

For

Zitkála-Šá

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Zitkála-Šá

By

Raven Chacon

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For

Laura Ortman
Cheryl L'Hirondelle
Suzanne Kite
Barbara Croall
Jacqueline Wilson
Autumn Chacon
Heidi Senungetuk
Ange Loft
Joy Harjo
Carmina Escobar
Olivia Shortt
Candice Hopkins
Buffy Sainte-Marie

Dedicated to all
my grandmothers

To the Witches of the Night when no man, no man hath seen you who carve on pipestone at night. At night so keen.... Oh leave no pictures of our braves. Their forms let not, let not us see. Let not us see with the fate. Do not come. Do not come to enchant our braves. Do not chip on the cliff. Oh make not a picture of fate. Stay away. Stay away. Oh! make not a picture of fate. Stay away, lest we die away, away. Make no picture of our braves; stay away.

—“*To the Witches of the Night*,”
Act III, The Sun Dance Opera (1913)

In 2005, I was a member of a small cohort of musicians and composers self-named the First Nations Composer Initiative. This group was led by prominent Rosebud Lakota singer Georgia Wettlin-Larsen, and our purpose was simply to convene, to learn that each other and our work existed, to discuss and assess our positions in the field of so-called contemporary serious music, and to find ways to expand our small community of North American Indigenous composers. The late revered Quapaw composer Louis Ballard, also part of our cohort, was recognized as the American Indian who paved the way for a Native presence in the field. As he sat and convened with us, I began to wonder: Surely, there must have been others before him—American Indians composing in the language of Western classical notation and using the instruments associated with the orchestra. If they existed, did their music survive?

It was in this search that I came upon mention of a Yankton Dakota woman named Zitkála-Šá, born in 1876 and living four decades into the next century. Her biography as a composer was little known. An opera, titled *The Sun Dance Opera* (1913), was linked to her name, but there was minimal writing about the work. As I researched, I learned that Zitkála-Šá (whose name translates to “Red Bird” and was also known under the white name of Gertrude Simmons and a married name of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) was not only a compelling figure of American Indian history but a commanding presence in all

corners of the country in the early twentieth century. Zitkála-Šá was a violinist and a composer as well as a poet, a short story writer, a political activist, a critical essayist, a music teacher, a language translator, and, importantly, a trusted leader to many tribal communities still fighting the encroachment of the United States of America.

Zitkála-Šá was born and raised on the Yankton Indian Reservation in South Dakota and sent to a missionary boarding school in Indiana while still a child. In this separation from her elders and community, she found her traditional ways gradually being replaced with the inverted protocols and imbalances of the white world. But in boarding school, she also gained the knowledge and skill of performing the violin and the piano and the reading and writing of black dots on five lines. She was forced to learn English, but her decoding of her kidnappers’ language led to a practice of writing narrative fiction and autobiography, poetry, essays, and political speeches, some of which were published in national periodicals (the *Atlantic Monthly*, now the *Atlantic*, and *Harper’s Monthly*, now *Harper’s Magazine*) by the time she was twenty-five. Her writing is fierce. It is not the privilege of retrospect we have today when we critique the early church, or residential schools, or other violent institutions of yesteryear; instead, it reads as though written from the point of view of one clawing their way out from inside the stomach of the beast.

By 1915, Zitkála-Šá was known nationally as an activist and political advocate for Native peoples. She became associated with the Society of American Indians and its championing of citizenship and voting rights, later co-founding and leading the National Council of American Indians (which later served as the basis for the National Congress of American Indians), bringing awareness to Congress of injustices suffered by Native peoples. She later formed the Indian Welfare Committee in 1924. Her work set new benchmarks for American Indian rights, resonating as new policy influencing future changes in reservation and urban Native education, tribal sovereignty, environmental law,

and, most importantly, broad advocacy for all the tribes in the US and beyond. Zitkála-Šá facilitated internal pan-Indian political relations—which had never been organized before—all while continuing a creative writing and musical practice and maintaining a family.

I still could not find her music, so I visited the archives at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, and studied the *Sun Dance Opera* score stewarded by Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. I was compelled to compose a musical dedication to her exceptional life, to an artist who demonstrated direct action in all the involuntary spaces where we, as Native people, find ourselves. I began an orchestral work, for forty-three instruments, a composition and score striving to be capable of honoring the immense work and extraordinary life of this woman. I continued my research into her biography and began to understand that Zitkála-Šá’s life was not without controversy. Her advocacy and stances on voting rights, religious freedoms, and residential schools were the source of some critique from Native people in her time, and still today, when benefiting from the distance of retrospect. I understood that the gains Zitkála-Šá fought to bring Native people can be considered an “opting in,” becoming a collaborator of the country that has tried to exterminate us. I questioned if the symphonic form is the appropriate expression for a Native man to tell the complicated story of how Zitkála-Šá navigated the early twentieth century.

From where we sit today, my questions became: Has the story changed? Have the barriers of Red Bird’s day been eliminated between then and now? Have our efforts in the continued fight against injustices become clearer and more unified than in Zitkála-Šá’s years? I began to think about friends and colleagues—Native musicians, composers, and scholars—who are doing important work in the field of new music. They all happen to be women, and, additionally, each has other, far-reaching extensions to their work, including education, activism, research, and leadership in their respective communities. I began conversations

with each of them about how they, as Indigenous artists, are navigating the twenty-first century. I decided that the proper dedication to Zitkála-Šá was to compose new works for these musicians, composers, and scholars instead.

These new scores are a kind of portraiture, not merely showing who these contemporary figures are but acting more as graphic, musical transcriptions of how I describe the work, music, and otherwise of these thirteen artists. These portraits of Laura, Cheryl, Suzanne, Barbara, Jacqueline, Autumn, Heidi, Ange, Joy, Carmina, Olivia, Candice, and Buffy do not endeavor to be instructive or prescriptive, although they are opportunities to perform. They can be an invitation to retrace the steps of their subjects, as many of them incorporate a feedback loop of learning within their design. When listening to and analyzing the music of *The Sun Dance Opera*, one grasps how Zitkála-Šá could not notate the sounds of her traditional songs within classical notation systems. The limits of that written system cannot relay the information of the complex keys and modes of the sung Native voice, nor the fluidity of time inherent in Indigenous musics. The diatonic staff reduces all tribal music to an Indianist sound, easier digestible to white ears. A graphic score can resist the history of Western notation, and with that can eliminate normalizations and assump-

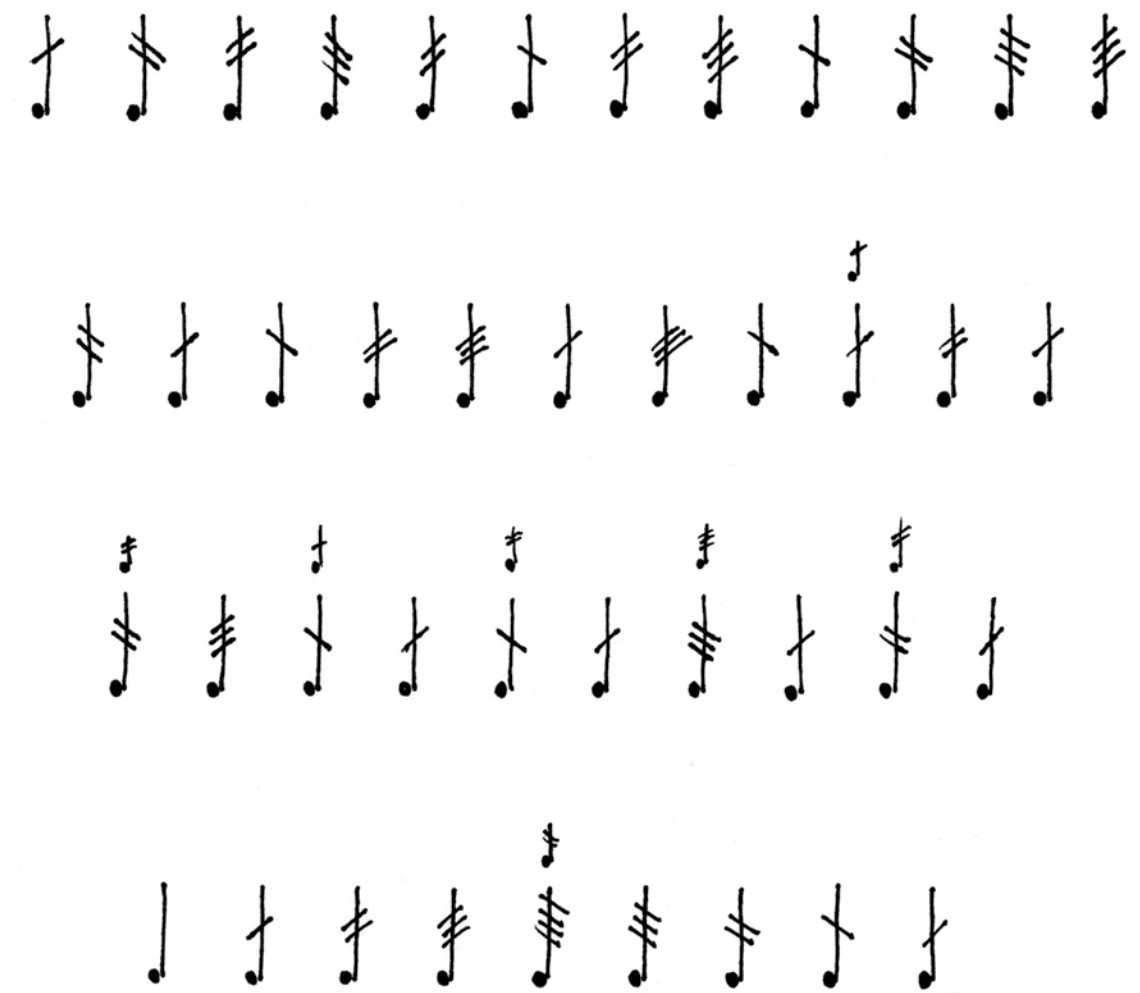
tions of time that influence how we see the universe and whoever created us. Each score needed to fit onto one letter-sized sheet of page, as this is the physical form that also contained most of Zitkála-Šá's work, be it poetry, music, prose, or letters of legal petition to the federal government.

In these scores, one may see a map, guiding us to worldviews that never doubted that women could be leaders. In many of these prompts, there is a duality of identity, becoming an obligation to perform two (or more) actions at once, at different speeds, and sometimes actions that are physically in conflict with the others. On these pages, there is a filtering, a decoding, a mediating of speed, and a regenerating of what was lost. By following these lines, paths of agency are acknowledged and celebrated. These lines and circles and arrows and dots request that their performers have a clear aim, yet as scores provide an opportunity and potential to radiate and wander. Everyone who encounters this set of scores is invited to perform them, to better understand where they have been and where they are headed, and to consider all the sites of conflict they are placed between.

If we see Zitkála-Šá as a woman who oscillated between two worlds, the question becomes: *What is the sound of this oscillation?*

For

Laura Ortman



For Laura Ortman

For any stringed instrument

At each note of any duration, activate the string at the indicated speed (example: tremolo bowing, plucking, picking).

The direction of tremolo slashes also indicates one of two contrasting ways to embellish or approach the performing of the note.

When there is a smaller note above another note, activate the string in an even more different way at its indicated speed.

Or you may perform a secondary action at those times, related or unrelated to the playing of the instrument.

Arenas
of Waves

Arenas of first waves and winds' vibrations danced with me first. They ignite the desire to channel places in the world where I attune myself to what is going on, where we come from. These are the nurturing aspects of almost always being a visitor, almost always an invited guest in different parts of this world; nature's significance leads the way.

Not knowing how long it will last while wishing the wave's survival...

If I play without disturbance in a long passage of quiet to accompany its twirling drift, I go along with all its other passengers...if there are others. It's so quiet that I look around. Focusing on the passageways creates the next level of understanding. I will follow this for the rest of my life.

The movement of water's presence, its tides and floods, mirrors my experiences with smoke and wind. I whistle in sync with its jagged patterns, marks left by the wind that reveal its path.

I perform from the inside out:
Ever-living on dreams of currents from all the rivers as well as the moon's bright active nightlife come alive when

it's time to perform. There are long perspectives that round up when I rosin my violin; this is where I give my take on the lay of the land. Creating sonic reflections of so much that flies, falls, or settles is love.

Sandblasting, carving, and their debris have so many repetitive energies. Worn in by direct desert sun and wind of my homeland, the night settles its shadow on each granule of sand. This contains the up and down of the violin bow in a vista of light and dark that shapes its own echoes.

I have lived decades of city life under the same moon. There's smoke between us. Shiny dark blues, crumpled sweaty skirts, and botched-up heeled dress shoes on their last season. Stockings with burrs and ripped-up pockets for lighters, drink tickets, broken light bulbs, and guitar picks. I can't see anymore; I close my eyes and picture why we've gathered.

A heavy weight is settling. All the energy of its attunement towards darkness or fire on the inside provides its hum. The atmosphere of this foundation speaks worlds to the creatures who experience it all the time.

—Laura Ortman

For Buffy Sainte-Marie

Assign your voice and two instruments
each to one of the three lines. Also assign
any meaning, effect or parameter to those lines.

Perform the lines, stepping up the effect or parameter at the
indicated intervals. Take a voluntary or involuntary break in the
middle. The meaning or parameters of the lines may change after the break.

danger is or to find allies. Olivia Shortt plays the saxophone, but their work is better described as artistic community organizing. Olivia tells me that an Anishinaabe philosophy, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, has guided these collaborations. The teachings are: Debwewin (Truth), Zoongidi'ewin (Courage), Manaaji'idiwin (Respect), Gwayakwaadiziwin (Integrity), Zaa-gi'idiwin (Love), Nibwaakaawin (Wisdom), and Dabasendizowin (Humility). These seven teachings are represented by seven of the arrows in the score. They are to be interpreted as different timbral or effect changes. I wonder if there are timbres of *humility* or *courage*. That is for the performers of this score to discover. Four of the arrows are reserved to acknowledge the four cardinal directions, and this provides potential moments of calm and rest and care for the player.

The format of the solo score cannot support an Indigenous woman's idea of leadership; it can be said that this composition is not technically a solo, since an audience is required for reciprocating feedback and providing cues—glimpses into their essences. It can be a survival skill to read the room, not just the people within but everything the Creator has placed in one's presence. Olivia has provided all the information we need within our view. Writing this score and talking to Olivia reinforced my understanding that our traditional teachings, such as those of the Grandfather, are crucial for this feedback loop to be sustained. This score prompts new relations, bridging knowledge of the previous ones to a new collaborator. The performer commits to listening, learning, and then reciting back to say, “I hear you.”

On Research

Candice and I talk about sound all day, and it is good practice for us both, because sound and music are immensely difficult entities to describe and explain, at least in the English language. This is not a piece about knowing languages—it is the opposite. It is about *not knowing*, and so utilizing the tools of research to expand one's

knowledge of the world. This is the only score in the series where actual sound may not be realized, though it does provide moments for the spoken voice to reveal itself, providing insight into the subjectivity of the speaker themselves—the way they treat the voids between the annunciation and translation of the initial single word.

This score dreams about how we travel, and how this aligns with our own expansion of knowledge. Being in motion, to the point of arriving in a foreign place, then returning back home to the language of origin describes many of our tribal ways: this is the method in which we adopt new tools to improve upon our own. This is also how art and music develop their own regional styles. It is how our tribes grow. At the same time, this score is a process of decolonization; a recognition of the research necessary for participating in this interconnected network of languages and knowledge sharing. The performed score demonstrates that Turtle Island could not remain an island. We—Native people—are part of a broader global society. These are our tools. Language is like music; it exists because a group of listeners and speakers claim it together; it is also a highly personal path of discovery, formed into one's own interpretative communication.

In this score, the words and their various and multiple meanings become bridges. Here, the concept of reducing the idea or going backward is not a regression. The score's concluding prompt contains ambiguity, which functions as a means to consider what your mother tongue is and what it means to return home. If the dominant language is a place where one lands, understand that this is not a justification of the colonial but rather a metaphor of where we have been forced to drift.

On Sacrifice

This score is about Buffy, but it is also about my mother. At first glance, it appears to be the easiest of the series to perform. Upon reading the instructions, it can become intimidating, once one comprehends the burden of what they

are setting out to accomplish. To realize the score, there is an obligation to modulate the sound of two instruments while singing.

When I think of Buffy Sainte-Marie, someone who I have seen and heard for so long a time that she could be a relative, two instruments are present: voice and guitar. My favorite of Buffy's works is her 1969 album *Illuminations*, where her voice and her guitar are joined by electronic synth. This addition of a foreign sonic element reminds me of how, outside of one's work, there are other presences, responsibilities, and obligations, other people who are listening, learning from your voice, and following in response. When I think of my mother, I think of her sacrifices to raise her children as one path, and the reminder of her own dreams as another. Somewhere in between juggling these two moving, expanding paths is the outcome of the work that has mediated these parts of her life. And so this score was drawn as three parallel, ascending, stepped lines, suggesting harmonized music in motion, always sounding, changing, and evolving, on a direct path to ascension and perpetual crescendo.

Then there is a gap. Either a pause chosen by the performer, a hiatus of rest, or an imposed interruption either by the ill will of an enemy force or the plan of the Creator herself. I think of the suppression of Buffy's work in the 1970s due to her outspoken advocacy for Indigenous people, leading to being blacklisted by the music industry. Also embodied in this break is every Native woman who has ever dodged a bullet, and their finding the space to heal.

After this pause, the score's aim is that the work continues as though the suspension had never happened, no reduction of voice. When it returns, a change has occurred: it is stronger, fiercer, louder than before. The other instruments must now match this shift and remain in support, because there are no more stops.

Scores
Written for

Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache) is a soloist musician and composer creating across multiple platforms and is versed in Apache violin, piano, electric guitar, keyboards, and amplified violin. She has collaborated with artists such as Tony Conrad, Jock Soto, Raven Chacon, Nanobah Becker, Okkyung Lee, Martin Bisi, Jeffrey Gibson, Caroline Monnet, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Martha Colburn, and In Defense of Memory. She has performed at countless venues across the US, Canada, and Europe including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Stone residency at the New School, New York; the New Museum, New York; imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, Toronto; the Toronto Biennial of Art; and the Centre Pompidou, Paris. In 2008, Ortman founded the Coast Orchestra, an all-Indigenous orchestral ensemble. Most recently, Ortman was the recipient of the 2022 United States Artists Fellowship and 2022 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists and was a participating artist in the 2019 Whitney Biennial.

Cheryl L'Hirondelle (Cree / Halfbreed) is an award-winning interdisciplinary artist, singer-songwriter, and critical thinker whose Indigenous family roots are from Paskachase First Nation and Kikino Metis Settlement, Alberta. Her

work investigates and articulates a dynamism of nêhiyawin (Cree worldview) in contemporary time-place, incorporating Indigenous language(s), audio, video, VR, the olfactory, sewn objects, music, audience and user participation, and community engagement to create immersive environments and events toward “radical inclusion.” As a songwriter, L'Hirondelle's focus is on both sharing nêhiyawêwin (Cree language) and Indigenous and contemporary song forms and personal narrative songwriting as “survivance” methodologies. In 2021, L'Hirondelle was awarded a Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Art.

Kite a.k.a. Suzanne Kite is an Oglala Lakota performance artist, visual artist, and composer raised in Southern California, with an MFA from Milton Avery Graduate School, Bard College, in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, and is a PhD candidate at Concordia University in Montreal and Research Assistant for the Initiative for Indigenous Futures. Her research is concerned with contemporary Lakota ontologies through research-creation, computational media, and performance practice. Recently, Kite has been developing a body interface for movement performances, carbon fiber sculptures, and immersive video and sound installations. Currently, she is a 2019 Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar

and a 2020 Tulsa Artist Fellow. Barbara (Croall) Assiginaak is an award-winning composer, musician, and educator of the Odawa First Nation. Apart from her music for Native flutes and for voice in the Anishinaabe oral-tradition way, her music for soloists, chamber ensembles, orchestra, film, theater, dance, and interdisciplinary performance has been presented in the United States, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the UK. In 1999, she founded ERGO to promote works by emerging composers, women composers, and composers of color and Indigenous heritage. She is also Founder and Director of Women of the Four Directions. Croall is frequently a Distinguished Composer, Visitor, and Lecturer at universities, and she regularly works with Indigenous youth and elders in schools.

Yakama bassoonist
Dr. Jacqueline Wilson is an active performer, pedagogue, collaborator, and advocate. She currently serves as Assistant Professor of Bassoon at Washington State University, Pullman, and as Principal Bassoon of the Washington-Idaho Symphony, and she is on the faculty of the Lutheran Summer Music Academy, Valparaiso, IN. As an active soloist and chamber musician, she regularly presents recitals, master classes, and clinics across the nation. An eager contributor to

the double reed community, Dr. Wilson currently serves as Co-executive Director of the Meg Quigley Vivaldi Competition and Bassoon Symposium and as Sponsor-a-Member Coordinator for the International Double Reed Society and co-hosts the *Double Reed Dish* podcast with oboist Dr. Galit Kaunitz.

Autumn Chacon (Diné / Chicana) is an artist and activist whose organizing work in media justice has led to the inception of three FCC-licensed community radio stations, and her work as an activist has led to meetings with the largest banks of the world in a successful effort to divest \$3.8 billion from the Dakota Access Pipeline. Her work as a conceptual, installation, and performance artist has been shown among First Nations communities throughout North America and abroad. Many of Chacon's pieces reveal Indigenous futurisms where technology has a sacred relevance and exemplify her skills as a self-taught electronics engineer.

Heidi Aklaseaq Senungetuk is a violinist and ethnomusicologist who explores Inupiaq music and dance and contemporary Indigenous music and art. Senungetuk earned degrees in violin performance at Oberlin College, Ohio, and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a PhD in Ethnomusicology

at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. She has held positions as a violinist with the Louisiana Philharmonic, the Tulsa Philharmonic, the Breckenridge Music Festival, and the Anchorage Symphony. Senungetuk contributed to the award-winning book *Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America* (Wesleyan University Press, 2019) and teaches musicology and ethnomusicology at Emory University, Atlanta.

Ange Loft is an interdisciplinary performing artist and initiator from Kahnawà:ke Kanien'kehá:ka Territory, working in TsiTkarón:to. She is an ardent collaborator, consultant, and facilitator working in arts-based research, wearable sculpture, theatrical co-creation, and Haudenosaunee history. She is a vocalist with music collective Yamantaka // Sonic Titan.

Joy Harjo, the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States, is an internationally renowned performer and writer of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Harjo is the author of nine books of poetry, several plays, children's books, and two memoirs; she has also produced seven award-winning music albums. Her many honors include the Ruth Lily Prize from the Poetry Foundation, the Academy of American Poets Wallace Stevens Award, two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships,

a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Tulsa Artist Fellowship. She is a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and Board of Directors Chair of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Carmina Escobar is an extreme vocalist, improviser, filmmaker, and sound and intermedia artist based in LA. Escobar investigates and expresses emotions, memory spaces, states of alienation, and the possibilities of interpersonal connection through voice performances, installations, experimental theater, interdisciplinary collaboration, new technologies, and video and film pieces that seek to challenge our understandings of musicality, gender, queerness, race, and the foundations of human communication. As an immigrant from Mexico, key to her practice is the exploration of interstitial states of being—suspensions between worlds, politics, and borders.

Olivia Shortt (Anishinaabe, Nipissing First Nation) is a Tkarón:to-based performing artist, sound artist, composer, noise-maker, trouble-maker, and professional disrupter. Highlights include their debut at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York City, in 2018; their film debut in Atom Egoyan's 2019 film *Guest of Honour*; and recording an album two kilometers underground in the SNOLAB

in Ontario. Shortt was a finalist for the 2021 Toronto Arts Foundation Emerging Artist Award, was one of the 2020 Buddies in Bad Times Emerging Queer Artists, and is featured in the 2020 Winter issue of *Musicworks* magazine.

Candice Hopkins is a citizen of Carcross / Tagish First Nation and lives in Red Hook, New York. Her writing and curatorial practice explores the intersections of history, contemporary art, and Indigeneity. She is Executive Director of Forge Project, Taghkanic, NY, and Senior Curator for the 2019 and 2022 editions of the Toronto Biennial of Art. She was part of the curatorial team for the Canadian Pavilion of the 58th Venice Biennale, featuring the work of the media art collective Isuma, and co-curator of notable exhibitions including *Art for New Understanding: Native Voices 1950s to Now*; the 2018 SITE Santa Fe biennial, *Casa Tomada*; documenta 14, Athens, Greece, and Kassel, Germany; and *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Notable essays include "The Gilded Gaze: Wealth and Economies on the Colonial Frontier," for *The documenta 14 Reader*; "Outlawed Social Life," for *South as a State of Mind*; and "The Appropriation Debates (or The Gallows of History)," for New Museum / MIT Press.

Buffy Sainte-Marie (Piapot Cree) is a singer-songwriter, musician, Oscar-winning composer, visual artist, educator, pacifist, and social activist. Throughout her career in all these areas, her work has focused on issues facing Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Her singing and writing repertoire also includes subjects of love, war, religion, and mysticism. Among her most popular songs are "Universal Soldier," "Cod'ine," "Until It's Time for You to Go," and "Now That the Buffalo's Gone." In 1983, Sainte-Marie became the first Indigenous person to win an Oscar. Her song "Up Where We Belong," co-written for the film *An Officer and a Gentleman*, won both the Academy Award for Best Original Song at the 55th Academy Awards and the Golden Globe for Best Original Song. In 1997, she founded the Cradleboard Teaching Project, an educational curriculum devoted to better understanding Native Americans.

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I want to also acknowledge other Native, First Nations, and Native Hawaiian musicians, composers, and sound artists who are making important work today: Elisa Harkins (Cherokee / Muscogee), Tanya Tagaq (Canadian Inuk), Jacquelyn Deshchidn (San Carlos Apache), Chloe Alexandra Thompson (Cree), Erin Genia (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), Leilehua Lanzilotti (Kanaka Maoli), Cris Derksen (Cree), Melody McKiver (Anishinaabe), and many others who are emerging. I also praise the work of my friend and collaborator Tanya Lukin Linklater (Alutiiq), who creates beautiful event scores dedicated to other Native artists, as well as the abstract portraiture works of Mary Sully, another Yankton Dakota artist like Zitkála-Šá, unrecognized in her time but whom the world now should know.

And, lastly, thank you to Zitkála-Šá for all the shifting shapes.

Raven Chacon
For Zitkála-Šá

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