

The St. Lucia Renaissance

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Lecture presented at the 2018 Vieux Fort Nobel Laureate Literary Night

If there was one area and period in which the island's inhabitants had circumvented history, or, at the very least, put history to work to their advantage, it would have to be in art and culture during the 1950 to 1971 period, when the St. Lucia Arts Guild unleashed the greatest outpouring of St. Lucian artistic creativity the island has ever seen. Among its more notable exponents were novelist Garth St. Omer, playwright Roderick Walcott, painter Dustan St. Omer, and poet, playwright and Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott. The twenty-year period (1950-1971) that the Arts Guild span could certainly be a candidate for the golden era of St. Lucian art and literature, and can be aptly described as the St. Lucia Renaissance, for arguably up till today these above-mentioned exponents of the Arts Guild have remained unmatched in St. Lucia in their respective fields of artistic endeavor.

How did the St. Lucia Renaissance happen? What were the forces that brought it about? Well, to find answers to these questions, we need to go back into history.

The British West Indies Federation lasted only four years, 1958 to 1962, yet the very notion of a federation, much less its implementation, had inspired a people and lifted their hopes, aspirations, and creative spirit to unprecedented heights. So, in investigating the St. Lucia renaissance, it may be instructive to explore the events and forces that led to the Federation, and what about the spirit of the Federation that inspired a nation, a civilization, to artistic greatness.

The British Empire

Before the Federation and up to the early 1900's, West Indians had been more or less contented to being part of the British Empire, and who could blame them. By 1900 the British King, Edward VII, reigned over 410 million people and his dominion stretched across 11.4 million square miles, making the British Empire the largest the world had ever known.

Clearly, if there were one empire to choose to belong to, it would have had to be the British Empire. In fact, not only were West Indians pleased to be under British rule, but culturally the striving was to become English ladies and gentlemen. After all, there was great value in modeling oneself after the British. To be English was to be cultured. Moreover, white plantation owners together with their surrogates in government ruled the land. Most of the civil service jobs and the choice positions at commercial houses were reserved for their off springs. Exclusive social clubs for whites only cemented their control over the economic life of the territories. Therefore, the closer to being British (if not in color at least in mannerism and culture) one became, the better were one's chances of sharing in the wealth of the homeland.

The Panama Canal, a Rude Awakening

However, soon after the opening of the 20th century, events and circumstances started unfolding that would open cracks in this West Indian coziness with and allegiance to the British Empire. In 1902 the Americans bought the failed Panama Canal enterprise from the French for US\$40 million, and by 1905 work had begun on the Canal in earnest. Roughly 50,000 West Indians emigrated to Panama to work on the Canal and as such they were to play an important role as agents of change in West Indian society.

In Panama, not only did West Indian workers receive a baptism in labor-capital confrontations, an experience they would later put to good use in the Caribbean, but besides exposure to American notions of rugged individualism and disregard for class distinctions, they came face to face with the American style of racism. The Canal was completed in 1914, and the West Indians who returned home arrived with a new concept of self. Dressed in flashy clothes and jewelry, they exuded self-confidence and self-importance. No doubt, these outward signs of the good life displayed by people who not too long before were no different than the rest of the population, must have fueled the imagination and expectations of those who had stayed behind of what could be had, not just in terms of luxuries but in terms of education and self-actualization.

The Panama Canal workers influenced West Indian societies in other ways. Some used their Panama money to educate their children, thus giving rise to a new generation of professionals of working class parents. Others having been schooled in the labor confrontations of the Panama Canal, and who after their Panama money ran out found themselves on the unemployment roll, became the vanguard of the West Indian labor movements of the 1930' and 40's.

World War I, a Lesson in Racism

As the Panama Canal came to completion, World War I came along, and with a great sense of patriotism and duty West Indians welcomed the opportunity to fight in defense of the motherland and its empire. From Jamaica alone, more than 10,000 volunteers enlisted in the British military. Altogether more than 16,000 West Indian soldiers served under the British flag. In terms of a military power, West Indians would have been hard pressed to do better than Britain. At the outset of the war, Britain's 442 warships made its Royal Navy by far the most powerful in the world. So one could well imagine the shock these black British soldiers suffered when once in the field they realized that no matter their training, education, talent, zeal and patriotism they were deemed inferior to troops from other parts of the British hegemony, including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and good only for the most menial of tasks. It didn't help that the West Indians observed that both the Americans and the French were treating their black soldiers with greater respect than the British were treating them.

And if all these weren't enough for the West Indian soldiers to get the message that race mattered, and that as long as they remained black or nonwhite they would never acquire full membership into the British empire, the news that must have filtered down from the United States to the West Indies that more than 70 blacks were lynched in the year after the war ended, and that several black soldiers still in army uniforms were among the lynched, would

have definitely brought home the point, particularly since the performance and bravery of the 200,000 African American soldiers who served in Europe were legendary. For example, the American 369th Regiment of which many were African Americans were the first soldiers to break through the German lines to reach the Rhine, and during 191 days of fighting the regiment didn't have a man captured, nor did it lose an inch of ground. Out of respect for the fighting spirit of the African Americans (not unlike the fierce fighting spirit of the buffalo soldiers of the US 10th Cavalry Regiment in the Indian Wars) the Germans renamed them the hell fighters, and so impressed was the French Army that it honored the 369th regiment with the Croix de Guerre (Bryan).

West Indian participation in World War I brought home other lessons. The War marked a period of industrial and political upheaval in Russia. In the October 1917 Russian Revolution, Tsar Nicholas II was forced to relinquish his reign. Lenin was ushered into power and thus began the transformation of Russia from a feudal-capitalist system to a communist state. Since Russia was fighting on the same side as Britain, the War brought West Indian soldiers in contact with Marxism and Russian nationalism. Ideas and sensibilities, which after the humiliation suffered at the hands of their British superiors, they had definitely become much more receptive and sympathetic to, and which no doubt made them question and reexamine their own situation back home and their relationship with empire. Clearly, the seeds of West Indian Federation as a breaking away from Britain had been planted. Consider, for example, that it was World War I veterans like Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler and Arthur Andrew Cipriani who were at the forefront of Trinidad's labor movement, and consider also, Clennell Wickham, another veteran who after the War, in 1919, founded The Barbados Herald, a radical and cultural activist weekly newspaper.

Another crack would soon appear in West Indians' cozy relationship with Britain. Italy's fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, came to power in 1922 with grand designs of returning Italy to the glory days of the Roman Empire. In 1936 Italy invaded Abyssinia, better known as Ethiopia. Despite having an overwhelmingly military superiority, Italy used poison gas on their adversary, extinguishing all life over large areas of the country. Italy conquered Abyssinia. The title of emperor of Abyssinia was taken over by the Italian King, Emanuel III. Emperor Haile Selassie fled to England and did not return until six years later in 1941, when the Italian army was defeated in East Africa during World War II. The fact that Britain, the world's super power, had not come to the aid of Ethiopia was a source of great disgust to West Indians who saw this as nothing less than a betrayal of the black race.

The Labor Upheavals of the 1930s

If West Indians' World War I experiences of British racism had not totally convinced them this empire business wasn't working for them, the events of the late 1930's would have definitely done the trick. Sugar prices plummeted, sending the sugar industry, the mainstay of the islands' economies, into a tailspin. The Great Depression, which left no part of the world untouched, ravaged the region. Workers were subjected to unlivable wages and deplorable working and living conditions. The result was spontaneous labor uprisings with often deadly

consequences.

Region-wide, between 1935 and 1939, no fewer than forty-six labor protestors lost their lives in clashes with authorities. British warships docked at bay for the sole purpose of quelling labor uprisings became a salient feature of the regional landscape. The West Indies was in a state of agitation and unrest. Labor Unions followed by political parties sprang up overnight. In St. Lucia, for example, the George Charles led St. Lucia Workers Cooperative Union turned into the St. Lucia Labor Party.

Under this onslaught, the cozy relationship that once existed between Britain and its West Indian subjects was shattered. The West Indies was in a state of agitation and unrest. Labor Unions followed by political parties sprang up overnight. The George Charles led St. Lucia Workers Cooperative Union turned into the St. Lucia Labor Party. In this state of social, political and economic crisis, West Indian Federation became an increasingly attractive proposition.

The Search for Identity and the West Indian Federation

Crisis forces change and paradigm shifts. West Indian society found itself at a crossroad. The people had arrived at a point where they could no longer deny history, deny that they were not British and that they could never be British. If they were not British, they had to be West Indian. But what did it mean to be a West Indian? Clearly, in this period West Indians began an earnest quest of self-discovery and self-definition. They began the cultivation of a West Indian identity as distinct from their African or Asian roots and their colonial heritage. All this internal examination and discovery found ultimate expression in the notion of a West Indian Federation, such that for once West Indians were willing and able to put aside race, class and territorial barriers and buy into the concept of regional unity. For once the idealism of regional identity transcended all else.

In his poem, *A Far Cry from Africa*, Derek Walcott gave voice to the West Indian dilemma of being caught between two loyalties—that of empire and one's original heritage, be it African or Asian. He said:

Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give them back what they give?

In hindsight, how has West Indians answered Walcott? It appears that West Indians have not so much as rejected Europe or Africa or Asia, as they have embraced a West Indian identity that may reflect both inheritances yet represents something new and different. And apparently this excruciating process of finding themselves, of discovering who they are, of consciously becoming West Indian, began in the crucible period of the 1930's through to the early 1960's, and unleashed the region's (not just St. Lucia) greatest outpouring of art and culture and creativity.

For example, of the ten authors whom a 1995 survey of West Indian literature, edited by Bruce King, classified as significant West Indian authors, the region's literary giants, seven were either born in the early 1930's or came of age in the labor and political upheavals of the late 1930's. These authors include Wilson Harris of Guyana, Samuel Selvon, Earl Lovelace and V.S.

Naipaul of Trinidad and Tobago, George Lamming and Edward Kamau Brathwaite of Barbados, and Derek Walcott of St. Lucia. Two of these significant authors—Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul—have since won the Nobel Prize for literature, and a few like Wilson Harris are knocking on the door.

In another survey, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, Kenneth Ramchand found that about fifty-five novels were published between 1949 and 1959 by twenty different authors. The poets were also active. In this period, Derek Walcott published his first three volumes of poetry; and others, including Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Martin Carter, Frank Collymore and E.M. Roach also added their voices.

Similarly, according to Caribbean Literature lecturer, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, this period also saw an upswing in drama, painting and sculpture; and the establishment of several institutions providing support for the arts, including the University College of the West Indies (renamed the University of the West Indies), the Little Carib Dance Company in Trinidad, the Jamaican School of Arts and Crafts, and the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica. Likewise, literary magazines like Guyana's *Kyk-over-al* and Barbados's *Bim* were in full swing, facilitating the exchange of ideas among West Indian artists and intellectuals. And in St. Lucia, defeating history, the St. Lucia Arts Guild, established in 1950, would set off a cultural and artistic renaissance.

In this turbulent era, the demand for national freedom and self-determination was by no means limited to the Caribbean. In fact, it was a worldwide phenomenon. By 1947, the Indian subcontinent had fought and won their independence. Starting in the fifties, the African continent had begun their independent march. Their cry for freedom and "Africa for Africans" could be heard loud and clear, such that between the Second World War and the start of the West Indian Federation, seven African countries had gained their independence, including the British ruled nations of Egypt, Sudan and Ghana. In 1957, the Fidel Castro-led Cuban revolution had claimed Cuba for the Cuban people. In America, in 1955, the Civil Rights Movement had begun in earnest. Martin Luther King's famous "I Have A Dream" speech was only eight years away; and soon Malcolm X would start sowing his seeds of armed self-defense and black nationalism that would germinate into the Black Panther and Black Power Movements. Clearly, all these events would have inspired and spurred on West Indians in their struggle for self-determination.

The West Indian Federation came to an end in 1962, and dashed the hopes and aspirations of a civilization. Professionals and intellectuals who had remained home specifically to contribute to the development of the region packed up and left. Those in England and America who were in the process of making plans to return home to play their part in civilization building stayed put. Literary magazines like Guyana's *Kyk-over-al*, whose founding had been inspired by the mere notion of a West Indian Federation, went out of press. Novelists, poets, dramatists, painters, all took turns lashing out at the politicians for their selfishness and shortsightedness.

And, not unlike the ethnic tensions and chaos that accompanied the breakup of the Soviet Empire, following the demise of the Federation, West Indian civilization began cracking up, returning to its pre-federation rivalry and conflicts. In 1962, a bloody civil war along political and racial lines (Blacks versus Indians), flared up in Guyana, claiming hundreds of lives. The larger West Indian territories (larger, if not in size at least in population), including Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and Guyana, gained their independence from Britain, thus setting up a dichotomy in the region that fueled national chauvinism, where the independent countries thought of themselves as superior to their tinier neighbors. And according to Caribbean and

women literature lecturer, Rhonda Cobham, after the collapse of the federation the "fragile regional alliance between the professional middle class and the working class against the common colonial enemy was swept away by a new wave of elitism."

But by then, in terms of art and culture, in terms of self-realization and self-discovery, in terms of coming to grips with what it meant to be a West Indian, in terms of helping to foster a distinct Caribbean art, theatre, and literature, in terms of motivating the establishment of organs and institutions that would enable art and cultural expressions to continue to flourish, the federation had done its job.

The St. Lucia Revolutions

For its part, during this West Indian civilization building period, St. Lucia fought a revolution on three fronts. On one front, there was George Charles, John Compton and their compatriots fighting for workers' rights, fighting for self-rule, fighting for political and territorial liberation. On the second front, bananas took over from sugar as the island's leading economic activity, in the process empowering the people economically and setting off an economic and social revolution. And on the third front, there was Derek Walcott, Roderick Walcott, Dunstan St. Omer and the other members of the St. Lucia Arts Guild fighting for the hearts, minds, and souls of St. Lucians; fighting to free the St. Lucian psyche from, as Bob Marley said, "mental slavery," fighting to decapitate the notion that provincial means inferior, that the island's folk creole culture wasn't worthy of art and celebration, and that black wasn't beautiful.

Of these three revolutionary fronts, the cultural renaissance has probably received the least attention (Woe be unto those who are unmindful of history) but it was probably the most remarkable of the three and it was what set St. Lucia most apart from its Caribbean neighbors.

Dunstan St. Omer, considered the father of St. Lucian painting and as such a cultural hero, harbors no doubt about what motivated the St. Lucia Arts Guild outburst of creative energy and hence the renaissance. He said, "It was a time in history when the world was changing. The entire world was moving towards independence and self-determination, the breakdown of colonialism and imperialism." He went further to explain that part of the reason for forming the Arts Guild was to rid St. Lucians of their inferiority complexes. "The black boys (of the Arts Guild) were up, recreating their society, kicking out the Victorian society that overlaid the country." For example, he said that in those days "it was forbidden" to speak patois in schools, then "Derek with his genius" started writing poems and plays peppered with St. Lucian patois and in which he was using the syntax of patois, thereby creolizing his writings, "and patois became legitimate, in the process giving the people back their language, and in the process giving them their self-confidence, in doing that they found their equality. Because as long as you using another man's thing you are not equal, but when you doing your own thing, you are yourself. You are equal."

The Arts Guild did more than uplift the St. Lucian spirit. According to St. Omer, it started a revolution in West Indian theatre. "We open the West Indian dramatic mind. Everybody was paying tribute to us for that. At this time St. Lucia was leading the way in West Indian theatre. The rest of the Caribbean caught the bug of being local, of being original. It influenced a cultural revolution across the entire Caribbean."

Henri Christophe, a play about the Haitian Revolution, was one of Derek Walcott's first plays and one of the first plays staged by the St. Lucia Arts Guild. A critic reviewing for the *West India Committee Circular* the 1952 London production of *Henri Christophe*, in which all the

actors were West Indians residing in Britain, seemed to agree with Dunstan St. Omer. He wrote, "In the development of an indigenous culture in the Caribbean (and no West Indian Federation can really be without it) no element is of greater potential importance than a West Indian theatre, for the theatre is the meeting place and the nursery of the arts. At the same time the initial obstacles are formidable. The three essential elements in the theatre—the playwright, the actor and the audience—must exist together if the theatre is to be a living reality in the life of the people. This condition has not hitherto existed in the West Indies. ... There have certainly been writers, actors and audiences in the West Indies in the past, but not West Indian writers of West Indian plays for West Indian actors to perform to West Indian audiences. ... In this critical stage of development of a West Indian theatre, the recent production of *Henri Christophe* ... is an event of the first importance. It was in every way a West Indian production."

According to Kendel Hippolyte, St. Lucian poet and playwright, during the period of the St. Lucia Arts Guild (1950 to 1971), the Guild staged no less than sixty-one plays. Twenty of these plays were by St. Lucians, and seven were by other Caribbean writers. Several members of the Guild, including Derek and Roderick Walcott, Allan Weekes, Howick Elcock, Eric Branford, Garth St. Omer and George Odium, took turns directing these plays.

Of the twenty plays by St. Lucian writers, ten were by Roderick Walcott: *The Harrowing of Benjy*, *Shrove Tuesday March*, *The One Eye is King*, *A Flight of Sparrows*, *Malfinis*, *The Education of Alfie*, *The Banjo Man*, *The Devil at Christmas*, *The Trouble with Albino Joe*, and *The Expatriates*; Five were by Derek Walcott: *Henri Christophe*, *The Sea at Dauphin*, *Ti Jean and his Brothers*, *Malcochon*, and *Jourmand*; Two were by Irvin Grey: *The Serenaders*, and *The Bitter Seed*; Another two were by Stanley French: *The Rape of Fair Helen* and *The Ballad of a Man and Dog*; And one was by Allan Weekes: *Talk of the Devil*.

The Mentor

At this point it would be a glaring omission if this account did not invoke the memory of Harold Fitzgerald Simmons, for though, regarding the St. Lucia Arts Guild, he was only in the background, by most accounts he planted the seed of the St. Lucia Renaissance. Indeed, behind any discussion or initiative on St. Lucia art and culture, or the awarding of any prize to St. Lucian nationals for their work in that field of endeavor, looms the singular, solitary figure of Harold Simmons (1914-1966), for he is considered not just the father of the St. Lucia Arts Guild and hence the St. Lucia Renaissance but the father of St. Lucian Culture.

Born on December 2, 1914, sixteen years ahead of the Walcott brothers, Harold Simmons was a local historian, archaeologist, artist (painter), journalist, folklorist and social worker. To illustrate the pivotal role of Simmons in the shaping of the artistic sensibilities of the Arts Guild, consider that, according to St. Omer, it was only upon meeting Simmons as a teenager and spending time in Simmons' art studio that he learned that "art (painting) is on the level of poetry and philosophy."

Now, it isn't that the aspiring artist wasn't doing his homework. He used to spend hours in the Castries Central Library studying art books, familiarizing himself with the works of the European masters. But all along he was under the misconception that art was only what was in those books, and anything outside those books wasn't art. So being an artist simply meant reproducing the works of the masters.

Looking back, St. Omer said he wasn't surprised that he had formed such an impression of art. Because after all this was the colonial era, "where all the values were colonial values," and everything else was considered inferior, vulgar, uncultured. In sharp contrast to St. Omer's notion of art, Harry Simmons told his protégés (Walcott and St. Omer) to "paint what you see, paint what was around you, paint what was yours."

St. Omer said that Harry made them "see that following the European thing was mere imitation." Their encounter with Simmons represented the first time they were meeting a real artist, a professional painter, working in a real studio, and also the first time they were seeing paintings of St. Lucian scenes: coconut trees, fishermen with their canoes, country folk, madrasas, St. Lucian heroes. "Suddenly," said St. Omer, "in Harry's studio St. Lucia became art."

Despite being such an eye opener to his students, both Derek and Dunstan admitted that Simmons didn't so much as teach them techniques or how to paint, but it was the example that he represented and their reorientation to the meaning and purpose of art that left a lasting impression on them. Here is Derek Walcott on the subject. "The influence was not so much technical. Of course, I picked up a few things from him in terms of technique: how to do a good sky, how to water the paper, how to circle it, how to draw properly and concentrate on it, and all of that. But there were other things apart from the drawing. Mostly, it was the model of the man as a professional artist that was the example."

So Simmons didn't teach his charges how to paint, but what he taught them couldn't be found in text books or structured art classes. He unleashed the imagination and channeled the talent and creativity of his protégés toward what was inside them and what was their own. He set them off on an epic journey of self-discovery, on a pilgrimage to claim for themselves and their people what was rightfully theirs. He gave them new pairs of eyes with which to see their country and behold their people. And what they saw and beheld was amazing beauty no less deserving of theatre, of music, of poetry, of paintings, of dance, of novels than any other. Simmons did nothing less than liberate the St. Lucian souls of his protégés and set these souls soaring.

Upon Simmons death, Derek Walcott wrote, "He was one of the first water colourists the West Indies has produced" and he helped to "create a community of writers and painters among whom were Sybil Atteck and Edgar Mittleholzer... For us he was like a walking museum that contained knowledge of all styles and our first paintings slavishly imitated his ... Because of him we could not have been anything else, and whatever honor his former pupils gain are homage to his spirit."

The Outstanding Exponents of the St. Lucia Arts Guild

A glance at the achievements and body of work of the more outstanding members of the Arts Guilds may help put the accomplishments of the Guild in perspective. As a playwright, Stanley French (1937-2010) published five plays: *The Rape of Fair Helen* (1983), *His Light and the Dark*, *Ballad of a Man and Dog*, *The Interview*, *No Rain No Play*, and *Under a Sky of Incense* (1977). Besides St. Lucia, his plays have been staged in London, Nigeria, and the Caribbean—most notably Jamaica. Stanley French was also a sports writer. His writings on cricket were published in the collections: *Francis Mindoo Phillip: A Portrait from Memory* (1979), and *Come In, My*

Lords, Come In! (2004). In 2000 he was awarded the Saint Lucia Gold Medal of Merit (2000) for his contributions to the literary and performing arts.

A generation younger than the Walcotts, McDonald Dixon (1944 —) joined the Arts Guild during its later years so he may be more aptly grouped with the next or second generation of artists who were inspired by and came immediately after the Arts Guild. He hasn't received the kind of international attention that some of the other members of the Arts Guild have received, but as a playwright, poet, novelist and photographer he stands out among the second generation of artists. Besides writing and directing a number of critically acclaimed plays, he has published three novels: *Season of Mist* (2000), *Misbegotten* (2009), *Saints of Little Paradise : Book One 'eden Defiled'* (2012); a collection of short stories: *Careme and other Stories* (2009), and several volumes of poetry most of which reprinted in his latest collection, *Collected Poems 1961-2001* (2003). In 1993 he was awarded the St. Lucia Medal of Merit (Silver) for his contribution to literature and photography, and in 2005 the Joseph Devaux Lifetime Achievement Award.

As a composer Charles Cadet wasn't considered a member of the Arts Guild but his work was so directly connected with Roderick Walcott's playwriting that in spirit he was an integral part of the Guild. He composed all the scores of Roderick's musicals, including *Chanson Marianne, The Legend of Tom Fool, the Guitar Man's Song, The Wonderful World of Brother Rabbit, and Romiel Ec Juliette*. He also composed the music for *Tinday*, a play by McDonald Dixon. Besides theatrical scores, Charles Cadet has composed such popular songs as *Mass for Independence, Kyrie, A Dream of Freedom, Ode To An Artiste, and Poinsettia Blossom*. He was the first Recipient of the M&C Fine Arts Lifetime Achievement Award, and in 2005 was awarded The Saint Lucia Cross, the country's highest award, for distinguished and outstanding service.

By the time the Arts Guild folded, Novelist Garth St. Omer had publish his first three novels—*A Room on the Hill* (1968), *Nor Any Country* (1969), and *J—, Black Bam and the Masqueraders* (1972) —and his first three novellas or short stories—*The Lights on the Hill* (1968) *Another Place Another Time* (1968) and *Syrop* (1964) —that would claim him a place at the front line of West Indian writers and would establish him as St. Lucia's only internationally acclaimed novelist. As such he was included in *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (1986), a collection of essays on fifty major West Indian writers of the last two centuries. Garth St. Omer has since published many short stories, *Prismns*, a novel published in 2016, and served as Professor Emeritus of the English Department at the University of California in Santa Barbara. In 2001 he was awarded the St. Lucia Gold Medal of Merit for meritorious service in the fields of arts and literature, and in 2005 he was awarded the St. Lucia National Arts Lifetime Achievement Award.

As playwright, screenwriter, painter, theatre director, costume and set designer, song lyricist and literary editor, Roderick Walcott (1930-2000) was the driving force behind the St. Lucia Arts Guild. He wrote seventeen plays and two screenplays and wrote the lyrics for and helped compose eight musicals, in the process earning him the recognition as one of the founders of modern Caribbean theatre. "His play *The Harrowing of Benjy* still remains the most produced play in the English-speaking Caribbean." Besides theatre, he led the Turks Steelband and is considered one of the pioneers of St. Lucian carnival. For his contributions to St. Lucian and Caribbean art and culture he was honored with the Joseph Devaux Lifetime Achievement Award (2000), the Order of the British Empire (OBE, 1976), and the Saint Lucia Gold Medal of

Honour (2000).

Dunstan St. Omer, a founding member of the Arts Guild, who as he said, served as an actor and set designer of the plays staged by the Guild, is one of St. Lucia's most renowned painters. He designed the St. Lucian flag and invented a new form of painting called prismism. Beginning in the 1970s he revolutionize painting and the Roman Catholic Church in St. Lucia by creating altar piece murals populated by ordinary St. Lucian folk and images of the island's folk culture. His murals and beautification of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Castries has drawn international attention both to him and his country. Besides St. Lucia, he has painted murals in Mexico, Martinique and Trinidad. For his contributions to art and culture, Dunstan St. Omer was awarded the Papal Medal of Merit (1985), the St. Lucia Cross (2004), and an Honorary Doctor of Letters (2009) from the University of the West Indies. In 2007 the Folk Research Center declared him a National Cultural Hero, then making him only the third cultural icon to have received such an honor. And in 2010 he was invested with the Insignia of a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG).

By 1971 Derek Walcott had written no less than ten plays and had established the Trinidad Theatre Workshop that evolved into a world class theatre company. He had already published seven volumes of poetry including *25 Poems* (1948), *Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos* (1949), *Poems* (1951), *In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960* (1962), *Selected Poems* (1964), *The Castaway and Other Poems* (1965), and *The Gulf and Other Poems* (1969)—firmly establishing him as an internationally acclaimed poet. And by 2017, the year of his death, he had published twenty-two volumes of poetry aggregated into 14 collections, written over 24 dramatic works many of which published in his eight collections of plays, and won more than ten awards and prizes including the Cholmondeley Award (1969), the Obie Award (1971), the Order of the British Empire (1972), the MacArthur Foundation "Genius Award" Fellowship OBIE (1981), the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry (1988), the Arts Council of Wales International Writers Prize (1990), the WH Smith Literary Award (1990), the Nobel Prize for Literature (1992), an Honorary doctorate from the University of Essex (2008), the T.S. Eliot Prize for Poetry (2011), the Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature (2011), the Griffin Trust For Excellence in Poetry Lifetime Recognition Award (2015), and the Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Lucia (2016).

However the outstanding achievements of the above mentioned members of the Arts Guilds, they don't tell the complete story. Naturally most of the attention on the Arts Guild has been directed to the ones who created bodies of work in the form of plays, books of poetry and paintings by which their accomplishments can be evaluated by later generations. But by some accounts, the actors and actresses of the Arts Guild were just as distinguished and talented as the writers and painters, but we have no recordings of their performances, and lacking a film industry they didn't have the opportunity of gravitating into film as is sometimes the case in countries with an advance film industry.

Some of these other distinguished personalities of the St. Lucia Arts Guild include actresses Zin Theobalds, Teresa Plummer, Joan Lansiquot, Sixtus Jeanne Charles, Pamela Walcott and Doris Thomas; actors Irvine John, Kenneth Monplaisir, Eric Branford, Arthur Jacobs, Oliver Oshaunessy, Carlton Glasgow, Hunter Francois, Frank Henry, Lennie St. Hill, Euralis Bouty and Irvin Norville; musicians and singers Frank Norville, Pet Gibson, Floreta Marquis, Ruby Yorke and Joyce Auguste; and set and costume designers Frantz Fritz, Michael Daniel and Shirley Edwards.

The Legacy of the St. Lucia Renaissance

The accomplishments of the St. Lucia Arts Guild could not be considered a renaissance or a revolution if their spoils had been limited just to the Guild. But this was far from the case. Their many productions over a twenty-year period would have definitely developed or cultivated a heightened sense of art and culture among the Castries population. As an art educator for thirty years with the ministry of education charged with introducing art in the island's school system, Dunstan St. Omer would have spread the artistic spirit and sensibilities of the Arts Guild throughout the country. His Roman Catholic Church murals that helped indigenize Catholicism in St. Lucia would have done no less a job of spreading the manifestations of the Arts Guild. And as a music supervisor for the St. Lucian school system and the leader of Hewanorra Voices, a major popular folk band in the 1970s, Joyce Auguste introduced folk music into the school curriculum.

The Arts Guild inspired and in some cases helped develop the next generation of St. Lucian poets, novelist, playwrights, directors, photographers, painters and musicians, thus ensuring the continuity of what the Guild had started. Some of the more prominent of these second generation artists who the Arts Guild would have inspired include poet and playwright Kendal Hippolyte; poet, journalist and librarian John Robert Lee; poet Jane King Hippolyte; painters Cedric George, Lugi St. Omer, Julio St. Omer, Giovanni St. Omer and Alwyn St Omer; poet and playwright Travis Weekes; poet and playwright Gandolph St. Clair; and playwrights Lucia Peters-Charlery, Hayden Forde and Floreta Nicholas; poet, playwright and event producer Adrian Augier; novelists Michael Aubertin and Earl Long; poet and playwright Melania Daniel, Hazel Simmons-McDonald, and Modeste Downes; dramatist George 'Fish' Alphonse, and Kennedy "Boots" Samuel, musicians Ronald "Boo" Hinckson and Luther Francois.

These second generation of St. Lucian artists advanced the cause both as practitioners of their craft and by actively teaching and interacting with a younger generation of artists in the making. As English, literature, and drama lecturers at Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, which harbored students and teachers in training from around the island, Allan Weekes, Jane King and Kendal Hippolyte had the opportunity to pass on their passion for the arts to several generations of the island's brightest. Added to that, over the years Kendal Hippolyte, McDonald Dixon, and John Robert Lee conducted poetry and theatre workshops, and their work with the Writer's Forum, a Castries based open membership creative writers workshop, certainly helped create the third and fourth generation of St. Lucia artist.

The hectic activity of the second generation of artists is evident in the number of theatre undertakings that succeeded the Arts Guild. These include The Creative and Performing Arts Society, The New Day Theatre Workshop, One Love Theatre, Unity Theatre Workshop, Creole Theatre, Lighthouse Theatre, the Soufriere Action Theatre and the State Theatre of Micoud. So in both spirit and practice, one can say the Arts Guild never ended. It just took on different shapes.

Sometimes the legacy of the Arts Guild have flowed from parents to off springs. Travis Weekes, the son of Arts Guild playwright and director, Allan Weekes, has become not only one of St. Lucia's most prolific playwrights and directors, but leads the way in St. Lucia Creole Theatre. Dunstan St. Omer's four sons—Lugi, Julio, Giovanni, and Alwyn—are now prominent

St. Lucian painters. Barbara Jacobs, daughter of Arthur Jacobs, the famed Arts Guild actor, is the founder and owner of Right Angle Imaging, an award winning marketing communications firm with several publications including two magazines—*Island WHERE* and *St. Lucia Business WHO's WHO*. Luther Francois, the son of musician, poet and educator, Hunter Francois, is widely considered the best musician St. Lucia has produced.

Some of the second generation of artists have in turn passed on the legacy to their children, the third generation. John Robert Lees daughter, Davina Lee, founder and owner of Lee Productions Inc., a television/film production company, is an award winning film director and is at the forefront of St. Lucia's film and video production industry. Kendal Hippolyte's daughter, Adele Hippolyte, is a prominent television journalist. And then we have Vladimir Lucien, winner of the 2015 Bocas Prize for literature, the English Caribbean most prestigious literary prize, of which Derek Walcott was the inaugural winner, who shares several parallels with Walcott and who may become the St. Lucian who comes closest to matching Derek Walcott's accomplishments. Vladimir may not be an offspring of the second generation of Arts Guild artists, but since Robert Lee was one of his mentors, he can be considered an offspring of sorts.

The St. Lucia Arts Guild inspired not only the next generation of artists, but motivated the establishment of some of the key organizations that are helping to institutionalize the spirit of the Arts Guild and the essence of what Harold Simmons and the Guild was striving for. The two key institutions charged with preserving and advancing St. Lucian culture are the Folk Research Center and The Department of Culture renamed the Cultural Development Foundation.

Established in 1973 the Folk Research Center serves "as a repository for cultural heritage, a vehicle for research, study, recording and promulgating Saint Lucia's rich heritage." The Folk Research Centre was founded by Msgr. Dr. Patrick Anthony, a second generation Arts Guild cultural activities, and since inception has had at its head various second generation Arts Guild artists.

Similarly, the Department of Culture or the Cultural Development Foundation was established in the late 1970s by government "to promote the development and management of the arts and culture in St. Lucia." Roderick Walcott served as the first executive director (1977-1980) of the department, and since then second-generation Arts Guild exponents has invariably held that position...

The legacy and spirit of Harold Simmons and The St. Lucia Arts Guild continues to not only inspire St. Lucian artists and cultural activities but also to permeate the country's educational and cultural institutions and all levels of St. Lucian society. Therefore, without a doubt, the St. Lucia Arts Guild unleashed nothing less than a cultural renaissance.