

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1998-09-05
Segment 2
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Dan and Mary Lou Smoke present a review of the film "Smoke Signals," signaling the importance of this film being the first major film created about Indigenous peoples, by Indigenous peoples. Mary Lou teaches listeners about the artists featured on the "Smoke Signals" soundtrack. After, Dan reads an opinion piece on the events that occurred over the summer at Restigouche, Mi'kmaq territory on the east coast. This piece argues for the creation of a new type of 'warrior,' one armed with knowledge from traditional teachings, in order to reach a humble triumph in future conflicts.

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke

DAN SMOKE: Shekoli! Sge:no! Kwe! Wâciyê! Koolamalsi! And that was **Ulali**, and that was their cover song "**Mahk Jchi**" from their CD *Mahk Jchi*. And it's interesting that *Smoke Signals*, currently playing at the New Yorker Cinema, 329 Richmond Street, it's going to be on tonight at 7:00, and then tomorrow night at 9:30pm, and then on Sunday and Monday at 7:00, and then on Tuesday at 9:30pm. It received a rating of four out of five from Louis Hobson. Louis Hobson is a columnist with the Calgary Sun, and he gave it a four out of five rating. And so, we give it a...if we had a rating system of five eagle feathers, I'd think we'd give it a five eagle feathers because it encompasses everything. It tells our story. It really, really does. It does a fine job. The acting is superb. It's very telling of the talent and of the creativity, all the ingredients necessary for a supreme production are there in this movie *Smoke Signals*. So, we wanted to...we urge you all to head on down to the New Yorker Cinema. It's only playing until Tuesday and then it will be leaving the city. So, all of our listeners, if you know people out in the outlying communities who may not have the opportunity to hear this broadcast, by all means, please do let them know. Let them know that they only have until Tuesday.

MARY LOU SMOKE: Also, the manager down at the New Yorker is interested in getting it out there, so if you can get a group of 25 people or more to come out, then they'll let you have tickets for \$5 each, so give them a call about that.

DS: Yes. Miigwetch, Mary Lou.

MLS: Oh!

DS: You have another review on *Smoke Signals*. Do you want to share that with our listeners?

MLS: Okay, alrighty. This is from Los Angeles, and it says: "There is critical acclaim for *Smoke Signals*, the first major film made by Native Americans about Native Americans, and it's sending a message to Hollywood that there is a talent pool waiting to be tapped. But it's also giving off another signal, that maybe it's time to start taking Native American music seriously too. The soundtrack is one of the most dazzling aspects of the movie, which has been playing in selected cities and it's already opened. Native American music is on the same boat as Native American film, drifting far from the mainstream. Just out of TVT Soundtracks, the *Smoke Signals* discs just might draw attention to an overlooked genre. 'Most people don't know anything about our culture and still have a vision of us as we were portrayed in Western movies,' gripes novelist Sherman Alexie, who not only co-produced and wrote the *Smoke Signals* movie but composed part of the soundtrack and recruited many of the musicians. There's a musical heritage that's more complex and interesting than the simplistic music we've heard in all those old movies."

“What’s called Native American music is either ancient traditional, spare and serene, cloaked in ethereal spirituality, and propelled by ritualistic chants, or various forms of pop (rock, folk, country, and new age, for instance) that incorporate this music. Though small and underexposed, the Native American music scene is brimming with skilled, adventurous artists such as Robbie Robertson, Bill Miller, Rita Coolidge, Jackie Bird, the Blues Rock Quartet, Indigenous, and arguably the best of all, the remarkable Joanne Shenandoah. The late Buddy Red Bow, one of the giants of the genre, recorded an extraordinary 1984 album, *Journey to the Spirit World*, featuring spine-tingling ballads that fuse country and Native American prayer, while hardly anyone knows about it or about Buddy Red Bow, who died a bitter alcoholic. Likewise, too few fans know about Shenandoah, a new-age diva who has recorded for small labels like Canyon and Silverware. ‘All Native artists are working towards getting exposure for our music,’ says multi-talented Shenandoah, who co-wrote a new Clear Light book, *Skywoman: Legends of the Iroquois*. It helps tremendously when something happens that inspires the media to look at the music.”

DS: Miigwetch, nya:weh, Mary Lou. Yeah, that book, *Skywoman*, is available from Clear Light Publishers in Santa Fe, New Mexico. If you want to write down there for your own copy of that book. It’s a children’s book. And Joanne has also done a CD for children which she won a **Native American Music Award** for the best children’s album. And she also won the award for the best female vocalist also at this year’s Native American Music Awards, the first ever in history of awards shows. There’s never been a Native American awards show. And there’s never really been a category for Native American music until Elaine Bomberry and Buffy Sainte-Marie got together back in 1993 and had the Juno people start a category called the Music of Aboriginal Canada. And that hopefully will be broadened into two categories: the one being contemporary music and the other being traditional music. Because it’s very hard to define what album is better, a contemporary album or a traditional? Because they’re worlds apart, the two different styles of music.

DS: Anyways, I wanted to read to you a story that follows the events that transpired in **Restigouche**. Restigouche, as most of you are aware, is **Mi’kmaq** country on the east coast, and it’s by **Richard Wagamese**. Richard Wagamese is a communicator with the **Assembly of First Nations**, living up in northern Ontario. And he’s written this story, this op-ed piece called “New Warriors.”

“Now that the barricades are down in Mi’kmaq country and the inevitable predictions of an **Oka**-like eruption on the east coast dismantled with them, all of us can breathe a little easier. Another summer has passed, and the apparent season of unrest in Indian country is over. As we move into the autumn season, we can be grateful that no one died in the Mi’kmaq dispute over logging rights and none of our people have to endure the indignity of imprisonment. Still, the echoes of hostility, mistrust, and suspicion linger over the land where we wonder will the next eruption flare. Who will be next to challenge the might of the white over rights we have paid dearly for the opportunity to exercise? For me, watching the images of masked and camouflaged warriors confronting authority in Restigouche, and hearing **Mohawk** warriors state their preparedness to support the Mi’kmaqs, the most pertinent question remaining from this summer is this one: what manner of warrior will emerge to fight the next fight? Because there will definitely be another battle somewhere, another scrape in which the inherent rights of our people are trampled by the assumed rights of capitalists, tunnel-vision politicals, narrow-minded opportunists, or all of the above.”

“Who, I wonder, will step up to protect Aboriginal interests, and what weapons will they bear? According to numerous prophecies across our nations, we live in the days of great change. Mother Earth is growing from the tremendous wounds. She’s growing from the tremendous wounds inflicted on her and all of nature is in the process of rebelling against the onslaught of technology and a sin called progress. Soon we will all be confronted with the real power of the universe, and our lives will be stressful and hard. If you respect those prophecies and the teachings that lie beneath them, you come to realize that there is a great need for a new kind of warrior to emerge from our circles, because the prophecies say that Indigenous peoples will lead the way to a new harmony, a new balance, and a newer and stronger relationship with all that is. In that light, we need to begin preparing ourselves to fight a new kind of fight and become a new kind of warrior. When nature flexes its muscles, and creation braces itself for survival at all costs, the power of men with guns becomes irrelevant. When true might is unmasked and presented, men in fatigues and bandanas become unnecessary.”

“All the floods, droughts, famines, altered seasons, and earthquakes point to a fulfilling of the prophecies. No one can shoot a heatwave, nor can all the barricading in the world prevent a swollen river from running where it wants to run. The weapons we will need to carry as Aboriginal people are spiritual weapons, and the armouries where they are stored are our traditions and teachings. This is not to say that in a conflict over the trampling of our rights that our resistance needs to be limited to placards, chants, and speechmaking because there is still a need to stand strong against oppression. But we also need to begin taking responsibility for passing on the intent of those traditions and teachings to those who have not been graced with them. Honouring the gift of teachings means sharing them, passing them on, spreading their influence like a healing hand across an aching body. At a recent spiritual gathering at **Maniwaki**, Quebec, I heard Elder after Elder talk about the need for us sharing our knowledge. I heard them talk about the need for welcoming everyone to our circle, regardless of colour, race, or background. I watched as men, women, and children from every direction on Mother Earth entered sweat lodges together, shared our pipes, and found a common healing. I felt the warmth of hugs offering me by whites, Asians, Blacks, and mixed bloods, and found that when my eyes are closed, a hug has no colour, and good will has no history.”

“The Elders spoke about the prophecies and urged all of us to begin training our children to become spiritual warriors. Our greatest gift to the next generation is not an armed victory, but a humble triumph. When we can stand shoulder to shoulder in the face of adversity and not crumble from our traditions and teachings, we have scored that triumph and we can pass on that strength to our young. Resilience lies within us like a latent gene, and it is this that arms us for the battles ahead and arms our children. Be grateful that no one had to die this summer in our defence and be grateful that we can enter a new season with the knowledge that our warriors are there for us when needed but be mindful too that the prophecies are being fulfilled around us every day, and the new warriors looking up at us with the eyes of innocence need us to teach them how to fight.”

DS: And so now, we will now listen to **Murray Porter** and a selection from his CD. I’m not sure...

MLS: Well, we’re going to do **Lunar Drive** first and then Murray Porter to finish off because usually we finish off with this song and we never get a chance to hear it, so it would be nice to hear the whole thing this time. This song is called “**Crying Looking for You**,” and it’s by Lunar Drive, and it also features **Kevin Locke**.