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St. Croix Festival Royalty Crowned After 8-Hour Pageant

Contestants dazzled in categories — cultural dress, talent, and evening wear, culminating in the crowning of Markeymah Cargile as Miss St. Croix, K'Asia O'Bryan as Jr. Miss St. Croix, and winners across Princess, Prince, Duchess, and Tiny Tart categories

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St. Croix's 2024-2025 Festival Pageant Royalty By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS

For eight hours on December 26, residents of St. Croix and the wider Virgin Islands were intently following their favorite contestants vying to be crowned Crucian Carnival Royalty for 2024-2025.

The St. Croix Central High School's Golden Voices began the proceedings with the national anthem and Virgin Islands March, swiftly followed by the opening number featuring all

contestants in coordinating black and white outfits.

Dubbed as “a celebration where elegance meets creativity” by one of the evening's two emcees Elaine Jn. Baptiste, the evening of pageantry sought to judge contestants in various age levels based on deportment, attire in costume swimwear, and formal wear, and their ability to think quickly on their feet.

Perhaps anticipating the long program ahead, organizers opted to begin with the question and answer segment – worth 100 points – immediately following their introduction (itself worth 85 points). Contestants were all required to wear white for this segment.

Former Festival Princess K'Asia Ronaé Alanna O'Bryan was the first Jr. Miss St. Croix contestant to introduce herself. Her pageant pedigree was immediately apparent in her confident declaration that “my time is now.” Meanwhile, Jr. Miss Contestant #2, D'Neisjah Lashay Clouden introduced herself as “art at its best,” and “a vibe like no other.”

The Jr. Miss contestants were followed by those vying for the Duchess title. Duchess contestant #1 Ky'Junae Kween Zynique Patrice Brewster declared that, “I don't need diamonds to shine, because I can sparkle all on my own,” while contestant #2 Le'Nijah Denay Liburd came prepared to “work this stage and make it come alive.” Meanwhile Duchess contestant # 3 Ajaela Bellah Ava Bell, in her introduction, described herself as a “dynamic force ready to inspire, uplift, and dazzle.”

Next were the Prince and Princess contestants.

Prince contender #1 Nelson Garcia Junior shared his opinion that “pageantry is like a game of chess,” advising that winning was about “courage” and “finesse” more than mere looks. Meanwhile, contender #2 Noah Ramnarine Cebedo declared his ambitions to become either a priest or an international recording artist.

Princess contestant #1 Deh'Jalise John Baptiste, the self-described “pint-sized powerhouse” warned audience and judges alike not to underestimate her, while contestant #2 Maia Lynn Franklin voiced her love of science and her dreams of becoming a marine biologist. While Ms. Franklin was unable to answer her question initially, the audience was supportive, cheering her through the difficult moment as she walked off the stage. She would return later in the program to respond.

Tiny Tart contestants were not judged for this segment, but contestant #1 Zahria Charles and contestant #2 Aleiya Edwin nevertheless both strutted across the stage wearing their best smiles to introduce themselves to the audience.

Markeymah Cargile, whose evening was a coronation rather than a competition due to the lack of other aspirants, nevertheless participated in the first segment where she introduced her platform of suicide prevention advocacy. Her strategy, she noted, was rooted in “teaching our younger generation to love themselves.”

Swimwear was next, with prohibitions against cutouts or overly-revealing styles for the younger Jr. Miss contestants. A maximum of 80 points could be awarded for this section. Both contestants wore suits that transformed during their time on stage, adding an element of surprise to a segment that attempted to ban robes and coats.

Long interludes between segments added to the show's massive running time, with hosts doing their best to engage audiences with banter, raffle ticket pulls and information sharing between the action.

Finally, however, Jr. Miss contestants were ready to deliver their 3-minute platform speeches, with 150 points up for grabs. Ms. Croix Markeymah Cargile was given the opportunity to lead the segment, telling the audience her formula for success: “Self-love plus self-worth.” She argued that “our cultural traditions are not just rituals,” but instead “treasure troves of wisdom, joy and identity.” Ms. Cargile wove those themes into the need for Virgin Islanders to practice self-love and self-care through their chosen cultural practice, and through that activity create safe spaces for themselves and others to discuss mental health challenges.

Another break in activity preceded the platform speech of Jr. Miss Contestant # 1. Ms. O'Bryan advocated for the creation of Club B.A.L.A.N.C.E; “Building a legacy of adolescents nurturing cultural excellence,” she explained. The club, which she said was inspired by Willard John's “Guardians of Culture”, would offer “weekly sessions that foster skill development, encourage creative self expression, and produces...camaraderie” to encourage students to disconnect from their devices and connect with each other face to face. Contestant #2, Ms. Clouden introduced Autism Allies, a club expected to begin operations in April – Autism Awareness month. She outlined a week's worth of activities to raise awareness of the condition among students of the St. Croix Educational Complex, and encouraged everyone to pledge their support for education and advocacy surrounding autism.

Duchess, Prince and Princess contestants did not have judged platform speeches this year, and so the next opportunity for them to earn points was in the School fun fashion segment.

Duchess contestants went first, dressing in their school colors under the theme “Rock and Roll.” The Prince and Princess hopefuls had to come up with their takes on the theme “Rhinestone Cowboy,” while Jr. Miss contestants displayed their school pride under the theme “A World of Fashion.” A maximum of hundred points could be awarded for the use of fabric, fit, modeling style, confidence, theme interpretation, and stage presence.

The next judged segment was cultural dress for the younger contestants, and cultural dress costume for Jr. Miss contenders. This segment was also worth up to 100 points. Madras of various colors and patterns filled the stage, as contestants energetically modeled the suits, gowns and costumes of their various designers.

While the audience waited for the next segment, several reigning members of Carnival royalty delivered their final addresses to an appreciative crowd, thanking them for their support over the past 12 months. Next, at just around the 3.5 hour mark, it was time for the talent segment, with 110 points at stake.

Prince Contender #1 Nelson Garcia performed poi, a dance performance art from indigenous New Zealanders. Meanwhile, Noah Cebedo sang “Beauty and the Beast,” meant as a reflection of his experience of sometimes being shunned and isolated by his peers due to their reaction to his autism.

For her talent, Princess contestant #1 Deh'Jalise John Baptiste sang “Heal the World” as a cry against gun violence in her community. Contestant #2 Maia Lynn Franklin’s song and dance were an ode to the Virgin Islands.

After another lengthy wait, it was time for the Jr. Miss contestants to showcase their talents. K'Asia O'Bryan danced, DJ'ed, and performed a little stint in her role as her uncle's naughty sailor shop helper, while D'Neisjah Clouden honored her late father with a combination of dance, spoken word, and song.

The final judged segment for all pageant contestants was evening wear. While the audience waited, it was announced that Duchess contestant #2, Le'Nijah Liburd, had withdrawn from the judging.

The other contestants paraded across the stage in dresses and suits tailored for their age categories – Tiny Tarts and Duchess hopefuls in teacup dresses, Princess contestants in ball gowns and the Princes in tuxedos, while Jr. Miss contestants appeared in A-Line dresses. There were a total of 110 points available for this category.

After the last contestant had left the stage, audience and hosts had to contend with an almost two hour wait for results. Ultimately, the suite of 2024-2025 St. Croix Carnival pageant title holders was crowned.

72nd Miss St. Croix: Markeymah Cargile

Jr. Miss St. Croix: K'Asia Ronaé Alanna O'Bryan

Princess: Deh'Jalise John-Baptiste

Prince: Noah Alexander Ramnarine Cebedo

Duchess: Ky'Junae Kween Zynique Patrice Brewster

Duke: Khari Newton

Tiny Tart – Z'haria Charles