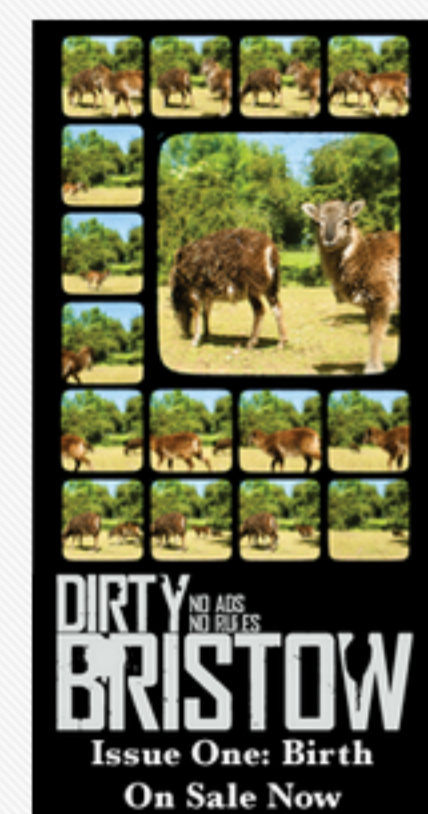




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## Danny Smith: A Christmas Carol

20 December 2010

By Danny Smith

The life of a blogger is nothing if not glamorous, only last week I was backstage at the dress rehearsal for 3P's marvellous version of The Nativity. Even before the performance, the squash was flowing and more than a couple of biscuits were passed around. Amid all the revelry the pre-performance jitters were in evidence: the third Wise Man had to be cajoled to climb out of the book cupboard and several shepherds had to be persuaded from kicking their prop sheep out of the window altogether.

The performance was a masterpiece, including an entirely improvised bank robbery sub-plot and a song and dance number that went on for three or four extra verses because none of the cast could remember how to end the song. I'm proud to be a part of such a game changing version of the Christmas story, which this year focussed completely on the story of the shepherds as 3P has no girls in it to play Mary. Granted, my role was to stand in the wings and push the correct performer to his mark at their cue. I got pretty good too, I now reckon I can shove an average-sized seven year old with an Olympic degree of accuracy.

Now did the Christmas story lose anything with the actual nativity scene dropped and a complex armed bank robbery subplot introduced? Not at all, in fact without all the nonsense about virgin births and angels the story made more sense. I applaud 3P and say we should follow their example—let's get the Christ out of Christmas once and for all.

The myth of Winterval is a strangely enduring one. Apart from being at best a misunderstanding, and at worst propaganda from the vicious lumbering right, it is most resonate for me because it's a model of what should be happening, the gradual decrease of superstition from our lives. The church in this country is failing, even if it was never the strict pit bull of Catholicism or rattlesnake of reactionism of America. In fact, rebelling against the Church of England seems a little churlish, like arguing with a nan, but the fact still remains that religion is silly and if people wish to practice their superstitions that should be their choice, not the enforced norm.

But rather than our Council killing Christmas, what you think of as Christmas was actually born in Birmingham.

Most of our notions of modern Christmas come from the Victorian author Charles Dickens, who being the rock star of his time toured the country reading from 'A Christmas Carol'. Turning a then barley-noticed mark on the calendar into the jolly family orientated affair we associate today. He really saw the value of a time of year where we take time to connect with family and give out nothing but love. The story of Scrooge is ultimately one of redemption, not one of spiritual redemption but one of redemption through the forgiveness of others and connection with his family. The place where Chucky D chose to first read from this book? Birmingham Town Hall, So really Birmingham is Christmas's Bethlehem.

I don't care which god, ghost or monster you worship or how you celebrate any festival, as long as you're not hurting others its fine by me. Be that eating the body of your zombie lord or handling snakes or lighting candles, really... go for your life, it's fine. But if the Christian traditions are fading away from the festival we would celebrate anyway, is it such a bad thing?

As long as we come together in our communities and families take a few minutes to connect and show each other how much we care does it matter if it's somebody's make believe birthday, be it Osaris's, Mithra's, Jesus's or Dionysus's.

*The opinions of Danny Smith do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers of this blog, its affiliates, or any sane adult human beings. He currently lives in your cupboard, watching, always watching. With his Yule log in his hand.*

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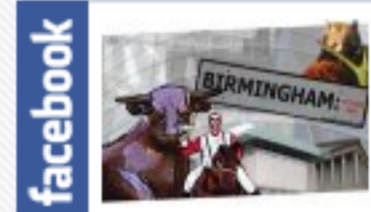
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