

December 25, 2007
THEATER REVIEW

Ghost of East Village Past Shows Up for Christmas

By ANDY WEBSTER

As the spreading infestation of skyscrapers cast long shadows over the East Village, an ember of a vanishing sensibility burned bright Saturday at P.S. 122: “500 Clown Christmas,” from a Chicago troupe combining music, clowning and acrobatics, was in raucous motion.

Predictably, audience interaction was high. Molly Brennan, playing Kevin, a punk pixie with spiky platinum-blond hair and a splendid shoulder tattoo, greeted guests while her co-stars collected coats. Paul Kalina was Shank, a Lucy Van Pelt type in breeches, with red ears and a scalp bare but for a forehead curl. Adrian Danzig was Bruce, an affable innocent in striped tights and a cape.

With a cry of “It’s Christmastime! It’s about being together!,” the show pinballed into light speed: Mr. Kalina, suspended on wires, tried to play a ukelele out of reach; Ms. Brennan joined him at a toy piano, while Mr. Danzig supplied rhythm with a microphone stuck into a spectator’s purse; children were summoned to decorate a tree of latticelike intersecting boards. Comically upstaged by the drummer, Mr. Kalina, the evening’s principal catalyst, dragged him across the floor. After singing, “It’s Christmastime and I am alone again,” he ran to the stairs indignantly, nursing a hip flask. (“That’s how we solve problems in Chicago!” Mr. Danzig said.)

Throughout, a band — comprising John Fournier, the composer and lyricist, on saxophone and piano; Joe Adamik on percussion; and Matt Thompson on bass — ably offered an [Elton John](#) cover here, mambo there, jazz riffs over here.

Though a tune about death ended with Ms. Brennan’s mock suicide, she emerged a song or two later from a coffin, a winged fairy in blue, delivering a torch number. The night concluded with Mr. Danzig’s singing, “I gotta dance like a monkey if I wanna dance, ” on a fire escape.

It was entirely scattershot, ribald and exhilarating. But of course — it was in a hot, industrial-looking room in the East Village during the holidays. Considering the neighborhood’s imminent transformation into Midtown South, it was nice that at P.S. 122, all was as it should be.