

## A NIGHT OUT WITH -- The Citizens Band; Strange Bandfellows

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THE Citizens Band was born a little over a year ago, soon after President Bush was re-elected, because its members felt politically frustrated and annoyed. So they started a cabaret act, based on post-World War I Germany and the discontent of the Weimar Republic, with tattered fishnets, lacy corsets and bleak eye makeup. The group soon grew into a collective of 30 artists, musicians and part-time acrobats, including the model Karen Elson, Rain Phoenix, (Joaquin Phoenix's sister), Craig Wedren (a musician who has composed scores for films like "School of Rock") and occasionally Maggie Gyllenhaal and Billy Corgan.

The band, which is based in New York City and whose repertoire includes standards and new material like "Heal Thy Self," about the health care system, hasn't produced an album, but word of mouth has made it a presence in the party circuit. The group performed during Los Angeles fashion week at the newly chic Hotel Roosevelt and at the Maritime Hotel in New York. Almost all the members work free.

So on Wednesday evening, a couple dozen members of the group found themselves in Miami Beach, at the Raleigh hotel, headlining for the New York gallerist Jeffrey Deitch, who represents the band, at the Art Basel Miami Beach art fair.

"Jeffrey keeps saying he wants us to feel like superstars," said Sarah Sophie Flicker, a filmmaker-stylist-trapeze-artist and one of the group's founders, who was lounging on a daybed with Ms. Elson and the hotel's owner, André Balazs.

It was midnight, and the group had just performed "The Trepanning Opera," a riff on the 1800's practice of drilling a hole in a patient's

skull to relieve pressure on the brain. Like rock stars, the performers were sitting down to dinner after the show, in a poolside cabana stocked with vodka, Champagne and fans stopping by between a New York Dolls concert on the beach and a party for the photographer David LaChapelle at the Setai hotel.

Mr. Deitch had flown the entourage from New York and put it up for two nights at the comparably low-rent Shelborne Hotel. Much of the act's decadent props -- antique couches, trapezes and an assortment of wigs -- had piggybacked down the coast on the trucks hauling Mr. Deitch's art pieces to the fair.

"It was amazing to see everyone awake at a very early hour," Ms. Elson said. "We got asked if we were in a circus twice." Ms. Elson, who is married to Jack White of the White Stripes, called out in her loud English drawl to no one in particular, "Now give a pregnant woman some food."

Ms. Flicker batted her fly-swatting fake eyelashes. "The only other time I've been to Florida was after the election, and I was crying in the Broward County airport," she said, explaining that several members of the cabaret act had canvassed neighborhoods together campaigning for John Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate.

To make it into the band one doesn't audition; one is referred. "Sarah asked me if I wanted to perform a weird funeral song," recalled Ms. Phoenix, whose black hair was piled up on her head. "And the next thing I knew I was part of this crazy family."

Ms. Phoenix, a singer who fronts two bands in New York, was sounding raspy. The previous night the collective had stayed out late, rehearsing by belting out karaoke songs at a dive nightclub at their hotel.

At 2 a.m. on this night the party in the cabana was still at full throttle. "Let's go to that karaoke place again," suggested Adam Dugas, one of the band's founders. Mr. Dugas poured himself another cocktail and settled back into the couch. Apparently it was still too early.

Photo: ON THE BEACH -- Karen Elson, left, shares a hug with Sarah Sophie Flicker. (Photo by Barbara P. Fernandez for The New York Times)