

MUSIC

Celebrating Diversity Through Indigenous Voices



Deborah Kiglugalik Webster will share her poetry in spoken word Sunday afternoon at the Ottawa Grassroots Festival.



Albert Dumont: Algonquin traditional teacher, poet, storyteller and activist.
PHOTO BY JASON PICKERING

By Grace Smith

Our nation's 150th birthday provides us with an excellent opportunity to shine a light on Indigenous singer-songwriters, musicians, storytellers and artists. Their music and songs recount the history of Canada's Indigenous Peoples in the hope of unifying with all Canadians. This spring, the 6th annual Ottawa Grassroots Festival has scheduled several Indigenous artists who will take listeners on a journey of hope, loss, fear and determination through songs, storytelling and poetry.

"Our festival is all about breaking down barriers," says Bob Nesbitt, Festival Producer. "We can help reduce cultural barriers that exist between Canadians of the North and South by allowing their voices and stories to be shared in an environment that nurtures respect, where everyone involved is an equal."

Fresh from the well-deserved honour of a Canadian Folk Music Award (CFMA) for Best Aboriginal Duo of Year, the popular Twin Flames will fill the Sanctuary at Southminster United Church on Saturday evening, April 22, when they open for Ken Whiteley and The Beulah Band at The Grassroots Festival. Having performed over 500 shows across Canada with frequent trips to communities in the North, this band strongly believes in the healing power of music that arises from a deep connection to their Aboriginal roots. They love to engage the audience and will have them singing in Inuktitut before the end of their set. This award winning duo combines Jaaji an Inuk/Mohawk man from Nunavik and Chelsey June an Algonquin/Cree Métis Woman from Ottawa. Twin Flames takes every audience on a musical journey across Canada and the Arctic. They will sing songs in English, Inuktitut and French. Tickets are required for evening performances and this is one

night you will not want to miss. Get your tickets before they sell-out.

Daytime programming on Saturday and Sunday is free and there is a kaleidoscope of culturally diverse performances to enjoy. A few indigenous artists scheduled to appear on Sunday afternoon will share their poetry in spoken word. Albert Dumont, "South Wind," is a Poet, Storyteller, Speaker, and an Algonquin Traditional Teacher. Born and raised in traditional Algonquin territory (Kitigan Zibi) he has been walking the "Red Road" since commencing his sobriety in 1988. Dumont has published four books of poetry and short stories and one children's story, written in three languages. You will also enjoy the poetry of anthropologist and author, Deborah Kiglugalik Webster. Originally from Baker Lake, Nunavut, she is the author of "Harvaqtuurmiut Heritage: The Heritage of the Inuit of the Lower Kazan River" (1998) and "Akilak's Adventure" (2016). Her third book is currently in progress and tells the story of Inuit RCMP Special Constables from Nunavut.

Larissa Desrosiers, an emerging Anishinabekwe singer and songwriter from Couchiching First Nation, will share songs "born from feelings of fear, anger and vulnerability." Desrosiers is a third-year music student at Carleton University who began studying Indigenous courses this year. "I don't know what I want to do with my life," she says, "but I want to interact with elders in my community and might major in Indigenous studies and possibly do a Master's degree."

If you are intrigued by an artist who successfully stretches across musical genres of blues, roots, folk, Americana, Rhythm and Blues, country and African music, then Vince Halfhide's performance on Saturday afternoon is the place to be. This talented guitarist, singer-songwriter began playing in 1969

with the Ottawa band Heaven's Radio. Playing alongside Sneezy Waters, Ball & Chain, Andrea Karam, the Jivewires and Mighty Popo to name a few, allowed Halfhide to craft his unique guitar sound. His lyrics propel listeners from funny to sadly beautiful in an instant, while taking them on surprising journeys of familiar yet unexpected truths.

Tickets and festival passes for the evening performances at the festival

are now on sale through the website and at both Compact Music locations. They are priced to be affordable for families (children 15 and under are free when accompanied by an adult). For more information on the fun and exciting line-up this April 20-23, the complete list of scheduled performers can be found at www.ottawagrassrootsfestival.com.

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