

Tansi, Boozhoo, Hello, and welcome to the National Music Centre's Speak Up Exhibition, celebrating the voices of Indigenous music trailblazers past, present and future. For thousands of years, music has played an integral and sacred role within the lives of First Nation, Metis and Inuit people. Traditional music, languages and cultural practices have withstood and survived an onslaught of colonialism. One example is Indian Residential Schools. They were operated in Canada between the 1870s until the last residential school closed in 1996. Children between the ages of four to sixteen were forcibly taken away from their homes and placed in the schools, with the goal of assimilation. Disallowed to speak their language or sing traditional songs, it is estimated that over 150,000 First Nation, Inuit and Metis children attended Indian Residential Schools. Another example is the Indian Act of 1876, that enforced assimilation under the law. A provision under the Indian Act was in place for close to 75 years that prevented the passing down of oral tradition, cultural teachings, and traditional music. A person found singing with a hand drum, or in ceremony, could be jailed. Despite these and other historic wrongs, traditional music and new forms of contemporary music have thrived. The Speak Up exhibition highlights 13 amazing voices that demonstrate resilience and have shaped Indigenous music history. A few examples are celebrated artists, like Jeremy Dutcher, whose music directly connects to wax cylinder recordings of his people from the late 1800s. To artists who in spite of living in very remote communities in Canada's far north found ways to make and record music on their own terms. Like Charlie Panigoniak, who's regarded as the father of Inuit music. To Northern Haze, who created a brand new form of Inuit rock and took stages at major festivals, and were even nominated for a JUNO award. Then there's Willie Dunn, Alanis Obomsawin, Dr Duke Redbird, who were successful in bringing a native voice to the 1960s folk scene in Toronto, Montreal and New York City. Even when you look at the advent of MuchMusic, Alberta's War Party were the first Indigenous hip hop group to break into the scene as Indigenous artists. Ontario's Seventh Fire were also on the scene, bringing a mix of genres and a revolutionary message. Another example took place at the 59th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. Northern Cree took to the stage with their hand drums, singing powwow. The crowd was visibly moved. Indigenous music has always been on the land, apart of the scene, always resilient, always creating opportunities and pushing boundaries, be it in the past, the present, or the future. Speak Up celebrates and honours so much. The National Music Centre would like to acknowledge and thank TD for their generous support. I'm David McLeod - click on my curators comments to learn more about all the artists whose music is a force for change. Miigwetch.