

Professor Rex Nettleford - Gone Too Soon

Vice Chancellor Emeritus of the University of the West Indies, Professor Ralston Milton `Rex` Nettleford, is dead.

Nettleford died at 8 o'clock last night (February 2) in the George Washington Hospital. He was 76, just a day short of his 77th birthday.

Nettleford suffered a heart attack last Wednesday while on a fundraising trip for the University of the West Indies (UWI). He reportedly never regained consciousness. Nettleford fell in his hotel room bathroom after suffering the heart attack and was found later after colleagues did not see him return.

Nettleford was a Jamaican scholar, social critic and choreographer. He was a recipient of the 1957 Rhodes Scholarship to Oriel College, Oxford, and returned to Jamaica in the early 1960s to take up a position at the University of the West Indies. At the UWI, he first came to attention as a co-author (with M.G. Smith and Roy Augier) of a groundbreaking study of the Rastafari movement in 1961. In 1963 he founded the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, an ensemble which under his direction did much to incorporate traditional Jamaican music and dance into a formal balletic repertoire.

For over twenty years, Nettleford had also been the artistic director for the University Singers of the University of the West Indies, Mona campus in Jamaica. The combination of Nettleford as artistic director and Noel Dexter as musical director with the University Singers has seen the creation of what is referred to as `choral theatre`.

Beginning with the collection of essays *Mirror, Mirror* published in 1969 and his editing and compiling of the speeches and writings of Norman Manley, *Manley and the New Jamaica*, in 1971, Nettleford established himself as a serious public historian and social critic. In 1968, Nettleford took over direction of the School for Continuing Studies at the UWI and then of the Extra-Mural Department. In 1975, the Jamaican state recognized his cultural and scholarly achievements by awarding him the Order of Merit. In 1996, he became Vice-Chancellor of the UWI, and held that office until 2004, when he was succeeded by E. Nigel Harris.