

Production exposes harsh realities of youth

BY STEVE KOWALSKI
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Eric Bogosian's *SubUrbia*, a play opening Thursday, Feb. 8 at Oakland University's Varner Studio Theatre, has also been shown on the big screen, easily carrying an "R" rating.

The production, which casts students from the University's Department of Music, Theatre and Dance, doesn't hold much back in the way of profanity and adult themes.

"It's a big shock-value type of show," said OU student Ruth Dudley, assistant director and stage manager.

The play, set entirely on the parking lot of a suburban 7-Eleven, features a college-aged couple embroiled in an argument

over their relationship while the concerned store owner tries to conduct business as usual.

Scheduled on eight nights between Feb. 8 and 18, Valentine's Day is one of the play's off-nights, appropriately enough.

Sweethearts, the main characters (Cliff and Soozie) are not.

Doesn't sound like the kind of play one would expect an Angel to appreciate, but this one does: Director Angel Maclean, a Bloomfield Hills native and a part-time OU performing arts professor who has returned to the university where she earned her undergraduate degree.

"I think nowadays 80 percent of kids talk that way when just hanging out with friends," Maclean said, not condoning, just acknowledging today's lan-

guage among the late teen and early 20s crowd. "You don't cater to what you hear, but Oakland University every once in a while does off-color shows and you really need to do a show like that because that's what's done in New York or Chicago."

Most of the University's plays meet what would be considered "G" or "PG" ratings by movie standards, but Maclean, who also earned a master's degree in theater from DePaul University and worked in various Chicago theaters for three years, said *SubUrbia* is good for variety's sake.

She said some theater students declined auditioning after seeing the script but others accepted, knowing they will encounter these roles in their

professional careers. Bogosian's off-the-wall works, including Ohio Award winning solo shows *Drinking In America*, *Sex Drugs, Rock & Roll*, *Pounding Nails in the Floor with My Forehead* and his most recent *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee*, have been staged around the United States and the world.

The playwright has also appeared in more than a dozen feature films, starring as the misanthropic "shock-jock" Barry Champlain in Oliver Stone's film version of his own *Talk Radio*. And his new novel *Mall* is capturing national attention.

Maclean, who has performed with the Meadow Brook Theatre and the Children's Theatre in suburban Detroit, said the cast does *SubUrbia* great justice.

It's so good, in fact, that the director said she had to double cast the main characters with Pat Butcher and his understudy Mike Schneider splitting time as "Jeff," and Christa Coulter and her understudy Jen Smith playing "Soozie."

That's the kind of decision-making skills that directing and teaching offers her. Maclean said one of the things she thinks is important is to have a director who still works in the business.

"Too often when you have a full-time professor it's hard to take that time (to direct)," she said. "It's hard enough for me just being part-time."

But the cast and stagehands would have to agree with her expertise. "It's a cool thing for the stu-

dents to have someone come back and teach us," Tudley said.

What: *SubUrbia*, an adult-language drama by award-winning writer Eric Bogosian
When: Feb. 8-18 (8 p.m. performances on Feb. 8, 9, 10, 15, 16 and 17; 2 p.m. Feb. 7 p.m. Feb. 11 and 2 p.m. Feb. 18)
Where: Varner Studio Theatre on Oakland University campus in Rochester
Admission: \$10 general, \$8 seniors and OU employees and \$5 students
Call: Varner Hall Box Office at (248) 370-3013 and Ticketmaster at (248) 645-6666.

Rothko from page C1

"Rothko doesn't start to find a voice until 1933 in his first one man show at the Contemporary Arts Gallery in New York City," said Dixon. "He starts to give drama to his paintings. (In 1947-48, Rothko wrote "I think of my pictures as dramas: The shapes in the pictures are the performers.") This ends when vestiges of the figure disappear in 1948."

The number palette of the early to mid 1930s soon hints at the vibrant blue and red to dominate later work. Rothko uses a blue background to bring together

and separate three women in an interior scene (1935). Each is lost in her own thoughts in this mix of abstraction and figuration. Gradually, Rothko's palette

lightens as he continues to paint portraits of people, alone in their own worlds.

Human isolation

Anonymity again becomes a major element in the 1938 *Untitled (Woman in Subway)*. The oil on linen is one of three versions Rothko painted. This is the only work in which the woman is wearing a bright red coat. Rothko used the subway on numerous occasions to explore the human condition.

Another work on the theme of isolation features a boy seemingly lost in his own world inside an apartment.

"There are subtleties such as sunlight outlining the figure; the sunlight shifts from second to

second," said Dixon. "Rothko was alluding to living in the moment, things are about to change."

A 1937 subway scene is almost ghostly as travelers, more like apparitions, seem to merge with the columns. A closer look reveals spots of bare canvas as if Rothko barely painted the figures, adding to the feeling that they're about ready to disappear. Rothko continues this economical style in the 1937 *Four Figures in a Plaza*. One of the faces is skeleton like. It is at this time Rothko begins layering and scraping back the paint.

"The figures remind me of Giacometti," said Dixon. "Rothko hints at the bright palette he would later use in this painting

where people are passing one another in a plaza but not connecting."

Abstracting figures

With the advent of World War II, Rothko took a different approach to the figure. Influenced by Surrealist artists who were exiled from fascist Europe, Rothko became interested in their depictions of myth, fantasy and ritual. In 1940, he fuses heads together in a monster hybrid, *Oedipus* implies violence by showing the figure with its entrails protruding from the trunk.

An untitled work from 1941-42 shows the influence of Adolph Gottlieb as Rothko begins compartmentalizing or dividing his

canvas to portray man's inhumanity to man. By 1943, Rothko was using a combination of animal, bird and human creatures in ritualistic paintings that deal with death.

"Rothko's palette continues to change," said Dixon. "In a gray painting in 1945 we see the influence of Joan Miro. Rothko scratches into the canvas. He's experimenting with what he can do to make you look. It precedes his 1960 period of dark painting."

Final three

The final three works in the show reveal a transitional stage from 1944 to 1946. Rothko simplifies his compositions. Layering becomes important. *Sacrifi-*

cial Moment, a work focusing on vague human forms engaged in ritual, builds on layers and layers of brushwork.

"By 1946, it's almost pure abstraction," said Dixon. "He's getting toward the phase where he didn't need figures any more to convey a sense of action. In a 1958 lecture he says 'Whoever used the figure mutilated it. No one could paint the figure as it was and feel that he could produce something that could express the world. I refuse to mutilate and had to find another way of expression.'"

The evolution secured Rothko's place in history as a member of the New York School.

Jazz from page C1

60s listening to Motown and early English bands like Cream and Jeff Beck. At 12, he formed a basement band on Woodrow in west Detroit because he "wanted to be a bass player like Paul McCartney."

"We played a lot of Jimi Hendrix then I heard Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown. I liked the way he swung, the way he felt."

Hall went on to play string bass with the symphony orchestra at Mumford High School. After graduation, he played Latin style jazz and began studying with Ned Mann at the University of Michigan.

"I'm influenced by it all," said Hall. "I see the beauty in it all."

Like Hall, Trajano began listening to the Beatles at an early age because his aunts played their recordings. His father was into Frank Sinatra and Nina Simone. By age 12, Trajano began playing drums.

"Then I saw Buddy Rich at DB's Lounge at the Hyatt and like every other drummer it changed my life," said Trajano, 31. "It didn't necessarily make me want to pursue jazz but be a good drummer. Then at age 17 I heard Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* and it changed my life. I sold all of my rock records to buy jazz and began taking drum lessons."

Trajano went on to study percussion at Wayne State Univer-

sity where he played with the orchestra. Along with the way he also studied with Myron McDonald, a former member of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

On the right track

"Myron McDonald put me on the right track but the best lessons are learned in the field," said Trajano who recently played for the Patsy Cline Show at the Gem Theatre. "We took notebooks to see Marcus Belgrave at all night jam sessions and did transcriptions. It never ends the amount of knowledge you can learn in the search to find your voice."

Grisa began his journey to

develop his melodic musical style at Bentley High School where he sang in the choir. It was there director Jerry Smith "instilled a real love of music" in him.

"I started playing wedding music in bands," said Grisa, 37. "My brothers played in a rock band and snuck me into bars. At 19, I started studying piano and joined School Jazz (the vocal jazz group based at Schoolcraft College). That's where I met Eileen Standley (the group's accompanist) who introduced me to Matt Michaels at Wayne State and I began studying piano with Matt, and vibraphone with Robert Phipp. I didn't play jazz until I was 21. That's when I heard the

Pat Metheny Group and started listening to Miles Davis and John Coltrane."

Over the years, Grisa's done everything from write jingles to play on background tracks for commercials. His original compositions can be heard on the 1999 release *Original Moon*. That group went on to play the Montreux Detroit and Flint Jazz festivals. Grisa also plays with Dave McMurray's local band, and with Francke on his last three CDs including the latest *What We Talk of - When We Talk*. He also occasionally plays with Michael King and Sheila

Landia.

The Dalo Grisa Trio, however, is his real love and it's no wonder why. Mellow is the word that comes to mind when they play *Blame it on My Youth*, an Oscar Levant and Edward Heyman tune.

"They're like Dave Brubeck, intelligent and accessible and sophisticated," said Hayden Kramer, general manager of the Livonia Marriott. "We have had positive feedback from our guests. We like the idea of supporting jazz and it's great music."

Expressions from page C1

les medley," said orchestra president Bob Bennett, who met his wife, Janet, at a fraternity/sorority party for students at Wayne State University.

The Bennetts have been married 48 years. "We both love *One Fine Day* from *Madame Butterfly*," said Bennett. "It's such a soulful, beautiful melody but also a little

and because of the story." A love story. What more perfect way to celebrate Valentine's Day?

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- List: Mephisto Waltz

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