



The Dance Centre

Kwíyalsh Indigenous Dance [An Essay]

T'uy't'tanat Cease Wyss

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My journey of knowing and understanding my culture has been built on witnessing the many styles of dance in my culture, and of the many cultures of the Pacific Northwest Coast and beyond.

It has been a journey of visual storytelling and of profound strength that essentially helped me shift my being from one that was, in a sense, lost as a result of the tragic situation of colonialism and all of the atrocities that have occurred in the past 550+ years since colonization started in the so-called Americas.

It's been 200+ years since west coast cultures began their journey of loss and eventual rebuilding of our spiritual connections through dance and other inter-connected ways that have expressed ourselves and told of important events in our communities and personal lives. This loss came about as a direct result of contact with European settler cultures, more than anything else that has adversely affected our indigenous communities.

Our dances are the foundations of our cultures. We began dancing before we began everything else. That is a significant part of what defines us as peoples and as cultural and spiritual beings.

We originally danced in order to warm ourselves up. As our cultures have expanded and grown, we have adapted and developed our dance styles as well as our regalia. And that has developed to align with our different timelines.

Reflecting on what I've heard many different people say about our dances, I can honestly say that I agree with the various ways that many folks have spoken of indigenous dance and what they are rooted in, and what they feel and see is the purpose of dance.

Here is a compilation of what I have learned about indigenous dance in Pacific Northwest cultures:

West Coast Cultural Dancing as:

Theatre

Storytelling

Medicine

Physical Therapy

Emotional Therapy

Spiritual Expression

Evolution of indigenous dance:

From the longhouse dance floor to the big stages of the contemporary era

Expressionism

Performance Art

Political Statements

Acts of Defiance

A statement of life and passion

Rites of Passage

Marking our Peoples Timelines

Honouring Debts to others

Payments for Wrong doings

To Settle Arguments between families

Restoration of Honour to an individual, family or village

To stay warm in the cold months

To stay fit and build muscle for the seasons ahead

I'm sure there are many other things that people say about our dances.

I'm still learning so much about what it means and what it is all about.

I'm grateful for the activation of dance in our cultures. I'm grateful for the healing strength of dance. And I'm grateful for the many layers that are indigenous dancing.

I have struggled to accomplish being able to dance well and to feel confident about dancing, specifically my peoples' dances.

My motivation is to encourage and to help people to continue to reconnect with their spirits. I have been able to grow in multiple ways because of the relationship I have built with dance.

Indigenous people will dance from birth, through their lives, and until their death. It's all part of the medicine of life.

T'uy't'tanat Cease Wyss (Skwxwu7mesh, Sto:lo, Hawaiian, Swiss) is an educator, interdisciplinary artist and Indigenous ethnobotanist engaged in community based teaching and sharing. Throughout Wyss's 30 year practice, Wyss's work encompasses storytelling and collaborative initiatives through their knowledge and restoration of Indigenous plants and natural spaces. Wyss has been recognized for exchanging traditional knowledge in remediating our relationship to land through digital media, site-specific engagements and weaving.

On unceded Skwxwú7mesh, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, and səlilwətaʔt lands and waters.

<https://ravenhummingbirdtea.wordpress.com> | www.indigenousplantdiva.wordpress.com | <https://rhteaco/> | #rhteaco | @cedarcopperwoman



ABOUT THE DANCE CENTRE

Established in 1986 as a resource centre for dance professionals and the public in British Columbia, The Dance Centre is a multifaceted organization offering a range of activities unparalleled in Canadian dance.

Our goal is to support the development of a vibrant dance scene in BC and increase the profile of dance, by providing resources and services for the dance profession; presenting public performances and events; operating Scotiabank Dance Centre, one of Canada's flagship dance facilities; and promoting BC dance.

We are located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xwməθkwəy'əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl'ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. It is an honour and a privilege for us to be guests in their lands.







The Dance Centre

Scotiabank Dance Centre

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