

In short:

In 2015, Juno Award nominee Khari Wendell McClelland retraced the steps of his great-great-great-grandmother Kizzy and collected the songs that likely underscored her escape to Canada through the Underground Railroad. *Freedom Singer* brings his journey to life on stage, along with the music he has reinvented through his contemporary aesthetics of soul, funk, hip hop and gospel. Created by Toronto's Project: Humanity, Urban Ink Productions presents *Freedom Singer* to Vancouver audiences October 7-15, 2017.

Urban Ink presents *Freedom Singer*, a new documentary theatre piece featuring Khari Wendell McClelland, at the Goldcorp Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre

June 14, 2017 (Vancouver, BC) – Hot on the heels of their successful production of Corey Payette's new musical *Children of God* and four Jessie Award nominations for Margo Kane's *Moonlodge*, [Urban Ink Productions](#) is proud to announce they are bringing Khari Wendell McClelland's *Freedom Singer* to Vancouver October 7-15, 2017

Created and produced by [Project: Humanity](#), *Freedom Singer* is a new documentary theatre piece co-created by Khari Wendell McClelland and Project: Humanity's Andrew Kushnir with CBC journalist Jodie Martinson. It was inspired by the journey of singer-songwriter McClelland in retracing his great-great-great-grandmother's steps to escaping slavery in the U.S.

In 2015, Juno Award nominee McClelland retraced the steps of his great-great-great-grandmother Kizzy, and using contemporary styles like hip hop, funk and soul, he personalized the songs that likely accompanied her and thousands of others as they escaped U.S. slavery. In sharing this music, Khari is brought face to face with his own "unrecorded" heritage, and the realities and myths of one of our quintessential historic narratives: the Underground Railroad.

The Detroit-born, Vancouver-based singer/songwriter talked to historians, museum curators, and descendants of slaves. His journey was recorded for a CBC documentary.

Freedom Singer premiered on stage in Toronto in February 2017 and is now on a cross-country tour, with a stop in Vancouver this fall at the Goldcorp Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre.

The latest groundbreaking verbatim work from Project: Humanity, *Freedom Singer* asks: can "vibrations of the past" bring us closer to the truths and freedoms we may be seeking today?

"A sweet reminder of our history"

"There are challenges translating a research project to the stage, but Khari Wendell McClelland finds a sweet spot."

★★★ – TORONTO STAR

“A moving musical journey along the Underground Railroad...with a Hamilton- esque twist: [the songs] are reinvented as hip-hop, funk and soul numbers.”

“A Must-See”

– *TORONTO LIFE*

[*Freedom Singer*](#) is a documentary-style piece of theatre that blends Khari Wendell McClelland's original music with 1850s freedom songs, verbatim interview excerpts, and first-hand stories. It tells of McClelland's journey to find the music that would have accompanied his great-great-great-grandmother, an escaped slave who walked to Ontario, lost her legs to the cold, had two children with a British-Canadian, then returned to Detroit after emancipation.

McClelland is joined on stage by acclaimed Vancouver guitarist Noah Walker and Juno Award-nominated soul singer Tanika Charles resurrecting these songs for contemporary audiences.

The show is directed by Andrew Kushnir of Project: Humanity, a Toronto theatre company that uses journalistic research and verbatim texts to explore social issues. (e.g., *The Middle Place* looked at youth shelters, and *Small Axe*, homophobia)

“You can physically feel this music right now as it may have been felt in the 1800s. History becomes animated; history becomes a verb instead of a noun. These were songs of survival for those singing them – for those who escaped, but also for those who endured or succumbed to the tyranny of slavery. They are songs of dignity forged in the face of inconceivable indignity. They stir the collective memory, the collective imagination -- and they need to live on,” says Kushnir.

McClelland adds, “What I've come to realize more and more is how important this look back is right now, with the number of people who are displaced through war, environmental degradation, systemic oppression and poverty. I want to ask the audience – what is our role in this time? We often see the Underground Railroad as a defining narrative of Canada, the realization of hope, a safe place from tyranny. I want us to investigate our commitment to liberty and freedom today.”

Recommended for ages 13+

***Freedom Singer* was originally developed by Project: Humanity in association with Urban Ink Productions and Crow's Theatre, with support from the NAC's "The Collaborations"**

Production dates:
October 7-15, 2017

Venue:
Goldcorp Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre, 162 West 1st Avenue, Vancouver, BC

A Project: Humanity production

Co-created by [Khari Wendell McClelland](#) and [Andrew Kushnir](#), with [Jodie Martinson](#)

Originally developed in association with **Urban Ink Productions** and [Crow's Theatre](#), with support from the [NAC English Theatre's "The Collaborations"](#)

Directed by Andrew Kushnir

Starring Khari Wendell McClelland, joined by guitarist [Noah Walker](#) and soul singer [Tanika Charles](#)

Set and costume design by Joanna Yu
 Lighting design by Oz Weaver
 Sound design by Debashis Sinha
 Stage managed by Emilie Aubin
 Production managed by Oz Weaver
 Research dramaturgy by Jodie Martinson

Tickets:

Will go on sale this summer through BMO Theatre Centre's ticket partner: [vancouveritix.com](#)

This presentation of *Freedom Singer* is made possible with the generous support from:

Canada Council
BC Arts Council
City of Vancouver

Links:

Web page: [Urbanink.ca/freedom-singer](#)

Facebook: [urbaninkproductions](#)

Twitter: [urbaninkvan](#)

Instagram: [UrbanInkVan](#)

Hashtag: #FreedomSinger

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ABOUT URBAN INK PRODUCTIONS

Urban Ink Productions creates, produces and disseminates original live performance works by Indigenous and Intercultural artists.

Mission & Mandate: Urban Ink Production Society (Urban Ink Productions) ignites and inspires revolutionary voices that transform our world. We collaborate with artists and communities to push artistic boundaries through the creation and production of innovative Indigenous and Intercultural performance works. We are dedicated to providing a platform for these artists to tell their own stories from their own unique voice.

**ABOUT PROJECT: HUMANITY**

Project: Humanity is a Toronto-based company raising awareness of social issues through the arts, with a strong emphasis on youth engagement. Their highly-acclaimed works *The Middle Place* and *Small Axe* have positioned them as a leading developer of verbatim theatre in the country.

Artistic Vision: To create aesthetically-compelling experiences for audiences that will challenge preconceptions, that will interrupt mainstream narratives, and will in a caring way open up dialogues around complicity, awareness, and advocacy.

Andrew Kushnir, creative director of Project: Humanity, and members of the production team are available for interviews or photo shoots.

Please contact for more information:

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