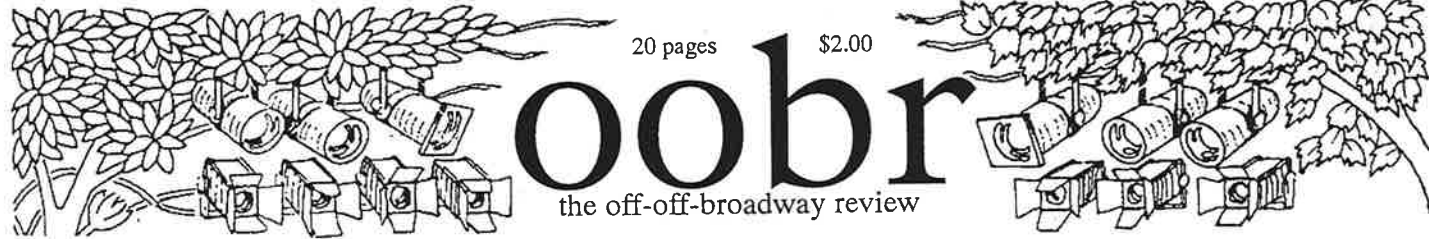


The only publication devoted exclusively to the Off-Off-Broadway scene



march 7, 1996

Dressing the part

TOO MANY CLOTHES
Written & performed by Linda Hill
The Kitchen
Non-union production (closed)
Review by John Michael Koroly

A wickedly biting stroll through the tangled urban jungle of pretension and hypocrisy, Hill's show introduces us to a range of hilariously observed oddballs. The thread (ahem) that runs through all the evening's vignettes is that of a couture-defined persona. For some of her characters, their drag is a reflection of their spirit. Others dress first to meet the demands of social hierarchy and then arrange their emotional insides to match, sort of the soul as fashion accessory. This latter group becomes more ubiquitous the higher the income level of the character in question.

The relationship of clothing and personality is delineated most entertainingly by Hill when she shares her process of creating a character. After hearing a particularly raspy-voiced matron in a Vegas coffee shop, she takes the audience along the path of construction: muu-muu, bunny slippers, bag, and fright wig all fall logically into place as she assembles her comic identity from the initial spark of the voice.

The cleverness of Hill's writing was matched by her versatility as an actor. A climactic cocktail party unites several of the evening's charac-

ters, and Hill is able to define them both visually and idiosyncratically with the adjustment of a single long red scarf worn over her black unitard. They include the excrementally trendy hostess as well as a "performance poet" named Negateeva.

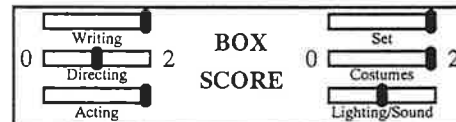
As in *Incognito Sex*, Hill's previous show reviewed in these pages (9/23/95), she is at her most inventive and likable when ad-libbing off audience participation. Here, she picked two patrons to choose an item each from the mountainous piles of clothing that surround the stage space. She then combined them (this particular night, it was an outsized bra and a quasi-sarong) to comic effect.

In terms of her technique, Hill had mugging down to a science and walked nimbly along the fine line between comic actor and out-and-out clown, drawing on the strengths of each approach. Hill and director **Henry Caplan** also did an inspired job in making the show work on a multi-media level. There were four charming interludes with videos of performance-artist cronies of Hill's leading tours through their respective closets, the funniest and most telling of which was **Todd Alcott's** "closet of long black coats." The one that stopped the show, however, was that of **Skye Hunter Pritchard**, toddler heiress to the Surf Reality empire, as she paraded around in her squirrel suit and bunny-ear slip-

pers. There was also a video confessional where audience members could seek absolution for their "fashion crimes" and a disturbing art exhibit by Hill called "Daddy's Girl" that consisted of a series of little-girl's party dresses that start out with a pretty new one and grow increasingly ripped and bloodied toward the end. As a metaphor for child abuse, it's not a new concept, but it was rendered powerfully and with admirable parsimony by Hill.

Matt Hausmann's set seemed a hybrid of a Hollywood costume shop, an Upper West Side boutique, and an East Village bohemian's closet gotten terribly out of hand. It was lit well by **Blake Burba**, who was able to create several well-defined spaces out of it. And **Sam Carter's** wacky, off-beat sound design, culled from countless sources, set a nicely apposite mood. Even a funny "fanzine," which included some howlingly funny excerpts from fashion tracts of the '40s and '50s, accompanied the program.

With *Too Many Clothes*, Linda Hill added an element of surprise and invention to a well-thought-out concept. Funny and thoughtful, it is to be hoped that it will return sometime soon.



Linda Hill in *Too Many Clothes* (p. 11)

John Sabatini