

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Music Educators Give Stellar Debut Performance At WICO's Jazz On The Dock Concert Series

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ST. THOMAS -- Members of the newly formed Department of Education Music Educators collective, 'ME', St. Thomas-St. John Edition, opened the WICO-sponsored September 20 Jazz on the Dock back to school concert to much praise in their debut performance.

Under the direction of Dionne Donadelle, the Department's recently minted territorial director of music programs, 'ME', smartly dressed in coordinated pink and blue colors, performed a host of instrumental, choral and jazz tunes to an audience of local residents, cruise ship visitors, students, school administrators and district officials.

With only three rehearsals as a group before their big showcase, the professional musicians nonetheless wowed the crowd. The 'ME' jazz band performed favorites, such as "Mumbo Jumbo," "Midnight" and "Spain." There were selections from the concert band and Charlotte Amalie High School music teacher Neomie Toussaint-Williams directed the 'ME' chorus in "Hallelujah" while Addelita Cancryn music teacher Malvern Gumbs directed the chorus in "We Are the Music Makers."

According to Ms. Donadelle, all music educators currently employed in the Department of Education are members of 'ME'. "Specifically in the St. Thomas-St. John district, there are 35 members and at least 20 more that I would like to make honorary members," she said. Those honorary members, Ms. Donadelle explained, are previous Department employees or well-known music educators, performers and lovers of music.

Ms. Donadelle said the purpose of forming a music educators' collective was to "bring back the passion" of music to those who teach music, and to help instill an understanding and respect for the Fine Arts in the Department of Education and throughout the community. She plans to accomplish these goals in ways that had not been previously explored.

"I plan to provide professional development, do collaborations with other subjects and give performance opportunities to musicians that may not do so on a regular basis, [in an effort to] keep their skill level high," she explained. "Previously, most professional development have been geared to all other subject areas, except for music or the fine arts, as a whole."

Ms. Donadelle said the result of professional development for music educators will naturally have a positive effect on students. "I believe that if you enjoy what you do, that in itself will be an example for all to follow," she said. "So, if my music educators are motivated to do more, implement new strategies and techniques that they have learned from each other, with of course the necessary equipment, then the students will enjoy creating, performing, responding and connecting through music, which are the Artist's Processes."

She explained that the Artist's Processes are "processes that musicians have followed for generations, even as they connect through music to themselves and their societies." According to the National Association for Music Education, "Students need to have experience in creating, to be successful musicians and to be successful 21st century citizens. Students need to perform – as singers, as instrumentalists, and in their lives and careers. Students need to respond to music, as well as to their culture, their community, and their colleagues."

For the 2016-17 School Year, Ms. Donadelle anticipates a total of four 'ME' performances in both school districts, "with the fourth being a big benefit concert," she said.

The St. Croix Edition of Music Educators will have its first performance in October 2016. Ms. Donadelle said there are at least 15 active music educators within the district "and a whole lot of musicians I would love to make members of ME, St. Croix Edition."