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CELEBRATING **97**th
Miss Lou's

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The one and only Miss Lou: True and still unspoilt icon



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By Ian Boyne

JAMAICA NEEDS a Second Emancipation. May the presence of our pre-eminent folklorist and First Lady of Culture, Dr. the Hon Louise Bennett-Coverley, heighten the process toward that end.

I cried on Tuesday as I watched the arrival of that indomitable spirit clothed in flesh; that quintessential Jamaican; that representation of the finest in our culture, the pinnacle of Jamaicanness; the fulcrum of decency and civility; that indescribable treasure whom we know simply as Miss Lou. I cannot be detached, emotionally uninvolved and purely

Aristotelian in the presence of Miss Lou. In her presence - as potent through the electronic media as face to face - all the trappings of my 'objective' Western philosophical influences melt away under the passionate heat of my ancestral roots.

For those of us who knew a Jamaica different from today's Jamaica, Miss Lou represents a bridge

with the past, an inspiration for the present and a hope for the future. She evokes in us the humour, optimism, resilience, creativity, defiance and boundless resourcefulness which our foreparents have used to survive the brutality, atrocity, treachery and dehumanisation of slavery and colonialism. Miss Lou used to be called the First Lady of Comedy. It took us a number of years to realise that Miss Lou was no comedian. Don't be fooled. She was not joking. She tackled some of the most serious and painful issues and used the cloak of humour - brilliant strategist and communicator that she is - to force this society to face certain unpleasant truths. She 'tek serious tings mek joke', for she knew that in the oft-repeated phrase of that other cultural icon, Professor Rex Nettleford, 'we can't take ourselves too seriously'. If we did, not only would we court arrogance but also insanity. For we have to learn to laugh at ourselves and, importantly, we have to learn how to 'tek kin teet kibber heart bun' -meaning how to maintain a sense of joy in the midst of the most disheartening circumstances.

Miss Lou is a folk philosopher, cultural anthropologist and community psychologist, digging into our rich and textured Jamaican culture to come up with the universals for daily living and coping. She is a cultural archivist, preserving the treasures of our culture. She is indispensable to our Second Emancipation.

Today, a cloud of pessimism hangs over Jamaica. Gloom and doom is proclaimed all over and many believe that 'Jamaica can't come back'. There has never been a time when we seemed as listless, as directionless and as purposeless as today. In the 'bad old days' of the 1970s when there were many shortages, frightening levels of political tensions, terrifying political violence, sharp political divisions and consternation over so-called 'creeping communism', there were at least a significant number of people who had a sense of purpose, mission and vision and a commitment to the nation.

In the early 1980s many found a new sense of hope, and began what they said was the rebuilding of their lives. But by the late 1980s, the disillusionment had set in and the then JLP Government was booted out. Since then we have been on a declining scale of hope, despite what the objective economic statistics are saying. Economics cannot buoy our spirits and economics alone will not rebuild our hope. In this developing economy we will never have enough for trickle down economics to work.

As I have been saying, our crisis is fundamentally cultural and philosophical and that is where we have to start in rebuilding hope. It is the cultural base which will give you the



strength to build your economy. It is from the culture that you will be able to launch the thrust into our Second Emancipation.

A TRUE HERO

At a time when many would-be heroes have stumbled under the weight of their own corruption, deception or plain ineptitude, Miss Lou remains a true, unspoiled, undefiled hero.

She was and is a symbol of non-partisanship. Her grace and dignity would never lead anyone in his right mind to accuse her of playing politics. She is the Jamaican's Jamaican. Kevin O'Brien Chang, whom this country owes a debt of gratitude for highlighting Miss Lou's epic contributions to Jamaican culture, made the point in a Daily Observer column that Miss Lou is probably the most loved Jamaican of all time. He said she was above the political fray and does not have the number of detractors that other famous Jamaicans have. Marcus and Marley can't claim the same broad-based, unequivocal adoration.

Sure, there are people who believe that she was irresponsible for promoting 'bad talking', 'poor speech' and even 'crude and crass' communication with the patois; but

there is something about Miss Lou's endearing, disarming grin, stunningly pleasant personality, charm and sweetly overpowering presence which make even critics warm to her. Miss Lou is a true icon, a symbol of the unity that this country desperately needs.

MESSIANIC

At a time when there are so many ways in which we divide ourselves; when the guns were only just recently barking near the airport where Miss Lou was so touchingly greeted (kudos to the organisers); and a time when it seems we have no one symbol to pull us all together, Miss Lou's presence among us take on almost Messianic proportions. If you say I exaggerate her importance, it is precisely because we suffer such an absence of heroes.

At a time when our people's minds are taken up with the success symbols of Western, particularly American, culture; when our leading deejays are simply reflective of a decadent American culture and its twisted values; when corruption reigns at all levels because people lack self-esteem and are in a mad rush to gain significance and 'smadditisation' (to use Nettleford's word), Louise Bennett-Coverley is a symbol of our

hoped-for mental and cultural Emancipation.

She accepted our language, our stories, our ways of seeing the world, our indigenous forms of culture, when 'polite society' deemed them scornful and inferior. She never craved authentication and validation from the middle and upper classes. She stood her ground, nurtured excellence in all she did and the middle and upper classes had to 'bow' to her and rise to her heights.

At a time when too many of us are willing to sell our souls for the Almighty Dollar; when integrity is regularly sacrificed on the altar of greed and social climbing, Miss Lou stands in prophetic defiance of this cowardice and cultural sell-out.

A NEW SLAVERY

We are a great people, with our traditional sense of community, family and caring. The runaway individualism and acquisitiveness which characterise so many of us today is not our authentic cultural history. This is something imported in the culture, something alien. We were very concerned about the 'alien ideology' of communism which was supposedly upon us in the 1970s, but we now enthusiastically welcome the alien hedonistic and materialistic ideology of self-gratification which is causing havoc in the society.

Today we are free from the plantations of the ruling class but we are slaves to their ideology of consumerism and commodification. Miss Lou calls us back to the abundance that we have in our culture; the wealth that we possess; a wealth not confined to physical things. This is no 'romanticising of underdevelopment' but an open rejection of the view that development is the same as Westernisation.

Since we don't listen to our own and always seek validation from outside let me quote the father of Western capitalism, Adam Smith, in that less well-known book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. He rejected the notion that happiness and fulfilment in life is synonymous with material possessions, 'bling bling' and the trappings of Western opulence. Hear him, if you don't want to hear Miss Lou: 'In the ordinary situations of human life, a well-disposed mind may be equally calm, equally cheerful and equally contented... in the most glittering and exalted situation that our ideal fancy can hold out to us, the pleasures from which we propose our real happiness are almost always the same with those which in our actual, though humble situation we have at all times in our hand and in our power... The pleasures of vanity and superiority are seldom consistent with perfect tranquillity, the principle and foundation of all real and satisfactory enjoyment.'

That is Louise Bennett-Coverley in Old English! Miss Lou never glorified poverty or belittled ambition, quite the contrary. But her work is stubbornly opposed to the view that the Western notion of success and 'making it' is the only way, and that without it we are necessarily wretched and miserable. Miss Lou made us understand that our foreparents were not just discontented souls before the Gospel of greed was introduced. The woman who popularised 'Tun you hand and mek fashion' knows the relentless creativity and improvisation skills of our people.

Hear Adam Smith, whose book *The Wealth of Nations* is synonymous with the capitalist revolution: 'All the members of the human society stand in need of each other's assistance... where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy.'

DESCENT INTO DECADENCE

Miss Lou's work shows us the things which really make us happy - community, human solidarity, caring, love, sharing, humour. We have forgot a lot of that in our mental and cultural enslavement to hedonism. We have become trapped in a rat race not of our own making. We have been manipulated psychologically. So our women bleach their skin, our inner-city men run after 'bling bling' and the latest gadgets from 'foreign' and we have freely traded our indigenous cultural values for those of a decadent United States. No wonder our



newspaper headlines follow the trends in America.

Says US Professor Stanley Rothman in his fascinating paper, *The Decline of Bourgeois America*: 'An ever larger number of children are initiated into sexual activity before they are ready for it; even as increasing numbers of children are born with AIDS or brain-damaged because of their mothers' sexual activity, drug abuse or both. More and more children, especially of the poor, are abused by stepparents or by their mothers' boyfriends who have no biological investment in the children of the woman with whom they are associating. Power replaces achievement as an ideal goal and with that comes heightened mutual suspiciousness, even as the number of narcissistic personality types increase.' He could be writing about Jamaica - but by extension he is, for Jamaica has swapped its indigenous values for those of a culturally decadent America. Our dancehall artistes, our professional and political elite - and now many of our churches - have all sold out. This is why Jamaica needs Louise Bennett-Coverley desperately and urgently.

CULTURE VS 'SKIN OUT'

There will be those who will seek to validate their vulgarity and cultural perversion by appealing to Miss Lou, noting the resistance she received from 'society people' when she started with the dialect. But don't involve Miss Lou inna unno nastiness. Miss Lou was never vulgar. Everyone who knows her knows she hated profanity with a passion. Lady Saw is no modern-day Miss Lou! Vulgarity and the 'skin out, bruk out' thing is not our 'culture'. It is imported from abroad.

We are a regal people, a dignified people, Marcus Garvey people. Miss Lou is sustainable because she is authentic. She is not 'commercial'.

Miss Lou never bowed to the dominant values just to get ahead, to make it overseas or to be acceptable to audiences who love vulgarity. She never catered to the 'nah no head', 'head no good' crew. When you 'tek off the head', anybody can lead you.

Miss Lou is far more significant to this country in what she represents than we will ever know. The Prime Minister might not officially declare it, but she is Jamaica's only living national hero.

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Labrish with Miss Lou

Published August 3, 2003

By Barbara Ellington

SHE RETURNED to a hero's welcome last week Wednesday. It is her first visit home since she emigrated to Canada in 1987. Thoughts of home have never left her heart and in her adopted country, Louise Bennett-Coverley (Miss Lou), is always surrounded by a loving circle of Caribbean friends.

In an exclusive interview on Friday, The Sunday Gleaner spoke with Miss Lou just after she had completed an afternoon snack which included some juicy ripe mangoes. She tells a great story, interspersed with songs, stanzas from her dialects and liberal doses of laughter. She is filled with joy and finds humour in simple things, she recites her verses with ease - and she was in a mood to reminisce about several events in her life over the years.

SG: Where and how is Auntie Roachie these days?

MISS LOU: (Chuckling) Public Opinion. Me mussie lef her a Canada or for all I know she might have followed me. I am certain Eric (Coverley, her late husband) came with me, I felt his presence with me on the journey from the airport.

SG: What do you miss most about Jamaica?

MISS LOU: I miss everything, the food most of all although I get ackee and saltfish and mackerel and bananas regularly (Miss Lou requested cornmeal dumplings with steam callaloo for her supper Emancipation night). But I also miss the scenery especially Gordon Town where I lived for 35 years. I was married to Eric for 48 years, three months and two weeks.

SG: Do you miss having him around

MISS LOU: Lawd, I miss him you see. I never imagined that he was going to go but I think he knew because the day before he died he told me he was tired of being sick and the next day he just slept away. He didn't look sick, he had a strong voice and always said 'my voice is the strongest part of me'. I knew him from I was 16 and at Excelsior, although there was nothing romantic at the time. He gave me my first professional fee on stage. Christmas of 1952 was the nicest and best one I've ever had, I can never forget it; it



was the year before we were married and we spent it in New York.

SG: Checks with book shops since your arrival revealed that all of your books have been sold out. How do you feel that after all these years, hundreds of children continue to receive gold, silver, and bronze medals for their interpretation of your work in the national festival finals.

MISS LOU: I feel proud and I'm happy about it because I am glad to transmit the love of the folklore of our country to others. The songs, dances and stories, it is a joy to see how well people respond to them. At the beginning when I started to write for **The Gleaner** there were those who wrote in to criticise and say people will never be able to speak it but I just fix up one man who used to write in several times, with one of me poems - ha, ha, ha.

*So you a de man me hear bout,
A you dem seh a tek
Whole heap a English oath
Bout you gwine kill dialect
Mek me get it right maas Charlie
Me no quite understand,
You wa'n kill all English dialect
Or jus' de Jamaica one?.....
For if we k'ean sing Linstead Market
An wata come a me y'eye
Yuh wi haffie tap sing 'Auld lang syne'
An 'Comin thru de rye'
An mine how yu dah read dem English
book de pon de shelf
For if yu miss a H, yu mighta haffi kill
yuself.*

I never heard from him again, him nevah write another letter to the Gleaner.

SG: How do you manage to retain so many of the poems at this age?

MISS LOU: I used to say them a lot, I hear them recited a lot and they are very alive and around me all the time.

SG: Many Jamaicans loved the popular television series 'Ring Ding', what inspired you to do it?

MISS LOU: It was at the time when Sesame Street had begun in the United States and they were contemplating bringing it here. The then JBC television invited me in to ask me if I would do a children's show to introduce each episode of Sesame Street. I did that for about a month but people started asking for more and so started Ring Ding for children - it was based on Jamaican themes, with riddles and jokes and games and it was well received.

SG: Joan Andrea Hutchinson, Amina Blackwood Meeks and Carolyn Cooper are

among those who currently encourage the use of and appreciation of our dialect. Do you think enough is being done to continue building on the foundation you have laid in encouraging us to be proud of what is ours?

MISS LOU: I think on a wider scale it could have been done better, but it's good to take it quietly like I did. I have been on programmes with Carolyn Cooper when she comes overseas to give talks and lectures in Toronto. I used to go all over the world and everywhere I went I spoke about the

SG: Take us back to where it all began for you.

MISS LOU: When I was a student in London, the BBC would invite us, (Caribbean students), to come and send greetings to our home countries. I was among invitees one year and the others before me were using their best English to say 'Hello mamma, hello pappa, Merry Christmas, it is cold...' I thought to myself, 'me not going up dere go do dat.'

*So when my turn came, I said:
'Fambly and frend
Me journey end
Me ketch a London town
A Chrismus time a London town
It cold, it cold a London town
But is Chrismus time so happy up yuself.*

Afterwards we were on our way to lunch when a gentleman said he would like to talk to me in his office the next morning. When I enquired who he was, I found out he was the General Manager for the General Overseas department of the BBC and his office was right there at the BBC. He said he had heard me and had long wanted a programme with a Caribbean flavour. He saw my greeting and liked my style, so he would like to speak to me.

I attended the meeting the next morning from nine and left after 12 with a contract. I named the programme Caribbean Carnival because it reached a Caribbean audience. I also had the BBC's 20 -piece variety orchestra and on Tuesdays I had a programme with a live audience that was broadcast later at night to the general overseas audience. It took off so much that by the third week people were standing in the snow waiting to come in. So I give God thanks for everything.

SG: Do you have the loving support of the wider Caribbean community in Canada now?

MISS LOU: Oh yes, especially Jamaicans more than anybody else and they are from all walks of life.

SG: Are you still writing poetry?

MISS LOU: I do and I have a lot of unpublished material; the thing I'm really concentrating on now is my memoirs. There are a lot of requests for interviews from people who want to do my memoirs but I would prefer to do my memoirs myself so that I don't get people writing things that aren't so. I have started making recordings to that effect.

SG: Are you happy with the Jamaica you see now or do you wish for the Jamaica of your youth?

MISS LOU: Jamaica is still the most beautiful place in the world, the people are still wonderful, what happen to us is that we too follow fashion. When we are overseas and hear bad things it makes us sad. When I was young the worst thing you heard, was that somebody drop down dead. And everybody say, 'Lawd de poor ting drop dung dead.'

SG: We notice your passion for bright vibrant colours, is that deliberate?

MISS LOU: First of all, Coverley used to love to see me in red (she smiles wistfully), but I also like bright colours. My mother who sewed her whole life made my clothes. When my outfits are being made, I have to have enough fabric to make a turban and sometimes matching handbags. When my mother was alive I went to bed to the sound of the sewing machine and woke up to it.

SG: If you could live your life all over is there anything you would change or do differently.

MISS LOU: I doubt it because I have this strong feeling that there is always a very good reason for things. Even though life has not always been a bed of roses, when I would say I'm so disappointed about something, my mother always said never say you're disappointed because something better is in store for you that does not seem likely at the time. Look at my life, everywhere I go, someone has heard about Miss Lou. I am happy with the legacy I am leaving for the people of Jamaica.

Noh lickle twang! Ja's cultural icon returns

Published August 6, 2003

By Claude Mills

THIS YEAR'S Emancipation and Independence celebrations have acquired an almost magical quality - a vivacity and soul - not experienced in recent years.

Many believe that the return of Dr. Louise Bennett-Coverley, or Miss Lou as she is affectionately called, is the main reason behind the 'natural mystic' in the air.

Miss Lou has always enjoyed virtual hamperlock on the hearts and imagination of the Jamaican public. But from the moment she made her way down the Air Canada plane's steps to place her feet on the soil of her homeland, she has single-handedly inspired a new joie de vivre in the life of Jamaicans.

This is her first visit to Jamaica since she emigrated to Canada in 1987, and the bubble of euphoria associated with her return has spread to swallow the entire country.

Miss Lou has become an object of mass cultural fascination as demonstrated by the 'boonoonooos' welcome she received at the airport and on the streets of Jamaica from hundreds of adoring fans. After being wheeled through a 'gauntlet of culture' inside the airport where she was treated to performances from the Rod Dennis Mento Band, the Cari-folk Singers and Ashe', she was escorted to her hotel by police outriders. Adoring fans lined the streets of Harbour View to greet her. They screamed her name as her limo passed, and whenever she paused to acknowledge their presence, they merely basked in the corona of her presence.

On Wednesday, she held centrestage during a rap session with the media at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel in New Kingston. She stated that while it was important to retain the Jamaican dialect as an integral part of the local culture, teachers must make it their responsibility to teach English translations.

UPSTAGED THE PRIME MINISTER

On Emancipation Day, during the Michael Manley Award for Community Self-Reliance, she upstaged the Prime Minister with an extemporaneous address to the audience jam-packed in the Little Theatre. As Miss Lou made her way down the aisle, she set off a round of frantic whispering, and a murmur



of excitement ran through the crowd like an electric current. Members of the audience began to clap rhythmically, and they rose to their feet in anticipation of something special. They were not disappointed.

After singing a few bars of Water Come A Mi Yi, she once again implored the gathering to 'talk Jamaican', and defended her lifelong obsession with and championing of the Jamaican dialect. When she finished, she received a standing ovation from the audience. The audience's minds were filled, in the minds of many Jamaicans, the portrait of a woman who redefined the way we looked at ourselves. Through her performances in the theatre and the 12 years she held centrestage on Ring Ding, she became an ideological touchstone for many Jamaicans, and her place is firmly riveted in the national psyche.

Miss Lou's return has set in motion what some dub as the 'Miss Lou multiplier effect' because as Power 106 commentator Tony Laing puts it, 'Jamaicans are rallying to her, she has rekindled, revived and restored the spirit of the country... the festival feeling come back'.

On the day of her grand return, opportunistic vendors sold 'Miss Lou flags', one can now purchase 'bandoolu' cassettes of Miss Lou's performances, and on August 3, 2003, the Creative Production Training Centre (CPTC) had a public launch of a Miss Lou cassette.

She has rekindled interest in all things Jamaican. Copies of her most popular liter-

ary works have been sold out. The radio talk shows buzz with talk of her return, and organisers have noted that the attendance at key celebratory activities has also increased. The newspaper is littered with Ms. Lou articles, and even ads thanking her for her return.

'People are expressing love more,' noted actor Charles Hyatt said of the multiplier effect. 'The love they feel for Ms. Lou is such that it unites them; it is contagious and I personally feel it throughout the society. The love that we have for Ms. Lou has translated into a love for each other. It is one action.'

Ms. Lou is sometimes referred to as the First Lady of Comedy, but underneath her wily, 'tek kin teeth kibber heart bun' comedic style, she forced the society to face unpleasant truths about itself through the multi-hued, multi-racial colours in her verbal palette.

But it is the bold, proud, unapologetic and unrelenting championing of the use of the Jamaican language internationally that so endeared her to many Jamaicans. The question cynics are asking is: with all the love and attention being paid to her now, will there be a Miss Lou backlash?

On Sunday night, Miss Lou was scheduled to be a special guest at a performance of 'Cindy-relisha' at the Ward Theatre.

Miss Lou will also be special guest at the Independence civic ceremony and the civic tribute/concert at the National Stadium today. On August 11, she will be inducted as Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica at the Little Theatre.

PM praises Miss Lou

Published August 8, 2003

By John Myers, Jnr.

IN A blast of cultural extravagance, Jamaica's Ambassador of Culture, Dr. the Hon. Louise Bennett-Coverley (Miss Lou), was Wednesday night showered with a grand tribute of the type reserved for national heroes.

This was during a special civic ceremony to honour her at the year-old Emancipation Park, New Kingston.

At the ceremony, which was witnessed by over 2,500 people who filled the park and spilled over into the streets, Miss Lou was hailed as a true Jamaican heroine who has championed Jamaica's culture and dialect (Patois), in the face of much criticism and adversity both at home and abroad.

With the dialect being used in many of the tributes paid, the cultural icon was assured of, in no uncertain way, the indelible mark she has made in the building of the Jamaican landscape in the 41 years since the island got Independence.

TRAILBLAZER

Prime Minister P.J. Patterson, in lauding the Jamaican folklorist, said: 'Miss Lou helped us to break the barriers of cultural ignorance, she inspired confidence in ourselves ...Dr. the Hon. Louise Bennett-Coverley has enriched and empowered us all.'

Poking fun at Miss Lou's distinct Jamaican accent, despite her extended stay in Canada, Mr. Patterson remarked: 'Is suh yuh come afta yuh tan suh lang, not even likkle language gal; not even likkle twang!' - a line from one of her more popular poems.

'Miss Lou, more than anybody else, learned and taught us how to tek sinting mek laugh, tek kin teeth kiba heart bun, then she wove all of this together into a seamless tapestry and returned them to us in song and the spoken word to strengthen us on our journey,' the Prime Minister continued.

Before presenting her with a copy of a citation from the Government, Mr. Patterson encouraged Miss Lou to return home. 'Anytime the cold get too bitter and biting, not only feel free to come, but if yuh want help to pack up yuh tings and come, we will be there to pack up yuh tings and come wid yuh because we want you to come home,' he said. He announced that as of April next year,



Air Jamaica will resume flying to Toronto, Canada, and said Miss Lou would be welcomed on board at anytime.

Will Rogers, senior vice-president of Air Jamaica, presented Miss Lou with a lifetime pass to travel on the airline.

Beaming with pride, and in a true Jamaican way, Miss Lou expressed her heartfelt

gratitude to the Jamaican people who gave her nothing less than a 'boonoonoonoos' welcome. She reminisced on her childhood days when people called her 'Miss Bibs' and would flock her. 'This is the sort of love I got from the Jamaican people when I was growing up,' she said, adding that 'Lawd, it sweet mi, it sweet mi.' et mi.' et mi.'

Howdy and tenk yu, Miss Lou

Published August 10, 2003

By Tanya Batson-Savage

AUNTIE ROACHIE art mussi full till it bus las' Wednesday night, wen likkle mos' all a Jamaican come out fi sey howdy and tenky to Miss Lou a Emancipation Park inna New Kingston. Since De Hanarebel Dackta Louise Bennett-Coverley lick de Norman Manley International Hairport las' week, Jumaica don't give har a fighting chance; dem jus a fling dung di love, wedda she ready ar not.

Wan afta anadda, she haffi go dis, dat or tarra wat cermany, an' everybody wan' ear a likkle boonoonoous talk. Everybody wan' dem piece, true sey a so long since she forwud back a yard, no since she lef go Canada inna '87.

So, on Independence Day, 2003, Jamaicans from all walks of life, young old and some who caan mek up them mind yet, poured into Emancipation Park, whether to take a prips at the esteemed lady or simply to part-take in the festivities. Neither Asylum nor Monday morning has produced the kind of traffic that crawled along Knutsford Boulevard on Wednesday evening at 7:00 p.m. Everybody and their best friend wanted to make it to the park.

Screens were stationed all around the grounds to make sure that everybody could see, even if they couldn't be near the stage. Unfortunatley the microphone set-up wasn't as good, but at least people could see from all around the of the park and even in the middle.

Of course with that kind of crowd, enough seats were not there for everybody to get a kotch. And of course, with all the lush grass on the lawn that wasn't a problem. People neva fraid to simply grab a piece of the ground and sit on that. As soon as dem sit down, dem tek out all that they brought to eat, because wha' de pint a wan show widouten likkle bikkle.

Mervyn Morris (he was the one who help a lot of people see that Miss Lou can be studied in school with his essay On Reading Louise Bennett Seriously) read a wonderful citation to Miss Lou. The citation full up

of nuff, big, sweet wud bout why she was a revolutionary and how she 'studied, shared and illuminated the heart of the Jamaican people'.

'She has helped us to realise that we likkle but we tallaway,' the citation said and Professor Morriss read it sweet-sweet.

Den Lawks, Miss Lou was so moved she could not even talk. 'I mus say suppen,' she said when they gave her the microphone. 'When you see I can't talk you mus' know,' she said. And everybody seemed to know. Har heart must have been well full and her speech said as much.

Along with all the big people speechifying and saying how much Miss Lou has done and dubbing her the 'mother' of Jamaican culture, the evening had quite a mix of people performing. Faith D'Aguillar, one woman who sound like the dead stamp of Miss Lou, was one of them. Fitz Weir, Easton Lee and Charles

Hyatt also took a walk down memory lane. Hyatt suggested that Miss Lou could be made a National Heroine, to ease off some of the pressure from Nanny.

Oliver Samuels also took a walk down memory lane, but he did not go too far down the road as he decided to bring Miss Lou up to date on what was going on in Jamaica now. He came to the stage with one big greeting an give out: 'Yuh brute yuh! Yuh tink I wouldn't fin' yuh? Yuh nuh easy y'know Louise. Yuh nuh

LIKKLE, BUT YUH TALLAWAH!

Of course, every body laugh, because is long time since Miss Lou was likkle - but she well tallawah. She tallawah cyaa done. Of course, with how Oliver Samuels very jokify, him start mek fun of the war between Cable and Wireless and Digicel, talking bout 'me a di owna fi di yard'. It get really funny when he started in on the Privy Council issue.

According to his dictionary, privy means latrine. 'All dem a galang bout Privy Council, a tilet so much people waah go?' he asked. Of course, everybody laugh. Samuels also made it a point to argue that if the statues wanted to emancipate their minds itally, then they had

the freedom to do so.

The bringer of the fresh vegetables, Tony Rebel, did not quite agree with the statues being ital. After having everybody singing along with his song, which used We Love You Miss Lou as the chorus, he ended his piece with the argument that they should take down the naked people and put up one of Miss Lou instead. This call had the audience cheering wildly.

Tony Rebel was not the only deejay to make the programme, as the beenie doctor himself also had his four minutes. Beenie Man's performance, which was not another case of 'hey green arm ova desso...', went over very well with the audience. He started off with the first verse of Redemption Song before going on to give his own version of thanks and praises in honour of Miss Lou.

Dub Poet Yassus Afari also took his time at the microphone. The poet called Miss Lou and international 'shero' and told her that her real place was in King's House. 'Ah you mek di people dem 'ave so much diabetes,' he said addressing Miss Lou directly, 'caah yuh too sweet.'

Joan Andrea Hutchinson also brought her poetic skills to the evening. She performed a poem which spoke about the trials of Miss Lou in the efforts of those who wanted to kill off Jamaican Creole because it is just 'bad talking'.

The evening clearly showed Miss Lou that we were not skylarking in her absence. Spirit of 8 gave a great rendition of her contribution to folk song history, including the perpetually calming Evening Time.

There were also performances of Quardrille, folk songs, ring games and dances. Of course, the highlight of the performances was when young Jade Harris performed an excerpt of Miss Lou's Cuss Cuss. The little bump of womanhood, a student of Gem Glow Kindergarten, warmed everybody's heart with her performance.

Sandra Brooks, Fab 5, Abijah, Stefan Penincillin and Leroy Sibbles also performed. When everything was done and Miss Lou was being taken out on a little golf cart everybody tried to get in a one look - but not everybody was lucky.

Disappointed, one young woman kissed her teeth and turned away saying: 'Cho! Mi nat even get fi see ar!'

Whether or not everybody got to see her live and in living colour the evening was a good show of Jamaica's culture to one of its staunchest supporters. It was a long time since Jamaica had seen har, and we all wanted to show love.

Even if it tired ar out. Is a good ting she tallawah, even at 83.

So mi get it, so mi give it.

Miss Lou is Institute of Jamaica Fellow

Published August 12, 2003

By Damion Mitchell

THE INSTITUTE of Jamaica has announced the establishment of the 'Louise Bennett/Eric Coverley Collection' as part of its initiative to preserve the work of the two Jamaican luminaries.

Chairman of the Council of the Institute of Jamaica, Professor Barry Chevannes, made the disclosure at the induction ceremony for the Hon. Louise Bennett-Coverley as Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica at the Little Theatre, yesterday evening.

Miss Lou, 83, and her husband of 48 years, the late Eric, who died last August at 91, have been recognised as 'key players' in the development of Jamaican theatre.

Professor Chevannes said in an interview that 'the Institute has a number of memorabilia and artefacts from the two cultural icons and on the occasion of the honorary fellowship that is being awarded to Miss Lou, a decision was taken to expand the collection.

'Hopefully, some of what Louise Bennett has in Canada, as well as here in Jamaica, will become part of the treasure.'

Among the items obtained for the collection are photographs, excerpts from theatre performances and videos.

missed last year's conferment

Professor Chevannes could not say when the collection would be officially launched.

Miss Lou's nomination as Fellow of the Institute of Jamaica was announced on January 15 last year; however, she was unable to

attend the March 27, 2002 induction.

In presenting the statement of induction yesterday, executive director of the Institute of Jamaica, Vivian Crawford, announced that Miss Lou has been selected by fellow inductees as an 'honorary fellow'.

She joins Sir Roy Augier, George Laming, and Professors Gerald Lalor and Rex Nettleford as fellows of the Institute who are still alive. The others are Edna Manley, Philip Sherlock and C.L.R James.

The Institute of Jamaica was established in 1879 for the encouragement of literature, science and art and elects persons who have made significant achievements in any of these areas as fellows of the organisation.

Published April 25, 1949

Louise Bennett In Ramson Hall Recital Friday

THE JAMAICA Arts Society presents Louise Bennett in a recital at Ramson Hall, Duke Street, on Friday April 29, 1949 at 8 p.m., assisted by Dickie Dalhouse and Lester Wilson.

As is well known Louise Bennett is one of our foremost exponents of folk-lore and an adept of rhyming all the interesting features of our everyday Jamaican life in Dialect.

Schools now encourage the dialect which is a distinct and not-to-be-forgotten part of our culture.

The Jamaican Arts Society in presenting Louise Bennett is beginning on the mission much needed in Jamaica and that is the presentation of persons in recitals of the spoken word. Of course, Louise Bennett's programme is very comprehensive and up-to-the-minute. She even promises to include any important happenings that might take place within the last few days before her recital.

She will appear in varying moods as will be required by the items and costumes which will be used in the presentation of certain special items.

Admission will be by programmes which are available at Montague's Music Shop and at the Jamaica Times Store, King Street.



Published April 3, 1967

Louise Bennett entertains at Kiwanis luncheon

MEMBERS OF the Kiwanis Club of Kingston were entertained at their weekly luncheon at Sheraton-Kingston Hotel on Tuesday, May 28, 1967 by Jamaica's foremost folklore artiste, Louise Bennett.

Miss Bennett who was the special guest at the meeting, was joined by her audience when she sang the Jamaican digging song **Lost Can't find**, Then she recited four of her popular poems **South Parade Pedlar**, **No Little Twang**, **The Boy with the Oxford Accent** and **Ban's a Killing**.

She, also gave a short talk on how she

became interested in the Jamaican dialect, explaining that she believed it gave a true expression of the people of the country. She thought that most Jamaicans loved, "to tek a bad sinting and mek laugh."

The guest speaker afterwards presented president; Mr. Ivor Brimble, with an autographed copy of her latest book **Jamaica Labrish**.

The vote of thanks was moved by Mr. Seymour Loftman, who also presented Miss Bennett with, a Certificate of Appreciation. Mr. Ronnie Nasralla introduced the guest.

LOUISE BENNETT:

Our well-Known, well-loved poet

By George Panton

THE AWARD of the Order of Jamaica “to Louise Bennett is one in which all lovers of the arts (and especially the P.E.N. Club) take special pride. One of the best-known and most popular persons in Jamaica she has not only brought pleasure to scores of thousands but she has also demonstrated that poetry is not something esoteric which few can understand and appreciate. Her “Jamaica Labrish” was a best-seller and after the sale of several thousand copies of the 1966 edition a second impression had to be produced in 1972. The hard-covered edition has been completely sold out but a paperback is still available in the bookshops (\$2.50).

The printed word is merely a record of Miss Lou’s writings and is known to but a small fraction of the numbers whom she has delighted from the stage or through the medium of TV and radio. Nevertheless it is mainly on that aspect of Louise Bennett that this short profile concentrates in keeping with the current series of Arts Profiles.

We all laugh at Monsieur Jourdain in Moliere’s “Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme” who expressed his astonishment “at learning from his professor of philosophy that he had been talking prose all his life. But many in Jamaica laid themselves open to similar laughter at not appreciating for a long time that what Louise Bennett wrote was poetry. And this included several critics, it being notable that the “Independence Anthology of Jamaican Literature” published in 1962 included poem of Louise Bennett’s but placed it (along with an Anancy story—she being the only person to be represented both in prose and in poetry in that book) under the Miscellaneous section, a hodgepodge of autobiography, history, folk-lore and humour.

ACCEPTANCE

But there were some percipient persons, notably Mervyn Morris, himself a highly respected poet, who took a different point of view and stressed that, the humorous verse despite (or because of?) its being written for



delivery from the stage was indeed poetry. He set out this idea at some length in a series of four articles which appeared on this page of the Sunday Gleaner in the four weeks of June 1964. The dialect had made the middle class, the one which read poetry and in fact did any reading at all, regard the poems with suspicion, if not condescension.

But Morris wrote: “We have moved gradually from an unthinking acceptance of a British heritage to a more critical awareness of our origins and a greater willingness to accept the African elements of our past as part of our national personality.”

This acceptance has now become almost

an insistence and no longer needs to be stressed. But Louise Bennett had demonstrated this long before the “culture vultures” saw it.

PUBLICATIONS

In addition to the dialect, there was the perhaps unvoiced suspicion that humour was not the subject of which poetry could be made and therefore Miss Bennett’s entertainments had to be labelled as no higher than verse. This idea, has now disappeared and it is accepted that humour is poetry in a vivid means of conveying satire or irony. Clearly the poetry of Louise Bennett held up a mirror to many of our foibles and forced us to laugh

at them (and perhaps try to correct them?).

Those who think of “Miss Lou” as an entertainer only are probably unaware that “Jamaica Labrish” was not the first publication of her work (it is the only one listed in “Who’s Who in Jamaica”). At least three others, now quite unobtainable, had appeared—“Jamaican Humour in Dialect” (Jamaica Press Association, 1943), “Anancy Stories and Dialect Verse” by Louise Bennett, Dorothy Clarke, Una Wilson, etc. (Pioneer Press 1950) and “Laugh with Louise” (City Printery 1961).

It is no longer true as it was in 1966 (and perhaps it was fading even then) that, as Rex Nettleford wrote in his Introduction to “Jamaica Labrish,” Louise Bennett “is yet an unheralded guest among some of the literary establishments.” Her place there in history among other distinguished writers, is now quite secure. She is fully acceptable as a poet in her own right without the need of her stage personality to lift her poems from verse to poetry.

But this should not be taken as a dismissal of the stage personality. Anyone who has seen her on the stage or on the TV screen is fully aware of the additional enjoyment given to the reading of her poetry. The gay spontaneity and the particular emphasis given to the various phrases add considerably to them. But then it is also true that all poetry benefits from being read aloud and that of Miss Bennett even more than many. As an aside the reference to ‘spontaneity’ should not be taken to mean that Miss Bennett’s performances are artless. As her diploma from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art can testify she is a trained artiste and neither her performances nor her poetry ‘just happen.’

QUOTATIONS

A few quotations from the poetry of Louise Bennett should serve to demonstrate her ability to comment vividly on topics of varying importance. One of her best-known poems refers to the post-war migration of Jamaicans to Britain which she describes as “Jamaican people colonizin, Englan in reverse” in the course of which she produced this verse, “An week by week dem shipping off’ Dem countryman like fire, Fe immigrate and populate De seat of “de Empire.”

Her “Back to Africa” - Written in 1947 when the ‘return’ to Ethiopia movement first became vocal emphasised that Jamaica was the real home of Jamaicans not Africa because we had other roots and other ancestors—“Back to Africa Miss Matty?; Yuh noh know wha yuh dah-sey?”— “Me know sey day yuh great great great- Gramma was African, But Matty, doan yuh great great great - Grampa was Englishman?”.

The shrewd comments on the anxiety



of the various countries to be the site of the capital of the

West Indies Federation were more than humorous—“Dat time wen it did look like sey De new West Indian nation Did want capital site more dan Dem wanted Federation!”

But there was a lighter side to her comments as in her poem,

“Pedestrian Crosses” with its tongue-twisting ending, “De crossing stop we from pass mek dem cross, But nutten dah-stop dem

from cross mek we pass, Dem yah crossin is crosses fe true.”

As Nettleford put it, Louise Bennett raised the sing-song patter of the hills and of the towns to an art level acceptable to and appreciated by people from all classes in her country.”

Miss Bennett has been married to Mr. Eric Coverley since 1954 and lives in Gordon Town, and ideal place from which to observe both the country and the city as her poems have done.