



Henry Rollins

Mental floss

by William Jed Holt III

When I was assigned to interview ex-Black Flag/current musician-poet Henry Rollins, I approached the interview with no hesitation whatsoever. Familiar with his work, I figured we would just casually chat about it and then I would retain related insight which could pave the way for my article. Unfortunately, what I got was a tired and curt Henry, fresh from a day at the CMJ convention, who would have preferred sleep over talking about himself. His attitude originally seemed a reflection on my questions, but that was not the case.

Rollins is a regular Joe who just happens to have influenced part of a generation and

of Americana, you related to it. When he read "Family Man" you laughed, but after thinking about it, thought how right he just might be. Maybe you've been to his ghetto, or maybe you just wish you had been. No matter, he has the ability to take you there. He doesn't speak in tongues, he speaks the word of the common man, thus rarely is the audience or reader put on the defensive. This is Rollins' asset as a spoken word performer and writer; the regurgitation of the obvious in a manner that is not a new concept, just one that Henry can seem to make his own.

If you have not taken the liberty of familiarizing yourself with Rollins, start with the track he has on the *Sound Bites from the Counter Culture* album, which has him

Eric Bogosian

A flip of the tongue

by Rosie McCobb

Eric Bogosian really knows how to talk. Not only does he do it well in public—in his shows like "Funhouse," "Drinking in America," "Sex, Drugs, Rock'n'Roll" and the film "Talk Radio"—he can yammer with the best of them on topics varied enough that he had the two old society dames and the Clark Kent reporter whom I joined one morning at the Ritz-Carlton, stumbling to keep up with him.

It's not that Eric Bogosian is overly intellectual, or even pretentious. But because Bogosian's shows have addressed issues and situations that most people are too busy trying to ignore, Bogosian himself cuts through the bullshit and gets to the real story without giving a dressed-up version of the basic things in life that he thinks everyone should be aware of.

"I find myself in a funny position because I don't really want to be a spokesman for anything," Bogosian says. "My work is generally about grey areas and confusing things."

"Sex, Drugs, Rock'n'Roll" is Bogosian's fourth solo monologue piece, available as a live album from SBK Records. The local performances of the show at the Wilbur Theater, the only ones outside New York, were filmed for release as a movie next spring.

It's "an attempt to be very funny and very engaging for an hour and a half," Bogosian explains. This show is very similar to the format of "Drinking in America," where Bogosian does 10 to 14 15-minute character sketches based on people or issues in everyday life that concern him.

"The show reflects my own questions. I mean, there are things I know. For instance, I think nuclear war is bad. But since my audience knows nuclear war is bad, how about talking about: is nuclear war good? I mean, there's a whole other region, and that's the way I make my shows. I flip it around."

In "Sex, Drugs, Rock'n'Roll" Bogosian gives the audience an array of characters. There's an English rock star and former drug addict who spouts about the horrors of drug use, a guy at his buddy's stag party who's messed up on every substance possible and loving it, and a typical bum in the subway.

"We have a lot of people like that in New York," Bogosian says of the bum-begging piece. "It would be nice if everyone had wonderful feelings towards people who beg, but I put the audience in a situation where they have to run through how they really feel

about beggars. The way the piece works—with humor and a little bit of pathos—I take the audience through the whole set of ideas, thoughts and feelings that they have when they get begged to in the subway."

When asked why he chooses to tackle such seemingly depressing topics, Bogosian says it's because "everybody pretends that we have nothing but good feelings toward all the bad things that happen in the world."

"I turn on the TV set, something's happening. I go 'I can't believe this guy George Bush,' and my wife is there saying 'put it in the show.' Everything gets put in the show. We grind it around, we look at it and then it eventually pops out the other end as a piece. It takes a long time to make them, but when they work right, they do what I like to see when I go to a show."

What does Eric Bogosian like to see in other people's shows? "I like to be really entertained," Bogosian offers while leaning



back in his chair confidently. "I like to think that the person worked hard to put it together and then, if I have something to chew on, then that's good. I don't like to know where things are going, I hate that."

What is it that makes Bogosian's shows worth paying attention to? "They're fun, fast, active," Bogosian says of his pieces. "This work...it's made for me and all the people who were brought up on rock'n'roll and have short attention spans. I'm really putting on the audience in a lot of the show. I mean, one of my characters goes on for four minutes about how big his dick is, how proud he is and how he has it over everybody in the world because of his dick. It's an embarrassing piece—for me and the audience—but it's fun. It puts it way out there."



At this point in the conversation, old dame #1 and #2 commence ladylike chuckling, so the question comes up: is an Eric Bogosian show something that only members of Bogosian's generation can understand and relate to? "I got an old lady one time, about 75, who almost ran me over with her bicycle to tell me about how much she liked the show," Bogosian relates with a grin on his face, "so it's definitely wide-ranging. The difference between an older audience and a younger audience is the older one seems to think I'm angry about something and also often hasn't had experience with drugs and sex that the typical person my age has. The younger audience just knows what I'm talking about." What is the kind of stuff that Eric Bogosian, as a suburban, middle class kid growing up in Woburn, MA, supported in the '60s and still stands for today? "I used to attack liberal points of view," Bogosian admits with a hint of a New York accent, "but there isn't any liberal anymore. In the last ten years we've reached a point where the point of view of people my age [37] is pretty much conservative, and so to take a stance that's straight-down-the-line progressive is radical all of a sudden. I don't think wanting peace, better education or the eradication of poverty is radical, but it is."

While Bogosian cites his somewhat bleak but realistic views of the world today as "a typical thing" of his generation, he hopes that "the magic of the theater" will cause his audience to do more than laugh at his shows. "When people come together, sit together and laugh together, they think together," Bogosian muses. "I think there's magic in people being together, and even if they leave the theater arguing about what they just saw, it's good. It's great."

Bogosian has lots of projects to keep him busy after S,D & RNR—"I do as many things that are fun as I can." He's planning on opening a nightclub in New York in January "for people to do stand up and monologue shows—like myself, or Karen Finley, or Reno, or Paul Hughes—people who have been blacklisted by the NEA and who could benefit from having a commercial joint," and also hopes to spend a little more time with his wife Jo and three-year-old son Harris.

"I think the important thing is just to always do what you really love and see what happens. I just have fun all the time, I do things I like to do, so I guess you'd say I lucked out." Eric Bogosian smiles, and as always, truly means what he says. ♦