

Nina Hagen: Fearless Angel Takes Flight

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By Ellen Zoe Golden

Submitted to the Shrine by Hagenpaws

All right, here's the predicament: You've been bombarded with photos of a woman who rotates between blue ponytails and glittery mod wigs. Her eyebrows point to the heavens and her outfits range from Egyptian-chic to 50's sleek. You've been told to meet this woman at her New York hotel, the Mayflower, temporary home to rock and roll's most feisty souls.

The living area of the suite has space-age gowns strewn on the chairs. And while you wait, you read about an episode on Austrian television whereby your hostess for the afternoon simulated masturbation to make a very important point, and the harmless instruction caused a scandal. Are you nervous? Don't lie.

When Nina Hagen finally emerges from her hotel bedroom, she is dressed quite simply: black spandex pants, ripped striped T-shirt, simple blue ponytail, no makeup.

"Nina, this is Ellen Golden," her publicist offers, while I wait for some boisterous reply. After all, Nina can belt it out when she wants to communicate on record. For reference, check out her two U.S. albums, *Nunsexmonkrock*, and the latest, *Fearless*.

"Hi, Ellen Golden," squeaks Nina. I am disarmed. Nina Hagen turns out to be the lovelies person I'd come across in a long time. She displays a spiritual awareness that makes everything around her very calm. Quite a contrast to the multi-octave performer who outrages on vinyl and stage.

"I found out that I need to be rebellious," Nina explains in her East German accent. "I need to do something and that is fight for love. I'm softspoken, but I'm all together. I consider myself a human angel, actually."

Nina's philosophy first surfaced within her when she was a child growing up in Communist East Berlin. All around this quiet young girl were walls of suppression, yet Nina recognized the need to break out. It was the punk rock spirit in its earliest form.

When Nina was 10, her mother moved in with Wolf Biermann, a poet whose criticism of the government created waves. This open home environment brought out Nina's fighting spirit. She hung out with other artists, partied,

created and scrambled for every type of message - music that could find its way into the country.

"The East German government really couldn't do anything to us, because we were all famous. If they put us in prison, there would have been a big scandal with pictures in the paper," Hagen says. "We had contact with all the other rebels, like Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. They all came by and said 'hi.'

"When I met Biermann, I also became involved with God. I was finding myself sitting in a church, thinking. I was also praying that God would help me to get to the West."

Before Hagen's prayers were answered, she made a startling discovery. "I found out that I am a true opera singer through extreme boredom during the rehearsals of my mother in *My Fair Lady*; one day, I yawned a big yawn, and I was making this tone. Later, when I was 19, I had training, but only for one year. I needed a professional passport, a thing which says that I am an accepted artist, in order to be on TV. It was a union. I thought I would do that and one day they would send me to a West German or Western European songfest and I would just stay there."

Hagen never had to resort to that method of escape, for the East German authorities were only too glad to get rid of Biermann and his trouble-making family. Nina Hagen was now free to travel to London, where she would change from a hippie to punk, a persona she was most comfortable with.

In London, Hagen became an "advisor and friend" to the Slits, dishing up singing lessons and support while the group made their way throughout the English punk scene. Hagen learned a lot about staging and emotion from the group, but she never performed and soon found herself restless again.

"I couldn't find a group in London," she says. "I wanted musicians who also could play because I had more to give than quick punk songs. I found them in Berlin, when I went back. We made a record and became an overnight hit in East Germany. That seems to be happening now in America. It doesn't mean that I didn't work for the recognition, but at one point it just happens overnight."

Although the singer released two records in Europe, and is actually a huge rock star abroad, her "overnight success" story is just typing out their first chapters in America. When *Nunsexmonkrock* was released last year, her hiccupy vocal extravaganza made the album a bit difficult to classify and digest.

Fearless, produced by dance-masters Giorgio Moroder and Keith Forsey, is

immediately accessible with the first cut, New York New York, "This album makes people very happy," Nina confirms, "and it makes me very happy."

But, what about the locale? Does Nina reside in Gotham City? "I did live in Los Angeles for a long time, but I lived in New York before I lived in L.A. Oh, I'm a part of many cities. I consider myself a pyramid builder. I already built a pyramid in Detroit because I was three times in Detroit. I am always traveling, hitting the same cities again and again. And I found out why I am doing that - I am building pyramids of light in those cities."

With rock and roll having a historical reputation for decadence, rebellion and sexual freedom, I question Hagen on her contradictory union of rock and religion, but my supposition is quickly corrected. "God is not what all religions are trying to tell us," Hagen asserts. "God's first-hand information is happening inside myself, and the more I tune into His station, I can be sure to receive the best messages. When we have the idea of what we can do, then we can do it every day and we can work on it. To live without God, for me, would be a life of confusion. How would I tell what is right or wrong?" end

Note: This article contained a photo of Nina with neon red hair all teased up with a big blue ribbon in it. She is wearing a t-shirt with Whinny the Pooh, Eee-yore and Tiger on it, and she is blowing soap bubbles in the air. The caption reads "I am building pyramids of light." Also, I guess I just ripped this article out of the magazine. Based on the format and my memory I can only assume that it is from BAM (Bay Area Music) magazine, but I could be mistaken. If so - sorry.