

Jones, Fortes, Canada Black History Honorees

On February 1 Canada's Black History Month Canada Post released new stamps to honor two individuals who have made vast contributions in their respective fields: Oliver Jones, world renowned jazz musician, and Seraphim "Joe" Fortes, dedicated lifeguard on the country's west coast.

The stamps focus on portraying each individual in their environment. Jones is shown in a candid moment and at the helm of what helps define him musically—a piano, while Fortes is pictured in the scenario that he loved most—keeping a mindful watch over Vancouver's English Bay, where he served as a lifeguard for many years. In addition to the stamps a souvenir sheet featuring both men also was issued.

"The vast musical career of Oliver Jones is one of the brightest in Canada and Joe Fortes' hard work and dedication to the people around Vancouver's English Bay is inspirational, said the Steven Fletcher, Minister of State (Transport).

"These men are unique in their accomplishments and contribution to Canada and telling their stories through our stamps is what our philatelic program is all about," said Deepak Chopra, Canada Post President and CEO.

Oliver Jones

Born in Montreal's Little Burgundy neighborhood in 1934, to Barbadian parents, Oliver Jones put on his first show at the age of five. By age eight, he was taking formal music lessons from no less than Daisy Peterson, sister of famed pianist Oscar Peterson.

In his early twenties, Jones formed the Oliver Jones Quartet, and in 1983 he released his first jazz album, "The Oliver Jones Trio."

His accomplishments, music and otherwise earned Jones a swath of honors over the years including the Order of Canada, l'Ordre national du Québec, The Governor General's Award, three Juno Awards, ten Félix Awards, the Martin Luther King Jr. Award for his accomplishments in the black community and six honorary doctorates



Although he attempted retirement in 2000, Jones continues to perform and tour the world as he has for decades.

"Over the years I have been the very fortunate recipient of numerous awards and accolades," explains Jones. "I thought I had achieved everything that I set out to do. When I was contacted by Canada Post I could not believe that I was chosen for this great honor....to be part of the Black History series is especially thrilling."

Seraphim "Joe" Fortes

"Joe" Fortes, originally from Trinidad and Tobago, moved to Vancouver in 1885. He soon fell in love with English Bay and its beach and eventually took up residence there by living in a tent. He spent any available time guarding the beach and helping thousands of children in the area learn to swim.

While the numbers cannot be confirmed, it is believed that Fortes saved in excess of 100 lives, including many children, during his time patrolling the waters of English Bay.

While there, he taught both adults and children to swim and appointed himself voluntary patrolman, chaperoning couples and chasing away hooligans. In 1894, the city formalized Fortes' volunteer work, making him an official lifeguard. In 1901, he was made an official swimming instructor, receiving pay for the summer months.

Fortes became such a beloved citizen that, in 1910, a private committee awarded him a gold watch and a locket, as well as a check for \$472. When he passed away in 1922, Vancouverites were stricken with grief. The city paid for a public funeral, which thousands attended.

In 1927, citizens raised money to install a fountain in Fortes' honor. It still stands in English Bay's Alexandra Park with an inscription that reads "Little children love him."

Fortes is shown on the stamp circa 1919 in his swimming apparel as many would remember him, against a background of the beach he loved so dearly.