

# ANTHONY N. SABGA AWARDS

## *Caribbean Excellence*



E-News

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## *Laureates' Speeches*

### 2022



*(Left) Mr Marlon James, Novelist from Jamaica, Arts & Letters; Dr Kim Jebodhsingh, MD and Health Educator from Barbados, Public & Civic Contributions (Joint); Ms Anuskha Varsha Sonai, Digital Entrepreneur and Activist from Suriname, Public & Civic Contributions (Joint); Mr Shyam Nokta, Entrepreneur and Environmental Consultant from Guyana, Entrepreneurship; and Prof Christine Carrington, Virologist and Geneticist from Trinidad & Tobago, Science & Technology.*

We are pleased to present to you in this edition the remarks made by our five laureates as they accepted their prizes in ceremonies in their native territories. Ms Anuskha Varsha Sonai, our first Surinamese laureate, was conferred by the President of Guyana, the head of state of the territory which nominated her.

The previous two years have been trying ones, and we are all anxious to resume normalcy. It is hoped that in the next awards cycle, we will be able to have our usual gala celebration in a single territory where our laureates would be feted and honoured in a manner

befitting their achievements, and more in keeping with previous years.

In the mean time, we have commissioned a film which features the work of our laureates which will be broadcast throughout the region. We have also uploaded brief videos of the presentation ceremonies to our YouTube channel [here](#).

We are also working hard to produce content on the work of our laureates. Apart from the films, we have also started a podcast series which we will launch in a few weeks. Follow our Facebook page for updates.



## Arts & Letters



It's so great to be here. My mother couldn't be here, but I was thinking of her, and I was thinking of what she contributed to my literary sensibility. People ask me what books my mother introduced me to. Actually she didn't introduce me to any. What she did was leave books around, and that was important for two different reasons. Number one, I came to discover books, some of them very good, some of them not so good, some of them I should not have been reading. But more than that she reinforced the idea that literature, reading literature, was an act of free will and it's a private act.

When the oppressors come, they always burn the books first. And one of the reasons is that through books, you can realise yourself, you can recognise yourself, you can liberate yourself, you can see what the world has done, you can see history, and all that takes place in your head, you have been totally liberated from your world and nobody knows but you. Which is why books are so exhilarating, and books are so dangerous. Which is why I know I had to write them. There is something truly special about getting acclaim, or getting

an award in the Caribbean. Mostly it means we're paying attention to the great things that are happening in our region, and it is, so meaningful to be recognised in basically in my own house.

There is a sort of Caribbean cliché about people getting acclaim abroad, and that has happened. But awards come with the legacies of their names, and it's a fantastic legacy that Anthony Sabga is leaving behind; one of Pan Caribbeanism, which a lot of us, writers and artists in Jamaica, have been slow to adopt. Sometimes I jokingly call Jamaica the Texas of the Caribbean in the sense that we have fully-formed Jamaican sensibilities, but we're still working on a Caribbean

sensibility. The great thing about visionaries like Anthony Sabga is that he saw the future before us, and that future is us working together and appreciating the talents we have in the Caribbean.

One of the problems with foreign awards, and I say that as somebody who's won a few of them, is that when you win a foreign award, 'foreign' likes to take the credit for you being award worthy. Usually whenever I'm on stage it's for something to do with the Booker Prize, sometimes it's not even asked, it's just assumed, which British college did I go to, or which foreign high school did I go to. And I say, 'Wolmer's Boys, in Kingston', and which foreign college? And I say, 'University of the West Indies. We do have a foreign campus in St Augustine, if that's what you're asking.'

The point being that my literary and historical sensibilities were already formed here, because of fantastic teachers, most of whom I remember by name. I still remember Daphne Chin, who hit upon this radical idea to teach basic school the primary school syllabus ... it made me a genius for the next seven years in the next school I went to. I still think of EC Barnett, the principal of





## Marlon James, Jamaica

Wolmer's Boys who taught me history, and Annette Leyow who taught me literature, and those are the twin peaks of what made me a historical novelist.

But I also remember when I saw this novel, *The Year in San Fernando*, by Trinidadian novelist Michael Anthony, and before we even talk about the novel itself, the idea of picking up a book with a black boy on the cover, was shocking to me. I like to tell myself that I'm the first of a new generation. I'm actually the last of an old. Meaning that I can remember reading Enid Blyton, and reading about snow, and reading all these foreign books, and they're good books, but the idea of reading and participating in literature where I could never see myself or people like me, or people like us, and just being electrified, by that book *The Year in San Fernando*, and that writer, and going on to seeing other literature from the Caribbean, and again it's something when you're not from the Caribbean you can take for granted.

An American can take for granted of having an American in a novel. A British person can take for granted seeing a Brit in a novel, at least for me, it was still pretty shocking, because we were not really told that our voices and our stories were worthy. Sometimes it's just a sensibility that I picked up. So that kind of education, that literary sensibility, was formed here.

I brought up my mother before. She was a member of the Jamaican constabulary force. She was one the first Jamaican women to reach the rank of detective. And I say that because, writing to me has always been a form of detective work, which may be the thing I got from her. I certainly think she thought that's what I took from her. And as a writer I'm always looking for the story behind the story. The interior story, the story that wasn't told correctly, or the story that was told quietly. Or the story that wasn't

told at all. And as a historical novelist, which I'm sometimes called, I consider it an obligation and a duty to uncover those interior histories. Historical novelist I say sort of, with a slight chagrin, because I write about the 1990s, which as far as I'm concerned is not history. But I as a novelist, a writer, a person from the Caribbean, I feel the past should be investigated, interrogated, and learned from. We have that cliché, those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. But then that's why we tell stories. and I remember stories from the first time I've been told them, I remember my grandfather.

The Caribbean has always been this repository of stories. We have never lacked material. So this is why I'm here shooting a television show, it's a Jamaican show, with Jamaican actors, talking Jamaican patois, and who don't understand it, that's their problem.

That's to say that all that I've ever needed to tell a story, I've found here. And all I ever needed to become a writer, I found here. All I ever needed to become a literary citizen, I found in the country, in this territory, in this region, which is why it's so wonderfully meaningful to receive this award. And to be surrounded by all of this excellence, and I sometimes go *Why am I here?*

But thank you so much for this award, and thank you so much for shining a light on Caribbean literature and Caribbean arts and Caribbean excellence, and I really hope that that this is a sign, or at least the beginning, of a greater sort of Caribbean identity, and a greater sort of Caribbean relationship, as we move forward, in a slightly uncertain time, and we have our writers and we have our artists, and our scientists and our musicians, to guide the way, and I hope we continue to do so.



# Entrepreneurship



hard work, diligence, and humility.

While my mom kept me on a straight and narrow path and ensured I focused on my academics, it was my dad who gave me the introduction to nature and the environment by taking me on trips to different parts of Guyana, and which sparked that interest. It is not often you get to thank your parents publicly and today I wish to say *Thank You Mom and Dad* for your unwavering love and support in all my personal, academic and professional pursuits.

Along the path I have taken I was afforded the opportunity to work with many persons and organisations – at the grass root community level, in Government, with international organisations, and with the private

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to all of you for being here today. I feel especially honoured to share this moment with some of the persons who have contributed significantly to my successes.

First of all, my parents, my mom could not make it to the event but my dad is here. The person I am, and much of what I have achieved has been due to them. They instilled in me at a young age, life principles of respect, discipline,

sector. Today I wish to recognize a few of these individuals – Mr. Ramesh Dookhoo, Mr. Eddie Boyer and Mr. Desmond Sears from the private sector; my friend Ms. Annette Arjoon Martins, a passionate conservationist, and Vice President Dr Bharrat Jagdeo who gave me the opportunity to work on climate change issues and to be part of the historic Low Carbon Development Strategy and Partnership with the Kingdom of Norway.



## E-News

# *Shyam Nokta, Guyana*

I have had the opportunity to make a career, and a successful business working in an area that I am passionate about – the environment. Today, EMC, as a company, has grown to much more than I first envisaged, and this success is due in large measure to our team, and I wish to recognize two key persons who have shared this journey with me for over 10 years – Mr. Khalid Alladin and Ms. Sharmattie Ramnath.

The work we do, providing environmental services and promoting green growth, is important not only to Guyana but the Caribbean Region. New approaches are being embraced to address development issues and global challenges such as climate change. There is also a recognition that if we are to be successful, the private sector has a critical role to play.

This award provides me with a new platform to promote EMC's work and to raise awareness on environmental issues, especially among young people - the next generation of environmental leaders, conservationists and entrepreneurs. In this regard, with the help of several prominent Guyanese environmental leaders, I have set up the EMC Foundation which will focus on environmental education and awareness, targeting young people, and persons passionate about the environment.

In closing, I wish to thank the persons who nominated me.

To the Sabga Committee, I am deeply honoured to receive this award.

To my fellow Laureates, congratulations, it is a privilege to share this space with you.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to my wife Malisa and son Shayne.

Malisa, your support throughout the years has made the realisation of many of my dreams possible. Thank you for being steadfast and patient.

Shayne, I am happy that you already have an interest in the environment.

I will be happy to hold your hand if this is the path you take.

However, know that whatever path you choose, you will always have my full and unwavering support.

Thank you all for coming out today to share this special moment with me.





## *Public & Civic Contributions*



parents and in-laws and best friend who have always loved and supported me, my husband Mark, and my twin sons Luke and Dominic who are my toughest but fairest critics. My mentors the late Professor Jeffrey Hurwitz and Dr Paul Edwards who have been some of my strongest supporters. Maria Superville Neilson for coordinating the awards and such a wonderful event.

This award for me is such an honour to be recognized in such a prestigious way for the work that I love to do.

Good evening all, it is an honour to be here this evening and I would like to thank the ANSA McAL Foundation chaired by Mr Andrew N Sabga for bestowing this most prestigious award on me. I would like to thank Her Excellency, the Most Honourable Dame Sandra Mason, for hosting this ceremony and the Eminent Persons Panel chaired by Professor Compton Bourne for the recognition of my work. I would also like to thank the Barbados nominating committee led by Dr Jeanine Comma, and its researcher Dr Jason Marshall, who had the confidence in my work and to spend the time and do detailed research to package and summarize my work to be recognized. My family,

It also a testament to the foresight of the late Mr Anthony Sagba, who had such foresight to launch an award which has and will continue to support the development of many facets of the Caribbean.

My fundamental belief is that we all have God-given gifts and talents that we are meant to use to better the world, so I have been just carrying on smartly playing my part, but to be recognized for this is really quite something.

I would say that I thrive on change, it really stimulates me and I have an unbelievable amount of mental and physical energy that I channel into various projects.

My style is to think about



## E-News

# *Dr Kim Jebodhsingh, Barbados*

it, create, execute and move onto the next one. The pandemic gave me momentum in some areas of my career whereby I designed and built the eye clinic, and my own practice during the lockdown, which gives me the freedom to carry on my pro bono work not only in Barbados but throughout the Caribbean.

The pandemic impaired medical research worldwide with the Caribbean being no exception. We really need research into eye diseases that affect us Caribbean people. As we are unique in so many ways: race, diet, environment. Eye care and eye research are necessities to save sight and lives. CORA (The Caribbean Ophthalmology Research Association), which I founded in 2018, will continue to promote and support research into eye diseases that affect us and assist the Caribbean medical fraternity in our quest for cures and treatment of eye diseases.

One of my passions is to help to share knowledge and through the conference the Latest Updates in Ophthalmology, which I started over 10 years ago, I have been able to invite some of the most well-respected doctors from around the world which has helped to foster the sharing of ideas, teaching and research exchanges with our local and regional doctors, nurses and medical students, keeping them abreast of all the cutting edge developments in the field.

This conference has led to opportunities for doctors all over the region and the world to further enhance their expertise by gaining mentors/long-term teaching relationships and gaining entry to fellowship programs at some of the world's premier teaching hospitals. I look forward to continuing this work.

As the immediate past president of the Barbados Squash Association, I plan to continue to promote health and educational opportunities through sport. Barbados is the current Caribbean Champion in Junior Squash and I want to

see Barbados continue to develop athletes that earn scholarships to some of the world's top Schools and make an impact on regional and international stages. Last month I started a new project which supports the training of national squash athletes at no cost to them and I am the manager of the Junior Team taking part in the upcoming Caribbean championships in July.

It has been a tremendous journey for me so far and it is my dream to continue the future expansion and development of eyecare, eye research, education and health and educational opportunities through sport. With this award it will assist me in expanding my work further throughout the Caribbean and I look forward to what the future has in store for me. I understand the responsibility of being an Anthony N Sabga Laureate. I am greatly humbled and through my work I hope to continue to maintain the high standards set by past Laureates of this most prestigious award. Thanks again to all concerned for the great honour and to The Most Honourable Dame Sandra Mason.







## Public & Civic Contributions



responsibility very seriously. And what I want to share with you is what today is not about: *No, you're too young; or Nobody is doing this; I don't know of any other women doing that; I don't see this happening in the near future--* many Nos.

But today isn't about those Nos, the doubts and disbeliefs I've had on my journey to becoming a Laureate of the Anthony N Sabga Awards.

I did not even know that was a possibility for me. What I missed in my journey was role models, to see people from my background, my country, my environment, as successful as this platform is making me today. I'm always very humbled when people come up to me and say: "Can I take a selfie with you? You're my role

It's very special for me to be here and to be nominated amongst people like Mr Shyam Nokta, Dr Kim Jebodhsingh, Mr Marlon James and Prof Christine Carrington, because I'm the first from Suriname.

I'm not the first child in my family but I still know what the pressure is to be the first child, as my older sister is always complaining that as the first, she always had this big responsibility, so I take this

model." And it's usually young people, youth and women.

I always feel that I have a big responsibility to do the right things. So being here today, I want to thank the Anthony N Sabga Awards, Caribbean Excellence, and the ANSA McAL Foundation, that you are creating this platform.

If you read my biography, you will see that I have been misunderstood for





## E-News

# *Anuskha Varsha Sonai, Suriname*

always trying to be excellent in whatever I do. And always asking for my team to put out excellent performances and always deliver to the highest quality standards and always trying to become better and better. Some people thought it was over-competitive and not healthy. But with an award in excellence, you make it look like it's a way to go if you want to achieve. It's important to be excellent if you want to become a leader in your work field. So thank you for that.

I want to give special thanks to the Guyana Nominating Committee, who had the courage to nominate me, and then fight for it. Thank you so much. I want to thank also the Anthony Sabga Awards itself, for organising this, for giving me this platform, and for helping me to propel my movement, in creating a sustainable digital economy in the Caribbean.

I want to thank my parents, for their strictness in my upbringing, that always asked that I come with good school marks, but also to be active and helpful in the neighbourhood, and help those in need, and with everything happening in our community; for always instilling in us that it's important to serve, and learn to share whatever you have. They insisted that if you have something, share it with someone else, even if they don't ask for it or don't need it.

That has been a great driving force for me to establish a social enterprise, where whatever we earn and when we make a profit, we are able to share that with those who are not able to pay for their own training and education, especially women and youth, and especially people in the rural areas.

I want to thank my business partners, especially Vincentius Kensil for hiring me when I was very young, and giving me his company as a platform where I could create more companies. I am so glad that I got that opportunity and we have created an ICT hub here in the

Caribbean. I want to thank the people from the Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago animation networks, Anime Caribe, our biggest festival in the Caribbean, and each and every other team member, who believe in my vision to create a sustainable digital economy in the Caribbean.

I want to thank my nieces and nephews, for keeping me sharp and reminding me who I'm doing this for, for the next generation to come.





## Science & Technology



First of all, a hearty “thank you” to the selectors of The Anthony N Sabga Awards, Caribbean Excellence, who have chosen me for this honour. I accept it with gratitude for the achievements in

science that I have been fortunate to be part of, particularly in the recent years. I accept it most wholeheartedly for the light it shines on the community without which I would not be standing here. It’s a large village of mostly unseen, tireless, energetic and engaged people that I represent tonight.

There’s an old saying: ‘If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together.’ Together... I believe in Together. I have always travelled with a village...a posse...a group. I have been happiest as part of a team, a couple, a community. And it is to that village, that community, that country of engaged citizens that I belong.

I was born with an older sister, Elsa, and joined by a younger, Helen, so in my family I was never alone. I thank my parents and first teachers Lawrence and Cecile, all the teachers who came after them, my sisters and my extended family, and the tight communities of my youth in St Augustine, Orange Grove and at St Augustine Girls’ High School.

It is these communities that nurtured me and from which lifelong friendships came, among them my cheerleaders: Lisa James-Manswell, Aneela Narinesingh-Dindial, Reisha Rafeek-Naidu and Samantha Tross. These friends, others from my university years in London (who dubbed me a “girlie swot” and taught me drinking games), and my local posse of Holistic [Primary School] parents,

are the people who encouraged and supported me at work and at play...and who kept me very firmly grounded with plenty picong and good humour.



## E-News

# *Prof Christine Carrington, Trinidad & Tobago*

My passion for biological sciences and research is largely driven by curiosity and a love of learning. I became intrigued with viruses in high school (to be honest this was mainly because they reminded of the alien invaders in the sci-fi books I enjoyed). But by the time I graduated, in the midst of the devastating HIV pandemic, the importance of understanding viruses was clear.

In the UK, I found the intellectual community where my world of viruses was challenged and shaped by collegial researchers and professors. I am so grateful to have been part of the teams of Professors Robin Weiss and Thomas Schulz, under whose expert supervision I completed my PhD at the Institute of Cancer Research; and [Professor] Eddie Holmes who later hosted me as a Commonwealth Fellow at the University of Oxford and introduced me to the world of virus evolution. In addition to the training that I received under their guidance, I was welcomed into the global network of virologists, evolutionary biologists and bioinformaticians who continue to inspire and support me.

I recognize and thank The University of the West Indies, which has been a part of my life since I was a child (my father was a staff member and The UWI was my playground). The institution and so many individuals supported and facilitated the development of the infrastructure and expertise that allowed us to respond when our region was in need.

It is never easy in a setting such as ours; sometimes it is two steps forward and one step back.

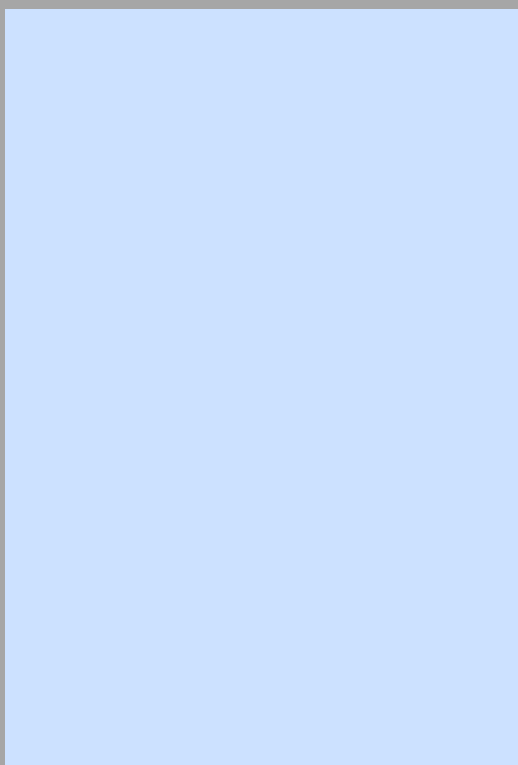
For me, those ‘two steps forward’ were possible with the advice, support, collaboration and friendship of colleagues like Professors Dan Ramdath, Michele Monteil, Abiodun Adesiyun, Jonas Addae and Chris Oura.

I have found fulfilment with my little team of ever resourceful and hardworking graduate students, post-docs and technicians—scientists, researchers, seekers of truth who have pushed me to continue learning (and who keep me young). I can’t name them all (it’s been 26 years at UWI!).

Today, I want to recognize and thank Nikita Sahadeo, Vernie Ramkissoon, Anushka Ramjag, Arianne Brown-Jordan, Soren Nicholls and Nicholas Mohammed who supported the fight, the Ministry, the country and the Caribbean in the battle against Covid-19.

My husband, Axel Kravatzky, and our two children, Lukas and Mia, are my final and forever team; and it is my dearest wish that they will always feel secure, happy and comfortable in the larger family that is our community.

I stand here on the shoulders of a wonderful “giant” community, and I accept this award on their behalf.







# *Presentations*



*Above HE Dame Sandra Mason, President of Barbados, presents Dr Kim Jebodhsingh with her medal*

*Below HE President Paula Mae Weekes of Trinidad & Tobago presents Prof Christine Carrington with her medal*





ANTHONY N. SABGA AWARDS  
Caribbean Excellence



E-News

# Presentations



*Above: Marlon James receives his prize from Deputy-Governor General of Jamaica, The Hon Steadman Fuller*

*Below: HE Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of Guyana, with Shyam Nokta and Anuska Sonai*



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