

THEATER ALBUQUERQUE

NATIVE NARRATIVES

'Echo in the Canyon' showcases Indigenous storytelling through artistic performance

BY ROZANNA M. MARTINEZ
JOURNAL ARTS EDITOR

Dancing Fire Productions will make its debut with "Echo in the Canyon: Lifting up Indigenous & Native Storytellers Festival."

The production, under the direction of Kim Delfina Gleason (Diné), features storytelling artists Michael Lente (Laguna Pueblo/Paguate Village), Sheldon Blackhorse (Diné), Debbie Smallcanyon (Diné), Stanley Shunkamolah (Kiowa/Osage/Pawnee/Comanche), Ria Thundercloud (Ho-Chunk Nation/Sandia Pueblo) and Colleen Biakeddy (Diné). Performances will take place on Friday, Nov. 1 and Saturday, Nov. 2, and Nov. 8-9, at Albuquerque Little Theatre.

"We brought in a good team of seven individuals who have a background in performing arts and film, and have been artists at large, members in the past with me in other circles, and we've been developing a four act show," Gleason said.

The 90-minute performance is a celebration created in honor of National Native American Heritage Month, which takes place in November.

"We tend to offer a platform for new general audiences to see what we call 'Ceremonial Theater,' which is consisting of our traditional values, but in a contemporary setting and in celebration of what's to come for Native theater," said Gleason, who is the founder and CEO of Dancing Fire Productions.

Gleason said she chose artists who were eager to contribute to the production.

"These are individuals that I usually choose to be ready to jump on this and write alongside me (and) give some new, fresh insights of what's happening in contemporary society or take what we see in the world that's happening right now with things like elections and politics and the economy and our resources," she explained. "Things that are really highly valued and should be addressed in our general, Native spaces. We want to share that part of the storytelling with the general audience on how we see the world through an Indigenous lens."

Rob Armstrong Martin, ALT executive

'ECHO IN THE CANYON'

Lifting up Indigenous & Native Storytellers Festival

WHEN: 7 p.m. Nov. 1-2 and Nov. 8-9

WHERE: Albuquerque Little Theatre, 224 San Pasquale Ave. SW

HOW MUCH: Pay what you can, suggested price of \$5-\$15, at albuquerquelittletheatre.org

director, said he wanted to use his new role to support artistic diversity. He added that he had heard about Gleason and her work through theater colleagues and decided to reach out.

"I felt that being sort of new in the role of executive director that we just wanted to diversify what's on our stage," he expressed. "It's been going strongly in a very particular tradition, but there are some problems with inclusivity and some absent voices that we just really felt we should reach out to. And so, because we were given a small grant from Visit Albuquerque's tourism board, 'I said, let's turn that toward this purpose.'"

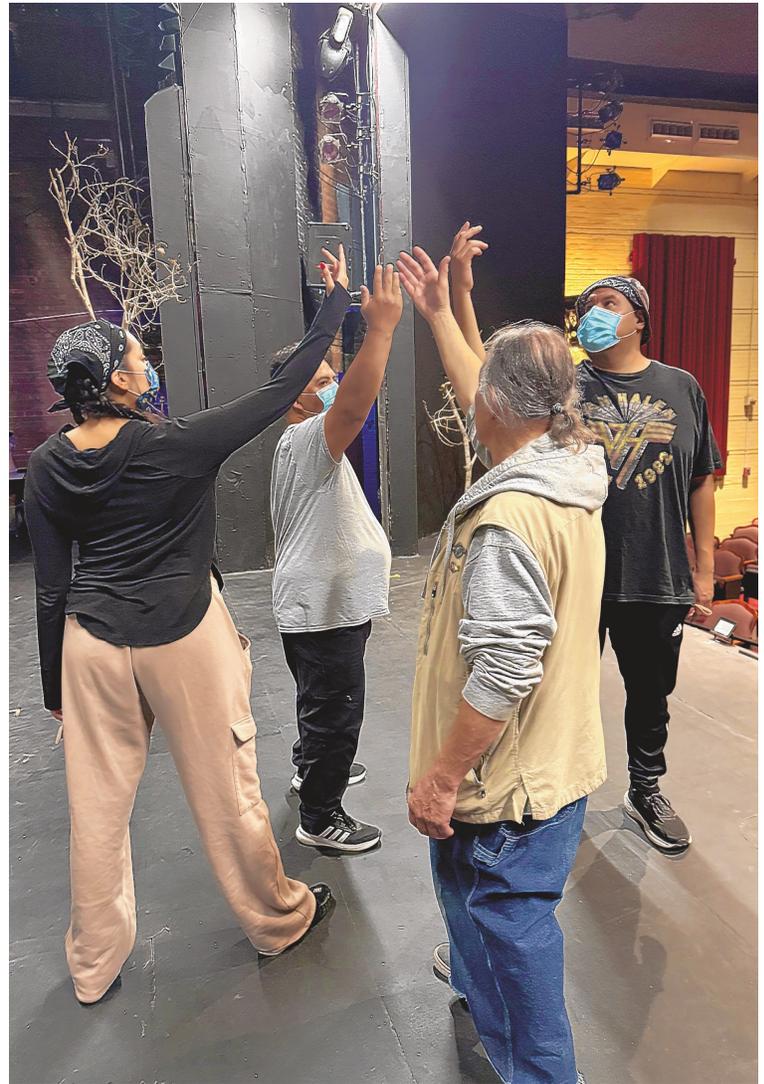
The indigenous storytellers festival was made possible by a \$10,000 competitive grant from Visit Albuquerque's 2024 Tourism Grant Program. The program's goal is to spark innovative ideas that contribute to Albuquerque's vibrancy and generate creative visitor and resident experiences that benefit and grow tourism along with building community, according to an ALT news release.

Gleason said she is excited about Dancing with Fire Productions' partnership with ALT.

"It's an honor to be able to create space for Indigenous people and to really just revolutionize the work that we're both doing together," she added.

Gleason has been part of the performing arts for more than 20 years. She currently works at the University of New Mexico as one of its first Native American theater instructors.

"My hope in the future is to open up the first Native American Performing Arts Center along with trying to open the doors for more talent and help spaces like Albuquerque Little Theatre (adopt) a new way of telling stories," she said.



COURTESY OF ALBUQUERQUE LITTLE THEATRE

Performers rehearse a scene from "Echo in the Canyon: Lifting up Indigenous & Native Storytellers Festival." Performances take place Nov. 1-2 and Nov. 8-9, at Albuquerque Little Theatre.