

Citation

WYCLIFFE SAMUEL BENNETT, C.D., M.F.A., B.A., L.R.A.M., A.D.B.

GOLD

The Institute of Jamaica recognises Wycliffe Samuel Bennett for distinguished contribution to the development of the Arts in Jamaica and the Caribbean.

On May 19, 1922 in the city of Colon, Panama, Hubert Elijah Bennett and Muriel Elister (nee Williams), welcomed their son Wycliffe Bennett into the world. He spent his early years attending the Central Branch School and the Normal College, then later Yale and Columbia Universities. Mr. Wycliffe Bennett has enjoyed a full and illustrious career which began in 1943 as a Civil Servant. He served in the Ministries of Finance, Education, Welfare & Culture; Mining & Natural Resources. He was also the General Manager at the now defunct Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation from 1968 – 71 and again from 1976 – 81. He is remembered across the Caribbean for his outstanding leadership and organizational skills he showcased whilst producing the first Caribbean Festival of Arts – CARIFESTA in 1976.

Referred to by his friends, colleagues and students as the man of the arts, Mr. Bennett's record of leadership in various spheres of cultural development, especially theatre, are legendary. As a broadcaster, he is celebrated for his insistence on high standards, and in so doing ensures the enrichment of the communication arts.

He was the chairman of the Ward Theatre Foundation and has been the driving force behind the campaign to make the Ward Theatre function as a Civic and Cultural Centre, thereby endowing Jamaicans with a home for the development and exposition of the Performing Arts. This is a task to which Mr. Bennett has stayed committed. He is a life member of the Little Theatre Movement as well as Former Chairman of the Creative Production and Training Centre (CPTC). The impact of his work at the CPTC has been of phenomenal value. In 2007, the "Wycliffe Bennett Television Studio" at that facility was dedicated in his honour. Speaking at the opening of the studio, the present Chairman praised Mr. Bennett as a Jamaican cultural stalwart, saying "there is one person in this room whose lifetime contribution of excellence is best embodied in the production history, capabilities and prospect of this facility that we re-dedicate here today."

Mr. Bennett served as chairman of the Jamaica School of Drama and the Jamaica School of Music; Jamaica Drama League; Adult Drama Festival; and All Island Speech Festival. He is a former Member of Council of the Institute of Jamaica; Urban Development Corporation and Town and Planning Authority. He was also the pioneer organiser of the National Arts Festival Movement for twenty years, 1943 – 1963.

Mr. Bennett's colleagues speak of his irrepressible spirit and his great courage to do the unthinkable in theatre. He encouraged pride in stage craft. Many prominent actors, once struggling, owe him a debt of gratitude as he is known for always finding a way to expose

new talent in order to make their dreams come true. He has a way with words. Cast members will never forget his demanding rehearsals for the Carifesta Grand Gala at the National Stadium in 1976. He kept 20,000 dancers and singers motivated as they practiced late into the evening by saying "You are beautiful". Then there was always the advice, "Always occupy your space darling". His talent to motivate was also employed for many years as he conducted voice and speech training at the CPTC where students of all ages were taught, many of whom today have turned out to be accomplished media personalities.

Mr. Wycliffe Bennett has obtained scholarships from: Freedom House, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars; Ford Foundation; and the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of the West Indies.

His other awards include the:

1. Commander of the Order of Distinction 1977
2. Silver Musgrave Medal, Institute of Jamaica 1975
3. Centenary Medal, Institute of Jamaica 1974
4. Caribbean Broadcasting Union 1990
5. Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (Inaugural Roll of Honour) 1994
6. Dr. Bird Award for excellence as Producer/Director/Trainer in Film and Television 1998
7. Inductee, Caribbean Hall of Fame 1999
8. PNP 60th Anniversary Award for distinguished contribution to national development 1998
9. CPTC Award for outstanding services in the field of media, Arts and Culture 1999
10. Actor Boy Honouree 2008

Mr. Bennett has published an assortment of articles on several thought provoking topics in publications such as "Life & Letters"; "Americas"; "Yale Daily News"; "The Jamaica Journal"; "Pepperpot"; "Caribbean Quarterly" and "The Encyclopaedia of Post Colonial Literatures" among others.

He is married to Hazel Eloise Gray, since September 14, 1957 and has one (1) daughter and one (1) son.

The Council of the Institute of Jamaica is pleased to award Mr. Wycliffe Bennett, C.D., M.F.A.; B.A., L.R.A.M., A.D.B., the GOLD Musgrave Medal for distinguished contribution to the development of the arts in Jamaica and the Caribbean.