Two Spirited Thunder People Visit 1991

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September 18, 1991

The Denison Lecture Series
c/o Margery Smith
DLS Coordinator
Doane Box 194

Dear Marge:

A contact at Kenyon College has sent me information on the Two-Spirited Thunder People, a seven-women Native American dance troupe which they are hoping to bring into the area the last week of March or the first week of April, 1992, if they can get enough of the GLCA colleges to go in together.

I have indicated to them that we are interested, given the success of Buck Ghost Horse's visit last year. The cost would be $700 plus travel, room and board (stage and sound managers could be provided by us). They would consider $75/dancer if more than one college would sponsor them. So far, we are the third college in the area to indicate interest. The travel costs are estimated to be in the neighborhood of $2,500 to be shared among hosting institutions.

I have so far gotten commitment of small sums from Dance and Multi-cultural Affairs, and am contacting other relevant units on campus. I would like to request that Denison Lecture Series would contribute a minimum of $500 towards travel expenses.

Enclosed are materials about the Two-Spirited Thunder People. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Annette Van Dyke
Director

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enclosures

cc: Betty Lovelace
    Gill Miller
    Michael Snyder
    John Jackson
NATIVE AMERICAN DANCE TROOP/TWO-SPIRITED, THUNDER PEOPLE

The Native American Dance Troop/Two-Spirited, Thunder People was formed in September of 1990 to serve as a means of expressing our culture and heritage as Two-Spirited Native Americans. (The terms "Two-Spirited" and "Thunder People" come from our traditional references to Lesbian and Gay American Indians.) We have worked to reach out to both the Gay and Lesbian, and American Indian communities in search for connection.

Historically Two-Spirited and Thunder People used to dance and ceremonially come together as a group. This however, has not been in at least two hundred years. Our group intends to bring our Two-Spirited Thunder People back into the circle. Our motto is: "Dancing our way back into the circle.

Our company members come from all four directions, representing thirteen different tribes throughout the continent. We come together for production and theatre events. Our goal of cross-cultural understanding and communication is the basis for our self-empowerment.

We are proud to share a bit of our culture with you and pleased that you have come to hear our message.

AHOE! (Means thank you in Comanche)
NATIVE AMERICAN DANCE TROOP/TWO-SPIRITED, THUNDER PEOPLE

For future information please contact:
Deborah A. Klenk, Coordinator
Native American Dance Troop/Two-Spirited, Thunder people
(612) 224-2742
54 E. Belvidere Street
St. Paul, MN 55107
NATIVE AMERICAN DANCE TROOP/ TWO-SPIRTED, THUNDER PEOPLE

THE COMPANY

Deborah Tahkofper  - Comanche/Kiowa/Mandan Tribes
    Black Leggings Society, War/Traditional Bustle Dancer
    From Oklahoma, residing in Minnesota.
    Deborah is also the founder/coordinator of the Native American Dance Troop

Myra Laramee  - Cree Tribe
    Traditional Women's Cloth Dress Dancer
    From Winnipeg Manitoba Canada

Anita Reyes  - Ojibwe Tribe
    Traditional Grass Dancer
    From Minnesota

Leota Lone Dog  - Lakota/Delaware/Mohawk Tribes
    Traditional Women's Cloth Dress
    From New York

Muriel Miguel  - Cuna/Rappahannock
    Traditional Women's Cloth Dress
    From New York

Rocky Montez  - Mono Tribe
    Traditional Women's Shell Dress
    From California, residing in Colorado

Ruth Kelly  - Navajo/Lakota Tribes
    Traditional Women's Cloth Dress
    From Kansas

Stephanie Milessande Hippie  - Company Stage Manager
    From Minnesota

Sarah S. White  - Company Photographer
    From New York
NATIVE AMERICAN DANCE TROOP/TWO-SPIRITED, THUNDER PEOPLE

THE PROGRAM

GRAND-ENTRY  Two-Spirited Troop

OPENING SONG (OJIBWE)  Myra Laramee

WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL CLOTH AND SHELL DANCERS
Leota Lone Dog, Muriel Miguel, Rocky Montez, Ruth Kelly and Myra Laramee

GRASS DANCER
Anita Reyes

TRADITIONAL BUSTLE DANCER
Deborah Tahkopper

ROUND DANCE  Two-Spirited Troop

RETREAT FLAG  Two-Spirited Troop

INTRODUCTION OF THE COMPANY  Two-Spirited Troop
THE DANCES

Traditional Bustle Dances
These dances are traditional dances, but in recent years, this is the name given to certain types of older dances and dress. We learned many dances - the Grass Dance, the Eagle Dance, the Hoop Dance, - and interpreted many things in dance. They tell the old myths, stories of the hunt, war, and portray animals and birds.

Traditional Women's Dress
These dances are traditional dances. The women dancing in buckskin reflect the earliest participation in dance. Some women later chose cloth dresses but both are seen today depending on the region. It is felt that some of these dances originated as the Butterfly Dance. When her mate is killed in battle, the female butterfly mourns and goes into her cocoon as interpreted with the shawl. Her emergence celebrates freedom and a new life. The woman is celebrated because she is the giver of life.

Grass Dance
This is an ancient dance and the basis of many other dances. In the Northern Plains the elders would ask individuals to stomp down the tall grass to prepare a clearing for ceremony. Many early dancers wore tufts of sweetgrass which evolved into the first feather bustles. Most dancers today use strips of cloth, leather or yarn to give the effect of rippling grass.
All the outfits in the production have been made by the dancers or their families, some pieces passed from generation to generation. The intricate beadwork and featherwork are all done by hand and required hundreds of hours to make. The colors and designs often reflect tribal patterns and colors combined with personal style.

The first Grass dancers in the Northern Plains tucked tufts of sweetgrass into their belts. Later dancers chose strips of leather or fabric, then yarn, to give the effect of the rippling grass as they danced. These tufts are said to have evolved into feather bustles used in other traditional dances. Traditional Bustle dancers today still use two bustles or a single bustle made of eagle feathers, often opening and closing like butterfly wings as the dancer moves.

Traditional warriors wore simple, unadorned buckskin. The warrior had to earn his/her feathers. Many traditional dancers wear two feathers representing the Creator and the one against the Creator. The porcupine quill hair ornament supporting the feathers symbolizes all existence.

Women in traditional dance wear buckskin or cloth dresses. The buckskin with long, flowing fringes symbolizing a waterfall, were the first outfits, later replaced by cloth, but today both styles are seen. The introduction of solo dances for women also influenced dress. Traditional women dancers always carried a shawl into the dance circle, later using shawl movement into the Fancy Shawl dance. As this dance became popular with young women they added intricate beadwork and bold colors.

Dancers choose certain materials or colors to help them. Some traditional Bustle dancers as well as Grass dancers wear anklets of Angora to keep them as sure-footed as the goat, many dancers choose owl feathers for headbands for wisdom; eagle feathers, claws and eagle patterns figure prominently in many outfits as the eagle is a symbol of strength and power. Otter fur gives speed and agility, symbols of nature dominate the patterns.
Long before the white man appeared on this land, Indian tribes began to meet with each other to trade goods and engage in religious and social dancing. These gatherings, called Pow Wows, provided opportunities for the young to learn dances and traditions from the elders, and are still carried out today. The Pow Wow brings together families to revive old friendships and to make new ones. It is a time to share crafts, foods, dances, and customs, and helps us preserve the old ways of our heritage. The Pow Wow singers have always been highly respected in the Indian culture. Without them, there would be no dances. Originally, all the songs and chants were sung in the Native language of the singer. When people from different tribes began to get together and share their customs, the songs were adapted so that singers from other tribes could join in the singing using "vocables" instead of words. A vocable is a set of meaningless sounds, created by the singers, imitating the original words of the songs in a way that could be universally understood. The Native American Dance Troop / Two-Spirited, Thunder People is proud to be able to share with you a piece of Native American tradition, culture, and history. We hope you will come to understand and respect the values and beliefs of the Two-Spirited American Indian, our dual roles, and encourage you to learn more. The Native American Dance Troop / Two-Spirited, Thunder People is unique in that it is the only Two-Spirited dance troop that exists in modern time.
MEMO FROM THE DANCE DEPARTMENT

TO: Women's Studies Committee

FROM: Gill Miller

DATE: October 2, 1991

RE: Announcements for Monday's Meeting

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I am unable to make the meeting on Monday because I teach during that hour. Please make the following announcements:

1) The Dance Department appreciated the support given by Women's Studies Programming for the Katherine Dunham lecture. Ms. Dunham, a very famous very courageous Black dancer from the 1930s (and forward) was the first to incorporate both Haitian and African rhythms into aesthetic dance in America. Martha Graham is credited with every detail of Modern Dance as if no one else did anything. While Martha's contribution is NOT to be underestimated, still Katherine did an equal share. So THANK YOU!

2) The Dance Department is willing to commit a sum of money to the Two-Spirited Thunder performance if it's still a go. We will contribute $150-$200. Are you still thinking about it? Where would it be performed? If our studio space is needed, the physical plant set-up is about $135. Tech director is another $20/hr. I just thought you should have this information ASAP. Because our funds are so limited, I need to know by the end of the semester. Otherwise (you know me ...) I'll spend the money on something else. (As you can imagine, the tugging on our tiny $1000 is misshaping the bill.)

3) The committee might be interested in arranging a field trip to Columbus when the African-American dance company, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, team up with Sweet Honey in the Rock in April. The concert is scheduled for April 11 at Mershon. Good tickets will be hard to come by much later than February. Put it on your agenda NOW. I'll organize it if people are interested in going.

P.S. I know it's early, but people's schedules get sooo full.

4) A personal message: I understand the reason for trying an 11:30 time slot, but I hate missing these meetings and 11:30 is impossible. If a vote is taken about the time ... please go back to the afternoons.
November 6, 1991

To: Two-Spirited Thunder People Supporters

From: Annette Van Dyke
Director of Women's Studies

I have recently heard from my contact at Kenyon that they and the other college involved in bringing the Native American Dance Troupe to the area have been unable to pull together their funds. It would be too expensive for Denison to attempt to bring them by ourselves, so my contact suggested that Denison and the other interested colleges try to bring them during the 1992-93 academic year.

Thanks for your support. Please let me know if you want to contribute to bringing the Two-Spirited Thunder People next year.

Yes, Annette I'm still interested. My lectures budget has been slashed however. So, I will not have very much to contribute. But I will contribute something.

John Jackson