

For Oliver its theatre and more theatre

by Lorrane Wint

Just the mention of his name sends some people into gales of laughter. To others just seeing him is quite a hilarious event. And who's this?

Oliver Samuels had absolutely no idea that he would one day be Jamaica's most sought after comedian. Of humble parents, Oliver was born in Harmony Hall St. Mary. He attended a series of infant and primary schools and got his higher education at Dinthill Technical High School. A few months after leaving school Oliver turned his tracks towards Kingston's way.

His first job interview took him to the doors of the Gleaner Company, where he was interviewed as a prospective proofreader, however even though he was successful in his interview he did not take the job and went instead to the Water Commission where he spent a short time and then started working at the University of the West Indies.

Though he had no ambitions for the theatre, his days of providing laughter started at Rose Bank Primary where he used to perform at "Penny Concerts". Here he used to do recitations, folk songs and biblical readings. But his serious theatre activities began when he saw an advertisement from a new theatre school inviting persons to apply for auditions. He went, was successful and a career in theatre was launched.

His first major role was that of "Moondrops" in the pantomime, Music Boy. Role after role followed and Oliver Samuels soon became a household name.

But which role, if any, has he found most challenging? That of Roscoe Callender in Trevor Rhone's *School's Out*. He was a schoolteacher of immense capabilities, but because of the "system," he was forced into being an ordinary teacher. As a result he became quite frustrated and even though he was

ordinary he was good and even though he tried to follow the guidelines set, he was accused of being a radical.

VERY, VERY NERVOUS

So why was such a role challenging? The many facets to the character was a challenge he said, and it took effort to develop the different aspects, and it is relevant to the society today. He confides that he also felt a certain kinship with the role as his burning ambition as a child was to be a teacher. An ambition that has not totally been abandoned as working with the Social Development Commission, Oliver conducts workshops in drama. After dealing with the role he has liked most, it was naturally time for the one that he totally detests. According to him there has never been a role that he hated, but there have been scenes which he positively hated and wished they never had to happen. But, he shrugs, philosophically, that's part and parcel of being an actor. Enjoy it, even if you don't!

As a seasoned performer, what are your feelings like on the first night of any performance?" I asked. "Very, very nervous to the point of trembling." But he goes on to explain that it's a feeling he would not want to be totally without. He feels that performers should never be totally relaxed, as their act might be empty.

"Are you married?"

"No, I'm single"

"Any children?"

"Yes, four, two boys and two girls."

"Would you like to see

any of you, children follow in your footsteps as far as the theatre is concerned?"

"The choice isn't mine, I lay it on the table and the choice is their's, but I don't think one of them would pursue a career in theatre."

"What kind of a relationship do you have with your children?"

"We are close", without hesitation.

"Do they enjoy watching you on stage?"

"As a matter of fact, one of my sons says he



OLIVER

never enjoys seeing me, he says he prefers to see other people?"

"Aren't you offended, disappointed?"

"No, I guess if that's the way he feels, that's the way he feels."

"So, Oliver, are you happy with the way things have turned out for you?"

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NOT FOND OF STARES

"Oh yes, many people set goals and never achieve them. I did not set any goals for theatre, but I am very happy with the way things have turned out.

As we talked, quite a few people kept coming over to say hello, there were those who knew him and those who recognised him. All came with one intention. That of making him say something just so they could laugh. At this point I had to confess to him that I was somewhat surprised that for the three quarters of an hour that I had been talking to him he had been speaking nothing but the Queen's English. He in turn confessed that he was constantly surprising people as he had found that everyone expected him to speak patois all the time

He then turned to me and asked "so whey vu want mi fi sey now?"

"Considering that you are always recognised wherever you go, what bothers you most about always being in the lime-light, and aren't you terrified that you might not live up to their expectations, that they might not find you funny?"

"The stares. They bother me most. I am basically a shy person, and stares without words can be very offputting. Sometimes, I'll say something and they'll laugh. But for the most part I am too embarrassed to say anything."

Currently enjoying a good role in the LTM Pantomime, Oliver is also pursuing a one year diploma course in Public Administration at the University of the West Indies.

So what are his plans for the future? Theatre and more theatre. He enjoys it, and the people obviously enjoy him, so he plans to be around to provide entertainment for quite a while yet.