



*A One-Time
Lodger is Back at
the Chelsea to
Rave About the
Hotel's Show*

BRONWYN RUCKER REVIEW, PAGE FIVE

25¢

February 2, 1989
Volume 58, Number 52

The Villager

Serving Greenwich Village, Soho, Tribeca
and Lower Manhattan

63 East 4th Street, New York 10003

Former Lodger Back to Rave About 'Chelsea'

BY BRONWYN RUCKER

Ah, The Chelsea! My old homestead. Tonight I am to see Anne Hamburger's En Garde Arts' presentation of site specific theatre, "At The Chelsea". In the early Seventies, I had a sublet "at The Chelsea," tender but turbulent times. I am excited. Will it be the same?

A woman thrashes about on a bed, dark expletives of evil and life. A red light, another woman enters and wakes her, chiding her for studying too much. One is wearing a strange "Miss Muffet" style cap, the other a red garter. I hear the names "Mary," "Laura." I am thinking the man next to me has bad breath, but then the sheet of the playpen is removed to reveal "dear little sister Carrie." She is a goat. Yes, this is Squat Theatre's "Little House on the Prairie," this evening's first presentation. (Squat, former residents of the Chelsea, kept a live goat in their room.)

The actresses, Alexandra Auder and Rebecca Major, are striking and the goat is very goat-like. Their performances enhanced by a droll, mock-sincerity in delivery.

WONDERFUL SICK HUMOR

It is a parody of big city prairie life full up of a wonderful sick humor, which was most reminiscent of my own experience. Laura turns tricks to put Mary through college. Mary gets high eating bread — it's something in the yeast. Mary rakes dead flowers from the floor. Laura waters the daffodils. They coo over "dear little sister Carrie's" crayon drawings taped to the wall. Mary pulls one off. "Did you make this?" "What an artist you are!" Carrie, the goat, eats the art. Ah, the metaphor! I can relate to this! Squat theatre never disappoints me.

A call from Stanley, the evil landlord. The rent is overdue and they must leave. They perform voodoo rites on "the Stanley doll," a teddy bear, and resolve to survive anyway because they love each other and life is good. The cuckoo clock goes "cuckoo."



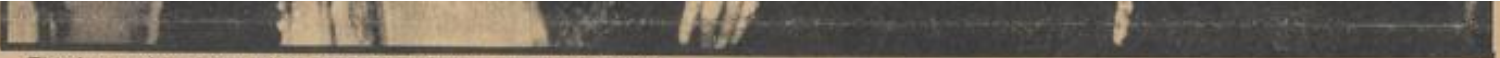
Next, up the wide wrought iron stairwell two flights to the fifth floor. Again, an olfactory awareness. Are there goats in this piece as well? But this is the Chelsea, an old hotel and there were always many odd odors.

TOILET FLUSHES, PIECE BEGINS

The second selection is entitled "The Room." The room is large with high ceilings, a sealed fireplace, a mike stand under the mantle. There is a bed, a round table and those straight back chairs — and I remember that Aztec pattern in the bedroom (except mine was blue).

A toilet flushes and the piece begins. Much banging. The windup duck falls from the mantle caught in the leg of the chair and table, occasionally twitching to the continued percussion behind the closed door. A Miami Vice man enters. Accompanied by the anxious repetitive chords of taped music, in exaggerated stances he plays his despair.

A woman enters. They argue. Their voices echo. He is a musician down on his luck. She is a producer/agent who has lost her job. The writing is excellent. David Van Tieghem is the composer/performer. Tina Dudek is a choreographer/dancer. Despite his pleas, she packs and leaves.



They've made a show of the Chelsea Hotel in the hotel spaces.

The VCR plays "2001: A Space Odyssey" (written by Arthur C. Clarke in one of the Chelsea rooms). He fantasizes with the video, donning a plastic toy helmet, his breathing amplified, synchronized with the breathing of the video's space man. Time passes. He begins to play wildly all items in the room with his drumsticks: the floor, the table, the walls, the chairs, the little toy drum of the windup bear, the TV — the bed is the bass! More banging. This time it's the outside door. He bangs back. Finally, she enters.

They dance. Make love on the round table. She dances on the mantelpiece, arms outstretched, touching the ceiling. The image is beautiful. There is a great style to this piece, very creative, highly imaginative, a hybrid of both artists' work.

In the end, they gather the bear and duck and the dolls and place them in front of the VCR. They all watch the end of the Odyssey. The spacemen touch the black obelisk. The children watch. Happy ending.

SID AND NANCY ON THREE

Now, it's back to the third floor for the final presentation.

"A Quiet Evening with Sid and Nancy" is an insightful, tortured portrayal of two lives of former Chelsea tenants. A filthy room, a string of Christmas lights and Frank Sinatra's "My Way", greet-us as we enter and find our carpet spot. Sid and Nancy are on the bed. It is hard to escape the grim reality of this piece. They are being interviewed, kind of. Sid keeps nodding out. The interviewer eventually leaves.

In reality, Sid Vicious bludgeoned Nancy Spungeon to death in one of these rooms. This being simply a "quiet" night, she is only pummeled with pizza.

Nancy is Penny Arcade and Sid is Steven Wastell. Their work is painful and powerful. Sid says very little but what he does say is so rooted in reality that for a moment, a brief moment, we see how such a violent act could happen. The very naturalistic acting of Mich Markowitz as the interviewer and

Giorgio Deaus as the unlucky delivery boy heightens the intensity of this dense work.

Stanley Bard, the owner of the Chelsea, who has always had a special understanding for the artist and who has provided the rooms, is to be commended for his generosity and Anne Hamburger for her vision. In the abstracted reality of Squat's "Little House", the stylization of Van Tieghem and Dudek and the contrasting reality of Sid and Nancy, this evening at the theatre was thought-provoking, entertaining and exciting — well balanced in content and tone. Terrific experimental theatre, coupled with the artful ambience and the history of the Chelsea Hotel, it is work with a genuine heart. Indeed, tender and turbulent.

AT THE CHELSEA: The program continues February 2-5 at 8pm with Ann Carlson, John Kelly and Frank Maya. 222 West 23rd Street. \$15.