

Introducing *Zebra* by Ian Humphreys



About Ian's Poetry:

In *Zebra*, a boy steps tentatively from the shadows onto a strobe-lit dancefloor. This debut shimmers with music, wit and humour while exploring mixed identities, otherness, and coming-of-age as a gay man in 1980s Manchester. These acutely-observed, joyful poems pay homage to those who took the first steps – minority writers, LGBT civil rights activists, 70s queer night-clubbers and the poet's own mixed-race parents.

A heady cocktail of the playful, political and mythical, Humphreys' *Zebra* is also a creature of opposites – light and dark, countryside and cityscape, highs and lows. The collection moves from semi-rural England to the metropolitan hubs of Hong Kong, London and New York, circling its subjects, often finding the uncanny in the familiar, always drawing the reader centre-stage.

“Ian has an enviable gift of finding final lines of poems, many of which are seared on the surface of my memory. With astonishing deftness, he is able to latch onto an image or scenario and orbit its circumference, re-examining, exploring and transforming what is there. Ian's work is lit with humour and wit, music and rhyme, which he employs with a lightness of touch. He is a natural poet with a highly individualist style; relaxed long lines and an instinct for allowing a piece to breathe.” – **Mona Arshi**

Read about how and why Ian wrote his poem 'Another boy's story' here:

<https://ninearchespress.blogspot.com/2019/02/in-conversation-ian-humphreys-for-lgbt.html>

Hear Ian on Andrew McMillan's Rich Seams podcast, Episode 5:

<http://newwritingnorth.com/podcast/podcast-rich-seams/>

Key poems to read:

Touch-me-not

Another boy's story

Manchester Youth Group, 1983

Into the frying pan

High Society

Dim sum decorum

Bare branch

London, 1997; Hong Kong, 1995

Glamour Puss

The man in the rah-rah skirt

Return of the discotheque dancers

Discussion points:

- Which poems did you find the most memorable on first reading, and why?
- What do you think is the one key theme of the book?
- What kind of language does the poet use, and what kind of effect does it have on the reader or listener?
- How does the title of the book, *Zebra*, make you reflect on the poems inside?
- Would you recommend this book, and would you share it with someone who maybe hasn't read or enjoyed a poetry book before? If so, which poem would you choose to share with them to convince them they might enjoy it?

Suggested activities for reading groups:

- Split off into groups of two, and find a space in order to take time to read each other a poem from the book. Discuss why you choose your poem, and share your reaction to the poem your partner chooses.
- Read one of the longer poems from this book in the round – reading a line each and going around the group.
- Choose a favourite word, line or stanza (verse) each, and share it with the group.