

KEN'S Choice #4
GIMISTORY '05 REVIEW

25.Dec.05

This is the fourth of an irregular series of e-mail "newsletters" with what I think are interesting cultural events, ideas, artists and productions throughout the Caribbean and its diaspora – the type that don't get any widespread publicity. I will be sending them out as "Ken's Choices" to my friends and associates who have agreed to receive them.

The annual GIMISTORY FESTIVAL in the Cayman Islands has come of age. From Nov 25th to Dec 3rd 2005 there were tellers with the widest variety of styles, themes, accents telling their stories on the beaches and in an amphitheatre, the town square and schools. It is now established as one of the major cultural events in these three tiny and exquisite islands.



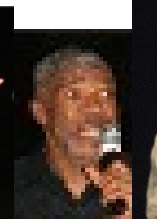
From this to..... this to.. this to these.....

There were tellers from five countries. Caribbean tellers were Trinidad's great Lord RELATOR sang his calypso stories, and his counter part Black Sage was superb again with his remarkable extempo calypso, Jamaica's premiere Ameena Blackwood-Meeks was there for the 7th time, and so did

Alex Neptune (Guyana/USA) from Brooklyn.



Photo Willard Harris



.....and I also enjoyed the experience for the 7th time. Barbadian drummer/playwright Donna Tull-Cox and Trinidad's drummer/choreographer Louise McWilliams and veteran flutist Cuthbert Fletcher were the backup musicians

This year's International tellers were the whimsical stagewise acrobatic Edgar Ortiz (Costa Rica), Jeeva Raghunath (straight from India) who charmed all the audiences, husband and wife team Jeri Burns and Barry Marshall from the upper Hudson River, NY were

unique as The Storycrafters; and from frigid Milwaukee came veteran Mama Nomusa with her drum and African/American folktales.



Photo Caymannetnews



And there was the usual after-show free-for-all fritters, bakes and swanki (fried fish, bakes, limeade).

Oh I didn't mention before, that all events are free to the walk-in public? Well there you are. The producer – Cayman National Cultural Foundation – is somehow able to tap the local resources to offer all tellers free air-passage, free accommodation, free transportation, free lunches, and endless free snorkeling, swimming, sunbathing. Sponsorship is remarkably generous – hotels, rental cars, bus transportation, restaurants, tourist board, Government – while volunteers include village committees and private home accommodation.



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Of course, to top up the pot, there were the beloved Caymanian tellers who are always a hit with audiences – there is teacher/dramatist Nasaria Sookoo-Chollette whose speciality is to tell her own Anansi creations, and there was teacher teller (sorry, can't remember her name) who in full duppy costume was particularly liked by the children that inhabit the front rows of all the events, and the piece de resistance for Caymanians are the almost extemporized comic skits by crowd favorites "Aunt Sookie and Zekiel".



Three weeks before the festival started, Edgar had come in to Cayman to run a storytelling workshop with school children and I did the same with teachers. The first storytelling event of the festival was entirely with the kids and they were outstanding to a standing room only crowd overflowing the outdoor Dart Park amphitheatre built on the edge of the South Coast's "iron shore". The teachers had their time on stage later in the week with a group performance of Caribbean poetry and stories with storms as its theme.

At the first session of the teachers workshop, I was faced with the chance that none of the teachers

wanted to "perform on stage", but seven of the original 16 stayed with it and are now storytelling enthusiasts. The Cultural Foundation hopes that some of the kids and teachers will continue to build on their workshop experience and help develop a local storytelling base for future festivals.



Photo Caymannetnews

...but the lasting image that put an exclamation mark to these nine days of story is a gathering of all the tellers/musicians in the most appropriate and ultimate extempo spirit – L – R Mama Nomusa, Lord Relator, Edgar Ortiz, Cuthbert Fletcher, Jeri Burns, Barry Marshall and Louis McWilliams.



GIMISTORY in the Caymans is a pleasant way to spend nine days in the peaceful and easy going Cayman Islands – don't get me wrong, because apart from the joy of the storytelling evenings and just "taking it easy", there is a lot to do if you like snorkling, scuba, restaurants, nightclubs, socializing. You couldn't do too badly by giving serious consideration to joining us at the late November GIMISTORY 2006.

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All photos except otherwise stated are by Ken and Elizabeth Barnum-Corsbie

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