

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

TO THE SENATE

BY

**SENATOR THE HON. OWEN K. DARRELL JP
MINISTER OF YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT**

“GOMBEEY FESTIVAL 2023”

4 OCTOBER 2023

Madam President, every October the Department of Culture shines a spotlight on Bermuda’s most iconic cultural art form at the Gombey Festival Showcase. This festival, one of the Department of Culture’s signature events, provides an opportunity to enjoy the what we all love best about the Gombeys: the impressive footwork, the staccato of the snare, the steady pulse of the bass drum, the flashing colours of the intricately designed costumes. If you’re a Bermudian hearing and seeing this spectacular performance, you know that it’s practically impossible to just sit quietly in your seat and observe.

Madam President, Gombey's are rhythm personified; and these Gombey troupes embody our connections with our African past, as well as our linkages with the future through the young boys who are apprenticed into this tradition. Each of Bermuda's Gombey troupes is deeply embedded in our community, and perform an essential function relating to the other Department in my portfolio, the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation – namely, providing a haven for our youth to participate in healthy activities that help them to feel included in, rather than disconnected from, their social environment.

Madam President, for this reason, the Government of Bermuda recognizes the Gombey troupes for their essential role in preserving our cultural heritage and has awarded each of the troupes a \$5,000 Department of Culture 2023 Heritage Grant. These grants are a confirmation of our commitment to supporting this tradition and of our appreciation for the important role that the troupes play in our society.

Madam President, this year's festival features Gombey Evolution, Gombey Warriors, HnH Gombey's, Place's

Gombeys, Warwick Gombey Troupe, and for the first time at our annual festival, SMS Village Gombeys.

In addition to the electric performances that we will see from these six gombey troupes **Madam President**, we will also have the opportunity to enjoy entertainment by the Fire Wayne, the PHC Majorettes, and United Dance Productions. This festival is a terrific family event, and in addition to food vendors such as J&B's Wood Fired Pizza, Duch Pops Bermuda and Alkaline Triangle, there will also be airbrush tattoos featuring the names of various Gombey troupes and a free fun castle for the children.

Madam President, each year the Department of Culture also takes the opportunity at the festival to highlight a special honoree who has – through dedication, talent, and leadership – helped to inspire the Gombey community. I am pleased to announce that this year's honouree is Mr. Robert Wilson of the Gombey Evolution Troupe. We will be providing more information in the upcoming days about Mr. Wilson's many contributions, but for now I would like to congratulate him and thank him for his service to our community.

Madam President, I would like to thank the hardworking team at the Department of Culture led by the director, Dr. Kim Dismont Robinson, for organising the Gombey Festival Showcase; particularly project lead Ms. Carlita Lodge, assisted by Mr. Jonari Smith.

Madam President, I would like to encourage everyone to bring their families to the Botanical Gardens on Saturday October 21st to enjoy this amazing festival, free to the public. It's a time to dance, celebrate, and cheer your favourite troupes with a response to the call of "Ayo!" but it's also a time to learn more and appreciate the hard work and deep cultural ties that make our Bermuda gombeys a collective national treasure.

Thank you, **Madam President.**

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