

## Tanya Tagaq

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

Tanya Tagaq is a trailblazing artist like no other. Her music interweaves traditional forms of Inuit throat singing with modern rock/pop/classical and electronica. She's a Member of the Order of Canada, a Polaris Prize winner, a JUNO-Award winner and bestselling author.

Rolling Stone magazine described her as, "One of the avant-garde's most dynamic performers." The New York Times has said, "This fiercely charismatic Inuk singer's throaty voice demands full attention, whether she's whispering in her softest register or howling at the sky."

Tanya grew up in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, a remote community of about 1,500 people. She spent time in a residential school, a tremendously dark period in Canadian history. She addresses this among other historic and current wrong doings on-stage; tackling the environment, climate change, food sovereignty, the loss of language, sexual abuse, and the long-lasting effects of many government policies forced on Indigenous peoples.

Tanya's musical journey began when she moved to Halifax to study art. It was while she was attending college and missing home that her mother sent her a cassette tape of Inuit throat singing to connect her to her homeland and people.

Throat-singing was once banned by the Christian priests acting under the government's authority in the far North. The clergy viewed it as "inappropriate" and "the devil's voice", and it wasn't until the early 1980s that throat-singing began to be reclaimed by Northern peoples.

It's usually performed by two women facing each other, making short, sharp, rhythmic breaths that emulate environmental sounds like birds or even a hand saw. It was traditionally used as a game between women; both trying to out-perform the other, and often ending in laughter.

Tanya makes it implicitly known that her version of throat singing is not traditional; rather a singular style that has morphed over time into what she performs and records today. And without a doubt, that style has gained attention.

In her early career she collaborated Björk on a single entitled "Ancestors". It put her on the industry's radar, and her own albums soon followed.

She's released five albums to date, which have collectively garnered over 13 awards, including double-honours in 2014 with a Canadian Folk Music Pushing the Boundaries Award and the Polaris Music Prize for best Canadian album, both for *Animism*, described as a spine tingling, powerful masterpiece.

In May 2018 she released her first book, a blend of fiction and memoir entitled *Split Tooth*. The book was longlisted for the 2018 Giller Prize and became a bestseller in Canada. Tanya is also the recipient of multiple honorary doctorates and was the subject of a recent *60 Minutes* episode, bringing her story and music to millions of people.

Tanya Tagaq will continue to be celebrated for decades to come as a music trailblazer who utilized the power of her voice and her commitment to her performance to soar.

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