

RHYTHMS OF LIFE SERIES

# Native Nations expresses diversity through dance

SHANNON EHRIN  
Staff writer

At noon Wednesday, Native Nations Dance Theater took the stage in Bruno's Café for an hour of Native American song and dance.

Native Nations is a family organization led by artistic director Vaughnda Hilton. Wednesday was only the second time that the troupe has performed for Penn State Behrend's Rhythms of Life Series.

Hilton and four generations of her family presented a plethora of traditional and contemporary Native American songs and dances, starting with the "Lakota Flag Song." This song is the national anthem of the Lakota people and was sung in honor of Veterans Day. Hilton said that the Lakota people "honor their flag and will honor it as they live, as long as they can."

Each song and dance performed had a story or purpose behind it, and some were composed of different languages from various tribes in North and South America.

The Eastern Women's Blanket Dance, a dance from the Narragansett people, is a traditional woman's dance. Hilton's mother, Pauline Hilton (Songbird), danced to a faster beat in very slow, circular movements with her bald eagle embellished blanket outstretched from her arms. Each woman who performs this dance will bring forth a different representation of it depending upon her age.

Two of the men danced the Prairie Chicken Dance. The men moved around in circles in steps with their hands on their lower backs to appear like chickens. This dance represents a male prairie chicken preparing the nest for the female and making sure that she is comfortable. It is danced to honor the prairie chicken because the male prairie chicken is looked at as a good example of how men should act towards women.

Another of the dances, the Hoop Dance, was performed by Delwin Fiddler Jr. Before the dance, Hilton added that some people consider the Hoop Dance to be "a choreographed prayer." Fiddler used many colorful hula hoops and intertwined them to create differ-

ent shapes. He would dance with the hoops over his head and step into them to move them up and down his body. At one point, Fiddler had the hoops looped together around his arms and flapped his arms in slow motion to make it look like he was soaring around the stage. The Hoop Dance is one of the oldest Native American

dances and was the most intricate dance of the afternoon.

Throughout the performance, Hilton opened the floor to anyone who wanted to attempt one of the dances. She encouraged the audience to try the Smoke Dance since it is the fastest of the dances at only thirty seconds long.

The group also honored veterans and warriors again in one of their last songs, a song from the Lakota tribe.

"[This dance] is a man's dance." Hilton said. "[It] is one of the traditional dances of the men. Normally they would have big, huge feather muscles on their back and a lot of feathers on top of their head...and the

bone breastplate. If you can picture the men's dance with all the feathers."

All of the dances were accompanied by vocals and various instruments. Rattles made from deer or buffalo skin and pebbles or corn, and hand drums with drum sticks were primarily used for this show.

The performers were colorfully dressed in traditional Native American outfits with eagle feathers in their hair. Each ensemble, or regalia, was created by Hilton. Hilton wore a Seminole patchwork design, which can take up to a year to finish since each piece of fabric is sewn on individually. Her mother wore an Eastern Woodlands dress made out of deer skin. The regalia is passed down from generation to generation and the eagle feathers are given to those who do good deeds or speak out on behalf of their culture. Eagle feathers are also given to family members by loved ones in the military.

Native Nations has offices in Philadelphia and South Dakota. It is represented by 12 to 14 of the 564 federally recognized tribes in the United States, including the Blackfeet, Seminole, Carib, and Creek tribes. Hilton, her mother, Fiddler, Andrew Lyn, Raoule Hilton, and Baby Drew are only some of the core members of Native Nations who performed on Wednesday.

Since 1991, the group has traveled all over the continent and overseas. This past summer they performed in Abu Dhabi and at the Aradosivia Festival in Greece. They were able to teach and learn other dances and songs from other cultures. That is the goal of Native Nations, to "keep the culture alive. [To show that] we're here, we're still going," Hilton said. He believes in the importance of the less informed to understand their culture and recognize Native Americans in a positive way.

"We teach any and everybody who has a desire to learn about different cultures and not the stereotype of what people would normally hear about or read about in books," Hilton said. "We try to put a face, a real face, to who we are today and who we represent today."



Evan Koser / The Behrend Beacon

The "Round Dance," as it's called, is a well-known friendship and celebratory dance. Often, the dance is used to celebrate a passing or upcoming birthday. Young Baby Drew, also known as Buffalo Stands Strong, joined the festivities toward the end of the performance.

## CAMPUS THEATER



Evan Koser / The Behrend Beacon

Swanson was joined by a varied cast, including Professor Elizabeth Fogle.

## Through a different looking glass

CHELSEA MARKLE  
Staff writer

Director Chrystyna Dail and her cast and crew performed a spectacular rendition of *Alice: Tales of a Curious Girl*.

The play is a spinoff of the infamous tale *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Although the production was more closely related to the novel rather than the ever popular Walt Disney movie, the audience can closely relate to the show and its childhood story of imagination and wonder.

Alice was played by the eccentric and passionate Kylie Swanson, a junior biology major. She captured the audience with her enthusiasm for her role, and there is no doubt about it that she was perfect for the part.

The cast consisted of only 12 on-stage members with various crew members keeping the internals of the show together. Other than Swanson, each cast member plays multiple parts and captured each Wonderland creatures' personality.

While the production was a little more abstract than expected, all anyone needs is an open and interpretive mind to fully appreciate what Professor Dail has done with the script. She took a somewhat psychoanalytical script and put an excellent, modern spin on the on it, adding various pop-culture references, such as the "Single Ladies" dance during the famous Tea Party scene. Students

will find themselves in for an incredible journey through the rabbit hole, though inebriated students may feel a bit more affected by the experience.

The show had an effective entrance with the entire cast on stage speaking in unison sending chills down your spine. Actually, this effect was used frequently during the performance, which created an eerie ambience. Coupled with the frequent black light usage, which captured the idea of imagination and added to the surreal experience of *Alice*.

Although the theater is not as large as one would imagine, the small size adds for an intimate performance, making the audience feel as though they're actually in *Wonderland*. Many members of the cast were freely allowed to break the fourth wall, which not only added to that effect, but brought the audience personally into the performance.

While it may not have been the intent of the show, many overtones were present. For instance, gender roles played as much a part in the show as Swanson's Alice. With ideas such as "little girl" to "grown ladies" and "queens," you're left to question the mores of our own society.

This year's production is one to remember and a total must see. With tickets at only seven dollars, you will definitely get your money's worth.

## GRADUATES

# Theses and thesauruses: Seniors graduate after writing, revising, writing

CHRISTINE NEWBY  
Managing editor

Seniors Tony Sherry and Jessica Storm, both creative writing majors, displayed what they have been spent countless hours working on this year on Thursday night at the Smith Chapel: their theses.

According to Tom Noyes, professor of literature and writing at Behrend, the thesis is a book length manuscript and an independent study in which students work with a director. Creative writing majors must not only complete the thesis, but they also have to read their thesis in front of an audience. Noyes said that if they pass their thesis, then they can graduate.

In addition to the thesis, Noyes said that students must complete a 10-15 page scholarly analytic essay.

"The essay talks about the influences that they have had," Noyes said. "What they have learned [throughout their academic career] is also included in the essay along with how their writing has changed from the time they were a freshman to a senior."

Sherry's thesis was a novella, a short novel, while Storm's was a compilation of short fiction and poetry.

"[The thesis] was tough," Sherry said. "There were a lot of nights in the computer lab. I just had to manage my time and get it done."

Sherry and Storm had to go through a thesis defense which consisted of Noyes and two additional professors asking questions.

"We drilled them with questions about



Daniel Smith / The Behrend Beacon

Storm's creative writing thesis spanned 60 pages, containing short fiction and poetry.

their thesis for an hour," Noyes said.

Both Sherry and Storm are set to graduate at the end of the semester.

Storm choose creative writing in her freshman year and has stuck with the major throughout her four years at Behrend.

"Every since I was 12, I've been writing poems, so when it was time to pick my major I picked something that I had been told I was pretty good at," Storm said.

Storm plan's for after graduation is to attend Mercyhurst College for a master's degree in elementary and special education. On the other hand, Sherry's original major was communications, and he switched to creative writing in the beginning of his sophomore year.

"After graduation, I plan on going back

home to Meadville and I eventually want to find a job around Pittsburgh," Sherry said. According to Sherry and Storm, Noyes has impacted them through his classes.

Sherry said that "Noyes has helped me improve my writing overall, not just one certain area."

"I learned so much and was exposed to really great writers," Storm said. "Tom is a great professor and a wonderful human being. He teaches how to be a good person, and not just a good student."

Noyes said that if Sherry continues to write as much as he did in school, he's going to continue to get better.

"Like Tony, if she keeps at it and if she is interested and willing to publish her work, she has potential," Noyes said.

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