



BIOGRAPHIES

for burglary as a teen. From humble beginnings with the odds of success stacked against him, he would become a 'titan of British literature' (The Black Writers Guild) who would entertain and provoke with his words. He moved to London in 1978, releasing his first poetry collection, *Pen Rhythm* and performing at political protests against racism, Police brutality, and Apartheid in South Africa.

His writing is included in the National Curriculum and has inspired multiple generations; I have had countless people tell me how they loved his poems growing up; his impact alone on inspiring children with poetry is extraordinary. It's difficult to summarise his vast output, but it is worth mentioning *Rasta Time In Palestine*, inspired by his visit to the occupied territories and *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us*, as a response to the racist murder. His poetry has always been relevant to the times and situations around him, often outspoken and championing the oppressed. Even his children's poetry, like *Talking Turkeys*, encapsulates his passion for animal rights and Veganism. Benjamin was a righteous man, motivated to uplift the poor and marginalised; he was the perfect living embodiment of the Rasta archetype. Thoughtful, intelligent, engaging, entertaining, sharp and witty.

Alongside poetry, he also wrote several books, such as *Refugee Boy*, exploring the topic of political asylum as it follows a young man fleeing war in East Africa who comes to London. Benjamin's writing was hugely influenced by Jamaican culture, and he was considered a 'Dub Poet'. He had a prolific musical career producing several albums, and he was the first person to perform with The Wailers in a tribute to Nelson Mandela after the death of Bob Marley. He was also an actor; he appeared in fourteen episodes of *Peaky Blinders* set in his home town of Birmingham. He was a hugely proud Brummie. Benjamin took his food and health very seriously, kept himself in good shape, and was an expert in martial arts. He was a man of peace and love, but I'm sure he could have been a ninja if he wanted to.

I was lucky enough to meet and work with Benjamin; we became good friends, and I feel deeply honoured that I was able to share time with such an amazing person. I first met him in 2005; over that year, I was involved in directing/producing four music videos for his *Naked* album, plus we also shot some short poems around his house for a DVD project. Since his passing, many people have spoken about how approachable and open he was; I initially contacted his agent, trying to get him in my debut no-budget feature film, *The Plague*. I was surprised when Benjamin phoned me to say he was away, so he couldn't do the film but wished me well. I ended up posting him a copy of the final film, which resulted in him sending me his upcoming album, *Naked*. I was a nobody zero-budget filmmaker, but he wanted to work with me, so we began making our first video together at Rong Radio Station.

