

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1991-06-13

Segment 1

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Dan Smoke speaks with Lee Crowchild and Quentin Pipestem, both members of the Chattie Kazee dancers. Dan asks about their experiences participating in the London International Children's Festival. Quentin shares what dancing means to him and the personal growth that he's gone through since joining the troupe four years ago.

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mike Beachey

Guest(s): Quentin Pipestem, Lee Crowchild

MIKE BEACHEY: Alright, that was music by **Mark Beachey**, an **Ojibwe** from northern **Ontario**, from the **Matachewan** band. And welcome to the Native People's programming. My name is **Mike Beachey** and with me in studio is **Dan Smoke**. Today we have a special guest from **Calgary, Alberta**. And ask Dan: would you like to introduce our special guest here?

DAN SMOKE: Thank you, Mike. Yes, I'm sitting in here with a couple brothers from the western provinces. And they are here as part of the **London International Children's Festival**. They are here until Saturday; they arrived Tuesday night. They are called the **Chattie Kazee** dancers. Now Chattie Kazee, as I understand it, translates into **Red Thunder**. And I would just like to introduce our listening audience to **Lee Crowchild** and **Quentin Pipestem**. So would you just like to introduce your nation and what reserve you hail from?

QUENTIN PIPESTEM: Well, for myself, I come from the **Tsuut'ina** Nation. It's located just southwest of Calgary, Alberta.

LEE CROWCHILD: And for myself, it's the same. I come from Tsuut'ina reserve.

DS: Okay, so that translates into Plains- is that **Plains** Nation? Or is it **Cree**?

LC: Yeah. No, we're Tsuut'ina. We're of the **Athabaskan** dialect. Just so, as a reference point maybe, our relatives to the south, the real well known ones, are the **Apache** and the **Navajo**. North would be the **Chipewyan** and the **Dene Tha'** and the **Dogrib, Slavey**- all ones that speak the Athabaskan dialect, those are what we're related to.

DS: Okay, so that's like a family linguistic group.

LC: Yeah, a family linguistic group. Tsuut'ina actually means "many people" or we're part of the **Beaver people**.

DS: Yeah, so okay could you tell us how you came to arrive here in **London**. Like a little bit about how...what is it that your dance troupe...where do you go...what are your objectives as a dance troupe? I know that it's cross-cultural. Do you want to share a little bit about that?

LC: Okay, how we got to London- it's quite a long story but these children's festivals are becoming quite popular across Canada and the United States. We did the **Vancouver Children's Festival** last year and through our own promotions and that the organizer for the London Children's Festival thought to call us and it's been a one-year, sort of back and forth negotiation to get here. And that's basically how we got here. Our dance company, we always tour with a number of six or seven people. I suppose we had just taken something that a lot of people have grown up with; sort of a Native belief in the way we want to present ourselves, and that Native dance is one element of that. And it's very visual so we take that and we go into the schools and perform in various schools. We actually complement a lot of social studies programs in their studying about the **Great Plains Indians**. Last year, we did 320 school performances. So we travel around quite a lot. Now our longest tour has been for 13 weeks nonstop. It killed us but we did it! (*laughter*)

DS: Sounds like you're really busy, I mean you're really meeting a lot of people. And are you meeting a lot of Native brothers and sisters on these journeys?

QP & LC: Oh yeah, yeah.

DS: So you're, in meeting them, sharing a lot of your ways and at the same time learning other ways.

QP & LC: Oh yeah.

DS: So Quentin, how did you come into being on the troupe?

QP: Well, I've been with the troupe now for it's going on four years and right now I'm one of the longest members that's been with Red Thunder Chattie Kazee. And I started as a summer job over the summer and then from there, it just evolved from there because I really liked it before. And I was learning about travelling and it worked out for me that it kept me—being on the road for 13 weeks at a time or eight weeks—kept me away from home which was alright, keeping me out of trouble. And it kinda turned a leaf for myself, being on the road, learning new things, and I really grew involved with it.

DS: Sounds like you have really come to an identity of your Native roots and this helps reinforce who you are...

QP: Oh yeah, for sure.

DS: ...you know, by going out and showing other nations, other people, exactly, you know, what your ways are, from where you come from. So you have a really good understanding of your roots and I think that's really important. Like you're—how old are you?

QP: I'm 19...and I'll be turning 20 at the end of July.

DS: Yeah because that's an age at which we seem to be wandering and kind of wondering. And...but you seem to have a good grasp of, you know, what you want to do...that's really good.

QP: Yeah.

DS: I had the distinct pleasure of being an observer for the performance yesterday. And I was really impressed with how you have the different dancers each do a different style of dance. These are all styles of dance that are seen at most **pow wows**. But you don't see them, you know, one person doing like you had the **jingle dancer** out there. Quentin here does a **hoop dance**. And these are all, like, individually, they seem like quite hard dances to master. Is that...do you do this for...as a **hoop dancer**...do you do that **hoop dancing** all the time? You never do, say, **fancy dancing**?

QP: Not really. For the hoop dance, and I've been doing it for about four years, in that four years I've done a lot of work with a lot of practice and working with the company. But actually I also dance **grass dance** style and I started off as a **traditional dancer** first. So actually I kind of evolved with the dance and I like to dance and I can try different styles. And right now my style I'm doing is grass dance. And maybe in the future, I'll change to **fancy dance**.

DS: Oh okay, so you can change your style of dancing...

QP: Oh yeah.

DS: You find that you do that...I guess as your personality evolves or the way you...is there anything that motivates you to change? In your dance style?

LC: Sore feet (*laughter*).

QP: Just that the different...to try a new style...to like, you know, change. Like, you know, I've been doing traditional for the last four years. And then...I still like doing traditional...I'll probably go back to it. But then I like to be able to vary and I like to be able to dance these other different styles too. Because it's fun dancing. I like grass dance style. But now I'm trying to dance grass for a little while. It's not really that hard to change cause it's pretty well all the time with the drum beat, and then you just gotta pick up the different beats and the different styles. But it's pretty well it's all in time with the drum beat and that I've got.

DS: Good. And Lee, you're a traditional dancer?

LC: Well I suppose if you put a label on it, yeah, but really the style of dancing I do is the **Prairie Chicken Dance** style—very common to our area. You know, in Native dance on the Great Plains, when we were little kids, we learned to dance, you know, watching everybody and sort of imitating what they do. And there comes a time when you have to be initiated into...to have the

right to dance. You know, and almost all of our dancers have gone through that initiation one time in their lives...you know, to have the right to dance. My style of dancing—Prairie Chicken Dance—but, you know, the more modern adaptation is traditional dancer. I just want to talk a little bit about maybe the...how our company actually works. You know, the idea of starting this company was, oh back in 1985, just sort of the initiative of, I suppose of myself really. I took...I saw this sort of idea work in **New Zealand**, you know, with the Native people of that country—the **Māori people**—they took young people who otherwise wouldn't have anything, you know, these are ones that maybe in trouble with the law, or you know, low education, unemployed, maybe some...there is a lot of solo parents as well involved. You know, and it sort of gives...all they did was really expand on something that they knew how to do and that was naturally sing. Oh for Native people I thought it would work very good because something that we always like naturally doing is dancing. You know, so that's how I adapted it and I thought well, I gotta take...not look for the best dancers around and have a group like that but take people that are common and, you know, everyday people, whoever wants to. We kind of have an open door policy. A person really wants to come into our company and dance, then we allow for them. And after, you know, a while, they kinda feel that maybe they want to stay with us and keep going. But when they come in, it's kind of like boot camp. We mold them and shape them the way we want. And to be, you know, it's a lot of personal...personal growth that they see.

DS: That they go through.

LC: They go through, yeah.

DS: Yeah, I can see that there is definitely a cultural emphasis on that growth with people, with your troupe.

LC: Yeah.

DS: Cause you have a lot of nations represented, you know, you have, I noticed the **Salish**...

LC: Salish (*corrects pronunciation*).

DS: Salish. Salish Nation and the **Shuswap** Nation. So right there, you know, I know that they're not indigenous to Alberta. They're from **British Columbia**?

LC: Well for the majority of our dancers, they just come right out of the woodwork and they approach us and say they have nothing that they're doing. And, you know, could they stay for a while. And that's really how we get a lot of our dancers. We don't really go out and recruit dancers, you know. We just allow for the people to come find us really.

DS: Yeah. Okay, I think I'll pass it back over to Mike and we'll continue this interview after.

MB: Okay. You know I just had a question for Lee there. I understand you did 320 schools...yester...or last year...yesterday (*laughter*). Yeah...but anyways...do you see this going into the school system...and...what's your feelings in dealing with the school system?

LC: Well we've never really had any negative experiences with school systems. Each school board or school district is really different, you know. There's no...all across Canada, there's no really one set way they do things. But I think what we really sell 'em on a point is...we're presenting something that is common to all Native people. And that's the ability to share a little bit of their lives, you know. All these years, in the past century, you know the...we've always been...everything's been sort of put under the rule of government and all these things, you know. In the...churches came in and had boarding schools and all that, you know. And they kinda tried to influence something that was very foreign, you know. And now, it's sort of, maybe call it a renaissance or whatever. But, you know, I think a lot of school boards and, you know, the Canadian population in general sees the importance of Native people and the traditions that they held long time ago—and they've still retained to this point. You know, so, we've always been welcomed wherever we've gone. You know, last year we did a tour of—what was it—80 schools in Saskatchewan?

QP: Right, yeah. In 5 weeks.

LC: You know, and three schools a day. And sometimes you travel 100 miles in one day. Yeah, you just dance. First thing in the morning, you just pack everything and go...drive an hour to the next one. And you have five minutes to get ready, and do that one, and then you can stop for a 20 minute lunch and then go to the next town.

MB: You really enjoy your lunch, eh? Okay, with that we're gonna take a little break here with some music from Mark Beachey, Ojibwe from northern Ontario, with some of his music here.