

NGC Sanfest Command Performance Day 2

November 8, 2017

Good day.

I bring warmest greetings on behalf of The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (NGC), proud title sponsors of this magnificent extravaganza of the Arts for yet another year.

Writer and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel commented that *without memory, there is no culture*. Because of their origins in our past, many aspects of our culture and traditions can come to be viewed as outdated or obsolete, no longer relevant. If we are not watchful, our cultural inheritance could be lost to oblivion. We need to understand that culture is not an ancestral creation to be kept in a glass box and handled with care. Unlike artefacts and relics, in order to be preserved culture must be aired, it must be engaged. The more we *remember* and *share* and *handle* our culture, the stronger it will become.

NGC Sanfest is such an important tool for cultural preservation because it encourages youth to reprise the cultural art forms of generations past. What makes the festival particularly important is that it doesn't just cater to cultural purists who value the originals, but it supports giving the art forms expression in meaningful new ways that are attractive to this generation. Some would argue that contemporizing certain aspects of our culture is actually critical to their survival, because it helps create a sense of ownership among young people and a deeper connection to those cultural elements. After all, we cannot realistically expect young people to perpetuate something to which they cannot relate.

That said, whether you are a purist or modernist, no one can deny that what NGC Sanfest has successfully done for over 47 years is

keep our traditions and culture *familiar and accessible to our youth*. The festival continues to introduce participants to folk dances, traditional Carnival characters, traditional Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian drumming, among so many others. The aptly named 'Sanfest syllabus' continues to outline a curriculum for the Arts that challenges teachers to keep our heritage top of mind when preparing students for the festival. For that, I want to salute the organisers of Sanfest - our heartfelt gratitude to you all for your tireless efforts in service of the Arts and Culture of Trinidad and Tobago.

Of course, much of the responsibility for cultural preservation still lies with the young men and women who are getting ready to perform for us this evening. I draw your attention to the theme of this year's festival - 'Celebrating the talent of our Youth'. I'm sure you would agree that one of the main reasons this festival has been so successful at perpetuating our traditional art forms is the ability of our young people to render them as exciting and memorable artworks and stage performances. They have also managed to portray cultures outside of our own to great effect - through dance for example - proving that lived experience is not a necessary prerequisite for appreciation of culture. On behalf of NGC, I want to congratulate all the participants in this year's edition of NGC Sanfest and express our pride in what they have been able to produce with their exceptional talent and unlimited imagination.

Without memory, there is no culture. This year the festival honours two cultural icons, Calypso Rose and Torrance Mohammed, who have dedicated their lives to the enrichment of Trinbagonian culture by way of music, dance and drama. I thank the Sanfest committee for reminding us all of their contributions to our heritage and for inciting our youth to look upon their work through new artistic lenses. To the performers I say - if your

presentations today channel only a fraction of their passion and commitment, you will have achieved excellence.

As I close, let me finally thank the teachers and parents for your invaluable input into making this festival come together as successfully as it has done. The NGC Sanfest would not be able to survive without your support, and given the festival's pivotal role in cultural preservation, the entire nation owes you a debt of gratitude for keeping it alive and well.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all, and do enjoy the day.