



LEONIE FORBES

What makes her tick?

LEONIE: If I can make one person smile each day...

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By CHRISTINE BELL

ticular actress was her performance in the JBC-TV production of Strindberg's *THE STRONGER*. While not having a word to say throughout the entire play, Leonie allowed the audience through an extra hard pull on her many cigarettes, a slight smile, a cynical twist to the mouth, a slightly raised eyebrow, sad brooding eyes or a faraway look and quick nervous pulls on her cigarette to run the gamut of emotions both for herself and for the 'other woman' in the play. As her younger son commented succinctly after seeing this performance: "Mummy, you smoke her out!"

When I spoke to Leonie on Friday June 15, it was her birthday. Looking particularly fresh and ageless in her red and denim outfit, Leonie told me about her career as an actress, radio/tv announcer and more. She spoke in a somewhat carefree manner which still could not hide the fact that she is and always has been deeply committed to her chosen profession.

As Leonie tells it, her involvement was intricately tied up with her work in broadcasting. It was while she was working at the UWT's Radio Education Unit that she was introduced to the

theatre by people such as Lloyd and Barry Reekord and Errol Hill.

Then when the JBC was being established in 1959, Leonie met and started to work with Robin Midgeley who was in the island to help set up the JBC's Radio Theatre. The "lady with the lovely voice" in fact did a number of radio plays produced by Robin and he was impressed enough to tell her she was "alright"; and to go as far as to tape an audition, take some photographs of her and submit these to the Royal Academy in London. Says Leonie: "They were impressed with the audition

and that was it!"

She completed two years of study in Stage, Radio and TV at the Academy; and the opportunities that opened up to her on its completion defy a full listing. It is sufficient to say that she found herself working with a few Repertory companies; in a few films; and writing and presenting documentary-type pieces for the British Broadcasting Corporation and so on.

In 1966, she returned to the Jamaican stage, to radio and later television. But by 1968, the wanderlust had set in again and she was off to Australia. There, she worked with the Australian broadcasting Corporation; she became a member of the Queensland Repertory Company; she wrote and presented scripts for Australia's *SCHOOL ON AIR* programmes; she started a drama class and another in movement and technique and she worked as a librarian at IBM ("my substantive post!")

How did the find time to do all of these things. It seems that this is easy when you HAVE to fill each hour.

As Leonie explains it: "I had to keep busy or go out of my mind. Me did wan' go home a me yard! Australia is a long way away..."

Leonie was back in Jamaica by 1970; and she put much of her energies into the full-time job of a JBC Television producer/presenter. Some of us can remember her stints with Bari Johnson on the *NUGGETS FOR THE NEEDY* shows; and for some of the lovely local shows she produced *AI ZUZUWAH* with the Jamaican Folk Singers; *INSIDE JBC*; *YOURS TRULY*; and, yes -- the still very popular *RING DING*.

In 1972, the JBC decided to utilize Leonie's many skills in a different way -- and she was named Head of Radio II with specific responsibilities for establishing JBC-FM.

This done, she was asked in 1976 to do something about JBC Radio I which then had a listenership of a mere 12.8%. One year later when Leonie was re-assigned to set up the new Department of Theatre -- Radio I listenership had risen to over 25%.

Leonie is still presently located in the Dept. of Theatre. According to her, "this Department is not yet a success, except in terms of *FLORA LEE* which is very popular, and a few other local productions. But we are

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"I have no great dream of being head of this or that organisation. My dream is that if I can make one person smile every day or forget their troubles for a little while, it will make life worth living. It makes me feel good ... maybe that's why I'm in theatre."

It is perhaps because she was not too anxious to fit into the so-called 'normal' careers that Leonie Forbes-Harvey has become one of Jamaica's greatest actresses and radio-TV personalities.

As a friend of mine once told me: "Boy, no matter what the play is, as long as I see Leonie Forbes name in the ad, I have to see it..."

Perhaps the performance for which I best remember Leonie and which to me proved the exceptional talent of this par-

One smile Leonie

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to grab hold of yourself. You are denied this chance by your public who always expect you to be performing. You feel naked - exposed - before them, especially on an opening night. If you can't feel close at home and have the comfort of not having to perform, then little things are going to build up. My profession is important to me. If your man doesn't understand your commitment to what you do but see it more as over-independence; if he doesn't think that what you're doing is even important enough for him to discuss it with you; if he is insecure in his position with you and just can't deal with the man you have to play opposite to on a stage - and especially if he cannot spot YOU when you walk through the door, there's bound to be trouble.

We are very emotional people and we perhaps

require more of a man. Why we may sometimes seem fickle is because we tend to be more courageous. If someone is not fulfilling a need, we are more willing to start over again.

Can you imagine your nerves already being shot to pieces on an opening night, he drops you off at the theatre late, you go to do a performance and him can only go and jump in someone else's chest? So when YOU come home and need a little comfort, HE'S too tired!! Go find someone else, yes...."

What really makes Leonie tick? Says she: "I don't have a clue! All I know is that I can't keep still. I like a pleasant, calm atmosphere where I work and live, but once I have that, I'm always looking for ways to improve it. Though I don't like change for change sake, I also don't like static things or hum-drum routines. My mother says mi nerves bad and she always advising me to drink sour-sop tea..."

Leonie has many favourite people whom she admires and it would be unfair to name only a few. About them she says: "I admire there crafts and wish that whatever I do, I will do as well. But I have never wanted to be like anybody else...."

On the Jamaican stage, she isn't.