

Birmingham

What do you make of a city, now and then?

In half an hour Hancock cheered a nation
With bright yellow custard and purple wrapped chocolate - we sweetened the world
From India, with love and Balti, we set fire to the nations taste buds
In mini car dreams we drove the world forward
From Ozzy's restless Black Sabbath to Bhangra beats, Steel Pulse and hip hop
We rocked this city and shook the world - by its ear.
From Spitfires at war and Jaguars in peace
From industrial skill, metal and magic
with Irish shovels and picks we cut and made canals
made this place better.

Baskerville, he knew the type
and made a world of ideas more legible
Rattle, he rolled into town, tapped his baton and made the air musical
William Murdock walked 300 miles south to be at the centre of it all
Burned with industrial ambition, coal and piped gas
through a gun barrel - took pot shots at darkness
and lit up the world - for us - with gas light and magic
The workshop of the world carries on, today
with drama, music, dance and stories - close to home and in the centre.

We minted, sweetened, spiced up and lit up the world - for you
We built up and made up this city today, with imagination
And check this out, it doesn't stop - soon - a new city library
and academy for ideas -
squeeze sun light out of cucumbers in Digbeth? Maybe.
Walk round a new city park and play, be human, in Birmingham,
Run it with Denise Lewis, boot it -Trevor Francis!
Rap it with Zephaniah and Moqapi - have it your way.
Listen, hear, today, make this city young, like they always did
with industry, imagination and small, brilliant, you
in the middle lands with bright light of Birmingham
"oh, say you'll come?"
"Bab, you're welcome,"
make a life
a city
a contribution.

Adrian Johnson

Birmingham poet laureate, 2009/2010
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set in Baskerville font, created by John Baskerville in Birmingham, 1757

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