

## SPOKEN WORD

# 'Poetry shouldn't have the stuffy stigma'

Spoken word poet M.Artz tells **LUCINDA BORRELL** about his love of words and debut EP

**D**espite having only been on the spoken word scene for a short time, M.Artz has already made quite an impact.

The Hackney resident, real name Marcus Haywood, took off as a spoken word poet in 2013 performing at open mic nights across London.

Fast forward to 2016 and he's currently shooting his second performance video with the launch of his EP *Grown* only a few months away.

"The EP is finished and is in the middle of getting mixed and mastered so I'm really excited," says Haywood. "I called it 'Grown' because it really reflects where I'm at in my life. I'm at a place where I am mature, where my subject is mature, so it really feels like the right name."

Spoken word poetry is the natural medium of performance for M.Artz, an artist who claims it was his love of "music and words" that originally spurred his involvement at events in London.

Following a performance at Vortex in Shoreditch he was approached by the event's organiser, Natalie Stewart – one half of performance duo Floetry – to record his material in the studio.

"Three years ago, I decided to start recording to see what

happened. Since then the response has been great." In 2014 he was approached to write and perform a piece of work at a protest against gentrification in Brixton. The resulting *Zone 2* was so well received that he's currently turning it into a video.

Like *Zone 2*, the majority of M.Artz's work is inspired by contemporary issues.

"I'm inspired by real life events. They may not be events I've experienced first-hand, but they are issues I can relate to and that influence what I'm thinking."

"This is really important to my creative process because I always need to start with a concept."

"I decide what to write about and take it from there. I've always got something I'm listening to through headphones which can also inspire me and I always work at night."

So where did the name M.Artz come from?

"What I do, I consider an art form that uses all the letters of the alphabet from A to Z. That is where the second part of the name comes from. The M stands for my first name."

Even in the few years that he's been on the stage, there has been a significant shift in the popularity of spoken poetry with audiences increasingly gravitating towards it as a form of entertainment.



■ M.Artz, aka Marcus Haywood, talks about his love for the marriage of music and words.

M.Artz attributes this to the accessible nature of the genre. "Traditionally poetry has had a stigma of being quite stuffy."

"It's the thing you had to learn from books at school, but it actually

shouldn't be like that. This is something people seem to be realising.

"I don't know why – perhaps people are just more open-minded now. In the next few years, I'd love

to push to the front of this and when people talk about spoken word, for my name to be mentioned as an artist."

■ *Grown* is released later this year

## THEATRE

## Piper is primal from the soul

**YERMA  
YOUNG VIC**  
★★★★☆

Australian adaptor/director Simon Stone has radically reinvented Lorca's 1934 "tragic poem". Moving from rural, Catholic Spain to 21st-century London, he finds searing resonance in a timeless piece about the agony of infertility.

Billie Piper stars as "Her" – a thirtysomething, right-on blogger whose life is upended by a growing desire to have a baby. Partner John is increasingly bewildered as this biological urge, which goes unanswered during years of trying, overtakes everything: career, relationship, family, finally sanity.

Some of the modernising feels self-conscious, with Sadig, Boris, Lena Dunham and Trump all name-checked and frequent labelling (Millennial, first-wave feminist). But Stone is sensitive to contemporary pressures that

make this an enduring taboo, at odds with a world defined by choice. We may have apps like Deliveroo, but you can't just order a baby, nor easily reconcile parenthood with an anti-establishment lifestyle.

His crisp, sub-two hour adaptation features chapter headings emblazoned on screens. That echoes the feverish blogging of Piper's protagonist, who spills her darkest secrets online in return for hits – confessional journalism both therapeutic and horribly destructive. Meanwhile John travels more for work, increasing the physical and emotional distance between them.

In strong support, Maureen Beattie's brisk, academic mother is unable to offer comfort to her struggling daughters: Piper's conflicted wild child and Charlotte Randle's put-upon sister. John Macmillan excels as ex Victor, as does Brendan Cowell as an increasingly distraught husband.



■ Billie Piper.

Lizzie Clachan's glass box submits them all to voyeuristic scrutiny, with sharply punctuating lighting from James Farncombe and choral music

from Stefan Gregory adding tragic urgency. But the night belongs to the outstanding Piper, whose raw, primal performance seems wrenched from the soul.

We watch her slip away, sacrificing everything she was for a phantom future just out of her grasp. Shattering.

Marianka Swain