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Once Synonymous With Dance on St. Croix, the Cruzan Dance Company is Back

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Donna Bellot **November 01, 2020**

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ST. CROIX — After an almost 8-year hiatus, the Cruzan Dance Company (CDCO) is coming back to the Virgin Islands by kicking off the holiday season with a number of activities. From a Fantasy Flare Halloween Make-up Competition in October, Zoom n’Dance classes in November, to the culmination of a Master Class in December, CDCO is coming back bigger and better than ever.

Founder and artistic director of CDCO, Alex Simon, said that he is extremely excited about their return to the community.

According to their press release Mr. Simon initially founded Cruzan Dance Company in 2003, after an invitation to perform at the Reichhold Center for the Arts on St. Thomas. At the time, Mr.

Simon — a St. Croix native — was with the internationally renowned Koresh Dance Company, based in Philadelphia, PA, and was given the opportunity to conduct a master dance class. Because of the overwhelming number of dancers who participated in the course, he decided it was time to give back to his community, returning that summer and founding the Cruzan Dance Company—which was later incorporated on June 23, 2005.

For several years Cruzan Dance Company thrived. Then in 2013 the Hovenssa Refinery on St. Croix shut down. Like many small businesses, CDCO was heavily affected by the closing of Hovenssa.

“It became stifling. Not just me as a business owner, but just so many parents and students who could not afford to pay for classes. They had to choose whether they keep the lights on, put food on the table, or take class,” said Mr. Simon. “They had to make an important decision, so I made that decision for them in other words. I just couldn’t bear the fact that my parents had to choose whether they needed to put food on the table, keep the lights on, or take their kids to dance.”

So, the doors of Cruzan Dance Company were temporarily closed with the hopes that things would get better in the territory. Mr. Simon said that he believes the time is now. However, he also strongly believes that this can only happen with the help of the community.

The intent is to open in the Spring of 2021, this time as a 501(c)3 Non-Profit Organization as recognized by the Internal Revenue Code. As such, all funds collected by the Cruzan Dance Company through their upcoming events and ongoing fundraiser will go toward renovating, operating, and maintaining their new facility. It also gives CDCO the ability to better serve its community by offering a well-rounded experience to the youth of St Croix. CDCO will especially focus on at-risk youth and the underserved persons in the community who have otherwise been unable to afford to participate in its programs.

Whether it is by providing a positive and expressive outlet to our future leaders, or doing its part in preserving our environment, according to Mr. Simon, it is all about serving the community.

“We’re just here to share our knowledge, our passion, our love for the performing arts. Not just dance because we do so much apart from dance. We’re into make-up, we’re into theater, the theatrics, set design, we do a lot of stuff...in addition we’re involved in the community,” he said. “We do have our own outreach program called Lend a Hand Community Outreach that focuses on mental health, substance abuse, as well as counseling. We’re also focused on sustaining an eco-friendly environment as far as green renewable energy... so we’re into our environment and living a greener life for this earth; because without us doing our part we would not be able to enjoy the fruits of this beautiful world that we live in.”

CDCO’s Spring 2021 resurgence is precluded by a number of events—including an ongoing fundraiser—to occur during the holiday season. The goal of the fundraiser is to raise \$250,000 which will go toward the renovation and operation costs. As a 501(c)3 Non-Profit Organization, companies and personnel can claim all donations made to CDCO as a tax deduction.

For the month of October CDCO held an international Halloween make-up competition. The winner will be selected by the “People’s Vote” through their website and Facebook page. Voting ended on October 30th, with the winner being announced on October 31st. Next, for the month of November Cruzan Dance Company will be presenting Zoom n’Dance. Classes will be presented over Zoom beginning at \$10 an hour per class. Classes include basic hip-hop, afro-movement, and modern jazz. Finally, in December, Mr. Simon himself will host a Master Class at the Beeston Hill Health and Wellness Gym. Mr. Simon has also said that he is looking to possibly add a few

more classes to his December schedule because of the current outpouring of support.

In closing, Mr. Simon was excited about the events and CDCO's comeback, saying, "We have a lot that we provide to the community and we're excited to do so this time around. This is something that we are definitely coming back on the scene as being bigger, bolder, and better than before. We just need to make sure that the community rallies behind our organization.

For more information on Cruzan Dance Center and to donate visit www.cruzandancecenter.org.

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