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## Charles Campbell presents, 'Actor Boy: Travels in Birdsong', in Charlottetown

Performance art that was part of the Flotilla events



Joni Low and Charles Campbell assemble the final pieces of Campbell's art installation, "Actor Boy: Travels in Birdsong." The actor, who grew up in Charlottetown, was performing Friday evening as part of Flotilla.

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**CHARLOTTETOWN, P.E.I. - A man's P.E.I. past and the past of the province melded Friday as Charles Campbell returned to the province where he grew up to present, "Actor Boy: Travels in Birdsong," in Charlottetown.**

It was a piece of performance art and part of the Flotilla events. Flotilla was the biennial gathering of the Association of Artist-Run Centres from the Atlantic, which took place Sept. 21-24 in Charlottetown.

*" By listening, we're participating. And we're kind of implicit in imagining what the other side of that conversation might be. And that often the other side of the conversation that we imagine tells us more about ourselves than the other "*

— Joni Low

Campbell's character, Actor Boy, is a being from an alternate future that began when the Jamaican slaves were freed. Actor Boy's future has healed some of the wounds around racial differences that our world hasn't yet.

When Joni Low heard of the Flotilla festival, her thoughts leapt quickly to Campbell's work and then to P.E.I.'s forgotten mixed race community, the Bog.

The Vancouver curator is interested in Canada's minority histories.

"Histories are multiple intersecting, always plural."

Campbell was keen to participate in the Island event. He had moved to P.E.I. with his family when he was five and lived here until he went to university.

As Actor Boy, Campbell spoke to memories of the Bog, Charlottetown's black and mixed race community located next to Government Pond from around 1780 to 1880.



Charles Campbell checks his "Actor Boy" mask before Friday night's performance as part of the Flotilla festival in Charlottetown.

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Jim Hornby, an Island historian, said while there were a lot of people in poverty at the time, the residents of the Bog dealt with all the issues of poverty, plus race.

"They were never allowed to forget they were coloured."

Together, Low and Campbell produced a large piece of art full of sound and images.

Seen all together, it looked like a flock of birds in flight. Birdsongs called out in the open space. A series of 72 shapes, three-sided oval tubes made of laser-cut birch wood, are suspended on monofilament arranged in interconnecting circles. Several circles are arranged into one large circle with a space in the middle. The overall shape, called a torus, is used in physics to depict an energy field.

Friday evening, each of the shapes yielded a memory from the Bog. Actor Boy spoke with each in a one-sided conversation.

What the audience heard in the silence will be unique to the person, Low said.

"By listening, we're participating. And we're kind of implicit in imagining what the other side of that conversation might be. And that often the other side of the conversation that we imagine tells us more about ourselves than the other."



Volunteer Symone is ready with handouts explaining "Actor Boy: Travels in Birdsong," an installation mounted in a building on Kent Street as part of the Flotilla conference in Charlottetown.

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Campbell hopes that Actor-Boy's conversations will give people a new point of view.

"Actor Boy kind of literalizes that, where a decline in birdsong is actually a decline in channels to the past and the future. So our ecological health is intimately timed with how we are able to access what potential futures are out there for us, and also how we are able to access the past."

"The whole exhibit sends out a good message about how we don't listen anymore to lessons of the past," said volunteer Symone. She's a student from the Holland College School of Performing Arts program.

"Plus the bird sounds are really calming. I really like being in here."

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