

The Berdache

A Drama/Comedy in One Act

By Cheryl Ann Costa

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"An exploration of spirit, doctrine and a person with three birth certificates!"

3M, 2W or 2T, 1M, 2W

Ammiel (Ammy) McLellen is a middle aged bi-gendered person, born of mixed sexuality/gender, who embraces Native American spiritual beliefs and shamanic practice. Has a visitation from a Native Spirit, who directs Ammiel to seek a path of teaching and study with the Priests and Nuns in the monasterial experience to share the joy of spirit! The Friars won't take Ammy because "he's too female" and the good sisters won't that Ammy because "she's to male."

* T - Transgender

*[Directors casting note: [In the casting of Ammy and the Kachina, the gender of the actor should be a soft male and should appear and sound very clearly androgynous, enough to confuse the audience, as well as convince the audience she used to be a guy! **DO NOT CAST A FEMALE, unless she can naturally pass for your brother!** It is critical that androgyny is apparent and natural, so that with subtle shifts in acting energy the actor could send signal of male, female or both, or maybe neither.] It is further suggested that the Kachina be cast with a Native American or soft Asian featured person.*

Stage setting

The stage is set with a single desk. The desk on stage has one chair behind and two on each side teased outward. This is the Friar's/Sister's desk; it should be dressed suitable to that of a church administrator. The chairs should be comfortable. The play opens with the desk covered with a large rock paint drape, that when softly front lit and back lit will give the appearance of being a mesa mountain terrain. The Mesa is either on a forestage area or off on stage right, it too is covered with rock paint drape covering a pedestal that suggests a mesa top.

Cast of Characters

Ammiel (Ammy) McLellan - 35-45 - very androgynous in appearance, wide range of voice timbre. Ammy as a human being is something of a paradox, born with questionable gender identity, baptized and raised as a good catholic "boy," currently represents self as a female. Has spent the past sixteen years touching spirit with the Native American

tradition and identifies as a Winkte. Ammy is the best of both genders. Though sincere, has a special comic sparkle.

(pronounced Ammiel - AM E L don't use Am eil, Ammy - AM E don't use Amy)

Winkte Kachina : The Winkte Kachina - 25 - 35 is a bi-gendered sacred being who is thought to be the spirit who "touches" certain individuals with the dream or calling to be of "both genders."

Fr. R. Thomas Daniel, Friar OSD - late 40s - early 50s: Fr. Daniel is very clearly grounded in the mundane aspects of running a monastery. He is the vocations director for a male monastery, he is sympathetic to anyone who is interested in seeking a religious life, but with obvious caution and reservation and always a defender of the church.

Sr. Mary Dorothy, OSB- late 40s - early 50s: A woman who has "found herself" in the order and service of God, has the collateral duty of vocations director in her cloistered monastery. She has great reservations about anyone seeking the religious life; she's seen them come and seen them go, waiting for the next wannabe to come in the door. She is the authoritative "foil."

Sr. Mary Concepta, OSB - Mid-20s-30s: Another woman who has "found herself" in the order and service of God, is a full time vocations director in her cloistered monastery in Scotland. She is a gentle though a perky person, who wears white Nike sneakers with her habit! To many she's too kewl to be a nun. She looks for that special sparkle that is a special calling to God's service.

Scene One

[The house lights dim.... A soft flavor of native American pipe music fills the stage and the house, soft special light comes up; center, Ammy is sitting on the desktop mesa, this is the established sacred space of Ammy, who is making offerings of corn meal and sage smoke to the spirits.]

Time:1994 - Place: New Mexico - Music: Maidens Prayer

Ammy: Grandfather and Grandmother, I offer blessings and greetings to you, oh sacred spirits who create all things. I ask that you come and soar in my heart like an eagle of the air and that your sacred passions will burn in my heart. Blessed spirits let your love pour into my heart like spring mountain waters. Come and ground the wisdom of my spirit in the good earth.

[pauses for a few more sprinkles of corn meal]

Great spirits, I make my offering to you that I may ask a favor. I ask that the spirit who blessed me with the dream and the path of the winkte come and give me direction. I offer myself to your sacred service, dearest creator of all things. Please send your blessed messenger.

[the light fades and reappears to show a passage of time several times, with each passage Ammy seems to lose a little composure, pleading at first then finally enough is enough]

Great Spirit, I hear your call, it burns in my heart, waking me every day, but what is it!? What is the mission you want me to mount, what task do you want me to fulfill?
[frustrated] Damn it! Why give me the heart for it and not the direction; what is it you want me to do?

[series of lightning flashes and thunder blasts that scare the hell out of Ammy, now cowering on the ground. Ammy slowly composes and begins to meditate. From the house offstage enters Winyanktehca. The Kachina stands behind the shivering enthralled Ammy, with gentle stroking about the head and shoulders the Kachina comforts the frightened Ammy. The Kachina is an attractive, soft and very androgynous being.] Music: Between Worlds

Kachina: Blessed child who walks in the path of my special dream, you who walk with two souls, you who are not man or woman but of both man and woman, hear my voice in your heart once again.

Long before you were of earth when "the people" were free to roam the land, the ones who walk with two souls like yourself, The Winkte. You who are my children were considered special and a blessing to any family who had them, you had a sacred place within the traditional community as singers, artists, historians.

When the conquistadors came, my children were condemned as abominations and were fed to wild dogs. With each generation since, the Winkte have fallen from "the sacred" in the eyes of man except among the traditional of "the people." [pause]

I have come to give you a task, one that is long awaited by the ancestors, you are of white skin as are they, but the soul of "the people" burns in your heart and my dream is in your mind, a dream that defines every aspect of what you are. Go my child and seek a life with the priests and priestesses of this white tribe, teach them of the special qualities and tradition of the winkte, go to them as my gift. [lovingly]

*[The Kachina leans over and kisses the meditating Ammy on the cheek, disappears into the darkness,
[as spirit backing away from the mesa]*

go to them as my gift.
go to them as my gift. [softer]
go to them as my gift. [softer yet]

After a few moments to recompose, Ammy awakens, shivers and laughs wildly with JOY.

Ammiel: Greetings to all my Relation - HO ME TOK QUE AH SON

*[End of Scene - fade to black]
[SOUND: Mozart - Eine Kleine Nachtmusik - Allegro]*

Scene Two

Place: The office of the vocational director of St. Dominic's monastery near Mount Vernon, VA.

Lights: Lighting on only one side of the stage.

[The Friars office after a few moments of music. Music up during the change of scene the rock drape is pulled from the desk and chairs set, continues for a minute until the phone rings, fade off. The Friar is sitting at his desk writing with pen and paper and obviously getting references from his bible. He is most likely wearing reading glasses or bifocals.]

[SOUND: phone ring]

Friar: Fr. Daniel, good afternoon, yes Lucy, the two o'clock is here? Thank you. Please make sure that we're not disturbed. Thank you. Please send in Miss McLellen. *[Ammy enters the office]*

Come in Come in, welcome to St. Dominics, I'm Father Daniel, how are you?

Ammy: I'm fine, thank you. Thank you for seeing me today Father, it's a pleasure to be here. *[female-ish voice]*

Friar: My secretary says that you're interested in vocation placement in a holy order; how can I be of help my dear?

[Ammy obviously very nervous and almost out of breath from excitement and fear]

Ammy: Fa... Father, when I was a kid the priests and nuns of my school told me I was born to be in a holy order and that I was special and meant to be in a life of service to God *[almost breathless]*

Friar: Relax, my dear, nothing to be nervous about, so you never acted on it?

Ammy: Welllll, I sort of did! *[pauses a few moments and recomposes]*

Father, remember back in grade school, when asked what everyone one wanted to be, we all raised our hands and said sisters and priests.

[Laughing]

Friar: Absolutely, but that field of candidates weeds out really quickly as kids grow up.

Ammy: In my case only 5 of us made it to high school *[serious, focused]* Father, I was one of those kids who went to church every day and sometimes twice a day during special seasons; I had every intention of following that "singing in my heart," calling me to monastery life.

Friar: Obviously something happened, what was it marriage, fear of vows, pressure from family???

Ammy: [*Reflectively*] I was in my senior year, spring of my senior year to be exact, everything was in motion, I was close with the parish priests and the nuns. I'd even made friends with some of the monks at the Abbey on the Lake; [*Chuckling*] I was a real goodie two shoes.

Friar: I know the type, Sister Mary's little helper, OK, I get the picture, continue.

Ammy: Everything was going fine - then one day I just snapped. Something was wrong, something wasn't right. I managed to get into a knock down drag out fight with the assistant pastor. He pulled my sponsorship and...and

Friar: And what you ran off and got married? Joined the Foreign Legion, the circus?

Ammy: I just walked away, walked away from my life's aspirations, vocation, church, mass, everything!

Friar: And then you ran off and got married?

Ammy: Married !!! Me!!! Hell, no! The Vietnam war was raging so I joined the service and got myself shipped to Southeast Asia.

Friar: It figures, we call it foreign legion syndrome. Sometimes when a person's life has an abrupt shock, they just walk away like you did and they run off and join the circus or join the foreign legion or sometimes run off and try and join a monastery. What's interesting to me is that you ran away from a monastery to join the legionnaires. That's very interesting.

Ammy: anh, Father it was the army.

[*amused*]

Friar: My dear they're all the same thing. So, explain to me how you were able to serve in Vietnam, I thought women weren't allowed to serve over there?

Ammy: Father, that's a common misconception. A little over two hundred and sixteen thousand women served in "over there!"

[*surprised*]

Friar: I didn't know that, and frankly I really didn't pay much attention to the war, I was in the seminary at the time and up to my ears with my studies.

[*Ammy obviously biting lip*]

Ammy: Father, the second thing was, wwwwell, [*with hesitation*]

I was raised as boy *[breath]* and I entered the service as a boy.

[thunderstruck]

Friar: I'm afraid I don't understand, you appear to be very female to me, are you a trans vestite, trans -- sexual person. Oh my! I'm confused!

Ammy: ooooh Father, those TRANS words are so over used and tend to be very clinical and disorder related. I was one of those kids born with a birth def e c t , a hermaphrodite *[struggles, then focused]* I'm a HUMAN BEING. I was born with ambiguous sexual parts, I was raised as a boy. A few years back I decided to represent myself as female. It's all very relative.

Friar: Wait a minute, What does your birth certificate say?

Ammy: Which one? I have three of them.

[obviously distressed and overwhelmed]

Friar: Three! WHAT!!! That's impossible, nobody's got three birth certificates! Do they?

[Ammy nodding]

Ammy: You see Father, I was going to be a priest or a monk when I grew up. The priests and nuns knew I was special because my parents told them that I was. They all thought it was best that I join some holy order since I would never have a normal married life and would most likely end up very unhappy, and after all, being married with kids is the purpose of life, right?

Friar: Yes, Matthew is very clear about man's purpose, that a man should take a wife and produce offspring, but in your case that completely breaks down.

Ammy: Welllll, That's not exactly true Father. You should re-examine Matthew 19:12. It refers to men who have been born genderless and those who have been made that way by man or in war. "that they are blessed if they make the best of it in holy service."

Friar: I must rediscover that passage in the near future. Miss uh mm Mr. McLellen *[struggling]* Please excuse me this is all very overwhelming and totally beyond my experience.

[Understanding a bit amused at the Friar's confusion]

Ammy: Father, it's OK, I deal with this sort of thing every day, I've gotten use to it. *[Ammy looking at the ceiling]* That's a really lovely ceiling Father, who painted it?

Friar: Some of the friar brothers about twenty years ago. Why?

[gently pleading for understanding]

Ammy: Have you ever noticed that Angels are a unique gender? I like to think I am whatever they are.

[notices that the friar is lost for words - changes tone]

Father, Why not call me Ammy? That's what people who know me call me, Ammy!

Friar: OK, Ammy !!! ? Where does that come from?

Ammy: My loving parents were puzzled with what to call me, so they asked the parish priest what would work for a child like me. He did some reading and came back to them with "AM" as the gender neutral, taken from Moses' encounter with GOD on the mountain -- *[beat]* You know!

[Deep voiced] "I am that I am" *[pausing gesturing to her/himself]*

I AM, Father! *[beat]* Anyway, the parish priest threw an angelic quality to it and I was baptized as Ammiel. My school chums all called me Ammy.

[amused]

Friar: Ammy, Obviously a lot of well meaning research went into it.*[changes to a query tone]* You said you went to Vietnam, I would have thought that the Army wouldn't take you.

Ammy: Welllll, you have to remember that at the time, every male of military age was either being drafted, burning a draft card or going to Canada *[making a quiet dig]* or hiding out in divinity school. I wanted to serve, so I got my congressman involved to help open a door.

Friar: They let you in the service? How?

Ammy: A medical waiver, it was simple. I mean Father, think about it: you don't need a penis to pull a trigger. *[ammy puts her foot in it - shrinking slightly]* Sorry, Father.

Friar: Please Ammy, don't be embarrassed, I've heard far worse. I used to run an inner city mission and I've heard every abomination of language! So what happened when you left the church and joined the military? Did the horrors of war push you back to the church?

Ammy: Not as you might have expected. But there was one incident that you must know about to understand the nature of my calling. I was in the signal corps as a communications techy type. One day we were out working on a damaged relay station. We had some serious ground pounders with us for protection --

Friar: -- Ground pounders?

Ammy: Seasoned infantry soldiers, well anyway, we came under attack,

[SOUND: a mortar round and fire fight sequence. Ammy is out of the chair and on the floor and screaming in an obviously male voice]

Ammy: I hit the dirt! I was a techy type. I wasn't used to this sort of thing. Then this grunt next to me takes a round in the chest -- it was a classic breathing chest wound. My sergeant and I started trying to stuff battle dressings into this guy's chest wound while the rest of the grunts handled the fire fight --

*[Going through the motions of first aid procedures on a pantomimed soldier on floor]
[The Friar is now down on the floor wrapped up in the emotion of the event]*

Friar: -- What's a battle dressing?

Ammy: It's a sort of a big cotton pad. *[continues first aid]* I had just finished with the dressing. I wrapped his chest up in a garbage bag to keep him together until we could medivac him out --

Friar: A garbage bag??? You wrapped him in a garbage bag!!!?????

Ammy: Ya! It was a very common technique to protect large wound areas.

[starting to come out of the flashback somewhat]

Anyway, this kid wakes up, turns his head and looks up at me with his big baby blue eyes and says "Father, baptize me!!!" I was shocked to say the least -- of course I put him off,

[shouting at the wounded soldier]

"Hey I'm not a priest I'm a telephone man !!!"

Friar: He asked you to baptize him in the middle of a battle. Did he know you had been preparing for the priesthood?

Ammy: Father, I never met him before that moment. I kept insisting that I wasn't a priest and he kept asking for baptism! So finally to shut him up, I knelt over him, with bullets whizzing everywhere, and with water from my canteen, I baptized him in the manner I was taught in school. I mean heck Father, I had been a really good Catholic boy, I knew the drill.

Friar: Ammy -- you did the right thing. What happened then, did he die?

[shaking head no]

Ammy: After the med evacs got there, I rode in the chopper with him back to the medical unit. Heck, during the flight I even took some M-16 oil and performed last rites, as best I remembered, at least in the spirit of the sacrament.

[Ammy goes through the motions of last rites anointing of the pantomime soldier.]

Friar: You probably did just fine, But what happened to the young man??

[Father helps Ammy up off the floor - Ammy obviously upset return to her chairs]

Ammy: Oh, He owns a dairy farm in Wisconsin.

Friar: Ammy, that was a powerful experience. I take it you returned to the Catholic tradition after that.

Ammy: Not exactly Father. The base chaplain had me over for breakfast; he had heard all about it. He told me he was very proud of me and wanted me to transfer into his field chaplain unit. I wouldn't hear of it though. I was still a very angry young man. I just wanted to forget the whole thing.

Friar: You know, it's said that those who are called to the "life" are sort of marked, they have a signature about them. It's obvious to me that the wounded soldier saw that mark at a spiritual level ...

Ammy: That's exactly what the base chaplain said, Padre, "they have a signature about them" I wasn't interested at the time. I was running away and I just kept running. Then about 16 years ago, I was touched by a couple of shamanic types. They had a spiritual place for persons like myself.

[Grabs the Priest by the shoulders, firmly.]

Father, I had a revelation in the desert!

[the priest pulls away in obvious upset]

It helped me overcome my anger with God for making me the way I am -- I came to see it as a blessing and not a curse.

Friar: Ammy, I question why you came to see me. I'm the vocations director for a male monastery. I see you as a female and of course then there's the issue of you reembracing the Catholic tradition a process that I feel will take you a year or two at the very least before we can even think religious life commitments. Provided of course that you are even suited for it, my friend, entering a monastery in your case could take as much as five years.

[devastated at first, then recomposes]

Ammy: I come to you as a gift. I am a gift from Great Spirit; sent here to learn and to teach. I possess a profound connection to the Spirits, They have shown me my mission -- to share myself as the Winkte that I am, so that you and your brothers can share in the

face of the Creator that has been shown to the people. *[beat]* Father, help me find a way to serve *[beat]* help me find a way to share the gift.

[Firm - Progressively louder, finally yelling from behind AMMY]

Friar: Frankly, Miss McLellen, I don't see a place for you here. This gender confusion you have must be resolved before you could ever join a monasterial community. Ammy, you are going to have to choose a gender, and you're going to have to become a good Catholic again.

[Ammy - petrified and wide eyed facing the audience]

Give up these primitive pagan ways and F I N D the True Face of G O D!!!

[Ammy, obviously wounded, places the palm of her hand over her face and sighs loudly. FADE TO BLACK...End of Scene - sound: Music: Bach -Oboe Concert]

Scene Three

[The Women's Monastery of St. Benedict, Smyrna, Delaware. Center stage, a single light come up Ammy looking into it as if to talk to God. very Slow fade up on general lighting, while she's talking to self and spirits -- Standing, in male voice]

Ammy: Spirit, I call upon you to support me in my hour of need. I blew it with the good friar. How can I question the grounding of these Catholics in their faith and face of GOD? I so very much want them to know of your revelations to me! I want so very much to **succeed**. I'll try the very direct approach this time, straight up from the start.

[Ammy is startled by Sr. Dorothy CLEARING her throat, making an entrance to the office, lights up full- Ammy takes a posture of a frighten Catholic school boy- hands behind back]

Sr. Dorothy: Pardon me for being delayed. You must be Ammiel McLellen

[petrified-male voice]

Ammy: Yes, Sister.

Sr. Dorothy: Sr. Janet told me that you called regarding a vocational interview.

[motions for ammy to sit - petrified-male voice- sits very rigidly]

Ammy: Yes, Sister.

Sr. Dorothy: Frankly, I'm puzzled why you came to us. *[Ammy gives an obvious look of confusion]*

What I meant to say, why you didn't seek out a men's facility?

[grinning to her self - clears throat- female voice]

Ammy: Sister, I am female.*[beat]* More or less.

Sr. Dorothy: You are!?! I'm so sorry, not sorry that your female, but I mean.*[double take]*
What do you mean "more or less?"

Ammy: You see, I've been dealing with a spiritual calling. One that seems to have resurfaced after 20 years. *[changes tone - aw, shucks]* Well you see sister, I'm sort of *special*.*[babbling]* The native Americans, specifically the Lakota call folks like me Winkte. "The one who walks with two souls." Obviously winkte are very special persons with special qualities and traditionally we have held a sacred place among native peoples --

[a bit dumbfounded]

Sr. Dorothy: Ammiel, could you please excuse me for a moment? I'd like a visiting sister who's also a vocations director to join us. Please excuse me for a few moments.

[she abruptly leaves the office -- Ammy up and over to God light position]

Ammy: Wonderful! This time they're calling in reinforcements. Come on guys I'm dying here, I need some help.

[Sr. Dorothy returns with another nun, Sr. Concepta, who wears white sneakers with her habit.]

Sr. Dorothy: Ammiel, this is Sr. Concepta. She is here visiting with us from Holy Loch Abbey in Scotland.

Sr. Concepta: Welcome.

[Ammy and Concepta connect after making eye contact - ammy shaking/pumping her hand]

Ammy: Pleased to meet you, sister, Gosh, I never imagined that folks in cloistered life traveled as much as you do.

[They both lean into and start to sit on Sister's desk]

Sr. Concepta: Good, you're breaking down the traditional misconceptions about cloistered life!

[Sr. Dorothy, clear throat and both jump then sit in chairs.]

Sr. Dorothy: Sr. Concepta, Ammiel has come to us with a strong sense of vocational calling and despite what your perceptions are, Ammiel claims that she is female. Though I must be honest, I sense a profoundly male persona.

[Ammy- innocent look - butter wouldn't melt in my mouth]

Sr. Concepta: Sister, I'm not sure what you are speaking of.

Ammy: Sisters, this is the crux of the winkte paradox.

Sr. Concepta: What's a winkte?

Sr. Dorothy: Sort of a native person.

Sr. Concepta: Natives?

Ammy: Native Americans! May I start at the beginning?

Sr. Dorothy and Sr. Concepta: Please!

Ammy: I was born with

[Ammy gets up to avoid talking SEX face to face with the nuns.]

ambiguous sexual parts, a hermaphrodite more or less. My parents raised me as a boy..

Sr. Dorothy: But earlier you said you were a girl!

Ammy: Well, a few years back I decided to represent myself as female, and as I was recently telling someone else, it's all very relative. You see Sister,*[not facing nuns again]* sexual identity is defined by sexual organs, in essence biology! On the other hand, gender identity is defined by society; boys do this or that and girls do thus and so. In my case sexual identity was a blur, and my gender identity was chosen for me pretty much by the flip of a coin.

Sr. Dorothy: Who flipped the coin?

Sr. Concepta: I've read about such things; I believe the anthropologists call them Berdaches.

Sr. Dorothy: Berdache, What's that mean?

Sr. Concepta: If memory serves correctly, a "young male prostitute."

[Ammy winces]

Ammy: Actually, the root word was Bardache, a Persian term for "submissive kept boy." I really wish the anthropologists would change that.

Sr. Dorothy: *[Sarcastically]* What would you have them change it to.

[To Sr. Concepta]

Ammy: Many of us prefer the term Mahoo or Winkte.

Sr. Concepta: Oh, yes of course, I'm sorry.

Sr. Dorothy: I can see that this is going to be very interesting.

Ammy: Oh, sister it is! You see, the problem really arose when the Conquistadors came to this continent. They saw a third gender functioning within the new native cultures. They had never encountered anything like this before, they struggled for a terminology, but the only model they had was related to homosexuals, of course, in their eyes that equated to sodomite, and, in the spirit of the Inquisition, they exterminated all the Winktes.

Sr. Dorothy: Aren't you homosexual?

Ammy: Not really, sister. The term "homosexual" is inaccurate in my case. *[befuddled]* In actuality I'm "relative sexual." *[almost talk to self]* Let's face it, I'm always gay in somebody's eyes, it doesn't matter who I go to bed with --

[Ammy realizes she put her foot in it -- Sr. Dorothy - pounding on her desk]

Sr. Dorothy: This is totally out of bounds for this interview.

Sr. Concepta: Aye, sister.

[Ammy - Trying to save the moment]

Ammy: For the record sister, I'm celibate. It's boring, but it doesn't confuse anybody, least of all me. Sisters, I think we got off to a bad start.

Sr. Concepta: Ammiel, Why don't you explain why you're here?

Ammy: When I was a kid, I found that I had a spiritual calling *[beat]* "a singing in my heart," something the priests and nuns of my parish interpreted to be a holy calling to religious life.

Sr. Dorothy: I think we can identify with you on that one, you're active in the Catholic tradition at present of course?

Ammy: Well, not exactly. I really haven't been to mass since I was seventeen. Something seemed very wrong, I just walked away, then recently I felt, called back to it. *[shift in tone - lighter]* Boy, have they changed the mass a lot since I was a kid!

Sr. Concepta: It's still the same basic mass, what changes are you speaking of?

Ammy: Oh no Sister, the last time I attended a catholic mass, the priest faced the altar with his back to the people. I mean you could fall asleep in the front rows and nobody noticed! And they still said the Mass in Latin!

Sr. Dorothy: Ammiel, how long have you been with the native spirituality, you sound like you're very established in it.

Ammy: About sixteen years, sister.

Sr. Dorothy: Ammiel, it seems to me that you've been involved in the native spirituality longer than you were a catholic. Why would you want to destroy your current connection with God?

Ammy: Sisters, I have a very powerful calling, a calling to come and share myself with those in the monasterial experience. Think of me as a gift, sent to share the best of my faith and my face of God and to learn the joys and principles of your face of God.

[all excited and perky]

Sort of an exchange program!

Sr. Dorothy: I don't know how to put this Ammiel, frankly I'm having a problem with this whole thing. If I'm having trouble with this I know the other women of the community will. We're a convent of middle aged to older women, I can assure you that none of us has ever had contact with someone like yourself.

Ammy: Sister maybe it's time to expand your horizons.

Sr. Concepta: Ammiel, living in the monastery is a complicated orchestration of personalities, there's a very delicate balance that must be maintained, to achieve harmony in the community.

Sr. Dorothy: Yes and one bad apple, can wreck a wonderful community.

Sr. Concepta: Perhaps we should think of her more as a Macintosh among the Granny Smiths.

Sr. Dorothy: Ammiel, even IF you were presently a devout and practicing catholic, and IF we found you to have a true calling, it would take a year or two before we'd even consider letting you join our community. Only in the movies do people walk in off the street into our lifestyle.

Ammy: But, but, but sister these are very special circumstances. I was sent here! I was sent to you, I'm an emissary!

Sr. Concepta: An emissary?

[sarcastically]

Sr. Dorothy: Who sent you, the Pope?

[Sr. Concepta starts conferring with Dorothy, they are very focused and whisper while Ammy speaks]

Ammy: The spirits have sent me. I have had a revelation in the desert, and I'm here to learn and to teach.

[both nuns continue to whisper after a long pause -- slightly petulant]

Excuse me!!!

[both nuns surprised]

I've had a revelation in the desert, and neither of you can say anything! Isn't that classic biblical scenario, a human being goes into the desert, *[male voice]* God comes down *[female voice]* and conversation happens??

Sr. Concepta: Aye, that is classic biblical scenario.

[sarcastically]

Sr. Dorothy: Classic scenario for Bellevue too.

Sr. Concepta: Sister please!! I think we must at least let Ammiel have the benefit of the doubt -- we've all had our special experiences with the spirit. Who are we to say that Ammiel didn't have a vision in the desert. I for one would like to hear about it.

[Ammy gets a little excited]

Sr. Dorothy: Yes! This I have to hear.

Ammy: [Ammy all excited to tell her tale] It started with a letter inviting me to come and pray in the desert, it was a shamanic thing. As it worked out, I spent two weeks in the Jemez mountains of New Mexico, with a bunch of other Winkte types.

Sr. Dorothy: A bunch of Winktes? What's constitutes a bunch...?

Ammy: Nineteen of us in all. We ate together and sang together and performed sacred ceremony together, it was wonderful

Sr. Concepta: It must have been very powerful prayer, did you have the revelation together?

Ammy: No, we each had separate experiences, It's better that way, but we did climb the mesa together!

Sr. Dorothy: Climbed the mesa?

Ammy: Oh, yes, climbing the mesa was an arduous intended to be difficult. It was suppose to connect us with the earth while reaching for the sky. Climbing it together was intended to build team work and a sense of family with the other Winkte. We climbed it as a family, and as single entities as well.

Sr. Concepta: How long did it take, the climbing I mean?

Ammy: Almost three hours, it was especially rough on those who had been fasting a couple of days -- in preparation for a vision quest.

Sr. Dorothy: Climbing a mountain on an empty stomach, sounds foolhardy to me... someone could have been killed.

Ammy: Yes, sister someone could have been killed, had spirit chosen to take one or all of us, we were all prepared. We were all prepared NOT to come back!

Sr. Concepta: So, when did *your* revelation event happen?

Ammy: After reaching the top of the mesa. The first thing I did was go for a walk and find a quiet place to myself. I prepared sacred space, I made offerings and chanted prayers.

[Ammy gets down on the floor and begins going through the motions of a ritual experience.

I began to feel the animal spirits within me --

[makes a wolf call] "aaaawwwwooooo"

[Sr. Concepta now leaves the desk and kneels down in front of the preoccupied Ammy]

After a period of waiting for the spirits I began to get restless. I was angry, frustrated, I had the calling in my heart, I began to yell at Great Spirit.

Sr. Concepta: It's ok to yell at God, lass, he's big enough to take it.

[Music: Spring Thaw]

Ammy: Suddenly all around me there was a raging thunderstorm - loud, angry, full of nature's fury. I was scared to death, but then, I was overcome by a feeling of peace. I became aware of a profound sense of connection to spirit. I was enthralled, in a state of total ecstasy and then, and then --

[a long pause, almost panting]

[from offstage and through the house the Winkte Kachina quietly appears on the stage and goes through the motions of comforting Ammy]

Sr. Concepta: And then and then what, come on Ammy, you can do it! Share it please share it.

[Ammy in a distinctly different persona, eyes closed]

Ammy: I heard beautiful prayer. Blessed child who walks in the path of my special dream, you who walk with two souls. You who are not man or woman but of both man and woman. Hear my voice in your heart once again. Long before you were of earth when "the people" were free to roam the land. You who are my children were considered special --

[in unison]

Ammy and Sr. Concepta: -- special and a blessing to --

Sr. Concepta: -- any family who had them. You had a sacred place within the traditional community as singers, artists, historians.

[Ammy startled and observes Sr. Concepta in deep ecstasy. She is quiet during the following, but filled with emotion and excited.]

When the conquistadors came, my children were condemned as abominations and were fed to wild dogs. With each generation since, the Winkte have fallen from "the sacred" in the eyes of man except among the traditional of "the people."

I have come to give you a task, one that is long awaited by the ancestors, you are of white skin as are they, but the soul of "the people" burns in your heart and my dream is in your mind, a dream that defines every aspect of what you are. Go my child and seek a life with

the priests and priestesses of this white tribe, teach them of the special qualities and tradition of the Winkte, go to them *[slowly]* as my gift.

[The Kachina leans over and kisses the mediating Sr. Concepta on the head. Sr. Concepta pauses, shivers and laughs wildly, almost hysterically. Ammy holds hands with the exuberant sister... the Kachina quietly moves to a neutral corner]

[Ammy starts to giggle as Concepta comes out of the trace state, finally holding Sr. Concepta, looking upward.]

Ammy: GREETINGS ALL MY RELATION, HO! Me TOK QUE AH SON *[joyishly]*

[fade to black.... end of scene]

Epilogue

Music: Enya-Epona

Lights: Softly up on the desk area.

*[Sr. Concepta is writing a letter... reads to herself as voice over reads aloud]
[Sound: She can either speak the letter from the desk live or the music and voice over can be mixed with Concepta just writing in a pleasant posture. the later is suggested]*

Sr. Concepta: Dear Bishop McGregor,

Your grace, I have often heard you speak of the need to recognize those with a calling to God's service, and the need to embrace those with this natural calling. I write this letter of introduction for Ammiel of the Clan McLellen, known as Ammy to friends. Ammy comes to us with a very genuine and unique connection to the Almighty, a bond that is clearly grounded in her shamanic experiences. In my opinion, Ammiel is among the most clearly chosen of any person I've seen in the years that I have been a vocations director.

I had the opportunity to meet Ammiel during my recent visit to the United States. This human being's spiritual connection is beyond my ability to describe with mere words. I hope that you will view Ammiel McLellen as a very special emissary and extend an invitation for her to visit us here in Scotland. It is my hope that she will travel to all of the monasteries on the isles sharing her face of the Almighty and singing the praises with us -- for as long as she will stay.

Yours in Christ's Love,

Sister Mary Concepta, "Order of St. Benedict"
Holy Loch Abbey

[Live - spoken as an after thought]

Sr. Concepta:

p.s.... HO! Me Tok Que Ah Son!

[Fade to Black -- Music: 'And the Angels Sing']

[Curtain Call]

THE END

Production *Materials:*

Quantity *Description*

One Desk - Three Chairs- Compatible with the desk One Desk drape, used to cover the desk in such a way as to suggest that the desk top is a mesa mountaintop. Neutral to earth tones in color, heavy in quality

One strong platform made to look like a mesa.

Costumes:

Priest's Clothes *Approach # 1, dress the good Friar in a monks alb, (monks robe) traditional brown. Approach #2, dress the good Friar in a Black Sport jacket, pants and classic ministers shirt with white collar.*

The Nuns *Approach # 1. Traditional Habits Black with white or Off White habit with white trim. {authors suggestion...it screams classic nun}. Approach #2, A more modem dress, conservative white blouse and dark navy or black skirt, head veil optional though shorter hair is the rule even with modern orders.*

The Kachina *Off white; native American moccasins, a plain indian dress made from drapery lining so as to look like thin white leather was in the debuted.*

Ammy *Opening scene - loose shirt and comfortable jeans.. sneakers*

Friar Scene *Chambray Shirt and Denim shirt*

Nun Scene *Chambray Shirt and Jean Pants*

Music *The Classical music is only suggested and easily available.*

The native American music is more difficult, the author suggests: Mixed Blood - Contemporary Flute Music by Jeff Ball

Published by Whispering Elk Music (ASCAP)

Available by writing:

Trailhead Flutes Inc.

P.O. Box 10175

Rockville, MD 20849

The Berdache was presented at **Silver Spring Stage** in Silver Spring, Maryland, on **September 6,7, 8 1996**. With a follow on competition performance at the **Maryland Community Theater Festival** Jan 17, 1997 Where it won **Best Overall Technical Achievement, Nomination for Best Original Play** and a **Ms. St. John** a Nomination for **Best Actress - The Final Debut** cast, **Encore Performance** was at Washington, DC's **National Theater** - 24 Feb 1997

Berdache was directed by **Cassandra St. John**; asst directed by **Rebecca Taylor** and **Mary Jones**; **Lighting** by **Linda Bartash**; **set design, costumes, sound design** by **Cassandra St. John**; **The cast** was as follows:

"In order of appearance"

Ammiel McLellen**Cassandra St. John***
Native Spirit.....**Flordelino Lagundino**
Fr. Daniel.....**Gerald Gietka**
Sr. Dorothy.....**Philippa Smith**
Sr. Concepta.....**Kristin White**

Director/Ammiel understudy.....**Cassandra St. John**
Asst-Director/Native Spirit understudy....**Rebecca Taylor**
Asst-Director/Ammiel script couch.....**Mary K. Jones**

** The part of Ammiel was initially cast three times: one trans person and two females, the role required serious versatility, alas none of the three worked out, finally the producers ask Ms. St. John to step in eight days before curtain. Her performance was received with raves, she is a Transgender person.*

The Berdache

Anyone in the creative arts will tell you that the muses are fickle. Playwrights are no different when it comes to waiting for the “divine kiss” that fills your soul with the magic of the story and the words to tell it. Anybody in the creative arts will tell you that muses seem to have their own union and work to their own strange clock and schedule. Finally, it’s been my experience that muses have likes and dislikes when it comes to not only “when” they kiss you but also “where.”

It was the dead of winter in 1995. I was working the 2nd level computer Help Desk for my day job employer a large multi-national corporation. I had just finished my first cup of coffee and suddenly something hit me like a bucket of bricks dropped on my head. “I’m not supposed to be here!”

I got up abruptly and approached my supervisor and asked if there were enough people to cover the desk. He looked at me with a puzzled look and answered in the affirmative and asked me why. I must have had a strange, crazy stare. I told him I needed to go home to attend to something important, NOW! He told me if it was that important, I should go.

Within 15 minutes I was at my apartment. I soon found myself in my room curled up in the corner of my bed with a pad of paper and a small portable cassette recorder. After I was settled and quiet, it all became clear as day to me, something grand in its scope was gestating in the womb of my deeper creative mind. Then I found myself mumbling the words that would later become the log line of the play;

“An exploration of Spirit, Doctrine and a person with three Birth Certificates.”

Within an hour the words that would become the opening monolog prayer to the Great Spirit found their way onto tape, as well as the charge of the Kachina spirit on a mountaintop. I spent the rest of the day and night drafting the concept outline of a very special human being of unique gender reference. Someone who had grown up Catholic, had become sort of a New Age shaman person, had a spiritual epiphany on a mountaintop and then tried to rediscover their spiritual roots only to be rejected by traditional doctrines and dogma.

Then I remembered the words of a Catholic nun I had met who said of spiritual vocations;

“The modern church has turned away more saints with its restrictive monastic regulations...how many of those who are truly called have we rejected?” she said.

This was my theme. Someone who was truly called, someone who was as strange as a three dollar bill and of course, the traditional vocations directors would turn this person away. This play was not about gender; it was about conflict!

Richard Rashke, one of my Playwright mentors, has hammered the concept home to me time and time again: “conflict, conflict and more conflict.” This play was going to be about conflict of the duty of the inner heart, conflict about not fitting the societal mold and conflict in the interaction of the people involved. One person who would be clearly

tasked by spirit, tasked with a charge from “heaven;” to be in conflict with someone who was charged with the duties of upholding the rules of society, the dogma and doctrine of the church. These were the words sung by the muses as they danced on my creative heart.

I clearly understood this spiritual epiphany on mountaintop stuff. I understood what it was like to have a strange gender signature that people were confused by. What I lacked was a true picture of what a bunch of conservative and stuffy Catholic monastics might do if a “queen” like me showed up in conservative drag and asked to join the monastery. –That should paint a pretty interesting scenario in your minds eye–

As a playwright, I did not want to fall into the trap of putting in my preconceived notion of what the monks and nuns were truly thinking about. In addition, I didn’t want to be accused of demonizing the clergy. I felt if I was going to be fair and have a play that was true and from the heart, I would need to let the monastics be themselves.

Over the next few weeks I sought out a half dozen Catholic monastic orders. I managed to arrange four interviews. Hidden in my purse was a fully charged dictation-grade tape recorder with a high-quality microphone. I sometimes feel a bit guilty about the method I used to gather my research, but I knew in my heart that it was the only way I would capture the Catholic monastics as themselves in their natural habitat. The representations of the Catholic monastics in the play are a composite of what I captured on tape.

The Catholic nuns surprised me, and it was they, in the end who became the stories heroes. The ones who ultimately wanted to hear the story of an epiphany in the desert, the ones who tried to find a way and tried to open a door. After a period of time I became very good friends with the nuns of a cloistered order in the Maryland area. After I became an ordained Buddhist nun myself, the friendship and relationship with this order became even closer.

While my personal story runs a bit parallel at times to the Ammiel character, it is indeed not my personal story, though that’s the rumor. You see, first off, I’m a transsexual not a hermaphrodite as is the character Ammiel. Like Ammiel, I too have three birth certificates but I gave Ammy a birth defect to invoke sympathy from the audience. Being a hermaphrodite or intersexed person seems to invoke more understanding and sympathy from your average person for some reason. I guess it’s the old idea; “she was born that way” vs “you chose what you are.” It’s a seriously wrong notion but it’s what some people think. I have just as much of a birth anomaly as do the intersexes persons, its just not as apparent.

During the production, the character part of Ammy was very hard to cast. We needed an actor who could convince the audience that he or she had truly been sort of a boy by birth but who would be able to shift back and forth between serious female and male energy at times during the course of the play. We initially cast a trans person in the part. Her family freaked out that she was going to be on stage and under pressure she quit two days into rehearsals.

I later cast two genuine women in the role but they didn't work out either for various reasons. By this point, it was about ten days before curtain and I had no lead. Our artistic director asked me to take a crack at it. I insisted that I couldn't do the part and still direct. Within a half an hour, he had called in one of the best directors in the company and she was all fired up to whip me into shape and put the final touches on the show before opening. I performed the role of Ammy, under my stage name of Cassandra St. John. Deep down I knew it was providence's way of fixing my wagon for secretly recording the monastics. The show opened and was one of the two hits of the summer season. Both shows were sent to the Maryland State Community Theater Championships.

At one of the weekend performances, several people, whom I grew up with, saw the play with me playing the part of a hermaphrodite. These folks knew I had adopted a female persona and had seen me five years before at a class reunion as Cheryl. After the show they came up to me and were convinced I had been born a hermaphrodite and had simply adopted a female persona like Ammy did. The next thing I knew, I was getting email from former high school classmates. They told me that the word was out that I had been born a hermaphrodite. In the end, they seemed to find more sympathy in their hearts thinking I was born this way. So be it.

“The Berdache,” was a strange phenomenon. If you had told me two years before that a play with a hermaphrodite as the leading lady was going to pack the house in the suburbs, I would have wanted a bottle of whatever you were drinking. The play was the award winner of this collection. It received nominations in Maryland for Best Original Play, Best Actress and Winning Best Overall Technical Achievement. Every place the play ran, it invoked tears and hugs from the audiences. The most commonly used words by audience members to describe it were; **“Spiritually uplifting.”**