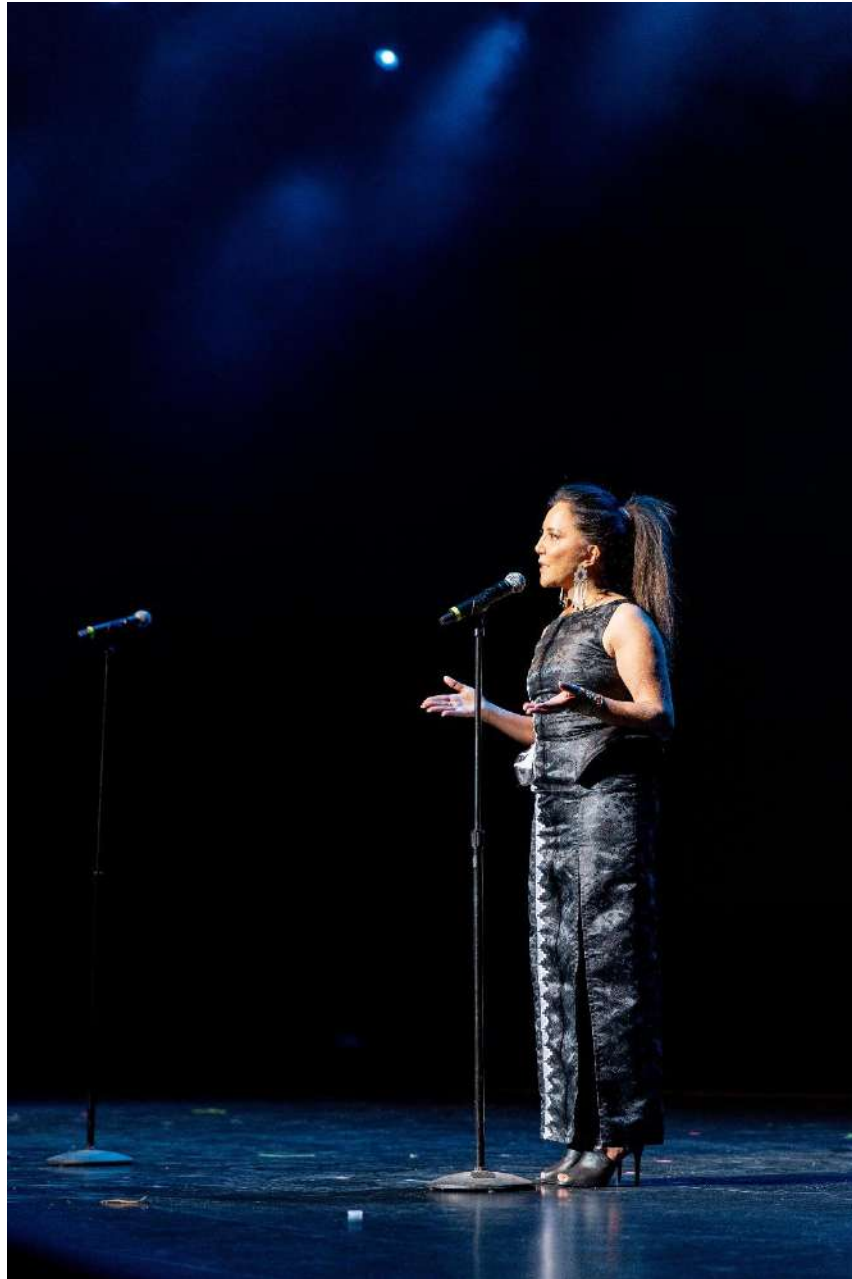




## The FNX App: Marking a New Era for Native Media

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"This Is Indian Country" host Ruth-Ann Thorn takes the stage during the FNX app launch celebration. (Photo credit: Erick Zambrano)

By Jeanne Ferris

The inaugural launch of the First Nations Experience (FNX), an Indigenous-led streaming platform, celebrated with a red carpet gala attended by Native creatives, storytellers, sports players, educators, strategic communicators, musicians, and legacy family business owners gathered in anticipation of the evening's promise of Native entertainment and celebrity arrivals.

Before entering “The Show” (venue), the Painiktem Bird Singers and Dancers from Agua Caliente officially blessed the evening with a traditional song and prayer, which was most meaningful since this event occurred on their ancestral homelands.



**Painiktem Bird Singers of Agua Caliente opening the event. (Photo credit: Erick Zambrano)**

Representing a cosmopolitan of Native creatives, to name a few: Gerald Clarke Jr. (Cahuilla Band of Mission Indians), sculptor and educator, *Subversive Verses* band member Elizabeth Paige (Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians), blues singer and former member of *Redbone*, Tracy Lee Nelson (La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians), Ryan Begay, (Navajo Nation) *Fancy Dance*; Gene Brave Rock, (Blood Tribe of Blackfoot Country) *Wonder Woman*; and Kayla Lookinghorse, (Hunkpapa, Itazipco Lakota, and Dakota), fashion designer—whose designs were worn by several attendees.

Colorful heritage ribbons and textiles, some hand-sewn by grandmothers and worn with great pride, were photographed on the red carpet and everywhere in The Show.

“This isn’t just entertainment, it’s a historical document that honors our journey,” Ruth-Ann Thorn (Payómkawichum/Luiseño).

She is the producer and host of *This is Indian Country*, a 12-episode season for FNX.

“Our stories are powerful, filled with resilience, talent, and creativity. The amazing individuals I meet during my travels share the legacies of their great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents—people who passionately hold on to their heritage, traditions, and culture.”

In addition to her production series, the indefatigable Ms. Thorn owns *N8iV Beauty*, *Exclusive Collections Gallery*, and *Native Star Boutique* (the first Native-owned business and residence in the Gaslamp Quarter of San Diego since the dark days of the 1800s for California Natives).

Ms. Thorn also served as one of the event’s “behind-the-scenes dynamos,” helping to secure the entertainers and celebrities for the event agenda and with promoting the event.

“I came straight from LAX [airport] to get here. I wanted to support FNX,” willowy Jessica Matten (Red River Metis-Cree) of *Dark Winds*, *Rez Ball* said, wearing a simple red dress.

Before acting, Ms. Matten spent decades working with at-risk Indigenous youth in Canadian rural communities and continues to advocate for Indigenous campaigns as a founder for programs designed to help aspiring Indigenous actors.

She and everyone attending added “Native Hollywood” glamor and gravitas.

The Show promotes international headliners and seats 2,057 people, including 457 on the theatre floor and an additional 1,600 in the theatre lounge, mezzanine, and balcony. It also has 12 luxury boxes/suites.

The spacious venue provided ample room for everyone to connect, share stories, and celebrate.

Agua Caliente Casino in Rancho Mirage is renowned for supporting Indigenous initiatives.

Credit for this milestone is due to FNX founding partner Yuhaaviatam (Yu-HAH-vee-ah-tahm) of San Manuel Nation, formerly the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians.

Also, a significant collaborator in realizing the FNX vision, hats off to the San Bernardino Community College District.

In his welcome speech, FNX producer Frank Blanquet (Yucatec Maya) gave a personal anecdote about how accurate representation is vital in media for Native youth.

“When we first walked into Caesar’s Palace Casino for the Reservation Economic Summit (RES) Conference, we were greeted by a young man about 20 years old.

He saw our equipment and then our FNX apparel and asked excitedly, ‘Oh, you’re from FNX?’

Then he said, ‘That’s all I watched growing up!’

He was the first interaction we had with anyone at that conference, where we were scheduled to make the first major announcement of the FNX App on their main stage. So, it set the tone for our amazing week there.”

Mr. Blanquet emphasized, “We are a team of Native producers, committed to telling stories from a community perspective, not through a sensationalized lens.”

The FNX production team, which includes Sahar Khadjenoury (Navajo), Mariana Lapizco (Yaqui), and Frank Blanquet, recently received a prestigious Regional Emmy® Award at the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS) Pacific Southwest Gala.

For this first-rate production team, it surely is the first of many more awards.

Meanwhile, black bow-tied servers quietly passed small trays of Native gourmet tastings.

Chef Sean Sherman (Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe), the founder of the Sioux Chef brand and Owamni restaurant, and a three-time James Beard Foundation winner, was also spotted in the festive crowd.

An advocate for Indigenous food sovereignty and an active proponent of revitalizing Native cuisine, Chef Sean spoke about “a soon-to-be-released book, *Turtle Island: Foods and Traditions of the Indigenous Peoples of North America*. It will be available on November 11, 2025.”

On the entertainment agenda, champion hoop dance artist and Cirque Du Soleil performer ShanDiegn Sonwai La Rance (Hopi, Tewa, Navajo, Assiniboine) impressed the audience with her six hoops and dynamic performance.

As did the all-Native Electric Turquoise Dance Troupe with their acrobatic hip-hop moves and rock ‘n’ roll.

Choreographer Tesla Wolfe (Seminole, Creek, Absentee Shawnee, Alligator Clan, and Eufaula Band) founded Electric Turquoise Entertainment as a non-profit organization to offer affordable classes in performing arts for Native children, teens, and adults.

Hope and optimism triumphed over worldly concerns that night, especially with the belly laughs from stand-up comedian JR Redwater’s (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe-Hunkpapa Lakota) R-rated monologue.

However, one conscientious mama decided her little one was up past bedtime and whisked her toddler out of The Show.

Behind every successful project or event stands a supportive cast of family and friends, and this evening in particular, such a cast of staunch supporters was present.

“No task is too big when done together by all. Many hands make light work.” —‘Ōlelo No’eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings by Mary Kawena Puku’i.



**Hailing from Canada, The Halluci Nation, DJ duo performed during the FNX app launch. (Photo credit: Erick Zambrano)**

Headliners and multi-award-winning DJs and producers The Halluci Nation (past and present members include the Anishinaabe from Nipissing First Nation, the Mohawk of the Six Nations of the Grand River, and Cayuga Six Nations) opened their segment with vintage Western clips depicting cowboys and Indians.

They blended electronic and instrumental hip hop, reggae, moombahton, and dubstep-influenced dance music with distinctive Native music elements, consisting of singing and traditional drumming.

The Evening Star, in complete traditional Powwow ensemble, danced to Halluci Nation's creative tunes, capturing every note with every step.

When The Halluci Nation concluded the evening with a famous John Wayne outtake from a John Huston film and a resounding "F\*\*\* John Wayne!" —they received applause, piercing whistles, and raucous laughter.

This event was more than a party—it marked a new era in Native media visibility.





**“Native Shorts” cohost and film producer Bird Runningwater with former Agua Caliente tribal councilmember Jessica Norte. (Photo credit: Erick Zambrano)**

The FNX streaming platform offers a rich tapestry of Native-produced and themed documentaries, dramatic series, nature, cooking, gardening, children's, and arts programming dedicated to preserving Indigenous cultures worldwide.

This community-driven initiative, owned by and originating from the studios of KVCR-PBS San Bernardino, is a testament to the power of collective action in supporting Native programming.

FNX is available to PBS affiliates, community and tribal stations, and cable television service providers nationwide.

Its free streaming launch will bring Indigenous stories and voices to over 85% of U.S. households.

FNX is available in the greater Los Angeles media market over the air on KVCR Channel 24.2 and via cable through Frontier FiOS Channel 471.

If you want FNX carried in your community, please contact local stations, cable, and satellite service providers. FNX is free!

For more information about the First Nations Experience (FNX) and its programming, please visit [www.fnx.org](http://www.fnx.org) or simply download [fnx.org/app](http://fnx.org/app) (<http://fnx.org/app>) on any cell phone or computer device through: Apple App Store, Android, Web, Roku, Fire TV, Samsung, Vizio, or LG TV.



**Writer Jeanne Ferris and Ruth-Ann Thorn. (Photo credit: Erick Zambrano)**