

SEX, DRUGS, ROCK & ROLL

Program Notes:

The first performance of the scenes that would become SEX, DRUGS, ROCK & ROLL was originally listed as, IS THAT ALL THERE IS? – SEX, DRUGS, ROCK & ROLL. The removal of the introductory question is a subtle edit, more likely the result of an ironic impulse for effective marketing than anything else – but however slight – it’s a telling moment in the history of a play that would bring international fame to its author and star.

The fact that Eric Bogosian continues to perform many of these monologues more than twenty years after their debut is an affirmation of the prescient moment of their creation. Like single malt scotch, denim blue jeans, and Johnny Cash – they just keep getting better with age. In the late 80s Bogosian was able to collect a cast of social misfits, outcasts, vagabonds, and swindlers whose combined power was nothing short of a crystal ball snapshot of our cultural horizon.



In the New York Times review of that initial performance, the critic, Frank Rich compared Bogosian’s work to the cultural heroics of Lenny Bruce in the 50s, Bob Dylan in the 60s, and Woody Allen in the 70s. He was the most recent in a long line of irreverent American soothsayers whose frustration with a system that demanded quiet compliance inspired him to loudly flip the bird in raucous, punk rock infused rebellion. The cumulative effect of his parade of dystopian visions is the condemnation of a society blindly driven by gluttonous want in the face of seemingly inexhaustible resources. The purity of the original American dream – the pursuit of happiness – perverted to hypocritical extremes by a marketing mantra that repeatedly suggests that we can have anything and everything we want instantly and it won’t cost us a thing.



My grandfather says, “Everyone is always selling.” Whether it’s the ideas of politics or religion, the emotions of sympathy or guilt, or the physical comforts that accompany material accumulation or pharmaceutically concocted bliss, if someone’s mouth is moving, you can bet they’re selling something. And with each purchase we make, in every moment we succumb to the temptation of the superficial over the substantial, Bogosian suggests that we pay with nothing less than our humanity. In his introduction to the printed play, he conjures the image of a “Danse Macabre” – The Dance of Death - originally illustrated by the medieval artists of the 15th century to remind people of the fragility of life. The ancient engravings depict a circle of joyous revelers, inebriated with the shallow pleasures of the flesh, partying themselves down the path to hell with Satan himself in the

lead. It’s the ultimate rock concert brought to Platonic perfection. Eventually though, the party ends, and those still standing when the lights come on are left, in their hangover induced stupor, painfully wondering, “Is that all there is?”

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