

ERIC BOGOSIAN: SERIOUS FUN

By Mark Hall Amitin

Bogosian is a true master of deceit. He threatens, cajoles, pleads, wheedles, gnaws, mocks and prods. Almost seamlessly he jumps from one character to another without the aid of more than a simple spotlight and a microphone. For some 70 minutes he creates a menagerie of not terribly pleasant but painfully funny people we have encountered throughout our life, but who are presciently contemporary. Some we have actually met before as they have been recycled from his film, *Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll*, but mostly, they are an all new collection of perverts and shysters.

There is no more apt title for either *Eric Bogosian's* work or for the festival that bears that name (which reappears each July at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall). Bogosian, who last summer brought his show to the Hamptons, visits us once again under the auspices of Renée Fotoui for two performances on Saturday, July 25th (7 and 10 pm) at the Southampton College Auditorium where he will present his newest work *Dog Show*.

Bogosian starts off with a hipster rap-rhymer who sees the guys in suits "square as a corn flake box" who make him howl and bark like a dog. No sooner do we think we're onto this riff, than he shifts in a split second to a whirling dervish porn-film director desperately attempting to set up a shot and get his actors to "perform" the act. As he shouts at the girl to "spread those cheeks" she asks him for a motivation, to which he responds that the needy men and women of America "need you for their erotic salvation." When the stud hits the set, he glances at his schlong and inquires, "where did you find him? The Port Authority mens' room?.... Oh, you did!"

Just when we think he really is speaking with us, he's got us fooled again. He thanks us profusely for coming, and appeals to our vanity as he asks for our affection, like a political candidate, first saying he doesn't "want to rock the boat," he wants "to help row." Then he calls us assholes and says he doesn't want or need our approval after all.

Bogosian is at his best when he takes on the sleazeballs of American life, and he does so with a vengeance. First, with his alter-ego Phil, who wants us to get in touch not with our inner child, but with that "inner baby" that wants and needs to shit all over itself. But what he really

wants is for us to part with our cold hard cash for his cassettes and group sessions. He then derides us for our greed and our inability to deal realistically with the horrors of world hunger and poverty, but through the stained-glass window of a slew of self-satisfied, self-indulgent, mole-like characters. The guys who drive and use their car phones at the same time; a mafioso who builds an enormous pool and a gazebo, but then admits "I don't even know what that is," as he chomps on his Cuban cigar. He opines that one must "take care of the luxuries, the necessities will take care of themselves."

and threaten to blow them away, which, our friend is afraid, may "give them a bad impression of us."

Finally, Mr. Bogosian returns to his dog theme, as he articulates how jealous he is of another dog whose owner "actually picks up his shit for him! I want to be a dog like others," he bemoans, and feels guilty after playing with himself... "I felt really bad after I felt really good."

Eric's formula remains, as it has been for many years: Solid writing, perfect timing, astonishing vibrancy and vitality, vivid, if not profound, perception of the variability and volatility of the American male psyche and character. His work on stage should not be missed, and even if you've seen him strut before, a return visit is like seeing all your least favorite relatives at a cousin's wedding — worth it just for the laughs.

There is an absolute clarity that Bogosian strives for, not only in his writing and his portrayals, but in his commitment to social change, like so many in these troubled times. When I asked Eric what he hoped for, he answered my query, "If you had one wish what would it be?"

"Eliminate the waste going on in the military; if we could just slow that down and shrink that budget by 75% we could put our efforts into more useful activities. One of the biggest problems is the AIDS crisis; simply the lack of financial support. There is so much that we could do with the cost of a Patriot missile.

I'm very militantly pacifist. In fact the premiere screening of *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll* was a benefit for ACT-UP. They may seem to be a radical organization but they get things done." ▲

For information and tickets for Renee Fotoui's Fine Art East Series, call 524- 8939.

Mark Hall Amitin has published articles in *Performing Arts Journal*, *WIN Magazine*, *Travail Theatral* (the French Theatre Journal), *New China* and is soon to reveal the secrets of his sordid past in his book, *From Beck to Albee and Back Again: My Life Around Art*.



Photo: Paula Court

Eric Bogosian

Highest on the list of this gritty rabble is a fucked-up, drugged out, half-witted, neo-Andrew Dice Clay. As his story goes, he and a carload of fellow assholes booze up, drop some ludes, crash their rod off the road, hitch a ride with a hippy in a van who pulls a gun on them when they pull a knife on him. They beat the crap out of him, steal his van, then rack it up out in the woods. They drop some acid (wrong drug for this crowd), wander up to a farmhouse ("the Pepperidge Farm guy lives here," he chortles in his Neanderthal guffaw), pistol-whip and tie up the Granny and Gramps of the house