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Navajo Memoirs: How Uncle Sam Incested Me (and then I got to meet Mary-Louise Parker)

Reviewed by Glenda Frank

Presented by Theatrix as part of the New York International Fringe Festival at St. Marks Theatre, 94 St. Marks Place, NYC, Aug. 12-24.

"Navajo Memoirs" is affecting, exasperating, and, at times, ingenious. Actor-writer **Mellow Moonshine England** (his given name) packages his hour-long monologue alternately as a Navajo vision-quest and as a sand-painting exercise for healing, complete with chants.

England takes us on a slideshow through his mother's life (the Navajo of the title), from the reservation where she was the 10th of 10 fatherless children to her marriage, motherhood, year as a rock groupie with Traffic (Mom was a "happy hostage"), her nervous breakdowns, and her episodic, sometimes violent visits. The quality of the slides is uneven, but England's a cappella chants, which accompany them and punctuate the narrative, are agile evocations—seasoned by philosophy—that you can't quite grasp but can intuit. The titles alone are an outline of the monologue: "Armageddon Love Song," "All the White Men," "Liar, Liar," "Don't Close the Door," "Karma Avenue," "Prescription Love," and "Letting Go."

His obsession with Hollywood colors the chronology, especially his tongue-in-cheek history of native Americans in which he casts the players (complete with slides): his mom, the bewildered Navajo princess, is Elizabeth Taylor; Peter O'Toole is Cortez; Bette Davis, Queen Isabella; Orson Welles, the Pope; and Roddy McDowall, the British King. And as young Mel grows, after the court battle when his hippie dad cut his long hair to keep custody, his mom becomes the star who pops in and out of his life, like a celluloid fantasy and a symbol of his mysterious heritage.

England is a handsome guy-next-door type with an appealing baritone.