

Rex Nettleford Conference: Cross Cultural Exchanges

In October I was fortunate enough to receive a grant from the Heritage Alliance and British Council to attend the Rex Nettleford Conference in Jamaica. Having worked with Rex many years ago on a conference and publication in the UK called *Serious About Dance*, I was honoured to have the opportunity to attend the conference in his namesake. It was also a valuable opportunity to meet likeminded practitioners and researchers passionate about expanding the dialogue around Black Dance internationally.

Dance from the African and African Caribbean Diaspora has often been ignored or undocumented by mainstream dance practice, appropriated or misrepresented. Where there has been a documented presence, it is often with reference to African American or African aesthetics, although in the UK many of the. Their contribution is invaluable and deserving of recognition, but what if the contribution of the Caribbean? The complexities of a melting pot, of dispersion with and across islands, of African retentions that have taken on new lives in the movements and practice both in Jamaica and across the Caribbean. This is a conversation that I was hoping to expand my research on and to further inform Serendipity's work and practice.

During my time in Jamaica I was fortunate to reconnect with L'Antoinette Stines and hear about the work she is doing to sustain a legacy for CARIMOD technique L'Antech and her company L'Acadco. It was significant for me to be able to talk with L'Antoinette about her life and practice, and to have her wisdom and guidance in my approach to the Rex Nettleford conference.

The trip also proved to be a significant moment of validation for the work that Serendipity are doing to contribute to international dialogues around the documentation, research and legacy of Black dance. Conversations with practitioners and academics highlighted the need for Serendipity's research, but also highlighted that in many respects the work that is being done is at the forefront of current methodologies. This research will pave the way for future projects.

Other practitioners expressed an interest in collaborating with Serendipity on future projects, and as a directly result we are planning an exhibition with archivist Valerie Rochon who is the custodian of several dance archives of Caribbean-based practitioners, in the US. I also had the opportunity to meet Jericho Brown, an award winning poet based at Harvard University whose work shaping dialogues and paving the way.

There was also time to visit the National gallery of Jamaica, the oldest and largest public art museum in the Anglophone Caribbean. The exhibits there, and the interpretation of the exhibits was something that I drew particular interest in; a crossroads between art, history, heritage and politics. The sculptures at Empanication Park *Redemption Song* by artist Laura Facey echoed the spirit of rising out of adversity. As a result of this trip, I have come away not just with new

knowledge and archival materials around Caribbean arts and culture, but also with a broader understanding of how archival materials and objects can be better interpreted and presented within museum and heritage contexts in the UK and Europe.

I am grateful to the British Council and Heritage Alliance for the opportunity to make this research trip, which I know is just the beginning of a wider area of research and practice. Serendipity has been empowered to move forward with our research, with a renewed network of collaborators and supporters.