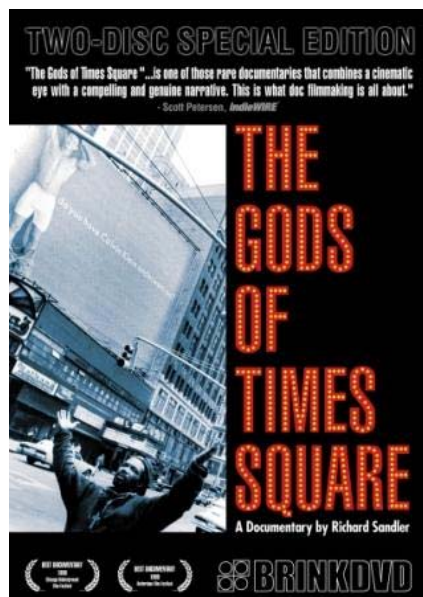


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DVD Review - The Gods of Times Square (2-Disc Edition)

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DVD Review - Gods of Time Square

Directed by Richard Sandler

BRINK DVD

Even if you've never been anywhere close to New York, chances are you've at least heard of Times Square. Occupying a prominent place in American pop culture (a culture that infiltrates pretty much every culture there is), Times Square is iconic – one of the city's landmarks, its meeting-places. To the rest of us, it's best known as the site of a never-ending series of New Year's Eve specials.

In this two-hour special edition release, "Gods of Times Square" gives us a very different, intimate view of those fabled city blocks. Film-maker Richard Sandler sets out to record some of the most flamboyant and yet most-ignored denizens of Times Square – the street preachers; religious zealots who seem to devote a significant chunk of their personal time to saving us all from hellfire or whatever in particular they deem is coming for us (and rest assured it's bad, because we're all sinners). Filming over the course of the mid-90's (1993-1998) Sandler introduces us to and follows an array of characters – some hateful, some mysterious and some simply bizarre.

"Gods of Times Square" follows no particular linear progression – the characters Sandler focuses on seem timeless. Touched on lightly are the changes that took course throughout these years, as the Disney Store moved in and small businesses moved out, and Times Square became a more sanitized version of itself. Yet the religious doom prophets remain, as they always have and likely always will.

Sandler films the stereotypical fire-and-brimstone preachers, condemning homosexuality, immorality, godlessness and so on, and then there are more obscure sects like "Jews for Jesus", and the Hebrew Israelites, African-Americans (possibly from the Nation of Yahweh) claiming to be the 'real Jews', who spout black supremacist rhetoric as virulent as any a white racist has ever thought up. Finally, there are more thoughtful characters - like James, who carries a copy of the Koran and wears a priest's collar, or Jimmy, who claims he is Christ returned, and will reveal himself to the world through rock n' roll.

At times, this film is a melange of strange imagery and even stranger people – the sort of scenes that only an urban mass concentration of people seems able to produce. Yet Sandler (through dialogue with various individuals, as there is no narration in this film) seems intent on keeping a mostly-neutral position in his work. What becomes clear is that as strange as it seems, Times Square is actually an important venue for free debate and conversation. In an era where most debate is confined to the various forms of mass media, here we see real (though not necessarily normal) people voicing their ideas about the best way to live in the world.

By skipping the narrative and getting face-to-face with people whom most others ignore, Sandler has created a challenging and thoughtful film. It's also a piece of work that can never truly be out-of-date. There will likely always be someone on a street-corner with something to say.

Special Edition includes: Over an hour of additional footage, including four featurettes.

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By [Derek Leschasin](#)

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