



NGC Sanfest Launch 2019  
September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 | SAPA  
Sponsor Remarks

Winston Mohammed | Senior Manager, Projects, NGC

Good evening.

There is a popular quote that says: 'Talent is equally distributed, opportunity is not.' The simple truth of this statement is that while most people have that something that they are innately good at, not everyone gets the chance or platform to develop and generate value from their abilities. We at NGC consider unrealised potential an unacceptable loss for our country. For this reason, we make it a Corporate Social Responsibility priority to help match our nation's young talent with opportunity. We do this in sport, in education, and of course, in the arts and culture.

For an incredible 49 years, the San Fernando Junior Arts Festival has been creating opportunities for young people across the country to find expression in the visual and performing arts. NGC began supporting the festival in this worthy cause back in 2003 and assumed title sponsorship in 2013. Our support is easily justified. As the theme of this year's edition affirms, NGC Sanfest is *where stars are born*. Though a simple refrain, these words speak powerfully to the value of this festival.

Firstly, this competition does not settle on mediocrity, it incubates **stars** - stellar works, brilliant performers and artists.

Excellence is the legacy of NGC Sanfest, a fact supported by the numbers who have graduated from the festival to even bigger stages. Everyone knows of Sanfest alumni Machel and Kes, and more recently Nailah Blackman, but we are equally proud of the quieter successes of others such as:

- Makesi Peters, International Youth Committee Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago and former President of the Guild of Students at The UWI, St Augustine
- Rondell Donawa, attorney-at-law and two-time South Calypso Monarch
- Khion De Las, lecturer at The UWI, St Augustine, and prodigious pianist and arranger with an international footprint
- Kevan Caliste, grandson of the great Black Stalin, himself a budding calypsonian
- And more personally to NGC, Leah La Borde, a former Sanfest dancer who interned with us this year, who is currently studying Communication Arts in New York

The success of these and many other artists post-Sanfest is no coincidence. It testifies to the standard of Sanfest competition which bids students bring their best and encourages them to grow through challenge.

This brings me to the next operative word in the festival theme, *Where Stars are **Born***. If you listen to the stories of accomplished artists – singers, dancers, musicians, visual artists – you would find a unifying thread across all narratives. In order to move from anonymity to fame and fortune, they needed a stage - that first platform to stand in the spotlight and be discovered.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is an undervalued gift that NGC Sanfest offers its participants. Whether their craft is song, dance, music, art, theatre, NGC Sanfest is that ***first stage*** that aspiring artists need to announce their talent – to be ***born*** and take their first steps on the road to stardom.

That said, while many have used the Sanfest stage as a springboard for careers in the arts and other fields, there are many others who have missed or are missing opportunities by not taking full advantage of this platform. Looking at participation data over the past two years, the number of Primary Schools entering the competition increased from 2017 to 2018, but the number of participants fell almost 20%. For Secondary Schools, both the number of schools and students taking part fell year on year by nearly 25%.

It is our sincere hope that the numbers for 2019 reflect an uptick in participation because now more than ever our country needs our young people to explore and develop their extra-curricular talents. The creative industries will assume even greater importance in our economy, and there is room for young people to profit greatly if they seize their opportunities.

On that note, I want to take my minute here on stage to appeal to schools and students to see the potential of the Sanfest stage to open doors and jumpstart careers.

NGC Sanfest is where stars are born, yes, but this is only true because first and foremost, NGC Sanfest *gives talent an opportunity*. Through this competition, our students can unleash and shine and become, but they must first step on stage. Teachers and parents, encourage the students in your care to participate, support them and help them see the value on offer. At the very least, they will take from the experience valuable lessons in confidence and communication; but the opportunity is also theirs to premiere on this stage as a future star of Trinidad and Tobago.

I close with best wishes to the festival organisers for a successful 2019 edition of NGC Sanfest and reiterate the commitment of NGC to stand with you in service of our youth, and the arts and culture.

Thank you and do enjoy the evening.