

NORTHERN HAZE

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

In the mid-seventies, a group of young Inuit men within an Arctic village shared a passion for gritty rock music.

Self-taught musicians Kolitalik Inukshuk, Naisana Qamaniq, James Ungalaq, Elijah Kunnuk, and John Inooya intertwined their love of music, their Inuktitut language and culture to form a band and to make music history. They called themselves Northern Haze.

Northern Haze's humble beginnings included jamming on homemade guitars and creating beats with a toy drum set. No matter the challenge, they strove to create something new.

Officially formed in 1984, in 1985, the band released its groundbreaking, self-titled debut record through the CBC Northern Service. The album is widely recognized as the first Indigenous-language rock album in North America, with lyrics in Inuktitut. Their riffs were reminiscent of Thin Lizzy, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix, but included traditional Inuit songs and local stories. Northern Haze had discovered a sound never heard in Canada's far North before.

The record's buzz quickly gained them invitations to perform at large festivals across the country; they became Inuit ambassadors at *Folk on the Rocks* in Yellowknife and were hailed at Expo '86 for their unique brand of rock. They toured across the North and were constantly requested on local radio. They also performed at the 1987 Canada Games in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Northern Haze faced tragedy in 2007, when Elijah passed away from cancer, and Kolitalik's life was sadly taken only a few days later. After a few years, the group's three remaining members picked up their instruments again and began to play and record with the addition of new bassist, Derek Aqqiaruq and keyboardist Allan Kangok.

In 2012 Northern Haze released a compilation album of their songs from the 80s through the 2000s entitled *Sinaaktuq*, and in late 2018 they released *Siqinnaarut*, a new record that delivered an updated, riff-heavy sound from the opening growl of "Inuk" to the power chords of "Inuusivut II." The album won Indigenous Album of the Year at the Western Canadian Music Awards and was nominated for a JUNO Award for Indigenous Music Album of the Year in 2020.

For over three decades the interest and fan base for Northern Haze has never diminished. Living in a very remote region of the world where it's difficult to record much less acquire instruments, Northern Haze has thrived and showcased the resilience of their people, their language and their culture.

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