

Indigenous Musician Leaves Audience Speechless in Performance at National Arts Centre

The National Arts Centre erupted with applause as two influential Canadian artists took the stage on Sept. 13, building a highly recognized space for Indigenous art.

A spotlight was placed on the conductor of the NAC Orchestra, Alexander Shelley, who took a bow and dedicated a song to Indigenous communities across Canada. A red light flooded the stage and poured over the audience as Jeremy Dutcher ran towards the piano sitting center stage.

The audience gave a standing ovation at the initial sight of Dutcher, to which his response was excitement and surprise. “Hello,” he said, “Wow, that’s an orchestra.”

Dutcher’s powerful vocals and intent piano skills drew the audience in, stopping fans from taking a breath to refrain from interrupting his talent. His ability to work with the orchestra provided a sound that confronted the audience with Indigenous language and culture.

Dutcher’s message was clear in his music. Indigenous culture is everywhere and giving Canadians access to Indigenous art is essential to boosting their community.

Indigenous and diverse people populated the audience, creating an environment of Indigenous art for Indigenous people. However, Dutcher’s message was aimed towards other people, beyond Indigenous communities. The concert could only appeal to a specific demographic given the expense of tickets to a concert of this calibre.

Nafshiya Haylestrom, a Dutcher fan of five years, commented on the accessibility of arts in Ottawa. “Music comes from a place of, like, bringing people together,” she said, “So I like the idea of it being open to everyone.”

Haylestrom urged that art in Ottawa be more available to the community at large. “There’s not really that many fully accessible music,” Haylestrom said, “We need more accessible and more diverse.”

Dutcher provides a deeper insight into Indigenous national truths through his music and conversations with the audience. Open accessibility allows a wider range of people to be exposed to these truths.

“There were six Indigenous people killed by police in the last two weeks,” Dutcher said, confronting the audience with a harsh reality. Jeremy Dutcher was referencing six Indigenous deaths caused by RCMP and municipal police across five provinces. Hoss Lightning, Tammy Bateman, Jason West, and Steven ‘Iggy’ Dedam were included in the six. Dutcher went on to play a piece dedicated to the lives lost, moving the audience to tears.

Dutcher closed the concert with *Honor Song*, produced with powerful and classical Indigenous sounds, leaving the audience in awe.

