

Dirty Tricks

By Jan Hoffman

GARBAGE. Jango Edwards and Friends Road Show, presented at Entermidia Theratre, 189 Second Avenue at 12th Street, 475-4191.

Jango Edwards is a self-exiled American presently living in Amsterdam, who has toured Europe for the last 10 years with his Friends Road Show, performing in the streets and on stage, pulling off innumerable wide-eyed stunts in public. He promotes himself—quite vigorously—as a clown. This may sound faintly familiar, a bit late '60s, and somewhat Merry Pranksterish. In fact, the show he's brought back home occasionally seems moldy—the hashish and LSD jokes, the Hare Krishna sendup, his CLOWNPOWER slogan. He enjoins us to leap on stage and dance to a number called "Springtime," and we're exhorted to clap our hands if we believe in love and hope.

Clowning is appropriate for someone who still cherishes a late '60s spirit. Clowns stand outside convention: they are scatological, blasphemous, defiant, and reflect (often in the reverse) social and political concerns. Edwards's mimed characters, which he pulls out of his repertoire like a magician pulling objects out of a tall hat, are preoccupied with manliness and genitalia. He mocks all sorts of posturing—circus high-wire artists, Las Vegas magicians, TV evangelists, classical pianists. He rims his lips in classic clown white, and his street alley stage set is cluttered with the most ridiculous props unimaginable. Indeed he is a fool, an immensely silly man with outmoded long hair, spectacles for all occasions (also an occasional spectacle himself), and a fondness for exposing himself to the elements.

Clowns are the butts of the world's jibes. At first, Edwards too seems to abandon ego, and gleefully blows the whistle on his own lousy jokes. He and his wonderfully laconic five-piece all-purpose band throw self-consciousness to the winds (along with club soda, egg yolks, spittle,

and raw hot dogs—if you sit within the first 10 rows, a raincoat is advisable). He seems to loosen up the audience by rushing past our self-consciousness, too: he flops down indiscriminately into laps, kisses men and women, tweaks whatever's available, beckons blushing volunteers on stage.

Clowns have always been at least this loud and blatant, but generally in the context of an Everyman persona, which is why we can laugh so readily at them. But Jango Edwards is finally too much of a showman to assimilate this fundamental facelessness. No matter how frequently he switches character, we never forget that this is Edwards as so-and-so. His act has a lot of stand-up monologues and songs, which are accompanied by the darker aspects of that kind of comedy. His parodies are often cruel. The audience volunteers become his victims. He's a Don Rickles clown. While late '60s folk prattled on (and with good reason) about freeing up inhibitions and so forth, Edwards seems determined merely to engage us in a vulgar taste test. (Come to think of it, he looks like Frank Zappa and Alice Cooper). He flaunts puerility.

In his printed handouts Edwards preaches at length about the clown as consummate actor, how clowning is a gesture of love, and laughter a form of relaxation and freedom. There were some moments in his show when he confirmed his own teachings. He became a droll, rubbery drunk who had a fool's true dignity; his dive into a cup of club soda was a hilarious sendup of the pomp of circumstance. He made provocative use of an armadillo. The laughter was filled with helium, it was a relief to giggle, and I wanted to run away and join his roadshow.

But many of his pieces had a hollow sameness—the crotch fumbings, the self-congratulatory naughtiness. They had neither the sharp-eyed political acuteness of good standup material, nor the blithe absurdity of elegant clowning. Bob Carroll

Continued on page 108

Continued from page 106

is a funnier, far more articulate commentator, Bill Irwin a more graceful mime/juggler/clown, Spalding Gray a more gifted actor—and any of them gives a more imaginative, more generous one-man performance. As the evening went on, the laughter became more diffuse, uneven, and I was quite content to let him do the running away for both of us. By the time he did a parody of an Elvis/punk rock band, it had long become apparent that Jango Edwards really isn't a clown. He's a ham.