

ARTS FINAL

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## The Third World In One Man's Voice

### REVIEW

**JAILS, HOSPITALS & HIP HOP.** Written and performed by Danny Hoch. Developed and directed by Jo Bonney. Performance Space 122, 150 First Ave., Manhattan, through April 18. Seen Friday.

By Jan Stuart  
STAFF WRITER

**A**FTER DOWNTOWN PERFORMERS are anointed with critical acclaim, many of them head uptown. Not Danny Hoch. He goes upstairs.

This young actor-writer from Brooklyn impressed us in 1994 with a gallery of inner city characters called "Some People," playing to small but grateful crowds on the ground floor of the East Village's P.S. 122. He was 21, but his chameleon-like ability to run the gauntlet of outer-borough New York accents and experiences showed the seasoning and compassion of someone twice his age.

After a prestige visit to the neighboring Public Theater, the Obie-winning Hoch has returned to his P.S. 122 roots, moving up to the larger, second-floor performing space. Even with the extra seats, he should brace himself for the clamor of frustrated theatergoers unable to squeeze into his new show, "Jails, Hospitals & Hip Hop." In the treacherous field of one-man shows, this one's a dilly.

Like "Some People," Hoch's latest is a relay of monologues from characters who either inhabit or feed off that segment of society known as the Third World. The folk who peopled his debut show were unified mostly by a language divide and the empathy of their impersonator, and those in "Jails, Hospitals and Hip Hop" share a renegade status as well. Drawing much of its inspiration from the prisons where the actor has taught workshops, this ferocious and profoundly humane evening stands on both sides of the cell bars with unflinching authenticity.

Alienation: and bewilderment are the bonds between Hoch's men, be they an entrepreneurial wan-

nabe busted for selling T-shirts without a license or a corrections officer called on the carpet for violent behavior. Class resentment bubbles over as the T-shirt salesman from Harlem tries to understand why he does not enjoy the same freedoms as a little white girl selling lemonade on the sidewalk. The American Dream also haunts the guard, who relates his hopes to open a prison gift shop.

Hoch permits us to laugh at the bullish posturings of both of these men at the same time as he validates their plights and anxieties.

Not all of his people are jailbound, however. One suffers a palsy-like disorder induced by his coke-head mother, another is crippled from an accidental shooting. In one Spanish-spoken monologue, Hoch becomes a sidewalk souvenir hawker in Cuba chatting up an American tourist about the obscene lyrics of Snoop Doggy Dog.

Television, as much as hip-hop, is a predominant influence for Hoch's people. One inmate identifies with the marooned Skipper in "Gilligan's Island" and encourages a fellow inmate on a letter-writing jag to Martin Lawrence. Hoch even steps out of character to deliver a devastating true-life anecdote about his misbegotten shot at playing a Hispanic pool boy on "Seinfeld."

In the evening's most telling juxtaposition of me-

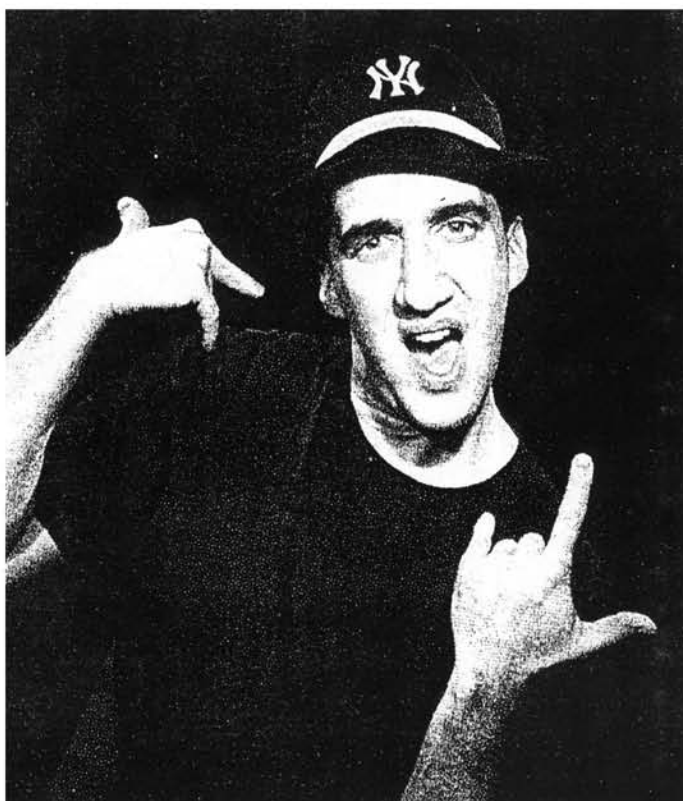


Photo by Paula Court

He is the world, mostly Third: Danny Hoch in character in "Jails, Hospitals & Hip Hop." The characters in his new show either inhabit the Third World or feed off its people.

dia mongering, Hoch's white-bread Montana teenager Flip aspires to become a world-famous hip-hop star, dissing things caucasian on "Jay Leno." At the evening's climax, Hoch steps into the shoes of the boy's role model, who admits to David Letterman that wealth and comfort have robbed him of the impetus for his art.

Characters and motifs interweave with bracing maturity in "Jails, Hospitals and Hip Hop," showcasing the artist at new levels of technical assurance and observational sophistication. This guy is just awesome! ■