

At the Traverse – Music Mondays – Amanda Rheume

Amanda Rheume is a quiet crusader. The Canadian singer-songwriter, who appears in the Traverse Theatre's latest Monday music programme, has a history of speaking out for good causes in songs that use gentle persuasion and catchy melodies rather than a loud hailer to get her message across, and her method has produced results.

✘ As well as winning her a 2014 Canadian Folk Music Award for Aboriginal Songwriter of the Year and a nomination for a Juno – the Canadian equivalent of a Grammy – in the same year, her songs and soulful singing voice have raised awareness of breast cancer and raised money for people in need.

Most recently, Rheume's song Red Dress has helped bring the problem of missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada greater public awareness.

Rheume, whose surname is pronounced Ray-oam, comes from a Métis background. These are people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry and one of the three recognized aboriginal peoples in Canada.

It was after attending a rally for Cindy Gladhue, a sex worker whose alleged murderer was controversially acquitted, that Rheume became aware that indigenous women's lives were being lost on a large scale.

"I didn't set out to write a protest song or a social commentary song," says Rheume. "Jim Bryson, who produced my latest album, Holding Patterns, sent me a few lines he'd written and asked me to see what I could add to them, and two hours later Red Dress was finished."

“Cindy Glade had been found in a bathtub after an encounter with a client and her case struck me as horrendous. But the murdered and missing indigenous women problem is massive and the song is a comment on how we blame victims rather than the perpetrators in these situations.”

Rheaume grew up in Ottawa and quickly developed a reputation as a singer-songwriter who was more interested in being involved in the community than singing about her personal life. She has an aversion to love songs, she says, and inspired by a great aunt who wrote a book about it, she has drawn on her family history to bring the Métis people's experiences to light.

She's sung for Canadian troops in Afghanistan three times – to show that she supports the troops themselves rather than war – and raised money on tour for the families of military personnel.

Holding Patterns is her fourth album and although she was initially a lone operator as a writer she's come to appreciate having someone to bounce ideas off.

“I'll play a chord sequence or make a verbal note to myself into my phone or onto my computer and songs start that way,” says Rheaume. “But sometimes I get stuck and I like it when I get together with someone else and one of us has an idea that the other can take a bit further and then it goes back and forth like a conversation.”

Rheaume appears at the Traverse on Monday, 23 January 2016. The weekly Music Mondays series begins on January 16 with Scottish folk group Blueflint and includes appearances by Tennessean gothic and alt-country singer Amethyst Kiah (February 6), Scottish fiddle quartet Rant (February 27), Mississippi troubadour Bronwynne Brent (March 6), and Boys of the Lough founder, singer and whistle master Cathal McConnell and Friends (April 3).