

Canadian Caribbean Arts Network (C-CAN)

C-CAN was founded by Rhoma Spencer on April 15 2017, when a chosen group of arts practitioners and professionals began to plan and manage the Canada-Caribbean contingent for CARIFESTA XIII in Barbados. After its successful representation in Barbados, C-CAN returned to the 2019 CARIFESTA XIV in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our current focus then in CARIFESTA was aimed at opening up regional, national and international opportunities to present, promote and effectively market the artistic works of Ontario's artists and artistic organizations of Caribbean heritage with potential Canada-wide impact.

MISSION

To instill and explore our cultural capacity through awareness of our creative 'Caribbeing' while remaining anchored to our Canadian reality.

MANDATE

To present and promote the Artistic products of our arts and creative practitioners of Caribbean heritage, whose works are inspired by the art and culture of the Caribbean. From the performing arts and film to multimedia and the culinary arts.

The COVID pandemic of 2020 saw the cancellation of CARIFESTA XV in Antigua and in an effort to keep the Collective active, we pivoted to presenting the works of our lead Collective member, Rhoma Spencer. In this regard we have presented the following activities: Queerantime, a Site Specific Physical Theatre Presentation as part of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre Pride in Place festival in 2020.

Login Logout, a Digital Monodrama as part of the Aluna Theatre Company Caminos festival 2021 Danse Macabre- A Play Development Workshop at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre 2022 Queen of the Road- The Calypso Rose Musical Workshop production in Collaboration with U of T's Queer and Trans Research Lab at Hart House Theatre.

Our Collective consists of an eclectic mix of Creative Artists and Arts Administrators with some having over 50 years of practice in their respective industry. From Theatre, Dance, Music, Carnival Arts to Administration and Diplomacy.

Sashoya Simpson - Producer

Sashoya Simpson is an Afro-Jamaican multidisciplinary creative spanning producing, creative writing, and oral storytelling, alongside being a cultural leader and theatre interventionist whose work reimagines Caribbean ancestral narratives within a contemporary framework. She's the award recipient of the ArtReach Pitch Contest (2016), an Emerging Arts Finalist for the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts (2017), a Siminovitch Playwright Protégé Finalist (2023), and her work has been shortlisted in the CANSCAIP Writing for Children Competition (2023). She's the founder of The Walking Griot collective, a space designed specifically for young Black audiences where they engage with stories

rooted in their cultural mythology, Caribbean knowledge systems, and embodied experiences. Her stage play, *LULU*, recently won the Patron's Pick Award at the Toronto Fringe Festival (2025), and her debut children's picture book, *The Instrument Maker*, is forthcoming in 2027 (Annick Press). In addition, her screenwriting debut short film, *A Quiet Morning*, was recently released (OYA Black Arts, 2026). She's currently the Associate Artistic Director of the Watah Theatre and Black Theatre School. She is also the recipient of the Toronto Arts Foundation Che Kothari Artist and Instigator Award (2025) as well as a Johanna Metcalf Performing Arts Prizes Protégé (2025).

Rhoma Spencer - Playwright/Director

Rhoma Spencer – A multi-hyphenated arts practitioner practicing in Toronto since 2001. A graduate of York University with an MFA in Directing, she formed Theatre Archipelago(TA) in 2005 and under her Artistic Direction the company produced *Mad Miss /Just Jazz* in 2005, *Fallen Angel and the Devil Concubine* (2006), *Twilight Café* (2007), *I Marcus Garvey* (2009) *Obeah Opera* (2012).

Acting credits include: *House of Bernarda Alba* (ModernTimes/Aluna), *Solitudes* (Aluna Theatre), *Jean and Dinah* (Lordstreet Theatre) *Mad Miss, Fallen Angel and the Devil Concubine* (TA/bcurrent), *Stori Ya* (bcurrent) and two seasons of the groundbreaking Afri-Canadian sitcom, *Da Kink in my Hair* for Global TV. Film: *Sound of Tears* (Short) which received an African Academy Award for Best Narrative Short (Diaspora). *The Apartment* (TV series Pilot for CCN TV6, Trinidad). The award-winning film, *Scarborough* (Comfy Films), *Deep Blue* (HaMa Films). Dora nominee in 2023 and winner in 2005.

Directing credits include: *Queen of the Road- The Calypso Rose Musical*, *Login Logout Password*, *Queerantime* (C-CAN). *Just Jazz*, *I Marcus Garvey*, *Our Lady of Spills*, *Twilight Cafe* (Theatre Archipelago) *Carnival Medea- Trinidad*, *For Colored Girls- USA* and many more. In addition to stage, she has been the Artistic Director of *Pan Alive*, the *Steelband Music Festival* during *Toronto Carnival* . **Follow her on Instagram: Rhoma Spencer, Facebook: Rhoma Spencer Entertainment**

Stephen D Hankey - Movement Director

A native of Trinidad and Tobago, Stephen Hankey is a dancer, master teacher in traditional Caribbean folk forms, Artistic Director, and Choreographer. Mr. Hankey teaches at the Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School (full-time) and is an Adjunct Professor at Central Connecticut State University. Stephen is the President and Artistic Director of the Island Reflections Dance Theatre, Inc., in Hartford, CT. He was a founding member, choreographer, and performer with The National Dance Theatre Company of Trinidad and Tobago. He holds a B.F.A. from the Hartt School, University of Hartford (Honors).

Derek Thorne - Music and Sound Composer

Since the 2000s, Derek has become a staple percussionist in Toronto's music scene while touring throughout Canada, the USA, and Europe, and further afield to west Africa and Malaysia. His versatility and hungry ear have fitted him in with a similarly wide range of music traditions and genres, co-creating and performing award-winning school presentations with arts-in-education company Hoza!; working as in-house talent at event companies Bongo and B Entertainment, ONQ Live, and Main Event Music; in dance theatre with Ballet Creole,

Ronald Taylor Dance, Lua Shayenne Dance Co., and KasheDance; with funksters The Soul Motivators, calypso legends David Rudder and Calypso Rose, and JUNO winners Kobo Town.

Locally he can often be found adding his unique touch to blues with Sugar Brown, rock with Nichol Y Los Falsos, and African pop with Njacko Backo and Kalimbas at Work. His classical music collaborators include the Bach Children's Chorus, the St. Michael's Cathedral Boys Choir, and the Canadian Children's Opera Company.

Trevor Schwellnus - Set, Lighting and Projection Design

Trevor is a Toronto-based Scenographer – designing sets, lighting, and video for performance with independent artists. He has developed his approach to direction and dramaturgy through Collaborative creation in a designed environment at Aluna, leading the creation of Nohayquiensepa (Nooneknows) and What I learned from a decade of fear. His design works for Aluna's La Comunion, Madre, and For Sale launched him on his artistic path. One of his chief obsessions is the intersection of design, dramaturgy, and cross-cultural art-making.

Trevor has collaborated in theatre and dance with Modern Times, Jumblies, Fixtpoint, Cahoots, The Theatre Centre, Buddies in Bad Times, Independent Aunties, Obsidian, Tarragon, Small Wooden Shoe, One Reed, Marie-Josée Chartier, Ame Henderson / Public Recordings, Selfconscious Theatre, Dancemakers, Theatre Passe Muraille, and others. He has 6 Doras (of 17 career nominations), a Harold, and a Children's Choice Award. In 2015 he was shortlisted for Canada's Siminovich Award.

Candice Dixon - Costume Design

Candice is a Toronto-based costume designer and cultural practitioner specializing in Caribbean Carnival Arts. She is the Co-Founder and Creative Director of SugaCayne, a Caribbean carnival arts and production collective that brings a distinctive carnival design aesthetic and immersive "mas-building" experience to local and international carnivals. Since 2010, SugaCayne has created intricately designed costumes presented in Toronto, the Cayman Islands, Miami, Chicago, and Trinidad.

As Creative Director, Candice has led SugaCayne's "Innovation in Mas" initiatives in collaboration with the Design Fabrication Zone at Toronto Metropolitan University, pioneering the first Caribbean carnival costumes to incorporate 3D-printed and laser-cut elements. This groundbreaking work has been featured by CBC, CTV, Breakfast Television, NOW Magazine, and The Social, and exhibited at major institutions including the Royal Ontario Museum, the Design Exchange, Toronto City Hall, Yorkdale Shopping Centre, and the Ontario Science Centre.

Candice is also the creator and instructor of the first Carnival Arts course offered at an accredited Canadian university through Toronto Metropolitan University (Fashion at The Creative School). Her recent work has expanded into theatrical costume design through

collaborations with Black Theatre School, further exploring the intersections of performance, storytelling, and Caribbean cultural expression.

Laura Baxter - Stage Manager

Laura Baxter has had the pleasure of stage managing for theatres across the country and around Toronto, including Buddies in Bad Times, Soulpepper Theatre, Obsidian Theatre, Nightwood, YPT, Factory Theatre, Canadian Stage, Studio 180, Dance Immersion, Tarragon Theatre, Cahoots, Theatre Passe Muraille, Blyth Festival, Caravan Farm Theatre, and others. Laura is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, 2005, and a member of CAEA since 2009. I would not be able to make art without the support of my wife and daughter.

King Cosmos (Henry Gomez) - Cast Member - Role: Magic

Henry Gomez aka King Cosmos is a multi-media, multidisciplinary actor and card-carrying member of ACTRA and Actors Equity. He is a veteran stage, TV and film actor. After originating the role of Spike in Rhoma Spencer's Queen of The Road-The Calypso Rose Musical, he is happy to be back with C-CAN in the role of Magic. He is twice Canada's Calypso Monarch, an award-winning (Canadian Reggae Music and Canadian Urban Music) composer and recording artiste, an academic and educator. He has worked with the Toronto District School Board.

King Cosmos performs regularly at festivals in the GTA and other parts of Canada. Highlights include performances with Toronto Symphony and National Arts Centre Orchestras. He holds an MA and MFA from York University, and a B Ed from the University of Toronto. His 2024 audio/video opuses are available on Tube, Spotify and other streaming platforms. In addition to performing his original compositions, King Cosmos enjoys performing other genres of music. He also sings in Spanish and has delivered academic papers on calypso music at conferences in Toronto, Senegal and Ghana. Ongoing projects include research and specialization in the life and works of Harry Belafonte.

Instagram: cosmos.king

X: @realkingcosmos

Uche Ama - Cast Member - Role: Cisco

Uche Ama is a Black Queer theatre arts and vocal performer born on the stolen Indigenous land Tkaronto. Deeply passionate about cathartic art that intrigues, creates discomfort and makes you ask questions, they are an anti-oppression facilitator, writer, director, 3 time Dora nominated performer and an alumni of the prestigious 'Broadway Theatre Project'.

You may have seen their work in 3 Fingers Back (LemonTree Creations), Sweeter (Cahoots Theatre), 21 Black Futures (Obsidian Theatre with 'CBC Gem), The Negroes Are Congregating (Piece Of Mine Arts) & Obeah Opera (Asah Productions) Alongside direction credits for Apology, My By Kieth Barker (New Harlem Productions, & VUKA 24/25(Theatre Passe Muraille) , They also have an assistant director credit of Women Of The Fur Trade @ The Globe Theatre.

Uche is a performing arts educator and a creator who is always looking to inspire brave spaces of exploration while hungrily exploring the many pathways that are available in their artistic practices.

shelby mwambu - Cast Member - Role: Tantrum

shelby mwambu is a Ugandan Canadian emerging artist based in Toronto. They are very grateful for the opportunity to work with such talented black artists. They hope to entertain and inspire through their love of storytelling. Shelby aims to continue to tell stories embracing their gender identity, ethnicity and queerness.

Thomas Fournier - Cast Member - Role: Marc

Originally from Kelowna, BC, Thomas is a Toronto based actor and a graduate of the TMU's BFA Acting program. Credits include: Sweeney Todd (Horrorshow Productions); The Bridges of Madison County (Bowtie Productions); Jim Watts: Girl Reporter (4th Line Theatre). Thank you to his friends and family for their endless support.

Keira Marie Forde - Cast Member - Role: Frame

Keira Marie Forde (She/They) is a multidisciplinary artist and the Artistic Producer of Community Engagement at Toes For Dance. Keira's recent performance credits include their solo show No More News for Nancy with Rendezvous With Madness Festival; The Sonkofa Trilogy with The Watah Theatre and the Theatre Centre. Keira Marie is presently the Producer of Paprika Festival.

Theresa Gomes - Cast Member - Role: Tantie

Born in Trinidad, Theresa Gomes knew she had the acting bug since she was 12 years old when she acted in comedy skits at her school that even had the principal nun in stitches. In Toronto, she has been a member of La Petite Musicale of Toronto, a Caribbean folk choir since 1982. Performing both as a singer and an actor. She has been a finalist in the Organization of Calypso Performing Artistes annual Calypso Monarch competition under the sobriquet as CuppaTee. Acting credits include: Master of Carnival (Ronald Amoroso) Dry Season (Ronald Amoroso), Soul Brother Job (Lennox Farrell) The Crucible (Arthur Miller), Parade (Alfred Uhry and Jason Robert Brown), Natrinity (Rhoma Spencer), Simi Dimi (Rhoma Spencer and June Straker) Theresa is currently a member of Toronto Choral Society and is happy to be back on stage playing "Tantie" in Danse Macabre.