



CUBA's Nicolas Guillen



BARBADOS's Frank Collymore



JAMAICA's Edna Manley



TRINIDAD/GRENADA's Mighty Sparrow

TO understand what is meant by the "Caribbean family" is to appreciate the outstanding contributions of six great West Indians who have been honoured at the current Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts (CARIFESTA).

The six who share the honour roll for this fourth CARIFESTA are: Dancer Beryl McBurnie of Trinidad and Tobago; sculptress Edna Manley of Jamaica; poet Nicolas Guillen of Cuba; the writer, Aimé Césaire of Martinique; world-renowned calypsonian, Mighty Sparrow of Grenada/Trinidad and Tobago; and the late Frank Collymore, writer/artist of host country, Barbados.

The distinguished Barbadian novelist, broadcaster and lecturer, Dr. George Lamming, was given the honour of paying tribute to these stalwarts of the Caribbean experience, at the colourful ceremonial opening of this grand cultural festival on Sunday night, July 19.

Lamming's presentation was the high point of the ceremony and, to the appreciation of his thousands of listeners, he began his address by singling out for special praise the late historian Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams, whose vision and commitment made possible "the necessity of gathering in this scattered family of artists".

By **GEORGE LAMMING**

THE first leader of a Caribbean government who brought my attention to the necessity of gathering in this scattered family of artists where they belong was the late Dr. Eric Williams.

After the victory of the People's National Movement in 1956, his invitation to the novelists, Samuel Selvon and V.S. Naipaul, to return and move within the region at their pleasure was a stage towards that ambition.

It was the transmission of this idea, taking root by chance in Guyana, that started the pattern of reunions which has brought us here.

Williams was also the first man, who a decade earlier, brought my attention to the names of two of our honoured guests - Nicolas Guillen of Cuba and Aimé Césaire of Martinique.

It was his wish that people of my generation then would ignore the imperial barriers of language, and enter the world which was being made by Guillen and Césaire. He was, essentially, a Caribbean person, and through his work, both as historian and man of public affairs, he became a great pioneer in helping to lay the cultural foundations of this regional house.

But a political life, especially a long political life, carries within it the burden of great contradictions, since critical moments will often show action to be in conflict with intention and idea.

And so, whatever contro-

WE MUST HONOUR ERIC WILLIAMS WITH REVERENCE AND WITH GRATITUDE

versies may surround the career of Eric Williams, I think it consistent with our purpose here, that we should, on this occasion, remember him with reverence and with gratitude.

That influence is at work in the selection of these six West Indians for special honour. It is the recognition of a family of islands including the mainland island of Guyana, peopled by the same blood, and shaped by the same historical experience.

Many of you will have good reason to know that Barbados, your host, has seceded itself in the bloodstream of every Caribbean territory. Wherever you go within this region, the signature of that sperm is there.

Federation may have failed to create common institutions, but the ceremony of marriage has certainly succeeded in reinforcing that first tradition of kinship by blood.

To speak of the Caribbean family, therefore, is to speak of a collective and personal experience of the deepest intimacy. And this has been a dominant characteristic of the work of those we honour: their recognition of common predicament, of common need, and of common destiny.

It is not by whim or fancy

BUILDERS OF OUR CARIBBEAN HOUSE



MARTINIQUE's Aimé Césaire and (at right) TRINIDAD and TOBAGO's Beryl McBurnie



that Mrs. Edna Manley, Jamaican in her experience, should welcome the Trinidad poet, Wayne Brown, to be her official biographer.

From the Great Sparrow in Trinidad, through the sparkling voice of Aimé Césaire in Martinique, to the earliest preoccupation of Nicholas Guillen in Cuba, each has sought to make permanent a vision of this regional house where no member of the family would conceive of calling another expatriate or alien.

Common decency tells us that it would be an act of the greatest perversity to train a Barbados-born child to think of its Vincentian or Jamaican mother as an expatriate in the island where she resides as mother and person who contributes to the continuity of this family.

Such language promotes a mischievous disruption, and threatens all of us in the most sacred areas of our domestic experience.

And so, we warmly congratulate the Barbados Government for using its authority and its power to confirm, by this particular choice, the possibility of that vision, of

a common family, which has influenced almost every creative, cultural worker in this region.

It is not only an excellent choice. It is also a very courageous one. When we consider the details of the work and lives of our honoured guests, we recognise that, in their different ways, each has been an agent of creative upheaval for ruling groups at different times.

I do not think it necessary to emphasise that the prevailing values of a society (the codes you respect and obey) are, to a large extent, the wishes of the dominant ruling group. And the most urgent need of all rulers is to achieve and maintain an order of stability.

But these honoured guests have all been led, by the nature of their work, to explore aspects of our reality which brought them into conflict with established and official ways of seeing.

While the soldier may applaud stability with his gun, the creative, cultural worker forces us to question the content of that stability, to re-think, even to re-define the terms of our meaning.

FRANK COLLYMORE

The grave is, after all, a very stable place, perhaps the most stable of all places. But it would be a strange intelligence which chose the cemetery as a model kingdom of development.

The late Frank Collymore who had the greatest genius for being genuinely loved, will always remain the most memorable father of this family of Caribbean writers.

The magazine *Bim*, became a regional home for all. But he was by occupation a school master whose reputation for kindness and humane concern will never be surpassed in this island.

It was his business to train boys into the habit of being stable, yet he always saw this function with a certain gentle mockery. It was his humour which concealed from us how deep was his creative suspicion.

"And I think of these youngsters, large or small, earnest or wayward, or frankly indifferent, but all, however, quite sure, that the ablative absolute and the Acts (by Marshall) are proven paths to a status that's secure.

"Then there's prayers every morning and double-entry book-keeping; one foot in Heaven, and one on the things that matter, plenty of time afterwards to fornicate, guzzle and chatter . . ."

"See how nicely his tie sits underneath his collar, you can always tell an educated man if you know just where to look. See, he takes his hat off when the band is playing the national anthem. That man's no bloody fool: he owns three houses and a drug-store in Port-Market. He has learnt to use both edges of the golden rule. Yes, he won't have to use a hoe, or lie out in the open wondering what things are or why they go . . ."

The privilege of school, and a gift for private accumulation, would later transform three houses and a drug-store into a miraculous haven of condominiums and boutiques, and all the expensive mysteries of un-real estate. But there remains the same virus of that stable man who perceives himself to be in a stable place.

It was once a condition of stability in this region to ignore the existence, and deny the human worth of an enormous majority of men and women whose labour made that order possible. The mark of their exclusion was the black skin.

"On that day," cried Frantz Fanon, "completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation?"

I know there are those among you, who tremble at the sound of that blunt and simple word, black: and who, apologising for your own victimisation, nervously anticipate a message of race.

But when we say black, it has no biological mean-

To speak of the Caribbean family, is to speak of a collective and personal experience of the utmost intimacy

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ing, nor is it used in the service of racial applause.

When I say black, it is the name of a profound and unique historical experience, borne by a particular group of men and women whose presence in the world was destined to transform the eyes and ears of the world, and whose ultimate liberation will be the decisive contribution to the liberation of mankind.

It is, precisely, in this connection, that we must perceive the meaning of those we honour today. For each of them has waged a war on that amputation Fanon speaks of: each has battled consistently to heal and restore the rhythm and beauty of that battered black body, which Europe argued, and continues to argue, is ugly, graceless and without history.

For Europe and their successors, the United States, have been trapped in the deceiving habit of seeing themselves, not as a portion of mankind, but as the custodians of all human destiny.

But we know, as Marx observed more than a century ago: Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin, where in the black, it is branded.

And the significance of the Rastafari Movement in its native Jamaica is that they confront us, in the most dramatic way, with a question which remains central to the politics of our culture. Where do you stand in relation to blackness?

It is curious that in so cautious a land as Barbados, the answer was being offered by the native poet, Mr. H. A. Vaughn, in a rebuke to the black classrooms of this island:

Turn sideways now and let them see
What loveliness escapes the schools,
Then turn again and smile and be
The perfect answer to those fools
Who always prate of Greece and Rome,
The face that launched a thousand ships
And such like things, but keep tight lips
For burnished beauty nearer home
Turn in the sun, my love, my love
What palm-like grace, what poise, I swear
I prize these dusky limbs above
My life, What laughing eyes, what gleaming hair.

Each of our guests came to their work on behalf of a family whose history is an example of a people, throttled by the embrace of imperial guardians (be they English, French, American), whose generosity demands our total acceptance of their will, and their interests.

EDNA MANLEY

It was this condition of self-denial that Mrs. Manley encountered in the Jamaica of the late 30s and 40s when

her participation in the political lives of the ordinary and the poor alerted her to the astonishing beauty of their physical presence.

And she set out, as sculptor and painter, on a remarkable labour of love and duty to return that black face to its own eyes, and to train those eyes to see again what they should never have forgotten.

It is the measure of her stature that an authentic history of Jamaica could not be written without focussing on the role she has played in the development of a national culture there.

The same role fits exactly the career of Beryl McBurnie of Trinidad and Tobago. The language of sculpture and the language of dance are different aspects of the same function.

They are tools, devices of the imagination, which, encountering a moment in reality, sets out to discover the meaning, the essence of that moment, by creating an order out of what had appeared too ordinary for serious attention.

The imagination teaches us to see.

BERYL McBURNIE

Beryl McBurnie, as dancer and teacher of the dance, created a wholly new vocabulary for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. She made the body laugh: she made the body sing: she made the body weep.

This range of mood and emotion could be heard through different accents: the Amerindian, the African, the Indian, and a creolising synthesis of all these.

But she is also a builder of institutions. The "Little Carib" theatre, born from the most fragile dream, would later grow into a resource centre for many a corner in the Caribbean.

The first independence celebrations of Guyana could not have been the same, if the "Queen of the Little Carib" was not there.

I do not believe it is possible to find anywhere outside this region an example of creative, cultural work, where the imagination of individual artists is so completely dominated by the lives of people from down below. Whether it be literature, music, dance, or the visual arts, each form has derived its power from an involvement with the realities of the poor.

SPARROW

It would ordinarily be a presumption to draw the Mighty Sparrow to your attention, for he, as a total creation of the Caribbean people, is also, perhaps, the most complete of all Caribbean artists.

His art embraces all forms. He sings, he dances, he employs, in the telling of a story, all the narrative devices of a novelist.

His act is visual. His themes, for all the laughter they provoke, are a source of great disturbance. Sociologists will never be able to formulate what his critical intelligence and quick perception so easily communicates.

"Outcast
The slave
Congo man
Dan is the Man in the Van
Monica Doudou
Rose
Why, why, did you leave me?
Why did you deceive me?
Rose, you looking for blows."

The enslavement of our educational system, the chaos in our sexual relations, the political leader in the role of the "bad john". He offers

those forces that would halt or extinguish the possibility of men and women becoming truly human.

It is to aid, by all means possible, that process of struggle against the racism of white power, the epidemic of class discrimination, nurtured in these neo-colonial cells, by a new breed of aspiring blacks, the assault on individual dignity by the personal abuse of official power.

"Get up, stand up;
Stand up for your rights".

NICOLAS GUILLEN

Behind those drums of steel, the agitation of Marley, and the joyful mockery of Sparrow, there was, across the water, an ancestor of the



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'GET UP, STAND UP; STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS'

us back our several humiliations.

But there is behind the extravagant vigour of this musical genius a persistent legacy of rage. For Sparrow was descended from a dangerous decade, before the steel bands got elevated to the status of national orchestra, and the streets of Carnival were ruled by warriors.

The sound was "Desperadoes", "Renegades", "Red Army", "Hell Yard", "Conquistadors". These are clearly not the names of patron saints in communion with a holy spirit. They are declarations of war on behalf of a turbulent folk who reminded all agents of power that space was not for sale.

This tradition of resistance is at the heart of Sparrow's art. And it is an inescapable Caribbean phenomenon whenever the artist goes seriously to work.

There has recently been universal mourning for the loss of Bob Marley.

"Get up, stand up,
Stand up for your rights".

But to accept Marley is to accept the moral necessity of entering into battle against all

same faith whom we recognise and honour as a resident of this regional house: Comrade Nicolas Guillen.

Recording his witness to the Spanish Civil War of the 30s he could say:

"So here we have this Cuban from Camaguey; this West Indian from Cuba; this American from the West Indies, proclaiming to his brothers from Spain:

"I who love freedom so simply,
As one loves a child, or the sun or the tree
planted in front one's house
I shout to you with the voice of a free man
that I shall accompany you comrades,
That I shall match my step with yours,
Simply and happy,
Pure, serene and strong,
With my curly hair and brown body."

He created the greatest scandal among the ruling classes in Cuba when, in 1934, his book, "Motivos de Son", drawing upon the African origins of a popular dance, The Son, affirmed that there was no Cuba without Africa, that the fundamental blood of the Cuban flowed

from that black continent.

There was no need, you might say, that a man of his complexion should offer himself up as target for such national villification.

We have special reason to embrace him. At the age of 17 his father was murdered by the "democratic" government of the day. And for more than half a century Comrade Guillen has combined the gifts of a great poet with the heart of a man of conscience.

As he enters the eighth decade of his turbulent life, he is often heard rejoicing that the Cuban revolution was the greatest Caribbean poem written in his time.

What does that poem say?
"When I look at and touch myself,
I, John-only-yesterday-with nothing,
and John-with-everything-today,
With everything today,
I glance around, I look and see
and touch myself and wonder
how it could have happened.

I have, let's see:
I have the pleasure of walking
my country,
the owner of all there is in it,
Examining at very close range
what
I could not and did not have
before.

I can say cane,
I can say mountain,
I can say city,
I can say army,
Army say,
Now mine forever and yours,
Ours;

And the vast splendour of
The sunbeam, the star, the
flower.

I have, let's see:
That I have learned to read,
To count,
I have that I have learned to
write,

And to think
And to laugh.
I have that now I have
A place to work
And earn
What I have to eat.
I have, let's see:
I have what was coming to
me!"

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

This example of dream has never had a more urgent voice in contemporary literature than that of Aimé Césaire of Martinique.

He is the product of a particular French intellectual tradition which knows ideology not as an epidemic to be controlled or exterminated, but as an example of theory and practice which all men, in different ways, bring to the conduct of their daily lives.

Of the humblest origins, where the house of his childhood could hardly boast a roof, his gifts have taken him into the academies of the world, through the ranks of the working people, and back to the original Africa which lent its heart to Martinique.

He was the teacher of Frantz Fanon: that Fanon who so abrasively warned:

"Leave this Europe/America where they
Are never done talking of
man
Yet murder men everywhere
they find them,
At the corner of their own
streets,
In all corners of the globe."

CARIFESTA is not about spectacle, it is a celebration of work accomplished and work that is still in progress: and it is sometimes the work of men and women of whom it might be said:

We who tried to lay the foundations of friendliness,
could not ourselves be friendly.

If you plant a breadfruit tree, it is unreasonable to expect that it will bear pineapples. The tree is known by its fruit. In a similar way it might be said, that a nation is made known to itself by the creative cultural work which grows out of the soil of that society.

Yet there is an important difference between the tree of man and the trees of nature.

The history of a tree is fixed since it can only obey the laws of its own nature. But men do not only enter the world. They transform the world by their work. They alter the chemistry of their own soil, and they change in their perceptions and their needs with every radical change they bring about in the material conditions of their existence.

If some of our children find us strange, it is, perhaps, because they live, as a fact of their experience, what we had only dreamt of as a vague possibility.

Just as many of us take for granted a measure of freedom which other men, at other times, beaten and enslaved, could only dream of as a distinct and achievable reward of struggle.

The dream is not an idle exercise. It is the very foundation of a future reality. And that is why it often carries the cost of an untimely death.

Let the voice of Césaire seal that dream:

"For now we know in truth that man's work is by no means complete
that we have not nothing to contribute to the world
that parasites we are not that no more need we squat at the gate
but that man's work has only just begun
and that he has to release his energies and conquer
and that no single race has a monopoly of beauty, intelligence and creativity
and that there is room for all to conquer.
And now we know that our land too is within the orbit of the sun
which shines on the little plot we have willed for ourselves;
that without constraint we are free to move heaven, earth and the stars."

Distinguished, honoured guests: Mine is a single voice through which an entire region now thank you for the gift of your life and your work to this unique family.

And in asking the Governor General to confirm these honours, I am deeply conscious that your presence here confers a permanent honour on this island; perhaps the greatest and most humane visiting honour it has ever known.