



By Kurt Gottschalk | February 2014

Inuit singer Tanya Tagaq made three appearances in town as a part of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters Conference last month, starting with a public show at Drom (Jan. 10th) where she and her trio (violinist Jesse Zubot and drummer Jean Martin) accompanied the 1922 film *Nanook of the North*. That film was the first many people saw of the struggles of life in the Canadian arctic.

Tagaq was a vision very different from her Arctic ancestors. In tight jeans, suede boots and Ziggy Stardust t-shirt, she was far from the hunters in the film. But animated and animalistic, feet planted firmly, muscles flexed, she seemed infused with the strength of people surviving in crushing environs.

Tagaq practices a style of throat singing native to her Nunavut homeland, similar to the more widely known Tuvan, but given to storytelling and even occasional humor. Her vocalizing was sometimes literal enough to include howls, which meshed nicely with the cricket chirping and baby crying retained from the film.

The music the trio played seemed to serve two functions. With the tribal rhythms of pounded toms and cinematic swells of bowed strings, the band seemed inside and outside the film at once. Which is not to say there wasn't interplay between them. They've been together since 2006 and have developed a deep shared consciousness. Quick violin strokes and cymbal scrapes melded with Tagaq's powerful, sorrowful cries to make a music that managed to be abstract and narrative at the same time.