

BOOKS NOVEMBER 9, 2016 2:14 PM

Miami Book Fair shines brighter light on the Caribbean



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BY CONNIE OGLE
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Highlighting Caribbean literature has long been a goal of Miami Book Fair. But now, the spotlight gets bigger.

This year, the fair makes that focus official with ReadCaribbean, extensive special programming that includes readings, book signings, panel discussions, children's writers, storytelling and music, all tied to the rich history and culture of the Caribbean.

There's a good reason for the more concentrated effort, says novelist M.J. Fièvre, author of the memoir "A Sky the Color of Chaos" and ReadCaribbean liaison.

"You walk around or drive around Miami, and you can see and feel the presence of the Caribbean. Not only Haiti but other French Caribbean countries, British Caribbean countries, Jamaica," says Fièvre, who's from Haiti. "It would be a mistake not to celebrate them. When you think about Caribbean literature, there's so much to talk about. The subjects of exile, returning to the motherland, engagement of the nation, self determination — we couldn't have a book fair that could last long enough for us to cover everything Caribbean!"

To expand its reach, Fievre and fair program director Lissette Mendez and her team worked with Sosyete KouKouy, Bocas Lit Fest and Read Jamaica to create programming, with support from The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. There are panels in English and in Kreyol and French with simultaneous English translation, with subjects including the state of the short story, the importance of setting, poetry, vodou and sex.

As always, other Caribbean authors will appear outside this program, among them Nicole Dennis-Benn, author of the critically acclaimed novel about Jamaica, "Here Comes the Sun," and Haitian poet Danielle Legros Georges, who appears on a panel entitled "New Directions in Caribbean Poetry" with Shivane Ramlochan and Rajiv Mohabir.

"It comes out of all of us at the fair thinking about what the fair means to this community and what it can do for the community," Mendez says. "We ask, 'Are we paying attention to different voices telling stories connected to people of our area?' We've always had Caribbean authors, so we started thinking how to expand or highlight that."

Novelist Edwidge Danticat — author of "Brother, I'm Dying," Miami's book for The Big Read in 2016 — appears on the panel "Conversations on Contemporary Haitian Literature," will be presented in Kreyol with simultaneous English interpretation.

“The fair has always tried hard to address different communities,” she says. “They started Kreyol programs, but this year has the most Kreyol programs. They’ll have programs that speak directly to the Caribbean audience and open up the Caribbean to a larger audience. I’m excited to see that.”

IF YOU GO

What: ReadCaribbean at Miami Book Fair

When: Nov. 19-20

Where: Miami Dade College, 300 NE Second Ave., Miami

Cost: Tickets for street fair \$8 for adults; \$5 for 13-18 and over 62; 12 and under free

Complete schedule: miamibookfair.com



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