



BARBADOS
TODAY.bb

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2023

CELEBRATING 57 YEARS OF
INDEPENDENCE



DEATH PROBE

Police are investigating the unnatural death of 55-year-old Gabriel Alleyne whose body was found at his Waterhall Land, Eagle Hall, St Michael residence on Monday morning.

According to police, a woman reported the discovery to the Black Rock Police Station at 7:15 a.m. A medical doctor confirmed death at the scene and a family member identified the body.

When a team from Barbados TODAY visited the area, residents declined to comment and distraught family members were consoling each other as police began their investigations, as seen in this photo by BT's Haroon Greenidge.

'UNCLEAR' CUT

NCF CALLED ON TO EXPLAIN DISQUALIFICATION OF THEATRICAL PRODUCTION FROM NIFCA

By Anesta Henry

Arts school Praise Academy of Dance Barbados is calling on the National Cultural Foundation (NCF) to explain exactly why its production **Speak Life** was disqualified from the 2023 **National Independence Festival of Creative Arts (NIFCA)**.

And it has raised the alarm that the stance could impact "how we in Barbados and the Caribbean, express our faith on issues of gender and sexuality in the future".

The theatrical production at the centre of the controversy is one about a 15-year-old girl who is struggling with gender identity and finds her identity in God. Praise Academy of Dance said it was written and expressed from a Biblical worldview and based on biological science, but when an excerpt of the production was submitted to the national competition, it was disqualified because of its content.

In a statement, Praise Academy of Dance said that in a verbal delivery of a decision to its leaders on October 27, "the **NIFCA** panel of judges indicated that the production denounced a particular community, was not in good taste, identified a particular community and said that they are wrong. They also said that the piece was defamatory;

the emotion behind the delivery of the piece was aggressive and that they were concerned that we [Praise Academy of Dance] are using children to promote discrimination".

But the arts company said it is unclear what exactly in the production had contravened the rules.

In a written response to queries by **Barbados TODAY**, the NCF, **NIFCA's** producer, said that "in keeping with the competition regulations, anyone who wishes to contest a result made by the panel of judges is free to raise the matter with the arbiter as is stated in the rules".

According to the **NIFCA** Performing Arts-Theatre Rules 2023, prior to the deadline for submission of entry forms, the NCF shall appoint an Arbiter to decide and adjudicate on any appeals, complaints and matters in dispute or requiring clarification arising from those rules.

"All complaints related to the competition shall be submitted, in writing, to the Arbiter in a sealed envelope . . . All decisions made by the Arbiter shall be final and binding on the competitors and the NCF," the document outlines.

Barbados TODAY was reliably informed that a formal letter was written to the Arbiter. However, Praise Academy's Artistic

Director Marcia Weekes has expressed concern that such disqualification by the **NIFCA** panel of judges "may impact, if left unchecked, how we in Barbados and the Caribbean express our faith on issues of gender and sexuality in the future".

In a statement, Weekes also expressed concern about the moral injury that the children participating in the **Speak Life** production have allegedly suffered and said they were potentially exposed to experiencing emotional distress because of the disqualification.

Praise Academy noted that in its formal notice of disqualification, the NCF quoted, as their basis of disqualification, Section 9 of the **NIFCA** regulations that states: If, during the process of the competition, an entrant or any of his/her supporting team makes any gesture or utterance that exceeds the bounds of good taste (whether on, or off stage), the entrant may be disqualified from the competition. The judges shall determine whether behaviour is indecent, obscene, and defamatory or in excess of the bounds of good taste.

"It is unclear which exact aspects of the production are deemed to have contravened this particular regulation. The Praise Academy of Dance has issued a request to the NCF to

provide explicit details of how the production is deemed to have violated this rule," the statement added.

It also indicated that Praise Academy of Dance, in alliance with Family Faith Freedom Barbados, Watch Out My Children, the Spiritually Aware Group Inc, TT Response and other organisations, were calling on the NCF and the government to uphold and protect their unalienable rights of conscience, and the constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom to allow all artistes, persons and organisations, regardless of faith, sexual preference or religious persuasion, to be able to freely exercise their fundamental rights of religion, speech and conscience.

"A fundamental tenet on which the company's work rests is that no one should be discriminated against because of their religious or moral beliefs, that no artiste should be penalised for creating art that is consistent with their beliefs," the statement read.

Praise Academy of Dance, a registered premiere arts school in the Caribbean with affiliated schools in Jamaica and Trinidad, has received more than 55 **NIFCA** medals and has also won Flame Awards for **Dance Group of the Year** in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

anestahenry@barbadostoday.bb