

# A great heart—Rex Nettleford

## Barry Chevannes

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A great heart, full of nobility, intellect, wisdom and love, made its last and final beat last night in Washington under the stress of the great love it has borne all these years for the peoples who tenant this island and the rest of the archipelagic chain.

Love has taken its final toll. Jamaica grieves. The Caribbean mourns. A greater and nobler love no one has.

Rex Nettleford died as he lived, working, writing, speaking, engaging, asserting, imagining, creating, reaching ever outward searching for our space and place in a world in which, as he knew only too well, we either define who we are or leave it to others all too willing to put us in our place.

His reach was colossal, across the continents of Europe, Africa and the Americas, his search relentless and detailed. Even as he is positioning the Caribbean, insisting on the humanity and centrality of the African presence in its definition, he is at work excavating and validating that presence in the creative intellect and imagination. His main but by no means only instruments were the regional University of the West Indies, his home; the National Dance Theatre Company, which he co-founded; the venerable Institute of Jamaica, which he found, saw and enriched, and the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, which he helped to build.

The Institute of Jamaica he served as a Chairman of its Council, guiding and shaping its role as the country's premier institution dedicated to the preservation of that most critical of faculties to the human being as to a nation – memory, through which we find and maintain a sense of identity.

The Institute made him a Fellow, an honour he was most proud of and wanted to be known, by appending "FIJ" behind his name. But he was not content to bask in its glow, but to exercise the right the honour gave him to sit as a full-fledged member of the Council. He missed no meeting, save on account of travel abroad or other duty, and remained up to the Council's very last meeting on January 13, 2010 a great source of knowledge, wisdom and sobriety.

There is no replacing this great heart. Others will come and beat with great distinction, but none can replace what we all have lost, if only because his was unique, from the time it began to the time it stopped at 20:00 hours on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, a full seventy-seven years.