

12: stand-up guy

DANNY HOCH PHOTOGRAPHY PAULA COURT
Growing up in NYC in an apartment complex where there was no racial minority or majority, actor/writer Danny Hoch absorbed the language that surrounded him - West Indian patois, different forms of Spanish, Yiddish, Polish English - you name it. In this microcosm of the United Nations, the one culture that did prevail over people his age was hip hop. Coming from second, third generation immigrant families, these youths were expected to inherit what their parents worked for. "The problem was," Danny says, "that there wasn't much to inherit in the context of bricks and asphalt, except bricks and asphalt. The only thing that was beautiful was hip hop - was spinning on your back, was writing graffiti on the train, was having a little cipher in the park or DJing or battling or whatever." Hoch stays true to his roots in his latest solo performance *Jails, Hospitals, And Hip Hop*. In fact, hip hop is the main reason why he chose to take his theater training and incorporate it into what he's doing now. Because, he tells me, "I found that all the roles I was auditioning for had nothing to do with my community, had nothing to do with hip hop, had nothing to do with my generation, even. You turn on the TV, it's not about us. If it is, it's some glamorized, bugged-out version." Danny shows us the real thing, transforming himself into characters that are rarely seen in three dimensions - urban minorities more usually kept in the periphery. This is impressive, regardless of the fact that Danny is white. It's impressive because he's an on-point performer who not only makes audiences laugh their asses off, he makes them think. And many times makes them uncomfortable. He admits, "People walk out. They're like, 'I thought this was funny. Why do I feel uncomfortable? Is it okay to laugh at this?'" Because he's not just doing a stand-up impression - like, say, Eddie Murphy imitating Bill

Cosby - he becomes the character, celebrating them while finding faults at the same time. One of the subject matters that Danny also knocks on stage is hip hop in the '90s. But only one who truly loves hip hop can accurately criticize it, and Danny Hoch has a tremendous love of hip hop. Take his character Flip Dogg, a white suburban teenager who, imagining himself to be one of the 'Montana Gangsta Blood Thugs,' tells a fictitious late night talk show host that "Even though I live in Montana, I still got the ghetto in my heart." Another character, a real gold-toothed rapper named MC Enuff admits to Dave Letterman that his violent gangsta rap sold better than the song that went *Put down your AK/ Have a nice day*. You laugh at these statements, but the bigger context of what's being said is what's compelling. But all is not so negative. Danny also shows us the hip hop-obsessed Cuban student who learned English from rap lyrics. And the grown up crack baby who brings his favorite hip hop tapes to speech therapy sessions. Even MC Enuff, after seeing kids in Japan breakdancing and mouthing all the words, yells out to the live studio audience that "hip hop is alive!" Danny's commentary on the music stays true to its own essence, one that he calls "a culture of resistance." By Danny Hoch's refusal to go to Broadway because it would alienate his Brooklyn neighbors, his refusal to play the stereotypical Spanish pool-boy on an episode of *Seinfeld*, and his refusal to sell his *Seinfeld* story to Nike to use as an ad campaign, Danny keeps up this spirit of opposition. Hip hop is alive, indeed.

Copies of Danny Hoch's book version of Some People, his OBIE-winning first performance, can be ordered by contacting Caseroc Productions c/o Washington Square Arts, 12 East 10th Street, New York, NY 10003 (212)253-0333. Though nothing compares to seeing him perform live.(AB)

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