



Youth Development Foundation, Inc.
Promoting Culture & Education Through the Performing Arts

USVI Wins International Title in St. Maarten

Performs Thrilling Tribute to King of Pop, Michael Jackson



Hal Jackson and Esonica Veira,
2005 HJTTI winner



Esonica is Michael Jackson!



Top 5 Winners

New York, NY (July 2005) - Esonica Veira, a fifteen-year-old dancer from the US Virgin Islands, was crowned the most talented teen in the world, Miss 2005 Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International, at the Scholarship Programs 35th anniversary competition, held at the Royale Casino Theater in St. Martin/St. Maarten, Netherland Antilles on July 30, 2005. Veira, who performed a thrilling tribute to Michael Jackson in a specially choreographed dance number set to several of his hit tunes, raced away with the title, beating out 34 other young ladies, ages 13-17, who flew in from various parts of the Caribbean, Canada and the continental United States to compete for such prizes as college scholarships, a diamond ring, and trips abroad to Europe and the Caribbean.

Her court consists of First Runner-Up Hannah Sidibe, California; Second Runner-Up Tillary Smalls, Georgia; Third Runner Up, Whitney Fullerton, Trinidad & Tobago and Fourth Runner Up, Dana McKinney, Connecticut.

Hal Jackson's Talented Teens Queen Esonica Veira, who replaces outgoing winner Nicola Dalrymple, remains stunned over her victory. In an exclusive interview with the Amsterdam News she comments, "I can't believe that I won; everyone was so talented; there were so many beautiful girls. I am still in shock."

Veira, whose eerie similarities to Michael Jackson as a dancer continues, "When I was younger, I listened to all of Michaels music and I have watched his DVDs over and over." She says her choreographer, Dominick Martin, helped her with her routine which was done encompassed snippets from The King of Pop's smash singles Billie Jean, Smooth Criminal, Beat It and You Rock My World.

Hal Jackson, Group Chairman of ICBC Broadcast Holdings and host of WBLS 107.5 FM Sunday Classics, reflected on the competitions 35 years. "Its the love of my life and has been since the beginning, back in 1971. It was really a challenge then. I started the competition as a way for Black teenagers to stay in school. At the time that I founded the competition, these young ladies were not able to get into other beauty pageants, hence the original name of the competition, Miss Black Teenage America, later becoming Hal Jacksons Talented Teens International. But we always left the door wide open for white contestants to appear in the contest from the very beginning. One of the elements of which I am most proud was our ability to send 27 young ladies to college the first year."

Although the winner receives a \$5,000.00 college scholarship, all young ladies who made it to the top 5 receive scholarships as well. Additionally, the Wilda La Brie Scholarship recipient, Miss Missouri, Rane Mehta, 16, received a \$1000.00 scholarship for having the highest GPA. Other cash prizes were awarded to Miss Anguilla, Jamila Morson, Miss Congeniality; Miss Tennessee, Stephanie Head, Most Creative, and Miss Jamaica, Samantha Strachan, Miss Personality. Miss California, Hannah Sidibe, was selected Miss Photogenic by HJTII photographer Mychal Watts to receive a \$500.00 award from celebrity journalist/publicist, Cynthia Horner, President of CHIPS.

The contestants spent a week at the Sonesta Maho Beach Resort Hotel in St. Maarten/St. Martin, where they attended a luncheon sponsored by the St. Martin Tourist Board, a trip to Anguilla courtesy of ICBC Broadcast Holdings, Inc. at the Frangipani Beach Club, shopping excursions and beach fun, in addition to holding press conferences and meeting with local dignitaries. One of the weeks highlights was the competition's annual Shooting Star Awards dinner held in a private villa where Hal and Debi Jackson, producers of HJTII and hosts of Sunday Classics, honored former Talented Teen winner Tai Jimenez, principal dancer for the Dance Theater of Harlem, Elinor Tatum, Publisher and Editor In Chief of the Amsterdam News and Charles Warfield, President and COO ICBC Broadcast Holdings Inc.

The contest, which featured two production numbers and a video tribute to great leaders, was hosted by WBLS air personality Doctor Bob Lee and former HJTII winner Sheryl Piland. Entertainment for the 35th annual competition, A Celebration of Excellence, was provided by Tai Jimenez, legendary crooner Chuck Jackson and Verity Records gospel trio 21:03. The Detroit-based members of 21:03 were amazed by the talent displayed by the contestants. "Its nice to see African American girls doing something positive," they stated.

Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International Scholarship Program is sponsored under the auspices of the Youth Development Foundation, Inc. and presented by ICBC Holdings, Inc.

For more information, log onto www.talentedteens.org

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