



Charles

Daily Observer Tue Jan 2, 2007 Page 1

Hyatt takes final bow

Revered actor dies in Florida

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OUTSTANDING Jamaican actor, comedian and broadcaster Charles Hyatt died yesterday in Florida, USA after suffering briefly from liver cancer. He was 75 years old.

But even as the nation mourned his passing, Hyatt's colleagues in the performing arts community praised his work on stage and film, his keen sense of professionalism and his humanity.

"Charles was for me the best acting talent I ever saw in Jamaica," said playwright Louis Marriott, while colleague actor and broadcaster Fae Ellington lauded Hyatt for having impeccable timing, a necessary skill for any comedian or actor.

"I celebrate his life, I celebrate his contribution," Ellington told the Observer.

She said that for 12 years she and Hyatt emceed the Reggae Soca Awards in Florida and her most outstanding memories of Hyatt surrounded their planning and co-ordinating of outfits

when the date of the show neared.

Ellington said, too, that Hyatt has made an invaluable contribution to local theatre and taught many young actors necessary skills. Hyatt's and his co-star Leonie Forbes' performance in Trevor Rhone's *Old Story Time*, Ellington said, were instructive.

"They demonstrated what carving out a character and going for detail was," she said.

Forbes, who said she first saw Hyatt perform when she was 19 years old, told the Observer that while she recognised his contribution and the possible void left by his death, she would simply miss her friend.

"He was my daughter's god father, he was my good, good, good friend. Right now, I can only register him as mi friend," she said.

She recalled that during *Old Story Time's* run, Hyatt, as a testament to his intense preparation, would arrive at the theatre before all the other actors and she, soon after him.

"And when other members of the cast came, they would greet Miss Aggy (Forbes' character) and Pa Ben (Hyatt's character), not Leonie and Charley," she said.

In a career that spanned close to half-a-

HYATT... described as a great actor

Colleagues want Hyatt to be remembered as a great actor

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century. Hyatt, who would have been 76 on February 14, performed in 17 national pantomimes, numerous films, stage productions and a series of radio dramas to become one of Jamaica's most revered actors.

He received the Silver Musgrave medal and the Order of Distinction for his contribution to theatre, as well as several Actor Boy awards for best actor. Hyatt also compiled stories of his boyhood in a book entitled *When me was a Boy* and released four recorded albums of his work, the last being *The Perils of Charley* in May 2003.

His film credits include *A High Wind in Jamaica*, in which he played alongside Hollywood greats James Coburn and Anthony Quinn; *Club Paradise*, with Robin Williams and Peter O'Toole; *The Mighty Quinn*, with Denzel Washington; *Cool Runnings*; *The Bushbaby*; and *Milk and Honey*.

Hyatt spent 14 years in England where he performed on stage and landed roles in *Crown Court*, *Blood Knot* and *Six Bites of the Cherry* on British television, before returning home in 1974.

Yesterday, Creative Production and Training Centre head, Dr Hopeton Dunn, said Hyatt's celebrity lay largely in the fact that he made a successful transition from stage to film, television and radio.

"Charles Hyatt was a natural humorist," said Dunn. "He evoked laughter and reflection in equal measure. Whether on stage, in print, on screen or on radio, Charlie provided a picture window into Jamaican life in the days that he himself described as 'When me was A Boy...'"

Among Hyatt's radio dramas was *Here Comes Charley*, a five-minute *Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation* serial in which Hyatt played all the roles, sometimes as many as seven.

Marriott remembered that he once did sound effects for *Here Comes Charley*. But when Hyatt would read the credits, everything was 'by Charles Hyatt', which had a nice ring, until he got to announcing sound effects.

"One day he said, 'You spoiling up mi ting man', and from then on sound effects were by Charles Hyatt," Marriott said.

Describing Hyatt as a tremendous and generous human being, Marriott said that when he first met Hyatt in the yard they both grew up in at Maxfield Avenue in Kingston, the actor was known as 'Bully' Hyatt.

Hyatt played the lead role in two stagings of Marriott's *Bedward* and played the lesser role of antagonist Sam Burke in the third staging. Marriott explained that during this third staging, he learnt that the real Sam Burke was Hyatt's grand uncle.

"Here he was, playing this role, which was anti-his grand uncle, and nobody knew. He was totally believable all the way," Marriott said.

Forbes, who remembered that she and Hyatt left Jamaica for England at the same time, said that the years they spent there held her most treasured memories of him. She was in a new country and pregnant, but Hyatt made it bearable for her. She reminisced how he would drive miles to get the Jamaican ice cream she liked, because "him neva want mi daughter mark fi ice cream" or how he would pick her up "when di tummy getting large and cumbersome".

"He was loads of fun," said Forbes. "We had wonderful times on stage, but nothing quite like the personal things."

Forbes said to the best of her knowledge, Hyatt's body would return to Jamaica for burial.

Forbes, Marriott and Ellington said they wanted Hyatt to be remembered not only as a comedian, but as a great actor.

Ellington had a parting word for Hyatt: "Charles, as usual, your timing is perfect — what better time to go than New Year's Day. Walk good, Charley."

Hyatt is survived by his widow, Marjorie Hyatt, and five children.

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B/N - Hyatt, Charles