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'We Outside': St. John Revelers Bring Color, Energy to Parade After Two-Year Hiatus

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**From left to right, Diamond in the Rough troupe members Eva Rijo and Esther Castillo.
By. V.I. CONSORTIUM**

ST. JOHN — Mas players gathered on St. John for the island's 2022 Carnival Parade on Independence Day, and July 4th was a fitting holiday to host the annual parade — which in part signifies freedom — after two long years of Covid-induced cancellations.

Themed “Culture and Revelry At Last, Making St. John Celebration 2022 A Blast”, the parade was the highlight of the weeklong celebration, which included panorama, a food fair and music entertainment at Jordan Ville, the name of this year's carnival village.

Troupes lined up anxiously, anticipating a great time despite the light rain.

Over 30 entries paraded downtown Cruz Bay with vibrant colors and energy, with their faces giving away the joy of once more participating in the island's annual cultural affair. Both children and adults were represented during Monday's parade as has been the tradition during the St. John Carnival. Among the participants were majorettes, moko jumbies and a variety of troupes.

Vernon Araujo, a representative of the Diamonds in the Rough carnival troupe said the group represents "everything that St. John's carnival is about which is essentially having a good time."

Tourists visiting St. John for the first time were treated to a memorable experience. "It was so wonderful, I enjoyed myself here," said David Hennis, a visitor from Anguilla. "It was my first time at the St. John parade and it was amazing compared to my hometown's parade, Anguilla. I will be back next year once the Lord spares my life."



From left to right, members of the Eccentric Moko Jumbies: Annalie, Jeniciya and Kriston. (Credit: V.I. Consortium)

Other individuals were visiting from the continental United States. "I've been on the island of St. John several times but not for carnival. I didn't even know about it when I booked the trip, however I was excited when I learned about it," said Joe Braido. "I'll be back next year."

Virgin Islanders who hadn't been to the St. John Carnival in years were among attendees. "My experience was fantastic, I haven't been to a 4th of July parade in St. John in over 18 years so for me it's like starting all new again," said Renee Charleswell, deputy commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction at the V.I. Dept. of Education. "The rain was refreshing, seeing friends, family, and colleagues were refreshing. I feel rejuvenated and ready to start the week." Ms. Charleswell said her favorite part of the parade was seeing children demonstrate their talents.

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, seen interacting with individuals, sought to provide a sense of balance to the July 4th celebration by speaking of another occasion of equal importance. "All I try to make people remember is that we need to always anchor in its context. Although the holiday finishes on the fourth of July, it's most significant observation is the third of July, which we should never forget because that is our Emancipation Day," he said.

Mr. Roach said his favorite part of the parade was watching as children dressed up as a moko jumbies came down the parade route. "That moko jumbie is a retention of our African heritage and it was good to see a whole troop with little children. I love the music as well," he said.

Governor Albert Bryan said unity and togetherness represent strength. "Carnival is great. It's always about people getting together. People think it's about the festival and food, but the real thing is about people being together, connecting with one another — that's what makes us stronger than ever," he said, using a line from his re-election campaign. "My favorite part is the band; I love dancing. I love food too but when we get in the jam with everybody else having a good time, it shows our V.I. culture where people are exhibiting their best every single time."