

THE **KITCHEN**

VIDEO MUSIC DANCE PERFORMANCE FILM LITERATURE

Wild and woolly tale

By SUSAN SHAPIRO

WE ARE sheep with no straight & narrow/We are sheep with no meadow/We are sheep who take the dangerous pathway thru the mountain range/to get to the other side of our soul."

These lines from Karen Finley's poem "The Black Sheep," cast in bronze and displayed in the lobby

PERFORMANCE ART
review

of the Kitchen, could well be the credo of all performance art. It certainly captures the artistic spirit of the Kitchen, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary.

"Lamb of God Hotel" is the first work that the controversial performance artist has written and

directed but does not appear in.

The intense ensemble piece nonetheless displays her usual tone of feminist rage. It's a dark and surreal semi-comedy about four misfits who meet in a welfare hotel.

Squeeze was raped by her father when she was a teenager. She became pregnant and had a botched abortion that left her

See BLEAT on Page 34

NEW YORK POST WEEKEND/MOVIES FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 1992

Where lambs meet to bleat

BLEAT from Page 30

sterile. Twenty years have passed, yet Squeeze continues to visit her father, hoping he'll finally say he's sorry.

Aggie, an old woman who hates ballet, was driven mad by her abusive husband, so much so that she wound up strangling her baby daughter. When someone suggests hope and faith, Aggie says, "Hope and Faith moved to a lesbian commune in Portland."

Chuckles, in pink tights and black top hat, is dying of AIDS. He's such a control freak that he's written the script for his own memorial service and insists on staging dress rehearsals. Beanie, a nerd who was raped and tortured by his older brother, tries Freud, Jung, Adler, est, Gestalt, primal therapy, TM, AA, Scientology, dream analysis, hypnosis, LSD, meditation, Outward Bound, Yoga, psychodrama, shock treatment and Weight Watchers. But he's still incapable of having a good time.

These four very troubled troubadours argue, connect and misconnect. They say things like "Tell me about your dreams before they were shattered," and admit that "No matter what I—the pain won't go away."

Beanie, whose "life hurts" and who is afraid he's "never in on the jokes around here," recites a confessional poem he's been working on for more than 10 years.

The actors, Helen Shumaker, Hapi Phace, Andy Soma and Amy Elliot, get a lot of mileage out of the psychodramas of their characters, who keep casting each other in old family roles.

In the most gut-wrenching and poignant scene, Squeeze announces that she is pregnant again. But this time the father is Beanie, who loves her and, unlike her sadistic father, treats her well. For a moment Squeeze and Beanie seem to believe the fantasy that they can be a normal family and live happily ever after. Then Beanie remembers they've never had sex.

The shock of reality is funny at first. But when you remember why she can't bear children, it's heartbreaking and haunting.

The imaginary child and its exorcism recall the "Bringing Up Baby" game in Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Indeed, both sexual dramas involve four characters, shock and role-playing, and both mix fact and fantasy. Had Finley also employed Albee's realism and slower pacing, "Lamb of God Hotel" could have been brilliant and less alienating. As it stands, the frenzied pace of exaggerated suffering and barrage of graphic language is disconcerting.

Then again with Finley, who will appear in her new solo work on April 28 at a benefit for the Kitchen, alienation is a political statement. At the beginning, Chuckles warns Beanie (and perhaps the audience): "We like to make our guests feel as uncomfortable as possible."

The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St., (212) 255-5793, Wednesdays through Sundays through May 3 at 6:30 p.m. Tickets \$15.