



## The Poet Laureate of Jamaica Citation 2017

# Lorna Gaye Goodison CD

The Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, through the agency of the National Library of Jamaica, is pleased to declare Lorna Goodison Poet Laureate of Jamaica for the period 2017 - 2020. A superlative poet, with a high international reputation, she is in great demand for appearances on both sides of the Atlantic. A few of her poems have appeared on the London Underground, a signal honour.

When her first book of poems, *Tamarind Season*, was published by the Institute of Jamaica in 1980, it announced an exciting new voice in West Indian poetry. The title and the title-poem were themselves indicative of her creative, eye-opening way with Jamaican folk wisdom and culture. In the years that followed, hers was to be no tamarind season, but a continuous, rich harvest of poetic delight and wisdom. During these years, she has given the world eleven books of poetry, culminating this year with her *Collected Poems*.

Her poetic journey has been one of always honing her craft and deepening her exploration of the human condition. She has drawn on a variety of poetic influences and represented a range of countries in which she has travelled, but always the journey, of craft, place and culture, has been grounded in her Jamaican beginnings and her sharp sense of our history. Speaking for the deprived and the oppressed, she has chanted a song of resilience and redemption. She contributed definitively to West Indian and world poetry by giving voice to woman's situation and self-realization. She has celebrated movingly the nurture of her matrilineal heritage and its African sources. Her poems in praise of her mother are classics. Her prize-winning prose work, *From Harvey River: a Memoir of My Mother and Her People*, is an illuminating complement and context for her poetry, as are her excellent short stories.

All that she has had to say has been said in a voice that moves with subtle craft, but naturally, easily along the range of Jamaican speech, and with deep responsiveness to Jamaican music, to jazz and the blues. Her gift for painting carries over into her poetry, where her painterly eye conjures vivifying images and thought-provoking responses to the work of great artists.

She brings to the role of Poet Laureate an expertise in the teaching of creative writing, especially poetry, that has been developed over many years and on both sides of the Atlantic, starting decades ago at Jamaica College and the Jamaica School of Drama, and culminating at the University of Michigan, from which she retired in 2014 as Professor of English and Afroamerican and African Studies.

Her overseas and international awards have included the 1986 Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the Americas Region, Poet Laureate of the Durham Book Festival in 2012, Honorary Patron for the Bristol Festival in 2013, and Trinidad and Tobago's 2014 OCM Bocas Prize for Poetry.

The poet has not been without honour in her own country, beginning as early as 1981, when she received the Institute of Jamaica's Centenary Medal. In 1999 she was awarded a Gold Musgrave Medal, in 2007 the Prime Minister's Medal, in 2013 the National Honour of Commander of the Order of Distinction, and in 2016, at the Mona campus, the University of the West Indies' Honorary Doctor of Letters degree.

With pride and joyful expectation, we welcome our new Poet Laureate, Lorna Gaye Goodison. Poetry will prosper.



The Honourable Olivia Grange CD, MP  
Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport

Miss Joy Douglas  
Chairman, Board of Management, National Library of Jamaica

Professor Emeritus Edward Baugh CD  
Chairman, Poet Laureate of Jamaica Committee

Wednesday, May 17, 2017