



photo: David Findlay

Caribbean perspective: Writer Nalo Hopkinson varies her writing but brings to it "an awareness of race, culture, gender and sexuality, and how all these things play out."

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In her PhD dissertation, Pamela Mordecai—a publisher, poet and writer originally from Jamaica who now lives in Toronto—used the term "prismatic vision" to describe how people from the Caribbean understand things.

"Caribbean societies—because of their history, location and cultural mix—are fluid rather than static," says Mordecai, whose company Sandberry Press publishes Caribbean writers and writers of Caribbean heritage. "'Prismatic vision' means that Caribbean people can tolerate multiple—and sometimes contradictory—meanings, without feeling the need to reduce them to any single principle or point of view."

Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) has helped Sandberry to distribute books by Caribbean authors in the region and promotes Canadian writers from Latin America and the Caribbean

in literary tours around the world. By attending book launches and festivals abroad, some of the writers have made invaluable contacts within the international literary community. For example, at one sponsored event, Hopkinson was invited to edit an anthology called *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction*.

FAC also supports tours to Latin America and the Caribbean by Canadian artists such as writers, painters, actors, filmmakers, dancers and musicians. In March 2005, for example, two French Canadian musical groups toured the region to celebrate Canada's participation in La Francophonie, with Swing performing in Colombia, Ecuador and Panama and Marie-Jo Thério impressing audiences in El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti with her piano playing and powerful voice.

For writers and musical artists from the Caribbean who have moved to Canada, distance from their roots offers new perspective. "I tend to write about a place after I've left it," says Bissoondath, who now teaches creative writing in French at l'Université Laval in Quebec City. "I need the distance to allow things to filter through my imagination."

Hopkinson, who has returned to writers' conferences in the Caribbean to discuss her work, also finds Canadian society more open. "I feel freer in Canada than I would in the Caribbean to write what comes to me. There's a sense you can be both Canadian and whatever your background is," she says. "That's very, very precious to me—to have it all." ❁

photo: FAC



Singer Eve-Lange Delouis

## Songs in the key of hope

When the Canadian embassy in Haiti co-organized a song contest last summer to inspire young people to vote in the national election, Eve-Lange Delouis had no doubt her song would win. Delouis, 26, started singing at eight years of age in the choir of the church where her father is a pastor, next to the family home on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. "I prayed to God every day that I would place first," she says.

When the finalists assembled to perform their songs in the Concert for Hope on October 30, the judges announced that Delouis, a nurse, had indeed won first place for her passionate "*Fòk n'al vote*" ("We've got to vote"). In addition to a prize of 50,000 gourdes (about \$1,400), Delouis will receive two years of promotional support from a local organization for her singing career in Haiti and abroad.

The contest, sponsored by the Canadian embassy in partnership with Haiti's Ministry of Culture and Communications as well as Tamise, a Haitian cultural association, drew 60 submissions. Musical styles could vary, but the lyrics had to inspire young people to vote.

"The objective was to create a forum in which young Haitians could express the importance of citizen participation in the life of the country and the importance of the election process," says Claude Boucher, Canada's Ambassador to Haiti. "In addition to showcasing all of Haiti's talent and cultural wealth, the contest bore witness to the strength and motivation within young Haitians."

The quality of submissions was so high that the nine-member jury chose 15 finalists instead of 10. Their songs were compiled on a CD, which was played by local radio stations.

Albert Chancy, a radio station owner who headed the jury, says the contest was a creative way to get young people involved in the election. "We have a lot of youth in Haiti, and we don't have elections often, and so many youth aren't familiar with them."

Eve-Lange Delouis is convinced that young people can play a critical role in the democratic process. "I'm very optimistic about the future of Haiti."

Listen to and download the Songs of Hope at [www.port-au-prince.gc.ca](http://www.port-au-prince.gc.ca).