

# 'Not a Boy, Not a Girl, Just Me'

By ROSALYN BEGGISON

The baby lives, arrives in New York City, she's the Esther Williams of the Manhattan set.

Freeking on in . . .

We were exceptional children  
Under-achieve  
Full-fledged freaks, folks,  
Children of the 60's . . .

The doors have been opened  
and we're coming on in.

—Opening number of "Heaven  
Grand in Amber Gold"

JACKIE CURTIS, 21, 5 feet 11 inches, gender male, "Not a boy, not a girl, not a faggot, not a drag queen, not a transvestite—just me, Jackie," growling down 51. Mark's Place in mini-skirt, ripped black tights, cranky lewis, chestnut curls, no fiances ("I'm not trying to pass as a woman"), flashes swift gallantly leaping behind her, is the newest playwright to make the Off Off Broadway scene. Her first play, "Heaven Grand in Amber Gold," a rock musical written last year on a trip to the way home from the Porgy and Bess Festival at Moins Domo where she starred in Ronald Tavel's "Lady Godiva," is being performed by the Playhouse of the Ridiculous at the Gotham Art Theater, 452 West 43d Street. And her second play, just completed, will be produced by Andy Warhol this winter.

Jackie is probably the East Village's first indigenous playwright—she didn't have to migrate from Brooklyn or even Queens. Her grandmother is Sigger Ann, proprietor of the long-time Second Avenue neighborhood eatery of that name. Some of Jackie's wardrobe comes from the days when Sigger Ann was a taxi dancer. (But Sigger Ann says: "It's all right for a masquerade, but do you have to go around like that all the time?")

"Heaven Grand is the heroism of Jackie's play; throughout she appears to be approaching death and outlived via multiple vic. (Continued on Page 4)

Photo by [unreadable]

Ruby Lynn Payne, left, has the title role in "Heaven Grand in Amber Gold," with Francis Buckley as a telephone banker. They team over director John Vautier.

John Vautier directs scenes from



# 'Not a Boy, Not a Girl, Just Me, Jackie'

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Jackie is a peculiar bundle. At the finish in the house are hoping "Mrs. V" will come and save her but, says director John Vaccaro presently, "Mrs. V is an idiot and just laughs and laughs." Jackie acts with contempt, "Mrs. V is a naive sex object." Further application is offered by Vaccaro: "It's about the sacrifice of the modern woman. In the end she becomes just a drag queen."

At first Jackie herself was going to play Susan Good, but Jackie is the just too feminine, as the part went to a Genetic Girl, Ruby Lynn Rayner, who with her incredibly heavy, heavy-lidded cheeks, hairs of red hair and grotesque, burbling looks like a decrepit Expressionist fell out of the New York period. Her nostrils, however, are pure Lorena Young or Susan Hayward in their sultry epic.

But trying to talk about "Susan Good in Aunt Orchid" as though it makes any sense is ridiculous. It belongs to that surreal genre created by the filmmakers of the *Flaming Creatures*—the concept that in a patchwork of bits from Shakespeare, Aristotle, 1930's movies, grand opera, TV commercials and comic books, in no apparent order, there is a script, and the players' mad delimitations and frenetic staging give the dominating impression that there must be plot and dialogue that you could follow if you knew how. The only patches of this genre are Tavel ("Shower," "Lady Godiva," "Genetic Games"), Charles Ludlum ("Compass of the Drivers," "Big Bird"), Bill Vahr ("The Worms of Babylon"), Tom Morris ("Cock Strong") and "Son of Cock Strong". Jackie represents one might say, the second generation of writers in the form.

For John Vaccaro, drama director and founder of the Playhouse, the worst of the script the better. His particular genius finds availing opportunities in any combination of words and stock

Vaccaro's stage looks like an advanced French painting with projected sound motion. With Susan Good in various interim stage in the steps of her final sex act, the actress's eyes are kept frantically rolling so as not to make the audience register her indifference to the left and a jump to the right, to the right with several loose shapings by herself. With all the thrashing and gasping, she loses all mystery, when, meaning, there or over her, Vaccaro's dramatic sense is attracting not only the uneducated masses of my advertising-dominated culture but also the traditional concept of sex role as a role in which

sex roles have been structured. In *Flaming Creatures*, the Playhouse goes far beyond the Victorian context of "Old Genitalia" and the slick-up Broadway love-consumer of "Heat." It also shows the "radical" sexual politics of other New Theater groups—the salvation-through-organ faith of the Living Theater, and the Performance Group's concept of purification through group games—as recently the latest packaging of the power-of-porn thinking for the big market.

Taking a cue from the opening song of "Susan Good," one might describe Vaccaro's theater as Church-aside humor. Though the stage is crude and ugly with actors in madhouse rags and painted grotesque faces, it is eddy, so-glam, rather as though *Genitalia* was wedded to Genetic Mark. Vaccaro's homages to American Dada instructions re-visited one that Artax's visionary burning Theater of Cruelty was influenced by the Marx Brothers and Mack Sennet.

However, the destructive humor of the Marx Brothers had an innocent air. They brought a wholesome, benign, great energy to their attack on the stuffy Wasp Establishment they were invading. On the other hand, the Playhouse's slapstick characters have a sinister side. The performers are not staid icons—dress but polite representation with self-inflicted by a

self-stigmatizing society. For those in the audience who consider the old social values unshattered, the actors are performing a satisfying rite of destruction. On the other hand, the innocent smiling of the theater, which commensurate itself as directly to the audience, means those viewers who resent the attack on the basic contracts of their existence to find the performers ugly, weird, stupid and infantile.

Although a Playhouse production gives the effect of chaos, this is achieved through highly structured, disciplined work. Vaccaro is known to be a harsh, even sadistic director, accustomed to living out the process in

the Genetic Genetic Theater. The group goes to far less structured, complex theaters than Vaccaro's, and has drawn a faithful following for several years at its midnight Suburban events. Ludlum, unlike Vaccaro with "leaving the Norma Desmond in the" (Norma was the star) film star Gloria Steinem played in "Genetic Good-variety" and "with loving him from the notion that as an actor you have to build a character rationally and as a playwright you have to know how to write. Ludlum's new attitude is that the only thing that counts in theater is the "moment of conflagration"—when the actor's very presence on the stage takes on a mythic quality.

Vaccaro's Playhouse was at its inception five years ago as a lighter, campier kind of theater than it is today. At that time Vaccaro, Tavel and a few underground film people including Jack Smith ("Flaming Creatures," "Normal Love") and Mario Montal (star of Warhol's "Screen Test") moved their private homes from Vaccaro's factory loft to an East Village art gallery where they presented Tavel's "Shower" and "The Life of Genitalia Culture." Later they moved to a loft on 17th Street where they did other Tavel epics but were finally closed as the result of an intentional incident involving the Indian musician. Vaccaro's latest staging of Tavel's "Genetic's Dancing Devils" caused the trouble. Tavel insisted his play was a serious fantasy about the lady prime minister saving the food crisis by arranging to freeze India's starving millions and sending them into outer space until such time as new stores of food could be found. But Vaccaro had the lady hypothetically hung up on the sight of a giant phallus which dominated the stage and this proved a bit much for the Indian diplomat.

Vaccaro, a stout, thin, dry man in his mid-30's with large, round hip-ripped glasses, is by vocation a rare book appraiser, a profession he loves but which requires poring over old records "25



Jackie Coffey  
Not a boy?

the people of each of his professions. In addition to psychological probing, sometimes with a chemical assist, he gives his performers football training exercises to keep them in top physical form for the art-house perverse adze attacks.

Vaccaro is noted for his Sigmund-like talent for releasing his performers from the hangups of restrictive social norms. One of the people he released is Charles Ludlum who went on to found a spin-off group, now called

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Perhaps the most important ingredients of the play are the film and the play. The film is a very modern one.

Where director Vaccaro maintains a connection with traditional theater, the playwright Jackie is not so much. She seems to be affected in her unorthodox person, single-handedly a social revolution. "It is a laugh at those people who say they had a vision, trapped in a hole in the wall. What is a man's hole-in-the-wall? It is in the furthest horizon of the social theories that attempt the idea that physical gender determines sex."

"These sex changes are just like 1969's. I am what a girl I am."

Despite the Joan Crawford—or is it Cicely Court-Thompson, the mad on top of old philosophy and cinema, the Academy Award-winning, Jackie's depiction of the

...and the ...