Rewarding Canada’s finest at Rendez-vous 2016 in Winnipeg, Manitoba

IN RECOGNITION OF THE TRADITIONAL INHABITANTS of the territory on which we held our event, CITT/ICTS Rendez-vous 2016 wishes to acknowledge that we met on Treaty #1 Territory and the homeland of the Metis Nation. Manitoba (where the Creator sits) encompasses the traditional territories of the Cree, Ojibwe, Dakota, Ojibwe-Cree, Dene peoples, and the Inuit. The opening and closing ceremonies were performed by Albertr McLeod a Status Indian with ancestry from Nisichawayasihk (Knee-Sich-Awaya-Seek) Cree Nation and the community of Norway House in northern Manitoba.

It was an evening of recognition and celebration that took place on Saturday, August 20, at Fairmont Winnipeg. Delegates from the 26th CITT/ICTS Rendez-vous gathered for cocktails and the annual awards banquet in the Midway Ballroom all jazzed up with black and gold linen. A large screen was set up for the award presentations, on which we would later watch the CBC live presentation of The Tragically Hip – A National Celebration. The special live broadcast became a huge cultural happening in Canada with screenings in hundreds of venues across the country as the nation came together to see the Canadian rock band simply referred as The Hip play in their hometown of Kingston, Ontario. Earlier this year, the band’s frontman Gord Downie was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and the band decided to undertake a summer tour of Canada with their 13th album Man Machine Poem. The tour wrapped up in Kingston on Saturday, August 20, the same night as our awards banquet. We absolutely had to include this unique live broadcast of their show as part of the evening. But first, the awards.

Recognizing our peers

Created in 1998, the CITT/ICTS awards are designed to honour individuals and companies from a wide spectrum of the Canadian live performance community. The nomination of candidates for the CITT/ICTS awards is driven directly by the membership with the final selection made by the Awards Committee composed of the CITT/ICTS Section Representatives, the
Vice-President, the Secretary, and either the Past President or President-Elect. The six CITT/ICTS awards are as follows:

The Honorary Membership Award is awarded to an individual or organisation not actively involved in the technical disciplines of the Canadian live performance industry, but who by virtue of their position has contributed significantly to the development of technical disciplines within Canada. This contribution can be seen through the recipient’s decision-making, influence, and philosophy within the community or by showing themselves to be a longstanding friend of the institute. The 2016 award was presented to the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance. The Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance is a multifaceted organization with geographically and artistically diverse Indigenous performing artists, arts organizations, and allied institutions. They are being recognized for their work connecting Indigenous performing artists, opportunities, and communities across Canada, through a collective voice, generosity, and inclusion. IPAA Executive Director Cole Alvis accepted the award on behalf of IPAA (see sidebar for his acceptance speech).

The Supplier (Corporate) Achievement Award is awarded to an individual, or a corporate entity, which has shown sustained commitment to providing excellent service and/or product(s) to the Canadian cultural industries community. The 2016 award was presented to Ultratec Special Effects. Ultratec Special Effects, based in London, Ontario, is a manufacturer and distributor of special effects equipment including fog, haze, bubbles, snow, dry ice, and simulated flames. They are the leading provider of solutions for the entertainment industry worldwide. Ultratec is built on a simple combination of humbled culture, experience, outstanding creativity, and excellent customer service. Through these basic principles they have the capacity to deliver some of the best products in the industry.

Over the years, Ultratec has become an avid supporter of CITT/ICTS. They participate at numerous events including the CITT/ICTS’s annual trade show, Expo-Scène in Montréal, and have sponsored CITT/ICTS’ awards banquet on many occasions. The leadership of Ultratec’s Vice-President Marnie Styles contributed in strengthening the relationship with CITT/ICTS. With her positive outlook and charisma, she is always willing to offer the National Coordinator constructive feedback, sound advice, and share her knowledge. Ultratec has demonstrated a true and sustained commitment to the CITT/ICTS, its members, and the industry at large.

The Award of Technical Merit is awarded to a production company or theatre, or a combination thereof, for outstanding achievement in the use of theatre technology on a specific project or production. The 2016 award was presented to Rick Boychuk and his company GridWell, Inc.

In 2005, Rick created Grid Well, Inc., through which he has helped sell, design, and install counterweight rigging systems in performing arts centres across the US and...
I had the privilege of representing the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance (IPAA) at the Canadian Institute for Theatre Technology (CITT/ICTS) by accepting their Honourary Membership Award on behalf of IPAA. Here is my acceptance speech:

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional caretakers of this land: the Anishnabeg, the Cree, the Oji-Cree, the Dakota, the Dene, the Inuit peoples and that this is the homeland of the Métis Nation.

My name is Cole Alvis and I am proud of my Métis-Irish/English heritage from the Turtle Mountains, just southwest of here. These lands and waterways are where my parents grew up and where my Chippewa ancestors can be traced to the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in what is now called North Dakota.

I am here today to accept the Honourary Membership Award on behalf of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance as an acknowledgment of our contribution to the development of technical disciplines within Canada.

IPAA’s mandate is to claim space for all Indigenous performing artists and with that in mind I offer this framework for how the action of awarding our Indigenous organization with an Honourary Membership can be meaningful and forward moving.

I will begin by speaking one of the 94 calls to action from the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC):

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We call upon the Canada Council for the Arts to establish, as a funding priority, a strategy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.

As you may know, the Canada Council for the Arts accepted this call and are in the process of implementing their new funding model which includes a program called Creating Knowing & Sharing: The Arts & Cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

At this time, I am compelled to address white supremacy within the performing arts. I understand it is an uncomfortable phrase because I too have white privilege.

In order to survive my Indigenous ancestors assimilated, choosing to marry out of their Nation as a result of Boarding School (as they were called in the US). I am proud of my Métis heritage and yet I, too, benefit from white privilege in this industry.

To clarify, white supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to those of all other races and should therefore dominate society. An example within the performing arts can be understood by examining the “nation-building” period when Canada was celebrating its centennial by building the regional theatres [that many of us work in] across this land, Indigenous peoples were just being given the right to vote.

The very structure of the arts in Canada are predicated on Eurocentric notions of art and excellence, lacking severely in Indigenous worldviews.

Returning to the TRC commemoration calling for collaboration that contributes to the reconciliation process, I invite you to consider how you will accept this call to action. At the Brown Bag Lunch yesterday, I spoke of the necessity for relationship building and meaningful engagement in any cross-cultural collaboration. Inspired by the work of the Canada Council, I encourage the Canadian Institute for Theatre Technology to establish a strategy that supports this framework. In accepting this Honourary Membership I encourage CITT to support all of us in the work of engaging with the local Indigenous artists and communities upon which we live and work.

This summer, I had the opportunity to attend Q2Q: A Symposium on Queer Theatre and Performance in Canada co-sponsored by Simon Fraser University and the frank theatre company on Coast Salish territory.

During this landmark gathering an affinity group of artistic leaders made up of Queer Trans Indigenous and People of Colour (QTIPOC) circled up and developed these four recommendations for the conference and for the performing arts:

1. Acknowledge that Two Spirit people have been performing here since time immemorial and should be looked to for leadership in the creation of queer futures on these lands and waterways.
Canada. Seeking to improve safety and user ergonomics in technical theatre, Rick invented the Front Loading Arbor in 2008. It is now patented in Canada and the United States with systems installed in Canada, the US, South America, and the UK. Last year, he applied for a patent for an Arbor Trap, which is designed to prevent runaway arbors. Grid Well products are licensed by and available through select manufacturers and dealers in North America, including J. R. Clancy, Thern Stage Equipment, BellaTex, Blackwell, and Peter Albrecht Company in the US. The Canadian license is held by Joel Theatrical Rigging.
System, 1500-1925 (2015 and reviewed in the Spring 2015 issue of Protocol). The book was nominated for the 2016 USITT Golden Pen Award. The book uncovers the real story of the development of the counterweight system. Rick has started research on the second installment of the story, which will complete the history to the present.

Rick has also started to collect complete historical counterweight line sets that will be donated to a museum for future generations to study. He is either in possession of, or has commitments to receive, line sets from various manufacturers from 1909, 1926, 1931, 1938, 1955, and 1961.

He is the president of Grid Well, Inc., a company that he created in 2015 allowing him to contribute to the live performance industry with his conceptual idea and practical realization of the front-loading counterweight arbor system. All those realizations make Rick worthy of the Ron Epp Memorial Award for Professional Achievement.

The Education Achievement Award is awarded to an individual, in recognition of longstanding career achievement as an educator. This individual is engaged in the teaching of a technical or related discipline, while preparing students for work within the Canadian live performance industry. The 2016 award was presented posthumously to Mike Taugher.

Mike was a mentor to not only his students, past and present, but to anyone he came in contact with in the industry. At the time of his passing on August 18, 2015, Mike was the chair of the Theatre Department at Vancouver Island University. Since starting his tenure at the University (Malaspina College) in 1991, Mike has had a profound effect on students who went on to become technicians working across the country. Prior to working at the Malaspina College, Mike worked in the theatre department at the University of Calgary. An ardent supporter of CITT/ICTS, Mike attended many conferences, especially the student-focused ones. He truly believed in his students and he tried to make the conference fun and engaging for them as well as encourage them to be involved and contribute to the organization. Work colleague and close friend Tim Johnson shared a poignant tribute to Mike and accepted the award on his behalf.

The Dieter Penzhorn Memorial Award is awarded to an individual who has provided significant and sustained service to the Canadian Institute for Theatre Technology / Institut canadien des technologies scénographiques, while playing an active role in the development of the greater Canadian cultural community. The 2016 award was presented to the Don Parman.

Based in British Columbia, Don has been extensively involved...
in the Vancouver theatre scene for 25 years and was the technical director of the Massey Theatre in New Westminster for 12 years. A member of the board of Actsafe and Interim Executive Director during their transition period, he now works as a consultant concentrating on backstage safety and education. Don has had a great personal effect on countless members of the BC Section and their careers. His contribution to the section and the national organization was recognized because of his unselfish dedication to the local, regional, and national CITT/ICTS organization over many years and the BC CITT Section would not exist in its current form without the influence of Don Parman. Don could not attend the conference this year; BC CITT Section board member Shawn Hines accepted the award on his behalf.

A national celebration

As the closing words of the awards presentation faded, we all turned to the screen. The first notes of the song “Fifty Mission Cap” resounded in the room, on stage the lights illuminating the band with Gord leading The Hip, and all of us, on an epic and unforgettable three-hour journey.

For more information about the CITT/ICTS Awards and the list of prior recipients, please visit our website: citt.org/citt_awards.html. The deadline to submit nominations for the 2017 Annual CITT/ICTS Awards is March 31, 2017.

After studying fine arts and theatre production, Monique Corbeil became involved in the performing arts industry in Quebec and has worked in almost every aspect—from technical production and touring to management and marketing. Based in Montréal, Québec, she is known as Mo, the CITT/ICTS National Coordinator, a position she has occupied since 2005.