

**Name of collection**

*Indigenous rituals*

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**[MUSIC PLAYING]**

This year, one very important strand in the festival was the 400th anniversary of Pocahontas' visit to London and the fact that was being commemorated in various ways, most of which, actually, were to do with her death, which seemed to me a great shame because, obviously, the most important thing was actually that she was a living presence here for a time. So we decided we'd like to do something ceremonial not in the place where she died in Gravesend, but at the place where she stayed for a time-- the home of the Earl's of Northumberland, in Syon House. And we brought together three Native American women, all of whom had undertaken a similar journey from Turtle Island to the UK and asked them to respond in some way to the fact that she had been here.

So Michael invited us to create a ceremony to commemorate Pocahontas. And as Michael said earlier, we didn't want to focus so much on her death so much as how she lived and who she was and what she may have been going through at the time. So myself, Stephanie, and Gabe came together and created, with very different backgrounds, a ceremony to not just remember Pocahontas and her life in London but also to help heal and acknowledge all the other indigenous travelers who've come from all over the world to either study, stay, or pass through London.

And we brought together Kwakwaka'wakw, Wampanoag, and Lakota cultures, which I actually think is potentially unprecedented, and combined certain knowledges and wisdoms with each other and found certain intersections and commonalities and differences that we thought meshed really beautifully together. And we created a very healing ceremony that I think all the witnesses that were there I felt was very powerful.

It's interesting for us as a theater company to be working with ceremony and to be working with ritual because, of course, the roots of theater are in ritual. British theater actually began from liturgy, from the quem quaeritis. And in Shakespeare's time and

just afterwards when Pocahontas visited London, there was still a great crossover between ritual and theater.

And she saw The Mask at the Banqueting House in Whitehall. And of course, The Mask was not really a play. It was more like a neoplatonic ritual for the court to try and understand itself. And so this sort of cross-fertilization of what we now think of as performance, as theater, with ritual and ceremony I think was very, very alive for her. It was very, very alive then in London. And rekindling that intersection I think is really exciting thing to do.

Indigenous ceremony is something that's incredibly sacred to us. And I think ceremony's a little bit different than ritual. Ceremony is very much an official affair. And all of us were very worried it coming from such strong indigenous backgrounds and such strong cultures that we might do something inappropriate by trying to combine these different cultural teachings.

But when we met together earlier that day in this beautiful park at Syon House, and it was really windy, and just lovely, beautiful grasses blowing. It was very magical. We all were kind of standing out in this grass field and discussing with each other what we could create together. And by the cross-pollination of our cultures, we realized that there's so much in common that we have with each other, and there are certain teachings and wisdoms that, when in conjunction with each other, can actually teach something greater.

And kind of through this creation process that we went through in the morning, we discovered by the evening that we could actually create something quite magical. And it was such an honor to be a part of, and I was very honored that the Origins Festival asked us to create this because had we not been asked to do it, I don't think it would have ever happened. And through the Kwakwaka'wakw, Wampanoag, and Lakota teachings, we really tapped into connecting with Pocahontas and connecting with different indigenous travelers who've come to London and really tried to help speak to them and help heal any of their pain or passing sadnesses they may have experienced, including our own, because it's very difficult as an indigenous person being in the heart of the country that sort of just colonized yours. [LAUGHING]

But yeah, so in general, I think it was very healing, and it helped us transform a lot of potential bitterness, potential hurt, potential pain, into something really beautiful that we can all move forward with and altogether connect with and work on bridging these gaps and working towards reconciliation through the legacy of Pocahontas that-- I find it very important as even in the Ohm symbol that I may come to represent as an indigenous Kwakwaka'wakw princess, it will hopefully move forward these-- move past this colonial ideology of us and them and move much more towards being co-creators together with all our different cultures.

For the bulk of human history, the bulk of performances have not been for living people. They've been for dead people in virtually every culture. And we perform as a way of demonstrating our own life, but also as a way of demonstrating our connection to the land on which we stand and the people who are underneath it. It's a way of, often, of embodying the presence of those who have gone before us and to

acknowledge that we've not forgotten them, and that we're part of them, and that they are part of us.

And so I think what was achieved in that ceremony was something intensely dramatic, and again, was going back to the roots of what things are really ought to be all about, which is making those bridges between the past and the present, and therefore, between different aspects of the present. That's what it means to bring different cultures together in a space and to reach, I think, a genuine process of healing and reconciliation.