



PROF. REX NETTLEFORD

Man of the Year and Gleaner Honour Award 2001 Recipient

AS WE honour Ralston Milton Nettleford, we honour the best of what we have been and the best that we hope to become.

We retrace the steps of every Jamaican who has dared to place his or her bare feet on the dusty tracks to self-actualisation and promptly shown the world a clean pair of heels.

We count the shattered links that once firmly fettered the minds and creative spirit of a people taught they had no identity outside the doors to the slave barracks and appreciate that not all freedom struggles are fought with muskets and swords.

We acknowledge that as a people we cannot liberate ourselves from mental slavery without leaders who have the capacity to grasp and apply knowledge at the very highest level, but the audacity to challenge prejudices once accepted as indisputable fact.

And we say Rex Nettleford is as graceful a guerrilla as ever glided across the cultural battlefield.

Professor Nettleford's fluid movements are as at home in the Vice Chancellor's offices of the University of the West Indies, Mona campus, as on the stage as co-founder and, four decades later, still artistic director of the National Dance Theatre Company and NDTC Singers.

It is not hard to speculate that some of those workdays, which begin at 6:00 a.m., are spent 'logging

on' to the latest and classic dance moves, the dancer becoming the administrator at the approach of an appointment.

But only Rex knows.

That he was rapporteur for the International Scientific Committee of UNESCO's Slave Route Project.

That he put his money where his mouth and heart is, arranging for the UWI to be the beneficiary of his \$1 million savings as he joined the Credit Union Golden Harvest Savings Plan.

Not surprising, then, that last year Rex Nettleford was appointed president of the Council of Voluntary Social Services and the University of Toronto joined 11 other universities in conferring honours upon him.

In addition to its Jamaican season, the NDTC toured the United Kingdom for the first time in 15 years in 2001, opening its seven-city schedule at the Elizabeth Hall on London's South Bank.

However, the company remained true to the vision of its artistic director, taking the show to Brazil as well.

It is almost redundant to say that Rex Nettleford is a scholar. As a pre-teen he won the only scholarship for St. James to Cornwall College; as a teenager he won a scholarship to the UWI and proceeded to take the Issa and Rhodes Scholarships, declining the former to take up studies at Oxford.

Somebody there must have appreciated his choice — three years ago

Rex Nettleford was made an honorary fellow of Oriel College, the highest honour Oxford can bestow on its graduates.

While he has informed us "that the Caribbean is a welcoming graveyard for imported creeds and rotund rhetoric", he has not simply spouted hot air.

He has formalised his formidable intellect in *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica, Roots and Rhythms, Dance Jamaica: Self-Definition and Artistic Discovery, Inward Stretch, Outward Reach: A Voice From the Caribbean* and several other publications.

And he has reminded us that 'a buttoo in a Benz is still a buttoo'.

We can only assume that that applies to SUVs, Rovers and Lexuses as well.

As it is written in the new introduction to 'Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica' in 1998, Rex Nettleford is determined that we recognise, as he has, that:

"Beyond being the hewers of wood and drawers of water, Jamaica's black majority, like all of their ilk in the Americas, also have minds. The author is still of the view that the universals we seek for the human condition can be best found through deep investigation into and rigorous analysis of one's own history and contemporary realities."

Thank you, Ralston Milton Nettleford, for taking us along for the ride.

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