

## THE REASONABLE RANTER

*By David McGurgan*

It's typical of America's lack of concern for art -- real art and not elephant-dung-encrusted sensationalism -- that the late Bill Hicks remains largely anonymous and unheard. Simply put, Hicks was one of the best comedians to ever walk this planet. He was a comic's comic, and, as brilliant social satirist, he combined a gut-level hatred of hypocrisy with a scathing sense of irony. Sadly, the same irony that Hicks wielded in his routines, including one about cancer, would put an end to the career of this "up and coming comic." He succumbed to pancreatic cancer at the age of 32, on the cusp of even greater success and recognition.

Hicks released two albums in his lifetime, *Relentless* and *Dangerous*. On these records, Hicks transcended the medium and used his right to free speech to point out governmental hypocrisies (arming much smaller third-world countries like Iraq, then declaring "war" on them) and to promote positive drug stories (using hallucinogenic mushrooms to heighten consciousness). Not exactly the stuff the censors are fond of.

Two posthumous albums were released, *Arizona Bay* and *Rant in E Minor*. It is the latter that is Hicks at his sharpest. Saying his wit is acerbic and sarcastic is like saying the Titanic was a big boat. Hicks would rant on incessantly about how TV keeps us numb (remember the program *American Gladiators*?) and made one of the strongest arguments for abortion ever recorded.

While some comedy aficionados found out about him a few years before his death (through two HBO specials and a dozen appearances on David Letterman's late night program), the biggest irony in Hicks' career is that most people who have heard of him learned of Hicks' comedy legacy after the fact. If Hicks' life had to be summed up in one sentence, it would be this quote from Noam Chomsky: "The responsibility of the intellectual is to tell the truth and expose lies."

Instead of dropping bombs at people from planes, Hicks suggested that we drop food at them. He advocated that instead of spending money on weapons and war, we spend it on provisions and clothing.

To Bill Hicks, the world was a place that he truly believed was capable of change for the better.