

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Online Magazine Features Extended Series On USVI Culture, Music & Lifestyle

Entertainment / **Published On March 29, 2015 10:21 AM /**

Cynthia Graham **March 29, 2015**



If you haven't already heard of LargeUp.com, we're happy to introduce it to you today.

The online magazine, which officially launched in 2011 after quietly coming on the scene the year before, is about everything Caribbean music, culture and lifestyle.

As we all know, there is no shortage of information about the Caribbean on the Internet -- the region's seas, sun and sand are coveted by travelers the world over, and rightly so -- but LargeUp's approach to showcasing the Caribbean through the ways of its people, the vibe of its music, the taste of its food is a rather refreshing take on things.

Through assistance from the Virgin Islands Department of Tourism, some members of the LargeUp staff visited the territory last summer for a whirlwind, five-day tour of the islands. The team's experiences on that trip is now being chronicled in a special series titled, *Virgin Islands Nice: A Series on Music, Life & Culture In the USVI*.

And the stories are a must-read. From the one featuring Harvey's Restaurant on St. Croix where "Timmy" is king and another in St. Thomas at the community center where "The Hawk" runs his youth boxing program, Virgin Islanders and those who love the Virgin Islands will enjoy an up-close view of the islands through the words and lens of LargeUp.

Click [here](#) to check out the articles in the *Virgin Islands Nice* series. And, there's still many more stories to come all this week.

The *VI Consortium* recently caught up with the magazine's editor, Jesse Serwer, to find out more about LargeUp's tour of the territory and what's next for the team.

VI Consortium: How did you come to the decision to feature the USVI in LargeUp? What piqued your interest in the islands?

Jesse Serwer: LargeUp has covered music from the US Virgin Islands since our launch in 2010, as part of our site's overall focus on Caribbean music and culture. We also have a writer based in St. Thomas named Kaya.lah who has written about cultural events there, such as St. Thomas Carnival, for us. Last year, the USVI was responsible for some of the best music out of the Caribbean, and it seemed to be a great moment for culture in the USVI. After working with Pressure Busspipe on events in NYC and seeing his "Virgin Islands Nice" video, we had the idea to expand on our coverage of the USVI and also some of the topics explored in that song and video. Vaughn Benjamin from the band Midnite and boxer Julian "The Hawk" Jackson are mentioned in the song and appear in that video, and they're also subjects of features in our series— along with many other things that aren't mentioned in that song, but just as easily could have been. For instance, Tippy Alfred from I Grade Records in St. Croix is in our series, and worked closely with us.

VIC: The three U.S. Virgin Islands each have their own unique vibe -- St. Croix tends to be a bit more culturally focused, St. Thomas a bit more fast-paced, and St. John is laid back. Of all the experiences you've had on the three islands, what stands out most to you? Was there anything that surprised you about the USVI during your time here?



Martei Korley (at left) and Jesse

Serwer (at right) with The Hawk, Julian Jackson, at the USVI Amateur Boxing Gym in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas.

JS: Getting together with Pressure Busspipe and Vaughn Benjamin in Frederiksted, which is not the easiest part of the VI to get to, on the same afternoon we flew into St. Thomas, and racing the sun with our shoot, was a special experience. Getting these two important figures in VI music was a priority from the conception of the series and, with Pressure set to leave the islands for tour the day after our arrival, there wasn't much of a window to work with. But we got it done--just in time for an amazing sunset on the Frederiksted waterfront. Frederiksted has a unique energy. It's remarkably quiet yet very vibrant at the same time. Not too many other cities you could say that about.

Working with "The Hawk," his son John Jackson and the 340 Boxing crew was also awesome and inspirational. Like a lot of our shoots/interviews, that one was very organic and the chemistry was just great. Our visit was planned, but it was also spur of the moment, if that makes sense, and we were able to capture a real specific moment in time, I think.

I was surprised by how international the islands were as a whole. Most of the people we met, even people you would think of as quintessential Virgin Islanders, had come from someplace else themselves, or their parents had.

VIC: Most people, when they think of the Caribbean, think of sea, sand and sun. LargeUp focuses on music and culture. What made you go in that direction? How has the reception been from readers?

JS: We were all already doing similar work in other forums. Our co-founder and publisher Dave Susser is a reggae/dancehall DJ who has been producing some really unique events bringing Caribbean music and culture to new places. Our creative director and co-

founder Martei Korley is also a reggae artist himself and is highly respected as a photographer for his work documenting music and culture in Jamaica. Martei, who took all of the photographs for this “Virgin Islands Nice” series, and myself have often collaborated to cover Caribbean music and culture for magazines such as *The Fader* and *Rolling Stone*.

Martei and Dave had the idea to create a place where you would see content of the same quality you get from those publications, but with the Caribbean as the main focus, every day, instead of something that only comes up occasionally every once in a while. They brought me on to make that happen as editorial director.

VIC: The imagery in the series and throughout your website draws readers into the story. Talk about the creative direction there.

JS: Martei and I come from working in magazines, where creative direction and drawing readers into the story is a necessary part of the job, when you're given an assignment. The Internet has made it easier to be more prolific in the amounts of information we can spread, but the quality of the way in which the stories are told has taken a hit.

We view LargeUp as a magazine, but one that's online. Our features are not just created to draw traffic on a particular day, but to tell stories that haven't been told with this sort of detail before, and that that can live on for years and years. Caribbean culture was one place in particular where there was a real void.

VIC: How many series of this kind have you done? What islands have you featured?

JS: We have an ongoing video series featuring the island of Dominica. And we have done some topical series set in Jamaica and Trinidad, which are places we work in and/or feature regularly, where we decided to focus on a particular topic. We're looking forward to doing immersive series spotlighting local culture all across the Caribbean. The Caribbean as a whole has a beautiful, enriching culture that's been somewhat overlooked in the media due to an emphasis on the allure of its beaches. We're very excited about sharing this other aspect of the Caribbean with the world.

VIC: Sometimes, as a visitor, you tend to see some things that locals may not see about the virtues of their home and culture. What message would you like to leave with Virgin Islanders about the islands as someone looking in from the outside?

JS: Do everything that's possible to ensure local culture is preserved. The beaches will always be beautiful but it's easier than ever to travel pretty much anywhere these days, and people have a lot of options. Tourists might come to the USVI once because they heard about a certain beach or got a special deal, but it's a real genuine connection to the place that's going to get them coming back year after year. Preserving what's unique about the USVI is crucial for those connections.

VIC: What's next for the team?

JS: Our annual Winter Music Massive event in Miami is this Sunday, March 29. In each of the last four years, this has been the only event at Miami Music Week and Winter Music Conference, a huge series of events that brings hundreds of thousands of music

fans to Miami every March, with a Caribbean focus. Which is interesting because Miami is largely an island culture. You can also look out for more features in our *Virgin Islands Nice* series all throughout this week.

How can people keep up with LargeUp on the web or on social media?

JS: We publish articles every weekday, Monday through Friday, on LargeUp.com. You can follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram at @largeupdotcom. www.twitter.com/largeupdotcom, www.facebook.com/largeupdotcom, www.instagram.com/largeupdotcom.

LargeUp offices are located in New York City, Miami and Kingston, Jamaica.

Feature Image: Courtesy of LargeUp.com