

Blood Of Our Heart Beats For Change

*you know i love to wear dresses of victorian lace
love six shades of sex all up in my face
love lighting bonfires of contemplation
love beats that merge like a german indian
pummeling the fields as the wagons roll in
red man white man ending beginning
now grown radiant and getting bolder
smile of a child held by strong shoulders
check the lessons in the shape of land
even the strongest rock can become sand
and can sift through the hands of a woman or man
who stops long enough to listen
ear to wind mind to the rain
blood of our heart beats for change*

Kinnie Starr, *Emerged*, from the Juno nominated album featuring Moka Only and Spek from the Dream Warriors.

When De La Soul's "Three Feet High And Rising" hit the streets in '89 it was like my brain exploded with optimism. Ice Cube, Run DMC, LL Cool J and Black Sabbath took a back seat in my cassette player. De La's 'daisy age' mentality, fun hippie outfits, crazy hair and ridiculous language play ushered me smoothly into spinning poetry into rhymes.

At the time I was making mostly visual art: T-shirts, stickers and stencil art sprayed on walls and huge collage pieces glued up in parking lots. City cleanup would come round and paint over my black and white work, and I would go back and outline to simply give the pieces more depth. I was, and am, a huge advocate of weaning ourselves off of TV and mainstream culture and challenging male centered ideologies as well as colonial ideology that celebrates European culture over indigenous beauty. Most of my art reflected my distaste for corporate, colonial culture. "BEAUTY IS NOT POWER IT'S THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SELLER", "TELEVALIUM SEDATES YOU" and "HERO?" slapped up on war heroes are some examples of the street art I used to do.

The graffiti and rap scene in the early and mid nineties was pretty much dominated by men, especially in terms of freestyles at clubs. From a girl's

perspective it was a bit tiring to only see men on the mic. I began getting up and rhyming simply to test my courage and make some feminine presence felt. Salt and Pepa were huge as far as stardom went, but in the club scene female rappers were non-existent. I would wait for my turn on the mic and when I would spit/sing, the crowd paid notice.

Making hip hop offered me a controlled environment where I was able to clear the clutter from my mind. Huge questions about the way society is structured come clearer to me from writing rhymes.

Writing rhymes affords wordplay, metaphor and making light of huge topics like not being connected to my Native ancestors. On my first album in '96 I wrote, "the Big Boys went out of style/ and so Pavement lines the roads now/ with indifferent reference to the past and preference/ of white pop trash and over abundance/ but where are my ancestors? Jacks of Deep River? Jacks of which trade though made up the depressor?" More than ten years later I continue to write about love, identity, family and history.

To a woman who carries Native blood but is mostly white by blood quantum, hip hop is a world where story-telling allows me to be frank about my questions, my spirit, and my life mission, ***which is that people should come together***. There is a huge portion of Canada's population carrying Native blood that does not associate with Native culture or stand behind Native causes as a result of elitism, which often comes from what one filmmaker refers to as "club Native." Those who are not full blood don't know much about their family, don't have status or are not from the reserve are often ridiculed or ostracized if they come forward to identify as Native. This imported European attitude disenfranchises what could be a massive Native presence in the Americas. Some estimate there are over 200,000 people in Canada with Native blood but not identifying as Native. **IMAGINE IF ALL THESE PEOPLE STOOD UP AND RALLIED IN DEFENSE OF INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS.**

One of the most important decisions I made as a hip hop producer on one of my earliest beats was sampling the group Ulali to create the song, "Red%X", a widely received song that has travelled further than I have. Eight years later this song still resonates with Natives I meet all over Canada and the U.S.A., and for that I am grateful. I chose to sample Ulali because this group of women influenced me heavily in the decision to be proud of who I am, despite my impurities. To this day, they are the only sample I have ever used. I feel so lucky to share a song with them!

Hip hop is a place where we share our stories eloquently at times, arrogantly or awkwardly at others. The beats and rhymes I have written showcase my background as a middle-class, white red girl from Calgary Alberta, raised on metal and old school rap, as well as an intellect, rocker

and a seeker of truth. On top of my thick dub-rock sloppy hip hop beats, I throw words like they are stones in a river and make my way through life. Making hip hop gave (and gives me) me a chance to slowly and articulately find my footing in the complicated landscape of Native and white Canadians. And though my feet sometimes stumble, I believe without hip hop I would still be hiding in the closet, afraid to take a step forward as the woman I am becoming.