New Jamaican Poets

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Abstract
In 1998 the Sunday edition of the Jamaica Observer launched its ‘Arts Section’, the first, and still the only, bona fide literary supplement in a Caribbean newspaper devoted to publishing indigenous poetry and fiction. It unearthed an unsuspected depth and breadth of home-grown talent; and, soon afterwards, the formation of the Observer Creative Writing Workshop brought most of these newly-surfaced Jamaican writers into continuing contact with one another.

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In 1998 the Sunday edition of the *Jamaica Observer* launched its ‘Arts Section’, the first, and still the only, *bona fide* literary supplement in a Caribbean newspaper devoted to publishing indigenous poetry and fiction. It unearthed an unsuspected depth and breadth of home-grown talent; and, soon afterwards, the formation of the Observer Creative Writing Workshop brought most of these newly-surfaced Jamaican writers into continuing contact with one another. The combination of a ready outlet for their work and the ongoing creative exchanges of the Workshop resulted in an impressive growth in these writers’ confidence, seriousness, and sophistication of craft. Those represented in this anthology have all since been awardees in local literary competitions; two have had individual collections published (by the *Jamaica Observer*) and two more individual collections of poems are due out from Peepal Tree press (UK) later this year.

Despite coming together in the Workshop, these writers do not comprise a ‘school’. They range in age from 18 to 58, hail from the ‘deep country’ as well as the city, and — in the case of those not still attending university — work in fields as diverse as academia, song-writing and sales. The poets’ styles range from the formal sonnets of Gwyneth Barber Wood, to the pentameters of Frances Coke, Delores Gauntlett and Verna George, to the free verse of Andrew Miller, Neil Morgan, Andrew Stone, and ‘the baby’, Safiya Sinclair. And while rooted naturally (as opposed to wilfully) in the Jamaican reality and landscape, their themes are as various as life itself.

In difficult circumstances — since opportunities for employment as a creative writer are few and far between in Jamaica, and most of these writers earn their living with full-time jobs in other fields — they are dedicated artists. And, unwittingly, they have also become pioneers: submissions to the *Observer Literary Arts Supplement* provide ample evidence that their accomplished poems and stories — appearing regularly in a newspaper literary supplement which, a recent survey showed, attracts some 120,000 readers weekly — are already inspiring a new generation of creative writers among school-age Jamaicans.