



# Michael Rosen: Still hip after all these years

By Ruth Anders

Funny, mercurial, moving, heartbreaking – all these characteristics apply to the prolific award-winning author Michael Rosen. On a dark evening in March, the warm and welcoming Katrina Thompson hosted 20 or so enthusiastic guests to meet local resident Michael in the cosy back room of the Muswell Hill Books & Parlour.

At almost 80, and after nearly dying from Covid, he is still writing books and poems for children and adults, working as professor of children's literature at Goldsmiths, presenting Word of Mouth on BBC Radio 4, visiting schools and planning an extensive one-man tour.

"I'm still doing hip young groovy things," he added with a twinkle. His books for adults were flying off the counter before the evening began.

Hannah Masson, sister of the bookshop's owner Chris, opened the proceedings by reading some of her witty and original poems, and then Michael launched into tales of his childhood in Pinner where "my parents came from something called 'Before the War'". His writing career started at age seven with a competition-winning tale about 'Solomon the Cat'. He told us about the story behind his recovery from the near-death experience with Covid, and his resulting book *Many Different Kinds of Love*.

He described some of the Jewish food recipes his mother made, and the story of eating hot potato that has made him famous as a meme worldwide. "I even get stopped in the street in China," said Michael. "Just look up Michael Rosen Hot Food." There were fond memories about the difficulty



Tales to tell: Michael Rosen in Muswell Hill. Photo Mike Coles

of opening corned beef cans, alongside tales of sadness relating to the death of his son Eddie, which inspired his book Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*, engaging for both children and adults.

He mentioned his relationship with his illustrious illustrators, including "the formidable" Helen Oxenbury. We heard about how children respond to his poems and, as he said, "The great thing about kids is that there are always new kids, so my old routines can keep going."

We left the shop cheered and inspired by our time with Michael and wish Muswell Hill Books & Parlour every success with their upcoming events. See [www.muswellhillbooks.co.uk](http://www.muswellhillbooks.co.uk).

## Music and beer in Muswell Hill

Two local professional musicians are hosting an evening of tunes on Sunday 24 May from 7pm at Muswell Hill-billies Brewery Taproom in Ave Mews, Muswell Hill, to raise money for Refugee Community Kitchen.

Violinist Kath Roberts and guitarist Peter Thornton both play in the West End, professional orchestras and the London folk scene. Expect music from folk to Stevie Wonder to Gershwin. Refugee Community

Kitchen serves nutritious food without judgement to those fleeing war, poverty, persecution, and climate change, living in northern France and the UK. Tickets are on sale at [RCKfundraiser.eventbrite.co.uk](http://RCKfundraiser.eventbrite.co.uk) with a suggested donation minimum of £10 per ticket.



Professional musicians play guitar and violin



Fantastic: Author A.Y. Chao, right, with friends at her book launch party. Photo Justine Csaky

## Author expands her mythical universe

By Justine Csaky

Bestselling author and East Finchley resident A.Y. Chao celebrated the publication of her latest fantasy novel with a 1930s-themed party in Soho.

*Paris Celestial* is set in 1830s Lijiang and 1930s Shanghai and Paris, places inspired by her time as a student in Paris and China, while the humour is drawn from her love of quirky comedy à la Saturday Night Live, Kids in the Hall and The League of Gentlemen as well as the more recent *What We Do in*

the Shadows. A sequel to her Sunday Times bestselling debut *Shanghai Immortal*, it follows the adventures of Lady Jing, a hundred-year-old half-fox spirit, half-vampire with a bad attitude. All Lady Jing wants is to escape Shanghai and spend time with her mortal beau Tony Lee.

The alternate-mythology historical fantasy is a Marie Kondo-ing of influences from Chao's life, including deities and creatures from Chinese mythology. Published by Hodderscape, the novel is available now in bookshops and on Amazon.

## Join a creative community in East Finchley

Would you like to be part of a local cooperative artistic community? The East Finchley Open Artists Group (EFOA) is currently inviting practising artists from all disciplines to join.



The group holds meetings, invites speakers and organises social events including a Christmas party. It offers support groups for various artistic disciplines, but most of all it offers a creative community and friendship.

EFOA also supports local charities, proposed by members. This year it is raising funds in support of Community Focus, an arts centre for adults and children with disabilities, autism or anyone who feels they need extra support.

The group's largest annual event is the Artists Open Houses at the end of June, an art trail of member spaces around East Finchley and surrounding areas. This year the event takes place on Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 June, and Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 July, from midday to 6pm. For more information or to join via an online application, visit [eastfinchleyopen.org.uk](http://eastfinchleyopen.org.uk)

**COMING SOON AT ARTSDEPOT**

**GARY STEWART PRESENTS PAUL SIMON'S GRACELAND**  
Sat 9 May

**PULMAN & STILGOE: HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD**  
Thu 14 May

**TALES FROM ACORN WOOD**  
Fri 22 - Tue 26 May

**STILL POINTLESS: BALLETTYBOYZ AT 25**  
Thu 4 & Fri 5 Jun

...and lots more!  
See the full line up at [artsdepot.co.uk](http://artsdepot.co.uk)

**arts depot** Box Office: 020 8369 5454  
[artsdepot.co.uk](http://artsdepot.co.uk)  
artsdepot, North Finchley, N12 0GA