



Wild Mint Arts

Indigenous Protocols, Terminology and Concepts

For: Nimihitowin!, They Carry Us, Powwow Mash-UP, Tsiiniiksiin Ahkositapiyo’p paskaan, and Iyikiikkaosit

This is an overview of some terminology and concepts that may be encountered around Indigenous dance. It is by no means meant to be an all-inclusive list but rather an introduction of topics for further research.

While terminology and concepts can be difficult to discuss and navigate, it is important to learn about key issues, topics, and histories especially when in relationship with Indigenous people and dance. Learning about Indigenous topics is an ongoing process. It is important not to avoid important dialogue surrounding Indigenous topics in fear of not knowing or being ‘wrong’; rather approach the conversation in a respectful manner and be open to learning.

Terminology in the protocols section will be explained in the terminology section below.

Protocols for the show

Protocols for Indigenous dance and song vary by nation, region, and family. Every Indigenous group will have their own protocols and guidelines for working within their cultures. It is important to ask each group what their protocols and wishes are for their performances.

The dancers in Wild Mint Arts are Cree, Blackfoot, Stoney Nakoda, and Anishinaabe. The shows come from Blackfoot (Kainai), Cree (Cowessess) and Stoney Nakoda knowledges.

- Wild Mint Arts uses smudge as an artistic practice preparation. The songs and dances in the show come from long traditions within the cultures. Indigenous dancers hold a responsibility and accountability to our communities as well as maintaining the roots of

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the dances alive for future generations. Smudging helps the dancers ground themselves and brings the dancers to the work in a good way. Please see the attached Smudging Document (Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance) for more context and history.

- We invite all theater staff, FOH, Techs and Stage manager to join us in the opening smudge circle when new people arrive (dancers, staff, etc).
- Regalia for the show is personal to the dancers and each item holds significance to the individual wearer. Each dancer has worked hard to gather, sew, and purchase items to wear.
- Some items have been handed down over 100 years, or have been gifted through ceremony, or by family. The regalia should only be handled by the dancers with Wild Mint Arts or with explicit permission from the directors or dancers.
- Please ask before touching any dancer's hair, regalia, fans, arms, shoulders, bodies, weapons, hoops, flutes, or other items.
- Hoops for Hoop Dance, Spears, feather fans, shields, sashes, sticks, hats, and other items are also considered regalia and should be handled only by the dancers/members of the company.
- Instruments such as drums, rattles and flutes also hold significance and should not be touched or handled by anyone but the dancers/person who is using them.
- In Cree/Blackfoot culture, Children and Elders are treated with respect. Youth are often part of the show, and are responsible for their own regalia, changes, and special items. Theater staff should be aware that there are youth in the show. Please do not address the children or ask question before, during, or after the show. If an issue arises with a youth, please talk to the Directors (Elijah Wells or Virginia Sparvier-Wells) first.
- Any questions, concerns, notes, tech issues, should be directed to Virginia Sparvier-Wells or Elijah Wells. The dancers are focused on taking care of the regalia, set and each other prior to, during, and after a show.
- The Land acknowledgment should be done by festival staff during the opening. Virginia Sparvier-Wells will also acknowledge Indigenous locality at the show opening.
- No filming, video, photos allowed outside of official Wild Mint Arts and the official _____ media unless previously agreed upon. Please inform the FOH team of this to help manage this expectation.
- Media inquiries should be directed to Virginia Sparvier-Wells.

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Terminology

The terminology section has been borrowed from The Dancers of Damelahamid (2018) from their protocols and technical rider document. Some amendments have been made for specifically Cree, Blackfoot and Stoney Nakoda dance. Terminology is from 'Indigenous Foundations' website¹

Why does terminology matter: The history of relationships between the Canadian state and Aboriginal peoples is complex and has oftentimes been paternalistic and damaging. As a result, terminology can represent something more than just a word. It can represent certain colonial histories and power dynamics. On the other hand, terms can empower populations when the people have the power to self-identify. It is important to recognize the potential these words may hold.

Aboriginal: The term "Aboriginal" refers to the first inhabitants of Canada, and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. This term came into popular usage in Canadian contexts after 1982, when Section 35 of the Constitution Act defined the term as such.

First Nations: "First Nation" is a term used to describe Aboriginal peoples of Canada who are ethnically neither Métis nor Inuit. This term came into common usage in the 1970s and '80s and generally replaced the term "Indian," although unlike "Indian," the term "First Nation" does not have a legal definition. "First Nation" can also refer to a band, a reserve-based community, or a larger tribal grouping and the status Indians who live in them.

Inuit: This term refers to specific groups of people generally living in the far north who are not considered "Indians" under Canadian law.

Métis: The term Métis refers to a collective of cultures and ethnic identities that resulted from unions between Aboriginal and European people in what is now Canada. It is sometimes used as a general term to refer to people of mixed ancestry, whereas in a legal context, "Métis" refers to descendants of specific historic communities.

Indian: The term "Indian" refers to the legal identity of a First Nations person who is registered under the Indian Act. The term "Indian" should be used only when referring to a First Nations person with status under the Indian Act, and only within its legal context. Aside from this specific legal context, the term "Indian" in Canada is considered outdated and may be considered offensive due to its complex and often idiosyncratic colonial use in governing identity through this legislation and a myriad of other distinctions (i.e., "treaty" and "non-

¹ "Indigenous Foundations." UBC Vancouver: First Nations and Indigenous Studies.
<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/>

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treaty,” etc.). In the United States, however, the term “American Indian” and “Native Indian” are both in current and common usage.

Indigenous: Indigenous is a term used to encompass a variety of Aboriginal groups. It is most frequently used in an international, transnational, or global context. This term came into wide usage during the 1970s when Aboriginal groups organized transnationally and pushed for greater presence in the United Nations (UN).

Native: “Native” is a general term that refers to a person or thing that has originated from a particular place. The term “native” does not denote a specific Aboriginal ethnicity (such as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit). In Canada, the term “Aboriginal” or “Indigenous” is generally preferred to “Native.” Some may feel that “native” has a negative connotation and is outdated.

Ceremony: Ceremony is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous culture. Ceremonies, just like Indigenous people, are diverse. It is important to be respectful of an artist’s cultural practice. People may want privacy and some ceremonies may not be meant to share publicly. Some artists may conduct ceremonies prior to their performance, for example smudging, prayer, etc. Some of these may require support from the presenter and venue, for example providing a quiet room to pray or a space that can accommodate smoke from smudging.

Contemporary/ traditional: There is a misconception that there is a binary of “contemporary” vs. “traditional” Indigenous dance. Distinguishing between the two can be difficult and complex. It is important to talk to the artists about how they define their work as it varies greatly between artists. Wild Mint Arts weaves traditional, contemporary and the existence in-between in their work. Wild Mint Arts has the permissions and foundational knowledge of their cultures to do this.

Indigenous performance: Indigenous performance is an integral part of many Indigenous people’s identities and communities. Through performance, Indigenous people embody songs, stories, dances, languages, histories, and ceremonies. Indigenous performance has historically, and often still is, seen through the colonial gaze. It is often seen as a spectacle that is purely created and enacted for entertaining the audience, however Indigenous performance is often created with greater intention. Performance is both personal and public. For many Indigenous people it is a process of connecting/ reconnecting with their identities, communities, land, language, etc. It is also a form of expressing histories that are specific to that person and/or community and expressing shared histories of Indigenous people, with the goal of sharing and teaching the audience. Indigenous performance celebrates cultural resiliency and resurgence.

Oral traditions: Oral traditions are teachings that are passed down from one generation to another by way of storytelling, song, dance, and other oral means. Oral traditions are valid, relevant, and are the foundation of Indigenous cultures.

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Pan-Indigeneity: Pan-Indigeneity is the grouping of all Indigenous people as one, assuming they are one culture and one people. While there are many similarities between Indigenous people, grouping all Indigenous people as one is inaccurate and erases diversity and unique cultures. Grouping the more than 60 distinct First Nations (in Canada alone) and their unique languages into one does not contribute to a deeper understanding of the diversity of Indigenous cultures. It is respectful to ask artists how they self-identify and then use the terminology that they use to avoid pan-Indigeneity.

Protocol: Protocols are an important aspect of complex traditional systems of governance that exist within Indigenous cultures. Although these systems have been disrupted, people have maintained these ways of working and being together. Indigenous artists are constantly required to navigate these bodies of knowledge when they create and share their work. There are often tensions around the discussion of protocol which can result in misinterpretations of the word as rigid ‘rules’ rather than guiding principles that are grounded in respect for Indigenous ways of being in today’s world. Cultural protocols are complex and different among Nations, communities, and families.²

Public/Private sharing: While performance is public in nature, there may be some things an artist will not want shared widely. This may include not allowing photography or video of their performance. What may work for one Indigenous performance group will not be the same for a different Indigenous performance group.

Regalia/costumes: Unless specifically told by the artist, do not call what they are wearing a “costume” – it is regalia. The term costume refers to something you dress up as in a temporary informal moment. Regalia is strongly connected to identity and is a representation of who Indigenous people are. It is important that you ask before you touch or take a picture of someone’s regalia. Some forms of regalia you may see in Blackfoot, Cree, Stoney Nakoda dance are:

- Dog Soldier Hat: A hat made from eagle feathers worn by traditional dancers.
- Roaches: head pieces made from porcupine hair and deer hair. Often with eagle feathers or prairie chicken feathers inside.
- Hoops: Hoops are not the same as hoola hoops, and should not be referred to as such.
- Face Paint : Paint is sacred, and is applied with meanings to the dancers.

Stereotypes: Colonialism is a structure of domination that deploys certain ideas onto mainstream society about Indigenous people. Misconceptions around Indigenous performance often revolve around the notion of “authenticity.” This idea of an “authentic Native person” is rooted in a deep, ongoing, and complex history of colonization that is driven by expectations of what and who Indigenous people are. Rather, Indigenous people are self-defining and diverse people which translates into their unique dance practices. It is extremely important not to

² Proceedings of the Cultural Protocols & the Arts Forum. First Peoples’ Cultural Council. March 3-4, 2015. Penticton, BC

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impose assumptions of who an Indigenous person or group are and what their dance practice should look like.

Territorial acknowledgment: It should be common practice to acknowledge the people and territory where you are. A territorial acknowledgement is commonly done before an event. If possible, it is good to get local elder to do the territorial acknowledgement. It is also best to consult the local Indigenous communities on how they want to be represented and acknowledged. Territorial acknowledgements are important for several reasons: it recognizes the long history of the land that Indigenous people have been on since time immemorial, and it gives visibility to Indigenous people who are often erased through dispossession of land and development. Some words that you may hear around territorial acknowledgement:

- Traditional territory: recognizes lands traditionally used and/or occupied by Indigenous people.
- Ancestral territory: recognizes land that is handed down from generation to generation since time immemorial
- Unceded: refers to land that was not ceded to the Crown by a treaty or other agreement.
- Treaty: refers to land that was designated by the crown for use by Indigenous people
- Reserve: land allocated to Indigenous peoples based on “head-count” at time of treaty signing, and then used to control population.

Witness / audience: Within many Indigenous practices, the role of audience member is that they are a witness to the event taking place. This means that they are all responsible for actively listening, watching, and remembering what took place.

I, _____, confirm that I have read this document and have shared it with FOH and other venue employees/volunteers/leadership who may be working with Wild Mint Arts and their performers.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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