



Benjamin Zephaniah

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Benjamin Zephaniah and Danish/Pakistani rapper Ataf shared a stage at the downtown Copenhagen venue Huset on 28 October when the British Embassy and British Council co-presented an integration-themed rap and poetry evening for an invited audience of young Danes.

Benjamin Zephaniah kicked off the evening with a reading of his poems which stimulated great enthusiasm from an audience almost entirely unfamiliar with his work. His performance style communicated his sense with remarkable clarity to his Danish-speaking listeners. After his set he took questions across a range of subjects, artistic and personal, starting off with a blunt “What do you think of Britain?” (“We have a lot still to learn but we have come a long way...”)

Ataf began his set with his song “Butterfly”, received rapturously, and ended with my Home Town Copenhagen. In between, he gave his audience a frank, funny, moving and sometimes chilling account of how it was to grow up between two cultures. His father, like Zephaniah's, he said, had a special room in which he told his son how to behave. In both cases, rebellion followed.

Opening the show, Ambassador Nick Archer told the packed room that he was proud to be presenting Benjamin Zephaniah to a new audience and looking forward as much as them to hearing Ataf perform. Talking afterwards to audience members, he acknowledged that the evening was about immigration and integration. But the point was not to preach. Showcasing and contrasting two human stories should allow food for thought to emerge very naturally. Judging from the audience response to the event, that seemed to happen.