

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Risque Troupe Designs Unveiled At Festival Of The Bands On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- Pride, lust and envy reigned at Fort Frederik Saturday night in an artistic vision that Simply Sophisticated Director and Designer Shamari Haynes hopes will revolutionize the upcoming Crucian Christmas Festival and Virgin Islands Carnival experiences.

About 200 people showed up to 'Festival of the Bands' – an event held to showcase Mr. Haynes's new concept and designs for his well-known troupe with a decade of carnival history, Simply Sophisticated, and to unveil the launch of his new troupe, Savage Festival.

Although rainy weather pushed the display to a late start, many enjoyed drinks and moved to upbeat, Soca music during the downtime and throughout the rest of the program.

Simply Sophisticated Fun Troupe

The first exhibition was a combination of dance, catwalk, and audiovisual media to illustrate the fairytale concept of Maleficent.

Dancers portrayed four phases of the fairy's character development as she transitioned from innocence to evil and, ultimately, to good. They danced to introduce each set of designs within the Simply Sophisticated Fun Troupe while scenes from the movie "Maleficent" were projected on large screens.

Each design line represented a phase in the Maleficent experience. Purity represented innocence; Obsession represented falling in love; Fury represented a heart turned cold after a betrayal; Bliss represented the feeling of ecstasy after reconciliation.

The designs progressed from medium coverage to minimum coverage. Detailing included sequins and feathers. Some designs included head pieces, neck pieces, wings and belts.

Designs catered to both men and women.

According to Mr. Haynes, these designs are a contrast from previous designs, which were more "serious." This year, he wanted to add an element of fun.

"For the past few years we have done serious themes. At one point, we represented the Indian culture; we represented the African culture. It was very serious," he said.

"This year I wanted to do something more fun, more lightweight."

If one were to ask 18-year-old Karima McIntyre, she'd say Mr. Haynes has succeeded. Miss McIntyre is a two-year veteran as a Simply Sophisticated reveler. She says the music and the "live spirit" of her fellow troupers keep her coming back; she's been following news about the troupe online, which led her to Saturday night's event.

"It was amazing. I was blown away. I've been planning this for weeks," she said of the show. "Shamari did a splendid job."

Her favorite piece from the Simply Sophisticated line was a blue and black outfit with wings.

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Savage Festival

Bolder designs were introduced via Savage Festival – a new troupe that Mr. Hayne's launched at the event for the first time.

The inspiration for the designs came from goddesses in Roman and Greek mythology who personify pride, envy and lust.

Models could be seen sporting accessories that resembled armor while strutting and dancing down the runway.

According to Mr. Haynes, these pieces that he called “very powerful” and “very overpowering” were designed that way to purposefully target a particular group of women. He said that these women are daring and willing to wear something “scandalous” because they’re proud of their bodies and want to show them off.

Mr. Haynes wants to cater to this group because he feels like nobody else does. He also hopes to be a catalyst for making the Virgin Islands carnival and festival experience an international one through his vision and designs.

Three of the seven deadly sins were an inspiration, he said, because they represent a real part of humanity, whether or not people want to admit it.

“I’m going to be very honest: Deep down inside, I feel like there’s a very grimy, edgy, taboo part of people and the world, but just like sex does sell – which is kinda crazy – people like that. People like the villain in a movie so, sometimes, people prefer bad over good – which is kinda crazy – but the reality is it have this sex appeal to it that good don’t bring,” he said. “We just wanted to bring something that was very, like, grimy – sexy.”

As the models came down the runway, cheers from the audience were audible.

Chena Cuencas was one of those models. She modeled for the Savage exhibit.

She and the other models had been preparing from 3 p.m. until the program started around 10 p.m. According to Ms. Cuencas, there was a lot of nervous energy backstage but on stage that energy transformed into something “crazy.”

“Once you finally get out there, it’s just like so much fun, you ain’ even studying nobody. You’re in your own element,” she said.

Ms. Cuencas had high praise for Mr. Haynes. She said that he has consistently put out an excellent product.

“Every year he brings it,” she said. “He never disappoints – and super professional, always on point.”

Mr. Haynes said that never before has his vision been executed so precisely. He said that he believed that the audience was impressed, and he took pride in the show.

“At the end of the day, I feel good about it. I’m very humbled and very proud,” he said.

Mr. Haynes designed and sewed most of the costumes himself. He gave credit to Regal Christopher, the owner of Designs by Regal, for sewing some of the costumes and the outfit that he wore that night as well.

‘No Waist! No Vote’ – Political Candidates Show Waistlines

While Mr. Haynes’s costumes undoubtedly captivated the audience, political sponsors’ waistline movements near the end of the show brought an entertaining element of surprise.

[View the original embedded media](#)

At the start of the program, the sponsors made remarks that were twofold: supporting the event on one hand and making appeals for votes on the other. Gubernatorial Candidate Albert Bryan appealed to young people. He asked for a chance to make the Virgin Islands a place where they could grow professionally and impact important decisions.

Javan James, a candidate for the Senate, also appealed to the youth. He asked that they take more interest in political forums like senate hearings.

But the response to the speeches could hardly compare to the response for the waistline exhibition that came later.

During his music performance, Sha HP called for all political sponsors to get on stage. That included Javan James and Allison DeGazon, candidates for the Senate, and Albert Bryan and Tregenza Roach, candidates for governor and lieutenant governor, respectively.

Mr. Bryan and Mr. Roach had to demonstrate a 'chook,' a pelvic thrusting movement, to the timing of the deejay's beat of choice. Ms. DeGazon held on to Sha's shoulders as she made her way down to the ground in a rhythmic whine, a motion where the hips move in a circular motion.

The pressure mounted for Mr. James, the youngest candidate, as Sha led the audience in chanting "No Waist! No Vote!" before his exhibition. But he still managed to reel animation from the crowd as he saddled down to the ground in a motion similar to the 'chook' to the beat of the music.

Camera phones went up in the air; laughter and cheers permeated the space.

How to Register for the Troupes

Those who missed registration at the event can register for Simply Sophisticated Fun Troupe online from Tuesday at www.SimplySophisticatedvi.com. The registration fee is \$60.

Registration for Savage Festival is exclusively online and wasn't offered at the event. Registration also opens on Tuesday at www.savagefestivalvi.com.

The registration fee is \$100. Only women aged 18 and older are allowed to sign up for Savage Festival. Spots for this troupe are currently limited to 75 women.

According to Mr. Haynes, those who can't decide which section they'd like to masquerade can opt to pay a \$60 registration fee and decide later.

Registration fees represent deposits on the overall costume packages, which include the costs for costumes, music, photographers, unlimited alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and goodie bags for all revelers. The Simply Savage package additionally includes T-shirts.

Costume selection will be made possible through the registration websites.

Anyone from the Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean is encouraged to register, Mr. Haynes said.

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