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The Contribution of George Williams to Theatre Stage Lighting in Trinidad and Tobago.

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ABSTRACT

This project sought to examine the contribution of George Randolph Williams to theatre stage lighting in Trinidad and Tobago. The requisite information was gathered through interviews with Williams' relatives and friends, and persons working in the profession and from literature review. The aim was to investigate and document Williams' work in the local theatre domain to gain a better understanding of his influence. The information gathered was examined through discourse, narrative and content analysis. Williams' expertise in the field of stage lighting was recognised both locally and internationally. If understood by the Trinidad and Tobago theatre fraternity and wider society William's legacy can add tremendous value to the appreciation of the evolution of the art form of stage lighting in Trinidad and Tobago.

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INTRODUCTION

Theatre (noun) is defined as an edifice in which dramatic performances or spectacles are exhibited for the amusement of spectators; anciently uncovered, except the stage, but in modern times roofed (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>). Theatre scholars by broad definition usually exploit, as above illustrates, a range of ethnographic, autobiographic and case study research findings. Some academic scholars position that knowledge is both presented and disseminated more powerfully and effectively through a pedagogical method. Therefore, for the development of this approach theatre pedagogy is the chosen academic vehicle of research to bring about change in understanding the world and the role of stage lighting in theatre in Trinidad and Tobago. Hence, this paper investigates the work of the late George Randolph Williams in Trinidad and Tobago's theatre domain with reference to lighting specifically.

Williams was a Trinidad-born electrical engineer who lectured at UWI and freelanced as a stage lighting designer. He rose from humble beginnings to the top of his field within a short period of time and made a valuable contribution to the theatre lighting industry, however, to my knowledge this has not been comprehensively documented. The research documents Williams' work as an Electrical Supervisor at the Carnival Development Committee (CDC)-now National Carnival Commission (NCC), a freelance stage lighting designer and a UWI Centre for Creative and Festival Arts (CCFA) now Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) lecturer in the domain of theatre stage lighting and in so doing contributes to the records of local cultural history. Focus is placed on Williams' life in the context of theatre in Trinidad and Tobago from the 1930s to his passing in 2008 and the impact of his work on the fraternity is examined. My objectives were to gather and analyse concrete information about Williams' contribution to theatre lighting in Trinidad and Tobago as a stage lighting designer and an Electrical Supervisor at the Queen's

Park Savannah and his impact on the UWI theatre arts community for the benefit of the theatre fraternity and wider society.

Information was gathered from primary documentary sources in the form of letters written to and by Williams, as well as secondary documentary sources including books and online articles. A number of primary material sources including photos of people and items such as trophies, letters and newspaper clippings are included. Finally, a significant portion of the information was obtained via primary oral sources through in-person and telephone interviews with surviving family members and work colleagues.

The study is focused on cultural study and takes a look into local history. The approach is qualitative in form but pedagogical in approach. The use of pedagogical strengths to unearth the value of the person and the field for teacher education is cited in works of Gallagher, Goldstein, Conrad, Saldana, Norris, Denmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer, Mienezakowski and Hill. These researchers committed to harnessing drama to cultural engagement, social intervention and educational change (Nicholson-Goodman).

The limitations of the study relate firstly to the fact that Williams and many of his contemporaries and supervisors have passed away; secondly, to the limited number of documented works on Williams; and thirdly but importantly to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The restrictions implemented as a result of the pandemic prevented students from visiting the West Indiana Section at the Alma Jordan Library, and DCFA Library, UWI, St Augustine Campus to access information and made it difficult to contact and meet with key primary oral sources.

The paper is laid out in four chapters. Chapter one explores the context of Williams' experience by presenting a summary of the evolution of the theatre industry in Trinidad along with a brief review of the history of stage lighting. Chapter two focuses on his early education and

further training. Chapter three outlines Williams' work as an Electrical Supervisor at the Carnival Development Committee (CDC). Chapter four focuses on his work as a freelance stage lighting designer and chapter five reviews his work as a UWI CCFA lecturer in the domain of theatre stage lighting.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Classification of Art

Table 1. Brief descriptions of terms used concerning Art

Term	Definition
Artifice	A deceptive tactic
Artificer	Someone who is the first to think of or make something
Artificial	Contrived by art rather than nature
Artisan	A skilled worker who practises some trade or handicraft
Articulate	Put into words or an expression
Artestry or Artistry	A superior skill that you can learn, study, practise or observe
Artist	A person whose creative work shows sensitivity and imagination

(Author, 2022)

Brief classification of Art

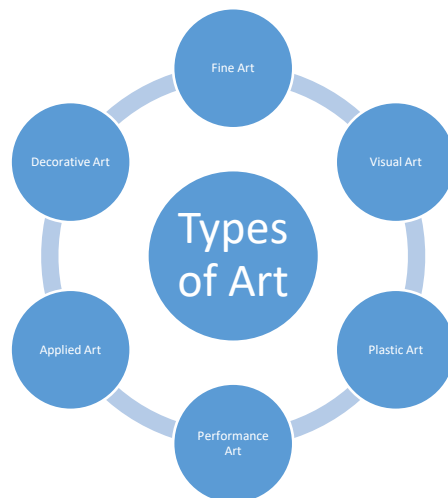


Figure 1. (Author, 2022)

For this paper the classification of Performance Art relates to the topic as it refers to public performance events. Traditional varieties include theatre, opera, music and ballet. Contemporary Performance Art also includes any activity in which the artist's physical presence acts as the medium. Therefore, it encompasses mime, face or body painting and so on. A hyper-modern type of Performance Art is known as "Happenings". For a critical understanding it is to be noted that the building blocks of all Art fall within the below, Figure 2 components.

Key building blocks of any art work

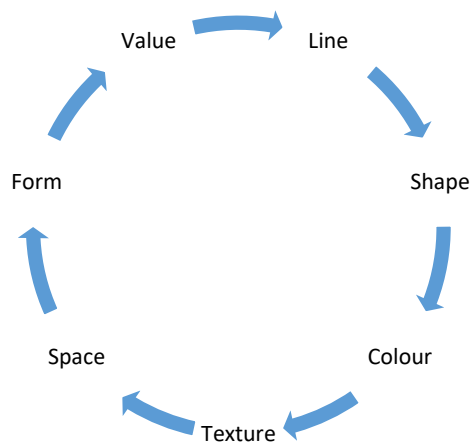


Figure 2. Author: Brandon, 2010

1.1 Modernity of Lighting: Theatre from the West to West Indies

Within the tradition of Western writing of theatre history, light and stage lighting in particular had a complex relationship with the space of performance. Firstly, it was used solely for practical reasons of illuminating actors and scenery. However, lighting has been emancipated from its primary function to a potent scene design tool evolving to an independent layer of performance with its own performative potential (Metallinos). From a post-structuralism approach, light as a medium and technology which provides it, cannot be separated from each other. The main change

instigated by the technology advances in stage lighting was better means of control, which allowed the light to be used as a medium. For example Chiaroscuro of the Baroque period brought the new role of light into prominence as light and shadow were used as a sign, along with their symbolic values (Taggart, 2020). Hence, the use of light as a medium in representational theatre served as an opportunity for adding meaning. However, this layer was not autonomous as it was subordinated to an imaginary world imitated on stage. Appia and Craig are considered to be pioneers of stage modernism which brought about a paradigm shift from stage to place (Britannica, 2019). The apprehension of stage lighting naturally followed. Appia ontologized the light on stage, freeing it from the constraints of stage and bringing it into a space where it could work together with music, rhythm and the human body to create a dynamic if not a perfect performance. This also inspired in my research, the reflection on the connectivity of Williams' enduring contribution to Trinidad and Tobago and West Indian stage lighting legacy as Appia has done.

Another key aspirant to this field of study is Bauhaus and their light plays, along with their futurist approach to light as actor. In this way it was the artistic medium, not necessarily connected to a theatre play. Time became important, performance was not a representation of something happening somewhere anymore, but a presentation "happening" in real time (Casciato, 2022). That modernist ideas preceded available technology is key to the appreciation of what Williams' stage lighting experience and action resulted in creating. This moved light projection from from suppression in theoretical performance to Czech scene designer Josef Svoboda, who made enough room for its textuality to take a leap forward. From a Western context Svoboda had been using modernist elements in his work for many years before the scholarly observation (Hawkins, 2015). He coined the term, "psycho-plastic space" to describe the dynamic and ephemeral nature of mixed media spaces, referring to the important role of the inner world of the spectators.

1.1.1 A Brief Note on Stage Lighting Development

Within theatre and in the modern context stage lighting is an art form. This form brings illumination to a performance venue making a definite impact on an event, giving visual direction and shaping the environment. There is a significant body of knowledge related to stage lighting and this paper uses the vehicle of sketching George Williams' contribution, to ethnographically lay a written history of the Trinidad experience.

1.1.2 Goal of Stage Lighting

Within the Art of theatre performance the goal of stage lighting is diverse and not limited to a singular objective. Stage lighting allows the director to capture the audience's attention and enhance a stage production. Observe the ideas illustrated in Figure 3 below.

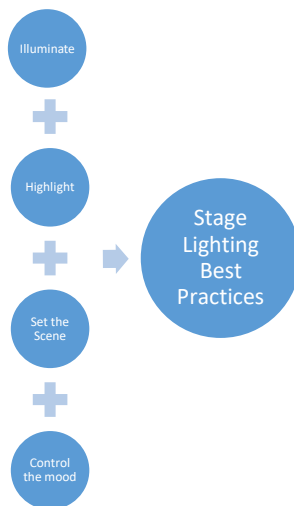


Figure 3. Stage Lighting Enhancement Ideas (Author, 2022)

From the above illustrations some brief considerations on stage lighting influence.

In consideration of illuminating the stage attention is required on how performers, set and props are lit so the audience can clearly see everything they're meant to witness on stage.

Inadequate lighting can take away from a production and also affect a performance. Dim light can make it harder for the audience to see the actor's facial expressions. For performers on stage proper lighting allows them to orient themselves on stage and see the other performers. Further, lighting highlights different areas in the performance, for example the 2018 Canboulay Production of Rawle Gibbons' *Sing de Chorus* at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Auditorium. This production catered not only to various dramatic scenes and dances but the lighting also directed the audience member's eyes to where they should look. In one most dramatic instance, the majority of the stage was dark with just one spotlight illuminating an actor playing a guitar in the focal point. In other instances, the lighting designer can start with a wash, which covers a wide area and acts as a base layer of light. From there he or she can add accent lights to guide the audience's attention to the performance area, for example where the speaker in the foreground. In setting the scene, lighting can also help create the visual the Director wants. This approach is used in modern film and is as crucial in theatre performativity. In some instances, this means creating optical illusions with lights, for example building light intensity to create the effect of the sun rising, or reducing its intensity to effect nightfall, as done in many plays. Additionally, for even more effect, backlit scrims are used to create the illusion of a starry night, a sunny day or even a fire. An example of one such play is Derek Walcott's 2013 production of *Oh Starry Night*.

Stage lighting can also have a major effect on mood. The idea here is to match the lighting effect to the content of the show to encourage the right emotional response from the audience. Williams while creating lighting designs for both the *Dimanche Gras* shows and the *Prime Minister's Best Village* competitions executed these emotional responses. This was done by using soft, warm glows for happy scenes, versus dim, cool hues for miserable scenes. Certain colours therefore effect different emotional responses and are associated with creating different moods.

For example, depending on the culture, blue equals sadness and red is associated with intense feelings such as love or aggression.

1.1.2 Performance Performativity Relationship in Culture and Theatre Revisited

The word "performance" is used to indicate a wide range of cultural events, such as drama, theatre, ritual, popular entertainment, and ceremonies, while its theoretical partner "performativity" is used to theorize the social construction of identity. Social theorists like Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, for example, have used the performative to theorize the complex and iterative construction of identity. In formal education, the concept of performance and related terms such as performance management, performance indicators, performance tasks, and performance-related pay are commonly used to measure academic achievement, professional competence, and standards of work achievement. This use of performance is also prevalent in the business and commercial world, again as a tool for assessing standards and is a key to shaping this paper about Williams's stage lighting value. Performance therefore, as a formation of power and knowledge contributes meaningfully to the interpretative nature of the study, within appreciation of the modernization of theatre in this field. Just like theatre, it takes place in institutional contexts, constrained and enriched by economic and technological factors. The theatrical model has come to inform organizational theory and web design, for example with respect to various software programs. This is crucial to the formulation of lighting as a growing interest in the field of theatre and the domain of Art in general.

Theatre in Trinidad dates back to the period 1826 - 1831 when five theatres, three that were English and two that were French operated in the city of Port of Spain (Hoefler). In two of the five theatres professional performers were engaged to perform twice or three times a week. The other three recruited amateur performers who performed once per month. One theatre house remained

by 1858 and in 1861 the Government began construction of the Princes Building east of the Queen's Park Oval to host visiting theatre companies. From the mid-1860s the many professional companies that came to Trinidad performed and numerous historical events were hosted at the Princes Building (UWISpace, 2010).

1.2.0 Theatre and Dance Halls Ordinance and Beyond

Theatre companies may have had influence on the native art form of Calypso music, hence Calypso was aligned to the Theatre and Dance Halls Ordinance of 1934. Calypso music gained popularity during the 1930s and 1940s but many people were still opposed to it (Hoefler). The Ordinance gave the Colonial Secretary the authority to ban records and English officers within the police the power to censor song texts. In fact calypsonians were required to obtain licences to sing in tents (Hoefler). This historical juncture is addressed in Rawle Gibbons' *Sing de Chorus*.

By the 1940s, the period when the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago gained universal adult suffrage (Nissen), folk expression began to be recognised as important to the development of national culture. In 1948 the young and vibrant, dancer and choreographer, Beryl McBurnie opened the Little Carib Theatre mainly to accommodate Caribbean Dance however it was also used for other art forms. In 1957 Freddy Kisson founded the Strolling Players Theatre Group and staged many shows in rural areas in Trinidad (THABITI). The assembling of the West Indian Federation in 1958 was launched by a regional festival of arts which stimulated theatre activity in Trinidad and Tobago. In 1959, Dereck Walcott started the Trinidad Theatre Workshop and Queen's Hall was built. In 1962, the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition was established and the Naparima Bowl was opened. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Sport and Community Development's website lists the following other theaters that

were established during the period under consideration in this paper: the Scarborough Centre established in 1955, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago established in 1986, the Learning Resource Centre, Couva established in 1997 and the Northern Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA) established in 2008 on the site of the Princes Building (UWISpace).

1.2.1 Lighting Technology in Theatre

At the inception of performance theatre, the objective of stage lighting was to allow the audience to see the performers and scenery. Subsequently stage lighting evolved into a scene design tool (Stojšić). The lighting designer's ability to use the relevant equipment to convey visibility, motivation, composition and mood contributes to bringing to life the director's vision of the script. The use of light and shadow evokes emotion from the viewer (Morley). Zumtobel, an architects' website describes the lighting for a museum with the following quote "daylight and artificial light are of fundamental importance because they guide people emotionally" (Zamtobel). Over time the objectives of stage lighting have been augmented and now lighting represents an essential component of the stage scenic tool (Stojšić). In the contemporary setting the use of technology has expanded the scope of stage lighting. Computerised systems use DMX 512 protocols to control various types of lighting fixtures from different manufacturers. Developed in 1986 by the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) DMX 512 was mainly utilised for controlling lighting equipment and accessories in entertainment applications; currently it is widely used in architectural scene-setting applications as well (USITT). In light of the advancement with the DMX protocols competent light board operators were required. According to the British lighting designer Richard Pilbrow, from the middle of the 20th century to the present the light board or control desk for theatrical lights has evolved into an efficient, complex addition to the theatre's

inventory; so much so that a specialised operator is needed to execute the programming (Pilbrow). Computerised lighting boards were being introduced to local theatres nearing the end of the 20th century and early in the 21st century DMX technology was slowly becoming popular. We can infer then that Williams had very little or no access to DMX technology. With reference to performance therefore, we can formulate an idea of the value of Williams' contribution to stage lighting in Trinidad and Tobago and perhaps the Caribbean. At the time of writing the lighting systems at the major theatre spaces in Trinidad and Tobago are computerised. The popular light board software programs in use include: MA Lighting – grandMA2 at Queen's Hall, NAPA, and Southern Academy of the Performing Arts (SAPA) and ETC's Eos v3.1 at Naparima Bowl, Shaw Park Cultural Complex and Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Auditorium. Other brands used in lesser known theatres include AvoLites's Ai v12.1.9.4 at Government Plaza Auditorium and Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre Auditorium and Martin M2GO at Little Carib Theatre.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 George Williams' Early Years

George Randolph Williams was a stage lighting designer for over five decades in Trinidad and Tobago. His career began in the 1950s and continued till his passing in 2008. Over this period he built up an extensive body of work which contributed substantially to the development of the art form of stage lighting in Trinidad and Tobago. Williams was born in February 1930. At that time labour unions in the Anglo-speaking Caribbean countries were uniting to fight the colonisers against racism and for better working conditions. In Trinidad and Tobago the strikes headed by labour unionist Tubal Uriah 'Buzz' Butler in the 1930s culminated in twelve deaths and over fifty injuries in 1937 (News). Williams' home town Tunapuna, also the home town of novelist and historian, C L R James, was according to James in his classic book *Beyond a Boundary*, a small town eight miles east of Port of Spain, the capital city of Trinidad (James). Williams' early education was at the St Saviors Anglican School a few miles west of his home. Subsequently, at the age of eighteen he earned his Wireman's Certificate in July 1948 after a stint at the Board of Industrial Training (Figure 4). Williams while practicing his trade may have been buoyed by the zeitgeist to work towards changing the status quo in terms of the presentation of performances on the Queen's Park Savannah stage.

2.1 The Yale Experience

Significantly, Williams later on became a student of Stanley McCandless, a Harvard-trained architect who developed the McCandless Method, a stage lighting formula, in the 1930s. This method is still taught and used around the world (Pilbrow). McCandless, considered to be the father of stage lighting in the USA, penned the book *A Method of Lighting the Stage* in 1947. In

early 1962 Williams applied to The Rockefeller Foundation for a scholarship to study lighting design and techniques at Yale University School of Drama. At that time according to Bruce King's book *Derek Walcott A Caribbean Life*, Williams was a member of the planning team for the "new-look" Little Carib Theatre in Port of Spain and was working with Derek Walcott on a list of theatrical lighting needs for the theatre. King mentioned that Associate Director at the Rockefeller Foundation, John P. Harrison stated that the Little Carib Theatre Board should not depend on the Rockefeller's support unless there was national appeal towards the Little Carib Theatre's new building. Moreover, King pointed out that Harrison would be discussing an upcoming dance workshop involving Beryl McBurnie and attending a production of Errol Hill's *Man Better Man* at Yale during the summer. While there, Harrison would discuss whether George Williams might be accepted as a special student to study stage lighting (King). In June of that year, Harrison acknowledged receipt of Williams' application and medical record (Figure 5). Harrison outlined a concern with reference to remuneration and charted an option for Williams to consider. Williams' follow-up letter accepted Harrison's offer. This letter from Williams also requested permission to begin the Yale Drama School classes at a later date, because Trinidad and Tobago's first Independence Day was coming up and Williams was assigned to a Government committee where his lighting design services would be needed (Figure 6). The letter from the Assistant Secretary at Yale School of Drama confirming that Williams was awarded the scholarship was dated July 10th 1962 (Figure 7).

Williams received commendations for his performance as a student at Yale School of Drama by way of two letters of recommendation. The first from Professor of Lighting, McCandless recognised Williams as a very competent and pleasant person to work with. McCandless also recognised Williams' substantial background in the technical aspects of theatre (Figure 8). The

second letter from F. Curtis Canfield, Dean at the School of Drama indicated “Williams’ lecturers’ recognition of his independence, confidence and creativity and the good use he made of the opportunity (Figure 9).

CHAPTER THREE

George Williams at the Queen's Park Savannah

The Peoples National Movement (PNM) formed the first party-based cabinet government in 1956 and in 1957 appointed a new committee called the Carnival Development Committee (CDC) to oversee the conduct of all major events connected with festivals (McIntoch). Presumably Williams was the first person to design stage lighting at the Queen's Park Savannah for the CDC and he drew from the McCandless Method to create his design. At that time there was no proper infrastructure for housing or rigging theatrical lights at the Savannah therefore I presume Williams devised the design to rig the lights from the catenary for the stage lights. His early design can be seen in the background of a 1962 Noel Norton photograph taken at the Queen's Park Savannah (Figure 10) (Norton). The stage lights are rigged on to cables to point at the stage at a 45 degree angle. The photo also shows the flood lights covered with red, blue and green gel filters. It is remarkable that Williams was able to execute his lighting designs using the basic red, blue and green mixes from limited lighting fixtures in the 1960s. The basic design format he devised is still used today to light the stage. This speaks to his futuristic vision and creativity in the mode of the aforementioned Appia and Craig, Bauhaus and Svoboda.

The Queen's Park Savannah and in particular its Grand Stand stage is the major hub of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival which features an iconic street festival that has been mirrored in many countries around the world. The allure emanates from the desire to recreate the festivity and revelry transmitted via sights and sounds from the Grand Stand stage and environs.

The Grand Stand – in conjunction with the paddock – was originally erected for the hosting of horse racing and in 1948 was first used for the parade of Carnival bands (Doyle). The Stand was ideally positioned and had most of the amenities to accommodate the audiences. The location

of the stage was also perfect for the flow of the masquerade bands; it meant that bands could assemble on its eastern edge and parade along its length towards the western end. Conversely, in order to accommodate the parade of masqueraders – or performers – other factors such as the visibility of the performance to the audience, infrastructure to accommodate lighting fixtures and their power consumption, the exposure of lights to the elements, and safety of the patrons and masqueraders all had to be taken into consideration. Similar to the early days of theatre when the Greeks used the rising sun to determine the start of their shows and its setting the end, masqueraders paraded in the sunlight on the Savannah stage and the performances would end when the sun set. To keep the performance going after sunset would require light reinforcement, a challenge for which Williams was prepared as detailed above. Williams went on to design the lighting for the Dimanche Gras Carnival productions at the Queen's Park Savannah from 1963 to 1991 (Banham).

While still at the Port Authority, Williams applied for the post of Electrical Supervisor at the Carnival Development Committee (CDC). The Chairman of the CDC, Senator Ronald J. Williams wrote in October 1964 that George had worked effectively with the CDC since its inception in 1957 and recommended him for the position (Figure 11). By 1968 Williams had gained considerable experience in the electrical field and applied for the post of Electrical Inspector at the Electrical Inspectorate. Again Senator Williams wrote a letter of recommendation on George's behalf (Figure 12).

In 1991 Williams was recognised by the Carnival Development Committee (CDC) for his contribution to the development of the stage lighting at the Queen's Park Savannah and issued a trophy (Figure 13). Williams went on to mentor many persons over the years while working with the CDC/NCC. Such individuals include Knolly Whiskey and Allen Muraldo to name a few.

Whiskey went on to become the Senior Lighting Technician at Queen's Hall for over twenty-five years and is now Course Instructor One at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). Muraldo is the head of the lighting department at the Rent A Amp Sound and Lighting Company, one of the leading theatre service companies in the Caribbean. Williams' legacy will continue through this succession as these individuals and his many other mentees continue to follow his principals.

CHAPTER FOUR

Williams' as a Freelance Stage Lighting Designer

While employed at the Port Services George Williams freelanced in the entertainment industry. This was evident from a letter addressed to him at the Electrical Garage, Port Services dated May 1960 from Lt. Col. J.T. Chapman on behalf of His Excellency Lord Hailes. In the letter Lt. Col. Chapman refers to Lord Hailes' gratitude to Williams for entertainment provided for Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret and an enclosed cheque. Lt. Col. Chapman also mentions the excellent arrangements that would have been made by Williams (Figure 14). This episode exhibits Williams' confidence and expertise even at a relatively young age.

Williams designed lighting for productions by leading Trinidad and Tobago performance companies such as Marionettes Choral, the Love Movement, Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra, Noble Douglas Dance Company, Immortelle and the Whitehall Players to name a few (Maraj, 2001) (Figure 15). He also worked in formal theatres including Naparima Bowl, Little Carib Theatre and Queen's Hall (Maraj, 2001). In recognition and appreciation of his contribution to the field of stage lighting, the National Drama Association of Trinidad and Tobago (NDATT) in 2001, at their 12th Annual Cacique Awards ceremony held at the Stork St Hill Theatre on Richmond Street, Port of Spain, honoured Williams with a Lifetime Achievement Award (Figure 16).

George Williams also contributed to the Prime Minister's Best Village Cultural Program. Michael Anthony in his description of the program said it was first established by the late Dr. Eric Williams in 1963 and was designed to encourage the preservation of ritual and traditional practices by the diverse groupings of people living on the islands. The Prime Minister also wanted to keep the young people in the communities engaged in positive activities. The annual festival involved villagers creating traditional handicraft items and presenting indigenous folk songs, dances and

other remnants of the folklore customs for judging. The Best Village productions were transmitted on local television and radio stations which brought popularity to the performers and for the first time the vision to villagers of representatives of themselves on television (Anthony). The late Joyce Wong Sang was given the task to manage the Program by then Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, which she did until the early 2000s (Persad). For over four (4) decades from the inception of the Program Williams provided stage lighting design services for the productions which were held at several performance spaces around the island with the grand finals being held at the Queen's Park Savannah stage.

The book *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre*, which Errol Hill co-wrote with Martin Benham and George Woodyard, mentions that Williams worked for local theatre groups and was the lighting specialist at the West Indian Festival of Arts in 1958 (Banham). Derek Walcott, the legendary St. Lucia-born poet, playwright and artist recognised Williams' potential and in January of 1964 appointed Williams as the in-house lighting designer for his Trinidad Theatre Workshop (TTW) based at the Little Carib Theatre, in Woodbrook, Port of Spain (King). In the 1970s George Williams also assisted with lighting the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) Heritage Festival. Dr. Cyril Collier (Collier) educator, actor and cultural activist from Tobago explained during a phone interview that he arranged to acquire Williams' services under Secretary for Culture at the time, Cynthia Alfred.

Another associate of Williams was former theatre practitioner Francis Lewis (Lewis). Lewis, a former lighting designer and consultant for the Lydian Singers choir during the period when it was led by the late Dr Pat Bishop, explained during an interview at his office in the latter part of 2021, that he first met George Williams at the Queen's Park Savannah in 1975. At the time Williams was positioned at the back of the Grand Stand delivering instructions to his crew for the

staging of two Best Village shows carded for later that evening and Lewis was a member of the stage management crew headed by Ellis Williams. One of Lewis' tasks was to run messages to George and return to backstage. Lewis, an enthusiastic young man at the time, had had prior theatre experience at the St Mary's College (CIC) his alma mater. It was at CIC that his curiosity for the theatre began. Through this inquisitive nature and his passion for theatre Lewis went on to work at the Little Carib Theatre and began working under local dancer and founder of the Theatre, Beryl McBurnie. Lewis recalled that in the late 1970s he fitted discarded milk tin cans with light bulbs to control the spread of the beams and eventually redesigned the Little Carib lighting system using tin cans and dimmer switches. This cleared up the misconception that Williams had designed the Little Carib stage lighting system. Lewis, with reference to his relationship with Williams, pointed out that Williams was always available to discuss matters relating to theatre lighting and appreciated when persons offered suggestion for solutions to problems they brought for him to solve.

In 1991 George Williams was awarded a certificate of excellence for his contribution in the field of stage lighting from the Trinidad Dance Theatre (Figure 17a). In 1992 he was presented with the Public Service Medal of Merit, Gold, for outstanding and meritorious service in the sphere of art and culture (Figure 17b).

CHAPTER FIVE

Williams as a UWI CCFA lecturer

With the introduction of electricity to stage lighting at the Savoy Theatre in London in 1881 the use of electrical theatrical lights quickly spread across the world (Pilbrow). After two decades working both in various positions at the CDC and as a freelance lighting designer Williams had immersed himself in the fields of electricity and stage lighting where he excelled. At this juncture he took the noble step of formally passing on his knowledge and around the late 1970s began to lecture in the Certificate in Technical Theatre Programme at the CCFA.

Williams' work has inspired a generation of UWI students to view stage lighting design from a different perspective while encouraging creativity in theatrical presentations. One such example is Ken Joseph (Joseph). Joseph first encountered Williams as his student at the CCFA. He went on to shadow Williams for a number of years and now has a comprehensive body of lighting designs for top productions locally, throughout the Caribbean and in North America. Joseph is now stage lighting lecturer at the UWI DCFA. At the Department Joseph makes it a point to inform his students about the works of the "grandfather" of stage lighting in Trinidad and Tobago, George Williams.

Founding member of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, Albert Laveau (Laveau), referenced the CCFA as the place where he met and interacted with Williams. Laveau reminisced about UWI's 1989 production of Femi Osofisan's *Kolera Kolej*, which was held at the undercroft to the new engineering building on the St Augustine Campus. There was concern about running the cables to power the light fixtures through the new structure as there was a strict rule at the new building that no holes should be made in the walls. Williams and his students followed the instructions and created ways of running the cable without interfering with the structure. The

approach was so unique that Professor Imbert (Inbert) of the Civil Engineering Department brought his class over to see the clever work of the artists, executed without pounding or sticking items on the new walls, ceiling and flooring.

Speaking to the use of the concept of performance in the business and commercial world it is interesting that Williams ventured into the business aspect of stage lighting to support his work in lighting design. He established the Electrical Contractors Stage Lighting Designers Theatre Architecture Consultants which rented lighting equipment and provided lighting consultancy services. The company's equipment was used at the Trinidad Theatre Workshops 40th Anniversary celebrations at the Cascadia Hotel, Ballroom in St Ann's in 1999.

In April of 2002 the CCFA presented Errol Hill's *Man Better Man* at the Auditorium in the School of Continuing Studies, St Augustine. For this production Williams' role was Lighting Consultant with students Jill Sampson and Curtis Bachan as the lighting designers. The stage is a square in the centre and the audience is raked on the four sides. The design of this space presented no accommodation for light reinforcement, therefore a make-shift rig was designed to accommodate the lighting fixtures over the audience on four sides. Additionally, vertical bars were erected to the back of the audience on which par cans ¹were rigged. During the process Williams' approach to the work was one of no nonsense. Sessions were held in his home studio under his house in Tunapuna so assist students in gaining a better understanding of drawing and reading lighting plans. He organised the work meticulously and insisted that his students have a professional approach to their tasks. Rawle Gibbons produced and retained Louis McWilliams and Tony Hall to direct. Wayne Berkeley was retained as production design co-ordinator.

¹ A type of stage lighting fixture

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to investigate the work of the late George Randolph Williams and to gather and analyse information on his contribution to theatre lighting in Trinidad and Tobago which hitherto has not been comprehensively documented. A further aim was to assess Williams' impact on the UWI theatre arts community. It is felt that this exercise will be of benefit to the theatre fraternity and wider society.

Williams showed himself to be passionate about lighting design through his perseverance to advance in the field. Based on the accolades he received from internationally respected experts in the field of stage lighting and his peers locally, it may also be said that he was competent and dedicated. Williams achieved lasting results with access to only minimal resources and technology. That his basic designs format continues to be used till today to light the Queen's Park Savannah stage is an indication of his vision, creativity and expertise.

Williams was not only a practitioner par excellence but he was also dedicated to sharing his knowledge. He conveyed his wealth of knowledge and experience to his students at the CCFA (and his mentees). So committed was he to his art that he extended his home to students to work on the craft. On the economic front several of his students were able to earn a living in the entertainment industry and the field of stage lighting design. On the political front, the theatre arts program has expanded considerably. In this regard Williams has contributed to the lifting of the quality of productions in Trinidad and Tobago.

George Williams' knowledge and understanding of instruments, materials, electricity and the use of lighting techniques as a visual method of communicating led to his tremendous success.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What are some of George Williams' accomplishments?
- When did Williams start working in the theatre and at the Queen's Park Savannah?
- Which theatre/s did he work in?
- What was George Williams' involvement in the first four (4) CARIFESTAs: Guyana 1972, Jamaica 1975, Cuba 1979 and Barbados 1981?
- Which cultural tours did Williams participate in?
- What was Williams's role at the Electrical Inspectorate Office?
- What was Williams's role at the UWI's CFCA?
- What was unique about his lighting Designs?
- How was he as a lighting designer?

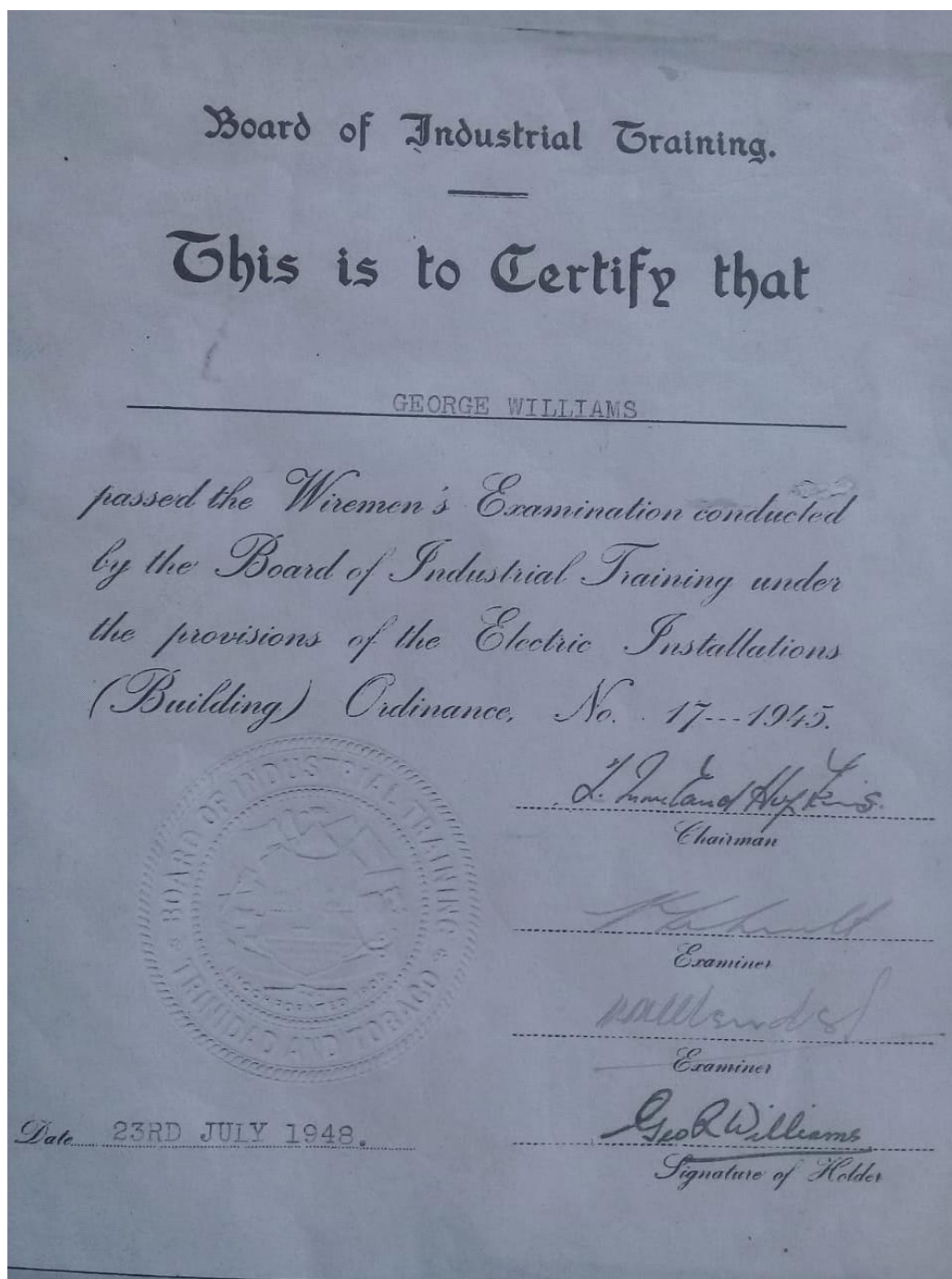


Figure 4
Image of a Board of Industrial Training Certificate
Source; the Williams Family 2021

The Rockefeller Foundation

111 WEST 50th STREET, NEW YORK 20

THE HUMANITIES

CABLE: ROCKFOUND, NEW YORK
TELEPHONE: COLUMBUS 9-8100

June 1, 1962

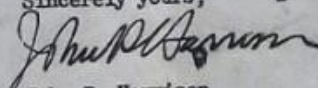
Dear Mr. Williams:

We have received your application for a Foundation fellowship to permit you to study lighting and lighting design for the theatre at Yale University during the coming academic year, together with the report of your medical examination which has been approved by our physicians here. We are then in a position to bring your fellowship into formal consideration.

I have only one concern and I would appreciate your comments on it before final action is taken here. Your present salary is slightly in excess of \$6,000 annually and, because your occupation is not directly related to the purposes of your fellowship in that the Post Services have nothing to do with the Little Carib or other theatrical activities in Trinidad, no part of your salary will be paid you during the period of study at Yale. The standard family allowance for a Trinidadian studying in the United States is BW \$140 monthly. This clearly would not support your wife and three daughters during your absence. There is no possibility, however, of bringing our contribution toward your family support above BW \$300 monthly, which in itself involves special consideration and approval here at the Foundation. My question then is if family support of BW \$300 a month in addition to your own living expenses at Yale will make it possible for you to spend an academic year, 1962-63 at Yale. Could I hear from you on this at your earliest convenience.

With warmest regards to you, Derek, and our other mutual friends in Trinidad,

Sincerely yours,



John P. Harrison
Associate Director

Mr. George R. Williams
Ramjohn Trace
Streatham Lodge
Tunapuna, Trinidad
West Indies

JPH:lg

Figure 5

Image acknowledgement of George Williams' application by Yale University.
Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021

Ramjohn Trace,
Streatham Lodge,
Tunapuna.
19th June, 1962.

Mr. John P. Harrison,
Associate Director,
The Rockefeller Foundation,
111 West 50th Street,
New York 20,
U.S.A.

Dear Sir,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 1st June, 1962 and I am very pleased to know that my fellowship is now being considered.

I am prepared to accept a family support of BW \$300.00 monthly in addition to my living expenses at Yale.

For our Independence Celebrations which runs from 31st August to 6th September, 1962 I have been appointed to serve on a Government Committee and to do lighting for several shows. In view of this fact, I would like to know what is the latest possible date for my arrival at Yale. I would be pleased if I could be granted the favour of staying through the celebrations.

With warmest regards from myself, Derek, and all your friends in Trinidad.

Awaiting your reply,
Yours respectfully,

George R. Williams.

Figure 6
Williams' Reply to Yale University
Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021

THE Rockefeller Foundation

111 WEST 50th STREET, NEW YORK 20

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Flora M. Rhind, Secretary
Janet M. Paine, Assistant Secretary

CABLE: ROCKFOUND. NEW YORK
TELEPHONE: COLUMBUS 5-8100

July 10, 1962

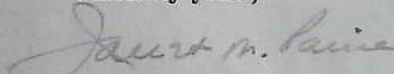
Dear Mr. Williams:

I am glad to be able to inform you that you have been awarded a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship for study in lighting design and techniques, principally at Yale University School of Drama and other authorized centers. This scholarship will be available for a period not to exceed twelve months beginning approximately September 1, 1962, and carries with it a stipend of \$250 per month payable for the period of your actual study, plus a family allowance of W.I. \$300 per month in Trinidad, West Indies. Authorized fees and travel expenses connected with your scholarship will also be paid by the Foundation.

A copy of a booklet entitled "Information for Fellows and Scholars" is enclosed herewith. A brief public announcement of your award will be made in the Foundation's quarterly report following the beginning of your scholarship study.

It is a pleasure to report this action to you.

Sincerely yours,



Assistant Secretary

Mr. George R. Williams
Ramjohn Trace
Streatham Lodge
Tunapuna, Trinidad
West Indies

Enclosure
Copy to Mr. Bruce Procope

Figure 7

Yale University letter of acceptance to Williams

Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021

YALE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF DRAMA
NEW HAVEN · CONNECTICUT

May 10, 1963

To Whom It May Concern:

It gives me pleasure to recommend to your consideration Mr. George Williams of Tunapuna, Trinidad. He has been an advanced student in Stage Lighting with me this past year under a Rockefeller Foundation Grant.

Mr. Williams has had considerable background in the technical side of the theatre and has added his advanced work here to that training.

He is a very competent individual and a delightful person to work with.

Respectfully submitted,

Stanley McCandless

Stanley McCandless
Professor of Lighting

Figure 8
Image of Stanley McCandless recommendation letter
Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021

YALE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF DRAMA
NEW HAVEN · CONNECTICUT

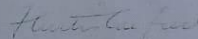
May 16, 1963

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This will certify that George Williams has been a student in residence at the Yale Drama School for the academic year 1962-63. He has taken a full program of course in Technical Production and Lighting, having been supported by a Rockefeller Foundation grant. As a special student he has audited some courses and has been enrolled in others on an informal basis. His teachers assure me that he has made very good use of his opportunities here and that while he has accepted our standards and methods, he has not done so blindly, but on several occasions has made intelligent and pertinent criticism or suggested improvements. He is a very hard worker and has performed manfully on crews and in his studies.

It is my hope that he may be given further opportunity to continue his studies in whatever way he believes will be useful to him.

Sincerely yours,



F. Curtis Canfield
Dean

Figure 9

Image of Canfield recommendation letter
Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021



Figure 10

*Image of the Queen's Park Savannah stage with theatrical lights displayed in the background
Source; The Norton Collection Carnival Section.*

CARNIVAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Chairman: Ronald Williams, Esq.

Phone: 4255 41652

 23, Guesen Street,
 Port of Spain, Trinidad
 October 29, 1964

Port Authority,
 Trinidad & Tobago,
 Wrightson Road,
Port of Spain.

Dear Sirs,

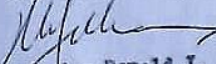
I have known Mr. George Williams for the past ten years. Since the inception of the Carnival Development Committee in 1957 he has been responsible for the installation of the stage lighting for the Carnival Development Committee shows at the Savannah. This includes the preparation of estimates and the supervision of electricians and workmen directly under his control, as well as instructing the Trinidad & Tobago Electricity Commission on the requirements of the Carnival Development Committee.

He informs me that he is applying for the post of Electrical Supervisor. I have no doubt that Mr. Williams's experience and qualifications make him eminently suitable for this position.

I am therefore pleased to give him this letter of recommendation and I am sure that with his undoubted technical ability and his conscientious devotion to duty, he will fill this position with distinction.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,
 CARNIVAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE


 Senator Ronald J. Williams
Chairman.

RJW/ah.

Figure 11

Image of Senator Ronald J. Williams Recommendation Letter
 Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021



No.
Chairman: Ronald J. Williams
Secretary: Pnace Cumberbatch
Tel. No.: 31350

Carnival Development Committee,
5, Sachville Street,
Port-of-Spain,

October 14, 1968

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Mr. George Williams informs me that he is applying for the post of Electrical Inspector.

I have known Mr. Williams since 1954. He is a licensed electrician and therefore possess the basic qualifications for the post.

Since 1957 he has been responsible for the state lighting of the Carnival Development Committee. This involved the preparation of Estimates, advising the Electricity Commission on our requirements and the actual installation and operation of our system. Because of the extremely short period we have to work it has been necessary for him to work very long hours.

I can vouch for his high degree of competence and his conscientious devotion to duty.

I have no hesitation in giving him the highest recommendation.

Yours sincerely,

Senator Ronald J. Williams,
Chairman,
CARNIVAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE.

RJW/mp.

Figure 12
Image of Senator Ronald J. Williams Recommendation Letter
Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021



Figure 13

Image of part of Williams' trophy from DCD
Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021

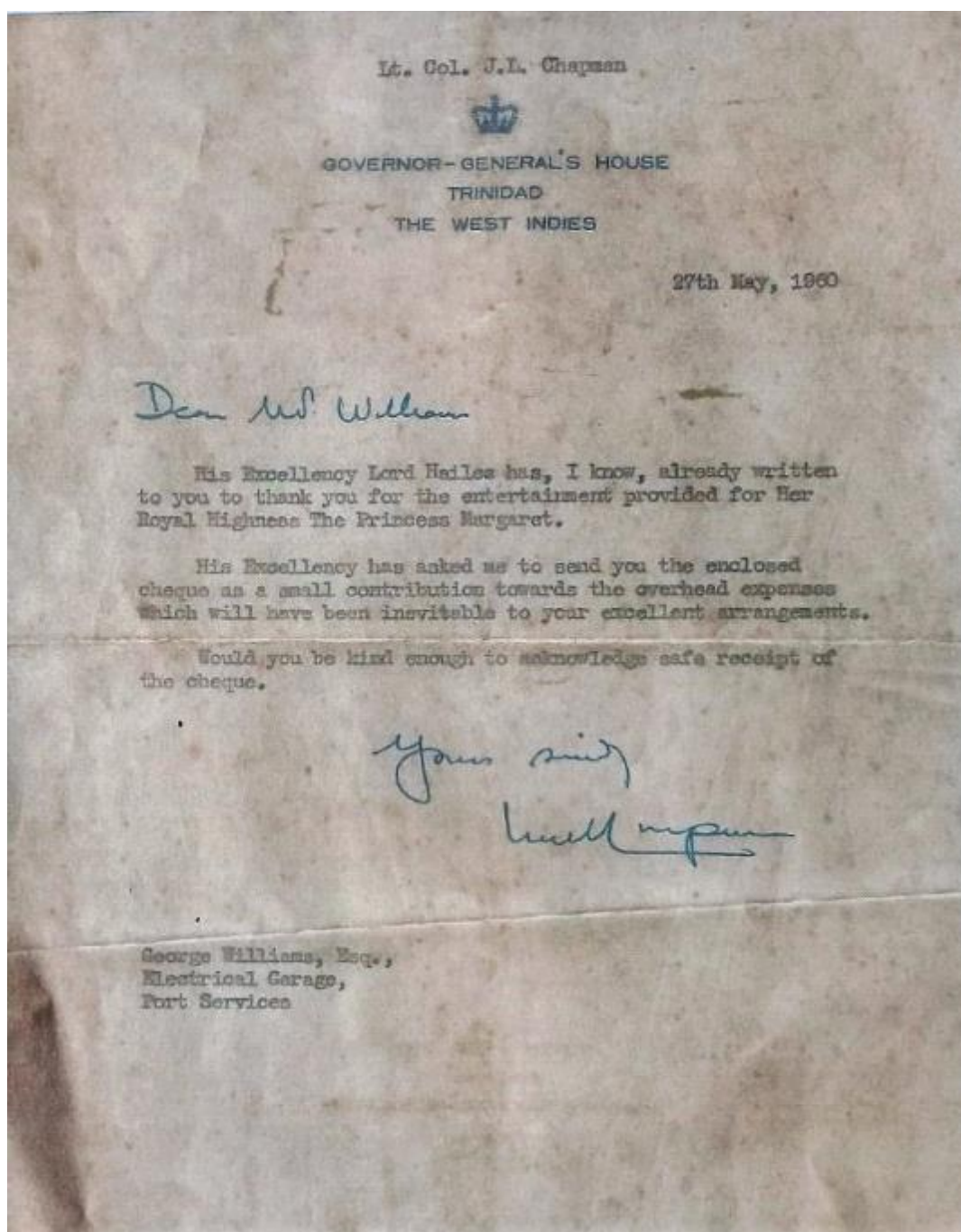


Figure 14

Image of Governor-General's Letter to George Williams

Source; the Williams Family 2021

King of lighting to be honoured

By ANEELA MARAJ

IT'S no contest. George Randolph Williams is the undisputed "King of Lighting" in Trinidad and Tobago.

And for his skill, talent and abilities, "Uncle George", as he is affectionately called, will be given a Lifetime Achievement Award during the 12th Annual Cacicque Awards carded for May 28 at the Stork St Hill Theatre on Richmond Street, Port-of-Spain.

Williams, an avid sports enthusiast, started his career in lights at the Trinidad Electricity Board (TEB) in 1943 as an apprentice. He was employed in 1948 as a First Class Wireman and he eventually made his way up the ranks and left the service as an Electrical Inspector III from the Ministry of Labour in 1990, having also spent time at the Port Authority.

His Theatre Lighting history has a lot more stops along the way, having started in 1949 with a production of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* presented by the Company of Five at the Public Library, Port-of-Spain.

However, he did have an encounter prior to this, back in 1948 when Beryl McBurnie asked him to help out with the opening of the Little Carib. "Nobody knew about lighting at that time, there were no books, nothing, nowhere to go to learn about it here. But I just got this feeling that this was something I liked."

And one of his more glittering achievements has been doing the Carnival lighting design at the Queen's Park Savannah from 1956 to 1996.

Famed lighting expert and teacher, Stanley McCandles, after seeing

the drawings for the Savannah, said it was impossible to light. "It is probably the only parallel stage (with audience seated on both sides) in the world and I got credit for designing the lighting there and a copy of the plans are still at Yale," said Williams.

In 1992, he also received the Public Service Gold Medal of Merit. Another grand achievement was when he did 775 shows in seven months in 1967, for the Expo in Montreal and other places.

Williams said he really had little choice as to how his career was shaped: "I did get into the police force but got out just as quickly. I was born artistic. It's in my blood and as a child I had been interested in anything electrical."

He is currently teaching at the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of the West Indies.

"Nearly all the people in

lighting have passed through my hands," he beamed, "and I also teach theatre on the whole, not just lighting."

Having had professional training at Yale and done productions across the US, including Broadway, Canada, the Caribbean and Europe, Williams would have picked up quite a bit of knowledge to pass on to his students.

He claims he has no favourite type of production to light, "dance, drama, Carnival, I just love doing the work. For dance though, you always have to remember that the body requires form and even for a singer, you have to help create the mood."

"Lighting can make someone cry or cause goose pimples on the skin, if it is done right," he said.

He says now when he goes out, he misses the

work. "When I see shows sometimes I get sick because there is so much more to be done. My wife, Beulah, doesn't even like going to shows with me anymore cause I will talk and see so much wrong," he laughed.

"She's not much into the arts anyway," he added.

He said he never considered going on stage himself. "I am a backstage person but I have taken steps to know how an actor or performer feels on stage when I appeared in the local production *Junction Village*. But my task involves a lot of drafting and planning and knowing where each performer is going to be during the entire show."

His big criticism of the local scene is that when performance spaces are created and built, the lighting needs are not considered. "We are not consulted, us, the people who do the technical work."

Williams is currently the appointed stage lighting consultant at the Naparima Bowl and his company, George Williams Electrical Contractors, Stage Lighting Designers and Theatre Architecture Consultants are affiliated with Alvin Dorset Architects design Associates, Architects of the Performing Arts Theatre, Dr Joao Havelange Centre of Excellence, Macoya.

He has done shows for the Marionettes Chorale, the Love Movement, All Stars Steelband, Noble Douglas Dance Company, Immortelle and the Whitehall Players as well as productions staged at Queen's Hall and other spaces in the country.

Williams has also been the stage lighting designer for the T&I contingent to trade fairs and expos in Barbados, Cuba, Switzerland, Canada, England, Scotland and other countries.

Figure 15

Image of Express article on George Williams

Source; courtesy the NALIS, 2021

Setting the stage for *T.G. 23 06 91 r.r. 19* *Drama Festival* Cacique Awards 1991

NINETEEN of the 50 plays vying for Cacique Awards this year are in the new play category, four of them are children's productions and at least two of them received awards in the Secondary Schools Drama Festival.

Cacique's panel of 26 is hard at work selecting finalists for the following categories which will be awarded at the Roxy on July 1: Best Sound, Best Lighting Design, Best Costume Design, Best Set Design, Best Choreography in Theatre, Best Musical Director, Best New Playscript, Best Production.

Among the sponsors are the Barbados, Jamaican and Nigerian High Commissions, Witco, Angostura, Rhyners, Tatil and Dr Janet Stanely-Marcano.

Patrons will view an exhibition — NDATT Through the Years — before the awards presentation. Emcees are Eunice Alleyne and Errol Fabien, Set by Gary King and Russel Julien with Steve Neaves doing Sound. Lightning Specialist, George Williams will shed light on the evening's proceedings while Frank Thomas, Stage Manager will be ably assisted by Attzs Browne, Juliet Laveau, Errol Pilgrim and Trevor Pantin.

In Winner's Circle, Cacique's cultural show, are Shiv Shakti, Miguel Browne, United sisters, Lincoln Enterprises Steel Orchestra, Tropical Angel Harps and Renee Hosten.

One hundred tickets at \$50 each go on sale at the Roxy from 1 pm on Sunday for Monday night's 8 pm show. Among the presenters are First Lady Mrs Zalayhar Hassanali, Dr Janet Stanley-Marcano, the Hon Mrs Jennifer Johnson, Her Excellency Ms Gail Mathurin and Mrs Rhvner.

Figure 16

Image of Trinidad Guardian, article June, 1991

Source; NALIS Library January 2022



Figure 17 a
Presidential Award Medal
 Source; courtesy the Williams Family, 2021

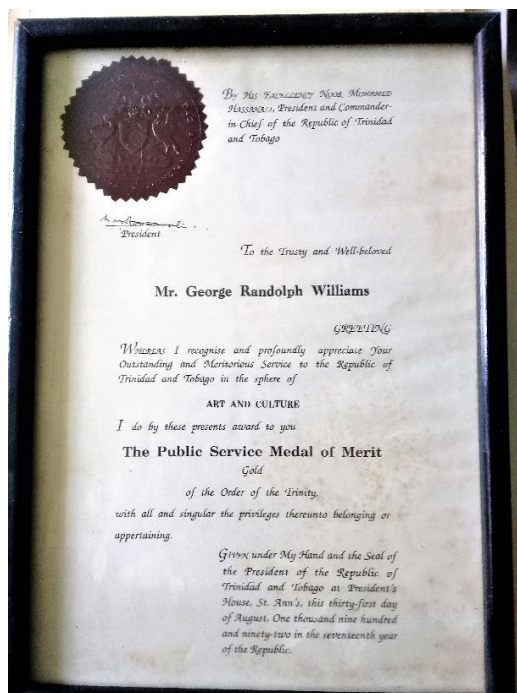


Figure 17 b
Image of Presidential Award Certificate
 Source; courtesy the Williams family, 2021

