

Our Children  
Our Freedom  
& Our Sanity  
Are Under Threat...

Buildings Fall  
Companies Collapse  
Democracy Reels.

Is Business  
As Usual?

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# STAND & DELIVER

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**ILLUSTRATION:** FELIX MAYHEW

**Picture this:** you're sitting through the 84th act of a spoken-word slam event. Everyone's sat waiting for their turn to get on while an egocentric minority at the back guffaw to themselves in a "Yeah, I understand that metaphor!" kind of way.

Now pass me a bucket.

Since Lemn Sissay queried the term 'performance poetry' on The Spoken Word release 'Blackvibe' as far back as 1988, the stuffy image of poetry evenings, not to mention the misapplication of the term, particularly when used as a disingenuous accolade, has come in for a long overdue kicking.

The absence of the term 'performance poetry' in the Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics is equally conspicuous, since the word 'performance' arguably implies an act, which in turn implies an untruth. But Bristol's former reputation as the country's spoken-word capital during the mid to late Nineties helped to bed down the term around the circuit in the South West.

Today's absence of anything resembling the groundbreaking vibrancy of days gone by around the region's spoken-word circuit, has brought the philosophy behind open-mike nights and so-called 'performance poetry' under the spotlight.

So what is performance poetry? Good question - one that's probably best answered firstly by establishing what it isn't. Most people who enjoy the spoken-word in one form or another agree that words intended for the page have never really engaged meaningfully with a live audience. For better or worse, people who pay to be moved, entertained or otherwise at a live event don't want to hear written poems just read out through a mike. Most people also agree that spoken-word events where audiences are essentially made up of poets and other writers, performing almost exclusively to themselves, is a real turn-off that belongs in the dark ages. History has shown that the spoken-word has its roots on the street in the everyday talk of everyday people. Its unique power to communicate with a wider audience across communities is central to its

BRISTOL USED TO BE THE SPOKEN WORD CAPITAL OF THE COUNTRY. NOW, AFTER YEARS OF UNJUSTIFIED SLACK, IS PERFORMANCE POETRY SET TO MAKE A COMEBACK?

appeal. So returning the spirit of poetry and the spoken-word to its source, in providing an artistic focus to the everyday exchanges of all people, is a more pressing issue than ever today.

"A lot of people talk about Martin Luther King and his dream. But if he came back today he'd see a nightmare," explains local poet Andy Veira.

"There are a lot of self-serving individuals on the performance poetry circuit who are less interested in the spoken word's core values of reaching out to the lives of everyday people and providing communities with a voice than with the pampering of their own egos," he adds.

"The only way to get more people raving about the spoken-word again is to support live events that have got their ears to the ground and truly represent. The bigger picture should always come before self-advancement."

Since the masses overdosed on slam events in the run-up to the Millennium, a group of black writers have been charting a fresh course on the region's spoken-word trail at 'Poeticize' - a live monthly event with a difference at Bristol's Chicane Café.

"At Poeticize, we prefer to encourage an atmosphere of community - that as artists and audience alike, we're all in it together," enthuses local poet and co-emcee Doreen Baidoo.

"I believe the event's breaking new ground by taking the spoken-word out to exciting new audiences and presenting it in an unpretentiously funky way that people who might not otherwise come into contact with poetry can relate to," she adds.

Only time will tell if a willingness to engage meaningfully with new live audiences is enough to capture the imaginations of people new to the so-called performance poetry scene, but little escapes the fact that the potential for the spoken-word to have a genuine and lasting impact on a wider audience will remain limited, so long as poetry is presented and perceived as a social add-on reserved for the educated classes.

*Poeticize is a monthly event at the Chicane Cafe*



## 47 Interview

# MOTOR MAN

**INTERVIEW:** TOBY REYNOLDS  
**PORTRAITS:** ALEC JACKSON

JUGGLING HIS TIME BETWEEN WRITING HIT PLAYS, ACTING AND RUNNING WORKSHOPS KEEPS **ADAM FRESCO** FAIRLY BUSY. OUR MAN TOBY REYNOLDS CAUGHT UP WITH 'MR. SHOWBIZ' FOR A BRIEF CHAT.

A one-man dramatic juggernaut, Adam Fresco charged into Bristol three years ago to become HTV Workshop Leader down on Bath Road. In charge of 250 aspiring thespians, with another 1500 on the waiting list, he co-ordinates some 9 productions a year which include three major live shows, three short films and special shows at Ashton Court. In addition to this he also knocks out murder mystery plays, including the infamous "Dinner with the Don", and wrote and starred in "Sex: a relationship in 69 scenes" which went down (oo-er) a storm both in Bristol, Denmark and Australia. Occasionally he finds time to breathe and eat and it was in one of these rare moments that he spoke to Decode.

Originally hailing from London, his first moment of dramatic revelation came when "I bunked off school to go and watch Ben Kingsley in "Edmund Kean", a one man show in which Kingsley played one of the greatest Shakespearian actors of all time, with nothing on stage but a trunk full of costumes and props!" Other influences were Dario Fo, Steven Berkoff, and Indiana Jones. "It was the 2am press screening in Soho, a full six weeks before it was released! Amazing to see a room full of hardened, tired, cynical press leap up, cheer, clap and whoop louder than us kids!" It was this that convinced him that being a popularist was his destiny. "Just because you entertain needn't mean you don't enlighten, question, stimulate or provoke. Unless you're a Big Brother contestant of course.."

To this end he went to Glasgow University "where I learned to drink. Copiously." Alcoholic pastimes aside, he became President of the Theatre, and wrote, directed and starred in a hugely successful show at the Edinburgh Fringe, and then went on the road with a group of unemployed drama wannabes with a show that they first performed in Barlinnie Prison's

Special Unit. Touring in Europe ("the best year of my life!") ended in Amsterdam where most of the cast apparently still live. Sacked for having no students, he taught and directed drama productions in Liverpool, Cardiff, Northumberland and Chester followed before he landed the job at HTV. So what's been happening recently? "Well last Hallowe'en week we produced Terry



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**ADAM FRESCO**

Pratchett's "Mort" as a stage play. It was an enormous success and we did a documentary following the show featuring Terry Pratchett who came to meet the cast and take part in the filming. This Hallowe'en we're bringing our vampire tale "Vampirology" to the Lakota nightclub. It'll feature live bands, DJ's and per-

formance artists." Blimey. Anything else? "Our first major film "Projection" finished shooting in Bristol Zoo recently, and, once Bath band Countermine finish the score, we're opening at the IMAX cinema. This coming year sees us touring the Czech republic with Gogol's "The Nose" and to visit Czech TV and film studios. We've also got a reciprocal visit to the U.S. to Cape Fear Drama Academy where we'll be making a documentary for HTV and I'll be learning to surf." Gulp. Anything more? "We open our first shows in Bath soon with our first ever pantomime "Dick Whittington and Bob the Cat" this Christmas at Bath's Kingswood theatre, and our production of Sue Townsend's comedy "Womberang!" at Bristol's Alma Tavern and then at Bath's Rondo Theatre in Spring 2003. Add to this "Snigger Hippy TV" our street style theatre that we're unveiling at Ashton Court Festival and "Marvel Man" that we performed at the recent Comics Festival and I guess we're pretty busy. Not to mention our next five short films and countless other projects, so I won't!"

What's the story with "Sex..." then? "I wrote "Sex..." a couple of years ago. Since it was first performed the show's been a huge success and audiences of all ages and backgrounds just seem to relate to the tale of a couple trying to form a relationship. What I thought was a really personal piece when I wrote it has become very popular and I'm currently negotiating both for a professional theatre production and for a proposed TV series based on the play." With this much energy and drive, surely Hollywood is in your sights? "I've got my film script. It's cheap to make. An exciting and original idea. And it's a surefire smash." Film producers take note. Any closing words? "My favourite quote is from Russian author Nikolai Gogol. "The world is full of the most outrageous nonsense!"