

Review/Theater

Retelling Of Life's Abashing Moments

By BEN BRANTLEY

Lisa Kron, the inspired creator of the one-woman show "101 Humiliating Stories," hates it when she gets sleepy in the theater, especially if she's onstage. So there's the inevitable point, befitting a performance where the star wears pajamas, when her eyelids grow leaden and her head so heavy that she bumps it against a lamp. She wakens to recall a childhood dream that was so realistic it influenced her behavior in school the next day; its unfortunate consequences will be familiar to anyone who remembers the social mores of second-grade friendships.

The fact that any performance — and life itself — is a minefield of potential embarrassments provides both the form and content of this blissful piece of theater of abashment. The show "101 Humiliating Stories" (there are only 17, actually, but each has numerous subsets) is a chain of artfully paced narratives of excruciating moments recollected in, well, not exactly tranquillity, but with the modulated control of a master comic eternally poised between ingenuousness and irony.

Ms. Kron, who is a member of the theater troupe Five Lesbian Brothers, combines a novelist's sense of the telling social detail with a Chaplinesque knowledge of the humor in the yawning gap between intention and action (or, as she puts it, between the self you see in your mirror at home and the one that leaps out at you from store windows). She realizes, as she tells us, brushing a sheaf of papers to the floor, that there's "a second set of behaviors that I exhibit to people that I am not aware of."

This premise infuses autobiographical tales that cover all manner of faux pas: stories of hair caught in school-bus doors; of "recky celebrity encounters"; of fainting in the corridors of a Michigan junior high school in a green-and-white polyester gym suit; of speculating, with wicked specificity, on the horrific events that must have led to the abandonment of a sanitary napkin spotted near the entrance of the same institution and of walking down the halls of a business office with a skirt tucked into a pair of pantyhose.

All of the anecdotes, in fact, are spiritually akin to the sorts of dreams in which you find yourself naked before a crowd. They are linked by a series of scenes in which Ms. Kron imagines herself addressing her Lansing, Mich., high school reunion, explaining — in styles ranging from cringing to confrontational — both her sexual and professional identities. No alternative, of course, is safe when you're standing behind a podium.



Beatrice Schiller/"101 Humiliating Stories"

Lisa Kron puts a comical slant on social awkwardness in "101 Humiliating Stories," part of the Gay Games and Cultural Festival.

The show, which has been artfully staged by John Robert Hoffman and was first presented in a rougher form at the Serious Fun festival last summer, is part of the Gay Games and Cultural Festival. The question of how Ms. Kron presents herself as a lesbian to the world at large (and particularly to her former classmates) is a prime source of the social awkwardness she describes. But "101 Humiliating Stories," at the New York Theater Workshop through July 2, is really for anyone who has ever had cause to blush.

101 Humiliating Stories

Written and performed by Lisa Kron; directed by John Robert Hoffman; set by Amy Shuck; costume by Jose Gutierrez and Chip White; production stage manager, Janet M. Clark. O Solo Homo Festival presented by New York Theater Workshop (James C. Nicola, artistic director; Nancy Kassak Diekmann, managing director) and Gay Games IV and Cultural Festival. At 79 East Fourth Street, East Village.