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Introduction

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The papers in this special issue of [Anthurium](#) have been selected from papers presented at the conference that celebrated Earl Lovelace's 70th birthday in July 2005. It is fitting that these papers should be appearing here, given Lovelace's long standing relationship with the [Caribbean Writers' Summer Institute](#) of the University of Miami, the home base of [Anthurium](#), and given the active participation in the "Lovelace @ 70 Conference" by Sandra Pouchet Paquet, the editor of the journal. From very early in the planning of "Lovelace @ 70," Paquet had expressed interest in the conference and offered the pages of the journal as an outlet for the publication of a selection of conference papers. I thank her for her generosity of spirit.

In keeping with Lovelace's own fluid relationships with the academy and the ordinary people, this selection has been done with an eye to both the academic and the testimonial. The articles by Carolyn Cooper, Merle Hodge, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Jennifer Rahim, and Vishnudat Singh interrogate various aspects of his work while those by Edward Hernandez, Greg Rigsby, Lawrence Scott, and Pearl Eintou Springer provide personal testimonies about Lovelace as a friend, as an astute student of people, as a mentor, and as a "limer" extraordinaire.

To fully appreciate the organic context of these papers, it is important to locate them against the background of the events that comprised "Lovelace @ 70." It was conceptualized as a series of events to celebrate a writer who has devoted his life and writing career to the celebration and interrogation of his people and their communities, as well as the larger Caribbean/human community. Hence, although the initiative for the conference and celebrations originated at the St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies (UWI), a decision was made to involve scholars from both the Cave Hill and Mona campuses of UWI as well as participants from the University of Miami and Pacific Lutheran University (Tacoma, Washington State)—two North American universities with which Lovelace has had significant visiting relationships. Also, as a result of the decision not to limit the celebrations to the academy, the various local communities within which Lovelace had worked and about which he had written were invited to take charge of specific aspects of the celebrations, with the university retaining only a coordinating role in those activities that were not under its direct remit.

On Monday, July 11th, 2006, at a press conference in the City Hall, His Worship Mayor, Alderman Murchison Brown, the Mayor of Port of Spain (Port of Spain being the city where Lovelace now resides), proclaimed the week "Earl Lovelace Week" in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. He invited the nation to celebrate Lovelace as an "icon in our midst" and to salute "his meritorious, selfless, committed and considerable contribution to various fields of endeavour especially in the field of literature, culture and community service."

On Tuesday, the 12th, a Creative Writing Workshop was mounted at Matura, the village with which Lovelace is most often associated, having lived there in the years when he wrote, among others, *The Wine of Astonishment*, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, *Jestina's Calypso*, and *The New Hardware Store*. This workshop, made possible through a generous donation from BHP

Billiton (Trinidad and Tobago), brought together about twenty participants. After a dynamic and intense half-day, the participants recommended that such a workshop should become a regular event in the area and that those who were in attendance should form writing support groups in their various communities. Later that evening, the focus shifted to St. Augustine for a performance of *Jestina's Calypso*, which brought back some personnel from the UWI Players' 1978 premiere of the play. Many of the members of the original cast who were unable to participate in this special remount of the play were present in the audience and joined in the curtain call at the end of the show. The standing-room-only audience was a veritable who's who of Trinidad and Tobago literati, and included the former president of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson, who attended as a personal friend of Lovelace. So overwhelming was the response to this play that many people had to be turned away and a repeat performance mounted the following evening.

The academic conference segment of the week was held on Wednesday, July 13th at the Learning Resource Centre, UWI, St. Augustine. The papers in this issue testify to the wide-ranging discourse that ensued. So engrossing were the discussions that participants were oblivious of the fact that it had been announced nationally that Hurricane Emily had been projected to make landfall in Trinidad and Tobago that afternoon and that all non-essential services should be closed and people should head for home. When the news of the impending landfall eventually filtered into the conference center, forcing a suspension of the proceedings, participants resolved to return the following day to complete the conference, once the hurricane had passed. And they did!

On the evening of July 14th, a gala event, sponsored by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, was put on in Lovelace's honor at the Queen's Park Savannah, considered the home of Carnival celebrations. It was an event fit for royalty. In a multicultural production before a large and enthusiastic audience that included politicians, academics, culture workers, and the crème de la crème of the press, Lovelace was serenaded, his artistry extolled, and his commitment to the region stressed. An excerpt from *The Wine of Astonishment* was performed by the Malick Folk Performers—a group with which Lovelace had worked for many years as its artistic director. To close the evening, Lovelace enchanted the audience with readings from his novel in progress, "It's Only a Movie."

For most people, especially the visitors to Trinidad and Tobago, "Writing Route: A Journey through Earl Lovelace's Literary Landscape," which took place on Friday, July 15th, was the jewel in the celebrations. Over a hundred people traveled from St. Augustine through Valencia (where Lovelace started his first job as a forest ranger), Cumaca Junction (Kumaca is the setting of *The Schoolmaster*), Matura (his home for many years) to Toco (his birthplace).

In Toco, he was ceremonially welcomed home and blessed by members of the Zion Tabernacle Shouter Baptist Church. The ceremony left an emotional Lovelace speechless! When he finally managed to speak, it was only to confess: "I look at these women's faces and I see my

mother.” He could not say more. But then, it was no longer an occasion for speaking. It was an occasion for feelings: intense feelings of acceptance and gratitude.

After spending the afternoon in Toco, we returned to Matura to an evening of another cultural extravaganza involving most of the schools and villages in the Toco peninsula, to be followed by an all-night fete, for those still standing. Lovelace was there in everything. It was obvious, to paraphrase Eva from *The Wine of Astonishment*:

He never get weary yet
He never get weary yet
Seventy long years he working in the field
And he never get weary yet.

Funso Aiyejina, Guest Editor
Co-ordinator, “Lovelace @ 70”