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The Beat Generation

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This Cabaret production marks the 10th anniversary of Cabaret at RISD. It is in a way fitting that it should be dedicated to the Beats in NY in the 1950s. The 1st Cabaret, which was the brainchild of the great Szymon Bojko and directed by the equally great James Barnhill, was dedicated to Russian Avant-Garde culture of the early century and the breakdown of its promise in Soviet life. And here in contrast we have American Avant-Garde culture immediately after the Second World War and its questioning of the American Dream. The Beats (beatdown, beatified, beatific) prefigured the counterculture of the 1960s.

The beat generation

Howl by Allen Ginsberg
Hilary Riley with Karoline Lavy
Mo'loch by Nina Ginsberg
Rhody Accosta
Go by Claire Holmes
Kevin Umbricht

The road

On The Road by Jack Kerouac
Kevin Walker

the trial

Characters: Clayton W. J. Ham, judge
Kevin Umbricht
Russell Woods, policeman
Karna Leoni
Ralph McIntosh, prosecutor
Martisa Nealon
J.W. Ehrlich, defender
Tamara Carroll

In the 1950s the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia (the "first" and "second" worlds, the Western and Eastern power blocks) confronted each other in what is known as the COLD WAR. The West now, with the fall of the Soviet Union, claims triumph in that conflict, but in the 50s it was a standoff of mutually escalating deterrence. Everything in this Cabaret must be understood against the reality of that confrontation which kept the world on the brink of nuclear annihilation. In the face of that unsettling reality, Americans created what might be called a culture of disturbance and anxiety but one of tremendous energy and personal commitment. Nostalgia for the 1950s whether political (that's when America was truly America) or aesthetic (love those organic clocks and kidney shaped tables) should be measured against that larger confrontation between Russia (our first Cabaret) and America (our 10th). Baruch Kirschenbaum, Dean of the Division of Liberal Arts

and Jack Kerouac first met and started a movement which changed the face of postwar America and influenced the 1960s as well as the subculture of the 1970s and 1980s. In 1995 the exhibition devoted to the Beat Generation at the Whitney Museum "sanctified" the movement, classifying it as an important part of American cultural heritage. The present revival of poetry-reading and café culture makes the Beat spirit tangible even outside museum walls. The commercial world also eagerly appropriates the legend: the Gap store uses old photographs of Ginsberg and Kerouac to advertise khaki pants; Kerouac's coat has been auctioned for 10,000 dollars.

The Beat Generation & the 1990s The RISD Cabaret has tried to respond to cultural needs of the time: in 1991, "Unknown and Awakening Europe" celebrated the liberation of Eastern Europe from Soviet dominance; in 1996, "Ubu Roi" commemorated the centenary of the premiere of the play which inspired many 20th century artists. In 1997, "The Beat Generation" coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the year when Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs

We, however, dedicate our Cabaret to all free spirits who, as the debate on art and censorship resounds with new force, look upon the Beats as "rebels with a good cause.

Don't miss the two exhibitions connected to the Cabaret:
- 10 Years of RISD Cabarets exhibition of props, paintings and posters from 1987 - 1997 - Waterman Building Lobby
- Beat Writers' First Editions - RISD Library

Thankyou...