

Leonard Sumner

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

On stage his delivery awakens the audience's conscience and fosters understanding of Indigenous issues through the power of his lyrics. His story-songs, described as "straight from the Rez" meld the political with the personal. His voice is sought after by Canadian and international folk festivals.

He's Anishinaabe MC/Singer/Songwriter/Storyteller, Leonard Sumner, who hails from the shores of the Little Saskatchewan First Nation in Manitoba.

Reviewers often note that he is a "vital, self-determined artist," and that his form of expression is a "medicine sound". Musically, Leonard cannot be pigeonholed into one genre; his expression criss-crosses between hip-hop, spoken word, country, alternative rock and R n'B.

He's also known for his presence at many First Nations rights gatherings, often sharing pertinent stories and songs like "They Say", about standing up and sharing your story as a strong Indigenous person.

In Leonard's 2017 single "I Know You're Sorry," he passionately asks the listener to reflect upon the meaning of an apology, particularly Canada's 2008 apology for its program of residential schools that began taking Indigenous children away from their homes in the 1880s. Residential schools were created by Christian churches and the Canadian government in an attempt to educate and assimilate Indigenous youth into Canadian society. The last residential school did not close until 1996, and over 150,000 Indigenous youth faced physical, sexual and psychological abuse inside them. Leonard addresses the effects of residential schools upon his family, community and nation.

He released his official debut album *Rez Poetry* in 2013, and his 2018 album *Standing in the Light* was nominated for Indigenous Album of the Year at the 2019 JUNO Awards.

In an era when Canada's historic wrongs are being unraveled, healing of wounds is greatly needed. Part of Leonard's gift is to turn emotions like anger, or deep sadness, into understanding. Leonard has poetically opened the minds of thousands of people, moving them toward a truer understanding of who First Nations people are.

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