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Feature Article: THE MAYOUMBA FOLKLORIC THEATRE An Enduring Legacy Of Cultural Performances

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As promised last week, The Anguillian now presents the following feature article on The Mayoumba Folkloric Theatre which, to date, boasts an enduring legacy of cultural performances in and outside Anguilla. The information was provided by Mr. Julian Harrigan, a founding member of the group.



The Mayoumba Folkloric Theatre group is one of Anguilla's longest-serving cultural heritage organisations. It comprises a caste of dedicated male and female performers who, after being on stage for many years, still continue to entertain and thrill residents and visitors alike with their narrations, songs, music and dance of Anguilla's glorious cultural past.

The group was formed in 1972 by Methodist Minister, the Reverend Ruben Telemaque, his wife, (Brenda) and Julian Harrigan, then a social worker. It was later named The Anguilla Choral Circle.

The Mayoumba Folkloric Theatre in performance at Sirena Hotel

A few months after the formation of the group, cultural performances were organised by a section of the organisation which was eventually called the Mayoumba Folkloric Theatre in honour of Anguilla's forebears who came from Mayoumba Village in Africa.

"Keeping our folksongs and dance alive is a major undertaking," Mr. Harrigan told The Anguillian. "Many locals believe that traditional music, song and dance are out of 'style' and should be confined to the history books." But, for Mr. Harrigan, and the rest of the performers in the group, there is every reason to keep the tradition alive.

Harrigan went on: "The International Folk Music Council defined folk music as 'the product of a musical tradition that has evolved through the process of oral transmission.' The Council goes on to state that the term can be applied to music which has evolved from rudimental beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular art music. It can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer, and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community.

"The term does not cover composed music that has been taken over by a community without modification, as it is the re-fashioning and re-creation of the music by the community that gives it its folk character."

Mr. Harrigan stated that this applied to the folksongs of Anguilla which had been passed on from mothers to children. "Research in local folksongs has been done by members of the Mayoumba Folkloric Theatre and the discovery was made that many senior citizens could only remember one verse of some folksongs. This meant that in order to have a decent length song, medleys were created telling similar stories, but different compositions."

The Mayoumba Folkloric Theatre has travelled extensively, informing other countries and people about Anguilla, its history and culture. The group has visited and performed in St. Maarten/St. Martin, St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Kitts, Santo Domingo, Guadeloupe, Curacao, Trinidad, Mexico, England, Holland and the United States of America.

At present it performs at Sirena Hotel, every Thursday, where visitors and locals attend and enjoy the presentations. The owners of the hotel, Robin and Sue Ricketts, recently announced that the 27-room resort will be transformed into a cultural centre and, at its reopening in October, will be renamed Anacaona, which means flower or feather of gold in the Taino/Arawak language. Groups like the Mayoumba Folkloric Theatre and individual cultural performers are expected to be constant features at the hotel.

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