Godfrey Cambridge drops dead on TV-movie set

By Ida Peters

Buried in California 'Where it is, and where I want to be'

Actor-comedian Godfrey Cambridge, an astonishing, unbelievable man whose show business activities included writer, photographer, master chef and producer, died of a heart attack after collapsing on a Burbank, Calif. TV-movie set this past Monday. He was 43.

He had arrived from his home in Ridgefield, Conn. earlier in the day. He had just started to play the role of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin on the set of the ABC television film "Victory at Entebbe."

The movie portrays the Israeli commando rescue of hostages at the Entebbe, Uganda airport last summer.

Cambridge, and his wife Audrey were waiting for a cue to walk onto the set "when he collapsed," said producer Bob Gunnette. "Godfrey did two small scenes earlier today and was doing a simple walk-on scene, speaking to the hostages. There was absolutely no forewarning, he just went down. I think it was apparent to most of us around that he was gone," said Gunnette.

Actor-folksinger Theodore Bikel, who was to be in the scene with him, said Paramedics worked on Cambridge for about 50 minutes giving him oxygen, electrical shocks and other treatment, but got no response.

He was dead on arrival at St. Joseph's Medical Center an hour after he was stricken, apparently by a heart attack, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Godfrey was born in New York City on February 26, the son of Alexander and Beth Cambridge who migrated from British Guiana to Nova Scotia and eventually to New York.

Godfrey went to grammar school in Nova Scotia, then returned to graduate from high scholl in Queens winning a scholarship to Hofstra University. He also studied at the College of the City of New York.

He said in a 1971 interview:

"People say I have a way of walking into a place like I just bought it. I'v always had a kind of arrogance — of knowing just who I am. It's part of my West Indian heritage. My parents were from British Guiana and we were not fighting for equality. My mother said, 'we're as equal as anyone else.' I can remember her in a Harlem butcher shop say to a very white butcher who was cheating her. 'You are not going to charge me $1.89 a pound for pork chops. I am a British subject.' She was already an American citizen, but that blew that cat's mind."

Cambridge began his acting career on the off-Broadway stage in the 1956 production of "Take A Giant Step." His Broadway baptism occurred in Herman Wouk's "Nature's Way," followed by roles in "Detective Story" and "Lost In The Stars."

In 1961 he won the Village Voice Obie Award for his performance in "The Blacks" by Jean Genet. He was fascinated by the character of Diouf who turns into a white woman; he eventually wears a blond wig, a white-faced mask and had to learn to knit for the role.

Ossie Davis wrote the role of Gitlow for him in "Purlie Victorious" for which Godfrey was nominated for an Antoinette Perry Award. He appeared with Molly Picon in "How To Be A Jewish Mother" and starred with Zero Mostel in a national engagement of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum."

In television, Godfrey worked in everything from the Dean Martin Show to Sesame Street; his nightclub work has been from coast-to-coast; and if all that entertaining has not been enough, he has made four best selling albums for Epic Records plus a book, "Putting Ons and Put Downs."

Somehow in his short life he held many other jobs including popcorn-bunny maker, airplane wing cleaner for American Airlines, maternity hospital ambulance driver, gardner, judo instructor, special policeman' newspaper circulation manager, hot rod racer, theatrical critic, and New York cab driver.

His most famous movie was "Come Back Charleston Blue" where he played the wondrous Gravedigger Jones, the Harlem cop who for the right reasons and does all the wrong things sometimes the right thing for the right reasons and for the wrong reasons.

He put his best foot forward too when he starred with Raymond St. Jacques in "Cotton Comes To Harlem." For this film he spent 16-hour days at the 28th Street Precinct in Harlem, where he saw how N.Y.'s finest survive in the jungle. When filming began, Godfrey felt he knew his man Digger, his problems and the pulse of his beat.

He also appeared on screen in "The Biscuit Eater," for Walt Disney; Disney's "The World's Greatest Athlete" plus "The Watermelon Man," "The Biggest Bundle of Them All," "The President's Analyst" and "Bye, Bye Braverman."

Cambridge honestly believed in laughter just as he honestly believed in the goodness of people and what he could do personally about the poor, the addicted, the imprisoned and all the unfortunates of the world.

He used to say he was "The Horatio of the bridge, defending the little man. I'm a screamer for the little man."

In 1974, he won a $20,000 settlement against a New York City cab firm whose driver refused to take him as a fare. The cabbie drove off dragging Cambridge through the streets of Manhattan.

He said he fought the fight when "Others might have given up, but I had to be vindicated, not only for myself but for all the others who are abused and humiliated by arrogant people."

He had an equally famous fight with the realtor who sold him an expensive house in Connecticut. Cambridge found the house rotting around him and was outraged.

In 1972, the normally chubby actor went on an eating binge and his weight swelled to 300 pounds. He was hospitalized in serious condition and credits Frank Sinatra for seeing to it he received proper care and inspiring him to recover.

* * *

Blacks on the move: Judge Theodore R. Newman has been named chief judge of the D.C. Court of Appeals. A Republican, he's the court's junior member ... The American Bar Association Judiciary Committee that has screened federal judicial appointments for five administrations has quietly added a black member for the first time. He's Charles Z. Smith of Seattle, Wash., associate dean of the University of Washington law school.

In "Watermelon Man"

Julius Harris replaces Cambridge

Julius Harris

The show must go on.

Godfrey Cambridge dropped dead Monday night just as he was to start shooting the ABC-TV movie in the role of Ugandan Dictator Idi Amon. in "Victory at Entebbe."

Tuesday, Julius Harris who played the muscle for a New Orleans gambler in "Let's Do It Again" the Sidney Poitier-Bill Cosby laughter, has taken over the part of the dictator.

Co-stars Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglass, Linda Blair and Elizabeth Taylor.

Richard Roundtree was first choice for replacement but he recommeded Harris.

Harris got into acting in 1965 when he boasted to Yaphet Kotto, Charles Gordone and other habitues of a Greenwich Village bar that he could. Previous to this, he had been a male nurse, musician and G.I.

A native of Philadelphia, father of a six-year-old daughter and a 22-month son, Carol and Kimberly, he and wife Carol have been married for nine years.

His first movie role in 1965 was Ivan Dixon's one-armed father, Will Anderson, in "Nothing But A Man."

He has been a busy actor ever since. His stage credits include roles in "No Place To Be Somebody," "Sty of the Blind Pig," "God Is A Guess What," "Bohekee Creek" and "The Amen Corner" with which he toured Europe.

Harris' motion picture credits include "You're A Big Boy Now," "The Incident," "The Slaves," "The Lost Man," "Husbands," "Super Fly," "Shaft's Big Score," "Trouble Man" and "Live and Let Die."

During an 8-year stint in the Army, he served with the 578th Field Artillery, the 742nd Tank Battalion and played drums with the 427th Band in Frankfurt, Germany.

He co-starred in the musical comedy with Molly Picon at the Mechanic Theatre, Dec. 11, 1967 in "How To Be A Jewish Mother".

Cambridge as Gravedigger Jones in "Come Back Charleston Blue" At left in disguise and right as member of the Establishment.

No stranger to B-more

November 25, 1963, Cambridge was starring in movie "Gone Are The Days". He joined Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee in personal appearances at the Charles Theatre for a benefit for Mrs. Santa, AFRO Charities.

February 16, 1964 he returned to Baltimore where he fell in love with Morgan State College. He made his television debut on the nationally televised Jack Paar Show with that segment shot on the Morgan campus.

Novemzer 24, 1964, he gave one-hour show at Lyric Theatre. Typical joke: "No reason why a colored man shouldn't be an astronaut. There's no place for a colored man to go but up". This is when he declared in an interview that the Maryland city gave him a big push in his career.

November, 1967 — He opened at the Morris Mechanic Theatre with Molly Picon in "How To Be A Jewish Mother."

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George Benson meets ... and all that jazz

By Frederick L. Douglass

Stanley Clarke

George Benson

Stanley Clarke

The Painters Mill Music Theatre was the scene of the year's major musical event when lead guitarist George Benson and bass guitarist Stanley Clarke led their groups on a rampage through Jazz-Rock sounds that bedazzled the SRO crowds that packed the house for the two performances.

I was fortunate enough to witness both shows and was left speechless by the brilliance and virtuosity of these two black geniuses. Fortunately my typewriter stayed home and can relay to you a story that is hard to transmit orally.

While Stanley Clarke was billed second, the truth of the matter is that the two musicians and their respective bands are on the same level. Nevertheless, Clarke assumed the warm-up position and, therefore, opened the show. Clarke not only warmed up the audience, he sent a tropical heat wave throughout the hall which earned him a standing ovation at the end of both of his shows.

During the first show Clarke proceeded to captivate many of the members of the audience who had never heard of him before and had come out solely to see George Benson. He played diverse selections from "Stanley Clarke," "Journey to Love," and "School Days." His three most recently recorded albums featuring him as a leader of a group.

Clarke also recorded an album in 1972 entitled "Children of Forever" which featured drummer Lenny White and keyboard wizard Chick Corea. These three musicians later formed the nucleus of Return to Forever, the most successful of all Jazz-Rock groups. The album, which is worth adding to your collection, also featured vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater adding color and texture to several selections.

You should have heard the incredible sounds rebound around the hall when Clarke got down on tunes like "Lopsy Lu," "Vulcan Princess," "Power," "School Days," "Silly Putty," and excerpts from "Life Suite." Clarkes tour de force of the evening was the driving jam "Concerto for Jazz-Rock Orchestra," a jam which also gave his sidemen an opportunity to show off a taste. Clarke's incredible band features Ray Gomez, guitar; Gerry Brown, drums; and David Sancious, the man who recorded those fantastic albums "Transformation" and "Forest of Feelings" sitting behind a battery of keyboard instruments. What a powerehouse of musical talent.

While playing the "Concerto," Gomez lambasted the audience with a barrage of sci-fi guitar riffs while Sancious romped up and down his myriad keyboards, issuing forth a torrential burst of space age sounds. Gerry Brown churned away on the drums evoking images of Africa. But it was Clarke who dominated the scene with his phenomenal electric bass playing.

During the evening Clarke also laid down some stellar acoustic bass work when he played "The Magician" from the latest Return to Forever LP "Romantic Warrior." To sum it all up, Clarke did a hell of a job and was a hard act for George Benson to follow. A lot of people are just now getting into the Music of Stanley Clarke, but perceptive readers of the AFRO have been hip to the man since December 31, 1974 when this writer reviewed his album "Stanley Clarke."

While Clarke put on two hellified shows, George Benson was ready for the challenge and knocked the audience cold. Benson, who skrocketed to national attention this year with his thriller killer hit "Masquerade," has been on the Jazz scene for more than a decade. He got his first big break during the 1960's when he joined the group of keyboard artist Jack McDuff. Later Benson moved on to record a series of albums with Freddie Hubbard, Stanley Turrentine, Esther Phillips, Hank Crawford and myriad others in addition to doing his own thing as a leader on fast paced LP's like "Body Talk," "The Other Side of Abbey Road," "The Shape of Things to Come," "White Rabbit" and many others. Then came 1776 when Benson cut the "Breezin" LP which featured "Masquerade" and suddenly he became the nation's number one guitar player.

During the evening Benson took the audience through his musical history by playing delicacies from his old albums as well as his new material. People were really surprised to hear him sing the Beatles "Here Comes the Sun" which was first commited to vinyl in 1969 on the "Abbey Road" album which was recently re-released.

By Bob Matthews

Every well-known musical group has its hard-core of devotees who slavishly devour every fad-bit put out by their heroes.

And thus, these subscribers of Kentonia were out in full-force last Sunday for the appearance of Stanley Newton Kenton as featured artist for the Left Bank Jazz Society.

Kenton is still an innovator. He continues to experiment with rhythmns and intonations.

Dissonance is evident in much of his work and the screaming brass section clicks along like metallic dominoes.

Musicians making up the current Kenton Band, are young, most in their late 20's and early 30's ... and as could be expected are technically proficient soloists.

Without exception they can pour out cascades of notes no matter what the instrument, enterpolate polyrhythmns ... even played total solos in harmonics ... simply fantastic.

But ... sad to relate ... they just don't swing. I mean that gut bucket, foot-stopping swing, as typified by Basie or Thad and Mel's aggregations.

No matter ... this slight deficit did not detract from the overall performance ... and indeed the appreciation of the Kenton sets.

Most enthusiastic response came with familiar old tunes long associated with Kenton, such as "Intermission Riff" or "Artistry in Rhythm."

Have been listening to the Kenton band for lo these many years, and have watched Stan conduct in his various groups. But, for the first time, noticed something different about his conducting.

Stan conducts in the manner of some symphony conductors i.e., the band is started and stopped with an upbeat. 'Tis a trifle disconcerting but musicians trained in the classics are used to it.

Maurice White, leader of Earth, Wind and Fire at Civic Center this Saturday and Sunday. The group just played to sell-out crowds in Richmond, Norfolk and Roanoke. They travel with 55 musicians and stage crew in a leased Viscount Jet.

Top R&B Albums

1 Songs in the Key of Life — Stevie Wonder
2 Spirit — Earth, Wind and Fire
3 The Clones of Dr. Funkenstein — Parliament
4 Message in the Music — O'Jays
5 Car Wash — Original Soundtrack
6 Hot on the Tracks — Commodores
7 Love to the World — LTD
8 Flowers — Emotions
9 Part 3 — KC and the Sunshine Band
10 This is Niecy — Deniece Williams

Top Jazz Albums

1 Breezin' — George Benson
2 School Days — Stanley Clarke
3 I Heard That — Quincy Jones
4 Barefoot Ballet — John Klemmer

Misty Hall is 'Bad Seed'

By Vashti McKenzie

Misty Hall

When The Arena Player's production of "The Bad Seed" opens Friday night at their new home, 801 McCulloh St., a talented and mature 10-year-old girl will make her first stage debut.

Misty Hall, a 4th grade student at Mt. Washington Elementary debuts as the cold, calculating and precocious Rhoda. During the course of the drama, Rhoda ends up killing three people and driving her mother to suicide.

Misty is not like Rhoda.

"She's beautiful, she is simply fantastic and she really is" said her director David Weiderman. He auditioned 40 other young ladies before selecting Misty, who came to her audition familiar with the script.

A mature 10-year-old, Misty's mother read to her from a very early age. Misty enjoyed lookin' at the pictures in National Geographic when she was only four.

Besides acting, Misty enjoys classes with the Maryland Ballet Company. She swims and plays tennis in the summer as well as karate.

It seems the cast has thoroughly enjoyed Misty. They have adopted her as a little sister but they don't patronize her.

She's taken to the stage like a duck to water. Misty can take direction and criticism like any actor in rehearsal.

The acting talents of Misty can be seen beginning this weekend along with the acting talents of Verna Day, Vacountess Payne, and Mary West Miller. Performances at the Arena Players continues on weekends through Dec. 19.

More...more

Next week LBJS has Ahmad Jamal on tap. On his last appearance he played only acoustic piano. will be interesting to see what this appearance holes.

* * *

Johnny Hartman, Johnny Hartman at the Maryland Inn in Annapolis; Ray Bryant is at Blues Alley in D.C.; Ethel Ennis is at Way Off Broadway in D.C. and Stanley Turrentine is at the Villa Rosa/Showboat. in Silver Springs, Md.

The "Resonance" Exhibition, paintings, prints and sculpture by Gil Ham / Edwards / Williams has been extended through Monday, Dec. 20 according to James E. Lewis in the main Gallery of Art in the Carl Murphy Fine Arts Centre at Morgan State University.

"When You Coming Back, Red Ryder" is now playing at Center Stage through Dec. 26. Prepare yourself for a great deal of profanity, physical violence and a little nudity.

Jerry Lewis winds up his "Hellzapoppin" engagement at the Mechanic Theatre. Critics say its getting better and better before it moves on to D.C.

The Douglass High School mixed choir is to give its annual performance of Handel's "Messiah." Part I at 4 p.m. Sunday in the school auditorium, Gwynns Falls Pkwy.

Stloists are Patelle Harris, Cheryl Redmond, Howard Wright and Fredericka Matthews. Admission is free.

The Handel Choir of Baltimore, under the direction of Darrold V. Hunt, will perform Handels "Messiah" Dec. 3 and Friday, at Kraushaar Auditorium, Goucher College.

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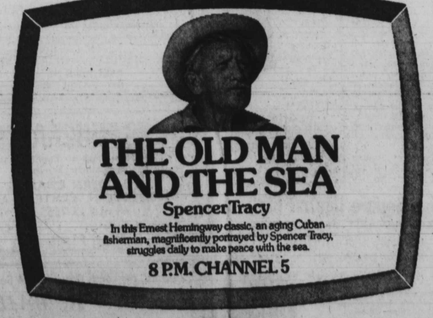
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Events in your community

December 3, 1976 — The Kingston Trio and Earl Scruggs Revue — Civic Center

December 3-4, 1976 — "Film as Art" under the auspices of UMBC Regional Media Center — University of Baltimore, Langsdale Auditorium, Charles St. and Mount Royal Ave. — 8:00 p.m. and 10:30 p.m.

December 4, 1976 — Earth, Wind and Fire — Civic Center

December 4, 1976 — Painting Clinic — Maryland Historical Society, 201 W. Monument St. — 11:00 a.m. to 12 noon.

December 6-10, 1976 — Eastern Opera Theatre presents "Doctor Miracle" — Poly-Western Auditorium.

December 12, 1976 — Football — Baltimore Colts vs. Buffalo Bills — Memorial Stadium, 2 p.m.

December 14, 1976 — Ice Hockey — Baltimore Clippers — Civic Center, 8:00 p.m.

December 16, 1976 — Christmas Concert, featuring College Choir and Dancers — Coppin State College, James Weldon Johnson Auditorium, 2500 W. North Ave., 8 p.m.

December 18, 1976 — Wrestling — Civic Center

Persons or organizations who wish to have coming events printed here are asked to write to Mrs. G. Steele, AFRO-AMERICAN Newspapers, P.O. Box 1857, Baltimore, Md., 21203.

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