

The Prestigious African Achievement Awards Scotland 2014

By: Dr Velma McClymont (The representative for Jamaica/the Caribbean Commonwealth Women Writers event at Glasgow 2014)



On 27 November, I participated in a Commonwealth Women Writers event at Glasgow Women's Library during National Book Week in Scotland, which was hosted by Writer in Residence, Magi Gibson. As a writer of African-Caribbean origin, it was an honour to represent Jamaica/the Caribbean at this feminist event, with its 'Big Party' in the afternoon. Alongside fellow Commonwealth writers, singers and poets, I spoke and recited two poems about Scotland's historical ties with the Caribbean, namely Merchant City and the many Scottish surnames in contemporary Jamaica and its diaspora in the UK. Take, for instance, Jamaica Street in Glasgow or my own surnames, Morris (nee) and McClymont.

Whilst in Glasgow, I had the pleasure of attending the third annual African Achievement Awards Scotland on 28 November. But first, the day began with a whistle stop tour of Kelvin Grove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow University, the Trongate Theatre cafe (for lunch) and Merchant City, stopping briefly to view John Glassford's tomb and the Cunninghame neo-classical mansion in Queen Street – (now the Gallery of Modern Art). I had first visited Merchant City during the Commonwealth Games, attending various literary and historical events at the Briggait where I had the temerity to challenge Scotland's leading historian, Professor Sir Tom Devine, to address the reparations debate.

Although I enjoyed my visit to Glasgow in July, this time my visit was more productive. The African Forum Scotland enabled me to connect with some of the key drivers who are working at grassroots level to promote integration, empower young people of African heritage and to celebrate "successful partnership work in Africa." So, after a hectic day on shank's pony, I was ready to relax back at my hotel but was compelled to attend what turned out to be the highlight of my trip. Exiting from the taxi outside 200 SVS, I was enthralled by the music within. As one who is researching Scotland's colonial past, my emotions were stirred by the haunting sounds of the bagpipes (played by Highland piper, Neil Maclure), whose swirls reminded me of Scotland's lochs, rugged landscapes and colourful history.

Indeed, the annual African Achievement Awards Scotland is a prestigious event that attracts high profile individuals from our global village and the world of politics (Guest of Honour, the Rt Hon David Martin Scott Steel, Baron of Steel and Aikwood, spoke of his childhood and youth in Kenya). Other esteemed guests included representatives from local government, banking and commerce, education and faith/community organisations that are working to empower African youth through a programme of employment, education, sport and culture. What is more, two young ladies and close sisters, Consolata and Divine Tasinda ensured that I was seated in an advantageous position and played host to me and my son, Gavin, a graphic designer, who also attended the event.

You had to be impressed by the array of men in Scottish plaid trousers and kilts, the piper with his heart-stirring tunes, the nominees doing sterling work in the African diaspora and the efficient way in which the food appeared on your table. The pudding came in the form of Awilo Longomba, who is one of the most popular African musicians. In spite of the morning trek across Glasgow and my tired feet in high heels, I was carried away by the Congolese musician's captivating voice and found myself on the dancefloor with an impressive line up of African achievers and friends of Africa in Scotland. I look forward to attending next year's African Achievement Awards ceremony with great anticipation!