

Composer's Statement

Where the Prairies Meet the Pines is a confluence of gratitude, appreciation and acknowledgement. Although only three minutes long, this composition attempts to honour the gathering of not only two major rivers, but also those who have met there for centuries.

My sincere hope is that educators, directors and students alike will be inspired by the peoples and places of this region as I have been in the writing of this piece. If those who participate in the making of this music gain even a fraction of the blessing I've received from writing and researching, it will be well worth the effort.

I want to begin by acknowledging the Creator who not only formed this beautiful part of the world, but also the people who have celebrated family, faith and culture in this region. The Creator placed within the Indigenous Peoples of this region a recognition of the sacred teachings which emphasize humility, respect, truth, knowledge, wisdom, courage and love. These sacred words have been passed down to us as the 7 sacred teachings, or grandfather teachings. They are recognized by each of the groups who have visited this region – Woodland, Swampy and Plains Cree; Dakota, Dene, Metis and European Settlers. The sacredness of this land, those who have gathered here and the character qualities they have infused into this region, will carry on for generations.

In addition to the leaders of each of the Indigenous Nations, I would like to pay tribute to James Isbister – Metis leader. As the first recorded permanent settler to the area, Isbister was a remarkable person and influential leader, despite the unjust treatment he received. Although he was considered “English Metis”, Isbister was instrumental in bringing both English and French Metis together. He was well educated, probably having attended a school in the Red River settlement (Manitoba), and was fluent in English, Gaelic, Cree, Chipewyan, and Michif. Although a member of the Church of England, he set aside any sectarian feelings and worked for the common good. Isbister was a hard worker and made his living through agriculture and by carrying freight for the Hudson's Bay Company. He was an influential leader and worked for proper land rights and titles for people in the region. Although he didn't take part in the uprisings, he was still imprisoned for five weeks and publicly condemned when he defended his actions. Isbister will be long remembered as a family man, a hard worker and someone who brought the Metis nation together. This composition is an homage to his legacy.

I would like to thank **Michelle Taylor** and the staff at The Prince Albert Historical Museum for their assistance. Having access to articles in their vast data base was extremely helpful. As well, they were able to give me a tour and connect me to leaders in the community.

I would like to thank **Leah Dorion** for her knowledge, passion and creativity in bringing the Metis story to life. Leah has been an influence in this piece not only through her artwork, but also her music, and knowledge of Metis culture. Leah's passion is to ensure that the story of the Metis and particularly Metis women is not forgotten and that this culture informs and instructs future generations. Leah's beautiful murals of the Metis from the Prince Albert Region are prominently displayed in the Prince Albert Museum.

Murals depicting the Dakota, Dene, Plains, Woodland and Swampy Cree also hang in the Museum. Thank you to **Kevin Peeace**, Saskatoon artist, who collaborated with Prince Albert community members and the Historical Society to make this happen. Kevin's input and encouragement have played a huge role in the formation of this piece and I am honoured to have developed a friendship with Kevin and have had the privilege of collaborating another project as well.

Thank you as well to **John and Vicki Arcand** for their kindness and generosity in allowing me to adapt the “Isbister Jig” from their recording to bring out the story of the Metis in this piece. Vicki took upon herself the task of researching the origin of this piece prior to recording it on their album “Traditionally Yours”. Thank you John and Vicki.

I am so grateful for the input of knowledge keepers and elders from the Prince Albert region. Thank you for your input, your blessing and your suggestions as to how this piece can communicate the story. I hope that I will in part reflect your insights and wisdom.

Thank you especially to **Leo Omani** for all of the research he has done on the Wahpeton Dakota First Nation. His extensive knowledge and writing was extremely interesting and formative in the making of this composition. The contribution of the Dakota people to our country, our province and to the Prince Albert Region is significant.

I was also fascinated to learn more about the Dene people. The special place that they have given to Thanadelthur played a major part in the murals at the Prince Albert Museum and in this piece of music. This important woman plays a significant role in the history of our country.

We are truly blessed to have so many Cree or Nehiyawak communities in our province and in the Treaty 6 Territory. Their contribution to the history, land and culture of this land can be seen everywhere. We have much to learn from the ceremonies, music, art, dance and teachings of the Plains, Woodland and Swampy Cree.

Lastly, the settlement of European colonizers who came across the prairies, have made their mark on the community of Prince Albert and region. James Nisbet began a Presbyterian mission as well as gave Prince Albert it's name in honour of Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. The prince was also a composer of music and several fragments from his compositions have been incorporated into the piece.

Where the Prairies Meet the Pines is more than just a Junior High band composition. It is a labour of love inspired by the knowledge keepers, geography, peoples, culture and history of this region teeming with rivers, wildlife, forests and rolling hills.