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June 11th, 2009

Présence autochtone

Imagine native nation

Melora Koepke

Festival Présence autochtone brings the best in aboriginal culture to the city

It's time again for Présence autochtone, the festival that celebrates all the arts and culture of North American native peoples (and some from around the world). It should be mentioned that the film portion of this festival is at the heart of a more extensive festival that features some very interesting art that's worth mentioning, as well as a festival-like atmosphere at the centre of the city, specifically at Parc Émilie-Gamelin, at the corner of Berri and De Maisonneuve.

As far as artistic events go, I'm specifically intrigued by *Fragments*, a ballet by Ojibway-Cree choreographer Lara Kramer. The piece, which is a premiere, is based on the traumatic events that happened to her mother in the residential school system.

There will also be a special, super-interesting-looking section on the culture of the Marquesas, Tahiti and French Polynesia.

As far as the film selection goes, as in all previous years of the festival, it's spotty at best. One exception is Montreal documentarist Neil Diamond's *The Last Explorer*, a creation of local prod house Rezolution Pictures. The film is about the filmmaker's great uncle, George Elson, who assisted on the Hubbard expeditions of 1903 and '05. Though the film has made the rounds, and been shown on APTN in its Cree version already, it's worth seeing because Diamond has a way with lensing and it may also serve as a preview of Diamond and Rezolution's new film, *Reel Injun*, which will come out in theatres after a (probable) festival run later this year. All you need to know so far about *Reel Injun* is that it's about the role of native (and proto-native) actors in Hollywood movies, and the pic has a shot of Diamond with Clint Eastwood, whom he interviewed.

Among the sampling of other docs presented at this year's festival there are several fascinating stories from various tribes around the world, including from Corumbiara, Brazil. Artistry, however, is somewhat lacking.

The shorts program is a bit more promising: Especially worthy of mention are three shorts, each of which had something appealing and unique: *Out in the Cold* is vanguard director and playwright Colleen Murphy's *Waiting for Godot*-ish piece about three guys drinking in the freezing cold. Andrew Okpeaha MacLean's *On the Ice* begins with a violent, bloody stabbing on the snowy white Arctic landscape, with stark and gorgeous horizons all around, and *Lost Tribe* is a collage-mood piece about native people in the city (Winnipeg?) set to an original composition by Andrew Balfour and performed by new music choir Camerata Nova.

Festival Presence Autochtone

At various venues, June 11-21

For full schedule, visit www.nativelynx.qc.ca

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Andrew Okpeaha MacLean's *Sikumi (On the Ice)*

photo: Terres en vues