

>> Well, good day, Virgin Islands.
You are listening to Ability Radio.
I am one of your hosts, Amelia Headley LaMont.
I'm the executive director of the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands.
And today, we are joined by two directors, co-instructors of an entity called Calico Theatre.
And one of the things that we always like to talk to our community about or what kinds of exciting things are happening in our community that involves a disability community, and we're very excited to have both of you here today.
So, good day to both of you!
>> Hello.
>> Hi.
>> How are you?
>> Doing well.
>> I like to consider myself to be a fan of theater.
And one of the things that I was quite intrigued by was to learn that there was a children's theater of long duration.
It's called Calico Theatre, right?
>> It's the Calico Cats Company.
>> Calico Cats Company.
All right, tell us about it.
>> So, the Calico Cats Company teaches kids ages 8 to 12.
And we just basically teach them stage craft.
They learn a little bit about tech and just all the basics of theater in terms of what acting -- what improvisation looks like and stuff like that.
>> Tell us about -- you said something about tech.
What does that mean?
>> So, theater involves tech, which means lighting, sounds, if you have to have props in stage, when you have to build a set for the stage.
So tech is anything that doesn't involve memorizing the lines and acting.
>> It's all that stuff backstage that you don't have any idea is going on while you're out in the audience enjoying the show.
>> Okay.
>> Yes.
>> And so you have 8 to

12-year-olds learning these things.
Is that what I'm hearing?
>> Yes.
>> Excellent.
>> Yeah, we don't put them too much on the tech side just because it's a lot of computers and building and sharp things. But we do teach them how to handle your props, what stage directions look like, what certain parts of the stage have to operate like.
So they learn -- they learn just the basics of it.
>> So they come away from this with a deep appreciation as to what's involved in doing a show, right?
>> Definitely.
>> Absolutely.
And for some students, and I think Imani, as a former student, would -- this would be the case with her.
Some students come away from there after spending some time there realizing that they really enjoy the tech and that aspect of it.
'Cause it starts out where they're involved in little shows that they put on.
But as with, you know, always in the theater, you're gonna have some people who really love being on stage, and then others who really enjoy behind the scenes.
and there is some opportunity for kids to realize that.
>> well, how long is this program?
Is this a summer program or a fall program?
How does that work?
>> So, it's two semesters a year.
We work in coordination with school semesters.
And it's four to five months.
So, our fall semester will run from September to December.
And then our spring semester will run from January to April.
>> All right, and what kinds of shows have you done so far?
>> Ooh.
we did a musical recently.
we really like those.
>> What was that musical?
>> It was called "Geology

Rocks."

[Laughs]

>> Okay.

>> And it was about these students whose geology teacher was kidnapped.

>> Oh, my.

>> So they have to talk to different geologic features of the earth to find out what's happening.

So some kids are mountains.

Some kids were metamorphic rock.

Some kids were volcanoes.

And it was super corny and super cute.

There were so many puns involved.

We do a lot of fractured fairy tales.

Our most recent was called "Big Bad," where the Big Bad Wolf is put on trial.

[Laughs]

>> Okay.

>> So that was really, really cute.

And every so often, we'll do more cultural stuff.

Our most recent one was called "Colorful Kallaloo," which we took tales from around the world. Each like 10 to 15 minutes long, and they did those. We had one from, like, Iran, one from Eastern Europe, one about Kallaloo, and we also do, like, poetry and kind of a storytime type things around Christmas because it's just cute to watch the kids talk about that stuff. >> Mm-hmm.

>> And at our Christmas show, there was a really cute skit called "The Day the Crayons Quit," and each of the kids came out as a different color.

And each color had its own personality and its grievances as to whether it's used too much or too little.

Is it ignored?

Is it boring?

And it's actually very funny because it really holds true if you remember what playing with your box of crayons was like.

>> Right.

[Laughs]

>> It was really cute.

>> I could imagine the color blue being quite upset, for example.

Interesting.

>> Used so much.

>> Who writes this stuff?

>> So, we tend to use Pioneer Drama, which is a long company of just -- they just write children's shows.

"The Day the Crayons Quit" was actually a book, and it has a sequel, so we adopted it into a script which just involved it being multiple monologues.

For the most part, we just use books and scripts.

>> So, have you had situations where you have a local student, for example, or either one of you writing a play?

>> We haven't recently because there's been -- there's been a bit of turbulence as of the past semester or two just because we had a long-time instructor who moved.

So now we're dealing with new instructors and new directors, so we like to keep it kind of simple.

>> Right.

>> This semester, I'm considering rewriting something for the kids.

So it wouldn't be original. It would just be adapting an adult show for kids.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Yeah, I don't think we've done any original shows in a while.

>> Oh, okay.

I'm curious going back to the "Geology Rocks."

What became of the kidnapped teacher?

[Laughs]

>> So, his -- what was his name? Professor Rock.

His name was Professor Rock, and the students met up with Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, and they just were roaming the planet, trying to find Professor Rock.

And it had turned out that ferns had kidnapped Professor Rock because they found out that he was working on renewable energy, and they wanted to become fossil fuels.

So they kidnapped him to try to steal his knowledge, and it didn't end up working out.

>> It didn't work out too well.

>> No, it didn't.
So the kids found Professor
Rock, and he was all good to go,
so it was good.
>> Okay.
How does this affect the
children?
what kinds of outcomes have you
had from involving them in these
kinds of activities?
>> well, I think one of the most
obvious things is -- and it's
really amazing how it can happen
in a short space of time is
confidence level.
Just, you might have some kids
that come in, maybe not saying
much, or they get on the stage.
They're really loud and running
around at first.
And then they get on the stage
where it's time for them to read
a line or deliver a line, and
they seize up.
They clam up.
They're very quiet, you know.
[Laughs]
And to see what -- you know,
what they produce at the end in
the show, we're always so
pleasantly surprised.
It's really, really, really
wonderful to see the growth.
>> Do you notice this difference
when they're performing, or even
when they're rehearsing, this
kind of reticence to --
>> Even when they're rehearsing,
for sure.
But there's something about the
show night or afternoon.
There's something about showtime
that just brings out that little
star, that extra magic that each
one of us has somewhere inside.
Without fail.
>> Wow.
>> We had one student in
particular who we knew was
incredibly talented, but he was
younger, so he was always a
goofball.
He'd do his lines, and we'd tell
him to go one place and do one
thing, and he was playing a
50-year-old man and is, like,
windmilling his arms and jumping
around and, like, just going
absolutely bonkers.
Then he gets onstage, and his
acting was, like, perfect,
amazing, precise.
>> Wow.

>> And we were, like, "Oh, so that's what you've been hiding from us this entire time."
>> Interesting.
>> Yeah, kids really like, when you turn the lights on, and you have a bunch of people in front of them, they're, like, "Mm-hmm, yeah, this is my time to shine."
[Laughs]
>> How long does it -- okay. Before I launch into another question because we've got lots more questions to ask. We're going to take a short break, and we'll be right back. You're listening to Ability Radio.
>> We're back. We're treated by two wonderful guests today. They're with the -- I keep saying Calico -- Calico Cat Theatre?
Okay.
It was the "cat" part I was skipping out on.
We're joined by Leslie Highfield-Carter, director and co-instructor, along with Imani Evans, who is a director and co-instructor for the Calico Cat Theatre.
I was going to ask you, before we took our break, how does it take for -- typically for the students to prepare, children to prepare for production, before a play?
>> So we'll spend the first month working on just skills and techniques, and then we give them audition time and scripts. So I would say they have anywhere from eight to ten weeks to work on it.
We have class twice a week. And then when they're at home, they're practicing and re-reading their lines. So they have a pretty good timeframe.
>> Do these youngsters audition? Do they know what role they're going to play before they even do all this practicing? How does that work?
>> Yeah.
So what we'll do is, we will sit around and choose a show, and then we'll do a read through of the show, just to show them what it's like.

They'll go home and think about,
okay, what kind of character do
I want to play?

How big of a role do I want?
And then they'll come in and
say, "I'm auditioning for this
role or this role," and then
they read for it and audition.
And then usually by the next
class --

>> That must be pretty tough,
huh, making choices about --
tell an 8-year-old, "well,
sorry, you don't get the start
part."

[Laughs]

How does that work?

>> You know, I find less problem
with the kids and more with the
parents.

>> Oh, okay, yeah.

>> Yeah.

>> Yeah, I could see that, yeah.

>> I was actually going to say,
it's almost more difficult to
tell adult actors they didn't
get the part for auditions for
adult shows.

>> Sure, yeah.

>> It's amazing.

The kids are -- they're
resilient.

And they're strong.

Yeah.

>> And they also understand
there's a certain hierarchy
almost.

So we have Calico Cat veterans
who are kids who have been in
Calico Cats for two or three
semesters.

We have a few that are on their,
like, fifth semester with us.

>> Oh, okay.

>> And those kids, because
they're more experienced, and
because they've had more time to
learn are usually -- they
usually end up with the starring
roles.

Every so often, we'll get
surprised with a complete newbie
who decides that, I'm gonna come
out and show all my talent, and
you guys are gonna cast me.

We ended up having a few newbies
who were doing starring roles,
which was really cute.

>> Yeah.

Who can participate?

How do you even set that up?

Is it limited to a certain, you
know -- other than age, is there

any other kind of parameters for eligibility to participate in this theater group?

>> No.

As long as your kid can read, that's all -- yeah, that's literally all we ask of our students.

Because acting can be taught for those who it doesn't come natural to, which is not many people.

But we're not -- we're not very restrictive in who we allow into our program.

>> Okay, and how do you advertise?

Say, we're looking for new students, new actors.

How do you promote it?

>> I don't think we --

>> Other than the show.

[Laughs]

Do you promote it?

>> I don't think we do.

'Cause it's really as simple as, we put up the flyers for the shows, and people bring their kids, and students will tell their classmates.

And then the parents bring those kids in, and they call us the next semester.

And they're, like, "We want to be a part of this."

>> Do you have good representation from public school kids, as well as private school?

>> Yes, but I definitely think we could do better.

>> Okay.

>> I would love to get it out to more public school kids just because they don't really get that opportunity nearly as much as private school kids do.

But there is a fee for the class, so it's understandable that sometimes that's not very accessible.

>> Mm-hmm.

What's the fee?

>> It's \$250 a semester.

>> Okay.

>> But it's \$200 if you apply early.

>> Okay.

Are there any scholarships available?

>> No, I don't think there are.

>> Okay.

That might be something else

1.25.19 Calico Cat Theatre.txt

that's possible because it's certainly not beyond reach for, you know, some of our deeper pockets of the community to support, you know.
>> Absolutely.
>> Where is Calico Cat Theatre located?
Where do you operate from?
>> So, we operate out of the Caribbean Community Theatre, which is in Golden Rock behind where Pueblo is, next to Business World.
>> It's the same road as the old Saint Dunstons School.
>> Okay, right, okay, all right. Where do the students practice, or when do they typically practice for plays?
>> So, that is on Monday and Wednesday afternoons, the two days a week that we hold the classes.
And it's 3:30 to about 5:15, right, that they're with us. And we'd have those two practices a week, those two classes a week.
And as we get closer to the show, we determine how many extra practices we need. And especially leading up to the show, we often have a Monday through Thursday, Monday through Friday practice schedule.
>> Okay, so I might have missed this.
Where do you actually practice it at?
At CCT or --
>> Yes, at CCT, yes.
>> Okay, and as you described, CCT is on the same road as Saint Dunstons School?
>> Yes.
>> Okay, okay, all right.
Let me also let our audience know that if you miss this recording, you will be able to find it on our website, which is located at drcvi.org. It is posted on SoundCloud, and there will also be a transcript of today's show.
So, typically, if a student wants to get in touch with you, how do they go about doing so?
>> So, there's a few ways to do that.
I think maybe the easiest would be e-mailing Eileen Des Jardins, which is the producing manager

1.25.19 Calico Cat Theatre.txt

for the theater who kind of,
like, runs the entire shebang.
E-mailing her would be the
easiest because she is the one
who takes in all of those
requests.
If not, you could leave it at
the mailbox, which is right
there at the theater.
>> Mm-hmm.
>> There is also a Caribbean
Community Theatre Facebook page,
and people can leave messages
there.
You know, we check messages
there.
So, and there's also information
about the theater and things
going on at the theater
throughout the year on that
page.
>> So it's on the CCT page,
which stands for?
What does CCT stand for?
>> Caribbean Community Theatre.
>> Okay, and so it's on their
Facebook page?
>> yes.
>> And does Calico Cat have its
own Facebook page?
>> No.
>> Okay.
>> But Calico Cats are included
on the Caribbean Community
Theater Facebook page.
>> Okay.
And if somebody wanted to call,
what would be the number they
would call?
>> The number would be
340-778-1983.
Calling would work best in the
afternoons because we're not
really there during the day
since it's an after school
program.
>> Right.
>> And probably in the evenings,
especially right now, 'cause
we're kind of always in the
theater every night.
We're currently preparing for
our annual musical which is
directed by our very own Leslie
Highfield-Carter.
So we're in there all the time.
>> All the time.
[Laughs]
We're gonna talk more about
that, but I'm curious about the
e-mail address for Ms.
Des Jardins?
Is that her last name?

1.25.19 Calico Cat Theatre.txt

>> Mm-hmm.
>> Okay, so I want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to join in if that's possible. That would be a good thing.
>> Okay, so the e-mail is eileencct@gmail.com.
That's E-I-L-E-E-N-C-C-T@gmail.com.
>> Perfect, great, great.
So, let's hear about this --
[Laughs]
Event.
It sounds exciting.
>> It is.
It really is.
First off, I wanted to say that I'm actually co-directing with Eileen.
>> Okay.
>> With Eileen Des Jardins.
We're both so excited because the last time CCT did this production of "Guys and Dolls" was 19 years ago.
>> Ahh.
So wait a minute.
The Calico Cats are doing --
>> No, the theater, the adult theater, yes.
>> Okay, okay.
[Laughs]
Gotcha.
>> The community theater.
>> Gotcha, okay.
>> But yes, so "Guys and Dolls" is part of our regular lineup.
[Clears throat]
Excuse me.
What can I say about it?
It's a musical that was written, I think, in the '50s.
It used to be a very popular Broadway musical.
It's a lot of fun.
It's a lot of fun.
It's about gamblers and showgirls and missionaries and just, you know, it's a slapstick musical comedy.
>> That should be wonderful.
And what were some of the songs?
I think I could remember some of them, but if you could give us a teaser, that would be fun.
>> Well, the title song, "Guys and Dolls."
I don't know if you've heard this one.
When you see a guy reach for stars in the sky
You can bet that he's doing it for some doll

Does that sound familiar?
>> Yep, that sounds very familiar.
>> Okay.
>> I remember "Adelaide's Complaint."
>> Yes.
>> "Adelaide's Lament."
>> Lament, yes, yes.
And I'm actually playing Adelaide again.
>> Oh, my goodness.
>> I'm doing the role again after 19 years, so I just love it.
>> That's great.
>> I love her.
[Laughter]
>> Very good.
>> In character all the time.
>> It's very easy to get into a New York mode, I'm sure.
>> I absolutely adore the role of Adelaide.
I adore this musical.
And as a matter of fact, it was the first show that I did with CCT.
I've done other shows throughout my life, but CCT, this was my first time with them.
It's been a wonderful relationship for 19 years.
>> My goodness.
So when is the show gonna start? What's the date?
>> We open February 8th, which is a Friday night, so it's the 8th and 9th, and then the following weekend, what are the dates?
>> I want to say the 15th and 16th.
>> 15th, 16th, and then on the 17th, that Sunday, we do have a Sunday matinee, which begins at 4:00.
Curtain is at 4:00.
The other shows, curtain is at 8:00.
And then our final weekend is -- I don't have my glasses on to see that.
>> The 22nd and 23rd.
>> The 22nd and 23rd of February.
>> Okay.
>> Again, the Friday and Saturday, and depending on how ticket sales go, and if there's a high demand, we will hold it over to March 1st and 2nd.
We got to get the theater

filled.
>> Right, understood, yeah.
That's exciting.
>> That's what we're hoping for.
>> That's exciting.
So, how do you do musicals?
I don't know if you have an
orchestra, per se.
>> We do.
>> Oh, you do?
>> We do.
>> Oh, my goodness.
>> We actually have co-music
directors, Patrick Baron and
Sean Bailey.
So actually, the sort of initial
creative team of four, and then
Imani is our stage manager.
And I'm so, so, so excited to be
working with her, have her on
board with this musical.
This is actually my first time
on this side of the stage.
So my learning curve is high
right now.
>> You're doing good.
>> Thank you, thank you.
And I am having a great time.
I really am.
but I'm just so grateful for the
veterans who know what they're
doing on this side.
I can really see how this is
something that I would enjoy
doing after I'm maybe, I don't
know, too elderly to be onstage
one day.
[Laughs]
>> Oh, no, no, no, no such
thing.
No such thing.
[Laughs]
Tell that to Helen Hayes or
Fanny Burroughs.
>> Right, right, there we go.
But you know, I mean, you can't
always be there, the 20-year-old
leads.
This is really just -- it's
really wonderful.
I'm actually really enjoying the
creative process.
really very much so.
>> So you're having to learn, or
you're putting yourself to learn
not only as the actor that's
being seen, but you're also
doing behind-the-scenes work, as
well.
>> Absolutely.
>> For the "Guys and Dolls"
production.
>> Absolutely, yes.

>> So, what kinds of things are you trying to do or have to do backstage, or why are you putting yourself through this?
>> I can explain that.
>> Okay.
Go right ahead.
[Laughs]
>> The director is the brain of the body.
Everything happens through the director.
There's not a single thing the director doesn't see.
The director's in charge off, first off, casting, which is a long and arduous process.
The auditions take about a week. I think we took a little longer this time because the case is so huge.
And then after that, just --
So after you cast, you have to figure out, what does this need to look like?
What are the attitudes that people need to have?
Because even though it's laid out in the script, you still have to give us a certain amount of, I guess, advice to the cast members.
And then a lot of creative license in terms of, what do you want your set to look like?
What do you want props to look like?
What do you want these entrances to feel like?
Talking to AV/Tech is a lot because you have to decide -- people don't quite realize it, but a lot of the moods that you feel during a show are prompted by the lighting.
So saying, okay, this scene needs to be sad.
So A/V Tech needs to know, you need bluish undertones.
You need to make sure that the lights look a certain way, and that the music is low.
We want this to be dazzling and spectacular, and you need to have a really, really cute light production.
And then after that, it's just rehearsals, rehearsals, rehearsals.
The director sits there for every rehearsal and watches everything that happens onstage and is taking, like --

[Clears throat]

Sorry.

Like two or three hours worth of notes.

>> I -- I was fortunate to visit a theater, and backstage and what I did not really appreciate this, how every single movement is cued.

And I'm thinking, oh, my goodness.

Oh, my goodness.

Okay, well, we're gonna take another break after I catch my breath.

You're listening to Ability Radio.

>> We are back.

You're listening to Ability Radio.

This program is brought to you by the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands.

I'm one of your hosts, Amelia Headley LaMont, and we are joined today by two thespians. Is that the right word?

>> Yes.

>> Leslie Highfield-Carter, who's the director and co-instructor of the Calico Cat Theatre.

And she is here also with Imani Evans, who is the director and co-instructor of the Calico Cat Theatre.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on the staffing that's required backstage?

I'm getting a sense, as we kind of mentioned staffing, staging, that it takes a lot.

Like I said, every single gesture.

How do you manage that?

>> You know, Imani can probably answer that question specifically, but I just did want to interject that the last show that I did with CCT before I moved away for a while was "Evita."

And I had 29 costume changes.

>> Oh, my goodness.

>> Okay.

And "Evita," because it's a rock opera is what it's called, right.

>> Right.

>> For me, I had to learn it like it was one long song. the whole show to me was one long song.

The whole show to me was one long song, even other people's songs were a part of the song going on in my head. And even my costume changes had to be choreographed. For that particular show, I had to have -- at one point, I had four to five dressers.

>> Oh, my goodness.

>> You know, not even time to say "I'm going to the dressing room."

No.

Makeshift dressing room, right in the wings.

Boom, boom, boom.

Just, it was incredible. So yes, everything is choreographed and completely managed.

I don't know if you can elaborate on how that's done, 'cause I'm learning.

>> So, we put together -- So, theater works as a machine. Every part has a very, very specific job.

So, let's start off with the cast.

Their job is to memorize their lines, memorize their choreography, show up on time, and put the show on.

The people that you don't see are the stage managers who do setups for prop, and they do cue setups, and they work out where are things supposed to be, and at what time does that need to happen?

There are light techs who are always on giant ladders moving around fixtures.

We have sound techs who spend a whole lot of time making sure that we don't have malfunctions. We'll often have special techs to work spotlights and stuff.

We have directors.

We have producers, which I think directors basically do at this point.

Prop masters would be people who take care of all the things that have to go onstage.

You have set builders and then one of our favorites are dressers and makeup artists because it is an incredibly hard job to get another person dressed.

"Evita" is one of those almost

nightmare shows where, when you write down the costume plot, and the stage manager asks, "Okay, well, how much time do you have backstage?"

You're holding your breath because it's terrifying. when we did "Into the Woods," we had this one scene where everybody has to go out onstage. And within five seconds, we would put one girl out of a gown and into a wedding dress. One girl was stepping out of a dress, and a person was stepping back into the same dress. we would have wig changes. we would have shoe changes. And all of this is happening. Like, you have a bunch of naked bodies backstage and people just running and trying to get it done.

It's kind of like ultimate Barbie dress up, except the stakes are super high because we've had so many moments where, like, okay, you're in the dress, go.

Zipper's not up. Or, like, okay, your wig is on. But it falls off.

>> Oh, my goodness. Uh-huh.

>> You have to be extremely, extremely precise in everything you do with dressing, especially because that's something the audience will notice.

>> Oh, yeah.

>> If you screw up. So there's -- I think for this show, in stage managers alone, we have four people.

So that'll be taking care of props.

That'll be taking care of tech. we have two technical directors who stay up in the booth, which is where the lights and sounds are controlled.

And I think we have a cast of 24 people who will all be in dressing rooms and green room. So I imagine that'll require a few dressers, maybe three or four if we can fit them backstage.

And then that's just stuff that's happening in-house. we also have people who are working concession and working the bar and working our box

office and working front of house.
So it's a big, big operation.
>> It is, and this is -- I'm assuming most of these individuals are volunteers?
>> Entirely.
>> Entirely?
>> Exactly, yes.
It's truly community theater.
>> Okay.
>> People just -- I mean, we have got so many talented people in the community.
And those are just the ones who come to us and show up.
But yeah, all these different pieces, and it's amazing.
Everyone has their thing that they love to do.
You know, whether it is doing the bartending or working the raffle table, being the house manager for the night.
And all the other things that we've talked about.
There's just so much talent and willingness here, and people, they want to be a part of it.
And we do our best to do as professional and excellent a job as we can with what we have at our little theater.
And I think it's a really, really wonderful part of this community.
>> Yeah, one of the important things about Caribbean Community Theater is the entire machine runs on purely passion.
It's -- I mean, you're going in there, and we have rehearsals sometimes that --
we walked in there at 6:00, and we ended up leaving at 10:00.
we had a tech rehearsal recently with the last show that we did where her technical directors were there until, like, 3:00 a.m.
And none of these people are being paid at all.
They're just here because this is what they love to do, and this is what makes them happy.
>> And most everybody has, at the very least, a part-time job.
But most of the people have full-time jobs.
And then this on top of it.
>> Interesting.
Well, what do you see beyond this season?

Do you have any other ideas?
Not to box you in because I know
you want to have the surprise
element.
Are there any other kinds of
plays or musicals long-term that
you would like to do?
>> Ooh.
>> I'm not sure.
[Laughs]
>> I mean, as far as for CCT
goes -- as far as CCT goes, I
don't know the possibilities
with all this yet because,
again, I'm learning.
But I mean, "Mamma Mia" would be
such a fun musical.
Gosh.
What else that hasn't been done
here or hasn't been done in a
while?
That's another thing is we will
recycle musicals, but we'll wait
at least ten years before doing
it again.
>> "Rent."
I want to do "Rent" so badly.
[Laughs]
They did "Rent" in -- it's only
been, like, eight years, so I'm
very sad because I probably
won't be here to work on it.
But if I ever get a call that
they're doing "Rent," I'm out.
I'm ready to go.
>> "Rent" has not been done
here, has it?
>> It has.
CCT did it.
>> Oh, my goodness.
>> I don't know what year.
I wasn't on island at the time,
but yes, they did it.
>> Okay.
>> I want to say like 2012,
maybe?
>> Okay.
>> I really don't know.
>> Okay.
>> Some of the musicals I've
been in as a teenager, like,
there's "The Wiz" or "Annie."
Those are big.
Also, they were on Island Center
Stage.
I would love to do "Jesus Christ
Superstar."
>> Oh, my God.
Yes, yes!
[Laughs]
And we haven't in so long.
>> Right, so maybe it'll be
coming around again.

>> I hope so.
>> I would fly down again for that, for sure.
>> Oh, my goodness.
Now, did you appear in that before?
>> No.
>> Okay.
>> I actually have just -- I was living off of St. Croix at the time they did it here.
>> Okay.
>> And I remember seeing the notice about the auditions, I think, online or something.
And I just was, "Oh! Ooh!"
[Laughs]
That was a "drats!" moment, you know.
>> I also -- weirdly enough, I don't think we've done "Grease."
>> I don't think so, which is such a --
>> It's a giant show.
>> Right.
>> We have not done "Grease." We also haven't done "Cinderella," which I would love to.
Another company did it pretty recently, so that's out of the picture for us for a little while.
I can't really think of any others.
>> I'm getting a note here and a pen waving in my face.
"Dirty Dancing."
>> Oh, "Dirty Dancing" would be so much fun.
>> It would.
That really would.
Well, one thought I just had is, you know, with all of these amazing musicals that are out there, we also need to get people to come out and audition. You know, of all ages.
All types.
Like, a musical like "Guys and Dolls," for example.
Not only do you need the actors and actors who can sing, but dancers.
We need dancers.
I know some theaters will shy away from certain musicals because not sure if you can get the dancers.
And there's just, like I said, so much talent on this island.
>> Right.

>> So I would just love to get the word out more and have people come and join us, you know.
>> That sounds exciting.
>> Yeah.
>> What's the structure, if you're aware of the CCT?
Is there a board?
Is there a director?
How does that work?
>> So, CCT is a non-profit organization, and it's run by a board of I want to say a dozen people.
And all those people have different roles.
Eileen, who is the head of it -- not Eileen -- I don't think she's the head of the board. But she's the one who's on site the most.
>> Okay.
>> I believe she's a producing manager.
>> Okay.
>> And there's presidents and people who are in charge of media and people who are in charge of marketing.
So there's a pretty solid team there that oversees everything.
>> What's your take of the community's involvement at CCT?
Do you find it supportive?
Has there been any dropoff since the two storms?
Has it been consistent?
How would you --
[Laughs]
How would you characterize that?
>> So, after Maria hit, we just started our first week of Calico Cats.
And we told the kids, okay, we probably won't see you on Wednesday because there's a storm coming, so maybe we'll see you the week after, which we absolutely knew was a lie because it was a category 5, and it was heading right for us.
>> Right.
>> The curfew got lifted, like, maybe three weeks after.
No power at the theater.
No air conditioning, no fans, and the kids still ended up showing up.
I don't think we lost any students.
We had 20 kids in a bunch of plastic chairs in the parking

lot, and we're just sitting out there with our scripts in, like, 90-degree weather because the storm had just passed.

And they were still getting it done.

>> Wow.

>> And that happened to be, like, a pretty large show for us.

I credit a lot of it to -- theater is an escape.

When you show up to a theater, and you sit down, you are completely put into this illusion.

And it gives you an hour or two to just leave your real life.

So I think a lot of people were using the theater for that.

>> Did the building sustain any significant damage?

The theater itself?

>> No, I think we were good.

We had a few things -- like, a few walls were kind of shaky, but nothing that we couldn't, like, repair pretty easily, so it was good.

>> That's great.

So in essence, you're saying that the community response has been positive.

>> Yeah.

I think we have a lot of regulars.

There are people -- there's faces that we see every show we do, which is always just really nice because they can give us, I think, the best feedback.

Because they're, like, "Oh, you know, it was good."

Or, like, "Oh, my God, this is one of the best shows of all time."

And that works out very well for us.

And I think our advertising has gotten a lot better.

We have full houses.

Especially for musicals, we have full houses.

Which is really, really fun.

The community, they like it.

>> That's great.

So do you have a membership thing that somebody could join and, you know, participate in?

>> Yes, we do, and

unfortunately, I'm not sure of -- I think there's other different levels of membership.

>> Probably.
>> Yeah, different packages, but yes, definitely.
So again, information like that is available through the different channels that we mentioned earlier.
And also, anyone who comes to the show gets a program for the evening, a program booklet. And there's information -- actually, there's a membership sign-up page right inside of that booklet.
>> Do you have a website?
>> We do have a website. It's just cct.vi.
>> That's easy.
>> Yeah, very, very simple.
>> If you can repeat also the contact information, the telephone numbers, e-mails, physical location, that would also, I think, benefit the audience.
>> So, our Facebook page is just facebook.com/cctvi. Our e-mail is eileencct@gmail.com. That's E-I-L-E-E-N-C-C-T@gmail.com. Our phone number is 340-778-1983. And our address --
Umm --
I actually don't remember what our address is.
>> Well, we could do what we typically do.
It's down the road at Saint Dunstons School, next to Legal Services, Orange Grove.
>> That's really funny.
When I was driving down here, I was using an app to get here. 'Cause I hadn't been to this exact spot before.
And then I was thinking, huh, I wonder if the days of those colorful directions are going to be lost or going past because, you know.
>> I don't think so.
Not for a while.
Not until they mark these streets, let me tell you.
Yeah, no.
>> I imagine people who drive ambulances have to have a pretty good awareness of, like, passing the mango tree, two speed bumps.
>> Absolutely, absolutely.
[Laughs]

On that note, we're going to take another break. You're listening to Ability Radio.

>> We're back to what I believe will be our last stretch of the Ability Radio Hour.

This program is brought to you by the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands.

And again, I'll repeat that if there's any section of this show that you've missed, it is posted on our website, which is located at drcvi.org.

We will also have this program transcribe for persons who may find it more easy to, you know, read through the interview, as opposed to listening to it during the course of your day.

Today's guest is Leslie Highfield-Carter, director and co-instructor and Imani Evans, director and co-instructor at the Calico Cat Theatre.

One question came up.

So when -- your age group is from 8 to 12.

All right, I'm 13.

What happens?

Am I --

[Laughs]

Gone forever?

What do you do at 13?

What do you do with teenagers?

>> Not necessarily.

We did have a 13-year-old recently who was a volunteer at first, but then we're, like, you're super talented.

Don't waste that.

So, we offered to have her be a student.

I don't know how often we do that, but I definitely think we're more inclined to take older kids than we are to take -- like, taking a 7-year-old would require a little more thought.

>> Right, right.

>> Yeah, and with the older ones, yeah, I guess there's, like you said, volunteer.

There's volunteer opportunities, and at that point, I think maybe that's when you find the kids who are really interested in learning a lot of the behind the scenes stuff, right?

I mean, that's what it appears -- how it appears to me.

>> Those are the kids that end up auditioning for CCT shows.
>> Right, right.
>> Oh, okay.
>> We have that very often. I don't think we've needed any younguns recently, but I think we will have, like, two Calico Cats onstage for "Guys and Dolls."
Three Calico Cats?
>> Yes, one of our older young ladies is gonna be joining us for --
You know, it's gonna be all that same scene.
We won't say too much, but yes. They're excited to come and join the adults.
>> Sure, sure.
>> Bona fide theater.
>> Yeah, exactly.
They can just get on the real stage.
They're so excited.
>> That's great.
>> Yeah, yeah.
>> That is great.
>> How long have each of you been involved in theater?
We haven't taken it to a personal level.
Let's start with Imani.
[Laughs]
What got you involved in this?
>> So, when I was younger, I did a lot of Caribbean dance and very quickly decided I hated dancing.
When I was in about second grade, I met this teacher, Miss Sage, who just loved theater, loved writing, and essentially created her own club.
We did like the Shakespearean Festival in St. Thomas.
And I acted until I was 11 and then decided that I hated it.
[Laughs]
And ever since, I've been involved with just backstage theater.
I went to Good Hope Country Day School, where I worked front of house mostly and costumes.
And I started working with CCT when I was 15 as regular just backstage crew.
And then after about a year, I got upgraded to Calico Cat Assistant Instructor, and then like Assistant Stage Manager, and I think as of last year, I

became like a real stage manager, real director, real instructor.

So yeah.

>> I'm curious, you mentioned the Shakespeare Festival. Was there a Shakespeare Festival in St. Thomas?

>> Mm-hmm.

The Shakespearean Festival was something that -- I think it happened at Historical Theater, or it might have been at one of those schools.

A bunch of kids from St. Thomas, a bunch of kids at St. Croix, and I think a few from St. John would spend months learning sonnets and learning different pieces.

And we would get in our costumes and get on the ferry, and we went over there and performed.

>> It sounds great.

>> It was awesome.

I don't think they've done it in a while.

I know that some schools are flying to the Shakespearean festivals in Utah now, which is much more expensive and much farther and much more talent. So that's pretty impressive.

>> It's a competition, if I'm not mistaken, right?

Yeah.

>> It's a big, big nationwide competition.

>> Okay, and the costuming must be amazing.

>> Yes.

>> Yeah.

>> I live for the costumes.

Your turn.

>> My turn?

Well, I live for all of it.

I just love it all, the costumes, the dancing, the singing, all of it.

So, I started -- the first time I was on a stage I was 4 years old.

I will never forget this moment.

I was a student at Free Will Baptist School.

I opened the school play on Island Center Stage.

I came through the curtain.

Spotlight on me.

And I could not remember what to say.

I was just frozen.

And whoever was right behind the

curtain whispered, gave me a cue, and I started, and it just came.
And then I was done.
And it was, like, all the applause.
And I remember standing there and going, "Ahh!"
I love this.
I was hooked.
[Laughter]
I really was hooked, and so since then, I've always been in school plays and whatnot.
And then as a teenager, I started taking dance lessons.
And then I realized I love, love, love dance and really wish I had started a lot earlier.
I think I started at 14 or 15.
And then as time went on -- and I've always loved to sing.
And as time went on, and you know, being in more shows, right, with small parts and whatnot, I also began to realize that I also have a powerful voice, a powerful singing voice.
I didn't know that until I was 25.
>> Hmm.
>> That was late in the game.
>> I know.
And again, I wish I'd -- just some things you didn't have a lot of opportunity to explore here.
However, it's okay.
I'm making up for lost time.
[Laughs]
>> "Evita."
>> Oh, my gosh.
Yeah.
>> Just -- just, oh.
I might -- I'm sorry.
My palms are, like, getting a little -- yeah.
[Laughs]
I'm perspiring a little, just out of excitement.
>> Yeah, yeah.
>> I can't tell you how, just what an experience that was.
The amount of research that I did for that show.
I learned everything I could about Eva Perón.
Studied her, even documentaries that were in Spanish that I don't funny understand.
It's okay, whatever.
>> Sure, sure.
>> So, and if you don't mind, I

wanted to share a technique that I use for every show that I'm in, and that is when I'm getting ready at home the day of a show. If I decide to do my makeup at home, you know, I relax, and then I play this CD of the show, and I'm getting ready listening to the music, starting to get in character.

I get to the theater probably 30 minutes before the rest of the cast does.

I go.

I walk onto the stage.

I actually thank the space.

I have a conversation with the space.

I've never told everybody this, and now I'm telling everyone.

>> Sure.

>> But I go, and this is what I do.

And I -- and I ask the space to take care of me.

I also pray.

I am a believer in God, and I ask God to give me what I need to deliver an amazing performance.

And then I'm ready.

And with "Evita," I added an extra step where there's this documentary.

And there was this scene, just a montage of scenes from her funeral.

I have goosebumps right now.

The music playing was "Don't Cry For me, Argentina," in Spanish.

And I would just get myself really, really sad to prepare for that moment so that when it came time to start to -- for the downfall, ohh.

My tears were real.

>> Wow.

>> Yeah.

>> Wow.

>> That was my secret for that show.

>> Wow.

>> Yeah.

I take it -- it's community theater.

I don't get paid, and it's my passion.

>> Right.

>> And I take it so seriously.

I love it.

>> I can feel it, yeah, absolutely.

Absolutely.

>> My process is not, like,
nearly as cool.
[Laughter]
I definitely believe in staging
the house and staging the stage.
I don't know if we do that at
CCT, but I've done that in other
theaters.
Just because it's nice to make
sure, like, okay.
This is a clean area, and we're
good to go.
Before every show, I have a
little St. Genesius charm, which
is the patron saint of theater
and comedy, I think.
>> The happy face and the
frowning face?
Is that what that is?
>> No, that's something else.
>> Okay.
>> St. Genesius was a Catholic
saint.
>> Okay.
>> And I just -- I rub it and
say, "St. Genesius, pray for
us."
And then the show begins.
That's my process.
I think everybody has a lot of
that.
I know actors who will spend all
day in one character.
>> Right.
>> And it gets a bit annoying
sometimes because one of my best
friends does that.
[Laughs]
I'm, like, "Hey, what do you
want to eat for lunch?"
And she's, like, "Hmm, well, you
know, I don't, umm, hmm.
I'm not really sure.
I would really, really like --"
I'm, like, "No, I mean for
real."
[Laughs]
>> What do you want for lunch?
>> And she's telling me what her
character wants.
And I'm, like, "You're allergic
to that."
What are you --
>> What are you talking about?
Oh, gosh.
That's wonderful.
[Laughter]
>> It's gorgeous.
It's wonderful.
>> I'm hoping that, at some
point, we'd like to hear how
"Guys and Dolls" does and what
you have planned in the future.

1.25.19 Calico Cat Theatre.txt

This has been a very, very
informative show, and I'd really
like to thank both of you for
this.

You know, there are times
sometimes you wonder, "Gee,
what's my next question?"

This was so easy and so
spontaneous and really
delightful.

>> Thanks for having us.

>> wish you much success.

>> Yes.

Thank you so much.

>> Thank you so much.

This has been Ability Radio, and
have a good day.

Thank you.