

FLIGHT 18: Maiden Voyage

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Space Invaders

By **Andy Gensler**

We are aboard the spaceship Kaleidoscope, leaving the earth's orbit at warp speed as intergalactic flight attendants comfort the giddy and slightly disoriented passengers. The rocket's engines rumble, the earth simulation rooms are readied for the homesick, and bubbles pour forth from the ceiling. Welcome to "Flight 18," a free-spirited experimental theater piece and joyride.

Eric Wallach, the show's writer and director (and Captain), cites the Open Theater legend Joe Chaikin, the performance artist Penny Arcade and Jack London's dystopian novel "The Iron Heel" as major influences. But in far more practical terms the show would not exist without a certain fashion brand: Liz Claiborne.

Thanks to a project-based artist residency program called Swing Space run by the nonprofit Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC), "Flight 18" is being staged in a 6,000-square-foot former Liz Claiborne store in the South Street Seaport. Swing Space matches artists with vacant real estate ranging from a former video store (remember those?) to a defunct Talbots (or those?) to an unused bank vault.



Photo: J. Price

Depending on how you look at it, the silver lining on the recession might very well be the abundance of unoccupied commercial real estate; at any rate, this beautifully symbiotic program is having something of a heyday.

Swing Space grant recipients include Bobby Previte, who performed improvised drum solos for individual listeners in J.P. Morgan's former residence (and later the French restaurant La Tour d'Or); the choreographer-architect duo of Eva Perez de Vega Steele and Ian Gordon, who commandeered a former photo processing store on Nassau Street; and the visual artist Kazue Taguchi, who showcased her luminescent installations in an office space.

After the Liz Claiborne store at 210 Front Street was shuttered a few years ago, the property's corporate owner, General Growth Properties, began donating the bi-level retail space to the LMCC for short-term projects. Between now and April 4, its dressing rooms contain earth-themed art installations, the cashier counter is a check-in area, and the primary retail floor space is the spaceship's main cabin, where improvised singing, dancing and revelry of any and all fashion are welcomed – rather unlike Liz Claiborne.

Space-Themed Performance Keeps Downtown's Soul At Zero-G

By **Stephanie Simon**

"Flight 18," a space flight-themed performance art event at the South Street Seaport takes passengers to new heights with music, dance, poetry and a blast of free will. NY1's Arts Reporter Stephanie Simon filed this report.

From the South Street Seaport, a music, dance and performance art event called "Flight 18" becomes a pretend space flight with a destination of "freedom." During the flight, artist Eric Wallach becomes the alter-ego Captain Wally Bruce.

"You are going to go through ticketing, you will meet some of our flight attendants, you will go through the gangway, boarding gate, and then onto the spaceship kaleidoscope and then soon enough, it lifts off from South Street Seaport and we go up there," says Wallach. "We go past the moon and we go out into the stars, we say hi to some galaxies, some nebula, and if they want to come back, we come back, if they don't want to come back, we drop them off at Andromeda."

Wallach conceived this intergalactic extravaganza back in 2002 as a way to give post-September 11th New Yorkers a sense of freedom. He was finally able to launch his idea this year with the help of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Swing Space Program.

The LMCC helps the arts thrive downtown by convincing businesses to lend vacant real estate to artists.

"Swing Space has been around in 2005. It was started with support from the September 11th fund in an effort to revitalize arts and culture downtown post-9/11," says LMCC Program Manager Ben Kerrick. "So there has been a lot of understanding of the importance and ability of injecting arts activity into these vacant pockets throughout Downtown to revitalize the neighborhood."

Art projects like "Flight 18" also help keep actors employed as spaceflight attendants.

"People really love to feel free. It's not something you think about," says actor Ali Skye Bennet. "We have had audiences come where at the end we are all dancing, it's very fun, we're going back to Earth."

Passengers are encouraged to pay attention during the safety demonstration, because even in space there is sometimes turbulence.

Tickets are \$18 and the last flight takes place on April 4. Performances are at 210 Front Street at Beekman Street. Reservations can be made at www.flight18.net.

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BLAST OFF

At the South Street Seaport, Imagination takes a Wild Flight

By Carl Glassman

What a trip.

Not that the “passengers” aboard the Kaleidoscope were exactly rocketing into space. But as theatrical experiences go, “Flight 18” was otherworldly indeed.



CARL GLASSMAN/TRIBECA TRIB

The crew is shaken up. Something's not right on the *Kaleidoscope*.

The show, launched last month and ending April 4, takes place in the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council’s “Swing Space,” a sprawling two floors at 210 Front Street. It was imagined by director/writer/producer Eric Wallach as a space flight filled with free flowing, mostly unscripted happenings—poetry, dance, song, video, existential meanderings, occasional mayhem, etc.

The audience is not just along for the ride, they are told. They are part of it.

“What performance lacks in New York is an acknowledgement of the audience and that’s what this is,” says Wallach.

“Please keep eyes, ears, body, heart and mind open at all times,” the crew tells passengers in a chorus of pre-takeoff safety instructions.

In un-NASA-like fashion, disco dancing precedes countdown and the room-rattling, engine-roaring “takeoff” that follows. Passengers watch the liftoff on a giant video projection overhead as the seaport recedes and the earth grows smaller.

After that, most anything can happen.

“To kick this off,” says crew member Josh Diamond at the start of one ride, “how many vegetarians do we have on board?” “How many neurotics?” “Passive-aggressives?”



CARL GLASSMAN / TRIBECA TRIB

Passengers aboard the flight are given emergency instructions.

Contortionist Amy Harlib takes the floor and ties herself into impossible knots. Then breaks into the song “Dona Dona,” backed up by the crew now-chorus.

Images from space, projected on the screen, fade into a video about birds, or into a plethora of flashing images that include mushroom clouds, starving children and Colin Powell. A moment of quiet contemplation, as the earth is seen rotating in video, explodes into a frenzy of mock panic and a loud, ominous beat. “Heads down! Heads down!” the crew shouts, and the passengers/audience comply.

Each bit begets another, so dizzying and unexpected that by the time a crew member takes off all her clothes and gives shoulder massages to the audience, it registers as a tame sideshow in a panoply of distractions.

“This is about giving people an environment where they can feel free,” says Wallach, the Kaleidoscope “Captain” who acknowledges a debt to performance artists and happenings of decades past.

Wallach said that he had been contemplating “Flight 18” for eight years, but until he saw 210 Front Street he imagined the setting to be an airplane. He threw out that idea and the 100-page script that went with it.

“I allowed the space to tell me what it wanted to be and it wanted to be a space ship,” says Wallach, “and it wanted to get off the planet.” For some 90 minutes, you could say that it did.

nycgo.com

Flight 18

While Flight 18 is not a children's show, it is a great chance to find your own inner child. Devised by theater artist Eric Wallach, Flight 18 transforms a massive former retail store space into a living, breathing piece of performance art—with every guest becoming a vital component in the experience. Simply put, you're on a space shuttle mission to distant galaxies, guided by the Flight 18 crew and accompanied by your fellow passengers (paying customers). Make friends, sing songs and play games to pass the journey along, but be prepared— unexpected events are

virtually guaranteed on this adventure. For more information, visit flight18.net