

## NOTES FROM OJIBWAY PLAYWRIGHT – Drew Hayden Taylor

When I was originally contacted by Roseneath Theatre to adapt the Irish play, *Tir Na N'Og*, I was reluctant. I wasn't sure what connection a play about Irish gypsies had with Native Canadians, specifically the Stoney Nakoda people of Alberta. The two don't usually sit at the same table in the restaurant of people's minds. But it was a challenge, and I love challenges. The surprising thing was, adapting it wasn't that difficult. Both are horse cultures. Both have been marginalized by the larger dominant cultures they exist in. Both have traditions older than time itself. And more importantly, both love their children dearly. Armed with that, Ireland became Alberta.



Having talked with people of the Stoney Nakoda Nation, specifically a gentleman by the name of Sykes Powderface, I found a legend that embraced the same elements, need for strength, and commitment that the original story had. Legends were my Rosetta stone. All cultures have stories and legends (do you know yours?) They are the fingerprints of a people. Over the phone, Sykes told me a fabulous tale of magical horses, mysterious lakes, and people rising to meet challenges. The true irony is that both he and I, being First Nations, come from what can be called an oral tradition; that is to say, history and education have always been passed down verbally through story. And here we were, exchanging stories orally, but through this thing called a telephone. And you must keep in mind that to the Stoney people, this isn't just a story. It's truth. According to their beliefs, there is such a lake, and there is such a horse. And it does take a very special person to ride it. *Tir Na N'Og* was originally a story about the gypsies in Ireland. It became a story about the Stoney people in Alberta, written by an Ojibway writer from Ontario.

What did I learn from this experience? Most importantly, I discovered that what I first thought would be difficult became fun. I made some good Stoney friends and learned more about their ways. I got to tell a fabulous story. I learned to never look at the differences; look at the similarities. As an Ojibway, I've always believed that stories are memories of the universe and if they aren't told and shared, the universe becomes a much smaller place. So start sharing.