

Olive Lewin Heritage Foundation - brings JA culture and heritage to the Jamaican Diaspora

"Jamaica's treasure of folk music and some of our oral history would have largely remained unknown and buried in the deep recesses of rural Jamaican rural culture, was it not for the late Olive Lewin, Jamaica's renowned folklorist" according to former Prime Minister, Hon. Edward Seaga.

Now, Jamaicans and friends in the South Florida community will be able to enjoy and learn even more of Jamaica's rich heritage and culture through the launch of the Olive Lewin Heritage Foundation, on Saturday, May 31, starting at 4:30 p.m., at The Steele Auditorium, Nova Southeastern University, located at 3200 South University Drive in Davie. The event is free to the public.

The Rt. Hon. Edward Seaga will launch the historical event which is in cooperation with the Caribbean Law Programs at the the Nova University Law Center. Mr. Seaga who had worked extensively with Dr. Lewin in the collection and preservation of Jamaican folk culture will also give a historical perspective.

Guest speaker at the event will James Early, Director of Cultural Studies and Communication at the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Other invited guests include (retired) Major Johanna Lewin, daughter of Dr. Lewin, and Ms. Hazel Ramsay-McClune, former field research assistant to Dr. Lewin.

Noted musical ambassador, Steve Higgins has been instrumental in the establishment of the Olive Lewin Heritage Foundation here in South Florida. Higgins himself had worked with Dr. Lewin, as a member of the internationally acclaimed Jamaican Folk Singers, which she founded. Higgins is currently the founder and musical director of the South Florida Caribbean Chorale, now celebrating its tenth anniversary. According to Mr. Higgins, Dr. Lewin rescued Jamaica's folk culture by travelling across the island unearthing its music and customs from the source – the elders themselves.

In 1981, Dr. Lewin, internationally known anthropologist also founded the Jamaica Memory Bank – a compilation of all aspects of Jamaican folklore, interviews, research and history from her travels across the island.

The Jamaica Memory Bank intended to document all aspects of Jamaican folklore, at its inception, absorbed the pre-existing Jamaican Folk Music Research Unit - a collection of over 2,000 musical works, 20 instruments, 150 photographs - and research material donated by the late Professor Frederick Cassidy and Hon. Edward Seaga.

Historically, Jamaica's culture had always been preserved, orally, where its music, foods, customs and dances were handed down from generation to generation by the elders of those communities.

The late Dr. Hon. Olive Lewin, OM, musicologist, folklorist, singer, actress, author, composer, musician, teacher, researcher and community servant was commissioned by then Minister of Welfare & Culture (Edward Seaga) in the 1960s, to collect all unrecorded Jamaican folk music in order to preserve and document this vital part of Jamaica's culture. Having collected the music over the years, she proceeded to the phase of musical arranging with passion and respect for the harmonies, beauty and uniqueness of the authentic island music described as equal to standards of revered and renowned world-class composers.

Olive Lewin was a highly accomplished professional musician- voice, violin, harmonies, piano, composition (The Royal Academy, London). She was an ethnomusicologist- a graduate of the Queen's University of Belfast, and also in the United Kingdom, a Fellow of Trinity College, London, and an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music. She was Director of Arts and Culture at the Office of the Prime Minister of Jamaica and Director of the Jamaica Institute of Folk Culture. In 1983, she founded and directed the Jamaica Orchestra for Youth.

Under her direction, the Jamaican Folk Singers took the music back to the Jamaican population, performing all over Jamaica, then to the rest of the world performing folklore and folk songs to the continents of the world, frequently staging lecture demonstrations to school children and adults alike and performing at world music festivals overseas.

Described as extremely hardworking and a disciplined daughter of Jamaica from Hayes, Clarendon, Dr. Lewin built a long and extensive musical career bringing Jamaican folk music to the world to impeccable standards. She died at age 85, on April 10, 2013.

For her tireless and relentless efforts to preserve and protect, and to present Jamaican folk music to the world, Dr. Lewin was recognized by foreign governments, international organizations including UNESCO, the International Council for Traditional Music, and the Organization of American States (OAS). She was posthumously awarded Jamaica's fifth highest national honor - the Order of Merit, last October.

During last year's Independence celebrations in South Florida, the Consulate General of Jamaica paid homage to her memory and service by incorporating into the 2013 anniversary commemorative church service, special hymns and selections which features the musical compositions and arrangements of one of Jamaica's finest treasures.