

Doggie Diner heads to N.Y. for special delivery

Artists take giant icons on road trip to gallery

By Ilene Lechuk

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

It's hard to explain why an old green bus packed with performance artists and bicycles-turned-psychotic-carnival-rides is pulling a trailer with three 10-foot-tall dachshund heads from San Francisco to New York.

"New York seems hungry for San Francisco's, uh, whatever you call it," Scott Beale, one of the road trip organizers, said at the launch Tuesday in front of the Carousel Diner near Ocean Beach.

"We don't really have an answer to that one," admitted John Law, steward of the three Doggie Diner heads, icons of a bygone Bay Area fast-food chain as well as icons of San Francisco's underground arts scene.

Fourteen members of that eclectic scene, who gathered Tuesday under the last Doggie Diner head in use, are taking this road show through middle America on their way to their final destination at CBGB's Gallery in Manhattan. They are stopping along the way at roadside attractions in Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and Graceland. But, really, they will be the roadside attraction.

What they bring, perhaps, is a message of levity during politically and economically stressful times. What they will meet, most likely, will be blank stares.

"I'm doing it to heal, or heel, America. Everyone is so tense and tight from the war," said San Francisco actor Ed Holmes, also known as "Bishop Joey," who leads the annual St. Stupid's Day Parade through the Financial District every April 1.

Still, the group says it is apolitical.

Except for Mr. Bunny Chain-saw, also known as Steven Ra\$pa,



Photos by CHRIS HARDY / The Chronicle

David Calkins waves as a bus hauling Doggie Diner statues leaves San Francisco for New York. Performers will stop at roadside attractions on their way to CBGB's Gallery.

a performance artist dressed Tuesday in a pink bunny suit, top hat and wielding a plastic chain saw who said he represents all the Easter bunnies that are "hopping mad about the human problem."

"They are messing with the world carrot supply," said the indignant bunny-man, who wished the bus bon voyage but will meet the group in New York to emcee its show at CBGB's Gallery on April 26.

The show is sponsored by Beale, an arts promoter whose company, Laughing Squid, keeps San Francisco's hard-to-describe artists and their patrons connected through e-mail about events.

Beale, who started the Squid

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ED HOLMES, San Francisco actor

List in 1995 and has 7,000 subscribers, now wants to connect artists coast to coast.

Twenty performers from both

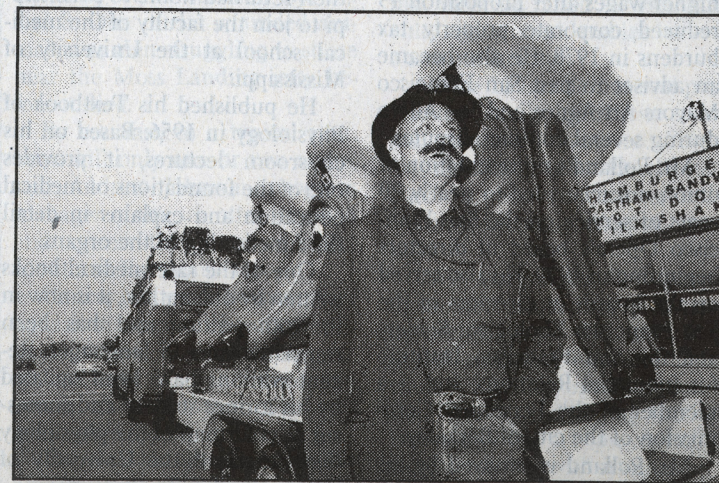
cities will be in the CBGB show, including poets, contortionists and musicians.

The next day, Cyclecide will perform a "bike rodeo" in Brooklyn, featuring scrap bikes recycled into carnival attractions like a Ferris wheel and the "Homeland Security Bike," which shoots bottle rockets.

As oddball as all that sounds, the artists hope the rest of the country doesn't dismiss them as San Francisco hippies or, as Law put it, "teenagers on drugs."

"We're angst-ridden, middle-aged artists," Law said.

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John Law, steward of the Doggie Diner heads, says he hopes the caravan isn't dismissed as a group of San Francisco hippies.