

BIO/BACKGROUNDER – SUSAN AGLUKARK

The Journey

During a career that has spanned more than 25 years, Susan Aglukark's journey as a singer-songwriter has led her to reflect on who she is, where she came from and the importance of discovery – discovery of history, culture and self.

She is the first Inuk artist to win a Juno and a Governor General's Performing Arts Award for lifetime artistic achievement, she is an officer of the Order of Canada, holds several Honourary Doctorate degrees and has held command performances; but Susan also acknowledges the path has not been easy.

"Here I was, living a life I never imagined, but I was struggling to understand who I was. There was no opportunity growing up to learn about who we were, the Inuit, from our own perspective. In essence, we were institutionalized by being told who we were, how we would live and when you are told a story for so long, you learn to believe it," explains Susan.

During the past 25 years of reflection and songwriting, Susan kept coming back to one area of profound knowing, the Inuit are an extraordinary people deeply grounded in a culture forged by their Ancestors, their journey is what shaped them.

"Their life experience is the foundation on which our precepts of determination, adaptability and love for life are built, they began the journey to our present-day Nunavut."

Winters Dream, set for release in April 2018, is Susan's eighth album, and one she describes as bringing her story full circle – from being caught between two worlds – an indigenous one and a western one – to a place where she is comfortable in her own skin and able to "just be me."

An Awakening

"The conversations around reconciliation have provided an opportunity to change the narrative. The Indigenous people in Canada come from highly organized societies built on knowledge, process and organization - without which none of us would have survived."

For Susan, art played a significant role in her healing journey and she believes it plays an important role for indigenous youth who are dealing with identity issues today.

"Our children and youth are strong and resilient, they still believe very strongly in their culture, in Inuit or Indigenous culture, and they are still fighting every day to find their place."

"They need to be anchored to an identity and some of those connections are in our ancestors and their stories and we have a duty and a responsibility to engage our children and youth in the process of connecting with and helping them write those stories."

Susan is very open about how her own fears and personal trauma left her disillusioned and disconnected. Born in Churchill, Manitoba but raised in Arviat, Nunavut (and a couple of other communities in the Kivalliq region of Nunavut), her parents grew up in traditional Inuit culture, her formative years were not traditional and were somewhat disconnected from her culture.

Despite the success she experienced in the 1990s, by 1998 she was suffering from post-partum depression and found herself in a dark place in need of time to reflect and heal.

And so began what Susan calls her "awakening". As she learned more about her culture and the strength and resilience of the Inuit who have been on this land from some 5,000 years.

Susan has also seen first-hand what happens when Indigenous children and youth make cultural connections with the stories that offer a glimpse of the extraordinary people that were their ancestors.

"We have an extraordinary past, much of which has been kept from us, and removed from the history books. To give them, and ourselves, the opportunity to learn about our very own heroes, heroes our children and youth desperately need right now, to engage them in that story and that culture, will help them to aspire for more, to dream and to reframe who they are in today's world."

Exhibit: *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*

Location/Phase: Parts 2/3 Winnipeg

Witness: Susan Aglukark

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Initials

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