

'You will always dance among the spirits': for Rex Nettleford

Rex's passing was sudden and untimely and it has taken some time to come to terms with it. To be Rex was to be full of vitality—physical, intellectual, spiritual—so much so that one imagined him to be a permanent feature of the landscape. In his personal interactions he was unfailingly warm, generous and illuminating of our condition. Across the wide range of his expressions as thinker, writer, teacher, educational administrator, historian, cultural theorist, cultural activist, choreographer, and performer; there was, for me, one transcendental theme. That was the centrality of the affirmation of *personhood*—to be somebody—'smadification', as he put it; in a society that was founded on the very denial of that most human of attributes. *Smadification*: self-definition, identity, self-esteem, self-actualisation. His genius lay in conveying this message in a manner that was inclusive, revealing its universal significance. And his secret was that he not only theorised it, brilliantly, but lived it. For Rex was not just 'somebody'—he was many persons, each the epitome of excellence in the field, and yet all rolled into one 'Rex'—a king among us indeed. 'The quintessential Caribbean man' is an apt accolade, but let us hasten to add: the quintessence of the finest creative accomplishments of our region.

Wherever you are Rex, we know that you are dancing. Dancing as your timeless message continues to enlighten us. Dancing among the ancestral spirits of all Caribbean peoples, of the Diaspora, of the human family.

Norman Girvan

6/03/2010