What is National Poetry Month

The Caribbean Writer invites the entire UVI Community to join us in celebrating National Poetry Month in April. National Poetry Month is a month-long, national celebration of poetry established by the Academy of American Poets in 1996. The concept is to widen the attention of individuals and the media—to the art of poetry, to living poets, to our complex poetic heritage, and to poetry books and journals of wide aesthetic range and concern.

Goals for National Poetry Month

The Caribbean Writer's goals for National Poetry Month are to:

- Highlight the extraordinary legacy and achievement of Caribbean, and in particular, Virgin Island and Latin American poets.
- Bring poets and poetry to the public in immediate and innovative ways by creating programs to combine music, dance and technology with poetry.
- Make poetry a more important part of the school curriculum in the Virgin Islands by establishing Poets in the School Programs here.
- Increase the attention paid to poetry by national and local media, by insisting that these groups regularly feature poets and poetry in their programming.
- Encourage increased publication, distribution, and sales of poetry books.
- Increase public and private philanthropic support for The Caribbean Writer and local poets.
What you can do...

We encourage all of you to find a poem you love and share it with your colleagues and family. Memorize a poem and recite it to friends. Join Opal Palmer Adisa, editor of *The Caribbean Writer* for the second Creative Luncheon (scheduled for Thursday, April 8 from 12 noon to 1 p.m. in NW 102) and write a poem celebrating your life.

When we think of poetry in the Caribbean, we have to first look to the Oral Tradition, at those poems that were shared and handed down to us in the form of songs and tales. Marvin E. Williams, the former editor of *The Caribbean Writer*, compiled a seminal work, examining Virgin Islands poetry. The collection is entitled, *Yellow Cedars Blooming—An Anthology of Virgin Islands Poetry*, and I invite each of you to read it. Those of you who are parents, get a copy and share it with your children so they know their history and culture.

Featured Virgin Island’s Poet Gerwyn Todman

One of the important early writers from the above mentioned collection is Gerwyn Todman. St. Thomian born and educated (1899-1948), who later emigrated to New York, but remained intricately connected to his roots, and published one volume of poems *St Thomas: A Retrospective*, 1921. An excerpt of one of his poems “Slavery Days” appears below:

“A New World lay before the eyes
Of Nations hot for fresh emprise,
And nothing barred the conqu’ring way
Of those who would acquire sway.
The Spaniard had, in ruthless mode,
Made ill its bosom his abode,
And swiftly drained each cavern-hold
Of that most precious metal—gold.
The French came and pitched his tent;
And every nation which did care
Made on its face a desmeane fair.”

(To read this poem in its entirety, pick up a copy of *Yellow Cedars Blooming—An Anthology of Virgin Islands Poetry* at the UVI campus bookstores.)

As we look to the past, we see the connections and links to the present and St. Croix’s own Marvin E. Williams offers us another perspective...

The Mill Ruin Above Ham’s Bluff

The sea’s hoarse turbulent voice grates
in the weary ears of the shell
of a windmill above the bluff
its open mouth invites Prosperity,
that thirsty estate whose memory only
remains prosperous (perhaps prosperity
lingers too in its rainbow back,
cranes that swiftly disappear in cavernous
traps of our docked pirates
or in search of rivers long sloped with
conquistadors wearing Panama hats).

In this mill I see shells of hurricances
crushed by the reflection of their returned
cruelty and magnificence; I feel my great father’s
arm crushed in the wheels that ground beyond
greed’s necessity, his rub soothed by
the stubborn astonishment of sugar; I hear
the bomba’s ambivalence in the whip
and the wound of his whipping; the slave
ship stranded on the middle passage of
The Mill Ruin Above Hamm's Bluff cont'd...

our journey from ruins of empires
of rise of profligate islands whose
gnarled roots are the new world's.

Often I fix my face in that stone work
mirror whose stare returns cracked, jagged
to give me fault lines that reject the faults
bequeathed in my inheritance. Yet I must
accept its gift, for this bounty is
the only one it can tender. Like this ochre
shell I surrender, the conch swallowing
without denying
the sea's echo as its own signifying.

Cruzan
by Opal Palmer Adisa

the poetry
of St. Croix
are its people
with their salutary
greeting
marnin' marnin'
referencing the day itself
and embracing the person

it's the hardy
delicious national dish
of kallaloo and fungi
fueling you to work
despite the heat
kissing and embracing
your body and soul

it's the wide stride
leap of the moko jumbie
forever stepping over
a colonial legacy
that would have it forget
its mother Africa
that prances and masks
tenacity and victory
in every stride

it's the grace of the yellow breast
indigenous to these regions
self-assured like its people
soaring beyond the beyond
backdropped against the ocean
with her protecting arms
cradling and soothing
as her singing waters
continuous
National Poetry Month Weekly Prize Question

The Caribbean Writer invites you to Win a Prize.

Tell us:
Who is the first Caribbean Poet to win the Nobel Prize for Literature?

Provide Poet’s Name, Island of Origin, Year and Title of winning Volume.

The first person to email us (qmars@uvi.edu) the correct answers will receive a complimentary copy of Seasoning for the Mortar and will be announced in next week’s Poetry Month news.

Stay tuned . . . .

Email us relevant information on Virgin Islands poets.

See what poets and prizes we will offer next week.

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The Caribbean Writer, an international, literary, refereed journal with a Caribbean focus, is published by the University of the Virgin Islands.

The Caribbean Writer has received grants from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, two Pushcart Prizes, and support from the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts and the Virgin Islands Humanities Council.

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