

On The Rock



Word Up! Hits The Spot

By Mickel Brann

American urbanites, especially the young, have a phrase that they use when they agree wholeheartedly with something. In agreement they say "word," and if it's absolutely in tune with their sentiments, they say "word up." Saturday night at the

Museum of Antigua & Barbuda was just that – an affirmation of our literary artistes at the inaugural Word Up!

About 100 persons packed the upstairs hall of the museum, and the reviews at the end of the four-hour showcase were issued in the superlative.

"Excellent," one woman said. "Fantastic,"

added another. "Wonderful," was thrown into the mix, along with "Talent!" while one expatriate nodded her head in approval and said, "I am so impressed with what I've heard here tonight."

And it wasn't just those who were present who knew that a good thing had transpired. One woman, who had her misfortune of not attending compounded with an excited blow-by-blow review, sighed as she said, "I heard ... they told me how good it was and I know it won't miss me again."

And that's the not-so-subtle message to chief organiser Joanne C Hillhouse, to make sure that we can refer to the event from this day forward as the annual ... Word!

At the end of the night, she stood at the mic, ecstasy dancing on her face, as she thanked all of the writers who she said "brought their game here...."

And that they did, all of them – storyteller Dr Ermina Oso, poets Tameka Jarvis, Dotsie Isaac-Gellizeau, Jermilla Kirwan, Sylvanus Barnes, Cush, Tamo Zakela and Joy Lawrence, budding writers Sandrena Martin, Rily Adams and Zeina Hechme, the ones at the middle passage, Mary Quinn and Laurel Hughes, and the elders SE James, Leon Chaku Symister, D Gisele Isaac and Mary-Elena John.

The blend was, to borrow from Joy Lawrence, *Island Spice*. The presenters were young and, ahm, older; they were published, soon to be published and had sights set on being published.

They painted the room with their words, some contemplative, some militant, some humorous, some reflective, all of them creatively brilliant. And the appreciative audience went along with them for the ride, wher-

ever the reading took them, applauding, murmuring, nodding, some even pumped their fists into the air.

At the back of the room, there was little tolerance for the owners of the jingling cell phones that broke the illusion or the chattering duo perched on a windowsill, who was on the receiving end of visual daggers.

Mistress of Ceremonies Natalie Clark White was, obviously, reveling in the moment, as she sought to find words of affirmation, agreement or encouragement after each reading, and unabashedly begged for more events like Saturday night's.

The invitation to the function declared that the "organisers appreciate the depth and wealth of Antigua's literary tradition and invite members of the public to revel in it."

And revel the audience and participants did. Cush, in one of his pieces declared, "Ah love the vibes ... ah love it ..."

And all present must have easily said in their minds, "Word up!"



Some know her as a Carnival queen and actress, but Jermilla Kirwan showed off her literary skills Saturday night with Masquerade. (Photos by Gemma Hazelwood)

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I repeat my statement here slowly. Many males have found, have identified various avenues – legal and illegal – to obtain or achieve the trappings of material success as we have defined it and in many instances formal university education is irrelevant to their goal achievement. I do not know if I can get simpler than that. One of the ways of achieving the material success we glorify is through the sale of illegal drugs. That is all I said, that is all I meant. Whether selling drugs takes you to the edge or whether it is sinful and damnable by hell fire or Lennox Weston's company, seems irrelevant to the substantive discussion.

Interestingly, as an aside – few seem to recognise the glaring fact that young boys and young men do not control the

capital/resources to be moving millions of dollars of drugs and guns through our societies and that the real criminals – as Sparrow warns us – "are all high in society," successful. Lester Bird once said he knew them, by name.

Interestingly, too, is the fact that those whom I antagonised somehow did not hear my call for re-evaluation of our definitions of social success and the promotion of those values that would make criminally offensive anyone who boasts of the fact that they never read a book since they were sixteen ... and you still want to know why young men and women are losing interest in the staid irrelevant education system we have designed and manage and to which we condemn them?

To be continued in tomorrow's paper.



Dub poet Cush declared, "Ah love it, ah love it ... ah love me culture."