

Society's Waltz

#1: Unconventionally Traditional

In this episode of Society's Waltz we'll be looking at the life of James Jones, a Canadian Hoop Dancer, and how he has been able to use TikTok to educate others about indigenous communities. As well as how social media has pushed many dancers to push themselves to their literal limits in the name of winning at competition.

Key:

Bed (music and stuff)

Ambiance

Terms

Starting music is piano and glockenspiel playing in a manner that sounds curious as well as mysterious

Dip starting music underneath voice track

Fade in Piano

Grace: Today on Society's Waltz we'll be covering Social Media, it's influence on what goes into a dance routine, and the one dancer who has used his fame to make a better world. I'm your host Grace Leishman and Welcome to the Waltz.

Theme music is has a feeling of wonder and calm to it

Music is in the clear then dips to underneath the voice track

Grace: Social media has become a prominent part of our lives. From keeping up with friends on facebook to the endless amount of tutorials on YouTube it's hard to imagine a world without it. But with all forms of media there are those who rise above the others. Gaining huge followings and significance within as well as outside of these platforms. Some may even be known as one of the greats.

Dub of James Jones from TikTok hit hot

James Jones: tanisi, welcome to native tiktok

Music hits warm

Music is more upbeat and repetitive

Grace: One of those deserving of that title is James Jones, and although in this context he is only one of the greats an argument could be made that he is the greatest Canadian. With over 1.9 mil followers on tiktok he already has a great amount of significance within the TikTok community, especially since he has basically become the face of indigenous tiktok for his videos surrounding native culture and hoop dancing.

Voice track is in the clear

Grace: However, it's the path that lead him to where he is today that really makes him great. James grew up on a First Nations reserve north of Edmonton Alberta. However,

like most indigenous youth, he was never fully exposed to his cultural roots due to the residential school system and pressure to conform with western society. Ending up in a strange limbo area between two clashing cultures. This was until he moved to Edmonton around the age of 9.

Music sounds like it's from a hip-hop track and is fairly upbeat

Maintain music volume throughout clip

Grace: James began to learn breakdancing and hip-hop at a local hip-hop club called First Element. According to the people who ran it he was a natural and soon a group of indigenous breakdancers picked him up and began to introduce him back into his lost culture. One part that he really picked up on were the traditional dances that they had taught him, more specifically hoop dancing. He spent hours improving his skills working to become the best version of himself, and soon enough that work payed off. He began to teach workshops that surrounded traditional hoop dancing and native teachings for youth from all different walks of life. Bringing together these different communities with this dance of healing. It was actually from one of these workshops that James was gifted a white eagle feather as thanks for teaching a Squamish Tribe's youth these cultural dances. To James, the joy he saw from these kids when learning about their culture was all the thanks he needed, pushing him to continue on this path of healing. However, it wasn't until March of 2020 that his efforts were truly recognized when he began to make tiktoks at the start of quarantine.

Voice track is in the clear

Grace: Although he started out just wanting to make humorous videos about Native lifestyles and just relatable situations in general, he realized people were actually extremely interested in the videos he had made about his culture and hoop dancing. Seeing this as an opportunity James began to make more of these videos, using the hype he had gotten to educate others on indigenous history and culture, as well as issues that are still prominent today.

Music hits warm

The music has a nice and calming aura to it

Grace: However, this trend of interest in cultural histories from the younger generation has also been noticed by teachers.

Andrea Yeo: I think the newer younger generations are actually pretty confused and surprised why this education hasn't been done more, and they want to learn, they want to learn about their history in Canada with indigenous people

Grace: That's Andrea Yeo.

Andrea Yeo: I'm the indigenous support teacher at Seycove

Grace: She agreed to allow me to interview her about the education surrounding indigenous cultures and history. One of the main points that came up was how the teaching of these subjects are handled by educators and the need to teach it right.

Andrea Yeo: it's more around people wanting to do it properly and share the knowledge in a way that is respectful and a lot of non indigenous people don't have lived experience and so they don't really know exactly how to share, the way to share.

Grace: This actually touches on a same point that James himself had made in a CTV news interview he had done in September 2020

James Jones: Educating from our point of view, because a lot of times our stories are told but they're not told by Indigenous people.

Grace: Which is a very interesting point to make because as Ms.Yeo had said *Andrea Yeo: It's our job to take the time to learn for ourselves so that we can be educated citizens of our country.*

Grace: Which is where James' tiktoks come into play, allowing for curious viewers to take their education into their own hands and to learn about this history and culture from someone who has lived in these realities.

But he didn't stop there. James began to make even more tiktoks that focused on personal acceptance of his own culture that were more targeted towards Indigenous youth as a way to say embrace your culture, don't be afraid to show off your native roots. And it's this type of social media empowerment that make James stand out to me, using these platforms to bring First Nations back into Canada's cultural narrative as well as our cultural identity as a country. So if you ever wonder who the greatest Canadian is I hope will be the first one to come to mind, I know he will be for me.

Music buttons to new story

Has a feeling of calming joy

Grace: now although we know that James has used his platform to spread positivity and understanding of indigenous cultures, the thing I'm left wondering is how he got so popular in the first place? It wasn't because off pure skill alone, that's for sure. There are hundreds of great dancers on TikTok all trying to catch the audience attention so what makes him different? To explain this I'd like to do a little bit of an exercise.

Fade in road ambiance

Ambiance of the side of a road with rain and cars passing

Grace: First of all, if you can, close your eyes. Now clear your mind and imagine that your sitting somewhere like your bed or the bus. You have your phone out and are currently scrolling through tiktok, you scroll endlessly through hundreds of tiktoks all of the same three dances and POV trends that are popular that week.

Dub of TikTok music

Dub sneaks up to medium volume

Grace: You begin to get bored of these videos there is never any variety in these tiktoks and just as you're about to close the app one video comes up that captures your attention. There's nothing special about the video in question and yet it still has you intrigued.

Music hits warm

Music has a bit of a traditional feel to it

Grace: It's of this guy in some fairly colourful clothing that seems to be some sort of traditional outfit, he is dancing with these hoops making different shapes and seemingly telling a story with them. The dance is oddly familiar while still being foreign, you don't know this feeling but it's nice. Wanting to learn more you go follow him and watch some more of his videos learning the history of his people and the culture he's from.

Music hits warm and posts

Music has a bit of a western feel to it

Grace: You see, the reason why so many people get famous on tiktok and other platforms is because they are doing something new. So how is one supposed to get the same amount of recognition as someone like James Jones if you are so much more traditional in your style of dance? Tricks of course! What better way to catch someone's attention than to do a triple pirouette into an illusion then multiple chenes? There's no doubt about it you're bound to catch someone eye. But that only looks cool the first few times, then it become the norm, so you are forced to always one up your last trick and the tricks of others if you want that sweet internet clout. Now you may be thinking, yeah that's interesting but how does that effect my choreo? Well I'm glad you asked.

Grace: The thing about the internet is it's basically just a bunch of people pushing each other to do bigger and better things so when dancers start to learn these tricks because of that pressure teachers are going to want to use them in their dances, I mean who doesn't want to have multiple turn sections in their jazz dance... right? but when that starts to become the norm at these competitions it creates the same push that the internet has to do more bigger and better tricks. I've already seen this happen at competitions like peak or synergy. As long as your technique is acceptable and your timing wasn't too off you could win first place just by adding a few tricks in. It was a real annoyance to those of us who value good technique before cool jumps and such. But it

has also pushed many girls that I know to learn and perfect these tricks adding them to their dances as they do.

Music sneaks up to medium volume

Music is the same as opening of episode

Grace: In the end everything evolves from James Jones' own content to the abilities of dancers. We all change but it's up to us if it's for the better or for worse. I'm Grace Leishman and this has been Society's Waltz.

Music is in the clear for a couple of seconds

Grace: Thanks for listening to this episode of Society's Waltz. Make sure to click subscribe so you always know when a new episode is out and to also go follow James at his TikTok. His handle is @notoriouscree I promise you won't regret it.

Music fades out