**JOYCE AUGUSTE- A Life of Music and Sports**

**DENISE JOYCE AUGUSTE** is one of the legends of the artistic, cultural and sporting life of Saint Lucia. She was born in Laborie on 13th July 1943, to parents Daranise Auguste and Alexander Sinclair Prescod.

Joyce Auguste first rose to national prominence in the field of sports- specifically netball when she became a leading member of her school’s netball team- St. Joseph’s Convent and was eventually selected for the St. Lucia National Netball Team in 1957 at the age of fourteen, the youngest player ever to be on the National squad. In 1963 she gained a place on the West Indies Team which competed in the first International World Netball Tournament in Eastbourne, England. In 1966, while pursuing music studies in London and playing netball for the Trinity College of Music, she was the only West Indian chosen to be a member of a Commonwealth Team to oppose England on the 15th October that year at Wembley. In 1969, she was named Sportswoman of the Year in St. Lucia and in 1988 inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame for outstanding contribution to Netball.

She began to study music during her preschool years and continued at the Canon Laurie Anglican School and later at St. Joseph’s Covent. In 1963, her brother, Robert, who then lived in the UK, had her enrolled in the Trinity College of Music where she received the Licentiate in Musical Education in 1965. She then went on to graduate with the GTCL from Trinity College of Music in 1967, having also won a Commonwealth Music Award in 1966.

Following her studies, Joyce August returned to St. Lucia in 1967 and commenced the work that was to revolutionize music in her homeland. She was appointed Music Supervisor for Schools at the Ministry of Education and for the next thirty- two years, her wonderful vigor and matchless vision and passion for music led her to change music in St. Lucia. She was also the Music Tutor at the St. Lucia Teacher’s Training College (1969-1985) and taught music regionally in Caribbean workshops from 1976-1981.

Joyce pioneered distance teaching in St. Lucia as she provided music lessons to the country’s schools by producing and presenting a schools music programme which was broadcast daily to all schools on the national Radio station, Radio St. Lucia. Joyce also prepared manuals for the teachers who were coordinating the classes in the schools. The programme was the foundation of music for countless young St. Lucians.

Teaching was not enough for her and she began researching, archiving and exposing the island’s folk music, which at the time, was confined to St. Lucia’s rural areas. Joyce therefore toured the island, interviewing and recording the country’s folk musicians. It was Joyce Auguste who discovered Dame Sesenne Descartes of Micoud, who is today recognized and honoured as the Queen of St. Lucia’s folk music. In 2014, Joyce produced the album “ The Magic of Sesenne”, but unfortunately Sesenne passed away by the time of its launching, underscoring the significance of Joyce’s work with her.

Joyce rearranged much of the folk music to enhance its preservation without losing its soul and founded her own folk music group, “The Hewannora Voices” which projected the new sound through three music albums. Her work with the island’s folk music was also significant for the value and the legitimacy it gave to its language - St. Lucian Kweyol. In 1984 she obtained a Diploma in Ethnomusicology and Folklore Research from the University of the West Indies School of Music confirming her mastery of St. Lucian folk music. She also published a number of articles and booklets on St. Lucian folk music.

Joyce Auguste has been responsible for the superb organization and management of a number of musical events in St. Lucia, most notably the Festival of Carols which she pioneered in 1982. Her love of music also led her to radio announcing and from 1976 – 1981, she was a part time radio announcer on Radio St. Lucia.

Joyce had a profound religious commitment and she used her musical talent in the worship of her God, organizing a choir at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Castries- “Our Lady’s Choir” which sings at Mass and Feast Days. She was also an organist at the Cathedral.

Joyce’s physical beauty was not unnoticed. In 1968, she won the Miss St. Lucia Civil Service contest and in that same year was among a group of women chosen to appear on St. Lucian postage stamps, wearing the national head dress in commemoration of the attainment of Associated Statehood by St. Lucia from Britain. Joyce Auguste graced the ten cent stamp.

The multitalented and excellent contribution to St. Lucia by Joyce Auguste has been acknowledged and honoured by a number of institutions and Government and she received among other awards, the Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1988 and in 1989 the Saint Lucia Medal of Merit (silver) for Music and Sports. The Organisation of American States (OAS), in April 2000, named her in its list of outstanding women of the twentieth century. On Thursday May 21st 2020, it was discovered that Joyce, who lived alone, had passed away at her home at Arrundell Hill, Marchand. Her life’s work was over but it had certainly made a wonderful difference to St. Lucia and the name Joyce Auguste, will be forever chronicled in the history of St. Lucian music.

By: Mr. Earl Stephen Huntley