

Maria Tallchief: America's First Prima Ballerina

An Afternoon of Film and Discussion with Sandra Sunrising Osawa and Yasu Osawa

Date: Friday, November 30th at 3:30pm

Location: The Goldsmith Family Cinema with reception to follow

Maria Tallchief, an Osage woman, was one of America's most celebrated ballerinas.

Between 1942 to 1947 Tallchief danced with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, but she is best known for her time with the New York City Ballet from 1947 to 1965.

Choreographer George Balanchine wrote several of his most famous works for her. She was the first prima ballerina of the New York City Ballet, where Balanchine was the principal choreographer. Her performance of Balanchine's *The Firebird* in 1949 and their earlier collaboration at the Paris Opera elevated Maria Tallchief onto the world stage.

Sandra Sunrising Osawa, an equally inspirational Native woman, took on the challenge to tell Maria Tallchief's story, in her most recent film, *Maria Tallchief: America's First Prima Ballerina*. Osawa, an independent filmmaker, writer, and member of the Makah Indian Nation in Washington State, produced and wrote the first nationally televised series entirely produced, acted, and written by Native Americans. Her award-winning documentaries have been broadcast on NBC, PBS and the Learning Channel, and have screened nationally and abroad at numerous festivals, including Sundance Film Festival, Vienna Film Festival, Native American Film & Video Festival, and Margaret Mead Festival. In addition to teaching and writing, Osawa has spearheaded cultural revival efforts to restore Makah songs and dances, and has actively worked for American Indian rights.

In this film, Ms. Tallchief tells her own story accompanied by dance clips, interviews with colleagues and historians, and archival photos. Explained Osawa, "There are no contemporary stories about Native American women on PBS, the myriad of other television stations, or on the big screen. For us, as American Indian women, Pocahontas is as good as it gets. This documentary aims to change the perpetual image of Indian women from one of 'beast of burden' or 'romantic princess' to one which will highlight a truly inspirational life — one filled with integrity and passion for the arts."

Osawa's film explains that in the late 1940's, Tallchief ushered in a new prototype of the ballerina that was distinctly American, in a ballet world that was dominated by the Russians, the French, and the English. All that changed in 1948 when Ms. Tallchief took the stage to capture the critical NY audience in a new ballet called Orpheus. Author Francis Mason, who is featured in the film, exclaimed, "Maria Tallchief lit a fire under classical ballet that is still burning."