

Charles Hyatt was a class act

JAMAICA is poorer for the passing yesterday of Mr Charles Hyatt in Florida. For apart from his sheer brilliance as an actor/comedian/broadcaster/writer, Mr Hyatt was, simply put, a decent human being.

Indeed, Mr Hyatt exemplified the kind of civility and integrity in his private and public lives that are characteristic of Jamaicans of his vintage, but which are sadly lacking in large quantities in younger people these days.

He was among that group of local artistes who, by dint of hard work and unwavering professionalism, earned the right to be called one of Jamaica's cultural greats. Mr Hyatt will most likely be remembered for his comedic skills, with which he entertained hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans — here and abroad — for well over 40 years.

From the time he started writing and voicing all the roles in *Here Comes Charlie*, a five-minute radio comedy sketch/variety show that aired on the then JBC Radio, Charles Hyatt signalled that his was no ordinary talent.

In fact, at the launch of his fourth recorded album, *The Perils of Charley*, in May 2003, Mr Hyatt was described by Mr Louis Marriott, himself a giant of the Jamaican theatre, as "the most talented and technically capable actor I've ever seen".

Indeed, Mr Hyatt's ability to transform a character from paper to reality landed him roles in memorable screen productions such as *A High Wind in Jamaica*, which starred Hollywood greats James Coburn and Anthony Quinn; *Club Paradise*, alongside Robin Williams and Peter O'Toole; *The Mighty Quinn*, with Denzel Washington; *Cool Runnings*; *The Bushbaby*; and *Milk and Honey*.

His stage and television records are just as impressive, with appearances on *Crown Court*; *Blood Knot*, described as a two-hander with South African playwright Athol Fugard; and *Six Bites of the Cherry* on British television; and Trevor Rhone's classic stage productions *Two Can Play* and *Old Storytime*, as well as Patrick Brown's *Dirty Diana*, Basil Dawkins' *Forbidden* and several national pantomimes.

We remember well his insightful series of columns in the Sunday Observer reflecting on the performing arts, particularly the theatre, and the passion which he displayed for perfection and for promoting Jamaica's cultural heritage worldwide.

In fact, it was very obvious that Mr Hyatt was focused on preserving our culture with the material he included on *The Perils of Charley*, albeit with more than a touch of humour. But it was humour delivered with taste and class, devoid of the crassness and desperate grasp for colloquial expressions that is so commonly utilised in the theatre these days to solicit laughter.

Indeed, at that May 2003 album launch, he gave a fine example of that wit when, in response to the many accolades bestowed on him by colleagues, he said: "My friends, to say thank you, just two words are not enough. But mi nuh know nuh more. All the words that I've used throughout my life most of the time are words that have been given to me by somebody. Tonight I have to rely on me and use one word, just one four-letter word — Love."

Mr Hyatt has indeed left Jamaica a lasting legacy that we should preserve for the benefit of future generations. It is the least we, as a country, can do to honour his memory.

We extend our condolences to his family and friends.

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