



Last night, there was a good exchange between the members of Tukak Teatret, Alaska Repertory Theatre and the King Island Dancers. Today, it seemed the blizzard in Nome would ground the airplane. But bold and hopefully competent pilots determined that they could make it to Gambell. Passengers run to the planes not out of fear of being late, but because it is cold.

Playing the Bush with Tukak'

Photos by Bill Hess

"Tukak!" a woman from Gambell exclaimed excitedly as she looked at her program. "In our language, that means 'Harpoon head'. I wonder if it means the same for the Greenland people." Indeed, it does. And that is just one reason the members of Tukak Teatret, a group of professional Greenlandic actors, received such a warm welcome wherever they toured in the Alaskan Bush.

Not only is their language similar to that spoken by Alaska's Eskimos, particularly the Inupiat, but they are the same people. And, the small one

who can play a happy child of the land as well as an evil man-dog who kills whatever he touches, says that back home in Greenland, his people eat whale and seal, just like in Alaska.

Makka Kleist, a leading Tukak actress said that although Alaska was only one part of a long tour which took the Greenlandic actors from Europe, through Canada and to many places in the Lower 48, it was the high point for her.

"We are the same people, the Inuit people," she explained.

"It's been really encouraging. I feel proud to see that the

people here have kept their songs and dances. When we were in Nome, I saw the King Island dancers. There was so much power in their songs. Their dances were so graceful, I feel like crying!"

Makka said that although the Greenlandic language remains strong among her people, 250 years of Danish colonization and missionary work have all but wiped out the songs and dances of her people.

And that is what "Inuit, the drama performed by Tukak in the villages they traveled to, is all about. Two-hundred and

fifty years of history is condensed into one powerful, symbolic hour, easily understood by anyone who knows anything of world history whether they understand the Greenlandic tongue in which the play is performed or not.

Reider Nilsson, the artistic director of Tukak and the head of their school in Denmark, explained that the theater began after a group of Greenlandic Inuit and himself spontaneously got together at a largely Inuit gathering in Denmark and staged an almost impromptu performance based on an Alaskan dance.

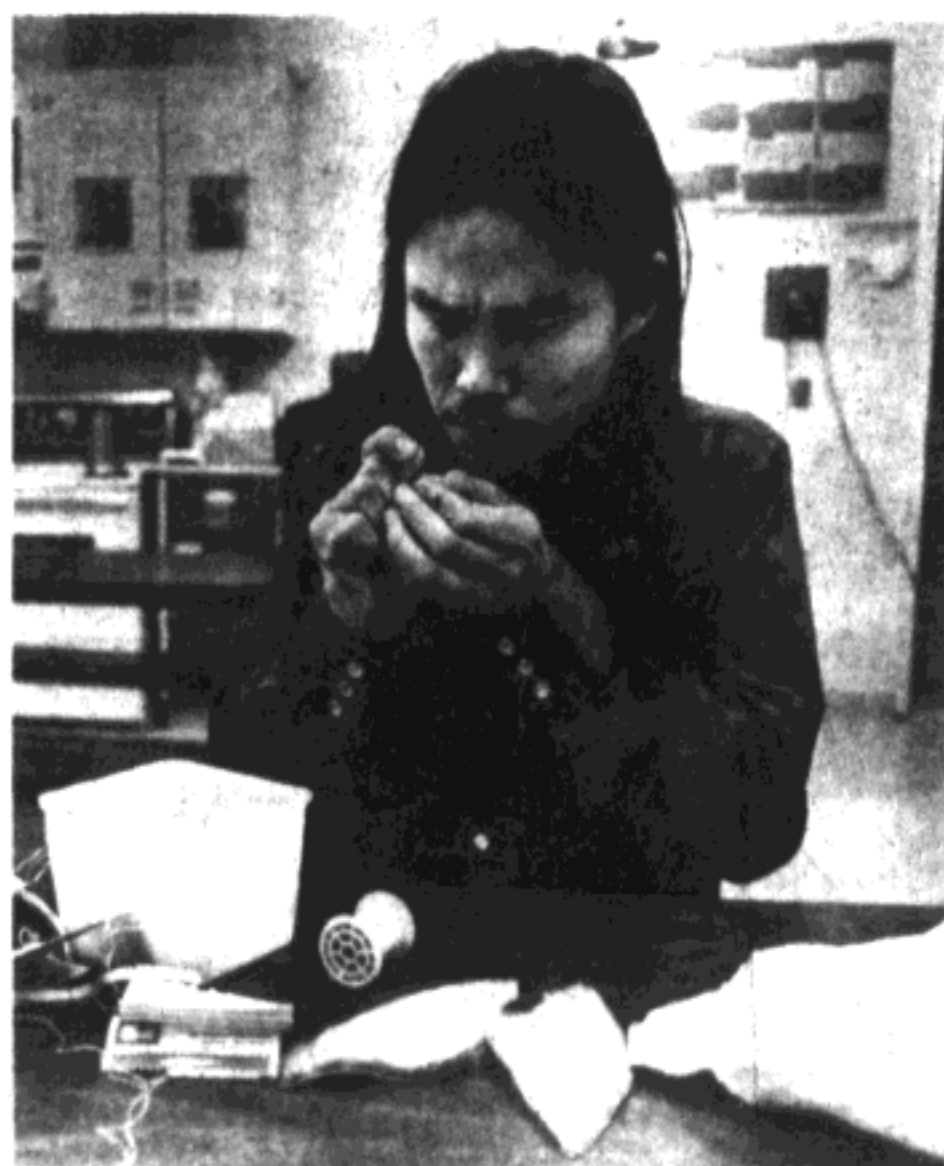
Everyone was so moved, that Tukak was started, and performances worked up between Nilsson, originally of Norway, and the actors expressing the feelings of people whose life had been forever changed by colonization.

They did such an excellent job of it that when they performed in San Francisco, the paper there gave them a four-star out of four stars possible, rating.

In Alaska, they were given an even higher vote of approval. Here, they were taken into people's homes. They were fed muktuk, seal and greeted as rela-



The weather is worse in Gambell. An unrelenting 50 knot wind blows straight down the runway, allowing the pilots to land, but making the mile-plus trip to the school by snow machine and three wheeler miserable.



When is there a moment to rest? Almost never. And, he discovers, as he prepares to sew repairs on one of his costumes.