

'SONG OF THE GREAT LAND'



BARBARA PURDY

Two Young Alaskan Natives to Perform at D.C.'s Kennedy Center

(Special to the Tundra Times)

By BETZI WOODMAN

Two Alaska Methodist University students with Native background are helping to tell Alaska's story with word and music in the nation's capitol and on world-wide broadcast.

As members of the cast of the award-winning drama "Song of the Great Land," Barbara Purdy, Fairbanks-born, and Jim Dybdahl of Hoonah, will perform in three shows in Washington, D. C. this week. (April 15-20)

Because the original work written and directed by AMU's

matinee performance in the concert hall whose 2700 seats are sold out.

During the Kennedy performance, the show will be covered by Voice of America for both English and foreign language broadcasts.

That night the group will perform at the National Women's Democratic Club and on April 18 a special showing will be given in the Smithsonian Institution's prestigious Spencer F. Baird Auditorium in the Museum of Natural History Building.

Barbara, a junior at AMU majoring in geology and literature, is cast as a reader in the drama which is in the form of a symphonic tone poem.

Among the several parts she plays in this poetic history of Alaska is an Athabascan girl in the moving love story with a worker on the Alcan. Barbara's own heritage has Athabascan roots.

"I'm not much into theatre or drama," says the lovely tall brunette. "I'm not really interested, but this has just got to be the neatest thing I ever did. I never tried it before . . . it's wonderful what you can do with your voice."

As Barbara talks, animation lights her face with the same inspiring glow that makes her performance in "Song" so out-



JIM DYBDAHL

drama professor Frank Brink was chosen one of the country's ten best productions in the American College Theatre Festival competition. "Song of the Great Land" appeared at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts April 16.

Senator Ted Stevens will welcome the audience to the

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Song of Great Land . .

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standing.

"The play is fantastic," she continues. "I'm glad Outsiders will get to taste a little of what it's like to be Alaskan. This is real . . . I think it's great. It's about time something like this was done. You can read books, but it's never portrayed so poignantly. You don't walk away depressed."

Barbara was adopted in Fairbanks when she was five by the late Fred Purdy and his wife. She was the last of ten whom that unusual family adopted and raised mostly at the gold mines in Chicken where Purdy, son of an Eskimo mother and a Bostonian father, had placer and lode mines . . . "the only lode mines for hundreds of miles."

Because she "grew up" with geology, Barbara says, "it seems right" to go on with these studies. Summer travelers on the Taylor Highway will remember her "Rocks for Sale" sign at the end of the Purdy Drive at Chicken.

She plans to do graduate work in this subject and would like to be a consulting geologist in Alaska.

Barbara's mother, whose own book on life at Chicken will be published this spring by Random House, taught her daughter at home through the fifth grade. The Purdys would head for Chicken as early as they could in spring and stay until late November.

Then there were winters and School in Fairbanks, Hope, Dot Lake and Tok. Because of her father's progressively bad heart disease, he took his family to California for winters later and thus Alaskan Athabascan Barbara was graduated from the unlikely high school of Twenty Nine Palms.

She came back north for college at AMU where she has been the whole three years. She is enthusiastic about life at AMU — "neat" is her favorite superlative.

Tall Jim Dybdahl, a fine blend of Tlingit Indian and Norwegian, is a tenor in the chorale of "Song of the Great Land". He says he is "totally involved in the show and even though I'm a basketball player at heart, I, like the others, sacrificed much to be part of this moving play . . . I've passed up two basketball tournaments!"

Jim has "always been with music." He was an outstanding member of his high school choir and represented Hoonah at the spring music festival at Ketchikan. He was also named Outstanding Member of his choir for the year.

Hoonah has a good history of music involvement, Jim relates. "The old timers all had their own instruments and a band. Then this dropped off for a while, but now profits from the town liquor store provided \$15,000 to the school for new instruments and a music instructor. The very first year the school rated third in the Music Festival.

Jim is particularly happy to have a legend of Hoonah included in "Song". The story of "Little Fish" which Barbara Purdy has a part in, comes from his home. "Frank Brink, the director, has transposed the story of Alaska into poetry — real stories, and it gives me a neat feeling. It catches the feel of Alaska."

The experience of being in the show has been exhilarating, too, Jim reports. There was a fine rapport with the audience at Pullman, Washington where the American College Theatre Festival regional competition took place.

"The energy level was so high, you could feel everyone respond. Our music director Jon Carlson (AMU music professor) kept the spirit high and the winning did something for us, too."

Jim, a freshman, came to AMU on recommendation of his brother who also attends. He likes the freedom which helps such projects as "Song of the Great Land" come into being.

When the group returns to Alaska after side trips for performances in Pittsburgh, Pa., Moline, Ill., and Dallas, Texas through arrangements by Methodist Churches and friends of AMU, they will have travelled some 8,000 miles.

At a reception, April 28, each performer will be given a specially designed bronze medallion from Amoco Oil Co., who with American Airlines is sponsor of the Festival and paid expenses for the Washington trip.

Governor Williams A. Egan will present the medallions during a special ceremony in Anchorage.