

Photo Essay by Jackeline García Alvarado'27



Photo by Mafer Vacca'27

In Spring 2024, the Center for Caribbean Studies sponsored a residency featuring the Warwick Gombey Troupe from Bermuda and showcasing a tradition integral to Bermuda's Christmas festivities. The residency was facilitated by the Center's Visiting Scholar Dora Hast, an ethnomusicologist, who is co-authoring a book about the history of this troupe with Irwin Trott, the leader of the Warwick Gombey, and ethnomusicologist Stan Scott. This event offered a glimpse into the historical context and cultural practices of Gombey music and dance.

The residency encompassed a Trinity campus programming series that included participation in Professor Godfrey Simmons' Theater for Social Change course, Professor Melissa Craig's African Dance Class and a procession across campus to surprise the Dean of Faculty's Happy Hour celebration. Additionally, the residency also featured a collaborative workshop with Professor Eric Galm and the Trinity Samba Ensemble, where dance moves and musical rhythms were exchanged, blending traditions from Bermuda, Brazil, and Connecticut.



Photo by Paola Evangelista'26



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Students from the Samba Ensemble had the unique opportunity to learn from Irwin Trott, the Director and Lead Drummer of the Warwick Gombey, as he described his personal experiences of representing Bermuda's heritage through performance. His discussion provided an understanding of the historical and cultural significance of Gombey, shedding light on its evolution and impact on Bermudian society.



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The residency presented a dance performance by dancer Kahni Place, drummer Alan Looby, and drummer/dancer Omar Barnett. Kahni Place appeared in a costume adorned with feathers, bells, and bright fabrics. The performance showcased the movements and drumming that define the Gombey tradition.



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Historically, the Gombey tradition developed in colonial Bermuda over two centuries ago, bringing together enslaved people of West African, Caribbean, and indigenous heritage. Initially a festive celebration during the Christmas season, Gombey also served as a form of resistance. Through music and dance, Gombey performers asserted their cultural identity and resisted colonial oppression.



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Today's Gombey performances continue to represent highly symbolic art forms. The costumes and masks are rich with symbols representing historical events and cultural stories. Although Gombey performances were historically suppressed, contemporary Gombey performers are now celebrated by the Bermudian government as national emblems. Gombey troupes are often featured in national celebrations, and their performances have become a source of pride and cultural affirmation for the Bermudian people.

The residency concluded with a final workshop by the Trinity Samba Ensemble, where Professor Galm and his class performed music and dance from Brazil. The collaboration between the Warwick Gombey Troupe and the Trinity Samba Ensemble highlighted the universal language of music and dance, bridging cultures and creating a shared space of artistic expression.



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