

PRESS RELEASE
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March is for the Arts
CAYFEST 2026 kicks off in style - and the best is still to come

If you felt a little extra electricity in the air last weekend, you weren't imagining it. CAYFEST 2026 has officially opened, and under the theme Global Threads, the festival's first moments delivered exactly what the name promises: connection - across islands, disciplines, and generations.

Presented by the Cayman National Cultural Foundation (CNCF), this year's festival is designed as more than a calendar of events. It is a living conversation with the wider world - expressed through dance, film, theatre, music, visual art, literature, and food - each moment linking Cayman's creative community with artists and audiences across the region and beyond.

Opening weekend energy: a grand welcome, a regional moment

CAYFEST opened with a true headline: RISE by the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica (NDTC) - one of the Caribbean's most celebrated dance institutions - taking the stage at the Harquail Theatre for CAYFEST's fundraising opening night experience.

The company's visit extended beyond the performance itself. Leading up to opening weekend, NDTC dancers hosted an Intermediate Dance Workshop, sharing their craft with Cayman's own dance community. On Friday morning, before the official opening event, the company also presented a special one-hour performance for schools, welcoming young audiences from across the islands into the Harquail Theatre.

The weekend became more than a performance; it was an exchange of ideas and artistry - a living example of what Global Threads looks like in motion. NDTC Artistic Director Marlon Simms captured it beautifully:

"To be part of CAYFEST is to be in dialogue with the spirit of the Caribbean — its people, its stories, and its enduring creativity."

That spirit carried straight through the weekend with CAYFEST on Film — Cayman Brac, transforming cinema into a shared community experience and setting the tone for a festival that values participation as much as applause.

In her festival message, CNCF Managing Director Rosalie Twohey describes CAYFEST 2026 as "*a once-in-a-decade moment for the arts*," positioning CNCF's work as something larger than production alone. The

foundation's vision expands into a national arts council approach - one that prioritizes capacity building, collaboration, education, grants, and long-term growth for the creative sector.

The goal is clear: to keep Cayman's stories preserved and moving forward - creating opportunities for artists, welcoming entry points for audiences, and building experiences that make people proud to say: this is ours.

What to see next: your CAYFEST week-by-week guide

This week: art after hours + a major concert

Thu, 12 March - NCFA Late Night Exhibition at Mind's Eye (6–8 PM)

Wine, cheese, atmosphere - and powerful youth artwork from the National Children's Festival of the Arts. Come for the vibes, leave inspired.

Fri, 13 March – Resident Company of the F J Harquail Centre, the Cayman National Choir & Orchestra: *Dawn & Awakening* (7 PM, Harquail Theatre)

A big, uplifting concert built around renewal, hope, and the transformative power of music. (Tickets: eventpro.ky)

Weekend plans: family stories + film lovers' paradise

Sat, 14 March - Children's Book Author Collective (10 AM–12 PM, Harquail Centre)

Live readings, interactive storytelling, and book signings with Caymanian children's authors. Kids welcome. Grandparents encouraged.

Sat 14 – Sun 15 March - CAYFEST on Film (1–9 PM, Camana Bay Cinemas)

Shorts, music films, and features celebrating Caymanian & Caribbean storytelling. Expect identity, memory, belonging - and plenty to talk about after the credits. [Cayfestonfilm.ky](https://cayfestonfilm.ky)

As Dart's **Christy Whittaker** shared: **"We encourage the community to enjoy the events, support our amazing local talent and celebrate the best of Cayman's creative spirit."**

Words, laughter, and community stage magic

Wed, 18 March — Floetry by Hylton Grace (7 PM, National Gallery Lower Exhibition Hall)

A free, intimate night of poetry and spoken word with local and international voices.

Thu, 19 March — "Go BIG or Go Home" Adult Improv Workshop (6 PM, Studio Theatre)

Free, playful, and open to all experience levels (18+). A great "try something new" night. (Register: events@artscayman.org)

Grand finale: Red Sky at Night

Sat, 21 March — Red Sky at Night (4–11 PM, Harquail Grounds)

The beloved multidisciplinary arts fair returns as CAYFEST's finale: multiple stages, live music (yes, **Swanky Kitchen Band, Heat, Madame Niroso and Future Fobia**), dance showcases, spoken word, storytelling, over 100 vendors, and a Caymanian Village packed with heritage demonstrations and hands-on culture.

Special thanks go to the many sponsors and partners whose generosity and support help make CAYFEST an experience to remember.

The Cayman National Cultural Foundation is deeply grateful to the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage, Camana Bay, CIBC FirstCaribbean, A L Thompson, Entech, The Bould Foundation, The Foster Group, Royal Bank, Vanguard Risk Solutions, The Alexander Hotel, Collas Crill, Webster's Tours, Radio Cayman, Stingray Media, Compass Media, High Impact Media, Charmspresso, Mise en Place & Co, Atrium, The National Gallery of the Cayman Islands, Acorn Media, Kelly Holding Limited, and Coca-Cola, along with the many individual sponsors whose continued support makes it possible to bring artists, audiences, and creative experiences together throughout the festival.

Opening Night Photo Credit: Bethany Halford

Workshop Photo Credit: David Goddard

About CNCF

The Cayman National Cultural Foundation (CNCF) is a leading non-profit arts organisation in the Cayman Islands, working with artists and creative partners to present a dynamic annual cultural programme at the F.J. Harquail Cultural Centre, Mind's Eye Centre, and beyond. CNCF is dedicated to celebrating Caymanian heritage, fostering the creative arts, and cultivating a strong national identity.

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