



You can catch Mary Youngblood, one of the few Native American women flute players, at Borders on Sunday.

Cowgirl and Indian

The offerings this week conjure blue skies and smoky lodges from times gone by. **By Chuck Thurman**

What's Up, Chuck?

With any luck, someday there'll be a better balance between men and women on stage. Most weeks, of course, area music offerings—both from local and touring groups—flow from the testosterone

pool. But a couple times every year, we seem to hit a musical weekend that's dominated by women. This is one of those weeks. And, in at least two out of three cases, these female musicians are breaking into new territory.

Mary Youngblood, whose Native American ancestry is a blend of Aleut and Seminole, has just released her debut solo album, *The Offering*. All the songs on the

album are written by Youngblood and played on Native American flute. But the traditional sound of the music belies their non-traditional origin.

In the first place, Youngblood is a woman and traditions in the Native American culture call for the flute to be played by a man.

Although Youngblood says response to her music has been generally supportive, she has encountered resistance from some people. "I've had a few people approach me," Youngblood says, "and had one person tell me it wasn't traditional for women to play the flute. But he was sort of part of the fringe, part of the AIM [American Indian Movement] group.

"Indian people aren't usually confrontational so they won't come up and tell you you shouldn't be playing. At one concert, an elder talked about everyone's music but mine. That was his way of letting me know he didn't think I should be playing."

In the second place, Youngblood came to playing the Native American flute after years of classical music training and a childhood being raised by a white family.

"I was adopted at 7-months-old and raised in a non-Indian home," says Youngblood, "so I had to find my way home, back to my culture. I haven't done an active search, but I'm trying to find [my father] Frank Youngblood, he's Seminole. I found my birth mother in 1986."

During her upbringing, Youngblood learned how to play both violin and piano, as well as classical flute—which she says she's been playing for more than 20 years. It wasn't until after she had made contact with her mother and began reclaiming her blood traditions that Youngblood began playing the Native American flute. Youngblood says that blending the two traditions is at times difficult.

"It's called walking in both worlds," says Youngblood, "and I still feel like I have one foot in both worlds. It's kind of difficult. It's also, when you have no choice, you're walking in neither world. I can't be white and live in my parents' white, intellectual, middle-class world because I'm brown. And I can't ever really be Indian, either, because I was raised white. It's been really challenging."

Youngblood's flute playing has been compared by some—including *Indian Artist* magazine—as "a female R. Carlos Nakai," probably the most well-known Native American flutist. Despite the critical kudos that might indicate long years of training, Youngblood says that she never had a teacher, that she's completely self-taught.

"I never even listened to a lot of the music," says Youngblood. "I just picked it up and started playing it. I believe these songs came from those who walked before me. I am simply a vessel between the Creator and this sacred instrument, the Native American flute.

"There's something very different about the Native American flute; there's some-

thing sacred or special about it. It's wood and that has a lot to do it. Traditionally either cedar or redwood is used, and those are very soft woods. Some people get very mystica about the process of breathing into something that was once alive to make this beautiful noise.

"They say the music does affect the alpha state of the brain; it seems to have a meditative feel to it. The flute evokes that; you want to go in that direction."

Further enhancing the meditative sound of Youngblood's flute, *The Offering* was recorded in Moaning Cavern in Central California (echo-ishly reminiscent of the Paul Horn flute series, "Live at..." the Taj Mahal and other other sacred places).

Mary Youngblood, Sunday, 3pm. Borders Books & Music, Sand City. 899-6643.

Another female musician toiling in a traditionally male-dominated field is cowgirl **Lorraine Rawls** who just released her second CD, *Plains Born*.

Rawls' claim to fame rests on her ability to take cowboy poetry, set it to music and interpret it in a way that makes it her own. She was nominated in '96 and '97 by the Academy of Western Artists as Female Vocalist of the Year (and also in '97 by the Western Music Association). An Oregon resident, Rawls has become a regular performer at cowboy-poetry events throughout the country.

A quick listen to *Plains Born* gives a listener a hit of something that's closely relate to early Mary McCaslin, with some Kate Wolf and Rosalie Sorrels thrown in for good measure. Topics, as you'd expect from the title, focus on the glories of wide-open spaces and horses to ride.

If Rawls continues at this pace, they're going to have to rename the music from "cowboy" to "cowperson."

Lorraine Rawls, Thursday, 7:30pm. California First Theater, Monterey, \$10, 373-7379.

Havilah may not be breaking any new ground but, in the last couple of years, the Washington-state resident has become a favorite on the coffeehouse-and-campus circuit. Her 1997 release, *Superfarmhouse* is filled with sincere songs of both personal and social concerns.

I've got a feeling Havilah's live performances are stronger than the album. You can hear a strong, passionate voice at work on *Superfarmhouse*—which is both the album's strength and weakness: while it's passionate, it's also all-too-obviously working. Outside the studio, in a more personal setting, it seems likely that Havilah will be able to relax and let the music flow more easily.

Anyway, you got two chances to explore the theory.

Havilah, Thursday, 8pm, Black Box Cabaret at CSUMB, 582-3597; Friday, 8pm, Morgan's Coffee and Tea. Free. 655-6868.