

SONS OF MEMBERTOU

Wapna'kik: The People of the Dawn



SMITHSONIAN
**FOLK
WAYS**
RECORDINGS

Produced by David Burke and George Christmas

1. The People of the Dawn/Wejkwita'jik (The Gathering Song) 4:40

The People of the Dawn (David Wilfred Burke, SOCAN)

Wejkwita'jik (The Gathering Song) (George Gregory Paul, SOCAN)

Includes a reading of the poem "Our Awakening" written by Kiju' Ka'wi. Used with permission.

2. Sma'knis (Veteran's Song) 4:08

(Pauline Bernard)

3. Kepmite'tmnej (Mi'kmaq Honour song) 8:30

(George Gregory Paul, SOCAN)

4. The Mountain/Mukla'qati 4:09

The Mountain (David Wilfred Burke, SOCAN)

Mukla'qati (Pauline Bernard)

5. 500 Years 4:22

(George Christmas)

Includes a reading of the poem "500 Years"
written by Rita Joe. Used with permission.

6. Kwan'to'te' 3:00

(Arr. Ben Christmas)

Includes a reading of the poem "The Spirits Are Calling"
written by Kiju' Ka'wi. Used with permission.

7. Kwa'nu'te' 4:01

(Arr. Ben Christmas)

8. Ko'jua (Partridge Dance) 2:58

(Arr. George Gregory Paul, SOCAN)

9. The People of the Dawn/Kniskamijinaq (The Ancestors' Song) 8:15

The People of the Dawn (David Wilfred Burke, SOCAN)

Kniskamijinaq (The Ancestors' Song) (Darrell Bernard—Frances "Puddy" Christmas)



The **Sound Communities** series of recordings is a uniquely cross-border initiative presented by the Centre for Sound Communities (Cape Breton University, Canada) and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings (Washington, D.C., USA), and supported by the Cultures of Sound Network (CSN), in collaboration with musicians and communities of First Peoples, settlers, and newcomers. Through the documenting and sharing of music and spoken word, the series highlights artists who tell stories of the lands, waters, and peoples of Turtle Island, focusing on the territories also known as Canada. It bolsters engagement with people across Canada and beyond, exploring diverse cultures, heritage, and current issues through the worldwide dissemination of contemporary audio recordings as well as other educational materials. It also showcases the roots of diverse musics in Canada, further exposing the global public to the preeminent artistry in this part of the world.



SFW CD 40603 © 1995 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings © 2025 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Sons of Membertou

Kiju' Ka'wi (Shirley Christmas)

Sons of Membertou, listen to the whispering of the four winds.
You have given hope to the young, and pride to our elders.
Their faces brighten like that of the early morning sun.
Their once tired feet dance with the steps of the young.

Sons of Membertou, your songs of chants have reached the stars
Awakening ancient spirits of our father's ancestors
Where tears of joy come as drops of spring rain
Where the thundering voices of our fathers echo out again and again.
"Our children have not forgotten. They have not forgotten!"

Sons of Membertou, our spirits will triumph defeat over our weakness.
Our spirit will rise and strengthen the hopes of the First Nation.
Once again, the children shall dance to the beating of drums.
Once again, the children shall chant the songs of old.

Sons of Membertou, listen to the whispering of the four winds.
Beat your drums not with anger and bitterness, but with honour and dignity;
For an angry heart will silence the beat of the drums for eternity.

(From the book *Sons of Membertou* by Shirley Christmas, published by *Capers Aweigh Magazine*, Sydney, Nova Scotia)



Sons of Membertou. Photo by Barry Bernard

THE REPOSESSION

DARRELL BERNARD SR.

The Sons of Membertou are proud to present this album, *Wapna'kik* (The People of the Dawn). We have been blessed to share our culture and our music for 30 years. During this time, we have witnessed many changes and experienced many changes as well. Our youngest drummers began as kids. Many are now respected moms and dads and even grandparents. Some of our members are now in the Spirit World. We are a group of men and women from the community of Membertou. We hope that you enjoy our music as much as we enjoy sharing it with you!

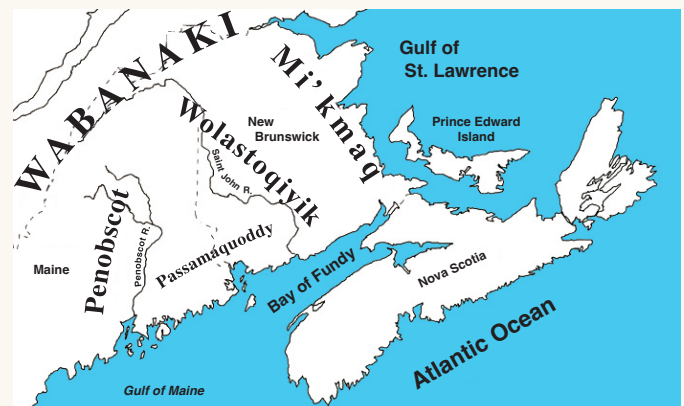
We originally recorded this album in 1995 at Island Recordings studios in Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island), Frenchvale, Nova Scotia. We released the album later that same year. Christopher Jones at Cape Breton University remastered the re-release while the Sons of Membertou were on campus as the university's first Artists-in-Residence. For this re-release, we removed three songs—"Kukukwesewtesinmimkewey," "Wapi-musikiskl," and "Wapna'kik"—because we could not verify their origins or get proper permissions. We replaced these three tracks with two others: the "Mi'kmaq Honour Song" and "500 Years." The latter is a beautiful poem by Rita Joe that has been set to music.

This is who we are, from long before Indigenous people inhabited First Nation communities, long before Indian people lived on reserves, long before centralization and residential schools, before VLTs (gambling machines) and cheap smokes. Long before wars and the treaties, the Mi'kmaq lived in the best properties on the Atlantic coast. We lived on the land and the ocean, and we harvested the best that this great land has to offer. The water and land, the sun and the moon—all are part of Creation. Our home was wherever we could walk or paddle to. We were free.

In our Nation, which we call Mi'kma'kik (including Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, the Gaspé Peninsula, and parts of New England), we have lived peacefully since our creation. And we will continue to live here, the way that the Creator intended. We are from the community of Membertou in the district of Unama'kik. We are proud Mi'kmaq. We are the Sons of Membertou, *Maupeltu Wkwisk*.

Membertou was a legendary Chief of the Mi'kmaq Nation. In 1610, after the arrival of European settlers in our country, Membertou made the decision to begin a friendly relationship with the French Church. He learned from the French that the kingdoms of Europe were under the authority of the Vatican. It was with the Vatican that he developed a relationship. He entered into a Concordat in 1610. This meant that the Mi'kmaq would become Catholic. It was a brilliant political move at the time.

Settlers continued to arrive. They arrived seeking shelter or sanctuary. Most of them depended on the hospitality of their Indigenous hosts for survival and friendship. The plentiful resources that were available to them made them hungry for more. War caused by the



Map created for the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq's Mi'kma'wey Debert by Gerald Gloade.

export industries from different countries soon broke out. The kingdoms of Europe fought over the resources here, bringing war and greed to our once-peaceful homeland.

A war for resources amongst the European settlers became a war for survival for Indigenous peoples. The intent of the enemy colonizers was to annihilate our people. The Wapna'kik Confederacy was an alliance between the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and the Abenaki Nations. The Confederacy pre-dated European colonization. Together, they held the eastern line of defense against the British and their allies. In 1752, after fighting years of horrible wars against the British and their allies, the Mi'kmaq signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the British Crown. The Mi'kmaq were also the first free Nation to sign a treaty with the United States (Watertown, 1776). The settlers and the Mi'kmaq were now to live harmoniously; this was the



Membertou Street, Membertou Reserve, 1958. Photo by Raymond Doucette

spirit and intent of the treaties. We were to live in peace and friendship. Both sides were to unite as treaty people.

The numbers of settlers quickly outgrew the numbers of Mi'kmaq. Disease and war took their toll on our people. The word of the Crown became the word of the Government. The government divided the land among the settlers, who then occupied the beautiful communities in which we had lived. We could not exercise our right to harvest on our waters or our land. We became squatters on our homeland. The dispossession of our country had begun. Our ceremonies were outlawed. We were one of many Nations dispossessed of our homelands. Poverty became a part of our lives. Our language was forbidden in the schools that we were forced to attend. Much of our culture was lost to us.

“Our hearts ache to embrace all that was given by the Creator.”*

In 1992, the Elders in the community gave a drum to Darrell and Sharon Bernard, a young couple from Membertou, in order to bring the drum back to our community. A few young people were recruited to be part of this effort, which many elders helped and supported. We learned a couple of songs by George Paul, an amazing,

*This is one of my favorite lines of poetry, from Kiju' Ka'wi "The Spirits Are Calling." I recite this poem in track 6 of this album, "Kwan'to'te'." The poem is about the revival of the drum; it is about loss, it is also about recovery and pride.

talented singer and songwriter who allowed us to sing and record some of his songs on our album.

The Sons of Membertou continue to perform traditional music of the Mi'kmaq people. We have performed across Canada in powwows, concerts, and festivals since we began singing together in 1992. We have also performed in Europe. The Sons of Membertou are a traditional group that continues to recruit new members today. It is our responsibility to share our music with the young people of our Nation so that we preserve as much of our culture and language as we can. Today, it is common to hear the youth in our community sit at a drum and sing the "Mi'kmaq Honour Song," and for the children to join the drummers for a chance to enjoy the songs and stories that the Sons of Membertou so love to share. Now, you have this opportunity to enjoy some of the music of the Mi'kmaq as presented by the Sons of Membertou. *Msit No'kmaq!*

Sons of Membertou members on this recording:

Rodney Bear, Darrell Bernard, Sharon Bernard, Austin Christmas, Ben Christmas, Frances "Puddy" Christmas, George Christmas, Victor Christmas, Clifford Copage, Lincoln Gould, Craig Hodder, Mark A. Isaac, Dawn Isadore, J.R. Isadore, Lonnie Jones, Angelo Laporte, Brian Marshall, Graham Marshall, Calvin "Jip" Paul, Shane Paul, and George Smith

Additional musicians on this recording

Allie Bennett (bass), David Burke (keyboard), Richard Burke (flute), Shawn MacDonald (fiddle), Kyle MacNeil (fiddle), Dave McKeough (guitar), Kim Lanze (viola), Angel Paul (vocals)



Sons of Membertou. Photo by Barry Bernard

TRACK NOTES

1. THE PEOPLE OF THE DAWN/ WEJKWITA'JIK (THE GATHERING SONG)

Darrell Bernard, poetry recitation; Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaq drum, vocals; Richard Burke, flute; Lonnie Jones, percussion. Poetry excerpt: “Our Awakening” by Kiju' Ka'wi (Shirley Christmas)

The gathering might be a powwow or a Mawio'mi, a traditional celebration that brings people together at various times throughout the year. Friends and family socialize, we see old friends and meet new ones, love is found or rekindled, and together we celebrate life. Our spirits are given strength, and our ancestors dance and pray with us.

2. SMA'KNIS (VETERANS' SONG)

Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaq drum, vocals; Lonnie Jones, snare drum

This song is not a song of war. It is a song of people and the sacrifices made for their freedom and for the freedom of others, and for what one believes is right.

3. KEPMITE'TMNEJ (MI'KMAQ HONOUR SONG)

Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaq drum, vocals

The “Mi'kmaq Honour Song” has become the national anthem of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This beautiful song, written by George Paul, is about a deep respect for the Nation of Mi'kma'kik. It is about bringing our people together, and about respecting and remembering the reasons that the Creator has placed us on this land.

4. THE MOUNTAIN/MUKLA'QATI

Wekatesk Singers, vocals; Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaq drum, vocals; David Burke, piano

Translating to “Where the Brant Geese Land,” Mukla'qati is a sacred mountain in Unama'kik (Cape Breton) that is under the protection of the Mi'kmaq people. This mountain is said to be the home of Kluskap, the prophet and legendary hero of the Mi'kmaq, and it is connected to our traditional rite of passage. Mukla'qati is also home to an ancient Mi'kmaq community, although it is no longer inhabited due to the Canadian policy of dispossessing the Mi'kmaq of our land. Mukla'qati was very sacred to our ancestors; therefore, it is very sacred to us.

5. 500 YEARS

George Christmas, lead vocals; Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaq drum, vocals; David McKeough, acoustic guitar; Kim Lanze, viola; Allie Bennett, bass; Sharon Bernard, Frances “Puddy” Christmas, Dawn Isadore, and Angel Paul, chorus; David Burke, keyboard

Rita Joe (1932–2007), the renowned and beloved poet laureate of the Mi'kmaq people, was born in We'koqma'q and lived much of her life in Eskasoni. She wrote the beautiful poem “500 Years” in 1992 on the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the Columbus expedition, to commemorate the survival of the Mi'kmaq people and the preservation of the teachings from the land and the Creator. This recording is a version of the poem, set to music by George Christmas of the Sons of Membertou.

6. KWAN'TO'TE'

Darrell Bernard, poetry recitation; Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaq drum and chant; Lonnie Jones, percussion. Poetry excerpt: “The Spirits Are Calling” by Kiju' Ka'wi (Shirley Christmas)

This social dance, called a Round Dance, represents life and the path that we all must follow. The poem “The Spirits Are Calling” is about the cultural renaissance that the Mi'kmaq have experienced since the mid-1980s and continues today.

7. KWA'NU'TE'

Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaq drum and vocals

This is an ancient song of our people, though its origins were once known. Some say it is a feast song, as it is often sung

during the blessing of a meal. We also know this as a peace song, made in treaty with the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk). We would sing to announce our arrival when traveling to their territory or to safely paddle through their waters.

8. KO'JUA (PARTRIDGE DANCE)

Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaw drum, *ji'kmaq*, keys, spoons, bottle, and vocals; Lonnie Jones, percussion; Kyle MacNeil, fiddle

This is one of several versions of a traditional Mi'kmaw Ko'jua dance. Even more important than the song is the dance itself, which involves very fast footwork. The Ko'jua is a favorite social dance in Mi'kmaw communities.



9. THE PEOPLE OF THE DAWN/ KNISKAMIJINAQ (THE ANCESTORS' SONG)

Sons of Membertou, Mi'kmaw drum and vocals; David Burke, keyboard; Lonnie Jones, percussion; Richard Burke, flute

This is a spiritual song that tells of the coming of the old ones and a return to the old ways. The Creator is found wherever one might decide to look for Him, and spirituality is a very personal relationship between you and your Creator. The old ones will come with the lightning, and we shall return with them.



Kabatay Family Dancers. Photo by Roy Gould

Credits

Produced by David Burke and George Christmas
Recorded at Island Recordings, Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island),
Frenchvale, Nova Scotia
Engineered, mixed, and mastered by Joe Bushell
Remastered by Christopher Jones
Album curated and compiled by Darrell Bernard Sr.
Essay and liner notes by Darrell Bernard Sr.
Cover painting by Gerald Richard Gloade
Photos by Barry Bernard, Ray Doucette, Roy Gould, Beaton Institute
Associate producer: Marcia Ostaszewski
Executive producers: Maureen Loughran, John Smith
Production manager: Mary Monseur
Production assistant: Kate Harrington
Editorial assistance: J.R. Isadore, Jane Meader, Sharon Farrell,
James Deutsch, Carla Borden
Language and music consultation: Graham Marshall, Starr Paul
Art direction, design, and layout by Cooley Design Lab

Smithsonian Folkways is: Sophie Abramowitz, digital marketing and distribution specialist; Paloma Alcalá, sales associate; Monica Alexander, financial operations manager; Cecille Chen, director of business affairs and royalties; Logan Clark, special projects and content manager; Toby Dodds, director of web and IT; Seth Elkins, licensing and publishing assistant; Will Griffin, licensing manager; Kate Harrington, production assistant; Maureen Loughran, director and curator; Jennifer Mellizo, education specialist; Mary Monseur, production manager; Sahara Naini, inventory coordinator; Jeff Place, curator and senior archivist; Sophie Sachar, marketing and promotions assistant; Laura Shanahan, social media coordinator; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, associate director; Jonathan Williger, marketing manager; Brian Zimmerman, sales and customer service specialist.

Special Thanks

We dedicate this album to the members of the Wapna'kik Confederacy—Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, Abenaki, and Beothuk Nations who have sacrificed their future for ours, in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Vietnam, Korea, World War II, World War I, Queen Anne's War, Louisbourg, Fort Beauséjour, Quebec, Montreal, Fort Nashwak, Fort William Henry, Fort St. Ann, Watertown, Chebuctou (Halifax), Mukla'qati, Newfoundland, Cibou, Beaver War, and countless other places where it has been the policy of one nation to oppress and dispossess another.

The Sons of Membertou are a traditional Mi'kmaw drum group, and its membership is in a constant state of change. Members have included Rodney Bear, Darrell Bernard, Sharon Bernard, Austin Christmas, Ben Christmas, Frances "Puddy" Christmas, George Christmas, Victor Christmas, Clifford Copage, Lincoln Gould, Mickey Herney, Craig Hodder, Mark A. Isaac, Dawn Isadore, J.R. Isadore, Lonnie Jones, Angelo Laporte, John K. MacEwan, Boyd McEwan, Brian Marshall, Graham Marshall, Terry Marshall, David Meuse, Angel Paul, Armand Paul, Calvin "Jip" Paul, Jada Paul, Shane Paul, Shaylene Paul, Oonig Paul-Ward, George Smith, Julian Wells, Lawrence Wells Jr., and Jeff Ward.

Acknowledgements

We, the Sons of Membertou, would like to express our sincere

gratitude to F.A.C.T.O.R., the Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent On Record, without whom this recording would not have been possible; to the people of Mi'kma'kik, especially Membertou, for your continued support since we first began, with a special thanks to the circle of elders in our community, especially the late Sonny and Elizabeth Laporte for their guidance and encouragement. To Harry and Connie Laporte for your trust in us. To Pauline Bernard for sharing so much with us and always taking the time to teach us and guide us. To Joel Denny for your time that you have invested in us. To the legendary drummer and singer George Paul and Kiju' Ka'wi (Shirley Christmas) for all of your inspirational words. *Wela'liek* for your love.

We would also like to thank Joe Bushell at Island Recordings and Productions, our producer David Burke, and Lonnie Jones, percussion genius. To Wekatesk, a ladies' group from Membertou, that has done more than inspire us. To Jo Anne Rolls, Tom Leadbeater, Richard Burke, Kyle MacNeil, Fred Lavery, Gordie Sampson, Allie Bennett, Dave McKeough, and Angel Paul for instrumental and vocal assistance. Special thanks also to Ricky Doucette and Glen Gould.

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to Marcia Ostaszewski, PhD, Director of the Centre for Sound Communities, Cape Breton University, for loving our music and making this all possible. *Wela'liek* to Cape Breton University for selecting the Sons of Membertou as its first Artists-in-Residence in 2022. *Wela'liek* also to Christopher Jones at Cape Breton University for your beautiful work remastering this album and to Logan Clark of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings for bringing our music to the world.

Most importantly, we would like to thank our families for your love and support during this project.

Love and Peace to you all.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In this way, we continue the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the production, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Folkways, Arhoolie, A.R.C.E., Blue Ridge Institute, Bobby Susser Songs for Children, Collector, Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Educational Activities, Fast Folk, Folk Legacy, Mickey Hart Collection, Monitor, M.O.R.E., Paredon, Right on Rhythm, UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music, and Western Jubilee Recording Company recordings are all available through:

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings Mail Order

Washington, DC 20560-0520

Phone: (800) 410-9815 or 888-FOLKWAYS (orders only)

Fax: (800) 853-9511 (orders only)

To purchase online, or for further information about Smithsonian Folkways Recordings go to: folkways.si.edu. Please send comments and questions to smithsonianfolkways@si.edu.

Wapna'kik (The People of the Dawn) by Mi'kmaw musical group Sons of Membertou foregrounds the powerful voices of their people. First released in 1995, *Wapna'kik* documents a vital resurgence of the Membertou community's music practices. The 2025 updated edition by Smithsonian Folkways includes "Mi'kmaq Honour Song" and "500 Years," introducing a new generation of singers and musicians. Their addition to the album exemplifies the diversity of Mi'kmaw sonic and poetic expressions, which continue, as they have for centuries, to incorporate global influences. Drums play a central role throughout the album, uniting generations of those who strengthen Mi'kmaw language and culture through these songs.

1	The People of the Dawn/Wejkwita'jik (The Gathering Song)	4:40
2	Sma'knis (Veteran's Song)	4:08
3	Kepmite'tmnej (Mi'kmaq Honour song)	8:30
4	The Mountain/Mukla'qati	4:09
5	500 Years	4:22
6	Kwan'to'te'	3:00
7	Kwa'nu'te'	4:01
8	Ko'jua (Partridge Dance)	2:58
9	The People of the Dawn/Kniskamijinaq (The Ancestors' Song)	8:15