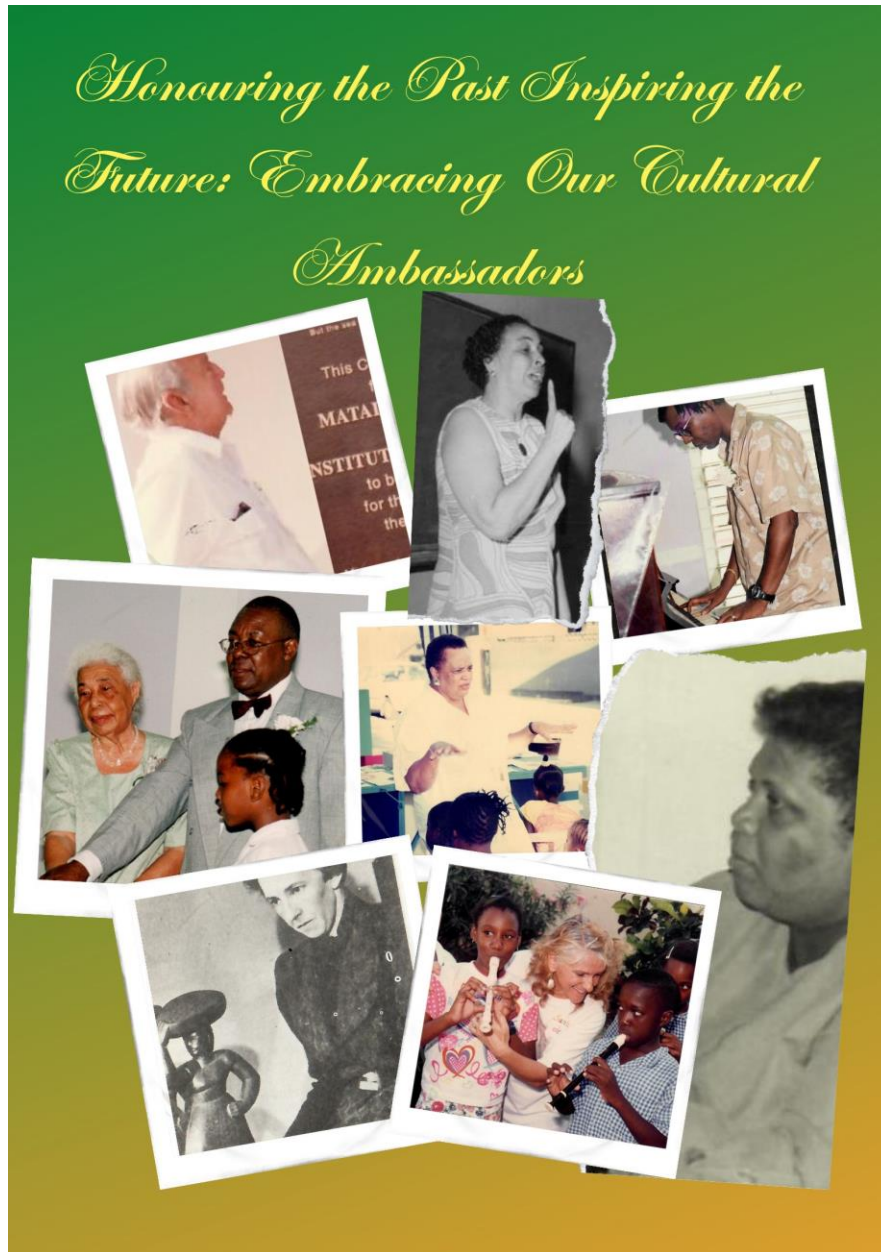


*Honouring the Past, Inspiring the Future: Embracing our Cultural
Ambassadors*

Celebrating the Legacy of the Junior Centre



Since its founding in 1940, the Junior Centre of the Institute of Jamaica's Programmes Coordination Division has stood as a beacon of artistic education and cultural development. Dedicated to nurturing young Jamaicans aged 6 to 17 in the visual and performing arts, the Centre has played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's rich cultural heritage. Through its diverse programs and community resources including a library at East Street and a reading corner at Greater Portmore the Junior Centre fosters intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural growth that resonates far beyond its walls.

The Centre's mission aligns closely with the vision of its parent organization, the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment, and Sport, which emphasizes excellence in service delivery and the realization of youth and cultural potential in nation-building. Over the decades, the Junior Centre has embodied this mission, creating a vibrant and dynamic environment for artistic exploration and personal development.

Celebrating Cultural Ambassadors: Alumni Who Shaped Jamaica's Arts

The Junior Centre has produced a remarkable roster of cultural ambassadors whose talents have enriched Jamaica's artistic landscape. From pioneering sculptors and jazz legends to contemporary music icons, these alumni exemplify the Centre's enduring impact.

Visual Arts Pioneers

Edna Manley - Often regarded as the mother of Jamaican art, Edna Manley was the first visual arts teacher at the Junior Centre in the 1940s. Her pioneering work in sculpture and education laid the foundation for Jamaica's artistic identity during the nation's early decolonization period. Her

iconic sculpture *Negro Aroused* (1935) symbolized the awakening of a people and remains a powerful emblem of Jamaican cultural pride (Poupeye, 2023).

Osmond Watson OD (1934–2005) - A celebrated painter and sculptor, Watson honed his talents at the Junior Centre between 1948 and 1952 before continuing his studies at the Jamaica School of Art and Craft. His contributions to Jamaican visual arts remain influential.

Musical Icons

Desi Jones- A masterful drummer and musical icon, Desi Jones began his artistic journey at the East Street Junior Centre in 1966. There, he learned to read music and became proficient on the conga drums, skills that propelled him to national acclaim.

Astley “Grub” Cooper CD - As the leader of the legendary Fab 5 band, Grub Cooper’s musical roots trace back to the Junior Centre, where he started learning the recorder at age eight under the tutelage of Mrs. Carmen Verity.

Sonny Bradshaw CD (1926–2009) -A veteran jazz musician, Bradshaw frequented the Junior Centre library as a child, where he accessed books like *Popular Mechanics* that inspired his early experiments with radio and sound. His career as a pianist and saxophonist spanned decades, leaving a lasting legacy in Jamaican music.

Bunny “Ruggs” Clarke OD (1949–2014) -The lead member of the Grammy-winning reggae band Third World, Clarke credited the Junior Centre with nurturing his musical talent.

Barry Chevannes- Renowned for his contributions as a music educator at the Junior Centre, Chevannes helped shape the musical education of many young Jamaicans.

Performing Arts and Contemporary Figures

Oniel Peart - Former member of the innovative performing group No-Maddz, Peart also served as a drumming tutor at the Junior Centre, guiding many students through successful Jamaica Cultural Development Corporation (JCDC) competitions. His work reflects the Centre's commitment to fostering versatility and creativity.

Spragga Benz - Internationally acclaimed dancehall artist and actor, Spragga Benz represents the global reach of Jamaican culture, a testament to the foundation laid by the Junior Centre.

Looking Ahead: Continuing the Legacy of Excellence

As the Junior Centre moves forward, it remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering creativity, cultural pride, and artistic excellence among Jamaica's youth. The Centre's ongoing programs and community initiatives ensure that new generations will continue to benefit from its rich legacy. By celebrating its past and embracing future possibilities, the Junior Centre exemplifies the transformative power of the arts in nation-building and cultural identity. Its alumni stand as living proof that with dedication, education, and opportunity, young Jamaicans can become true cultural ambassadors on both national and international stages.

Reference

Poupeye, V. (2023). *Collecting art in the Anglophone Caribbean: The case of post-independence Jamaica*. Caribbean Cultural Institute at PAMM. <https://cci.pamm.org/en/collecting-art-in-the-anglophone-caribbean-the-case-of-post-independence-jamaica/>