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Nell Campbell: Don't forget to wear your socks

IF YOU WANT TO LOUNGE ON A LOVE SEAT IN NEW YORK'S HIPPEST CLUB, YOU'LL HAVE TO GET NELL CAMPBELL'S OKAY

t's been a long time since New York City had a nightclub so hot that it could make the world beg. But Nell's, the three-month-old gathering spot on grungy 14th Street, makes simply everyone risk humiliation and frostbite to get in-and few are chosen. One night it was Cher who couldn't get past the velvet ropes. Another night-maybe because they hate men without socks—the fickle doormen turned away Don Johnson. Faye Dunaway and Jerry Hall waited 15 minutes to get clearance, Nell's patrons-among them, Warren Beatty, Michael Douglas, Emilio Estevez and Kim Basinger-all pay \$5 (\$10 on weekends) for admission and \$5 for mixed drinks. Unthink-

able as it may be, at Nell's there are no comps

With lots of other clubs dying to dish out VIP treatment, it's a wonder Nell's isn't empty. On the other hand, since Studio 54 ushered in the high-tech disco age, no nightclub has offered the old-fashioned comfort of Nell's. Walk into the main bar and there is no blaring disco music, just soft jazz; there are no whizzing lights, just a huge crystal chandelier, antique lamps and giltframed mirrors. Search for a dim-lit, private corner and you'll be in the dark. Calvin Klein, David Bowie and Bianca Jagger can be found sitting in plain view on overstuffed velvet sofas or eating their light meals at tables in the CONTINUED



back. Dancing is allowed only in a small area hidden downstairs.

The most extraordinary detail at Nell's is its ever-present namesake, Nell Campbell. A quondam actress whose best credit is her role as the tap-dancing groupie Columbia in The Rocky Horror Picture Show, Nell, 33, presides over the club as if it were "my own drawing room." Wildly garbed in anything from a vintage man's suit to a fringed corset, she chats and jokes with guests, helps decide who gets in, has sung classic jazz songs with the resident combo and accepts homage. "Every night 1,000 people are here," she says, "and every night 1,000 people come up to tell me how fabulous

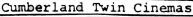
"She has made the club warm instead of disco cool," says Raquel Welch, Debbie Harry concurs: "Nell's is really comfortable. You can hear yourself think."

Though no one has carried it as far as she has. Nell has no monopoly on the intime style. New York City's Limelight and Palladium preceded her with small, cozy rooms that cater to the A-Stupid Saturday in one night. list crowd. The brand new Tunnel has opened a small new room that looks like Nell's-The Sequel. Keith McNally and his wife, Lynn Wagenknecht (pronounced wa-gon-nekt), co-owners with Nell, probably got their inspiration from private European dining-and-dance clubs: Chez Castel in Paris, Annabel's in London. Says Helena Kallianiotes, a former dancer who opened the similarly hyperexclusive Helena's in L.A., "People want to get out and communi-

cate about philosophy and life." Just a year ago, when Nell was singing in a 1930s-style band in her native Australia and writing a beauty column called "The Nell File" for a magazine called Stiletto, she seemed a most unlikely catalyst for Manhattan nightlife. Born Laura Campbell in Sydney, she was dubbed Little Nell by her columnist father after the tot in Dickens' Old Curiosity Shop. At 18, Nell moved to London, sang and danced on street corners and livened up her job as a soda jerk by tap-dancing on the tables. Disshe was cast in the stage show, then the 1975 cult film. Though she is known mainly for B movies and one oddball song, Do the Swim, Nell impressed London's swells, "She's so

versatile," says British fashion execu-

tive Cindy White. "When people first





FREE

HOST Warren Beatty, Mick Jagge and **Faye Dunaway** hang o at Nell Campbell's hot New York club, but Don Johnson and Cher were rejected

Nell Campbe is also kno as Little Nell. She played Columbia in the RHPS (f you cave me

Little Nell's other side.

met her, they saw this crazy, mad girl. But she has a serious, calm side too." McNally, a former Rocky Horror

lighting technician, was among the fans. After breaking her in last year as maitresse d'at his hip Manhattan restaurants, Odeon and Cafe Luxembourg, he quietly opened Nell's last October in a renovated electronics store and began fighting off crowds.

In a stab at some sort of admission policy, Nell now sells \$200 memberships to screened applicants. Even so, certain nonmembers walk right in. Sometimes Nell's own needs come into play. "I am driven by men," she once joked. "One of the nice things about owning a nightclub is that they are guaranteed to come in." She also helps some decide to leave. One night Women's Wear Daily editor Michael Coady refused to shell out the \$5 fee that members must pay for each guest. Nell returned his membership dues and Coady left, for good.

Nell and her doormen steadfasti snub mere humans. One night they agreed to admit two men if their dates-who were not famous and parently did not look important and chic—stayed outside. "I don't like Nell's snotty attitude," says New Yo partygiver Vito Bruno. "When I met she was all sweet and said, 'Come the club.' But I couldn't get in. I gue they thought I was just another fat slob.

In the end the trendiness that has made Nell's a hit could be its undois "In these elitist times," says Haoui Montaug, a doorman at Tunnel, "lo people want a place that excludes one who isn't their own kind. But I th that will blow over soon. Most peop basically want to see people who a different—if only to make fun of them." —Written by Michael -Written by Michael S reported by Michelangelo Signorile



NEXT WEEK: VIRGIN CAST NIGHT! 10 people who've NEVER done the show before do the show! Can you top that???

Q: What happens when you overstuff the Suggestion with too

many cards?

A: Gouey cards.

And now, to the dried-out cards:

BOX: What does "2 Ply" mean? HaHa.

RIR: 4 Ply divided by 2.

BOX: Run Roy for Pres in 88,

Rocky Party.

RIR: Could I still do the show?

BOX: How about a double cast/

It'll be awesome.

RIR: I think we, er, ah, did that by accident 2 weeks ago.

BOX: How old is Dick the Cop?

RIR: As old as his gun.

LAST WEEK AT CTC



85

FRI



Joseph Fourniercovered by Rocky Horror's creators,

SAT 7.10 Lisa McDonald

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? WRITE : R. I. ROCKY, 100 LYMAN AVE, NORTH PROVIDENCE RT 02911