

Mohegan Colony festival celebrates the art of storytelling

Annual Mohegan Colony festival returns, features ghosts, face paint, music

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Written by **STEPHANIE SMITH**

The art of storytelling predates the written alphabet, when people communicated through the use of words and gestures. It's an art that has been long embraced by Mohegan Colony, which sponsors an annual Storytelling and Music Festival. This year's festival takes place Saturday.

At this year's event eight acclaimed storytellers and the musical duo No Soap will present traditional and original pieces.



They'll be told on two stages during the day (one for adult tales, another for family-friendly fare) with ghost stories scheduled for after dark.

The Mohegan Colony, which began life as an anarchist commune in 1923, is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year. During its history, everyone from Pete Seeger, Paul Robeson and Isadora Duncan, to Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis entertained there.

Christopher Agostino, one of the headliners this year, is a storytelling veteran, from Baldwin, N.Y., who has been performing for more than 30 years. Starting as a young actor, Agostino has been on stage for years, performing famous works of Shakespeare and some of his own material.

Storytelling wasn't far off his radar. "It was a natural outgrowth for me; I started with acting and went on to theatrical storytelling," he says. "It works."

Agostino recognizes that as a storyteller, creating original work can be challenging. "StoryFaces" is his repertoire of shows that involve comedy, tales of heroism, and stories inspired by ancient events and tales. He combines all that with face painting as a way to emphasize his stories and engage listeners.

No matter where Agostino performs — at a school, library or theater — he encourages full audience participation. So for those planning to drop by the Mohegan Colony festival, some of you may walk out covered with interesting designs.

“Most storytellers focus on the folk-type art of it all, gestures and voices, but I’m a storyteller who includes visual arts, too,” he says.

Agostino continues, “I believe that more important than the design you get painted with is the experience of being painted; the experience of seeing a new identity when you look in the mirror and how that identity is perceived when others look at you.”

Even with intricate images that are difficult to create, Agostino always finds volunteers. He admits, however, that it can sometimes be challenging to pick the right subject out of a crowd. “I don’t want to make anyone upset that they weren’t chosen, so I put a lot of care into my decision.”

“I like involving the audience because of that unknown element of what could happen,” he says. “I think the audience likes that, too.”

These days, with decades of experience behind him, he says that his favorite part is when a performance brings out the true magic of storytelling. Agostino says that he enjoys watching audiences react to stories that prove the universal nature of the art.

In addition to performing at the festival, Agostino will host a storytelling workshop titled “Before Cave Walls,” that focuses on the origins and significance of masks and body art.

“It’s like a Discovery Channel program, live,” he says. “You’ll learn more about my work and its impact on the arts.”

When Agostino is not telling stories, he fills his life with art by visiting museums and going to the theater to keep his cultural life rich.

“Art is important for everyone and for me, it’s not only my inspiration, but my passion,” he says.

If you go

What: Mohegan Colony’s 13th annual Storytelling and Music Festival

When: 1 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Saturday. (“Before Cave Walls” workshop runs from 10 a.m. to noon.)

Where: 99 Baron de Hirsch Road., Crompond

Tickets: Adults \$20, children \$5 for day and night; adults \$15, children \$3 for day only; adults \$10 and children \$3 for night only; \$20 for the workshop.

Details: Call 914-528-5830, or visit www.hvstoryall.org/mohegan