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THEATER REVIEW | 'THE ALL-AMERICAN SPORT OF BIPARTISAN BASHING'

Start Spearing the News

By NEIL GENZLINGER

Perhaps you've seen Will Durst, the political humorist, doing sound-bite commentary on television, trying to riff on questions from some stiff anchor or talk-show host, and your reaction has been, "This guy's kind of drab." But that's not the real Will Durst. The guy now cracking people up for 90 minutes at New World Stages in a sharp one-man show: that's the real Will Durst.

Television isn't Mr. Durst's best medium; it doesn't do well with wry or folksy or brainy. Sure, Jon Stewart is brainy, but in a smirking sort of way. Mr. Durst doesn't smirk; he observes and remarks. Mr. Stewart is the hotter star, Mr. Durst the more lovable one, which is why the stage is the right place for him.

He is also, however, a bit of a liar. His show, which opened last night, is called "The All-American Sport of Bipartisan Bashing," but it's hardly bipartisan. Yes, there are some Hillary Rodham Clinton and John Kerry jokes, but they function mainly as a sort of DNA test for the audience. Mr. Durst gets in some dandy double takes when the laughs aren't as lusty as they are for his Bush-Cheney-etc. gibes. And of those there are many.

The show, directed by Eric Krebs, opens with a video collage of Mr. Durst's television appearances that's uncomfortably hagiographic, but once the live Mr. Durst shows up, all is quickly forgiven.

Working on a set that consists of bundles of newspapers, he shifts effortlessly between well-rehearsed bits and material that seems new. (Karl Rove: "proof that Satan and the Pillsbury Doughboy had more than just a passing acquaintance.") President Bush is hailed as one of the country's greatest leaders ever — for humorists. ("I'm part of his no-comic-left-behind program.")

The show is loose enough that quoting from it is dangerous; it will presumably be different every night. Perhaps as the run goes along, Mr. Durst will purge some of the staler material: the Dick Cheney hunting accident jokes; the why-can't-we-find-Osama stuff. But the crowning moment is likely to



Jason E. Grossman

Will Durst is no fan of the Bush administration.

remain intact.

It comes at the end and ties the package together, making it a show rather than just a stand-up comedy routine: a tirade of adjectives that will have any Bush loyalists who accidentally wandered into the room under their seats, and everyone else out of theirs, cheering.

"Will Durst: The All-American Sport of Bipartisan Bashing" is at New World Stages, 340 West 50th Street, Manhattan, (212) 239-6200.

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