

Three Nights / Three Artists: The Pyramid, 1985 C.Carr

I began covering the East Village clubs (The Pyramid, 8BC, WOW, Limbo Lounge, Club Chandelier, Darinka) for The Village Voice in summer, 1985. These are excerpts from my column, "On Edge," written in August and September of that year.

JOHN SEX: The pompadour deserves a place in the history of great ideas. No one realized this till John Sex sharpened his hair, exaggerating the outlandish essence of the sex god. It crests a foot above his forehead like a wave about to crash. Last week at the Pyramid Club, in this hair plumage like a courting bird's, in a broad-shouldered tuxedo jacket encrusted with little lights, John Sex hit the stage singing no one does the shing-a-ling like he does. Small leap of faith to ask in the face of so extravagant an image, even if the music was—well, less than memorable.

This was Las Vegas from another planet, Sex working through eight songs of either awesome schmaltz or vulgarity—from the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* theme to the X-rated "Hustle with the Muscle." He dropped the electric Liberace coat, asked us to applaud it, and danced loose as a go-go boy in front of his three-woman back-up group, The Bodacious Ta-Tas.

"I want what I've got!" he sang. That's the secret of his sex appeal. He called it the story of his life. His act celebrates a pansexuality even though a few songs reaffirm everything Frankie Avalon ever believed. This teen dream is a freak, delighting in his sexiness and everyone else's: "I've got it and it's alright. She's got it and it's alright. Sex appeal."

ANN MAGNUSON: It was just after 2 a.m. at the Pyramid Club when a guy dressed like Prince (ruffle, black patterned stockings) appeared onstage to claim that just like God created Eve, he had created...Fallopia. Enter Ann Magnuson.

Fallopia looked down on us slobs, not a megasuperstar in the bunch. Dancing to "Love Slave" in Dolly Parton wig, garter belt, and push-up bra, she was pure Object. So it was her job—and a job well done—to stay coolly distant while singing of how much she wanted to fuck. She told us how great it was to know that she wasn't as poor as us—and had we seen all the magazine covers she was on? From *Redbook* to *Field and Stream*?

Fallopia is pretzel logic, proudly informing us that her act— according to *Newsweek*—is "a witty send-up of sexuality." And if we couldn't see the socio-political implications, then "fuck you up the ass!" Sure—she might be "made for modern man, part of God's sexy plan," as she sings in her opening disco number. But the marriage she was planning, to an actor who beats up paparazzi because he's living "on the edge," is basically a good career move. Unfortunately, neither Madonna nor a single corseted celeb was on the premises to get offended at this parody. Or revel in the publicity.

With Fallopia, Magnuson mocks both male fantasy and the women who excel in the ancient art of manipulating it.

ETHYL EICHELBERGER: Ethyl Eichelberger thinks that at this point in his life he should play both women and men. So when he hit 40 two weeks ago, he did his own variation on *King Lear* at 8BC. *Leer* he called it. With a cast of one. That way, he got to do Cordelia too, which "made playing a man easier." So he told me later...

A couple of nights earlier I'd stopped in at the Pyramid Club to see a drag version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written in Cliff Notes chunks attributed to a certain "Joey." I stayed only for the 13-minute first act, in which Ethyl played Queen Hippolyta, and I couldn't always catch what was on the somewhat muddy prerecorded tape. ("That's to prevent improvising. We have to keep it short," the doorman told me.) But the style was pure pose, a distance mocking comment on all the characters.

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Ethyl's "Minnie the Maid" performance at 8BC the weekend before (and also performed at the Pyramid) was a completely different sort of theater. That both were "drag" describes nothing. Minnie had finally appeared to a thinned out crowd at three in the morning, wearing a short black dress, fishnet stockings, and huge silver wig entwined with black feathers. Accompanying herself on accordion, she sang about love, about how she's "never said no" but never found the right man either. Would she never find The One?

Suddenly Ethyl himself came into focus. Said probably we thought we were gonna see some classy drag act. And he reeled off a line each from Bette Davis, Diana Ross, Mae West et al. But no. Ethyl's never been a female impersonator, just an actor who wants to play great women. And men.

He shifted back into Minnie, who did another verse on love lost. She told of finding happiness at hairdressing school, because the teacher was a queen "nellier than me. Who said, 'The hair has no brain,' and I thought, 'I'm home.'" Actually that was Ethyl, licensed hairdresser, speaking. Minnie/Ethyl then sat down at the old upright piano to do a song on what her/his mother had told him/her about love— that friends were the most important thing—and then s/he pointed out the people in the audience who were friends, saying *why* they were friends. Ethyl said later, "Minnie is me."

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