

The New Sun Conference rises "Above the Noise"



The New Sun Conference took place on campus on Feb. 27.

PROVIDED

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Andrea Menard, a Métis singer, actor, and writer, filled Fenn Lounge with uplifting music from her most recent album *Lift* at the 15th annual New Sun Conference on Feb. 27.

The Conference has been running at Carleton since 2002, and acts as a forum for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists.

Menard's music certainly struck a chord with New Sun Conference chair and professor of Canadian Studies Allan Ryan, who chose the theme of the conference "Above the Noise" from a lyric in one of her songs,

titled "Let's Sing a New Song."

"There's many of us, the artists of our communities and the world, who are communicating the feelings of the people, our own journeys of pain, of loss, of despair," Menard said in a presentation following her performance. "I needed someone to say you're going to be okay, that you are worthwhile, that life is good and that humans are good . . . so I created an album with songs with a hopeful message, as an Indigenous person, because we've got incredible miracles going on in our community."

Audience members were tapping their

feet, closing their eyes, smiling, mouthing the words, clapping their hands, and some were even teary-eyed.

The narrative of strength and hope was carried throughout day as the four other presenters—filmmaker Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, poet Katherena Vermette, contemporary artist Robert Houle, and Manitobah Mukluks ambassador Waneeq Horn-Miller—shared their passions for bringing Indigenous stories, art, and tradition above the mainstream lines of loss and struggle.

Arnaquq-Baril, an Inuk producer and filmmaker, spoke about how the art of film can help start conversations both within and outside of her own community. Baril talked about the quiet nature of her community, and how outside pressures such as animal activists who have vilified seal hunting have created pressure for her quiet people to fight for a practice that's vital to their livelihood and culture.

"We have to learn to communicate our anger in a way that the outside world understands, but how do we do that when our anger is quiet and soft?" she said.

In response, an initiative was started called "sealfies," that featured people taking selfies wearing sealskin. The idea came from a friend of hers, Baril said, and it is a response to the famous selfie Ellen took at the Oscars in 2015.

"She donated \$1.5 million to the Humane Society in the United States and made some pretty damning statements about seal hunt-

ing," Baril explained. "So my friend came up with the idea as a positive and sort of cheeky response . . . to be heard above the noise . . . without having to change who we are as a people."

Horn-Miller, a Mohawk Carleton grad and former water polo Olympian, spoke about her work with Manitobah Mukluks, a company working across the country to keep the art of mukluk- and moccasin-making alive. They're hand-crafted and sold as artwork, she said, meaning some footwear has been sold for over \$1,200 a pair.

"Less and less people are doing this work, and that's why it's so important," she said. "Cultural revitalization is happening everywhere. We have lost so much of our art forms, from quill work to moose hair tying to fish scale painting . . . and these are things that tell our story, that tie us to where we're from."

The company also started the Storyboot program with the intention to tour around Canada and give lessons on how to make the traditional footwear. A class was held at Carleton in September, and was "a great example of reconciliation," Horn-Miller said.

"'Above the Noise' captures this sense of celebration and hope," Ryan said of this year's conference, "And on a very modest scale, 15 years on, this may be what truth and reconciliation looks like, sounds like and feels like." □