

HIN - N.D. 7 - C
Dance Jamaica



Cultural Definition and
Artistic Discovery
The National Dance Theatre
Company of Jamaica
1962-1983

Rex Nettleford

One of the most innovative companies to have achieved world acclaim in the last half-century, the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica blends the lore, music, and dance traditions of Jamaica, Africa, and the American South with both modern and classical ballet forms. This richly illustrated history, written by artistic director Rex Nettleford, celebrates the Company's first twenty-one years.

Dance Jamaica tells the story of how a group of unpaid dancers, musicians, choreographers, designers, and technicians became one of the most influential cultural voices of the third world.

Mr. Nettleford describes the Company's continuing efforts to forge an organic vocabulary, technique, and style of Caribbean dance art against the background of the wider society's history of severance, suffering, and survival. He shows how the Company achieved its ambition to secure for the Jamaican people a way of articulating their identity and of building faith in a historical reality virtually denied by three centuries of colonial subjugation.

The tours of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica have taken them to all parts of the world, from London's Sadler's Wells, to the Theatre Royal in Sydney, to Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes, to the Palace of Culture in Kiev. In the United States they have performed at New York's City Center Theater and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, at the Dade County Auditorium in Miami, at the New Orleans Theater of Music and Performing Arts, as well as many colleges and universities, including Howard University, Atlanta University, Temple University, and Antioch College.

FROM THE FOREWORD

"[In 1962] there began on the other side of the Caribbean another responsible movement concernedprimordially with language — the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica which in its roots, structure and manifestations, now far exceeds (though that is not the word) anything that has so far been formally attempted in the Caribbean outside, that is, the marvellous achievements of revolutionary Cuba, and which complements the work/style enterprises of the Theatre Workshop in Trinidad — both, all three, refutations of the Naipaul 'nothing' ".

"..... if Rex Nettleford's account of the NDTC carries with it less of the sybilline elation and less of the subversive despair of [Derek] Walcott's 'Twilight' (for Nettleford it is a developing beginning not a culmination) that has something to do with the personalities of the twinned Artistic Directors and with the differences — arc of miles and subtle histories — between Trinidad and Jamaica: the one ... 'Byzantine', the other 'Babylonian'; one 'pleasure dome' and Carnival, the other (put simply) dread: Rasta and real estate".

"This Company was born as Jamaica was reborn and has lived the stark sonorous destruction and renewal of the dream that the Caribbean has been involved in since 1962, since 1865, since 1834, since 1492. As such it is the avatar and living monument to those countless voiceless millions dead who made their mark unmarked before this could be so."

Edward Kamau Brathwaite