

For Immediate Release: September 17, 2019 • Please include in your listings/announcements

**NATIVE EARTH PERFORMING ARTS**  
announces the line-up of  
**Weesageechak Begins to Dance 32**  
**ANNUAL DEVELOPMENT FESTIVAL OF NEW INDIGENOUS WORK**  
**November 13-23, 2019 at Aki Studio**

**TORONTO, ON** – Native Earth Performing Arts is thrilled to announce the 32<sup>nd</sup> annual **Weesageechak Begins to Dance**. This year's festival invites emerging, mid-career, and established Indigenous artists from across Turtle Island and Australia to develop and showcase contemporary theatre, dance, and multi-disciplinary creations on **November 13 to 23, 2019 at Aki Studio (585 Dundas St East)**.

The festival opens with a music performance by contemporary roots songwriter **Mimi O'Bonsawin** (Abenaki), who was recently won Best Pop Album at the 2019 Indigenous Music Awards. Heavily influenced by her mixed heritage, her music embodies the powerful scenery of Northern Ontario and the beauty of its waters. Following O'Bonsawin's soulful performance is the staged reading of **Sonny's Way** by **Jimmy Blais** (Plains Cree), who originally developed the play at The National Theatre School's Indigenous Artist in Residence program. Inspired by acclaimed writer James Baldwin's *Sonny's Blues*, Blais' new play highlights the opioid crisis through the story of two brothers who try to reconnect after many years apart.

The first week of the festival features theatrical creations-in-development by artists who are new to Weesageechak. **Zach Running Coyote** (Nehiyaw) shares a Greyhound Vision Quest through the spirit world in a virtuosic folk musical performance of **Kohkum & me**. **Christopher Mejaki** (Ojibwe/Odawa) tells a compelling story about a young man living in poverty who turns to dealing drugs as a way of survival in **You the Guy?**, which was developed at Native Earth's 2019 Mskomini Giizis Summer Residency. Coming from Oregon, USA, **Ed Bourgeois** (Kanien'kehá:ka/ hunka Dakota) brings a story of an Indigenous man's quest to identify the roots of his mixed-blood heritage in **River of Blood**. Saskatchewan-based artist **Mark Dieter** (Saulteaux/Plains Cree) comes to the festival for the first time as a playwright with **A Path of Ghosts and Warriors**, which begins on the eve of a historical Land Claim decision which is soon shadowed by a long history of social poverty, band office politics, and cronyism.

Following the development at Paprika Festival's Indigenous Arts Program, a group of young playwrights bring their latest work to Weesageechak. After a successful reading of *S.O.S. Saving Our Sovereignty* at last year's Weesageechak, **Out of Sync Collective's Theresa Cutknife** (mixed Nehiyaw/Puerto Rican Iskwew) and **Jesse Wabegijig** (Ojibwe) return with **Kisâkihitin/Gizaagjin**, a non-linear narrative reimagining love within colonial spaces, highlighting the best parts of being Indigenous when the world is focused so much on trauma, hate, and the darkness of the world – "What does Indigenous Love look like in our world today?" Emerging theatre artist **Cole Forrest** (Ojibwe) brings an excerpt of **The Heels of Our Grandfathers**, a journey of Little Eagle, an Indigenous youth who takes themselves from reserve reject to full-fledged drag queen.

The week also includes a staged reading of **Tapwewin – Her Inquiry**, a response to the official government-established Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Under the auspice of The Crossing Theatre Company, the play is written by **Maria Campbell** (Cree-Métis), award-winning writer, playwright, and elder who is known for her memoir *Halfbreed*, a foundational piece of Indigenous literature in Canada; **Yvette Nolan** (Algonquin), acclaimed director, dramaturg, and former

Artistic Director of Native Earth; **Marilyn Poitras** (Métis), Director of the Native Law Centre at the University of Saskatchewan; and **Cheryl Troupe** (Métis), a Métis history scholar at the University of Saskatchewan.

Native Earth is honoured to have **BUNK #7** by the late and great **Larry Guno** (Nisga'a). Set to debut as part of Native Earth's 2005/06 season after four years of development, the play is now represented by **The Raven Collective** with **Yvette Nolan** (Algonquin) as the living writer, **Marianne Brorup Weston** as the director, and **Donna-Michelle St. Bernard** as the dramaturg. Based on a true story, **BUNK #7** highlights the riot at the Edmonton Residential School in 1959 when students revolted and put the building and staff on lock-down until the RCMP intervened.

The second week of the festival begins with two evenings of dynamic theatrical and multi-disciplinary workshop performances by emerging artists from the **Animikiig Creators Unit**. After two years of development, the Animikiig participants are offered an opportunity to showcase an extended workshop version of their work at Weesageechak. Currently in its tenth season, the program features **Jenn Forgie** (Métis) who weaves physicality, vocal expression, and breath in **Seven Pieces**, an interdisciplinary play about a woman's story of dissociation and disconnection. Two Spirit Non-Binary artist **Ty Sloane** (Anishinaabe/Chinese/Greek/Irish) presents **Hummingbird** which begins with a weekend of celebration and searching that soon turns into a weekend of tension and unexpected endings. After a successful run of her first new play *Finding Wolastoq Voice*, which premiered in Toronto as part of Native Earth's 2017/18 season and is part of the inaugural season of National Arts Centre's Indigenous Theatre, **Natalie Sappier** develops a multi-disciplinary story about **MAW**, a two-spirited being who travels different times, entering different bodies and minds to find answers about their mixed bloodline.

**Frances Koncan** (Anishinaabe/Slovene) brings **Women of the Fur Trade**, which explores the cultural inheritance of three 19th century women as they navigate the rapidly changing world of the Canadian fur trade. This comedic theatrical piece won Best New Play at the 2018 Toronto Fringe Festival and plans to premiere at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre as part of their 2019/20 season. **Quelemia Sparrow** (Musqueam Nation) highlights the battle at Stanley Park in **Women of Papiyek**, which forcibly removed the mixed race families of Papiyek and burnt their homes to the ground.

Following the Animikiig presentations, the festival features an evening of multi-disciplinary work by artists from across the world. Hailing from Australia, contemporary dancer and choreographer **Jasmin Sheppard** (Tagalak/Kurtjar/Irish/Chinese/Hungarian) brings her latest piece, **The Complications of Lyrebirds**, which uses the lyrebird as a metaphor to explore the very prerequisites of identity. The lyrebird adopts the calls of other birds to appear more attractive, but the authentic identity of the bird is no mimic – just like the external pressures thrust upon Indigenous people to prove their 'blackness' and adopt certain ways of talking and appearing.

Multi-disciplinary artist **Dakota Alcántaro-Camacho** (Matao/CHamoru/Ilokano/ European) comes from Seattle, USA, to share **MALI'E | Tâno' Uchan**, an embodied meditation on ancestral lineage, responsibility, and relationship to home/birthland. Converging oral history, hip hop and capoeira, Camacho imagines the traditional Matao practice of improvisatory collective singing. A familiar face of Weesageechak, **James Dallas Smith** (Mohawk) returns, not as a performer, but with his first full script. A comedic, fantastical, and historical theatre-musical, **Crossroads** follows two brothers who haven't spoken in fifteen years and are thrust into a magical place that shouldn't exist, forced to confront deities and mythical beings, their personal failings, and their own complicated history to save the world.

The festival ends with an exciting new initiative by the hit CBC podcast, **The Secret Life of Canada**. Co-hosted by **Falen Johnson** (Mohawk) and **Leah-Simone Bowen**, this alternative history podcast looks at

our nation's untold and under-told histories. With special guests, Johnson and Bowen present a live workshop performance featuring the terrible, hilarious, dirty, and wonderful history of this land with some pop cultural references from the early 2000's.

For the 2019/20 season, Native Earth proudly participates in **Climate Change Theatre Action (CCTA)**, a biennial initiative by the New York-based theatre company, The Arctic Cycle, which aims to foster non-partisan local and global conversations about climate change. CCTA commissions professional playwrights from all continents, several cultures, and Indigenous nations to write short climate change plays. Throughout this year's Weesageechak festival, the audience has the chance to witness four five-minute plays by Canada-based Indigenous playwrights: **Yolanda Bonnell, David Geary, Yvette Nolan, and Corey Payette.**

Native Earth is honoured to partner with **Buddies in Bad Times Theatre** once again to bring back the **2-Spirit Cabaret**, a celebration of the strength, beauty, and talent of queer and 2-Spirit Indigenous people. Sold-out for three years in a row, the fourth edition promises an electric line-up of artists showcasing music, dance, performance art, spoken word, and comedy, curated by award-winning theatre artist **Michaela Washburn** (Cree/English/Irish/French).

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**Weesageechak Begins to Dance 32**  
**Annual Development Festival of New Indigenous Work**  
**NOVEMBER 13-23, 2019 at AKI STUDIO**

**WEESAGEECHAK BEGINS TO DANCE 32 LINE-UP – WEEK ONE**

Wednesday November 13, 2019 @ 7:30pm

Music Performance by Mimi O’ Bonsawin  
*Sonny’s Way* by Jimmy Blais

Thursday November 14, 2019 @ 7:30pm

*You the Guy?* by Christopher Mejaki  
*The Heels of Our Grandfathers* by Cole Forrest  
*River of Blood* by Ed Bourgeois

*Tapwewin – Her Inquiry* by Maria Campbell, Yvette Nolan, Marilyn Poitras, Cheryl Troupe

Friday November 15, 2019 @ 7:30pm

*Kohkum & me* by Zach Running Coyote  
*A Path of Ghosts and Warriors* by Mark Dieter  
*Kisâkhitin/Gizaagin* by Theresa Cutknife & Jesse Wabegijig  
*BUNK #7* by Larry Guno, presented by The Raven Collective

Saturday November 16, 2019 @ 8:00pm | Buddies in Bad Times Theatre

**2-SPIRIT CABARET**

Curated by Michaela Washburn

Presented in partnership with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre

**WEESAGEECHAK BEGINS TO DANCE 32 LINE-UP – WEEK TWO**

Wednesday November 20, 2019 @ 7:30pm

**ANIMIKIIG NIGHT**

*Seven Pieces* by Jenn Forgie  
*Hummingbird* by Ty Sloane  
*MAW* by Natalie Sappier

Thursday November 21, 2019 @ 7:30pm

**ANIMIKIIG NIGHT**

*Women of the Fur Trade* by Frances Koncan  
*Women of Papiyek* by Quelemia Sparrow

Friday November 22, 2019 @ 7:30pm

*The Complications of Lyrebirds* by Jasmin Sheppard  
*MAL’E | Tâno’ Uchan* by Dakota Alcantara-Camacho  
*Crossroads* by James Dallas Smith

**Saturday November 23, 2019 @ 7:30pm**  
***THE SECRET LIFE OF CANADA – LIVE!***  
**Co-Hosted by Falen Johnson & Leah-Simone Bowen**

**Evening Tickets: \$15**  
**Festival Pass: \$60**

**Aki Studio**  
**Daniels Spectrum | 585 Dundas St East**  
**Box Office: 416-531-1402 or [boxoffice@nativeearth.ca](mailto:boxoffice@nativeearth.ca)**

**For more details: [www.nativeearth.ca/1920season/w32](http://www.nativeearth.ca/1920season/w32)**

**Connect with Native Earth!**

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**Native Earth Performing Arts** is Canada's premiere professional Indigenous performing arts company, dedicated to sharing stories of the Indigenous experience in Canada through theatre, dance, and multi-disciplinary arts. For 37 years, Native Earth has led the creation of the Indigenous canon in Canada, and has developed the work of over two hundred Indigenous artists through Weesageechak Begins to Dance, our annual development festival. Native Earth seeks to fulfill a community of artistic visions that are inclusive and reflective of the Indigenous community members who actively participate in the arts.



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