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## News Release

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## WINTER VOICES TOURING PROJECT

### Youth featured in Native American storytelling performance

Milwaukee Public Theatre is collaborating with nationally recognized storyteller/dancer/musician Thirza Defoe to present *Winter Voices: Native American Stories to Warm the Heart* in early spring, 2010, along with student artist interns, talented youth from the Indian Community School (ICS).

This vibrant and elevating spectacle preserves Anishinabemowin language and cultural traditions, honors community elder voices, and presents warrior dances and the crafts stories of three Native American tribes. The multidisplinary production features the character Grandmother Keewaydinoquay, played by Ms. Defoe.

The performance schedule includes shows during the **Winter Pow Wow at State Fair Park, March 6 and 7 at 11 am**, and the **ICS Feast Friday, March 19**. Other performances are being scheduled.

In *Winter Voices*, an Iroquois Corn Husk Doll, Snohomish Coyote and Elk and Lakota Grass Dancers explore the change of seasons through authentic captivating narrative, movement, song, masks, and traditional rhythms. Following a series of workshops in movement, performance, writing, costuming, and storytelling, the youth from the Indian Community School perform with Thirza, serving as powerful role models for their peers. The ensemble hopes to tour the production and accompanying workshops to four or five additional sites.

Thirza Defoe (Giizhiigoquay) is from the Ojibwe and Oneida tribes of Northern Wisconsin. Her many years as an accomplished dancer, storyteller and cultural educator have awarded her recognition in both the Native community and throughout the world. Thirza is the recipient of the 2007 First American in the Arts Outstanding Performance Award, 2004 First Americans in the Arts Scholarship Award and 2004 Indigenous Heritage Festival Award—given to artists who have made a major positive impact on indigenous people and issues of the world. She is also part of the Young Native Playwrights Project and the First Composers Initiative. A mentee of Mr. Kevin Locke, Thirza recently received a 2009 Grammy for Best Native American music album for her work on the album *Come to Me Great Mystery: Native American Healing Songs*. Ms. Defoe is not only shaping and performing in the production, but has also composed and is playing music for it.

Assistant Director/Stage Manager for the production is Jasmin Bravo, who performed major roles in MPT's first production of *Winter Voices* in 2008. She also dances with the Omeyocan Aztec Dance Company. Choreographer Sensei Thom is well versed in over 20 Martial movements, including many Native dance styles, warrior movement, Silat, and Kali Stick techniques. Costume Design is by award-winning Oneida artist Deb Fabian-Matson. Additional music composition is by Ernest Brusubardis.

The project is funded by the Forest County Potawatomi Community Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more information about booking *Winter Voices*, contact Milwaukee Public Theatre at 414-347-1685 or [www.milwaukeekeepublictheatre.org](http://www.milwaukeekeepublictheatre.org)

