



Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah, 1958 - 2023

A Biographical Sketch by Ben Hall Taken from Freedom News (2023)

On Thursday, 7th December 2023, it was announced that Benjamin Zephaniah, aged sixty-five, had passed away in the early hours with his wife by his side; eight weeks prior, he had been diagnosed with a brain tumour. Born 15th April 1958, he leaves behind a vast legacy of poems, literature, music, television and radio. Benjamin lived an extraordinary life; he was a phenomenal person who created innovative art that positively impacted multiple generations. A poet, author, musician, performer and activist are just a few of the labels that capture the man, but if truth be told, he was a force of nature whose death leaves an enormous void on humanity that can only be partially quenched by the body of work he left behind for us.

When I was asked to write an obituary on Benjamin's passing, I was daunted by the task because how can any words truly convey the free-spirited nature of his outlook, art and life? While I will struggle to articulate every achievement across his adventurous time on Earth, I want to remember him framed through my personal experiences of being lucky enough to have known and worked with him. Benjamin was warm-spirited, insightful, and basically an all-around incredible human being.

The term 'man of the people' often gets bandied about, especially by the political class, to make themselves seem ordinary and not abhorrent to the wider population. It is a cliché I hesitate to use, but it describes how I feel about Benjamin Zephaniah. He was a real 'man of the people', championing the underclass and oppressed throughout his life while steadfastly remaining grounded to his roots. The outpouring of sentiments since his passing and numerous positive recollections and personal memories of people's interactions with Benjamin reaffirm the notion that he connected with and inspired so many.

Born in April 1958 in Birmingham, Benjamin began performing poetry as a teenager despite struggling at school with dyslexia; he was kicked out of education, unable to read and write, but would later go on in his life to achieve multiple honorary degrees and become a Professor of Creative Writing at Brunel University. He was sent to a borstal detention centre as a youth and was incarcerated in prison

