

## ■ OUR STUDENTS

As this year's UWI Got Talent winner Kendra Hope took her bows, it was clear that we were witnessing the end of a transformative journey.

"This win means so much to me and reminds me that I matter, and that my voice and gifts are valuable," Hope, a vocalist, said.

A few months ago, this year's crop of student performers courageously took the first steps, auditioning in the categories of Dance, Voice, Music or Performance Art. The judges had the difficult decision of choosing 16 finalists for the grand finale scheduled for Queen's Hall on October 1.

Produced by the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD) and the Student Guild, UWI Got Talent was created to celebrate performing arts excellence within the campus' student population. Jarell Alder, Manager of Student Engagement at DSSD, emphasised that it is a programme designed to inspire and empower participants to use their creative talents, gifts and artistic expressions for social healing and to unite people from all walks of life.

Many ambitious performers came forward in the programme's first outing in 2019. A large contingent of students contended for the chance to be this year's winner.

"I think events like this provide a very useful and needed breath of fresh air for students, and gives them something to look forward to and participate in other than classwork," said Luc Corbie, an instrumentalist and one of the 16 finalists.

Alder explains that emotions ran high during this year's auditions. In 2019, candidates brought fellow student supporters who sat in the bleachers cheering, an atmosphere of excitement and camaraderie. The 2022 mood was a bit different. After the difficult years of the pandemic, many students were not as familiar with the campus, and some were a bit nervous. Many brought family members to give support. Pent-up feelings found release during the spirited performances.

"We had a few instances where persons broke down in tears just before their audition or during their performances. Just a rush of emotions for many different reasons," he said.

Even Alder and the judges were moved. "I felt that 2022 was more than persons sharing their talent. It felt to me like a moment of freedom, freedom of expression."

During the preparations for the ultimate test of their abilities, the finalists were mentored by the UWI Got Talent coaches, musician and vocalist, Vaughnette Bigford; actor, Kevin Soyer; choreographer, Sherma Burke; and talent manager, Marlon Pierre Grant.

"I have learned how to effectively use vocal techniques that I did not previously have the confidence to use, and I have also gained a greater understanding about examining multiple aspects of the performance of a song," explained vocalist and finalist Rex-Anne Bobb.

"My coach has not only given me ideas for how to structure my performances, but he has also given me tips on how to improve my stage presence," said Luc Corbie.

The organisers hoped that participants would end their journeys transformed and fired up to continue to explore their talents. The 2019 winner, pianist Emmanuel Joseph, had already distinguished himself as a performer even before his win. He went on to become an ambassador for the brand.

"I think he realised the title came with a level of influence. He used that for all the right reasons," observed Alder proudly, noting that Joseph has used the platform he achieved to educate others in the steel pan.

Alder also related how the programme has captured the minds and hearts of the campus community. The coaches committed wholeheartedly to their roles, and the participants rose to the occasion.

"You might know a shy student in engineering, but on that night, you don't see a shy student, you see a performer," observed Alder.

"These events also create a space for students who have

# A moment of freedom through performance

*UWI Got Talent's successful return gives students a much-needed release*

UWI Got Talent winner Kendra Hope.  
PHOTOS: MICHAEL ANTHONY/WILE ANTZ PIXOGRAPHY



BY DIXIE - ANN BELLE

hidden talents to come out of their shells, gain courage, experience and exposure," said Rex-Anne.

The corporate community has also shown enthusiastic support. Sponsors included TTT Media Limited Network, and Digicel Trinidad and Tobago.

As all involved in this year's event recover from the exhilaration of the grand finale, plans are already in motion for the next production. Alder revealed that UWI Got Talent has inspired an initiative at the university level, which will not only seek out performers among students, but staff

and alumni from across campuses. This inaugural event will form part of The UWI's 75th anniversary celebrations.

Besides seeing the programme evolve, Alder hopes that it will continue to motivate students to embrace their time at UWI.

"Through my work in student engagement, I genuinely hope to empower and propel students to really maximise their university experience by connecting them to diverse experiences, activities and developmental opportunities that will aid in their holistic growth."



From left: Jarell Alder, Kendra Hope, Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Director of DSSD Dr Deirdre Charles, Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts Randall Mitchell, and Student Guild President Kobe Sandy.