

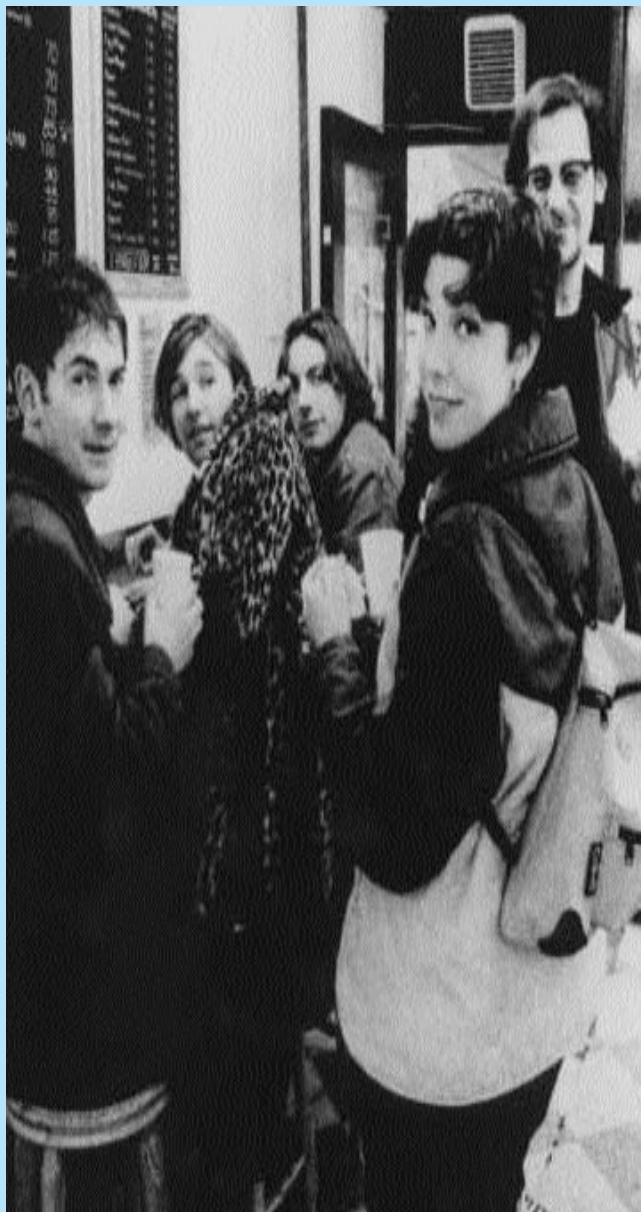
Hasi goes in search of the latest happening band from the US of A.

Nyack is a small town outside Manhattan. Nyack is a band. Nyack could soon be a street term for complete determination if they have their way. Nyack has five members, which you fast realise boil down to singer Craig Sterns and guitarist Kim Collister, who you guessed it grew up in Nyack - which incidentally is American Indian for 'fishing village'. (If that one pops up a the local pub quiz you'll be laughing)

Collister and Sterns hooked up through their passion for The Cocteau Twins, junked in their day jobs, formed Nyack and moved to London. There they met Steph Naylor (who was shortlisted for the new Suede guitarist, James Harris and Martin Hall and Nyack took to the road.

We met up with them over a few mineral waters (everyone had had a rough night) one sunny day to discuss music and the universe. Soon it is very clear that Craig and Kim are Nyack, the other Brit guys are mere session musicians as far as they are concerned.

Craig, classically good-looking and donning the inevitable baseball cap, labels himself as a total control freak - pretty obvious really when you realise he writes all the songs.



Kim, slim with short red hair, acts as his side-kick, filling in where he takes a break for air.

They are pretty full of moans at the moment. They're supporting Blameless, although they think they should be top of the bill. They didn't get to play Glastonbury, although they think they're a real festival band and on top of that they haven't had the press they expected for their new album '11 Track Player'. 'The album isn't intended to change the universe and we didn't expect to be press darlings, but we expected more,' said Craig.

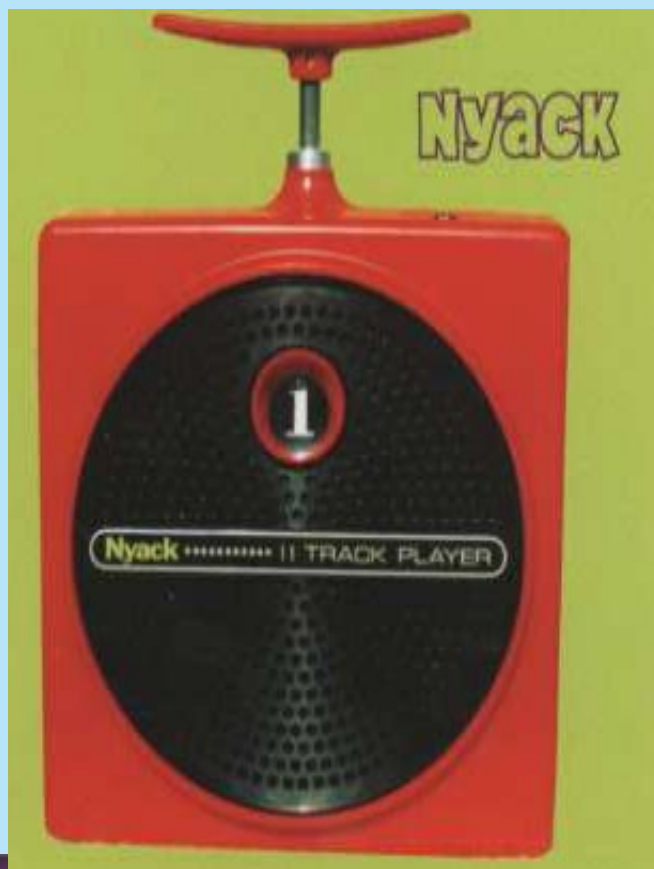
They're also fed up with being pigeonholed. 'We've been compared to everything from Dinosaur Junior, the Lemon Heads, Teenage Fan Club, Smashing Pumpkins and Nirvana' laughs Craig. Now whoever said Nirvana must have been on a wicked trip, but that is another story. 'We're a mixture of everything, no-one can work us out,' says Kim. Craig is quick to point out that he is mega influenced by 70s power pop. 'The Shoes and Raspberry, guys like that,' he smiles. And when Craig smiles you know about it, his charisma comes buzzing through.

Both Craig and Kim are full of fighting spirit, but wasn't it kind of mad to come to Britain to try and make it, when they are quite clearly American. 'The songs might be written by an American, but we are very British sounding,' explains Craig. 'We were

feature

on an indie label and we really didn't want to jump straight in with a big US label and lose our artistic integrity', adds Kim. A very familiar line - right! Craig admits it hasn't been a party though. 'We didn't think it would be this hard, especially as a lot of US labels look to the US for inspiration then follow like sheep', he says.

They might sound like they're feeling



sorry for themselves, but they've had a difficult year getting by in the big smoke without jobs. But they've had some good news - they're going to play Reading and they've already built up a fan base of 5,000. 'We're going to bring out a limited edition vinyl single for our fans in the fall', confirms Craig. Vinyl. An odd move when they've just released their album on Cdi disk. 'We're hi-tech in a low tech way I guess', laughs Kim. 'No really you get much more attached to vinyl,' butts in Craig.

Craig spills the beans, they're off back to the US this autumn to record a new album. This comes as a surprise to Kim. 'What you never told me we were going that soon,' she glares in that cheated girlfriend kinda way. Yes Kim and Craig might appear to be a couple, but apparently they're not. Craig came out to Melody Maker only a few days earlier, but they weren't up for talking about that one, aside from saying 'we really are very alike', which doesn't exactly tell you a lot. Kim does admit that Craig has made it possible for her to show her true feelings and lose her temper, which is by all accounts mad. 'It seems an odd thing to thank someone for, but then live is strange,' she says.

With Craig and Kim you really can't tell if its all a big game. For all we know they could be the Waltons back home and they know it, but they're not letting on. No they're playing tease and killing time 'until the flip flop sit-

uation changes and we're suddenly in fashion,' laughs Craig. I'll bet with their determination they'll soon be as trendy as a jelly sandal.



I got my MOJO working

Karen Trevelyan Goes in search of some new Talent on the London stage and comes back with a renaissance man.

Jez Butterworth is only the second playwright to take his first solo play, MOJO, straight into the main theatre at The Royal Court. The first was John Osborne, in 1956, with LOOK BACK IN ANGER. It seems, therefore, somewhat fitting that MOJO is set in the late 50's. I finished reading MOJO over breakfast, not to be recommended for those with weak stomachs, before going to interview him. Having done so I wasn't expecting an angry young man, as Osborne's work represented, more like a dodgy, violent, sick and possibly chauvinistic one. The play is set in a pre porn, but never the less, seedy night-club in gangland Soho in 1958, and covers the events of 24 hours in the lives of a group of young "spivs", the twisted relationships amongst themselves and with a singer called Silver Johnny. It was a relief to find that Jez Butterworth did not fit my projections and was in fact unmenacing, honest and frankly scared shitless with impending first night nerves.

"I've done a few interviews in the last few days and I was feeling



Pic by Jason Bell

really excited, but now it's the final dress rehearsal in an hour, I've got that I WANT MY MUM feeling".

You'll be pleased to know his mother wasn't in sight, so we continued. Butterworth is 26 years old, bought up

in St Albans and then went to read English at Cambridge which provided a forum for him to start writing.

"I'd always wanted to write but was too chicken but at Cambridge, with its wealth of actors, theatres and funding it was a good excuse not to work and I started writing little plays with other people. It was great, if you wanted to you could produce a play every two weeks."

Despite the temptation he just about held back and with the aid of crash "pull the parachute chord" revision left with a degree. Still "too scared to write alone" he attended one course, The Carlton Television New Writers Course, in 1993.

It seems that in 1993 everything took off for you?

"Well yes, sort of. I co. wrote a play, with two friends, called HUGE which premiered in Edinburgh and then transferred to the Kings Head, London. Then I was commissioned to write a pilot of HUGE as a sitcom for the BBC, but then I decided I was crap at comedy so I didn't do it and decided to concentrate on films and plays. Then it all stopped."

From an outsiders point of view I personally would suggest that Jez Butterworth experienced a nano-second pause. He and his brother Tom



were then commissioned to co-write an 80 minute film for Film on Four and at the same time he also decided to take the risk to write alone and won the prestigious George Devine Award. (This is an award dedicated to the memory of the Royal Courts Artistic Director 1957-1965) Resulting in him being commissioned to write a play for The Royal Court, aka MOJO. Not bad for someone who's life stopped?

“Yes, well. Anyway my brother and I went and lived in the country and wrote them.”

You don't look like someone who lives in the country?

“True, if someone told us to go and write there it wouldn't have happened. It was more of a case of, well money really. We only had the commission fee and the award money. In the country we could rent somewhere for £30 a week. Anyway it was fun, we'd write the film together and then I'd go off into the next room and write the play.”

Is it more difficult writing by your self?

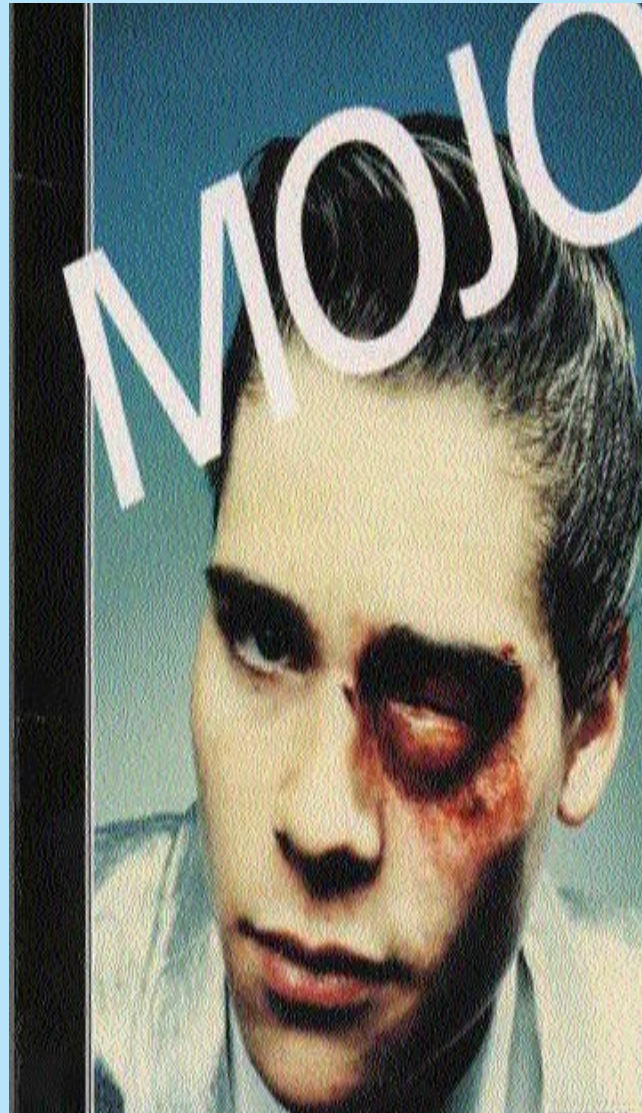
“I still need help with the story line. Like who does what, can they do this and why.”

More like a sounding board?

“Yes, otherwise its like playing chess on your own, but then I can go back and put in all the dialogue.”

So why was MOJO set in the fifties?

“It was the first time American culture took hold in England. I wanted to



show how it was expressed here and, combine crime and music.”

Was it based on real people?

“No but I did a lot of research. Read a lot of books and interviews, watched documentaries. There were people like Ezra. (the club owner in MOJO who is only shown in two parts - literally!) They'd take young boys and keep them like greyhounds.”

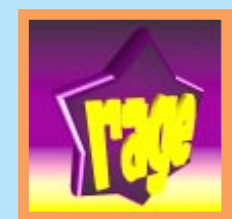
MOJO is very film like, was that intended?

“Yes it was a battle to make it a play. I never went to the theatre much before Cambridge, I preferred films, but it is a very different way of writing. All the violence takes place off the stage, as in Greek tragedies and Jacobean plays. Shakespeare was probably the first person to have some one waving a sword around and gouging eyes out on stage.”

I remind him of a couple of toast churning scenes I had read that morning. One concerned the description of a pair of shoes, (which after reading I seriously considered not wearing shoes again).

“Yes that's a good example of what could only work in a play, in film it would sound too staged.”

But there is a killing on stage and the





constant threat of violence.

“Yes but its very theatrical, downbeat, pathetic so as not to be sensational. I tried to make the violence crap. I didn’t want to make it like a gangster movie. The characters in the play think they’re gangsters but they aren’t and when the violence happens they crap themselves, like I would and which is what most people I know would do.”

With such honesty, I decided now was the time to get on my soap box. There are no women in the play. Why?

“Deliberate, no accident. It was a very male world at that time. No women had any position of power. I also didn’t want any tokenism and to show how the men behaved without women.

Is that why there are strong homosexual overtones between some of the characters?

“They all have desires, sexual, financial, violence, jealousy, power....I wanted to smudge them all together, Silver Johnny (the singer) provides the focus for all of these. MOJO is an African expression of a totem for purging aggression and sexual desire.”

Our interview was coming to an end and the final dress rehearsal was 10 minutes away, his nerves returned and he voiced his concerns of

whether it would work .

“It’s difficult to judge if it will work, having been involved all the way through, I’ve been spoilt by the Royal Court, I was even in on the first auditions.”

Well what about the future?

“ A holiday first and then I’ve been commissioned to write anther play for the Royal Court and I’m writing a film for the BBC and there are a few people interested in making MOJO into a film, so I’d be writing the screen play.”

For the man who’s life stopped in 1993, how long will this holiday be?

The nerves evaporated with a laugh
“Probably an afternoon!”

As we got up to leave he pointed out of the window

“Look at that”

We were facing the back of the letters that spelt his name on the front of the theatre

“They can’t even get all the letters the right size and that one’s on an angle, I’ll look like a cartoon.”

Well he might have be feeling like a crapping chicken the day I met him, but he has the makings of a rooster,

and he certainly has something to strut about.



Butch Boy

Karen Trevelyan interviews **JOHN ANSTISS** and while she's at it reviews his book **BUTCH BOY**

"I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hill"

An example, courtesy of Mr Wordsworth, of the type of poetry taught to most of us at school. It also sadly defines how most of us view poetry, out of date, out of context and lacking in relevant content. Songwriters are considered the poets of our time, which until recently, would have been an argument I strongly supported. But in the last few years the emergence of performance poets, and their work, will, I feel, bring any debate full circle. While some contemporary poets have taken their rhythms from the music business, rap poets being part of a growth industry, many word smiths are finding ground in their own right.

Launched this month **BUTCH BOY** is the first book of poems by performing poet, John Anstiss. Unlike traditional poets Anstiss performed first, then published. The initial delay occurred when he left school at fifteen, "I didn't think you could be a poet", you probably didn't think you could be, openly, gay either at that time.

Thankfully Anstiss is not bound by limitations, leather maybe.

Swathed in black leather, topped with an urban shaved head, his courteous manner is perhaps the only betrayal of his years. Ageism would have been the last label I'd have put on Anstiss but it was this that finally drove him to become a performing poet.

Starting as an office boy, progressing to journalist, scriptwriter and copywriter for an advertising agency, described by Anstiss as "a commercial form of writing poems", this was followed by the inevitability of the 80's, redundancy, followed by non re entry to the commercial world on the grounds of ageism, he was 50 years old. Enough to drive someone who's effectively been told their career is over, to drink and despair.



Was he driven to drink and despair?

"No I took the (redundancy) money and ran! Well actually I went travelling for a year."

And magically became a poet?

"Well no. When I came back I started producing Community Events. I didn't know about performance poetry until introduced by a Canadian friend."

So then you became a poet?

"Well yes. All the negatives in my life have provided a focus and poetry is a medium of writing that suits me. I enjoy the theatre and performance poetry provided an un frightening way that I could get up and do something, some-

thing using my own words. Its like the ancient way of story telling. Something every one's got in them."

Most mortals would be scared shitless whether it was in them or not, but armed with a charismatic and resonate



voice and awesome stage presence Anstiss did just that a regular performer at the clubs and pubs culminating this year at the London Poetry Festival, the International year of Literature in Swansea, the Lesbian and Gay Pride festival and a discussion and performance at the ICA with John Giorno from New York, followed by a tour around the UK from September.

So you can make a living being a professional poet?

“No not really, not in this country. In the States they get anything from \$500 - \$1000 per performance, and that’s not even the best poets. Here you get a share of the door, which just about covers your fare home. Oh for an American tour!”

Undefeated he produced BUTCH BOY, a book of poems he’s performed, containing finally tuned words that flow off the page as easily as his voice. What ever your sexual persuasion BUTCH BOY provides an honest and witty look at Anstiss’s journey through life. From early reminisces of his father through to self discovery -

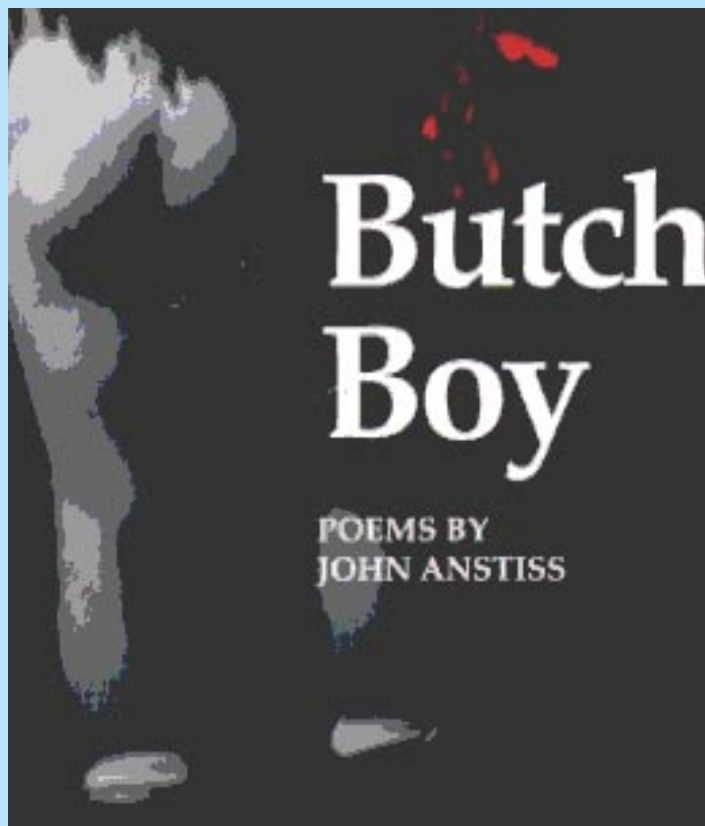
“The easy bit is finding your genitals
The hard bit is finding your head.”

on to an example of horrific homophobic violence in “Queer Bashed” which still manages to end on a tri-

umphal note -

“I heard him say you’re queer, you’re gay
It was nothing new to me
I celebrate that fact every day.”

through amusing ditties, poignant thoughts and observations of street life and death, and on to Hymn to my Brothers, the most succinctly put message on Safe Sex, and certainly educational.



I asked Anstiss why an Aids Trust hadn’t taken it up or used it in their literature. He graciously replied

“Well I suppose it’s too rude”

Yes it is a bit, but it leaves no eventuality un rubbered and is very amusing! As, amongst others, is his ode to S & M Lets do it in Leather I & II.

BUTCH BOY is not a soapbox for gay rights, its a celebration, and perhaps if they put BUTCH BOY in the classroom it would spark a generation into lively debate and bring down many barriers, especially poetry’s.

BUTCH BOY is published by Gecko press, costs £5.95 and is available in Waterstones, Dillions and other good book shops.

