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# 'Miss Lou'—eighth time lucky

By Anthony Gambrill

**THE HONOURABLE MISS LOU,** the new long playing album of popular Jamaican folk songs by Louise Bennett-Coverley, may prove to be a case of "eighth time luck" for Miss Lou. She has recorded seven earlier LP's over the past 30 years but you can't find one in record shop racks today.

Lost tapes, missing record jacket artwork, defunct production companies, these add up to the reason why her earlier, highly-acclaimed records are no longer available. In her inimitable style of good-humoured optimism, Miss Lou is hoping

that her latest album will not only become a collector's item like the others, but also will be available in perpetuity. Her first break as a recording artist came three decades ago when she was studying in London at the Royal Academy of

Dramatic Art. She was invited to record four 78 RPM single-play records by Leslie Hutchinson, popularly known as "Hutch", a Jamaican born singer and band leader who was widely-popular in Britain. Miss Lou recalls him as a gentle, warm-hearted man, a talented musician with an incredible flair for arranging a mento like "Gordelia Brown" which she sang. Some years later two of her numbers with Hutch were released in Jamaica as a special promotion with Appleton Rum.

From being recognised as a colourful stage singer, Miss Lou won recognition as a serious performer of authentic Jamaican music when Folkways Records pressed two albums of songs and children's singing games in New York two years later.

By the mid-Sixties, Louise Bennett had turned to humorous social comment with her programme "Miss Lou's views" on Radio Jamaica. Assisted by her sponsor, Seprod Limited, she produced an LP by the same name. It enjoyed enormous success in Jamaica, the West Indies and everywhere in the world where two or more Jamaicans congregated. To Miss Lou her most astonishing success came in Panama where she sold literally thousands of copies.

When asked how had this come about, she explains that coincidentally, the Panama-born daughter of a friend with whom she had gone to school had herself been attending school in Jamaica and had taken the album home to Colon. The girl played it at a birthday party and the father of another child decided to import and distribute it. It was an instant hit and became known by the title of one hilarious piece of commentary on the mini-skirt craze. Miss Lou later performed in Panama which accelerated sales.

A record LP recorded at Federal Records, "Listen to Louise", followed and included a number of folk songs. She was accompanied by a group of eager, young musicians who called themselves the Fabulous Five. As she puts it, "that was before they were fabulous but they were really very good".

### Folk music

Her sixth venture was into a children's album. This time she told Anancy stories and sang children's singing games. Her most recent release, prior to

'The Honourable Miss Lou,' was an album entitled "Carifesta Ring Ding", which was recorded with the late Mapletoft Poulle. Although recorded in 1970, it was not released until Carifesta came to Jamaica four years ago. This record featured Mapletoft Poulle's music and traditional Jamaican songs and mentoes.

What she considers as her "eighth time lucky" album, 'The Honourable Miss Lou'; captures the very best of Jamaica's folk songs in an impeccable setting. The setting is provided by Peter Ashbourne's musical arrangements which are superbly crafted. Peter is a graduate of Berkley College of Music in Boston and a former teacher in the African-American Department of the Jamaica School of Music. He originally arranged the music for the stage show "Come Home to Jamaica" which played in Kingston, New York and seven British cities as an Air Jamaica promotion.

This latest album captures every side of Jamaican folk music from the hap-



MRS. LOUISE BENNETT COVERLEY (MISS LOU)

piest, "Long time gal", to the saddest, "Liza", to the funniest, "When goat meat done", to the romantic "Lion Heart".

On this occasion Miss Lou briefly introduces each number of enable everyone, including those who are familiar with Jamaican folk music, to enjoy them all the more. And enjoyment could be said to be the reason that this record was produced. For this all Jamaicans will forever be in her debt.

To quote the liner notes, "In short, she is a living and more often than not, a laughing — legend in her time."

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