

*For public release – please share
Thursday 18 June 2020*

The *Mighty Niagara* serves as dramatic theme to the online production of the 4th annual Celebration of Nations

Rising to the challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, organizers of the annual Celebration of Nations Indigenous Arts Gathering will offer the entire weekend long program online from **11 – 13 September 2020**.

"Attendees can still expect the same high-quality diverse programming that distinguishes Celebration of Nations as a premier Indigenous performing, visual, and intellectual arts event," said **Artistic Director Michele-Elise Burnett**. "Onondaga elder Oren Lyons has long warned that we 'prepare to meet the conditions' regarding the uncertainties brought about by human-induced environmental damage and destabilization, and we're heeding his instructions."

With thoughts about the powerful life-giving force and energy of water and the need to practice responsible stewardship of the region's environment, **the theme for this year's Celebration of Nations is *Mighty Niagara and the Great Lakes Watershed***. The dozens of creeks and rivers serving as tributaries to Lakes Erie and Ontario have, over millennia, created the conditions for sustaining hundreds of generations of human societies, reaching back to the Indigenous peoples who first explored and inhabited the peninsula some 13,000 years ago.

The gathering will launch on Friday, September 11 with the *Celebration of Nations Outstanding Achievement Awards* and many of this year's programs will focus on this theme by sharing expressions through music, dance, poetry, song lyrics, seminars and symposia, and a variety of interactive sessions that include online craft workshops.

Through it all our sacred fire will be kept alive in the backyard of the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, officiated by Indigenous Elders and maintained by faithful Firekeepers.

In addition, this year Celebration of Nations will introduce the ***Indigenous Niagara Living Museum Tour***, an experience that will transport visitors (virtually) to several significant cultural and historical Indigenous locations within the region. From archaeological sites, ancient geologic landmarks, and unique ecosystems, to amazing art installations, important battlegrounds, and Niagara Falls itself, visitors will have the opportunity to follow Niagara's Indigenous trails in search of knowledge and adventure.

"Last year when we focused our programming on *Empathic Traditions* and the need for humans to act responsibly toward other living beings, we never envisioned the current circumstances, which have emerged with such devastating effect around the globe, would arrive so quickly," said **Artistic Producer Tim Johnson**. "It nevertheless underscores the knowledge and wisdom

inherent in core Indigenous cultures that we ignore at our own peril. At this year's gathering we therefore come together to recognize and honour the life sustaining beauty of the Niagara Peninsula with the intention of engendering respect and intelligent behavior that benefits our communities."

Celebration of Nations emerges as an opportunity for national and international visitors to actively participate in an inclusive and engaging community gathering that will foster a greater sense of belonging, support of meaningful reconciliation, and leave a lasting legacy of goodwill for future generations.

To learn more about the September gathering, tune in **this Sunday 21 June at 4pm** for FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre's 17th episode of [#NiagaraPerforms](#), featuring a conversation with Artistic Director Michele Elise Burnett, Artistic Producer Tim Johnson and **special guest performance by Canadian Mohawk Two Spirit singer/songwriter, Shawnee!**

Stay tuned for the 2020 Celebration of Nations online schedule, to be released this summer.

For more information, please visit: www.CelebrationOfNations.ca or contact CelebrationofNations@FirstOntarioPAC.ca

Kakekalanicks' mission is to promote Indigenous art and artists to broad-based audiences and acts to educate the public about the deep-rooted beauty and uniqueness of each Nation's culture, heritage, and traditions through the medium of the Arts.

The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre aims to provide meaningful opportunities to bring our community together in a place of mutual understanding, empathy, and respect through the arts.

The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre acknowledges the Department of Canadian Heritage, the province of Ontario, the City of St. Catharines and our longtime partnership with Brock University for their ongoing support of Celebration of Nations.

—30—

