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Music, Art and Lifestyles



## SPOKEN WORD

# DAVID SEDARIS AT THE BALBOA THEATRE

FEBRUARY 16, 2016 | ERIC NIELSEN | [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

Yesterday at the David Sedaris show, a rather large and inebriated woman sat on the other side of my wife. I'd guess her blood alcohol level was over 0.08% and she obviously wished to be more of a participant than an audience member. She was with a couple of men who were constantly checking their phones, and the three were engaged in lively conversation. As the lights dimmed and David come onstage, it became apparent, through her whoops of bravo and snorting laughter along with the flashing lights of the men's phones and constant conversation, I would first have to overcome the distractions to my left before I could enjoy the show.

At one point, an older woman, part of a nicely dressed couple, turned around and gave her that look, like "can you mind your manners?", to which the large woman smiled. And when the lady in front turned back around to enjoy the show, our loud friend shot her the dancing, middle finger, snickering with her male accomplices.

As a coping mechanism, I started counting her claps, each was accompanied by some utterance of approval, like we were at a southern church and Sedaris was the preacher. She would lean forward with her arms in the air and create thunderous booms with her hands shouting, "Yes, bravo! That's right!" and accompany it with a deep chested choke of a laugh.

As the arc of her inebriation peaked, her claps became less frequent, she slumped a little and it slowly became time for the audience to focus on Mr. Sedaris. Her friends became more and more distracted by their phones and finally left, one after the other, in the middle of the show. Once the alcohol fatigue sank in, I was finally able to shift my attention from my left to front. It was about then that David was telling a story of a young man who had impeccable manners sitting next to a loud talking ninny on the plane and I couldn't but help hope the woman sitting next to my wife was seeing the parallels. Was I that polite young man in the story?

Damn, David is funny and crass. He's so accessible to the masses that he commands the stage at the larger Balboa Theatre even when tickets are priced from \$40 and up. I'm very fortunate to have been able to see him. A night of laughter is priceless really, so what's \$50 buck? He read from his gigantic catalogue for much of the evening. His stories focused on themes of homosexuality, culture, the south and his interactions with the service world as a touring artist. Always politically correct, he still liked to dance around the edges of crudeness and race in a way that could make the old, white people laugh, (there were a lot of old, white people at the show, in fact the show was mostly older, white people)... disclaimer, I border on this demographic.

There weren't many people of color in the audience, there weren't many students and the culture espoused by the star was one of privilege, NPR ideology and it was definitely snarky. No doubt David is funny and an extremely talented writer. No doubt there is a huge audience for a show such as this. The ArtPower director in his introductions said this was one of the featured events of the whole year's programs. As David said while reading his edited journal entries, "This is the edited me". It would interesting to hear the unedited parts.

The riskiest parts of the evening were some bawdy jokes and some voices he did for African American characters from the South. His one liners from his diaries were a big hit and had people rolling in the aisles. His longer stories were less successful as they tried too hard to be a package and felt flat or formulated. David likes to cap on people and their eccentricities and their lack of interest. But sometimes we all fall flat in those situations.

He liked to say very often that he would say something to another person he had just met, just to make it weird and that's how his show felt sometimes. Many times it worked and very often it seemed canned. Oh well, you do this every night for 45 nights in 47 days and I'm sure it difficult to be fresh, new and inventive. Don't get me wrong, the people loved it and I laughed my ass off. I'm sure it was a successful night for ArtPower and David, though it just left a slightly off-putting after taste in my mouth. Sort of like the story of his fatty tumor that he wanted to feed to a turtle near his house might have tasted.

The lady next to me was the *every lady* in David's stories. I could definitely relate to his edginess relative to other people and overall she just confirmed David's theme for the whole night. So, if I were paranoid, I'd have to say she seemed like some kind of plant. But, in reality, she's just another one of those characters from David's pieces that were somehow inhuman and real at the same time.