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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Apryl Allen



Apryl Allen is becoming recognized as a unique talent with the ability to create lyrics and music that reflect her passionate outlook on life and personal experiences – various and inspirational experiences that are shared by many drawn to her music. In a relatively short span of time Apryl has written and recorded two albums. The first **Morningstar** is a tour de force consisting of eleven songs demonstrating her songwriting ability across multiple music genres - Blues, Jazz, Country, Pop, Adult Contemporary and others are represented in this compilation. *Velvet Voice*, a Bossa-Nova/Jazz song co-written by Julio Fernandez (Guitarist) has received numerous accolades, including #1 Jazz song for May 2009 on Ourstage.com.

Apryl's second Album **Na Unu Nahai (Shape Shifter)** is rapidly becoming a cultural phenomenon. What started as a personal journey or words and music through her Camanche

Another example is the song 'Oray'- she is my Great-Grandmother, and next to those lyrics is a brief outline of my Great-Grandfather, Muutuumi, which tells the story of how he accidentally killed Oray and how he lived his life thereafter. Basically the stories and photos intertwine – it is amazingly powerful and I'm receiving huge accolades for this accomplishment. I've been approached recently to create this type of album for other indigenous cultures on the edge of extinction. That truly would be a dream come true for me!

RV: Congratulations, for being nominated for a total of four NAMMY'S and capturing your first NAMMY for Best Pop Recording. I found myself asking this particular question because, when you accepted your award, you exhibited a humbling array of emotions when they called your name. Can you please explain what was going on in your mind prior to the announcement that you had won and what does it feel like for you now that you have received your award?

Apryl: It was interesting because that was the first NAMMY I was up for that evening. To be honest, I really did not think that I had a chance in that category - my fellow nominees were amazingly talented individuals. Quite frankly I was looking around the room for those individuals to see what their reaction was going to be like when their name was called. At first I didn't hear my name, and my husband grabbed my hand and said, "Apryl you just won!" I didn't know what to say – I was completely blown away and shocked! Walking up there, it was as if I was on a cloud. I was completely speechless.

Personally, I feel I cannot take credit for that accomplishment, I truly can't. Let me give you a little bit of a background. My mother, who has always had a tremendous influence in my life giving me strength and inspiration, passed away in 2002. At that time, I was not pursuing a singing career at all, even though it had always been a passion of mine. In 1993 I was crowned Miss Arizona then began pursuing an acting career

ancestry has become a touchstone for Native Americans throughout the country and world. Her ability to blend Native American music and sounds with modern music and arrangements is a lyrical and musical marvel. World Music is the genre she is most categorized with this album. This music comes from a place deep in her soul and inner being; it resonated with people from all cultural backgrounds. Tribal leaders from the Comanche Nation were so impressed with her accomplishments the proclaimed April 7th as Apryl Allen Day.

Na Unu Nahai (Shape Shifter) is receiving extraordinary responses throughout the US and internationally from fans as far reaching as France, Italy, Spain, Norway, Switzerland, Ireland, and Japan. ***Na Unu Nahai (Shape Shifter)*** has been placed in the Comanche Nation Historical Archives. The Oklahoma Historical Society Indian Archives and is merchandized at the Comanche Nation Tourism Department, The National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian Institution) and the internationally recognized Heard Museum in Pheonix Arizona.

In 2009, ***Na Unu Nahai (Shape Shifter)*** was honored with four Nammy nominations by the Native American Music Awards program and won Best Pop Recording of the Year for her song "*Black Moon*". ***Na Unu Nahai (Shape Shifter)*** also qualified for seven GRAMMY categories for the 2010 Recording Academy GRAMMY Awards.

Apryl performed as the featured soloist with the Pheonix Symphony at their 2010 New Years Eve gala. That same evening she performed with Richie Cannata and "The Family".

Apryl is a Voting Member of the Recording Academy (GRAMMY'S), an Adisory Member of the Native American Music Awards (NAMMY's), a contributing member of both the NAMMY's and GRAMMY's, a member of ASCAP, and has additionally performed at the Cutting Room in New York, and at Native American special venues. The Comanche National Museum featured her album ***Na Unu Nahai (Shape Shifter)*** via remote transmitter for the Comanche Nation's Christmas Display.

RV: Thank you Apryl for finding time to provide an interview to Native Digest. It is quite an honor to share some time with you and learn more about your work. What have you been involved in recently?

Apryl: I recently performed with the Phoenix Symphony at their New Years Eve gala. It was quite an exciting event for me. The Phoenix

more than singing, and living every minute of it with all my heart. I was hitting a lot of brick walls and found it extremely frustrating – I felt a dream shouldn't be this difficult. Then I met my husband and he kind of made it easy for me to say okay that was my childhood dream, and it was time to put it in my past. But as fate goes I guess it was always deep inside of me.

In 2002 my Mother was given six months to live and luckily we were able have some beautiful time together. During one of those moments I asked if she could help somebody from the next life achieve their dreams would she? Don't ask me where this came from I truly have no idea. You could really see her thinking and then said yes, I guess I would if I could. She then paused and asked "Why, what do you want?" Now there's the question of a lifetime...

When I was two or three my Mom told me, I came home one day and ran into my bedroom and changed into my pink swimsuit and black patent-leather shoes and climbed atop the fireplace mantel. My Mother asked "Apryl, what are you doing?" I proclaimed "I'm going to be Miss America and an actress and singer when I grow up". I guess I had the foresight back then to look into the future or more so, was just that in tune with my dream – which is really quite amazing. So, when she asked what I wanted, with no hesitation I replied "I'd love to be able to write music and sing" and here I am. I'm not kidding, when she passed away, the melodies and lyrics just came pouring out of me!

RV: So you had a really close relationship with your Mom?

Apryl: I loved my Mother more than life. She was an amazing woman with what she went through in her life time. She was born in 1922, being Native American back then you were not welcome in a lot of places. She was in the Women's Army Corps and lived in New York for awhile and would send

Symphony, which is really involved in world music, requested our band perform for their gala. Michael Christie, who is the conductor and musical director for the Phoenix Symphony, has a deep appreciation for Native Americans and works with our youth – getting them excited about music and playing instruments.

They asked if I would help them with the Gala by bringing in the band for the evening. We did not play any music from my album though. The theme for the evening was Casablanca. My producer, Richie Cannata, who was also Billy Joel's original saxophonist, has a studio called Cove City Sound Studios in Glen Cove, located on Long Island.

They've recorded everyone from Celine Dion, Mariah Carrey, Taylor Dane, and the Beach Boys. The list goes on, and that is only the tip of the iceberg of who they've worked with. I feel very, very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with him.



Apryl standing with Richie Cannata

RV: How did you come to be chosen to play at the Phoenix Symphony Gala?

Apryl: The chairperson Linda Miller, who organized the event, knew a personal friend of mine who gave her my album. She contacted me and said she would love to have the band perform for the Phoenix Symphony Gala. However, we did not perform my music as I was a featured guest at their function. I sang a couple of songs with the band, and later I sang "As Time Goes By" with the Phoenix Symphony. It was a very beautiful elegant event and evening. I was completely honored and thrilled to have performed with the Phoenix Symphony.

money home to her family, her younger brother and sisters. She was one of the most giving individuals I have ever known in my life. If you needed food and she had it, it was set before you. If you needed money and she had it, she opened her hand. My father past away when I was nine months old; and I'm the youngest of eleven children. She always provided for us. I never wanted for anything in my life. We were really poor, but I didn't know or want for anything; I have been so blessed. I feel I have a lucky star shining on me. I'm so thankful that I had a Mother such as her. I hear sad stories about people that do not get along with their Mothers or do not have the upbringing I was so lucky to have. We always had dinner at six o'clock at night together; she had it on the table and we were expected to be there, unless we told her differently and got her permission. We would all be seated together for dinner. That was a beautiful thing to have that growing up.

RV: You don't always see that as often these days do you?

Apryl: You do not. It is so sad because most families now sit around the TV during this time.

You don't have the opportunity for conversation. My mother always told us to turn the TV off and then we would all sit and talk, it was really beautiful. If the phone rang... it rang.



Apryl in the studio

RV: Can you please share your personal outlook on life and the experiences that inspire you? Your Mother might be one of those inspirations?

Apryl: Absolutely. My Mother is a huge, huge inspiration to me. I just wish she could have lived long enough to have reveled in the success that I'm having. My outlook on life is just that we need to love and have peace. Really, truly that is what

RV: How did music come to be in your life?

Apryl: I am really interested in being a song writer. The first song that I wrote was 'Miles Away'. I initially sent it to my now producer, Richie Cannata, who has been a long time friend. Some of the musicians that played on my album were **Julio Fernandez, Guitarist (Spyro Gyra)**, the pianist and bass player that currently tour with **Alan Parsons Project**, and the drummer for the **Trans-Siberian Orchestra**. I also co-wrote with Richie's son **Eren Cannata**; an amazingly talented individual. They all fell in love with my music and one by one approached me and asked if I would be willing to co-write with them. I was completely taken back. I ended up writing with all of them, it was an amazing experience. I think this is why my first album is so eclectic – everything from Bosa Nova, Adult Contemporary, Pop to even Country tunes.

In my heart though, I've always had a fondness for my Native American heritage, the music and sounds. Since I was 13, I had the dream of bringing the sound and music, basically, our culture into the mainstream and that is how the album "*Shape Shifter*" came about.

Back in October when I attended the NAMMY'S there was a gentleman who informed me that I was considered a 'Blood Talker'. I didn't quite understand what he meant, but then he explained, "It is in your blood Apryl, your ancestors.

RV: How did the title of your first album come to be?

Apryl: The first song I wrote was '*Morningstar*', which was not initially the name of the song; it was '*May You Be*'. I had written it for my Mother in 2002 when she passed away. We had just finished all the songs on the album and were in the beginning of creating my second album '*Shape Shifter*'. I had gone to New Mexico for two reasons to have my Aunt give me my Indian Name and have her help translate in Comanche on my second album. My Aunt was having a difficult time with my Indian name, which I was unaware of.

During my visit I played her this song and she said, "Apryl, I was having the worst time coming up with a name for you. I had all these names that I had come up with but it just didn't feel right. But the moment I heard the song I knew what it was **Taa Tatsinupi** which means Morningstar in Comanche." I was completely taken back as I feel somehow my Mother had a hand in naming me.

Of course at that point I changed the name of the song and the album.

we should strive for. So many people are too willing to look at the negative things in life. My husband says that I am just like my Mother because he could put any individual in front of me and I would see the beauty in them. He often says he wished he had that ability and is worried that he'll taint me. I think that it's just so inbred into me. I love beauty. I love honesty. Honesty is a huge thing that resonates with me also. That's another part of my outlook on life, be honest with one another and respect each other's beliefs. I don't care what upbringing a person may have had or where one has grown up in this world. I believe a person can accomplish anything he or she wants, we need to respect each other's beliefs and dreams.

RV: What is the most gratifying part of being a singer/song writer for you?

Apryl: Being able to have a voice for others.

RV: What other projects are you currently working on?

Apryl: We are looking to do an event – I am keeping my fingers crossed – at Lincoln Center with the National Museum for Native Americans (Smithsonian) and the Brooklyn Philharmonic. I am really looking forward to this opportunity, but this is all in the beginning stages. Also, as I mentioned earlier, I have been approached by a group who is involved with tourism and various different indigenous cultures all over the world wherein they are interested in me creating albums such as my '*Shape Shifter*' for their cultures.

RV: Do you think that touring would change you in anyway?

Apryl: Everyone always asks "when are you going to go on tour"? Which I would love to do but, unfortunately, all of my band members are famous in their own rights, so it would be very expensive.

I would have to put another band together and to be quite frank, I am extremely happy with my life and husband. I am a real homebody and I love to travel with him, I love to experience new things with him. I also love working in the studio. I do love performing, but to take on a venture of putting a band together and start rehearsing and then traveling... I'm having enough of a difficult time just trying to stay current with Facebook, Twitter and MySpace.

If I had my druthers, I would love to perform at very special venues. To go on tour for a year, it sounds daunting to me. To be honest, I do not even know where to begin to do something like that? However, what I would love about it is teaching people not to forget the past. I think all of us too easily turn our backs on the past of which



"Click to listen to Morning Star"

RV: How did you integrate the Comanche Language into your music?

Apryl: After visiting my Aunt in New Mexico with hopes she could help translate lyrics for me, she directed me to contact the Comanche Nation; since she wasn't speaking it full time she was starting to lose the language. So I took Morningstar with me to Oklahoma and I contacted the Language Emersion Program there at the Tribal Complex. I made a phone call not knowing anyone and asked if someone could help me translate some lyrics into Comanche. The voice on the other end of the phone happened to be a distant relative of mine, Videll Yackeschi. I did not realize there were only three people in the world that could read, write and understand Comanche. He welcomed me with open arms when I went to the Complex – it felt like I was going home; it was such a beautiful, beautiful feeling! Videll is one of the elders of our tribe, and was very patient with me. He had already translated the lyrics to 'Morningstar' so he taught me phonetically how to say it in Comanche.

That night I stayed with my Aunt, and she started telling me family stories and showing me historical documents of family members. It resonated so loudly within me, I realized as children and teenagers we do not pay attention to our families when they are telling us stories. It goes in one ear and out the other. She does a lot of genealogy so she was able to give me a printed version of my lineage and our ancestors. She's traced it back to the late-1800's. It is truly incredible what she has accomplished. While she was telling me all the stories I wrote them down. Anything she could give me I took. I became a sponge and was so consumed with the history of our family and how I

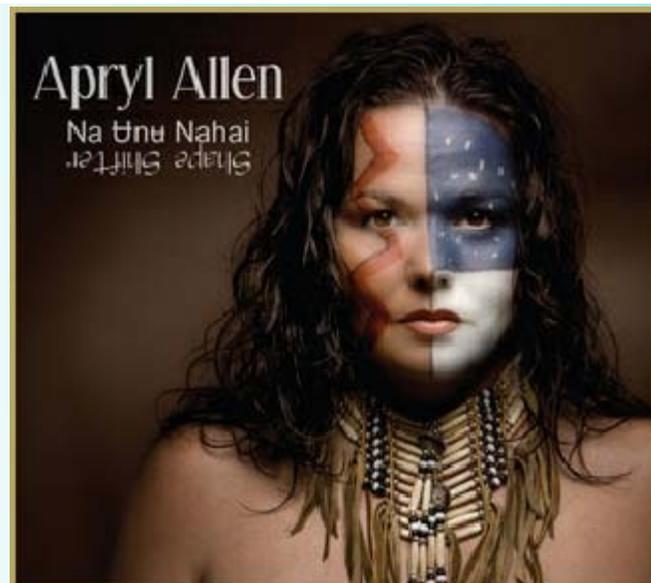
we could learn so much from. There are so many things that are happening, not only in our personal lives and our family lives, but politically, world events, technology, everything. We are just repeating the past in many cases and we need to look, listen and learn from this. I feel my music teaches people to not forget your past. How sad it was for me when I found out that my tribe had only three people that could read, write and understand Comanche fluently. When my Mother and her siblings were younger, they were taught not to speak our language and they were beaten, in many cases, if they did speak Comanche. The one thing that really astonished me was, when I initially went to write the music, I wanted to find traditional Comanche songs, pre-Christianity, there was none – it was all gone.

RV: That is like a loss when you hear that, as if somebody had passed away.

Apryl: It broke my heart. Music keeps history alive, so we really don't know what their true beliefs were. All the songs I could find were all Christian songs Elders sang in Comanche. It is really sad and taught me what I needed to do with this album in a sense.

RV: It's an infringement on the culture when you lose the value of it as well as the origination, you're absolutely right. Your album is like a reawakening for a lot of people. I have heard your music, and I was just like - this is great! Your music is inspiring and you can hear the stories and traces of the Comanche culture in there. I think that the success is hearing all the combined ascetics as one. It seems like it can go off into different routes with the pop and the different avenues of music the way that it's composed, but you have a gift and an affinity that's easy to see.

Apryl: Thank you.



Click to listen to "Black Moon"

have become the person that I am. It really took my breath away.

When I returned home, I started writing and the lyrics and melodies came so easily. I'm taking this a step further, I had dreams! My family would come to me in my dreams and say I needed to be a voice for them – they wanted their stories told. I am so honored to be blessed with this ability because a lot of the words that come to me seem to be prophetic. I can't really take credit for what I've done, it is so amazingly beautiful. So many people thank me for what I've done not just for the Comanche Nation, but also for the Native Americans as a whole. I have people tell me "I wish there had been somebody who would have done this for our language and tribe because all of our elders are gone. Nobody speaks the language anymore, it is absolutely gone, and we have no record of it". I truly had no idea my music would be so profound for others.

RV: Would you like to mention any names in this interview?

Apryl: The Oklahoma Historical Society who have a letter from 1901 depicting the death of my Great-Great-Grandfather Black Moon. I went to view the letter in person this past year. While I was there they found two other letters about his death. Of course my song 'Black Moon' was written about these letters. I will be posting the letters on my website in the near future so people can read it for themselves.

Also, an archived file about my Great-Great-Grandfather is at The Oklahoma Historical Society and during my visit they informed me they were starting a file on me. I was completely taken back that. What an amazing thing to have happen in your lifetime. They're wonderful individuals, all of the stories they have and the knowledge. I spent half a day there listening to them relay various stories and am anxious to go back and meet with them again.

And of course, Videll Yackeschi; he just told me that the Comanche Nation may be doing away with the Language Immersion Program. This makes me so sad, because without him and that Department, my CD would have never come to fruition.

RV: Is that a very strong possibility?

Apryl: Yes, actually, just before I spoke with you today he happened to call and we chatted. There is a new chairman that was just voted in this past year and I am told with any new administration everything changes.

RV: Is there a petition somewhere that people can sign?



Click to listen to Morningstar

RV: That sounds like quite an accomplishment which, apparently, resonates through your music. I can easily understand how the road of discovery has inspired you. Your music is inspiring to a lot of different listeners with diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as in other countries. How do you attribute both of your album's acceptance, celebration and success?

Apryl: I really believe it is the story telling. What a lot of people don't realize about '*Shape Shifter*' is it's based on family history and stories. In fact, there are family photos and stories in the lyric booklet that coincide with the music. For instance, next to the song "Morningstar", there is a photo of my Grandmother Jane with a brief synopsis of her life story. It's something special I added to the album, a kind of gift for those that purchase it; it's not on my website either.

Apryl: At this point no, but I will speak with Videll and let you know what, if anything there is we can do.

It has been a true honor to interview Apryl. Her stories within and behind her revealed in this interview add an aura of enlightenment that inspires, influence, celebrates and instills pride and respect for tradition and heritage.

I would like to bring to everyone's that the song Morning Star was re-released on the Shape Shifter album but sung in Apryl's native language. I guarantee that you are going to be very moved and inspired. This is a rarity and a gift from a very blessed performer.

Please be sure to visit Apryl's website to sample other music from her two album's at AprylAllen.com

Also please view these honorary recognitions given unto Apryl:

[Apryl Allen Day dedicated and blessed by the honorable Comanche Nation.](#)

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