

Classic Jamaican Play Opens in Kingston in October

Winston “Bello” Bell in the role of “Pa Ben” and Dorothy Cunningham as “Miss Aggy” lead a vibrant cast of actors in the Sydney Reid production of the Trevor Rhone classic, *Old Story Time*, which opens at Stages Theatre, in New Kingston, on October 5.

Director, Eugene Williams, Director of the School of Drama, at the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, says that the cast has become a tight “ensemble” subtly playing off each other, as they weave their way through the nuances of the episodic drama about Miss Aggy who has charted “a future of advancement” for her son Len, through higher education into the social strata of power. He points out that Rhone’s play provides, “iconic representations of the internalisation and vicious legacy of the prejudices of race, colour and class; and, the indomitable strategies of the peasantry to overcome these obstacles have resonated with poignant familiarity across the Jamaican and Diaspora landscapes, over the past fifty years and beyond.”

Bell, who is playing “Pa Ben” for a second time around, brings a wealth of theatre experience, which spans some 35 years, performing in *Whiplash*, *Stop That Train*, *Ship to Zion* and many others; several movies, shows on television, and he was part of the comedy duo, “Bello and Blakka.”

He commands the flow of events, as the storyteller, and “seasons the drama’s brew with proverbs, folk phrases, interacting cast and audience.”

“I did a dreadful tryout for the role of Miss Aggy at the casting for the original production of *Old Story Time*,” Dorothy Cunningham, a theatre stalwart, says. However, this time around she welcomes being at the professional level to be able to play this role.

Since her “tryout,” Dorothy’s long-term television role of “Miss Zella” on *Lime Tree Lane*, and numerous performances, including: *Not About Eve*, *Office Chase*, *Positive*, and *Second Chance*, honed the acting skills that she brings to the current production of *Old Story Time*.

While Devon Yetman, in his own words, “is a newcomer to commercial theatre,” however, he assumes the role of “Len,” Miss Aggy’s son, with confidence; and deftly grapples with the “mother and son conflicts.”

A freelance news presenter and producer with RJR 94 FM, Yeman’s previous theatre experience includes performing in *Children of the Dust*, in the 1989 Tallawah Drama Festival at The University of the West Indies.

Len’s wife, “Lois” is played by Patria-Kaye Aarons, who performed in *The Wiz*, *Sarafina* and *Cindy*. Her theatre history goes back to Kathy Levy’s *Little People and Teen Players*; and she has performed with the Jamaica Musical Theatre Company (JMMTC), as well as *Father Ho Lung and Friends*.

A Campion College alumnus and currently Communications Manager, at Grace Kennedy Money Services, Patria-Kaye says that *Old Story Time* brings her to “yet another dimension of drama.”

The late Dennis Scott, dancer, playwright, director and theatre educator, influenced Michael Forrest, who plays the role of “George,” to become involved in theatre. Forrest attended the Edna Manley College and City College (CUNY) in New York, USA; and currently teaches drama.

Over the past three decades he has played in many productions, including *When the Cat’s Away* and *Bedward*; as well as, several television dramas.

In this production, Michael Forrest, as “George” portrays the student, banker and ponzi scheme operator who muddies the lives of—Len through his deeds at Munroe College; manipulates Lois on the job; and cons Miss Aggy in his investment scheme.

Keniesha Bowes, who plays “Pearl,” says that “Eugene is not only a director, but a teacher,” who took her back to the “drawing board of acting, helping me not only to recite lines meaningfully; but, actually take on the role by living, breathing and being Pearl.”

A graduate of the Edna Manley College, Keniesha played the “vivacious dancing helper” on the popular Jamaican soap opera, *Royal Palm Estate*; and says that “shows, such as *Lime Tree Lane*, *Titus and Oliver-at-Large* influenced me to become an actor.” She has also acted in *When the Cat’s Away*, *Wine & Roses*, *Positive*, *Moon River*, and *Tick Tock*.

Jamaican folklore and rituals permeate the fabric of Old Story Time; but, as Director Williams opines, "The overriding statement of this drama; and, indeed the primary focus of this production, is the importance of family, community and nation in contemporary Jamaica, where old obscenities are masquerading in new masks."

The sets for Old Story Time are being designed by Ron Steger, a teaching and design award winning theatre professional; and Professor Emeritus of Wyoming University, USA, who currently lectures at the Edna Manley College.

The Stage Manager for the show, Evone Walters, is a graduate of Edna Manley College, who provides the "glue in the production," and maintains the unities between cast and crew.

Old Story Time plays Wednesdays through Sundays, at Stages theatre in New Kingston, from October 5 through December 2.