

Jerry Alfred is a Northern Tutchone musician and cultural figure from the Selkirk First Nation. He is recognized at the Speak Up! exhibition for his significant contributions in representing his people within northern Yukon.

Born in 1955, he was raised in a traditional lifestyle on the land and is a fluent speaker of the Northern Tutchone language, despite attending an English-speaking residential school beginning at the age of five. Jerry's musical journey began during his time at residential school, where he was placed in a choir. His parents supported his passion for music early by purchasing his first guitar when he was seven. He became dedicated to music in his teens, inspired by the music of Bob Dylan.

This is Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat with “Old Ways,” at the Speak Up! exhibition.

What a beautiful drum song, entitled “Old Ways” by Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat.

As a member of the Crow Clan, Jerry inherited the respected title of Keeper of the Songs from his father, which holds the role of collecting and understanding the meaning of traditional songs, and to perform them and bring them to life at special events and ceremonies.

Let's take a listen to another song. This is Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat with “Generation Hand Down.”

A beautiful track from Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat, entitled “Generation Hand Down.”

Jerry's professional career began in the early 1990s, following a pivotal encounter at the 1991 Yukon International Storytelling Festival with producer and guitarist Bob Hamilton. This meeting led to the formation of Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat, a quintet featuring Bob, Andrea McColeman, Mark Paradis and Marie Gogo.

Jerry recorded four albums with The Medicine Beat, which was founded on his commitment to his late father to preserve the Tutchone songs. Jerry and the band utilized contemporary musical elements that were delicately intertwined with traditional vocals, the drum, and Jerry's language, which created a new sound when it was released in the 1990s. Then, by 1996, Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat received a JUNO Award for Best Music of Aboriginal Canada for the recording of their album, *Etsi Shon* (Grandfather Song).

Let's now take a listen to the moody and inspiring “MacMillian River Love Song” by Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat, here at the Speak Up! exhibition at the National Music Centre.

That was “MacMillian River Love Song” by Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat.

In addition to his artistic contributions, Jerry played a significant role in the 1980s and early 1990s during negotiations with the Government of Canada regarding the Selkirk Peoples Land Claim, which resulted in a successful agreement in 1995.

Jerry's music played a significant role in the community's healing and cultural reconnection efforts. This was captured in a 2012 CBC documentary highlighting language classes inspired by Jerry's work. Another example occurred in May of 2021. He performed at an on the land camp for families affected by Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls at Minto Landing.

Let's now take a listen to Jerry sharing a message in a song entitled "Nendaa" (Go Back).

That was "Nendaa" (Go Back) by Jerry Alfred and The Medicine Beat.

Today, Jerry lives in Pelly Crossing in the Yukon. The Speak Up! exhibition recognizes Jerry Alfred's legacy that is deeply connected to the spirit of community, the Elders and those who came before him, and the land. Jerry's life demonstrates his commitment to keeping traditional songs alive and revitalizing language that addresses the ongoing generational effects of residential schools.