
BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH IN DENBIGH: A REVIEW

"In the future, Black People will speak Welsh." Benjamin Zephaniah, Oral Poet - live at 'Denbigh Words', 4th February 2004

Denbigh Town Hall was packed to capacity with an audience of 300 on a Wednesday night to listen to two unusual poets. First up was "punk poet", John Cooper-Clarke, who gave a hilarious performance, a wild mix of stand-up, poetry and rant. I had gone to hear the second of the evening's performers, thought-provoking Brummie Rastafarian, Benjamin Zephaniah, best known perhaps for his modern version of Kipling's "If" commissioned by the BBC:

*"If you seek peace in times of war creation,
And you can see that oil merchants are to blame..."*

*"If you can speak the truth to common people
Or walk with Kings and Queens and live no lie..."*

Extracts from "What If", The Nation's Favourite Twentieth Century Poems.

The above poem is unusual as most of his poetry is written in Patois and strongly influenced by the music of Jamaica. To be fully appreciated, Benjamin's work deserves to be heard rather than read, hence his preferred title of oral poet. His other inclusion in The Nation's Favourites, "Dis Poetry", illustrates this.

He pulls no punches with his "rantin'" on racism, animal rights, pollution and, perhaps influenced by having a twin sister, Zephaniah believes that boys and girls should be treated equally. He is passionately vegan and a member of Poets Against the War.

Benjamin is not for air-heads - I swear the hair on my neck stood to attention during the recital of "What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us" -

*"..never to take the tedious task
Of waiting for a bus for granted."*



*Benjamin Zephaniah,
Oral Poet*

Taking a swipe at political correctness gone mad, he lampooned white people marching against apartheid when the real problem was what to rename "black coffee", "blackboards" and other heinous wording!

Benjamin spoke fondly of his grandmother in Jamaica who never saw more than sixty pounds in her life. He also commented on fair trade and the Jamaican currency of "good-will" which kept his grandmother afloat in hard times.

His recital of "Turkeys" was in response to the call for an encore. But I didn't hear it too well, since I left the gallery as soon as the final applause began and went backstage in the hope of securing Zephaniah for a WPJF event: no chance for this year but a possibility for next.

This review would not be complete without mentioning his recent stand against the British Empire - Benjamin strikes back!

"There is something very strange about receiving a letter from Tony Blair's office asking me if I want to accept this award [OBE]. In the past couple of months, I've been on Blair's doorstep a few times. I have begged him to come out and meet me but he won't come out and now here he is asking me to meet him at the palace!"*
Quoted in The Guardian, Thursday 27th Nov. 2003.

*He was there with a million people, Feb 15 2003

More info. On: www.benjaminzephaniah.com

REMEMBERING HILDA MURRELL: 20 YEARS ON

21st March 2004 will be the 20th anniversary of the last time Hilda Murrell was seen alive before she was found murdered on 24 March. Hilda was a keen naturalist, pioneering environmentalist and founder member of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, as well as a dedicated anti-nuclear campaigner. Hilda's friends and acquaintances are invited to celebrate, with her nephew Rob Green, her life and many interests over the weekend 20-21 March.

Saturday 20 March Field Trip to Hilda's Favourite Haunts. 10am.

Sunday 21 March A Celebration of Hilda's Life. 2.30pm Admission £2.50

More information about both events from Stella Reid (01743 284280)