

The rant king returns

Lewis Black in Concert: A Benefit to The Human Race (Theatre Company)

By JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN



Comedian Lewis Black will perform at the Victoria Theatre on Oct. 11 as a benefit for the Human Race Theatre Company

“It is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane.” I don’t know that Philip K. Dick was specifically making a reference to Lewis Black, but he may well have been. Our civilization is rampant with hypocrisies and absurdities, and it’s liable to drive a person mad. And anyone who has heard Lewis Black knows just how mad he can get, angry at the injustices in a world that just won’t see reason. This Sunday at the Victoria Theatre, Dayton will have the opportunity to hear some good sense at Lewis Black in Concert: A Benefit to The Human Race (Theatre Company).

When HRTC President and Artistic Director Kevin Moore first met Black after a showing of last September’s “Miracle on South Division Street,” he was unaware that the hot-blooded comedian is also a playwright. Black holds degrees from the University of North Carolina and Yale Drama School, and oversaw the development of more than 1,000 plays as the playwright-in-residence at the West Bank Café’s Downstairs Theatre Bar in New York City. Black’s romantic comedy “One Slight Hitch” appealed to Moore, who added it to the 2015-2016 season.

“Lewis offered to come back and do his concert for us as a fundraiser,” Moore remembers. “No brainer—we accepted.”

The funds raised from the benefit will help support the production of One Slight Hitch, which will run April 7-24, 2016.

“It allows us to reach a new audience—one that might not typically come to The Loft Theatre to see our shows, but because of Lew’s involvement, may take that step,” Moore says. “Once there, the chance of getting them back increases exponentially.”

A cause near and dear to Black’s heart, to be sure. Black recently took the time to talk to *Dayton City Paper* about the one-night-only benefit. The following are highlights from that conversation.

Why is local theatre like this important?

Lewis Black: I think what’s extraordinary about it, there’s not a lot of cities that have that kind of a professional company. ... I just think it’s a vital way in which we communicate with each other. In as much as you can go see a movie or watch a TV show, there truly is something that is extraordinary about entering a room with 300 or 500 people you don’t know and having a group of people perform in front of you and that you’re all basically suspending disbelief and creating another reality together. That’s fuckin’ nuts!

And how does the theatre experience differ for you from doing stand-up?

LB: The difference is you work with a group of people. You’re not up there by yourself. You’re up there interacting with other human beings. I mean it’s kind of what really is intriguing about theatre and the way in which it’s passed on. ... It’s really an oral tradition in which the people who are working and making a living at it pass it on to the next generation who pass it on to the next generation. It’s an oral culture.

What has most recently gotten your signature explosive response, with either the news or —

LB: Donald Trump. And the success of Donald Trump and the amount of time they’re giving him and the amount of focus and attention they’re giving him. That along with just the whole idea of it. It feels as if we’re in the middle of a campaign that really has another almost year and two months to go. I mean it’s absurd. It’s so sick we’re not doing anything that needs to be done. We’re sitting around having discussions about things we should be doing and somehow we should wait around until somebody else is elected. And that’s all we ever do now. You know, and then we’re told that, you know, “If I’m gonna get there, I’m gonna bring everybody together.” Please. No one’s done it in a long time. It requires both sides to do it. It doesn’t require just one person to say we’re gonna do it. It requires a complete change of the goddamn mindsets. And what really infuriates me is both sides continue to say the same things over and over again. So we know your position, k? And we’ve lived under both positions and we’ve survived and there were no overwhelming traumas and we managed through it and now you have to realize that both sides have been problematic in terms of what their solutions are and we have to go ahead and both sides have to sit down and figure out what the

other side really has to offer and figure out how to work with what the other side has to offer and then come up with something. Because we don’t move quickly, but now we’ve really managed to not move at all. And now we’re not even making decisions. So that they say, “Well, what we’re gonna do is we’re just gonna put a cap on stuff. We’re gonna take four percent out of the budget across the board.” You don’t do that stuff, ok? There are no adults in the room. That’s what infuriates me. And when I’m the person speaking like an adult, something is fucking wrong.

“When I’m the person speaking like an adult, something is f-cking wrong.”

— Lewis Black

From a non-partisan place I’m wondering, why aren’t there any funny republicans? There are funny socialists, there are funny democrats...

LB: In part it’s because they don’t really know what’s funny about the other side. ... Nor do they know how to make a joke about themselves. I think they, the democrats, part of it is they’re kind of mealy mouthed. I don’t consider myself a democrat. I consider myself a socialist. So, both sides to me are, you know, really?

So as a socialist, are you on board with Bernie Sanders?

LB: It’s the only candidate that I’ve had running as such in my lifetime, which is why he’s gonna lose.

Don’t say that!

LB: Well he is! I mean, I wish it weren’t true, but it’s true. He should have referred to himself—you know, “socialist” doesn’t work. It’s a dirtier word than “cocksucker.”

I feel like you’d have a lot of support if you were to throw your hat into the presidential ring. Has that ever been on the table?

LB: There’s a consideration of it now, but I don’t know what’s gonna happen. If it’s more work, I don’t wanna do it.

That’s fair, although I would adore the opportunity to someday go to the Lewis Black Presidential Library. I think that that would be—

LB: —pretty small.

Back to the benefit, will it be structured like your other live shows? Will you answer tweets during the last 20 minutes?

LB: No...it’ll just be me in concert, how does that sound? I’ll probably talk more about theatre than I normally talk about on stage, and I’ll try to sucker people into seeing the show.

Lewis Black in Concert: A Benefit to The Human Race (Theatre Company) will take place Sunday, October 11, 2015, 7 p.m. at the Victoria Theatre, 138 N. Main St., downtown Dayton. Ticket information can be found at humanracetheatre.org. For more about Lewis Black, to view media or purchase merch (such as a talking Lewis Black bobblehead), visit his website at lewisblack.com.



Reach DCP freelance writer Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin at JenniferHanauerLumpkin@DaytonCityPaper.com. To read more from Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin, visit her website at jenniferlumpkin.com.