

Hot Ticket



The Curaçao North Sea Jazz Festival

This year, Curaçao North Sea Jazz will celebrate its fifth anniversary – five years of the most exciting, celebrity-filled event to hit the islands, on the 29th and 30th of August 2014 at the World Trade Center near Piscadera Bay. This year is expected to be just as entertaining as ever, with performances by internationally renowned artists such as Rod Stewart, Joss Stone, Smokey Robinson, Bruno Mars and Chaka Khan.

TEXT KARELIAN WILLIAMS

There will also be a free pre-concert show on the 28th of August, paying homage to Doble R (Rignald Recordino), one of the longest active and most famous Caribbean composers, and not to mention “yu di Korsou” (child of Curaçao). In the weeks running up to the event, the island will be submerged in the sounds of Jazz, Soul, Latin, Hip Hop and R&B, all with a Caribbean touch.

Good deeds for Curaçao

Although the North Sea Jazz festival was recently brought to Curaçao in 2010, it has been in existence since 1976. Dutch Jazz promoter Paul Acket created the festival. The first concert took place in the Netherlands and attracted an audience of about 9,000 people. Little did he know back then that it would spiral into the international spectacle it is today. Now, the festivals command a global audience in the hundreds of thousands, with over 200 entertainment acts across several stages. On Curaçao alone the festival has attracted, on average, a staggering 12,000 visitors since its inception five years ago.

In 1999, Mojo Concerts, Dutch organizer of pop concerts and festivals, had the intention of bringing the festival here through

the Curaçao Tourism Development Bureau in the Netherlands. Negotiations however, were moving too slowly, so they decided to contact local entrepreneur, business management expert and philanthropist, Gregory Elias.

According to Percy Pinedo, Director of International Career Services and right hand to Gregory Elias, “Gregory is a yu di Korsou and he is indeed one of the bon (good) yu di Korsou for the island.”

Gregory Elias, among other things, is founder of the local charity Fundashon Bon Intenshon. The primary focus of his charity is education, culture, sports, poverty reduction, healthcare, tourism, sports and creating better opportunities for disadvantaged kids.

It is through this charity that he decided to bring the festival to Curaçao. The North Sea Jazz Festival is therefore currently a not-for-profit activity – all proceeds from the festival are donated to charity. Pinedo explains why Elias took on Curaçao North Sea Jazz, “They wanted to combine doing the concert with doing something for tourism and the hospitality industry on the island. The purpose of the foundation is to do good deeds for Curaçao and the festival definitely provides many benefits to the island.” The months of August/September were chosen for the festival because it is the off-peak season for tourism in Curaçao. The event helps to maintain a steady influx of tourists all year round and has contributed to putting Curaçao on the map as a holiday entertainment destination in the Caribbean.

Elias’ second motivation for bringing the festival here was, according to Pinedo, simply because of his interest in music. It is well known that Gregory Elias is one of the co-founders of one of the leading Latin independent labels in the US, Top Stop Music, formerly representing Grammy® winners Luis Enrique and Prince Royce and with current multiple Grammy® nominated artists and winners like Tito Nieves and Jorge Villamizar.

Elias could have easily turned the festival into a mega profit-focused event. However, even though the festival is still not even close to the break-even point, Elias insists on keeping the price more or less the same and refuses to oversell tickets at the expense of the quality of the event.

How good things can get even better

A few years ago, the Curaçao Tourist board (CTB) commissioned the Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism studies (at the Roden College of Hospitality Management within the University of Central Florida), to conduct an analysis of tourist perceptions with regard to the Curaçao tourism product, the tourist profile, and the spending behavior of tourists frequenting the island. The ongoing study entitled “Through the Looking Glass,” highlighted a number of issues to be addressed, which can contribute to this festival being even bigger contributor to the island’s economy:

- Advertising

Pinedo explains that despite the fact that the Curaçao community is “talking with pride about ‘their’ CNSJ,” local businesses, particularly those that interact on a daily basis with tourists, can put in more effort to create awareness of the event with tourists visiting the island. As this festival has the capacity to have a significant positive impact economically, it is vital that local businesses are more involved in sustaining this event through word of mouth promotion and advertising.

- Flights

Most attendees of the Jazz festival originate from overseas, namely, Surinam, the Dutch Caribbean, Colombia, Venezuela, the US and the Netherlands. At the moment there is a shortage of flights both internationally and regionally to the island during this period. Pinedo acknowledged, “We need more flights. Airlift is a problem for us; getting people to the festival.” On a positive note, Fundashon Bon Intenshon, along with the CTB, is currently holding meetings with Insel, Surinam, Copa airlines, American airlines and the government with the hope that this issue can be resolved in the future.

- Accommodation

Around this time of year, many of the hotels on the island have a tendency to double their fees to such an extent that the room rates are significantly higher than in the peak tourist season. They are also placing a minimum length of time guests can stay during the days of the festival.



Percy Pinedo

The exorbitant prices of hotel rooms are not only keeping tourists from flying in to attend the festival, the minimum duration of stay is also keeping locals, who may just want to get a room for one or two nights, from staying in the hotels. Pinedo is very disappointed with this behavior from the hotels. He mentioned, “I’ve attended a lot of festivals all over the world and I know what’s going on. When I attend North Sea Jazz in Rotterdam, for example, you will see an increase in room rates by something like 10 to 25 euros, but not double the normal price, making it ridiculous.” Currently, Elias and Fundashon Bon Intenshon have been talking to the Curaçao Hospitality and Tourism Association (CHATA) and the government about the situation. However, Pinedo is still skeptical, “Let’s see what happens and hope for the best. In 2015 if there is no more CNSJ, the rooms of the hotels that would have been filled for the festival will stay empty.”

2014 and beyond

The ultimate intention of the organizers is to keep the festival here indefinitely (as our fellow Dutch Caribbean islands would love to have the privilege of hosting this event); they refuse to compromise on quality, as seen in their ability to put on a spectacular show for the past four years. There is also potential for the number of high-status celebrities featured to increase

even more, as many of the artists in the past have given feedback on how impressed they are with the friendly hospitality but yet hands-off, respectful nature of our locals compared to other celeb-crazy societies.

As more directly described by Pinedo, “When the artists come here, they experience the island and what the audience brings to them — the satisfaction they are getting back from the people. The people aren’t bothering them with anything, touching them and things like that, just being themselves, expressing themselves and being simple. The experience these artists have in Curaçao is incredible. Sting (multiple Grammy-award winning singer/song-writer/musician) felt comfortable enough to walk from the Renaissance to Princess Beach, just to stroll and see.”

The 2014 Curaçao North Sea Jazz Festival is set to be the best yet. Already, the bonus of a free concert paying homage to Doble R, backed by the full 65-person Dutch Metropole orchestra from Rotterdam, has already generated an incredibly positive reaction. Support your community and our beautiful island this August by attending the Curaçao North Sea Jazz Festival!

To get your tickets and for more information, log on to: <http://www.Curaçaonorthseajazz.com/en/tickets/> ■