

John Two-Hawks brings rare music and wisdom to Alton

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – Grammy-nominated Native American flutist John Two-Hawks and his wife, Peggy Hill, journeyed from their home in beautiful Eureka Springs, Arkansas to grace Alton with Two-Hawks's performances and teachings.

Two-Hawks played the historic ballroom at Mineral Springs Mall Friday night from 7:30 – 9:30 p.m. Hill said her husband played to a crowded house and took time after the show to meet with the audience. She said one of the main reasons the couple travels from Arkansas to Alton is because of the people. She said Alton reminds her of Eureka Springs, which she described as a quaint town full of nice people, artists and other creatives. In previous interviews with Riverbender.com, Two-Hawks said he also enjoyed the history and architecture of Alton.

Many musical merits have been bestowed upon Two-Hawks. He was nominated for both a Grammy and an Emmy following the release of his record *Wild Songs*, which was a collection of 21 first-take flute solo improvisations. He said he entered his recording studio and asked the spirit to guide him to whichever of his 70 flutes needed played. He would then play what his heart desired and recorded everything in one take.

Outside of commercial and professional recognition, Two-Hawks flute-playing abilities have also been recognized on a spiritual level by a Lakota elder Two-Hawks said he deeply respects who carries a lot of honor. That recognition was being called Shiyotamka, which roughly translates to “Big or Great Flute” in English.

“Big or great in this context is not what it seems to mean in English,” he said in previous interviews. “Big means large in size and great means awesome and powerful, but in this context, it means more of a spiritual power. The man who gave me that name was a very respected elder and spiritual leader. It's a real honor for me to carry that name. It speaks to the whole journey I've taken for the flute to come into my world and change it. I like to say it wasn't an accident.”

Two-Hawks was granted his first flute while teaching living history of Native Americans from every education level from elementary schools to universities. He was already a gifted musician, being able to play any instrument he was handed, so when he was gifted a flute, he quickly learned it and loved it.

He brought much of that love and many of those flutes to the Crystal Room for a class on the Native American flute sponsored by It's Raining Zen Saturday morning. During the class, which hosted a few dozen people, Two-Hawks encouraged people to not learn songs on their flutes, but instead find their own song and try to play that.



That Native American flute and the music it gives were nearly destroyed by the reservation culture in America, which worked to Christianize the Native Americans and make them European while sending them to boarding schools and forcing them onto reservations. Now, however, Two-Hawks said it was thriving in what he referred to as a “renaissance.”

Hill said she and her husband were planning on returning to Alton again next year, thanks to the kindness of the people in the town and their hosts, Donna and Dave Nunnally, who own and manage It's Raining Zen.

“We have a pretty large St. Louis fan base,” she said. “And, Alton is a great spot for them to come and see us in a beautiful location overlooking the river. It was a great night, and John had a great time meeting with everyone following the show.”

After the flute class, Two-Hawks also hosted a “Hidden Medicine” class in the Crystal Room to discuss how the directions of the Sacred Hoop, which he said in previous interviews would be a small course based on how the sacred symbol of the hoop or medicine wheel can help direct lives and creative energies using the four sacred directions.

