

December 11TH 2020

THE REVIVAL OF NINE MORNINGS

Introduction

On Sunday December 6th 2020, the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Nine Morning Committee had a very impressive launch of the 2020 edition of the Nine Mornings festival. The launch took place against the backdrop of a well-managed Covid-19 pandemic that continues to create serious challenges to developed and developing countries alike, and a global economic crunch brought on as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this reality, thousands of Vincentians came into capital city Kingstown to be part of the very seasonal Sunday shopping experience as well as to be part of the launch that took the form of a concert that heard brief remarks. The ULP is proud of its role that it has played in restoring cultural activities, making them bigger and better in terms of participation and more significant in terms of the impact these activities continue to have on Vincentians of all generations. The Nine Mornings festival is just one example of the stellar work done by the ULP since coming to office in 2001 to revitalise our cultural festivals and put them on a sure footing. The lack of attention paid to culture and the arts by the previous NDP administration, saw a significant decline in some cases and in other cases complete discontinuation of some events related to Nine Mornings. What we have today as a Nine Morning festival is an excellent indication of what a clear cultural policy with proper planning can do in injecting new life into a once dying festival.

Nine Mornings before 2001

When the ULP took over in 2001, there was a broad-based dilapidation of cultural festivals in general and this was very obvious in the Nine Morning festival like in all others. There was very little

investment made in the Nine Morning festival from the government level and this in turn acted as demotivation to the private sector that didn't see any value in contributing through corporate sponsorship to the hosting of the festival. This lack of investment by the government translated into a very lowkey execution of this once vibrant festival that now mainly took place in Kingstown. There were few rural communities with consistent Nine Morning activities due mostly to the lack of support provided by the Ministry of Culture to ensure the viable and organised expansion of these activities beyond Kingstown. The complimentary activity of village lighting across the country also saw significant decline in participation, as less attention was paid to community groups that were involved in these activities. This was the sad situation that characterised our unique Nine Morning festival in 2001, something that the new ULP administration had to get to work on immediately to correct if we were to not just save the festival, but also put it on a sure footing to ensure its restoration above and beyond what we could remember.

The ULP Investing in Culture

With the appointment of Hon Rene Baptiste as Minister of Tourism and Culture following the 2001 General Elections, the government moved swiftly to put things in place to ensure that the very next Christmas (December 2001) could see the beginning of the resurgence of cultural activities including importantly the Nine Morning festival. The creation of the National Nine Mornings Committee headed by Cultural Officer Michael Peters was a very important step that brought together key stakeholders in culture and the arts to plan for the activities of the festival.

The Ministry placed more emphasis on the festival including offering assistance to communities to develop the Nine Mornings activities. As a result of this renewed focus, there began in very short time activities being held simultaneously in the communities of

Barrouallie, Carriere, Stubbs, Grieggs and Richland Park, among others. This brought joy and delight to those communities as residents got involved locally in a major festival planned and executed by groups in their communities working together and supported by the Ministry of Culture. There has also been a resurgence in a major way of the community lighting activity, from Rose Bank in North Leeward, that has won the competition in the past, overtaking Sion Hill, once considered the Mecca of community lighting, to Point Village in North Windward, that seems unbeatable in recent years. There is now even a garden lighting competition that, like the village lighting competition, present excellent examples of the creativity of Vincentians.

In recent years, a new feature added to the Christmas season is the Nine Nights, that takes place at the Botanic Gardens offering activities for all member of the family to participate and enjoy. Christmas is really and truly back again, and the ULP must take the credit for this because of the investment it has made in developing our cultural festivals over the years of this administration.

Beyond the financial assistance provided by the Ministry of Culture, the marketing of the destination by the SVG Tourism Authority has also gone a long way in promoting the Nine Mornings Festival. The coverage of the Nine Mornings Festival, provided by international news media invited to do so by the SVGTA, all form a part of the serious investment made by this government, that is in large part responsible for the resurgence and growth of the Nine Mornings festival.

Conclusion

As difficult as it is for the opposition and its supporters to give credit to the ULP for the excellent work done to improve the festivities around the Christmas season including Nine Mornings, it doesn't

change the reality. The large crowd that attended the launch of the launch of this year's festival is a living example of how the festival has grown. As the festival gets into full swing from December 16, 2020 the example of the growth and the impact of this festival on the lives of Vincentians from all communities across SVG would present itself in sharper focus. Do enjoy the festival and be sure to participate if you get the opportunity.