



Viva la Cult de Nina

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A frail knock. Then she enters the studio, exhaling a sliver of smoke that trails backward to the door. Swaddled in citrus orange fun fur and black latex. Dark overstuffed duffel bags dangle from her fuzzy shoulders. A limousine driver follows closely, escorting her with the concern of a stage mom. Nina wiggles her way past camera cables and tripods. A frayed wig twisted up in a bun with uneven French bangs perches on her head like a crown of dust bunnies. Small steps urge your eyes down fishnets to her tiny feet, strapped snugly into dusty Westwood stilettos. "Heellloooow-I am-Neeenaah," bounces from wall to wall with staccato reverberation. She enunciates every syllable, speaking in what seems to be three or four different octaves and character voices. From the squeal of a three-year-old entering a playground to the earthy muffled tone of a junkie coughing after a three day binge.



She approaches us with the eagerness of an old friend. Her cleavage oddly punctuates her warm smile and angular face. Nina introduces herself to each member of the styling crew with a royal curtsy. Then drops her bags. The crew begins to hover, as she kneels to rummage through her weathered luggage--apparently searching for some item of extreme importance. Within moments she lights a fresh cigarette and a mound of colorful clothes has begun to form a nest around her: a mangle of frizzy pink, green, platinum and black wigs, crumpled designer dresses, rubber mini skirts, bows and platforms. Nina abruptly loses interest in her quest for the mysterious item, and heads for the restroom to wash and prep for makeup.

A stylist quickly takes Nina's place in the mound of wardrobe and begins mending wigs and sorting clothes. Fresh-faced, she sits for the makeup artist with her back to the rest of us. Nina raises an arm and gently lifts her wig, exposing scalp and inch-short pale brown hair. Her hairline darts down her thin neck pointing to the ridges of her spine. She places the wig next to the ashtray on the cosmetics table. There she sits, a prepubescent boy awaiting his monthly buzzcut.

SURFACE: *What was punk?*

NINA HAGEN: For me, punk was in East Berlin in nineteen hundred, oh, and about seventy four, when I got the first album of Roxy Music. We all put gel-oil in our hair and a black piece of paper on top of a tooth to make it look as if a tooth was missing, and then it was punk--it was punk for us. Then much later, in 1977, I went to London when I came out of East Germany. Then I saw what punk really was...because it had developed after Roxy Music [laughing], so I am like a Roxy Music punk, basically.

What is punk now?

You don't see it on TV, but it's happening in the clubs and in parties and festivals and it it's still out there. It's the lifestyle and the people with big hearts, you know, who live together, share apartments and squat houses.

Communal?

It's a tribe. Even in the punk movement you have the Mohican tribe, the Skin tribe, etc...

And the anarchist following?

Most of those punks are very young people. They experience the freedom of creating their own lifestyle and I guess that's what they call anarchic lifestyle, but still we are all part of society. We have to pay our taxes-even punk bands have to pay taxes. I know a few punk bands around here who are very organized; they go selling their demo tapes if they don't have a recording deal yet. They are selling video tapes of their gigs. Very interesting. For example, on my 40th birthday (March 13) we held a big party for Filthy McNasty's FM Station in North Hollywood, which I call the valley. And some of those punk bands and h Snap-Her and Fifi, and Weg Peg and the Nep-tunas and six or seven bands all played. Not only the young punks come to see them but older people from my generation, people who know it's still that nice party feeling. I know a couple of them punks in Hamburg. They do an exhibition in a big building and in the next room there is a stage. It's great, and it's organized--you have to be to stay in the business. For example, Johnny Rotten... Johnny Lidden. I like his videos. There's the Ramones, and you have Siouxsie and the Banshees...she's doing very well. And meeee. We are all still here, it is not dead.



Life through older eyes?

I have less illusions about people and circumstances. I can look the truth in the eye better than before.

"The mother of punk." Have you heard that before?

NH: [Cough] It makes me cough. Yeah I've heard that before. Definitely. They've called me that for a long time because I was always older than the youngest ones. When I came to London in '77, I was already twenty-two and everybody else was 14, 15, 16, so I was never really accepted as one of them, but as a good friend of the punks, as a mentor. For example, by The Slits, I was at their rehearsal and I told Ariana how to not stretch out the voice so much. They all knew that I had an opera voice, that I had been singing for a long time already; back then I was the oldest in the club.

So you were literally nurturing young punks?

Oh yeah, that's so much fun to do. In India they would say matati, for mother...such a sweet name, matati. Yeah, definitely, I'm a mother.

And tattooed sex goddess?

My sexy side is a very funny side. I'm preparing an underground Nina Hagen TV show. I'm filming myself on my Sony Hi-8. When I have my mini-dresses on, I always come across as sexy but funny at the same time. For me to look sexy and do sexy movements [she flutters her words and whisper-sings as though in a private opera] like crossing the legs, it's always a fun part to do. It's not because I think I'm one of the most sexy looking people, I'd rather think that I'm very funny.

Hardcore tattooed Nina?

Finally I've got some good tattoos. I always went around with this one name on my left arm, Ferdinand, which I had done in Amsterdam. And Ferdinand did Nina on his arm. And now I have a big TV set over Ferdinand's name on my right arm, my hammering guitar-playing arm! It's a TV set with the Hindu Mantra in inside. Basically, it's for me to remind me to get my TV show project worked out. Because for many years I've been running around with this idea that I have to put a Nina Hagen TV show out. Maybe every Friday night, or something like that, where [she begins to sing] I'm talking to people live on the phone...they can call me, there's also calls from celebrities. It sounds pretty normal, but the way I'm doing it will be quite entertaining!

"Do you purposely break certain social taboos?"

I just want to be able to share lots of information. That makes me happy, when I can show people things in a new context, they can laugh and learn at the same time. There's so many different people and things nobody knows yet. It's like, it's amazing.

Fame has its own dress code. So do most religions. How do the glamorous spiritual people rationalize fashion?



Fashion is an art form. I think Jean Paul Gaultier... his clothes are so beautiful (expressive pieces of art), they are also for Hindu women like me, these beautiful long dresses.

You carry a little notebook full of scraps, drawings, and writings...

And, my camera too. I like recording everyday situations. In Hamburg, I hung a show of all my paintings and collages; actually you can call my stuff pop art. Big collages like Andy Warhol. Hee-hee... It's photocopy collages! Then I paint on them. I

make huge frames with hellistic images and shiny foil. You know that stuff you can glue on, the sticky stuff? I have an idea for my next album cover, I want to call it Difficult Bearth. Because I consider this planet Birth but written like Earth. And so I have a painted image of a mid-wife, and a woman who is in the process of giving birth to a baby and the baby is...it's a difficult birth, and the feet are hanging out first and the mid-wife has her arm in there and she's trying to pull. [She giggles] It looks very funny in a painting, in a sketch.

You do realize that you have a cult following, a cult status?

Oh, I'm so happy about that. It's so much fun to have so many friends and even people who you've never met before, who know you through your music and your creativity. It's just so wonderful.

Why do you have this effect on people?

I don't know.

What about yourself really attracts other people on that level?

Well, let's put it that way: if you open up to creativity and freedom, and truth and art, and music, then you are able to represent G-O-D, God. More than if you would only be concerned about your life, and worry all the time and

do a job you don't like to do, then you probably don't ..blah, blah... I could go on. I mean, I don't know...[she pauses then interrupts her silence] It's all about music and art...they vibrate so nicely. Amen. I have very many fans throughout my work, throughout the years, in America...in San Francisco. But I also know that when I toured Brazil, 13 cities in '85, that I had very many people come see me again, many friends and fans. But I think everywhere, in every little--or not every little country--but like in Europe, Germany, France, I always have a little following in these cities. They all seem to know that when they come to see my show that we are going to have a fun time. Like Aerosmith. Yes! I am like the female Aerosmith! [She bursts into laughter]

Is the response the same everywhere?

Well, actually it is the same in every city. Let's say when I had this fun party, and all these surprise visitors in San Francisco, and I thought my God, this is incredible! So many people seem to be totally going nuts over me, that I have the same thing happening in Hamburg or Berlin. And the same audience...male, female, gay, straight, you know, everybody. Even older people. This very old man in Sweden always comes when I pray there.



*How do you feel about your agnostic fans?
Or people who view your belief structure as pop-religion?*

We are all spiritual people whether we know it or not, because every moment is part of eternity. So, even the worst sinner will be getting better. Part of a way to develop quicker is to do a dream journal, which I just started again recently. I have this little cassette recorder next to my bed, and when I wake up I record my dreams, otherwise I forget so quickly. Because your dreams, they tell you a lot, a lot, a lot! A lot about what you can accomplish, and they give you hints and clues and sometimes very profound messages. And I just love doing this again. I learned it from reading about it from this American prophet called Edgar Cayce, and he was saying, you know, about past life. And to do the best out of this life is to keep a dream journal. Basically, everybody should do it. The moment you get into an activity--getting up, doing your peee-pee, whatever--the dream is gone.

You mentioned twice, "getting yourself better."

Making yourself better means making yourself happier, and making yourself more available to happiness in general. Which means helping



others and by helping others, helping yourself, and creating a big network of friends, and then you can just do something creative together, like building an ashram, or a place where like-minded people can live together...a farm.

This is kind of a naughty question, but have you ever thought of how to turn this kind of cult following into a political power or into any other kind of power?



I am doing that. I am trying to drag all of my friends and following, the people who really know me and come to see me. I would like to give them all a book about the place I'm going to in India, and I would hope that everyone in this lifetime will join me up there. For example, I'm going back there, for a couple of weeks, and it's such a nice place up there in the Himalayas, and we all learn a couple of disciplines every day. We are doing things together, working together, making music together in a temple and taking a bath together in a river in the early mornings. I met very international people. They are from all over the place, people from Holland, Italy, and

America, A whole group of Americans came. It's a great place where I'm also planning to have my little video studio up there in the Himalayas, and become more and more a filmmaker, Fla-Hai It's a great place and there are so many good people, each time I go there I wonder God, what people you meet here!

Do you all subscribe to one religion? Is there a communal spiritual code up there?

Part of my belief is that all religions are equal, and everybody is equal and everyone should follow the religion of their heart, and if that means [your religion] is just having fun and eating a lot, then that's fine too.

You believe in holistic healing?

Oh, yes There is the ancient science of natural healing, and what they have done in the past! They didn't have factories to manufacture penicillin, but the knowledge is there, the nature people still have that knowledge. There are good medicines out there, and herbs and therapies. When you are sick you must detoxify; I believe every illness is a toxification of the body and maybe of the mind...doesn't it sound logical? The orthodox doctor would give you a batch of pills and chemicals to put even more artificial stuff into the body. That's not right. That doesn't sound right.

Is it healthy for your following to adopt your "religion?"

Definitely. I'm reading this book called Autobiography of a Yogi. And it tells you so much about the real stuff, because Christ and Buddha--they were not the only ones, there were more great teachers around, and thank God there are lots more treasures around. We just have to find them.

You are a teacher?

And a learner.

Your vision is to live on a commune in the Himalayas?

Wherever I live, I will be with friends and we will plant tomatoes. And we will create families of like-minded people. I think that is the future, people in villages. Not the Mr. Simpson way of life where everyone has their own little prison homes. In Germany, in an Ashram everything belongs to everyone. In the Himalayas there is a village, Chilianolaya, where you build your home, you plant your food and the seeds and the land belong to everyone...it is very beautiful.



What will be the symbol for you and your village?

The Om, a snake in the shape of a three. Its breasts point to the sky. And a Vargas-like pinup drawing of me by Terry Perez.

What monuments will you build?

A shrine to Shiva, to God and Goddess, with real diamonds as eyes. The floors will be soft so you can knock your head on the floor without hurting yourself.

And the first law you would instate?

DO NOT ENTER THE RECORDING STUDIO WHEN RED LIGHT IS ON.