

Indigenizing the Music Industry

By Sara Aldred / Calgary Journal

On Cluster Stars, Sandra Sutter's debut album, she explores her Indigenous heritage by telling the stories of others, and hopes the record will inspire Indigenous youth to pursue their own dreams as well.

As a Métis musician, Sutter performs songs related to past and current Indigenous issues to better understand her roots.

"I want to honour where I come from, that's where I feel connected," says Sutter.

Adopted into a non-Indigenous family as a baby, Sutter has always felt different than her siblings.



"I was lucky because my family were very good people, very down to earth. And we had a very close group of family members, cousins and relatives and all of those we were able to spend a lot of time with. But as loved as a person is, and I was very lucky in the situation I was in, I just never felt like I belonged. I was always attracted to the land."

Later on in life, Sutter wanted to find her Indigenous roots. Her adoptive parents were supportive in helping her find her birth family. Unfortunately, since her mother wasn't in the birth registry, and her father had died before she turned 18, she was unable to connect with her biological parents. However, with the help of a friend, Sutter was able to locate members of her extended biological family.

For Sutter, her Métis background has had a large influence when it comes to music, so it naturally flows together for her. Sutter's album, Cluster Stars, was written to help bring an understanding to Indigenous issues and help people see through the eyes of an Indigenous woman.

"I think it's in our heartbeat, the drums replicate our mother's heartbeat, our heartbeat and the heartbeat of mother earth," says Sutter.

With organizations such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Idle No More and court cases involving Tina Fontaine and Colten Boushie, there's a lot of coverage for conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. When Sutter wrote Cluster Stars, her vision was acceptance and ultimately peace between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

"I chose the songs that dealt with specific issues that impact Indigenous people: the 60's scoop, murdered and missing women, veterans, and how women end up feeling like we're not enough. And nature, you know, the nature of the people. So all of those things that impact us, we need to find a positive resolution for them."

Sutter adds she still experiences occasional racism and despite being a confident woman, it still hurts.

"I think people are afraid of what they don't know and Indigenous people don't see the world the same way as non-Indigenous people see it. Our experience is not the same, but we have so many gifts to give to other cultures." -Sandra Sutter

Tweela Nepoose, Sutter's friend, says that when she first heard a snippet of the new album, her eyes lit up.

"She tells those stories and those songs like everyone else, like any other artist does; but she tells it from an Indigenous heritage. She has a finesse of bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people," Nepoose says.

Kevin Watson, another friend of Sutter's, explains how she's inspired by her own culture.

"I saw that kind of evolution and growth in Sandra, to discovering her roots, to discovering her Métis heritage, and then putting that together with the musical and lyrical talents that she always had."

Indigenous youth are treasured within Indigenous communities, as are elders, but for quite different reasons. Sutter says that youth are the future of their communities and she's very excited from what she sees from young people today because they're more likely to become successful in their careers. She adds that having success allows Indigenous youth to return to their communities and contribute back to the wellness of their homes.

"I get to talk to youth, and there's nothing more amazing in our world-the potential of youth and their closeness to the Creator. They get to experience the world and create something beautiful and new."

By increasing Indigenous representation in mainstream media, Sutter and other Indigenous artists have paved the way for Indigenous youth to be more accepted in society, inspiring them to pursue their own dreams.

By having songs that speak about Indigenous issues, Sutter helps people understand the pain Indigenous people have gone through for hundreds of years. The bridge she speaks of between Indigenous and non-Indigenous is being built, slowly but surely.

"That message has to speak to all of us because social issues that impact Indigenous peoples, they impact everyone. It's like the talk of truth and reconciliation, a conversation for all of us."

Sutter's album, Cluster Stars, is available to stream on Spotify, iTunes, and YouTube.