

May 2023

SAVE THE DATE! Wahzhzhe Ballet: An Osage Ballet

On the Seminole State College campus, Thursday, August 17, 2023!



Wahzhazhe is a contemporary ballet that mesmerizes audiences from the first beat of the rhythmic drums to the final curtain close. Audiences are surprised by the powerful storytelling, and even those who are not ballet lovers return to the show repeatedly to be moved by the story that unfolds in front of them. Since its humble beginnings, *Wahzhazhe* has garnered national and international attention.

In 2013, the ballet was invited to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. to perform. In September of 2015, the Festival of Families in Philadelphia gave *Wahzhazhe* a global stage with more than half a million people in attendance during the Papal visit of Pope Francis.

Wahzhazhe touches audiences in a way that even they cannot anticipate. An audience member who watched the performance at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center in 2013, lauded that although she did not usually enjoy ballet, she would watch this ballet every time it was performed. At a performance at the Coleman Theatre in 2014, a woman embraced a young dancer after the show and explained through tears that she had no words for the depth of emotion that she felt after watching the ballet.

The Osage Ballet itself depicts a shared history of Native American people, but the specific story told is that of the Osage Nation. Beyond its cultural relevance, the human interest and historical account has relevance for all Americans. This ballet evokes a visceral reaction as the audience is introduced to four hundred years of Osage history, which encompasses both the positive and negative outcomes of a culture that was once untouched by outside influence. The audience is carried along as a pre-contact. People are swept into the flowing current of the European incursion that brought unimaginable changes, disease, wealth, modernization, death, and a syncretization into modern American culture.

Osage composer Lou Brock inspired the creation of the ballet with his works called, *The Journey*. The University of Tulsa's Chair of Film Studies, Dr. Joseph Rivers joined Mr. Brock in composing original music to finish the ten scenes of the ballet. Dr. Rivers arranged all the compositions. Osage/Cherokee Jenna Smith choreographed the scenes, and twelve professional ballet dancers from around the country along with thirty local dancers and actors (including Natives from the following tribes: Osage, Cherokee, Apache, Chickamauga Cherokee, Sioux, Kaw, Pawnee, Seminole, Shawnee, Pottawattamie, and Otoe-Missouria) to bring the ballet to life.



A video of the ballet will be presented at Seminole State College on the Jeff Johnston stage on August 17 at 11 A.M. As the video is being presented, students from Dance Maker Academy will create live performances to selected scenes from the ballet.