

Two Grand Coulee-Area Men Are Finalists For National Native American Music Award

By [Doug Nadvornick](#) November 2, 2019



Tim Brooks, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville, provided flute music for a song that's a finalist for a Native American Music Award. CREDIT: Doug Nadvornick/SPR
This week, two Native American men who live in the Grand Coulee area are going back east to complete what has been a surprising adventure.

They are finalists, along with Chicago singer/songwriter Joan Hammel (who is not Native), for a [Native American Music Award](#).

The ceremony is Saturday, Nov. 2 in Niagara Falls, New York, and the men will be there to see if they win.

About two summers ago, Hammel packed her son and her guitar in her car and headed west. She had just been named by the National Park Service to serve for a few weeks as an artist-in-residence at the Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area in central Washington. Her task was to write songs that reflected the spirit of the area.

She brought some lyrics from her songwriting partner and, on the drive, started to develop some melodies. One day, they pulled into Nespelem on the reservation of the Colville Confederated Tribes.

“When I got out there, I had always had a wish to collaborate with local musicians,” Hammel said.

So she called around and was referred to Faran Sohappy. He’s a Yakama tribal member, a sound engineer who worked at the time at the Colville Tribes’ community center. They met at a studio on the reservation.

“I brought my guitar and we did some guitar things there and then he also recorded the flute there,” Hammel said.

The flute was played by Sohappy’s uncle, Tim Brooks, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville.

After Hammel went back to Chicago, Sohappy mixed the musical elements of the song together and emailed the final version to her.

“Joan had an idea of where the flute would blend perfect,” Sohappy said. “I told her I think it’s the beginning and then, as the flute track faded out, her track faded in. It just blended perfectly together.”

“Both Rebecca and I had goosebumps in the studio. It was just such a moving and incredibly spiritual experience,” Hammel said.

Fast forward several months. Hammel submitted the song “Nature’s Walk” to music competitions. Judges at the Indian Summer Music Awards picked it as a finalist, as did the Native American Music Awards. It didn’t win in the former and they’ll find out on Saturday for the latter. Win or lose, this has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience for Brooks and Sohappy.

Brooks says he got the initial call about the nominations from Sohappy. He says the news didn’t really sink in, until his wife mentioned it to him later.

“I went, you’re kidding me,” Brooks said. “She says, no I’m not, I’ll show you, hold on. And so she went to the computer and she pulled it up. And I think after watching that video, it took like 10 or 15 minutes and it was like, oh my god.”

Brooks says he’s only had his songs recorded a couple of times, both for charitable purposes. He says he developed the passage picked for Hammel’s song while playing his flute near the town of Leavenworth.

“My mom, when she was alive, she used to call that home and after my mom passed away, I still today go up there and play. I call it my mom song,” he said.

The Native American Music Awards will be streamed live on the organization’s website Saturday evening. Hammel’s song is one of six finalists in the Best Folk Recording category.