

'August Mawnin' makes a Jamaica 50 comeback

August Mawnin, the celebrated theatrical production, developed by the Little Theatre Movement National Pantomime Company to mark the observation of August 1, Emancipation Day, is returning to the stage in tribute to Jamaica 50.

Described by Professor Emeritus Mervyn Morris as "Emancipation Theatre", the production was first unveiled to Jamaican theatregoers in 1997 and proceeded after that to entertain and educate audiences not only across Jamaica, but in the North American diaspora. It is now regarded as a classic work which celebrates history with the blending of poetry by some of Jamaica and the Caribbean's finest creative talent, with dance, songs, movement and comedy telling a story for all ages. One of the most distinguished international figures who was an early member of the audience was the celebrated Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka who, during a visit here in 1977, attended a performance, after which he stayed behind to discuss the relevance of Emancipation history with the cast and producers. For 10 successive years, August Mawnin opened every August 1 at the Little-Little Theatre. The cast was drawn annually from the National Pantomime ensemble. The music, composed by Grub Cooper with lyrics by Barbara Gloudon, has been hailed for capturing the spirit of a time when "hope was hard to come by". Cooper's contribution was described as "digging deep into the sound of the ancestors, and a score which continues to be fresh and relevant". The text has been described, too, as a remarkable blend of poetry and prose, created by the noted Lorna Goodison, the late Dennis Scott, and Sir Philip Sherlock as well as Guyanese poet A.J. Seymour. These contributions are woven together to fit into a frame created by Gloudon and Brian Heap, who collaborated to "pay nuff respect to the amazing creativity and integrity of Jamaican/Caribbean talent". Generous adviser Nicky deGrasse Johnson, now principal of the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, and Alice Berry of the School of Dance created the original movement which has become the template for the staging of the play, while Hazel McClune of the Jamaica Folk Singers has been a generous adviser, ensuring the authenticity of traditional songs. Respect is paid to the spirit of Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff, and other contemporary talent to whom emancipated Jamaica owes much. The new season of August Mawnin is being presented in tribute to Jamaica 50. It will be onstage at the Little-Little Theatre beginning August 1 when there will be two shows, one at 11 a.m. and the other 4:30 p.m. Other performances will be August 2-4 at 7:30 p.m. and August 5 at 4:30 p.m. In keeping with tradition, after the shows, audiences will be able to savour old-time Jamaican delicacies. For the first show on August 1, after-performance delights will include fresh fruit, soup, water coconut, and other treats. Tickets can be obtained at the Little Theatre Box Office. Online information is accessible at www.ltmptantomime.com. The cast includes Faith Bucknor, Kevin Halstead, Cadean Hall, Marvett Murphy-Davis, Ray Jarrett, Barbara Johnson, Delrose Burke, Nicole Taylor-Thompson, Derrick Clarke, Cecelia McCarthy, Yanique Berlin, Orlando Lawrence, Kimree Lyons, Shama Reid, and Max-Ann Stewart-Legg. Costuming is by Anya Gloudon-Nelson, props Symonne Coombs, and set Michael Lorde.