



CULTURAL
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Creativity Culture Community

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SAINT LUCIAN CULTURAL ICON ARTHUR JACOBS' PASSING LEAVES A VOID

On the morning of September 16, 2021, the Cultural Development Foundation received the heart wrenching news of the passing of our legendary and honored 2020 Cultural Icon, the indomitable Arthur Léandre Fédave Jacobs. The emotions on the passing of this Theatre Arts and Sculpting Artists has touched us at the CDF and Cultural fraternity to the core and will no doubt leave a void in the world of Arts and Culture.

Arthur L. F. Jacobs affectionately known as “Jakes” was born on February 27th, 1937 at the corner of High Street and Chaussee Road, Castries. The son of popular teacher Willie Jacobs and his wife Sarah, Arthur began his early education at the St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Infant School but left at age 6 to enroll in the Castries Intermediate School.

To his many friends and admirers, he was a gentleman of few words but much depth and talents. He resided in the community of Independence City, in the Castries East Constituency where he was well-known and revered by man, woman and child who encountered him personally or in his professional life.

He has been described as a blend of humility and passion. His citation for the 2001 M& C Fine Arts Lifetime Achievement Award described him as an artist in the truest sense of the word; – concerned less with his accolades and awards, and more with the art itself. He remained focused on being true to the creative springs that well from within him; being responsive to what needed to be said, and heard, and felt; and simply being honoured to have contributed in his own way to “good art”.

As a young man, his love for the creative arts was evident and Arthur became a self-taught craftsman and sculptor - working with both stone and a variety of woods such as the samaan and mahogany found naturally in the rain forests of Saint Lucia. Fascinated by ancient Egyptian history, and having visited the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, his work often reflected the inspiration of this rich North African civilization.

“-More-”

As is often the case with artists, his creativity seeped out in more than one genre – under the influence of Roderick (Roddy) Walcott, Jakes, as he became more affectionately known, had developed his love for music and theatre as well. He went on to become a Turks Steelband veteran, and even more significantly, production manager for the Saint Lucia Arts Guild’s annual theatre festival productions at home, and to Carifesta 1972 (Guyana), and 1979 (Cuba). What he continues to be most remembered for is his ranking as one of Saint Lucia’s most notable actors from the era hailed across the Caribbean as Saint Lucia’s renaissance period, the 60’s and the 70’s.

In 1960, at the young age of 23, Arthur Jacobs took to the stage in his first major festival performance with the Saint Lucia Arts Guild, that of The Stranger in “Africa Sling Shot”. He would go on to become an actor of repute, playing leading and supporting roles in several productions, local and regional. Among his most memorable are his portrayal of Mephistopheles in “The Tragedy of Dr. Faustus”, as Herod Antipas in “Salome” and ‘Macak’ in Sir Derek Walcott’s Dream on Monkey Mountain performed in Trinidad. He cites as the highlight of acting career, his role as Toussaint L’Ouverture in Sir Derek Walcott’s celebrated world premiere of Haytian Earth, a production commissioned by the Government of Saint Lucia to commemorate the 150th after the emancipation of slavery, which was also shot for film. Mr. Jacobs toured with Sir Derek Walcott performing in festival seasons in Trinidad, Guadeloupe and Italy. Mr. Jacobs as also performed in at least five short films.

Despite his several award-winning leading roles, none gave him a sense of accomplishment as that of father to his daughters Barbara, Laurima and Jessica.

As a sculptor, he created bronze busts, relief sculptures and silhouettes of famous Saint Lucians such as Garnet Gordon, Louis McVane, Karl LaCobiniere, Sir John Compton, Sir Derek Walcott and Sir Arthur Lewis. Arthur Jacobs has been commissioned by successive governments to produce national gifts of art to foreign diplomats and prime ministers and members of the British royalty. These works are to date on display in various collections from Government House to palaces far and wide.

Even following his retirement from the stage, Arthur Jacobs remained distinguished as the actor who holds the most awards in Saint Lucia; at least six of these were from the eight-year annual Arts Guild festivals which is still hailed as a period of artistic revival led by our revered Icon - Roderick Walcott. It is noteworthy that at the time of his passing our poet laureate and playwright Sir Derek was planning a celebration of the Arthur Jacobs, his work and his formidable talent. Sir Derek compared his stage presence with that of the famous African American actor Lou Gossett Jr. So high was his regard and affection for “Jakes”, that Sir Derek immortalized him in poetry in his penultimate collection ‘White Egrets’. Given the mutual affection between the two men, Sir Derek’s tribute qualifies as the ultimate affirmation and endorsement for Mr. Jacobs.

In 2018, Mr. Jacobs was awarded the Saint Lucia Medal of Merit Gold for his indelible contribution to the Arts. In 2020, the Cultural Development Foundation honoured him as Saint Lucia’s 2020 Icon at its Annual Cultural Icons Series. The Icon Series recognizes those who have contributed significantly to our concept of national culture, to the quality of life and destiny of a nation, leaves a legacy for future generations, who define and contribute to a system or life of cultural celebration, promotion and development for a nation and whose names are recognized by a large percentage of the Saint Lucian population.

“-More-”

The CDF fondly reminisces on the attendance of Jakes at the 2019 CARIFESTA dry run held at the National Cultural Centre prior to the cast departing for Trinidad. His emotions were running high, tears of joy pouring down his cheeks, with the satisfaction that his lifes' work in Theatre was not in vain. He was of the view that Theatre had a promising future in the hands of the youth, who were instrumental in such a magnificent piece of creative writing and production. His daughter, Barbara Jacobs Small was so very pleased that Jakes was alive and present to experience this CARIFESTA Production.

The Cultural Development Foundation, The Government and people of Saint Lucia, the Minister and Ministry of Tourism, Investment, Information, Culture and Creative Industries expresses deep condolences to the Family, friends, contemporaries and artists at his most difficult time. Fly with the Angels dear Jakes and sleep in the Theatre of Heaven with your Director God our Father.

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