

## Miss Lou Celebrated in Florida

Jamaicans in the Diaspora continue to celebrate the life and work of the Hon. Louise Bennett-Coverley (Miss Lou), as tributes were paid to the cultural icon at the third annual Louise Bennett-Coverley Reading Festival on Saturday (January 30) in Florida.

The event, held at the Broward County South Regional Library in Pembroke Pines, was used to launch this year's Black History Month celebrations. Following the death of Miss Lou, in July 2006, in Toronto, Canada, the annual Reading Festival, along with the Annual Community Tribute and Scholarship Fundraiser, were started by Director Emeritus of the Jamaica Folk Revue, a South Florida based cultural group, Norma Darby, to honour her contributions to Jamaica's cultural development. The various ways in which Miss Lou's body of work was influenced by the traditional art forms of Jamaica's culture and heritage, were aptly put into perspective by a distinguished line of panelists, including the Rev Easton Lee, writer, poet and composer, Dr. Susan Davis, actress, poet and educator, L'Antoinette Stines, choreographer and educator and Lilieth Nelson, poet and composer, and former Chairman of the Traditional Folk Forms Committee of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC). Dr. Davis spoke of how Miss Lou was able to transcend the ridicule of patois dialect into the language of the day. Speaking on the "Elements of Drama/the Spoken Word", Dr. Davis said that Miss Lou was an innovator who gave status to the Jamaican language using the colourful, mastery of the dialect to address the thoughts and feelings of the Jamaican people. Arguing that her music revealed a tapestry between her poetry and the Jamaican music, Ms. Nelson illustrated the balance, the rhythm, melody, harmony and syncopation that Ms. Lou carefully used, through music, to reflect on the social life of the Jamaican people.

Speaking on the "Elements of Ancestral Teachings", Mr. Lee, one of Jamaica's foremost voices on its cultural development, also spoke of his memorable learning experiences with Miss Lou and described her as part of the national landscape. Miss Stines demonstrated how Miss Lou used elements of Jamaican traditional dance, along with details of English classical dance, to express another form of Jamaican cultural heritage - Elements of Dance - using the body to teach history and culture. Ms. Stines indicated that her work and writings were greatly influenced by the teachings of Miss Lou and the late Professor Rex Nettleford, former Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. Lauding the organizers of the annual Reading Festival, Ms. Stines appealed to the audience that they also had a responsibility to help keep alive the legacy of Miss Lou, so her work can live on with generations to come. The evening's entertainment included a medley of Jamaican folk songs performed by the Jamaica Folk Revue and the Tallawah Mento Band, both locally based cultural groups. The event closed with the book launch and signing of "Angles of Reflection: Poems by Lil", a collection of poems and prose by Ms. Nelson, who is also a member of the University Singers. The 117-page book and CD of prose and poetry illustrate, what Ms. Nelson describes as, "a collection of outpourings from my heart and enriching experiences" which she has been composing for almost 45 years. Consul General, Sandra Grant Griffiths, expressed gratitude to the Library for setting the stage for a series of events celebrating Black History Month. She noted that the Library continues to play an increasingly significant role as a repository and expositor of the community's diverse cultural offerings, including that of the Jamaican and wider Caribbean Diaspora.