

Jim Cuddy

(Honorary Doctor of Letters)

June 3, 2025

By virtue of the authority vested in me by the legislature of this province and with the consent of the Senate of this university, I admit you to the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, and invest you with all the rights and privileges and powers pertaining thereto.

Congratulations. And Peter's going to jump in for-- Peter's going to jump in here too.

You have to hold this. (Applause)

Well, it is my pleasure to call up Dr. Cuddy to the podium for his remarks.

Thank you very much. (Applause) Thank you very much.

I don't think I'll ever get used to that, Dr. Cuddy. It's a great honor to be bestowed this doctorate, and it's also a great pleasure to be able to speak to you, to have a gathering of people just embarking on the rest of their lives is very exciting. And there's a couple of things I want to impress upon you, and one is sort of a Paul McCartney quote, "Life is a long and winding road." I want to tell you a little bit about how I got here so you can know what a haphazard path it's been.

I graduated from Queen's University, and my friend Greg Keeler, who is my co-founder of Blue Rodeo, came and picked me up in the spring, and I had decided that I was going to devote one year to music because I really loved music. I knew it wouldn't be a career, but I just loved it, and I wanted to just devote a year to it. So on the way home, Greg said to us, "Well," he said to me, "Why don't we get a band?" And I said, "Okay, that sounds like a good idea."

So one year turned into two, turned into three, and then ultimately we moved to New York where my wife was, my girlfriend at the time was going to acting school. So down in New York, which was very exciting, doing music, a lot of failure, but still very much exciting, I took the LSATs down there, Columbia University, and fully intended to go to law school because it didn't seem like music was a reasonable career path. So I took the LSATs and I got into a few universities, and I decided that University of Windsor would be the place that I would go, and I was preparing to go for the fall, and I just couldn't do it. And so I phoned the registrar. In those days, you could just phone the registrar's office. Somebody would answer, and I said, "I am accepted to university, but I don't want to come this year. Can I put

it off to next year?" And she said, "Oh, love, you can. Just call us next year." So another year goes by, and I still can't do it. So I gave her a call again, same woman, "Sure, just give us a call the following year." So again, third year, I called her up, and she said, "Honey, why don't you just call me when you want to come to law school?"

And I realized at that point that I just couldn't do it. I couldn't give up my connection to music. And even at that point, we didn't have any success, but there was just something so compelling about staying in the world of music and being among people that love music. I got other jobs, and then of course, everything happened. I mean, things, we moved back to Toronto, and we became a popular band, and all these unimaginable things have happened to me, like standing in front of you now as a doctor.

Clearly, I didn't need any more education to become a doctor, so this is a much easier route.

But I really want to impress upon you that when you finish your degree and you walk out of there and you see a path ahead of you, it's unlikely that that will be the path of your life, and you should embrace all the twists and turns, because that's where life really happens, is every turn that turns you off of your decided path.

And it's exciting, and it keeps life from being boring.

The second thing I wanted to tell you was when I was young, when I just moved to Toronto, and I had been a really good kid, I just didn't get any trouble anyway, and somebody convinced me to skip class, skip school, which I'd never done before. I mean, I was only 12, and we went down to City Hall in Toronto, and there was a huge anti-Vietnam protest, and we were given signs, and we joined the crowd, and it was thrilling, it was thrilling to hear that many unified voices. And it was, you know, they backed horses into us, it was mayhem. Anyway, I got home, and I was very moved by this whole experience. And then the next morning I was at the breakfast table, and my father was there, and he was holding the newspaper out, and there on the front page was a picture of myself and my friend in the front row holding signs that said, you know, hell no, we won't go, or LBJ, how many kids have you killed today? There we are, like little 12-year-olds. And that was a terrifying moment, obviously.

But he never noticed, he just closed the paper, and I couldn't eat, you know, I was like, huh.

But it really opened my heart to the idea of people gathering in protest. And I think what we're seeing now in the world, trouble around, the dismantling of a democracy to the south, and wars all around, and what we need, I mean, Peter put it so beautifully, is what we need is we need people to use their voice. We need young people to use their voice. Whether it's collectively, which is very powerful, or individually, we need you to change the

world. You know, I have a lot of discussions with, my wife and I have kids that are in their 30s, and there's a lot of discussions that end up with them disagreeing with me, and which is fine, because I think what they make me realize is that I see the way the world was, and maybe is, but they see the world the way the world can be. And so I trust that you go off, and your mission is to use your voice to make the world what you want it to be. And thank you all very much. (Applause)

Thank you for those remarks, Dr. Cuddy. I have to say, when we were singing "O Canada," I was thinking about what 20-year-old Julian Demke, who was sitting in his friend's basement, listening to "Five Days in July," would think of him singing on stage in front of thousands of people with Jim Cuddy. So I was feeling very, very happy about that.

So I will say, when you award an honorary degree to a musician, one hopes that there's a chance they might honour us with a performance.

When you award an honorary degree to a musician who is also friends with the President, who is also a musician, there's an even greater chance you might get a performance out from both of them. So with that, it is my pleasure to announce for one night only the musical stylings of Dr. Jim Cuddy and Dr. Peter Stoicheff. (Applause)

So you should also know, if I can take a little bit more of your time, that Peter, your revered President, had the same dilemma that I did. When he left Queens, he came to study music in Toronto, ended up going back into academia, but never thought he would end up at the University of Saskatchewan. Now, I saw him in his second year here. We came through and he came out. And it was one of those days, those Saskatoon days, 25 or 30 below, and bright, bright sun. And he was completely transformed. He had the big boots, he had the big coat, he had the gloves. You know, people in Toronto, no matter what temperature they were, they were running shoes, no gloves, jacket open. And he loved it. And he's still here because of the opportunity this life presented him with.