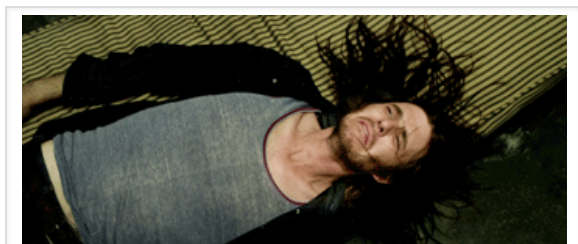


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Wounded Knee As Backdrop for Indigenous Drama

March 13, 2014 By *Ed Rampell*



Chad Brown

THE ACTIVIST Film Review

The *Activist* is a feature film about two political prisoners, police brutality, and more, set against the backdrop of the 1973 Wounded Knee rebellion at Pine Ridge Indian

Reservation in South Dakota and the resistance by the American Indian Movement. In this political thriller two activists are arrested: Marvin (Chadwick Brown), a lawyer whose Native wife Anna (Tonantzin Carmelo) supposedly died accidentally, and Bud (Michael Spears of *Dances With Wolves*), the brother of the dead woman. Marvin and Bud both suspect Anna met with foul play.

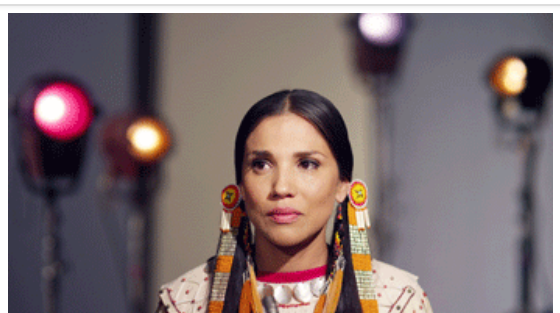
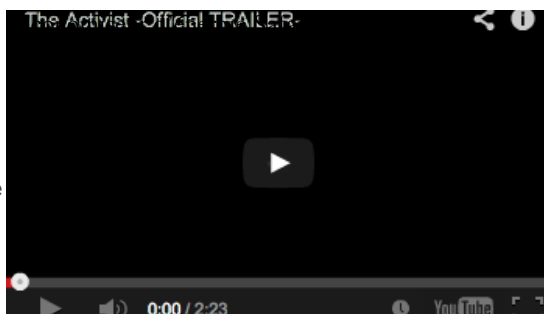
The duo are held at a remote sheriff's station where the activists are subjected to police excessive use of force, if not outright torture. The two paleface sheriffs play out an ultimate version of the good cop/bad cop routine. The prisoners' attorney, Claire Chapman, is portrayed by

Alena von Stroheim — yes, she is billed as the granddaughter of legendary director Erich von Stroheim, who helmed the 1924 silent masterpiece *Greed* and portrayed the director-turned-chauffeur in Billy Wilder's 1950 *Sunset Blvd.*

As *The Activist* unfolds Nixon and Watergate figure into this period piece's subtext. Actor King Orba plays Marlon Brando, the actor/ activist who backed A.I.M. and sent Sacheen Little Feather to the Oscars ceremony to decline his Best Actor award for *The Godfather* around the time of the Wounded Knee events.

The Activist's plot hinges on a secret corporate/Nixon administration plot to turn the Pine Ridge Reservation into a so-called "National Sacrifice Zone" of environmental devastation in order to pursue energy drilling in Indian Territory. Inquiring minds want to know: Does Anna's untimely death tie into this

subversive subterfuge? Does white man, once again, speak with proverbial forked tongue?



Tonantzin Carmelo



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(Given the Keystone Cops' XL Pipeline, and contemporary tribal resistance to it, this plot set 40 years ago has a renewed relevancy.)

The feature film, which is often slow paced, is directed by French filmmaker Cyril Morin, who also wrote the screenplay. Like the Native Voices Theatre Company's *Stand-Off at HWY #37* currently onstage at the Autry Museum, *The Activist* is most notable and worth seeing for its indigenous actors, theme and depiction of what could be called a more recent version of "Cowboys versus Indians."



The *Activist* plays through March 13 at that Hollywood showcase of indie films, the Arena Cinema, 1625 N. Las Palmas Blvd., L.A., CA 90028. Information: (323) 306-0676; <http://arenascreen.com>. The film is available online via iTunes and opens in Paris in May. The trailer and more info is at: <http://www.theactivistfilm.com/>.

Ed Rampell

L.A.-based reviewer Ed Rampell co-authored "*The Hawaii Movie and Television Book*." (See: <http://hawaiimtvbook.weebly.com/>.)

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About Ed Rampell
 Film historian and reviewer Ed Rampell's interview with legendary Greek director Costa-Gavras is in the September issue of The Progressive Magazine. Rampell is the co-author of *The Hawaii Movie and Television Book*, to be released by Honolulu's Mutual Publishing in October 2013.

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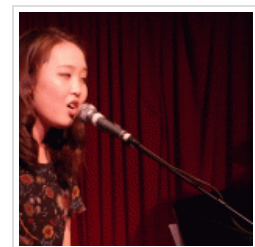
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