

NINA MOINI: Caribbean music, food, and culture will take over part of the Mississippi Riverfront on Saturday as Carifest returns to Minneapolis. This year, the annual festival also includes a special screening of a documentary exploring the meaning of the traditional celebration known as Carnival. James Byron, an organizer of the Twin Cities annual Carifest, is on the line to share more about the festivities. Thanks so much for being with us, James.

JAMES BYRON: Thank you. Good morning and afternoon, I should say. Thank you for having me.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, we're right on the noon there, where we turn to afternoon. James, for folks who may be unfamiliar still, just about the beautiful tradition of Carnival and of Carifest every year, would you tell us a little bit about what the celebration is all about?

JAMES BYRON: I would love to share. We [MUFFLED] host this annual Caribbean-type celebration that showcases our food, our culture, with the people of Minnesota. We have a Caribbean-type parade with Carnival costumes and stuff like that. And we bring artists that represents the Caribbean in music to the Twin Cities so that the Twin Cities population could hear and enjoy the music. And we encourage them to come out. One of the things that I say to people is that you could travel the Caribbean without purchasing a ticket when you come to Twin Cities Carifest.

NINA MOINI: That's a good way to sum it up. Yeah. So this year, and I understand this has been going on for decades here, the celebration just here in Minneapolis and in Minnesota. But there is a special screening of this documentary called *Carnival-- They Can't Steal Our Joy*. It's going to be at the Main Cinema in Minneapolis on Thursday, as I understand.

And for people who haven't experience this big street celebration, this documentary, I understand, shows that it's more than just a big party. It's more than a spectacle. Could you describe what Carnival is, and what you hope audiences understand after watching the documentary about it?

JAMES BYRON: When people watch the documentary, I hope they take away from the documentary, the effort that goes into making this celebration, because it's years-long effort to put into it. The time, the artistry, the commitment of the people and what they portray to the world, the joy, and enthusiasm of the festival. There is no other festival like that in the world that encompasses every culture together. Carnival does that.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. The title of the film stuck out to me, as well. *They Can't Steal Our Joy*. Why is that idea so important to you in this moment?

JAMES BYRON: We need joy. It's plain and simple. And we are a community that rises from the ashes and stay risen. Our joy is a deeper thing. You cannot steal that. It's ours.

NINA MOINI: Tell me about some of the other sights and sounds and foods that folks can look forward to at Carifest this weekend.

JAMES BYRON: We have a wide array of vendors, from East Indian, Latin American, African, Caribbean vendors that would be at the festival. You could travel from Mexico, to Cuba, to Minneapolis, to Jamaica, to Trinidad, right there tasting the food. I don't think anywhere has that type of body of food vendors anywhere else, as we would have at the festival. It's the one place you would find vendors that doesn't have stores or carts. People that just do catering for individuals. Some of the things that you would taste there, you can't buy it anywhere else.

NINA MOINI: What do you think people would be surprised to know or what do you wish people knew about just the Caribbean influence here in the state of Minnesota?

JAMES BYRON: We always pride ourselves on sharing our culture with our newfound neighbors. We show the people how we live as a community. The Caribbean is made up of 40 different islands, and everybody lends something to that Caribbean culture. We are sharing that with our new neighbors in the [? upper ?] [? wilderness. ?] Come out, live within us for a couple of hours, and see how we go about, how we speak to one another, how we treat each other, how we accept everyone in our midst.

NINA MOINI: What about youngsters, maybe youngsters who grew up here in Minnesota? They don't get to visit the islands as much. What are you hoping for them?

JAMES BYRON: Come and see where your parents or foreparents came from and learn a little bit. We encourage, we encourage the young people to come out. We have a little place we call the Caribbean American Cultural Center right now on West River Road, close to the location. We are fortunate enough to have something of the Caribbean there that the young people could come and take part of.

There is a steel pan that rehearses there at the center. The young people are encouraged. Come out, pick up two sticks, learn to hit a note or two. You'll be surprised of the exhilaration you will get when you hit those two notes together.

NINA MOINI: And it's not just for people who are really familiar with the culture. You were talking about people sharing amongst cultures. But also for just Minnesotans, or folks who have not been out yet, or are just hearing about this, maybe they've lived here their whole lives, and they didn't this was going on, what would you say to encourage them to come out?

JAMES BYRON: If you like to travel and you like to participate in foreign dishes, if you want to see a people that laughs and talk and enjoy each other, and you want to share in that, come to the festival. Carifest, it's like a melting pot here right now in the Twin Cities. We welcome everybody to come in. You have questions. We have answers.

NINA MOINI: Absolutely. Thank you very much, James, for joining the program. Have a great time this weekend.

JAMES BYRON: And come out to the festival.

NINA MOINI: Thanks so much. That was Carifest organizer James Byron. Carifest, again, will take place on Saturday, along the Mississippi Riverfront in north Minneapolis. Before that, you can catch the documentary called *Carnival-- They Can't Steal Our Joy*. That's Thursday evening, tomorrow, at the Main Cinema in Minneapolis. We'll have more information linked with this interview at mprnews.org.

Thanks so much for joining us. Again, stay tuned. Right after this program, officials are providing another update on the wildfires in northeastern Minnesota. Emily Reese will bring you that news conference when it begins. Stay with us.

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