

STATEWIDE
PERSPECTIVE
70114.2004.00.05.01
“OMAHA SONG”

[Stacey Fox/Composer] It’s going to start with actual water from the Missouri and that will be amplified, so you’ll just hear the Missouri River in the beginning of the piece.
(DRUMS)

The piece includes various songs from the Omaha Tribe including a children’s song. The Omaha Flag Song comes in at the end and there’s also a prayer to Wakonda, or the universal force, that’s in the piece. (DRUMMING & CHANTING)

There’ll be a narrator or at least two probably. One in English and the other one will be speaking the native Umonhon tongue.

[Brad Penner/Reporting] Stacey Fox first came to Macy, Nebraska, for than a year ago. She came to meet the people and learn about the Omaha Nation. She came to hear their song.

[John Mangan] Hi ya Sis, how are you?

[Fox] Good morning.

[John] The only one who’s never met Stacey yet.

[Penner/Reporting] John Mangan, band director for the Omaha Nation School introduced Stacey to Wehnona St. Cyr, director of the health center in Macy. She also co-chaired the composer selection committee.

[Wehnona St. Cyr/Health Center Director] She seemed like a woman that would come and try to learn about us and then put something forth that would represent the community and the tribe.

[Penner/Reporting] Wehnona told Stacey about the importance of relations within the Omaha tribe.

[St. Cyr] That’s why I came home because, you know, yeah, I’m Omaha when I leave. I’m still Omaha, but to really be Omaha, you have to be here. You have to be around your relatives. You have—you know, it’s a real strong feeling that you get from being here.

[St. Cyr] It's very soothing, and it's very strong. It's a strong pull, you know. So um, so that's what I like and that's what I want you to portray I guess in your music, you know. What a richness our culture is here.

[Fox] On my mother's side of the family, I'm part Nantikoke, which is a tribe that now is established in New Jersey. So when I saw the Omaha project open up, I thought, oh how wonderful that here is another culture, indigenous culture, that I could go and experience and learn more about.

[Penner/Reporting] Photos from past Pow Wows decorate the new Omaha Nation School. They remind students of their heritage.

[Fox] So I asked a student the other and, and I said, and who are you? And the student looked at me and he goes, well I'm Omaha. And I went and you know, I went uh huh, good. You know, it's yes, you're an individual, but you're also a whole community.

[Chello Sherman] Within that one person. Because that's how it is

[Fox] Yeah, rather than give me his name, his immediate reply was, well I'm Omaha, and I thought that was really interesting, yeah. That was great.

[Penner/Reporting] Chello Sherman isn't Omaha, but she lives in Macy. She's worked with the Omaha Nation children in an arts program. Stacey met with Chello to hear her vision for the song and celebration.

[Chello] It starts off with kind of the concept of the circle of life. It's like there's a birthing where individually people come out and they dance, you know, a dance of you, you know, that they've come into existence.

[Sherman] Earlier on, I hear more flute music, more rhythmic type with maybe like a— maybe even a Pow Wow song sung over a more rhythmic type and orchestra type music.

[Fox] Some of the things in your vision are already things that I had thought about doing.

[John Mangan/Band Director] She came to the community, stayed for a few days at a time, visited with community people, talked about the music, how the music is made, the different types of music, the history of the music, attended social gatherings where the music is used. Just started to get to know the community, get to know the people.

(DRUMMING)

[Mangan] This song is called Cherokee legend and it kind of evokes the sounds maybe of Indian music from way back when.

[Penner/Reporting] John Mangan's been making music in Macy for more than 30 years. He wrote the application that led to Macy's selection for the Continental Harmony Program.

[Mangan] And I think that'd be a really nice thing to celebrate, just the history of this tribe and the plans of this tribe for the future. I've been here 35 years. I'm bonded to the kids, to the people. I want to celebrate the community.

[Penner/Reporting] He's worked closely with Stacey Fox since she started the project.

[Mangan] I wanted the piece to reflect the music of the people, spiritually and musically. But I wasn't going to tell her how to write you, you know, composition. (DRUMMING)

[Penner/Reporting] Last summer's Pow Wow provided more inspiration to Stacey. She also found compelling images for a film she's producing to go with her musical composition.

[Fox] It's so visually oriented, as well as the singling and the drumming and the dancing, but I can't imagine not having those together cause I don't think you can pull them apart.

[St. Cyr] We do have a rich culture here, you know, with our singing and our dancing. We were the originators of the Hethushka right here, the Omaha tribe. We—The whole Pow Wow culture started right here with us. (DRUMMING)

[Fox] But the important thing about being here and seeing the Umonhon tradition of the Pow Wow is that to know that this is a living tradition. These are real people.

[Snd Carey Nadeau/American Composers Forum] And I think that's why Stacey is such a perfect choice for this community because she sees things. Not just orally. You know, she doesn't just hear it with her ear, but she actually sees it as a filmmaker. And so if she can use those two disciplines really interchangeably, you know, as she sees something happening with the dancers, you know, it's another inspiration for the piece, we can hear something. As she's filming something, she gets a better idea of the sound that she wants. And then as she's, you know, hearing the drums and writing out her piece, she can see the kind of, the dancers through through. So I think she's just the perfect match for this community. (DRUMMING)

[Fox] And to really represent a culture, especially an indigenous culture, you need to stand on their ground and drink their water and smell the air and know what it's like. And feel the heat, you know, and to realize that they're sweating while they're dancing and while they're drumming and that's all part of it.

(Stacey and band students making music)

[Penner/Reporting] John Mangan says that Stacey Fox formed a bond with his students. Stacey says those students inspired her work.

[Fox] The students have probably had the biggest impact on me writing the piece because the kids are—they're so smart here and they're so quick-witted and intelligent and just, I love the student here. They're just fun to be around.

[Mangan] Being such a down-to-earth person that she is, she really connected with the kids.

[Fox] That's the way! Bravo! You were rocking! Whoo-Hoo! Good job!

[Mangan] But when she left, when's Stacey Fox coming back. You know, duh duh duh, all this type of stuff.

[Paryss Aldrich-Omaha Nation Student] I think it's pretty cool that we finally have a song just for us.

[Will Webster-Omaha Nation Student] It's an honor to play this song that has been made for us. It feels really good.

[Penner/Reporting] In October, Stacey delivered a rough draft of her composition for the band.

[Fox] And the name of the piece is Hu'thuga and the Hu'thuga is actually the tribal clan structure of the Omaha tribe.

(DRUMMING)

[Mangan] But when I was this or the score, I said, oh, some parts of this look ungodly difficult, but that's okay, we have a year.

[Fox] One and two and one ninety-eight. (Band playing)

[Penner/Reporting] And so they went to work. Learning a piece that's difficult, but possible. It's their song. And they want to play it well.

[Webster] Everything's pretty difficult, but once we get more time and more of Stacey helping us, then it'll be a good song.

[Mangan] And boy, the moment when she got together with the high school kids for the first time where they played this composer's piece, not all of it of course, no but the 15 or 18 measures that we had worked on. And oh, my heart went just yes! Yes, this is what it's about. Cause this is—these kids playing this music written for them by this lady who's traveled thirteen fourteen hundred miles or whatever. And has lived in their

community to learn about them and not just write a piece of music from New York and say, here you guy guys.

[Penner/Reporting] And the students in the band won't be alone.

[Fox] It'll be multi-generational so there'll be moms, dads, grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, playing with the students.

[Mangan] The first time I did get the over-the-hill guys back, I think in March perhaps, and Stacey happened to be here. A trombone player who hadn't played in 25 years came down, picked up the trombone, and then starting to get the lip back, but 15 minutes later, his son came in and they played together and that is what it's all about. Connecting the kids, their parents, and the community.

(CHANTING)

[Penner/Reporting] The song's premier late next summer will tie in with the Omaha Nation's bicentennial Pow Wow celebration and nearby commemorations of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Details aren't set, but Stacey Fox envisions a multimedia production of film, dance, and music, honoring the past and celebrating the future of the Omaha Nation.

[Fox] A century ago, our government wanted these people to die out. You know, they tried to erase them completely. And if anything, they've become stronger in the face of adversity. And so it's really important that even in today's technological world, here's an amazing people that are still surviving and progressing and it's—You need to be there. You need to see that it's breathing. It's a culture that's breathing. And will be around for a long time.

(DRUMMING)