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Dancers from Sitka

Moses Wassillie, interviewer

Series: Potlatch series

1977

Moses Wassillie said this program is a continuation of recordings from the Festival of Native Arts from March 1976 in Fairbanks, Alaska. The following performers are from the Raven Clan: Judy Brady, Sharon Frank, Bruce Farquer, Larry Garrity, Patty Johnson, Timothy McGraw, Julia Nielson, Mike Spoon, Mark Strand, Martina Strand, Molly Thomas, Mike Kiletale, Cynthia Williams, and Ethel Williams. The following performers are from the Eagle Clan: Nancy Eddy, Larry Joseph, Alex Kitka, Marla Kitka, Donna Lang, Alicia Williams, and Karen Williams. Isabella Brady provides narration for the songs.

Isabella Brady introduces 83 year old Charlie Joseph. She said he was raised in his culture. He started learning the songs and dances when he was three years old. He knows how to make the traditional headdresses which will be used in the performances. He has been a song leader for years in Sitka. He is chief of the Eagle Tribe in Sitka. He will welcome everyone in his Tlingit language and his daughter, Ethel McKennan, will translate. Charlie Joseph speaks. Ethel McKennan said Charlie said thank you for coming to see his grandchildren. She said she will do her best to interpret for her father. Charlie speaks. McKennan said her father said he will not talk for very long. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the canoe that the children will use on their first performance has the raven and the eagle on it. Charlie speaks. McKennan said the children that are performing in this dance group are from the Eagle and Raven clans. McKennan said the children are paddling toward a better culture hoping to get some of it back.

Isabella Brady said the first two songs that will be performed tonight are canoe songs. One of the songs is from the Interior Indians. She explained the background of the song. She said the children are in the costume of the Athapascan and Copper River Indians.

The songs are performed.

Isabella Brady said the next song is an outside song. It was written by a man for the women that he loved. The second song is a coming inside song. She explained the meaning of the children's costumes.

The songs are performed.

Isabella Brady said they will be doing the Old Sitka song. It is about an old man who is very sick and is going to die and he talks of Old Sitka. Donna Lang is the drummer for the song.

Isabella Brady said that they were able to come to the festival because they had Title 4 funds. Sarah Williams came with them. George Ramos is a dance instructor. He said they have been working with the students for the past year. They have sixty students all together. The youngest student is five years old. He said he is from Yakutat and has danced with the Yakutat group. He was able to learn the dances from his father before they were lost. In the late 1800s missionaries came to Alaska and prohibited potlatches, dancing, and cut down totem poles. He talked about the Copper River costume that he was wearing. He said on the back you can tell that he came from the Raven Clan. He comes from the Frog House and that is also reflected in his costume.

Public service announcement