

Samuels, Oliver

Oliver is still 'Large' -

By Ian Boyne

EVER since the smashingly successful Oliver at Large series had ended the last time round, eager fans had been waiting with baited breath to see another.

On Thursday evening last, a young lady ended her conversation with me abruptly. She screamed "Mi haffi go! Oliver start!"

Oliver Samuels had, indeed, been back with his comedy show. This time it is simply entitled "Oliver".

Jamaicans like to laugh at themselves and it

seems the more rough the economic times, the greater the need for some emotional response. Our people love to let off steam through humour. It is this which has helped us maintain our sanity. The series therefore, is well timed. But there were many who could not wait on the promises that the series would "soon" be back on television. This has paid off handsomely for JBC. Many people rushed to the stores and gobbled up expensively priced video cassettes, with advertisements and all (which many found annoying) just to be sure to get in on the action.

Oliver and JBC television want to make sure this time that they reap some of the sweets from that obsession. The last time around people

Oliver in action... Oliver in action..



wisely taped the series and sold it for good money in the North America and other parts of the world (principally England), where there are strong Jamaican communities. Apparently not even the producers and Oliver knew that the series would have attracted so much attention. This time around the videos were released before the series though some say JBC should have waited longer before airing the programmes. Whether or not, the videos are still going like hot cakes.

Oliver, who still drives his LADA, the same one he sang about in "Oliver Yu Large" record, says he want to be able to buy his benz out of this series (one is never certain when to take him seriously)!

As usual, however, there are the dissatisfied. Some are saying that Oliver is losing his touch, that he is not as funny as he used to be and that he lacks variety. Others disagree and believe that Oliver still has his appeal. Many have expressed the view, however, that Jamaicans abroad would find the show more appealing than us, here, and that the videos still make for a good gift package.

Sun. Gleaner Mag.
Oct. 27, 1991
Pg 6-7

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF JAMAICA

P.

Oliver is sensitive to public criticisms, though not paranoid and he is strong and unrelenting on the point that he would like to leave the theatre in his prime than rather than when people get tired of him. "I would rather go out with a bang rather than to hear people say "boy him get stale," the actor has to know when to leave the stage".

Oliver knows, however, that there will be a lot of bitchiness. He himself the subject of various unflattering rumours, he says that the bitchiness and petty gossip don't disturb him very much for "Is so our people stay, I suppose it happens everywhere but it is especially evident in a small society. People will always find time to be nasty. Is one philosophy I have, leave them to the Lord, no man, I believe in retribution. People do me bad things and mi see some things happen to dem and mi nuh touch them. A tell you!" He smiles broadly, and slapped his leg. I don't mean to seh a wish

He said, "If because of my fame the people dem who I grow up with and who used to me from time, start to feel that I outgrow dem and don't have time for dem, then that would bother me, I would be upset if people feel that they don't have access to me.

Oliver has very passionate views about not leaving Jamaica to earn a living permanently.

IN fact, he does not like to travel at all. He just hates it. When he had to go to Britain for a few months on some productions, he became very home-sick. "The only reason mi did get mi passport some years ago was to use it fi I.D." Oliver says, grinning over a plate of cowfoot. "It always hurt mi to see that some people have to go abroad to gain recognition and make their name. I can say that

Oliver in action... Oliver in action..



people evil, you know", but "a just see things happen." Oliver says that when he was younger he was more feisty and snappy. Those who know him can attest that it would be hard to find a more genuinely humble and peaceful soul. Oliver can stand up for his rights and get angry, but in him there is none of the bravado or show-off attitudes that inflict some celebrities.

Oliver Samuels is naturalness personified. No airs, no pretensions, no sense of his own importance. His model inspiration has been the Hon. Louise Bennett-Coverely, Jamaica's First Lady of comedy. As a boy growing up on a plantation in St. Mary Oliver used to listen to Miss Lou on radio. He was captivated. "I have always wanted to be like Miss Lou. She is my hero and my inspiration. I used to try to talk like her and to imitate her in every way. I remember when she came to St. Mary: I walked miles just to be able to see her in the flesh. I used to watch her perform in the Pantomime and I remember the year before I appeared in my first Pantomime which was Music Boy, I vowed that I would not watch her anymore but would work with her. So in 1971 I worked with her. I used to also observe how she was natural with the people and how she appreciated them and showed them genuine love."

Apparently, Miss Lou's earthiness and patriotism has deeply influenced Oliver. It bothers Oliver no end that people would feel "high-up" and bigger than the ordinary Jamaican. Many things don't bother him, but this perception does.



thank God, I stay right here in Jamaica and make mi name, that is how I want it. I would never go abroad to seek a job and live. No sir! The way me see Jamaicans clamour to go there illegally and work I would never do it! Even before I had gained the recognition and a few dollars me accustomed to mi struggling right here in Jamaica. Me see a whole heap of my Jamaican people inna foreign and dem live worse than dem used to live inna Jamaica.

Oliver Samuels is more than a comedian or a humourist. He has a deep interest in politics. He is an avid reader and who likes to discuss philosophy and the social sciences. He also has deep religious interests.

His burning desire is to do a degree in the social sciences. Rex Nettleford has strongly encouraged him, and Oliver has done Extra Mural courses and looks forward to enrolling on campus. "Knowledge is a wonderful thing, the challenge and the discipline of study is great".

The interest in politics was instilled from very early as his mother was an ardent Garveyite who, told him about black pride and self-confidence. His

Contd.



father was a casual worker on the estate and his mother did a little selling there. "Marcus says you must stand tall", she used to tell him. At the age of seven Oliver was organising concerts in the district. He went to the Salvation Army School and then attended high school at Highgate, later moving to Dinthill Technical. Having finished his secondary schooling he worked as a store-keeper at the Orange Rover Agricultural Station.

When some friends decided to move to Kingston he came along, too, to seek a job to help his sick mother. He started working at the Water Commission, but drama had infected him and he knew he didn't want to "rot" in some civil service office. So he went to the Jamaica School of Drama and did a few insignificant jobs here and there.

Oliver in action..



Afterward, Oliver worked at the Social Development Commission which gave him quite a bit of exposure to people through youth clubs and community groups. Oliver has appeared in 13 pantomimes and more than 30 plays. In 1975 he got the Best Actor Award. He has for years been a favourite of many Jamaicans. People have only to see him to start laughing. His celebrity appeal is magnificent. To walk with Oliver on the road is to see the level of public adulation that exists. He takes it all so well. His lifestyle is simple. Almost any night you can find Oliver at home when he is in the island and not rehearsing. He is addicted to television, (he has a dish) he lives in Havendale, does his own gardening and some work around the house. He loves the quiet life. He has five children though he says his biggest disappointment in life is the fact that his two daughters have been pregnant before what he feels is "the time". His face becomes sad as he talks about it. Both became pregnant though he had warned them. "Boy, I don't have the courage and the patience to deal with it, I am so upset with them. They don't achieve anything with dem life yet and yet dem gone have baby", he said. One son lives with him, though, and they are very close. He is a strict father and a disciplinarian.

Even Oliver has serious problems and frustrations. But then that's what makes him so funny, and that's why he can relate to us and our situations. At the end of his career, Oliver says he would be pleased if people felt, "I was true to the my craft and that I believed in it and approached it without pretensions."

Sun. Gleaner Mag.
Oct. 27, 1991

Pages 6-7