

# BACKSTAGE

## OFF Stage: the West Village Fragments

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By Paul Menard

Once upon a time, in downtown Manhattan, apartments were affordable and actors were able to live off their day jobs. A cursory glance at the real estate listings or a quick trip down Cornelia Street will tell you that the West Village's days as an artists' haven are indeed over. But instead of sitting around and complaining, Peculiar Works Project has decided to do something about it.

Part traveling site-specific performance, part historical walking tour, *OFF Stage: the West Village Fragments* is an homage to the pioneers of New York's downtown theatre scene. The audience meanders through West Village streets as scenes from over a dozen of Off-Off-Broadway's more-influential plays are presented in front of landmarks from the movement's early days.

The scenes, staged by a sizable team of actors and directors, are strewn throughout the West Village — on stoops, sidewalks, even in hedges. Working outdoors conveys the sense of danger associated with those early days, as many theatres were raided and gay content was considered a punishable offense. It feels as though the show can be shut down at any moment for lack of proper permits or because a group of drunken NYU frat boys are going to beat up an actor in drag.

*OFF Stage* is an artistic archeological dig, offering up artifacts of a bygone age in situ. There are a few gems — such as actors stripping down to perform the infamous "birth ritual" from Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in 69* — but without a sense of context, the evening begins to feel like a scene study class. But you don't go to *OFF Stage* to see the plays; you go for the experience. And frankly, that's reason enough.

*Presented by Peculiar Works Project beginning at Sixth Avenue and West Ninth Street, NYC. Sept. 21-Oct. 7. Thu.-Sat., 7, 7:30, and 8 p.m. (212) 352-3101 or [www.theatermania.com](http://www.theatermania.com).*