

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FILM, CONCERT EVENT PUTS CHEROKEE LANGUAGE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Museum of the Cherokee Indian offers free two-night community event

CHEROKEE, NC: On August 4 and 5, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian (MCI) will present [The Way We Speak with the World](#), a film and concert event celebrating the Cherokee language. Held at the [Chief Joyce Dugan Cultural Arts Center](#) at Cherokee Central Schools, the community-centered event is open to the public and free of charge; free tickets can be secured via [Eventbrite](#).

The event kicks off on **Friday, August 4** with a screening of "[ᏊᏊᏍᏍᏁ \(Dadiwonisi / We Will Speak\)](#)," a feature-length documentary collaboration chronicling the efforts of Cherokee activists, artists, and educators fighting to save the Cherokee language. A Q&A with members of the film's production team will follow the screening.

On **Saturday, August 5**, attendees will be treated to a Cherokee language concert featuring Cherokee Nation musicians who contributed to the groundbreaking 2022 compilation album [Anvɔvnelisgi \(ᏈᏍᏁᏍᏁᏍᏁ\)](#). Artists will perform their original songs, with genres ranging from folk to metal to hip-hop, reggae, and beyond.

The Way We Speak with the World signals the urgency of language preservation and honors the citizens who are working to preserve, perpetuate, learn, and teach Tsalagi. Every two weeks around the world, an Indigenous language is lost. Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma counts only 2,000 living fluent speakers among its 380,000 tribal citizens, while North Carolina's Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) estimates that 152 of its 16,800 enrolled members fluently speak the language. In 2018, United Keetowah Band of Cherokee Indians counted 101 speakers among its 14,000 citizens. Forced assimilation at [Indian boarding schools](#), where speaking Cherokee was forbidden, is a recent memory. But citizens persisted: elders who held language close have shared their knowledge with their successors, and with the development of adult language programs and immersive language schools for children—like the EBCI's own [New Kituwah Academy](#)—generations are uniting to ensure that Cherokee language thrives.

"Through oral traditions, our Cherokee culture has been able to survive for millions of years," says Shennelle Feather (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Diné, Lakota), Education Program Manager at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. "This event is honoring our language through film and music—two modern ways of sharing stories—and proves that we are still using oral history to teach the world and remind ourselves that we are still here. That our language is not

dead, it is living, it is and can evolve just like the people who speak it and have spoken it since time immemorial.”

A companion event to MCI’s 2022 event *The Way We See the World*, which featured screenings of contemporary, Indigenous-made short films and special guests—including *Reservation Dogs* creator Sterlin Harjo (Seminole Nation)—*The Way We Speak with the World* continues the tradition of centering the Cherokee community and exhibiting how tradition and culture endure through contemporary media.

“This event is for our at-large Cherokee community from North Carolina to Oklahoma and will happen in the original homelands—not just for our people, but for all the beings that yearn to hear the language that is originally theirs,” says Feather.

The Way We Speak with the World is made possible through the generous support of North Carolina Arts Council, Cherokee Preservation Foundation, Harrah’s Cherokee Casinos, Office of the Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Management Resource Associates, The Center for Native Health, University of North Carolina at Asheville American Indian & Indigenous Studies, Kituwah LLC, and Walelu Cherokee Ball Team Inc. Sponsorship opportunities are still available: learn more [here](#).

Download high-resolution photos and graphics for *The Way We Speak with the World* [here](#).

About the Museum of the Cherokee Indian

Established in 1948, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian is one of the longest-operating tribal museums in the country. Located in Cherokee, North Carolina on the Qualla Boundary, the sovereign land of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and ancestral homelands of all Cherokees, the Museum shares the history, culture, and stories of the Cherokee people through its exhibitions, collections, and programs. Learn more at mci.org.

[LJOhb \(Dadiwonisi / We Will Speak\), 2023, 95 minutes](#)

[Watch the Trailer](#)

Directors: OGYW / Schon Duncan & Michael McDermit

Producers: P W J / Keli Gonzales & Laura Heberton

Cinematographer & Editor: Jacob Koestler

Executive Producers: ʘH ʘS J / Wes Studi, Thomas Sadoski, Katherine Harper, The McClellan-Sorell Family, Gill Holland, Ben Speiser, & Mark Shlomchik

From the Filmmakers: The Cherokee language is deeply tied to Cherokee identity; yet generations of assimilation efforts by the U.S. government and anti-Indigenous stigmas have forced the Tri-Council of Cherokee tribes to declare a State of Emergency for the language in 2019. While there are 430,000 Cherokee citizens in the three federally recognized tribes, fewer than an estimated 2,000 fluent speakers remain—the majority of whom are elderly. The COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately hastened the course. Language activists, artists, and the youth must now lead the charge of urgent radical revitalization efforts to help save the language from the brink of extinction.

This feature-length documentary was shot on-location in Oklahoma and North Carolina throughout 2019-2022; through intimate interviews, vérité footage of community gatherings, and extensive archival materials, the film explores the nuanced ways the Cherokee language is vital to maintaining a unique cultural identity and relationship with the world. The collaborative project is also meant to act as an empowering agent of hope for Indigenous voices despite enduring inequity and oppression.

Our film follows various Cherokee community members—specifically language activist and co-director Schon Duncan, educator Carolyn Swepston, and artist Keli Gonzales—as they continue the long fight to help save the language. The film’s “big concepts” of language revitalization are carried through the three characters’ stories and narrative trajectories.

Note: There are three federally recognized Tribes of Cherokee (Cherokee Nation, United Keetoowah Band, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians); our film features participants and representatives from all of them. In any press or write ups, we ask that “Cherokee Nation” be avoided as a blanket term to identify the Tribal affiliation for all the participants in this film. This is a story of Cherokee people from all Cherokee Tribes. G.V / Thank you!

Anvvnelisgi DᎠᎦᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ

[Listen to the Record](#) | [Meet the Production Team](#) | [Meet the Artists](#)

An Indigenous language is lost every two weeks around the world. With only 2,000 living fluent Cherokee speakers, the recorded album DᎠᎦᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ (Anvvnelisgi, pronounced Ah Nuh Duh Nay Lees Gi), celebrates the Cherokee language in a modern world.

Led by Cherokee citizens as part of a wide-ranging commitment to preserve and expand the Cherokee language, DᎠᎦᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ, which translates to “Performers” in English, is produced by Cherokee filmmaker and creator Jeremy Charles and distributed by Horton Records, a non-profit 501c-3 committed to providing support and tools for Tulsa-area musicians to broaden their reach. The project was funded in part through the Commemoration Fund, dedicated to supporting bold and innovative efforts to correct social, political and economic injustices that impact Black, Indigenous, Latinx and People of Color.

The Museum of the Cherokee Indian is honored to welcome all artists who performed on the Anvvnelisgi DᎠᎦᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ record to Cherokee for an unforgettable live performance.

Performers:

Aaron Hale (Psychedelic Singer/Songwriter)

Agalisiga Mackey (Country)

Austin Markham (Pop)

Colby Luper (Metal)

Desi & Cody (Rock)

IIA (Pop)

Kalyn Fay (Folk/Americana)

Medicine Horse (Metal)

Monica Taylor (Folk/Americana)

Ken Pomeroy (Alternative Folk)

Travis Fite (Reggae)

Zebadiah Nofire (Hip-Hop)