

# Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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## American Indian Cultural Forum ? Review

Written by David on February, 23 2010

American Indians enlighten, entertain crowd at Sunday service

In Native American culture artistic expression is often a form a spiritual communion and this religious, mystical experience was shared Sunday afternoon at the Stand Theatre by the members of the American Indian Center of Indianapolis.

For more than two-hours, audience members were educated, entertained and participated in a cultural forum sponsored by Shelby County Reads which focused on the traditions, history, lore, spiritual beliefs and artistic celebrations of the original caretakers of American soil.

"The drum is the heartbeat of Native Americans," Doug Poe told the rapt audience gathered in the theater. "Drumming, dancing, singing and playing music are a form of prayer in our culture."

This eye-opening, often haunting journey opened and closed with a rather fitting bridge across cultures: a "Veterans Dance," performed by several dancers in full, "traditional regalia" accompanied by the resonant drums and other-worldly vocals of Four Winds singers and musicians.

This "Veterans Dance" is a celebration and thanks-giving offering to all who served our land, community and country, added Poe, of the American Indian Council. The final performance of this more modern dance included quite a few veterans from the audience who danced on stage after being praised for their service. The crowd, in fact, joined the dancers several times on stage during "inter-tribal" dances during the afternoon.

In a not so subtle irony, Native American's dance was outlawed by the United States government in 1883 said Poe, during a Power-Point presentation that highlighted the historic litany of physical and cultural genocide against Indians in the country. This ban, which in effect outlawed a form of religion, was historically inspired by the "Ghost Dance" that swept the Great Plains in the aftermath of Gen. Custer's disastrous defeat.

While a "Ghost Dance," was not performed Sunday, another traditional Plains Indian mystical dance was. The "Grass Dance" is the oldest surviving dance of the Plains Indian cultures. It is a spinning dance designed, it seems to me, as a trance-inducing shamanistic communion with the creator.

Another clearly inspired mystical, mythic dance was the "Hoop Dance," a crowd favorite Sunday afternoon. This "medicine" dance is a metaphoric allegory of the world, an interwoven series of circles that symbolically come together to both describe and define the Native American vision of the world. It was and is replete with the symbolism of circles uniting and coming together to form into visually complex images and forms that also simultaneously merge to form the world as a series of circles.

Aside from these often spiritually infused dances, the evocative nature of native American musical traditions was driven home to the crowd by the echoing of the drums and a rather poignant display of flute music by Jeff Roberts.

In American Indian culture the flute was traditionally the instrument of courtship, according to Poe. While it was used to serenade brides, the inspired flute play of Roberts evoked a more emotion laden and lamenting experience. His very haunting, willowy, textured tones of breadth and melodic breaths were again filled with longing and spirit.

In a rather significant ceremony, which highlighted the spirituality of the event several members of the American Indian Center blessed the theater prior to their performance in a ritual sage burning ceremony.

Following the initial Flag and Veterans Dances which serve as traditional Native American national anthems the crowd rose to its feet. The ceremonies then reconvened with Carolyn Statler of Shelby County Reads addressing the awed crowd.

?Welcome to this wonderful, wonderful event,? she said, ?and I would encourage everyone here to also attend our program featuring James Alexander Thom, author of ?Follow the River? and his wife Dark Rain Thom, who will speak Wednesday night at 7 in Breck Auditorium at Shelbyville High School.?

Overall, this American Indian Cultural Forum was a colorful, yet thought provoking journey that once again reminded one of the importance of creativity, celebration and art that spans, informs, influences all cultures across this globe that we call home.

In conclusion, anyone with an abiding interest in Native American culture was well served by the Sunday?s service at the Strand Theatre and should, could and can further educate themselves about this traditional culture at the Shelby County Library, the Grover Museum or by reading any of the books currently being promoted by Shelby County Reads, which can be purchased locally at Three Sisters Books and Gifts on the circle.

Submitted by: Terrance Aldridge

This independent review does not express the opinion of the Strand Theatre.

**Images on this post:**

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