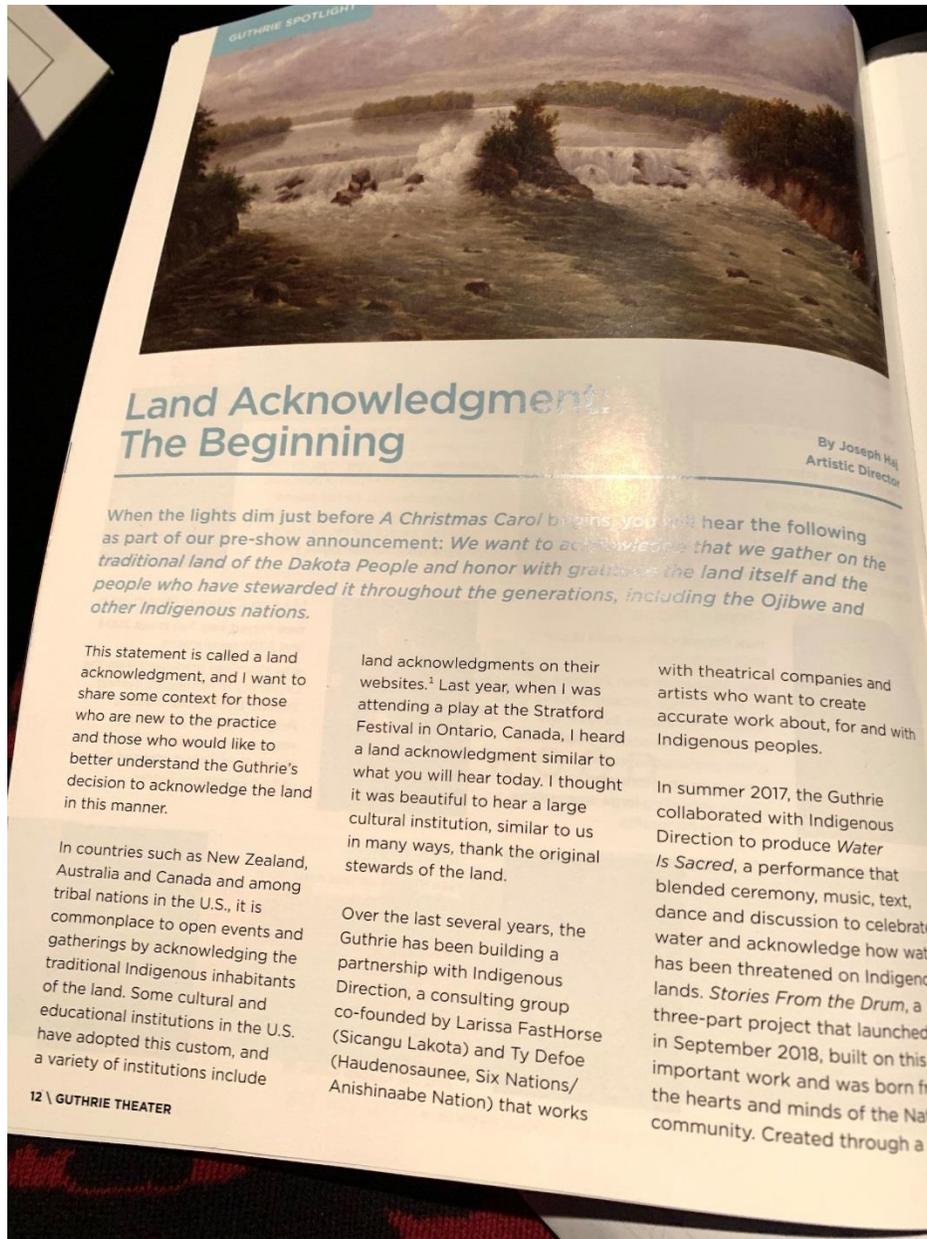


## LUNACY AT BDOT

POSTED ON DECEMBER 27, 2019 BY JOHN HINDERAKER

Our friend Kathy Kersten attended a performance of "A Christmas Carol" at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis last night. She was astonished to find that the theater's program included a lengthy "land acknowledgement" of the sort that is being promoted by a handful of Native American activists in Minnesota. Click to enlarge:





Right: *Water Is Sacred*;  
Below: *Stories From the Drum*

Above: Larissa FastHorse  
and Ty Defoe

series of Indigenous-led workshops and culminating in three public performances on the McGuire Proscenium Stage last June, *Stories From the Drum* featured an all-Native cast from the Twin Cities. Both projects looked to expand and deepen relationships with the Indigenous communities who hold ties to the Mississippi River and the sacred land on which the Guthrie sits.

While working with Larissa and Ty during *Stories From the Drum*, we asked them about land acknowledgments and what our next steps should be at the Guthrie. We received the great advice that everyone appreciates being thanked and this process is a journey — where we start most likely won't be where we end. We were also advised to consult local elders for feedback around our statement. Rebecca Noon, our director of community engagement, had worked closely with the Native community on *Stories From the Drum* and met with community members and elders to share our desire to start

acknowledging the land and ask for their thoughts and guidance. Here are some of their responses:

**From Isabella Star LaBlanc (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota):**

Storytelling inherently requires an acknowledgment of history, an understanding that we are all products of the people and places we come from. Theater asks us to find collective ways to honor our own individual stories. As theater artists and audience members, every time we step foot into a theater, we are asked to bring our histories with us. Land acknowledgments remind us that our stages are built on land that also has its own stories, ones that have always colored the art we make here. By acknowledging where we are, we can acknowledge the beauty of where we've been and where we still need to go.

**From Eileen Hudon (Mahskawaziibiikwe/Anishinaabe, White Earth, Crane Clan):** Land acknowledgment is an act of respect and acknowledgment of Native people. It is a first step

away from public invisibility. Colonization, history and racism cast a deep shadow over our perspective of land, life, culture and people. We have been exiled to a place of extinction. In *Stories From the Drum*, we declared, "We are still here!" We have survived all the efforts to extinguish everything about us.

**From Larissa FastHorse (Sicangu Lakota):** FINALLY!

The land acknowledgment you hear today was thoughtfully crafted by Guthrie staff with guidance from Dakota and Ojibwe consultants as well as non-Natives who have incorporated land acknowledgments into their organizations.

I want to thank them for their guidance and recognize this is only the beginning of our journey. We know there is still much work to do. 

<sup>1</sup> "Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment," U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, [www.usdac.us](http://www.usdac.us)

This is the Native American version of the 1619 Project—a perverted retelling of American history in which everything is extinguished except racism, slavery and oppression. Kathy, who writes for Center of the American Experiment, exposed the phenomenon here. Thus, one of the activists writes in the Guthrie program:

Colonization, history and racism cast a deep shadow over our perspective of land, life, culture and people. We have been exiled to a place of extinction.

“Colonization” means you and me. Kathy writes:

They actually read the land acknowledgment out loud, right before the opening scene in Victorian costume. Ridiculous beyond belief.

What any of this has to do with “A Christmas Carol,” God only knows.

The program includes a reference to “the sacred land on which the Guthrie sits.” But it seems that, if you listen to the activists, all the land in these parts is “sacred.” Thus, Fort Snelling, built

after the War of 1812 to protect the territory from British incursion and the single most historic place in Minnesota, is currently the subject of a campaign to rename it “Historic Fort Snelling at Bdote,” on the ground that it, too, stands on “sacred” land. Worse, the Minnesota Historical Society, which operates Fort Snelling, is under pressure to transform it into an Auschwitz-style monument to evil (“colonization”) instead of what it really was, an outpost of peace and a beacon of freedom, as when thousands of Minnesota volunteers mustered there to fight to abolish slavery.

The Guthrie’s land acknowledgement says that “we gather on the traditional land of the Dakota People,” and includes a casual reference to “the Ojibwe and other Indigenous nations.” In fact, the Dakota (Sioux) and Ojibwe (Chippewa) were bitter enemies, and southern Minnesota became a “traditional land of the Dakota People” only recently—the early 18th century—when the Dakota were driven here by the Ojibwe. Warfare between the Dakota and Ojibwe continued well into the 19th century, and keeping the peace between the warring tribes was one of the missions of the soldiers at Fort Snelling.

You may wonder, what is the point? What are the activists after? They want to recast American history—your history and mine, not theirs—as evil. They want to bend the rest of us to their will, by imposing “land acknowledgements” and renaming sites and buildings.

And, of course, as with all political activism of this sort, the day will come when money is expected to change hands.