

“Good frien’ better dan pocket money”



Amos and Andy... Ranny and Lee Gordon first crossed paths during their days as performers with the Edelweiss Park entertainment troupe in the 1930s, but it was not until the 40s that they became a performing duo. Lee Gordon invited Ranny to join in a travelling “Sagwa” medicine show which was organised by a visiting American - Victor “Chief Little Bear” Webb. They offered various herbal remedies for sale to the public and included a heavy dose of entertainment as part of the sales pitch under the names of Amos and Andy. The variety show featured dancing girls, tap dancing, singing and comedy acts. Ranny and Lee travelled the island from main towns to small rural villages. Ranny played straight man to Lee’s broader comic character poking fun at the current happenings in the country. They became so well known for these “topicalities” that the duo was invited to take part in the 1942 Pantomime “Babes in the Woods” to entertain audiences front of curtain while scene changes were effected. Lee and Ranny worked the pantomime stage until Lee went to England in 1954. Ironically, Lee died only a few weeks before Ranny in 1980.

Louise Bennett and Ranny Williams

first met on stage in “Bluebeard & Brer Anancy” in 1949 when he was teamed up with Lee and she joined with them in the now famous ‘Topicalities’ which provided immense amusement as they poked fun at all and sundry. Louise took over as Ranny’s comedy partner when Lee retired from the stage and together they were magic. As one critic put it “*Louise Bennett and Ranny Williams excel; she with accomplished variety of voice, face and body; he with the easy clarity and comic timing.*” They were often joined by Lois Kelly Barrow and the trio developed a working relationship which delighted audiences for many years.

Ranny most often played the samfie man - Anancy against Louise’s earth mother who very often caught him out while Lois Kelly Barrow’s Mrs. Malaprop added to the humour.

Ranny and Louise also worked together on the “Lou and Ranny Show” which ran on JBC Radio in the 1960s. They also performed together in various variety shows and in the LTM’s Shakespeare productions.



“Music Boy”



“Bredda Buck”



“Moonshine Anancy”



Pantomimes which featured Maas Ran and Miss Lou:

- 1949: Bluebeard and Brer Anancy
- 1955: Anancy and Pandora
- 1956: Anancy and Beeny Bud
- 1957: Busha Bluebeard
- 1958: Quashie Lady
- 1959: Jamaica Way
- 1960: Carib Gold
- 1961: Banana Boy
- 1962: Finian’s Rainbow

- 1963: Queenie’s Daughter
- 1964: Bredda Buck
- 1965: Morgan’s Dream
- 1966: Queenie’s Daughter (revival)
- 1967: Anancy and Pandora
- 1968: Anancy and Doumbey
- 1969: Moonshine Anancy
- 1970: Rockstone Anancy

- 1971: Music Boy
- 1973: Queenie’s Daughter (revival)
- 1974: Dickance for Fippance
- 1975: The Witch

"Anancy in Padua"



The Little Theatre Movement in following its mandate to bring a "little theatre" to Jamaican audiences embarked on staging productions by William Shakespeare in the open air. It began with "A Midsummer Night's Dream" staged at Vale Royal in 1964 and soon became a fixture of the theatrical calendar. Performers such as Ranny Williams and Louise Bennett who were usually seen in the annual pantomime embraced the Shakespeare experience wholeheartedly.

Ranny in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" (1970)

"Taming of the Shrew" - Ranny Williams and Leonie Forbes (1972)

Ranny is quoted as saying: *"If people could only realise that the Shakespearean comedies can be as much fun as the Panto an enormous amount of pleasure could be given to more people."*



Another scene from "Taming of the Shrew"

His performances were noteworthy and in a review of "The Taming of the Shrew" published in the Daily Gleaner, the reviewer M.M. noted:

"Ranny Williams' reading of the part is sustained with thorough professionalism, accurate with his Shakespeare, but squeezing for every Jamaican nuance the part contains; abusing somebody, for example, he lingers on the first syllable of the word "rascal" so our minds receive the Jamaican swear-word he does not actually utter."



"A Midsummer Night's Dream"



“I was a Hooper...”



TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!!
Three Nights
Of High Class Vaudeville
 EVERY WEEK
Monday, Tuesday &
Saturday Nights.
 A New Feature in Jamaica Amusement at
EDELWEIS PARK
 67 Slipe Road.
COMING! COMING! as a Start
(TO-NIGHT) TUESDAY NIGHT, 13th MAY
 Repetition of
“LANDING THE LANDLORD”
 Comedy Farce by Ranny Williams with added fea-
 tures. You will laugh until you are satisfied.
 Ha! Ha! Ha! And the clapping of hands, with frantic shouts
 of joy and pleasure were all the sounds one could hear coming
 from the audience at “Edelweiss Park” on Tuesday Night last.
 YES SIR! the show was a wow, not a dull moment. Such fun
 will again be yours on Monday Night. The whole show is im-
 proved—the laughter is increased, and the dramatic qualities
 of the performance further intensified. See the Landlord,
 marching towards the sleeping shadows of a ghost form steadily
 or a real ghost? Come and find out, you will laugh, cry and
 moan solving this puzzle and watching the lonesome tenant in
 his plight. Cast:—Itasca and Sandy, Roxie and Rannie Wil-
 liams, Edna Jones and Amy Spalding—Nough Said.
 You know what will happen when we turn on the fun. There
 ain't no blues you can't laugh away at Edelweiss Park.
Come and Hear Harold and Trim.
 GOOD MUSIC
 ADMISSION 1/
Dancing after Show to Midnight.

“D during the whole of the post-war years up to the forties, show business was booming – from the lowly backyard to the lavish Ward Theatre productions. Of course, we were all amateurs. Our efforts were for charity and for love of the theatre.

With our histrionic world already in this joyous, pulsating twirl, home came Mr Marcus Garvey to set up the World Headquarters of the UNIA at Edelweiss Park on Slipe Road. Apart from offices, he built a large open-air auditorium to accommodate the thousands who came to listen to this great man’s famed oratory. Mr. Garvey felt that entertainment was needed for the vast crowds. He organized the first professional entertainment company in Jamaica. He employed Geraldo Leon, late of New York Show-biz circles, as manager- director and hired performers who were paid a weekly salary.

I was first a hooper (back line dancer). Soon I was a front-liner and then a feature dancer with partners in front of the frontline! A large UNIA conference was being held and Mr Garvey gave me permission to sit in on sessions. My observations later formed the basis of a successful monologue I performed imitating some of the more eccentric and popular delegates.

After Edelweiss Park, Lee Gordon and myself formed the Amos and Andy team and toured the island playing to thousands from a collapsible stage and without the benefit of microphone. On these tours, I had the opportunities to learn a good deal of folklore right from the mouths of the folk!”

Ranny Williams, “My Life in Theatre” as published in the Souvenir Programme for the 1979/80 LTM Pantomime “The Hon All Purpus and the Dancing Princesses”

Edelweiss Park was an entertainment centre which hosted lectures, concerts, plays, films and sporting events. During the 1930s it was run by the St. Andrew division of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). During that period, Ranny Williams wrote several skits which were performed at the venue, among them were “Landing the Landlord”, “Blacks Gone Wild”, “Sheba” and “Medes and the Persians”.

Ranny: Samfie Anansi

Ranny Williams showing his motion in 1977/78 "12 Million Dollar Man"



King Wanluv in 1979/80 LTM Pantomime "The Hon All Purpus and the Dancing Princesses"



Ranny and Louise in 1975/76 LTM Pantomime "The Witch"

Ranny Williams (Headman) motions to Annie (Lois Kelly) as Coobah (Louise Bennett) and other slaves of Rose Hall look on in 1975/76 LTM Pantomime "The Witch"



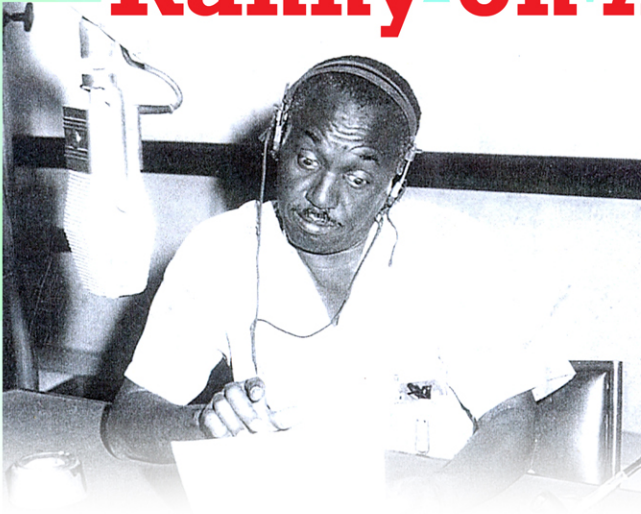
Playing the Dame in 1973/74 Revival of LTM Pantomime "Queenie's Daughter"

Dancing - Lunar style 1969/70 LTM Pantomime "Moonshine Anancy".



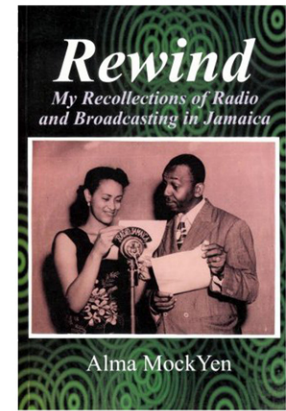
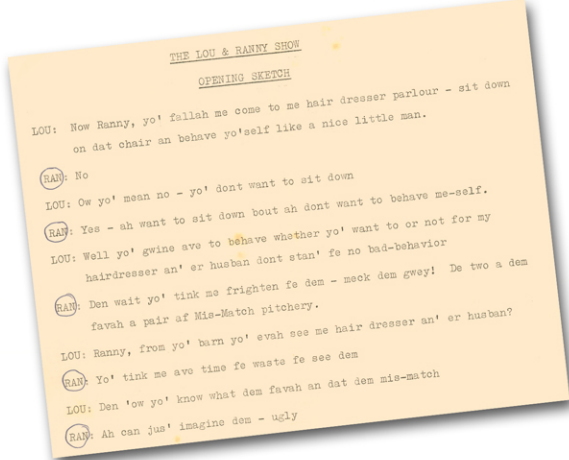
Down on the wharf! 1974/75 LTM Pantomime "Dickance for Fippance".

Ranny on Air and in Film



Recording the Lou and Ranny Show
(Courtesy National Library of Jamaica)

Ranny began his stint on radio on ZQI doing a monthly show with Lee Gordon called "Jamaica Nights" which featured their Amos and Andy characters. When Lee Gordon left for England, Ranny created a new series with the character Morgan Henry. Jamaica Broadcasting Company took over ZQI in 1950 and the commercial station Radio Jamaica (RJR) came into being. Soon after, "Life With the Morgan Henrys" popularly known as Morgie and Putus began its run with Ranny voicing all the characters. With the popularity of the show growing, he was later joined by Alma Mock Yen (néé Hylton) who voiced the Putus character. It was said that the Morgie and Putus show was such a hit that it was responsible for a decline in the attendance of Sunday afternoon church services. In addition he also ran "Cuz in the Country/You Out There In The Country" aimed at the Jamaican rural audience.



Alma Mock Yen's book on broadcasting in Jamaica includes her memories of recording "Life With the Morgan Henrys" with Ranny Williams.

Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation took to the air waves in 1959 and Ranny Williams was the first voice heard live with his morning show "Early Bird". He also served as disc jockey for "As Time Goes By" and went on to voice "Yu Did Know Seh?", and "Stick a Pin".

The "Lou and Ranny Show" was aired on JBC in 1958 and became a favourite among Jamaicans who gathered on Sunday evenings to get their fill of the comic duo. Ranny also did the Ranny Williams TV Show on JBC TV.

Ranny performed in several films with many leading local and international actors. These films include "White Sails", Zaca Experience (also referred to as Cruise of the Zaca), "Oh Dad, Poor Dad", "A High Wind in Jamaica" and "Marijuana Affair".



Break in filming of "A High Wind in Jamaica" which featured scenes with Ranny Williams. (Courtesy National Library of Jamaica)



"The Pen is mightier..."



"The Mass Ran, of Lou and Ranny fame, was equally at home on the stage as he was behind the radio microphone or behind the typewriter. For he, too, had his journalistic connections. The ever-prevailing humour that was to evoke laughter in his stage and radio shows were also manifested in newspaper writings. He once wrote a humorous column for the Gleaner that takes its place among the classic contributions of its kind: an expression of folksy, homespun wisdom-cum-jest that is of the very essence of Jamaican grassroots culture."

The above excerpt was published in the Daily News, Saturday December 13, 1980 on the occasion of Ranny Williams receiving an award for Journalism linked to culture.

Ranny wrote articles for the Daily Gleaner through the 1940s and 50s and the scripts for his radio programmes. For the stage, Ranny Williams wrote two Pantomimes - 1958 "Quashie Lady", 1959 "Jamaica Way" and adapted 1953 "Robinson Crusoe" and is listed as co-writer for 1963 "Queenie's Daughter" and 1964 "Bredda Buck". Some of the other theatrical works written, directed and produced by Ranny Williams include:

- 1930: Landing the Landlord
- 1940: So This Is Kingston
- 1940: Maas Bob's Nine Night
- 1940: It's a Wedding
- 1945: G'on Yanks (You can't lose)
- 1951: What a Weddin
- 1954: Old Folks at Home

IFM Pantomime

QUASHIE LAD!

Starring
 Carolee Nasser
 Charis Wyatt
 Leslie Bennett
 Michael Strong
 Ranny Williams
 Joyce Laine
 Keith Bradley

Written by Ranny Williams
 Directed by Keith Bradley
 Napier's Pantomime Orchestra

OPENING BOXING DAY AT 8 P.M.
 AND PLAYING TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS AT 7 P.M.
 FRIDAYS AND SATURDAYS AT 8 P.M.

Box office opens at TIMES STORE on December 15

Prices: 10/-, 7/6, 5/6 & 3/-

WARD Theatre

The MAJESTIC THEATRE
 SHOWS THAT SATISFY

TONIGHT: ON STAGE 9.00

Ranny Williams presents:
"SO THIS IS KINGSTON"
 (NEW MUSICAL COMEDY)

See Above as a Country Hick and how they fleece him. Night life in Kingston and Havana. Also hear REDVER COOKE & HIS RED DEVILS ON THE SCREEN 7.30 & 10.00

BOB BAKER in "THE GUILTY TRAIL"

Tomorrow: "DRUMS OF FU MANCHU" EP. 1, 2 & 3

SAT: By Popular Request. GILBERT AND SULLIVAN'S "THE MIKADO"

SUN: "100 MEN AND A GIRL" Deanna Durbin.

Reserved Seats All Shows: Call 3811 (Day) 3811 (Night)

QUEENIE'S DAUGHTER

The Sunday Gleaner, February 21, 1954.

EAST of the BORDER

LAILAN (Two Stick) Pin-nock was a giant of a man, six feet three standing barefooted.

He had a perpetual scowl, liked to grind his teeth when he was in a temper and outside of his strength and skill prided most in the possession of two mean-looking weapons: a long hardwood stick and a short well-cured cow thong.

Lailan did not like back-talk that is, to him but he himself was full of back-talk and offence. In the whole of Kingston East and West Ends there was no man so easily offended and so ready with offence. Rude women were not to be trifled with and over when

by Ranny Williams

in range of her fast moving and accurate little head.

SHE did not care at all what people said about her. "Talk as yo' like" she used to say "but if yo' tink yo' had touch me". This is why she could not understand Lailan. She felt that he was just being touchy. She couldn't see any reason in the world why if she considered him or any one else a big knee snake eye so and so she could not say out loud the thoughts in her mind.

Lailan's practice of beating women with his cow thong was not commended itself

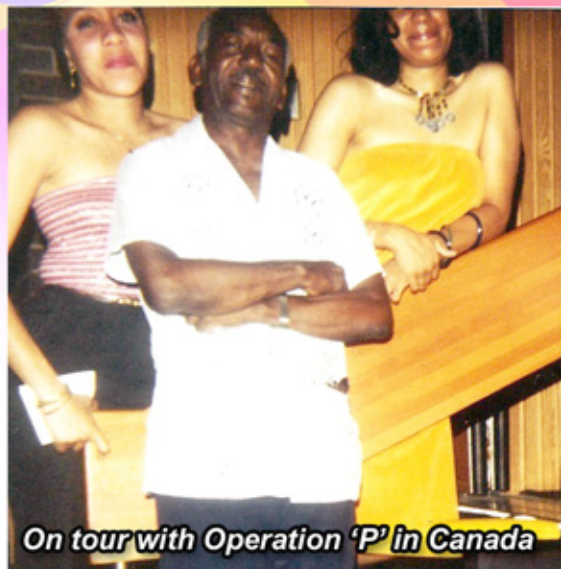
the bully bellowed. "Tell er mus' pay me-Gen, no".

That was as much back talk as Lailan would take from a woman. He laid on his cow thong. The woman fled leaving her fish part behind.

THAT evening "Coolie Gal" got no fish for her dinner. She wanted to know why. The fish-seller told her what had happened in the East End.

The following morning Coolie Gal tied her head with her bit of black cloth and went east. At the corner of Fleet and Tower Streets she saw some women sitting on the side walk. She went up to them and said "Onoo ave a bigknee snake-eye so ad so roun here im look-mama tristin' fish case".

Ranny - Behind the Scenes



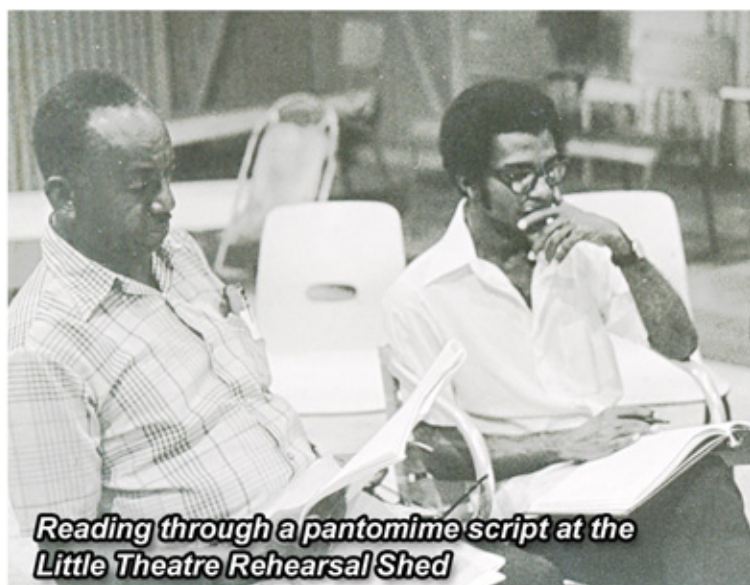
On tour with Operation 'P' in Canada



A quiet moment during rehearsal



Celebrating the 100th performance of 1978/79 "Johnny Reggae"



Reading through a pantomime script at the Little Theatre Rehearsal Shed



Publicity photo shoot for a Shakespeare production

"Curtain Call"



"Jamaica has suffered a real loss in the death of Ranny Williams. For years this talented and versatile man of the theatre brought fun and laughter into the lives of his fellow Jamaicans, entertaining them with an inimitable brand of comedy that was peculiarly his own." (*Daily Gleaner Editorial, Wednesday August 13, 1980*)

Ranny Williams died of a heart attack at the age of 67 in the East Toronto General Hospital on August 10, 1980. Although he had lost a leg a year earlier, he was performing up until his untimely demise. He performed in the 1979/80 Pantomime "The Hon All Purpus and the Dancing Princesses" and in July he toured to Canada with the Ed Wallace Production of "Operation P". It was during the opening night of that production in Toronto, that he took ill. He was taken to hospital afterwards and later he passed on. His body was flown back to Jamaica and was laid to rest August 21, 1980 at National Heroes Park with official honours.

In 1991, the LTM held a ceremony of re-dedication at his grave site. In 2005, a celebration in his honour was held by the Jamaican Canadian Association in Toronto to remind Jamaica of Ranny's outstanding legacy. The LTM is honoured to remember Ranny Williams on the 100th year of his birth.



Members of Ranny Williams' family, theatre friends and officials at the Re-dedication Ceremony and Tree Planting exercise in Heroes Park.



Members of the public view a display mounted at the Little Theatre in memory of Ranny Williams.

THE DAILY GLEANER, MONDAY, AUGUST 25, 1980

Ranny Williams buried with official honours

Mr. Randolph "Ranny" Williams, one of the best known Jamaican entertainers ever, was buried on Saturday at National Heroes Park in Kingston with official honours.

The burial was preceded by a service at the St. Andrew Parish Church which was attended by the Governor-General the Most Hon. Florzil Glaspole, people from entertainment circles and government officials including the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Hugh Small, who read one of the lessons.

Mr. Norman Williams, son of the deceased and the Hon. Mrs. Louise Bennett-Coverly Ranny's stage companion, read the other lessons.

Ranny died in the East Toronto General Hospital on August 10 from a heart attack. He was 67. His body was flown to Kingston on August 16.

The Remembrance was read by Professor Rex Nettleford, who described the late entertainer as a "man for all seasons." "In death he now challenges us in his own unspoken way to see him for what he was worth, for in doing this we may all come to understand ourselves much better," Mr. Nettleford said.

"Such is his stature in the life and development of modern Jamaica, for Ranny Williams shared in the momentous dawning of that new day when the ordinary people of Jamaica would begin to see themselves creators of their own destiny." "This made him into more than a funny man with a suggestive shuffle," Mr. Nettleford said. "And how he played fool to catch wise. For he was a master of the most difficult of theatre arts-comedy, which embraces the contradictions of fun-with-tragedy, hope-in-despair, laughter-with-tears, the bitter-and-the-sweet, suffering-with-survival."

"It is the grasp of this fact of human condition that made Manse Ran the patriot he was, helping the Jamaican people through the use of their own popular artistic expressions to understand themselves, to appreciate their own sense of self and society, later to be given political expression in Independence and in current social struggles which, as a creative mind, he saw merely as part of our long inescapable process of becoming."

Officiating Ministers at the service were Rev. Ernie Gordon, the Rev. Raymond Cooke, the Rev. Ernest Desouza and the Rev. Horace Ward. The St. Mary's and St. Andrew Church choirs as well as the NDTC Singers and the Jamaica Folk Singers performed.

The casket, draped with the Jamaican flag, was carried from the church to the hearse by members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force.

At the graveside two policemen in their white and black official dress sound the "Last Post", after which the mourners sang the hymn, "Jesus Lives", as a casket was slowly lowered into the grave at the southern end of National Heroes Park.

Mourners included the Governor General, the Most Hon. Florzil Glaspole and Mrs. Glaspole and Mrs. Glaspole, Minister of National Security and Public Utilities, the Hon. Carlyle Dunkley, Minister of Education, Dr. Phyllis MacPherson-Russel, Mr. Arnold Bertram, Dr. D. K. Duncan, the Chief Justice, the Hon. Kenneth Smith, Mr. Lacroft Robinson, Councillor Ken Hill, Mr. Bill Bowes, Commissioner of Police, Mrs. Edna Manley, Mr. Wills O. Isaac, Mr. Buddy Pougat, Mrs. Barbara Gloudon, Mr. Arthur Carney, Mr. Vin Bennett, Mr. Reggie Carter and Mr. Eric Coverly.

Mrs. H. Villiers, Mrs. Joan Romain, Miss Grace Williams and Miss Francis Williams, daughters, Mr. Norman Williams, son, and Mrs. Williams, Mr. Earle Williams, son, Mr. Roxy Williams, brother and Mrs. Williams, Miss Luna Williams, sisters, Mr. Cleveland Williams, brother, Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Row, Mrs. Beverly Johnson, Mrs. Doreth Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Derrick McCalla, Dr. and Mrs. Keith McKenzie, Miss Gloria Powell, Mr. David McKenzie, Mr. Michael Stewart, Mrs. Elaine Leslie (Wint), Mr. and Mrs. George Lee and Mr. Raymond Brooks.

More regrets at Mass Ran's death

The Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica has joined with other organisations and individuals and with all Jamaicans in mourning the death of Ranny Williams comedian and actor who died in Canada on Sunday.

Other expressions of regret at the passing of the country's top actor and comedian came early this week from the Rev. Cleve Grant, the Press Association of Jamaica and the managing committee and members of Club India.

The PSOJ said that Mass Ran as he was popularly known was always very concerned about the plight of the less fortunate members of the society as evidenced by the community work of the Ranny Williams Youth Club of which he was the patron.

The PAJ, in its release said that throughout his long and illustrious career he was committed to the highest standards of professionalism, personal integrity and patriotic service to the Jamaican people.

“Man Pon Spot”

Folklorist, Social Activist, Cultural Icon

Ranny and folklore

"Ranny became one of the earliest and most reliable informants on traditional lore that has cradled, nurtured and conserved the sensibilities of the Jamaican people over centuries of severance, suffering and survival.

His writings in the local press revealed his keen sense of observation and his deep grasp of the myths, manners and moods of his people. He grew to know them even better as he travelled the length and breadth of this island as medicine-man peddling concoctions for physical ailments, real and imagined, but more importantly bringing the elixir of imaginative fun and comic laughter, to heal (if only temporarily) fractured spirit and ailing souls."

Ranny was knowledgeable of many aspects of Jamaica's folk culture and this included vast knowledge of Revivalism; his support and promotion of Jonkonnu; noted musicians Slim and Sam; Anansi stories and other folk tales.

1. Taken from Rex Nettleford's Remembrance of Ranny Williams. Published in "From the Heart Eulogies by Rex Nettleford" UWI Press.

Ranny and Social Activism

- Patron of Ranny Williams Youth Club based in Allman Town/Kingston Gardens
- Member of Diabetes Association of Jamaica
- Volunteer with Jamaican Movement for the Advancement of Literacy (JAMAL)
- Regular on the annual charity show "Nuggets for the Needy"
- Emcee and entertainer for several community events and fundraisers



Ranny Cultural Icon

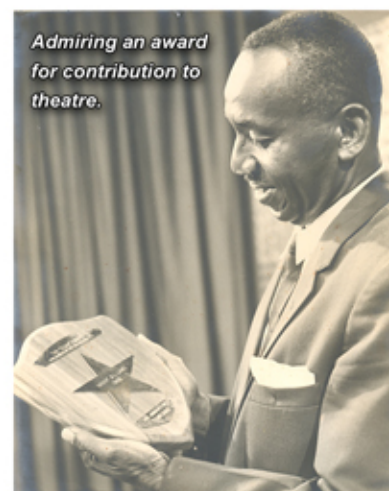
- Jamaica Certificate and Badge of Honour (1963)
- Musgrave Medal - Silver (1966)
- Order of Distinction Commander Class (1976)
- Ranny Williams Entertainment Centre in Kingston named in his honour
- Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) "Ranny Williams" Award for Best Actor in the JCDC Drama Festival Competition.



Receiving the Badge of Honour from Governor General Sir Clifford Campbell (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)



Receiving the Order of Distinction from Governor General Sir Florizel Glasspole (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)



Admiring an award for contribution to theatre.