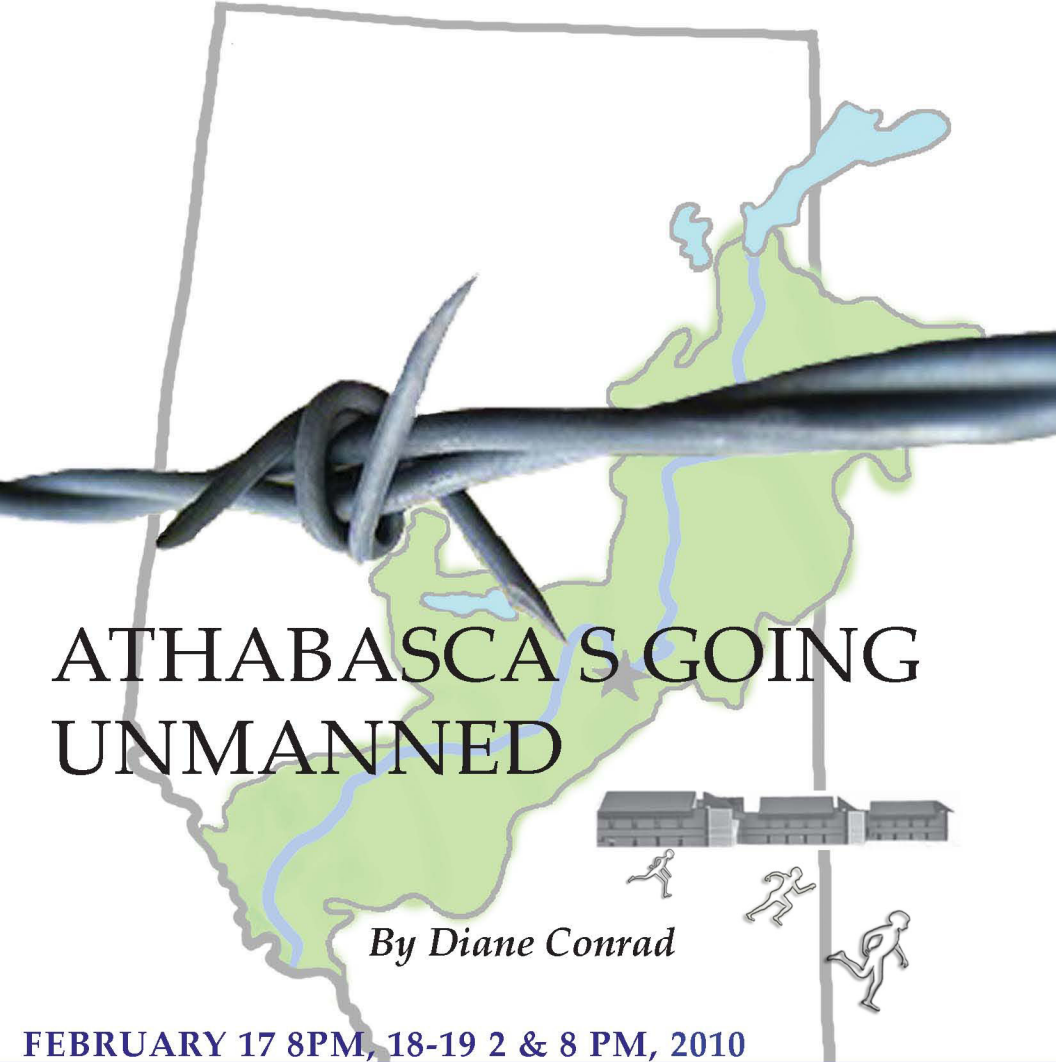


60° N, 120° W



ATHABASCA'S GOING UNMANNED

By Diane Conrad

FEBRUARY 17 8PM, 18-19 2 & 8 PM, 2010

Arts-Based Research Studio
4-104 Education North
University of Alberta

Tickets \$10.00 At the Door



Social Sciences and Humanities
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ATHABASCA'S GOING UNMANNED

by Diane Conrad

Cast of Characters:

Wesley.....SARAIN WASKEWITCH
RandyCOLE HUMENY*
Stan..... RICHARD LEE HSI*
Eileen..... DARLENE AUGER
Jim.....ERIC NYLAND*
Val.....MELISSA THINGELSTAD
Various (on video): MARI SASANO (Amy), PAMELA SCHMUNK, and
GARETT SPELLISCY

Director: IAN LEUNG*

Dramaturg: KIM McCAW

Stage Manager: DAWN FRIESEN*

Cree language consultation: DARLENE AUGER

Fight director: PATRICK HOWARTH

Production Designer: DANIELA MASELLIS

Assistant Lighting Designer: KEVIN GREEN

Videographer: CLINTON CAREW

Technical Crew: AMY KUCHARUK & MATTHEW LATIMER

Running Crew: AMY KUCHARUK & MATTHEW LATIMER

*Appear with permission of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Arts on the Avenue, Larry Clark, the City of Edmonton, Michael Kennard, M.E. LaZerte High School, Christy Morin, the Theatre Garage, Mari Sasano, Pamela Schmunk, Garrett Spelliscy, the generous extras who appeared in video segments but whose names we were unable to credit before this program went to print and the actors who workshopped the script in 2009: Darlene Auger, Michele Brown, Ryan Cunningham, Sheldon Elter, Jesse Gervais, Cole Humeny, Richard Lee HSI, Patrick Howarth, Garrett Spelliscy and Fred Zbryski. Thank you especially to Elder Rose Wabasca for offering a smudge ceremony and prayer for opening night of the production.

*If you have come to help me you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound
up with mine, then let us work together.*

**Aboriginal Activist Group,
Queensland, Australia, 1970s**

Culture is something which is our very foundation. Reprimand toward criminal acts is also a part of most cultures. The Western definition of crime is an offense against king, society, church, and/or deity. What happens when those who are being charged with crime were in place with a home land and culture/heritage before any such definitions arrived and were applied to them? This issue points to deep-seated problems and pits cultural pride of a colonizing power against a living heritage and identity that it holds not only with indifference but in contempt as well.

A Western penal code is not only a foreign disincentive, but it rejects, limits and sentences Native people to lives of social and spiritual poverty, through indifference toward their pride and traditions as a people. The very act of imprisoning Indigenous persons is an imposition of the colonizing power. The notion of rehabilitation – the stated purpose behind the incarceration of youth, is itself built upon a deficit model, assuming that the offender is the one lacking and in need of change. Rather, the play suggests, it is the institution that needs to change.

Athabasca's *Going Unmanned* offers audiences a challenging, fresh and informed viewpoint on the obstacles facing incarcerated Aboriginal youth. The play, written by researcher Diane Conrad, Associate Professor of Drama/Theatre Education, in the Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, is the culmination of three years of drama-based research with youth as part of the Native program at an Alberta youth corrections facility.

Set in a jail, the play tells the story of three incarcerated youth and three corrections staff who work with them. Focusing on an escape plot hatched by the youth, through video projection and live performance, the play examines the needs of the youth and the prospects for offering them programming with transformative potential.

The purpose of education in Indigenous cultures is to connect people to their heritage and to their distinct place on earth. In a non-indigenous perspective on education this is not primary.

In the area of education, drama has an important part to play. It is through drama that direct experience and practice can be given alternate realities conjured up by the body's acting in space. From those bodies acting in space, through the interplay, new experience develops. This is where the power of drama/applied theatre comes into play. The art of drama is an interpretive activity which yields provocative contexts for reflection on established practice.

Conrad's play underscores a long standing and continuing hostility directed toward Aboriginal existence. It is a compelling call for all who are part of the Canadian educational system to re-examine the cultural assumptions that underlie the situation of disproportionate incarceration rates of Aboriginal peoples.

-- Michael J. Coulis, Research Assistant

Elements of Native Spirituality in the Play

I want to honour and show respect for the Native spiritual items and ceremonies that make an appearance in the play. These were all elements that had some role in the context of the work that I did with youth at the jail as part of the Native program.

The elements of Native spirituality in the play are: the Smudge Ceremony, Ojibway Dreamcatchers; the Medicine Wheel; transformation or shape-shifting from human to non-human; the Sweat Lodge; the Medicine Pouch; headwear traditionally made from Eagle feathers; quill chokers and breastplates traditionally worn by ceremonial dancers, and the Buffalo hide.

These elements all originate in ancient Native spiritual beliefs with deep significance for living peacefully and in harmony with all of creation. These practices and beliefs often have subtle variations from Nation to Nation. Though some of the items and practices in the play do not originate in Cree culture, they have been assimilated into current day Cree culture in some cases.

If you are interested in learning more about these sacred Native items or ceremonies I would encourage you take the time to speak with Elders about them and to seek opportunities to experience them for yourself. There will be an opportunity for questions and discussion following the performance.



Disproportionate Aboriginal Incarcerations Rates

These statistics are from Statistics Canada, other Government of Canada, and provincial government sources.

In Canada in 2007/08:

- there were approximately 369,200 adult admissions to correctional services;
- the Aboriginal population represented 3% of the Canadian population overall;
- Aboriginal adults accounted for 22% of admissions to sentenced custody;
- since 1998 the numbers of Aboriginal adults in federal custody increased by 19.7%.

In 2007/08 representation of Aboriginal adults in custody was higher in Western provinces:

- In Alberta, Aboriginal adults represented approximately 35% of admissions to provincial sentenced custody while representing 5% of the general population in this province;
- In Manitoba, Aboriginal adults represented 69% of the admissions to provincial sentenced custody while representing 12% of the general population in this province;
- In Saskatchewan, Aboriginal adults represented 81% of the admissions to provincial sentenced custody while representing 11% of the general population in this province.

In Canada Aboriginal adult incarceration rates are three times higher than non-Aboriginal incarceration rates.

The incarceration rates for Aboriginal youth are also disproportionately high.

In Canada in 2007/08:

- the representation of Aboriginal youth in the general population was approximately 6%;
- Aboriginal youth accounted for 25% of youth admitted to remand, 33% admitted to sentenced custody and 21% admitted to probation.

Following the introduction of the Youth Criminal Justice Act in 2003, the Department of Justice reported that, while there were fewer youth in custody overall, the representation of Aboriginal youth in custody continued to increase. Aboriginal youth are eight times more likely to be in custody than non-Aboriginal youth.

In the corrections facility in Alberta in which research was done for this play approximately 60% of the youth incarcerated there were Aboriginal.

Government reports explain these high incarceration by citing:

- low education levels
- low employment status
- substance abuse
- Mental health issues.

My research suggests these are symptoms of the real root causes:

- systemic injustices in our society – poverty and racism;
- inequitable treatment of Aboriginal people by police and the courts;
- generational trauma – the effects of cultural genocide including residential schools.

This is a human rights issue in Canada that demands our immediate attention.

Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks to all those individuals and organizations that helped make this project possible; without whom it would not have happened.

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Thanks to the Canadian Actor’s Equity Association.

Thanks also to Dwayne Donald and Bev Bagnall for offering their advice on the play.

Break the chains of systemic violence and racism; learn and never forget how to play!