

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Shamari Haynes, Owner Of Largest Carnival Troupe In VI, Announces 'Savage Festival', A New Troupe Set To Raise The Bar

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ST. CROIX -- Before Hurricanes Irma and Maria walloped the U.S. Virgin Islands, Shamari Haynes, the owner of the largest carnival troupe in the territory, called Simply Sophisticated, was gearing up for an overwhelming Crucian Christmas Festival season, with over 700 individuals signed up to play mas.

Mr. Hayne's troupe had already topped 500 individuals the year prior, and the 700 total would be another milestone in his journey of setting the standard for what carnival can look like in the U.S.V.I. But the 2017 storms ravaged the islands and many people who

had signed up to participated in carnival with Simply Sophisticated left the territory -- bringing down the count back to 500.

Yet, Mr. Haynes was not disappointed; in hindsight, he said, it worked out for good.

During a wide-ranging interview with The Consortium on Friday, Mr. Haynes said the 700 registrants had placed an immense amount of pressure on his team to deliver. And although he was confident that everyone would enjoy their experience with Simply Sophisticated, the burden of providing a euphoric carnival for so many people was much more manageable at 500.

As expected, the massive troupe [shined bright](#) during the 2017-18 Crucian Christmas Festival Season.

With another successful year now in the dusk of history, Mr. Haynes has been working on new, exciting ideas aimed at taking carnival to a new level of excellence on St. Croix.



Simply Sophisticated Fun Troupe (T-Vision Photography)

Simply Sophisticated was founded in April 2008, and the troupe celebrated a milestone anniversary last year. "After the tenth, I was thinking of what's next for the group and festival," Mr. Haynes said. "When we started, it was to revolutionize and change festival. Now that that goal has been accomplished, what's next?"

Mr. Haynes laid bare his plans to this reporter on Friday. He announced the launch of a new, smaller troupe with as much "impact and representation" as Simply Sophisticated. But the troupe, called "Savage Festival", will be different in many ways.

He said Savage Festival will be a high-end troupe that's able to compete on an international level. "Savage Festival is unruly in regards to the look. We're going away from doing routines and that orderly format because we've set the standard from day one. With Savage Festival, we want to make it more free spirited, meaning no routines," Mr. Haynes said.

Savage Festival will have approximately 100 women; there will be no males in the troupe. "You have to have the look -- one look -- we will be pushing the envelop. There will be much more feathers, more flare, you will get that international feel -- Trinidad, Barbados, St. Lucia," he said.

The troupe will allow women to be free spirited with no need for any set coordination that sometimes tame performances. In essence, Mr. Haynes said, Savage Festival brings the J'ouvert Morning feel to the Adults Parade.

The troupe's theme for the 2018-19 festival season is "Sins of Sovereignty". Based on Greek and Roman mythology, the sovereigns are three goddesses: Peitho, a Greek goddess who personifies persuasion and seduction; Athena, a Greek goddess often associated with pride, and Invidia, a Roman goddess who is associated with being envious. Mr. Haynes said as it relates to the Savage Festival troupe, the three goddesses will represent lust, pride and envy.

"It's going to be very sexy," he said. "We just want women to feel good." Mr. Haynes said although Simply Sophisticated has catered to different women, sizes and color, "We know there's a group of women out there that really want to go all out, and nobody is offering that option for them."

The dedication and passion that Mr. Haynes has for carnival is well known. He is a master at creating costumes, and plans events that lead up to the festival season to build momentum -- his last being [a runway style affair](#) that showcased Simply Sophisticated Troupe members with designs that were to be worn during the 2017-18 festival season. A video compilation of the event is [here](#).



Shamari Haynes

He is also widely accepted as a cultural bearer, and someone with deep knowledge of festival. But where did this passion come from?

Mr. Haynes said he was about 7 years old when he realized that his involvement in festival would be above the regular citizen's. "I was standing on Emancipation Drive -- about 7 years old --- when I saw Kasun Baptiste and the St. Croix Majorettes," he said. "They had a live marching band at the time and it was there that it really grabbed me."

The second most memorable carnival experience for Mr. Haynes was during St. Croix's 50th Anniversary Festival, which he said was the last time that the event was held in the town of Christiansted. The event was so memorable to Mr. Haynes that he remembers it as if it took place this year.

"I remember it to the point I could hear people talking," Mr. Haynes reminisced. "I could hear it like it happened to me yesterday. I remember what it looked like, sounded like -- and why that is important to me is because it was the last time it was held in Christiansted.

"It was long and different. I remember UVI [the University of the Virgin Islands] had one of the biggest troupes. The judges stand wasn't at the end of the route -- that's when carnival was carnival. That was the second time it was confirmed to me that this is what I wanted to do."

Mr. Haynes has lived up to his dream and intends on doing much more. He is known outside the territory in places like Trinidad for his work with Simply Sophisticated; he has gotten requests from various organizations to create costumes; and Mr. Haynes has traveled to various carnivals to educate himself on the art of carnival, while keeping abreast with the latest trends.

And even so, he remains a man who is deeply rooted in culture and the importance of it being the foundation upon which growth is to take place. "Culture is what makes up a people," he said.

The Consortium will have more coverage of the unveiling of Savage Festival, which is set to take place in July.

Feature Image: Women display costumes of Barbadian carnival troupe [Aura Experience](#). Shamari Haynes says Savage Festival Troupe will have a similar look.

[Watch the original video](#)

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