

Short Bio

Rosary Spence (Piisimonapii Iskwew) is a Mushkego Cree traditional singer, recording artist, cultural worker, curator, and multidisciplinary artist from Fort Albany First Nation in Northern Ontario. Rooted in Cree teachings, storytelling, and song, her work weaves together traditional music, cultural facilitation, collaborative arts practices, and community wellness. Through performance, workshops, and creative collaborations, Rosary creates spaces for healing, connection, and Indigenous cultural resurgence.

Full Bio

Rosary Spence (Piisimonapii Iskwew) is a Mushkego Cree traditional singer, recording artist, cultural worker, curator, producer, and multidisciplinary artist from Fort Albany First Nation, located along the western shores of James Bay in Northern Ontario. Deeply rooted in Cree teachings, ceremony, and land-based knowledge, her work bridges culture, healing, music, visual art, and community connection.

As a traditional vocalist and song composer, Rosary carries and creates songs that honour spirit, ceremony, ancestral knowledge, and Indigenous identity. Her music blends traditional teachings with contemporary expression, creating spaces for healing, reflection, and cultural continuity. Alongside her work as a recording artist, she collaborates with musicians, dancers, visual artists, and cultural practitioners across a wide range of artistic and community-based projects.

Rosary's practice extends beyond performance into cultural leadership, arts facilitation, curation, and production. She has curated and produced Indigenous arts programming, concerts, cultural gatherings, workshops, and land-based experiences that center Indigenous voices, storytelling, and ceremony. Her collaborative work often focuses on creating meaningful spaces for community engagement, intergenerational learning, and cultural revitalization.

In addition to her artistic work, Rosary is deeply involved in community wellness and cultural advocacy through her role within the urban Indigenous community, where she supports culturally grounded programming and ceremony for Indigenous children, youth, families, and community members in the city.

Whether through song, ceremony, visual design, collaborative arts projects, or community gatherings, Rosary's work is guided by the belief that culture is medicine and that Indigenous art and ceremony are vital pathways for healing, connection, and resurgence.

Artist Statement

Rosary Spence (Piisimonapii Iskwew) is a Mushkego Cree traditional singer, recording artist, cultural worker, and multidisciplinary artist from Fort Albany First Nation in Northern Ontario. Her

artistic practice is deeply rooted in storytelling, song sharing, community connection, and the intergenerational teachings that shaped her relationship with music from an early age.

Rosary began singing as a child, growing up surrounded by church hymns, choirs, and the strong musical presence of her grandmother. She fondly remembers singing hymns she heard her grandmother sing, who would encourage her with the words, “Kiminotakosin nohisim, nikamoh!” “You sound beautiful granddaughter, sing.” Those early moments planted the seeds for a lifelong relationship with voice, emotion, and performance.

Throughout childhood, Rosary was actively involved in school choirs and performances, often drawn to solos and the joy of being on stage. However, during high school in the early 1990s, a negative experience with a music teacher deeply impacted her confidence. After being criticized for the natural tone of her voice and told to either sing “properly” or not at all, she stopped singing publicly for many years.

It was not until the early 2000s, while attending college, that Rosary found her voice again through traditional music. Invited to sing with a local women’s hand drum group called Waabehska Makwa (“White Bear Singers”), she began reconnecting with song in a new way. The group gathered weekly to practice, share songs, and eventually perform together at community events. Through these experiences, Rosary developed her own unique vocal style and rediscovered the power and purpose of singing.

Her musical influences span across gospel hymns, soulful harmonies, powerhouse vocalists such as Etta James, Marvin Gaye, and Aretha Franklin, as well as the groundbreaking Indigenous women’s trio Ulali, whose music profoundly inspired her as a young person and affirmed her desire to sing traditional music.

After years of collaborating and contributing vocals to numerous projects and recordings, Rosary released her first solo album, Maskowisiwin, in 2015. The album was dedicated to her family, friends, collaborators, and the many artists who supported and shaped her artistic journey.

Today, Rosary’s performances blend traditional song, storytelling, layered harmonies, and contemporary sound exploration. Using a vocal looper, she builds rich harmonic textures with her own voice, creating immersive performances that weave together traditional teachings, personal narrative, and emotional resonance. Her work continues to be guided by the belief that song is medicine, a way to heal, connect, remember, and carry teachings forward for future generations.

Performance Description

Rosary Spence’s performances blend traditional Indigenous song, storytelling, layered harmonies, and contemporary sound exploration. Using voice, hand drum, and live looping technology, she creates immersive soundscapes rooted in emotion, spirit, and cultural memory. Her performances move fluidly between traditional teachings, personal narrative, and musical improvisation, creating intimate and powerful experiences for audiences.

Workshops & Cultural Facilitation

Rosary Spence offers culturally grounded workshops rooted in Indigenous knowledge, creativity, storytelling, and community connection. Through hands-on learning and shared experiences, she creates welcoming spaces where participants can engage with traditional teachings, artistic practices, and land-based knowledge in meaningful and accessible ways. Rosary's approach is guided by respect for cultural teachings, relationship-building, and the belief that art, music, and cultural practices are powerful pathways for healing, identity, and connection. She works with youth, families, schools, organizations, festivals, and community groups, and adapts workshops to meet the unique needs of each gathering while honouring the teachings and traditions they come from.

Workshop List:

Music & Cultural Teachings

- Traditional Singing & Song Sharing
- Hand Drum Teachings
- Community Drum Circles

Arts & Craft Workshops

- Moccasin Making
- Mukluk Making
- Beading
- Regalia Making
- Ribbon Skirts & Ribbon Shirts
- Cradle Boards
- Waspisoyan (Moss Bags)

Land-Based & Cultural Teachings

- Hide Tanning
- Medicine Walks
- Land-Based Teachings
- Storytelling & Oral Teachings
- Indigenous Cultural Teachings