

Creative Space

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De artistry, lyricism, movement and expressions of the Caribbean, by Joanne C Hillhouse.

For the book lover, heaven on earth is an open book and all the time in the world to read it. Before I was a writer, I was a book lover. But one of the ironies of growing up in the Caribbean is how little of what was accessible reflected my world.

"I grew up reading about Snow White and Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood and Goldilocks," says Verna Wilkins, whom I first met in 2006 at the Antigua and Barbuda International Literary Festival (www.caribbeanliteraryfestival.com). The Grenada born, UK-based writer is the founder of Tamarind publishers. "I needed to put children of colour into the picture... my picture books feature black fairies and black female giants and real little boys who love dinosaurs. The books have beautiful sunsets, bougainvillea and frangipani, hibiscus and oleander."

This reminds me of Antiguan Althea Prince's *How The East Pond Got Its Flowers*; I know the east pond, and this story resonates. Books are, after all, a wonderful way to discover and define our world.

And from Calabash (www.calabashfestival.org) in beautiful St. Elizabeth, Jamaica to the Alliouagana literary festival (www.litfest.ms) due to debut this year in Montserrat, homegrown readers and tourists alike, have even more opportunity to discover Caribbean literature.

That, for me, is always part of the pleasure — sitting back and listening to voices I am still discovering. Last year at the BIM Symposium in Barbados, Celebrating Caribbean Women Writers, I shared the spotlight with Trinidad's Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné (whose lyrical prose has some sharp and interesting turns), Swinging Bridge author Ramabai Espinet, Jamaican Curdella Forbes, Bermudan Angela Barry-Gilkes, and Barbadian Dana Gilkes; all of whom left me with a hankering to read more of their work and about our world.

The lit fests are some of the prime places to meet them. The Antigua and Barbuda International Literary Festival (ABILF) has attracted the likes of Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison who, according to Sharon Wilson-Strann, a teacher and author of the Macmillan Study Companion for the CSEC Exam, is essential reading for those desirous of discovering the vitality of Caribbean literature. Wilson-Strann also favours Guyana's David Dabydeen, and Jamaica's Olive Senior and Louise Bennett, among others. Throw in a couple of fiction writers such as Michael Anthony of *Green Days by the River* fame and *The Wine of Astonishment*'s Earl Lovelace — both Trinis — and you have most of her must-haves right there.

There's so much to discover, whether dusting off the classics like Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* or Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*; introducing children to Ashley Bryan's *The Dancing Granny* or Jason Cole's *Max and Me*; discovering the sensual appeal of Colin Channer's *Waiting in Vain* or Oonya Kempadoo's *Buxton Spice*; meeting the poets — Martin Carter, Grace Nichols, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, and others; or tuning into electric spoken word artistes ranging from Paul Keens Douglas to Motion in Poetry. We've long since found our voice, so open a book, put in a CD and listen to its unique lilt.

Homegrown talent

Joanne Hillhouse, whose first book, *The Boy from Willow Bend*, has received the distinction of being added to the Antigua schools reading list and as a consequence will be re-issued by Hansib Publications with a new cover designed by celebrated Antiguan artist, Heather Doram. The novel tells the story of an irrepressible youngster, Vere, who is growing up amidst poverty and loss in Antigua. Everyone he counts on eventually leaves, one way or other, but Vere is bright and talented, and survives his childhood only to be faced with a life-changing choice. What are you waiting for? Grab a copy now!