



This project began over a year and a half ago from a discussion Leela Gilday and Melina Laboucan-Massimo had while sharing their experiences of how both their grandmothers passed away after contacting tuberculosis. While Leela unfortunately did not have the privilege of meeting her Etsi, Melina was in the process of grieving her recently passed Kohkom. They decided to premiere the piece at the Talking Stick Festival - A First Nations Performance Arts that happens annually in Vancouver, BC.

The 20 minute piece is an inter-disciplinary performance combining modern and traditional dance accompanied by live music consisting of 2 part female harmony, guitar, and various drums. The piece also explores how dance interacts with multi-media through live visuals throughout the performance. The performance reflects on how foreign diseases i.e. tuberculosis have affected our communities even to our present day. The theme revolves around the grief and loss we experience with the passing of loved ones namely our Elders. The piece journeys through various stages Native people have experienced before and after the process of colonization from strength and pride to loss of culture to mourning and remembering.

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Artist's Statement:

The reason for my work is to bring light to stories that have been kept out of the lime-light for far too long. Dance has an unspoken way of translating messages and emotions that sometimes do not transcend through other mediums. Movement can form a story that is unique to each person that watches. I also work in media in an attempt to reveal First Nations perspectives and stories; however, I have found that the art of dance can also be another vehicle to express our history and culture. In a post-modern society, First Nations peoples are realizing how they must bridge two worlds; one that reflects our ways and traditions as well as incorporate new ways and technology. I feel my dance is also a reflection of this as I have begun to see how the fusion of contemporary and traditional dance is also an evolution of how we bridge these worlds.

The Cree word Manat'siwin is the title of a poem I composed the day after my Kohkom passed away. The loose translation of Manat'siwin means 'respect and acknowledgement of our ancestors'. I titled the poem as such because I realized I must somehow come to terms with the fact that my grandmother was no longer on this earthly plane but now with the ancestors who watch over us. After Leela and I started developing this project, I decided to call it Manat'siwin as we both were reflecting on how the passing of our loved ones had affected us as well as our families.

Since the onset of the piece, Leela and I knew we wanted to set the dance piece to her original music with her playing live with her band. This is how we rehearsed most of the piece; they played while I worked out choreography. We also felt that a live, collaborative performance would have much more of a dynamic impact on the audience. As a bonus one of Leela Gilday's band members is also a fashion designer so she custom made all the costumes for the dance performance.

While developing the piece I began to think that including of other types of mediums of art would also further the impact on the audience. So I decided to ask Leena Minifie and Quentin Rogers to work with me to develop the visual component of the piece. This way I felt that there was a diverse array of art within the piece so those who liked multi-media could enjoy the piece just as much as those who loved dance or live music. It was great to work with Leena as she also has experience in how new media can accompany dance pieces as a live component. The end result has been satisfying and encouraging because this piece started out as a journey through grief but has also amounted to a celebration of life. With the collaboration of these 6 artists we have used our diverse and unique talents to tell a story of suffering and strife but ends with gratitude, love and respect of who we are and where we come from.

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Melina Laboucan-Massimo

Melina Miyowapan Laboucan-Massimo was born in Lubicon Cree territory. She began to study ballet, jazz, tap, flamenco, salsa and traditional fancy dancing at the age of 5. It was always something that was a passion and driving force in her life. However, at the age of 17 she decided to pursue a bachelor of arts degree and take a hiatus from dance. After graduating and working in Brasil, Toronto and Vancouver she still missed the uniquely expressive form of dance and longed to start dancing once again. In 2006 Melina began training at MainDance - a contemporary dance conservatory and in 2007/2008 she trained at Harbour Dance Centre's Intensive Training Program. She is currently working on a project with Michelle Olson for International Dance Day in Vancouver, BC.

Leela Gilday

Juno Award Winner- Aboriginal Recording of the Year 2007, Juno Award Nominee- Best Music of Aboriginal Canada 2003 Winner of 3 Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards for Best Female Artist, Best Folk Album and Best Songwriter.

Leela Gilday was born and raised in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. She is a singer/songwriter from the Dene Nation whose songwriting reflects her northern roots. She sings about identity, death, love and life from the urban Indian perspective.

Her unbound and naturally powerful voice transports her listeners to a world where freedom and joy balance sorrow and injustice, making you cry and laugh in the same breath.

Juli Steemson

Drawing on 15 years (and counting) of fulltime musical commitments as well as several short stints as a guest/emrgency repair percussionist, Juli currently supports Juno-award winner and all-around superstar Leela Gilday as well as stirring several pots of rock'n'roll (in various flavour) boiling on the backburner relying on a deep sense of groove and an open heart, she hopes to bring love and multi-cultural awareness to every avenue, arena and venue possible throughout our wide, wild world.

Okalani Leblanc

Okalani LeBlanc is a multitalented singer/poet/improv artist/clothing designer. With a strong connection with the local arts and activism scene, expect nothing less than an honest opinion from a strong, beautiful voice.



Leena Minifie

Leena Minifie is a multi-disciplinary artist of Gitxaala/Tsimshian/British descent. With a background in film, television, journalism, dance and multi-media art, she is rapidly moving towards her passion of producing cutting edge documentaries on the subjects that are dear to her heart. Currently she has started up her own production company, Stories First Productions, through which she has several projects in development.

Quentin Rogers

Quentin has been involved in the arts for about as long as he can remember. Growing up in an artistic family exposed Quentin to the fine arts and an early exposure to underground art provided a critical foundation to his outlook on life. Often content to sit in the background, making sure the show goes on and supporting his fellow artists in their endeavors, Quentin is working on putting his art school degree to its intended use.



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