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New D.O.E. Program Highlights Students Who Embrace and Showcase V.I. History and Culture

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Marley Cassius By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The V.I. Department of Education on Monday launched its “Youth Cultural Bearer of the Month” initiative, which D.O.E. says highlights students who embrace and showcase V.I. history and culture in and outside of school.

Marley Cassius, a Bamboula dancer and 7th grade student at John H. Woodson Jr. High School, was the inaugural recipient of the title, Education made known via release Thursday.

According to the release, the initiative seeks to raise awareness of the numerous students within the Territory’s schools who are practitioners of Virgin Islands cultural and traditional art forms.

Cassius has been dancing Bamboula since 2020 at the Music in Motion Dance Academy, where she studies a variety of dance styles; however, the academy places focus on African Diaspora and Caribbean dance styles, Education said. She received training as a Music in Motion dancer from both Charlita Schuster, her dance director, and Dr. Chenzira Davis Kahina, a master drummer and cultural bearer of the Bamboula dance form, and a prominent voice in Caribbean history.

Cassius says she feels “connected to my ancestors” while dancing Bamboula—a derivative of many different African dance styles with drums that bear the same name. This concept exemplifies Marley’s identity and devotion to a greater community.

“Students carry out Antillean customs in their homes that have been followed for hundreds of years and tell the story of these islands in their own distinctive way,” explained Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education (DVICE) Director Stephanie Brown, who will oversee the monthly programming. “From wood turning to jewelry making to storytelling, DVICE celebrates students who are taking the lead in preserving Virgin Islands traditions, ensuring that the texture of our identities is always openly displayed.”

The next Youth Cultural Bearer of the Month will be featured on March 1.