The Hum Podcast

Episode 26: "We Were Meant To Be Assimilated Or Exterminated"

[Theme music fades in]

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[Music increases in volume]

Speaker: You're listening to The Hum.

[Music decreases in volume]

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Gilad: Jeremy Dutcher is a two-spirit Wolastoqiyik from the Tobique First Nation in Northwest New Brunswick. He's most known for his music as an artist, tenor, composer, performer, and also my favorite maybe, a human rights activist. In 2018, his album won the 2018 Polaris Music Prize, and just this year he won the JUNO for the Indigenous music album category. That was huge. If that's not impressive enough, he's not even 30 years old. Now you can't see obviously, because this is a podcast, but I'm also joined here today by a special guest host. We have Blanche Israel joining us. Blanche, just for some background, works as our grant writer at JAYU, but also lives a double life. Blanche, maybe you can introduce the other side of what you do.

Blanche: I was very fortunate to connect with Jeremy last year, and be asked to join his band. I play the cello, and it took a bit of a sideline, but it is front and center in my life again, and I'm just over the moon about that.

Gilad: I can't speak enough about when you can see the love for art like literally exploding out of people's eyeballs, and ears, and pores, and it happens with you any time we talk about the arts. Jeremy, it happens with you any time I listen to your music. Thank you both for being here. This is going to be a great interview. So Jeremy, before we jump into things, I was doing some digging, and perhaps the most important thing, I notice you were born on November 8th, which technically makes you a Scorpio. Now full disclosure, I am terrified of Scorpios. I've had some terrible experiences with Scorpios. Are all the things they say about Scorpios true, or what's going on here?

Jeremy: It's all a misunderstanding really. You know I think we get a very bad rap, and I didn't really understand it for a long time. Every time I would tell people, "Oh, you're a Scorpio, oh no." Yeah, we're just very intense, and some people aren't able to deal with this. Some people, and some Scorpios, aren't able to balance that intensity with love. Yeah, so I'm sorry about your past negative experiences with our people.

Gilad: You're convincing me though. You're convincing me.

Jeremy: You know, I'd just rather speak in confidence.

Gilad: I'm seeing through it. I'm getting it. I'm a Leo, just full disclosure.

Jeremy: Oh, Leos.

Gilad: I'm a Leo, and so if there's-

Jeremy: I'm a Leo moon, so we're connected in a way, you know. I've got to learn your lessons.

Gilad: There you go. If there's one thing Leos love doing, it's reminding the world-

Jeremy: Being adored.

Gilad: I was going to say reminding the world that they love being Leos.

Jeremy: Yeah.

Gilad: We get lions tattooed all over ourselves. I think I've got like eight on my body. We're going to jump actually right into it. I was just watching you on the JUNOs. You were awarded the winner and you come up to do your acceptance speech, and I thought it was super awesome that you had the space to speak, but you ran out of time. Then the Arkells come up at the very end of the night, and I thought it was amazing that they actually invited you to come back up and finish

your speech. It was super powerful. I have a question though. The first time you came up, it was right around the time, and I was watching it today actually, it's right when you said, "Reconciliation," and then the time was cut off.

Jeremy: First of all, isn't that just the perfect metaphor for how the dialogues have gone in this country? You know, right when we're ready to like grapple with it, like really talk about it, the music goes up, you know, and we get distracted. We get pulled off course. There's something that steers us away. I think what was powerful about the Arkells' act ... It was really funny actually, I didn't know them at all. I sort of knew them as entities in the world, but I didn't know them personally.

Gilad: You're now in the band, so-

Jeremy: Oh yeah. Sixth member, you know, hi. I don't know what I'm going to do. I think they already have a keyboard player, so I don't know.

Gilad: We'll have to figure it out.

Jeremy: We passed each other in the hallway, and this was after my first speech, sort of in between, and Max, he says, "Hey man, I'm sorry you didn't get to finish your speech." Like really earnestly. I said, "You know Max, it's okay. I don't think they were ready for it anyway." Yeah, and then as they won the award for Best Rock Album of the year, he just comes over to my table, he taps me on the shoulder and he says, "Come finish your speech." You know, and what an act of holding and sharing space. They have such a platform, and they used it. This was what was sort of frustrating to me about the whole evening was that there's so many things that we need to critically be talking about at this moment in time. Not just in this country, but globally, and people were just getting up and thanking their managers, and the industry. I'm like, what?

Gilad: Giving more space to people who occupy space.

Jeremy: Use a platform. You know.

Blanche: Yeah. That's something I admire so much about you, is that you are able to just arrive in the moment, and say exactly what needs to be said. What I was seeing was just a lot of people being so extremely grateful for the platform that they can't even-

Jeremy: Use it.

Blanche: Use it.

Jeremy: Yeah. That's it.

Blanche: That's a big problem with Canadian identity, we're just ever grateful, ever sorry, and then we forget to come out with our voice. You're fantastic at just arriving and jumping right in.

Jeremy: I think it's just because I don't know that I put too much like stock in it all, in the industry, in celebrity culture. Like it doesn't mean much to me, and so I think I'm able to interrogate it and sort of like poke it, and see it for what it is.

Blanche: Exactly. When you start out as an Indigenous artist, already you're in a political space.

Jeremy: I mean, inherently our art is political.

Blanche: You don't get to be apolitical. I talk to Ian about this all the time. Ian is my partner, for the listeners at home. Sorry.

Gilad: Shout out Ian.

Blanche: Hello Ian. I think about, I don't know if we've talked about this before, but I think about the Dixie Chicks a lot, and how 15 years or so ago they called out, gently called out President Bush abroad, and they were skewered, and their career was flipped on its head because of basically saying that they weren't proud that the president was from Texas. That is not even much of a statement.

Jeremy: What a call out.

Blanche: One thing I've noticed now is that art is, the performing arts have become more political than they were maybe 15 years ago. Also, I think about how the Dixie Chicks had all these fake fans that assumed that they thought a certain way, and as soon as they found out that they didn't, they peaced out. You at least know that your fans agree with you, or accept you because you don't hide. As soon as you put yourself out that way, then you don't need to hide. I do definitely want to talk about, because we've talked about it before, what you see as being the responsibility of artists today, as they're starting out, and when should it happen, I suppose, that you start participating?

Jeremy: You know the uptick of political-ness of artists lately, and I think this is, it's just responsiveness. Like artists are really like a litmus test, or like a canary, in a way, to let us know, because we're always watching. I think creators and people that tell stories, and we're always looking around and seeing what needs to be done. This is why artists and creators, we push the conversation, because we're looking. I think what we're seeing, increasingly, is some really messed up stuff.

Like fascism, and environmental degradation, and really bad stuff. I think it is the medicines that we bring that are going to, if not heal people, then at least point them in the direction. At least show them a pathway. Like you said, build empathy. I think this is really all that I hope to do, is humanize the stories and the lives of Indigenous people.

Jeremy: I think there has been a grand lie that has been lofted by the media, and just by people's limited experience with Indigenous people, which is to say that they think they understand us because they've seen a western movie, or they think they understand us because they see our people sleeping on the streets. It's all uncontextualized, because we have not been taught a proper history in this country, so we have no idea how to contextualize it. Now that we're coming to understand a true history, talking about the residential school legacy intergenerationally, and like what that actually does to people. When you take a child out of a home around like five years, like I think about my mother, who was taken and put in the schools when she was six. Right when you're learning how to parent, what that parent/child relationship is, and what that dynamic looks like. You take them and you put them in this institution where they're beat for speaking the only language that they speak. How does that not filter down into the next generations, that kind of trauma?

Gilad: We work with a lot of youth in our programming, and there's one kid we work with, and he was telling us this story. He's Inuit, so he was telling us this story about how his mom, during the Sixties Scoop, was scooped up, put into foster care, was abused by the family she was with, became an alcoholic. That was how she could deal with her challenges. Ends up getting pregnant, giving birth to this kid who ends up being in our program. Cannot properly take care of him, but also while she was pregnant she was drinking, so this kid was born with fetal alcohol syndrome, and so now this kid is born, innocently, already into a situation that can't take care of him. He was then picked up and put into foster care as well because his mom was not able to take care of him. Not only was he moved away from Newfoundland, where his family is, he was put into foster care in Ontario. He was ripped apart from his brothers, his sisters, his culture entirely.

Jeremy: The land.

Gilad: Exactly. How do we expect this kid to not ... to thrive when generationally they've been destroyed? They've been set up to be destroyed.

Jeremy: Yeah. I think it's important to understand that the setup is not always the result. Our people are incredibly resilient, and yeah, have survived. It's incredible to me that we're all here. This was not the plan of any of this.

Blanche: Yeah.

Jeremy: We were meant to be assimilated or exterminated.

Gilad: I wanted to chat a bit about, and we'll talk about this in many different ways, just reconciliation very quickly. I went up to a reserve called Wapekeka a couple weeks ago, and they have been struck by a lot of youth suicides, just because of the community and the way that it's set up. You had a pastor by the name of Ralph Rowe, who in the 70s and 80s went up there. It's claimed that he sexually assaulted about 500 young Indigenous boys. A lot of people actually don't know who Ralph Rowe is, and a lot of people think it's because his victims unfortunately were young Indigenous boys in the north.

Gilad: I'm up in Wapekeka. It's a fly-in community. There's nothing there. School only goes to grade eight. If anyone wants to go to school after, they have to fly out of the community. There's no doctor. The cost of a box of cereal is like 15 bucks. There's no fresh fruit, no produce. I'm there, and it doesn't seem like reconciliation even is a thing up in Wapekeka. My question to you, does reconciliation at least here in Toronto, or when we're talking about it, ever seem to you like maybe it's just a buzzword? Like some of these things that we're doing, like land acknowledgements, are becoming like empty rituals. I wanted to get your thought on that.

Jeremy: Yeah. I think you're hitting on something very, very critical, which is to say that words and action are very different things. Particularly from like a media standpoint, from a political standpoint, these words have been really tossed around for expediency's sake. There hasn't been a whole lot of action put behind them, and I think it doesn't ... See this is exactly it. This is what allows this myth to keep existing is because we were removed. We always lived by the water. We were always here, and when you take people out, and you put them on a reserve, out of sight, out of mind, there is no coincidence that most of our communities sit far outside of a city limit. Out of sight, out of mind, we do not have to worry about it. What has happened, we have let these communities go. We've let them go. No clean drinking water. Suicide epidemic.

Jeremy: It ripples outward too. When you have a suicide in a community, it's not just that one suicide often, it's a chain reaction. This is actually what got me into doing a lot of my activism work. A bunch of our communities on the east coast, particularly our two-spirited people. I think this is a very important intersection that we really need to talk about, because when you look at suicidality among LGBT youth, it's very, very high. I could be getting my numbers wrong, but I do believe it's two to three times higher than the national average for non-LGBT people. Then when you talk about Indigenous people, especially in Inuit communities, in more remote communities, it's sometimes ten times higher than the national average. It's like the intersections of those identities, and where

those people are set, these are our most vulnerable people, and we need to be lifted up.

Jeremy: Two, what I think is really insidious about this example that you're citing just now is that the real meaning and the real power behind those middle people, two-spirit people, [Indigneous language], these are people of power. This is what this means in our language, when we talk about two-spirited people. It's actually meaning the person of great spiritual power. There's no coincidence that the church specifically went after our people, two-spirit people, as they came here, because they knew we were the spiritual center of our community. Then they brought this lie in about sin, and tried to shove it down the throats of our children, literally. What's really damaging about this, like there's so many damaging things about this, but one of the most damaging things, particularly around two-spirit identity and the residential school system, or even religion as working in our communities. Trust and believe that missionaries are still going out to Northern Ontario and still trying to convert our people, and they're doing it all the time.

Gilad: Well it was eye-opening, because when I was there in Wapekeka, there's two churches there. Two churches, and I mean it seems like the white man has gone. It's mostly just Indigenous people who are living there, but the presence of those churches still lurks in the background. For example-

Jeremy: Internalization, that's exactly what we're talking about.

Gilad: Exactly. Only until very recently have they been okay with themselves doing smudges and pow wows. Because if you try to smudge in Wapekeka, someone from your community would look down on you. There's been like this instilled shame and hatred. Even though they're gone, that church and the presence of it all is still very much there.

Blanche: Shame is ... Something I've learned through spending time with you, and you, is why live with shame? We talk about this because we're both Jewish and it's like the Jewish guilt complex.

Gilad: Oh my god, the guilt. Find me someone that carries more guilt.

Blanche: There are so many people living with shame, and it sort of compounds everything else. One thing about Jeremy Dutcher is I think that you've gone through every experience in life to get to a point where you're eschewing shame altogether. You were out early in life.

Jeremy: Yeah. I came out at 12 years old.

Blanche: You were in-

Jeremy: Rural New Brunswick.

Blanche: Rural New Brunswick, and you just did your thing.

Jeremy: I was also chubby and had glasses and braces and darker skin than most of the people around me. It was not an easy experience, but through those experiences you come to understand internal strength. I was so lifted up by my family. A note on shame. I really think we can sit in it when we come to find out what's going on, but it doesn't do anything. There's no action behind shame. It's a strictly individualistic experience of like, ugh, but if there's no action behind it, then it's truly meaningless.

Gilad: It's entirely self-limiting.

Jeremy: Exactly. I hope to ... It's a balance. Like you really want to convey the gravity, and to let people understand what's going on. Because I feel it because it's my fucking family, you know, but if I can come to make somebody else understand it, I have to make them understand it in beauty. Because finger wagging and sign holding is important, and you have to take space, and you have to get loud. I spent a lot of time doing this in my adolescence for sure. But for me to change people, to touch people, you have to tell a story, and you have to move them.

Blanche: This is what's so powerful about all of the work that's going on in Indigenous music. I think that it's kind of like maybe a trifecta or something like that. You have the finger wagging over here. You have the reconciliation chats over here. This big part of the pie is just, what does it look like? You teach. You're a major teacher, and it's kind of in everything that you do. You bring everyone along, and you say, "Look, this is what this could all look like, and just come along for the ride." I think people feel very invited, and it's created a wave.

Gilad: It's important to, you're mentoring. I mean, when Blanche describes you as a teacher, you're mentoring. In a way, you're helping other people see a vision that isn't realized yet. I wanted to know, you identify as two-spirit. I'm sure there's so many challenges that come with, number one, being an Indigenous artist. Being an artist in general is a struggle. Then you're an Indigenous artist. Then you're a two-spirit Indigenous artist. I wanted to know, what are some of the challenges in that space? Mostly I wanted to know, because we are looking at you as a teacher, did you have any mentors growing up who you could look up to, who were two-spirit Indigenous artists? Like who ... was there anyone there that helped you come along to where you are right now?

Jeremy: Yes, naturally, of course. A community, communities of people. There's one particular person whose name is Allan Polchies Jr., but we call him Chicky. Chicky is one of the delightfully most flamboyant people I've ever met. He's on the reserve close to Fredericton, where I was doing a lot of my growing up. My mother was the healthcare worker in that community, and so we spent a lot of time, even though it wasn't my reserve, we spent a lot of time there. Just futurism and possibility, this is what my teachers have shown me. To unapologetically and unwaveringly show yourself. Because this is exactly what you're saying, is like when you do that, when you show yourself and don't translate, you automatically weed out everyone that your message is not for. It's like, uh-uh, not for you. I know who I'm speaking to. And you have to know, and this is what I want to encourage all young artists and all young creators to really invest in thinking about. Who is your work for? This really helped me.

Jeremy: There's a phrase from one of our traditional songs about just this. It's [Indigenous language], "All my people, this is for you." This is the exact ethos that drove my creative process, because I knew exactly who it was for. When you cut out all this and narrow your focus, and know who you're speaking to, they will hear it. They will hear it. It might take a little time. You might have to give a little ... You know, I make sure I go back all the time to the east coast, and make sure that this music I'm sharing, and it's living there. Because as much as it's incredible to go on the JUNO stage, and to share it on national television, and do all this stuff in downtown Toronto. That's great, but at the end of the day it's not who it's for. Everyone is welcome, and I really do try to live that ethos that everyone is welcome to come and witness, but fundamentally I do this work for a very specific group of people, and they've received that. For me, the work is complete, or at least this iteration of it.

Blanche: Gilad and I have talked about moving, getting out of Toronto and going to the east coast. Jeremy, I don't know if I'm like spoiling this, but is it soon? You're moving out east.

Jeremy: Yeah. Next month.

Blanche: Back out east next month to Shediac, New Brunswick. To be back in the space and to recharge and everything.

Jeremy: Yeah.

Blanche: What does that mean to you as far as what are you going to get out of being there instead of here? In the three days a month that you're not touring.

Jeremy: Well that was exactly it. You know, the touring schedule for the last two years has been very, very intense, and it's really picked up since Polaris and all this

stuff. It's been really, really constant. For me, I'm really invested in this idea of balance, and so always going on the road and having to come back here for my few days of rest is like, I don't know. I'm sure folks that are listening to this have been to downtown Toronto. If you haven't, just trust and believe that it is chaotic, in a sense. For me, to have my rest time by the ocean, where I come from, this is invaluable. Also, around my people, people that speak my language. My journey with the language has been ever-evolving, I'll say. It really came home to me why I need to be doing this work when I was at university. I studied as an opera singer. When you're doing these studies, you often need to take a language course, or many language courses actually. I was studying for a German test one year, like really trying to get these big conjunct words, and trying to figure out how they're all ... You know, it's-

Blanche: Jeremy's German is super good. Better than mine, and I live in Germany.

Jeremy: That's very nice to say.

Gilad: It's brilliant.

Blanche: I don't think that's your point.

Jeremy: No, certainly not. My point is I was sitting studying for this test, and I sort of had this like, German's going to be fine as a language. There's country, actually there's countries of people that speak this language. There's less than 100 fluent speakers of my language left, and it's only here. After that sort of moment I was like, I have to dedicate my life to this.

Gilad: Yeah, and for context, I heard there's what, 87 Indigenous languages across Canada that are in danger of going extinct.

Jeremy: Severely endangered, yes.

Gilad: Your music, I mean, is a way to nurture and keep it alive.

Jeremy: What's great too is I've gone coast, to coast, to coast on Turtle Island now. To get to share this work, and to get to meet locally people that are also so invested in linguistic revitalization of their own traditions, and that have come to me and said, "Your work has inspired me to learn my language, or to dig a little deeper into my traditions." That for me is, this is why I do it. It's a continuation. It's to lift up people. It's to show them that there's beauty in what we have.

Jeremy: I think about my mother and her generation. Her mother told her, "There's nothing in your language for you. This will do you no good to know." She stopped speaking to her. Even though my grandmother spoke very little English,

she would stick to it because she didn't want her daughter to know our language. Because she knew that it wasn't, one, it wasn't safe. Two, she felt that there was nothing there. She didn't value it in the way that I've come to understand its value. Because when you start to dig into it, you realize that it changes your perspective on how you live in the world, really. Language we think of as simply communication, but really it's worldview. It's how we are in relation with each other. It is truly everything. When you abstract that from a people, when you beat it out of a people, we have people without a sense of identity.

Gilad: Also when you're relying on other languages, you're relying on the pronouns and all the things that come along with that. I'm going to mention a quote that came directly from you, but you said, "We need a less western way of speaking about gender."

Jeremy: Did I say that? That's amazing.

Blanche: Bars.

Jeremy: Bars, yeah.

Gilad: James is actually snapping. He's like, woo bars. What does that mean to you?

Jeremy: Yeah. Can you read it again one time?

Gilad: Let's do it.

Jeremy: I really don't remember saying this, but I love it.

Gilad: "We need a less western way of speaking about gender."

Jeremy: Of course, yeah. For me, again this is the beauty of our language, I have to go no further than to talk about gendered pronouns in our language, we just don't have them. I was constantly misgendered by my grandmother all the time. Misgendered I say, but like you know, calling me she all the time, because it was hard for her to work out, because in our language there's no distinction between those genders. We just use [Indigneous language], which is like a, it's they essentially. I love that we're really patting ourselves on the back a lot because we're really coming into a new understanding of neutral pronouns and really creating space for people that are non-binary and trans under that umbrella. I think we do a lot of shoulder patting. To understand that actually linguistically, and in our traditions and our understanding, we've been living that reality for a very long time in this place. That's why I feel like when we start to know our languages better, we start to understand that all this gender stuff is, it's important for a lot of people, but it's also just make believe. It's a creation that

we all live inside, and we can step outside of it if we want. You know all the kinds of stuff that I get to wear onstage.

Gilad: It's beautiful.

Jeremy: It's gender play. No part of me thought I would be doing this. I grew up as a chubby little kid, really ashamed of my body and what I looked like. To be able to come full circle, understand that it's actually putting your body out there that allows you to get past it. In that putting it out, you're showing, you're representing. You're showing what I never saw, which was a big, brown, a little hairy, body onstage.

Gilad: I love that too, because the power in that is not just that you now exist as this talented musician who's making this incredible music. Also, that whoever's listening to this, and whoever listens to you say this in other spaces, however they look, however they feel, whatever they think is limiting them, hopefully will learn to shed that so they become as beautiful and as talented as you are. It's setting the way. It's saying, "I felt this about myself, but I'm here, and I'm thriving now," you know.

Gilad: Blanche and I, Jeremy, one thing that we share is Blanche is in our lives. Blanche and I often talk, this is not, you guys are like, "Hee, hee, hee." This is actually we have a conversation all the time. I want to go back to Toronto for a second, just about the state of the arts here in Toronto. I've been doing social justice work now for, I don't know, like over 10, maybe 15 years. A very long time, and I haven't always been paid for it. I've hardly, not always been recognized for it. One thing I'm recognizing right now is that social justice is becoming this like very trendy thing, which makes me happy because we're having more uncomfortable conversations. I'm also noticing that it's becoming more like a brand. It's like commoditized-

Blanche: Commodifying.

Gilad: Commodifying it. For example, in the way that you could be like a sports photographer, or a lifestyle photographer, or food photographer, you can also become now a social justice photographer. I get worried, and Blanche, I want to get your thoughts on this, that sometimes we just use it as a way to brand ourselves. Like I'm the socially conscious musician. I'm the socially conscious filmmaker. All of that is just meant to push along your own brand. I wanted to get your thoughts on that. Is social justice, we're talking about it more, but is it becoming emptier in some way?

Blanche: I was wondering if we would go in that direction after talking about the Dixie Chicks because ... Sorry I keep bringing it back to the Dixie Chicks. Because it

wasn't something that was trendy, it was markedly un-trendy, and now it's either an expectation or it's a major trend. I can't tell which one it is. I hope it's a trend that transforms into a requirement.

Jeremy: Reality. Yeah.

Blanche: What do you think?

Jeremy: I'm hopeful in this way too. I think folks growing up right now, like in the school system, they understand things in a totally different way. They're socialized completely differently than certainly I was in the 90s. Like, oh. Honestly, like we were driving from London today, from the JUNOs, and Ariana Grande's song "God is a woman" came on. Cranked that up, because it's such a jam. At the end of the song I turned it down, I said, "We grew up with 'Hit Me Baby One More Time'."

Gilad: Yes. Limp Bizkit was a thing.

Jeremy: You know.

Gilad: People were angry and alone.

Jeremy: God. Now "God is a woman", you know. She's the biggest fucking pop artist in the world, and everyone's hearing that song. How transformative is that?

Gilad: We did have "What If God Was One Of Us".

Jeremy: This is true. This is a new message too, and true. Let's keep asking this question. Because this allows us to move through the world and see God in everyone.

Gilad: Beautiful. I wanted to ask something else. Do you ever get exhausted in some ways? I'll preface this with a very quick story. My name's Gilad, it's not very common. People feel like whenever I introduce myself, it's like an open invitation to ask me where I'm from. When I'm in the mood, which is not often, to tell them where I'm from, which is Israel, they will then associate me with the politics of the country, which I can't be further away from the politics of that country. I don't agree with the atrocious human rights record and all those things. It's exhausting sometimes to feel like I have to be the poster child for this thing. I ask this because I've been listening to some interviews with you in big media, and sometimes they might ask you like, what is your album doing for reconciliation? You'll actually respond with, "This is not an album for reconcil- ... It's not meant for that." I wanted to get your thoughts. Is it ever exhausting feeling like you have to represent something all of the time?

Jeremy: Yes. It is. Completely. It is tiresome, but I understand this is the role that I have stepped into. I do it gladly, and I feel like I'm positioned in a way through both my identity but also my education. What I came to know very quickly in this process is that the media and people that are hoping to push stories out have their own story, and they want to tell it too. They want to tell it through your story often, which is fine and understandable. I hope to say things that are relatable, and people can take in their own lives. But I have to be very, almost like doubly aware of everything I say, because everything is twisted. Everything is moved to position narratives, and to talk about certain things that they want to talk about. What I knew, and actually it was amazing, so I have the same manager as A Tribe Called Red. He has been working with A Tribe Called Red for over a decade. He was involved in their rise, and he was sort of knows all the pitfalls of a media industry that really doesn't have much in terms of Indigenous representation. Like how many of us are there out there in the sphere?

Jeremy: They're grasping at anything, and because they don't understand our stories fully, they're coming to, but they don't currently, they just take a sound bite. They come to understand what the prime minister had said, and then they said, "Oh, something similar." Then they put labels onto what you do and they say, "This is this." I have never once said that this album is about reconciliation. I think music and the arts can be involved in that work. I think it's a lofty goal and we better start working on it. We better start creating pathways to empathy. We better start telling each other stories. We better start listening instead of talking so much, but fundamentally this is not what this work is about. Yeah, all the time I get this question, or compared in this way to that buzzword. For me, I'm much more interested in resurgence and revitalization. Like there's so many better, even R words that we can use to talk about this work.

Gilad: If we have to keep with R.

Jeremy: As long as we're using R words, that's fine. You know what I'm saying? It's like this is ... Fundamentally, that R word is not our word.

Blanche: Whoa. Bars.

Gilad: Head exploding.

Jeremy: You know, but it's true. Yeah. I think there's a residential school survivor by the name of Isabelle Knockwood, she's from the Mi'kmaw Nation, and she says, "What I'm more interested in is [Indigenous language]." That within that word is all included the act of apology and reception and back again. There's a relationality that I think is kind of missing in what reconciliation is. Take for example the TRC. How many school administrators did we have testifying at the TRC? How many non-Indigenous people did we have to take that space and to

grapple with what they had experienced? We still never even got an apology from the Catholic Church. The main administrators of this system still will not come to talk about this in a real way. I think they've obviously got like a lot of shit on their plate right now, you know, with all these pedophile priests.

Gilad: Yeah. I get nervous that we're calling something by just a different name. I was researching and I found that there are, I mean relatively, don't quote me on this, you can go online and look, but it's pretty close. There are relatively as many Indigenous kids today in foster care as there were Indigenous kids in residential schools. I mean, we're just doing the same thing and calling it, I worry, by a different name.

Jeremy: Yep. Softer language, right? This is why I try to cut through that and not let us be fooled, or let us have the ... Like they're trying to almost put the rose-colored glasses on our face. For me, it's a matter of swatting it away and saying, "No. We need to look with clear vision, because we do not have time left." Really, we do not need to look further than a UN report that came out a couple of months ago to understand that this moment is so critical. That if we do not start to come together, and this is all connected to land and language too. Every problem that we have in this country right now, and kind of in this world right now, could be solved with a relationship with Indigeneity and Indigenous language. How we are to relate to each other. Wars. Environmental degradation. Respect for women. It's all, like we just need to be in conversation with each other. I really do feel like our cultures and our languages are a light that we could lift up right now, and be a pathway forward. We are medicine people.

Jeremy: This is a bit of a tangent, and I'd love to dialogue about this too. It's just an idea that I've been thinking about a lot lately. When we're sick, we always move towards the source of healing. It's the only way. When we're feeling unwell or we break something, we go to a doctor. When our teeth hurt, we go to a dentist. At the time when Europe was exporting, it was a sick place. Murderers on the thrones of Europe, the Crusades, all that shit. This is exactly the time when Europe was going out. Were they going out as expansionist entities to go and claim land? Well this is the line, this is how we've come to understand our history. Or were they drawn to a land, and a place, and a people, where the unbroken chain of interrelatedness of all of us has never been broken? We understand this still. Through our languages we know that we're all connected in a very, very deep way. Was this migration about land acquisition and resource, or could we tell a different story? Is it about healing? I really do believe, and our prophesies talk about this too, that we are all here on this continent for a reason. All the nations of the world have gathered in this place for a reason. We need to start coming together and having those dialogues, because if we don't we're just wasting our time together.

Gilad: Thank you for joining us. Just to wrap it up, this was actually one of the best Scorpio experiences I've ever had. You've helped reshape the way I think. Thank you so much for popping by and having this conversation. I can't wait to see what comes next from all the stuff you're doing.

Jeremy: Thank you. I'm so obsessed with the work that JAYU does. Blanche has been really your biggest cheerleader, in a way, and I think has really, has just tried to lift you guys up at every turn. It's such an honor to sit for a little bit with you as well, and you, to have some conversations. I really feel like this, talking with each other is actually the only way. Music is a starting place, but I think the real substantive stuff comes when we're at a table together. Let's do it again.

[Theme music fades in]

Gilad: Let's do it. Thank you so much Jeremy. Thank you.

Gilad: My name's Gilad Cohen.

Simona: And I'm Simona Ramkisson.

Gilad: This podcast is edited and produced by Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani. Our associate producer is Ron Ma.

Simona: This is an initiative of JAYU, a charity that shares human rights stories through the arts.

[Music fades out]

Gilad: If you enjoyed this podcast, help us make more of them by donating whatever you can. Visit us online at jayu.ca/donate.