

# THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

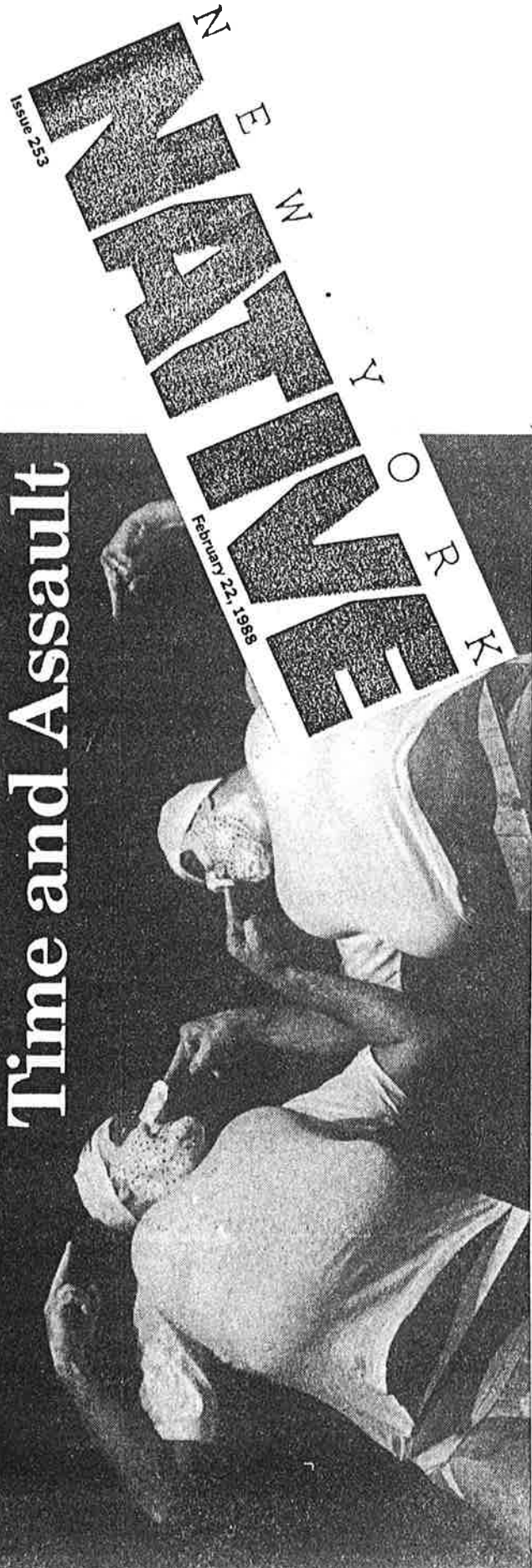
MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

512 West 19th St. (Btwn 10th & 11th Aves) New York, NY 10011

Reservations: 255-5793



Time and Assault

On a barren, rubble-strewn landscape straight out of Samuel Beckett, a dilapidated wooden shed squats ominously, its battery of doors, slots, apertures, and windows closed tightly. With a small-scale sonic boom, side windows suddenly are punched out; shattered glass flies everywhere, and the hubbub of a confused rabble issues from the little house on the desert.

The Kipper Kids, returning to the Kitchen for their first New York appearance in several years, begin their performance with a bang—and they go out with one, too. Their performance is the raucous antithesis of Ping Chong's delicately calibrated artistry. Obscene, leering, ill-mannered, gross, lewd, and hilarious, the Kipper Kids are the shameless, terrible infant repressed somewhere deep within us all. They know more about scat than Ella Fitzgerald and Jonathan Swift put together, and their messy, visceral act deliberately suggests a new genre: performance assault.

Appropriately enough, the Kipper Kids are neither Kippers nor kids, but Martin von Haselberg and Brian Routh, two beefy grown men who have been performing together since 1972 in theaters, museums, rock clubs, and now through the National Performance Network (an ambitious program coordinated by Dance Theater Workshop and other organizations). Their appearance is timeless and creepy, the *commedia dell'arte* gone to hell, with faces painted clown white dotted by stylized stubble, white rubber skullcaps, pointy chins and noses. Generally, they wear only stained jockstraps and clodhoppers, which costume is not only practical, as they end up literally covered with paint and food and slime, but also a calculated inversion of what otherwise might be sexy.

At first, they are seen only in fragments, popping in and out of doors and slots in the manner of television's *Laugh In*, to sing English music hall ditties in teeny genteel-lady voices, or in the booming rumble of the Village Idiots immortalized by the Monty Python gang. Singing their creakingly winsome songs from their tiny puppet-scale windows, they burp and fart, leer and glare, like Punch and Punchier. If that sounds like a wide range of references, the allusions are there to be caught; these two might act like cretins with the social grace of goats in rut, but there is no doubt that they know exactly what they are about. Breaking further boundaries, the house even has little flaps out of which the two poke their genitals. (A possibly unique program bio lists their penis lengths as two inches. Go figure.)

In the second half of their performance, the Kids emerge atop their shed at the stately pace of priests atop a ziggurat, and proceed to engage in a ritual of their own, but twisted and outrageous. They slather each other with Day-Glo paints, smash beer bottles, crack eggs on each other's heads, cover themselves with flour, light firecrackers on each other's noggins (the closing bang). Violent as individual actions might be, the pace is tidily organized. Much of the effect of their act is achieved through juxtaposition or surprise. Little plastic bags of what looks suspiciously like shit hang from the backs of their jocks. They puncture the bags and zestily smear this all over each other's bare behinds. You can hear the stifled giggles or aghast revulsion or outright guffaws from different audience members. But the act achieves its symphonic grossness not just by the sight of people frolicking with what might be shit on a stage, but by the additional subversion of the expected. Those plastic bags are like the Baggies Mom used to put peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches in for school lunches. When the two dump food all over each other, they use industrial-sized cans of cranberry sauce and Spaghetti-O's. Remember Chef Boy-Ar-Dee? The Kipper Kids do, and what was already gross enough to eat they use as gooey fingerpaint. Further, when they aren't burping or mumbling or making loud rapsberries, the two speak in teddibly proper faux-British accents. The Kippers present aspects of civilization civilizations deny.

That said, however, the act proceeds set piece by set piece, like porno or horror movies, with the same set-up: What next? How scary? How big? How gross? In isolated moments the act is powerful, but it does not progress or build cumulatively. One hilarious or outrageous event follows upon another, and there are often extended waits between songs or events. What could be cathartic or liberating ends up being clinical. The Kipper Kids' act feels more like a particularly bawdy lecture demonstration than a dramatic event. That may be part of the point. ■