

THE KIPPER KIDS: Into the Box, Out of the Box. A performance piece by the Kipper Kids, presented by The Kitchen and the National Performance Network at The Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, 255-5793. (Closed)

I hadn't thought about it much, but I guess I was a Kipper Kid once. If not a real Kipper Kid like Brian Routh and Martin von Haselberg, then some kind of middle-class, small-boy mischief-maker, especially tough when conspiring with my friend, Ralph, against our hated neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Mean, they were, and if their smarmy son, Lee, was any evidence, anti-Semitic to boot.

So one spring afternoon, having nothing better to do, Ralph and I took some eggs out of my mother's refrigerator, giggled and muttered at one another while marching down to the Jones' house, spotted an open window to their living room, and tossed the eggs inside. We fled in two different directions, making it impossible for poor Mr. Jones to chase both of us at once. Unluckily, he chose me, managing to catch up just as I dashed through my front door. Demanding to see my father (who didn't like him any more than we did), he asked for satisfaction—a spanking in front of him, which my father refused to do. I would be punished, he assured Jones, but not publicly, and not—oh how sweetly characteristic—without discussion.

Real Kipper Kids don't throw eggs into living rooms, they break them over one another's head, scandalizing the neighborhood without calling for anything except mild shock and minimal—not minimalist—discussion. Smarter than Ralph and I were, possibly because they're big kids masquerading as performers, Routh and von Haselberg have arranged their hostilities into a 35-minute act that turns out to be amiable good fun for them and, therefore, risible—but not really shocking—to the rest of us. If they're out to get the Jones of this world, it's not because they smell anti-Semitism or a cause. They just want to do in public what they suspect many of us secretly would like to do.

Theirs is almost, but not quite, an act without words. After two or three bangs heard in darkness, the lights rise on a gigantic gray-black box big enough to house the two men. Visible by their outlines are several squared sections of dif-

ferent sizes that can be opened to reveal the Kippers' heads, arms, legs, or genitals. The latter are revealed only after the popping of two blue balloons, seen first in limp form emerging from the two smallest squares. When they expose their genitals, one of them says, "It's only cock and balls, but you like it," arguably the most articulate sentence heard in the evening.

Both Kippers are called Harry. They resemble commedia del l'arte fugitives—white, pockmarked masks with long Pinnocchio noses, topped by white bathing caps. From invisible squares on either side of the huge box, one holds an open parasol, the other an umbrella. Vague mutterings are their first sounds, quickly turned into a mumbled rendition of "Pitter-patter, don't mind the rain." If they are anything recognizable on ordinary earth, they sound like British music hall comics emerging from some primeval slime with the alternately shy and pugnacious voices of nasty little cutups.

After a verse or two, they withdraw, closing the square doors behind them. Silence.

Next, they open the doors again, placing black-and-red plaids over the edge, one holding a banjo which he eventually plays, the other a wind instrument, which he plays raucously in between a verse of "Roaming in the gloaming."

Silence.

Soon they return, but only after they've blown up the limp blue balloons. This time, their baby-babble song is "Shine on Harvest Moon." The balloons pop. They sing, "Hi, neighbor." Then their legs emerge through the bottom squares, attempting to look like they're strolling. Throughout all these appearances and retreats, they make splatting noises with their lips—little obeisances to the digestive tract, so many fart-variations on an enigmatic theme.

Silence.

The top of the box—a giant platform—is partly raised so that they can pull themselves up to be revealed in full-body-form for the first time. Wearing T-shirts encasing a chest full of balloons, and jockstraps, they whistle "Tonight" from *West Side Story* while drinking white wine from two bottles, swilling it between whistles, finally spitting it out over the sides. In almost perfect unison, they break the bottles, then use the cut edges to break the chest-balloons, splotches of colored paint dripping down their bodies. Above their asses are tiny, transparent bags with something brown in them. Not surprisingly, they puncture one another's bags in order to smear the brown stuff over their ass cheeks. Holding two dainty pink dust brushes, they then sing, "there is nothing like a dame," while simulating masturbation.

By this time, their great bloated bodies have been fixed with what look like inner-tube tutus below their waists. The rest you can almost guess: using one another as adversary, they invade a chest of

drawers, extracting from each successive drawer more eggs, bags of flour, Campbells soup, cranberry aspic, and bigger versions of each as they dump the junk all over one other. After two 10-pound bags of flour have been showered on their heads, they take snow shovels to clear much of the debris off the platform. Uselessly, they wipe some of the mess from themselves with paper towels, finally squirting Redi-whip on top of one another's heads, lighting the "very statuesque" vision with tiny firecrackers. "Up your bum," I think I heard, and that was that.

Ralph and I never realized we were performing a critical act, so more power to the Kippers, even as I can't help wondering where they can go from here. Risking an interpretive comment, one of them told C.Carr in last week's *Voice* that "performance art is dead, anyway." Meaning, I suppose, they're content to do everything and say nothing. Is this the ultimate deconstruction of the American musical or the American ethic? Or is what you get merely what you see?

It was moderately intriguing to hear an audience laugh not as a mass, but as quietly struck individuals—a giggle here, an almost audible smirk over there. Some of us may be genuinely indifferent to the toilet humors of our youth; such open celebration of that past, and its untroubled creativity, is a salutary reminder not of lost innocence but of found irony.

Yet why, after 15 years of relative obscurity, the Kipper Kids should suddenly be notorious may simply be the natural show biz spill from von Haselberg's link to Bette Midler and the commodities market (he's married to both); or maybe they're appealing to a new generation discovering for the umpteenth time that the Word is dead. Meanwhile, the Kids are having a good time and are sweet enough to get it over with in little more than a half-hour. And if they're offensive, it can only be for those who forget to be offended by the pompous villains and overgrown kids running our government. ■