

# Man's Search for Happiness Indian Style

MARY L. BRADFORD

*Indian*, produced and directed by Kieth Merrill, premiered in Wichita, Kansas, November 1976 and was shown to select audiences in Washington, D.C., January 1977.



Kieth Merrill, who created the *Great American Cowboy*, has done it again. This time the movie is *Indian*, a beautiful, kaleidoscopic montage dramatized through the odyssey of a young Navajo (Raymond Tracey), who has left his family's hogan to be educated in white schools. Seeking to raise his cultural consciousness, he interviews representatives of fifty tribes in thirty states and Canada. (Eastern and northern tribes are only sketchily shown.)

This 86-minute documentary, resplendent in the colors of Renaissance paintings, speaks in the words of the Indians themselves and their friends. Old men tell the legends of their tribes, a sculptor cries as he recounts the life of Crazy Horse, whose figure he is carving into the granite mountainside at Little Big Horn; endearing gestures of small children are caught and caressed by the camera; slow motion shots of war dances combine with an Indian rodeo and frank interviews with Indian leaders, including some women activists.

Mormons will recognize a familiar theme in an ancient Indian quotation that introduces the movie: "Those who are destroyed shall speak to the children.

Their voices shall whisper from the dust, and they shall bloom like a rose on the mountain." The values of family life are stressed: Indian children in Church with the voices of "The Lamanite Generation" singing "I am a Child of God," and certain other patriotic numbers.

Some scenes break Merrill's poetic "stream-of-consciousness" line, and introduce a slick commercial quality alien to the rest of the film. Even as welcome a sight as Robert Redford on his horse at Sundance doesn't seem to belong. The love interest could be effectively suggested, and then dropped, along with the "Marlboro Country" scene seemingly borrowed from some BYU films of the past: The hero and his friends are shown loping, slow-motion over brilliant sand dunes for what seems like days and miles, never missing a breath, nor mussing their hair. (An old BYU movie shown in stake conferences had President Harold B. Lee's sermon being illustrated by three euphoric nymphs romping through a field of high grass.)

Overall, however, *Indian* is a joyful experience. The color in places and faces, in costumes, and in jewelry is so sensuous that one feels like a traveler in an idealized country where museum artifacts come alive and tell their history. And, despite the diversity of locales, stretching from Monument Valley to the Everglades, the artistry of Merrill's vision succeeds in catching the inherent continuity and timelessness of his subject.

