

West Port Book Festival – Luke Williams & William Letford



Luke Williams

by Sonja Bettina Klein

Book festivals are about books and poems, obviously. But they are also about the people who write and tell the stories and poems. Yesterday at the West Port Book Festival, Luke Williams read from his first and very new novel, *The Echo Chamber*, and William Letford recited some of his award-winning poems.

Cramped into a small second hand bookshop in West Port, surrounded by old books and the smell of literature, about twenty people from young to old allowed themselves to be carried away.

Luke Williams who began his career studying history at Edinburgh University did not simply read from his book, he drew the listener into the story – a story about a middle-aged woman called Evie Steppman who grew up in Lagos in the 1950s and had extraordinarily acute powers of hearing. She spends most of her time alone in an attic in Scotland and when starting to lose her hearing abilities, decides to write down her memories.

“She is quite a freak.”, said Williams about his character. “I used a rather unusual style of writing because I tried to put a talk to paper the way it reaches the ears.”

“I also decided to place the story in a different country because I think every writer needs a bit of distance to the story and I needed quite a bit more. So I picked a country I

have never been to and that is far away.”

Open to all sorts of questions, William soon tells the listeners how he got the story idea that was partially inspired by history as well.

“As you can see my ears are sticking out quite a bit. When I was a kid and got teased about it, at night I used to think I had these amazing powers of hearing everything because of my ears.”

It was Williams’ humour and self-honesty that made the audience laugh and be swept away by the story. There is no face in the room that is bored or not hanging on to his every word.



William Letford

And so after that it was the perfect moment for William Letford to begin reciting his poems. Letford received the New Writer’s Award from the Scottish Book Trust in 2008 for his work. He talked freely with a light smile throughout the whole performance. With his Scottish accent, the up and down intonations of his voice coupled with his humour, the audience did not have any option but to listen and laugh. Ranging from more serious topics to romantic and unusual descriptions of making love he covered a wide range of emotions.

“In winter, I fight 50 battles from the duvet to the front door – and win.”, he says in one of his poems and it is not hard to imagine him in the morning on a cold winter day, knowing he will have to go outside for the day.

At the end of the event, the applause did not easily stop and most of us could have listened longer to Letford and Williams. But then the audience is best left wanting more surely?

If you would like to hear the Luke Williams’ reading or

William Letford's recital, then go to the [West Port Book Festival website](#) but I also conducted a couple of short interviews with both Williams and Letford:-

[Interview with William Letford at Westport Book Festival 2011 \(mp3\)](#)

[Interview with Luke Williams at Westport Book Festival 2011 \(mp3\)](#)