

PERFORMANCE

Sportin' Solos

By Sally Banes

OUT OF THE PUBLIC EYE. A performance by John Malpede. The Kitchen, 59 Wooster Street, 925-3615. (January 26-28)

Two tendencies are emerging clearly in performance art of the '80s. One is the explicit borrowing of popular and folk entertainment forms as both structure and style: the comic routine, the TV variety show, storytelling, even circus. The second, perhaps a by-product of the first, is the wholesale use of character, especially the device of switching characters. Where avant-garde performers in the '70s exulted in the self and explored issues of identity through revelatory personal display, now they are involved in the flip side of that quest, endlessly trying on personae. But it's not exactly a Stanislavskian enterprise; as in the work of Eric Bogosian, who may be the godfather of this genre, seamless narrative is ruptured each time the character changes.

John Malpede's recent solo performances are instances of the character-switching genre, and the characters he plays are stock ones from popular sources: the deejay, the TV interview host, the carnival con man. In *Out of the Public Eye*, he spreads the format over a group (Malpede, Ann Magnuson, and Frank South). The characters remain more or less constant—a famous athlete and two

magazine interviewers/TV sportscasters. But, aptly enough for a performance about sports, the roles are tossed from actor to actor like so many balls. The result is like a cross between Howard Cosell and Tom Stoppard.

Most of the script is devoted to two interviews, one of Bobby Kubey (Malpede), a born-again Christian quarterback. But embedded within these scenes are more plays on role-playing, including watching and constructing one's roles through television. The interviewers are trying to capture the "real" Bobby. Both Bobbies enact the same solo nightclub routine in which a coach plays mind-games with a basketball player in a story about a baseball team. Both Bobbies constantly watch themselves on TV and even treat themselves to instant replays of their games and their ads. Bobby Kubey even shows his interviewers a tape of his epiphany—which, he explains, came upon him while he was at home alone watching TV—as he reenacts it for them, turning the event into a duet with himself. Finally, there is a taped, "on-the-spot" interview with a hunger artist who is fasting in a sports stadium, as a kind of athletic event. Malpede is brilliant as the aging Slavic émigré artist who balefully scoffs, in response to Magnuson's beaming journalistic platitudes, "Vot's to admire? I don't eat because there's nothing I'm interested in eatin'."