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The Business of Fancy Dancing

■ Spokane Indian Sherman Alexie's new movie tells an unusual and unsettling tale of Indian Country.

By Peta Tinda

Native poet Sherman Alexie's latest movie "The Business of Fancy Dancing" played to a packed house at the Portland Art Museum on February 9. The movie was part of the Portland International Film Festival.

After the film, Alexie answered questions and talked with the audience.

"I love this place," said Alexie of Portland. "It's a great Indian town."

Set on the Spokane Reservation, the movie's plot revolves around two friends, Aristotle Joseph (played by Gene Tagaban) and Seymour Polatkin (Evan Adams) sixteen years after they've graduated from high school.

"It's one story about a few Indians and a couple of white people thrown in for good measure," joked Alexie.

This was Alexie's directorial debut. In 1997, his short story "This is what it means to say Phoenix Arizona," from his book "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" was made into the award winning film "Smoke Signals."

The film begins with a flashback to the two friends on graduation day, right before they leave to go

to college. Although they both leave the reservation with excitement for college, they're success and experience in the white man's world would differ dramatically and ultimately turn the life-

long friends away from each other. Seymour thrives in college but Aristotle doesn't do as well. The gap between the two former friends widens as Seymour becomes a successful poet, gets rich and famous and has dinner with the President. Aristotle eventually drops out of college and goes back to the reservation.

But many Natives, especially the ones at home whose lives have been exposed in his writings, can't stand Seymour.

Seymour's life is further complicated by the sudden death of his friend from childhood, Mouse, (Swil Kanim) a well-known reservation personality and gifted violinist.

Seymour feels like he must return to the reservation and to people who would rather that he just

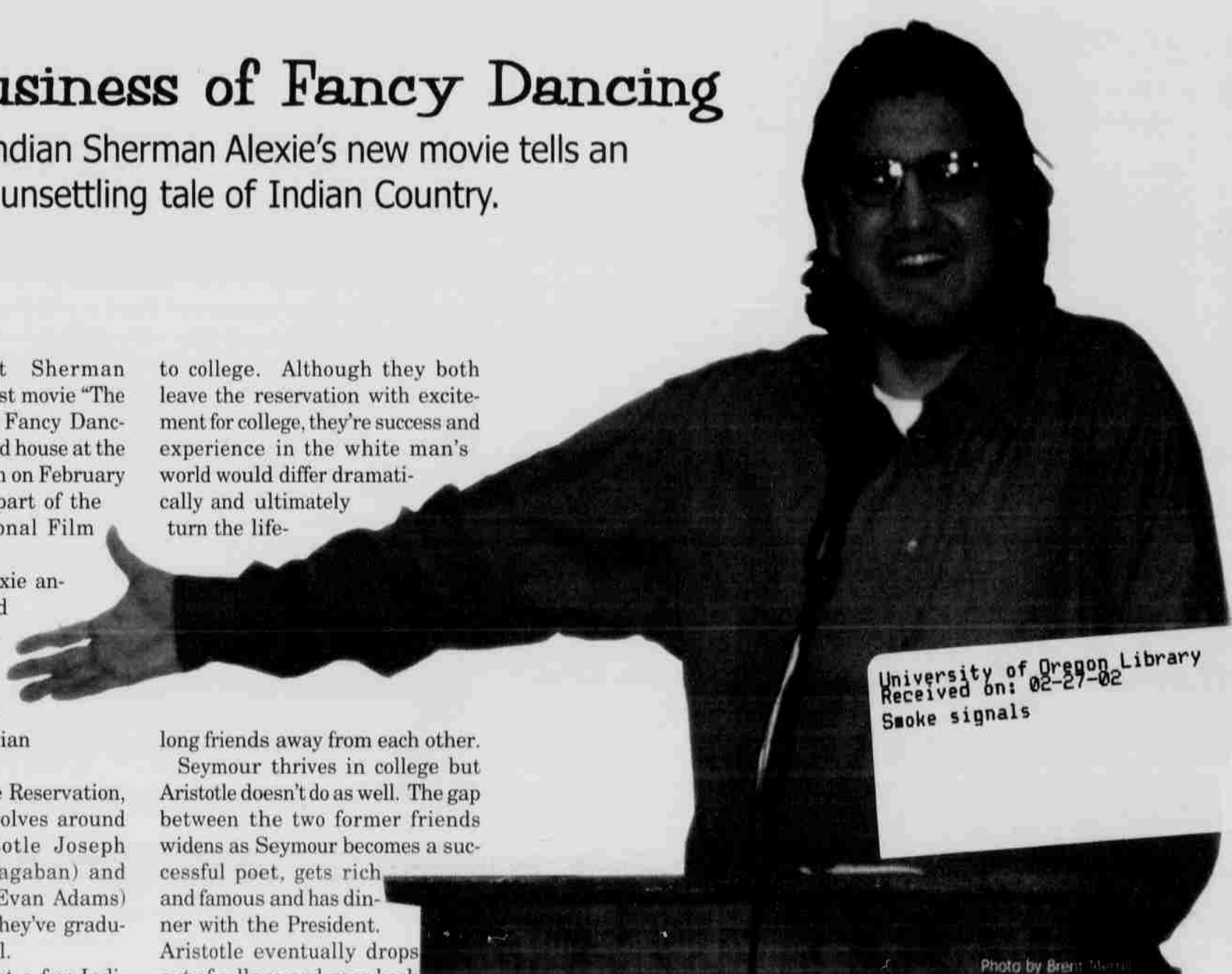


Photo by Brent Merritt

Storytelling With A Twist — Spokane Indian Sherman Alexie followed up his critically acclaimed movie "Smoke Signals" with a new movie called "The Business of Fancy Dancing." The controversial film debuted in Sundance, Utah and then made its way to Portland. We sent journalist Peta Tinda to give us a movie review.

stayed away.

Seymour's white lover, Steven, (Kevin Phillip) also does not want him to return to the reservation. Steven fears that if Seymour goes, he might not return, saying: "They're not your Tribe anymore,

I'm your Tribe."

The one person on the reservation that welcomes Seymour back is his former college girlfriend Agnes Roth (Michelle St. John).

Agnes is half Spokane Indian and
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Photo by Willie Mercier



Ready For Visitors — The Gordon House at The Oregon Garden, a recipient of a Spirit Mountain Community Fund grant, in Silverton will celebrate its dedication and open the stunning Frank Lloyd Wright home to visitors on March 2 and 3.



Photos by Peta Tinda

◀ Remembering...

This year, Valentine's Day was a time of remembering for many families in the Grand Ronde Tribe.

▼ Flower Day —

The Tribe's Spirit Mountain Casino passed out hundreds of red roses to guests and brightened a few days as well.



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