Northern Lights Episode 12

Contemporary Arctic Music – Part 1 (ft. Andrew Morrison)

Produced, edited and narrated by: Vickie Rochon, UArctic

Interviewee: Andrew Morrison, lead singer & songwriter from Iqaluit-based band The Jerry Cans and co-founder of Aakuluk Music record label.

Introduced by: Sarah Mackie

Sarah Mackie
Hello everyone and welcome to Northern Lights, the Harvard Arctic Initiative Student Podcast.
In the first episode of a miniseries on the music scene in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Vickie Rochon speaks with Andrew Morrison, lead singer & songwriter from Iqaluit-based band The Jerry Cans and co-founder of Aakuluk Music record label.

Vickie Rochon is a Circumpolar Studies student at Trent University in Canada, part of the UArctic network. She has significant experience as an expedition guide in both the Arctic and the Antarctic.

This is Vickie Rochon with Part 1 of Contemporary Arctic Music.

Vickie Rochon
Music. We all consume music in one way or another. Some of us are absolute melomaniacs, others enjoy it when it comes around. Music is a facet of human life that is so accessible and embedded in our everyday, we often forget about its importance or take it for granted. But what can it tell about ourselves? How does our cultural background and life experience shape the way we consume, make or are introduced to music? And what best way to get to know another culture than by diving into its music scene? We will explore that in two episodes.
Our first guest is a member of Iqaluit-based band The Jerry Cans. The Band has been publishing albums since 2012 and was nominated at the 2018 Juno Award for Breakthrough Group of the Year and Contemporary Roots Album of the Year. They have also founded Aakuluk Music, Nunavut’s first ever record label. This is to say, they are well established in the music scene of the North. The lead singer which we will hear from today, is a non-indigenous local who after having been exposed to Inuktitut his whole life, has sought to learn how to speak it himself to better connect with its native speakers. He has become a fond ally of both the language and its culture and talks about it with a sheer passion.

I actually caught him as he was coming back from seal hunting on the land, cheerful and refreshed and we dove right into the subject:

**Vickie Rochon**
Hello? Andrew?

**Andrew Morrison**
Yeah, I’m here!

**Vickie Rochon**
I was looking at, at your web page where you talk a little bit about the last album that you've published and there's a style of music that is listed there as: “Arctic Post Punk”, can you describe what it is and what you refer to?

**Andrew Morrison**
Well, I think that labeling music is kind of silly in the first place but I do think that Punk is a very helpful word in describing music, and not just necessarily the sounds and the esthetic of the music but the spirit behind it… And we played in an actual legit, like, noisy great punk band when we lived in Peterborough the drummer, the bass player and myself and so we got hooked into that community and it was very…. the, lots of the things that were very powerful… The philosophies of the punk world were very…, it resonated with us big time because it's doing, making art with limited resources and doing whatever you can with what you have, and that was very much Arctic
Punk, ‘was we were recording…, we only had one microphone for the first few songs that we ever recorded; Iqaluit, Mamaqtuq and uh… GN Song maybe? No, Northmart is Ripping Us Off? I can’t remember! But we literally… Just recorded the drum one take through, just recorded the guitar one take through, just recorded the snare drum one take through!

Vickie Rochon
Oh really!

Andrew Morrison
That was, it was ridiculous! For people that understand the recording process…, they’ll say: “what the hell's wrong with you kids?”, like..! But we just made do with what we could. Somebody had a camera, somebody had some props and we just slowly figured it out and that was very much kind of punk style. That's what I think of as punk music and I think Post Punk to me is going beyond the normal sound that you associate with punk music and… And allowing that term to embrace more of the philosophy and, and lifestyle behind it. And Arctic is there just because…,. We're very much from here and our art and our music is very much rooted in… In being from the North.

Musical interlude:
...
You find yourself travelling among the Northern Lights
Cold winds howl hear the sled dogs cry
Don't you never ever forget to the ones who live there
...
Vickie Rochon
Would you say there is an obvious difference in between music, like, Northern Music and Southern Music?

Andrew Morrison
Yeah, I think for sure, like, I think people often think about music in too limited a way of looking at it, and just what it sounds like, and to me, powerful music is what it sounds like plus the story and the experience and the context behind it. That's what I think great art is… When people look
at those paintings with one line on it, there like: “What the hell is this?” and if you only look at it for what it looks like you don't understand it, but if you understand the history and the context behind what that one line means modern art, like, modern visual art becomes very interesting. And I think it’s the same with music…

And I don't know why we're so focused on…, just the sound of the music when the story and the experience is what makes it appealing and more interesting and distinguishes it from other stuff so, I…, for us…, I think that northern music, I think Arctic music, and I don't know if this particularly applies The Jerry Cans because a lot of other… Well, music in Inuktitut I think is resistance music I’ve been listening to a lot of Peter Tosh and Bob Marley and, uh, Damian Marley and lot of reggae music and it's so steeped in resistance. And, I was trying to think about how that northern and Arctic music kind of relates to that and I think that any song in Inuktitut is a song of resistance, and it's resisting the totalising force of English and the colonial force of English and along with all the ways of thinking that come with English…

Musical Interlude:
...
Qannuigittuq (Inuktitut lyrics)
...

Andrew Morrison
So, I think that Inuktitut music…, is resistance music I think it's de-colonization in a song, in every song, every time it's played it's a moment of decolonization and I think that…, that's what I think characterizes northern songs is…, even if it's not blatantly a moment of resistance I think northern music is so steeped in, in resistance music. Because again it goes back to that punk idea of like making art against all odds and with very little resources and very little support so I think that that's what I think is one of the defining characteristics of, of Arctic music.

Vickie Rochon
Yes absolutely, and it seems like…, you can tell there is a lot of story telling in the songs you guys make and, is there a specific topic or a specific story you’re especially proud and happy that you could bring up, maybe to the public eye, by putting it into a song?

Andrew Morrison
I think that they're all special in their own way but they're all stemming from experiences of colonization and that's, like, obviously white people benefit from colonization and so, that's where I come from, that's part of our story, at least for Jerry Cans, like, I think…, we talk about suicide, we talk about high grocery prices, we talk about seal hunting, we sing about people dying and their names being passed on to the next generation a very, like, uh, very common cultural thing up here and I think that, that's…, all of those are stemming from…, like, their significance and why they're significant today is all shaped by colonization.

Musical Interlude
...
(Instrumental)
...
Andrew Morrison
And when people like: “What does colonization actually mean?” well, it means exactly what those specific songs are. It means that there’s ridiculous experiences buying groceries in Nunavut, like, because Nunavut is not prioritized by the federal government to get proper access to these same things. Uh, same thing with the power of seal hunting. I think that…, that, the why that song's important it’s important because it's related to grocery prices. Seal hunting has been, is, under attack by animal rights organizations so there's all these different, sort of, jumping off points you can take once you start to talk about the music.

Music Interlude
...

My brother
Got the phone call today
My brother
Why'd you have to go this way?
My brother

Andrew Morrison
And that's what every other artist I think that we kind of work with too, it's all very much steeped, shaped and comes out of experiences of colonization. And that's from my perspective that's, like, a white dude…, thinking, understanding it is important for white people to acknowledge that and take part in pointing that stuff out…

Vickie Rochon
Yeah.
And trying to address it.

Vickie Rochon
So Aakuluk Music, what was your aim behind it, or what was the goal?

Andrew Morrison
I mean we had, like, being a band in the Arctic we’d face lots of challenges just not being, having access to the same resources or the same connections or whatever in the music industry because it's very, very, very dominated by who you know and, we can say that again, it's like a thing the people hear but it’s absolutely so true that nepotism and favoritism and that runs very deep in the music industry so… And we made a lot of mistakes like, we went of showcase festival, different festivals that sort of represented themselves as the big breaking opportunity, they turned out to be crap. And whereas a band in Toronto would spend five hundred bucks getting there, we would spend fifteen thousand dollars getting there because we were going from Iqaluit so…, we just wanted to help anybody who was interested in pursuing a career in music not have to make the same mistakes as us and that was…, that, that's why we started the rec… We didn't even know what a manager was, we didn’t know what a publicist was, we didn’t know what a record label was…! We only know what a record was in like, the last year and a half! (laugh)
Before that we had no idea, we had no idea! I would try to explain to people I'd be, like, you know what? I don't even know! So, we just did it because other…, we saw other people doing that and then we slowly figured it out, but again it came out of the idea to help other artists not have to go through the same gauntlet of the music industry as we had to go through… ‘Cause it was very challenging.

Vickie Rochon
Yeah, it seems so.

Andrew Morrison
And hard! We sang in Inuktitut, so everybody would say no to us. CBC Radio would say no, managers would say no, record labels would say no…, all because it wasn't in English. Like, everybody was like: “I love the story, I love where you come from…” and all this crap about that stuff but then…, it was this weird, like, ongoing colonial situation where they're like: “If you sang in English or moved to Toronto, we would work with you”.

Vickie Rochon
Yeah…

Andrew Morrison
So, that, it rears its head in a lot of weird ways. But now we're so stoked to be able to help, like, Terry Uyarak right now is on, like, a weeklong hunting trip, there's like, three people trying to get a hold of him for live shows and contracts and all this stuff and we're like: “Sweet! Go and hunt caribou, go dog sled do whatever you wanna do, we’ll take care of this” instead of requiring artists to have to put away their life and do all this logistics stuff. I'm very proud we’re able to do that.

Vickie Rochon
So I asked him if he could develop on the different music styles observed from his standing point at the record label, and here’s what he replied:

Andrew Morrison
Well yeah, I mean I always tell people and, like, we've invited some people up North, some pretty big media and industry people up North because I really believe that Nunavut has one of the strongest per capita music scenes in the world…, there's hip hop, people like FxckMr, Triple 6 God, there's hard rock, like, Northern Haze, the Tradeoffs, Jerry Cans, there’s like, world class throat singers that are collaborating with many, many people…, electro-pop music like Riit and Aasiva and the list goes on…, and more, like, kind of country, traditional stuff like Daniel Kolola and…, and then Terry is like… I don’t even know how to describe him he’s like… super… I don't even know …Super music!

Like, soul…, soulful beautiful music…, so I don’t know! It’s very challenging right now because of Covid but, uh, we were doing so much to try and…, not build, just share… So, I mean, I encourage everybody to kind of, check out Nunavut music and, people are always surprised and shocked at the wide range of genres too, which is so cool…

Musical Interlude
…
(Instrumental)
…

**Vickie Rochon**
Yeah, it seems like a very vibrant culture out there.
…
Ullakkut naggajaumi
Umiaqturlauqtugut
Sila qanuillauppa?
Silattiavalauqtuq
Imaq qanuillauppa?
Uqsualauqtuq
Ammalu sulauqqita
Nattisiulauqtugut

Mamaqtuq
Vickie Rochon
And before I let you go, ‘cause I’m sure you have other stuff to do…. that, might come as a funny question but I was wondering umm, what kind of question do you never get asked on interviews and really wish would come more often?

Andrew Morrison
I wish that people asked about specific songs, what that… I love hearing from artist what a song, a specific song, is actually about.

Vickie Rochon
Oh..!

Andrew Morrison
I think more people…, I think…, we get asked all the time about the North and our band name and all that stuff and I think, maybe that's an interesting story but I find like, as a songwriter, a lot of the context and, like I was saying the story telling and the context behind why a specific song is written is so interesting to me… Because it's often not what you think and, can be… But sometimes it ruins it too though! So, I don't know, I take that back actually! (laugh)
I don’t know!

Vickie Rochon
Can I actually go ahead and ask you?

Andrew Morrison
Sure.

Vickie Rochon
Ok so, one of my favorite songs from The Jerry Cans is Arnalukaq, I guess…? You know the one I’m talking about?

Andrew Morrison
Arnalukaq! Yeah, I know…!

Vickie Rochon
Yeah, yeah!

Andrew Morrison
Yeah… See! Already you hit me right in the heart more than any other…

Vickie Rochon
Can you tell me what this song is about?

Andrew Morrison
Arnalukaq is about… The specific song is when the Stephen Harper government was in power, and there was lots of pressure for them to call an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women.

Vickie Rochon
Yes.

Andrew Morrison
And… They voted it down, and they denied this request. More to that is that Nunavut had a Inuk female member of Parliament and she voted no to it, and it wasn't specifically about…., I mean it was specifically about women that were missing and murdered, but it is also…., to understand the systemic issues than are…., for violence against women. And to us as a society to acknowledge that this is an issue in that we need to address it. And I was so disgusted that the government would first deny it, but then that our MP would vote against it…., and I have three beautiful daughters and I wrote the song…., for them! They're Inuk, they’re indigenous and I wrote the song….,
Piujuqpaalujutit means you're beautiful and I wrote it so that they would never, ever, ever forget, if they found themselves in situations of abuse, or violence, that they would never forget that they are beautiful… And that they would always remember to find that light in life.

Musical Interlude

…

Arnalukaq, arnalukaq piujuqpaalujutit
Arnalukaq, arnalukaq puiguqtailigit
Arnalukaq, arnalukaq your soul carries the light

Andrew Morrison
And so, it was this major political thing that was trickled down into me staring into my daughters’ eyes, making sure that they never, ever, ever doubt…, themselves…, as beautiful, beautiful humans. So that's what that song is about.

Musical Interlude

…

Arnalukaq, arnalukaq ain’t no man ever got the right

Piujuqpaalujutit
Piujuqpaalujutit
Piujuqpaalujutit
Piujuqpaalujutit
Piujuqpaalujutit

Vickie Rochon
This is gorgeous… Really glad I asked! (laugh)

Andrew Morrison
That’s what I’m saying, I'm like, why don’t people ask me more!? Like, even, I get passionate talking about it!
Vickie Rochon
Yeah, yeah I can tell!

Andrew Morrison
You chose a very, very, very interesting one. Thank you.

Vickie Rochon
Yeah, well, thanks to you, thanks for making it. I truly, really love this song and I…, even though I cannot understand the language…, I don't know I could feel there was something really powerful through it, and it does resonate with me regardless and…, yeah I totally love it. So, thanks for that.

Andrew Morrison
Now you know that song, the chorus, it’s only one word in every…, and through the whole chorus over and over; Piujuqpaalujuit, means you are beautiful and it's a reminder to all women, and people who identify as women, to never forget that they're beautiful…, no matter what any asshole tells you.

Musical Interlude
...
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
Piujuqpaalujuit
...

Vickie Rochon
This was Andrew Morrison singer and songwriter for The Jerry Cans and co-founder at Aakuluk Music. A huge thanks to him for taking part in this discussion and for allowing me to include music from the band in this episode. All songs are from The Jerry Cans and can be found at www.aakulukmusic.com.

**Sarah Mackie**

Today’s episode was written and produced by Vickie Rochon.

We would like to thank Andrew Morrison for his time and Andrew, The Jerry Cans and Aakuluk Music for allowing us to use their music.

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