

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coronavirus Brings Anxiety, Brent Hoyte Brings the Remedy with 'Sunday Service', a Facebook Live Event Rocking the Virgin Islands and Beyond

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Brent Hoyte By. BRENT HOYTE

TORTOLA, BVI — “I wonder if Brent D. Hoyte doing a Good Friday segment,” posted Keiroy R-Browne on Facebook on Thursday.

This basically summed up the sentiment of tens of thousands of young people throughout the Virgin Islands and further afield who were left craving for more, after musician extraordinaire Brent D. Hoyte of the British Virgin Islands rocked the Internet with a virtual church service two Sundays in a row.

It was a refreshing sound which saw the young people rising up and embracing the musical culture of the Caribbean presented as gospel.

There was representation in terms of viewers from the BVI, USVI, Anguilla, St. Maarten, St. Kitts/Nevis, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, Grenada, France and the United States, including Atlanta, Florida and Texas.

The first Facebook Live events were held on March 29 and April 5, racking up an estimated total of 50,000 views, close to 8,000 Likes and over 4,500 shares, with up to 3.9k live viewers.

For an hour and a half in the first instance and in the other for nearly two hours, this musical genius mixed a selection of gospel music in various genres, particularly from the Caribbean cultural perspective, interspersed with words of inspiration and encouragement.

The general consensus was that the events were amazing, really uplifting, everyone was blessed, Brent was on fire, he is a legend and this was nothing short of greatness.

Brent Hoyte breathes music and he is a Preacher's Kid. In fact, he is the son of two preachers – Pastors Wayne and Joycelyn Hoyte, who themselves are musicians. Today, he continues to lead music at his parents church, First Assembly of God on Tortola.

Mr. Hoyte is largely self-taught and is now proficient in the keyboards, sax, drums and other instruments, but he credits former/current music teachers at the then-BVI High School, now Elmore Stoutt High School, Glenice Rabsatt, Kamau Georges, Alton Bertie, André Braithwaite and Lincoln Ward — all professional musicians — for training him.

By the time he graduated high school in 2009, Mr. Hoyte was already himself at an advanced level, reading music and playing by ear. He had also completed the Royal School of Music RSM Grades 4-6 examinations in saxophone, which put him in good stead to teach music at ESHS for the next six years.

In the past four years, Mr. Hoyte has been employed at Home Grown Studios with Raul Sprauve, and is now the owner and full-time music teacher at Home Grown Musical Academy and director of the popular High Frequency Band.

Mr. Hoyte has produced concerts in the Caribbean for local, regional and international artists such as Vashawn Mitchell, Todd Dulaney, Kim Burrell, Sinach, Donnie McClurkin, Jekalyn Carr, Myron Butler, Johnathon Nelson, Jessica Reedy, Positive, Nigel Lewis, Emrand Henry, Carlene Davis, Ishika Charles, Deanna Wattley, Gabrielle Danae, The God Movement, Oneyke and Kendra Penn.

So with his Christian background, his burning love for music and a desire to reach more young people and inspire change for the better, the challenges presented by the novel coronavirus, where the British Virgin Islands is now under a 24-hour curfew, were no match for this 26-year-old musical maestro.

"The whole idea for me, from small going church every Sunday and then with the whole coronavirus and the curfew, it was a case where we weren't able to go to church and it was kinda weird," said Mr. Hoyte. My thing is, and I don't want to call myself an

evangelist because that's a serious title, but I want to see more youths involved in the church, especially the youths with a bad taste for church and don't want to come to church and engage in church activities."

Mr. Hoyte said he wanted to bridge the gap presented by the lockdown and not have the young people using this as opportunity to stay at home and not having church, but rather be captivated by an event such as his praise party.

He said the concept was to go Live on Facebook, play well-known gospel music with a zouk or Virgin Islands calypso beat and also bring a word.

From all reports, this was a really great idea, meeting with rave reviews by not only the youths but older folks as well.

For the critics of the fast-paced music featured during the praise party, Mr. Hoyte argued that this is just the organized sound of music being used to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some of the testimonies shared on his Facebook Page are as follows:

"Brent D Hoyte moved an entire generation today. And he did it our way!" – Crispin Brooks.

"Brent D Hoyte made VI Facebook catch the Spirit while simultaneously making all secular bands thankful that he's in the gospel arena!" – Hashim ThaDream Lewis.

"For once, all the youths of the Virgin Islands near and far came together in a way that has never been done before!" – Nikkii Jae'lieya Henry.

"He gave us church in a very unconventional way, compared to what most of us are used to and brought people that normally wouldn't take heed to the message together, all for the glory of God." – Danica Brown.

"I praised, I cried, I danced, I bounced, I laughed during your praise party today. You are certainly God's messenger of music! I enjoyed the mixes." – Surbhi Hodge-Williams.

"Brent did what he does and brought it to our homes during the lockdown!" – Petra Marie.

"Brent D. Hoyte continue to blend your culture with your love for God!" – Crystal EvolvingEveryday Winston.

"While the enemy tries to shut the church doors, there are those who are ensuring church goes on...Brent Hoyte keep the worshippers and the praise going...You are an inspiration and a leader." – Walter Barrett.

"Real talk, I've never seen any Caribbean artist/minister bring different people from different backgrounds together for the glory of God." – Castel Abraham.

"FB church ain't had no kind of sitting nor standing room so to speak eh." – Gerilyn QueenEmpress Rey.

“It’s great to know we can worship God in different ways and all come together and enjoy it.” – Jhonathan Mercer.

“This religion thing have people stuck and can’t see what this is really about. God is God. Doesn’t matter the denomination. Reach the people by any means necessary.” – Kendra S. Kent.

“Watching these kids listening to Brent D Hoyte, maybe all the youths would really turn a new chapter for the better in their lives.” – ShaSha Hodge Winston.

Mr. Hoyte said he did not expect this tremendous response and he was surprised and encouraged, especially when persons reported seeing their parents and even youths who wouldn’t go to church watching the stream. He reported that some persons were influenced to change their behavior, go to church, get saved and give their lives to Christ.

According to Kora Dora Brathwaite, Brent’s Praise Party “made a good influence on me and inspired me to change my ways and how I’m living today.”

As to whether he will be hosting a praise party every Sunday, Mr. Hoyte said this Sunday might be the last as he would really want to see someone else taking up the mantle.

The musical evangelist, who was proud to describe himself as a husband to Donielle and the father of a not-yet 1-year-old daughter, expressed gratitude to everyone for joining him and also to telecoms provider Flow for the reliable internet service.

Indeed this is a movement, also being done by other artists and presenters, that comes out as one of the positives on the other side of this COVID-19 pandemic.