

OKC Friday Review: **DISTANT THUNDER**

By Franci Hart

DISTANT THUNDER

Lyric Theater

March 24, 2022

Book by **Lynne Taylor-Corbett** and **Shaun Taylor-Corbett**

Music and lyrics by **Shaun Taylor-Corbett** and **Chris Wiseman**

Additional music and lyrics by **Robert Lindsey-Nassif** and **Michael Moricz**

Directed by **Lynne Taylor-Corbett**

The world premiere of the impactful “*Distant Thunder*” almost didn’t happen at Lyric Theater in Oklahoma City. This contemporary Native American story was in final tech rehearsal, March 2020, at Lyric when COVID shut everything down. Recognizing the power of the musical, Lyric staff stayed in touch with the performers, as the creators continued to refine the play, and was finally able to premiere “*Distant Thunder*” outdoors at First American Museum (FAM)

Co-author, and co-creator of music and lyrics **Shaun Taylor-Corbett** employed all his skills gained over the years on Broadway, in films and TV to produce a musical that celebrates Native Americans with all their colorful traditions, prejudices endures and social issues caused by poverty and lack of opportunity.

According the co-authors, “*We have been encouraged to tell a contemporary story that deals with real life issues happening in one of the most impoverished communities in America. We have been encouraged to develop a score that fuses Native and pop music, to bring the show to the larger arena of American Musical Theatre.... May there come a time when they (Native American children) can look up on the stage of a mainstream theatre and recognize themselves in the story; then go home and write their own.*”

“*Distant Thunder*” opens with a flashback scene at a powwow. For anyone loving Native American dance, this colorful fast paced scene alone was worth the price of admission. During the powwow, young Darrel and his white mother abruptly leave the Blackfeet community.

Years later Darrell (**Shaun Taylor-Corbett**), now a corporate lawyer, returns to this community. He has a scheme that he thinks will help the Blackfeet. During his visit, which he expects to last at most one day, he is reintroduced to his heritage. He meets characters from his past like Betty Still Smoking (**April Ortiz**) and his former classmate Dorothy Dark Eyes (**Angela Gomez**) who is

the teacher at the language immersion school. Darrel also confronts his father (**Jeff Barehand**) for his abandonment. There are fights, a fire and reconciliation at the end.

Taylor-Corbett and his mother **Lynne Taylor-Corbett** have created a slice of life musical. "*Distant Thunder*" presents the facts of Native American life as it is without assessing guilt or blame. According to the authors they are using musical theater to bring the heartbeat of their people to life.

This is a fast paced, beautifully directed production with lots of very memorable songs and dance. The fire scene is portrayed through lighting effects and dance that is surprisingly menacing. It is also an ensemble production with each character finely defined and exquisitely portrayed. This, however, is not necessarily a show for young children. It employs adult language.

"*Distant Thunder*" cries for an outdoor setting. And the partnership between Lyric and FAM provided the ideal location. The strong view of Native American life was perfectly captured under the stars with wild grass as a back drop.

Congratulations to Lyric for sponsoring this world premiere; to FAM For recognizing the value of the play and partnering with Lyric for this production. And most of all congratulations to the Native American cast of "*Distant Thunder*" for a masterful presentation of their culture.

This is a short run production. I do hope Lyric will bring it back again for a longer run. "*Distant Thunder*" is theater magic.