

Band overcomes racial stereotyping

By Alan Cochrane
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BIG COVE, N.B. (CP) — Hunting for success in the music industry is tough enough, but when you're a band of Indians it's even tougher.

Just ask the members of Eagle Feather, who are poised to release their first single and embark on a tour of the United States to promote their unique blend of country rock music.

Singer and keyboard player Jim Augustine — one of three Micmac Indians in the group — says the hardest part has been finding people who will take the band seriously.

Color of skin

"People will look at the color of your skin before they look at anything else," says Augustine.

When they first got together about two years ago, Eagle Feather was branded by the misconception that all Indians are trouble makers, untrustworthy and unable to play rock and roll.

They have since overcome the myths and are now trying to deal with the responsibility of representing their people every time they take the stage in their white buckskin outfits and traditional feathers.

"I would like to write a few songs about Indians in general and try to show the white people the good side of Indians and get rid of the picture that an Indian

is nothing but a drunk," says Augustine.

"We don't drink or take drugs and we like to follow the traditional ways."

The other Big Cove Micmacs in Eagle Feather are guitarist and singer Hubert Francis and bass player Byron Simon. The band is rounded out by lead guitarist Kelly Buote of Rustico, P.E.I., and drummer Jim Gallant of Charlottetown.

They recently recorded several songs in Virginia due for release Jan. 6.

Old rock

The first single, Lady of the Evening, was written by John Washington, who has penned many chart-toppers including I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing.

Eagle Feather's repertoire ranges from covers of old rock tunes by the likes of Roy Orbison and the Beach Boys to the country rock sounds of the Kentucky Headhunters.

When they auditioned before American promoter Doc Holiday, he chose them over many other Atlantic Canadians.

"It was the visual uniqueness that hit us at first," Holiday says. "But then we found out these guys had talent."

They are now in demand across the United States and Europe.

Holiday can't believe the problems the band has gone through

trying to get bookings in their own area.

"Nobody would touch the act," says Holiday. "There was even one club owner in Moncton who wouldn't return their phone calls."

Despite their successes, band members are still finding stumbling blocks.

Augustine says Eagle Feather put off recording a song called Walking in a White Man's Shoes because of last summer's problems at Oka, Que.

The band also avoided the area because of the problems and had a couple of shows cancelled by promoters in western provinces who were nervous about having an Indian band in their bar while news reports were filled with the standoff between Indians and soldiers.

Benefit concert

"Oka really got out of hand," Augustine says in retrospect. "When they started looking bad, we all started looking bad."

Although the band members did not condone the use of violence by Indians in Oka, they did perform at a benefit concert to help raise money and food for those affected by the siege.