

TAKE FIVE

A Revealing Q & A
with...



Christine Sokaymoh Frederick



Christine Sokaymoh Frederick is artistic director of Alberta Aboriginal Performing Arts and producer of the annual Rubaboo Arts Festival, ED of the Dreamspeakers Film Festival. She is the first Indigenous Associate Artist of the Citadel Theatre and recent appointee to Vice Chair of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. She is an urban Aboriginal Cree-Métis and has thirty years of artistic experience in multiple disciplines and the 2016 Mayor's award for Excellence in Artistic Leadership.

1. When did you first think of yourself as an artist?

I might have first thought I was an artist when I was about 5 years old. I was a child performer in dance and acting in film and video, even represented Canada on the international stage a number of times. But I've probably doubted or questioned my artistry on a regular basis ever since then.

2. Who helped you develop your voice as an artist?

Everybody! My grandparents who were political and cultural leaders, my mother and father, teachers in school, in life, great actors and writers from the silver screen, folklore and live theatre have all helped me develop. But once I put my own artistry aside in order to advocate for Indigenous arts and worked to nurture and cultivate the arts community, I delved deeper into understanding how arts came to be. An elder told me that arts began as participatory practices embedded in our ceremonies meant to express our humanity to the Creator. It makes me think of my whole ancestry, the blood inside me of those who came before me with the strength of will to survive, those grandfathers and grandmothers whose prayers were so strong they are still on the breast of Mother Earth. The strength of my voice comes from them and extends to those that will come after me.

3. What's something that's inspired you this week?

The Airbnb where I am staying is littered with amazing books in every room and when I was flipping through them I was inspired by the dedication pages. We don't know about who they are or why the book is dedicated to them. It's so anonymous and mysterious and yet we understand they were important, maybe even vital to the author. I was inspired to start writing about dedicatees.

4. What's your favourite restaurant in the city to visit?

I haven't had the chance to get to many restaurants, but I really enjoyed Frankies Diner on Queen Street. It was exactly what I needed after a long hard week of rehearsals and production to unwind with fellow artists over some great burgers and a few glasses of wine.

5. What do you want to see more of on Toronto stages?

I hope this isn't vague, but I know it is not too much to ask. I'd like to see across Canada more generosity of spirit towards Aboriginal and Indigenous writers and performers, for the time and space to redress the cultural and capacity deprivation we've experienced through the human rights violations of colonialism. Our cultures were criminalized through the Indian Act and although there have been amendments, there has been intergenerational loss. I'd like to see more mainstream theatres and organizations supporting our work and projects instead of competing for "Reconciliation" funds through projects that sometimes further appropriation and exploitation. End the onus of having to justify our heritage or blood quantum to meet expectations against measures which are often based in colonialist structures. For example demanding an artist declare connection to a reserve does not validate their heritage, their ancestry or their work, when reserves were formed from the segregation imparted by the Indian Act and connections to family, community and culture were stripped by the Residential schools and the foster care system. Such practices violate and distract from our rights to reclaim our heritage. We redress and rebuild culture when we practice art. I want to feel the expressions of humanity that is within and evolving the people.