

Honouring the Great Mystery that can Heal the Soul

Image



'You can't have a movement without music,' singer and social activist says

Editor's Note: Axiom News is partnering with the Skylight Festival to cultivate the narrative of transformation, justice, arts and faith. This is one of the featured stories. Visit the Skylight Festival site [here](#).

Diem Lafortune feels like her life is just starting, listening to her deepest inner voice following a journey of healing to tell stories through her music with stark honesty and heart.

The singer/songwriter, musician and social activist known as "Mama D" is

performing at the inaugural Skylight Festival July 31 to Aug. 2. She says it has the potential to light “lots of little lights” for social change.

Music and faith — some of the central elements to be explored at the Skylight Festival — can be powerful instruments for spirit and truth.

“I’m inspired by the great mystery and by that I mean, where do ideas come from,” says Diem, who was nominated Aboriginal songwriter of the year in 2013 by the Canadian Folk Music Awards.

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— Diem “Mama D” Lafortune

“That’s the magic, that’s the connection — the great inspiration from the greatest Creator. And so (music and faith are) tied together,” she says. “And it heals the soul, it heals the spirit, the emotions.”

Diem sees a gathering like the Skylight Festival “as the beginning of the connection between faith and art in a re-establishment of honouring the great mystery, by using our gifts.”

She knows of the power of music, especially in healing, as Diem has journeyed from significant and searing life challenges. Foremost is what she describes as “this big hole in me,” growing from her experiences as an adoptee and the search for the Cree birth mother she would never be able to meet.

Music was an escape from her life when Diem was a child. She recalls music and dancing were constants with her adopted father’s family. Her adopted father was Mi’kmaq Acadian and during family visits, Diem says, “we’d end up in the big family

kitchen ... with a bunch of fiddlers and accordions.”

She studied piano and learned to play guitar before starting to sing around age 19. Diem’s musical inspirations included singer-songwriters and activists Joan Baez and Buffy Sainte-Marie.

Diem stopped making music when her adopted father, whom she calls “a foundation” in her life, died in 1982. She became a constitutional appellate lawyer and, in 2008, petitioned the Supreme Court of Canada to open adoption records.

“I was in my healing journey ... And I was on my way to the Supreme Court of Canada and I knew I wasn’t going to get there so I just said, ‘That’s it, I’m out of here.’ And I started busking on the street because I had an album I did earlier that I didn’t like but it had great material.

“I decided I was going to go back to music,” Diem says. “I have one life, (music) is what I’m meant to do.”

Telling stories through music is part of Diem’s healing, soul-searching journey. It’s helped her to deal with years of grief that she’d not been allowed to acknowledge by some members of her adopted family.

“I needed to know who I am and where I come from but I had been punished for asking,” Diem says.

The simple act of holding and playing her guitar has kept her going, she says. “It’s the healing power of music. I get the vibration right into my guts where I store my rage of what was done to me and I still am forced to live with.”

It’s taken years to heal and now Diem says she’s “exactly where I’m supposed to be.”

She was able to revamp her album and re-released it. She performs at festivals and other events, including the Wild Goose Festival in the U.S. which is a sister event to Skylight.

Diem’s music has been described as prophetic, drawing from a range of styles while

telling stories of deep challenges and moments of truth experienced on life's journey.

"The simple rule I have in the larger picture is, everybody needs a foundation. No matter how broken or fractured it is, you have to know what that foundation is," Diem says. "So a lot my work as an activist is around stopping the international trade in human infants, family preservation, healing as opposed to separating children from their families, because that foundation may be broken but it is still a foundation. It's better than nothing."

She views her music as a gift and musicians, along with other artists, have a responsibility to give away their gifts, to share them. And appreciating one another's gifts can build strong relations for the creation of movements.

Diem says the faith music scene is alive with social justice, and faith communities have the structures to support movements, of which music is an integral part.

"You can't have a movement without music," she says. "And that's important because music is very unique. It's the most abstract of the art forms. It's something that (Greek dramatist) Sophocles said is the most dangerous of art forms because it goes right to the soul. It bypasses the head.

"That's why I write ... (One reviewer) said (my music) is prophetic and wrapped in a beautiful package. So it sneaks up on people ... you've got to get to their hearts before you get to their heads. I try to do both."

This story was originally posted on [Skylight Festival website](#) and appears here with permission.

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