

# Literary Festival Committee Selects John For 2008 Award

By Joanne C Hillhouse

The Antigua & Barbuda International Literary Festival committee has selected *Unburnable's* author Marie Elena John, currently at work on novel number two, as its 2008 awardee.

This honour went to Althea Prince in 2007; and

both Prince and John are expected to visit a number of schools during the build up to the festival. John's award, meanwhile, will be bestowed during the November 7 to 9 annual Antigua & Barbuda International Literary Festival.

This award is only the latest for the critically acclaimed 2006 literary release and soon-to-be film,

which the awards committee also credited with being the "fastest and highest selling novel by an Antiguan author."

With respect to how it feels to be the fastest and the highest, though, John responded, "I doubt that ... what about Jamaica Kincaid?" and added that the reaction of the fans is for her the true measure of success.

Commenting on the Antigua & Barbuda International Literary Festival Author Award, John informed The Daily OBSERVER, that this win "trumps" all others, "because this is home."

*Unburnable* has, since its release, been nominated for the International IMPAC Award, short listed for the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award in the Best Debut category, named one of three International Voices by the New Haven Festival of Art and Ideas, and dubbed Best Debut of 2006 by Black Issues Book Review.

The author was also

selected, in 2006, as one of 10 Emerging Voices by Book Expo America. Set in the USA and Dominica, the book has also been well-received at home and in the world of academia with Women's Studies, Literary, History, African Diaspora, Black Studies, and Caribbean Studies professors presenting on it at various global conferences and teaching it in the classroom.

But the biggest deal yet may be plans to turn *Unburnable* into a film. John has had interest from none less than *The Hurricane* producer Rudy Langlais, who, John said, "contacted me a little over a year ago after my brother Joey met him and gave him a copy of *Unburnable*."

Turns out that the Hollywood heavyweight – who also has projects on Miles Davis and Rita and Bob Marley in development – is Kittitian born with a Dominican father.

Since that fortuitous meeting, Langlais and John have been collaborating on an adaptation of *Unburnable*.

"It took us a whole year to break the book down and rebuild it as a movie," John explained, "and this summer, we finally finished with the structural part and I'm now writing the actual script."

The author has also been spreading her wings in other ways since her book's release, notably into the realm of teaching, the bread and butter of many writers. This new gig has taken her from her alma mater in New York to her old stomping ground, Nigeria.

She's looking forward to the Antigua & Barbuda International Literary Festival, however. In fact, she's full of nothing but praise for Antigua's homegrown festival, which debuted in 2006.

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Marie Elena John interviewing Nike Davies Okundaye, a Nigerian artist and women's rights activist at her Centre for Art and Culture in Lagos as part of research for John's second novel



John, centre, with participants in the two-week Creative Writing Workshop conducted by her in July 2008 at City College New York

# Premier Warns Of Hardships Ahead

HAMILTON, Bermuda (CMC) - Premier Ewart Brown has warned the island of hardships ahead, saying Bermuda's two economic pillars -- international business and tourism -- are not immune to the global economic downturn.

However, in a television broadcast on Monday night, Brown said the government was committed to continuing free child care for families earning less than US \$70,000 per year, free Bermuda College tuition and free public transport for school students.

The premier's broadcast followed a meeting he had with his Council of Economic Advisers, a group of international and local business leaders, over the weekend.

Brown conceded Bermuda's buoyant economy would be affected by the global downturn but he had

faith in its sustainability.

"The Bermuda international business sector, cemented in insurance and reinsurance, is well managed and continues to play a vitally important role in the world of risk management," he said.

"Yet some of the companies in our international business sector have had to deal with investment losses from deteriorating financial markets."

The premier also acknowledged that "the formation of new international business in Bermuda has slowed over the past three months, all but certainly related to the pinch being felt around the globe.

"However, even with that cautious assessment of the insurance sector, I'm encouraged by one simple fact: the world needed to buy insurance yesterday and it will need to buy insurance tomorrow," he said.

On the topic of tourism, which he said in August this year was going through a "platinum period", the premier acknowledged that numbers may slip.

He added that hotel projects continued to progress and only one, the new Southampton Beach Resort, was facing any challenges.

"Our other great pillar, Bermuda tourism, will suffer in a global economic

downturn, especially since the US is feeling the brunt of that downturn and 85 per cent of our visitors are from the US market," he said.

In his speech, Brown also ordered a moratorium on all non-essential government travel for the next six months. The premier and ministers will also have to travel by coach class for trips that are three hours or less, though upgrades using frequent flyer miles would be allowed.

## LIVESTOCK FAIR POSTPONED

The Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Marine Resources and Agro Industry regrettably announces that due to the passing of Hurricane Omar, the National Agricultural Livestock Fair, scheduled for October 25 and 26, and the seedling distribution and Prize Giving and Awards Banquet which were to have taken place on October 16, have been postponed. A new date for these activities will be announced as soon as they are finalised.

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"Most don't realise that apart from getting to hear your favourite writer read her/his work, and ask questions about the books, is a chance to learn from some of the greats," she said. "I experienced my first writing workshops right here at our literary festival, with writers like Marita Golden and Nalo Hopkinson and Steve Barnes, and it gave my own writing a big boost."

She also plugs it as a great networking opportunity.

"People write me all the time asking for advice on finding an agent or a publisher, and I recommend going to festivals like ours, and meeting the agents and publishers and writers face to face," John said. "It makes a big difference. Our festival has had agents of

the calibre of Marie Brown, who is one of the top agents in the US."

The standard remains high in 2008. Among the activities posted to the Antigua & Barbuda International Literary Festival website are workshops on "Writing with Heat: The Sexy Novel," with Eric Jerome Dickey; "The What, When, Why, and How of Book Publishing," with Carol Mackey, Troy Johnson, Ron Kavanaugh, Christian Nwachukwu, Jacqueline Hacket, Michelle Gipson and Linda Duggins; and "Bringing out the Poet in You," with Ethelbert Miller, Ramabai Espinet and Lorna Goodison.

As usual, it's shaping up to be a pretty packed schedule. John is scheduled to participate in two ses-

sions "Just Write - Your First Piece," with fellow Antiguan author Brenda Lee Browne and "Establishing Your Place in the Literary

World" with Tina McElroy Ansa, Rosalind McLymont, Zee Edgell, Lorna Goodison, Ron Kavanaugh and Ava Hutchinson.



Marie Elena John, far left, at a public forum marking the end of the Chimamanda Adichie International Creative Writing Workshop in Lagos. Also pictured are co-facilitators, from left, Adichie, Binyavanga Wainaina and Dave Eggers. (Photos courtesy Marie Elena John)