

## CELEBRATE WHA'?

### TEN BLACK BRITISH POETS FROM THE WEST MIDLANDS

edited by Eric Doumerc  
and Roy McFarlane

- Anthology of Black British poets based in and around Birmingham.
- Co-edited by Birmingham's current Poet Laureate.
- Also incorporates performance poetry and music.

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### Ten Black British Poets



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About *Celebrate Wha'?* edited by Eric Doumerc and Roy McFarlane

*Celebrate Wha'?* is an anthology of poems about identity and race, curried goat 'n' rice. Ten poets – Dreadlock Alien, Sue Brown, Marcia Calame, Evoke, Martin Glynn, Michelle Hubbard, Kokumo, Roy McFarlane, Chester Morrison and Moqapi Selassie – explore what it means to be black and British and from the West Midlands.

This is the English language in a Caribbean coat, Auden in a Creole accent. *Celebrate Wha'?* celebrates writing with a reggae rhythm, born out of a heady mixture of dub, grime and performance poetry, politics and music, anger and laughter.

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**About the editors:** Eric Doumerc teaches English at the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail in France. His books include *Caribbean Civilisation: The English-Speaking Caribbean since Independence* (2003; ISBN 9782858166992) and *An Introduction to Poetry in English* (2007; ISBN 9782858169214). Roy McFarlane was born in Birmingham of Jamaican parentage. He is a Community Development Worker in Dudley and Walsall. His play *For the Love of Auset* was premiered at The Drum, Aston, in 2007. He is a former Starbucks poet in residence and a member of the New October Poets. He is currently Birmingham's Poet Laureate.



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## What is the story behind the book?

In 2006 Birmingham Poet Laureate Roi Kwabena and Eric Doumeric from the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail in France launched an anthology called *Five Birmingham Poets*, a collection of interviews and poetry of five prominent poets. These were voices from the African Caribbean community, born or living in the Birmingham area. Roi wanted to go further with a collection of 10 Birmingham Poets unfortunately he passed away in 2008 and was unable to realise his dream.

In 2009 Eric Doumerc and Roy Mcfarlane Birmingham Poet Laureate revitalised the project, by asking 10 poets to submit a selection of poems. No general themes were suggested but what we found is a common theme of identity, injustice and an integral insight through the lens of these black poets. In 2009 after doing the circuit of re-known and independent publishers, all responding with positive and encouraging feedback, the project found a welcoming home in the stables of Smokestack books. Andy Croft provided valuable feedback and suggested we re-name the collection as *Celebrate Wha*.

*Celebrate Wha* not only introduces us to 10 Poets from Birmingham and surrounding area but it is an anthology about identity and race, curried goat 'n' rice, poets exploring what it means to be black and British and from the Midlands.

Moqapi's *Celebrate Wha* and Kokumo's *Check-Out Mista Govament Man* are examples of the dub poetry found in this collection politically infused in language and message. These poems challenge the idea of celebrating freedom and governments living in a fantasy far removed from a third world reality.

Sue Brown takes us on a journey around *Birmingham* which is truly multi-cultural. Michelle Hubbard *Twelfth CD-Track Nine* is Auden on the streets of Nottingham or any other urban city. Marcia Calamie *Speak English* is a culinary delight fully spiced with callaloo and saltfish.

Martin Glynn takes us on an introspective journey *to whom it may concern* and *I found my father's love letters* by Roy Mcfarlane explores the journey of absent fathers. Chester Morrison challenges the notion that a good black man can't be found in his humorous *Some Black Men*.

DreadlockAlien reminds us that *I am whatever colour you see*, a lyrical word marathon on identity followed by Evoke *We* the youngest member in the book, a poem that is profound in light of the disturbances across the UK in August 2011.

A lot of the poets within this collection follow the tradition of the griot. A griot supplies a historical chronicle of events through poetry. A way to identify and to show light on events that affects the marginalised, the disenfranchised and those simply without any stake in society. Many of these poets have worked with excluded youngsters, gang affiliations, prisons, women abused and rape and domestic violence, all using poetry as an outlet.

Hopefully people will feel *the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings* written and evoked from the writers within this series when they read this book. Sometimes writing can be straight jacketed, needs to be written in a certain form, articulated in a certain way before writers of an African diaspora are allowed on to the page. But in this collection there is a freedom, allowing individuals to express themselves and staying true to what they have entrusted into this collection.

Hopefully will read and experience the carnival of poetry that portrays the life and culture of the black community within the Midlands. Someone asked me once why does my poetry always have to be angry and certainly over the last few years I've added something more diverse to my cache of poetry, but poetry should reflect that moment, that reality, that lived experience and sometimes it will be angry, intense and challenging.

But also this collection shows the humour and the simple mundane, everyday reflection of the world around us. But there is a desire for these poems to be owned by the readers, that they will get an insight into the injustices, the struggles and the immediacy for change.