

*Eleven*

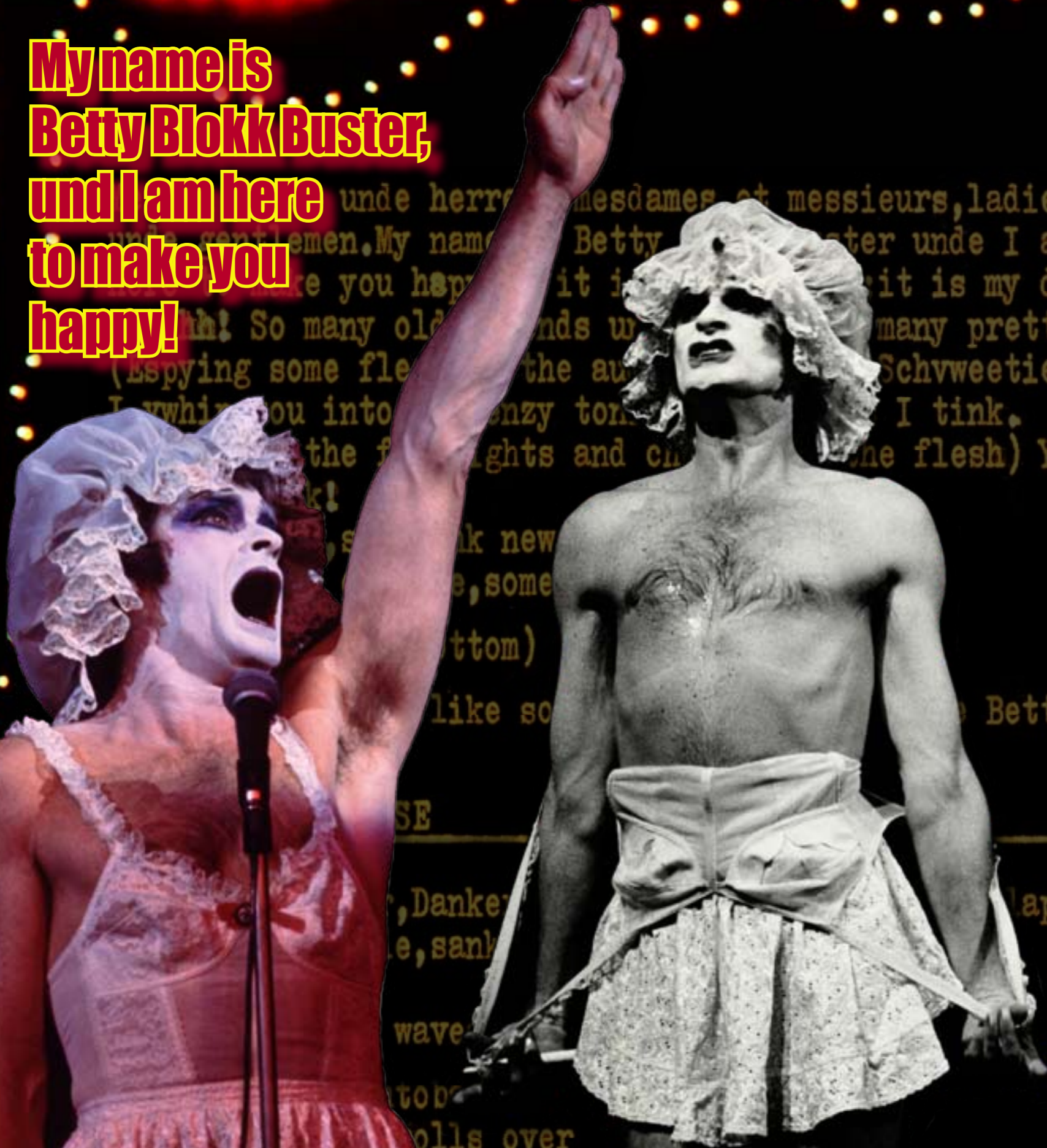
# BETTY BOMB SHELL!

All that follows is a bit of a blur, and what I fancy I'm remembering is perhaps not the truth of it. Betty was a big show, very demanding of me. Everybody remarked how brave I was to even attempt it, but let's not be in any doubt, the audience was brave too; the tickets they purchased put them on a rocky road where they had to endure a roller coaster of extremes, unexpected emotional ups and downs, tactics that deliberately and sometimes unintentionally put them off balance – a big ask. But it was hilariously funny at the same time, on so many levels and in so many ways entertaining and somehow 'different'.

**'Hello  
Schweeties!'**



**My name is  
Betty Blokk Buster,  
and I am here  
to make you  
happy!**



**You vwill be happy. NOW!**

First off, the music: great songs by Lou Reed, Elton John, Paul Williams, John Prine, Charles Aznavour and Gilbert O'Sullivan, and a couple by artists not then familiar names, such as Billy Joel and Leo Sayer. All of them performed within a theatrical context, and splendidly realised by Baxter Funt and our trio of female backing singers, the Reginas; Veg and the Reginas, the most usual aphorism, otherwise Reg and the Vaginas. Then there was my rollcall of 'survivors', the cast of characters I'd invented, on parade, and by way of their individual monologues fully exposed; the result was a heartfelt jumble of language and predicament, of sound, colour, and music. Every night there was something on show for just about everyone, something to see, to hear, and to feel; no mean feat. I'm not sure how we ever got it all together, but something quite wonderful began to happen. From the moment Miss Betty Blokk Buster goose-stepped to the centre of the stage and told the audience to LAUGH, and SCREAM, and CLAP, to CRY, and CHEER, above all to LET YOURSELVES GO, we were away. Motivated by my experience in live television studios, where illuminated signs advise the audience when to APPLAUD, something they can't decide for themselves, apparently, I devised signs for Betty along the same lines: a range of orders and saucy suggestions she'd bark at them, messages that lit up on a contraption like a portable countryside cricket scoreboard. It left our audience in no doubt as to what exactly Betty expected of them, and it never failed to get the show off to a great start.

The memory of that preview night is a large blank in the black box of my brain. I was flying from one number to the next as best I could, changing costumes, scooting on and running off again; I had my nose down and my arse up. There was no time to think about anything, no time to savour, to bask in any glory, to luxuriate, to even be aware fully, not until it was over.

At the end, the most spontaneous, the most moving outburst of applause I'd ever known; when it is so loud and prolonged, when you are standing there looking at waves of people throwing their arms up and down, and shouting out, people who are so physical, you occasionally cease to hear at all, as if to protect yourself against it. There was cheering, there were yelps and screams, and a jump-up standing ovation I don't think the audience itself saw coming; as people sometimes say, you should have been there. I think that on *both* sides of the footlights there was evidence of surprise; we certainly looked equally stunned, and if those of us on the stage looked *pleased* with ourselves as well, I hope it was endearing, and on that occasion forgivable.