

## No exit\* (reviewers choice)

# subUrbia

By Eric Bogosian

Directed by S. Barton-Farcas

Nicu's Spoon

Abingdon Theatre Arts Complex

312 West 36th St.

Equity showcase (closes April 25)

Review by Jenny Sandman

"If you grow up in the suburbs, you are told over and over again that you are living the American Dream. But if you are like me, you're not so sure. If you are like me, you leave the American Dream."

--Eric Bogosian

"I hate it here. It's ugly. It's like being dead."

--Bee Bee, *subUrbia*

"I'm alienated too, man! But at least there's Oreos." Such is the rallying cry of teenagers everywhere, especially those trapped in the generic wasteland of suburbia. Nicu's Spoon's production of *subUrbia* perfectly captured the futile energy of adolescence -- all revved up and nowhere to go.

When *subUrbia* premiered in 1994, explorations of Generation X were all the rage. But adolescence hasn't changed appreciably since then. *subUrbia* is probably the best known of Eric Bogosian's plays; Bogosian is best known as an Obie Award-winning creator of monologs and solo shows (*Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll, Pounding Nails in the Floor with My Forehead, Wake Up and Smell the Coffee*), but he's also a playwright and novelist (*subUrbia, Talk Radio, Mall*). He wrote the screenplay for the 1996 film version of *subUrbia*, directed by Richard Linklater and starring Steve Zahn and Giovanni Ribisi.

*subUrbia* is the theatrical equivalent of a *Seinfeld* episode -- nothing really happens. A group of kids hang out behind a 7-Eleven every night, eating pizza and junk food, drinking beer, listening to music, and annoying the Pakistani owners of the convenience store. These kids are spinning their wheels -- out of high school, wanting to escape, but afraid to leave. Jeff (**David Tully**) is the smartest one of the bunch. Sooze (**Jennifer Stokes**), Jeff's girlfriend, wants to go to New York and become a performance artist. Jeff doesn't want her to go, but knows she has no reason to stay. Buff (**Tony Von Halle**) is a "postmodern idiot savant," undereducated and hyperactive, in love with Sooze's troubled friend Bee-Bee (**Melissa Vigada**). Tim (**Dylan Fergus**) is the oldest, an Air Force

dropout who is full of rage and bitterness. They taunt the immigrant Pakistanis (**Karam K. Puri** and **Jyotsna du Ciel**), talk vaguely about the world and their indistinct dreams, and try to come up with exciting things to do.

On this particular night, Sooze's old friend Pony (**Christopher Conant**) is coming into town. He now fronts a popular band and the kids are alternately excited and cynical about their upcoming brush with fame. (Bee-Bee to Tim: "Didn't you see their video on MTV?" Tim: "I shot my TV.") Pony, naturally, is pompous and egotistical, though he tries to downplay that. But more importantly, he got out -- and so provides an important impetus to Sooze, one that Jeff interprets as a threat. Of course, when bored, disaffected teenagers get together, trouble is inevitable -- especially when guns and alcohol are present -- but these kids fuel each other when trouble starts, causing some ugly confrontations and betrayals, and a wholly unexpected ending.

The actors were terrific. The central triumvirate -- Tully, Von Halle, and Fergus -- were both the literal and figurative center of the play. Each had his particular character down cold; each was engrossing in his ferocity. Fergus particularly was riveting; he danced a fine line between disaffected and dangerous, and the audience could tell he wanted to snap. Stokes, as Sooze, was equally engrossing, though Vigada seemed to be letting her costume do the acting for her. Conant reveled in his status as the pretty-boy rock star. Together they had some great group chemistry.

Director S. Barton-Farcas kept the lively cast from spinning out of control in the small space. The tiny stage aptly recreated the metaphor of the suburbs (small, dreary) and added to the play's inherent claustrophobia. The set (**Howard Goldberg**) was an almost perfect recreation of the back of a convenience store -- complete with broken fencing, milk crates, and a pay phone.

Bogosian is one of the best writers around, and *subUrbia* is haunting in its accuracy. Nicu's Spoon, known for its small but excellent productions of current playwrights (most recently Mac Wellman's *A Murder of Crows*), scored a hit again with *subUrbia*. It was sure to resonate with anyone who ever wanted to get out.