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April 27, 2022

### **Native American Playwright, Rhiana Yazzie, Makes Debut Feature Film Set in the Twin Cities**

**MINNEAPOLIS (April 27, 2022)** - *A Winter Love* follows the story of Blue, a struggling Native artist getting by on odd jobs, music and teaching gigs. When Blue falls in love with a younger guy, Eddie, from another tribe, we get a window into a story most audiences have not seen portrayed on the screen: intimate moments of love between two Native American characters that is not steeped in trauma or loss and the intertribal comraderies and rivalries that you can only be a fly on the wall to hear. It is a side of the Twin Cities that we have yet to see from a community that is often at the mercy of screenwriters, directors, and producers in the entertainment industry who have their own agendas and motivations for making work about Native Americans.

This is the first film by director, Rhiana Yazzie, a citizen of the Navajo Nation. Yazzie is an acclaimed playwright who has been under the radar winning national accolades like the 2020 Steinberg and 2021 Lanford Wilson playwriting awards and locally as a McKnight, Jerome, and Bush Fellow. Those familiar with her work know she is responsible for creating and running the Midwest's most frequently producing Native theater company, New Native Theatre. The film features many of the theater's actors and others from the larger Twin Cities theater community. A strong characteristic of *A Winter Love* is that the story reveals complicated characters through beautiful photography and of course dialogue, another telltale sign of Yazzie's roots as a playwright.

This is the first starring role for Yazzie and her co-star, Brian Watson who plays Eddie and hails from the Leech Lake Ojibwe community. The cast is rounded out with other locals like Payton Counts who is Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk youth actor, Anne-Marie Haambiig, and Navajo elder, Lini Wilkins among others. Even Minnesota Lt. Governor, Peggy Flanagan and radio personality Tom Weber make a cameo. Boston native, Chris Trapper of the popular 90s Indy band, The The Push Stars, plays Ruben, a folks-singer turned real estate manager. The original music in *A Winter Love* was written by Mille Lacs Ojibwe musician, Leah Lemm, and the score is provided by Yazzie's sister's group, Animals in the Dark, who bring an edgy girl-punk-band vibe to the film's score. Animation is by Ojibwe artist, Moira Villiard.

The movie features sets filmed in Minneapolis businesses and organizations like Powwow Grounds Coffee, The Moose on Monroe, and pre-2020 Lake Street where The Division of Indian Work stood between two buildings that would be destroyed during the summer of unrest.

On top of all the other hats Yazzie wears in this project, she also self-produced and financed this film with support from the Sundance Indigenous Program and The Tiwahe Foundation. When Indy film, *A Stray*, was shot in Minnesota, Yazzie was part of the crew as a production coordinator. “I saw how an entire film could be produced with a relatively small crew, it made me think, this is just like the kind of theater I’ve been producing for years. So, why not produce a film? I’ve often had to open my own doors as a Native female artist, I didn’t think twice about not waiting years for someone else to decide to produce my screenplay.” In November 2021, *A Winter Love* premiered at the Chinese Theater in Los Angeles in the LA Skins fest and won its Achievement in Directing award.

It has been making the global indigenous film festival circuit with appearances at the Wairoa Māori Film Festival, Richmond, Virginia’s Pocahontas Reframed Festival, the Quetzalcoatl Indigenous Film Festival in Oaxaca, Mexico, and later this month it will make its Canadian debut at the DreamSpeakers Indigenous Film Festival.

Key crew include BAFTA award winning Director of Photography, Ryan Eddleston (*Good Posture*, *Black Mountain Poets*) and Editor, Farrah Drabu (*Ill Manors*).

Minnesotans can catch *A Winter Love* when it premieres in the MSP International Film Festival on May 7 in Minneapolis and on May 15 in Rochester. Tickets are available online at <https://mspfilm.org/>.

***A Winter Love*** (92 mins) written, directed, and produced by Rhiana Yazzie, *A Winter Love Productions & Navajo Playwright Films*. Not yet rated.

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