

Danny Hoch, one-man gang

■ **Theater: Monologist**
*beyond the pale in 'Jails,
Hospitals & Hip Hop.'*

By J. WYNN ROUSUCK
SUN THEATER CRITIC

Performance artist Danny Hoch has been known to step outside the theater and drum up trade among the kids on the street.

"I see 50 kids playing basketball who live across from the theater and have never been there. I tell them, 'Yo, there's this kid across the street, he's [bleeping] hysterical, you should see it before it goes to HBO.'"

It's not that theaters have trouble filling seats for this 27-year-old solo performer, whose newest show, "Jails, Hospitals & Hip Hop," begins a three-day engagement



Street theater: Hoch raps
with the audience.

at Center Stage's Off Center Festival tomorrow.

Hoch's last solo show, "Some People" — which played a pre-New York run at the TheatreProject in 1994 — won an Obie Award, extended its run at the New

York Shakespeare Festival from one month to three and was indeed broadcast on HBO. The *New York Observer* wrote: "He takes us to the outer limits, and more authentically beyond the safer, now almost too well-known territory of Eric Bogosian, and even the docudramas of Anna Deavere Smith, or the show-bizzy performance art of John Leguizamo."

The reason Hoch sometimes serves as his own pitchman is that he'd like his audiences to include some of the same folks he portrays on stage — that is, the younger generation, and characters who have been described as "the disenfranchised" or "the ethnic fringe."

In "Jails, Hospitals & Hip Hop," which opens at New York's Performance Space 122 in March, his 10 characters range [See Hoch, 4p]

'Working my stuff out'

[Hoch, from Page 1D]

from convicts to a corrections officer, rehab patients to rappers. Thematically, "it deals with language and race and class and the media," he says. The show also includes Hoch's first non-New Yorker — a white kid in Montana named Flip, who aspires to be a gangsta rapper. Although his characters are composites, Hoch says Flip was inspired by kids he met when he was touring the Midwest with "Some People."

Despite his wide travels, Baltimore is the only city besides New York that will have seen all three of Hoch's solo pieces (the first, "Pot Melting," was part of Maryland Arts Place's Diverse Works series in 1992).

"Every show I did [in Baltimore] the audience was a) really in tune and b) supportive even though I was working my stuff out," he says, speaking from his apartment in Brooklyn.

And Hoch will still be working things out when he's here, rehearsing each day with director Jo Bonney, who happens to be Eric Bogosian's wife. "She's going to flutter the show, butcher it, make

heavy changes," he says kiddingly. "All of that and more," Bonney responds.

Hoch has been called "Bogosian's younger brother," and Bonney agrees that the similarities between the two performers include their on-stage energy and use of multiple characters. "The difference is that coming from different generations and backgrounds, their reference in terms of language and music is different," she says. "But I do think that they both have the same intense relationship with the stage and with their audiences."

One thing she and Hoch will be working on is the show's only female character — who may or may not be included in all of the performances at Center Stage. "[She] is a very strong character who says a lot of interesting things, but I'm worried she might tip the balance of some of the show," Bonney says.

Another character under debate is a Jewish boy from Brooklyn who grew up with rap and break-dancing and is about to be bar-mitzvahed. Hoch claims there's part of him in all his characters, but this one appears to have more than most, since Hoch is also Jewish and was raised in a multicultural community in Queens.

Also still being discussed is the character of Hoch himself, who appears in a monologue about turning down a chance to guest star on "Seinfeld" as a pool caretaker at Jerry's health club.

"When I got there, they asked me to do it in a Spanish accent," Hoch explains. "I refused because the character was one-dimensional. ... Jerry said: 'Isn't that what you do? Don't you do little funny accents?' ... The discussion led to an argument, and the next day I was back on a plane to New York."

"Seinfeld" is hardly the only opportunity Hoch has passed up since he was last in Baltimore. He also rejected the movie "From Dusk Till Dawn." When Quentin Tarantino's screenplay arrived in the mail, he says, "On page 16, it said, 'They enter a bar filled with

Danny Hoch

Where: Center Stage, Head Theater, 700 N. Calvert St.

When: 8 p.m. tomorrow, Wednesday and Thursday

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dirty, greasy Mexican whores.' I said, if this is what the film's like in writing, what's it going to be like shooting?"

Then there was "Money Train" with Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson, in which Hoch was supposed to blow up a token booth. Hoch, who spent four years performing in schools and prisons as part of New York University's Creative Arts Team, explains, "I'd rather get stopped on the street by a kid who's like, 'Yo, I saw you on Rikers Island, you made me think,' rather than, 'Yo, you're the guy that blew up the token booth.'"

He did accept some movie roles, however. He'll be seen in Hal Salwen's yet-to-be-released "His and Hers" and, most notably, in Terence Malick's coming World War II epic, "The Thin Red Line." He also wrote and starred in a critically praised episode of HBO's "Subway Stories."

A TV pilot he co-wrote with Darnell Martin ("I Like It Like That") about young people in Brooklyn fared less well. "ABC had bought it," he says, "[but] ultimately the people at the top said, no, we're going to lose our white viewers. It's too culturally specific" were their words.

So now Hoch is working on a screenplay set in the American heartland. Titled "White Boys," "It's about white kids in Iowa that model themselves after black gangs in Chicago," he explains. "Maybe if I get more leeway I'll make it about Brooklyn, which is really my goal."

And he has other goals as well. "I want to make more theater, and I don't necessarily want to be the only one on stage. I'd like to collaborate," he says. He'd also like

other performers to take a stab at his solo shows, but he realizes the scripts have to be published first, and that's been a problem.

"Publishers have told me, 'Oh, but your stuff is oral. It doesn't read on the page.' I look at Anna Deavere Smith, it's published," he says. To get around this problem, he's self-publishing "Some People," which will be on sale at his performances of "Jails, Hospitals & Hip Hop" in New York.

He'd even like to try his hand at a musical. But a Danny Hoch musical won't exactly be "The Sound of Music." "I want it to be salsa, hip hop, reggae, klezmer, merengue and grunge for the end of the world," he says.