

Movie score includes sounds of Sedona

Star comes to town to record prayers at area sacred sites

By Lu Stitt

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The mood of a movie is set not only by the story and the actors, but by the music that runs through it.

In "Sedona: The Motion Picture" the music, or score as it is called, is different from other movies. It will include not only orchestral instruments, but will have many of the sounds and music found specifically in Sedona.

"When I thought about a score for the movie, I wanted to come up with what the sound of Sedona was," composer Ebony Tay said. "Sedona has brought about several revelations in my life that connect into the film. I came up with an idea through hikes and other adventures I've had here."

"Sedona: The Motion Picture" is directed by Sedona resident Tommy Stovall, and was completely shot in and around Sedona in the late summer of 2010. Stovall, along with Marc Sterling and Tay are producing the movie.

Tay's idea has taken form, and she was in Sedona recently recording some of the Sedona sounds, especially with the film's lead actress Frances Fisher.

Fisher is recording prayers in caves and sacred places. Tay heard Fisher saying the prayers every day on the movie set and wanted to include them on the soundtrack. That is why Tay had Fisher come to Sedona the week of Nov. 29.

"We've been recording in several areas — Sinagua dwellings and sacred spots here in the Verde Valley. The best recording studio is the one God made," Tay said. "David Hicks is coordinating with us and several of the Arizona Indian nations to get permission."

The prayers are very personal to Fisher.



Photo courtesy of Mal Cooper

"SEDONA: THE MOTION PICTURE" star Frances Fisher plays an Indian drum on a recent visit to Sedona to record sacred prayers for the movie's soundtrack. The sounds of the drums and didgeridoos will also be included to create what composer Ebony Tay calls the sound of Sedona.

"I have some prayers a friend of mine, Howard Wills, wrote for me. He said say these three times, three times a day. It puts me in a good frame of mind and clears my energy," Fisher said. "I always feel better afterward, which is great, and connect to a higher being. We're all spiritual beings having a human experience. We tend to forget that. Five minutes to talk to the creator of the universe is not too much time."

Fisher said the prayers fit in with the life of the movie's lead character, Tammy Johnson, who she plays. Johnson is dealing with some personal challenges and goes through a transformation, facing things she had been running away from, and a healing takes place.

"I think we're all doing that — to face ourselves and find joy again, and celebrate. I like the idea of portraying a person going through a personal

transformation," Fisher said. "Everyone who sees the movie will get the prayers."

Fisher's hope is that the audience will hear the prayers along with Johnson's transformation and have an emotional experience — to go along with the lead characters on their journey.

"To hear the lead character do this [recording] is a very spiritual experience. That's why I wanted to include it in the score," Tay said. "Frances is kind of blessing the score along with the natives."

Tay and Fisher said they enjoyed the experience of recording outside, away from the sterility of a studio and having the blessing of the Indian nations. Next Tay, who studied at the Juilliard School in New York, will take all of the sounds back to New York and orchestrate them with the strings at her alma mater.

"We're creating a template of sounds, collecting them and starting to come up with a Sedona sonic template — and that will be the bed of our score," Tay said. "We'll be putting this together in Tony Bennett's studio. He loves Sedona."

Next on Tay's list is to record the voices, and come back to Sedona to gather the sounds of local artists on didgeridoos and have a drumming — all of which will be part of the soundtrack.

Fisher said she would like to come back to Sedona to be a part of the drumming but would need to check her calendar since the date is close to the holidays.

"Something really mystical, wonderful, eclectic and global is coming," Tay said. "I love scoring movies."

Tay also scored and produced "Hate Crime," another film directed by Stovall.

"Sedona: The Motion Picture" will premiere Saturday, Feb. 19, during the Sedona International Film Festival in the Sedona Performing Arts Center at Sedona Red Rock High School.

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