

BILL HICKS

By Rich Jones

Despite obscurity on a mainstream level, Bill Hicks easily ranks with Richard Pryor and Lenny Bruce in that highest echelon of stand-up comedy -- brilliance comprised of optimistic cynicism, supreme personal dignity and savage social commentary. Continually being recognized by old fans while at the same time discovered by new ones, Hicks' legacy has been persistently growing following his death due to pancreatic cancer in February 1994. Through the magic of the recorded archive, Hicks is still "filling your empty lives with humor you couldn't possibly think of yourself" seven years later in *Philosophy: The Best of Bill Hicks*. Filled with selections from the four concert albums comprising Hicks' CD catalogue (1990's *Dangerous*, 1991's *Relentless*, 1996's *Arizona Bay and Rant In E Minor* -- only the first two were released during Hicks' lifetime), *Philosophy*, while containing no new material, is nevertheless the quintessential starting point for anyone with even a remote interest in what Hicks is about. Like Pryor and Bruce before him, Hicks' devotion to the unadulterated truth serves as a truly devastating tool, providing that purest kind of insight only visible after the haze of hypocrisy, deception and lies has been vanquished. This technique is clearly demonstrated throughout *Philosophy* as Hicks attacks a wide range of topics including religion, war, the government, children, drugs, pornography, sex, the military, smoking, advertising, taxes, television, personal freedom and the state of America. Born in Georgia in 1961, Hicks showed many of the early warning signs of impending comic genius at an early age: an anti-authoritarian nature, a collection of characters -- including Goober Dad, Dumb Jock and Maharishi Fatso -- designed to point out the mass inconsistencies inherent in adults' non-logic, and of course the obligatory teacher's desperate hope that five minutes of performance at the beginning of each English class would be enough to get it out of young Bill's system so that he and the rest of the children could focus on the lesson at hand (it never worked). By the time Hicks had graduated high school, his comedic instincts were firmly in place. Moving to LA, he began performing alongside then-unknowns such as Jay Leno, Jerry Seinfeld, Garry Shandling and Andrew Dice Clay. While most critics at the time inaccurately lumped Hicks in the same boat as Clay, nothing could be further from the truth. Whereas Clay's purpose was exclusively to be vulgar and shock, Hicks, whose stage presence was indeed audience-friendly, just never went out of his way to be sensitive towards any topic addressed. At the time, Hicks went on record to describe himself as "the antidote" to Clay. In retrospect, Hicks must have been amused at certain critics' incapability to differentiate between obscenity and the truth. Some of the more notable moments in Hicks' career include having his leg broken by two Vietnam veterans following an anti-Reagan rant; not missing a beat while being held onstage at gunpoint by an "intellectually challenged" would-be heckler unable to deal with the scathing rebuttals Hicks kept dealing out to his asinine non-witticisms; and most notably a late-night talk show appearance censored out entirely by David Letterman's pro-life sponsors. Although enraged at the time, Hicks later admitted the latter experience "earned him more attention than my other eleven appearances on Letterman times one hundred." Publicly revered by such entertainers as Dennis Miller, Denis Leary, Henry Rollins and Richard Belzer, as well as music groups Radiohead and Tool, Hicks is a cultural icon whose moment has still yet to fully arrive. *Philosophy* is an opportunity to hear his wisdom in one condensed listening

experience.PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT="

HYPERLINK ".../writers/RichJones.html"By Rich Jones

September 2001

