

# She sneaked in through the backdoor, now she's one of radio's best



Leonie Forbes: she dabbles in writing television and radio drama and she's an accomplished actress as well.

BY MYRNA DALEY

There is a very well-known female radio and television personality who literally 'sneaked' into the backdoor of the media to become one of the best loved radio personalities in Jamaica and an executive of the JBC. She also has an active life as an actress and has done many a pantomime plus musicals, comedies and serious drama. She even dabbles in writing radio and television drama though she doesn't think herself capable of writing stage productions.

Beside all this there is still more to the lady. She has studied and worked in the English media, she has even done some work in Australia. Her recent achievement has been the successful setting up of JBC's Radio 2, the station's FM wave band. And now the lady is ready to aspire even higher.

After all of that you must by now be wondering who the lady is, if you have not already guessed. Well, I won't tell you her name just yet, instead I'll give you a few more clues and a lot of facts about who the lady is and what she has done.

The first job she had after leaving school was with Sir Phillip Sherlock as a typist at the then recently incorporated University College of the West Indies. She was switched after a while to work with Barry Reckord. Here she would type up Barry's radio plays for him and sometimes accompany him to the studios of the Government Information Service to watch the recording sessions.



Remember "Queenie's Daughter"? Well, Leonie played the part of Maria in the 1973 pantomime, which Carroll Dawes directed.

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accepted but she had also won a tuition scholarship. She visited the British Council and told them that she had won a scholarship for tuition to the Academy but she also needed other financing. The Council gave her a bursary for the first term.

This was all in 1961. After the first term Leonie found out that she had won a full scholarship to cover all expenses for her two year course. She pursued a Diploma Course in Radio, Television and Stage. During this time she also worked on scripts for the BBC's Caribbean home service. Most of her work had to do with the Jamaican lifestyle.

On returning home Leonie became a producer-presenter at the JBC. In addition, she did a radio show, the **Jamaica Woman** with Beverly Anderson, and a television comedy series with Ken Maxwell, which proved to be very popular. On the show Ken was called Prorata Powell, the man from 'Camarant.'

In '68 Leonie left for Australia did another course and at the same time enjoying herself doing plays in Australian schools with the children and holding down a job as a librarian with the Australian branch of IBM computers.

When she returned this time she was given the job of producer-director. In '72 she was put in charge of Radio 2. She got people like Dermot Hussey, Barry Jonson and others to help out as presenters of shows. She found out about a company in California which made selected music tapes for FM, and got them to make tapes specially for Radio 2. She compiled local music tapes and made JBC Radio 2 into a force to be reckoned with.

There is also another side to Leonie. She is an accomplished actress of stage, radio and television and among her achievements she has quite a few pantomimes including the **Witch**, musicals, an example is **Oliver** with the KC Boys Choir,

straight drama, radio serials, television drama and even some very funny commercials.

Leonie says that she loves Louise Bennett who was the one who gave her her first real taste of theatre at a school concert where Miss Lou sang the Alphabet Song. She enjoys working with her now. She also likes working with Lois Kelly-Barrow, Bobby Gishays, Barry Jonson and Trevor Rhone, among others. She feels she can work with them best because they are disciplined and take

the theatre as seriously as she does. Leonie complains that "There is too much indiscipline in the theatre! Every one seems to think of it as a big joke, so no one really gets into the work in depth as they should."

Leonie also has some very positive views about the role of women in our society. What they should know about sex, men, and generally how to cope with life. She thinks that the root of our country's problems stems from part economic troubles and part ignorance, more so ignorance.

She says that since she has been doing the National Family Planning Board five-minute show on Sunday evenings, "So many mother have brought their daughters to me to explain to them about the pill, babies and many other topics.

"Though this places a burden on me I always try to answer questions the youngsters ask. Letters though, I refer to the Board. There I wouldn't know where to start!"

On men Leonie thinks, "In a few years time we will be needing a Men's Liberation Movement. Women are not sitting still for any male dominance in this age. They are branching out and finding themselves and I think this is good. Why should we be the ones to take the kids if a union breaks up?"

One day, while there, one of the ladies in the cast could not make it and a script was pushed into her hand and the producer told her to read. He was very impressed with her voice and from then on she made regular visits to the studio to do parts in the Government-produced productions.

With the inception of the JBC Leonie Forbes, (I bet you guessed), came into her own as an announcer. She was one of the first voices on the JBC airwaves along with Dennis Hall, Erica Allen, Desmond Chambers and Beverly Anderson (now Mrs. Michael Manley).

Mrs Rita Coore heard her, phoned her up at the station and offered her speech lessons saying, "You have a charming little voice dear, but you are doing some dreadful things to the language!"

Then an Englishman, Robin Michelin, came to the island to help set up the JBC. He was very impressed with her voice and told her that he thought that she had a very good chance of getting into the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Leonie thought this very funny and didn't really take it seriously even though she did oblige the gentleman by giving him an audition tape and other particulars to take back with him to England to see if she had a chance of getting into the Academy.

For months there was no reply and she almost gave up hope, then Robin wrote and told her that she had been accepted but she was to wait for the school to write her. The Academy did write, telling her that not only had she been