

# THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES



## Boscoe Holder

*Chancellor, Mr. Boscoe Holder has contributed several decades of energetic creativity in a variety of areas. Entirely self-taught, he is a multi-talented and internationally acclaimed painter, dancer, costume designer, choreographer, orchestra leader and pianist.*

*Born in Trinidad in the 1920s, he displayed unmistakable artistic talent by the age of five. With a perfect ear and ability to play from memory, he developed rapidly as a pianist and was playing professionally by the age of nine. By World War II, with American bases established in Trinidad, he aired his own programme on the US Armed Forces Radio Station, and painted commissioned portraits that servicemen would send home to their families. Then, in 1946, a visit to Martinique imposed an influence not only on music but on colour and form, urging development of an Afro-Caribbean and unique personal style. Awareness of Afro-Caribbean dance shaped him as dancer, choreographer and costume designer and thus shaped his influence on others, including his brother - Geoffrey Holder, noted dancer, choreographer and actor.*

By 1947 he moved to New York, danced, taught, and then moved to London in 1950. Here he formed his Caribbean Dancers and began twenty years of acclaimed performance in London clubs, cabarets and theatres, at times before royal audiences. Boscoe Holder and his wife, Shiela, performed before Queen Elizabeth at her coronation in 1953 and again in 1955, by Command Performance. With his Caribbean Dancers, Boscoe Holder made numerous appearances on television shows and films, and hosted his own television show (Bal Creole) on BBC TV, through which he introduced the steel pan to England. He also reached an international audience through successful tours throughout Europe, Egypt and the Caribbean.

His stature as a painter is no less significant. His work is known through numerous exhibitions at major institutes and galleries, the Leicester Galleries having bought two of his paintings for their permanent collection. Another was presented as a wedding present by Sir Ellis Clarke, then President of Trinidad and Tobago, to Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1981.

By 1970, however, Boscoe Holder had returned to Trinidad. He appears to have decided, like the poet, Julian Grenfell that,

... life is colour and warmth and light,  
And a striving evermore for these.

So he has since concentrated on his paintings, which have been exhibited throughout the region and beyond – in Canada, Venezuela and the United States. He has passed his Golden Anniversary as a professional painter and has opened his own studio/gallery in Port-of-Spain, to mark the millennium.

Boscoe Holder has been recipient of numerous honours: Trinidad and Tobago Humming Bird Medal, 1973, followed by Venezuela's Order of Francisco de Miranda;

*Washington D.C. Award for contribution to the Arts in the Caribbean; the Sunshine Special Recognition Award for outstanding contribution to the art forms and cultural heritage of the Caribbean, 2002. In Philadelphia, with his brother, Geoffrey, and son, Christian, he was awarded the Drexel University Award for International Excellence.*

*Chancellor, I present Mr. Boscoe Holder, and ask that by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of The University of the West Indies, you confer on him the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.*

*St. Augustine campus  
October 31, 2003*