



MAKING TREATY 7: "We are all Treaty people" 0

BY KEVIN DUNCAN ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2014 INDIGENOUS ARTS

Kevin Duncan in conversation with Cowboy Smithx:

Work-shopped over two years in Creative Residencies at The Banff Centre, *Making Treaty 7* is a groundbreaking theatrical presentation featuring a diverse and talented ensemble of over 20 First Nations and non-Aboriginal performers, musicians, dancers and poets. The performance breathes life into the history and legacy of the 1877 treaty between the Crown and the Blackfoot Confederacy, a founding event of modern southern Alberta.

The project's goal is to create a greater understanding of what Treaty 7 means and provides a new insight into Calgary and its history.

I was able to sit in on a reading during a rehearsal at The Banff Centre. The scene showed Cowboy Smithx, a writer, actor, and filmmaker from the Piikani and Kainai Tribes, as a Blackfoot youth coming to the startling conclusion that his fears of learning and speaking his traditional language are similar to his uncle's fear of learning English in residential schools.



Making Treaty 7 musicians Eye-Hey-Nakoda perform at The Banff Centre

What has hit home the hardest for you while working on this project?

The most important thing is acknowledging that our education system has failed us. It has taken a group of artists to finally tell a story that is hundreds of years overdue. Personally, I have also learned a lot more Blackfoot language, and for me that's huge. The scene you saw was a reflection of anxiety around language, caused by the process of colonization in this area and across Canada.

What was your personal knowledge of Treaty 7 before the project, what is it now, and what do you want the

audience to walk away with?

Coming into this project I was an advanced beginner. Since I started I have become an intermediate. The hope is the audience comes away with the truth. It is a brilliant, courageous project with the primary objective of breaking down stereotypes.

So how do you see the project moving forward?

The hope is it becomes a perennial event at Heritage Park (in Calgary) with the potential to tour around the world. The production covers pre-treaty, the 12 days of signing, and from now to eternity. Forget the pun, but it's a pioneering project that will inspire other regions of North America to explore their history in a similar way.

You typically work in film. How has the theatre experience differed for you?

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Theatre for me is a refreshing reminder that I love the whole process, especially the shared experience you don't often get in cinema. For me, I want to tell stories in a way that is not pragmatic, to make room for young people's ability to be autodidactic. I do this through application of film, theatre, and literature.

What has been the biggest challenge?

I was brought on as part of a collection of artists from various fields of storytelling. The biggest thing has been managing vicissitudes and offering solutions to help the project continue its forward momentum. We are constantly adopting new people, situations, and information. We have the right people on board, it's a powerful ensemble and I am honoured to be part of it.

Have you actively taken a leadership role in the creation of this project?

Leadership in this project is unavoidable. Every member of the ensemble has to be a leader. I personally welcome the responsibility of leadership.

See *Making Treaty 7* at [Heritage Park](#) in Calgary September 11, 13 and 14 at 7:00 pm. For more information, please visit www.makingtreaty7.com.

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