

BIN Seaga Edward

The Most Hon Edward Seaga installed as IOJ Fellow

By Nicola Cunningham

Of all the accolades heaped upon him before and after his retirement from political office, this, he said, was among the most special as the culture of the Jamaican people is and will always be his undying passion.

It was therefore with great delight that the Most Hon Edward Phillip George Seaga accepted, on Monday, the status of Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica, in recognition of his sterling contribution to nation building through heritage.

The ceremony at the Little Theatre marked his installation into the Fellowship alongside other distinguished fellows including Louise Bennett-Coverley, Professor Roy Augier, Professor Gerald Lalor, Professor Rex Nettleford, George Lamey, Edna Manley and Sir Phillip Sherlock. The last Fellows' induction ceremony was that of the Hon Louise Bennett, renowned Jamaican folklorist, actor, poet and artist in August 2003.

Mr. Seaga was elected as a Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica on the authority of the IOJ Act of 1978, which stated that an individual who has achieved distinction in the areas of culture, science or history (including the training of artists and education in the Arts) could be conferred as a Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica.

Deserving honour

Minister of Transport and Works Robert Pickersgill in delivering Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller's tribute to Mr. Seaga, said that people should not wait to eulogise good deeds but honour individuals when they are living and able to appreciate it.

"He has played an instrumental role in shaping our cultural identity and set about making cultural integration an important aspect of our development.

"There can be no whispering about his deserving of the highest honour. It is for this reason that the Institute of Jamaica is recognising a man who has captured the creative genius of the people of Jamaica."

Penetrating research

Responding, Mr. Seaga said that he was thankful for his mother whose guidance allowed him to see people not by their appearance but by their character. He always followed her maxim: 'If you treat people nicely, they will treat you nicely in return'.



Professor Barry Chevannes (left), chairman of the IOJ Council and Minister of Transport, Works & Housing Robert Pickersgill, representing the Prime Minister, look on as Governor General Professor Kenneth Hall (second right), presents the conferment of Fellow of the IOJ to former Prime Minister The Most Hon Edward Seaga at the ceremony of installation at the Little Theatre on Monday, May 1.

PETA-GAYE CLACHAR PHOTOS

He spoke of his early years, of having left Harvard to go live in West Kingston for almost four years at various places including Salt Lane behind Coronation Park.

"My father could be heard at the breakfast table grumbling loudly as I replayed the tapes of the revival sessions I had attended the night before. He repeatedly asked my mother in an audible voice, 'Is this what I sent him to Harvard for?'"

"From the beginning I knew I was charting new ground because living in a community full time or 24/7 as we now say, which was a research approach being used for the first time and indeed the only time since, enables the researcher to probe areas of life which would otherwise be missed. And so it did.

"The moonlight nights with ring plays and folk tales of rolling calf, anancy, duppies and the black heart man; the weekly butchering of the goat with children encircling the butcher, each one hoping to be the one to get the 'eye-tooth' or testicles; the friendly talks about history of family and village.

"No questionnaire would ever capture these events and reminiscences. I was penetrating deeper into folk life than academia had done before."

Facilitated friendship

Mr Seaga spoke of how his recording of folk history facilitated his friendship with individuals, present and deceased who would later become legends. Persons such as Kumina leader 'Queenie' who when she died left him her ceremonial gown; Malachi 'Kappo' Reynolds whose works were secured by Mr. Seaga for the National Gallery and mento player William 'Sugar Belly' Walker who gave him his prized bamboo saxophone.

Mr. Seaga then announced that he had bequeathed all his folk music tapes to the Institute of Jamaica to guarantee posterity.

'Spin her roll'

After the official ceremony, guests were treated to several performances including that of the Tivoli Dance Troupe, both juniors and seniors and the Cohension Band out of Fletcher's Land.

The Jamaican Folk Singers also provided masterful interpretations of Negro spirituals that delighted even the children in the audience.

The highlight of the evening however, was the performance of the Port Morant Kumina Group led by the senior female who would 'spin her roll' and circle the musicians situated in the centre of the stage, while dancing with a lit candle atop her head.

Nation's pioneer

As one of the nation's pioneers in promoting the establishment of institutions or initiatives to foster a greater appreciation of Jamaica's diverse culture, Mr. Seaga joined the staff of the University of the West Indies (UWI) in the 1950s, conducting extensive research on child development and revivalist cults.

'Parent Teacher Relationships', published by the Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies in 1954, revealed his findings on child development.

Other publications include "Faith Healing in Jamaica", 1955 and "Revival Cults in Jamaica", which was published in the **Jamaica Journal** of 1969.

The Most Hon Edward Seaga was also integral to the conception of the **Jamaica Journal** in 1967, an internationally acclaimed scholarly publication of the Institute of Jamaica, with a diverse range of expository articles on Jamaica.

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