

WHAT IS NIGHT OF THE INDIGENOUS DEVS?

KAITLYNN TOMASELLI | IMAGINENATIVE

This first edition of Night of the Indigenous Devs was an evening of six hand-picked games from the iNDigital Space at *imagineNATIVE* were brought into the comfort of a theatre. There the public were able to sit back and watch the games played live with real-time commentary from the artists who created them.

Hold My Hand by Nathan Powless-Lynes, *Wao Kanaka* by The Ka Lei Milika'a Collective, *Terra Nova* by SlipCycle, *Don't Wake The Night* by Brujería @ Werk, *When Rivers Were Trails* by the Indian Land Tenure Foundation, and *Full of Birds* by Ashlee Bird & Sarah Biscarra Dilley; these 6 Indigenous game creators and groups from all over the world were invited to come up on stage, one by one, and speak about their game. They talked about their process, which communities were involved, their successes, the failed attempts, and where they are at now with their games. The excitement was there with those artists, as they got the opportunity to share their projects and speak about their passion, to an audience who listened and became captivated in their stories.

Volunteers who were chosen at random from the audience, came up on stage to play these games for the first time live. There was laughing, conversations, and intense battles between players. The audience asked questions that sparked even more conversation. The engagement received from this event was remarkable!

The evening ended on a high note with a giveaway of an art piece donated by award-winning game designer, writer, and artist, Elizabeth LaPensée, merchandise from *East Side Games*, and a poster signed by all the artists and designed by *Achimostawinan Games'* founder, Meagan Byrne. At then end of the evening artists and the audience were given the opportunity to network amongst each other, talk, and even plan to meet afterwards for celebratory drinks.

This wasn't your traditional theatre viewing, **Night of the Indigenous Devs** is an event made to give Indigenous creatives a platform to highlight their talent within the interactive digital media sector, that can sometimes get overlooked because it is a smaller group of creatives that are making games. It is a chance to come out and have fun talking about Indigenous games in a relaxed, celebratory event. The audience gets an opportunity to really understand the creator's narratives and perspective as the artist gets the chance to share their story behind their game.

As games are increasingly getting recognition as a collaborative process, this event shows the audience how a combination of art practices all contribute to the creation of a game. The cultural aspect in Indigenous people coming together as a community to build towards a common goal is our way of life and has always been a valuable lesson.

Night of the Indigenous Devs is an important event for Indigenous creatives and I can't wait until the next one!



KAITLYNN TOMASELLI

Kaitlynn Tomaselli is of Anishinaabe (Odawa and Potawatomi) and Italian descent from Mnidoo Mnising (Manitoulin Island). She is currently working at imagineNATIVE as the Digital + Interactive Coordinator. At imagineNATIVE, she helps facilitate the year-long programming and is currently working on an initiative that supports youth with video game development from start to stability.

She has taken part in many community-oriented programming around the City of Toronto, such as joining the youth council ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency and the Native Child Youth Advisory.



NAOMI JOHNSON

Naomi Johnson is a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) Bear clan from Six Nations. From 2013 - 2017, Naomi served as Artistic Director and then in 2018 as Co-Executive Director of the Woodland Cultural Centre, where she curated and programmed annual exhibitions and performance art events.

In June 2019 Naomi accepted the position of Associate Director for imagineNATIVE, having the unique and rewarding opportunity to be mentored by then outgoing Executive Director, Jason Ryle. In June 2020 she assumed the role of Executive Director of imagineNATIVE, taking on the leadership position for the organization. With a life devoted to the arts, she very much looks forward to continuing her work supporting Indigenous talent within the film and media arts industry.

Image courtesy of imagineNATIVE (2020)