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**TRIBUTE TO TREVOR RHONE**

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2018 GRIFFIN AWARDS  
SVA THEATRE NEW YORK

# TREVOR DAVE RHONE

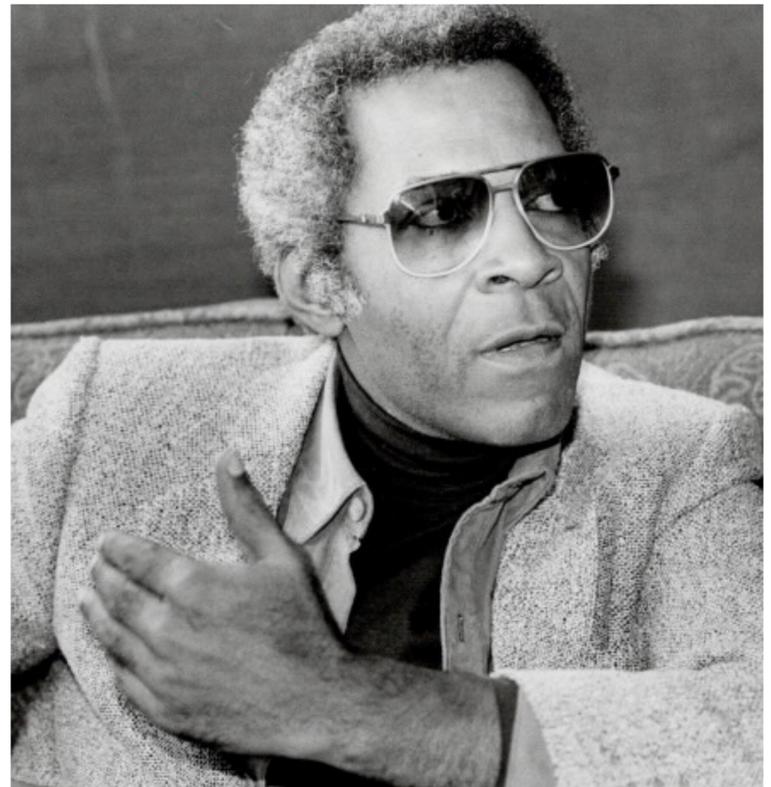
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## JAMAICA'S GREATEST DRAMATIST AND STORYTELLER

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Trevor Dave Rhone, Jamaica's most celebrated dramatist and storyteller, was born on March 24, 1940, in the Victoria Jubilee Hospital in Kingston. He was the last child of his parents Hezekiah Nathaniel Rhone, known as "Mass Heze" [MassHeze.jpg], and Rosamond Wilhelmina Rhone (nee McCalla) known as "Miss Mac" [MissMac.jpg]. Mass Heze was a Gentleman Farmer and Miss Mac was a School Teacher. Trevor grew up in the rural village of Bellas Gate in the hills of St. Catherine 10 miles north of Old Harbour.

A vivid account of the first half of his life is given in his autobiographical play and book "Bellas Gate Boy". In particular, the audio recording in the Audio-CD accompanying the book gives the account in his own voice. It was about at age nine that Trevor's talent in the Dramatic Arts first blossomed in a Rally at the All Saints Anglican Church in Bellas Gate. It was the standard practice for a Rally to be used to raise funds for the Church.



The Rally included recitals of verse and music. Trevor's mother Miss Mac and his Aunt Syl [AuntSyl.jpg] were impressed by his talents and thereafter supported his pursuit of the Dramatic Arts. It is however interesting to note that Trevor claims that he inherited his dramatic talents from his father Mass Heze.

At age twelve in 1952 Trevor entered Beckford and Smith's Secondary School (later St Jago High School) with a half Parish Scholarship. In those days there was just one Scholarship per Parish. As Trevor tied with another student for the top position, the Parish Scholarship was split into two. It was a few years later that Trevor discovered the theatre and became actively involved in the Secondary Schools Drama Festival, as well as the annual pantomime staged by the Little Theatre Movement. After graduation in 1958, he began writing radio plays for the newly established Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC).

With the encouragement of the great Trinidadian actor Edric Connor, Trevor applied to and was accepted by the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama in England in 1960. However, in those days a few years before Jamaica gained independence from Britain, a course of study for a career in the Dramatic Arts was not considered a viable proposition. Rather students going on to higher education were encouraged to pursue careers as Doctors, Teachers, Lawyers, Accountants, Pastors, etc. In a family conference called to discuss the matter, Trevor's eldest brother Neville [Neville.jpg] proclaimed: "On no account, Miss Mac, spend any of your good money to send that damn idiot to England to study foolishness."

By this time, Mass Heze had passed (in 1956). However, Trevor had the backing of his mother Miss Mac and Aunt Syl to study at Rose Bruford College. On their meager financial resources respectively of School Teacher and Postmistress, they supported Trevor at Rose Bruford College for his first year. For his remaining years he was supported by Bursary Scholarships from the College.

Returning to Jamaica in 1963, Trevor taught at Kingston College. *School's Out* (originally titled *Take Six*) came out of his experiences as a High School Teacher. It is also among the region's most popular dramas because of its sometimes irreverent hilarity, but it is the equal of *Smile Orange* in the way it satirizes the education system. Many years later, he would be honored by the Kingston College Old Boys Association of New York at their annual reunion dinner in 2008.

However, Trevor was discouraged by the low pay in the Teaching profession, and returned to England.

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In England he was frustrated by the limited roles available for black stage actors, and so returned to Jamaica in 1965. Back in Jamaica he formed a dramatic arts group, Theatre 77, with Yvonne Jones-Brewster and other colleagues, and later opened the Barn Theatre in a converted garage. He also taught at St. Andrew Technical High School where he was very impressed by the enthusiastic efforts of students in staging a dramatic production.

Staging local productions at the Barn and writing pantomimes in Jamaican dialect, Rhone continued to support himself through teaching, but stopped this in 1969 to concentrate on writing. His first stage play, *The Gadget*, explored the tensions that developed between an illiterate countrywoman and her urbanised, educated son.

In 1970-71, Rhone collaborated with Perry Henzell on *The Harder They Come*, the acclaimed cinematic masterpiece about a country boy forced into a life of crime and violence by the dehumanisation of the city. In 1976 he directed the film version of *Smile Orange*, and in 1988 his screenplay for the film *Milk and Honey* received the Canadian Genie award for best original screenplay at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Rhone shares a stage at the pinnacle of Caribbean drama. His legacy is not only the existence of a number of excellent and very relevant plays, but a lively professional theatre, a rapidly growing corpus of films and a rapidly expanding compendium of cultural industries.

Rhone later served as a visiting lecturer at Harvard University as well as at a number of other American colleges and institutions. He lectured for some time at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies. His family donated a collection of his works to the UWI Mona Library in November 2014.

Rhone received many awards during his lifetime, such as a Fellow of Rose Bruford College in 2007, and the Musgrave Gold Medal in 1988 by the Institute of Jamaica.

He was made Commander of the Order of Distinction by the Jamaican government in 1980.

Trevor had always retained ties with Bellas Gate community and towards the end of his life was actively involved in philanthropic activities in the community. He purchased the property [FamilyHome.jpg] containing his boyhood house and donated that property to build a Basic School for the community. He assisted in the process to secure funding to build the Basic School [BasicSchoolFunding.jpg]. The Basic School is named McSyl in memory of his mother Miss Mac and his Aunt Syl [McSylBasicSchool.jpg]. In 2008 he established the Bellas Gate Boy Foundation which provided computers to the McSyl Basic School to enable computer literacy among the young children.

The Foundation had plans to tackle the limited career opportunities available to the young people of Bellas Gate by providing Young Adult education and establishing a



It was the day after returning from a trip to Bellas Gate with his brother Neville that Trevor Dave Rhone died on the 15 September 2009 at age 69 (the same age as his father) of a heart attack.

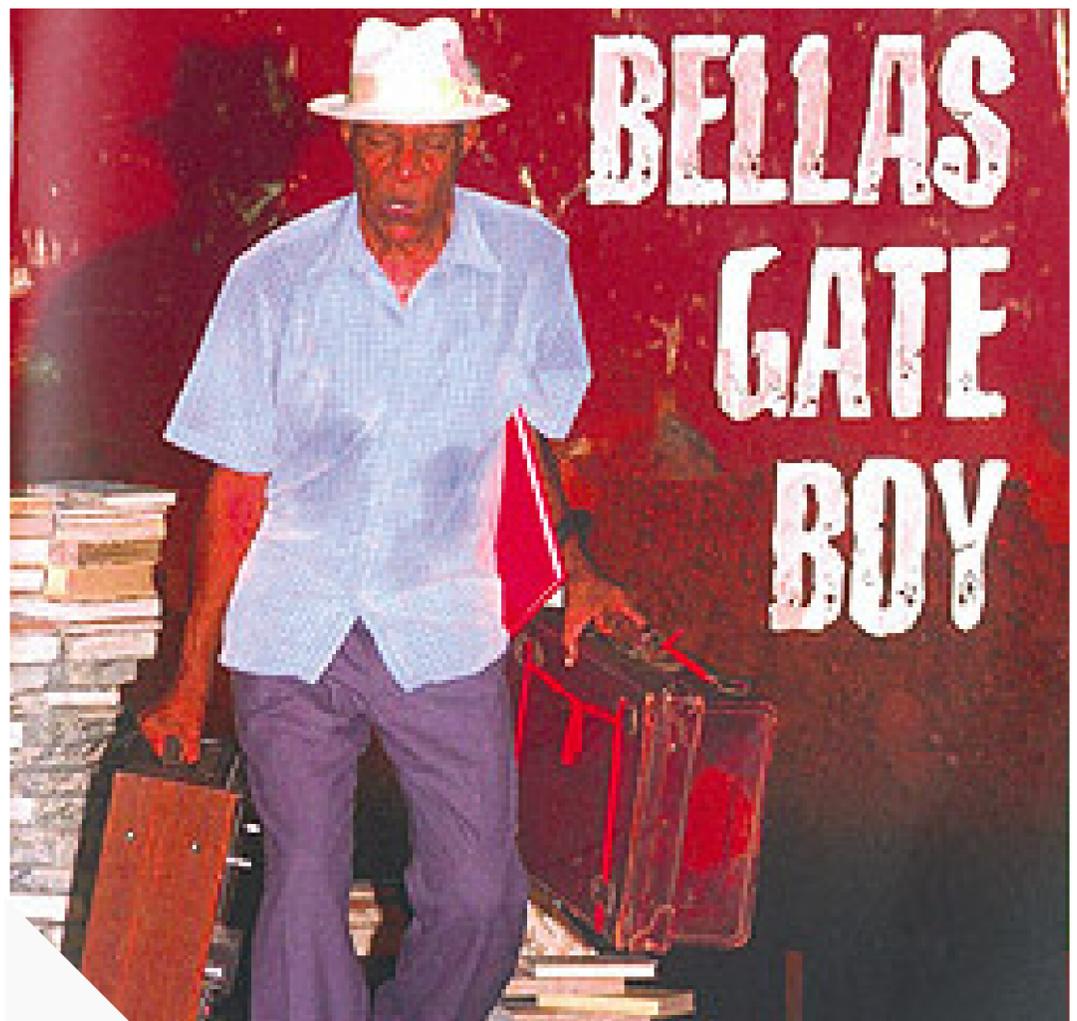
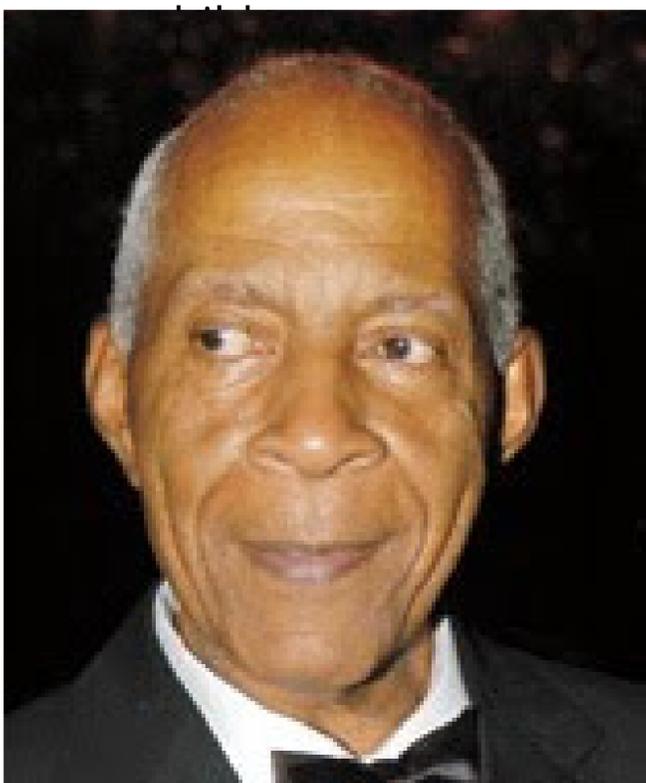
He is survived by his wife Camella, children Traci, Trevor-David, Jonathan, and grandchild Sosia. The nine-night wake was held at the Ranny Williams Entertainment Center on September 30, 2009. The funeral service took place on October 1, 2009, at St. Lukes Anglican Church in Cross Roads. His cremated remains [Tomb.jpg], surrounded by the graves of his ancestors [GrandFathersTomb.jpg, GrandMothersTomb.jpg, MissMacTomb.jpg], lie in the churchyard of the All Saints Anglican Church in Bellas Gate. In his after-life he has a panoramic view of the south coast of Jamaica, extending from the Bull Head Mountain in the West to the Blue Mountains in the East.

## BELLAS GATE

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## REFERENCES

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2. David Katz, Trevor Rhone Obituary, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/sep/29/trevor-rhone-obituary>, September 2009.
3. Tyrone Reid, Smile Orange Review, Tallawah Magazine, <http://www.tallawahmagazine.com/2009/06/theatre-review-smile-orange.html>, June 2009.
4. Trevor Rhone Official Website, <http://trevorrhone.com/biography.html>
5. Dianthe Spencer, Smile Orange: Melba Liston in Jamaica, Black Music Research Journal, Vol 34, No 1, pp 65-83, 2014. doi:10.5406/blacmusiresej.34.1.0065
6. Top 5 Jamaican films, Jamaica Gleaner, <http://jamaicagleaner.com/gleaner/20101106/life/life2.html>, November 6, 2010.
7. Smile Orange, IMDb Review, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075237>, May 1976.
8. "Trevor Rhone, Playwright," National Library of Jamaica Digital Collection, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://nljdigital.nlj.gov.jm/items/show/941>.

## PLAYS

- IT'S NOT MY FAULT BABY (1967), CO-AUTHOR
- THE GADGET (1968) MUSICAL
- CINDERELLA (1969)
- MUSIC BOY (1971)
- SLEEPER (1972)
- COMIC STRIP (1973)
- SCHOOL'S OUT (1974)
- OLD STORY TIME (1979)
- EVERYMAN (1980)
- TWO CAN PLAY (1982)
- THE GAME (1985)
- MILK AND HONEY (1988)
- FAMILY PLANNING MUSICAL (1989)
- ALL IN ONE (1991)
- THE POWER (1992),
- ONE STOP DRIVER (1992)
- DEAR COUNSELOR (1997)
- BELLAS GATE BOY (2002)

## FILMS

THE HARDER THEY COME (1972), CO-AUTHOR  
SMILE ORANGE (1974), DIRECTOR  
TOP RANKIN' (1986)  
MILK AND HONEY (1988), CO-AUTHOR  
ONE LOVE (2003), AUTHOR  
GOING TO EXTREMES (ABC TV), ACTOR  
REVELATION - MIRAMAR (2001), ACTOR

## BOOKS

BELLAS GATE BOY, MACMILLAN CARIBBEAN, 2008.  
OLD STORY TIME AND SMILE ORANGE, LONGMAN, 1987.  
TWO CAN PLAY, KET BOOKS, 1984.  
TWO CAN PLAY AND OTHER PLAYS (SCHOOL'S OUT, THE POWER), MACMILLAN CARIBBEAN, 2008.