comical subplot and the spirit of the Festive Season augments the reality of a hard hitting message. It is an intimate profile of a Native family, with Taylor hitting to the core of these characters to reveal their real pain. The clever dialogue and humour compliment the serious and often tragic elements that endear each character to the audience.

Lewis was a bit hesitant to produce such a controversial play, but felt strongly that, being a reality for many people, a theatrical form would be the best way to present the issue. The character that he related to was Grace, taken from her mother's home when she was a baby. But through many late nights and re-writes, the play was ready for its developmental stage with the actors.

"Someday" was directed by Lewis with the assistance of Floyd Favel, the present day Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts. The cast included Edna Manitowabi [who had just finished the past summer at the Native Theatre School] in the role of Anne [the Mother]; Joy Keeper as her daughter, Barb; Doris Linklater as her long-lost daughter, Grace; and Herbie Barnes as Rodney.

Due to technical problems, the production was slowed down a little and it wasn't until opening night that they were able to have a full run-through. Things were tense but Lewis says "they've

● accomplished what they set out to do and more importantly as a group". The set included a revolve, a real challenge for a touring show, but it was "awesome" as he adds, "One could practically move into the set, all it needs is two more walls and some insulation" (Simon 1991:9).

The set was designed by Stephen Dorege, a 1990 Dora Award winner in Outstanding Design. Marsha Coffey designed the sound with the help of vocalist Edna Manitowabi and musicians Don Druik [flute], Rose Stella [vocals], Michael Stewart [saxophone], Peter Moore [The Earth Song] and herself playing Keyboards and percussion. Technical Director was Wilfred Fisher with assistant Zeke Peltier, Stage Manager was Sheila Kinoshameg with the assistance of Sonny Osawabine; and Production Assistants were Lori Baldhead and Shannon Manitowabi. Clayton Odjig was the Tour Manager for "Someday" and organized the provincial tour which lasted until December 15, 1991.

The spring of 1992 brought in a new Artistic Director, Herbie Barnes, with a training grant from Theatre Ontario. "Lupi, The Great White Wolf" was re-mounted for the summer with Lewis directing and Barnes co-directing.

Most of the cast returned, including Justine Eenoose, Gloria May Eshkibok, Clayton Odjig, Jonathan Fisher, Rona George, Bruce Naokwegjig, Gregory Fisher, Joey Osawabine, Leroy Peltier and Ruby Trudeau. Shannon Manitowabi and Harvey Jr. Bell joined the cast. Most of the technical staff returned, one of the few exceptions being the hiring of a new stage manager, Julia Pegahmagabow, replacing Jeffrey Trudeau who was working in Toronto.

This production mounted a successful tour which included a performance at the Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec and an appearance in the DuMaurier World Stage Festival at Harbourfront in Toronto.

The fall of 1992 introduced a new young playwright, Mark Seabrook. "20th Century Indian Boy" started rehearsals for a three month provincial tour.

Seabrook had previously work-shopped his play at Native Earth's "Weesageechak Begins To Dance-IV" in November, 1991. It was directed by Lewis with Vince Manitowabi, Pamela Matthews and Levi Agunnie in the cast.

"20th Century Indian Boy" is about a young Native boy who is caught between two cultures. Being raised by a non-native family, he decides to seek his true identity. His adopted family supports him in his search. The cast featured Julia Pegahmagabow, Jerome Basque and Jonathan Fisher and was stage managed by David Osawabine. They toured all over Ontario and had one performance in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Jonathan Fisher began his association with De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig in the spring of 1991 as an Assistant Tour Co-ordinator for "Dreamer's Rock" and performed in "Lupi" for two summers. He believes that De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig is the "grass-roots of Native Theatre" and has served as an effective "springboard for other artists" and cites many others as examples (Fisher 1993).

That fall, after six months, Herbie Barnes decided to step down as Artistic Director. He had been doing a lot of work as an actor throughout this period, and explains that "I knew it wasn't the place for me. I was sitting behind a desk...I'm more of the 'let's do it' than 'let's plan it' type" (Barnes 1993). From that point on, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig was being run by the General Manager, Angela G. Wemigwans, whose heavy work load caused her to step down in January, 1993. The only other person in the office at that time was Audrey Debassige, the tour co-ordinator.

De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre's current Artistic Director is Alanis King-Odjig, a recent graduate of the National Theatre School in Montreal. King-Odjig, a resident of Wiki, began her long association with De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig as early as 1988 on the production of "Nothing Personal". She was officially appointed April 1, 1993 but started as Interim General Manager in January after the departure of Wemigwans.

A new General Manager was assigned on May 3, Ron Berti, while a new Tour Co-ordinator, Maxine Corbiere, started her job on May 18. King-Odjig is keeping the company afloat with the help of Berti, Corbiere and the Board of Directors. Wemigwans comes in to help sometimes and Bernadette Eshkawkogan helped out as the Publicist (and clerk) from October '92 to April '93. They are hoping to get an Administrative Assistant to help with the work load on King-Odjig, Berti and Corbiere.

The present Board of Directors consists of Rosemarie and Marjorie Trudeau, as President and Vice-President, respectively, with new members Angela Wemigwans, Lorraine Pitawanakwat and Mary Lynn Ominika.

Their next production, slated to open on July 29 in Wikwemikong and tour for the following three weeks during the summer, is called "New Voices Woman". It was written by Larry Lewis, will be translated into Ojibway by Lena White and directed by Alanis King-Odjig. The seventeen member cast will include veterans Gloria Eshkibok and Vince Manitowabi.

In under ten years, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig has grown from a community theatre to a professional group with a national profile. Many of today's Native theatre professionals got their start at this very successful theatre company and many more will find their way.

MUSKIGEE DRAMATIC ARTS

Kennetch Charlette is an actor and the founder of "Muskigee Dramatic Arts". He, like many others, is tired of other people trying to tell our stories and asserts that it is time to take control. In fact, one of the reasons he started "Muskigee", other than as a job creation project, was because of the long struggle he had to undergo to take control of his own life.

Charlette [Creel] explained that "Muskigee", which means "medicine" in western terminology, encompasses a whole lot more than just medicine, it is a way of life, it is learning to again understand the natural laws of nature. Western society has taken all of that away because they feel they have to rationalize everything, that everything is mathematical and logical. But the two views have now confronted each other, he explains, and we must not ignore it. The arts is a way of bringing back some of our traditional methods. He said that, especially with the advent of modern technology, we should keep in constant contact with our elders so as to not forget our past. Many of the elders are talking about using both the old and the new to come together. To create theatre, we have to know who we are, as a people, but it starts individually. With "Muskigee", Charlette wants to bring out those stories, the truth in everyday life, the legends, the storytellers, the past, and also look forward into the future. "People are slowly waking up".

The present board of Muskigee consists of Charlette, Tracy Bomberry (Six Nations), Caroline Descary and Matt Maxwell. They are going through some changes now, he explains, and will be electing a new board in the near future, possibly by October. Because of the spiritual nature of the company and the sensitive issues that they will be exploring, he is hoping to have more Native people and a few elders on the board.

The first production that they have in mind, "The Sweat", is being co-written with Charlette, well-known elder, Vern Harper and Howard Jerome. It is based loosely on a true story about a ten-year-old young boy, from a reserve up north, who was in a Toronto hospital, very ill. The doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong with him but when they did, they realized that he didn't have long to live (ten days or so). So akin to last rites, hospital officials didn't know who to contact for their Native patient. They called Anishnabe Health who advised them to call a certain Medicine Man from the south. This Medicine Man did a ceremony for this little boy and after the ceremony, he started to recover. This really surprised the doctors. Charlette is still researching the project, talking to the doctors and nurses involved. Workshops are being proposed for the script before production plans can be made.

Charlette is having difficulty getting funding, especially being a new theatre company which is not yet established. He finds

●at there is a lack of interest from major funding bodies though there is, of course, a lot interest from the Native theatre community. Also, Charlette, who was not familiar with the administrative side of theatre, is learning the process "taking it one step at a time, making mistakes, then getting back up and trying again". But he has had a lot of help from other theatre professionals and a lot of advice and input from the Native community. He will not be deterred.

We're undaunted, we're going to keep on going. Within the near future we're going to start putting out a call to writers who have stories that need to be heard. There's a lot of interest in the healing of Native people and a lot of those stories go untold, because of their sensitive nature. A lot of times they're not glamorous stories, but nonetheless, the results are worth more than the glamour. (Charlette 1993)

SPRIT SONG NATIVE INDIAN THEATRE COMPANY

Spirit Song is mainly a theatre school for young Native actors. [Refer to the 'Training' section for more details.] As well as student productions, Spirit Song has produced plays on a semi-professional basis. Their list of public performances over the past ten years is rather modest.

Sadie Worn Staff [Chirachuo-Apache] is a former playwright/director with Spirit Song. She wrote "The Tribes of Dawn" dealing with environmental issues and also "Shadow Warrior" which was later produced at two different stages in the city. The cast of this production included Sam Bob (who would later act in "Paradise and the Wasteland"), Denise Brillon, Byron Chief Moon ["Medicine River"], Ruby Alexis (a student and one of the future developers of Sen'klip) and Renae Morriveau (not a student at Spirit Song). This was a drama about the struggle with alcohol and substance abuse among Native people in contemporary times. The main character, Buck Skinner, eventually comes to terms with his problems with the assistance of his new found cultural strength and heritage. This show would later be picked up by Lynn Phelan and Ruby Alexis to be the first professional production at Sen'klip. Morriveau commented that, although not a student at Spirit Song, she enjoyed working on the show, at the time, and learned a lot. (Morriveau 1993) She has since gone on to appear in "The Rez Sisters" and "North of 60", conducts workshops and has a cassette released with a band called "Zumak", for which she does vocals.

In 1985, Val Dudoward's "Teach Me The Ways of the Sacred Circle" was produced. She wrote this play to educate and entertain and to 'connect heritage, youth and the elderly'. Petrone, who agrees that the play achieves its goals, describes the story:

Matthew Jack, a materialistic, ambitious, urban-oriented, goal-motivated young high-school graduate (the first in his family) is confused because he has not come to grips with his Tsimshian heritage. Through his dream-vision of his grandfather, and the traditional wisdom of his grandmother, Matthew is finally able to resolve his predicament. (177)

"Pewase-nakwun" was produced by Brillon Productions and Spirit Song Studio in recognition of Louis Riel more than one hundred years after his death. Few people understand the major role that the Metis had in the formation of Western Canada. Riel oversaw the election of a provisional government and the writing of the Manitoba Act before being forced into a bitter exile that would end when he was hanged in 1885.

This 35-minute performance piece (slated as a work in progress) was choreographed by Wayne LaRiviere, present Artistic Director, and Denise Brillon with an all Metis cast: Tracey Olson,

Artis Grey Eyes, Wayne LaVallee and Denis Belland. Lisa Primrose designed the costumes, Aaron Fox did the program design and LaRiviere designed the set and lights.

This production was supported by the Native Indian Youth Advisory Committee (NIYAS) Board of Directors, Brenda Taylor, Denise Brillon, Leonard Fisher Jr., The Primrose Family, Clockwork Printing and ABC Laminating.

One year later, in May 1993, "The Shape Shifter" was re-mounted, but not as a 'student production'. It was again directed by Ronnie Way and Stage Managed by Denis Belland. The performers were Dean Aylesworth as Jim Eagle Feather and Darrell Dennis as John White Raven. It was first performed at the Vancouver First Annual Men's Festival on April 15-18 at the Station Street Arts Centre and then played at the Spirit Song Studio from April 26 to May 3. All proceeds from ticket sales went to Native Youth acting programs. LaRiviere reported that the overall audience response was very positive and was well-attended by the theatre community and casting directors.

Most of their audience was non-native and they responded "respectfully, because it's not new, it's just innovative and interesting what we do....it's not a curiosity it's more of an interest to see what we're up to." They didn't get a lot of Native people to come and see their show even though there is a large population of Native people living in the city and "even though we did one of the biggest campaigns in years directly to the Native organizations. But we'll keep plugging it, we can't stop" (LaRiviere 1993).

Denis Belland's stage credits include "Graffiti Highway" and "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe". He is currently working on a script and aspires to be a director. Dean Aylesworth, a Blackfoot, and Darrell Dennis, Shuswap, both made their first appearances with Spirit Song. Dennis, who is a regular on CBC's "Northwood", studied at the Gastown Actors Studio and has also appeared on "Neon Rider" and "Leaving Normal". His stage credits include "The Private Ear". Aylesworth played in Lorca's "Play Without A Title" for the Calgary Drama Festival. He is currently writing a play entitled "Hiatus".

The most recent production was called "Dawn" which opened on Friday, May 28, 1993. It was directed by LaRiviere and choreographed by Karen Rose. It featured Marie Humber, Carmen Moore, Sherri Maracle and Monique Stewart. The show also performed at the "First Nations House of Learning" to open the Longhouse at the University of British Columbia and from there it will tour the province.

SEN'KLIP NATIVE THEATRE COMPANY

Located twenty kilometres north of Vernon, British Columbia, Sen'klip Native Theatre Company was inspired from the traditional dramatic expressions of Okanagan culture. It was born out of a need to give Native people a medium in which they could express and share their cultural uniqueness and value systems. There is a need to give voice to social concerns and to retain the rich history of the indigenous peoples. Sen'klip has combined traditional elements with contemporary theatre techniques to produce a very unique style of Native theatre. They have grown immensely over the last six years and operate under the guidance of the United Native Nations [U.N.N.] Friendship Centre.

Sen'klip founder, Lynn Phelan, had previously worked with Spirit Song Native Indian Theatre Company in Vancouver from 1981 to 1986, where she eventually moved up to her position as General Manager. Unfortunately, she sensed that they did not have a solid sense of direction and that, therefore, there was a lack of commitment. Also, many Vancouver actors, she felt, were more interested in film than theatre. With her own ideas, Lynn returned to her home town, Vernon.

1987 saw the beginning of a new project, the Native Youth Summer Theatre. She invited Ruby Alexis, who had just completed two years at Spirit Song, to help in writing, directing and performing. In the beginning, says Alexis, it was a struggle to find people willing to act and be trained as actors. "We had to go and beg..please, please, please!" But, soon enough, they had a team. She goes on to say that, even harder, was trying to find a place to perform their productions. "We'd try and find some function where there was a ready made crowd....As we put on more performances, we had more groups and organizations asking us to perform for them" (Perry 1992).

At first, Alexis, who's from the Okanagan #1 Reserve, says their group focused on self-education. "There was a very big gap between those who know the culture and those who don't. I lived my whole life on the reserve without knowing any of my own culture. But now there's really been a big push for natives to heal themselves through their culture" (Perry 1992).

Several of the students of this original project contributed to the development and growth of the company which generated an interest in local theatre.

Since the Okanagan people are traditionally known as the 'People of the Coyote', the name "Sen'klip" was chosen for their theatre company. Sen'klip, the coyote, is an interesting multi-faceted personality, very much like the people who bear his/her name. Sen'klip is a trickster, creator, teacher and entertainer. Through Coyote, an assortment of characters exist as they must in

the theatre performer. "Sen'klip was given the job", explains Alexis, "of preparing the world for the coming of the people. Sometimes he did a good job, sometimes he didn't" (Perry 1992). Their logo represents, in respect to Coyote, a performer wearing the contemporary theatrical mask [tragedy/comedy] with the traditional Coyote skin which represents their dramatic roots. The Coyote in song, gives meaning to the circle. While the circle, as symbolized in the drum, portrays the culture of the Okanagan People as continuous and progressive. Coyote, supported in the hand of the performer, represents both the spiritual connection between the Okanagan Indian and Coyote and the holding of our history through the performer.

Sen'klip believes that through the performing arts, Native theatre has the potential to be a major method of cross-cultural communication, a means of sharing our rich heritage and of heightening Native people's awareness of our cultural strength and on-going history.

By 1988, a core group had been formed and began training in administrative duties as well as performance and production.

The objectives of Sen'klip are:

To provide, through theatre, positive outlets for physical, creative, emotional, intellectual and spiritual expression.

To work toward the retention of culture through traditional songs and dances, storytelling and other dramatic expressions of the Okanagan People.

To present theatre performances that are of unique Native content, in contemporary as well as traditional productions.

To create awareness of the culture and lifestyle of the Okanagan People.

To provide through the medium of the performing arts the resources and opportunities for the development of self-confidence and personal awareness. (Native Youth Summer Theatre)

Their first production, in 1988, relied very much on community members for its support. This first production gained an unprecedented 19 local cast members.

The following year, 1989, Sen'klip produced their first professional play, "Shadow Warrior", which toured British Columbia and also began development of the "Coyote Tales" series.

"Shadow Warrior" is a drama about the struggle with alcohol and substance abuse among Indian nations in contemporary times. It is the story of Buck Skinner, a well-educated handsome man who travels one of the most dangerous and destructive roads any human being can venture down. Throughout the production we see how one man comes to terms with his problems and how his cultural strength and heritage assists him in his fight with the shadow that stalks him, explained Phelan (qtd. in "Alcohol"). The play deals with the shame and pride in each of us that cause many to seek hiding places. It is an honest reflection of the growing strength of a people in the face of a diminishing enemy.

Playwright and director was Sadie Worn Staff, who has been active in the performing arts for many years. She said her approach to directing came from a unique perspective which linked her directly to her roots as an Apache woman. Drawing from those roots had given her a unique style, a style of communication and creative inspiration (qtd. in "Native Theatre"). "Shadow Warrior is unique because it is written, directed and performed by Native Indians and is presented by a Native theatre company" ("Native Theatre").

Gerald George, of the Sto:lo Tribal Council in Sardis, saw the play when it was first performed. He commissioned Sen'klip's play to send a message to Indian youth facing the problems of alcohol and drug abuse. "We felt we needed another way to sensitize the people in the Fraser Valley to [these problems]". He said that "Shadow Warrior" sends a stern message: "There needs to be ownership of the problem. Once we take ownership of the addiction then we need to actively seek help through drug and alcohol counsellors or the elders" (qtd. in "Native Theatre").

David Gregoire of the En'owkin Centre in Penticton says that "Native theatre provides role models for Native people....I think it's a great medium to present the different aspects of Native culture" (qtd. in "Alcohol").

This second production featured Byron Chief Moon as Buck Skinner, a Blackfoot from Alberta, who has had much experience as an actor, dancer and stuntman. The other performers were Earn Quewezance, Kelly Roulette, Sam Bob and Sally Norris, all local actors.

"Coyote Tales" is an on-going series of legends based on Sen'klip, the hero of Okanagan legend, the trickster, teacher, creator and performer. These stories are based on the themes of "Respect the earth and animals and they will respect you", says Phelan. "As long as there are deer, there will be Indians. If the deer disappears, so too shall the Indians" (qtd. in "Native Play"). In keeping with these themes, they avoid the use of theatre masks. Instead, they use make-up and have their own unique style of costumes. Their unique music is composed with flutes and drums which produce their own natural sounds.

The play has Sen'klip, or Coyote, plotting revenge on Willow and Red Alder, the man-eating trees who attacked him while he was without his eyes. It is a combination of both humorous and serious Okanagan Band legends which describe a time when animal people lived on earth. Lance and Dwayne Marchand participated in "Coyote Tales".

The 1989 program led to the further development of their summer theatre, established outdoor summer weekend performances and resulted in the increased demand for commissioned bookings. It is interesting, notes Alexis, that their efforts "attracted more attention off the reserve than on....there was a genuine interest among non-natives to learn more about native culture" (Perry 1992).

By 1990, their cultural storytelling style began to emerge more strongly and they made appearances at several cultural festivals and expanded their audiences to elementary school performances. Through theatre, says Alexis, we can continue our oral story telling tradition practised for centuries by our forefathers. One specialty of Sen'klip is their 'Native Cultural Theatre' division, the "Coyote Tales" series, whose purpose is to "create awareness of the culture and lifestyle of the Okanagan people and to work toward the retention of culture." (Brochure)

The 'Contemporary Theatre' division hopes to advance the general population's knowledge of the artistic quality and achievements of Native Theatre. It also provides to the public, productions with enhanced cross-cultural communication.

As in most small theatre companies, one of their difficulties was the constant search to find a place to rehearse and perform.

October 24, 1990 marked the official unveiling of Canada's first environmental land-scaped theatre. "Toom: Tem:" is an astounding one hundred foot theatre representing 'Earth Woman Mother who provides life'. Perceived as a prominent tourist attraction and permanent home for Sen'klip, it is located in the North Okanagan at Newport Beach, Vernon, B.C. Phelan wants to "encourage people to get outdoors and enjoy the environment." She believes that "theatre shouldn't be just confined indoors" ("Outdoor"). The natural setting creates a living backdrop for their plays. This project was initiated by Sen'klip, designed by Artist/Designer Barbara P. Marchand and constructed by the Environment Youth Corps (E.Y.C.) of B.C.. Sen'klip's invitation to the grand opening of their new 'theatre' read:

TOOM:TEM:TET
{Our Mother, who provides life}

Sen'klip Native Theatre Company extends an invitation to honoured guests to attend the official opening of our new outdoor Environmental Theatre Stage, "Toom:Tem:".

A 100 foot long Earthwoman landscape has been constructed and designed with artistic theatre concepts in mind, to be the theatre's mainstage for performances. The living landscape will also become a nature garden that showcases indigenous plant life. At the site Sen'klip Theatre Company produces a visual imagery that is in harmony with the sets, props, costumes and play content.

Environmental Theatre utilizes the natural landscape as a backdrop for performances in much the same fashion as did our traditional storytellers. By using the environment for Cultural Story Theatre concepts, audiences are better able to experience the characters and mythology, through a unique and informative style of theatrical delivery.

Sen'klip Native Theatre Company's partner in this endeavour is Newport Beach, who the company recognizes as a pioneer in business support of Native Theatre. This creative union between Native Business and Native Performing Arts represents the new cultural emergence of Native Theatre. (Sen'klip 1990)

Sam Evans, Program Director of E.Y.C., commented in KAHTOU that the construction of the theatre is one of the many Provincial programs that helps to revive and protect the natural environment in their community and also gives the participants employment and environment related skills. The Environment Landscape Theatre, he added, is also beneficial to the general public, the Native community, educational institutions as well as professionals working in horticulture and botany ("Outdoor").

KAHTOU reported in 1990 that the initial landscape was made possible by the Outdoor Recreation Foundation of B.C. in sponsorship of Environment Youth Corps. There were many local contributors who helped reduced cost by making valuable donations of materials and expertise: Swan Lake Garden Centre, Fishers Hardware, Lakeview Contracting, Kekuli Construction, Chuck Christman, Tree Island Steel Company and Eddie Miller. The Special Project Consultants involved were: B.G.C. Forest Research Centre, The Royal B.C. Museum Ethnobotany Department, The Vernon and District Chamber of Commerce, the Okanagan Indian Band and Barbara P. Marcand. Special thanks went out to Diane Logan of the Newport Beach Resort for allowing the project to develop. She had envisioned the outcome as magical and just the beginning. ("Outdoor")

Overall, 1990 was a successful year. Sen'klip was nominated for a Chamber of Commerce Business Award and were featured in the CBC National Television Documentary "Drums", a two hour special that focused on Native issues.

In 1991, the Environmental Theatre was officially introduced to the Okanagan. "Earth Woman - Elements For Life", written by Ruby Alexis, is the first production in the Earthwoman series. An ad for this next show, complete with photograph, read:

A dire warning

Ruby Alexis plays Sheena the Owl Woman, warning people of the consequences of damaging Mother Earth. She is part of the Sen'klip Theatre Company, which will be performing its award-winning production "Earth Woman - Elements For Life", Sunday at 7:30 p.m. Audiences are asked to bring a blanket or lawn chair to the company's environmental stage at Newport Beach on Westside Road. Admission is by donation. (Morning Star/Sen'klip)

As the brochure described, this style grew from the concept that cultural story theatre should reflect more thoroughly the inspiration of the stories...the environment. The surroundings in which Native people lived and their connection to all the beings that shared Mother Earth are recurring themes in Okanagan Mythology. The style is an attempt to harmonize the site, sets, props, costumes and play content to create visual imagery that is reflective of nature itself.

Audiences have enjoyed their experience at Too:Tem:. One spectator said: "Environmental Theatre is an experience unlike anything that can be duplicated on stage. It promotes an appreciation and respect for nature, while taking its audience on a journey into the past, a journey into the land of animal people, before the power of the age of legends subsided and the transformation of the first people evolved" (Crockett 1992).

The actors themselves are influenced by working in the outdoor setting. Lana Louis [cast of "Sookinchoot"] says that a lot of her inspiration comes from nature and helps in her search for inherent ancestral roots (qtd. in Crockett 1992).

In the summer of 1991, Sen'klip performed at the Stein Valley Festival on Seabird Island. According to organizers, "Sen'klip is widely known for their stunning dramatizations of Central B.C. native mythology" (Stein Valley brochure 1991). They have made two appearances at this popular Festival.

1991 also marks the year that Sen'klip entered their first theatre competition. They were the first Native Theatre Company ever to participate in the annual Theatre B.C. Festival. In order

to perform in the provincial festival, the company had to first be chosen to represent their region at the Okanagan Zone Competition, or more fondly referred to as the "O-Zone". They won awards for artistic innovation, costume design and scene development.

The increasingly consistent bookings for 1991 caused some concern for the company. They felt that they needed to spend more time and effort on the planning and development of new material.

As predicted, 1992 was a big year for Sen'klip. It had become a necessity to spend more time planning, producing more specific production runs and co-ordinating series of performances.

The year brought a greater exploration into the fields of education and cultural tourism. Highlights of the year included a valley wide elementary school tour, the development of an experimental traditional summer camp (that was featured at the PNE) and an Ecotourism conference in Whistler.

As part of their 'Community Theatre' division, as a means of introducing theatre to Native people, "Creative Expression" is a program designed to provide initial dramatic experiences and a positive creative outlet. "Vision Quest" was their on-site production involving the Native Youth Summer Theatre' performers which very successfully increased the audience count at the Earth Woman site during August. There is also the LIL Coyote theatre for children.

Since the Natives of the Okanagan Valley have a unique culture seldom represented in the public school curriculum, Sen'klip began to use its plays to teach area students about the local Native culture. Phelan said that the company has educational plays and displays ready for the three different educational levels, including elementary, high school and college. "We want people to become more aware of what we're involved in", she added. "We're more than just a performance troupe." An open house was held (last December 1991) at the Coast Vernon Lodge which included demonstrations, discussions and guest speakers. "Our performances come from legend material once used for teaching," said Phelan. "There's an oral tradition in Native culture that fits in with [the approach to the] year 2000." She added that after all the past years of research, they would like everyone, including school teachers, school board staff, trustees, resource centre managers, librarians and school district reps, to know that they have all this research available to them. (Sen'klip 1992)

"Merging Pathways" is a new innovative, instructional method which combines contemporary theatre with the historical culture and oral traditions of the Okanagan People. The series of presentations use traditional and stylized costumes, musical instruments and props to enhance storytelling as an educational medium for children of all ages. The presenters/actors also serve as role models. All

presentations combine performance, lecture, demonstration and teacher/resource materials in their delivery. "Sookinchoot: The Seeing of Oneself" was created as an introduction to this newly developed series which began in the spring of 1992.

Once again, Sen'klip participated in Theatre B.C.'s festival. There were a few problems, however. At the last minute they suffered the loss of a few key cast and crew members from "Sookinchoot", but fortunately, director Ruby Alexis and the remaining cast created a modified version and the show went on. "I certainly applaud the company, director and producer Lynn Phelan for their quick-wittedness, determination, commitment and artistic integrity in pulling the show apart and back together again for the festival. Much more than that, however, I applaud the show on its own merits" (Brennan 1992). Adjudicator of the regional shows, Gary Dalton, wanted to know "why isn't more of this kind of theatre being done?" (Brennan 1992). "Sookinchoot" went on to win the "O-Zone" division and, once again, were headed to Mainstage '92.

This year was the 59th edition and was held in Campbell River from June 7th to 13th. More than 265 registrants and 22 member community theatre groups from across B.C. took part.

"Sookinchoot" is the story of a 'Dreamer' whose hidden desire to reconnect with ancestral roots is answered by 'The Darkness of the Night'. "The shades of her darkness unravel the fabric of his dreams to reveal the embracing threads of ancient past, being woven into a history not yet complete. The song of 'Sen'klip', the legendary coyote, and the heart beats of the 'Chaptilk Ancestors' [the Animal People] envelop the Dreamer. The enabling power to see oneself is reclaimed by the Dreamer, that which was lost, is found again. "Sookinchoot" relates the creation of the land, the coming of the first people, the four Chiefs of the food groups [and how they agreed to give themselves to feed the people] and the stories of the Beaver, Flint, Red Willow, Salmon Woman, Bear and Indian. The Dreamer goes back to before time and discovers the layers of physical and spiritual evolution which have influenced the modern Native person. The modern person's journey into the future continues while their links to the past still remain.

The cast included Ruby Alexis [the Berry and Root Chiefs], Lana Louis [Red Willow, Beaver], Dorion Kohl [Salmon Woman] and David Florence [Flint, Bear].

Sen'klip received the Darrell Phillips Memorial Award for its performance of "Sookinchoot". This prestigious provincial award is given by the Workshop Plays Director to a Club that "best displays commitment and the courage to take risks and grow" and "for their faith and belief in the magic of theatre".

One reviewer commented that "Spectators may not come to a Sen'klip production expecting to see professional theatre, but often walk away with a whole lot more than they bargained for" (Crockett 1992).

Another reviewer pointed out that the vocal quality of some of the performers was weak and flat, that more levels were needed emotionally, and that more variety in pacing and mood and a more imaginative use of the entire stage would have enhanced the story's impact. She did, however, admire the way the actors physically re-created their mythological characters (Brennan 1992).

Overall, the show was a great success. It had stirred a great deal of interest from both Native and Non-Native people on a variety of levels. Performances were also arranged for Kelowna, an area previously untapped, and at a world-wide Eco-Tourism Conference in Whistler. They went on to perform at the Pacific National Exhibition where they were the hit of the Aboriginal Pavilion. Sen'klip had displays, a demo area and entertainment every day from September 2 - 7. Their series of shows included "Sookinchoot", "Transformation: The Dream World" and "Seasons of Change, Cycles of Respect".

The latter is part of their summer camp presentations and depicts the hunting, gathering and lifestyles for each of the seasons. It touches on some of the important tools of survival while exploring the values, past and present. The sacrifice of the animal was a rich blessing, accepted as a gift.

"Transformation" is an exploratory Visual Art Light Sculpture/Theatre presentation that connects the themes in "Sookinchoot" and "Vision Quest". It illustrates the cycle of life by depicting the close relationship between man/woman and nature. We follow 'Skeilwh' through his life's journey where he is confronted by the forces of nature. It attracted a lot of attention. The performers were Ruby Alexis, Lynn Phelan, Kelsey Marchand, Alicia Marchand, Roxanne Williams, Maureen Marchand, Perry Joe Williams, Inga Harris, Dave Florence and Richard Kenoras. It was directed, written and designed by Barbara Marchand.

The fall season continued with the "Merging Pathways" series. As well as presenting "Seasons of Change - Cycles of Respect", there are a series of workshops that give valuable information on the lifestyle and culture of Native people. There are workshops in 'Traditional Fishing', 'Traditional Hunting Methods of the Interior', 'Cultural Awareness', 'Myth and Music' and 'Traditional Clothing and Adornment'.

In 1993, Sen'klip is focusing on the 'International Year of Indigenous Peoples'. Having gained successful entry into two new major markets in the past season, they are also developing international markets. An international tour is in the planning

ages. The company has been invited to perform at two major conferences. One of them is the Adventure Travel and Ecotourism conference in Brazil, while the other is the 1993 World Wilderness Conference in Norway. Canadian Airlines is supporting their planned expansion into the international tourist market and have met with Phelan and members from the Spirit of Ecotourism Cooperative. The Western Canada Wilderness Committee has donated one thousand 1993 Calendars to generate revenue for the Tour, the potential revenue being from ten to twenty thousand. The group has also met with representatives from the Provincial and Federal Ministry of Tourism and have obtained support in principle thus far.

According to their brochure, Sen'klip has also been involved in the research and restoration of Okanagan lifestyles and traditions as part of its efforts to create a unique style of presentation. They have undertaken this project, entitled "Sneena Cultural Education - Production Development and Marketing", to expand the artistic and research work to related areas of profit making activity.

Early 1993, from January to March, was also spent in preparation for their next productions "K'sapi" and "Kou Skyloux - How Names Were Given".

"K'sapi" ["A Long Time Ago"] tells the story of Red Elk, a young neo-native anthropology student who returns to the reserve where he was born. He is in search of his cultural roots. "Armed with reference books and big words" he encounters a blind spirit-woman, Tuma, whose missing 'gift' holds her in the physical world. The shape-shifter and trickster, Sen'klip, manipulates and disrupts Tuma's search while, at the same time, enlightening Red Elk to see himself and 'the power' in a different light.

"K'sapi" was written by Ruby Alexis and Duane Edward Marchand and directed by Inga Frank. The workshop directors were Peter Hall [from Caravan Theatre, Armstrong] and Gary Dalton [from Crossroads Theatre in Cranbrook]. The cast included Eric David Lainhart as Red Elk, Duane Edward Marchand as Sen'klip and Judy Good Sky as Tuma. Working on the crew were Kevin Lacroix, Inga Frank, Dave Florence, Ilean Danby and Eric Lainhart.

"K'sapi" was presented in high schools from April 14 to May 12 and will begin its summer at Toom:Tem: in July.

"K'sapi" was also entered in this year's Theatre B.C. Festival and won three awards. Marchand won as Best Supporting Actor and two special prizes were awarded for Backstage and for 'Expansion of Theatrical Horizons'.

Sen'klip's play for elementary schools [Kindergarten to Grade 7] in May and June was called "Kou Skyloux - How Names Were Given". The play takes its young audience on a journey toward their own

Self-discovery, to learn the importance of their own name and to examine the purposes the Creator may have given them in this life. Coyote and Fox involve the children in this story by encouraging them to create the sounds and movements as they learn to identify various Plant, Animal and Water People.

The 1993 Season features these two new plays as well as two traditional skills workshops and a 15 minute vignette. The vignette includes a short play about the life of a Native woman writer, Mourning Dove and "Pa-ata-itsa", about a woman who single-handedly fights a grizzly bear and wins. The workshops are "Introduction to Traditional Fishing" and "Cultural Awareness".

The former is conducted by actor/fisherman David Florence who gives an exploratory look at the practices and fishing tools of the Okanagan Native People. He displays hand-made bone and antler fishing equipment and introduces the 'ring and spear' game. The Cultural Awareness workshop is conducted by David Florence and Richard Kenoras and covers ceremonies, social structure and daily life. You can also "help Coyote win the important flint rock from the stingy flintman in a traditional stick game." The fee for each of the workshops is \$350.00.

The summer line up at Toom:Tem: includes "K'sapi", weekly Cultural Awareness Workshops, a week long pilot "Tee Pee Summer Encampment Project" with Twin Island Resort, a production (T.B.A.) for their 'Cultural Story Theatre' and finally the premiere of "Death of A Storyteller" [working title] on August 28th and 29th. [This play will be available for fall bookings as well as "K'sapi".] Sen'klip will also be performing for bus tours on a regular basis and have been contracted to do so through 'A Place To Be Travel Agency'.

Professional development of staff has had positive results. Two employees received diplomas as Native Adult Resource Instructors; Phelan is the Co-producer for the Aboriginal Pavilion at the P.N.E.; Sen'klip was featured on a CHBC TV special for its work in the educational system; and Alexis was selected to perform in Sunshine Theatre's [Kelowna] production of "The Rez Sisters".

Growing up on the Okanagan #1 Reserve in Vernon, Alexis commented that "traditionally we aren't a loud and boisterous people....native people are always snushed down".

Alexis plays Annie Cook with an astounding energy that creates an immediate rapport with the audience
....Okanagan native shines in role. (Matheson 1992)

Unfortunately, Alexis, a dedicated theatre professional, decided to leave Sen'klip after five years. She cited the enormous stress involved in acting, writing and directing.

Sen'klip is also doing their part to help develop theatre professionals. Last March, actress Renae Morriveau ["North of 60", "The Rez Sisters"] participated in Sen'klip's youth gathering to help conduct some theatre exercises. This year, Sen'klip has hired an apprentice from the Kootenays to 'learn the ropes' in all aspects of theatre, in the hopes of developing a theatre in their area. Realizing a great need for training, they developed a Theatre Arts Training Program. Closely connected with the local colleges, it has had success. Unfortunately, reveals Phelan, many promising students have left after two or three years for the big city. "If people got back into doing theatre, it would be a great resource" (Phelan 1993).

Yet another branch of Sen'klip is "Coyote Casting and Production" [Artistic Concepts, Video Production, Talent Referrals]. The objectives are: (1) To visualize the oral tradition practices of Indian culture through video productions and (2) To work toward increasing the visibility and impact of Native performers. Coyote Casting has worked with CHBC TV in producing visual inserts, commercials and a half hour special. A 30 minute theatrical video "Coyote Tales" received an award in the experimental category at the Okanagan Smilkameen Film Association Festival.

Sen'klip operates under the guidance of the U.N.N. Friendship Centre Society and its Theatre Advisory Board. Its memberships include the Vernon Community Arts Council, Vernon and District Chamber of Commerce, Theatre B.C. and the B.C. Touring Council. It also has a Creative Business Partnership with Newport Beach RV Park for Toom:Tem:.

The 1992/93 Artistic Director's Report states that:

Audiences and bookings increased substantially in the past year. The financial situation was considerably better due to increased bookings and higher fees along with innovative fund raising - ie: Arts and Crafts/Coffee Venue.

Sen'klip has developed a professional standing and high profile and is being actively supported by governments, the business community, general public, the local community and its own membership. It has a competent and talented group of performers, a well established artistic mandate and administrative structure and the total commitment to become a driving force in the development of Native Theatre in Canada.

Sen'klip Native Theatre Company has developed a structure that, artistically, financially and administratively reflects the company artistic aspirations and accomplishments.

FULL CIRCLE FIRST NATIONS PERFORMANCE

Margo Kane, Vancouver based actress, singer, director and teacher, is the founder of "Full Circle First Nations Performance", a newly formed Native theatre company. Many years ago she earned national acclaim for her performance in the lead of "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe" at the Prairie Theatre Exchange. But, Kane is best known for her one-woman show "Moonlodge", which has toured all over Canada and the United States for many years. She has travelled throughout Native and Inuit communities "as a guest, a workshop facilitator, a performer and a friend". (Kane 1991) Her other performance pieces include "Reflections in the Medicine Wheel" [created for Expo 86], "O Elijah", "We've Always Been Here" and "Childhood Burial". Being a high-profile member of the theatre community, she feels the weight of leading and advancing the cause for developing Native Theatre in Canada. "I have to balance my personal aspirations and the community needs. I'm a workaholic. I want to do too much. But I can't assist the community unless I'm well myself. For the time being, that means working at Full Circle and continuing to tour Moonlodge" (Prokosh 1992).

Kane, as part of Full Circle, has been conducting workshops for Native performers in the Vancouver area. Greenlander, Makka Kleist, recently was invited to conduct a workshop in conjunction with Full Circle. She commented that it was a wonderful experience for her and that they work well together (Kleist 1993). Dolores Dallas, a Vancouver area actress commented that Spirit Song got her started in theatre but feels that her on-going training in Kane's workshops was the most beneficial. "I'm really glad that she got this company working for us, we're always learning. It keeps me going" (Dallas 1993).

Some of the objectives for the company include:

To access funding to create larger projects that would include an ensemble of performers.

To access funding to promote Kane's own work.

To address the needs of the Native and non-native communities for more Native theatre.

To access funding to train a manager due to the lack of Native arts administrators.

To create training programs and on-going workshops and classes for Native actors.

To self-determine our own work.

To develop a resource centre for Native artists.

Kane believes that since there's not enough benefits going back into the community in terms of developing on-going training for Native performers, arts administrators, designers, etc., that we really do need to establish our own organization. Since establishing the company in the spring of 1992, she's found it difficult because, as an artist, she has minimal experience on the administrative side. Kane, who has spent many years working for other non-native organizations, states that she has begun to understand more and more what's necessary in terms of management, board development and recruitment, but is still in need of a manager.

"Moonlodge", which has won widespread critical praise, has become a 'signature piece' for Kane, who is of Cree, Saulteaux and Blackfoot heritage. It began with workshop improvisations with Floyd Favel; was performed in January 1990 as an oral storytelling directed by Leonard Fisher; workshopped with dramaturge Deb Porter for Weesageechak Begins to Dance in June 1990; and then, under the direction of Favel, premiered at Native Earth Performing Arts in November and December 1990. "Moonlodge" then returned to the west coast for a run at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre during February and March 1991, directed by Teri Snelgrove. One of its many performance venues included the July, 1991, Earth Spirit Festival in Toronto.

Over the years of performing the piece, she has been surprised by the lack of knowledge that the white audiences have about Aboriginal peoples. She continues to say that "no one knows about the scooping of Native kids by Children's Aid in the fifties. People had no idea or concept that it happened to Natives. I find that outrageous. Everything I take for granted about Native peoples, they don't know. I don't believe they know our history" (Prokosh 1992).

The play focuses on Agnes, a young Metis girl who is taken from her natural parents and sent to live with a non-native family. She grows up in white society, goes to Brownies and gathers her inaccurate impressions of Native culture from popular songs and by watching television. After high school, she sets out to 'see the world'. While hitch-hiking, she experiences her first pow-wow which prompts a journey to re-discover her Native identity. It is a humorous and sensitive performance piece, and as Kane explains, "It's a survival mechanism. I choose to laugh rather than to break up the furniture. Humour is so important to our survival" (Prokosh 1992).

In the Canadian Theatre Review article, titled "From the Centre of the Circle the Story Emerges", Kane writes:

"Moonlodge" is not about providing answers. It reveals no secrets of ancient rites of passage. It doesn't tell all!

It is performance, a demonstration of survival, albeit a condensed story without the serious conflict and horror and gut-wrenching lurid details that have desensitized the contemporary world. It is different. It is gentle by nature. It may be therapy to some because it is a story that can assist in the healing process. These stories developed out of a need to say something about Native experience, not to educate people about spiritual ways but to remind and state that these practices are still alive - they are necessary for the healing of our people. That we, ourselves, must reconnect. That healing can occur even against all odds. (1991)

The following is a partial excerpt of an interview conducted with Kane in April 1993 in Vancouver:

Last spring you formed your company. How have things been progressing since then?

We've been having trouble getting a solid organizational structure that I need in order to promote my work and to create larger projects. And I'm still having trouble because, to create, I need to make a living as an artist. I spend all my time doing management things and trying to find funding. It's a lot of work for a management person, let alone an artist.

Where do you get your funding?

Mostly from Explorations Funding from the Canada Council. That's the only place other than the City of Vancouver, project funding. I got some donations and sponsorships based on my own connections and reputation but there are very few, because I don't work in that area myself, fund-raising. I am having to learn all that stuff myself. I also have to scramble to do all these things. I need a manager.

Have you tried the Native Arts Foundation?

They have not supported me monetarily. I had a part-time manager at one point (non-native) who applied for money from them but wrote up a big budget but hadn't done the proper research to find out that their discretionary money was much less than what we were asking. The N.A.F. is possibly just in development, they only deal in training dollars. They don't understand what I need out here. The jury was very supportive of my project but they didn't grasp the fact that they could have given us a small amount towards our full budget, they just turned the whole thing down. They figure that all the ensemble artists come individually, ensemble artists don't come for grants. The Native Arts Foundation didn't give us anything at all, which for me, just says that they don't yet fully understand the importance of supporting administrative systems.

● Tell me about your early work with Spirit Song.

I was a director in the early days. Spirit Song was developed out of a make-work project for youth. They decided to do a play they had seen previously, and do it with a native cast, so they approached Green Thumb Theatre, who then asked me to direct. I couldn't at the time but I offered to assist the director. I ended up working with them for a couple of years, to gather the first small company and teacher's guides and all these things. I left because I found that what I wanted to do was at odds with what the board wanted to do. I learned a lot there but they needed more input and I wasn't allowed to be a director. The management and organizational structure wasn't established the way a theatre company should be and I did them a diagram of how the artistic director is at the top, not the administrator. They couldn't buy that. She didn't want me to be in charge. I had hoped that somewhere down the line I would be involved again to teach or something. But, in ten years, they have only asked me to do one workshop and that was two years ago. They are not drawing on the skills of the community and they never did. They need maturity and they need advice and that includes all of us. I mean, even I would like to assist them in giving them advice. They need maturity and assistance in turning out a finer program. I don't presume to be the expert on anything.

THE SWEETGRASS PLAYERS

As a presentation of Calgary's Maenad Theatre, "Dance Me Born", is the first all Native theatre work to be produced in this Albertan city. The only other plays produced here with any Native content have been Tomson Highway's "The Rez Sisters" at Alberta Theatre Projects in the fall of 1990, a University production of "The Land Called Morning" about four Native teenagers (written by non-natives, however) and a production of "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe", many years previous. Calgary resident and actor, Shane Cunningham, commented that "the only other play I saw was one with an Italian guy playing the Native role" (Cunningham 1993). These facts are rather surprising since the Native population of Calgary is quite high and there are a number of reserves on the outskirts of the city.

Therefore, "Dance Me Born" is definitely an important theatrical event both for Calgary as a whole and for the Native community in particular. Maenad Theatre, under the Artistic Direction of Alexandria Patience, is largely a feminist group. The Publicist, Rose Scollard, commented in the promotional material that "we feel greatly enriched by the inclusion of this wonderful production in our season." Working with a script by well known Metis poet Alice Lee, directors Robin Melting Tallow and Amethyst First Rider added layers of dance, music and ritual to create a remarkable theatre piece.

Robin Melting Tallow, who holds a degree in Fine Arts, directed the first Native production at the University of Calgary, "The Land Called Morning" (a play about four Native teenagers written by John and Gordon Selkirk). She works in the capacity of Native Liaison and Native Casting Consultant for CBC's "North of Sixty". Fellow director, Amethyst First Rider is currently working on her Masters' Thesis on the Trickster in North American Native Cultures.

Thursday, April 29, 1993. It is opening night of the very first production of an aspiring new Native Theatre Company called "The Sweetgrass Players". We are in the Pumphouse Theatre in Calgary, Alberta, just three hours before the curtain rises. All seems calm.

How did you get started?

MELTING TALLOW: We have been very isolated here, even though there is Lee Crowchild (Founder) and the "Red Thunder Cultural Society" (a popular local traditional dance company), their methods of performing are so much different than what we're interested in doing, it is hard even for us to connect although we know each other very well, and we have a really good, healthy relationship. Lee Crowchild is just a wonderful guy. But their focus is on dance and we want to focus in theatre. There is still this tremendous

● plation. In order for us to come together and actually begin to do some solid work, we need to find a base, because it is just too difficult scrambling all the time for a rehearsal space. It is just a constant, constant scramble. The only place that we could find to rehearse for "Dance Me Born" was at the Native Centre at the University of Calgary. It is a wonderful Native centre, but the space is actually quite small. We have this horrendously huge cast, 12 people, and everybody is just squashed into this tiny little space. And because it is not a theatre space in any way, it is very hard to understand the concept. I mean, we knew what the theatre space looked like, but most of other actors didn't. So we found one of the constant things was trying to encourage people to see beyond the four walls we were in because it definitely wasn't a performance space. And we have two actors who have actually finished the [four year] program at the University of Calgary, Joe Pierre and Shane Cunningham. And beyond that, there is Danny Rabbit, from Morley [one of the local reserves] who finished the [two year] Acting program at Mount Royal College, and Michelle Thrush, has moved back to Calgary. And we have a few actors who are up-and-coming, like the newer actors from "North of 60", Laurie Okemow, Mervin Good Eagle and Beverly Latham. Fred Eagle Tail who plays our elder is also the elder for "North of 60". The only reason that we were finally able to pull in a group of people was because "North of 60" was such a high profile thing, that all the people who were all of sudden interested in acting, would come out of the woodwork. But before that, we couldn't find anybody, it was amazing, it was a constant struggle to find people. When I was doing "North of 60", I would get 50 calls a week, and I am not exaggerating, from Native people from all over the place, "I want to be an actor. How do I learn to act? Where do I go? How do I find out?" Their options [for training] are so limited here at this time. They have the option of doing a two-year program at Mount Royal College or the four year program at the University of Calgary, neither of which have any focus on Native theatre or on Native people, period. The University of Calgary probably had only 4 classes out of the whole University that were of Native content. It has been a very isolating experience, but we are up for the challenge. But I think for us, now, what we need to do, is actually form a base, form a group of people who are in this area and are willing to strongly come together and really working for this.

You had mentioned that it was about six years ago that you were trying to put something together?

MELTING TALLOW: Six years ago we were going to school, doing stuff here and there and doing different stuff in the community. One of the hard things for us was, not only being Native [I am Metis, Cree and Scottish, my family is originally from Manitoba, Amethyst is Blood] but being women, we found THAT one of our biggest obstacles. Calgary is very male-centred and we realized that we had to have an incredible amount of validation. We realized, in the process that we have been going through these days, that we needed to have that

certificate, to have that degree, Amethyst is doing her masters degree, we needed to have those pieces of paper so that people would say "Oh, okay, you're legitimate now." And we have found that wasn't necessarily true for the MEN in this community, but very true for the women.

FIRST RIDER: It has been a struggle for people to see that what we do is legitimate, not just something that what we do as a hobby. It has been a struggle in the community. What we do, we take seriously and it is a lot of work, it takes a lot of dedication.

MELTING TALLOW: We do theatre for a reason. It is to empower, to teach, to encourage. Like "Dance Me Born", it is incredibly honest. It deals with a lot of gut issues. We had our first audience last night, a kind of different audience, we had an audience that wouldn't normally be in the theatre. We had 20 people from Sarcee (another nearby reserve), we had almost all of Fred Eagle Tail's family (Eagle Tail plays the Man Spirit) and we had 6 or 7 non-native people. The Sarcee people are very introverted, so we didn't really get a big reaction. What I am trying to say, they pull in and it was really very emotional, they really came away with smiling faces, so you know that they took away something good. The non-native people were just distraught, they were sniffing, crying, shuffling, all through it, so it was a kind of a different audience. But I do not think that any of this audience was a typical theatre audience.

And your typical theatre-going audience in Calgary is what?

FIRST RIDER: They are very conservative. They have never been exposed to any kind of Native theatre, other than "The Rez Sisters" at Alberta Theatre Projects. That was it. And so they don't even know we're here! And there are reserves right outside of Calgary. One of our goals is to let people know we are here, and that we have something to say.

MELTING TALLOW: But what I find in Calgary is that there are a lot of interest groups, like "Maenad Theatre" (it is known as a feminist theatre group), the Committee Against Racism, who all come out to support us. But, beyond that, we just going to shock a lot of people. It is very hard hitting. You know what got me last night. You know now when you're working on something for a long time and you almost become de-sensitized....I was strange last night because I saw a lot of extremely emotional people.... "oh, I am sorry, I didn't mean to make you cry....but I really did..."

"....and I am glad you are!" What were biggest barriers you came up against trying to put a production like this together?

FIRST RIDER: First of all, it was the casting. Getting people to come out for auditions and then, typically, financial problems.

Where would you get funding? Who is supporting you?

MELTING TALLOW: In the end, it was Maenad Theatre that supported us, and for that we are eternally grateful. At this point there is little access to any type of funding for us. We are going to approach the Canadian Native Arts Foundation. One of the things that we realized, as we said before, is that being women, and that is very sad to say, we needed that piece of paper to be legitimate. We are taking what we are doing dead serious and it is very important for us. Now we want to put all that paper work in place, to be constructive and know what we are doing, how we are going to do it, and find out who we can approach to help us, we need to create a base. But we really are realistic about this and we realize it is going to take us 10 years to really create something solid.

FIRST RIDER: It has really been important for us to have Native theatre. We have done a lot of work with kids in the community and I think that through the theatre, we can introduce stories, pieces of work, we can give them experience working in the theatre. There is so much talent out there but we need designers, writers, stage managers, everything. We don't have any of that.

MELTING TALLOW: Fortunately we met some incredible non-native people who are so dedicated to our cause. But, IDEALLY, we should be working with all Native people, but they just do not exist here. But the beauty of it is, that being Metis, and being the directors, we had [artistic] control over everything from the set to costumes, and we can do it our own way. We are a little nervous. We're not sure. We have a scene of a mother in a bar and she never, at any time, gets drunk. What she has done is gotten all dressed up and gone to the Legion for the afternoon, but she does have a redeeming scene where she realizes that this isn't for her and she leaves. But it is really important for us to put that in because that is our story. We needed to be able to recognize our story. And the redeeming part is that she never gets totally drunk, but the point is that she's in this very negative environment. She finds the power to remove herself from this environment and she takes a closer look at things that are really and truly important to her. We want to show a balance because the daughter doesn't drink at all, she's gone beyond that and she realizes she can't heal that way. But the truth is, she was isolated. And she was left alone, a lot. We needed to justify that pain and claim ownership of it us. We all have those stories to tell. We're a little bit frightened about how people are going to interpret that. Having control is one thing, but going out on a limb is another. We'll stand by what we do. But she never comes off as a negative character. It was done with class. It was a bit scary because we had a Native reporter from the Calgary Native News. "Aren't you scared, aren't you worried about what non-native people are going to think?" And we'd say no, because we never do portray her as this horrific drunk, she is portrayed as a gracious lady who is in pain. And that is still

The first question she asked us, but it's funny because when I first saw Tomson Highway's work, when I first read Tomson's work, that's what I thought, and I thought, "wow, that man's brave!" I've seen "Rez Sisters" and I've read "Dry Lips" and my first reaction was "Wow!!" I was shocked. And the interesting thing about that was that the more I got into theatre, the more I recognized that THAT is how you have to do it. And that is why we are willing to [take some risks]. This is my reality. If you can't deal with that, I'm sorry, but this is my journey. It's a little risky....and we really hit the church in this play, big time, big time, it makes a lot of people squirm.

FIRST RIDER: We are very lucky because Alice Lee, the writer experienced a lot of what she wrote, so she could share with us a lot of the emotion and trauma of what she went through, especially with the church. So we were really lucky that we had that piece of work by a Native woman because it really added to it....

MELTING TALLOW: And if they weren't stories about herself personally, they were about friends or family. What she did was to link nine pieces of poetry together. She is an incredible poet, too. We added an entire different dimension to the show that never existed in the script, just because we needed a way of creating rhythm to the piece. But the words are extremely powerful, it was a huge effort.

What made you decide to take this piece and go with it?

FIRST RIDER: Alice does a lot of reader's theatre here in Calgary with her poems, so she approached me and asked if I could find some actors and help present these pieces of poetry. We did it and got a really wonderful response. When we looked at it we thought 'there's a play here', we thought we could develop it into a wonderful play. So over the next year we did that. We had an opportunity last year to workshop and then present it at the Glenbow Museum for Native Awareness Week. From there it kept growing.

MELTING TALLOW: She's been really wonderful and because it was nine pieces of poetry, she just gave us those original pieces of poetry and said "here you go!"

FIRST RIDER: She was very trusting, very generous. She just said, 'I'm the writer, you guys are the directors, you interpret it.'

MELTING TALLOW: So she's coming tonight and she hasn't seen it at all, she has no idea. So I really hope she likes it..... We ended up putting all of Fred Eagle Tail's dialogue in his own language. Because English wasn't his first language, his memory couldn't retain so much English dialogue. I mean, we were watching him become more and more tense and nervous, although he was so dedicated and supportive. Until one day we came up with this great

...ea....'What are we doing here? This man's language is Sarcee! Let him speak his language!' because we needed him in the show for WHO he is. Problem solved. We had a Native male speaking english, and Fred speaking his own language.

FIRST RIDER: It really added a whole new dimension. It was very important to have him because as we grew we shared his knowledge.

MELTING TALLOW: We have to be really careful because there is a naming ceremony and we don't have that knowledge of how to conduct something like that, nor would we dare say we would. So, we would say "Okay, Fred, you show us how this scene should be done, whatever you want, we'll do." And so, we learned a lot.

FIRST RIDER: And it was wonderful because he sings beautifully and he told us what the songs meant, their history. His gift of song was really an honour for us.

MELTING TALLOW: When we moved in here he held a blessing ceremony for us, and blessed the space for us, blessed our younger girls, Laurie, because she's our assistant drummer and it was wonderful. He bestowed a lot more gifts than he realized.

"Dance Me Born" follows the path of two young Cree people who experience loss, separation and damage in the contemporary world. Interweaving their story are the events of the Spirit World. This world too, has experienced loss and damage. Led by the Trickster, the Dancers pursue a course of healing and renewal for themselves and the two young protagonists.

The all-Native cast (except for the adoptive parents), although inexperienced, were very enthusiastic and dedicated. The contribution of the Elders was invaluable. Fred Eagle Tail, a respected Elder from the Tsuu T'ina Nation, portrayed the 'Man Spirit'. According to the program biography, he is "a traditional man who believes in sharing his culture with all those who show a true interest....a wonderful, warm, funny, patient teacher....we will be eternally grateful to him".

The 'voice' of the 'Man Spirit' was echoed by Hayden Melting Tallow, the husband of Robin. He has been working extensively in the Native community to bring about awareness of Native people. The 'Woman Spirit' was portrayed by Henrietta McGregor, a retired mother of four originally from Ontario.

Shane Cunningham, a graduate of the University of Calgary, portrayed the young man very convincingly. His training was readily apparent. Through his acting, he hopes to honour all those storytellers who "played an important role in connecting the past, the present and the Creator with the people" (Program). Playing his partner, the young girl, was Calgary native, Michelle Thrush. She

ated in her bio that "to be an artist is a responsibility to honesty of the spirit".

Steven Gin, one of the only two Equity members of the cast, has an extensive list of theatre and television credits. He was the dramaturge and choreographer and danced the role of the Trickster. He was accompanied by traditional dancer, Mervin Good Eagle, and accomplished fancy dancer, Jennifer Nicole Melting Tallow. Sixteen-year-old Jennifer, in her bio, mentioned that she had a published piece in the Canadian Teacher's Federation's "Racism and Education". She added that "I am determined to fight until I can change at least one person's mind about Native people."

The other members of the cast included Beverly Latham, from the G'witchen Nation of the MacKenzie Delta, as the Mother; Laurie Okemow, a high school student, who plays Eagle Tail's 'side-kick drummer'; and Jack Locke and Jean Whitford as the non-native adoptive parents.

Cunningham reported that the show went well after opening night and they were soon sold out to the end of the run. He added that the reviews, however, were mixed, but "they just don't understand" (Cunningham 1993). Martin Morrow, reviewer for the Calgary Herald, comments that the monologues "effectively articulate the anguish of displaced Indians in a white world" and praises Gin's "lithe and mischievous Trickster" but added that it is "the storytelling - the very backbone of native culture - that lets us down" (Morrow 1993). Does he realize that it was an ORAL tradition?

It seems be the general consensus that there is a definite need for more Native Theatre in Calgary, and as Robin Melting Tallow said "we really are realistic about this and we realize it's going to take us ten years to really create something solid" (Melting Tallow 1993).

TUNOONIQ THEATRE

In the isolated Inuit community of Pond Inlet, on the far tip of Baffin Island, is Northern Canada's most famous and influential theatre company, Tunooniq Theatre.

The company was formed in January of 1986 by a group of eight people who were concerned, among other things, about the need to give their young people 'something to do'. One of those eight was Pakak Innuksuk, a recent arrival from Igloolik, who started the group as an employment project with the help of Ellen Hamilton, the Adult Educator at the time. They began creating plays that dealt with many current issues: high unemployment, many school drop-outs, substance abuse, spousal assault, family violence, unemployment and their rapidly changing cultural life. They believe that important issues can be better understood through theatre than by just talking about them. Theatre became "an attractive alternative to traditional adult education programming throughout the region" (Cowan 24).

Along with the 'ajajags' (traditional folk songs which celebrate the power of nature), innuksuk hoped to revive drum dancing, a tradition when hunting was easy and food was plentiful.

The Inuit drum dancing has been slowly fading since Christianity was started in the North. This is because the drum was sometimes used to call the Spirits, although many of (the) songs were just a way of telling stories. I thought it was important for the tradition to be carried on by the new generation, so I started a theatre which had drum dancing in it. (Innuksuk 22)

Drum dancing, throat-singing, the ajajags and Northern games are important components of the cultural expressions of the Inuit. Life has changed immensely through the process of colonization. Although the majority of families continue to live off the land, young people aren't hunting as much. The introduction of alcohol, the ministry, 'white' laws, police, education systems, businesses, social workers and non-traditional types of work have all influenced their beliefs and their lifestyle. "The Inuit way of life used to depend on the Shamans", says Qamaniq. "He [Innuksuk] wanted to let the young people know that we are the Inuit" (Qamaniq 1993).

Innuksuk, who grew up listening to his Grandfather singing the ajajags, believes that the Elders are very proud to see their young people interested in learning their traditional songs and stories. They have been a great help to Tunooniq and are very supportive. "There's so little time left before the Elders who know the songs and the great stories pass away leaving us with only what we know" (Innuksuk 23).

Their first play, "Changes", explored these threats to the survival of their culture. In the Canadian Theatre Review (No. 73, Winter 1992) it is described as follows:

The performers are all dressed in traditional clothing, one of them carries the drum. The men, prepared for hunting, go off in one direction while the women wait, desperately hoping they will return soon. "All we can do is watch and wait." A young boy, Naujak, is perched over a sea hole. It is apparent that he has been waiting a very long time. Finally, we hear a seal come to the surface, a moment of tension, the boy aims...and misses. Aqigiq, with her daughter and her mother sewing seal skins nearby, reflects on the importance of the Elder's teachings for their survival. Eventually, the hunters return home empty-handed, dejected. Nukulik announces that two of their hunters are missing, probably never to return. The Shaman, Tapqiapi, states that there is an evil spirit in their camp, which he will kill. Soon, he produces a bloody knife, "I have killed the evil spirit!" The men and Naujak, hopeful, go back to their hunting grounds. This time, they are blessed. Young Naujak manages to catch his first seal. "Now I am a hunter!", he announces proudly.

All celebrate and have a feast. In their traditional way, they play several games, one of which is called 'nugluktaq'. The strongest hunter, Nukilik, wins. "Hai, now my wife can make kamiks from the sealskin", he announces. But Tagiapi, the Shaman challenges him to wrestle. Nukilik accepts the challenge, but the powerful man transforms himself into a walrus and 'kills' his opponent. To the amazement and relief of the onlookers, Nukilik is restored to life. "In our camp we have a shaman capable of doing strange and awesome things. He can be fierce or he can be helpful. We must follow his advice for it is our law." The men prepare to embark on another hunting expedition, but just as they are about to leave, they are approached by a group of white traders. Their leader approaches suspiciously and introduces himself as Bob. The Inuit are hesitant and confused and approach cautiously, intrigued by his appearance and clothing. Bob offers a mirror and then a knife as trade items for their sealskins. The Inuit are fascinated with the mirror, "Eeh, hai, there's a person inside it!" and equally pleased with the knife, "They gave me a good knife." Finally, Bob invites them to have a drink of his 'broth' claiming it is 'good medicine'. While the Inuit enjoy the 'medicine', Bob speaks:

"I aim to get my fortune....The trading is easy and so, I gather, are the women. These savages don't know the true value of a skin....While I'm here I'll take a look around for gold and other valuable minerals (and) when

the ship returns I'll be laden with enough furs to fulfil all the dreams of the women in Europe and the New World. Yep! I'm going to be rich! RICH!" As Taqiapik watches, the Inuit all start to fall down, pass out and wander aimlessly all over the stage. The white trader loads all of their furs onto his sled and exits. Taqiapik worries, "How will we survive these changes?" He had a vision of the coming of the white man. They begin to sing the ajajaqs when a Priest enters: "Stop! Stop this Shamanism!....You must now leave the old ways and live a new way of life. God is now your new leader." The elder, Uvilik, begins a sad song and speaks: "Our leader, the great Shaman is dead! What are we to do now? We have always struggled for survival. We used our knowledge and our strength to overcome the cold and the uncertainty. [Pause] My children will know an easier life and I'm glad. But, will they know a better one? Will they be strong? Will they be wise? Will they be proud of the struggle...?" The Inuit join in her song and the stage fades to black.

The cast of "Changes" included Pakak Innuksuk, Iga Attagootak, Josia Kilikushak, Kitty Komangapik, Oopah Attagootak, Lamechi Kadloo, Malchi Arreak and David Qamaniq. Many of the original cast had never been to a play or finished high school, but wrote from their own experience, their own life. In fact, Qamaniq had been working in the oil fields when Tunooniq was just starting and had been recently laid off due to plunging oil prices. Coincidentally, one of the actors in "Changes" had to drop out of the play and Tunooniq had to search for a replacement. The local radio announced auditions that April, Qamaniq responded and was given the part (Qamaniq 1993).

"Changes" was first performed at Expo'86 in Vancouver and then went on to tour Banff, Edmonton, Ottawa, Greenland and then at the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in Alaska.

In 1987, Jan Selman, a director from Catalyst Theatre in Edmonton, was sent to Pond Inlet to help Tunooniq develop and produce an original production on the growing issue of spousal assault. This was spear-headed by the Department of Culture and Communications, N.W.T., who, approached by the 1986 North West Territories Task Force on Spousal Assault, initiated a number of public awareness programs, one of them theatre-based. It was felt that general education programs would be of little value. Also receiving funding from Candace Savage of the D.C.C., was the community of Fort Franklin on Great Bear Lake, a Dene settlement of about 400, at the time. (Selman 11)

After five and a half weeks of workshopping, writing and rehearsing, two spousal assault plays, "Help" and "Survival" were staged under the direction of Jan Selman. The script-writing period

... difficult for everyone, reveals Selman, since they were originally written in Inuktitut and had to be translated for her for rehearsal purposes. "I was new to the group, an outsider yet the director, trying to get to know the group across cultural and language barriers" (Selman 12).

The subject matter itself led to difficulties since the group had varying views and experiences on the issue. Selman points out that "there was also a strong desire to tell stories with 'happy endings' - which did not include a couple separating or a woman leaving to escape violence" (Selman 12). Cindy Cowan, a long-time professional with the Mulgrave Co-Op Theatre in Nova Scotia who has conducted theatre workshops in the North, commented that "it is appropriate that the happy ending is noticeably absent...the audience is confronted with urgent questions that need to be addressed by the collective community" (28).

Selman pointed out that the contractual obligations (with the Department of Culture and Communications) conflicted with their cultural views. One of the clauses in the contract stated that the production "will make it clear that the victim/survivors of the assaults are not to blame for being beaten". Selman points out that "that view, however, is not generally held in this Inuit community" and that "the group found it difficult to reconcile its cultural beliefs and community viewpoints with the demands of the contract" (Selman 12). Fortunately, a compromise was reached and the issues were presented in their full complexity. Through "an increased creative output", says Selman, "a wide variety of characters, experiences and viewpoints emerged from the process." (12)

Being a newcomer in theatre and having only worked with Pakuk, an Inuit director, David felt that it was often uncomfortable working with a non-native director due to their cultural and language differences. "There is a scene in "Survival" when the old man goes to the couple who are having trouble and gives them advice and tries to help them. In her culture, I think they must have a different way of communicating....I guess maybe with a social worker. We said we wanted an old man first to try and help the couple" (Qamaniq 19).

Qamaniq admits that they did have a few differences and disagreements but she (Selman) did a really good job. "I ended up playing the old man and I had some few difficulties trying to get into that character but Jan Selman, she helped me a lot....we helped each other" (Qamaniq 1993).

"Survival" and "Help" were performed in Inuktitut when it toured to the communities of Clyde River, Pangnirtung, Iqaluit, Sanikiluaq and Yellowknife. Qamaniq pointed out that they could not get to all the communities that they had wanted to visit because of limited funding (Canada Council and Culture and Communications) and the great expense of travelling by air (Qamaniq 20).

In 1988, as well as conducting a Theatre Workshop, their tour continued to Eskimo Point, Cape Dorset, Iquluit, Fort Franklin and Yellowknife. This tour included performances in Inuktitut of their next play "Search For a Friend", which examined the issues of substance abuse and the ways of overcoming it, individually and as a community. It also examined other social problems associated with modern society. Excerpts from this play and "Changes" were performed during the Arctic Song Festival in Cambridge, England in 1989.

In England, Tunooniq Theatre was the only group from the North West Territories. Innuksuk, Hamilton, Bernice Kootoo and one of their elders, Elizabeth Ootoova made the trip. Other groups arrived from Greenland, the Yukon, Alaska, Northern Sweden and Finland. They were inundated by the media: the London and Cambridge newspapers, the BBC (television and radio), media representatives from the [then] Soviet Union and Alaska and ABC T.V. They were even sent a fax from Yoko Ono who congratulated them on their participation in the international Festival (Cowan 17).

All over the world, as Ellen Hamilton points out, there is a real lack of understanding of the native lifestyle. She goes on to say that "This is one of the reasons why animal rights activists have been able to destroy the seal industry. Tunooniq is a good way of communicating Inuit culture" (qtd. in Cowan 16).

During their six days in England, they felt welcome by the locals, who were very receptive to their concerns with the proposed banning of the seal hunt. The Inuit wanted to stress that they "love their environment and want to work at preserving it, and that Inuit need to harvest their environment, particularly by seal hunting" (Cowan 17).

In 1991, Tunooniq continued touring the country. They went to the Popular Theatre Alliance Festival in Guelph (whose Artistic Director was Syd Bruyn), Upstart '91 and the Earth Spirit Festival in Toronto. At the Earth Spirit Festival, the performance by David Qamaniq, Lamech Kadloo, Louise Atiak and Nathan Ootova was described as follows:

A group of Inuit actors, through their original plays, entertains their audience with tales of the old and new ways of their culture. One outstanding piece of work depicts the changing attitudes towards violence in their community life. Other pieces deal with the issues of modern concern such as alcohol abuse, suicide, education and careers. The group performs in both English and Inuktitut.

They also travelled to the Northern Storytellers' Festival in Whitehorse, a very popular annual festival which attracts writers and storytellers from across the Northern circumpolar region. They

ve also been to the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in Alaska and the Greenland Summer Festival. They have been to Greenland several times and will make another appearance there in July of 1993. Several actors are going to Tukak Teatret in Denmark in the summer of 1993. Tukak Teatret, in its 1992 brochure, is billed as "one of the few professional theatre and theatre schools to be found within the 4th World, that is to say among the indigenous Peoples of the World".

Most recently, Qamanig performed in Young People's Theatre's production of "Whale" in Toronto. His performance earned him a nomination for one of Toronto's most prestigious awards, the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best Male Performance in a Play (Large Theatre Division). This certainly took him by surprise as "Whale" was his first performance in a major urban theatre. Adapted by Director, Maja Ardal, it is an adaptation of David Holman's play about the 1988 rescue of trapped grey whales under the ice off Barrow, Alaska. Qamanig played the storyteller, an Inuit child, a character called Joe and an old man but, more importantly, he brought to the play his own experience in the North. He coached in Inuit dancing, singing and playing the 'qilauti', their hand-held circular drum. Holman incorporated the legend of Sedna, 'The Mother of Sea Beasts', a mermaid-like spirit, whose ritualistic death and resurrection is celebrated each fall. Qamanig recalls his elders telling him that "when Sedna's hair gets tangled, it's much harder to catch animals...and if her hair's untangled we can catch more animals" (qtd. in Walker 1993:83).

Qamanig talked about his experience living and working in Toronto:

I felt homesick a lot the first few weeks when I first came here and I wasn't used to seeing these people who doesn't even say hi or how are you. I missed that for a while but I guess I got used to it in a couple of weeks. It's okay and it's a lot warmer than where I live...I can wear a t-shirt now. I think I'm going to have a longer summer than some of the people in Pond Inlet! (1993)

As for "Whale" and the use of the Inuit legends, Qamanig is very happy with the way the story was told:

I'm very proud that Inuit legends can be shown down south where an Inuit can be involved, an Innuk can be involved, even though some of the actors are not Inuit. We, the Inuit, don't get this chance very often and we don't get a lot of money from the government of the North West Territories or the Canada Council. It's very rare that these legends and stories and what's happening in the north are shown in the theatre. Hopefully in the upcoming years, in the future, the Inuit will be able to do a play themselves. This is only the starting point. This is

something I can understand, we need encouragement for other Inuit to try and do what they can do. Being the only Innuk in this play doesn't bother me, at least I'm an Innuk and I'm here and I know the Inuit way of life. (1993)

Ellen Hamilton and Pakuk Innuksuk have since left Tunooniq, but David Qamanig, now 32, is still keeping the theatre alive, he is keeping up the story telling tradition. He is presently writing a new play based on a story his late-grandfather told him from the time when HE was a young boy of six or seven years old. It is about the very first murder trial of an Inuit by the white judicial system in the early 1920's:

This particular trial is quite famous in the area where I live, the Baffin region, especially since there were never any white people there, except the odd explorer or trader. In the stories that I heard from my grandfather, a trader who was left behind during the world war, was really homesick, and began to lose his mind and was causing trouble among the local people. This had been going on for several years until finally three of the Inuit decided to shoot him. The trader was trying to make his way to Churchill, but never made it. The man who shot the trader was my grandfather's brother-in-law. He was sent down to the penitentiary and he came back after three years because he had some problems with his lungs. My grandpa said he used to tell stories of what it was like to be in the penitentiary down south. I didn't believe what he said about what they used to do to them. They would try to beat him up, but when the first one couldn't, they would have a bigger person try, then a bigger person. He almost got beat. (Qamanig 1993)

Qamanig goes on to say that he is just in the process of writing this story as a play. A few people in the area have tapes about the trial but there is much more to the story and many details are still missing. But, he hopes to complete the research soon, including the "southern point of view". Another complication, he added, is that the report was filed by a 'qailuunaq' (whiteman) who spoke Inuktitut, thereby causing some concern as to the accuracy of the translation.

As for the near future, Qamanig plans to spend the summer [1993] training at Tukak Teatret in Denmark.

In Cindy Cowen's interview with Qamanig in the Fall of 1992, she asked him how he felt about the future for northern theatre:

I think that theatre is going to survive and get stronger. After Tunooniq started in 1986 I have been seeing lots more theatre. Here in Pond Inlet they have a

school drama club, and in Igloolik they have a company of youth actors. I can only speak for myself...but it seems to have helped the young people to not be so shy, like I was....this is how I see Tunooniq Theatre. (Cowan 21)

NATIVE THEATRE GROUP (XAESADE)

The Native Theatre Group in Yellowknife, was formed in 1987 by a group of Inuit, Dene and Metis people. There was a lot of theatre happening in the north at the time, but little or none of it had any Native content. Therefore, there was a great desire to see theatre produced, written, directed and performed by Native people.

It was strongly believed that, through the performing arts, it would be possible to fulfil a great need to retain cultural and traditional values and to address the many issues of concern in order for the healing process to begin. It was with this healing process in mind that the group was formed. Their main objective: 'to see Native people heal'. They want to see change and justice, but they also want to educate and entertain.

During the first few years, they did a few small productions, including "Voices of the Past", but realized that they needed someone to be a coordinator full-time. They raised some funds to hire someone for this position, but as John Blondin points out, "nobody seemed to want to take it, so they asked me and I said I didn't know anything about theatre". He did take the position and he says "since that time we've been doing a lot of stuff and learning a lot and building our repertoire and our group of people slowly to a point where we're travelling round a lot and being funded by a lot of groups" (Blondin 1993).

Since most of this original group had little or no theatre background, but as Blondin (a Yellowknife-born Dene) pointed out:

This was by no means a setback, but rather a plus. It meant that they wanted to learn more about theatre. In doing so, through time, they have developed a style which has become the foundation of all their theatrical works....This [style] is the difference between the Native Theatre Group and other theatre companies and it has been developed in isolation from the rest of the theatrical world. No one has taught them to do this. It came out of necessity. (Blondin 7)

The group's methods include what they call "feeling one's role and personalizing one's script". Their methods of play development are very similar to the rest of the theatre world. But, in rehearsal and performance, each player knows the story inside out so that any player can play any role, each player can interpret a situation in any way they feel it should be done, any player can say whatever they feel they need to express, so long as the dialogue and storyline reinforce the theme of the play. In this way the script is 'personalized'. "It is not a question of memory on the part of the players, but rather feelings" (Blondin 8). The

Storylines utilize their legends to help deliver their ideas and messages.

Their first major production, directed and produced by John Blondin, was entitled "Edu" or "I'm Scared". It brought together many important issues: loss of cultural identity, child abuse, wife battering, racism and sexually transmitted diseases including the AIDS epidemic that faces the Northern and Native people. The characters were representative of the Creator, the four directions, the seasons and childbirth and adults. Blondin was able to hire four actors for a performance in February 1991. The cast included John Blondin as the Creator; Maureen Evans as North, Childbirth and Winter; while Columpa C. Bobb (a Vancouver resident at the time) played South, Adult and Summer.

At the Earth Spirit Festival in Toronto in July, 1991, "Edu" was presented twice at the 'Tent In The Square'. The cast included John Blondin as Time, Gwen Villebrun as North, Margaret Petton as South, Connie Norwegian as East and Roy Dahl as West. The original music, used in the initial production, was composed by Russell Wallace; costume design was by Cheeko Desjarlais; production design was by Carmel Reckzin and John Holman; and the stage manager was Pat Derkis.

They have had two more plays produced. In a workshop in Victoriaville, Quebec, they developed three plays based on the relationship between the Natives and non-natives in Canada. In November, 1992, they produced two of these one-hour plays back in Yellowknife where they received a favourable response.

This past March, 1993, they wrote their own play called "Ene Ezhaili", which in Dene means "Mother (Nature) is Sick". The story dealt with how the Dene looked at the environment. Blondin was pleased with the results saying that the messages were clear and that the audience was also visually captivated by the show.

They are presently working on their next production, a collective created by eight to ten women on their experiences in the north. They hope to stage the play in October or November. They have a core group of actors which is forever expanding and changing. Most of the actors are Dene (one is Ojibway) and they do have the occasional non-Native actor join them from the community.

Blondin, the one person on a salary, has recently been writing a lot of proposals to try to get funding for more staff and training for the actors. (As of May 27, 1993, he had not received a reply; he had asked for a large sum.) They are also trying to raise money to acquire a rehearsal and office space; currently he runs the theatre's work out of his home. Performances are staged at the Northern Arts and Cultural Centre, the auditorium in the local museum and school gymnasiums.

Blondin explains that theatre and the concepts of theatre are very new to the Native population in the North, especially for the Elders. He feels that, they think it is too 'avant garde' and that visually there is too much dancing, singing and movement:

We're doing a lot of different techniques like slow motion [movement] and a lot of people say it's not natural. The Native population, especially the Elders, say it's not natural, you don't do things in slow motion. But those are all theatre techniques that we're exploring because we're dealing with sensitive issues. When something like sexual abuse comes on, we do it in slow motion so that people can see it and really feel it. The elders come to our shows, I think they're learning something, I hope they're learning something. We include a lot of storytelling in our shows. It takes time for them to understand [the combining of storytelling techniques with the theatrical techniques]. But a lot of people enjoy the shows. Theatre is something new for the Dene.

So it's mixed, some say it's good and there are others who don't understand the concept. I think they are spoiled by television. (Blondin 1993)

Despite this though, the performances themselves drew an interesting response among the Native population. Blondin noted that they were a little shocked, probably because the truths about their situations struck close to home. The younger children seemed to be fearful about the scenes involving spousal assault and huddled together.

In contrast, the non-Native population "appeared to be more sophisticated". Blondin felt that they questioned a lot of the images in "Edu" and tried to reason out every act. In a recent interview, he added that finally they are getting a reputation with the government. "They certainly enjoy what we've been doing. Whenever there is a social or political function they ask us to do something" (Blondin 1993). In general, "the performance was educational for the non-native audience, whereas it was revealing for the native audience" (Blondin 9).

As for the actors, the process helps them to understand one another as a people and as an individual. They hope to touch the lives of the Native and non-native communities in a way that will help them heal. (Blondin 9)

As for the future, they hope to expand because of public demands. They would like to do a minimum of two productions a year. The people of the north still crave Native output. Blondin reports that they just got some money to do some promotion on behalf of their theatre and a small amount to travel. Blondin is interested in going to Toronto or Montreal to check out other

native theatres. But he is most interested in coming to Toronto and visiting Native Earth. He feels that he can learn a lot from NEPA's organization.

In the meantime, besides finding an office space, Blondin is going to direct the French community's next play (there is a large French community in Yellowknife) and teach an adult course in drama at the Museum in the fall.

IGLOOLIK DANCE AND DRAMA TH AT --- OUP

In 1988, Alison Ott, a Montrealer, returned to Igloolik [present population about one thousand] on Baffin Island. [She had been an exchange student there when she was fifteen and really enjoyed the North.] As a teacher at Ataguttaaluk School, she decided to start an after-school drama club to combine with the dance club, whose instructor had left the community. The group started with mostly the grade 9 and 10 students of the school, but later incorporated members of the community into their productions. [The school recently grew to include grade twelve.]

Their first production was developed from a modern dance piece to a more theatrical storytelling performance piece. It focused on the dilemma that the Inuit youth faced in dealing with their identity, which seemed to have been hanging in limbo somewhere between the past and the future. The play was entitled "Uvanga" which means "Me". The modern world was represented in a teenage dance, which Ott says "emulated Janet Jackson", while the past was represented by a drum dance. To help the students answer the many questions regarding traditional values, two Elders were invited in to tell some stories and share their knowledge. Noan Piugattuq, who was ninety at the time, and Emile Immaroituk, both had a strong desire to help the young people. Their stories became the basis for scenes. The students learned more about drum dancing and the 'ajajaq', folk music that is part of the Inuit oral tradition. The elders got so involved that they decided to join the performers on stage. "The play showed the contrast of the old ways with the new ways", explained Ott, "and how they joined together by the end of the play, how one could have a promise for the future by holding on to the words of the past, gaining strength from the elders" (Ott 1993). The whole community got involved in the preparation of the play, and making the students begin to be aware of the great changes that have been occurring in their culture.

Opening night of "Uvanga" was a very exciting evening. They performed at the celebration for the signing of the "Nunavut Agreement-in-Principle" in Igloolik on May 1, 1990. This auspicious occasion marked the beginning of Inuit control of their own lands and as Ott points out "it was appropriate that the youth - Nunavut's future leaders - should be validating their unique identity and strengths through theatre" (Ott 12).

Shortly thereafter, the group was invited by the [then] Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Tom Siddon, to perform at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. The students were exposed to other high school drama groups and acquired a broader understanding of the constituents and scope of dance and drama.

Research for their next play began in January of 1991. They wanted to adapt the legend of "Qallupilluit" for the stage. "Qallupilluit" are the sea-creatures that live in the cracks of the

...e, waiting to scoop up children who play too near the danger during break-up. Some references are made to the children's story book, "A Promise is a Promise", by Michael Kusagak and Robert Munsch (which the people in the south are more familiar with), but most of the research relied on the local television's filming of the live testimony of the residents of Igloodik who had seen the Qallupilluit. The play brought in many new elements and incorporated innovative dance choreography, unique character movement, music, masks and vocal dialogue (not taped as in "Uvanga") to depict their interpretation of the legend. Ott recalls that the rehearsal process was much easier due to the experience and skills gained through the first play, although it was still very challenging (Ott 14).

The group was invited to perform at the Northern Storytelling Festival in Whitehorse, Yukon. As they travelled west, they did performances in Iqaluit, in arts centres, halls, churches and once in a young offenders correctional centre. While in Yellowknife on the first weekend in June, 1991, they participated in a series of theatre workshops at the Northern Arts and Cultural Centre, conducted by the Artistic Director at the time, Chris Foreman. Their tour ended with the performance at the Festival.

During the 91-92 school year, the students began to develop their third play, "Inuk and The Sun". This play dealt with the endless waiting for the sun's return during the winter dark periods and a youth's impatience, which caused him to venture out into the wild tundra in search of the sun. The youth is counselled by his elders to be patient. Ott believes they 'bit off more than they could chew in trying to write it and produce it' within the school year. They ended up only performing one scene from the piece.

Unfortunately, the past year has seen the club unable to concentrate on putting together a full performance. One reason was that Ott was in a position where she was supervising teachers-in-training, which meant that most of her afternoons after school, which used to be the club time, were occupied with her supervisory duties. The previous core members and leaders had moved on or graduated which made it hard to keep up the momentum. Also, they were dealing with sporadic attendance among some of the teenagers that occurs after Easter. On a more technical level, many of their props, costumes, masks and make-up had to be ordered from 'the South'; delivery usually took four to six weeks and they were on a limited budget (only \$700 for "Qallupilluit"). All in all, practical problems made after-school rehearsals and a final performance almost impossible.

Ott, who hadn't had an extensive theatre training herself, says that quite a few of the students gained a real interest in the power of theatre and the graduating students are starting to think of theatre as an option to study in University. She believes that

lot of their interest was sparked by what they realized they could do on stage and the emotional effect it had on an audience.

Many students have expressed the importance of the plays and the effect it has had on them. Fourteen-year-old Qajaq Robinson, who has lived in Igloolik all of his life, has been a member of the Dance and Drama Club since the beginning:

Doing this helped me a lot more than I expected. For example, it helped me with expressing my feelings well, to get the message across, it helped my self-esteem greatly, which made me happy with who I am - not who I could be. And it showed me the great part of being a teenager. For me, I think dance and drama have really made me a better person. (qtd. in Ott 1992)

The residents of Igloolik do not have many opportunities to see live theatre. They recently had a modern dance troupe in to perform for the students and conduct workshops. This helped to rekindle the interest in performance and create a desire to recreate their previous performance of "Inuk and The Sun". They got some more choreography ideas for their piece through the workshops and the students ended the week with an evening performance for the community. But the most important influence came from Tunoonig Theatre [Pond Inlet] when they recently performed in Igloolik and several other communities in the area. Ott explains the impact that their own style of native theatre had on their own community:

It was a very powerful thing coming into the community because, here they were, Inuit creating Inuktitut plays of issues that were very real to everybody....very thought provoking and emotionally very stirring. They had a substance abuse play and a spousal assault play that were so powerful. A lot of the humour was in the Inuit trying to face changes and there are parts of that the kids still never forget. There was Inuit type humour in there that just caught everyone's attention. That was probably the most effective in giving the kids the idea that 'oh, we can do that too'. Their effect, obviously, was more powerful than any other group that could have come up from the south. (Ott 1993)

As for the future, Ott is off on maternity leave next year but hopes that she can still encourage the students to pursue drama and their unique expression through the arts.

In Igloolik, drama can, and does, serve as a tool for young people to understand their traditional Inuit culture. (Ott 1992)

LES PRODUCTIONS ONDINNOK

Located in Montreal is a small, yet very important Native theatre company. Ondinnok Inc. was founded in 1985 by Yves Sioui Durand, a Huron-Wendat. Until the recent introduction of Koostachin Productions, he has been the only Native Theatre in Quebec. They have continued to meet the needs and standards of professional theatre.

Over the years they have toured throughout the reserves in Quebec and have also taken their shows to Mexico, England and France.

In a brief telephone conversation, Durand, whose third language is english, explained the importance of Native theatre:

I'm working really hard to convince, not only the non-natives but the Natives themselves, that it's very important to have a mirror of themselves, for today and for the future. Because the next generation needs to have a connection with the heart, a communication. It's really important for me because our culture is not generating itself, it's getting bad, worse. We need a sense of real culture. Not just for show, but, it's important to be connected like real people, the soul, identity, origin and conscience of yourself, to have a real respect for yourself and to be able to grow in this world. So it's important for me that the young Natives be given new hope and mind and learn to really relate to themselves (as to) who they are, to the continent, not only on their own reserves. By the process of these stories, they learn who they are. So it's important now to open up the young generation (so they are) conscious of the Native habitants of this continent, so they realize that the natives are habitants of this continent, not only part of Canada or part of the States or part of Mexico. But we need to be ready to incorporate an open mind so it will, perhaps, get more fresh air inside of the soul of the young people just in time to give them the opportunity to develop themselves to the sense that they will have a new future. Instead of always blocking the same area, we must face the wall of incest and violence. Some don't have the possibility to develop their imagination. So this is why, for me, that Native theatre is so important, now, in this country. Not only because of the politics, it's also for the balance of politics. It's not for politics, it's for a balance of the politics. We need another discord, another language, someone who can really translate the real feelings and needs of the people. Okay? So this is my point of view. I have created real strong work here for the past seven years and, like I tell you, it's not easy. It's a fight to convince Native and non-native

people, that this is essential for the future of the new generation, it is not just for me. Because all the young now, in all parts of Canada, up north, the Inuit and the Natives, are in contact with the dominant culture, through videos, music videos, films, movies, and television, you know, it's a process that will not stop. It will be there for a long time. And the young kids are leaving this connection with the traditional ways, leaving the old traditions, not learning how to survive in this territory. And at the same time, they are thrown into the modern world. They are living in this beautiful land but when you are at the jeopardy of the big city, or when you are living up north, it's like a desert. The nearest place to go for getting out your blues is very, very far. So this is why a lot of young kids have this block inside of them, they can't tell people what's happened, their own tragedy, they are alone in this desert and sometimes they shoot themselves. This is what we are living with now. This is why I think it's very important that we try to open their imagination, their sense that they can connect with their own origin, and at the same time, have an open mind for growing in the future. So it will be for me, really, a strong target for the future. And I think theatre is one of the tools that can help the people. People without heart are really poor people. I think Tomson (Highway) and I have the same vision of what and why it's so important now. Because we need some people who can show the truth, who can show the reality of what's happened in this country. And this is why I say that politics is not the only real thing, it's more than politics, it's the people themselves. We will have territories, we will have money and we will get better. If we could just realize, that all around the world a lot of people are getting more rich, but, they just lose their soul. And so we are not interesting (important) people. The importance of the Natives to this continent is their soul. It's not money. We don't need only money, we need more affection, more attention, more affection (for) each other and more respect. (Durand 1993)

In 1985, Ondinnok won the Americanite Award at the Festival du Theatre des Ameriques (Festival of the Americas) in Montreal for "Le Porteur des Peines du Monde". The festival presents plays, readings and symposiums from several countries in the Americas. They look for "works that (are) not only challenging and representative of current theatrical trends, but more importantly, ones which (can) be understood or at least appreciated by audiences who do not necessarily speak all languages of the Americas" (Hunt 1987).

Their 1988 season included "Atiskenandahate" or "Voyage to the Land of the Dead" which was staged at the University of Quebec. The play, involving some nudity and performed in French, Montagnais, and English, dealt with alcoholism and family violence. Denis Lacroix, who had met Durand about four years earlier, commented on the response of the audience:

The audience was "Blown away, all the reviewers were blown away. And we had no curtain call, just like a ceremony. They'd never seen anything like it. Some natives were in the audience but protested because they'd never seen green and blue Indians. Some are totally deculturized, but they were welcome. We had a prayer and a song before the show, smoked some tobacco, then the audience came in. It's a neutral ground, everybody's a human being there. Don't matter how much native [culture] you know, or don't, you're a human being, that's what we told them. Some people objected to the show, no one else on the reserve wanted to explore these issues, maybe they were afraid to. (Lacroix 1993)

Another original piece called "La Conquete de Mexico" was written by Durand and directed by Jean-Pierre Ronfard. This was staged as a co-production with Le Nouveau Theatre Experimental.

Their most recent production was "Ukuamak", a play based on an Inuit legend, and played from June 5 - 10 at the 1993 Festival du Theatre des Ameriques in Montreal.

KOOSTACHIN PRODUCTIONS

In the summer of 1992 Jules Koostachin was a student at the Native Theatre School where she was inspired to write her first play and motivated to start her own theatre company which she called "Koostachin Productions". "Koostachin" means "fear" in Cree, and to 21-year old Koostachin, fear is, in part, what makes her so brave. Koostachin Productions is only the second Native theatre company to be formed in Montreal. Koostachin, a Cree from Moose Factory, Ontario, feels that, instead of being quiet and oppressed as a Native person, one can express their feelings and frustrations through theatre. It can be a form of therapy for the Native community. She believes that Native theatre helps raise public awareness of First Nations people and the issues that affect them, such as environmental abuse. Koostachin does her work to educate and benefit Native and non-native people, it is a healing process.

Inspired to write about the state of Mother Earth, Koostachin, with Kelly O'Dwyer and Gene Pendon, wrote "Earth Whispers", their first production. Koostachin herself, produced and directed. "Earth Whispers" played to full houses for five performances at the sixty-seat Cazalet Theatre at Concordia University, with matinees for children. An admission fee was not charged but a minimum donation of \$2 was requested. All proceeds went to the Native Women's Shelter and the Native Friendship Centre.

Despite her lack of experience both in theatre and in fundraising, Koostachin managed to procure her own funds independently from various sources. She received \$600 from the Office of the Dean of Students at Concordia University (who also donated the Cazalet Theatre for five days), \$200 from the Office of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, \$1000 from the Royal Bank and a donation from the Anglican Church of Canada. Single-handedly, she got the local press and television stations involved, including the CBC and the Montreal Gazette.

Like many others, Koostachin found that there was no response from the various Native organizations for funding. Her funding came exclusively from non-native organizations. "That really surprised me", she said. She added that "the people who funded me were very supportive, very genuine, very good people". She wants to encourage other young Native people: "don't be afraid to ask for funds".

The name "Earth Whispers" was chosen because Mother Earth "can no longer speak, but only whisper". In the play, Earth and Wind form a primordial couple and the four peoples of the planet - black, red, yellow and white - spring from them. The earth's children, but, forgetting their roots and losing respect for the earth, they poison their Mother. Eventually they are made to see the error of their ways, and an eagle sits in a Spirit Tree to watch over the four peoples.

"Earth Whispers" is a multi-cultural piece. The four colours of the races of man are represented, black, white, yellow and red and each character was given an element, either fire, water, soil or air. For example, a Hungarian woman played Mother Earth, Father Wind was played by an Ojibwa and a Latin American played the eagle. Koostachin wanted to re-inforce the idea that every Nation is equal and human, and that therefore, every nation is just as responsible for the abuse of Mother Earth.

It is a modern Native myth told through movement and voice without verbal dialogue. "Through language", she explained, "you don't always say what you mean, but body language is very truthful and honest, more direct, it is universally understood". Through the rehearsal process, which spanned four months, Koostachin encouraged the actors to develop their own movements and interpretations to tell their own stories through their own bodies. She really believes in the actors coming up with their own form of expression. During rehearsals, she noticed that her performers, who were stiff and self-conscious in the beginning, gradually began to feel more comfortable about touching their own bodies and touching each other in the group. They had developed a non-sexual but powerful bond. Sadie Buck, who taught traditional Haudenosaunee women's songs at the Native Theatre School, was also a great inspiration for Koostachin. She introduced some of these songs to the performers who, then, created their own incredible songs. "It gave me goosebumps", recalled Koostachin.

Koostachin commented that her audience responded positively and that each person had interpreted the myth in their own way. "The play really seemed to affect them. They came up to me after the play and were hugging me and thanking me". The audiences were mostly non-native and she felt that they really understood, they were interested and full of questions. She really enjoyed her first experience as a director. "I would like to keep directing, it's really happening now. Through the seventh generation, after Columbus' arrival, the languages are being brought back" (Koostachin 1993).

The next project, called "Survivors of Broken Waters", will feature six Native women. Each will be given a characteristic like sexual abuse, incest, alcoholism, drug abuse. She wants to focus on Native women who are ashamed of their bodies and who have survived to break the cycle. She would like each person to learn something of their own Native language and bring it into the piece.

As for the future, Koostachin, who is a second-year Theatre major at Concordia, says that she wants to study Native law but also points out that "I eventually want to open a Native theatre, maybe in Vancouver, and go touring around reservations in Canada and the United States to inspire young people. I want to educate myself about Native law and anthropology and combine it into theatre" (qtd. in Concordia's Thursday Report 1993).

MISCELLANEOUS PRODUCTIONS

In discussing the importance of Native Theatre in Canada and its development, it is necessary to include the original works of many other prominent Native actors and writers.

Since its debut at Native Earth in 1986, "The Rez Sisters" has had several productions across Canada. In August, 1989, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre produced "The Rez Sisters" with an all-Native cast [five of whom had never been on stage before] which, according to one reviewer "gave the show a distinct local flavour while rendering a universal reflection of life on a reserve". Story adds that "the play's director [Larry Lewis] has made it in Toronto, but continues to work with people that he cares for. It is a commitment to the arts in a context that would otherwise be forgotten" (Story 1989).

In the fall of 1990 [the year of the Oka Crisis], Michael Dobbin, the Artistic Director of Alberta Theatre Projects presented the play in Calgary. He explained his reasons for choosing Highway's play:

It's my job as Artistic Director to know as much as I can about the community ATP serves and to choose plays which reflect and illuminate all of our lives. We're here to serve everyone in Calgary - not some select, elite clique. ["The Rez Sisters"] is bold and honest but it's also warm and funny. I would never have suddenly chosen it simply because it was topical. I don't approve of theatre protesting simply for the sake of protesting. It also has to be highly entertaining. (qtd. in Hobson 1990)

Under the direction of Allan MacInnis and Tantoo Cardinal, the cast included ATP resident ensemble actors (non-native) Jane Logie and Loretta Bailey; local actors Cheryl Blood Bouvier and Lee Crowchild; Winnipeg resident, Bernelda Wheeler; and Ontario residents Shirley Cheechoo, Tina Louise Bomberly and Pamela Matthews.

In the summer of 1992, Kelowna's Sunshine Theatre produced "The Rez Sisters" under the direction of Keith Turnbull, an influential director in the development of Native theatre. [See section under 'Northern Delights'.] This production was assistant directed by Vancouver Native, Dennis Maracle and had an all-Native cast. The local British Columbia actors included Ruby Alexis [Sen'klip], Renae Morriveau, Judy Good Sky, Gunargie O'Sullivan, Darrell Guss; and included veterans Doris Linklater, Pamela Matthews and Bernelda Wheeler. The production, in this popular tourist city, was the season's most successful play. The local paper, "The Okanagan" described the play:

Harsh, vulgar and shocking. "The Rez Sisters" is undeniably entertaining. And those people who still like to think that summer theatre is reserved for a succession of flaccid and gassy two-act farces had better pay attention. This is Canadian acting and playwriting at its best, and Sunshine Theatre deserves much credit for having the guts to bring theatre of this magnitude to their summer line-up. (Perry 1992)

"The Rez Sisters" continues to be in demand. Future plans include productions at Theatre Aquarius in Hamilton, Ontario for early 1994; the New York Theatre Workshop in New York City (to be directed by Muriel Miguel); and a french translation for Montreal, Quebec.

Many of Drew Hayden Taylor's plays have been produced by different theatre companies throughout the country. "Toronto At Dreamer's Rock" and Bootlegger Blues" have had several re-mounts while "A Contemporary Gothic Indian Vampire Story" played at Persephone Theatre in Saskatoon.

In the fall of 1991, Andrey Tarasiuk, the Artistic Producer of Theatre Direct Canada, decided to produce Drew Hayden Taylor's "Toronto At Dreamer's Rock" for its school tour. Lynda Hill, a graduate of the Ryerson Theatre School, was chosen to direct. The cast included Jonathan Fisher, Tim Hill and Jeffrey Eshkawkigan. Lynda Hill commented that Theatre Direct, recognizing the cultural diversity of Toronto schools, had accessed many schools and had an amazing response (Hill 1993).

"Dreamer's Rock" has continued to play in various venues throughout the country, most often with Theatre Direct Canada. On September 28, 1992, "Dreamer's Rock" played at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. It was again directed by Lynda Hill with Tim Hill (no relation), Levi Aquonie and newcomer, Spencer Kowe in the cast. Cheryl Francis was the stage manager, Snadowland provided the costumes and set while Marsha Coffey created the sound design.

Theatre Direct picked up "Dreamer's Rock" for the third time to perform in the country-wide Children's Festival. Under the direction of Lynda Hill, the cast ['The Dream Team' as she called them] included Tim Hill, Jonathan Fisher and Levi Aquonie. They performed in Calgary, Vancouver and Winnipeg. As Drew Taylor noted, "Dreamer's Rock" has had seven productions in four years (Taylor 1993). Jonathan Fisher added, "it's the show that will never die" (Fisher 1993).

Director Lynda Hill explained the possible reasons for the popularity of "Toronto At Dreamer's Rock":

First of all, they had an amazing response from the first tour. Partly because, as a TYA [Theatre For Young

Audiences) company with a long history of touring in the metropolitan area, they accessed a lot of schools and had a very big response from their boards indicating that it was something that other schools would want to see. But I think, they, unlike some other companies, are recognizing the cultural diverse make-up of Toronto and the need for children of diverse cultures to see their experiences reflected on stage. And whether or not the population is made up of Native kids, or South Asian or Chinese or whatever, the play speaks about 'difference' and what it means to be straddling two cultures and trying to, in your teen years, ground yourself in your own cultural identity while surviving and moving towards the future. And that's a message that's really important for kids of any colour. They've had a lot of success with that. They did reach a lot of Native kids, but certainly not in the same way that, for instance, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig would, but the play moved beyond a specific culture into other cultures. (Hill 1993)

"Bootlegger Blues" is a popular play and has been produced by the [late] Awasikan Theatre in Winnipeg and in the summer of 1993 it is being produced by TWO separate theatre companies. The Lighthouse Festival Theatre in Port Dover, Ontario staged "Bootlegger" from June 22 - July 10. This production featured De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig alumnae Herbie Barnes, Clayton Odjig and Doris Linklater, Tina Bomberly from Six Nations and Toronto newcomer, Columpa Bobb. The Grand Theatre in Kingston will pick up this same production. Arbor Theatre in Peterborough will also stage "Bootlegger" this summer on the Trent University Campus.

When questioned as to the reasons why Native Earth has not produced any of his plays, Taylor responded:

In my personal opinion, I think Native Earth prefers to work within the surreal element of theatre, they prefer theatrics, while I write what's called 'kitchen sink drama', realism. They wants to explore the weirdness, the wonderful theatrical possibilities of the stage, and get away from realism and that's what I excel in. So, to me, that's why they've never done any of my stuff. (Taylor 1993)

Daniel David Moses, whose first play, "Coyote City", premiered at Native Earth in the spring of 1988, has continued to write plays. "Big Buck City" and "Kyotopolis" are the sequels to "Coyote City". Moses' other play, "Almighty Voice and His Wife", also played at Native Earth.

Daniel David Moses' "Big Buck City", a Native Earth Seed Show (Native Earth donated \$5000 towards the production), was produced by Cahoots Theatre Projects in association with the Tarragon

theatre, in May 1991, with funding from the Ontario Arts Council and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council. Artistic Director, Beverly Yhap added:

This production started over a year ago with phone calls to Tomson Highway and chats with Dan. Several grant application forms, board meetings, and much sweat later, here we are. (Yhap 1991)

Wayson Choy, the President of Cahoots Theatre Projects, described to the audience, in the program, the reasons behind his choice of Moses' play:

In a time of changing economic and cultural realities, the voices of new playwrights must explore and challenge the truly destructive stereotypes within and without each of us. Such arresting voices must push forward a fresh and provocative view of our common humanity. New plays must bend the old rules of what can be exposed and explored - and laughed at. Not surprisingly, the voices of First Nations writers, poets and artists are growing less easy and more discomfiting. We believe Daniel David Moses is such a voice. And we believe voices like his, now becoming accountable, must above all be heard. Thank you for being in the audience. We are risking something new together. (Choy 1991)

Cahoots Theatre Projects was able to hire several First Nations artists: actors Garrison Chrisjohn, Kait Matthews and Pamela Matthews; Don Ross as Composer (this was his fourth original score for live theatre) and photographer Greg Staats for production shots. Moses, himself, is very appreciative of Native Earth's influence and the work that Cahoots Theatre has accomplished:

There's a good sense of community among the theatre artists within Toronto particularly with the development that Cahoots Theatre is doing with the cross-cultural [material], that's been really important. I don't think that could have happened if Native Earth hadn't made such a good example of how to work between cultures. It's been really inspiring for the rest of the community to see what Native Earth has done. (Moses 1993)

"Big Buck City" is about an urban Native upwardly mobile couple, Jack and Barbara Buck (played by Garrison Chrisjohn and Kyra Harper), whose peaceful Christmas Eve is interrupted by the arrival of several unwanted visitors, including a long-lost niece, Lena (Marion DeVries), who is about to give birth to a baby whose father may be a ghost. Also in the cast were Kait Matthews as Lena's sister, Pamela Matthews as the born-again Christian and Von Flores representing the Trickster. The tale ends in tragedy with the family realizing that the paths they have chosen are not

Leading them towards happiness. The Globe and Mail review said that "Big Buck City":

Begins (as a farce) but does not end; while he offers plenty of prat falls and broad caricatures, Moses ultimately aims for something darker, more complex, something magical. He doesn't quite achieve it, but to the extent that he does 'Big Buck City' is a strangely powerful, disturbing piece of work. Moses is a bit heavy-handed at times....but save for the Native element we've seen all this before. What we haven't seen - and what saves 'Big Buck City' from being just another yuppie-bashing comedy - is the way (Director, Colin) Taylor and Moses use the power of the Native myth to break through the limits of the form. (Dafoe 1991)

The final instalment of the trilogy, "Kyotopolis", was staged at the Robert Gill Theatre at the University of Toronto Graduate Centre For the Study of Drama in March 1993. This production was also directed by Colin Taylor. The story takes place twenty-five years into the future when the little girl, "Babe" (the baby born in the prequell), has gone on to be a media celebrity and goes up in a space shuttle. Moses said the play deals with 'spiritual hysteria' and alternative visions for society. Others have described it as:

Kyotopolis is a technically complex tragi-comedy that uses pre-recorded and live video, plus music and slides, to stress the simultaneity and interpenetration of the past and present. In opposition to the Rationalist view of history as a linear progression, Moses suggests a circular motion in which the future and the past are endlessly folded into one another, like the batter for a chocolate swirl cake. (Davis 35)

Moses recalled that the audience was mostly students, alumnae and "white middle class people". He described the audience response:

It was at a University, people there are so serious. One night, there was a guy sitting on one side and there were a couple of girls sitting behind me somewhere who were laughing all the way through it and I thought 'Oh great, this is wonderful, they're getting the jokes'. When the lights came up at the end, I noticed the person on the side was a CBC guy who's worked a lot with Native people and the girls in the back were Native girls. Everybody found it very interesting. People had a lot to say about it but I think, finally, there was too much that was strange for them. They didn't quite know HOW to react. (Moses 1993)

Shirley Cheechoo, actress, playwright and founding Artistic Director of the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group, has had much success with her one-woman show, "Path With No Moccasins". Her ninety minute show has toured across Canada and the United States. It is an auto-biographical account of her life from the reserve, to the residential schools and her 'path of destruction'.

"Path With No Moccasins" played in Toronto in November, 1991. The Toronto Star reported that:

It's hard to believe that the harrowing life story told by Shirley Cheechoo in her one-woman show at the Theatre Centre, is fact, not fiction. What's even more appalling is knowing that the Cree actress/storyteller is only one of many Native Canadians with this particular story to tell. (Friedlander 1991)

The play deals with her journey from mental and physical abuse, alcoholism and suicide attempts, to self-discovery and spiritual re-birth. For Cheechoo, the show is part of her healing process.

Monique Mojica, actress and former Artistic Director of Native Earth for a brief period of time, is the author of "Princess Pocahontas and The Blue Spots". The full length play explores, in a series of vignettes, the clash between the indigenous peoples of the Americas and the various waves of white settlers. The story is told from the point of view of women who were exploited, including Malinche [the mistress of the Spanish invader Cortez]; Margaret, a fur trader's wife; and a contestant in a beauty pageant, "Princess-Buttered-On-Both Sides".

"Princess Pocahontas and The Blue Spots" was developed through grants from the Canada Council and the Toronto Arts Council. It was originally workshopped by Nightwood Theatre in a co-production with Native Earth in May 1989 with a staged reading in June. Nightwood Theatre's Groundswell Festival of New Work by Women' conducted a workshop in November, 1989, and mounted a full production with Theatre Passe Muraille from February 9 to March 4, 1990. This production was directed by Muriel Miguel of Spiderwoman Theatre. Mojica played the majority of the roles with support from Alejandra Nunez providing the music. The review praised the play's unique view and the performers:

Mojica is a committed, at times compelling, performer and the diverse musical talents of Nunez bolster the piece considerably. (Crew 1990)

Catalyst Theatre in Edmonton, a professional company operating year round, is best known for its productions dealing with social action. Over the years, Catalyst has been involved with many projects based on the experiences of Aboriginal people in Canada.

Two of these plays include Floyd Favel's "The Learning" and "All My Relations". "The Learning" was the highlight of a Native Education Conference entitled 'Our People, Our Struggles, Our Spirit' held in the fall of 1988. "All My Relations", about a family who leaves the reserve to live in the big city, was initiated in response to the numerous community requests and produced in early 1990 in Edmonton. "All My Relations" opened on March 8 at the Chinook Theatre and played for ten nights. The company toured Alberta and did a final performance in Winnipeg, hosted by the Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba and Awasikan Theatre.

Director, Allen MacInnis, notes in the program that:

Directing a play that comes out of a culture that is not one's own is a prospect with some uncomfortable ramifications. One questions one's own culture, one's real ability to understand another culture, one's skill for communicating the image and spirit of another culture without filtering each image through what might be an outsider's eyes. But directing this play has forced me to trust the real nature of live theatre which has, if we trust it, an unbiased force that allows the truth to come out. The live performance is enjoyed and understood on so many levels - visual, aural, emotional, [and] intellectual. (MacInnis 1990)

The production included original music by Lance Tailfeathers and an all-Native cast: Tantoo Cardinal, Floyd Favel, Rhonda Cardinal, Pamela Matthews, Ron [Loon Hawk] Cook and Bertha Twin. The play centres around the misadventures of George, a young Cree, who searches the bingo halls, bars and pawnshops for any expression of the traditional culture he left behind. But, his endeavors merely make him an object of amusement to his friends and relations. One of his plights is the doomed notion of his tour guide business for Fort Lauderdale sightseers. He explains to his sister, on their way to a bar, the reason for her taking pictures:

These are my promotional pictures. My new business, All My Relations Agency. See, I invite non-native people to come and see us, for a price. I take them around to contemporary urban Indian families and they see how we live. I give them a light lunch, they see our beauty....'Visit All My Relations, tours offered daily, by a real urban native guy!' (Favel 1990)

The reviews were favourable. The Edmonton Journal said that:

One of the great appeals of Floyd Favel's new play, which touches on urban poverty, unemployment, racial stereotyping and other mega-voltage issues, is the humour [and goodwill] it generates from foiling expectations and undercutting pathos. (Nicholls 1990)

Yvette Nolan (Metis) is a playwright, residing in Winnipeg, whose first play, "Blade", was the hit of the 1990 Winnipeg Fringe Festival. Her second play was "Job's Wife" and was produced by Theatre Projects' 1992 Studio Series at Prairie Theatre Exchange. It played from February 5 - 16 as one-half of a twin bill of one-act plays. (The other play was Joan MacLeod's "Jewel".)

In "Job's Wife", Tiffany Taylor played Grace, who turns to god when her out-of-wedlock pregnancy (by her Native boyfriend) appears to be ending prematurely. She wants spiritual help but is shocked when God (played by Gerry Martin) shows up at her door as 'a burly Native'. He tells her to take responsibility for her own actions. The child (Metis) spirit, played by D-Anne Kuby, made an essential spiritual connection.

In Theatrum's review, Longfield praised the overall production and the fact that Nolan successfully directed her own play with "enough objectivity to ensure that her ideas were effectively translated to the stage". He also compared this production to a popular Toronto play:

It accomplished what the hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in Kugler and Roses's "Not Wanted On the Voyage" could not; it presented an intelligent alternative to traditional ideas about modern religion in effective dramatic terms. (Longfield 35)

Margo Charlton is the Artistic Director of the Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba, a non-profit theatre organization founded in 1984. Since 1985, they have developed four program areas: Community Outreach, Professional Productions, Touring Productions (for example, Favel's "All My Relations") and Contracts/Training.

The Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba will be producing Yvette Nolan's next play "A Marginal Man" next season. They believe, however, that there should be Native theatre produced by and for Native people. Charlton sees the development of Native theatre in Canada as very important:

I see our role in the development of Native Theatre as being a resource. But certainly, we don't set ourselves up as a Native theatre group. But while there is no Native theatre company operating out of Winnipeg, I try to put Native content into our season each year because it's not happening otherwise. And whenever I can, I hook up with groups like Children of the Earth (the Aboriginal high school that runs a drama program) and provide support, send artists and performances in there. And we're also bringing in Tukak Teatret from Greenland. They are set to be in Winnipeg from October 28 to November 7. (They are also going to Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal.) Things are still up in the air in terms of funding. In

terms of other Native Theatre in Winnipeg, there's a group that's trying to get off the ground called the Aboriginal Artists Group. They are planning on doing Billy Merasty's play "Fireweed" in August. Joy and Tina Keeper had thought about starting a theatre group called "Urban Shaman" about two years ago. We started talking and thought maybe they could bring in "Moonlodge" as a co-production with us (PFAM did eventually produce the show) and learn how to do all the promo and everything else that deals with putting on a show. But it never happened. But if another group came along we would, if they wanted, offer our help and resources. We are trying to nurture the next group that comes along. That's the kind of role we see ourselves in. (Charlton 1993)

Nolan has also been commissioned to write a play for the Manitoba Metis Senate. But, she feels that it's tough trying to work in Winnipeg. There are no resources. She also feels like she's the 'token Indian writer' and when someone needs a Native person or a Native representative on a board, they call her. She explains that:

The population is one-tenth aboriginal. It's very racist. Especially in the arts, there's no one (of Native ancestry) left there. The artists and actors leave. Also....they have no concept of non-traditional casting. Rarely, if ever, do they cast aboriginal or ethnic people in a part. For instance, the black actors play the maids. It's tough. There aren't any Native actors left there. They can't even cast plays there. They've tried. Leslie Silverman at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People tried to hire two native people but couldn't find anybody. They ended up hiring two East Indians. Their play "Whispers In the Dark", was about a people losing their culture, their language (Gaelic), about being colonized, like when the British took over. It was based on Irish and English fables by Noel Greig. Because the story related to the Native situation, they wanted to tour to the rez's. (Nolan 1993)

Michael C. Lawrenchuk, a Cree from the Fox Lake Indian Reserve in northern Manitoba, wrote and performed in "The Trial of Kicking Bear" on a nation-wide tour. A co-production between Factory Theatre and Mato Ska Theatre, it played at the Factory Theatre Studio Cafe in February 1992. The press release describes the play:

It's 1891 and Kicking Bear - a Souix Warrior Chief and leader in the Ghost Dance Movement - is pacing his prison

cell after most of his family and friends have been massacred by the U.S. Cavalry at Wounded Knee. Should he join Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and sell his past to strangers? Or should he keep his past to pass on as a legacy?

This important story is set during a pivotal moment in Aboriginal North American history. Although the review cites Lawrenchuk's inexperience as an actor, he adds that "he does make his point with a conviction that is hard to ignore" (Wagner 1992).

Over the years, there have been many collaborative efforts between Native artists (writers and actors) and the mainstream theatre community to produce plays dealing with Aboriginal issues.

"Jessica: A Transformation", a two-act play, was written by Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell, and based on Campbell's book "Halfbreed". Campbell, who was "impressed by the power of theatre and its potential to convey a spiritual world", felt a need to "create a thing of beauty from her painful past" (Pastor 1990). It is the story of a Metis woman, Jessica, who survives a long painful journey and finally comes to terms with her spirituality and strength as a woman. The play was published in 1989 in "The Book of Jessica" in which "two-thirds is devoted to a series of heated conversations between the co-authors about the ups and downs of their collaboration" (Petrone 1976). "Jessica" was first performed for the 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon, and subsequently played at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto, The Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa, Quebec's Quinzaine International Theatre Festival and eventually back to Theatre Passe Muraille where it won a Dora Mavor Moore Award in 1986.

"21 WAYS TO SCALP AN INDIAN" is described as "A Tongue-in-cheek Satirical, Farcical, Humorous Romp Through the Mine Field of Native Issues". It is a thirty-minute series of sketches designed to be performed in a 'stand-up' method of comedy by two or three actors. The Founders of this unique troupe are actors Pamela Matthews (the Administrative Head), Kenneth Charlette and Billy Merasty. Many other actors, writers and directors have contributed to the many performances. In 1993, "21 Ways" was the recipient of a small grant from the Toronto Arts Council to aid in the development of more material.

The objectives of the group are to raise public awareness of important Native issues and dispel Native stereotypes through drama and stand-up comedy. All original material is written by the company and designed to be easily performed in any venue.

"21 Ways To Scalp An Indian" first performed at the Project Indigenous Restoration Concert at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in April, 1991. The group has since written their own material for many different venues. They have performed at the 1991 and 1993

North Spirit Festivals, Ontario Place, the Amnesty International Concert featuring the popular band Blue Rodeo, the Stein Valley Festival in British Columbia and the Art Gallery of Ontario. There are several performances lined up for the summer and fall of 1993.

"No'Xya' [Our Footprints]" was a co-production between the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council of Hazelton, B.C. and the Headlines Theatre Company of Vancouver. "No'Xya" focused on the ownership of ancestral lands and the Tribal Council's rights to jurisdiction over 22,000 square miles of land in northern B.C.. The script was researched and written by Headlines' Artistic Director David Diamond in collaboration with Marie Wilson and Herb George from the Tribal Council; 'Ksan Dancer and Hereditary Chief Billy Blackwater; and his son Hal Blackwater; Lois G. Shannon; elders; and many other members of the community. (Cooke 44 and Meili 8)

The play toured B.C. starting in the fall of 1987 then went on to a national tour in the spring of 1988. This tour included the "From The Ground Up" National Festival of Canadian Theatre [Toronto] in May, 1988, of which Native Earth's "Coyote City" also took part.

"Out Of The Silence" was first developed in 1991 as a co-production between Headlines Theatre and the Urban Representative Body of Aboriginal Nations [URBAN] and toured British Columbia in early 1993. The cast of the most recent production included Carmen Moore, Sophie Merasty, Columpa Bobb, Donald Morin and Darrell Guss. The twenty minute play focused on a Native family's problems with alcoholism and abuse. It is a 'Forum Theatre' play whereby, during the second performance, the audience is encouraged to intervene to "get a chance to break the patterns that this troubled family has fallen into, [to] come on stage at a pivotal point in the action, replace one of the characters and attempt to break the cycle" (Diamond 1993). Headlines Theatre is concerned about the struggles of people worldwide for self-determination and freedom from oppression.

COMPARISONS OF NEPA TO OTHER THEATRE COMPANIES

RICK GROEN [CRITIC]: A bizarre mix of contrasting styles and competing tones, "The Beavers" [at the Annex Theatre] is a very theatrical grab-bag long on risks and rich in rewards. Way over in the pricey part of town, mega-musicals coast on the hype and rake in the bucks. Here, in the little show that could, big-time theatrics thrive in a bargain-basement setting, riding on nothing but raw talent and sheer likeability. (1990)

What is the importance of De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig?

DREW TAYLOR: Well, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig is the only touring Native Theatre Company in all of Canada. All the other Native theatre companies are urban based, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig is rural and caters to the reserve and rural audience, unlike Native Earth which is specifically urban based. De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig's audience is much more grassroots whereas, Native Earth appeals to the intelligentsia, the academic Indian, the business Indian, the artsy Indian, not to mention the white theatrical crowd. De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig goes right into the heart of the reserves, to people who would never have seen theatre to begin with and does their plays for them.

JONATHAN FISHER: Mainly because it's the grassroots of Native Theatre and it's been the springboard for other artists, like Gloria and Scan and many others who have gone on to work for other companies. Native Earth, on the other hand, is one of the leading professional Native theatre companies in the country, it's more urban-centred and well-established.

DARCY ALBERT: I've seen other shows in Toronto, like at the Canadian Stage Company, but I find the productions at Native Earth have a much stronger message than others in Toronto.

ANONYMOUS: When I first went to Native Earth, I found it so welcoming, that there is a sense of a team, professionals. We don't get that here (Spirit Song). It all feels very amateurish. And you should be able to go there and talk, but you can't. They discourage it. It's like a private club.

NATIVE THEATRE COMPANIES OF THE PAST

Over the vast theatre history of Canada, many theatre companies have come and gone. Over the relatively short history of 'Native Theatre' in Canada, a few companies have come and gone.

Canada's first known professional Native theatre company was founded by well-known director, Keith Turnbull, and called "Northern Delights". Based in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, it evolved from the "Ne'er-Do-Well Thespians" (or NDWT), an innovative Toronto theatre company developed from the association of Turnbull and playwright James Reaney in 1975. To understand the beginnings of "Northern Delights", it is important to know the history of NDWT.

Toronto based NDWT was formed specifically to tour Reaney's trilogy of the "Donnelly's" along with a production of "Hamlet". Later, in April 1977, one of Reaney's other plays, "Wacousta", toured Ontario. "Wacousta" is described as "A dramatic retelling of the giant Wacousta's revenge on the British garrison at Detroit and Michilimackinac. From the 1832 writings of Major John Richardson" (Carley 1985). What is interesting to note, is that Tomson Highway, then a student at the University of Western Ontario in London, worked as a consultant for Reaney on Native storytelling and the use of the Cree language in the development of "Wacousta!". Native actors, Denis Lacroix and Graham Green, were also hired for the production along with David Ferry and Michael Hogan, now prominent Canadian actors. With Turnbull as Artistic Director and Jerry Franken as Associate Director, NDWT "remained active until 1982, dedicated to producing new Canadian plays; to collaborative work among playwright, director and actors; to involvement through street festivals, drama workshops, and study guides in the social and cultural life of the communities in which they performed; and eventually to the development of theatre by and for Canada's native Indians" (Noonan 366).

In 1978, NDWT toured much of Canada, including Northern Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec and the North West Territories with "The Northern Delights Travelling Review", a collective creation about life in the north. The cast included three Native actors, Gary Farmer, Shirley Cheechoo and Colleen Loucks. Doris Linklater met Turnbull, Franken and the troupe when they travelled through Sandy Lake (Northern Ontario). She became involved with the company when, on April 1, 1978, she received a call from the North West Territories from Keith Turnbull to replace actress Cheechoo (Linklater 1993).

After that first tour with "The Northern Delights Travelling Review", that's when they (NDWT) started talking to us about setting up a company up north. Some of us got really excited about theatre. That particular show was the first time I saw live theatre. It grabbed

me, it was very interesting. So, we began the process of forming a company. (Linklater 1993)

The following year, 1979, another play, produced by NDWT about native people, "Radio Free Cree", by poet/novelist Paulette Jiles (non-native), went on a northern tour.

According to one source, both "The Northern Delights Travelling Review" and "Radio Free Cree" were well-received on their Northern tours but "failed in Toronto" (Noonan 367). According to this same source: "NDWT's alienation from Toronto, combined with an ongoing deficit of \$13,000 from the 'Donnelly's' tour, forced the company to leave the Bathurst Street theatre in 1980. It continued to produce plays at other venues in Toronto. But by that time much of the energy and several of the actors had left the company" (367). Linklater added that everyone, including Turnbull, seemed to just go their separate ways (1993).

It is interesting to note that these early plays, mostly written by non-natives, were not successful on the Toronto theatre scene but were successful in northern Ontario. Perhaps this was an early sign of the need for Native theatre, especially in more northern isolated areas.

"Northern Delights" was officially formed in 1980 with Jim Morris as President of the Board. Their first play was Jiles' "Northshore Run", a co-production between NDWT and Northern Delights which toured Northern Ontario in 1980.

Linklater mentioned that during the formation of their company, NDWT set them up for some training, which included workshops with Kene Highway in movement, Eric Nagler to teach rhythm and Lloy Coutts (Stratford) as a voice coach. Linklater added that:

They also brought in a lot of other people interested in acting. But I remember being frustrated with some of their attitudes, some of the 'actors' didn't view the work seriously. I think a lot of them were just doing it for a lark. They didn't see themselves doing this as a career. There was no discipline. But I was very serious about it. So I started taking all the training and, eventually, I started teaching some voice and other classes. I was the only one, during all of those workshops, to go on in theatre. (Linklater 1993)

Jim Morris' "Ayash", directed by Barry Karp, was their next production in 1982. During the rehearsal process, Linklater added that:

Tomson Highway came up to observe rehearsals. He took time off and paid for his own way there. At that time

there weren't any Native writers. Tomson got really interested after seeing "Ayash". He was very interested in Jim [Morris]'s idea of taking a legend and making it into a play. Tomson wanted to do his own stuff. (1993)

Before the tour, the company was invited to Peterborough to the International Indigenous Theatre Festival which included many performances from various countries. Northern Delights did a presentation of "Ayash" as a 'work-in-progress'. Linklater, who was the Artistic Director from 1982-1984, explained that they were able to participate in several workshops, which included mime, movement and mask work.

It was quite a production. But, at that same time, in Peterborough, Rene [Highway], who had been a teacher at Tukak Teatret, told me about the school in Denmark. I met Reidar Nilsson, whose company was performing at the conference, and he invited me to come to his school. So, I got a grant from Canada Council and went to Tukak in 1983. At that time, I had been interested in setting up a school, like Tukak. (Linklater 1993)

Their next show, in 1984, was "And The Dream Was", by Jim Morris. The actors included Linklater and Makka Kleist under the direction of Muriel Miguel [Spiderwoman Theatre]. While on tour, the company went under and the tour was cut short. Linklater added that:

I worked there for two years without getting paid. I didn't know very much about the administrative part of running a theatre and the Board wasn't really involved with the company enough. The Board couldn't find any money. The only time I got paid was when we worked on different projects. I was really young back then and I had a young son. We were on welfare, it was really tough. So, in 1984, when our tour was cut, I went to Toronto to work with Native Earth. I had worked with them before, on their first show ["Native Images In Transition" 1982], and this time, it was the [Pochinko] clown workshop with Ian Wallace and the production, "Clown Trickster's Workshop". (1993)

Linklater explained the importance of the early work of Keith Turnbull, Tomson Highway and Larry Lewis in the early development of Native theatre:

I'd have to say that Keith and the others at NDWT are the ones who really got me interested in theatre. And I think those people weren't acknowledged enough for their contribution to Native theatre. They were the ones that took a chance on there being an audience out there, that there were people interested in hearing Native stories.

And they wanted to develop that audience. That's why we got involved and, I think, that's where Tomson saw what they were trying to do and that's what Tomson did. He was able to do that, develop those stories. We were looking at training actors, the physicality of theatre. But Tomson saw that it had to be more than that, you have to start with the writers, you have to start with the voice. And that's what he did, through Native Earth. There isn't enough acknowledgement for people like Keith Turnbull, and Larry Lewis, for what they've done in terms of Native theatre. They should be acknowledged formally. (1993)

A small reserve in Hobbemma, Alberta was the home of the "FOUR WINDS THEATRE" from 1986 to 1991. Darrell Wildcat, from the Ermineskin First Nation, was a student at the Native Theatre School in the early eighties along with his wife, Laurie. Wildcat later became Artistic Director of the school for the summers of 1983 and 84. Two other people whom they met at the school ended up in Alberta and they decided to pool their talents to set up their own theatre company. "We just started working here in Hobbemma first", explains Laurie, "then it just spread, people from other reserves heard about it, were interested, so we got contracts to go out and it was non-stop after that".

Some of the objectives of "Four Winds" were:

To keep alive their sense of identity as Aboriginal people.

To raise awareness and discussion of important issues.

To use theatre as a tool to push forward ideas.

To enable the community to identify changes.

Their shows were geared toward Native audiences and dealt with issues of concern to their people. Funding came mostly from various organizations in Alberta and from the Band.

As with Native Earth, the Trickster was an important element in all of Wildcat's plays, starting with "Dreamstick". This play dealt with teenagers approaching adulthood who needed to break down the romantic images of life in order to survive. They did this with the help of the Tricksters guiding them on their journey.

"It's My Life" was developed out of the need to address the issue of suicide among the young, an important topic that was not being addressed by the community. Working alongside the community, they gathered information and conducted interviews with those directly affected by the suicide issue and eventually developed the story. The story follows the journey of a young man, who, wanting to commit suicide, is greatly influenced by his brother, who already took his own life. Wildcat explains that:

The two aspects of spirituality we follow are life and death. We don't say death is bad; when it comes naturally, it's part of life, but when it's cut short, it becomes unnatural. (qtd. in Wheeler 1991)

"Vicious Circle" examines the cycle of abuse found in certain families who were previously victimized by the residential school systems. Children at these schools were disciplined through corporal punishment and grew up thinking that it was acceptable. The aboriginal people have picked up some unfavourable patterns and passed them on to the next generation. As Wildcat says, "What we're trying to do is find out where we learned to strike our kids" (qtd. in Wheeler 1991).

"Four Winds" also created a children's puppet show called "Dining Out With Weesageechak". It mostly toured the reserves and also performed a couple of shows in Edmonton schools that had a high Native population.

Their last show, which toured from January to April 1991, was called "History - Our Story" and was about the history of the residential schools. The tour went all across Alberta and into parts of British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

Recently, Wildcat has been working at the Ermineskin school teaching drama and is presently writing a new play at the playwrights workshop at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

In a recent interview with Laurie Wildcat (Darrell's wife), she explained the problems that they encountered in the later years:

We were over-worked. I was running the company with my husband and there were only five of us working. [Their actors at that time included Darrell, Laurie, her sister, a woman from South America and her husband who was from northern Alberta.] We have two small children that we took on the tours with us all the time and it just got too much. We were touring twenty days out of the month. We also couldn't find anyone else qualified to work with us as actors, not for the tour schedules that we set up. They were pretty gruesome. Long term. Also, we like to stay reserve-based so that we don't have to deal with any of the tax problems. And a lot of the actors that we do know are from the city and they don't like to move out to the reserve. That was one of our criteria that they had to move out here. But the city is where the work comes from. So it was part of the problem in keeping things going. We tried some people but it just didn't work out, it was a hit and miss type thing. I got to the point where it was just too much for everyone. We just had to close it down, we couldn't take it any longer. (Laurie Wildcat 1993)

In 1986, the Manitoba Puppet Theatre in Winnipeg had a Native component called "Awasikan", which in Cree means "child-like spirit coming out". In order to broaden their scope and attract more Aboriginal people to theatre, the group incorporated itself as an independent theatre in the summer of 1989 to become "AWASIKAN THEATRE INC."

In the beginning, working out of Prairie Theatre Exchange's old space (they moved into a new space in Portage Place), the Arts Councils were generous, donating about \$50,000 towards their first productions. Marilyn McGillivray, the Artistic Director, found that the theatre community in Winnipeg was receptive to the idea and she also received moral support from Manitoba-born Tomson Highway.

Awasikan's long term goals were ambitious:

To operate a professional theatre year-round.

To act as a resource centre for Aboriginal artists interested in the performing arts.

To create a theatre school for Native people.

They had hoped to present three plays in their first season, including one new script by a Native playwright. (As a comparison, Native Earth still only produces two shows a year with eight script-development workshops in one annual festival.)

Awasikan's first venture in the spring of 1990 was co-sponsoring the touring production of Floyd Favel's "All My Relations" which originated at Edmonton's Catalyst Theatre. This production sold out for three nights from April 10-12 and demonstrated that there was an audience in the city for Aboriginal artists.

Due to the scarcity of professional Native actors in Winnipeg, Awasikan advertised for people interested in acting. With a promise to train a certain number of people to perform in their productions, they got an overwhelming response. They preferred to work with local Native performers instead of flying in experienced, professional actors or hiring professional actors who could 'pass' as being Native.

Their first production was a play by Montrealers, John and Gordon Selkirk, called "The Land Called Morning". The play takes place on a reserve in northern Saskatchewan and deals with two young teenage couples trying to make sense of the world around them. ["The Land Called Morning" had two previous productions. The first performance, with four people who had never ventured onto a stage before, was at the Edmonton Fringe Festival in August, 1985,

and the second was in Quebec the following summer, with the same cast.)

Awasikan's four actors, Louis Ogemah, Rebecca Chartrand, Elaine Chartrand and Darrel Myher, made their professional stage debut with this first production. They opened Wednesday, May 30, 1990, for a three-night run at the Gas Station Theatre in Winnipeg.

The reviews were not favourable. The main point being criticized was that Awasikan was calling itself a professional theatre company but did not meet the accepted standards. Randal McIlroy commented on this issue:

This was not a play. This was an early rehearsal that happened to take place before a paying audience. Acting was almost non-existent....the direction was always half as fast as needed, with yawning chasms of pauses. It will take more than the hopefulness of these virtual stage neophytes to do the job". (McIlroy 1990)

McIlroy does offer some suggestions, though. He believes that they should have started "slower and smaller, beginning in the rehearsal hall, and save looking for wider exposure until they're ready". He also suggested that they find better material. He thought that "The Land Called Morning" was muddled and lacked the crucial elements that were unique to the teenagers living on a remote reserve (McIlroy 1990).

Their second production, "Aweena Neena", was written by local Ojibwa playwright, Tina Mason [later author of "Diva Ojibway"] and was performed at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival in July. "Aweena Neena", or "Who am I?" in Cree, had a cast of seven actors, including the same cast from the first show.

The play examined the conflict between the contemporary and traditional ways of living as seen through the eyes of a young teenage girl, played by Rebecca Chartrand. Through legends told to her by her grandfather, portrayed by Darrell Myran, she gains an understanding and awareness of her people and their culture. "Aweena Neena" used a combination of both contemporary and traditional styles and as McGillivray points out:

There has to be a balance with the new world and the old. It's not realistic to be totally traditional and we can't be totally contemporary because we lose our identity as Aboriginal people. (qtd. in Wheeler 10)

In October, 1990, they began rehearsals on their third production with the same cast and two additional actors, Joy Keeper [a graduate of the Native Theatre School] and newcomer, seventeen-year-old Ojibway, Dawn Roach. This was a play written by another

cal playwright, Duncan Mercredi, with the working title "The Bearded Purse". The title was later changed to "Dancer In My Dreams". The play dealt with the sensitive issues of suicide and child abuse at residential schools but the play never got produced. According to Mercredi, there were several problems during rehearsals:

There were some pretty graphic scenes but I didn't want to water them down any more than they were because it would have taken away from the story. Also, one of the actresses was objecting to the re-writes that were being done by another actress without my knowledge [a definite faux pas]. I couldn't be there all the time during rehearsals, I have a regular job, but apparently, the teenagers working on the show were having major nightmares. They were trying to bring in an elder to work with the group. It just didn't work out. (Mercredi 1993)

Writer and journalist, Jordan Wheeler, defended the inexperienced actors and directors and argued that criticisms of Awasikan's plays were, instead, linked to the lack of understanding of Aboriginal people:

Aboriginal humour just isn't understood. Nor is silence. Pauses in Awasikan's plays have been criticized for being too long and too frequent. For the Aboriginal person, silence and stillness are as important as sound and action. Mainstream theatre strives to fill every corner of a play with words and action while Awasikan threw moments void of sound and action, all over the place. Non-Aboriginal people squirmed during these moments. Aboriginal people listened to the silence. (1990)

McGillivray, unfortunately, could not be reached for comment. But, it appears that the reasons for Awasikan's demise, except for the probability of the lack of funds, included their lack of experience in developing material for the stage, the lack of an experienced creative team and, more importantly, the lack of experienced administrative staff.

Margo Charlton is the Artistic Director of The Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba and has been working in Winnipeg for some time. She gave McGillivray encouragement during the early years of Awasikan but is not quite sure what happened to them after their last production, "Bootlegger Blues", which went quite well. She ponders on the demise of Awasikan:

Marilynn is not involved in theatre any more, she's working at the University. I don't know exactly what happened to Awasikan, but I think it closed down for a combination of different reasons. Funding is hard and as a new company, they lacked experience, but I think they

were on the right track. It was a really big improvement from the first show to the last one and there was a lot of hope. It's unfortunate. Marilyn didn't have a theatre background and that might have been their weakness, in the long run. Although she certainly had the will and the drive. But, in their last show, the acting was tighter, there had been a big improvement. I don't know why they went down when they did, but I think the strain of keeping something like that together is pretty tough. (Charlton 1993)

Floyd Favel and Drew Taylor comment on the failure of Awasikan and the situation in western Canada:

It is due to their lack of professionalism. [Some Native people] do not want to ally themselves with non-native producers. I associated myself with a professional theatre who had an administration that was set, fax machines, everything and so I just asked them. They agreed to help fundraise, write grants with my name on it and with my ideas and projects....as long as the proposal was good and sound they [funding bodies] would give you money. It is much easier out west because there is no Native Theatre out there. I think people want to see more Native Theatre. (Favel 1993)

Well there was Darrell Wildcat's Four Winds in Hobbema, and of course, the ever present question is 'Spirit Song, dead yet?' It doesn't seem to be as strong out there as it is here in Ontario. I don't know why that is. Could be just population based, the fact that, Toronto is the third largest English-speaking theatre city in the world, right after London and New York. From what I've been told, there's more theatre here than in Los Angeles. (Taylor 1993)

Overall, the demise of Native theatre companies can be attributed to a variety of reasons. Location plays a large part in the continued success of a company in the way of the unavailability of local professional people, lack of resources, and possibly, the lack of demand. A play can only be staged for so long in a small community and touring is expensive. The big problem, however, remains financial.

CHAPTER THREE

TRAINING

MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

In Canada, there are many Universities and Colleges with programs in Theatre and Drama. They vary in duration, accreditation and specialization.

The most prominent schools that specialize in theatrical training are limited. The National Theatre School in Montreal is a three-year program and the most highly recognized in the country. The Ryerson Polytechnical Institute has just become Ryerson University. The Ryerson Theatre School, once a three-year diploma course in either Acting, Dance or Technical Theatre, is now a four-year Degree Program. The University of Alberta, in Edmonton, is also a four-year Degree program. York University, in Toronto, is noted for its Graduate Studies in Directing and Performance. These four schools carry a high reputation. The Banff Centre for the Arts conducts summer and winter courses, workshops and conferences in all aspects of the arts. They have a very popular summer program in theatre.

The list of First Nations people who have graduated from these mainstream Universities is very small. [This list does not include the many writers who have formal education, including Tomson Highway, Daniel David Moses and Drew Taylor.] The National Theatre School has graduated Alanis King (1992), Artistic Director of De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig; August Schellenberg (1966), actor in such films as "Black Robe"; Garrison Chrisjohn, a Vancouver Native and Denis Lacroix, one of the founding members of Native Earth. The Ryerson Theatre School graduate is actor, Pamela Matthews; Carol Greyeyes, is a graduate of the Masters Program at York University; Lorne Cardinal just graduated from the University of Alberta Acting Program (1993); Shane Cunningham is a recent graduate of the acting program at the University of Calgary; and directors Robin Melting Tallow and Amethyst First Rider, who live in Calgary, have also completed degrees in theatre. [Apologies to anyone left off this list.]

Many of these graduates have been influential in encouraging others to enrol in schools for training. Schellenberg was an important influence on Floyd Favel and Denis Lacroix to study. Favel subsequently trained for many years in Europe studying classical methods, as did Tomson Highway, while Lacroix went on to the National Theatre School.

Billy Merasty, a successful actor and playwright, was born and raised on his reserve. He attended Ryerson Theatre School for just

er a year and trained for a summer at the Native Theatre School. He describes the importance of his training at Ryerson:

People encouraged me to take more training because I had potential, but it was rough and raw and needed a focus. I found the first year quite valuable. It gave me a good technical base, to develop the body, the instrument, at a very base level. I learned a lot from that, and to this day, I benefit from that experience. But, I was offered the lead in a film, so I had to debate whether I should stay in school or do the film. I talked it over with administration and they suggested that either I could refuse it or take it, in which case I would take a year off from school and come back the following year. Since they gave me that option, I decided to take it. But I've been working ever since and never got around to going back to Ryerson. (Merasty 1993)

Pamela Matthews is a graduate of the Ryerson Theatre School and also spent a year at the University of Calgary. She found the acting program in Calgary inadequate so she applied to Ryerson. It was a much more concentrated study in acting techniques, which she, too, found very valuable. She continues to encourage young actors to obtain some solid training. The main drawback at Ryerson, she added, was that the classes were too large (Matthews 1993).

Carol Grey Eyes understands the importance of full-time intense training. She comments that:

The only thing I can say, though, is that people need to have more experience, Native actors have to have more training. Absolutely. (Greyeyes 1993)

Shane Cunningham is a recent graduate of the University of Calgary. He enjoyed the program and found it suitable for his needs. He did mostly mainstream shows, but he did learn a lot of different techniques, he feels all actors should. But, he does comment that there were no other Native people in his class, except Joe Pierre, but he dropped out for personal reasons, not because of the school itself (Cunningham 1993). The other schools in Alberta to learn theatre technique are the University of Alberta; Mount Royal College in Calgary, a two year program; Grant McEwen College in Edmonton and the seasonal programs at the Banif Centre for the Arts.

NATIVE THEATRE SCHOOL

The Native Theatre School was formed in 1974 by Jim Buller and the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts [ANDPVA]. Noting the serious lack of unique training for First Nations people, the Native Theatre School "gives people of Native ancestry the opportunity to explore and express their personal and

cultural experience through the art of performance" and incorporates "self-confidence, self-expression and cultural identity". The school has had many influential directors over the years, including Darrell Wildcat (Four Winds Theatre) in 1983-84 followed by Cat Cayuga in 1985, the first Native woman to direct the school. The school is open to students, 19 and over, who are of Native ancestry.

Floyd Favel, Artistic Director for the past three years, and himself a 1983 summer student, describes his vision on "Native Performance Culture" in the 1993 brochure:

Each nation, country, locale of the world has its own tradition of art dating back hundreds or thousands of years. Each classical tradition has its literature, its history, its song and dance. All major theatrical revolution begins with people going back to their roots. We begin by examining our roots, as theatre artists and as Native people.

The investigation of body techniques emerges as a starting point which supports our song, dance, mask and myth in the research of a Native type of performance.

We are not after the presentation of folklore or ritual on the stage. We are undertaking a search that is different because it has not been done before - a marriage between tradition and the contemporary stage, the development of a performer's training.

We are exploring the distinct cultural use of the body and voice - the performer's instrument. By gathering, learning, mastering and then taking the unique performative virtues indicated in our dances and in songs in relation to the modern stage, something new and transcendent will be born....an innovative art form, a disciplined performance. (Favel 1993)

The eight week program includes training in traditional Native and Western performance and theatrical techniques, such as voice, movement, work ethics, mask, singing, dancing, drumming, storytelling, improvisation and performance with a variety of Native and non-native instructors. A collective creation is devised and rehearsed in weeks five and six, and then toured in the final two weeks.

The school is located in the isolated, rural setting of the Beaver Valley, near Owen Sound, in Heathcote on Kimbercote Farm. The staff and students live communally in the farmhouse and use the barn as their studio. The program states that "participants are expected to help in all daily chores". The cost of the program this year is \$2400, which includes instruction, room and board, production costs, tour costs and a field trip. Students must provide their own spending money and transportation to and from

Toronto. The school will provide information on financial aid/subsidies if needed.

The list of supporters of the school is extensive and includes The Canada Council, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, Pathways Job Development Program, Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications, Theatre Ontario Youth Training Program, Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, Toronto Arts Council, Canadian Native Arts Foundation, Kahnawake Education Centre, The Viobir Family Foundation, Clare Walker Casting, Bell Canada, Rio Algom Ltd., Accent Entertainment, INCO Ltd., National Trust, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Caledon Enterprises, The Canadian Friends Service Committee, O.E. Company of Canada, Becker Automotive, The Second Cup and Blyth Festival, Native Earth Performing Arts, Inc., De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group, The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto and many friends in the community.

Unlike the Ryerson Theatre School, for example, the staff and training team at the Native Theatre School outnumber the student body [usually twelve]. The core training team [First Nations] for the summer of 1992 included, along with Favel, Monique Mojica and Jani Lauzon as Associate Artistic Directors and Edna Manitowabi as Traditional Cultural Director. The Professional Resource Training Team included Art Solomon, Drum Making; John Snake, Ojibwa traditional drumming and singing; Wes Whetung, Sweat Lodge teaching; Muriel Miguel, Story Weaving; Louis Mofsie, traditional southern plains drumming, songs and dances and Sadie Buck, traditional Iroquois songs and dances. Lisa Longboat was the Stage Manager. The other team members from Toronto include David Smukler, a well-known voice and text instructor, Patrick Matheson as the Technical Consultant and John Kelly Cuthbertson, a regular crew member for NEPA, for Set Production.

The 1992 final production was entitled "The Incredible Joy of Being Herd" and was based loosely on Euripides' "The Trojan Women" in which the grieving widows and daughters of Troy are divided up among the victorious generals as spoils of war. Favel explains this choice:

The situation of these defeated women parallels the cultural position of Native people. Our Troy happened and is still happening. Troy was a matriarchy destroyed by Greek patriarchy. This same reversal happened to Indian society where women were leaders. The white man brought to the Americas a destructive and fascistic male voice. (qtd. in Citron 1992)

Last year the final tour included, after the original production at Kimbircote Farm, Parry Island, Sagamok First Nation, Sucker Creek, Temagami, Blyth Festival, the Mississaugas of New Credit, the Kingston Prison for women and the DeMaurier Theatre at

rbourfront in Toronto. The 1991 tour included some of the above locations but also featured performances in the north. Air Creebec Inc. generously donated tickets for the entire company to fly into the James Bay area to perform in Moose Factory, Moosonee, Fort Albany and Kashechewan. A final graduation ceremony and feast took place at the Native Canadian Centre in Toronto.

Along with several of the aforementioned instructors, the 1991 staff included Rose Stella as Assistant Director, Marie Annharte Baker, poet and writer; Jeff Henry from York University teaching mask and movement; Billy Merasty teaching acting technique; and Paul Thompson, then Director General of the National Theatre School, as Production Consultant.

Past 'graduates' of the summer Native Theatre School who have continued on to a successful career include Floyd Favel, Billy Merasty, Gary Farmer, Graham Greene, Wayne LaRiviere, Ron Cook, Kenneth Charlette, Rhonda Cardinal, Vince Manitowabi and Jules (Galipeau) Koostachin, to name a few.

Vince Manitowabi was a student in 1992 and says:

The resource people that they brought in were really good. They gave a lot of their time and energy, all the instructors, guests, cultural resource people and others; I already knew a lot of them from home, my mother (Edna Manitowabi) was there. She was the Elder, sort of like a cultural advisor. It was a good experience, I learned a lot. (Manitowabi 1993)

Billy Merasty describes the summer program as a unique experience:

Before that I had been making my living working in offices doing clerical, reception and typing work and all that monotonous stuff. So, I figured (the school) would be worth a try. It was such a scary idea, back then. And Native Earth hardly existed, it was really still a concept. Since Native theatre school had been going on for several years and I had seen some troupes, I decided to jump into it and take a chance on it. I decided to commit myself to theatre. It was really a wonderful summer, because I was surrounded by people my own age who were interested in theatre and were wanting to see it developed. Everyone had big plans, huge imaginations, were wonderfully creative and we were being given an opportunity to do mask work, movement, dance, acting exercises, everything about theatre. That's how I met Floyd. And we really connected. It was really nice to be surrounded by people who had no previous experience in theatre but were genuinely interested. It was a very inspiring time for me. (Merasty 1993)

On October, 1992, Vinetta Strombergs assumed the position of General Manager for the Native Theatre School. She has had a long association with the Native Theatre community through Native Earth and De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre. There are a few new faces at the school this summer including successful dancer, Michael Greyeyes. He will be teaching movement and dance and is looking forward to learning more about theatre as opposed to dance. Maariu Olsen from Greenland will also be part of the team. Strombergs added that many people will be returning, including Muriel Miguel, David Smukler, Sadie Buck, Louis Mofsie and Edna Manitolowabi.

SPIRIT SONG NATIVE INDIAN THEATRE COMPANY

In 1977, an organization called the "Native Indian Youth Advisory Committee" [NIYAS] was formed in Vancouver to address the needs and concerns of Aboriginal youth. Two years later, board member, Brenda Taylor, was approached by Campbell Smith, a (non-native) director who was attempting to cast a play called "Juve" that he was directing. Taylor, always interested in theatre, obliged and sent him two dozen teenagers to audition for this production which was planning a tour in Europe. Unfortunately, Smith did not hire any. Taylor, was obviously disappointed, but began to think about the possibility of doing an all-Native youth play in the summer.

By the summer of 1981, Taylor had formed a group of six teenagers, 13 to 16, who were interested in writing and performing their own play. She called in Smith to direct and he agreed. The youth decided to call themselves "Spirit Song" and they were on their way. Lynn Phelan [Sen'klip] joined the team as General Manager [1981-86] and Margo Kane soon came on as the first Artistic Director from 1982 to the fall of 1984. Over the years, they grew from a Native Youth Summer Theatre (eight weeks) into a full time training program.

Wayne LaRiviere began his long association with Spirit Song as a stage manager in March 1985, which led him to study at the Native Theatre School in Ontario the following summer. He then started Spirit Song's nine month acting program that fall, then the Voice Intensive at Simon Fraser University. In 1989, Wayne took the vacant position of Administrator at Spirit Song, then went on to study Arts Administration at the Banff School of Management. When he returned to Vancouver, he took over as Artistic Director.

The company runs out of a small space on Broadway which consists of a few small rooms for props and supplies, a box-office, reception area, green room and a kitchen. The rehearsal/performance space is very small with low ceilings and holds about 35-40 in its audience. They are currently renovating their space, painting, laying carpet and improving the lobby. In addition, LaRiviere has an office space on the Musqueam Reserve in Vancouver.

The lack of funding is their main worry but they are learning of new avenues. Only LaRiviere is on a full-time salary and their space costs \$1,000.00 per month. They apply to every grant possible [the province, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, corporations, etc.] and rely a lot on fund-raisers. Once a year they hold their "Casino Night". The most recent was held at the "Royal Diamond" where they made a substantial amount [it helped that it was Halloween and there was a big concert in the area!] and once a month they hold a bingo in nearby Burnaby. They get more support from the non-native communities than the Native communities. "For instance", added LaRiviere, "less than half of the Native communities in the area are seeing their shows on a regular basis" (1993).

LaRiviere believes that the company has helped to establish a place for Native actors and technicians in the Vancouver area and that it has helped to make changes and open doors for Native people interested in the performing arts. In a 1990 advertisement, LaRiviere commented that "Our company works as a great stepping stone into the professional world."

Spirit Song offers three different programs: a nine-month full-time program [shortened later to seven], an 8-week summer program [which has been recently changed to a 7-week course due to cut-backs], and a series of on-going classes and workshops with a variety of instructors. They also co-sponsor a summer camp in Gibsons [Charlene Aleck] for approximately 20 inner-city kids, 13-19 years of age.

The full-time theatre training program was designed to blend traditional cultural performance with European stage techniques. This program accepts sixteen Native students from across British Columbia and was designed to provide them with a full range of European acting workshops including voice, movement and improv. Simultaneously, the students were to study Native singing and drumming techniques with the emphasis on the philosophy and traditions of Native culture. Run in connection with Vancouver Community College's King Edward Campus, they hoped to bridge the gap between the two cultures with this unique mixture of stylistic training.

In "BC Youth", a newsletter published by the B.C. Youth Advisory Council, LaRiviere promotes his nine-month full-time program saying:

Spirit Song stages a number of public performances during the year, with a mix of specific cultural shows and contemporary plays. Even though the students come from a variety of different Native backgrounds, everyone is here for the same goal - to become proficient at acting skills. There's a lot of exposure in the end for our students, and we invite casting directors and people in

the industry to come and see them....A program like Spirit Song is one of the best ways to accommodate our acceptance into the performing arts. By proving our worth as professionals, either behind the scenes or on stage, it's helping to make positive changes....We use our Native brotherhood and sisternood images to grow together.' Theatrical experience isn't necessary - just a strong commitment to a career in the performing arts. (qtd. in "Spirit Song")

The year-round course includes 'technical' training as well as an 'audio-visual' division. For technical training, as well as working on their own shows during the year, they are sent out to work on other mainstream productions.

Most recently, in April 1993, many of Spirit Song's students did technical work on Tamahnous Theatre's production of "Paradise and the Wasteland" at Performance Works under the direction of Teri Snelgrove [who had worked with Kane on "Moonlodge"] and Dennis Maracle, an up-and-coming Native director [he co-directed "The Rez Sisters" at Sunshine Theatre in the summer of 1992]. This five-hour production was HUGE, with a large cast, including Sam Bob in the role of King Arthur, and a larger crew and was very technically demanding, a wonderful training ground.

A recent addition to the full-time course involved 'audio-visual' techniques. This portion of the training is varied and rather vague. One project involved the students directing and producing a 5-7 minute promotional video, with younger actors, with the hopes of encouraging others to undertake training. Another project had the students tape a local Native band, the "Indian Dogs".

Over the years, one of Spirit Song's greatest problems, aside from funding woes, has been to find Native people who are qualified to teach acting. Within the Native community, the list of guest instructors and workshop co-ordinators include (other than Margo Kane) Marianne Jones and Charlene Aleck [Beachcombers], Denise Brillon, Annie Fraser, Leonard Fisher, Sam Bob, Marie Humber and Michelle Thrush. Fraser, a poet and actress, and Brillon have been working in the performing arts for some time. Marie Humber, an actor/writer, is an alumna from two years ago and since then, has had regular training with Margo Kane, workshops with Linda Darlow and Peter Breck, and acquired many professional credits. Humber conducts several workshops. Meanwhile, Thrush is very new to the business with little theatre background.

One of the instructors for the on-going series was Jay Simonsohn, an experienced actor and instructor from the United Kingdom. Simonsohn conducted two different courses in October, 1992, with 8-10 students per class. The first was an 'Introductory Course to Acting' and was to cover topics such as 'Acting as an art

form or business'; 'The Audition (form and protocol)'; 'Elementary understanding of the monologue, scene and play'; 'Technique - Relaxation, breathing, voice, movement, rhythm, and speech'; 'Character building'; 'Understanding the Text' and 'Guides towards performance'. The fee for this introductory course was \$100.00 and consisted of four sessions of four hours each, for a total of (only) 16 hours.

The second series of classes was the 'Intermediate Course for Acting' and was to 'build upon the techniques described above' including 'Television/film vs. Theatre-differences in style'; 'The monologue as it relates to audition technique'; 'Advanced interpretation and understanding of text and scene'; 'Advanced character building' and 'Group work towards performance'. This intense course was covered in (a mere) 16 hours.

In August, 1992, the graduating students of the Spirit Song Theatre Arts Program presented their final project, a one-act play entitled "The Shape Shifter" [A Horror In One Act]. It was written and directed by Ronnie Way and "inspired" by Cliff Red Crow, Aaron Fox, Mark Handley and Denis Belland, the graduating students.

Set in a burial cave on the west coast of B.C., two Native men set out on a camping trip which ends in a cave of spirits, an eerie, spiritual experience that tests their friendship and trust. Aaron Fox plays John White Raven while Denis Belland plays his friend, Jim Eagle Feather. Cliff Red Crow, who played Wasetuma, also worked on the make-up, props, costumes and scenic art with the help of Keith Gow. Music was by Paul Horn except The Coastal Chant was written and performed by Sylvi. Way designed the sound, while the stage and lighting was designed by Scott Richardson. During the run of the show, Way and LaRiviere operated the lights and sound.

Several alumnae talk about their experience at Spirit Song. Marie Humber took the 7-month course two years ago:

It was really good for a starter....based on a couple of levels. It was good for getting back to our culture and that kind of thing, that was a big deal. And also learning theatre basics and being able to be in touch with other native artists and net-work that way, to exchange a lot of ideas. (Humber 1993)

The students in Humber's class at that time included Darrell Guss, Carmen Moore, Sherri Maracle and Dolores Dallas (there were a few others but they dropped in and out). She says that they got along well and did several public presentations during the year with one final at the end. She believes that the courses at Spirit Song really help in the training of Native people and is especially good for support. She learned a lot from the guest instructors, the casting directors who taught film technique and the Native instructors.

Dolores Dallas, an artist and painter, took the full-time program in 1989. She confesses that she didn't know what she was getting into, that it was more than she had expected. She talks about her experience:

Taking the initiative to apply at Spirit Song was taking the risk of my life. I was 43 years old and the program was for Native youth so I thought I would be rejected. I took the chance and got accepted. It opened another art form for me that I never knew I was capable of doing. It helped me realize that creativity has no limits. Being older, there is a need for some of us to come out and say it's okay if you are interested in this, 'go for it', if you have any interest in it, do it. I want to tell the older people this: it's good for your heart and soul. (Dallas 1993)

Since then, Dallas has been working on her own performance piece called "In The Shadow of Light". It centres on the theme of rape, the rape of the human body and the rape of Mother Earth. She believes that society needs to open up their eyes, that it is a social need, not just a Native need. She also strongly believes that we need our own people to tell our own stories. "Theatre is a good way for people to open up, to make people listen, to make changes and recognize the chaos in the world" (Dallas 1993).

Mark Handley, who has been living in Vancouver for three years, grew up in an adopted home. He had only found out in 1990 about his true Native background. In October of 1991, when doing some extra work, someone on the set suggested that he call Spirit Song. A few months later, Handley auditioned for the Theatre Arts Program (Acting and Audio-Visual) and got accepted. As part of their course, their first assignment was "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe" at the Firehall Theatre. The experience was really good, he says, and he learned a lot from the actors (Columpa Bobb and Michael Lawrenchuk) and the directors (Donna Spencer and Dennis Maracle). It was his initiation to acting, he adds. He also studied some video techniques and he got a chance to go out in the community and work with Loretta Todd, an excellent native film-maker. Despite the lack of Native instructors, Handley says that Spirit Song opened up new avenues for him, he was able to make regular contact with his own people and the Native community. Prior to this, growing up in a non-native environment, he had no native cultural background. He was given a much needed sense of identity (Handley 1993).

LaRiviere works very hard. What keeps him going? "The success rate of our alumnae....they're doing well. We must be doing something right. The guidance and leadership established by its administration and board speaks for itself....because they are the ones continually challenging the system to keep the place going" (1993).

This year, one of their graduates was nominated for a Jessie Richardson Theatre Award (an equivalent to Toronto's Dora Mavor Moore Awards for excellence in theatre). Carmen Moore received a nomination for Best Supporting Actress for "Danceland". Carmen Moore has generated a huge following, adds LaRiviere, garnering a lot of respect from the non-native community. That itself "inspires us to continue, knowing that we have the strong youth, the talent at such a young age, to carry us well into the 21st century" (1993).

LaRiviere is very proud of the accomplishments of the Native actors in Vancouver. Last June 1992, at the 10th Annual Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards, three Native actors were nominated in various categories. Sam Bob was nominated for his performance in "Out of The Silence", a Headlines Theatre production and Michael Lawrenchuk was nominated for his performance in "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe". Columpa C. Bobb won the Sam Payne Award for Outstanding Newcomer for her performance as Rita Joe in the production of "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe". This June, Dennis Maracle ("Paradise and the Wasteland") won a Jessie Award for Most Promising Director of 1993.

In the future, they hope to continue to tackle the need to generate interest among Native people to enter the performing arts, "a medium that isn't terribly foreign but certainly misrepresented". Every year they get a whole new group of people who are interested in Spirit Song. The interest that is generated is feeding the company. He hasn't done a lot of acting himself....he's helping others get into the business so that they don't have to go through the hardships that he had to go through as a young actor.

LaRiviere and Brenda Taylor are planning a big fund-raising campaign and the production of a promotional video. Every year becomes more challenging, he says, because of the money value. They hope to be able to produce better quality shows....the talent has changed in the last two or three years, he says, they are more focused, more dedicated, committed. They are highly motivated. He also wants to be able to find more Native instructors and get more support from the Native community. Right now, "it's a labour of love" (LaRiviere 1993).

THE EN'OWKIN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF WRITING

The En'owkin International School of Writing is a two-year credit program leading to a certificate in First Nations Creative Writing awarded jointly by the En'owkin Centre and the University of Victoria. The purpose of the school is to assist First Nations writers to find their voice as writers and to encourage them to interpret and record First Nations experiences through First Nations eyes. Although they do not specialize in playwriting, they have, as part of their school, a second year university level

course in script writing. Director, Jeanette Armstrong talks about her work in developing and encouraging Native playwriting:

We've been talking to Sen'k'lip about a collaborative effort. We are trying to provide a service to them in terms of studio space and programs that they can utilize to develop their theatre skills better, and to workshop some of their scripts. We want to help increase their potential by collaborating with them this fall on a series of workshops that we would co-sponsor with them here at the writing school and make it more available to other people who might be interested in writing drama. Essentially, since we have a number of people who are drama writers and a drama writing instructor and we have a number of theatres in the area, whether it's Vancouver, Calgary, whatever, then we are going to need good script writers. The Native theatre groups, out here, do not have enough original new material coming out seasonally. Out east, they have a good working ground, but there is a serious lack out here. We could use more playwrights across Canada. What we want to do is pull together a series of modular workshops that other people can attend on a tuition basis and not have it tied to accreditation. Most of the people in theatre are not concerned about getting a degree, they're concerned about the experience. So, we want to work with the local existing theatre companies and link up with their dramatists and writers. We also try to bring dramatists in to do residency workshops for a week or a couple of days. We actually tried to bring Spiderwoman in, but we couldn't afford the cost of bringing in the whole company, so when they were here in (Vancouver) B.C., we brought our students to them to do a two-day workshop. And we paid for that. But during the year we usually bring people into the school who are already in the field, people who have experience. For example, Floyd Favel and Margo Kane. We want to expose them to as many different senior artists as possible. It promotes those senior artists and makes their approaches accessible. It also enhances and enriches the students here by giving them a variety of points of view. But we are definitely promoting interest in playwriting. The problem here in Penticton is, that we don't have access to the kind of theatre that you have in Toronto, where you can go to a play almost every night. We have to make special excursions to see theatre or wait for theatre to come here. (Armstrong 1993)

BEN CALF ROBE/SASKATOON NATIVE SURVIVAL SCHOOL

Ben Calf Robe School in Edmonton, and the Saskatoon Native Survival School in Saskatoon, are two Aboriginal Schools that use theatre as a major part of their curriculum.

This program at Ben Calf Robe, still in effect today, is a part of the option program where the students, in grades 7 to 9, have a choice, twice a week, whether they want to do traditional Indian dancing, drama or beading. Some of them take the drama course, for which they hire a Native instructor, which usually culminates in a show.

Ruth Smillie, Artistic Director of Catalyst Theatre in Edmonton, has played a large role in the early success of these programs. At Ben Calf Robe, Smillie directed the young cast in a collective creation called "Which Way Home" in 1986 (Johnson 44). Since then, many professional actors have worked with the students. This list includes Tantoo Cardinal, Ben Cardinal and Floyd Favel. But it was back in 1981 when Smillie received her first call from the Saskatoon Native Survival School. This marked the beginnings of the first Native Survival School projects. The productions were "designed to give a strong voice to the experiences and dreams of inner-city kids" and provided the young actors and their audiences with an alternative vision (Johnson 45). The storytelling and collective techniques that she developed with the students are recorded in her book "Story Circles" (Johnson 44).

TAKWAKIN THEATRE

In 1990, Floyd Favel acquired some grant money to create the Takwakin project, a four-month project whose primary objective was to train Native actors. The program included physical training every morning, scene work and improv, among other things. The same actors eventually did a performance of "Requiem". Favel explains the enthusiasm for the program:

At Takwakin, we used to have presentations once a week, every Friday afternoon, where the students, the actors would present their week's work. And we'd have lots of relatives coming. And they would all come to the final production. We'd have the auditorium packed with all relatives, friends, relatives' friends, so for me that was the real inspiration, because then I thought, if only it could be like this all over. Aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces got involved in sewing, helping to build props, volunteer in box office, everything. (Favel 1993)

Four out of the five actors in this one-time-event have gone on to pursue careers in the performing arts: Rhonda Cardinal, Lee Crowchild, Carrie La Framboise and Warren Arcante. Laframboise, who lives in Saskatoon, attended the Native Theatre School in 1992 and just finished working at the Prairie Theatre Exchange. Cardinal, a graduate of the Ben Calf Robe School in Edmonton, also

attended the Native Theatre School last summer. Crowchild has a successful dance troupe called the Red Thunder Cultural Society in Calgary and Warren Arcante is a freelance writer who is presently working on a film script in Vancouver.

SUPPLEMENTARY COURSES

Along with formal training, most major cities, especially Toronto and Vancouver, offer many different courses covering all aspects of training.

In Toronto alone, there are a wide variety of courses that are conducted year round. Equity Showcase and CAST/The Centre for Actors Study in Toronto both offer various (introductory and advanced) year-round courses in scene study, voice, audition technique, acting for film and television, clown and classical text. Equity Showcase also conducts Directors' Workshops.

On the special request of Native Earth, several Native artists were given the opportunity to take a Director's Workshop with Richard Rose at Equity Showcase in the spring of this year. Tomson Highway, Doris Linklater, Floyd Favel and Jani Lauzon presented scenes at the end of the workshop period. Many others expressed interest in the course and more workshops are being considered for the future. This highly successful course has created further interest from the Native community.

The Theatre Resource Centre has recently offered courses in Contact Improv, Kinetics and a course on Clown Through Mask, which centres on the pioneering work of Richard Pochinko. This special course is designed to incorporate Native American and European clowning traditions. Other classes are conducted by notables [Theresa] Sears and [David] Switzer, comedy with R.H. Thomson, and Acting for the Camera with Gordon Pinsent, to name a few. Theatre Ontario holds summer courses as well as programs for youth. They also have several funding programs. The fees for these courses vary. Vancouver has a similar cross-section of courses conducted by such organizations as Simon Fraser University, which holds a Voice Intensive every spring; Studio 58; and Workshops in the Performing Arts [seasonal].

Jennifer Preston, General Manager of Native Earth, commented that it seemed that too many young actors are not taking advantage of some of the training available to them, including the supplementary courses offered throughout the city. In terms of funding, she added, there are moneys often available through the Canadian Native Arts Foundation and Employment and Immigration (1993).

MAINSTREAM EDUCATION - IS IT APPROPRIATE?

Despite the facilities available in Canada to train actors and other theatre professionals, and despite the efforts of Spirit Song and the Native Theatre School, almost all agree that training for Native performers is severely inadequate.

Many Native people have commented on the fact that, being unique to our present society and being a minority population, special considerations must be taken when devising training programs for First Nations People. Often, there are many drop-outs from these institutions in every faculty. The main problem seems to be that, Native students who come directly from the reserves, have a difficult time adapting to the different life styles and the rigours of the city. There are language barriers, cultural barriers and social barriers.

These topics were discussed in length at the recent Symposium in Toronto and can be reviewed under that heading.

FORMAL TRAINING AND/OR EXPERIENCE

There are many people in all areas of theatre, and in all other careers for that matter, who, lacking formal training, acquire much of their 'training' through experience. Over the last several years, Native Earth has been able to train artists in many different areas.

Stage Manager, Jeffrey Trudeau, acquired his training through direct experience with De-Ba-Jeh-mu-Jig Theatre and Native Earth without any formal schooling. In turn, he has been able to train others in the area of stage management.

Lisa Longboat was a stage management apprentice under Trudeau on "Fireweed" and the "Weesageechak Festival" in the fall of 1992. She is presently working at the Native Theatre School in stage management.

David Osawabine, who also worked with Trudeau, gained most of his stage management experience through apprenticeship positions at Native Earth and earlier work with De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre. In 1991 he was the Assistant Stage Manager on "Someday" (at the latter) before being sent to Native Earth to work on "Almighty Voice and His Wife" and "Night of the Trickster". Following that, he went to study stage management at the Banff Centre for the Arts in the summer of 1992. He commented that he didn't really learn anything new and gained much more valuable experience while working at Native Earth (1993). Osawabine was the Stage Manager on "20th Century Indian Boy" for De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig's most recent tour. However, Osawabine has returned to Banff for the summer of 1993.

Denise Bolduc, also feels that her hands-on work over the years has been much more valuable (Preston 1993). She trained as an administrative assistant and production assistant for Native

Earth's 90/91 season. The following summer, she took the Stagecraft program at the Banff Centre for the Arts then returned to Native Earth in the fall to train as a fundraiser. From January to May, 1992, Bolduc worked as the Sound Apprentice to Marsha Coffey on "Almighty Voice and His Wife" and "Night of the Trickster". That summer, she returned to Banff to do an internship in sound, and once again, returned to Native Earth. "Fireweed" marked Bolduc's debut as a Sound Designer. Currently, she is enrolled at the Harris Institute For the Arts in the Sound Engineering Program.

Kent Monkman (an artist/illustrator) trained as a Design Apprentice on "Almighty Voice And His Wife" in January and February of 1992. He then went to the Banff Centre for the Arts as a Design Intern. His first professional position was the Set and Costume Designer for "Lady of Silences" in the spring of 1993. Monkman will be working on Native Earth's next two shows of the 93/94 season.

Pamela Matthews got her first experience as Assistant Director/Dramaturge on "Lady of Silences" [1993] with funding from the Canadian Native Arts Foundation. "I jumped at the opportunity to direct, it was a great opportunity. We are in desperate need of Native directors, in film, television and theatre" (Matthews 1993).

Conversely, there have been very few people trained in the administrative methods of theatre. Sam Norton came to Native Earth Performing Arts on the Pathways for Success Program and trained as an Administrative Assistant. He now fills the position of Office Manager. Jean Akiwenzie, who now works for ANDPVA (the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts), did a one year administrative internship at Native Earth. Clayton Odjig recently finished a one year intern as Development Co-ordinator and then moved on to De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-jig Theatre.

Vinetta Strombergs, General Manager of the Native Theatre School for 1993, explained that this year they also have a technical person and an administrative person that they are training through a seed program. She adds, "Lisa Longboat is still training, last year she trained as stage manager, she's very committed" (Strombergs 1993).

Strombergs explained the importance of training theatre administrators:

I heard they were looking for somebody as General Manager and I needed a job. But that came as a direct result of my connection with the Native theatre community via Native Earth, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig and Larry Lewis, it goes back to 1986. I had known Marrie (Mumford) for a while and she knew what I had done generally in theatre with my own projects, and the administrative skills and grant-writing experience. They couldn't find a general

manager for the Native Theatre School and I was looking for a job.

[They were looking for a Native person for the job?]
Oh, absolutely. But they didn't have anyone. They had a grant and they put out a job posting and didn't get anyone. But, I don't know the full details of their job search, whether they just didn't get applications or whether they just didn't get anyone who was qualified. But in that situation, I don't think the Native community is any different from the theatre community in general in terms of arts administrators. Arts Administration is a thankless job. So people will do it for a short term in order to realize their creative projects, but to do it as a career choice, those people are few and far between. So the idea is that I should be training somebody. (Strombergs 1993)

Many of the actors involved in the early days of Native Earth, acquired their training through actual productions. It is apparent, when watching these actors perform today, that the years of experience have greatly added to their abilities, skills and knowledge.

In a review of "The Sage, The Dancer and The Fool", a critic commented on how the years of experience made up for the lack of formal training:

The performances are uniformly outstanding. Kenneth Charlette as the troubled Sage, Alejandro Ronceria as the graceful Dancer; and especially Billy Merasty, who offers a giddy, over-the-top performance as the Fool. (Sakamoto 1989)

Merasty gained most of his training through direct experience. He commented that:

I was lucky that I was based here in Toronto and Native Earth was just starting. It began my training in theatre, I had no experience, to speak of, only my life experience. Most of my experience and raw talent was developed through the [early] shows at Native Earth. It gave me an opportunity to hone my skills. (Merasty 1993)

In the 1988 Native Earth production of "Coyote City", most reviews noted lack of experience on the part of the actors and the writer. However, as The Toronto Star noted in "high expectations shattered": "All lack training, experience, sophistication. There are times in theatre when there's no substitute for experience" (Crew 1988).

The Globe and Mail review on the same show, on the other hand, said "but non-professional acting can be overlooked where the dramatic force of the work is overpowering" (Conologue 1988:C6).

In 1990, in a review of "Diary of A Crazy Boy", Crew described the acting to be "as equally unpolished" as the plot, storyline and dialogue, but, he added, "like the play, it is never less than totally honest". He describes Charlette's characterization as lacking in technique but that "becomes a minor concern weighed against his vulnerable, open and emotionally convincing performance" (1990).

Hector Bunyan, a Guyanese playwright working in Toronto, when casting his first play commented that "non-actors [who], through their looks and experience, can embody rather than play the role....whether this performer is trained and can act is beside the point; the physical presence backed by the authenticity of life experience" is what is important (Ynap 27).

David Qamaniq, from Tunoonig Theatre in Pond Inlet, is of the similar opinion. [He gained a nomination for Best Actor at the 1993 Dora Mavor Moore Awards in Toronto for his performance in "Whale".] He believes that because he has lived this life, he can do theatre to tell his stories. He says he doesn't need the diplomas: "Theatre is like life and I have experienced a lot of life" (Qamaniq 18).

Here, the issue becomes complicated. Where do we draw the line? In keeping with our notion of "Native Theatre", do we hire an inexperienced Native actor or an experienced non-native actor to play the Native parts? As Larry Lewis asserts, "The time for compromise is over. There may be non-native actors with more experience but our responsibility is to the community, to give them a chance to learn the skill" (qtd. in Lauzon 1991).

After attending a performance of De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig's "Quest For Fire" in 1990, Jani Lauzon commented that:

I was forgiving at times at the noticeable lack of experience the actors occasionally exposed. Experience comes only from experience and their willingness to 'jump into the fire' made my heart glow. I felt a compassionate affection for my heritage. (1991)

PROBLEM SOLVING/RECOMMENDATIONS

No institution is without its problems. In regards to training, most agree that there is very little to choose from in Native oriented theatre training. One of the major problems is the lack of funding.

This lack of funding can have indirect repercussions on students and teachers down the line. Students have had a wide range of complaints dealing with such issues as favouritism, lack of emotional support, lack of communication and power-tripping. This seems to be a direct result of the lack of experienced, trained instructors and management personnel. It seems that some are very qualified as actors, but not instructors; therefore, there is a definite need for teacher training.

This inexperience and lack of maturity prompted one theatre professional to comment on the lack of progress of Spirit Song:

I found that they were unable to develop their program beyond entry-level training, and barely entry-level training. I don't trust their training. They are not drawing on the skills of the community and they never did. They did not even help to develop the strong people that came out of their program, they stopped including them. We need to draw upon the skills of the people in our programs and certainly offer them opportunities to develop their skills. I think Spirit Song needs to get advice from their Native professionals and they're not doing it. They need maturity and they need advice, and that includes all of us. They need maturity and assistance in turning out a finer program. (Anonymous 1993)

In Tomson Highway's first major production of "The Rez Sisters" in 1986, he commented that "the lack of trained Native performers is the single greatest frustration". He also admitted that the summer course at the Native Theatre School is inadequate (qtd. in Yhap 1988).

Makka Kleist, an actor with many years of experience behind her, agrees with this notion and on comments on the need for a full-time, year-round training program for Native actors, makes some suggestions for a Native theatre school:

We need training, we need schools here. We could incorporate all the art forms in one school, that would be good, but we shouldn't copy the European way of doing it, separating the art forms....visual arts, dance, theatre and all the technical stuff that you have to know. We could create the school for Natives, a big one with solid training, to develop the tools to work from, a base. It takes at least 3 years of solid, intense training in any discipline. I think the first year they should touch all different art forms (no matter what they want to be), acting, carving, painting, dance....to get the feeling of all the arts, because as an actor, or whatever, you are using the same sources. And in this

training, you not only go for the refining of your own craft, you have to deal with the mythology, dreams and languages of other cultures, other peoples like the Japanese, Chinese, East Indian. They have such a rich culture too, we should look into, it is all ours. (Kleist 1993)

Several recommendations have been suggested by members of the theatre community.

(1) It was suggested to hold a workshop session so that actors can find out more about the various theatre schools, the individual classes that are being held and where and, especially, how they can access funding.

(2) To develop courses in all areas of teacher training to have experienced professionals available.

(3) To conduct exchange programs with other Native actors across the country to share experiences and knowledge.

(4) To conduct a Canada wide seminar to discuss the possibilities of our own full-time theatre school.

SYMPOSIUM ON NATIVE THEATRE

On May 15, 1993, Native Earth Performing Arts presented "A Symposium on Native Theatre....Celebrating 10 Years of Great Theatre". Held at the Helen Gardiner Phelan Playhouse at the University of Toronto, the topic was "The Future of Native Theatre". An invitation was extended to anyone interested in voicing their concerns, making suggestions or just listening to a discussion with the community and a few guest panellists.

The symposium included Floyd Favel, Artistic Director of NEPA; Drew Taylor, writer; Herbie Barnes, actor; Billy Merasty, actor and playwright; Vinetta Strombergs, General Manager of the Native Theatre School; Ira Levine, Chairman of the Ryerson Theatre School; Kenneth Charlette, actor and founder of Muskigee Dramatic Arts and Pamela Matthews, actor. The special guests included Reidar Nilsson of the Tukak Teatret and Paul Rathbun, editor of the very first 'Native Playwrights Newsletter' in Madison, Wisconsin.

The objectives of the Symposium, "an informal discussion about certain themes", as explained by Favel, were to get the ideas of collaboration across, opening up beyond the provinces to different countries, "because this is what we believe in". Another purpose was to extend the idea that dialogue is very important between the different artistic disciplines. [Favel was working with a choreographer and a musician on a dance piece for the first time.]

He stated his belief that, without collaboration, we are going into an artistic isolation, into a smaller world. The only way for a dynamic survival is in support, such as this, work-related support, very much different from fund-raisers and social functions. We are beginning to have artistic dialogue, work dialogue, to not be afraid of each other's work, to go out and support each other's work. Reidar Nilsson was the first guest to speak. [General topic headings are listed in the margins for ease of reference.]

[TUKAK TEATRET]

Reidar Nilsson is the Artistic Director of Tukak Teatret in Greenland. He calls himself a "gypsy" who comes from "the woods and the mountains of Norway". He was imported to Denmark as an actor/dancer about twenty years ago. In a promotional package for Tukak, Nilsson describes his theatre:

Tukak Teatret is one of the few professional theatre and theatre schools to be found within the fourth world, that is to say, among the indigenous Peoples of the World. The principle aim of the theatre is to assert man's right to the freedom of artistic expressions regardless of race or ethnic origin. This is achieved as man is stimulated in gaining respect for himself, as he experiences pride in being the person he is. If the theatre succeeds in developing a realization of beauty, pride will follow.

And with it a change in perspective occurs. People begin to see both themselves and the world with new eyes. The actors of the Tukak Teatret are Greenlanders, a minority group in the Danish Society. A minority theatre has two main functions: To inform the majority about the special needs of the minority and to strengthen the cultural identity of the minority itself. (Nilsson)

As mentioned earlier, Nilsson believes that "when Adam and Eve climbed down from the trees, or wherever they came from, and met each other, theatre started. Nilsson then refers to "that crazy theatre guy from France", Antonin Artaud, who believed the purpose of theatre was the salvation of mankind and that "theatre without magic is not". Artaud, through his "theatre of cruelty", forced the audience to confront itself on moral and psychological issues (Brockett 514).

In 1975, Nilsson was invited to a dinner at the Greenlandic Community House where he met several people interested in the performing arts. Many of these people, interested in becoming professional actors, had applied to the theatre school in Copenhagen and three other official theatre schools in Denmark. The response to their application was, as Nilsson demonstrates, that "Hamlet was not written for somebody with black hair, eyes like this, and legs like this". He was referring to "Eskimos". They were not admitted. At that time, he adds, Greenland was a part of Denmark, not a colony. They eventually got their self independence in 1980. [According to the encyclopedias, in 1953 a new Danish Constitution made Greenland a part of Denmark and full internal self-rule was achieved in 1981.] When Nilsson heard that Hamlet could only be played by someone with blue eyes and they had no access to the theatre schools...this was the same with the Academy of Music and the fine arts schools. He took a plane to Copenhagen, went to the Ministry of Culture and told them that this was 'bullshit'. Nilsson reminded the Minister that the legislation of Denmark gives equal rights to all its citizens [Greenlanders were Danish citizens at that time]. The Minister listened to him for ten minutes and agreed. Within a month, the first professional Native Theatre School was formed. He emphasized that the important thing was to start with your heart and just do it. He has been the Dean of this theatre school for eighteen years.

In the beginning, they had a few select people on their board. They pondered whether to copy the pattern of a western theatre school or if should they use this unique opportunity to create something entirely new. Their first difficulty was to find a name. They looked into the Native language of Greenland, Inuktitut, and found out that the word theatre did not exist. They consulted elders and found a rather lengthy word, which shortened, is "Tukak" and means "a group of people who work with something they think is important that they want to share with other people". Nilsson believes that you cannot find a better definition of what theatre

...the actual term 'theatre' was created when the Greeks had an actual building with seats for the audience.

Nilsson explained that the political situation was that Greenland had been a colony of Denmark for more than 250 years just as Norway had been, and there was the common meeting point. They were an Inuit culture, his was a Nordic culture. How could these two elements meet and be fruitful? Being a performer, your foremost work is about yourself, because if you don't know yourself or have anything to say, why be on stage? Acting in a play written by others, you have to make it yours.

In 1975, Greenland was fighting to get a self-rule government. To get any sort of higher education, including high school, university and art schools, they had to go to Denmark. So, the main question was, what was it to be Greenlandic? With NEPA, what is it to be Native, or First Nations or Canadians? There needed to be a definition. Before they started to work they needed to ask 'Who are we and what do we want? What is it to be Inuk?' The only way was through the truth, our identity, to start with the legends and stories....but not to reconstruct them, not to go back in time, because "we are contemporary and we are living here now. But we must utilize the energy and the wisdom of what these tales are....every single story is a learning story...the old way of education...that is true storytelling.

[STORYTELLING AND THEATRE]

So, we have to choose the storyteller as our model of how to be a performer, because the storyteller, all the movements, the way he tells the story, everything, you see it." Nilsson reminded us that all you need for theatre is one performer and one spectator. So, to combine his Nordic culture with the Inuit culture, and to find what keeps them together, not apart, he went back to his own stories and found that they were both very similar, that the stories were the same. The stories are the same all over the world. He added that, referring back to the Adam and Eve story, with this temptation, this need of passing borderlines, you have this wonderful thing called curiosity. Without it you will never be a good actor, you must be on fire.

[MUSKIGEE DRAMATIC ARTS]

Kenneth Charlette is an actor and the founder of "Muskigee Dramatic Arts". He says that he, too, is tired of other people trying to tell our stories and that it is time to take control. One of the reasons he started "Muskigee" was because of the long struggle he had to undergo to take control of his own life.

Charlette [Cree] explained that "Muskigee", which means "medicine" in western terminology, encompasses a whole lot more than just medicine, it is a way of life, it is learning to again understand the natural laws of nature. Western society has taken all of that away because they feel they have to rationalize everything, that everything is mathematical and logical. But the two views have now confronted each other and we must not ignore it. The arts is a way of bringing back some of our traditional methods.

He said that, especially with the advent of modern technology, we should keep in constant contact with our elders so as to not forget our past. Many of the elders are talking about using both the old and the new to come together. To create theatre, we have to know who we are, as a people, but it starts individually. We should start a network system right across Canada and have more Native theatre schools. Some of the younger artists are getting caught up in a system where they are losing a part of themselves, putting their values elsewhere. Some are getting caught up in the fame, glory and money. He pointed out that, for example, Margo Kane wants to start a program whereby she can teach the younger artists to keep their sense of values, their sense of identity. With "Muskigee", Charlette wants to bring out those stories, the truth in everyday life, the legends, the storytellers, the past, and also look forward into the future. People are slowly waking up.

Favel stressed that each person's input, even if it's only one person, goes a long way. Through these discussions, we can support each other, especially when we feel ourselves weakening and feel that we need some extra support. One person can make all the difference.

[TRAINING/FAILURE OF OTHER NATIVE THEATRES]

Nilsson revealed that he has been following the development of Native theatres in the Americas, including Alaska and down south, since 1975 and has been in contact with many people. He revealed that there have been a lot of attempts at starting up Native theatres, but most have lived for a year or two then died. So therefore, what is needed is a professional training program for Native people. He stresses that we need trained people. "It is not enough to just BE Native, you must have a skill. A program is needed that goes far beyond the summer school, one that goes four years, seven days a week, from nine in the morning to eleven at night. This is needed to really learn the skills." Nilsson detests schools that follow the norm. In his school, they have no 'classrooms'. He said that the only way to learn theatre is to do theatre, to train, to become fit and to prepare yourself. You can have some wonderful ideas, but if you don't have the tool to put these ideas across, then you will fail.

These points were agreed upon unanimously but the question remained, how do we put together a long-range professional Native theatre school in Canada? Nilsson commented that they had been talking about it for eighteen years, and it has not happened yet.

[TRAINING/IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE THEATRE]

Billy Merasty, who spent a summer at the Native Theatre School and a little more than a year at the Ryerson Theatre School, commented that the mainstream institutions do not encourage the uniqueness that Native people have nor do they embrace them as people who have unique visions and ways of looking at life. Only since moving to the city did he start reading about his family and culture and now he wants to get back what he lost and to strengthen what he has. He stated that theatre saved his life. He had been

totally lost in the city and he believes that theatre can save other people's lives too. Merasty, nephew of Tomson Highway, has been involved in theatre for the last ten years and has seen it grow. He commented that, in that time, there have been a few 'generations' of actors and now there is a whole new generation evolving. Many young people have approached him and asked him questions about how they, too, can become involved in theatre and where they can study. He encourages theatre as an option for some of these younger people, to help them find a direction. Theatre teaches people how to deal with other people, to look at other people with respect, to not ostracize anyone and, generally, how to be a better human. Merasty is very proud to say that NEPA and everyone involved with NEPA have shown that, that no one is more special than any other and everyone has their own unique way of contributing to our work, "it's a collective, it's teamwork". He said that he noticed that one of the comments that NEPA gets is how well everyone works together, and "when it shows from outside people and Native people coming into it, and recognizing that it is a special world, it really confirms that it has to be protected." For Merasty, it is a world that he feels he really belongs in, it is a special world.

[TRAINING]

Vinetta Strombergs added that "one of the things that we must remember is that the only reason that Native people came to you [Nilsson] was because you already had your role models. A lot of people went to Tukak, and knew about Tukak, because of the people that went there before. And a lot of those people went to Native Theatre School first. It may be only a little program that only runs for a few weeks in the summer, but it started so much". She added that we need role models, it starts with "the people with the fire". She believes that the training will come, because the people who went before have shown that it is possible. "But just to put up an institute and say it's going to happen here, it won't happen that way".

Favel opened up the floor for an open discussion:

NILSSON: I just told you that I hate school. I hate institutions. But what I'm talking about is a training camp that you really go there and develop full-time, as a training ground.

BARNES: But aren't we doing that already? I mean, Billy and Kennetch and Pam doing shows....

NILSSON: That's not what I'm talking about.

BARNES: Plus we also take classes outside but we're part of what the audience sees, and we do the classes, but we don't have a building that says 'this is the Native theatre school', this is where we go to learn theatre every day, we go out and we do our theatre in life, at YPT [Young People's Theatre] at NEPA and the director's workshops...part of our theatre is what we see out on

the streets...the drunk Indians down on Spadina....and going to Pow
wow's....

NILSSON: I'm sorry, I really have heard this discussion over the years that I've been in Canada and the United States...the lack of having the opportunity to dig in to the profession of being a performing artist on a full-scale basis. If you don't want it, fine....come to my place, for instance, it exists because there is a need and I think that will help to produce, or help with the troubles that you have now. That's the only I'm saying, I'm not here to give you a model of how to do it, far from it.

FAVEL: I think there's been an misunderstanding here....

[DEFINITION OF NATIVE THEATRE]

BARNES: Yeah, I'm not saying that what you're saying is wrong, but, there has definitely got to be some training. That's a big problem that we have in Native theatre, but I think, also a big problem that we have is that we don't know what Native theatre is...can anybody define Native theatre? Commedia Dell'Arte is set on a basic group of characters...Shakespearean theatre is based on the Shakespearean play....but what makes Native theatre? Is it doing Drew Taylor's plays, Tomson Highway's plays, is it because we do it with Native people, what is it? What makes Native theatre 'Native theatre'? We've got to define that and realize what it is and then we can start training in Native theatre. Right now it encompasses all theatre, it has every aspect of theatre in it and it's not just story telling, story telling is told in every theatre, so what is Native theatre?

MERASTY: I know, but I don't know how to explain it. This is more a FEEL, being brought up in the language, I consider myself Cree and I follow that way of looking at life and it is a FEEL, I wouldn't know how to describe it. It is one individual's commitment to all of creation and belonging in a group. But that's just the words...there's a connection to your body, everything.

CHARLETTE: I tried to explain that with Muskige, it's a way of life and it's bringing back the truths about that way of life. I touched upon it very slightly when I said the 'natural laws of nature'. Because it's big, it's very vast, and once you feel that you're only a part of it, you go with it. So to answer that question, Native theatre is being a part of that natural law.

BARNES: So can Daniel Day Lewis do Native theatre?

CHARLETTE: I don't know, can he?

MERASTY: It depends on the individual. One of the reasons to have this 'feel', unfortunately, is language. Unfortunately, some of us have lost that feel, which is directly connected to language. Because the language is connected to people who do theatre. Unfortunately, people have lost that language.

BARNES: I don't speak the language, does that mean I can't do Native theatre?

MERASTY: No.

BARNES: And I did, I'm sorry that I did lose the language.

CHARLETTE: See that's what I was talking about, right now we're living in an era where we're going forward, we're going forward into the future with a part of our past lost. So now we're at a standstill and we have to regain part of that past in order to go forward. As far as I'm concerned, Native theatre is going back into the very roots of what natural law is because we have been living under so much clouded ideas of what natural law is. Take a look around you, it's time to look around you at what is alive and what is dead, what is a part of living, what is a part of you, who is running you, where are you going? Are you taking the time to sit down and think of what you really want to do? Take a look at your spirit, how strong is your spirit? It's all a part of natural law. And we are slowly getting into that.

BARNES: Part of me right now wants to take time to learn commedia dell'arte. Now, does that become Native theatre?

NILSSON: People come to my school, I'm not Native American okay, but I'm Native Norwegian. My family's been in the same spot since [I can remember] But I'm NATIVE Norwegian and I'm proud of being white.....but people come to me and they come to learn skills and they come to learn theatre and then they go back and make their own theatre. They learn how to be YOU. Not just how to move, how to speak, how to walk, they learn how to dig into material, into themselves and they learn how to be YOU....that is what training is about. We don't teach people to be Native in my school. And we have so-called Natives from all over the world coming there. We are not teaching Native actors, we are teaching actors. And that is the important thing. We train actors, dancers, musicians and singers. And be Native as much as you want, that is what it is all about, you must find yourself in your work.

BARNES: Good, then we are going to take it back and create Native theatre and we don't know what Native theatre is....

[Everybody protests at once.]

MERASTY: You can't say Native theatre is one thing, otherwise you fall into that mistake of categorizing it into one....

FAVEL: No, no, Herbie....it would be very different, for example, if one thinks of a theatrical space for Natives, it's impossible, because, first of all, because each nation has a different architectural use of space. For example, the Indians in Saskatchewan use big round spaces, like camp grounds, but the

Algonquian people use longhouses, in villages, and the Ojibwa has different architectural...so even if one tried to get a Native architectural space, they'll differ in the next one hundred miles, even fifty miles, it'll vary from tribe to tribe. And we could get technical, looking at each tribal use of how they use their voice, which resonators they use, their posture, each tribe has a different posture, but there's the basic fundamental which is a little crouch. Each tribe has a different rhythm in their dances and songs, there are many variations....

BARNES: Oh definitely.

FAVEL:like a Pan-Indianism, or a Pan-Nativism, it's basically almost impossible. There can be a mirage of 3 or 4 different types, combined with different European techniques. But I think it starts with what Blue's musicians call 'soul'.

BARNES: Yeah, I know what you're saying and I'm not arguing about that but then, it's hard, because how do we put it in words?

MERASTY: Why do you have to put it in words?

BARNES: You don't have to put it in words, but I don't want this lost for the next person, the next generation, my children, I don't want this lost. The reason that it's so important is that we can teach it and keep it alive. Now, is it in the blood or is it in the heart? If it's in the heart, then can we share that, that spirit, this, can I share Native theatre with, with....

MATTHEWS: Daniel Day Lewis.

BARNES:Daniel Day Lewis. It's because of "The Last of the Mohicans" that I keep referring to him and thinking 'well, he can't do that because he's not Native', but why can't he....I know what you're saying and it shouldn't be defined, but it's important to me.

STROMBERGS: That's what I was trying to say about the role models, Reidar. I'm not against the teaching of the skills but no one, I don't care what culture you come from, if you've never even seen a ballet dancer, why would you even think about becoming a ballet dancer? So, Native theatre is going to be constantly defined by the people who do it. And I don't think it matters if it is in words because the stories are going to change according to how they are told. And, yes, you're saying the same stories occur in every culture around the world, but it's the story teller, and that can be one person or a group of people or a film. And that's what will inspire the next group of people to want to do that in THEIR way. It can't stay static, it's got to grow, it's got to keep growing, it's got to changing and it's got to keep developing. But it will communicate and then it's happening. If it's not communicating and it's just in a book, it's dead.

[TRAINING]

STROMBERGS: And I don't think it matters which training you take, but unfortunately, what I've seen documented in Canada in educational institutions, regardless of what skills are being taught, theatre arts or any education, it doesn't work for Native people. They drop out. So that is part of the training thing that has to be looked at also. Why is the system that exists for training actors, any actors, not working for Native actors? Why do they not want to go?

NILSSON: Just a comment to this....[I hate schools]....ask this gentleman here [Merasty], whom I met many years ago at the summer school, WHY did he go to [Europe]? [what the hell did he say?]

MERASTY: I wanted to go to Europe too. Because that was only one of the few companies that were training Native people, and to me, being surrounded by my own people is really important.

BARNES: But "Lady of Silences" was very European in its style.

MERASTY: And I like that, I like taking different styles out and you know, because Indians can do it too.

NILSSON: But why does your art have to be so bloody Native?

MERASTY: Because that's how unique we are.

NILSSON: But why not be contemporary? This is not Native because he's dancing wrong....

MERASTY: That's just one aspect. I can be totally city and still be Native because if I'm surrounded by people, by non-native people, I know I can stand out just because I'm...

BARNES: You're gorgeous!

MERASTY:that and also, I'm Native and of all the people here I have the oldest lineage to this earth, that backs me up, that's part of my 'thing'.

FAVEL: We'll get to you.....no, go ahead.

Diane: My name's Diane, I'm Ojibway from Northern Ontario, and I was one of the first technical directors for the Native Theatre School back in the seventies. I'm also a product of the technical theatre program in Kingston, going teaching theatre school and going back and getting my degree in theatre at the University of Guelph. After listening today, I find it fascinating, there is, and I have to concur on a variety of points, there is a definite need for skills. Skills enhance what we do as performers, they enhance what we do as technicians. Now, from a Native point of view, the fact that we have storytellers, a process that we all learn from

our mothers, our grandmothers, our grandfathers and our elders, is inherent as to who we are as Native people. It's that way of life, it's knowing that WHO we are defines what we do as performers. But if we want to present something to distinguish ourselves as a certain identity, a person apart from everybody else, we need to have, first, that centering, that focus of who we are. And that takes us back into going back to the elders, it takes us back into the past and learning from our roots. [LANG]

There are a lot of us in this generation who have lost their mother tongue. I speak Ojibway but it's fragmented. This is due to the fact that I started school on the reserve, but soon after I got taken off the reserve and put in downtown Toronto. My only family was a mixed family and I got discouraged from speaking my own language. The only time I spoke it was when I went home to the reserve. My grandmother used to laugh because I'd speak one line of Ojibway with an english word in it, and she'd say it in Indian', and I'd say 'I forgot'. So, it's the kind of thing where the longer you stay away from your roots, it's more difficult to get it back. [FUTURE OF NATIVE THEATRE]

But there is an inherent thing in Native people wanting to establish their own identity, saying 'okay, we want to do Native theatre, but it's not Native theatre in a sense of not wanting to learn the skills and how to do it, it's important to know how and utilize the European knowledge base of what theatre is, because it enhances what we do as performers. So it's important to combine that knowledge base simultaneously with what we learn from our elders. We should blend the two into Native theatre and that's where I see Native theatre has to go. Establishing an institution, having been a teacher at the Native Theatre School, in the summer I always thought, 'this is much too short', we've only just started and you see potential coming from the young actors and technicians and you know you're only going to send them away with six weeks of information. And if they go back to the reserve, and there's no follow-up to that training, you lose that. [SUGGESTIONS]

As for a 'building' we can have access to.....where we are now, looking at different theatres companies across the Americas, there is a desire for "Native theatre". It is important, as part of the future progress, our future goal, that we look at maybe establishing a building; but I don't think it should be the focus. I think we should be establishing a place for Native artists, dancers, musicians, a place to come to. Something that is monetarily accessible, that we shouldn't be charging \$200 for a workshop if they can't afford \$200. Maybe we should be looking at some kind of environment, and I know we were talking about money earlier, how difficult it is to achieve money; but why can't we, as a community of artisans at a grass-roots level, establish a network, that goes to places, or has people come to us....so that we have some sort of on-going teaching program for them. That they do their three years of technical skills, maybe over a period of

six years, but they do it in periods of time that are conducive to teaching. That gives them a sense of having somebody who gives a damn about them. We lose artists and we lose people that come to the Native theatre school, they get caught up in this euphoria of 'great I'm going to be an actor'. They come to Toronto and start pounding the pavement to get a job that pays money. They don't realize how difficult that is, and they lose it because there isn't a support network for them. My perception of what Native Earth is, or should be looking at, is to provide that network. There are people working in the craft, there are people who have resources to offer, people who are willing to teach me how to be a storyteller, a stage manager, willing to teach me how to learn the way to go home. And that's all I want to say.

BARNES: Yeah, but I think that network is there. You're talking about losing people, but you're always going to lose people. A lot of us here went to the Native Theatre School, Kenneth, Floyd, Billy, I started working as a publicist there, that's how I met Drew. There are a group of people who have come out of there and have gone on....Joy Keeper, Tina Keeper, Tina Bomberry, you can't keep everybody....

Diane: I'm not saying that you can keep everybody, I'm saying that if you don't have a way for them to continue after that six week period, wherever they are...

BARNES: De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig is doing that, Native Earth is doing that, Spirit Song out in Vancouver is....

MATTHEWS:TRYING to do that....

BARNES:trying to do that, but is Floyd going to make sure that he hires everybody out of the Native Theatre School next year, no, and you took Jerry Longboat and you took him after school....you took a group of people that came out of there. It's a dog eat dog world and we all got to pay rent, we all got to pay for food....

Diane: That's not a point of contention. I'm not saying that people have to abandon what they need to do to survive. I mean, I'm a part of that whole system, I worked in theatre. It's not enough for some people to just be able to be artisans, you must be able to do something else. I went back to school and became a nurse. So, I nurse during the day to pay my rent, to pay my bills, and I do theatre and I write and I work in small community areas doing theatre.

FAVEL: So your point is that we need a place for people....so they can continue. I agree. I know there was a lot of people who would have loved to go on, but they didn't have 'the fire' or the opportunity. At Native Earth, we would love to have two casts, one as apprentices.

CHARLETTE: I'd like to just add to her point too. It's great that we, as part of one's growth, learn all the skills and that we know who we are. But that's going to come again from stopping and sitting down and listening to the elders. We have to take the time to explain....and we have to get past all the lies, all the misconceptions, all the myths and go back to the basic truths....you can have all the skills in the world, but if you have no spirit, you have nothing.

FAVEL: The two major points there is all the skills in the world, because on a certain level every skill is objective, whether you're a good traditional dancer or a good ballet dancer or a good singer, at a certain point everything's pretty objective, either you're good or you're not. At the same time, the spirit, the soul of what's behind you is important.

PAUL RATHBUN: I'd like to talk about the newsletter. My name's Paul and Floyd left a message after I had called him and threatened to come, it's been a while since I've had the opportunity to sit in a theatre and have a discussion, but I won't get into that....There's a book by a guy named Augusta Boal and it's called "Theatre of the Oppressed". And actually, it's a place where everyone here agrees, believe it or not, he talks about what is natural as a creative force.

[A mixed reaction follow this comment, some do not like Boal's theories.]

At a recent writer's conference that I attended, as you [refers to Taylor] recall, theatre and theatre people were laced in and around everything, and yet the perception, even by the people involved, was that it was more of a poet's conference or a writer's conference.

TAYLOR: Prose.

RATHBUN: Prose. That's what everyone called it, I've never heard it so much in my life, whatever it was. But anyway, in various discussions I had with people there and after, and I'm just a student who got started on this Native theatre project a couple of years ago, and I was very excited to be around some of those people. People were talking about having a conference that should be more specific to Native Theatre. In letter writing later, I proposed a Native newsletter and offered my bibliographic material and to print it. There was a lot of support. It was an exciting time, with the Native Writers Circle of The Americas, and a lot of people offered to submit material. It is also about role models. There are a lot of indigenous writers who are working very hard and just the knowledge of that fact is encouraging to a lot of people who have written things or even thought about writing something. For the next issue, I promise something about Canadian Native theatre, but frankly, I have no idea where I'm going to get that

information, maybe somebody here?? There's a bibliography in this one from the Five Civilized Tribes Museum in Oklahoma who've been having a contest for nineteen years now. And as we were talking about what is Native theatre, they have a theory letter that goes out to all their prospective playwrights and in the letter, which tells you what Native theatre should be about, it holds up Faulkner as the ultimate model of a writer for all Natives to work from. Well, I just wanted to say that if one of those people were sitting here in this discussion, they would have some things to say that are not anything like what anybody here has to say about what Native theatre is about. So this newsletter is mainly for Native writers and any suggestions are more than welcome. In the next issue will be an interview with Bruce King and his experience with Indian Time Theatre in Niagara Falls. He talks about starting an Indian theatre group and the how the rigid European concepts of "you're late, you're out, you miss rehearsals, you're dead", didn't work with the Native performers and how he approaches it now. Canada is just so far ahead of the United States in this area. For instance, I got two letters from people who were trying to be the first Native playwright ever. (Raucous laughter.) Their heart is in the right place, but it's not all their fault that they're not aware that there are other Native playwrights, though they should be aware.

[TRAINING]

IRA LEVINE: I'm the Chairman of the Ryerson Theatre School here in Toronto. [Missed the beginning of this story.] There is an aboriginal group in Australia which has gotten funds to set up a trial three month program. And I told them they should connect with your school so that they know about some pioneering efforts here in Canada. So, they're groping towards something. The National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney, is not doing much to assist with the emergence of aboriginal theatre, but I'm not one to throw a stone because my school isn't either. There is a school in Wellington, New Zealand [the New Zealand Drama School or Te Kura Toi Whakaari o Aotearoa is described in CTR 74 Spring 1993] and I was struck by what I saw which was a school without facilities, to speak of, that exists upstairs in a factory. They have two studios. It's a two-year training program for actors, exclusively, but they have a young, dynamic caring team which is trying to realize the mandate of the school which is determined by the board....its mandate is to offer professional training within a bi-cultural community for a bi-cultural nation. And they are making progress towards understanding what that commitment means. They have Maori cultural expert, an amazing young man, they're teaching courses in Maori tradition, Maori protocol, Maori ceremony, to both the white students, the 'papiya' as they are called, and the Maori students, who needed just as much. So they are learning about each other's theatrical tradition. This is in its infancy, but it is a reality and you can't go into that school and you can't meet with those students without sensing that they have something there that we lack, to that degree, and something that Australia lacks as well. How that will be realized in terms of the curriculum, theatrically,

is another question. That is whether you train an actor to be an actor, or you train a Native actor to perform, I don't want to say Native theatre, but offer training to them in a way that is culturally significant. I don't have the answer to that, New Zealand is a little ahead of us, in that respect. Anyway, these were just a few of my experiences.

And so, I've come back to my particular institution with a great urge to do more, assist more, than we have hitherto. I find it most upsetting that this gentleman [Merasty], whom I've never met, because he was there before me, left after a year. I feel it's our failure, maybe I'm wrong. There have been other people who have begun our program and left who have carried through, whether it's our acting, dance or production program.

[DEFINITION OF NATIVE THEATRE]

You're asking about the definitions of Native theatre. Well, one definition, very pragmatic definition being bandied around in Australia is that it's theatre written, performed and produced by Native people. That's only a partial definition, but that's one form of definition.

[SUGGESTIONS RE: SCHOOLS]

And here in Canada, it seems to me we have very few Native people skilled in production. I have a three-year program, soon to be a four-year program, in every facet of production and we have very few, if any, Native peoples going through that. And that's a failure that we have in recruiting and that's a failure that we have in supporting people to go through. But you should have your own theatre school for four years, however speaking from the perspective of someone who is struggling everyday to maintain facilities and have enough financial resources just to carry on with the life of the theatre school, I fear a great distraction in terms of energies and artistic resources to generate a Native theatre school. Another route to go is to use existing resources provided there are people there who are open enough, amenable enough and caring enough. I'd like to think that my institution may be like that, but we need guidance and we need some sort of direction. So, that's why I'm here and I've mentioned to Floyd very briefly that I would like to open up contacts to see if we can do more, ASSIST more, whether it's through our facilities because they are basically there during the summer and not being utilized or through some other way.

FAVEL: We can talk at some point, in the next few months, maybe you can come and visit our school.

LEVINE: I'd like that.

[REASONS FOR DROP-OUTS]

MERASTY: That whole thing of having gone to Ryerson, although I dropped out, the reason I dropped out was for a very personal reason, but I've always told people that year I spent at Ryerson was very valuable. What I've learned, the basic technical stuff, to this day has helped me in my work. I've always stressed the importance of that. I know how important it is to acquire those

basic, basic concrete skills. I've always encourage that in people around me, it is one of the best places to go to.

Diane: I know that in my year that I was there, there was three Native students. Two graduated with me and one dropped out because of the system. She came from a very, very traditional environment, right off the reserve. It was a culture shock for her. It was a very disciplined kind of thing for her, that's why she dropped out. The other two have gone on to do other things. They also agree that learning the skills is important, it's a foundation.

[CLOSING REMARKS]

FAVEL: So we can talk more about that in the near future. So, in closing, we can say that, that is what we are trying to do, set up a year-round system, we are trying to set that up and we have a lot on our plate. The Native Theatre School almost died two years ago and we are trying to revive it. We're getting some good instructors. We're bringing a teacher in from Greenland this year, from New York city, we're just trying to open up the doors, make it more exciting, more international. I want to thank everybody for coming today, it was very exciting to meet all the great minds and because as I said before, that's the inspiration. One person is an inspiration a lot of times in a project. For example, when we did "Lady of Silences" it was....'fire'. When the fire was weak it was rejuvenated by Billy or Pam and that keeps you going. So that's the importance of a group, even a small group, and of 'lighting' each other, keeping each other going, not giving up, believing in the art. Because believing in art generates other things, work generates work. We'll close with that and thank you everyone for coming.

SPIDERWOMAN THEATRE

Spiderwoman Theatre is North America's oldest Native feminist performing arts troupe. Based in New York City, it was founded seventeen years ago by (Kuna/Rappahannock) sisters, Muriel and Gloria Miguel and Lisa Mayo, all Brooklyn born and raised. The troupe, including veteran actor Hortensia Colorado (Chichimec) and resident stage manager Deborah Ratelle, was in Toronto performing "Winnetou's Snake Oil Show From Wig-Wam City" as a presentation of Native Earth Performing Arts. Their hilarious show is loosely based on the turn of the century German novel by Carl May entitled 'The Legend of Winnetou'. The play satirizes the new age 'plastic shamans' and how they portray a completely false view of Native culture. The following, is a compilation of the comments made by the troupe in the informal gathering:

We performed last year at the United Nations Assembly and felt that we were treated as a freak show and that all the indigenous people performing there were the freaks. We felt patronized and demeaned and were upset about being treated as "little darlings". It's not what we expected. It's the Year of Indigenous People, and that's how we were treated.

It was good to see a Kuna orator get up and speak but the assembly had already adjourned. The political clout for indigenous people was just not there. The indigenous people were talking in a vacuum and the people who should have been listening weren't there. Anyway, the Kuna orator was photographed and it was recorded. And had the assembly not adjourned, he would not have been allowed to speak. But it was still good to see him up there speaking. He was so eloquent. He is the first generation [of Kuna] to go out there being verbal and making contact. He spoke about how it is for the Kuna in Central America.

But, what we found exciting was the meetings that we had, before the assembly, with indigenous people from all over the world, Sami's from Finland, Iroquois, Navaho, Maori's. We all sat around these long tables, all these different languages were being spoken and translated, that was so exciting.

We had to do this outside the U.N., in hostels and stuff. We weren't allowed to do it inside the U.N..

Theatre should really rock ships and not be "safe". In the states anyway, I don't know about here, but if you make too many waves, you may not get hired.

We feel that we have to be political. So often our politics are watered down and made to appear weak. Like when only one Maori was went to represent all indigenous people in Rio de Janeiro.

Seventeen years ago we did a show called "Women In Violence", which dealt with family violence, incest, sexual abuse and racism. We experimented and did it with a mixture of clown and the use of obscene gestures. It was amazing because this was only seventeen years ago and people thought it was too much. They would say this sort of thing never really happens, 'maybe it does in New York, but not here'. For example, in Europe, they would say 'this sort of thing happens only in the states, but not here'.

And we would do dirty jokes to the point of absurdity, to examine why we feel so upset when men sit around and tell dirty jokes about women. The men were so upset at us, they walked out.

We would also examine racism by doing racial jokes to the same point of absurdity. We found it interesting that people would laugh and laugh at some racial jokes but would find, for example, Jewish jokes unacceptable. Even now, seventeen years later, that particular show is apropos.

What started it all was our being upset with AIM (the American Indian Movement) and now women were being treated. We feel that in a revolution women are equal to men. These Indian guys were really angry that we would even say that. In AIM, a lot of women were right behind the men, carrying guns, cooking, typing, etcetera, but when it came time to do the talking to the "biggy wigs" in

Washington, the head of aim said "No women". Only men would negotiate, do the talking. We put all of that in "Women In Violence". If women are still being used as only recreation, it's not a revolution. That's what got us in trouble.

Last year Masterworks Laboratory started working more on storytelling and they chose Irish stories, but, they had been inspired by Spiderwoman Theatre and we were proud of that. The suicide rate is so high with Native kids that there needs to be more creative people out there, working with these kids, like making films, doing theatre. The teenagers need to feel that they can tell their stories. As artists we really need to be out there giving to the new generation, giving back.

I'm a grandmother now and I'd like to have a lot of other workshops with other grandmothers. The best workshops I've done have been the ones with the Native communities in Chicago and Minneapolis where the ages ranged from 6 to 77 years old. All in the same workshop. That was fun.

It's important to have a centre for Native theatre. I see such a movement happening. There's the European theatre and then there's Native theatre where the importance of storytelling is so strong. We walk different, have a different kind of imagery, the centre for our dance is different. Even the pow wow is a part of that. Some Native kids start learning at pow wows about circles of life, the drum, the dance, the earth, the cosmos. It is important for us to develop our own vocabulary. The Avant Garde have their own kind of vocabulary and various styles. We're half way there already. This is really developing in Native Theatre. A lot of kids already have the vocabulary and can really go further with that through theatre.

INTERVIEWS IN OTTAWA - "BEYOND SURVIVAL"

In April, 1993, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canadian Native Arts Foundation and the En'owkin International School of Writing hosted a major conference. "BEYOND SURVIVAL: THE WAKING DREAMER ENDS THE SILENCE - An International Conference of Indigenous Writers, Performing & Visual Artists". Its purpose was to "network, share information and develop strategies around issues of common concern which affect indigenous and cultural expression" (DeLeary 1993). Interviews were conducted during this conference to explore the importance of Native Theatre in Canada.

(1) Evan Adams, Coast Salish, is a 26 year old Vancouver-based actor.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to native communities and to non-native communities?

ADAMS: People who work in Native Theatre realize that there is a difference, when gearing towards a Native community or towards a non-native audience, and the difference is, I think we are doing more towards community development when we work in our own communities, whereas, for non-native audiences, we try to educate them a bit about our reality.

How is it going to serve a community?

ADAMS: A true artist tries to come up with the whole truth about the community they come from and it means they are putting up, right in front of the community, very real pictures of what they perceive to be happening in our own homes...so we are like mirrors in some ways. We draw impressions where we come from and people have to deal with that reality. For instance, we say things that other people don't want to talk in a community. But, also, we can make them laugh and we can reinforce their beliefs, help them along with their healing and just help them to have a good time.

Is that what you are trying to do in your work?

ADAMS: Yes. Lately I've been moving away from the more educational edge to the laughing part because I have been around long enough to know that the problems don't go away. Sometimes the best thing you can give a person is a really good time, give them a smile, I think this is an important lesson.

There are many cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal peoples today. What are these and how are they addressed by the Aboriginal arts community?

ADAMS: Politics....who are our leaders and where are they taking us? There's also drug addiction, sexual abuse, and family issues,

family systems, family support, that kind of stuff. In the Native arts community, a lot of us are exploring all those issues. Tomson Highway has been dealing with sexual abuse, rape, our poor perception of ourselves and dysfunction in his writing. But he doesn't do it in a didactic way. But we need more leadership. I think we the artists have been a bit timid about putting our own visions forward....of what we think things can be like. A lot of the academics, like Lee Maracle and Jeanette Armstrong are putting forward that vision for tomorrow. Hopefully, their work is going to be more accessible to the Native communities than it has been.

Do you have any suggestions as to how Native theatre can better serve as a link between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities?

ADAMS: That is an interesting question. I don't think I can answer it. Before, I thought that if we could all share what we all knew, for instance, if we presented our theatre to non-native audiences they might understand us better, but I am not that naive any more. But, I am also worried about what it does for us, because it means we, the people who are below, have to do the reaching out and be the strong ones and do the educating yet again. We are the ones who have to transform and accommodate the greater population, it's often painful. I don't really know how it can serve as a link, but I know that it has...many people have come to see my work and other artists' work. I think the way it does serve us is that we get to struggle with our identity, deal with the question of how much can we know about our Native population, how much can they know about us. And we keep throwing ourselves out there saying, does this help you to understand us, to see our world a bit better? Ultimately, I trust this is the reason why we create our art.

Would you like to see more Native Theatre in Canada?

ADAMS: Yes, yes, yes! I think there is such a need for it. Directors, actors, writers are out there now and putting out brilliant stuff and we need theatre so we can exchange, visit each other, share and we need physical bodies to house us, to put us all in. We have such an amazing history and stories to tell, that it is a real shame we don't have places to go and tell them.

How do you think Native Theatre sticks up against Mainstream Theatre?

ADAMS: I think they are very different. I think in the past, what we have been trying to do is to fashion our theatre into a white model, and that has been done somehow successfully. I think in some ways, we are transforming it. I think some of us are ignoring the whole model completely.

2) Kateri Damm (Ojibwa) is currently a conference co-ordinator on a project basis. She is a writer who originates from the Cape Croker Reserve in Southern Ontario.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to aboriginal communities?

DAMM: I think it is a way of expressing some of our culture, a way of telling about things that have happened, talking about our tradition and culture. I guess it depends on what level the theatre is happening. If it is community based, like De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig, when they go around and bring theatre to the communities, I think it is really an important way of passing on knowledge and dispelling some myths and stereotypes that Native people have also bought into because they've been educated through a mainstream system which perpetuates some of the lies, stereotypes. Theatre is an important way of communicating with each other and telling our stories and speaking to each other.

Do you think there is an importance to non-native communities?

DAMM: Yes. I think it serves the same purpose, in some ways, of dispelling some of the myths and stereotypes. People seem to think that, or that's the impression I have, that Native art, in whatever form it takes, hasn't changed from the traditional ways. There are certain expectations, though, if you are a writer, about the kinds of things you can write about. You also have to use that (stereotypical) symbolism and imagery of Native people or else it is a disappointment to the non-native community. I think it happens a lot, that kind of reaction from the non-native community, like if they go and see native story telling they want some elder sitting around cross-legged on the floor or something, telling stories. I think it is important to them and they have to know more about the First Nations people and I think this is one way we can communicate, since we have not really infiltrated the education system yet.

There are many cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal peoples today. What are some of these issues and how are they being addressed by the Aboriginal Arts Communities?

DAMM: Some of the issues, I think health issues are really big concern, because literally people out in our communities are dying, there are suicides, kids die from solvent abuse and so on. AIDS is a real problem. Those kinds of issues are the ones people are trying to address. Why are we hurting ourselves, and what is happening in the community, sort of the despair and so on. I think (through the arts) we have developed a way of talking about healing the communities. I think it is like Adam's (Evans) play about AIDS and it comes up in Tomson Highway's plays, some of the health

issues and so on. Personally, I think health is a big issue, it's life and death in many cases.

Do you have any suggestions as to how Native Theatre can better serve as a link between the Aboriginal and Non-aboriginal communities?

DAMM: That is kind of a tough one because it is a question of how to get people to listen who aren't a part of the community, how to get your voice out there and get access to some of the theatre companies and places like, small towns and cities. It is one thing to get a place on a reserve but how to get in a place like Toronto that is a big enough community that you can have small theatre groups that can exist and have access to space. I don't know how you make people more aware so you can actually get them to go and see these things. I guess it's trying to get people who are into arts administration and used to dealing with some of the people that are involved booking these spaces. And also just promoting the writers so that there is more of an interest in them. That is all I can think at this point in the evening.

Would you like to see more Native Theatre in Canada?

DAMM: Oh yes, definitely. I like to hear what some of the issues are from other First Nations people. It is such a big country and we are separated by geography and I think it is one way of bridging some of the distances to find out what other people are talking about. When Margo Kane's play comes to Ottawa, you get a sense of what some of the common issues are across the country and also what some of the different ones are. We do not all have the same experiences. I like to hear what's happening. People also incorporate some of their own traditional stories and things into the plays and writing and it's interesting to learn something about other cultures.

Do you get enough opportunities to see much Native Theatre?

DAMM: I guess, relatively, I have done okay, because being in Ottawa, there are several different venues for seeing theatre.... the Museum of Civilization seems to make an effort to do some Native programming in their theatre space. In the National Arts Centre we get the bigger run plays like Tomson Highway's. And I think I have even seen one of Drew Taylor's plays there [Toronto At Dreamer's Rock]. Another opportunity is when I have been home to Cape Croker, I have seen some of the plays that De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig has run through there in the summer. I've been fairly lucky that I've had access to see theatre in the city and in the communities. They are two totally different theatre-going experiences, I have to say. I don't think I'm probably the norm, I think I am the exception. There should be more opportunities for other people to see Native Theatre.

3) Lee Maracle (Cree/Salish) is a renowned author and has published several books including "Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel", "I am Woman" and "Sundogs". She has taught at the En'owkin International School of Writing and presently lives in Toronto.

What, in your opinion, is the importance of Native Theatre to aboriginal communities?

MARACLE: I think theatre is, first of all, a venue in which our folks can see themselves visibly, they can see themselves in power, they can see themselves being whatever exists in their dreams, and it is an inspiring venue for young people to witness theatre in their communities even though there are not enough Native theatres in communities. I wish there were more.

What do you think is the importance of Native Theatre to non-native communities?

MARACLE: It is like a bridge. Theatre shows you who you are, shows other people who you are and I think it bridges the misconceptions people have. And it transforms audiences, from formerly closed people into being able to see the universal connections between them, seeing the commonalities between them, and it changes people's minds about who we are, as a people. Much more than books do, by the way.

What are some of the cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal peoples today and how are they being addressed by the Aboriginal Arts Community?

MARACLE: First of all, I think there is a lot of cultural reclamation that is going on and there are a lot of people doing work around that. There is some traditional theatre going on, there are traditional stories being re-written and re-told but also there is a real struggle to end the cultural arrest that I feel we experienced from the time settlers came until very recently, in which we are reaching into the past and pointing to a future in which the characters, the metaphorical images that we had in the past point to the future and reflect a modern reality.

Do you have any suggestions as to how Native Theatre can better serve as a link between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities?

MARACLE: I think that some real efforts on the part of the Canadian Cultural Money Sources could promote Native Theatre a whole lot more than they do; could fund it more heavily than they do. It's always very crowded, the venues that we have are always very small, they are always very poorly advertised and I think if we had larger venues, larger amounts of dollars, more Canadian people could access Native Theatre.

Do you think there should be more Native Theatre in Canada?

MARACLE: Yes. I think that our communities on the one hand, should have access to touring groups. Every Native reserve has a hole in which that can happen if there was money available. But I also think that in urban centres, that it is very, very important to have Native theatre promoted in a much more sustained and larger way.

Do you get many opportunities to see Native Theatre yourself?

MARACLE: I really try to. I really like theatre. I don't write plays or anything like that, but I really like attending theatre. It is always for me a learning experience and I can get in touch with myself. So, I try to but don't think there's enough for me.

(4) Pat LaVallee [Ojibwa/Potawatomi/Odawa] is an artist; he does beadwork and is presently co-producer of a short film for Cinefocus Canada.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to Aboriginal communities?

LAVALLEE: It gives the residents of certain communities a sense of ownership of their own history. It is something that varies even though the stories are basically the same. It makes people want to explore their own history, gives people a sense of pride; it is not a pride in the way that people feel better than the others, it's a pride in knowing that there is something born within themselves that is special....they have a certain philosophy, a certain way of performing. Not very many people in this day and age either have the time or the ability to understand a certain cultural way of thinking. Theatre is something that global villages of native peoples can understand together.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to Non-Native communities?

LAVALLEE: I have no idea what they think of native theatre other than it's quaint, it's something that non-native communities feel they have to work towards. It would be one obvious way, I imagine, that they would feel it would help our communities to work with us. I can't really speak for them and I hope that they wouldn't want me to.

There are many cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal Peoples today. What are some of these issues and how are they being addressed by the Arts community?

LAVALLEE: I think one of the main points are, taking control of your own values, your own way of getting a point across to other people through your art. For the most part, I have seen non-native people trying to interpret...even the way we should speak to other people. Art is a method by which you can express yourself to the rest of society in order for them to understand you. The important

ing is to try make people understand that we have our own way of communicating. For example, there are many very important variations in theatre such as opera, not everybody understands opera, but they go anyways, and it is a beautiful experience. In the same way native people try to build their own cultural, understandable form of theatre, something very unique.

Do you have any recommendations as to how Native Theatre can better serve as a link between the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal communities?

LAVALLEE: That's a tough one. I think the thing to do is to take stories from our past, the legends, futuristic stories, bring everything out in the open so that none of our history is left to the imaginations of the non-native community, so that we can dispel all these stereotypical images.

Would you like to see more Native theatre in Canada?

LAVALLEE: Definitely. I think Native people have got to be the most interesting group of people in the whole world. There's an energy. There is just so much that can be done, so much that Native people need to communicate.

As things stands now, do you get much opportunity to see a lot of Native Theatre?

LAVALLEE: No, if I am lucky I can catch may be a show every two months. I, maybe, get to see a half to a third or all the Native productions and new productions in southern Ontario, which isn't very good, because I live in central Ontario. There aren't enough productions going on.

(5) Edna Manitowabi [Ojibwa/Odawa] is currently teaching Native studies at Trent University. Her first passion is the arts, so for the summer months, June to August, she will be working at the Native Theatre School at Kimbercote Farm.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to the aboriginal communities?

MANITOWABI: I think it is really, really, very important because it is a vehicle for us to express....our voices, to bring out creativity and to tell our own stories, whether it's music or acting on stage. I like what Drew Taylor says in his play, "Someday": "Life, the Creator's way of saying, impress me." In our teachings, in the Ojibwa Creation story, that's exactly what the Creator says to original men as he is being sent out to come down to the levels, when he is being lowered. The Creator says to the original man, the Anishnabe, go and live life to the fullest,

and express it in the most beautiful way, go and bring out that creativity. And to me, that is what we are doing, through theatre.

How do you think theatre serves the community?

MANITOWABI: For now, especially where we are now in terms of our history and art, if you look at the Native communities, what's happening on reserves, I don't have to give you the details, theatre creates a vehicle for those young people. I have a great concern for young people and I'll always encourage them to express themselves because they are our most valuable resource. They have that energy that is so incredible, they have that beautiful energy, that creative energy, and so to help them to channel that energy.....especially now, because there are a lot of things that are going on, when you get off the track, whether it's booze, drugs, sniffing glue....and the suicide amongst our young people.....we need something to bring them out of that and give them something they can USE to bring that out. It [theatre] is a way for them to express their anger. They have a right to bring that out and release it. To me I see it as a form of exorcising, letting it go. And whether you want to take a canvas and put your emotions, your feelings, your fears, everything on canvas. It is the same with the theatre, with acting, with music, you can use that media because it is very powerful. What happened to me was that the theatre freed me. I am not young but it brought me back my youth and it showed me a gift that I didn't know I had. And it was there all along. I just needed that space, that medium to liberate myself, to empower myself, so that my voice could be heard, and it is like I am free, I have that freedom. I want those young people to see that, to experience that....it is a way of finding the spirit within them and awakening that spirit. Theatre is a means to express that.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to Non-Aboriginal communities?

MANITOWABI: I feel very strongly that we have to tell our story from our prospective, and we have to be able to share our history, we have to be able to share what has happened to us in past 500 years, we have to be able to tell about the genocide, about the colonialism, about acculturation, assimilation, about resentment, about the oppression and the effect that it had on us. It is a way of educating the non-native community. They have to hear the story, they have to hear it, so it is a way of telling them the truth.

What are some of the cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal Peoples and how are they addressed by the Aboriginal Arts community?

MANITOWABI: This conference is a really helpful, and for me, this is the first time I have gone to huge conference like this and to be able to hear the different speakers, sharing and networking and

inking up with other aboriginal people all over the world and addressing those issues. Issues like appropriation and the others that we talked about....through whatever medium, whether it is a film, whether it is on stage, and everything that has been discussed here at this conference.

Would you like to see more Native theatre in Canada?

MANITOWABI: Oh yes, yes. I'll tell you something. I really believe that THAT is the way we used to teach, in our past, that it is part of our culture, story telling. Some of us, we have lost that. At one point I felt that had I lost it but then I got it back when I did theatre. That awakened me, the story teller in me came out. I'd really like to see more of that and more young people encouraged to use theatre, to use that medium. Here in Canada, our young people are encouraged to go to the Native Theatre School. We need more writers, more film makers, more actors, more theatre people. Even in ritual, in ceremony, you know how they talk....this one I have a hard time talking about....I guess the reason why I really connected with theatre is because I have been doing ceremonies and it is easy for me to go into that medium, because in ceremony it is not an act, you are not acting, you are in prayer, you have to be connected to your thoughts, your brain, your heart and your body. You have to be in tune and so you have the body, the mind and you have the spirit of ceremony. In theatre you have to prepare your body, you have to do the warm ups, and it is the same thing with your mind, you have to connect that with the character and the spirit. So that was how I was able to focus to get into theatre, into the story.

As things stand out, do you get much opportunity to see Native Theatre?

MANITOWABI: I make an effort to go to theatre now. I never used to because I was caught up in my own work, I had to have that time to learn from the elders because they were my teachers. But there was always something missing and for me....because I never found the way to let go of certain things and, now, I use theatre in that way. I also use voice in that way because my voice was silent for a long time. I am a grandmother but I feel as if it's just the beginning and it feels really good. It is really challenging. It's like a new life for me, a new world....there is a whole transformation for me.

(6) Ruby Slipperjack [Ojibwa], a member of the Fort Hope Band, is a writer and visual artist who is presently working at the School of Education at Lakehead University, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education. Her novel, "Honour the Sun", depicts Ojibwa life in difficult transition, through the eyes of a child. (Moses/Goldie 386)

your opinion, what is the importance of Native Theatre to Aboriginal communities?

SLIPPERJACK: It is very important because you can express yourself in theatre perhaps a bit more than you would in the written form. Because writing is very alien to our culture, there are not that many young people who do read a lot, mainly because the books are not available. Especially in the Northern communities, they don't have an access to Native literature like you find in the city. When they do see Native theatre it is a very great way to bring across ideas.

That is how you see it is serving the community?

SLIPPERJACK: Yes, it is a lot easier to observe theatre than it is to read a book, but, then again, when you get groups like Kashtin [a very popular Native singing duo from Quebec], they are a big hit up North, and that means a lot to them.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to Non-Aboriginal Communities?

SLIPPERJACK: Yes, it is very important because we don't see very much Native Theatre. Usually when you go to see a play, it is all non-native people, non-native values, and when you do see Native Theatre it does reflect a part of culture, that would usually be missing.

What are some of the cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal Peoples and how are they addressed by the Aboriginal Arts Community?

SLIPPERJACK: I can only speak from where I come from [Thunder Bay] and it is very limited. Our resources are very limited. It is not your every day thing, we even don't even have a Native arts council of any sort. There isn't an organized group, but we do have a Native Art Gallery there, but again, it is located in the city so you have to come to the city to see the Native art. Do you have any recommendations as to how Native Theatre can better serve as a link between the Aboriginal and Non-aboriginal communities?

SLIPPERJACK: There again, it is something that the Native communities don't have. Now if we had a travelling Native theatre going to these Native communities up north, I think that would increase quite a bit of the awareness, because you are so isolated when you are up north and there is absolutely nothing.

Do you yourself see much of Native Theatre?

SLIPPERJACK: No and I live in the city, in Thunder Bay, and there is not much Native theatre.

Do you think there should be more Native Theatre?

SLIPPERJACK: Yes, the ones we do get are the tours that come through Thunder Bay. We had Shirley Cheechoo [Cheechoo toured extensively with her play "Path With No Moccasins"] last summer and that was a bit hit. It really struck home because we don't have a network system, we don't have groups to speak with each other and deal with these problems. So it becomes a very isolated problem that you have to deal with yourself. And then when you see the play, all of a sudden, everyone's feeling all these hidden feelings that they thought they had dealt with a long time ago, but hadn't, and these pent up emotions come out into the open, and all of a sudden you're just leaning on each other, crying.

(7) Bernelda Wheeler [Cree/Ojibwa/Assiniboinel], born on Gordon's Reserve in the Touchwood Hills in Saskatchewan, has worked in all forms of media: film, video, radio, television, written media and stage and has authored books for children.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to Aboriginal communities?

WHEELER: I think that Native Theatre is very important to Native communities because it is a reflection of many different nations. It serves as a linking factor between communities and between nations because there are sometimes major differences. But also it serves to identify common denominators among nations. Thereby providing lineages, paths and roads, from one to another and in the final analysis a unification mechanism.

This is how you feel it serves the community?

WHEELER: It serves the community in a whole lot of ways. But there's also the entertainment factor. Indians all these centuries have been presumably entertained by media from the outside. This is our own media, it is much more entertaining because we understand it better. It reflects us, our value systems, our priorities and what we think is important in our communities. It's ours. I think we are going to learn a whole lot more from Native theatre than we learn from any other type of theatre.

What do you think the importance of Native Theatre is to Non-Aboriginal communities?

WHEELER: it is really important because one of the things it is going to do is to educate the non-native community about aboriginal people. They don't give us a whole lot of credit for anything at all. They will be able to see, reflected through, drama the value system of the Aboriginal Canadians. They will be able to see the

priorities among the Aboriginal Canadians and I think it is going to help them develop more of a respect for the value system, the ways of living of the First Nations Canadians. Maybe get the idea that we know what we're all about, we know this country and we might have something to offer.

There are many cultural issues of concern for Native people today. What are some of these cultural issues and how are these being addressed by the Aboriginal Arts Communities?

WHEELER: I think there are a lot of states of interest and knowledge about our cultural lives. The issues with highest priority, at this point in history, is our own place in the Canadian mosaic, politically, and the environment....a LOT of concern about the environment. I think that Canada doesn't take it seriously enough but I think the Aboriginal people who know of their land, know of their environment and are very concerned. And this issue is cultural, cultural for First Nations people, as well as Canadians in general. It is a major concern.

Do you have any suggestions as to how Native Theatre can better serve as a link between the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal communities?

WHEELER: Artists have always prided themselves on not having racial barriers. I have heard, over and over again, art is art, writing is writing, acting is acting and they don't recognise race. It is not always true. They do get together, almost all the productions that I know of are collaborations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal artists including the actual performances. I think, maybe they can provide an example what kind of strengths can come out of cooperation. I think they reflect a Canada that we would like to see with everybody working together and not allowing racial barriers to affect the final product. I think they do operate that way. I think they are probably doing what they can and what is appropriate.

Would you like to see more Native Theatre in Canada?

WHEELER: Oh definitely, yes. It is 500 years now since the Europeans made contact with this continent and in 500 years there is just a minute amount of knowledge on the part of Western Europeans about First Nations peoples and the amount of knowledge about First Nations people is VAST. It is overwhelming to think of how much knowledge that is there and now little is being used to the benefit of Canada. I have always believed that we were descended from one of the greatest nations that has ever lived. I still believe that. And the reason I believe that is because I know a little bit of the attainments of the North American aboriginal civilization prior to European contact and what it is as in our civilization that produced people such as they were in 1492. They were strong, they were healthy, physically fit. They were spiritually far, far advanced

than Western European civilizations and they still are. The spiritual values of the aboriginal people of this Continent are living, practical values, and there is no concept between the spiritual values that we lived and practised and those of other philosophies and dominations. If you examine them more closely you'll see that the principles are exactly the same, The difference is that by the time contact happened, we had learned to live by those principles. I think these gifts, this knowledge, this ancestral history that has been articulated is valuable to Canada and I think if Canada embraced these values, I think we might have a healthy country instead of one that is dying.

Do you see much Native Theatre?

WHEELER: A whole lot more than there was 10 years ago. One or two a year is 100% more than what was happening 10 or 15 years ago. It is developing very quickly. Today, there are playwrights in almost every province in Ontario. Ten years ago there might have been one playwright in Ontario. It's moving, it's moving as quickly as we can possibly expect it to.

(8) Anne Acco (Swampy Cree) is a writer and full-time grandmother. She is currently trying to put together a publishing company to deal strictly with Aboriginal works.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to Aboriginal communities?

ACCO: The importance of Native Theatre to Native communities is historical. It has always been there. Artists have always been considered the most important community, almost like the icons. In my community, the storyteller is treated with such reverence that we need 2 people in order to ask her to tell the story now. We need almost to negotiate the time when we can go there. We do this because we respect her privacy, we respect the fact that when she does something, it is usually done so well, done with such finesse, that we take this position that we have to negotiate even speaking to her. Which we wouldn't for anybody else. Not the Chief. If the chief was to say, 'I don't have time to see you', we would probably knock on his door and kick it in on the way out. That is the way it is.

How does Native Theatre serve the community?

ACCO: Native Theatre has always served the community in that it codifies all the feelings, it codifies them in the same way as you make a structure of a building. You have codes, if you don't build something properly at this end, it will collapse on you. If you cannot build the community with its feelings, all its people's dynamics, personalities and you don't codify them.....you end up with awful situations, because communities evolve and resonate

from one generation to the other and adapt to the situations. You have to have stories that move us from one place to another. When I am saying stories, we are talking about narratives, poetry, and the ability to sit down on a bench with a bunch of kids and start telling them something or playing a game with them. You start right from the beginning. A mother sings a song and this is apparent in all the historical documents we have. We even have a song for the Voyageurs (she sings), de-dah, de-dan, de-dah, and that's for the tump line.....you pull it, you heave it, you pull it, you heave it....that is a cradle song. The other situation that exists, in my little community in 1949, I remember Ittener(?) came from Massachusetts to visit his sister and people came from 120 miles away to hear him sing, because he always sang Ave Maria. Those people would go through anything to hear a good thing and one of the things that is very apparent is that, people would go miles for pow wows. People would go across the country for pow wows. We are the only people in the world that have a road show starting from April all the way till late Fall. In the southern states, I don't think it ever stops.

What is the importance of Native Theatre to Non-Aboriginal communities?

ACCO: All their historical documents, all their present policies, vis a vis, from the Native community to the main stream society, I am talking about multicultural people, to them we are a quaint people. Because they have all been told, all their books tell them, all their schooling tells them....that we are a dead people. We protest that continuously because this government is one of the most racist and has some of the most racist institutionalized structures in the world. That's not just an opinion, we can prove that over and over again.

So how does it affect them [the non-aboriginal people]?

ACCO: It would effect them only if they understood it and they don't have the background for it.

What are some of the cultural issues of concern to Aboriginal Peoples today and how are these addressed by the Aboriginal Arts Communities?

ACCO: One of the ways I'd like to address this is starting with the Royal Commission itself. The Royal Commission has in its structure A white person, who will, in this very project, do all the analysis, pick and choose without having the background, without having the aboriginal thinking in their system. They have no right to be doing the analysis. That is NOT my opinion, that is based on scientific educational systems. If you don't know something, how can you do the analysis. It's as simple as that. However, it seems to me that the Commission, what they did do, was decide that they would allot very little to cultural identity, cultural ways in

which we express ourselves in the arts. They have allotted very little money to that and, in effect, what they've done is, by not giving direct cash to us to have direct word into the packaging of the Royal Commission where there is proper analysis being done. One of the packages of analysis I saw were done by white people. I'm sorry, they are not qualified to do it. If all were doing is being informants, I don't care for it. Period. If we are providing the analysis, because we have very qualified people to do it, even in the Royal Commission there are people qualified to do it, we are not allowed to have the final say.

Do you have any suggestions as to how Native Theatre can bridge the gap between the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal communities?

ACCO: I am not interested. First of all, we have to have the money to build up your own aboriginal theatres. We have to have the stretchers by which we can tap into funding or we have to convince our people that if they give 5 dollars a year for travel funds alone, every little community give 5 dollars a year, then people can come out. In this particular conference, I wanted to bring out a Tlingit speaker, and somebody from the Yukon and they couldn't come because we didn't have travel funds for them. I think that is garbage. There wasn't a single agency that could give us a cash for that, there were no private donations, etc. I don't have prospectus that tells people who we are, what we are. I am just another person asking for funds, and for all they know, I could wallpaper with the cash. But the whole idea is that we have to have structures that give us the kind of authority that gives us funding, this has been my experience, funding for every dollar that I can put on the table. I can raise 3 for 6 because of what that one project can generate. The number of people it employs. I publish something, I employ myself. I employ a copy editor, I employ a lawyer, and several other people in some contracts. I would generate up the means by which people would be employed. That's what I'm interested in. What I see the problem being right now is, the politicians are very busy being politicians, but our narrative goes on. This is why we have suicide, this is why we have different things happening. Because we do not have the means by which we could raise the consciousness of the people, which is the role of the artistic community to raise the consciousness of the people so they can handle their sorrow, or they can handle their joy. You can celebrate their joys.

Do you get many opportunities to see Native Theatre?

ACCO: Not enough. They are usually at the National Arts Centre where they're very expensive and are part of a mainstream, people can't come up there, or they are at eleven o'clock at night....we don't have a very good theatre presence.

Would you like to see more of Native Theatre?

CO: Certainly. It is the only thing for me. I am very interested in all different forms of art, and different people's expression, but right now, what I do see, is a lot of money being wasted on, what I call, bare-ass photography on prime time television. Very little substance but a lot of bare-ass. And I say to myself, boy, if you could take some of that money and apply it elsewhere, to the fun that we could have, the humour.....we haven't even discussed humour in this country. I'm dying to do that because it is damn funny. But would I get prime time for that? No way man and then I don't want that to be controlled either. I don't want a white man telling me how to be funny. I wouldn't tell him how to be funny. And if they lost their ability to be funny and if all the Jews went back to Israel they'd have nothing. How pathetic. That one area of our life, we need to laugh, we need to have fun, that's how bad it's getting.

(9) Greg Young-Ing [Cree] is a publisher for Theytus Books Ltd. in Penticton, B.C. He is originally from The Pas, Manitoba.

What do you think the importance of Native Theatre is to Native communities?

YOUNG-ING: I think it is a form of cultural expression and a form of documentation, a healthy activity for young people to get into to express themselves. And I think it has a therapeutic value too, as well as an artistic and cultural value. It is also a good way of teaching non-native people about first nation's people through drama.

Do you think it also serves the non-native community too?

YOUNG-ING: I think it helps to create a greater understanding when it is Native controlled theatre and members of the audience are non-native.

There are many cultural issues affecting Aboriginal people today. In your opinion, what are some of these issues and how are they being addressed by the Aboriginal Arts community?

YOUNG-ING: I think the artistic community is a lot more open to express things than other communities, such as the educational and the political community, because the artistic community has freedom, a higher level, maybe an absolute level of artistic freedom, whereas, other groups are kind of tied by other criteria, political gain, economic gain and such things like that. I think our artistic community is the most free to express itself and does, it is the most absolute expression of what our indigenous people are thinking.

Q What are some of the strongest cultural issues affecting the Aboriginal people today?

YOUNG-ING: The inundation from the outside, of course, the survival and evolution of aboriginal philosophy, the aboriginal way of life....I think that's a strong issue, how is it going to evolve, how is it changing, how can we affect the change the best way we can, because of the changes in the world that are happening and because of the domination that is all around us. I think that is the key issue. Of course, the issue of aspects of our culture are being used by other people and misused.

How is Aboriginal Arts community addressing these issues?

YOUNG-ING: I think they are taking a really strong position on all the issues, they are taking the right and proper position. And of course every artist and group of artists, when they come together, are doing different things depending on how they are bound together. It is a kind of a difficult question to answer. It is a real true expression that the artists are putting out.

Do you have any suggestions as to how Native Theatre can serve as a link between the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal communities?

YOUNG-ING: Definitely. Thousands of people have enjoyed Tomson Highway's plays and are highly impressed. I am just using Tomson as an example. I am sure that when non-native people see his play their opinion of Native people goes up considerably and they gain a lot of understanding into the aboriginal community that they don't really get anywhere else. It's really an intense experience, sitting in the theatre for two hours and getting all those messages and seeing aboriginal life expressed through theatre.....and in a really direct way, I just can't see if there is anything but good in increasing awareness.

Do you get an opportunity to see Native Theatre?

YOUNG-ING: Yes. Whenever I can, I go.

Do you think there should be more Native Theatre ?

YOUNG-ING: Definitely. For reasons I have just mentioned and there is a lot of potential for it, it is a great activity for cultural expression, people can make money and get work from it, it creates awareness, and I see it as part of our tradition, the theatrical tradition is very strong in First Nations communities. And it is just great way of letting some of our traditions, our expressions, our thinking and our creativity.....be seen and understood by other people, as well as our own people.

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