

Wowing Crowds – Popular crown dancing ensemble performs at Summer Nightly Indian Dances

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 04 August 2017 04:28



Wowing Crowds – Popular crown dancing ensemble performs at Summer Nightly Indian Dances

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 04 August 2017 04:28

Coming from White River, Arizona, the Apache Spirit Mountain Dancers mesmerizes crowds when they perform at the Summer Nightly Indian Dances.

The group performed over the weekend of July 29 to a packed audience, close to 700 people.

Group leader Terrance Yazzie has been performing since the age of twelve and loves the feeling of passing on his culture to various crowds while keeping his traditions alive. Raised in White River, Ariz., on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, Yazzie is half Navajo/Dineh and half White Mountain Apache. He was taught by his grandparents the importance of maintaining traditions

“My grandparents told me ‘this is who we are,’ so I got into by dancing and singing,” Yazzie said.

Yazzie’s group consists of 12 dancers and singers. During each performance there are always five dancers and two singers including Yazzie. Four of the five dancers represent the Four Directions and one is the clown, Yazzie explained.

“The four represent East South North West, and the other dancer is simply known as the ‘clown’ or the ‘messenger’,” Yazzie said. “He is the representative for the four. The Creator created the four first, and placed them standing in each of the four directions.

The Four needed someone to communicate for them, thus the clown/messenger was created to go up to the Creator to communicate for them, and bring back word to them from the Creator,” Yazzie said.

The regalia of the dancers consists of the Christian cross mixed with other symbols from the earth. When the dancers perform each carry long white sticks and clack them together; to represent lightning and thunder.

Wowing Crowds – Popular crown dancing ensemble performs at Summer Nightly Indian Dances

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 04 August 2017 04:28

A 'lightning stick' is also used during the dance by the clown. It's a small stick attached by a string, and when swung around it gives a whizzing sound. According to Yazzie, this is done for the people who may be having problems in their life.

"The lightning stick is done so that if anyone has evil around or maybe sick in body, it's spun around (and) it chases evil spirits away." Said Yazzie.

The group sings about the clouds, beginning of creation, earth, pollen, mountains and wind. The drums used to sing with are simple cooking pots covered with deer hide, and rubber tubing is used to tie it down. It is then stretched and water is placed inside to reverberate a certain sound.

"If we don't add any water to it then there is no sound, if you wet the top then you get a whole different sound to it," Yazzie said. "If you stretch it some more then you really get different tones with it."

Yazzie says there are traditional stories, long stories behind the method of stretching the deer hide over the pot.

Nightly Dances Director Teri Fraizer was impressed by the amount of folks that packed courthouse square.

"It was great and we had close to 700 people in attendance, and I was quite pleased," she said. "The Apaches have been a great and unique addition to the Nightly Indian Dances. We are honored to have them and look forward to their participation in the future."

Fraizer said Yazzie's mastery of Apache songs is nothing short of amazing.

Crown Dance fan Ella Dawes said it was a perfect birthday gift.

Wowing Crowds – Popular crown dancing ensemble performs at Summer Nightly Indian Dances

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 04 August 2017 04:28

“Today was my birthday and I turned 65-years-old, and I wanted to come to get blessed by them. The Apaches have always been a favorite of mine,” she said.

Dawes’s daughter, Midge Dawes, said her mom always talks about these dancers, and to see them perform is always a treat.

“I think the Apache dancers are always a crowd pleaser and if you want to see traditional dancing at its best ... then this is it,” she said.

Coming from California, Will Loma saw the performance as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity

“I recall seeing pictures of these fascinating Apaches perform, but have never had the rare privilege like I had tonight ... utterly, simply breathtaking! I’m glad I came tonight and will always cherish this moment,” Loma said.

Yazzie’s group has traveled extensively in the past, but now that more groups are performing he has cut back on traveling. However, he helps the other groups by informing them of who wants a group to perform when his is taking a break and vice-versa.

You can catch the group performing at the Gallup Summer Nightly Indian dances when scheduled. Visit: www.nightlyindiandances.com

Be sure to look for this group during the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial. For a full schedule of events, visit theceremonial.com

For more information on the Apache Spirit Mountain Dancers contact Yazzie through Facebook/Terrance Yazzie or call (928) 594-0870.

Wowing Crowds – Popular crown dancing ensemble performs at Summer Nightly Indian Dances

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun

Friday, 04 August 2017 04:28

By Dee Velasco

For the Sun