



BERMUDA DAY 2026: GRAND MARSHALS

Demeka "Tiny T" Tacklyn: Bermuda's Dance Icon and Cultural Innovator

Demeka "Tiny T" Tacklyn is a real mover and shaker in Bermuda's arts and business circles. Her style and drive have made her a key figure in the local dance scene and beyond. On stage, Tiny T is unforgettable. Her dance is a celebration of Bermuda and its rich cultural heritage, something you can feel in every one of her powerful, committed performances. She shows what it means to be Bermudian with movement that grabs your attention and doesn't let go.

Her connection to local culture began at age 12, as a member of her uncle George Richardson's troupe, Richardson's Gombey's. As part of the troupe, she went on to represent Bermuda as a dancer in the West Indian American Day Carnival Parade in Brooklyn, New York, showcasing local talent on an international stage. At age 14, she was given the opportunity to perform as an opening act for popular artists including Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton, Beenie Man, and Lil' Kim. Later, she gained national recognition after winning Bermuda's first dancehall queen competition.

Her entrepreneurial path also began early with a small popcorn business selling at schools and football games, which later expanded into distribution in grocery stores across the Island. Tiny T later founded Street Vybez, a brand inspired by traditional Gombey culture. The business produces clothing and accessories that incorporate cultural elements into contemporary designs, offering a way to represent Bermudian identity through fashion while also giving back to and helping preserve the culture that inspires her work.

She has since expanded her business portfolio with the opening of Love Tiny Bermuda, a retail store on Front Street offering organic products and clothing for men, women, and children.

In addition to her work in performance and retail, Tiny T contributes to youth development through summer camps and after-school programmes focused on creativity and confidence-building. Through Brokout Studio, her dance fitness space, she provides an environment for individuals to engage in movement and self-expression.

Her career reflects a combination of performance, business development, and community engagement - all rooted in Bermudian culture.

Jules Roberts: Voice of Bermuda's Reggae Revolution

Jules Roberts, revered as the lead vocalist and guitarist for Ital Foundation, stands as an unwavering figure in Bermuda's music landscape. Since the late 1970s, Roberts and his band have

been pioneers of the roots reggae movement on the island, underscoring the genre's ethos of spirituality and social justice drawn from Rastafarian influences.

Ital Foundation was founded in 1977 by Roberts, along with Kevin 'Aswad' Wilson, a vocalist and percussionist, and others who shared a love for reggae music. Their debut album, "Ital Foundation Vol. 1," released in 1980, was not just a collection of music tracks but a cornerstone in defining Bermuda's reggae scene. The album, which was recorded on the Island, encapsulated messages of resistance and empowerment, resonating deeply within the local community and beyond.

Roberts' proficiency on the guitar, combined with his evocative lyrics, has not only entertained but educated his audience on matters close to the heart of Bermuda's identity. His work with Ital Foundation has been instrumental in broadcasting the Island's unique voice and stance through the universal language of reggae music.

In addition to his musical contributions, Roberts is a mentor to aspiring musicians, nurturing talent that seeks to explore reggae's rich auditory and spiritual heritage. His passion extends beyond performance; he is committed to fostering a deeper understanding of the music's roots and its potential to mobilise societal change.

Through decades of rhythmic advocacy and cultural enrichment, Roberts has earned a revered spot among Bermuda's cultural icons. His ongoing journey with Ital Foundation continues to inspire and invigorate the local arts scene, ensuring that the pulse of Bermuda's reggae rhythm remains strong and impactful. As he moves forward, his legacy is marked not only by the beats he plays but by the minds he opens and the community he builds.

Tawana Lee: Guardian of Bermuda's Majorette Legacy

Tawana Lee, a pivotal figure in Bermuda's cultural landscape, has dedicated her life to the preservation and advancement of the Island's cherished majorette tradition. As the driving force behind the PHC Majorettes & Drum Corps (PHCMDC), Lee has not only kept a vital part of Bermuda's parade culture thriving but has also molded it into a powerful vehicle for youth development and community engagement.

Her journey began in 2002 when she crafted a vision for a Majorette & Drum group that placed community at its heart. With a belief that there should be a place for everyone, she was instrumental in expanding the group's scope to include activities catering to various talents beyond baton twirling, a move that solidified PHCMDC as a family-oriented powerhouse where every member could find their niche.

Under Lee's steadfast direction for the past 24 years, the corps offered a robust programme that not only entertained but also inspired the community, with a firm aim to perpetuate the majorette tradition through generations. However, between 2012 and 2016, she faced a worrying decline in traditional majorette groups and a surge in dance troupes, which saw PHCMDC membership fall to less than 40 members from 150. This spurred Lee to pioneer creative solutions to sustain this beloved part of Bermudian culture.

In 2017, Lee began an outreach strategy, starting with an educational presentation on majorettes and drumming at Purvis Primary School. Surprised to learn that some children were unaware of

this tradition, she expanded this effort to more schools and corporate entities, passionately advocating for the importance of preserving Bermuda's Heritage month traditions.

Lee's commitment to preserving the majorette and drum corps tradition is unwavering. Her success is a testament not only to her dedication but also to her extraordinary team of leaders and managers who have shared in her vision, as well as the sponsors who have supported their mission over the years. Through Lee's visionary leadership, PHCMDC has remained a bedrock of Bermudian heritage, ensuring that the majorette and drum corps not only endure but also continue to thrive in the hearts of Bermudians.

Posthumous Recognition - Allan Warner: Bermuda's Celebrated Gombey Icon and Community Champion

Allan Warner, a name synonymous with Bermuda's Gombey culture, has left an undeniable mark as one of the most honoured Gombey captains in the Island's history. Steeped in the tradition from the tender age of three, Warner's remarkable journey within this vibrant art form saw him honing skills in dance, drumming, and costume creation, bridging the artistry of his ancestors with Bermuda's contemporary pulse.

His leadership of Warner Gombey's spanned over five and a half decades, during which time he led the group with passion and integrity, ensuring the sacred dance and music echoed through the streets of Bermuda and resonated on international stages. Warner was an advocate for community, often guiding the troupe to perform at charity events. He stood by the belief that Gombey's true essence was its ability to instill pride, maintain discipline, and carry the collective memory of a people.

In 1995, Warner's dedication was recognised with the Queen's Certificate of Honour—an accolade that declared him the first Gombey Captain to be so distinguished. Yet again, in 2015, his lifetime achievements were celebrated at the Gombey Festival, reinforcing his role as a stalwart of the tradition he so dearly cherished. He also traveled internationally representing Bermuda in numerous festivals in Tennessee, Washington, Virginia, Philadelphia, as well as in Switzerland. Warner Gombey's was also the first group to visit St Kitts to forge connections to family traditions.

His belief in the Gombey spirit as a vital link to cultural heritage motivated Warner to impart his knowledge to the youth, molding future custodians of the Gombey legacy. The late Allan Warner's contribution to Bermuda's cultural fabric transcends his role as a captain; he was an educator, a mentor and an inspiration to all who would follow the captivating drumbeats and footsteps he left behind with his passing in October 2016.

Today, his influence continues to be seen and felt across Bermuda's Gombey troupes, reflected in their rhythms, discipline, and the enduring pride with which they carry the tradition forward.

Sonya Smith: Trailblazer of Bermuda's Athletic Excellence

Sonya Smith, a name forever etched in the records of Bermuda's sports history, is a towering figure whose prowess in track and field has paved the way for future generations of athletes. Her

extraordinary journey began with a simple throw—a javelin soaring through the air—sparking a career peppered with broken records and pioneering achievements.

In her formative years, Smith's exceptional talent manifested itself as she shattered a staggering 18 school competition records, many of which still stand as a testament to her outstanding ability. At the tender age of 13, Smith captured the national imagination by setting a Bermuda record in javelin, a benchmark no athlete has since surpassed.

The Carifta Games became Smith's competitive domain from 1977 to 1981, her accolades accumulating to 11 medals with five golds, primarily in her favorite javelin event. Her 1979 Carifta javelin record remains unbroken, a monolith of her athletic dominance.

Her journey beyond Bermuda's borders was marked with distinction. She represented the Island with pride at the Commonwealth Games, Pan American Games, and CAC Games, and etched her mark in history as Bermuda's first javelin medalist at the Junior Pan Am Games.

Her tenure at Abilene Christian University saw Smith continue her meteoric rise, smashing collegiate records and becoming the first woman to triumph at the Texas Relays. Qualifying for the 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games, she made her country proud on both occasions—her legacy commemorated by a street bearing her name on her alma mater's campus.

Smith's imprint on sport in Bermuda transcends the records she broke and the medals she won. As a beacon of determination and excellence, she has inspired countless young Bermudians to reach for their dreams. Today, her inspirational story continues to motivate aspiring athletes, securing her place as one of Bermuda's most revered sporting legends.