

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Ase Moko Jumbie Students Are New Generation Of V.I. Culture Bearers, D.O.E. Says

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The Department of Education's Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education (DVICE) ASE Moko Jumbie Academy put on an electrifying showcase for locals and tourists in its finale summer performance held at Emancipation Garden, St. Thomas, on August 1, D.O.E. said Wednesday.

Joined arm in arm, participants could be seen praying as they prepared to showcase the skills they spent the summer honing. Family members and visitors could be heard cheering on the campers as the performers entered the park with heads bowed, the department said. The young culture bearers brought to life the spirit of the Moko Jumbie with energetic dance routines and techniques to the musical stylings of various Soca

artists.

The endurance of Virgin Islands culture sits squarely on the shoulders of its people, such as Valrica Bryson, DVICE director, who works to “create culture bearers and empower them to carry on various cultural art forms, such as that of the Moko Jumbie,” she said.

Bryson says she wants “each student to understand and have appreciation for the history of the Moko Jumbie and its place in Virgin Islands culture.”

This summer’s crop of cultural recruits jumped into their academic and physical training in June to prepare for the debut performance. However, according to Bryson, training is a year-round affair, as students must maintain their strength, hone their skills, and learn new applications of the techniques acquired through the Academy.

According to D.O.E., Bryson successfully expanded the Ase Moko Jumbie Academy, which began on St. Croix two-and-a-half years ago, to include a summer camp on St. Thomas. The Academy, which is open to students beginning at age 8, but in some cases as young as 5, teaches the art form of Moko Jumbie stilt walking.

From the first day, students begin learning various cultural terms and start visualizing what their personal Moko Jumbie would look like—placing themselves in the shoes of the mythical cultural protectors they portray when in costume, D.O.E. said. Students also learn other technical considerations involved in making the iconic stilts, such as Douglas Fir wood and tread-less tires or leather and towels for securing the leg to the stilt.

The Academy began with Bryson as its propelling force along with the support of Alpha Taylor and Malik Morton through DVICE. Expanding the program to St. Thomas has always been a goal, Bryson pointed out, but it wasn’t made possible until a meeting with Randall Donovan at DVICE’s monthly Cultural Pop-Up Afternoon on the Green hosted by the University of the Virgin Islands. Reichold Center for the Arts provided additional support the program needed to become a reality.

Students interested in joining the Ase Moko Jumbie Academy or other activities sponsored by the Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education, should call (340) 773-1095 ext. 7042 in St. Croix and (340) 774-0100 ext. 2806 in St. Thomas.