

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Solo (May 12, 2000)

It's late, I'm alone in the office, just cranked out another show up at the Jane Street. Then I rode my bike back through the rain and lighting on the bike track along the Hudson back down to Ararat Productions, Inc. headquarters.

It's a trip doing this thing eight a week. I sleep a lot so I can get up for the ninety minutes of sweat and holler. Audiences have been good, a mixture of people who are hip to what this is about and what I like to think of the "deer in the headlights" audience. I look out at them and they seem confused.

I get to the theater about three hours before the show, eat, nap (to clear the mind more than anything), do a voice warm-up, shave, stretch, drink coffee, run lines, dress. Because my throat gets a little whack, I have to stay quiet most of the day. And then when I'm wide awake around midnight I do constructive things like this. Or not.

I just saw a documentary about the "Sex Pistols" called "The Filth and the Fury". Wow. It made me so happy. Because here I am, slugging away onstage every night, with producers and critics breathing down my neck and sometimes I forget why I'm doing it in the first place. Which is that I need to scream, I need to say lots of words about things that are crammed in my head, I need to perform in front of people. I need to act. I saw that film, with Johnny Rotten drenching people with words and spit, and I thought, yes.

I'm obviously only some theater guy, not a lunatic playing punk rock who changed the way people around the world think. But still, I guess there's an attempt at a degree of authenticity. And to think that is a form of Romanticism. To believe that anyone is really doing what they say they're doing. And I guess walking some kind of freak line and at the same time seducing an audience, well, that's art isn't it? Seducing people to follow you down one's own internal mental plumbing?

And in fact, nothing's pure. One aspect of my performance that may go unnoticed is that in New York anyway, these shows are "commercial", that is to say, there are producers who put them up. This is not "non-profit." Why do I do

commercial runs? (I've done tons of non-commercial shows.) Because that way I can stay in one theater for awhile and we can have a box office and sell advance tix and be easy to find and all that stuff. It sucks when you've worked hard on a show and then it comes and goes and people stop you on the street and say "Oh, were you doing a show? I'm sorry I missed it." This run keeps me in one place for awhile so I can be found. Or not.

Plus, if the show is making money, I think I should get some of it, since I'm doing all the work. (Not to disparage, say a non-profit theater like PS 122 who pays me very well. Although they've invited me for long runs, I personally don't think I should be taking up four months of a non-profit theater's time/space.)

So anyway, producers means investors, means there's an investment here. And depending on what happens, the money is made or lost. I'm working with the same guys who have put up three other commercial runs of my solos, namely Fred Zollo and Nick Paleologus. They drive me crazy sometimes, but look at it this way: on the first show, "FunHouse", they lost money. On "Sex, Drugs Rock & Roll" they made money. They broke even on "Pounding Nails" so it's hard for me to think of them as money-grubbing or anything like that. They put the shows up at risk, because they like them. (And as I write this, they probably won't make much on this one.)

By the way, if you find the tickets too expensive (me and the producers have had many "conversations" about this), there are always seats in the balcony, which are actually bar stools, that are more than excellent. And late on Friday nights, it's \$25 bucks. Or e-mail us here at Ararat and if there's any other kind of discount, like a special code or something, we'll tell you what it is. So come on down. Besides, I went to the record store yesterday and bought the "Slipknot" and "System of a Down" albums and it cost me forty bucks. SO FUCKIT, just spend the money.

Where were we? Oh yeah, so the thing is, I get caught up in all this PRESSURE. And all I really care about is what happens from the time I step on stage until the time I walk off seventy-five minutes later. The critics throw in their two cents, the "average theater goer" sits there pissed-off and I just want to HOOK UP. And I do, and it's good.

[Oh and could I say one thing about critics? Why don't they just answer one simple question: Are you happy you saw this show? Were you bored? Did you laugh? That's actually three questions. They get so wound up trying to shove things into pigeon holes. Analyzing! As in "ANAL-yzing". Here's the deal, if you dick around too much in your review, people can't tell if YOU liked it. I was interviewed by Bryant Gumbel on the Today Show a while back when we released "Talk Radio." We're on air and he's giving me this really hard time about how "dark" the material is, and then we go to commercial and he whispers to me that he loved the movie. WHY DOESN'T HE JUST SAY THAT? I'll tell you why, because he thinks he's got to intrepret things for the masses. WHO ASKED? That's all I want to say right now on this subject.]

I get lonely. If I were in a theater company, there would be people to talk to in the dressing rooms. Comraderie. Instead I have to spend a lot of time alone. Because the show is a strain on my vocal chords, I can't really talk much during the day. And I get so wound up doing the show, I sort of bounce around in my head for about four hours after the show. (Surf that internet! Bikinibabes.com!) I'm the writer, so the writer doesn't stop by to visit. Jo Bonney is the director and she sees me all the time anyway. So it's kind of twilight zone-esque.

All the same, the show being fun and hard to do, I stay focused on it. It's like having hard core sex every night at eight. You've got to have a taste for it. And I do. But I don't do much else when I'm doing the show.

I hope you can make it by. I will tour this show next year. But I don't think I'm writing another of these after this. This is it. The dog is done. Time for the couch.

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