

Film Academy Honors Son of Jamaican Immigrants With “Green Book” Oscar



Dr. Don Shirley and Actor Mahershala Ali

By Vinette K. Pryce
Special Assignment

Nowhere in the Oscar-winning film “Green Book” is it mentioned that Dr. Don Shirley, the principal character of the film has Jamaican roots. As a matter of fact, the story of a Black, classically-trained pianist and his Italian chauffeur who engages on a road tour through the Jim Crowera south skirts Shirley’s heritage and even mimics his tendency to reject stereotyped affinities of Black America.

For instance, Shirley neither

craves fried chicken nor the Hit Parade dominated by Little Richard and others revered by the American Black population.

His disdain for jazz musicians who smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol onstage is reprised on celluloid to be typical revulsions of the Caribbean genius titled and named Dr. Don Shirley.

Born in Pensacola, Florida on Jan. 27, 1927 to Jamaicans Edwin, an Episcopal Priest and Stella a teacher, Shirley probably was not raised on flour-battered, grease-soaked chicken but the kind of brown-stewed and curried chick-

en Jamaicans prefer.

And while Chuck Berry, Little Richard, James Brown and other prominent Black American performers are extolled throughout the pop and rhythm and blues genre, in his youth Shirley must have been consumed by the prowess and artistry of Bach, Tchaikovsky and other classical composers.

According to reports Shirley was a child prodigy who started playing the piano at age two. By age 18 he was regarded as an accomplished, professional playing with the Boston Pops.

The three-time-Oscar winning film “Green Book” however focuses heavily on the white driver, his Italian family and friends and the fact the raucous Bronx bouncer nicknamed “the Lip” was far more familiar with Black culture than his “dignified” employer.

The title is derived from the actual compilation of safe hotels that welcomed people of color who stop into racist towns below the Mason-Dixon line. Despite the fact Shirley was accomplished, in demand and revered for his talent, the storyline cites occasions when he was denied

eating in the very places he was applauded in performance.

Throughout the film Shirley is portrayed as a refined, articulate, well-mannered man who lived above Carnegie Hall at 57th Street in New York. His home reflected his travels and an appreciation of Asian and African art.

Shirley’s story was depicted by actor Mahershala Ali who won a best supporting actor Oscar last Sunday. The film also copped the best picture votes and for a triumvirate the Oscar for best original screenplay. Shirley died April 6, 2013 at age 86 of heart disease.

Bahamas PM & 1st Female Premier of Turks & Caicos Merit AFUWI Honors

Now that the entertainment industry has fully regaled their most achieving talents by presenting film and music trophies during the Academy and Grammy Awards, distinguished Caribbean citizens are set to receive Pinnacle Pathfinder, Chancellor’s, Luminary, Pelican and Legacy Awards.

Slated for Feb. 27, the 22nd annual and probably most anticipated Caribbean, black-tie gala awards event closes out Black History and Reggae Month at the Pierre Hotel with honors and a principal purpose of boosting scholarship donations to worthy students seeking admission to the University

of the West Indies.

Hosted by the American Foundation for the University of the West Indies, the annual affair will again pay tribute to a myriad of figures representing politics, banking, hotel management, entertainment and entrepreneurship with presentations from Sir Hillary Beckles, Vice Chancellor at UWI.

One of the most prestigious is the Legacy Award which will be handed to Hubert Alexander-Minnis, the Prime Minister of the Bahamas and the first female Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands, Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson.

Both alums of the highest institution of learning in the

Caribbean, the two heads of governments will join an illustrious gathering of outstanding individuals whose excellence have surpassed the average.

Also named for excellence — Jamaican hotelier Kevin Hendrickson will receive the Chancellor’s award in business, Canada Scotia Bank’s Anya Schnoor, the Luminary and the 2019 Pinnacle Pathfinder award will go to Filmmaker Malcolm D. Lee.

The 70-year-old education maintains campuses in Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica with satellite facilities in a number of Eastern Caribbean countries. For more info. Check www.afuwi.org



Sharlene Cartwright-Robinson