

## Charlie Panigoniak

Tansi, Boozhoo, Hello and Welcome to The National Music Centre' Speak Up! Exhibition, celebrating the voices of Indigenous music trailblazers past, present and future.

Nunavut is a vast region made up of 2 million kilometers of land and 36,000 people, and means "Our Land" in Inuktitut. About 85% of the population is Inuit, and one artist that has connected with generations of music fans within the territory is Charlie Panigoniak.

Charlie's dedication to Inuktitut music made him a legend throughout the Arctic Circle. The late singer-songwriter wrote and sang in Inuktitut, and for decades humbly played concerts throughout the North, sharing his sense of humour and vast knowledge of Inuit culture and traditions.

Charlie is considered to be the first Inuk musician to record contemporary-styled songs on reel-to-reel audio tape, market the tape and receive radio fan support. His ingenuity and passion for music lead to several studio album releases.

Charlie was born on March 7th, 1946 near the town of Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut. His father gave him his first guitar when he was 21; a homemade one that included parts from a tin can. He instantly took to it with his playful nature and love of country music.

It was in 1967 that Charlie traveled to Brandon, in southern Manitoba to receive treatment for tuberculosis. The experience of being in a prairie city included hearing new forms of music, and also, the life-changing opportunity to buy his first real guitar.

He learned to strum out chords and began writing lyrics about what he knew: stories about friends, family, traditions, faith and life events. The songs were written in his Inuktitut language yet he had no idea that his music would connect to Inuit people like no one else before him.

While playing at Rankin, Inlet, Northwest Territories in 1973, Charlie was heard by Doug Ward, a producer with CBC who was so impressed with his sound that he arranged for a recording session in Toronto the following summer. Charlie recorded three albums with CBC Northern Service: *Inuktitut Christmas & Gospel Songs*, *My Seasons* and *Just for Kids*, because he adored performing for children.

His music was very unique, sometimes featuring a talking animal or finger taps on his guitar to imitate the sound of a traditional Inuit drum.

Charlie performed on the 1981 *True North* television broadcast and was asked to host a daily CBC radio show because of his popularity. He was also well known for collaborating with his wife and musical partner, Lorna, for over 30 years.

Charlie's music garnered invitations to perform in far off places like Alaska, Ireland and Greenland. In 1990 he appeared at the WOMAD international arts festival in Toronto.

In 2012, Charlie received the Order of Nunavut for his outstanding contribution to the territory's cultural, social, and economic well-being, and in 2016 he was awarded the Nunavut Commissioner's Performing Arts Award to recognize his musical contributions throughout the 70s and 80s.

Charlie Panigoniak made his journey to the spirit world on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2019 at his home in Rankin Inlet, one day prior to his 73rd birthday. Today, he is widely regarded as “the father of Inuktitut music”, who bridged pre-colonial life through the tremendous changes in the north; inspiring generations of Inuit musicians to believe in their language, their culture and their stories.

I’m David McLeod, curator of Speak Up! Click on more of my Curator’s Comments to learn about other artists, like Charlie Panigoniak, whose music is a force for change. Miigwetch