

JAY MASON-BURNS

The Middleway: it's a livin' thing

I walked the A4540, the Middleway, Birmingham's Middle ring road, all the way around in one go. I started and finished at Belgrave Middleway by the junction with the A38 Bristol Road, walking in an anti-clockwise direction. The journey, which took just over four hours, at a distance of ten and a quarter miles, left me tired, elated and yet somewhat at odds with myself. This urban motorway is difficult to walk, the air is dirty, and I felt like I was constantly being repulsed by its polarised anti-pedestrian energies. And yet, despite it all, I came away from the Middleway feeling like I had connected with it, somehow.

Later, whilst I was editing and putting my images in order, this favourite old song came on my MP3 player. Suddenly the Middleway, and how I felt about my experience of walking it, began to make a curious sort of sense. It is alive, a dirty great beast of infrastructure that pulses with the energies and urgencies of modern urban life. It wraps around our great city like an asphalt Mobius strip, moving and turning, slipping and sliding, endlessly circulating the City. It's a livin' thing.

The song is called *Livin' Thing* by the Electric Light Orchestra, one of Birmingham's greatest ever bands. As I look back at these images this is the music I can't help but hear in my head, it transports me back to how I felt travelling along the Middleway. The lyrics to the song are reproduced here.

*Sailin' away on the crest of a wave
It's like magic
Oh, rollin' and ridin' and slipping and sliding
It's magic*

*And you, and your sweet desire,
You took me, ooh, oh, higher and higher, baby*

*It's a livin' thing,
It's a terrible thing to lose
It's a givin' thing
What a terrible thing to lose.*

*I'm taking a dive
Dive, dive, dive,*

*Making believe this is what you've conceived
From your worst day,
(I'm taking a dive)
Moving in line then you look back in time
To the first day
(I'm taking, I'm taking)*

*And you and your sweet desire
(Don't you do it, don't you do it)
You took me
Oh, higher and higher, baby*

*It's a livin' thing
It's a terrible thing to lose
It's a givin' thing
What a terrible thing to lose*

(And I'm taking a dive, on the slide, hey!)

*Takin' a dive 'cause you can't halt the slide
Floating downstream,
(I'm taking a dive)
So let her go don't start spoiling the show
It's a bad dream
(I'm taking, I'm taking)*

*And you and your sweet desire
(Don't you do it, don't you do it)
You took me
Oh, higher and higher, baby*

*It's a living thing
It's a terrible thing to lose
It's a givin' thing
What a terrible thing to lose*

*It's a living thing
It's a terrible thing to lose
It's a givin' thing....*

References

Source: Musixmatch Songwriters: Jeff Lynne Livin' Thing lyrics © EMI Blackwood Music Inc.

Taken from the album 'A New World Record' by the Electric Light Orchestra, 1976

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24th February 2023