

Intimate bio-pic recounts the illustrious careers of Carmen De Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder

Written by Kam Williams



Carmen De Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder have been happily-married for 53 years. During that time span, the talented couple has not only raised their son, Leo, together, but they've supported each other's every creative endeavor over the course of celebrated and enduring careers in the arts.

Born in New Orleans, but raised in California, De Lavallade was discovered by Lena Horne and got her start in the Fifties as a dancer, appearing in Hollywood films like *Carmen Jones* and *Odds Against Tomorrow*. However, she really came into her own as a soloist with Alvin Ailey's company and as a prima ballerina with the Metropolitan Opera.

Holder, meanwhile, was born in Trinidad where as a child he was unfairly labeled as slow academically due to dyslexia and a stammer which caused him to stutter. Furthermore, given that the Anglophilic nature of his post-colonial homeland where all of his local folklore was banned, it's a wonder that he was able to reach maturity with a healthy sense of self still intact.

But the 6'6" gentle giant made his way to New York City where he broke into showbiz on Broadway, initially as a dancer, just like the lovely wife-to-be he met when they were both cast in *The Flower Drum Song*. Relying on De Lavallade as a constant source of inspiration, Holder soon blossomed into a formidable Renaissance Man.

His myriad talents led to noteworthy accomplishments not only as a dancer but also as an actor, director, choreographer, costume and set designer, painter and musician. Although his stage career peaked when he won a Tony Award for directing *The Wiz*, he is probably most recognized as the pitchman for a series of TV commercials for 7-Up in the phenomenally

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successful “Un-Cola” ad campaign.

Holder has also left his mark on Hollywood, co-starring in the 007 feature film *Live and Let Die* and in the screen adaptation of the musical *Annie*, etcetera. All the while, he has remained a prolific fine artist whose paintings and sculptures have landed in leading museums and private collections. Today, De Lavallade, a renowned choreographer, teaches at Yale where she’s been on the faculty since 1970.

As engagingly-chronicled by co-directors Linda Atkinson and Nick Doob, *Carmen & Geoffrey* stands as a fitting tribute to a pair of extraordinary overachievers and as a touching portrait of over a half century of black-on-black love and of lives very well lived.

Excellent (4 stars)

Unrated

Running time: 80 minutes

Distributor: First Run Features