

# Leonie Forbes hailed 'Queen of Jamaican theatre'



- Winston Sill

*Leonie Forbes receiving her award from Arnold Bertram,  
Minister of Local Government Youth and Community  
Development. ■*

THE GLEANER

Wednesday, August 25, 1999

the use of theatre in religion to enhance new theological understanding - where God is seen as neither Man or Woman.

who gave an outstanding performance of **Wind Beneath My Wings**, which almost moved Ms. Forbes to tears.

"We must become sensitive to

In responding to the tributes,

**O**N A stage draped with beautiful, free-flowing material accentuated by dim lights and a cosy ambience, which presented an air of expectancy, Jambiz International celebrated its anniversary with a unique service of thanksgiving at its Centrestage Theatre, New Kingston Monday night. The occasion was also conceived as a tribute to one of Jamaica's 'leading ladies' of the theatre, Leonie Forbes.

The format was a modernised worship service, comprising Bible readings, extracts, dances and Christian hymns. Rev. Ernie Gordon officiated.

Senator Olivia 'Babsy' Grange read the first lesson; Arnold Bertram, Minister of Local Government, Youth and Community Development the second lesson, while Dervan Malcolm read an extract from the Philosophy of Marcus Garvey. Entertainment came from the a cappella group **WORD!**, religious-themed dances by members of Praise Academy of Dance, a rendition from trumpeter Paul Henry and a solo by Felice Mah Lung of The Stella Maris Dance Ensemble.

Paula Brown-Powell also gave a beautiful musical solo rendition, while Christine Bell and Rishille Bellamy read celebratory verses in praise of the guest of honour. The entertainment package was brought to an end by the **Grace Thrillers**.

Thrown into the mix also was a nail-biting and cautious stage demonstration on skates by Brian Grant, 1999 Skating Champion.

In an artistic and innovative style of presentation, Grace McGhie and Munair Zacca introduced Miss Forbes by extolling her virtues and fame.

Although the event started half-an-hour late, it was well worth the wait, as the conceptualisers ensured that there was participation from a great pool of talent. It turned out to be one of the most fulfilling presentations of its kind.

Rev. Ernie Gordon, while praising the talents and capabilities of Jamaican theatre practitioners, he challenged all to express our ancestral past by worshipping 'with an holistic approach'. And he advocated

the Caribbean experience and this has to begin with the theatre", he said.

He further challenged the Jamaican theatre "to move on to accommodation and absorption, from intimidation and imposition to one of exploration... to explore the identity and totality of who we are, because we are a great people".

Another high point of the evening was the presentation of video clips, highlighting Leonie Forbes' work as a dramatist par excellence.

In making a presentation to Ms. Forbes, Minister Bertram described her as "a Jamaican woman who exudes charm, poise and the best in the Jamaican woman."

The guest of honour was then serenaded by Keisha Patterson,

Ms. Forbes said: "I am standing on Cloud 9". In acknowledging all those who made her career the success it has become, she paid special tribute to Sir Philip Sherlock; Robin Midgley, Englishman and Alma Mock Yen.

She also pointed out that throughout her years in theatre, she had presented works from Shakespeare to Trevor Rhone. "My little head is bursting with pride", she declared.

She continued in a frivolous tone: "I've been to 'far-in', (foreign) and return back-a-yu d". Then she did an extract from an Indian play, **I Thought You Had Gone As Well!**

The **Gleaner** spoke with Miss Forbes after the function:

**Q.** How do you feel about

receiving such an honour this honour?

**A.** I am overwhelmed... I am honoured. I did not expect it!

**Q.** Looking back on your theatrical career, do you have any regrets?

**A.** Not in a million years! No regrets. You see I get on well with new and old talents, especially those with whom I grew up.

**I** cannot tell you how proud I

Lenford St. John, director of Jambiz International presented a cheque valued at ten thousand dollars to Eugene Williams, dean of studies, School of Drama to be used as scholarship money for an outstanding student of drama at the school.

The production was brilliant. It not only provided enjoyment, but proved that excellence can be attained through persistence and collaborative effort.