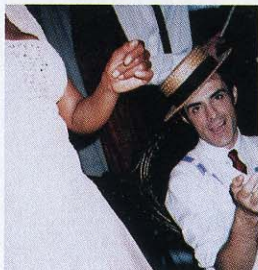


# PAPER

November 2005



*papermovie*  
by Hugo Arturi

## 52 ★ COVER STORY

THE CITIZENS BAND IS THE MOST EXCITING ACT IN NEW YORK NIGHTLIFE. THE TROUPE'S FOUNDERS—SARAH SOPHIE FLICKER, KAREN ELSON, ADAM DUGAS AND JORJEE DOUGLASS—COMBINE CABARET-STYLE SHOWMANSHIP, BREATHLESS SINGING AND DEATH-DEFYING TRAPEZE ARTISTRY FOR A SHOW THAT'S TOTALLY ORIGINAL AND ENTIRELY INSPIRED BY VICTORIAN VAUDEVILLE. WEIRD, RIGHT? BY MICKEY BOARDMAN

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pm

out with Brooke Shields

THE NIGHTLIFE ISSUE

MARIA BELLO's Big Break  
THE MISSHAPES Play Dress-Up  
BOY GEORGE's London Snaps  
CHINATOWN After Hours

THE CITIZENS BAND  
WILL SAVE YOUR SOUL

November  
2005



(l-r) Sarah Sophie Flicker,  
Karen Elson & Adam Dugas  
of the Citizens Band

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Chelsea wears a dress by  
Lagerfeld Gallery.



CHELSEA BACON

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WELCOME TO THE

55

*CITIZENS BAND*

**CITIZENS BAND**

*CITIZENS BAND*

*citizens band*

**CITIZENS BAND**

*citizens band*

**CITIZENS BAND**

WITH THEIR 19<sup>TH</sup>-  
CENTURY STYLE

AND 21<sup>ST</sup>-

CENTURY JOIE

DE VIVRE, THESE

WRITERS,

MUSICIANS AND

CONTORTIONISTS

☞ ARE ☞

TRANSFORMING

NIGHTLIFE INTO

AN ART.

By Mickey Boardman

Photographs by

Danielle Levitt

Styling by

Kristina Dechter &

Sarah Sophie Flicker

PHOTOGRAPHED AT SPLASHLIGHT STUDIOS

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ADAM DUGAS AND JORJEE DOUGLASS

**T**HE SCENE BACKSTAGE AT A CITIZENS Band show is nothing short of showbiz madness. Band members cram every nook and cranny of available space, vocalizing, beautifying and preparing the props. There's one of the group's founders, Jorjee Douglass—a tattooed beauty with angel eyes—putting some finishing touches on Karen Elson's maquillage. (The world-renowned model, another Citizens Band founder, has a husky voice that's perfectly suited to the group's sadder songs; she consistently knocks audience members on their tuchases.) Aerialist Chelsea Bacon, whose nattily nimble rope-climbing contortions are among the highlights of the show, is working to figure out how to rig a trapeze. All around them, band members are milling about in various degrees of Edwardian carnival

drag, playing accordions and kazoos and randomly bursting into song.

The Citizens Band are the contemporary New York equivalent of a merry roving band of Victorian gypsy vaudevillians, if Victorian gypsy vaudevillians were political activists who fought against war and in favor of universal health care. During the band's most recent performance, called "The Trepanning Opera" at Manhattan gallery Deitch Projects, 26 people took the stage, dressed in attire that was equal parts Tim Burton and Weimar Republic, evoking a romantic past that transcended any one specific era. They performed for an hour and a half, singing originals and standards about love lost and love won, the power of beauty and the need for good doctors. (Their original songs include Jorjee Douglass's delightful ditties "Je t'Aime Scumbag" and "Syphilis," as well

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KAREN ELSON AND SARAH SOPHIE FLICKER

as Adam Dugas's "Heal Thyself.") The show had a medical theme—"trepanning" refers to the ancient custom of drilling a hole your skull to relieve pressure on your brain, a practice that was in vogue in the U.S. in the 19th century. The performance featured Scottish chanteuse Angela McCluskey and actress Rain Phoenix; in the past, the band's rotating cast of characters has also included, among others, actress Maggie Gyllenhaal and former Hole and Smashing Pumpkins bassist Melissa Auf der Maur. Claire Danes, director Jim Jarmusch and the White Stripes sat in the star-studded audience. Despite having only performed a handful of times, the Citizens Band has been featured in a number of places, including *The New York Times Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Dazed and Confused*. Their combination of Broadway showmanship and arty charisma make them the most appeal-

ing nightlife act to hit downtown in a long, long time.

The band began at the suggestion of marvelous multi-tasker Jorjee Douglass, who is part rock star, part makeup artist and all superstar. Until 2003, she was the front woman of the San Francisco band Butcher Holler, which her friend and Citizens Band cofounder Sarah Sophie Flicker described as being like a "rock 'n' roll cabaret." The two first laid eyes on each other when Sarah was attending high school in San Francisco. She was shopping at a store where Jorjee worked and was mesmerized. "She looked like a cross between a ragged Victorian doll and a cabaret singer," Sarah says. Then, one tipsy evening several years later in New York, Jorjee told Sarah, "Let's start a cabaret called the Citizens Band!" Sarah agreed.

\* "Sarah and I were obsessed with the movie *Cabaret* and why *Cabaret* happened, as a political rebellion," Jorjee



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ALESSANDRO MAGANIA AND TURNER CODY

explains. "Also it came from feeling the need to take entertainment a little bit higher than performing with my rock band." The idea percolated until charm-oozing crooner Adam Dugas entered the fray. Dugas, an actor, producer, director and singer, had met the girls in California and offered to screen Sarah's short film *Kill Your Darlings* (which had been featured on such diverse bills as the Kiev International, Jerusalem International and New York Experimental film festivals) at a series he was programming with Fischerspooner in Brooklyn. Sarah told him that she and Jorjee wanted to do a cabaret-style performance after the film. The Citizens Band was born.

All four of the band's founders all come from musical backgrounds. Jorjee heard her calling early. "It started at a 10-kegger party in a barn," she says, recalling her youth in San Francisco. "I was singing 'Hell Is for Children' with the high-school band." After she finished school, Jorjee ran a successful clothing line, Jorjee, then worked at clubs in San Francisco and sang with the band Stone Fox before fronting Butcher Holler. Adam says he's been a performer since he was three. Pre-Citizens Band, he was working on the burlesque circuit. He came to New York and made a splash with his cuckoo-crazy Christmas show "Chaos & Candy" at Deitch Gallery in 2002.

The third member of the original Citizens Band family is model Karen Elson. She and Sarah met in 1997 on the night Karen won the *Vogue*/VH-1 Fashion Award for Model of the Year. "I went up to Sarah and practically harassed her," Karen recalls. "[I was like] 'You look so beautiful! You look like a fairy! I love you!'" Sarah concurs. "I remember I was wearing some weird vintage outfit and feeling so stupid because

"I'VE BEEN AROUND IN A FEW VERY ENERGETIC POINTS IN DOWNTOWN CULTURE AND THIS IS ONE OF THOSE POINTS," SAYS DOWNTOWN GALLERIST JEFFREY DEITCH. "NEW ART, NEW WRITING, NEW FASHION ARE CONNECTING. THE CITIZENS BAND IS A CELEBRATION OF THIS KIND OF CONVERGENCE AND ENERGY IN THE DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY."



everyone was in their fancy, expensive outfits. I felt like Karen was the only person who spoke to me the entire evening."

Karen had done some singing but was busy ruling the modeling world at the time. Before she first performed with the Citizens Band, she had a little bit of stage fright, if you can imagine. "I knew I really wanted to sing—that was the thing in my life that I really needed to do. But I was really shy about it. I guess the model-slash-anything is just so lame, you know?" Sarah recalls looking down from the stage at the first Citizens Band performance and seeing Karen looking up "like a runner on her mark." Sarah says, "Karen did her song and then she whispered to me, 'I have this other song that I could just get up and do.'" Adam laughs and says, "By the end of the show, we had to physically drag her off and restrain her from getting back onstage." Karen defends her behavior: "I said I was shy, but give me a chance and I'll jump on it!"

Due to recent highly publicized marital developments, your reporter felt compelled to ask Karen about her marriage to Jack White and about whether it will affect her singing career. "I'm happy, so obviously that's incredibly, incredibly important to me. That's all I'm going to say. The Citizens Band is where I really want to put my attention now and whatever happens after that will happen. This is the most important thing."

Despite the contributions made by her colleagues, anyone who knows her can see that Sarah Sophie Flicker has her fairy-dust-sprinkled fingerprints all over the project. She claims that the costumes are the last thing to be thought of but that hasn't stopped her from enlisting the fashion designer Zaldy, a good friend of hers, to whip up some gowns for the girls. Sarah was born in Denmark to a Danish mother and American father; she grew up in Copenhagen and Northern California. She recalls one formative episode when her mother, a trained dancer, took her to the ballet at the Royal Danish Theater. Sarah was four. When it was time to leave, little Sarah had to be pried from her seat and told her mother she wanted to live in the theater from then on. She swears she threw up when she got home.

"I've done ballet my whole life," Sarah says. "I started acting in commercials when I was 12. I took a big break and went to law school. Then I moved to L.A. to act and that was per-

Alessandro wears a vest and hat from *Hooky*, shirt and tie by Giorgio Armani, pants by Jil Sander. • Turner wears a jacket by Dior Homme, shirt by Cloak, pants by A.P.C., belts from Screaming Mimi's, shoes by Yohji Yamamoto.

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**“FINALLY ALL THE WEIRD THINGS I’VE DONE IN MY LIFE ARE CULMINATING IN SOMETHING THAT MAKES SENSE, WHICH I NEVER THOUGHT WOULD HAPPEN,” SAYS CITIZENS BAND COFOUNDER SARAH SOPHIE FLICKER.**



haps the most degrading, miserable experience of my life.” Sarah has always been tough to categorize. She sums it up best herself when she says, “I can’t explain it other than I’ve always been the way I’ve been.” And what she’s been is an otherworldly apparition who’s inspired everyone around her with both her pantomime pin-up aesthetic and her choreography. We at PAPER fell in love with her at first sight. She first came to our offices in 2000, when she was working on a documentary by Susanna Howe. Shortly after that, we were shooting our friend Milla Jovovich for our cover, and Milla told us that she’d love to be styled by *her* friend—Sarah Flicker. Sarah isn’t exactly a stylist, but she went on (with Jorjee doing makeup) to style PAPER fashion stories and covers. She has also worked as a filmmaker, writer, stylist, trapeze artist and contortionist, but, she insists, “I am certainly not a singer. Finally all the weird things I’ve done in my life are culminating in something that makes sense, which I never thought would happen.”

**T**he Citizens Band comes along at a time in New York nightlife when clubs have strayed far from the good old days of cross-pollination and have become mired in the expensive model of bottle service and demographic segregation. “I definitely don’t think Citizens Band would be the same in the daytime,” Adam says. “There’s something magical about nighttime, the atmosphere of theater lights.” He continues, “I think it does contribute to have people sitting at tables with wine and cocktails. It allows them to relax and maybe be a little more open to feeling the things we’re throwing out there.”

Gallerist Jeffrey Deitch, who represents the band, remembers the first time he saw them perform. “There was an evening at the Fischerspooner salons when [the Citizens Band] had installed banquet tables and a candelabra. People were dripping with jewels. It was a moment you knew something was breaking. They knew it. The audience knew it.” Deitch has gone so far as to list the Citizens Band on his roster of artists. “I’m very interested in the collapse of historical time. Sarah says the span of the show is from 1880 to 1928, but they make it completely contemporary. It’s a counterpart to the revival of interest in figurative painting. There’s a whole conceptual structure behind it.” Deitch also agrees the Citizens Band is part of a real cultural convergence. “I’ve been around in a few very energetic points in downtown culture and this is one of those points. New art, new writing, new fashion are connecting. The Citizens Band is a celebration of this kind of conver-



**RONIN AND IAN BUCHANAN**

gence and energy in the downtown community.”

When the members of the Citizens Band call themselves a cabaret, they don’t just mean cabaret in the sense of musical numbers, but in terms of the medium’s historical context, too. “The one really amazing thing about cabaret is that it always came out of some sort of political oppression or a time of war, which we are in right now, or bad feelings about the state of affairs in general,” Sarah says. “[But] I’d hate to ever say that any great work only comes out of bad times or depression. I’m so sick of that stereotype.”

Aerialist Chelsea Bacon’s acrobatics are one element that ensures that the Citizens Band isn’t just a traditional cabaret act. Before joining Sarah, Adam, Jorjee and Karen, Chelsea was working on her own show, *Sweet Nothings for my Neurosurgeon*, inspired by her long ordeal with a brain tumor. Sarah attended trapeze classes Chelsea was teaching, and they became friends. When Sarah approached her about joining the band, Chelsea, whose demeanor is a lot less cuddly than the rest of the group, wasn’t that interested. Still, after some wooing, Chelsea made her Citizens Band debut. “It just seemed wacky and fun,” Chelsea says. “It’s a fun way to play with trapeze.”

For those who have watched the entire birth of the group, it’s amazing to see that they’ve gone from an idea to stories in a million magazines in such a short time. Like Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland putting on a show in a barn, there’s something inspiring and irresistible about the whole thing. “It’s all based on pushing yourself to do a fantasy thing that you don’t get to do in your normal life,” explains Sarah. “I want this to be my normal life,” Karen adds. And without missing a beat, Adam declares, “This is my normal life.”

Welcome to the Citizens Band. ★

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Desi wears a shirt by Yves Saint Laurent, cape from Screaming Mimi's, hat from Alan & Suzi.



DESI SANTIAGO

Photographer's assistant: Hugo Arturi • Fashion associate: Dean'a Jacobsen • Hair by Michelle Firona/Bumble and bumble; Stevie/Bumble and bumble; & Andre Gunn • Makeup by Jorjee Douglass/the Rex Agency; Tamarah K using Christian Dior; Teymour/Paul Labrecque Spa; & Kristi Matamoros using Shu Uemura • Special thanks to: Noah Davis and Amanda Hanna. Super-special thanks to Diane "Double-D" Drennan-Lewis for her crazy-fabulous coordination and O.C.D. organizational skills on this and every PAPER shoot.