

Reibach melds Native flute, rock 'n' roll on new CD

'Looking Wolf Project' set for Internet release in August; brings career full circle

By Dean Rhodes
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On his soon-to-be-released CD "The Looking Wolf Project," Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach successfully combines the searching melodies of the Native American flute with the edgy, crunching guitar chords and wall-vibrating drum beats of alternative rock 'n' roll.

And for the artist, "The Looking Wolf Project" fittingly brings his musical career full circle from his days of playing rock 'n' roll in Portland bars to being one of the world's most recognized and honored Native American recording artists on the Native flute, having released 12 CDs and two DVDs and received almost 20 awards.

"I'm so excited about it," says Kathy Sohler, Reibach's agent based in Forest Grove. "It's such a wonderful CD. Jan poured his heart and soul into it, and it will draw more young people to the sound of his music. It's more contemporary, more hip. It's another step up ... or three or five."

"The Looking Wolf Project" features 10 tracks — six rhythmic Native flute instrumentals and four vocal tracks that interweave the Native flute into rock arrangements. It also features Reibach playing most of the guitar licks. The new CD will be released via the Internet at lookingwolf.com in August and arrive in brick-and-mortar record stores early in 2009.

Sohler says she plans an initial distribution of 17,000 copies nationwide.

For the 42-year-old Reibach, who is a Grand Ronde Tribal member of Kalapuyan descent and also the Tribe's Lands Management manager, the timing of "The Looking Wolf Project" and its potential for significant crossover appeal occurs at a demanding time in his life.

Between his music career, job at the Tribe, family obligations and teaching gig at Oregon State University, where he teaches two classes for three terms a year, he realized there were not enough hours in a day to do everything, so he decided against touring behind the new release.

"Everyone knew this was a studio project," he says in his McMinnville home nestled in a west hills subdivision just 20 miles from Grand Ronde. "Everyone knew something had to give."

"I worked really hard to get a degree in real estate and I did not want to give up my classes. I love teaching. It's in my heart."

Recorded between November 2007 and May 2008 in Keith Sommers' studio in McMinnville, as well as at Grammy Award-winning producer George Noriega's studio in Hollywood, Fla., "The Looking Wolf Project" seamlessly melds Native American flute with rock 'n' roll and includes a cover of Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door."

Every song on "The Looking Wolf Project" has emotional meaning to Reibach, particularly the Dylan cover, which is a salute to Reibach's uncle Mike, who walked on in April 2005.

"He used to sing that song to me when



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal member Jan Michael Looking Wolf Reibach will soon be releasing his CD "The Looking Wolf Project." Reibach sings and plays the Native American flute and guitar on the album.

I was little," he recalls. "And I sang it as his funeral. The song represented sadness to me for a long time."

But Reibach wrote a third verse to the song to honor his uncle: "Like a prayer upon the wind/Uncle won't you have pity on me/It took my whole life just to see/We should be walking hand in hand."

"The verse is a prayer," he says. "My uncle stood for unity. He talked about it all the time until he passed away. I wanted to honor him with that. He thought that all people were equally important."

Other tracks include the hard-hitting "Addiction," which tackles Native American battles with drug and alcohol abuse and includes Native American chanting.

"We wrote the music first and the words just came from my heart," Reibach says. "That was the first time I've chanted like that. It took a lot of takes, but that was fun."

The love ballad "Everything" was written for Reibach's wife of 20 years, Rhonda.

"Phoenix Rising," another rocking vocal track, is a nod to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, which, like the mythical bird, has risen from the ashes of Termination.

Even the instrumental flute tracks involve Tribal inspiration. "Fire-N-Water" is a nod to Reibach's Tribal colleague in the Lands Management Department, Ann Lewis.

For all the excitement Reibach feels

about "The Looking Wolf Project," he says it will be his final release for five years. His son, Shane, will be entering McMinnville High School this fall and he does not want the demands of being a touring musician to steal away from being a father.

"There was a time when winning awards was important to me," he says about the maturation of his life. "But now to have my Tribe accept me, have my music respected and now that my son is in high school, I can't just take off."

"It'll still be there in five years," Rhonda interjects at the family dining room table.

Reibach shakes his head.

"I'm not Bon Jovi," he says.

However, that doesn't mean he's totally retired. Reibach will perform July 19 at the Home Center in Salem and will go to Milwaukee, Wis., in September for the Indian Summer Music Awards. He's also booked for gigs at Flute Quest in Seattle on Sept. 20 and at Spirit Mountain Casino on Sept. 26 for National Indian Day.

He'll also perform at the Native American Music Awards in October with Noriega and at the casino again in November for Indian Heritage Month and the Tribe's 25th Restoration celebration.

He's also planning on producing a CD for his son, who is into Christian rock; mentoring Ann Lewis' son, Kenny, who plays guitar; and thinking of recording some of his own

Christian songs.

"I will always make music," he says. "Music is a great bridge that brings people together. Music is beautiful. It always has been and always will be a part of my life."

"If my Tribe calls upon me to play, I'm there."

But there's no denying how jazzed Reibach is about the impending release of "The Looking Wolf Project," its cover featuring a colorful Picasso-esque overlapping of seven wolves — perhaps representing the successful blending of Native American flute with rock 'n' roll.

"This was something that was inside of me all of the time. When I first heard the CD, I felt like, 'Wow, that should shake things up,'" he says. "I feel like I left a footprint in the Native American music industry."

"There was a question if this could ever be done, but I think my experience as a lead guitarist in rock bands helped bridge the gap between alternative rock and Native flute."

Fourteen-year-old Shane has already given "The Looking Wolf Project" a big thumbs up by putting the CD on his iPod.

"I like it," Shane says. "It's really good."

"I'm still inspired by the same things," Reibach says. "The wind, sun, mountains, birth, water, fire ... all living things. My inspirations have not changed ... just how I convey them." ■