



The Warm Springs family flute trio seen playing flute in their home on the reservation. The flutes, says Foster Kalama, are in a variety of styles from the Native American nations in North America. FROM LEFT: Simeon Kalama, Foster Kalama, Titus Kalama.

Native flute trio travels abroad

Germany rolls out the red carpet for Warm Springs tribal members



Map of Germany

Story and photos by Shannon Keaveny

Last month, the Foster Kalama family flew to Germany and served as representatives of the tribes.

In addition to their flutes, they packed tribal knowledge of their heritage and culture.

The experiences accrued by flying across the Atlantic Ocean and seeing a new country and culture were bountiful. Their German escorts, said Kalama, treated them with honor and "rolled out the red carpet" for them wherever they went.

But the thing that got him the most was the way his two sons represented his family and the tribes.

"It just took my heart away. I was so proud," said Kalama of Titus and Simeon's presence and flute performances.

Kalama and his sons proved to be more of a cultural phenomenon than they expected.

At most of their public appearances the local media was milling around in full force.

"There were newspapers, radio and television. It was hard to get used to, but anything to set a good example for the youth. I just wanted to show if I can do it, anybody could. I'm no one special."

Consequently, Kalama and his sons appeared throughout the country in newspaper, radio, and television coverage.

The trip lasted two weeks. The visit was such a success that next summer Kalama may return for a flute performance tour.

Christian Carstenson invited Kalama and his sons to Germany after a visit to the Warm Springs area. Carstenson is involved with The Museum of World Culture in Frankfurt, Germany.

Currently the museum has an exhibit called "Indian Times: News from Native America," which runs until August of 2003.

When Kalama and his sons arrived in Frankfurt, they helped complete the museum's depiction of Oregon Indians fishing off scaffolds at Sherar Falls.

As a model the museum used a picture of Sherar Falls Carstenson had taken during his visit.

"When we got there, they had the scaffold built already. I just helped with the nets," Kalama humbly explained of his participation.

The Kalama family traveled to many German towns, but spent most of their time in the quaint village of Landau.

While in Germany, Kalama was a guest speaker, flutist, and drummer at two universities, two middle schools and one high school.

He participated in two roundtable discussions and shared his vision of cultural diversity settings in the school. Kalama is a cultural liaison at Madras High School.

The Germans, he said, were intrigued with his job and interested in implementing similar positions in their schools to address cultural clashes within their school system. Currently, Germany has more than eight major ethnic groups.

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Foster Kalama

"I came wanting to play flute but ended up doing a lot of speaking," joked Kalama.

He spoke of the culture and life of Warm Springs.

"I spoke of our life in two different worlds, the education world and the Native American world."

The Germans, he said, were particularly interested in our spirituality. Kalama shared with them that the tribes have always been peaceful and spiritual.

"This can be seen in the traditions of the longhouses and our songs," Kalama explained to his audiences.

Kalama said he spoke of the Indian way of life, and the connection to spirits through drums and flutes. "We have songs about the ground, air, water, roots and fish. All the songs give thanks to our Creator," he told his audiences.

Kalama also had to tame some stereotypes. The audiences were told that Indians have cell phones, computers, and Native American children dress the same as kids all over the world.

While entering a troubled middle school, the kids heckled the Kalama trio with the stereotypical Native American war hoop that they had probably seen in the movies.

"I told them I came 7,000 miles to speak to them and I felt disrespected. That I would never do that to them," he said. Afterwards, the students were quiet and attentive as Kalama played drums, and sang.

"In the end, I felt I received the deepest respect from that group," said a pleased Kalama.

Playing from your heart

Foster Kalama taught himself how to play flute. The first time he held a flute was in a shop class at Chemawa Indian School, where students were making the Native American instruments. He was about 17 years old. Even then, he says, he "felt something."

His generation still suffered the consequences of their musical instruments being stripped from them because they were perceived as a threat to missionaries. Although, they were making flutes in school, not many of his classmates knew how to play.

Yet, Kalama learned by listening to the older generation. He speaks fondly of visiting Rock Creek, WA, a Nez Perce town, and learning drumming and singing.

"The elders said you had to go out to the mountains and get your songs," said Kalama of his experience learning flute, drums and singing.

Today Kalama teaches his sons and other students the tradition of his people. Titus has been playing flute for 4 years and his younger brother, Simeon, just over a year.

Together, now back from Europe, on a Sunday morning in their home, Titus and Foster share a song. The sweet sounds of their flutes waft into the air. Songs, says Kalama of where his flute songs came from, are up to every individual. There is no style. You play from your heart.

Aside from trying all the different ethnic restaurants, visiting castles, getting off the subway on time, and driving on the autobahn at 110 mph, Foster Kalama did get some flute playing in during a recent visit to Germany.

In fact one flute performance at a church in Landau, a southwestern German village near the Rhine River, Foster and his two sons, Titus, 14, and Simeon, 12, drew nearly 800 people.

"It was pretty amazing," said Kalama, "we were only expecting about 180 people."

"The Germans have a deep respect for Native Americans," he noted.