

GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN

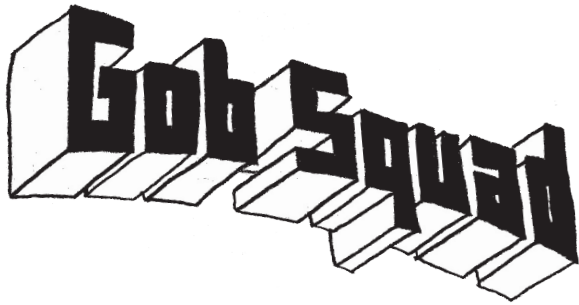
you've Never Had It So Good



GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN: PRESS PACK

PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER

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About the group

"This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine" - The Guardian

Gob Squad is a seven-headed monster, a multinational **arts collective** with seven bosses, a patchwork family, a Berliner institution and a social utopia. Gob Squad have been devising, directing and performing together since 1994, working where **theatre meets art, media and real life**.

For 30 years, Gob Squad have been searching for **new ways to combine media and performance**, producing stage shows, video installations, radio plays, interactive live films and urban interventions. The use of audio and video technology plays a prominent role in their work, with the result that alienated forms of intimacy have become a central theme. They try to scratch beneath the shiny, pixelated surface of the 21st century, seeking out the dark corners and hidden desires of contemporary culture.

Always on the hunt for beauty amidst the mundane, they place their work at the **heart of urban life**: in houses, shops, underground stations, car parks, hotels or directly on the street, as well as in theatres and galleries. **Everyday life and magic, banality and idealism, reality and entertainment** are all set on a collision course and the unpredictable results are captured on video.

Motivated by a desire to elevate the everyday and **empower audience members** to step beyond their traditional role as passive spectators, Gob Squad set up often absurdly **utopian scenarios** where **meaningful collective experience** and genuine encounters involving local guests, passers-by and audience members are suddenly possible. They are always looking for ways to **transcend barriers of language, class, age and culture**. Anything might happen during an evening with Gob Squad. You might be asked to dance, sing or even kiss one of the performers. You might play in a band or the part of a lover or liberator in an improvised film or a home video. You might be part of a temporary community or simply be asked to bear witness to the organised chaos unfolding on stage before your very eyes.

Gob Squad was founded in **1994**, whilst its members were still at Nottingham Trent and Giessen universities. **Berlin** has been the group's creative home since 1999. HAU Hebbel am Ufer is their home theatre and long term production partner. **Core members** are Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost and Simon Will. The group is managed by Marta Hewelt (Company Management), Caroline Gentz (Funding und Financial Management), Grischa Schwiegk (Financial Administration & Production), Talea Schuré (Touring und PR) and Christina Runge (Production Management and Dramaturgy). A pool of collaborative artists are regularly invited to join the creative process.

Gob Squad's **international reputation** has grown steadily since coming to prominence at documenta X in 1997. Their productions have been shown on all the continents (apart from Antarctica) where projects such as SUPER NIGHT SHOT (2003), GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN (2007, winner of New York's Drama Desk Award 2012), SAVING THE WORLD (2008, winner of the Goethe-Institut Prize), BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES (2011, selected for Germany's Theatertreffen), WESTERN SOCIETY (2013), CREATION (PICTURES FOR DORIAN) (2018) and SHOW ME A GOOD TIME (2020, selected for Theatertreffen and awarded with the Friedrich Luft Prize 2021) have received wide acclaim. In 2020, the group was awarded the Tabori Prize, Germany's highest honour for the independent theatre sector. Their latest works are IS ANYBODY HOME? (2022) and HANDLE WITH CARE (2023). The group will be awarded the Silver Lion at the 2024 Venice Biennale.



Gob Squad's Kitchen

you've never had it so good

About Gob Squad's Kitchen

"If tomorrow I find somebody who is pretty much like me and I put her here to sing, she can be Nico while I go and do something else." Nico

It's 1965 and everything is just about to happen. Pop, subculture, superstars, feminism, drugs, bright lights, and sex are about to rock the world like never before. Gob Squad take the hand of the King Of Pop himself, Andy Warhol, and take a trip back to the underground cinemas of New York City, back to where it all began.

Gob Squad's Kitchen takes one of Warhol's films, *Kitchen*, as its starting point. Nothing much happens in the original film yet it somehow encapsulates the hedonistic experimental energy of the swinging sixties. Learning lines was considered 'old fashioned' so the actors just hang around. Sex, drugs and wild parties are referred to but nothing in particular takes place. As Edie Sedgwick, one of the film's stars, says "I live my part too – only I can't figure out what my part is in this movie."

Gob Squad set themselves the task of reconstructing Kitchen and other Warhol films such as *Eat*, *Sleep* and *Screen Test*. How can they get it just right? How do they know if they're going wrong? How did people dance in 1965? What did they talk about? Had feminism happened? Or was it yet to begin? Gob Squad's Kitchen becomes a journey back in time and back to the future again. A quest for the original, the authentic, the here and now, the real me, the real you, the hidden depths beneath the shiny surfaces of modern life.

Gob Squad's Kitchen is one of the company's most widely toured shows, having been performed well over 100 times throughout Europe and beyond. In January 2012 the piece was performed every day for a month at The Public Theater in New York to huge acclaim, giving the locals a chance to see part of the mythology of their city through the eyes of the English/German collective.

Credits

Concept

Gob Squad

Devised and performed four of:

Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost, Simon Will, Sharon Smith, Nina Tecklenburg, Laura Tonke, Erik Pold

Video Miles Chalcraft

Sound Design Jeff McGrory, Jeffrey Fisher

Stage Design Gob Squad and Chasper Bertschinger

Production Manager/Dramaturgy Christina Runge

UK Producer Ayla Suveren

Artistic Assistants Tina Pfurr, Sophia Simitzis

Interns Paula Diego, Hanna Senft, Alisa Tretau

Gob Squad Management Team:

Company Manager: Marta Hewelt

Funding & Financial Planning: Caroline Gentz

Financial Administration & Production: Grischa Schwiegk

Touring & Public Relations: Talea Schuré

Premiere 30.03.2007, Prater at Volksbühne, Berlin. Germany

Gob Squad's Kitchen is a Gob Squad production

Co-produced by Volksbühne im Prater, Berlin, donaufestival Niederösterreich, Nottingham Playhouse and Fierce!

Funded by the Senatsverwaltung fuer Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur Berlin, Fonds Darstellende Kuenste e.V. Bonn and the Arts Council of England.

Duration of show 1h40 approx

The original screenplay for Andy Warhol's film Kitchen was written by Ronald Tavel. You can find out more about Tavel's work at www.ronaldtavel.com

Gob Squad is regularly funded within the Konzeptförderung programme 2024 – 2027 by the Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt Berlin

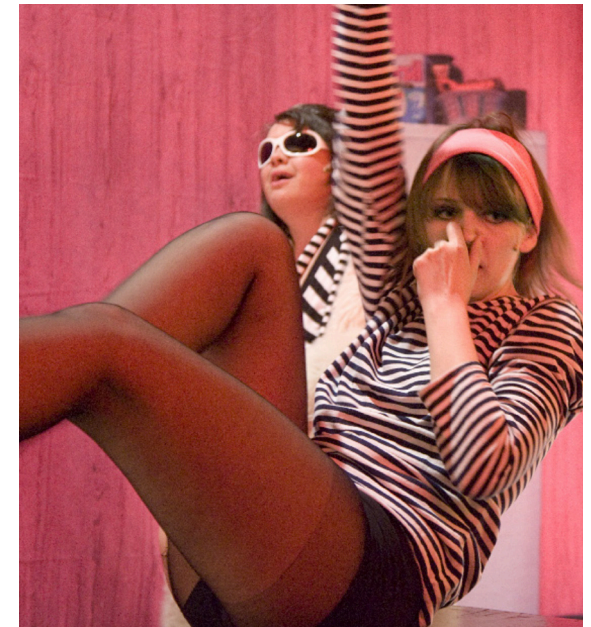


PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER



WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

ON GOB SQUAD:

Gob Squad has always felt similar to a gang – and watching it, you want to sign up and join in.
THE STAGE

This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine.
THE GUARDIAN

Gob Squad virgins, please stop reading now, and go get your tickets!
TIME OUT NEW YORK (on WESTERN SOCIETY)

ON KITCHEN:

"This is an absolute gem of a show. It's a live magic act of sorts, and one of the most enjoyable such feats I've ever seen at the theater."
Charles Isherwood, *The New York Times*

"Gob Squad skip fearlessly along the thin line between fiction and reality... a moving meditation on the nature of self and the unknowability of the past."
Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*

"It's a deftly orchestrated and very funny layering of reality, fiction, historicity and futurity."
Time Out New York

"Easily the first can't miss show of the season."
Theatermania

"In the generous, friendly atmosphere of Gob Squad's Kitchen, fleeting fame is suddenly comforting."
NY Press

"If we permit ourselves to see our world and the people in it as the Gob Squad does, it is almost too gorgeous to bear."
Weekly Glamour

"They create an oddly beautiful and compelling world, willfully questioning and undermining the audience/performer dynamic, engaging the idea that in the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes. Gob Squad condenses time and folds it in on itself. Remarkable. Amazing. Totally transcendent and, sadly, over."
culturbot, USA

"Gob Squad engage us in masterful dance between the historical and the contemporary... thoroughly entertaining, full of irony and intelligence."
Der Tagesspiegel, Berlin

"Andy Warhol would have loved it. He would have taken the cast and made a movie out of it."
History News Network

"A brilliant show, full of wit, life and humanity."
Der Standard, Vienna

"A must-see show...mesmerizing, intellectually rigorous, laugh-out-loud funny."
NY Press

"Gob Squad's Kitchen is smart, witty and constantly entertaining — a wonderful integration of film and theater."
New York Post



PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER

Gob Squad's Kitchen

You've Never Had It So Good

Gob Squad: The unruly Anglo-German theatre collective still evolving after 25 years

THE STAGE
Jul 3, 2018

The Anglo-German theatre collective considers itself 'a bit like a blob' – 'morphing' to meet its members' needs. Founder member Sarah Thom tells Matt Truman how the company has grown together over 25 years

The Japanese art of flower arranging, ikebana, features heavily in Gob Squad's latest show. Throughout *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)*, flowers are serenely slotted into place under a heat lamp. As an art form, ikebana elevates the act of arranging over the final arrangement, and it celebrates the plant's life cycle – growth and decay – over the pristine beauty of blooms at their peak. As the performance plays out, petals wrinkle and wilt.

Gob Squad's seven members have grown up together, over 25 years, but age has hardly withered them. The iconoclastic Anglo-German collective has built up a body of rambunctious performances unlike anyone else's – and is still going strong.

Creation, a careful meditation on ageing, art and visibility, which premiered at Brighton Festival, felt like Gob Squad's most mature work to date, but it still showed the silly side that has set the collective apart. En route, it has sent signals into outer space with *Calling Laika*, incited insurrection from the Institute of Contemporary Arts in *Revolution Now* and taken to the streets with camcorders and superhero capes to capture every single thing in existence for *Saving the World*.

Gob Squad has always felt similar to a gang – and watching it, you want to sign up and join in. But behind

the buccaneering playfulness, there's always insight and purpose. From its early site-specific shows to its own brand of real-time films, splicing the best bits of theatre and live TV, Gob Squad's work has consistently pushed performance. Its shows stretch their limits and expand horizons, whether riffing off classics, such as *War and Peace* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or teaching robots to talk, such as in *My Square Lady*. But, for founder member Sarah Thom, it all adds up to something bigger: **"Just being Gob Squad, that's our greatest work. Some have come, some have gone, but we've managed 25 years. It's a piece in itself."**

Like ikebana, Gob Squad is an ongoing act: unfolding, evolving, undergoing growth and decay. It's more than its shows – more, even, than its members. Gob Squad is a process – perhaps a way of life. **It functions as a collective, completely and utterly. It doesn't just create work collaboratively, the team members run their lives and their company in the same way.** Touring dates, pay packets, funding applications – all of it comes from communal decisions.

"There really is no boss," Thom stresses. "It's a struggle, but we believe in the politics of that. You're constantly in process, negotiating things, working everything out so it's completely fair and egalitarian. We're all one – a bit like a blob. We can't exist without each other, but each of us is absolutely replaceable. Gob Squad would go on without any one of us."

It's not easy being Gob Squad. In fact, Thom reckons theirs is "the most inefficient way of working ever", but the benefits outweigh the hassle. "Everything takes longer, but it does mean that, at the end, everybody owns it." And nobody gets left behind, either – the company "morphs" to meet its members' needs and fit their lives. It has shifted to

accommodate relationships, babies and illnesses – people always come first. "There's no institution to defer or submit to. Everything's open to debate, everything's up for grabs. It's what has held us together all this time," she says.

Gob Squad grew out of Nottingham Trent University. Its founder members – four of which remain – met on its Creative Arts course, an inter-disciplinary programme rooted in collaborative practice that criss-crossed from video to visual arts. An exchange scheme with Giessen University gave the company its Anglo-German core: Berit Stumpf and Johanna Freiburg clicked with Thom and Sean Patten. They still do: "There was a kindred spirit. We just got on – that's the most important thing."

For the last 20 years, Gob Squad has been based in Berlin – the funding's much better, commissions matched by the state – but it has retained relationships with theatres in the UK. "The UK is so important to us, way more than people realise," says Thom. They still "feel very at home here", but homecomings are getting harder. "Funding's less available given the size we are now. Our shows practically have to fit into suitcases to tour."



PHOTO: DAVID BALTZER

GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN

You've Never Had It So Good

Having begun making site-specific work, taking over houses, offices and a furniture shop floor to subvert everyday spaces, Gob Squad began taking “baby steps” towards theatres at the end of the 1990s. For its first foray on to the stage, *Close Enough to Kiss*, it built a mirrored box to block the audience out. “Theatre’s about the act of looking,” Thom explains, “not just telling stories. We wanted to ask questions about the stage as a space.”

Effectively, it treated theatres the same as any other site, toying with their configurations and conventions. The show *Safe* likened theatregoing to travel: ticket checks, stewardess ushers, a pilot MC. *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* is all about “frames within frames”. Similar to Wilde’s novel, it examines the triangular relationship of art, artists and audience.

On stage, however, Gob Squad found itself constrained by the need to stick to the script. Since *Safe*, it has created structures, then improvised as it goes. **“Rules, risk, reality, rhythm” – that’s the Gob Squad playbook.** “Without them, something’s missing: the element of not quite knowing where you are. **We create a space where we’re able to be alive and to be ourselves** – and that is fun. It’s always at risk of being dropped and that makes it so much more exciting.”

If Gob Squad shows are alive, they’re also electric – literally as well as figuratively. Video is often at the heart of its work, the camera adding to and emphasising the quality of being live. *Room Service* plonks four lonely souls in separate hotel rooms for a night with only a camera for company. *Super Night Shot*, which it is doing for the National Theatre of Scotland this summer, sends four performers on to the streets to shoot a blockbuster film. One’s the hero, another the villain; one casts extras, another scouts locations. Their four feeds are mixed live.

This, perhaps, has been Gob Squad’s most pioneering front – not just in terms of performance, but in relation to society. Since the members of Gob Squad first picked up their VHS camcorders, cameras have become ubiquitous. Anyone can be a social media star. “When we first started using it, lots of people had home video cameras, so it felt quite universal, quite a DIY aesthetic,” Thom says. It proved liberating, freeing Gob Squad from ‘stageyness’ and participants from inhibition. “As soon as you’ve got a camera, you’re not crazy. You can ask people quite full-on questions in the street and they’ll answer.” In today’s camera-centric world, it can go one of two ways: either people are cautious, wary of protecting their image online, or they’re comfortable – too comfortable.

That might explain Gob Squad’s retreat to the stage of late, and to those classic texts. Practically, it’s useful. Thom says: “Source material brings us all back to one point, as we go off on our seven different tangents.” But there’s politics too: about looking back, about remaking, engaging with the past. “You’re always standing on the shoulders of giants,” adds Thom. History, like Gob Squad, art and ikebana, is a process.

Matt Trueman

Five Facts about Gob Squad

1. Gob Squad started in 1994. Its members wanted a way to get into Glastonbury for free.
2. Gob Squad has toured every continent but Antarctica.
3. Among the unusual spaces Gob Squad has performed in are the Steffi Graf tennis stadium in Berlin and a bingo hall in West Bromwich, UK.
4. Gob Squad’s smallest production was *To@ster*, which involved two performers, 10 toasters and 1,000 slices of bread. The biggest, *My Square Lady*, involved a 40-piece orchestra, a choir of 35 children, 30 technicians, seven opera singers, seven scientists and a robot called Myon.
5. Performing *Super Night Shot* in Rio, Gob Squad faced arrest. The show ends with performers running through the streets in pants – illegal in Brazil. They bought bikinis and swimsuits, which are fine.

Gob Squad's Kitchen

You've Never Had It So Good

THE NEW YORK TIMES
January 25, 2012

A Visit To Warhol's World, In All Its Goofy Glory

"Is that gluten free?" asked a woman behind me, in response to an offer of peanut butter on toast offered by one of the cast members of "Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had It So Good)." Before the show begins, the audience is invited to take a tour of the stage cum movie studio where it will be performed. "There's no such thing as gluten in the 1960s," came the answer, delivered with a smile and just a little bit of British cheek.

The movie studio on the stage at the Public Theater, where this smart, goofy and surprisingly moving show is playing through Feb. 5, is a makeshift mockup of Andy Warhol's Factory, or at least the filmmaking part of it, around 1965. Nobody had heard of the evils of gluten when that turbulent decade was beginning to swing, and Warhol was churning out movies almost as quickly as he was slapping down silk-screens. Probably nobody at the Factory had heard of the evils of amphetamines either. The distance between now and then, and how much (or how little) of real experience can be captured and preserved on film, is a recurring theme in this absolute gem of a show, a breakout hit of the Under the Radar festival last year that has returned for a well-deserved encore. (The German-British collective Gob Squad performed a new show, "Super Night Shot," at this year's festival.)

Loosely inspired by Warhol's movie "Kitchen," the show is by no means a literal re-creation of it. This is probably all to the good. The amateurish aesthetic of Warhol's celluloid adventures is not something you'd want to see reverently mimicked onstage. "Kitchen" was meant to be the vehicle catapulting Warhol's new fascination, Edie Sedgwick, to stardom, but she couldn't remember her lines and sneezed her way through a lot of it.

The Gob Squad version borrows bits and pieces from the original, but the intention is to comment on the elusive nature of the past by trying to recreate "the essence of that time," as Sean Patten, one of the evening's four performers (the cast changes nightly), intones to the camera as the show begins. The time in question has now become a fat and fabulous chapter in the history of the 20th century, when everything was "moving and changing" and "sex was about to get a lot more interesting," as Mr. Patten's opening monologue puts it.

Warhol and his crowd of strung-out hangers-on have become emblematic of the era's excesses, good and bad, and Gob Squad treats the artifacts they left behind — the movies — with a combination of affection and parody that manages, against all odds, to spoof their deadpan (and often deadly) style while regenerating the intoxicating sense of fun that must have attended their making. It's a live magic act of sorts, and one of the most enjoyable such feats I've ever seen at the theater.

It's also complicated to describe. After touring the studio on the stage, the audience takes its seats in front of a large movie screen on which the action being filmed behind the screen is projected. At center is the humdrum set of "Kitchen," where most of the wayward behavior — chitchat, some groovy dance moves, the eating of cake and an existential discussion of its metaphorical meanings (that's from the Warhol original) — takes place. This dominant image is flanked by two other "movies" being projected as they are filmed. At right we see versions of Warhol's "Screen Tests"; at left is a homage to "Sleep," one of Warhol's endurance-test films, in which the poet John Giorno was shown engaging in the title activity for more than five hours.

Mr. Patten and the other Gob Squad members — Sarah Thom, Nina Tecklenburg and Simon Will at the performance I caught — use their own names as they banter and bicker aimlessly but amusingly. Ms. Thom is first glimpsed dozing away, but soon rises to complain that she can't really do it, and that she would like Mr. Patten to take over her role. Mr. Will stares expressionlessly at the camera during his screen test as the show begins, but soon he flounces into the kitchen to join the party taking place there, portraying a campy gay man and huffing, "In the future I will become a cliché, but now I am transgressive."

Ms. Tecklenburg takes his place for her screen test but defies the desired simplicity of the form by goofing her way through it, to Mr. Will's outrage. She's supposed to be herself, not some version of Lady Gaga, he rants at her. Among the show's sly points is how impossible it is to assume the un-self-consciousness of a prior time in the look-at-me YouTube age. And in the spirit of the Warholian idea that just about anybody has star potential — an attitude that has turned out to be eerily, dreadfully prescient — the performers also take turns recruiting members of the audience to take over their roles or make a screen test.

No need to fear enforced participation. You are free to decline. And yet while I usually find audience involvement an unappealing and overworked cliché, in this case it brings an element of spontaneity and even poetry to the event. The Warhol movies of this era have a raggedy air of being improvised on the spot even when they were formally scripted, and "Gob Squad's Kitchen" wants, above all, to resurrect some of the reckless sense of experimentation that went into their creation.

That the group manages to do so with such guileless amiability is a testament to the appeal of the performers and the cleverness of the show's execution. The production blends the kind of precise technological wizardry that the Wooster Group brings to its work with an unpretentiousness that pays tender homage to Warhol's gaping adoration of the thoroughly mundane.

As if collectively bewitched by the atmosphere of friendly collaboration, all of the audience members who took part in the show when I saw it threw themselves into the proceedings with ease, as if the act of being filmed playing these oddball roles (they are fed dialogue through headsets) was a liberating experience.

It is liberating for observers too to see how easily and how intimately the creation of theater and the experience of watching it can be integrated. By excavating a particular turning point in the cinematic past, "Gob Squad's Kitchen" excites in us a startled appreciation of the beauty in the present moment, which is among the most gratifying things good theater can do.

Charles Isherwood

Gob Squad's Kitchen

You've Never Had It So Good

NEW YORK THEATRE GUIDE January 26, 2012

Wow. That is what I have to say. These people take theatre way off center and manage to bring you into the new loopy orbit. Ordinarily I don't like the idea of audience participation. Even though I am an actor, or perhaps because I am, I like to see people who have had a bit of a go in rehearsal up there rather than people about whom I might have to be concerned. And I think I would refuse to volunteer myself.

But the Gob Squad makes the transition seamless. They are investigators and collaborators at heart, and the audience is a sea of possible co-workers. The evening starts with a brief visit backstage where we see the set and the set-up that will be used. We meet the cast, which changes with each performance. Bread and peanut butter are offered. There is a kitchen, a bed and a sort of settee as well as the table where the technical equipment is located. Back to our seats we go, and soon the tale begins, all behind the enormous triptych of a screen.

Simon Will, on camera in the center screen, welcomes us to the set of a remake of Andy Warhol's *The Kitchen*. It is 1965 and things are about to "become more relevant". Simon and Nina Tecklenberg set the mood and explain the props – contemporary food will stand in for 1965 items. All except for Wonderbread because what could replace that and, oh by the way, it is still around. The discussion of what to do and how soon overtakes any planned action and the intended movie begins to unravel. On stage left and right there are two other screens. One is the bed where Sarah Thom is sleeping, but not for long. She is soon replaced by Sharon Smith who doesn't last long on the bed either. The other screen is a dark area where the settee is located. The actors move from one side of the stage to the other, in various states of curiosity or dissatisfaction, always behind the screens, walking through the kitchen and participating in that film at will. As the "reality" of the actors' tasks becomes clearer, the difficulty of said tasks becomes clearer as well, and soon each leaves to find replacements. This is where the audience comes in – and only the willing are chosen.

It all seems delightfully unorganized, except that, like the Yale marching band, it is not. It is however, organized in such a gentle way that the structure does not hit you until the performance is nearly done. The screens operate separately and in unison with actors and civilians guiding each other from point to point. Although it is planned out to the point of being choreographed, there is still a spontaneity and innocence that is always present. Somehow, because of the audience participation, we are included in a very intimate experience. They are us. They are also the actors. This means the actors are us as well - interchangeable and still irreplaceable.

This is a theatrical experience where every person has value and each night is a unique experience. You are asked to take off your shoes and step into the pool of ceremony and creativity. Step on in. The water's fine.

Tulis McCall

Gob Squad's KITCHEN

You've Never Had It So Good

ASSOCIATED PRESS

January 25, 2012

Gob Squad go back to the 1960s in new show

Can a modern-day troupe of European performance artists capture the ennui of privileged, avant-garde artistes and hangers-on during a hot New York City summer in 1965, in the midst of social upheaval that included civil rights violence, anti-Vietnam War anger and rising feminist outrage?

Attempting to do just that is “Gob Squad’s KITCHEN (You’ve Never Had It So Good)” a zany, audience-participation experience that opened Monday night for a very limited run off-Broadway at The Public Theater. The British/German collective Gob Squad, who conceived and perform the show, provide a rotating cast of actors who drolly seek to reconstruct the creation process of Andy Warhol films, primarily his limp, plotless 1965 “Kitchen.” They cleverly parody dialogue and events from the original film, adding wry modern perspective and a genuinely sweet air of trying to make it “authentic.” To that end, they eventually replace themselves onstage with willing audience volunteers, who are given dialogue and instructions through a headset.

Initially, the audience watches three separate, grainy, black-and-white videos as they’re created live backstage, while the cast earnestly attempts to behave as they think hip people would have done 47 years ago. The time warp keeps slipping between 1965 and 2011, with non-stop comical results.

The actors offer delightfully shallow ruminations on things that were once new, like sexual liberation, space exploration and instant coffee, often interrupting themselves and quarreling about how the scenes are going. At a preview performance, Sarah Thom, Sharon Smith, Nina Tecklenburg and Sean Patten performed as two sets of people: their present-day selves, discussing the film and their motivation, and also as a 1965 version of themselves (helpfully called Sarah, Sharon, Nina and Sean) enacting their own version of “Kitchen.”

The four try to generate some fake liberal anger and sexual energy, seek to portray the “genuine nothingness” that Warhol achieved, and eventually just dance wildly around on the nicely cheesy kitchen set. Their lack of historical knowledge causes much hilarity, as when an adorably mischievous Tecklenburg tries to persuade a very unwilling Smith to snort Nescafe, claiming that everybody who was hip snorted instant coffee in the ’60s because it still had cocaine in it.

Thom is particularly funny as her 1965 self, using a bad Southern accent and slinging around her “big 1950s breasts” that she says don’t compare favorably to Smith’s “small, revolutionary, Sixties breasts.” Attempting to act like early feminists, the pair loudly call one another “Sister!”, and when Thom tells Smith, “We need to stick it to the man!”, Sharon replies, with 21st-century political incorrectness, “And then he doesn’t call.” Patten is both diverting and wistful as Sean tries desperately to access his inner hedonist, which he gradually realizes may not even exist.

The success of each performance depends on what the cast can get out of their audience replacements, but they seem quite good at selecting uninhibited volunteers and working creatively with them. Playful and smart, “Gob Squad’s KITCHEN” runs through Feb. 5.

Jennifer Farrar

GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN

You've Never Had It So Good

THEATERMANIA
January 24, 2012

The members of the UK/German theater group, Gob Squad, have a goal they express to audiences early on in Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had It So Good): they want to recreate Andy Warhol's 1965 film, Kitchen (along with Sleep and the famous screen tests). But in what is easily the first can't miss show of the season, the performance actually begins before you even take your seats, as the Public Theater ushers invite audience members to tour the backstage upon entering the theater.

A large screen divided into three panels separates the audience from the show's set. Walking through a bed area, kitchen, and couch area, you meet the actors (a rotating quartet of Gob Squad members and special guests that included members Sarah Thom, Sharon Smith and Sean Patten and guest actor Nina Tecklenburg I attended) but aren't quite sure what you're looking at. It's a savvy move, though, because we will view all the show's action in black-and-white on two-dimensional screens, but this gives us a reference point that we are watching a live performance instead of just a video. Strangely, the screens end up magnifying the thrill of the action while also reminding us of the filmmaking process.

Initially, Warhol had frequent collaborator Ronald Tavel write the script as a vehicle to propel Edie Sedgwick to stardom, but Sedgwick got high each night of the shoot and couldn't remember her lines, radically altering the outcome. Norman Mailer called Warhol's films "historical documents," and along these lines, Gob Squad is fascinated with recreating this moment as a way to gain insight into an era where so much was changing: civil rights, gay rights, women's rights, and sexual freedom of all kinds.

At one point, one actor asks another if she would burn her bra and the latter responds with something to the effect of, "what? This bra? No, it's too expensive." In another moment, Patten, who leads us through the history of the film, points out that they're using Trader Joe's Organic Corn Flakes with no preservatives while the original featured Kellogg's with "all preservatives." The one constant he points out is Wonder bread. Patten ingratiates

himself to the audience with these little details and anecdotes of the filming process.

Warhol's films, like his eight-hour Empire (a single shot of the Empire State building), have long been his least accessible work but Gob Squad is changing that. Even as they recreate Sleep (a 5-hour and 20 minute take of someone sleeping), they explore the practical difficulty of just lying in front of a camera trying to sleep as naturally as possible. Thom starts out in the bed at the opening of the show but bolts out midway through complaining of boredom and wanting to be a part of Kitchen instead.

It's hard to blame her. The excitement on stage is palpable, and Kitchen is nothing short of thrilling. The actors deliver their lines with such ease it's as if they've just had a great thought and had to blurt it out. There are plenty of surprises, including extensive audience participation for a lucky few, but I'd hate to ruin what Gob Squad has in store for you. I can say they deliver that rare theatrical experience where time melts away and nothing exists beyond the stage (or screen in this case).

Chris Kompanek

GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN

You've Never Had It So Good

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“Someone’s in the Kitchen with Andy” — The Public presents the marvelous, moving Gob Squad’s Kitchen

Sometimes I love my job. It’s my great pleasure to direct you to Gob Squad’s Kitchen (You’ve Never Had It So Good), the first must-see of an unusually busy 2012.

A mesmerizing, intellectually rigorous, laugh-out-loud funny recreation of Andy Warhol films (including Kitchen), Gob Squad’s Kitchen is smart about a lot of things, but most importantly about the pitfalls of nostalgia. Unlike so many attempts to relive the heady days of The Factory and its amphetamine-fueled cadre of freaks and chics, the multi-national Gob Squad company doesn’t try to transplant the era into the present. They readily admit that the days of ’60s hedonism are long gone, but they capture the essence of what it meant to be making art at a time when anything went.

Audience members are allowed to tour the stage prior to the show, their only chance to see what lies behind the movie screen that hid the three sets on stage. From those three sets, a cast of four project simultaneous revisions of Warhol flicks, from Kitchen to Sleep to the Screen Test series. Giddy at the chance to play docent, Sean (played by Sean Patten) has the eager-beaver demeanor of an earnest grad student discussing his thesis work. Co-stars (and co-conspirators in this wink-wink, deadpan evocation) Sarah (Sarah Thom), Nina (Nina Tecklenburg) and Sharon (Sharon Smith), however, aren’t as interested in the intellectual underpinnings. Nina, in particular, with her sharp bob and German accent, is more focused on having a good time, something the uptight Sean can’t quite fathom. (He sometimes wonders what his mother would think while he has sex, he confides to us via black and white film.)

As the show progresses and motivations collide, the quartet throw up their hands and recast themselves with willing audience members, all of whom are treated respectfully and visibly relax, rising to the occasion. The inclusion of audience members is the

perfect example of everything that Gob Squad does so effortlessly here: Both a subtle nod to Warhol’s notion of 15 minutes of fame and a reference to the quote from Velvet Underground’s chanteuse Nico that is quoted in the program (“If tomorrow I find somebody who is pretty much like me and I put her here to sing, she can be Nico while I go and do something else”), the concept is successful as both an exploration of Warhol’s theories and as sheer entertainment.

Watching Sharon replace herself in Sleep (the infamous five-plus film of John Giorno sleeping) begins as an amusing experiment—one of us is projected onto that screen!—but morphs into something more interesting and even moving, as Sharon—who has Giuletta Messina’s down-turned clown face—gently grills her replacement about hopes and dreams, searching for some nugget of wisdom from her new self that she can apply to her own life.

Despite a concept of the highest order and its ambitious technical aspects, Gob Squad’s Kitchen is more than just a post-modern lark; Gob Squad is clearly too smart, too well-versed in both the actual era and its implications, to rest on the mere notion of entertainment. There’s real pathos amid the jokes and banter, and when the curtain comes down on a cast made up of audience members, back to their real selves but still projected in glamorous black and white, the idea of 15 minutes of fame is no longer an appalling one. In the generous, friendly atmosphere of Gob Squad’s Kitchen, fleeting fame is suddenly comforting.

Mark Peikert