

Olive Senior captures Jamaican heritage

DEPENDING ON how in touch you are with Jamaican heritage, or even depending on where you originate, the question of who 'Big Boy', 'Madam Fate' and 'Tacky' are may simply leave you scratching the side of your head in complete befuddlement.

On Tuesday evening, a possible solution to that vacant look, **The Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage**, was launched at Devon House. The book is written by Olive Senior, the author of **Summer Lightning, Gardening in the Tropics, Talking Trees, Arrival of the Snake Woman and Discerner of Hearts**.

Published by Twin Guinep Publishers, **The Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage** presents 580 pages of information about many aspects of Jamaica. It follows Senior's tradition of producing texts on Caribbean culture, which include **The A-Z of Jamaican Heritage** and **Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English Speaking Caribbean**.

FAMED ORATOR

In introducing the encyclopaedia,

Professor Edward Baugh described the collection of data as an embodiment of what Jamaica means. The famed orator, who delivered his piece with wit and style, was also quick to point out that the text was not exhaustive – but that it does not pretend to be.

EXPERIENCES

His presentation highlighted what the text had to offer, as he mingled the varying bits of information that he revealed with his own experiences, explaining how the book complemented or completed his own knowledge. Titbits of information, such as that the rainfly becomes the termite 'chi-chi', were met with 'ohhs' and "I didn't know that" from the audience, revealing that there is much to learn from the text.

The Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage is an independent production of Olive Senior. As such, despite the exhaustive nature of the research it required, the project was unfunded.

Senior told **The Gleaner** that though she made a few approaches to get funding, she did not pursue it aggressively because she wanted to retain control of the project. "I just went along at my own pace," she says. Although the pro-

ject took three years, she notes that it is not possible to say exactly how long it took to produce, since she worked on it between other projects.

She also explained that the encyclopaedia is something of a revised version of **The A-Z of Jamaican Heritage**. Describing the research as a "process of discovery" she says said that while **The A-Z** formed a core list from which to work, **The Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage** "took on a life of its own." "Things suggested other things," she said.

TIME AND EFFORT

In his introduction of the work, Baugh had also made mention of the time and effort that the work took. He noted that though Senior had to interview many people for the information, the book was all hers. "Ah she one write it. Ah she one pick dem brain," he asserted.

Baugh lauded the varied nature of the information to be discovered in the book, which he said present a textured view of what makes up Jamaica. He went on to describe **The Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage** as a handsome book that is that is fitting for exploration and getting lost in.