

December – January 2009

STATUS REPORT

LOOKY-LOOS
Guests enjoy dirty dinner theater at The Box. RIGHT: Actor Josh Lucas peaces out. BELOW: Tiiu Kuik.



naughty and nice

Manhattan's demimonde indulge their vice for charity. By Hudson Morgan



don't host these very often," **Mike Myers** says. "I'm an intermittent extrovert." An unlikely line coming from the comic gale behind *Austin Powers* and *So I Married an Axe Murderer*, but hey—party on, Wayne. Tonight he's front and center at The Box, Manhattan's Lower East Side lounge of the louche. As the emcee of a benefit for Only Make Believe—the children's theater charity started by **Dena Hammerstein**, mother of Box proprietor **Simon Hammerstein**—Myers has agreed to shtick for a crowd of a hundred that includes **André Balazs**, **Alan Cumming**, **Allison Sarofim**, **Damian Loeb**, **Piper Perabo**, and **Lisa de Kooning**, some

of whom have paid \$15,000 for their dinner table. I ask the 45-year-old Myers if he's ever spent much time trolling this rather notorious place after the witching hour. "I've only been here once before," he insists. "I blush very easily."

This being a benefit for kids, The Box is sporting only some of its usual charms (women hanging from aerial hoops over the bar) along with a few new ones that don't quite fit (flashbulbs detonating every time a celebrity walks in—usually a big no-no). My dinner table, thankfully, is vintage Box: **Jamie Johnson**, **Leelee Sobieski**, **Josh Lucas**, **Jessica Joffe**, and Hammerstein's fiancée, **Francesca Zampi**, all frequent flyers of the venue that has titillated the elite, irritated the neighbors, and single-handedly broken the ennui of New York nightlife. As we nosh on hamachi *status report* >62

PAS DE DEUX
FROM LEFT: Box owner Simon Hammerstein's fiancée, Francesca Zampi, and Jessica Joffe.



SECRET SHARERS
Zoya and Damian Loeb.

Mark Peterson/Redux Pictures (5)



HOOP DREAMS
FROM LEFT: Host Mike Myers; Leelee Sobieski; a performer swings easy above the crowd.

sashimi and roasted maret duck, conversation turns from stories about **Brett Ratner's** early sexual experiences (best left unrepeated) to the perils of bringing mom and dad to this place (to avoid disinheritance, send them home before the 3:00 A.M. late-late show).

Tonight the burlesque is a *bit* more vanilla vice-vice baby, but even on his best behavior, Hammerstein knows how to have fun, bless him. Cheerleaders with pom-poms and Hannibal Lecter masks take the stage and flash the crowd in unison; Batman and Rob-



in come out of the closet with an acrobatic routine to "On the Wings of Love"; a man and woman imitate, respectively, a human beatbox and a rather intricate feature of the

female anatomy; and a quartet of urban dancers spurns physics with a flurry of impossible jump-rope routines.

As the crowd thins out, a dozen or so of us—Lucas, Hammerstein, the human beatbox, and a few other stalwarts—head upstairs for the après action. Hammerstein is talking about the difficulty of planning a frisky show in collaboration with his

mother and recommending an all-night massage parlor in Koreatown called Juvenex—which sounds more like a prescription for something you'd take after a visit there. Lucas, who's been deep in conversation with one of the waitresses, jumps up and gets behind the bar. "Can I get a drink?" says Simon. "I'm sorry," Lucas says, "but how do you know the Hammersteins?" As they all carry on, I can't help but think that despite the recent turmoil they've faced—employee lawsuits, community-board party poopers, rumors of bankruptcy—The Box will somehow endure. On what kind of timeline, though, even Simon doesn't seem to know. "A while," he says, almost wistfully, when I ask, and I'm reminded of the Japanese term *hakanai*, which evokes the feeling of missing something before it's even gone. "It's been great again," he adds. "The past week here has felt like the beginning." □

exotic locale

Where do beleaguered bankers go to diversify their portfolios?



LOVING CUPS
A Penthouse Executive Club dancer shakes her moneymakers.

a nineteenth-century French novelist wrote, "Next to the wound, what women make best is the bandage." In that spirit, I wondered, what better salve in this surreal economy than the Penthouse Executive Club? During my recent visit to the Midtown topless mecca, dozens of Wall Street types were burying themselves in the dancers' generous cleavage—and if anything, it seemed like the club had hired even more women (Russians, Czechs, Brazilians, you name it) to handle the influx. "Nothing's changed," one

staffer told me when I asked about recession specials. "Look around. Does anything seem different?"

Indeed. Some patrons were even there to celebrate rather than medicate. One infamous and rather public billionaire—whose identity I promised to keep secret after he charitably offered to bring us (perhaps it had something to do with the civilian girls in our party) into his VIP room—shelled out thousands for our hour-long group strip-a-thon. "Recession?" he laughed, as two women became rather well acquainted on his lap. "What recession?"—**H.M.**