

## **FRIENDS RECALL HICKS**

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*By Kevin Phinney*

Bill Hicks is remembered by his contemporaries in Austin and around the country as an uncompromising talent.

"He was the kind of comedian everybody in the business either wanted to emulate, or in some cases, imitate," said Johnny Torrez, who opened for Hicks' last shows in Austin last fall. "I know a lot of people think that Denis Leary's onstage persona owes a lot to Bill."

Rick Johnson, who came up through the comedy trenches of Houston alongside Hicks and now works in Hollywood, said, "Bill Hicks was the comedian Sam Kinison always wanted to be. They're both gone now, but as part of the 'Outlaw Comics,' I can say that Sam owed a lot to Bill."

Johnson said, "The first time I saw Bill, he was 17 years old and carried a judge's permit to work in a nightclub that served alcohol. He was so fresh and innocent looking, and then he'd go into some stuff that people five or ten years older could never get away with. He used to wonder why in the world nobody on Gilligan's Island ever tried anything raunchy with Ginger or Mary Anne. He was completely fearless."

Kerry Awn, one of Austin's most recognized and popular comedians, remembers his first encounter with Hicks as "inspirational."

"I saw him when the Comedy Workshop first opened in Austin in 1982, and he was all of 20 years old. There he was, this little kid, on the stage doing things that were light-years beyond what the headliners from L.A. were able to do. I saw him, and I said, 'Yeah, that's what I want to do. He didn't have an act. He told the truth - as he saw it.'"

The former manager of the Workshop, Arthur Cicchese, said that Hicks' intensity never abated.

"He didn't really mix well with the other comics," Cicchese said. "Most of the comics would hang out in the green room, and Bill would be out in the alley going over his routine. Of the Houston Outlaws, he was Billy the Kid - the youngest, but the leader."

In his later years, Hicks began recording his material for release on compact disc. To date, *Dangerous* and *Relentless* have enjoyed healthy sales as cult items, and two posthumous releases are planned: *Rant in E Minor* and *Arizona Bay*.

"The last time I saw Bill, we ran into each other at a bookstore, and he invited me to lunch," Torrez said. "We talked about some old days and made each other laugh, which is what we liked to do most with each other anyway. He will be missed. He opened the door for so many people, and like Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor, he was willing to go the distance, no matter what the consequences."