

B/N Seaga, Edward

A life on a cultural mission – *Part II*

*This is the final instalment of the acceptance speech by former Prime Minister Edward Seaga
at his recent installation as Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica*

AFTER MY 42 months of research in folk society which took me to Buxton Town in St. Catherine and Salt Lane in West Kingston, I had a wide range of experiences and encounters. Among these I valued highly my relationship with the Institute of Jamaica and the succession of kindred spirits with whom I have worked. I have always retained responsibility for culture in my ministerial portfolios. This, of course, included the Institute of Jamaica, the most prestigious of all the cultural institutions in the country. Over the years, to them I have given much and from them I have received in like measure.

To the Institute of Jamaica, I bequeathed all my folk music tapes which were recently digitalised for security of quality as a guarantee for posterity. These are a comprehensive collection of the songs of revival and kumina.

I found kumina in practice in Rose Town, away from its native St. Thomas. Unknown until then to the world outside of folk life in Jamaica, I gave it prominence and brought to the forefront the Kumina Queen who became known as 'Queenie', but to me was 'B'. Kumina, the only unadulterated African religious retention in Jamaica, with its medieval Angola language, is now cemented in a prominent position of our folk life. When Queenie died, she left for me her gown and her crown.

KAPO, MOST PROMINENT ZION REVIVALIST

In Trench Town, I found Malachi Reynolds, 'Kapo', the Zion Captain and the most prominent of Zion revivalists in

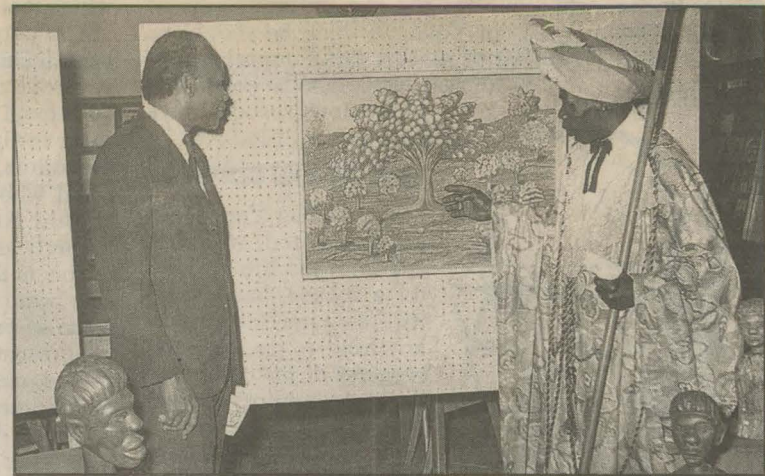
Edward Seaga



Jamaica. But he was also something else. He sculpted and painted, not in the contemporary, but African sense. In making the work of Kapo prominent to the rest of Jamaica, I was able to follow through in later years with the purchase of the large and very valuable Larry Wirth collection of his works for the National Gallery, a subsidiary of the Institute of Jamaica, where it is displayed in majestic prominence as the most eminent example of Mother Africa in Jamaica's paintings and sculpture. The collection was to be sold to an overseas buyer. I was just in time to capture it for Jamaica. Kapo gave me his first piece of sculpture carved with a penknife, unbelievably, from *lignum vitae*. After completing that impossible task, I advised him to switch to cedar. He left for me, when he passed away, his rocking chair on which I sat for the many hours of our interviews over several months.

In the small nightclubs of the city and later in the hotels, I marvelled at the bamboo saxophone fashioned by Sugar Belly who extracted from it a mento sound that was unparalleled. As my good friend over the years, he left for me that golden bamboo saxophone which I closely guard.

With my passion for revival, I penned a poem of 28 verses depicting one of the most moving episodes of any revival function:



FILE

In this April 1968 photograph, Mallicai 'Kapo' Reynolds (right) discusses one of his paintings with Mr. Reginald Murray, then director of the Institute of Education, University of the West Indies, Mona.

The dance of the River Maid, possessed by a spirit as she enters the healing stream. Here was nowhere suitable to publish it, nor, indeed, any other interesting work of literature, papers on history, historical reproductions of archaeology, and scientific documents dealing with natural history. Our knowledge of ourselves was being trapped in ignorance for lack of communication. So I established the **Jamaica Journal** as a subsidiary of the Institute of Jamaica. The Journal is now a prestigious addition in libraries around the world and a valuable source of Jamaican.

The National Library and its predecessor, the West Indian Reference Library, were my resource base for endless research connections. I used it to broaden my own knowledge. There is no better reference on the culture of the region than this invaluable collection which pulls scholars from everywhere. In particular, the Afro Caribbean Institute of

Jamaica led me to many unknown areas of African retentions which I gleaned from its own outstanding resource base.

JAMAICA MEMORY BANK

When I entered political life, I resolved that no trace of our cultural history would remain unrecorded, uncaptured or unknown. I arranged for recordings to be done to capture our oral history – that ancient record encased in the minds of village elders. The project was only started when the researcher took up another appointment. It fell to Olive Lewin to pursue this in the creation of the internationally renowned Jamaica Memory Bank. This work now resides in the ACIJ.

Another task of monumental importance was the collection of all our folk music not yet recorded. I gave that task to Olive Lewin. She completed this project. The tapes are at the School of Music where they have been recently digitalised. Olive Lewin has now

become an internationally-respected folklorist and ethnomusicologist honoured by the Government of Jamaica and the government of France.

All the elements of our heritage – music, dance, poetry, theatre, speech and the culinary arts – were encapsulated in the Jamaica Festival which served as the cradle of our folk culture.

Much more could be written of the decisive action in the nick of time to save Devon House from becoming another condominium development; the exciting interaction with the newly-formed National Dance Theatre Company to expose them to live revival performances to authenticate their repertoire; the efforts at moral suasion to get agreement from ex-wife and widow to have the body of Marcus Garvey returned to Jamaica; the establishment of National Heritage Week to venerate our National Heroes and stimulate discussion on heritage; the excavation of historical Taino sites at White Marl; the archaeological work on Nuevo Seville, the first capital of Jamaica; and the titanic demise of the ill-fated capital of commerce in the Western world, Port Royal.

I value the role I played in all of these cultural events in which the Institute of Jamaica was either at the heart or on the periphery.

I value too the conception and design which I outlined for the establishment of the multi-disciplinary Cultural Training Centre, now the Edna Manley School of Visual Arts. This institution was planned to offer education and training in all forms of art so that each could enrich the other. To ensure that this would be so, I instructed that the bathrooms should be in one location, to make certain that there would be contact by students of all disciplines with each other. Unfortunately, I mistakenly advised that this would ensure inter-fertilisation between students, rather than cross fertilisation, of ideas, of course.

REPOSITORY OF ANCESTRAL SOUL

The Institute of Jamaica is the repository of our collective psyche

and our ancestral soul. It is in this repository that the people of one Jamaica meet the other to mould us into one people.

But it is in need of another home where it can flourish in the limelight of a national beacon of learning, fully exposing its treasury of our heritage to all Jamaica. It cannot do so from a corner in a city which is decaying.

Emancipation Square, Spanish Town, one of Jamaica's richest historical venues, is the ideal location to expose our cultural treasures, for the day is coming when Spanish Town, not Kingston, will be the cross roads of Jamaica as the population shifts to the west.

I initiated a plan in the 1980s for the development of Seville, Spanish Town and Port Royal where Seville and Port Royal, the two commercial entities, would, from profits, carry the financial cost of developing a national museum in Spanish Town as a monumental home for our cultural heritage, in the trusted care of the Institute of Jamaica and its sister cultural institutions.

I cannot conclude without thanking all of you on whom I have leaned over the years, in villages, inner-city communities, in my work at all stages and in friendship. I am particularly, indebted to my earlier cultural guru, Jean Smith and to Babsy Grange, my ever-present guru, and with special acknowledgement to that one-of-a-kind international guru, Rex Nettleford. With my more recent links to two men, Vivian Crawford and Professor Barry Chevannes whose work in culture I greatly admire, and the inspiration of that life-long friend and cultural icon, Olive Lewin. I hope to continue in the service of the gifted, accomplished and culturally renowned people of Jamaica who have lifted this small country to heights of world recognition which few can surpass.

I salute also at this time the culture teams from West Kingston which will be performing here. All have established themselves as more than community efforts. They are recognised in their own rights as national examples of what opportunity and training can do to open the doors of talent. May you enjoy their works of entertainment.

In closing, may I, once again, thank the Institute of Jamaica for making me one of its own.

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