Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The sound of drums and the chant of Indian song will introduce the American Indian Performing Arts Festival April 22-27 in the Department of the Interior Auditorium, 18th and “C” Streets, NW., in Washington, D. C.

The dance performance will be one feature of the first American Indian Festival and Exhibition to be held in Washington under the sponsorship of the Gallery of American Indian Art in the Department of the Interior. Opening concurrently and continuing for several weeks will be a showing of priceless Indian arts and crafts of all periods, on loan from several museums. The exhibition, to be displayed in the seventh-floor Gallery, will be open to the public without charge.

For the theater presentation, ninety American Indians will be brought together through the efforts of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a school operated by Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs. Representing Indian groups from Florida to Alaska, some of the dancers will be Institute students. Under the direction of Lloyd Kiva New and Rolland Meinholz, instructors at the Institute, the performance has been described by them as a “collage of dance and chant, symbolizing birth, life and death.”

The entire presentation, according to the directors, will typify the customs, beliefs and practices of the American Indian, especially in that period before his culture became overlaid with European influences. Through dance and chant, pantomime and poetry, the presentation will symbolize an Indian day of worshipping, working, playing, sorrowing and battling against the enemy.

The show will open with the presentation of a child to the rising sun, followed by ritual preparations for the day and the Hoop Dance and Eagle Dance. The second segment, representing high noon, will consist of legend-telling, games and social dances and here the Rabbit Dance and Fluff Dance of the Senecas, the Seminole Alligator Dance, the Haida Blanket Dance and the Pueblo Buffalo Dance will be performed. With the coming of night, the audience will be the onlookers at a Plains burial ceremony which will be complemented by the Mescalero-Apache Crown Dance and the Navajo Night Chant.

To complement the performing arts production, the Indian arts and crafts exhibition, the most ambitious and comprehensive yet undertaken by the Gallery, has been designed and coordinated by James McGrath of the Institute of American Indian Arts. Traditional--and in many instances ancient--items suggestive of dance, music, legend and myth have been gathered from museums in Denver, Colo.; Tacoma and Seattle, Wash.; Portland, Ore.; Los Angeles, Calif.; Flagstaff, Ariz.; Santa Fe, N.· M.; Anadarko and Ponca City, Okla.; Chicago, Ill., and New York City. The Smithsonian Institution has also opened its showcases and unbolted its garret doors to McGrath in his search for the authentic and unusual.

The setting for the assembled pieces will in itself be a reflection of an Indian day, with piercing light and darkness, reflecting ceiling glass and opaque rugs and animal skins employed in startling counterpoint to create an aura of drama.

The dance performances are scheduled as follows: Evenings - April 22, 23, 26 and 27 at 8:30; and matinees - April 23, 24, and 26 at 2:30. Tickets for children are $1.00 and for adults $2.85 at all performances, and may be purchased through the American Automobile Association.

The Exhibition of arts and crafts will be open April 22 through May 28 and may be seen Mondays through Fridays between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., in the Interior Gallery, which is operated by Government Services, Inc. During the evening performances of the Performing Arts Festival, the Gallery will remain open until 8:00 p.m.
