

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Anticipation Building for Festival of the Bands 2023; Event Moves Outdoors, Will Transform Frederiksted Waterfront

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The entertainment extravaganza will give the public their first look at Simply Sophisticated's interpretation of "The Awakening", the troupe's theme for 2023. By. SIMPLY SOPHISTICATED

Shamari Haynes and his team are now on the home stretch, making final preparations for Festival of the Bands 4 on Saturday July 22.

This year's VIP costume release party for Simply Sophisticated and Savage is the most highly anticipated thus far. "I think that is definitely one of the biggest attractions as it

relates to outdoor events for the summer,” said Mr. Haynes during an exclusive interview with the Consortium. Sanctuary Festival troupe by Chalana Brown will also be presenting costumes at the event.

The entertainment extravaganza will give the public their first look at Simply Sophisticated’s interpretation of “The Awakening”, the troupe’s theme for 2023. “We’re paying homage to African leaders of various stripes,” said Mr. Haynes. Meanwhile, Savage costumes will showcase something “completely opposite of anything that I’ve done in the past,” the young trailblazer leader said.

Known for his colorful, exuberant presentations, the “Blackout” theme for Savage will certainly be a departure for Haynes.

One big draw for FOTB4 is the opportunity to pre-register in person. Last year, Mr. Haynes said, interest was so high that the troupe’s website crashed due to overwhelming traffic when registration opened. The pre-registration option, he says, allows people to express their interest. Then, when the site goes live, they will be personally assisted in signing up for the sections of their choice. There will be five to choose from under the Simply Sophisticated banner, while Savage has one presentation this year.

“I’m excited,” Mr. Haynes said about the upcoming band launch. One of the things he is enjoying most in the run-up to the activity is the opportunity to work with a young, vibrant team of professionals. “What’s fulfilling for me is actually being able to work with our millennials,” he said, noting that the production crew is made up largely of youth from the community. That was a deliberate decision. “We just want to create an avenue for young people to be able to showcase their talents,” Haynes said.

His experience with the Division of Festivals has exposed Mr. Haynes to carnivals around the region. He understands that for many revelers, especially those who fly in from elsewhere to participate, these festivals are about much more than the parade. “Culture, cuisine, excursions, experiences,” Mr. Haynes said, describing the package of activities visitors during Festival time want to undertake. He says the USVI is in a good position to take advantage of the growing demand for, and interest in, cultural festivities. “I think we’re heading in the right direction,” Mr. Haynes declared. “But we just have to be ready.”

The excitement Haynes feels about FOTB4 and the 2023 Crucian Christmas Festival seems to be shared by the public. Already, VIP Tickets for Saturday’s event are completely sold out. Some general admission tickets still remain on the band’s [Eventbrite](#) platform, however, and Mr. Haynes is encouraging patrons to secure theirs early. The outdoor location this year was chosen because the event has become too big for popular indoor venues. “Last event...had over 400 people in attendance,” said Haynes, which is when he realized that a bigger space was needed.

He and his team decided to “just turn a portion of the waterfront into that carnival feel, that kind of a scene.” Food, music, and of course the costumes will be integral parts of the experience, which will be headlined by Monea and Shaw, supported by DJs from the territory and the wider region.

Haynes notes that in the true spirit of carnival, FOTB4 is a collective effort - by his team members as well as the wider community. “I feel like this is our production being hosted

by the community for the community,” he told the Consortium. “We just happen to be the facet to make it happen.”

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