

THUNDERBIRD AMERICAN INDIAN DANCERS



Artistic Director Louis Mofsie (Hopi/Winnebago) is MC of Thunderbird American Indian Dancers. Photo by Jonathan Slaff.

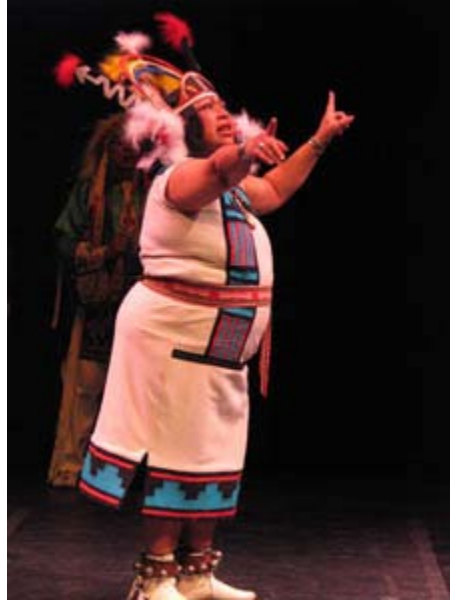
Highlights of the show include a Hoop Dance performed by Donna Ahmadi (Cherokee) and Tom Pearson (Creek/Cherokee), a Caribou Dance (from the Inuit people of Alaska), a Butterfly Dance (a Hopi custom which gives thanks for the beauty of nature), a Grass Dance and Jingle Dress Dance (from the Northern Plains people), a Stomp Dance (from the Southeastern tribes), and a Shawl Dance (from the Oklahoma tribes). Featured performers will include the Heyna Second Son Singers (various tribes) and Matoaka Eagle (Santo Domingo/Chickahominy). Bessie winner Tom Pearson, director of Third Rail Projects (a modern dance troupe), will perform his own work, "Ceremony," a piece about his investigations into his Native American background. In the final section of the program, the audience is invited to join in the Round Dance, a friendship dance.



L-R: Alan Browne, Julian Gabrouel, Ciaran Tufford, Gabriel Perez. Photo by Jonathan Slaff.

Louis Mofsie, the Thunderbirds' artistic director is quoted as saying "Educators try to supplement the kids' knowledge of Native Americans and to teach them about different cultures. But the emphasis is on how we used to live, in the past tense. The kids are never taught how to relate to us in the present. Now they can meet us, and it's present tense. It's more than just seeing us on stage." He adds, "Learning about different cultures is important to enlarging the kids' perspective, particularly in light of what's going on in the world. We're in trouble today because we don't understand different cultures."

This spectator event is a joyous reunion for native peoples nationwide and an opportunity for the non-Indian community to voyage into the philosophy and beauty of Native culture.



Storyteller Matoaka Eagle (Santo Domingo/Chickahominy).
Photo by Jonathan Slaff.

Pageantry is an important component of the event, and all participants are elaborately dressed. Most dances are performed in the traditional Circle, which represents a unity of peoples. There is a wealth of cultural information encoded in the movements of each dance.

Throughout the performance, all elements are explained in depth through detailed introductions by the troupe's Director and Emcee Louis Mofsie (Hopi/Winnebago). An educator, Mofsie plays an important part in the show by his ability to present a comprehensive view of native culture.



Alan Browne - Shooting Star (Delaware/Dutch). Photo by Jonathan Slaff.

The Thunderbird American Indian Dancers are the oldest resident Native American dance company in New York. The troupe was founded in 1963 by a group of ten Native American men and women, all New Yorkers, who were descended from Mohawk, Hopi, Winnebago and San Blas tribes. Some were in school at the time; all were "first generation," meaning that their parents had been born on reservations. They founded the troupe to keep alive the traditions, songs and dances they had learned from their parents, and added to their repertoire from other Native Americans living in New York and some who were passing through. Within three or four years, they were traveling throughout the continental U.S., expanding and sharing their repertoire and gleaning new dances on the reservations. (A number of Thunderbird members are winners of Fancy Dance contests held on reservations, where the standard of competition is unmistakably high.) Members of the Thunderbirds range in professions from teachers to hospital patient advocates, tree surgeons and computer engineers.