

Rex Nettleford film takes shape

B/N Nettleford, Rex Balston

SOME SAY he was born a prince who was destined to become a king called Rex. This is the essence of the late Professor Rex Nettleford whose life is being celebrated in a documentary now in post-production.

The film is a commission by the Rex Nettleford Foundation and is being executed by Mediamix under the direction of Lennie Little-White.

The concept for the film was developed in 2006 by Little-White in collaboration with Professor Nettleford and Cheryl Ryman.

Despite many efforts to raise the funds for the production, private and state entities turned a blind eye. On his passing on February 1, 2010, it suddenly dawned on many that there was not one cohesive document that told the Nettleford story from 'poor boy' in Trelawny to his rise to the pinnacle of academia, as the first graduate to become Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies.

This Rhodes Scholar was able to skilfully straddle academia and the arts by his judicious time management that many still cannot comprehend or practise. His intellectual acumen saw him hustling from the lecture halls on campus to international arenas where his thoughts and ideas were always sought after.

Parallel to his intellectual pursuits was his role as the doyen



Rex Nettleford (left) and Yvonne DaCosta.

and artistic director of The National Dance Theatre Company (NDTC). There, he choreographed and mounted more than 70 different dances over a 48-year span. His vision and creative discipline helped to hone the skills of dancers whose terpsichorean efforts onstage have made the NDTC arguably the most versatile dance company in the Caribbean.

The dichotomy of the man poses the biggest challenge to Little-

and the Jamaica Information Service have opened their film vaults to assist Mediamix with showcasing the poetic language of the professor as he put his whole life in historical context and in his own words.

He was born in Jamaica, but he became the quintessential Caribbean renaissance man. Little-White has managed to get diverse points of view on camera with a broad Caribbean perspective.

These pan-Caribbean commentators include Derek Walcott, Sir Hilary Beckles, Mia Mottley, Dr Christian Campbell and Dr Hazel Simmonds-McDonald.

At home, luminaries like former prime ministers Percival James Patterson and Edward Seaga, Dr Edwin Jones and Jimmy Cliff are supported by long-time friends like Dr Lester Woolery and Sam Smith.

The thread that holds the Rex Nettleford story together is dance.

The broad canvas of his choreography for the NDTC paints vivid Caribbean images while principals like Marlon Simms, Kerry Henry, Barry Moncrieffe and Dr Monica Potts-Lawrence amplify the essence of his creativity with their analyses of his works.

One hour is all that the director has to work with. Despite this, Little-White promises to tell the amazing story of the little boy from Trelawny whose nationality became Caribbean to all – at home and in the diaspora.

The film is expected to be completed before the second anniversary of his passing.



LENNIE LITTLE-WHITE

White, who aims to fashion a work that will not only celebrate Professor Nettleford, but match his artistic brilliance.

Unfortunately, this must be done without the man himself, who made his transition almost two years ago.

Luckily, Mediamix has the largest current collection of Professor Nettleford's choreography – having filmed most of the annual NDTC stagings for the past two and a half decades.

The company also filmed him in several formal and informal settings.

If dance was one side of Professor Nettleford, his philosophical musings and unique verbal articulation were also trademarks of this Caribbean man.

Television Jamaica, Creative Production and Training Centre



File
Professor Rex Nettleford

The Gleaner, Wednesday, October 24, 2012.