

http://www.nicholsonstudentmedia.com/life/next-top-model-caribbean-students-association-brings-culture-to-life-at-ucf/article_39e64f6e-b8d8-11ee-af12-975c561ee4d2.html

Next Top Model: Caribbean Students' Association brings culture to life at UCF

Keira Gilmore

Jan 26, 2024



With bright colors, flags, jewels and feathers flying, the models give the audience a taste of a Caribbean Carnival.

Keira Gilmore

UCF students strut their stuff down the runway of the Caribbean Students' Association annual fashion show Sunday night.

Students filled the Key West Ballroom with an energetic atmosphere, brought by the host Evence "Vintage" Eliassaint, for CSA's annual fashion show, which showcased fashion and small local businesses.

The music began to play, and host Vintage began hyping up the already lively crowd by reading off a list of all the islands represented in CSA that night, chanting for each island present.

When the music switched over, the 11 models, dressed in all-black attire, who were scattered throughout the crowd, emerged and headed towards the runway before going backstage to prepare for the first category: loungewear.

This annual event started over ten years ago with a different theme each year, all centered around culture and fashion.

Susana Poten, senior health sciences major, is CSA's event coordinator. She said the theme of this year's show is "Caribbean's Next Top Model."

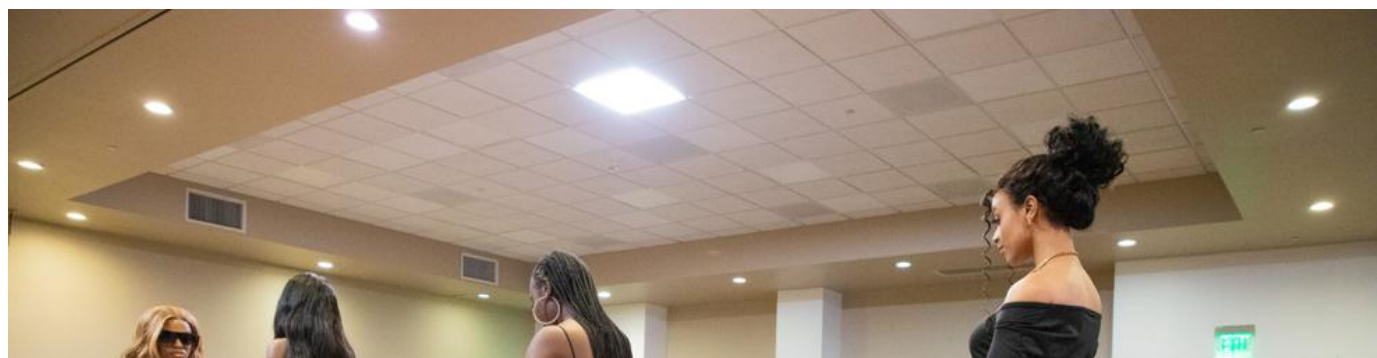
"While trying to find a theme, we wanted chic, fun and clean," Poten said.

As the ballroom began to fill with students, many chose to check out the local vendors who helped bring the fashion show to life.

CSA also invites local outside minority and Caribbean vendors to the show to promote their small businesses and share their love for the culture.

Local vendor Khiefer Bell is part of Caribbean American Passport, a non-profit organization that was present at the show. Bell likes to consider the organization and members Caribbean Americans, as many are second-generation or moved to America at a very young age. This organization helped bring to life the Carnival aspect of Caribbean culture to the fashion show.

"We do a lot to give back to the community and to engage with the younger crowd so that they can get in touch and a sense of pride for their Caribbean roots, cultures and celebrations," Bell said.





CSA Models take to the runway Sunday night as the annual CSA fashion show begins.

Keira Gilmore

This event not only brings CSA members together as a club but also gives students the opportunity to model and showcase their love for Caribbean culture through their love of fashion.

The models start by auditioning four to five months prior to the show in order to participate. They will continue to go through practices leading up to the final show.

Foltricia "Tracy" Johnson, junior criminal justice major, is one of the models in the fashion show. Johnson said she'd modeled before for Orlando African Fashion and decided to audition for CSA's fashion show after hearing about it on campus.

"I feel like it's important because it can show an outsider who has never been to Jamaica how people in Jamaica dress or what music they listen to," Johnson said. "It's just a fun way to show them different parts of Jamaica with a twist."

Models in the show got to showcase their sense of style and love for their culture in outfits of their choosing. The outfits included colorful activewear, floral swimwear, vibrant jewels and feathers to celebrate Carnival, and chic formal wear to end the night.

Gabby Poteau, senior biology major and CSA's Outreach Director said how important fashion is to Caribbean culture.

"Because it's how we express ourselves. From our hair to our feet," Poteau said.

Poteau said how important this event is for CSA members as a community and allows them to take in their culture's beauty and express themselves.

Poten helped coordinate the fashion show's theme this year, helping the models practice leading up to the final show and bringing in community and club members.

"We want members to embrace their culture by showcasing it," Poteau said. "We also hope our members leave with more confidence they came in with and embrace how wonderful their culture is."



CSA members and the audience react with energy as the models began walking down the runway.

Keira Gilmore

While fashion, jewels, feathers and vibrant colors are the main stars of the show, it's all about the culture for CSA members.

"It's important to embrace where we come from," Poten said.

