



IN RHYTHM WITH NATURE!

RUPUNUI MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL PILOTS AN EXCITING UPCYCLING MUSIC PROGRAMME

The finale was noisy, musically noisy, as the participants from Joshua House Children Centre ended the upcycling programme on a musical high! Popular Surinamese musician Leon Limmer (aka Bongo Charlie), 'conducted' the 16-piece community group and the laughter and the percussive sounds filled the Board Room at the National Racquet Centre in Woolford Avenue, Georgetown, bringing the 3-day pilot upcycling music programme to a happy ending on Sunday November 19th.

The Rupununi Music & Arts Festival, 'Arts & The Environment' project, is an ongoing tailored programme designed to integrate the arts into its educational work, focusing on creating awareness about the negative impact of climate change. Aimed specifically at children and young people, the programme is flexible and easily accommodates adults, each in their own way, contributing to Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) through recycling, upcycling and tree planting.

The 'Arts & The Environment' programme has been in gestation for nearly two (2) years and was launched in Lethem, Region 9 on Friday May 26, with the help of many supporters from the Diplomatic community. According to the Festival's Director, Dr. Bob Ramdhanie MBE, "We must engage the younger generation about climate Change and there's no better way

to do it than through the arts. We are surrounded by raging fires in Europe, the USA and Australia, tsunamis in Bangladesh, drought across Africa and these are all clear indicators that climate change is about you and me, about our behaviour and our reluctance to change. The arts are instruments of social change and have a key role to play in increasing community awareness. As individuals, we may feel helpless and think we have no contribution to make but that's not true! We can recycle and upcycle, we can plant trees and protect the ones we have, we can form community groups and spread awareness of the issues and we can join forces with many other organisations, to make our voices heard. In our own small way, we can make a change by being a part of the change!"

The Festival recently launched two (2) pilot programmes in Georgetown in October and November of this year. The October programme focused on sharing information about planting trees as part of a long-term economic strategy (cocoa & cotton) in addition to the cultivation of trees for food and fruits. In partnership with the University of Guyana, the festival will be planting fifty (50) fruit trees on the university's campus!

During November 17th – 19th, the Festival collaborated with the Ambassador of the Republic of Suriname to pilot the music upcycling programme, which highlighted how discarded and unwanted materials could be recycled and upcycled, and turned into musical instruments. Bongo Charlie brought a very diverse range of upcycled instruments which he has been making over several years, to show the young participants and to encourage them to collect material for their own uses. As he shared with workshop participants, "Upcycling is the art of using discarded materials and converting them into something functional as musical instruments. All these percussive instruments, everything you see here, the variety of drums, the maracas, the xylophones, the whistles, I have been making and playing them in my group for many years. Some only take a few minutes and others, a few days but with a little time, you can all make everything you see here.

Ambassador of the Republic of Suriname, Liselle Blankendal was involved in the shaping of the programme from inception to the end and was delighted that her Government was able to partner with the Festival. "I am delighted that the Festival was able to engage young people who are not often included in this type of programme, and especially pleased that

you involved the Buxton Fusion youngsters and the participants from the Joshua House Children Centre.”

In addition to the Embassy of the Republic of Suriname, the ‘Arts & The Environment’ programme was supported by Thistle Construction (Guyana) Inc., the University of Guyana, Cara Lodge, Courtesy Rent A Car and Hertz in Guyana, the British High Commissioner and the National Sports Commission. Special thank yous must be extended to Chucky (Buxton Fusion) and Ms. Accra (Joshua House Children Centre) for their kind and generous support!

According to Luke Johnson, a Director of the Festival, “The Festival is a member of and the representative for Guyana within the Caribbean Philanthropic Alliance Organisation and we are also a member of Policy Forum Guyana. These pilot programmes will help us to frame a plan for expanding the project across Region 9 in the coming years”.

The Festival sees the ‘Arts & The Environment’ programme as an integral element of its longer-term plans and will explore more avenues to engage creatives – landscape designers, story tellers, visual and performance artistes, architects, musicians, writers, composers and many others – to work alongside community groups, involving them in creative ways to share their stories and develop meaningful programmes within an action-oriented climate change programme.

The workshops were free, and overall, both the pilot programmes were successful and will be ongoing. Initially, participants who were introverted and ‘shy’ expressed their joy and their happiness through their energy and enthusiasm in creating and making music from their souls!

(Photographs: Cindy Beckford)