



concerned citizens

The star-studded collective Citizens Band is making cabaret with a conscience

By **Steffie Nelson** Photograph by **Joseph Pluchino**

Willkommen to the wide world of Sarah Sophie Flicker. An experimental filmmaker, stylist, law school graduate and budding trapeze artist, Flicker, 31, is the flame around which a group of downtown New York musicians and glitterati have gathered, forming a cabaret collective dubbed the Citizens Band.

Equal parts circus, vaudeville and a game of kids-raiding-the-dress-up-trunk, the Citizens Band was born last fall at a performance series in Williamsburg started by the electro-pop duo Fischerspooner and art impresario Jeffrey Deitch, and now the troupe has joined the artist roster of Deitch Projects. "It's a grand experiment," Flicker says. Other founding members include Adam Dugas, who curated the performance series; Jorjee Douglass, a makeup artist and musician; the model and singer Karen Elson, who got hitched to the White Stripes' Jack White several weeks ago; and pianist Paul Cantelon, who composed the score for the upcoming film version of *Everything Is Illuminated*—which stars Gogol Bordello frontman Eugene Hutz, also a Citizens Band regular.

The ever-shifting list of performers in the Citizens Band is long and somewhat fabulous, but everybody balks at the celebrity-variety-show tag. After Maggie Gyllenhaal donned a USO uniform and sang Radiohead's "We Suck Young Blood" at the group's second event, a presidential-inauguration-themed show in January (which also included Melissa Auf der Maur doing a rendition of Black Sabbath's "War Pigs"), the press reduced the event to "Maggie Gyllenhaal and her friends threw a little party," Dugas complains. But for the participants, the collective experience and message are more important than the spotlight. "It's an opportunity for us all to shine in a different way," says Elson, who croons and plays the Autoharp. "We're not doing this for the hype."

Like the cabarets of Weimar Berlin, the Citizens Band sprang up in reaction to political turmoil. Its third official show, *No New Thing Under the Sun*, slated for Wednesday 6 at the Maritime Hotel, takes on religion. But don't expect pedophilic priests, naughty nuns or other clichéd portrayals; Cantelon, whose father was a preacher, says he wouldn't be involved if the show belittled the subject. Instead, *No New Thing Under the Sun* will tap into gospel music and spirituals, the '70s musical-theater classic *Godspell*, the work of Leonard Cohen and Nick Cave during their respective Jesus periods, and obscure Hebrew folk songs. It will also feature original compositions by Douglass, who is eagerly envisioning "big Bible hair" for everyone. "Instead of being judgmental, we're saying there are some good messages in the Bible," Flicker offers, "and some things that we can celebrate: beautiful music, having faith in something, being good to each other."

Flicker has been keeping her husband, movie director Jesse Peretz (*The Château*), up at night reading passages from *The Bible for Dummies*. Dugas, meanwhile, is "obsessed" with Ecclesiastes. "There are so many cultural references that come from the King James version of the Bible," he says. "No matter what page you open, you'll see names of books, movies." He gives a defiant shrug. "This is our book as much as it's anybody else's."

The Citizens Band will play the Hiro Ballroom in the Maritime Hotel Wednesday 6. See Music listings.

COSTUME DRAMA Some citizens (from left, top row: Adam Dugas, Sarah Sophie Flicker; second row, Jorjee Douglass, Mike Jackson, Mark McAdam; third row, Ronin, Allesandro Magania, Rain Phoenix; bottom, Craig Wedren, Amy Miles) get set for a group action.