

**DANGEROUS / RELENTLESS / ARIZONA BAY / RANT IN E-MINOR
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By Keith Cameron

STAND-UP COMEDY is the last refuge of the loud-mouthed, lazy-brained, self-righteous, self-satisfied, talentless, hopeless, all-round useless git. Two exceptions have held this truth to be incontrovertible during the 1990s: Eddie Izzard, and Bill Hicks. While one fondly anticipates Izzard's absurdist wisdom lightening life's woeful realities for years to come, Hicks is gone, killed by pancreatic cancer three years ago at the age of 32.

A laconic Texan relocated to New York, Hicks invariably gets compared to Lenny Bruce, seeing as both railed with increasing desperation at the iniquity of the world, both pushed the boundaries of taste, and both died young. Yet, in truth, such linkage ill-serves Hicks, whose humour had a warmth and sleight of hand rare for someone whose favoured topics included pornography, drugs and the sexual proclivities of Barbara Bush. His devastating assaults on the myriad institutionalised hypocrisies of America were heightened by an array of droll characterisations and wonderfully expressive facial mannerisms. These albums clearly want for the latter's absence, yet still convey a substantial measure of the man's genius. Previously available, though long since deleted, 'Dangerous' and 'Relentless' date from '90 and '91 respectively and contain the recognised essence du Hicks. Both are products of his 'Flying Saucer Tour Of America', whereby the charmingly, uh, traditional citizens of Fife, Alabama, feel the wrath of this avenging misanthrope. Why, wonders Hicks, would aliens choose to visit such places when they could go to New York instead? ("Oh my God, we're being invaded by rednecks!")

The Gulf War is helpfully explained: "They said the Iraqis had the fourth largest army in the world... Well, the Hare Krishnas are the fifth largest and they've already got our airports..." Religion is a favoured topic: "A lot of Christians wear a cross round their necks. Do you think if Jesus comes back he ever wants to see a f--ing cross?!"

Then there is smoking. Always a prodigious inhaler, Hicks' nicotine habit spiralled after he ended his fractious relationship with alcohol ("I'm up to two lighters a day." "A message for all you non-smokers - non-smokers die every day!"). The chilling irony of his dread prediction that in five years he would be addressing his audience through a post-tracheotomy voice-box is, of course, that Bill Hicks didn't even last the full five. If 'Dangerous' is good **8/10**, 'Relentless' is damn near comic nirvana, capturing Hicks at his peak before illness and disillusionment took hold **10/10**.

Of the two posthumous works, 'Arizona Bay' **6/10** is fitful and flawed, featuring Hicks' tactic of linking tracks with music, which simply detracts from some acidic material ("Ever noticed how people who believe in creationism all look unevolved? 'God created me in one day.' 'Yeah? Looks like he rushed it.'").

'Rant In E-Minor' **9/10**, however, is astonishing. Aware that his disease was terminal, it's the unfettered invective of a man with nothing left to lose or gain, the last will and testament of a man whose obsession with not selling out to the US entertainment mainstream now led him to launch a frenzied attack on his former friend Jay Leno. Hicks imagines Leno shooting himself and his brains forming the shape of the NBC peacock on the wall behind - "a company man to the bitter f--ing end... another whore at the capitalist gang-bang". And all because Leno had done an advertisement for Doritos.

With complacent goons like David Baddiel currently gang-banging their way to considerable wealth without even having the grace to be funny, the visceral power of Bill Hicks is felt like a

knee to the solar plexus. "I believe there's a commonality to all humanity," he says on 'Rant...'.
"We all suck." Beyond question, the King of Comedy, and a prince among paupers.