

HONOURING MISS LOU



ON SATURDAY, Sep-tember 6, the Kingston chapter of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association will be honouring the Hon. Louise Bennett Coverley at the JHTA second annual Independence charity ball at the Wyndham Kingston Hotel.

The Gleaner presents the first of a two-part series in tribute to the island's leading folklorist.

By Claude Mills
Entertainment Reporter

IN HER heyday as the ambassador of culture, 'Miss Lou', was not content to sit on the sidelines; she was one for the trenches, fighting pitched battles inspired by a fierce love of her language.

Her rich chuckle, the unmistakable lilt to her voice, her infectious joie de vivre have become recognisable characteristics of this folk icon.

She has given us new words for the language, 'every mickle mek a muckle', 'de one dem who a spoil up de pedigree a wi good good name', 'unfairity', 'mannersable', 'ignorancy', 'jump alleculia', and 'tek bad sinting

mek laugh', to name a few. She has also given us the 'nylon road' for the black smooth barber green road surface that came into use decades ago.

Folklorist. Author. Poet. Performer. Whether reminiscing on 'bwile crab and janga soup' (janga is river crayfish) or on Easter time as 'bun an' cheese' time in Jamaica, Miss Lou is a force to be reckoned with. In some quarters, she is revered as a folk hero/pioneer in the vein of USA's Davey Crockett, who wrote and recited in Jamaican patois, settling hostile territory, staking claims to an unclaimed legacy that the inhabitants of the island, at the time, were threatening to discount.

Kudos fly fast and furious when conversation veers

towards the grande dame of Jamaican comedy. Joan Andrea Hutchinson-Jarrett, of the JCDC, who some say is a 'Miss-Lou-wanna-be' had this to say:

An icon

"Miss Lou is more than just entertainment, amusement, songs or stories. She is an icon. She fought so hard for Jamaicans to be proud of their heritage and to increase our self-esteem; and it has been an everlasting fight for us to accept ourselves as we are, Jamaicans. I think she should be a national hero.

"She is selfless. There is not a time that you cannot pick up the 'phone and call her for advice on how to deal with certain things. She's like a ball of sunshine, even when she is not feeling well, she will still sing you songs or tell you stories. And to this day, she still calls me that 'little Hutchinson child'. Her spirit surpasses anything else I know." Mrs. Hutchinson-Jarrett said.

Miss Lou has written a number of books including 'Jamaica Labrish' (1966), 'Anancy and Miss Lou' (1979) and 'Selected Poems' (1982), all published by Sangster's. She was awarded the Order of Jamaica in 1974, the Norman Washington Manley Award for Excellence 1972, the Musgrave Gold Medal of the Institute of Jamaica in 1979 and

Jamaica's Folk Icon

an Honorary D. Litt. from the University of the West Indies in 1983.

'Aunty Roachey Seh' is the first published collection that has been culled from Miss Lou's Views of Louise Bennett's monologues in prose, the popular radio programmes aired in Jamaica between 1965 and 1982.

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She is the subject of a feature-length docu-drama 'The Drums Keep Sounding' and 'Miss Lou'

Resident artiste

She was the resident artiste at the British Broadcasting Corporation in the late 1950s where she produced a distinctly Caribbean-flavoured show, 'Caribbean Carnival' which aired every Tuesday evening and was an instant success. Locally, she is known for the popular 'Lou and Ranny' show of the 1960s with Ranny Williams (Mass Ran) where she used to 'put on lick pon him wid a piece a flatboard'. And, of course, she is known for Ring

Ding, which became a creative centre for folk songs and 'Anancy stories', games based on singing and rhythm songs. In the 1970s the Government of the day decided that it wished to highlight the contribution of two of Jamaica's foremost theatre personalities by building and dedicating The Ranny Williams Entertainment Complex, including the Miss Lou Garden Theatre, in honour of 'Miss Lou', Louise Bennett and 'Mas Ran', Ranny Williams.

The Honourable Louise Bennett-Coverley O.J. now lives in Toronto with her husband Eric.