

Loreena McKennitt puts her career on hold



PHOTO HUGO-SÉBASTIEN AUBERT, LA PRESSE ARCHIVES - Loreena McKennitt is putting her career on hold to fight climate change.

La Presse has learned that Canadian singer-songwriter and musician Loreena McKennitt intends to put her music career on hold in order to devote all of her energy to fighting the negative impacts of digital technology and global warming.

In the speech she delivered before the Rotary Club of Stratford in Ontario on September 26 - which *La Presse* obtained a transcript of - the 62 year-old singer and multi-instrumentalist made a heartfelt plea for the need to address the problems that have been plaguing the music industry for the past 20 years, the adverse effects of emerging technologies on children and families, as well as the urgency of taking action against climate change.

Contacted by phone yesterday, Loreena McKennitt confirmed her decision to withdraw from the stage “for an indefinite period” to face these battles head on, effective after the final leg of her tour in the Province of Quebec at the end of this month. She also said that she would add a brief explanatory comment in the tour programme distributed to concertgoers.

“I have not made any plans for what will follow. I do not know if I will be recording new albums or undertaking other tours in the near future, but I do know that the crises at hand might have such far-reaching consequences that I – as an artist, as a parent, and as a citizen – feel the need to take action now.”

Loreena McKennitt

McKennitt says her decision has been “long matured”. She adds that she felt the urge to take a public stance on these issues right from the moment she released her latest album, *Lost Souls*, back in spring of 2018. Indeed, on April 19 of that year, she personally penned an opinion piece in the *Toronto Star* explaining to her fans her reasons for leaving Facebook.

“It is still too early to say exactly what will be my role in the next few months, but I can tell you that I intend to give public talks and to speak to government representatives directly about every one of these issues,” said McKennitt. *“I believe these are extraordinary times and I just cannot sit around waiting for what comes next.”*

She described how, as she was addressing her speech to a room full of business people, she sensed that her public speaking on these topics might have more of an immediate and powerful impact.

“I think they just hadn’t realized to what extent the music industry’s current business model is unsustainable for artists, and to what extent the artists’ share of benefits is not proportionate to their contribution. While I was speaking about some of the harmful effects of technology use in early childhood education, they seemed especially compelled by the fact that many parents who work in Silicon Valley send their children to screen-less and tech-free schools.”

On the subjects of the collapse of the record business and the threat of slow extinction that producers are facing as a consequence, the Canadian artist gave a brief historical overview of the music industry in the past 20 years. From the illegal digital file-sharing platform known as Napster to the streaming sites dominated by the Spotifys and Apple Musics of this world, Loreena McKennitt also questioned the right of web giants to take up the lion’s share of online advertising revenue and stifle the news media.

On the issue of revenue-sharing, she was quick to remind members of the Rotary Club that, *“While artists used to receive twenty-five cents per song sold on vinyl or CD, today they receive less than ten cents per thousand plays on streaming sites. Were I to start out my music career today, I could never achieve the kind of success I have experienced in my lifetime.”*

Loreena McKennitt – who adopted a boy (now 12 years-old) which she home-schools along with other children – also intends to strongly advocate in favor of revising policies in her City of Stratford’s environmental action plan and in the city’s schools themselves with regards to the use of digital screens during class-time.

“We must all do our part, including calling on our elected representatives to bring about change. Greta Thunberg’s presence in Canada a few weeks ago arguably had a major impact on many of our

communities. These are the kinds of interventions and efforts that are needed to increase awareness,” she concluded.

Loreena McKennitt will play concert dates in Quebec City on October 29 (at the Grand Théâtre), in Montreal on October 30 (at Place des Arts’ Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier) and in Sherbrooke on November 3 (at the University of Sherbrooke’s Cultural Center).