

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Sonnets for the Newton Aycliffe Youth Centre

By Hannah Lowe
Durham Book Festival Laureate 2022

Doors

It's like rummaging through the bedroom drawers
in an upstairs room of a house that isn't yours –
easy to imagine, but impossible to know
what those die-hard kids in bags and brogues
were feeling, popping blueys or black bombers,
spinning on the floors of a youth centre
long since knocked down – though I have danced,
years later, in the old and cavernous coal shed

behind Kings Cross, different pills and sounds
but the same all-nighter feel, the morning-after-
stumbling into daylight and the boring world.
Paul says the one door opens on another,
that his Nan, a maid in service in London,
took cocaine all night and danced the Charleston.

Automatic Musical Instrument

He buys a jukebox with his pension, an AMI,
like the one they had in Cofficana
fifty years ago, those churning Sundays,
the speed pills wearing off, their morning
eyes still spinning like the DJ's vinyl.
And now he finds himself in record stores
at weekends, fingering the stacks of singles,
remembering that boy in Scarborough

who sold him records, which filled the second bedroom
and which, when newly married with a baby
he swapped with a baker for a turquoise mini.
This was '83. Now the kids have gone.
Do I Love You? fills the empty rooms.
His wife in the hallway, laughing. *Remember this song?*

Aycliffe

Call it a fluke: for three months in summer '73
the 'Youthy' was the only soul all-nighter.
The older kids had been to Manchester,
hauling back with them a jamboree
of soul and style – Oxford bags and blazers,
the Drifters, Jackie Wilson. The Torch had gone,
the Twisted Wheel, VaVas in Bolton
closed at 2, which left a crew of teenagers

to beckon dancers, DJs, rare collectors
to catch the national rail to Aycliffe village
and stomp and backdrop past the ping-pong tables.
They made a flier with a record label
and not wanting anyone to know their age
they left out 'Youth' and advertised 'The Centre'.

Youth Culture

My older brother Peter went to Durham.
He was there in '73. We had his picture
in our album – a ginger shirt, flared denims,
John Lennon glasses, a hippy ripple of hair.
When I got to know him later, he said
he'd joined the croquet club and folk-danced with a sword.
He loved the Telleman Sonata, he played
the bass recorder. He liked the harpsichord.

He wasn't in the crowd of students who wanted
Slade and Mud and Gary Glitter, and stormed
the Aycliffe kids' all-dayer, throwing punches,
getting punched – a cartoony kind of ruckus –
not Mods v Rockers, not even brains v brawn.
Pete was probably on the croquet lawn.