



# CHANGING CONVENTION

TWENTY YEARS AFTER HIS FIRST FORAY INTO EDMONTON'S MUSIC AND DANCE SCENES, MATTHEW WOOD CONTINUES TO INSPIRE COLLABORATION — AND COMMUNITY

BY DAVID BERRY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL WOOD



Matthew Wood is a community centre. Ideas, people, art forms, cultures, subcultures, histories and futures: He is both a focal point and a staging ground for all of them.

He opens his doors to the world that surrounds him, to every part of it, and transforms it into something that is both rooted and unimagined, a part of the whole that is pulling it somewhere new.

Wood is not easy to define, if only because definition by nature involves boundaries and restrictions. He performs under the name Creeasian, which nods both to his heritage — his father was Vietnamese and his mother Cree — and to his endlessly original approach to the mediums in which he's most at home: dance and DJing. But it doesn't quite capture the breadth and depth of his inspiration. Perhaps the most encompassing way to say it, is that he's an artist. Still, if the purpose of an artist is to absorb the world and reflect back an entirely original perspective, he has made community-organizing as central to his practice as anything else.

"He rolled all the time with community — he always had people with him," says Tim Hill, of Halluci Nation (formerly known as A Tribe Called Red), for whom Wood has been a touring dancer for more than six years. "The kind of aura he brings around, it's always a very warm, light-hearted, inviting place. And he's like that with everybody."

"When he receives something, he always shares," explains Gerry Morita, artistic director of Mile Zero Dance, who has worked with Wood for more than a decade, and recently welcomed him as an artistic associate at Mile Zero. "He's a really strong mentor to other people, a teacher — he's always bringing along youth or the community as a whole."

If Wood's place in the community has been recognized by his peers since shortly after he began dancing at community centres and at the Edmonton International Street Performers Festival nearly 20 years ago, it's now also being acknowledged by the city's institutions. This year has seen him recognized not only with funding from the Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund but as the city's Indigenous Artist-in-Residence. Whatever else it might mean, the implications for what it says about his place in the community are not lost on Wood.

"I always didn't feel like I belonged everywhere. I always had to fight for my place to be, to prove that I belonged where I felt I belonged," Wood explains of his youth, and the drive it gave him to create spaces where people could feel part of something. "I didn't want to have that for people in my community. That's always been the most important component for me. Because I didn't want others to feel that same way." >

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