



GORDON TOOTOOSIS

# GTNT

NĪKĀNĪWIN THEATRE

ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2021-2022



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada

**Nutrien**  
Feeding the Future™

**Eagle Feather**  
NEWS

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Canada

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Saskatoon

Community  
Initiatives Fund



SaskTel



# SUMMARY

This year marked a cautious return to live performance including the world premiere of *Shadows Among the Prairies* by Artistic Director Jennifer Dawn Bishop performed at the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival site in September of 2021.

The season was marked by many points of hope and subsequent disappointment in terms of the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, however our theatre remained flexible and continued to create work for Indigenous artists which was our focus for this year.

This season also marked the departure of three of our long-time employees, Cheyanne Lemaigre, Darlene Okemaysim-Sicotte and Cory Dallas Standing. Their work over the past nine years amplified our theatre's presence in the community and we wish them the greatest success in their future endeavours.





# GTNT 2021-2022

## FOREWORD

In the summer of 2021, COVID-19 vaccines became widely available to Saskatchewan residents giving us great hope for a return to normalcy for the theatre. GTNT managed to acquire enough rapid antigen tests through the Canadian Red Cross to ensure artists and staff would be able to detect any potential infections for the entire season. This report covers July 2021 to June of 2022 which included the emergence of the COVID-19 Delta and Omicron variants both of which caused some disruption to our operations. We are thankful to report that none of our programs were cancelled or paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are so grateful to our core funders including the Canada Council for the Arts, SKArts, SaskCulture with funding provided by Saskatchewan Lotteries, and the City of Saskatoon. We also received important project funding from the Government of Canada through the Canada Summer Jobs program, the Canada Council’s Digital Now program, Business/Arts, the Community Initiatives Fund, Nutrien, and SaskTel. We are, as always, proud of the support given to us from our media partners at the Eagle Feather News and the Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation and from our many private donors. We also received support from Little Ox Film Company in the form of a sponsorship that brought down costs associated with the streaming production of *Shadows Among the Prairies* and for that we are extremely grateful.

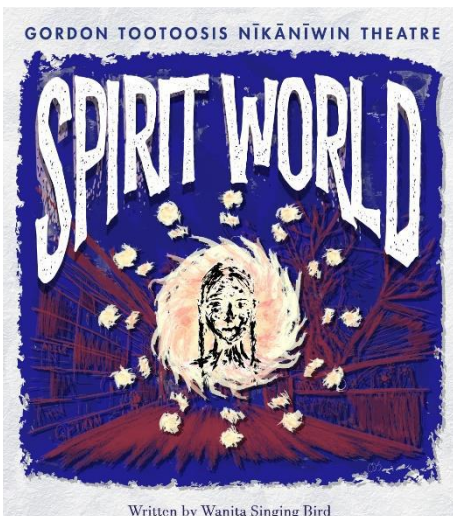
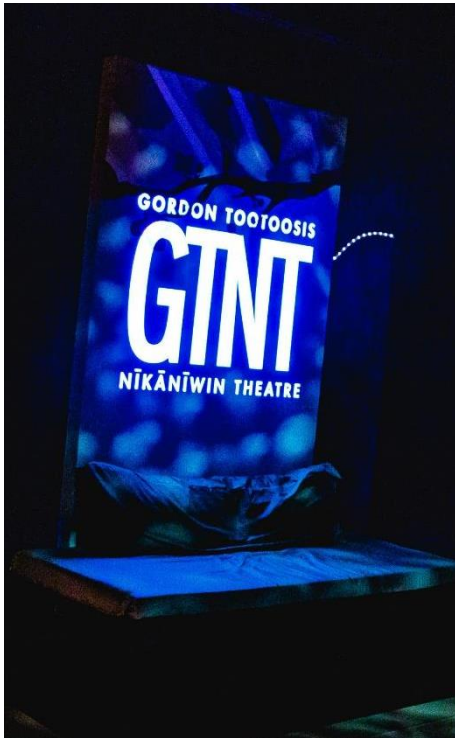


## NĪPIN (SUMMER) 2021

At this time, COVID-19 restrictions were entirely removed by the Government of Saskatchewan and vaccine uptake was on the upswing. GTNT reviewed its COVID policies to ensure artists were still protected as we began working on live productions.

### 25<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre Fringe Festival 2021

GTNT was included as part of the Digital Fringe with its recording of *Spirit World*. It was hoped that by including *Spirit World* as part of the 2021 Saskatoon Fringe Festival that we would expand our audiences and expand the Indigenous offerings at the festival itself. In the end, only a handful of individuals purchased tickets for *Spirit World* which we attribute to having already streamed it for free in April/May of 2021. Still, we were happy to be part of the festival and look forward to working with them in future seasons should the opportunity present itself.



## New Voices Playwriting Residency

The second iteration of the New Voices Playwriting residency kicked off with seven new participants in April of 2021. This year's program also featured the addition of an upper tier of the program which welcomed back three previous participants: Nitanis Bear, April Rogers, and Risa Naytowhow. Daniel Macdonald returned to coordinate both elements of the program. The writing phase of the New Voices residency continued through to October of 2021 at which time we shelved the readings until a suitable time for the organization.

In the end, a handful of the participants dropped out citing a lack of time to write, however, those that stayed through to the end created worthwhile works that were included in a final reading that took place in April of 2022. More on that will be included later on in the report.

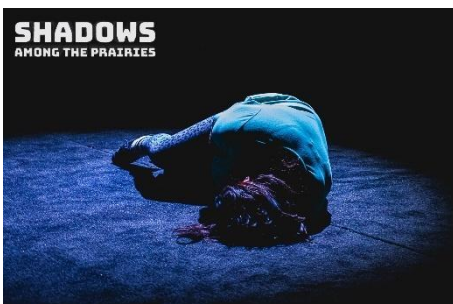
### Shadows among the Prairies (August 17<sup>th</sup> to September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

SATP was a World Premiere of a work written by Jennifer Dawn Bishop that was directed by Carol Greyeyes. Rehearsals began mid-August and the production run was held at the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival Site in mid September of 2021.

Opening night was marked by a sacred fire ceremony organized by Darlene Okemaysim-Sicotte, and the opening night performance was well attended. Attendance for the rest of the run was lower than anticipated which we attribute to the rising Delta wave and general hesitancy to attend live theatre in the midst of the pandemic. One evening was cancelled due to unseasonably cold weather: the temperature dipped down into single digits which was too cold to reasonably perform in.

A mask mandate was re-introduced by the Government of Saskatchewan on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, one day before the closing of our production. Our production was affected by this mandate, and for the last two evenings, our artists were masked on stage. Audiences were already masked for the entirety of the run per our policies.

This production was made possible due to a Digital Now grant which enabled us to film and stream the production later in the season. Generally speaking, we are happy with the way this production came together considering the challenges posed by COVID-19.





## TAKWĀKIN (FALL) 2021

During the fall months, we began recruitment for the Circle of Voices program and began preparations for the production of *Mekiwin: The Gift*. At this time, Cheyanne Lemaigre, Circle of Voices Coordinator, left the company for personal reasons which made recruitment difficult for the 2021 Circle of Voices iteration. GTNT hired Derek Bishop as interim COV Coordinator and he began in this role in early November of 2021.

**The Circle of Voices** program began in early October of 2021 at La Troupe du Jour's theatre space. We began with seven from a variety of schools with the vast majority being from Nutana Collegiate. Theatre skills, life skills, and cultural competency classes were delivered by local theatre practitioners, cultural advisors, and more Tuesday to Thursday evenings.

Circle of Voices students were able to take in *Cottagers and Indians* at Persephone Theatre in early November, and attended a production of *Fruitcake* by 25<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre in mid-December.



## MIKISKĀW (FREEZE UP) 2021

**Mekiwin: The Gift A Rez Christmas Story**  
(November 9<sup>th</sup> – December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

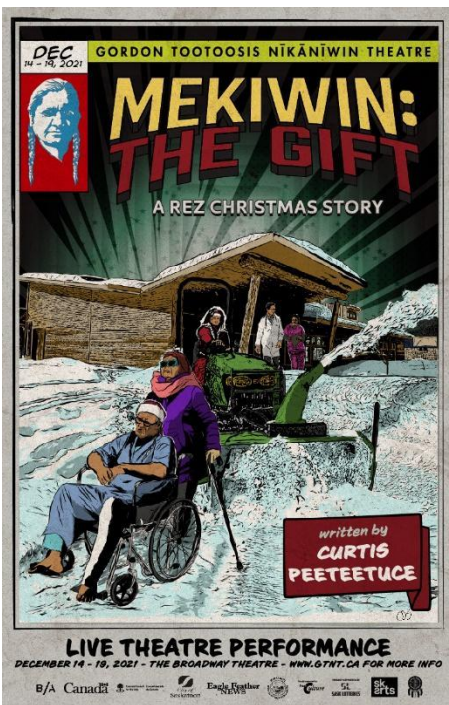
Rehearsals began at Studio 914 in early November of 2021. Mandatory masking was in place during rehearsals and thankfully we were able to have performers unmasked while on-stage at the Broadway Theatre. Initially performances were capped at 150 patrons but this was extended to 250 as the caseload numbers for COVID-19 began to drop later in December.

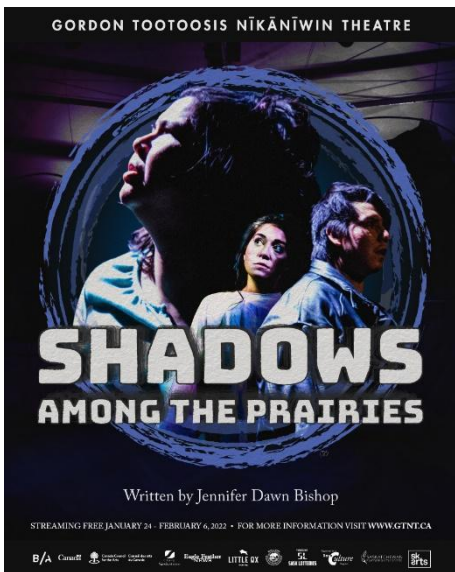
In all, we had attendance of just under 1,100 patrons for this production and we were glad to be able to tour this production for audiences in La Ronge through the Kikinahk Friendship Centre. We were also able to perform at Wāhkōhtowin School just prior to our opening at the Broadway Theatre. In all, we were elated to be back for a public performance at the Broadway Theatre and back to touring, albeit in a limited capacity.



## PIPON (WINTER) JAN/FEB 2022

The Circle of Voices program moved to digital delivery and our staff began working from home once again due to the onset of the Omicron wave in early January. We would continue to work from home until early February.





**Shadows Among the Prairies Digital Delivery**  
**January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 to February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

The Digital Stream of Shadows Among the Prairies went online for four scheduled show times in late January and was available for on-demand streaming from January 29<sup>th</sup> to February 6<sup>th</sup>.

As part of the Digital Now campaign, we launched Facebook and Instagram ads that targeted Indigenous audiences across Canada. We also took the time to send messages to the artistic directors of all Indigenous theatre organizations across Canada so they could help us promote this project to their audiences and increase viewership outside of Saskatchewan. In the end, Saskatchewan was fourth in terms of viewership. Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta all had higher viewership. To us, this was the ultimate mark of success. We had hoped this digital offering would increase our national profile and, based on viewership numbers, we were able to achieve that goal.

**Trilingual King Lear**

Thanks to the support of microgrant from SKArts, GTNT was able to partner together with La Troupe du Jour and Bob Wicks to begin translation of King Lear’s themes into both French and Cree. This is not a direct textual translation, rather, a thematic one. This project was the first step in what will hopefully be a fully realized production in a future season.



**MIYOSKAMIN (WARM-UP) 2022**

**The Circle of Voices Open House**  
**March 3, 2022**

Our three remaining Circle of Voices participants filmed an open house at the Persephone Backstage Stage with the assistance of our Cultural Advisor Elizabeth Ahenakew, and Liam Scramstad an alumnus of both the COV and RAIS. This was uploaded and broadcast on Facebook for on-demand streaming on March 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2022.

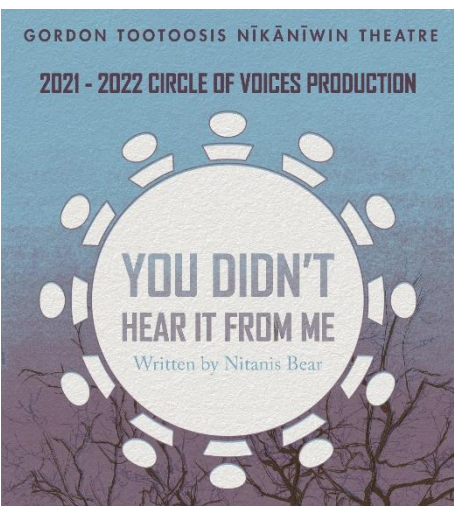
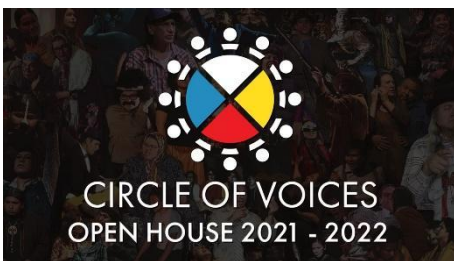
In all, we received just over 150 views on this video which is a wider audience than we would usually receive when performing the open house in person.



**SĪKWAN (SPRING) 2022**

**You Didn't Hear It From Me by, Nitanis Bear**  
**(March 22nd-26th 2022)**

*You Didn't Hear It from Me* follows three high school students as they navigate their school year. Madison is an ambitious gossip host with a growing YouTube channel, but her spotlight might be too much to handle. Evan, her loyal cameraman and reporter, runs her show but just might be



growing out of his role in the shadow. Jordan, an old friend of Madison's, joins the school as the new Indigenous Cultural Leader and threatens to turn both their worlds upside down.

This production featured cast and crew of former COV Alumni and was debut directed by Ezra Forest.



### **New Voices Play Readings (April 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022)**

The culmination of the 2021-2022 New Voices Playwriting Residency was a series of live readings of three of the works developed by the artists.

***To Die For*** by Risa Naytowhow – Originally featured in the 2020 program, Risa's film noir influenced work was developed thoroughly and finally achieved a fully fleshed out ending.

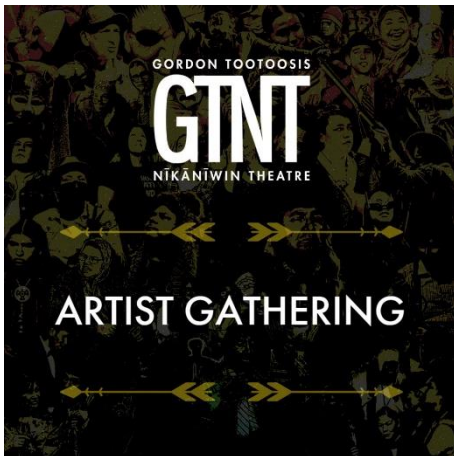
***Tayen and the Mimi Kwesak*** by Mona Kormas – We were blown away by Mona's intention to write a TYA piece that captured the spirit of youthful innocence and traditional storytelling.

***Powwow Play*** by April Rogers – April's play connects a series of comedic sketches centered around pow wows together in a massively comedic and satirical hour.

All of these productions have great potential to be produced by GTNT in future and we are looking forward to the next iteration of the New Voices residency to see what other stories come forward from our community.

### ***Artist & Community Gathering* – May 26<sup>th</sup> 2022**

GTNT held a gathering of local Indigenous theatre artists on May 26th from 1pm to 5pm at Station 20 West in Saskatoon. The pandemic disconnected us for too long; the time came for us to come together and get to know each other better as artists and as people. GTNT wanted to know how we could further support and uplift emerging and established artists in the community as we come out of the pandemic. Although attendance was low, we had wonderful catch-ups and conversation with different members of the community and made space and opportunity for those who could not attend to have their voices heard through personal meetings.



## **NĪPIN (SUMMER) JUNE 2022**

### **Nutrien Children's Festival – June 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> 2022.**

#### ***It's About Time***

After shelving this program for two years due to the pandemic, we finally came together with La Troupe du Jour to present an interactive theatre/storytelling performance activity that focused on Indigenous/Settler relations in Plains Cree, Dene, Michif, and French.



In all, we saw over 400 children and caregivers at our venue over the four days of the festival and we were elated to produce some work through the summer months for the first time in a while.

### ***Playhouse Program***

Typically, GTNT would host our Playhouse Program from January to June each year. We visit five (5) partner schools in the community and teach theatre skills to elementary school students from grades four to eight. Sadly, due to ongoing concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to deliver this program in any capacity. Schools were very hesitant, and rightfully so, to allow outside facilitators in for programming.

**THANK YOU TO OUR PATRONS, ARTISTS, FUNDERS, AND SPONSORS FOR A FANTASTIC 2021-2022 SEASON!**







# SUCCESSSES



## Increased productions

Compared to our 2020-2021 season, we had 129% more public performances/activities.



## Future Development

Developed the skills of new playwrights through the New Voices program

Completed the Circle of Voices program in-person for the first time since 2019-2020.



## HR Shifts

Cheyenne Lemaigre, Darlene Okemaysim-Sicotte, and Cory Dallas Standing departed at the end of this season. While they will all be greatly missed, their departures give us a chance to breathe fresh life into the organization.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

GTNT expanded its reach in the community by performing at the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival Site, and by partnering with La Troupe du Jour and the Nutrien Children's Festival this season. The SOTS festival site is Saskatoon's newest theatrical venue and was a fantastic venue for our production of *Shadows Among the Prairies*. The contemplation circle on site was used to host a sacred fire ceremony prior to the opening night of the production and the outdoor elements of the site aided in the ethereal feeling of the production itself. The Nutrien Children's Festival was a fantastic way for us to engage with youth in the community and allowed our artists to hone their storytelling skills. Our partnership with La Troupe and Bob Wicks has laid the foundation for future work on a trilingual *King Lear* that is sure to appeal to a wide swath of audiences in our community.

## DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

This year we received a \$50,000 grant from the Canada Council for the Arts to digitize our production of *Shadows Among the Prairies* which streamed in late January/Early February of 2022. This grant included funds specifically allotted to digital ads intended to increase engagement of the Indigenous community across the country. This, coupled with improved SEO on our website led to an increase in traffic from across the country. SATP was seen by more audiences in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia than it was by Saskatchewan audiences.

## RETURN TO LIVE

After a hard fought 2020-2021 season where most of our projects were delivered digitally and the ones that weren't were invite-only, we were pleased to be back to live audiences, albeit in a limited capacity for their, and our, safety. Our ability to adapt to the ever-changing COVID-19 restrictions and our continued implementation of protections once provincial restrictions had been dropped in late February. Aided by COVID-19 rapid tests from the Canadian Red Cross, we were able to implement a testing regimen for all of our productions and programs in the 2021-2022 season to ensure the health and safety of our community.