

Reggae Month events begin Sunday

February is officially designated Reggae Month, but this year it is off to an early start with two events in honour of Dennis Brown in downtown Kingston on Sunday.

There will be a symposium on the late Crown Prince of Reggae at Liberty Hall, King Street, and, in the evening, a tribute concert on Orange Street outside the 'Big Yard' where he once lived, at the corner of North Street.

The symposium and concert are part of a dense Reggae Month calendar outlined by the Jamaica Reggae Industry Association (JaRIA) at the Bob Marley Museum, 56 Hope Road, St Andrew, on Tuesday evening. JaRIA vice-chairman Charles Campbell also announced that the organisation's annual Wednesday concerts, which will run on five nights throughout February, have been moved from the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts to Emancipation Park, New Kingston.

Though that would seem to indicate an expansion in the scope of the concerts, there was a persistent thread of concern for Jamaica's hold on its popular music throughout the event. Host Ibo Cooper, JaRIA's chairman, pointed out that, as a nation, Austria has done a superb job in preserving and disseminating information about the music and life of composer Beethoven and "today the world is taught about Beethoven".

"Our children should not know more about Beethoven than Bob and Peter and Bunny and Dennis," Cooper said.

IRIE FM's Brian Schmidt got down to the legislative nuts and bolts of ensuring a space for Jamaican popular music in the society, saying that, this year, he would like to see zoning laws passed. "We can't have an industry that is not at home at home. That makes no sense," Schmidt said, laying down a challenge to Minister of Youth and Culture Lisa Hanna and state minister in that ministry, Damion Crawford, who were both present.

"We must fast-track the legislation this year around zoning," Schmidt said, emphasising that to not do so would be detrimental to the business of music.

JaRIA board member Rupert Hoilett outlined a slate of events, the official calendar having an event every day, staged by JaRIA or a regular event which has been endorsed by the organisation for Reggae Month.

Mary Isaacs, member of the JaRIA board, ran through the list of awardees for the showpiece Honour Awards, slated for Saturday, February 25, at Emancipation Park. The honourees, covering the deceased and alive, run from the 1950s with sound system operator Tom the Great Sebastian to the 2000s with Digicel Rising Star champion Romain Virgo, with Clement Dodd, Duke Reid, Laza Morgan and Mavado, Copeland Forbes and the Jamaica Federation of Musicians (JFM), among the individuals and institutions in between.