

# ONCE AFRICVILLE STORIES



**Museum of Natural History**  
1747 Summer St., Hfx

Thursday Sept 3, 8:30pm

Sunday Sept 6, 7:40pm

Monday Sept 7 (Labour Day) 1:30pm, 9:55pm

Saturday Sept 12, 12:00pm, 7:10pm

Sunday Sept 13, 8:00pm

**Admission:** (at door only) – All ages



A production of **Voices Black Theatre Ensemble**

## 2015 ATLANTIC FRINGE FESTIVAL

Welcome to *Once-Africville Stories* - a dramatization of the people and events of Africville- an African Nova Scotian community destroyed by the City of Halifax and its residents re-located to other parts of the City in the 1960's in the name of urban renewal. Told through drama, storytelling, poetry, contemporary dance and music, playwright David Woods takes us on a journey through true stories of individuals and events before, during and after the community's controversial expropriation. *Once* attempts to paint the emotional landscape of a people in the throes of not only fighting for the community in which they lived but for who they are as a people.

### Play history

In 1990, poet/playwright David Woods wrote *Africville* - a collection of short epigrams about personalities and incidents in the community of Africville. After hearing the poems, CBC Radio producer Peggy Hemsworth felt that the poetry suite could be presented as a radio drama and commissioned Woods to create a dramatic version of the work. Woods approached this task by breaking the suite of poems into three dramatic sections (*Africville* before, during and after relocation); assigning the poems to three 'Voices' - (Voice #1 Africville elders, Voice #2 Africville women, Voice #3 Africville youth); adding monologues to give added weight to each section; and using music to thread through the poems. The finished work was re-titled *Once: Africville Stories* and was broadcast nationally on CBC Radio's Sunday Matinee in 1997 with the original cast of Shauntay Grant, Celeste Willis and David Woods (actors), Rosella Fraser and Jeremiah Sparks (singers). The drama was also performed that same year in the Halifax Word on The Street Festival on Spring Garden Road and later became touring performance piece of Voices.

### Other

- *Once* was the winner of the 1998 George Elliot Clarke Literary Competition
- Selected poems and spoken word excerpts from *Once* were included on *Africville Suite* by jazz composer Joe Sealy (1996 Juno Award, Best Contemporary Jazz Recording)
- A selection of poetry from a later version of *Once* was shortlisted for the 2004 CBC Literary Award.

### CAST



#### **David Woods - Voice #1, Narrator, Poet, Play writer, Play director, song lyricist**

David Woods (Dartmouth) has worn many professional hats in Halifax. His professional engagements included serving as Founder, Director of the Cultural Awareness Youth Group- CAYG (1983-1990), Black History and Culture consultant with Halifax City Library (1984-1990), Associate Curator at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (2006-2007), and most recently Executive Director of the Imhotep Science

and Math Program at Dalhousie University (2013-15). He is also a visual artist, curator, playwright, storyteller, actor, director and arts organizer. As a stage artist, Woods trained in directing and acting with the Halifax based Enounce Theatre and Global Village Theatre Companies in the late 1980's. He began his professional acting career playing the lead in Global Village Theatre's production of *Sizwe*

*Bansi Is Dead* (1980)- a play about South Africa's apartheid system and toured with this play over much of 1981-82. Woods also began appearing in local stage productions including *Junction Village* (Dal-SMU Caribbean Society 1982) and in several CBC Radio dramas. In 1983, wanting to see more theatre exploring African Nova Scotian and African Canadian experiences on stage, Woods began creating plays and performance pieces on these themes. His early plays include *For Elsie Dorrington* (1983), *Voices* (1984), *Black Journey* (1985), and *The Dream Continues* (1986). Woods' work soon attracted theatre producers across Canada and over the next two decades he was commissioned to create works for CBC Radio and theatre companies across Canada. Woods became a 'go-to' writer for individual performers and performance companies looking for drama on African Canadian experiences including actress Jackie Richardson, jazz composer Joe Sealy, classical choir Nathaniel Dett Chorale, Toronto and Black Theatre West, Vancouver. Woods also contributed dramatic writings to several film documentaries, musical recordings and literary and variety shows. Woods has directed over 15 stage plays and acted in important Canadian productions including role of Rev. Miner in George Boyd's Governor General Award nominated play *Consecrated Ground* (2000). Woods founded Voices Black Theatre Ensemble 1990.



#### **Koumbi - Voice #2**

Koumbi (Halifax) is a Halifax and Toronto based stage, television and film actress. She studied theatre at Concordia University, Shakespeare Theatre School, Stratford and Ross Creek Summer Theatre Academy. She appeared in television series including *AQATEAM* and is currently regular on the popular *Mr. D* television series. Koumbie was also part of the ensemble cast of *Studio Black*- a four-part CBC television dramatic mini-series exploring African Nova Scotian folklore from the 1930's that was recently broadcast on CBC television. This is her first appearance with Voices.



#### **Nathan Simmons - Voice #3**

Nathan Simmons (East Preston) first appeared in the Voices play *Black Journey* in February, 2014. A science major at Dalhousie University at the time, he was immediately bitten by the acting bug and later that year enrolled at the theatre arts program at the Dalhousie University School of the Performing Arts. Since that time Nathan has appeared several Voices performances and was cast in *Black Halifax Historical Video Series* playing the role of Leonard Parkinson— a leader of the Jamaica Maroons. He was also a member of the Studio Black ensemble cast.



#### **Jade James - Dancer**

Jade James (Cole Harbour) - 13 year-old Jade James is following her sister Jayla's footsteps by becoming a dance performer with Voices. (Jayla recently relocated to Toronto to study contemporary dance at Ryerson University). Jade has been studying and performing with Halifax dance troupes Stars of Tomorrow Dance Company and Dartmouth Dance Academy since she was four years old. She is a Gr. 8 student at Sir Robert Borden Junior High School, Cole Harbour. *Once* marks her first appearance with Voices.

## SINGERS



### **Kaleb Simmons**

Kaleb Simmons (Cole Harbour) is a well-known vocalist, rapper, beatboxer and recording artist and a 2008 Canadian Idol top ten finalist. This is his second stint with Voices having performed with the ensemble as a teenager (1990-94). Now more mature in his outlook, Kaleb is looking forward to performing in adult dramas exploring African Canadian experience. He is a second-generation descendant of the Africville experience.



### **Tracey Grouse**

Tracey Grouse (Cole Harbour) is a Gr. 4 teacher at Bi-Centennial School in Dartmouth. She has been singing since age 6 primarily in the choir and as a soloist in the Good Shepherd Church, Lawrencetown where her father served as pastor. She is also a member of the Boyd Family Singers (a vocal group consisting of her siblings and parents) that perform in local churches and community events.



### **Owen Lee - Vocalist, keyboards**

Owen 'O'Sound' Lee (Cole Harbour) discovered his singing talents at the age of 5. After receiving a prophetic word as a teenager, Owen decided to pursue music as a career, and he has been making strides ever since. He has performed as a back-up vocalist with numerous industry giants such as Mariah Carey, Kim Burrell, and Alvin Slaughter. He is the vocal director of Brian Hamilton & Divine Worship, the Music Director of the Emmanuel Baptist Church Meeting Place in Upper Hammonds Plains, and the director of the Nova Scotia Mass Choir. He is completing a music degree in Jazz Music Theory and Performance at York University.

## CREW

Sound, sound effects **Lindell Smith, Brandon Tolliver**

Set **Justin Augustine, David Woods**

Graphic Design **Corporate Graphics**

Production Assistant **Letitia Fraser**

## VOICES BLACK THEATRE ENSEMBLE

Voices Black Theatre Ensemble was founded in 1990 by David Woods. It was organized in the wake of the Cole Harbour High School riot in 1990, when students at the school's CAYG group approached Woods about creating a play to tell story of the lives of Black students at the school. The resulting performance *Nova Scotia Black Reality Song* was an overwhelming success and brought such accolades to the student performers they decided they would like to stay together and do other performances with Woods...and thus Voices Black Theatre Ensemble was born.

Voices soon became a force among Nova Scotia youth and the theatre community in general in the 1990's. A full-time repertory company of young African Nova Scotian actors, musicians, dancers and singers drawn from around the province was established in 1992 to provide continuity to the ensemble from year to year. Over the next decade, the Ensemble created plays examining African Nova Scotian education; history and culture; women's issues; individual community experiences etc. Voices also launched annual performance tours to schools and communities across the province. These tours crystallized Voices' importance as not only as a 'teller' of African Nova Scotian stories, but as an inspiration to young people across the province who could see performers their own age and background performing in a professional theatre company. Voices also created special performances for clients outside of Nova Scotia including Black History Month stage performances in Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary and Vancouver. In 1995, Voices was selected to represent the province during the Halifax G7 Conference with a performance of its play *Nova Scotia Suite*. Some of the ensemble's noted plays include *The Detention* (1992), *Womansongs* (1995), *Choices in the Skin* (1997), *Home* (2002), and *Witness* (2004). Former Voices members who have gone on to pursue full-time professional acting and performing careers include Jeremiah Sparks (Cherry Brook) and Jivaro Smith (North Preston).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, THANKS

Props

- **Dalhousie School of Performing Arts**

Rehearsal space

- **Black Cultural Centre**
- **Sobeys**, Panavista Dr., Dartmouth

Financial contributors:



**Black Artists Network  
of Nova Scotia (BANNs)**



Delmore "Buddy" Daye  
Learning Institute  
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**Delmore Buddy Daye Learning  
Institute (DBDLI)**

For interest in performing with Voices, booking a performance, or supporting the ensemble initiative contact:

Danielle Hodges, Coordinator

Voices Black Theatre Ensemble, P.O. Box 23106 Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B3A 4S9  
phone 902 430-3560 | e-mail [admin@banns.ca](mailto:admin@banns.ca) | web [www.banns.ca](http://www.banns.ca)



*Grazing Cattle* oil on canvas, 1899



*Edith MacDonald-Brown* circa 1896

## Preservation of the art of EDITH MACDONALD-BROWN

Voices Black Theatre Ensemble is giving its support to the Black Artists Network's \$10,000 campaign to raise funds for the restoration and preservation of the paintings by Edith MacDonald-Brown (c.1880-1959) of Africville.

Edith MacDonad-Brown (nee MacDonald) was born in Montreal, the granddaughter of John Brown- one of the original deed holders of Africville. She relocated back to Africville in the early 1900's and raised a family there. Though not much is known about her early life in Montreal or her art training she was a brilliant painter of English pastoral scenes.

Art curator David Woods has argued that her work 'rivalled the best art being produced in Nova Scotia at the turn of the 20th century.' MacDonald-Brown was not known to have exhibited nor was her work known outside her family.

Woods 'discovered' MacDonad-Brown's art at the home of her daughter Ruth Johnson in Sackville in 1997 while researching for *In This Place*- the first exhibition of African Nova Scotian art (Anna Leonowens Gallery 1998). An oil *Sweet Peas* was loaned for that exhibition. In 2008, a granddaughter Geraldine Parker of Halifax loaned two of MacDonald-Brown's paintings *Grazing Cattle and Deer in Forest* for the exhibition *Incantation*- the first exhibition of art a from and about Africville (2008, Seaview Park).

So far seven large MacDonald-Brown oils dated between 1899-1921 have been identified all held by family members. All are suffering from mould or light damage and are in serious need of restoration to ensure their future survival. MacDonad-Brown's art is both an Africville and Nova Scotia treasure and must be preserved for future generations to see and enjoy. Voices has agreed to do a future performance of *Once* in support of this fundraising initiative and to promote the initiative during its play performances.

An Africville art print series created by BANNs for this initiative and featuring two works by Edith MacDonald-Brown is available for sale from Voices table in the lobby.

For info and contributions to this initiative please contact:

Black Artists Network (BANNs)

902 430-3560 | admin@banns.ca

The fundraising campaign is sanctioned by Geraldine Parker— owner of most of the artist's surviving paintings.

## **ARTWORK AVAILABLE**

**Edith MacDonald-Brown** (c. 1880-1959)

1. *Cattle* oil on canvas 1898
2. *Deer in Forest* oil on canvas 1901
3. Photo of Artist

**Justin Augustine, Hfx**

4. *Africville and other such blissful memories*  
oil on canvas 2000

**Angel Gannon, Hfx**

5. *Mr. Byers* oil on canvas 2009
6. *Africville Messiah* oil on canvas 2011

**David Woods**

7. Poetry collection *Native Song* featuring the original *Once* poems
8. *Africville Requiem*- a mounted poem
9. *Seaview* acrylic on canvas 1996 (featured on cover of Joe Sealy's *Africville Suite*)