

Laugh with Oliver Samuels

HIS facial expressions cause shrieks of laughter. His witty and humorous comments put audiences in an uproar. Adults flock to watch him, children find him fascinating. Yes, Oliver Samuels is certainly one of the best local actors and comic that Jamaica has ever seen.

Oliver's involvement in drama began in his childhood days, performing in the "back yard theatre" of his birthplace, Harmony Hall, in St. Mary. He knew he possessed a creative side and by indulging in these little skits, Oliver developed his talent. Of course, no one in the community, whether family or friend could have seen any significance or importance in 'another little country boy's antics,' but little did they know the roads that would open and the big name that this child would one day become in the Jamaican theatre.

His high school career at Dint Hill offered no scope for the development of his innate dramatic creativity. An attempt made by one of the teachers in 1964 to start a drama club failed. Of course, Oliver was the only student interested.

Failure
With a burning desire to become an actor, he travelled to Kingston seeking to have his talent recognized. His efforts to contact well-known theatre personalities ended in failure and the only alternative was to enroll in the then Jamaica Theatre School.

Having had no proper experience and formal training in the field of drama, Oliver upon viewing his other competitors, half-heartedly did an entrance audition. His pessimism was quickly transformed into hope when he was accepted by the school.

During his four years at the institution Oliver participated in various productions. His first play was "A Raisin In The Sun" in which he was a voice off stage. His role as 'the coolie' in the play "Servant of Two Masters" had one critic commenting that he was "labouring under a misconception." This statement made Oliver determined to prove the critic wrong and it also formed the basis of his inspiration to strive for perfection.

Pantomime
His popularity increased overnight when he appeared in his first pantomime "Music Boy". The reviews on the character he played, "Moon

Drop", were very favourable and even the critic who had made an unflattering remark had to take back his words.

The pantomime experience was a real testing and launching ground for the budding actor, who since then has acted in all pantomimes except two. Oliver acknowledged that his participation in the pantomime greatly helped to boost his popularity.

A production that stands out in the actor's mind is Trevor Rhone's "School's Out," in which he was singled out as the Best Actor. According to him, it was a very good production which tested his ability and brought out a type of creative force which he was not aware existed.

The unique characteristic about Oliver Samuels is that he is able to portray a character humorously, in a natural and real manner. Flair asked its Big Date his secret of success. "In all the acting that I have done, I have always been able to associate the character with someone I know and, in the community where I was born I was exposed to a lot of different people. My sense of humour was strongly influenced by a dear and good friend of mine Nenen, who has been like a mother to me. She possesses a great sense of humour and all the acting that I have done, I have always been able to associate the character with someone I know and, in the community where I was born I was exposed to a lot of different people. My sense of humour was strongly influenced by a dear and good friend of mine Nenen, who has been like a mother to me. She possesses a great sense of humour and I love listening to her. My own mother was also a humorous individual in spite of her physical suffering. I cannot stand pain and suffering and my use of humour is an escape from that reality."

Demand
There is a very high demand for Oliver. Everybody wants him. Apart from the numerous plays he has performed in, Oliver has done many advertisements for several companies

including the Jamaica Tourist Board and Air Jamaica. He has been on tour in Miami with Faith D'Aguliar, performing skits that he wrote. He has starred in the film "Smile Orange", two BBC documentaries "Fight Against Slavery" and "My Father Sun Sun Johnson", an Italian film, "Three on a Honeymoon" was recently given a line in "Our Man Flynn" and, has been casted for "Club Paradise" being filmed in Port Antonio.

Speaking about the interest that foreign producers have taken in using Jamaica as a location and, Jamaicans as actors, Oliver said it was good but pointed out that the producers should not go through the unnecessary scouting to find actors. Prominent Jamaican actors and actresses are subjected to never-ending interviews and after all that they still do not know where

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they stand. He suggested that the Government pay more attention to the artistic and creative personalities of the society. An institution to which local actors belong should be set up on a national level so as to facilitate the casting of roles when foreign producers need the use of Jamaican talent.

"Jamaica possesses some fine actors and actresses who I think qualify on an international level. For example there are times when I see a production abroad and I think how Leonie Forbes "would eat that role." Our playwrights are also good — Trevor Rhone, Barbara Glendon, Gloria Lannaman, Carmen Tipling, to name a few. It is a pity that more of our plays do not go on tour but the small remuneration is

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Oliver Samuels...the look of laughter

by Andrea Jaghai

Actor, playwright...

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discouraging to the producer.

The area of playwriting is not strange to Oliver who has already written and produced a play "A Tellers Tail" which focuses on the aims and desires of a bank teller and, more recently "Ultimatum", not yet produced.

Oliver is now involved in the Players Theatre Company which was recently formed by himself, Aston Coke and Cathi Levy. Their first production is entitled "Children Children and proceeds from the play will go towards the Maxfield Park Children's Home and the Swift Purcell Home in St. Mary.

Many actors will let it be known that the profession cannot stand on its own as a source of income. So what does Flair's Big Date do to supplement his income?

Serious side

Oliver has been working with the Social Development Commission for 11 years. As a Cultural Coordinator he designs and implements cultural programmes. One of his biggest projects there was the coordination of the closing gala at JAMFEST '85. Commenting on his task Oliver said that the entire team rose to the challenge and it was a fair presentation. (In preparation for the JAMFEST activities, Oliver was stationed in the Prime Minister's office as Project Coordinator.) His term at the PM's Office terminated at the end of April.

Although he might always be laughing and giving jokes there is a serious side to Flair's Big Date. He philosophises, "If you

have a job to do, do it well irrespective of your political conviction, because it is to the benefit of the nation and to the benefit of the future generation. We have to be honest with each other and go into whatever we have to do with the best of our ability."

Four children

Oliver, a Libran, describes himself as an ordinary type of person. He hates poverty, suffering and the wanton killing, which all get him depressed. One of his childhood dream was to build a home for the aged in St. Mary, but although he has not yet accomplished this he spends a lot of time in charity service and still keeps in touch with his family community in St. Mary.

How do Oliver's four children cope with the busy schedule of their father. Well Flair's Big Date is not only a good comedian but a good father as well, who wants the best for his children. "I see to it that my children get a good education because they have to be fully equipped to survive. I would hate to have to leave my children destitute because I know what it is like to start from nothing. My greatest aim is providing happiness and a comfortable home for my children."

When Oliver is not working or in the theatre he either spends time with his children or reads books on theatre and politics.

Flair asked Oliver what was his option for the ideal woman. "The ideal woman for me is one who is independent, bright, intelligent and one who exhibits qualities of a good mother."