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WESPE POU AYITI PROJECT

ADVANCING THE HAITI AGENDA FROM THE JAZZ MAINSTAGE

Castries, March 08, 2012; For the average person, the name Haiti conjures scenes of poverty, civil unrest, voodoo and in more recent times, devastation caused by the catastrophic earthquake of January 12, 2010. But the followers of history recognise and appreciate Haiti as the Caribbean's earliest Mecca of Art in all its diverse forms of expression. From applied arts to performance, from the literary arts to the visual, from decorative to applied arts, Haiti's inimical brand has been wrought in a crucible of resistance, by a people fierce in their defence of their freedom from political exploitation and economic domination. Thus, where the Haitian landscape may show up the fault lines of its economic and environmental vulnerability, its creative environment pulsates with artistic expression as its lifeblood, brilliantly defiant against the militating forces that have conspired against its sustained ascendance to the glory it deserves.

Enter the **WESPE POU AYITI PROJECT**, underpinned by an appreciation of the contribution of Haiti to Caribbean Art, and by the firm belief that music is a more powerful and unifying force than any politically derived effort. Performing mainstage on **Sunday May 13th**, WESPE POU AYITI will be a compelling reminder to the visiting world, that through tangible forms of solidarity, the first black independent republic of the new world can steadily regain its footing and rise to its former glory.

WESPE POU AYITI PROJECT has its origins in a **Bluemango and Labowi Promotions** Haiti Solidarity Forum held in May 2010, five months after the earth opened in and around Port Au Prince, swallowing the life and the livelihoods of the hundreds of thousands living and working there. Scheduled within the Jazz week, the forum targeted resident and visiting artists and international press, to maintain focus on the continuing plight of their Haitian counterparts following the cataclysmic impact of what most Haitians today simply refer to as L'événement" or "the event". With the support of agencies like Alliance Francaise, St. Lucia School of Music, Cultural Development Foundation (CDF), Saint Lucia Folk Research Centre and ScotiaBank, the forum met its objective which was to situate the Haitian crisis at the forefront of the continuing narrative of Saint Lucia Jazz.

Emanating from the Haiti Solidarity Forum was the establishment of the Haitian Solidarity Collective which issued sustained appeals to international festivals to include at least one Haitian artiste/group at every major festival as an expression of solidarity with Haiti, and to create economic opportunities for Haitian artistes who badly need it. At least eleven festivals in the region heeded this call and, like Saint Lucia have consistently featured Haitian performers in their festival line-up.

That same spirit would inspire **Bluemango's** pianist Richard Payne to pursue an association with Haitian/American Trumpeter Jean Caze whose outstanding performance at Jazz in the South event 2010 had moved Payne. Through the **Labowi Promotions** international network, introductions were facilitated between the two artistes, and later on with the highly sought after Guadeloupian drummer/composer Sonny Troupe. The three set about exploring the opportunity to work together and the Wespe Pou Ayiti Project was born. The result has been an explorative endeavour which has since been invited to grace festival stages in Guadeloupe, Haiti and Martinique and will give proof of its brilliance to Saint Lucia Jazz patrons at Sunday's mainstage. The set will be heavily spiced with Zouk, Haitian Compas and Ra Ra, Soca, Latin Jazz and Gwo Ka that have been seamlessly interwoven with Jazz and other influences. Richly inflected with the popular danceable rhythms of Caribbean music, the **WESPE POU AYITI PROJECT** set will introduce the legendary eclectic Jazz in the South aesthetic to the Pigeon Island.

Saint Lucia Tourist Board welcomes the opportunity to give a platform to the Haiti agenda, moreso for the significance it adds to the attainment of the Festival's 21 year milestone.

Tourism Director Louis Lewis describes this as characterising the less obvious but poignantly significant returns of Saint Lucia Jazz.

"When it's all said and done, the relevance of the Festival needs to be assessed not only in numbers and revenues but against how it continues to support the aims, aspirations and concerns of our people," he said.

The director gave high praise to Labowi Promotions and Bluemango as committed, pioneering Festival partners, who contribute extensively to the Saint Lucia Jazz experience and to its differentiated brand.

"In these two entities you have people with long range vision - for their community and their fraternity; whose sense of identity is fierce and who are knowledgeable about music, about the commonalities we share as a Caribbean, the inherent promise this carries and the value of collaboration," Mr. Lewis said, citing these characteristics as value-added to the Jazz product, and how it will continue to refine and differentiate itself.

For more information on the full line-up for Saint Lucia Jazz 2012 along with show dates, venues and ticket sales, log onto www.stlucijazz.org.

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