

What Una had to say

UNA MARSON'S abundant creativity gave expression to literary and dramatic life in Jamaica. She had an unconscious courage. I met her, more years ago than I care to remember, when she edited *Cosmopolitan*, the first magazine owned by a Jamaican woman.

At that time, too, Una founded The Readers and Writers Club. There I met the Hill brothers, H. P. Jacobs, O. T. Fairclough, Elsie Benjamin Barsoe, Noel Vaz, Mike Campbell. Each in some way or other, gave vitality to Jamaica. Among the club's members was the late H. G. de Lisser, almost legendary author and editor of the *Daily Gleaner*. That Una Marson secured the membership of an astute, proud man shows how mighty were her powers of persuasion. She was a dynamic of the Poetry League.

Una contended and proved before anyone else that neither writing, nor acting, could be profitable and acceptable to the Jamaican public unless real-life, contemporary situations and words were employed. She produced plays and founded a publishing house to put into effect those theories. Today, they are commonplace.

Una introduced me to Kingston, her city of adoption. She made it mine too. She gave me counsel and criticism.

Una was the liveliest of critics. Nothing, no one, escaped her humorous perception — not excluding herself. Recently she inquired: "What do you think of this dress? — Too young and bright for me?"

Reflecting quickly that Una preferred honesty, I said gently:

"Well yes, it's a bit gay."

"I'm so glad!" enthused Una. "That's how I feel — bright and colourful."

By AIMEE WEBSTER

THE POOR — that cause which engages the sympathies of many — Una never judged as an ever-hungry maw into which endless money, food, cast-off-clothing must be poured. Una judged all by the capacity of the individual to do, to perform. Thus, after she

The blues of a Jamaican Lady

*Without care for critics
Nor recondite music
She sang the blues of a Jamaican lady.*

*Bred in a parsonage
Careful of her manners, yet poet,
She told of an ancient ache
Of love and loss and sang
The blues of a Jamaican lady.*

*Once in a mad spring
She wrote of the heart's ambush
In coiled Garvey's Europe,
'Old and cold, feeding on its dead.'
Yet glimpsed a glory
And searched and finding none
Distilled in phrases
Love as elusive as its sun.*

*Had she not wept enough,
She asked, to satisfy the years,
In the stillness, memory,
Darts like golden fish
In the translucence of yesterdays
Under the sea. Now she has done.*

*We put her decently under the earth:
Playwright, distinguished
Social worker, journalist,
And poet, I insist, poetess
If you wish, above all, poet,
She sang the blues of a Jamaican lady.*

— SYLVIA WYNTER



founded The Save The Children's Fund. Una saw unerringly that material donations without the gift of educational opportunity nullified and even disgraced charity. So Una founded schools for underprivileged children.

Some two years ago she telephoned me: "Bring some plants — lots of plants — and come and teach my school-children to plant," she commanded. Una warned that my crusade for gardening must fail inevitably unless poor people grow flowers of their own.

I never saw her but that she was involved in some crusade or other: that with complex domestic problems of her own.

Una had almost childlike faith in prayer. Yet her Christian faith did not make her impatient with non-prayer persons.

Perhaps her capacity for combining intellectualism and materialism with loving kindness enabled Una to hold simultaneously a bread-and-butter job, run fund-raising drives, write poetry, stories, articles, meet people of all levels and to express original opinions without caring upon whom the pricks fell.

SHE WAS always travelling. That perhaps sharpened her perceptions and gave her perspectives that were considered extreme. Una was first to warn against the irreparable harm of the cult, "Black man time come now." She it was who first detected and spoke out against incipient hooliganism in the Jamaican society.

Una's views earned in some quarters the prejudice that she was not moving with modern Jamaica: not "with it." To which her retort was that her critics were the ones not moving with the times!

Una was staunch, brainy, tolerant, erudite. Beside her, most of her compatriots seem flimsy and pretentious. She had a vast following. What everlasting regret there is that neither Jamaica's radio stations, nor festival organizers utilized the gifts, compelling genius and popularity of Una Marson. Whether or not you liked Una Marson, her's was a name respected in many countries; and at home. She enriched her times and her nativeland.

I am glad I heard what Una had to say.

Sunday Gleaner; 9 May 1965

P. 4