

Crystal Shawanda was born in the Wiikwemkoong First Nation on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. She was raised in a musical home and learned to sing and play guitar from her parents. Crystal fell in love with Nashville, Tennessee in her teens, making multiple trips to the city and building a strong following, which led to her signing with RCA records in 2007. And in 2008, her debut single, “You Can Let Go,” became a major hit.

The song describes an ill father and his close relationship with his daughter. It became the fastest climbing track on the Canadian country singles chart, topping the top ten in Canada and number two across the United States.

This is trailblazer, Crystal Shawanda, with “You Can Let Go” right here at the Speak Up! exhibition at the National Music Centre.

That was a very moving song that deeply connected with listeners in 2008.: “You Can Let Go” by Crystal Shawanda.

Her debut album, *Dawn of a New Day*, sparked major support. A CMT documentary series, *Crystal: Living the Dream*, premiered nationally in February of 2008. It detailed what it takes to make it in the country music world, showing her perform on the famous Grand Ole Opry stage. She was also very busy touring throughout 2009 with major country acts like Brad Paisley and Dierks Bentley.

Crystal went on to win the Canadian Country Music Association Female Artist of the Year in 2008, and that same year Crystal released this track, “What Do I Have to Do,” which reached number five on the country music charts in Canada.

That was a powerful voice of Crystal Shawanda with “What Do I Have To Do.”

By mid 2009, she moved away from RCA Nashville to release her own Christmas album, “I’ll Be Home for Christmas.” Through her own label, Crystal achieved another milestone by becoming the CEO of her own label, New Sun Records, with distribution through EMI.

Here's Crystal Shawanda single from 2010, “Beautiful Day,” which saw her again on the country music charts.

That was Crystal Shawanda with “Beautiful Day” at the Speak Up! exhibition at the National Music Centre.

It was 2010 when Crystal performed “Let's Come Together” and the meaningful “This Is My Land” at Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Other single releases like “Love Enough” in 2011 led to a promotional tour with fellow country star Reba McEntire. Crystal's album, *Just Like You*, was released in April of 2012, and she went on to win the 2013 JUNO Award for Aboriginal Album of the Year. A few years

later, Crystal made a transition into her first love, the Blues. She described the musical shift like letting a bird out of a cage.

In 2014, her album titled *The Whole World's Got the Blues* focused on her story as an Indigenous woman. From the album, this song raised awareness of the national issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls across Canada. This is “Pray Sister Pray,” a powerful song with an important message.

That was Crystal Shawanda with “Pray Sister Pray.”

Her 2020 album *Church House Blues* earned Crystal a 2021 JUNO Award for Blues Album of the year, marking the first time an Indigenous artist won in this category.

Crystal's follow up album, *Sing Pretty Blues*, was released in April of 2025 and quickly debuted at number two on Canada's Top 50 Blues Album chart and maintained a strong presence that reflected support from both radio and streaming platforms. In 2022, Crystal released *Midnight Blues*, which debuted at number eight on the American Billboard Blues charts, and she became the first Indigenous person to appear on that chart.

The album was also nominated for Blues Album of the Year at the JUNO Awards. From *Midnight Blues*, this is “How Bad Do You Want It.”

That was the unmistakable voice of Crystal Shawanda with “How Bad Do You Want It.”

Today, Crystal lives in her longtime home in Nashville, Tennessee, and continues to perform across North America. She's appeared on many major festival stages that include the Mariposa Folk Festival and Calgary Blues Fest in 2025.

Crystal Shawanda has made significant cultural impacts as a barrier breaker for Indigenous artists and women in blues and country music. She is an Indigenous trailblazer and has made history and is recognized here at the Speak Up! exhibition at the National Music Centre.