

East Meets Best

Peculiar Works' new trip through Off-Off's past

by Michael Feingold

If theater should be a moving experience, **OFFstage: The East Village Fragments** must certainly be the season's theatrical highlight. Few works have ever kept their spectators in such constant, breathless motion. The area traversed, from Astor Place to East 4th Street, may be compact, but the whirlwind barrage of text, using excerpts from 25 plays of the early Off-Off era, keeps your mind spinning while your feet hurry to keep up with the crowd. Much more seamless than last fall's *West Village Fragments* in the way it links scenes together, Peculiar Works Project's new foray into the history of the movement makes both memories of the old Off-Off and the possibility of its youthful rebirth seem tangible. Leonard Melfi's *Birdbath* on a brownstone stoop, Sam Shepard's *Rock Garden* against the fence of St. Mark's Church, *Hair* with the chorus in the Public Theater's window alcoves, two riotous "rival" productions of Charles Ludlam's *Conquest of the Universe* under a construction scaffold, and for a finish, Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* in a grim metallic hallway—it's all there, in its outrage and exhilaration, a chance waiting to be seized. Grab this joyous chunk of the past and, when you've caught your breath, start contemplating the future.

OFF Stage:
The East Village Fragments
Peculiar Works Project
212-352-3101



Ryan Redebaugh, Christopher Beier & Frank Blocker
in a scene from Ruth Landshoff Yorck's
"Lullaby for a Dying Man."
Photo/Jim Baldassare