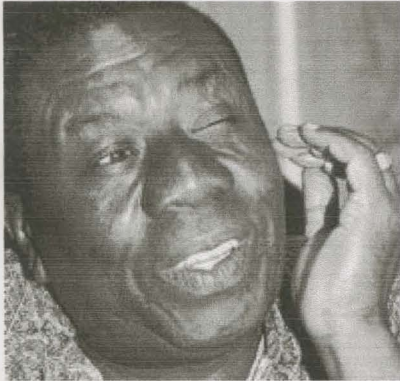


Oliver Samuels Living Large

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B/N Samuels, Oliver

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS into his career in film and stage comedian Oliver Samuels is as far removed from his rural origin as the canefields are from Hollywood.

Oliver Samuels, known by most through his vastly popular television series, **Oliver at Large**, has combined a career in marketing with life on stage, touring every year between spring and summer before returning home for his executive offices at Mack D's -- the Kingston-based company where he is a director and head of marketing and public relations.

Abroad, he is known as Jamaica's Bill Cosby and is a brand name that is synonymous with Jamaica and laughter. Samuels is widely regarded as one of the funniest talents to emerge from the Caribbean.

In addition to his work with the local car company, Oliver Samuels was recently selected by the wire transfer service Unitransfer to star in a series of advertisements that will market their products to Florida's Caribbean community.

Oliver Samuels also, in recent times, piloted the launch of Oliver's Yaad Cyaad which features Samuels giving instructions in Patois and standard english. The unique feature of Patois prompts is a first for the international calling-card industry.

He is living large, but not for himself alone.

Friend and acting colleague Audrey Reid told Outlook that Samuels has a special fondness for the poor because he knows exactly where they are coming from.

"Going on tour with him, meeting people, he has a weakness for those who are poor. He knows their plight, he has lived it. He would die a pauper now the way he gives things. I don't know that he would regret it."

Samuels was born on an estate called Tremolesworth in St. Mary where he grew up with brother Harry, and parents Mabel and Hubert Samuels.

Great place to grow up

Life was very basic but, for the children, it was a great place to grow up.

"My childhood was a fantastic one," says Oliver.

"The children were protected. We were loved and chastised alike by all the adults. We never felt as if we were in danger ."

His father worked on the estate but his mother was an entrepreneur.

"She sold flittas (fritters), dumpling, fry, fish, plantain, juices, any and everything," recalls her son. "She was a woman before her time."

His hardworking mother believed that her son was destined to lead a special life and would encourage him at every turn, attending his performances at school and always enquiring from his teachers about his progress at the Salvation Army Infant School, 'teacher Haffstead's school' and Rosebank Primary School.

As he grew older, one of Oliver's greatest desires was to leave Tremolesworth. He hated the mud. He hated the pit latrine.

"I knew I had to go to school and do something better," he recalls.

Oliver boarded at Dinthill Technical High School where he had thoughts of becoming a teacher.

After leaving Dinthill he worked at various times in a number of companies as a costing clerk, in clerical jobs at the University of the West Indies and even briefly at The Gleaner as a proofreader.

His first glimpse of a movie screen removed from his mind every thought of teaching. When classes were offered at the Little Theatre by the School of Drama, Oliver enrolled with alacrity and beginning with his first role in the production A Raisin in the Sun, never looked back.

Locally, his television show, Oliver at Large, was a rating's triumph.

Today he comments: "Oliver at Large was a show that brought families together on Friday evenings. Previously, the men and boys would hang out and the mother and children would be at home. The television show brought everyone inside. I believe it gave all Jamaicans a sense of pride, looking at ourselves and laughing at ourselves."

Successful touring

When the sitcom came off air, it continued to do well abroad, leading Oliver and his 'triumvirate' of fellow actors into years of successful touring.

Audrey Reid recalls, "We were like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, referring to fellow actresses Deon Silvera and Ann Marie Fuller who, along with her, were taken under the actor's wing both locally and on tour abroad.

"We could not do anything wrong. We started very young and thought theatre was a big joke. No one could speak against us. He (Oliver) has always kept us with him and speaks of us as if we are his daughters. Now that we have carved a niche for ourselves, he takes great pride. He has moulded us this way. Being with him was a learning experience. He was our drama teacher, working and learning and exposing us to other cultures outside of Jamaica."

According to Reid, while most people think that Oliver Samuels is funny, she simply does not share that view of him all the time.

"For me, Oliver is not that funny as how others see him on the road. I know when to draw the line with him."

Oliver, she says is a loving, caring and serious, especially where his grandchildren are concerned.

Serious about work, family

"Besides theatre, he is very serious in terms of his work and in terms of family. He is a very serious and dedicated grandfather. Those kids are his life; everything else is secondary."

Samuels is the father of six children: Renée, the pastry chef, Sandrene an assistant teacher; Lesmore a pilot; Norman who until recently was in the U.S. Navy; Delroy, who is a sales representative resident in Florida; and, Christine, an assistant teacher in Kingston.

Separated from his children's mother when his twin daughters Sandrine and Renée were only 11 months, Oliver Samuels took them to live with their grandmother in the country.

When they grew older, the single father took on the role of parenting them himself.

According to Renée, "He (Oliver) was an excellent dad. He was very strict, especially in the areas of schoolwork. He aims for excellence." Now that he is a grandfather, the actor is much less strict. He spoils his grandchildren. They get off easier than us. In our time he was stricter. He denies it but they are spoilt."

Mother's understanding

Although Oliver has never married his mother he says, was the only woman who understood his desire to act it is women who are the focus of his greatest admiration and inspiration.

According to him, the best time of his life was working with Louise Bennett in the Music Boy.

"She is my mentor. I just love her because of how she used the dialect. She was always so funny. She made me feel proud. When you hear her talk you could sense the pride and love she had in Jamaica."

That feeling of pride in being Jamaican is something he wants to replicate for audiences all over the world.

But theatre is not all he loves.

For the future, what Oliver has on his mind are charitable projects to benefit the poor. On his list are the Rose Bank All-Age School which he attended as a child, the Swift Purcell Boys' Home in Clarendon, St. Mary and children living with HIV/AIDS. He also dreams of setting up a fund to help young people in St. Mary.

With a determination similar to that invested in his theatre career, he is likely to succeed.