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Keemayah Ford, Jazmine Samuel, Ne'keya Fraser Crowned 2024 Carnival Royalty

Contestants from ages five to teens dazzle in a vibrant display of Carnival spirit and local heritage

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From left to right, Carnival Princess Jazmine Samuel, Petite Princess Keemayah Ford, and Jr. Miss Nekeya Fraser. By. DIVISION OF FESTIVALS

On Saturday night, seven girls took to the stage, competing for three crowns in the junior Carnival pageants for St. Thomas 2024 - Petite Princess, Princess, and Junior Miss.

The youngest contestants were five-year old Keemayah Ford and Nahkiya Jeffers, who began by welcoming the audience to the night's "cultural tour like never before." Keemayah was dressed in a pink and white majorette costume while Nahkiya wore a carousel costume, the panels of which

depicted various scenes associated with Carnival and culture.

Princess contestant #1 Amiah Motta introduced herself wearing a madras-trimmed chef's uniform, signaling her focus on highlighting VI cuisine. Kaysiah Charleswell was also wearing madras, fashioned into the blazer of a flight attendant's uniform as she welcomed patrons aboard the "VI Nice" airline. Meanwhile Jazmine Samuel wowed the audience by displaying her ability to shift between characters at lightning speed, as she carried on a 2-sided conversation with a hybrid outfit and voice changes to match her dual role.

Junior Miss contestant #1 Ne'keyah Fraser translated the theme into her portrayal of an AI GPS computer, programmed to guide passengers to the best experiences of Carnival 2024, while contestant #2 D'nae Todman chose to serve as a "cultural culinary guru", highlighting local cuisine but this time from the perspective of a food tour guide.

After an entertainment break provided by the Elite Dynasty Dance Group, the Princess contestants took to the stage in candy-focused couture wear. Amiah donned a colorful dress, its red fitted bodice and wide flaring skirt decorated with candies and wrappers in an homage to M&Ms. Her yellow, extended-Afro wig was similarly adorned. Kaysiah was a peppermint fairy, her red and white striped dress enhanced at the shoulder and waist with oversized candy canes and peppermint sweets.



Her hat also bore the same large candy canes as her dress. Finally for the segment, Jazmine Samuel's dress underwent a double transformation during her presentation. She first shed her gummy bear skirt for a smaller one of tiered cupcakes, before stepping out of that skirt to reveal an ingenious tiered design that dangled lollipops down to her feet as it lowered.

Next was the "Rip The Runway" segment for the Junior Miss contestants, featuring career-focused couture. Ne'keyah Fraser stepped out in a colorful ruffled duster which became the train of a pearl-trimmed madras wedding dress when she threw it off her shoulders. Ms. Fraser then took off the fabric of the duster/train completely to transform the outfit into one perfect for a bride at her VI wedding reception. Meanwhile, D'nae Todman's cosmetology-themed outfit began with a pink and black overcoat paired with metallic pink knee-high lace up boots. She took off the coat, placing it around the shoulders of a half-mannequin that was on stage surrounded by the tools of

her adopted profession, to reveal black leggings and a top where the bodice and one ruffled sleeve were fashioned from a pink sequined material.

The smallest contestants were up next, showing judges their interpretation of the Winter Wonderland Barbie creative wear juxtaposed with a topical location. Keemayah Forde stepped out as a Winter Wonderland Barbie, dressed in white and sparkly silver coat before ducking behind a column of spring flowers, only to re-emerge as a vibrant yellow flower. Her ruffled skirt formed petals, as did the enormous asymmetrical headpiece which framed her face. Kaysiah Charleswell's tropical winter scene began with her in an iridescent white wide-legged jumpsuit with a matching fur-trimmed coat dripping small icicles. Her change was into a purple bodysuit with pearls dotted over the fabric, and attached capes on the sleeves.

Judges next had to consider creative couture wear with a madras flair, in which Amiah Motta paid tribute to the power of journalism with a dress partially fashioned from the front pages of a popular local newspaper. The rest of the dress was a cascade of ruffles of black and white madras, reinforcing the newsprint theme. A red belt, gloves, and trim on the dress accentuated the outfit, while a white petticoat peeked out from underneath her voluminous skirt.

Kaysiah Charleswell stepped out in a madras outfit paired with pink and blue satin fabric. The ruffled legs and skirted overcoat were trimmed with yellow measuring tape, an homage to local designers who use madras in innovative ways. After shedding her overcoat, Ms. Charleswell revealed a waistcoat with ruffled sleeves and peplum, which she also removed to reveal a madras halter neck bustier with jeweled accents as her final form – each look a tribute to one local seamstress.

Princess contestant #3 Jazmine Samuel took the audience through the life cycle of a butterfly as she took to the stage in a madras cocoon before discarding it to reveal a long-sleeved madras jumpsuit with ruffled wings connecting the arms and legs, apropos to the theme. The jumpsuit transformed again to reveal another iteration with a more explicit butterfly design.

The Jr. Miss contestants were required to wear fashions that paid tribute to local women who were stalwarts of preserving the territory's culture. One such woman was Helen Sebastien Gabriel, represented by Ne'keyah Fraser. Ne'Keyah initially wore orange cropped pants and a floral jacket with mock turtleneck and peplum in an homage to the "Virgin Islands Matriarch of Baton Twirling", before changing into a yellow and blue majorette costume.

D'nae Todman's tribute was to Muriel Lettsome, owner of Marie's Cookshop. The bell-shaped skirt of her dress was emblazoned with depictions of cooking pots and the meals therein. She opened a panel on the dress to reveal more items associated with local cuisine. Georgia Francis and Dionne Donadelle were also honored on the back of the dress, which was decorated with a glittery rendition of a musical scene.

After an entertainment number from the Helopolis Dance Group, the Petite Princesses were back, displaying their creative Island Doll dress. The skirt of Keemayah Ford's dress was a geometric piece paying tribute to Mary Ann Christopher, renowned for bamboula dancing, with her market basket hat signifying Mary Ann's favored portrayal. Meanwhile, Nahkiya Jeffers's doll dress was an orange and blue number trimmed with madras and dripping with colorful gems. She decided to honor Dorothy Lockhart Eslscove, a carnival committee stalwart.

VI Karnage then took to the stage as the contestants prepared for the talent segment.

Amiah Motta began by re-enacting Theron Thomas' triumphant Grammy award, before sitting at the keyboard to perform a number of songs written by the award-winning musician. The musical and dance performance, she said, would hopefully inspire other VI fathers to support their children as Thomas' father Kibo Thomas did for his son. Kaysiah Charleswell's steelpan, xylophone, and saxophone performance was in honor of her late father, cultural icon Pupa Kelly, who was last year's Carnival Village honoree, named as such weeks before he passed. Meanwhile, Jazmine Samuel gave the honor to her music teachers at the Joseph Sibilly Elementary School, as she treated the judges to a saxophone solo, before transitioning to a dance routine, giving credit to the VI Institute of the Performing Arts.

The Jr. Miss talents were equally as exciting. Ne'keyah Fraser gave the audience a sneak peek at the routine that she will be performing at an upcoming All-Star cheer and dance competition. Dance combined with floor gymnastics and aerial acrobatics wowed the audience, culminating with a limbo performance. For her talent, D'nae Todman introduced the audience to her alter-ego Tia Rashae, who in her skit was performing at the hotly anticipated [Utopia Unity concert](#). She began by singing before picking up a pair of pan sticks and playing along to several local melodies.

The Petite princesses began the formalwear segment, as Keemayah Forde shared her birth journey with the audience, stepping on stage wrapped in purple cloth, the same color as the blanket she was wrapped in during her first minutes on earth as a premature baby. The blanket gave way to a baby blue off-the-shoulder gown with short ruffled skirt, the gem-encrusted fabric glistening under the lights. Nakeah Jeffers, meanwhile, initially concealed her gown under a pink cloak, before throwing it off to reveal a pink and magenta dress with elaborate shoulders made of reinforced fabric covered in gems which swept backwards into a bow, the ribbons of which trailed backwards over an elaborately ruffled skirt.

For the Princess contestants, Amiah Motta's ballgown featured a bodice with slashed sleeves and covered in sequins which gave way to a voluminous magenta skirt itself dotted with sparkles. Kaysiah Charleswell glimmered in a baby blue ballgown, its gem-encrusted bodice featuring a sweetheart neckline and elaborately puffed sleeves. A white peplum covered an enormous sequined skirt, with dangling diamante earrings to complete the look, which was dedicate to the premature loss of her father. Jazmine Samuel began with a blue satin covering adorned with a large sequined bow at the waist, which she took off to reveal a champagne colored sleeveless gown, the tiered skirts of which were fashioned like petals of a flower. The illusion neckline added to the interest of the piece.

For the most senior group, Ne'keya Fraser chose a yellow gown that looked almost neon under stage lights. She dazzled with diamante accents on the column dress with ruffled skirt as she paid tribute to the father figures in her life that stepped in after her biological father was tragically killed when she was a newborn. D'nae Todman's overcloak was a white and yellow ombre satin piece trimmed with yellow fur. Once she threw the coverup aside, the judges were treated to another ombre fabric, this time in crimson. The gown was fashioned into a one-shouldered column gown which ended in a frothy mermaid ruffle at the knees, accented by large diamante gems placed in strategic locations across the dress.

In the final segment, the petite princess contestants answered questions about what they wanted to be when they grew up, as well as about their favorite foods and hobbies.

After the smallest participants had completed their segment, the princess contestants took the stage to field questions about TikTok, discussing the benefits of the app (creativity and self-

expression) along with the downsides (malicious use). They also spoke about their competition journey, and their responses to a hypothetical bullying situation.

The questions for the Jr. Miss contestants focused on bullying as well, asking them to respond to a friend who was caught bullying another. They were also asked about potential strategies that teachers can use to keep students motivated in the classroom (staying accessible, building relationships with students), and the benefits of social media.

At the end of an almost 7-hour marathon, three young Virgin Islands were crowned St. Thomas Carnival Royalty for 2024. Keemayah Ford is this year's Petite Princess, while Jazmine Samuel took the Carnival Princess 2024 title. The Jr. Miss crown went to Ne'keya Fraser, wrapping up this year's junior pageant.

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