



Arts

Covid Visions

Together,
In and Out of Isolation
Isabelle Impey + Davy Sage

by
STEVEN ROSS SMITH



Saskatchewan
Arts Alliance

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Could the artistic forms – reggae and beading – be farther apart in terms of aesthetic, method, and presentation? My conversations with two creative makers this July, as Covid restrictions eased, revealed diversities and similarities across generations and modes of expression. I spoke with traditional beader Isabelle Impey, a northern Métis, and Nigerian-born singer-songwriter Davy Sage. For these artists, isolation has reinforced the value of community, however they find or enable it.

Davy Sage, now living in Regina, reflects this value in his song lyrics. “I released a song in 2020 called Together. It speaks of the spirit of togetherness”.

‘Isabelle Impey, in Prince Albert, enacts a combination of connection and solitude through her beading, and in retreats and “...traditional stuff. I do my smudges and prayers.” She retreats with her sisters to strengthen the family. And she finds community through remarkable work for the homeless and hungry.

Isabelle learned beading growing up in Cumberland House where, around age 11, she sat with the experienced women beaders. “Often it was a social event where beaders in the community would gather around the table and we would either be watching or they would include us, so that we would learn to bead. The women did all floral. We are known, the northern Métis, as the flower-beader



Traditional beader Isabelle Impey models her work. 1992.

people.” Impey beads onto hide, melton cloth, and velvet. Eagle and dream catcher images, and orange t-shirts on pins are also in her repertoire. In 2003, at the Gabriel Dumont Institute, where she also taught and served as a director, commissioned several works from her. Some of that striking beadwork can be seen at <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/00214>.

Davy Sage pumps a distinctive funky sound into Regina’s music scene and beyond. He describes his music as “a mix of Afropop, dance hall, reggae, and RnB.” He’s no stranger to Covid. “I actually got COVID back in April ... and it was challenging time. I was about to fly back to Regina from Toronto for a scheduled live performance that Saskmusic had put together, which I had to cancel.”

More erasures followed. “In summer 2020 I had more shows cancelled...the Beauty of Africa Pageant show in Calgary, and the Live Stream Showcase at The Recording Arts Institute of Saskatoon. Festivals cancelled were NXNE Toronto and the African Descent Festival Vancouver. Not being able to showcase in festivals and perform in concerts affected my income.”

Streaming on digital platforms has become music’s primary mode of delivery. Sage has used YouTube



Nigerian-born singer-songwriter Davy Sage.

and Twitch to share his music. However, he acknowledges: “Not much income comes through streaming or endorsement at the moment...My main target has been Instagram, Facebook, TikTok...and I’ve gotten non-financial support from agencies to help develop my music business during lockdown.”

Sage has also found community online. He joined “Clubhouse, one of the platforms independent artists have been using to connect with industry influences...and RnB Songwriters on Facebook and Afrobeat Music on SoundCloud.”

Davy managed, during the pandemic, to record his

upcoming six-song EP, Once Upon a Summer which he’ll drop in August. “I can’t wait to share this exciting moment with everyone who’s been with me on this journey.” You can check in on Davy’s work at <http://davysagemusic.com/>

Isabelle Impey’s beading has reached notable heights. “It’s made special for people. I’ve got an album of coats I’ve made for family members. I’ve made a beaded vest on moose hide for Prime Minister Paul Martin...I beaded a whole moose hide jacket for Clem Chartier,” [President of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, in the ‘80s, and vice-president, in the ‘90s.]



These days her beading has slowed down, but not due to the pandemic. “I’m approaching eighty years old (she chuckles), and I have arthritis which is normal at my age and it’s not as easy now, so I just do it for the joy of it.” And speaking of decelerating, Impey adds: “I’m sure there’s a reason for the pandemic. It was to slow us down and make us look at what’s important in life.” Isabelle’s slowing is relative. For nineteen years Isabelle has been working with Prince Albert’s program for the homeless and hungry, and with the Foodbank. “The pandemic has made poverty worse, and I think it’s going to continue to be a problem.”

Impey’s generous spirit motivates a resourceful initiative, her dedication to helping and feeding those in need. “I don’t get any funding for it, so I’m a real good bum – I go around, and I bum day-old breads and pastries and stuff. Renewable Resources brought me a whole truck-load of birds that somebody had shot, and we cleaned them and provided them

to families.”

She has converted her garage into a food depot. “I talk to people that are moving into the neighbourhood and tell them ‘Hey, I’m not doing anything wrong. These people are coming for food.’ So they don’t think I’m selling drugs. (Impey laughs). Then they help, they donate, they become part of what I do. I have wonderful neighbours.” She even uses her own funds when necessary.

Isabelle is also the coordinator of the Elder Council that works with the Ministry of Social Services and Families to resolve issues between families, children, and the Ministry. In 2016 Impey was given Prince Albert’s Award of Merit for her inspiring community work. It is an art unto itself.

I asked Impey and Sage what they are going to do now with the easing of Covid restrictions. Davy says: I’m going to go on vacation with my family.”



Steven Ross Smith is a poet and arts writer. He has written for literary and arts publications across the country. Over three decades, has crafted the innovative six-book poetic series *fluttersong*. He has just completed a two-year term as Banff Poet Laureate. His work appears in print, audio and video in Canada, USA, and abroad. He lives and writes in Saskatoon.

Isabelle will venture out too. “I’m going to be gathering medicines in the woods. We’re going for rat root. It deals with fever, cold, and body aches and pains.” Impey knows elders who can’t get out, so she will share her harvest.

As Davy Sage sings in his song “Together.”

*My world is your world
Your world is my world
My joy is your joy
So together we sing*

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