

## Shopping With...Andrea Reese, star of "Cirque Jacqueline"

By Lauren David Peden

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People strolling down Second Avenue last Friday afternoon could be forgiven for thinking they'd just seen a ghost. A familiar ghost. A famous ghost. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis's ghost, to be precise.

"People have said I looked like her since I was very young," explained actress Andrea Reese, she of the wide-set eyes, jet black bob and willowy frame. The enterprising thespian has made the most of her startling resemblance to America's most famous First Lady by writing and starring in the critically-acclaimed one-woman play "Cirque Jacqueline," which has enjoyed a successful run at various theaters in and around Manhattan since it debuted in March 2002.

Currently on hiatus, "Cirque Jacqueline" is being reprised for a special Valentine's Day benefit performance, with all proceeds going to The American Red Cross Tsunami Relief Effort (February 14th at 7pm, Triad Theater, 158 West 72nd Street; 212-501-2584; [www.jackieoshow.com](http://www.jackieoshow.com); \$25 suggested donation).

"After the tsunami hit I thought, 'God, I want to help but I don't have enough money to do anything significant,'" Reese told FWD. "Then I thought, 'Well, I have this play and we could probably fill the theater, so why not do it as a benefit and give all the money to the Red Cross. The Triad agreed to donate the space for the night, so that's what we're doing."

On this sunny January afternoon, the warm and witty Washington D.C. native — who studied acting and music at Sarah Lawrence College and got an MFA at UC, Irvine before moving to New York — was in an altruistic frame of mind. But first, Reese agreed to do some shopping with FWD, an outing she had planned with military-like precision.

Operation Metamorphosis (as we'll call it) commenced at 12:00 Hours at the Starbucks on Second Avenue and 9th Street ([www.starbucks.com](http://www.starbucks.com)), where the self-described "bargain queen" splurged on two bags of holiday blend java (\$12.85, plus \$1 for the tip jar).

"I want to buy two really small bags of coffee for two really special people," she said of David Gibbs, her actor-publicist boyfriend, and Lisa Kapler, the makeup artist who transforms her into Jackie O for each performance (see for yourself at [www.islebeauty.com/portfolio](http://www.islebeauty.com/portfolio)). "They're both lovers of coffee."

Reese herself never touches the stuff. "I'm so hyper anyway that it would push me over the top," she laughed. "I'd be like a Jackie cartoon character!" Gifts in hand, she steered us toward "the ultimate thrift shop in the universe," where she hoped to find some Camelot-worthy couture.

Reese was unapologetically frank about her love of a good deal. "For me it's like a game; it's a fun thrill," she enthused as we crossed the street. "I can't pretend I don't follow fashion at all. I do. I look at magazines and I try to stay somewhat current, but I take *tremendous* pride in not spending a lot of money on stuff. I respect the artistry of designers, but I personally don't want to spend money on that. It doesn't matter to me whether something is designer or whether it's a knockoff. If I like it, I'm going to buy it."

Hence, her outfit on this day: A beige pencil skirt from Target (\$6.48), a black thrift shop button-down (\$4), a gray faux-fur collared American Eagle Outfitters coat found at the Salvation Army for \$10 ("It was originally \$100 and still had the tags on it, but it had a one-inch tear in the back that I sewed"), accessorized with Payless boots, a watch from Target, a red street vendor scarf (\$6) and a stretchy bracelet from the 99-cents store ("It has dogs on it; I'm a dog fanatic"). Her bright red Chinoiserie bag was a Christmas gift that her Japanese step-grandmother picked up in Shanghai. "I figured I needed a big bag for shopping," Reese said as we approached the East Village Thrift Shop (186 Second Avenue; 212-375-8585).

Although she claimed that she doesn't follow the NY fashion shows "because Fashion Week doesn't exactly go along with being a bargain queen," Reese was shrewd enough to take her Jackie O Show on the road — dressing in character and turning up outside the Bryant Park tents carrying a life-sized President Kennedy cutout during the September 2003 shows to publicize her play — which resulted in the New York Times' Bill Cunningham snapping her photo for his "On the Street"



Styles section column.



Before we went inside to begin Operation Metamorphosis, the animal lover (who lives in a building that does not allow cats or dogs) told us she had two pet hamsters named Hector and Achilles, and that she was the proud mother of 30 bouncing baby Triops, which she grew herself, sea monkey-style, in a Triops tank she had also received for Christmas.

"They're a prehistoric sea creature that I grew, and there are too many of them to name," she explained. "They're kind of strange and have three eyes and what's called an exoskeleton — the spine is on the outside." Can you pet them? "No, they're like fish; they just swim around. They're not really intelligent. You can't train them or anything. But I saw [the tank kit] in a catalog and I knew that I had to have it, of course." Of course.

"I have to tell you something," she confided as we entered the cluttered store, which was stocked with a range of well-priced garments from the '40s through the '90s. "I came in here the other day and saw a dress that was so spectacular I bought it and put it on hold and thought I could put it on [now] and slowly become Jackie during the rest of the day. Wait until you see it — \$15."

With that, she disappeared into the dressing room, emerging a few minutes later in a quilted black Mort Schrader sheath that fit her like a glove. "It's gorgeous," the 5'9" looker announced as she made her way to the back room, where she ignored the \$1 paperbacks, used albums and racks of Ann Taylor pumps that were stacked near the full-length marabou-trimmed mirror. "Isn't this great?! I practically fainted when I saw this dress." Indeed, she looked like she would fit right in at a Washington wives' luncheon, circa 1962. Stage one of Operation Metamorphosis was declared a success.

"Let me see if I can find some pearls and glasses and earrings," she said as she walked to the front counter. She was momentarily distracted by a silk A-line evening dress with heavily beaded bodice (\$25). "Look around — you can find real treasures here," she advised, pointing to a \$5 plaid mini-kilt.

So how would she describe her own style when not channeling Dead Presidents' Wives?

"Somewhat trendy," she replied. "Usually colorful. I like to exude some creativity and I don't like anything at all corporate or waspy." Hmm. Sounds like the polar opposite of the fashionable but uber-classic Mrs. Kennedy.

"It's funny," she mused. "I always thought it was intriguing that I looked like her, but I wasn't necessarily a fan. She wasn't my type, honestly. She was much more hifalutin' and fashion conscious and things like that." But as Reese began exploring the flesh-and-blood woman behind the media-made myth — which she did after director Jim Simpson met her during an audition and suggested she make use of her uncanny likeness by writing a one-woman vehicle based on the life of the White House icon — the brainy opera-singer-turned-thespian discovered she had more in common with her stylish doppelganger than she knew.

"She was really smart — most people don't realize that because she put on that airy voice," explained Reese. "She was incredibly creative — she painted and drew and was very good. And she was hysterically funny. I just saw her as this socialite who decorated the White House, but she was an artist and smart and clever with a raunchy sense of humor, which I never would have expected. I never identified with her and all of a sudden I realized, 'Oh my God, we're not as different as I thought!'"

The resulting play is a multifaceted portrayal that follows Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis from boarding school at age 10 to her cancer-related death at age 64, and paints a portrait of a woman who is everything she was said to be and more — without shying away from the more difficult aspects of Jackie's life, including her husband's flagrant womanizing and her own dalliance with amphetamines, which has been well documented in recent biographies.

In addition to employing hair and makeup tricks to further heighten her resemblance to JKO (such as tweezing her eyebrows by almost half their natural size to make her eyes appear farther apart, teasing her hair into a raven bouffant, artfully contouring her nose and chin to mimic the First Lady's profile and applying a generous swipe of JKO's signature Adrien Arpel "Perfect Pink" lipstick), Reese also relies heavily on period clothing and accessories to help her get into character, going so far as to wear her boxy tweed suit and pillbox hat to the theater each night to put her in a JKO state of mind.

"I don't do the hair and makeup until I get to the theater, but I do go there in costume because the clothing is so different than what I wear," she told us. "It's somewhat constricting. I don't wear heels in real life. And people's reactions to me are different when I dress as Jackie. They are much more respectful. They see me as this elegant woman and act accordingly. They are extra polite, doors are held open for me more than they normally would be. So it actually puts me in a

different place in the world."

As Reese spoke, she scanned the accessories counter and quickly chose some screw-on pearl earrings (\$7) and Jackie O-worthy tortoiseshell shades (\$6) to complement her new dress, which she had paid for earlier in the week as part of her Operation Metamorphosis Master Plan. Stage Two: Accomplished. "This is definitely working," she said gleefully as she appraised her reflection in the countertop mirror.

Next stop: Urban Outfitters (162 Second Avenue; 212-375-1277; [www.urbanoutfitters.com](http://www.urbanoutfitters.com)). "They have good fake pearls," she said along the way, as passersby did discreet double takes. "This store is out of my price range for most things, but I think it would be good for today, don't you?"

Upon entering the store, Reese immediately lunged into a basket of pearl necklaces (\$20) and looped a strand around her neck a few times. "These totally aren't working," she opined with a frown. "[Jackie] wore them right up against her neck, and these aren't hanging like that."

The nonsmoker admired a silver cigarette case before noticing a huge bowl of sale accessories behind the counter, including triple-strand pearl necklaces — 99 cents each! — which a salesgirl handed to her.

She rifled through the bowl with increasing excitement. "Now we're talking," she muttered. "This is 99 cents? How could people not want these gorgeous sets of pearls?" She tried on a pearl necklace with a pink bow closure, which fell just at her clavicle.

"That's it! Now we're in business," she crowed, as Operation Metamorphosis entered Stage Three (Reese's growing resemblance to JKO was downright eerie, each piece of the costume bringing her one step closer to The Kennedy Myth). "I think I'm going to get two of these," she announced giddily. "I will definitely, without a doubt, use these for years to come." She vetoed the brown-beribboned pearls ("Jack Kennedy hated brown. He had this thing about it") and fished a lilac-trimmed necklace from the bowl, along with another, more modern, multi-charm gold-tone choker.

"I'm getting the shopping adrenaline jump right now," she added. "It's like being on amphetamines, like Jackie [was], because there is really good stuff here."

She took her loot and hightailed it for the sale rack at the back of the store, where she alighted upon a puff-sleeved black angora sweater by Lux (originally \$54, now \$10). "I think I might get it," she said to no one in particular. "I don't even have to try it on. It would definitely fit. I'm going to get this. But like a gambler who knows I can spend too much, I'm not going to buy anymore. I'm still looking but I'm stopping."

Uh, not quite. She grabbed a pale green silk snap-top bag with pink flowers off a nearby wall display. "Oh my God. This is very, very cute," she gushed, helpless in the face of fashion. She put the bag down and took two steps, reasoning out loud as she went. "The black sweater was how much, \$10? This bag is \$10 [down from \$34] the three jewelry things are...it would make it \$23. It's not bad for all that stuff."

She took three more steps then turned on her heel. "Let's go look at that bag and then I'm out of here. I have to save a lot of money for the most important stop, which is the last one."

As we stood at the counter waiting to pay, Reese — who was determined to stay within her \$100 FWD cash allowance — whipped out a pen and paper and did some lightning-fast calculations to see how much she had left.

When complimented on her speedy addition, Reese revealed that she taught second, third and fourth grade at the tony Upper East Side Town School for three years in the early '90s. "It completely reinforces all your basic math skills."

One sweater, one purse, three necklaces and \$24.95 later, we were back on Second Avenue. "That was unbelievable" she crowed. "I'm so happy right now. That's another reason I don't need coffee. I could be on my deathbed and if somebody said 'Do you want to go to Target?' I would be cured. It's true!" Having seen her in action, we had no reason to doubt this claim.

Reese's reason for counting her pennies became clear when we arrived at our final stop: Whiskers Holistic Pet Care (235 East Ninth Street; 212-979-2532; [www.1800whiskers.com](http://www.1800whiskers.com)).

"This is a great pet store," said Reese, who became a vegetarian after visiting the Catskills Animal Shelter several months ago, where she bonded with cows and horses and a pig that "you could lie on top of and he was so happy he would almost purr."

"I've always had a huge love of animals, but I was disconnected in a way," she added. "The experience of really connecting with animals right in front of you and hearing what goes on in

meat factories...I couldn't eat meat anymore. I felt like I wanted to do more, so I went to an animal shelter in Queens and met all these dogs and cats, and I'm going to start volunteering there. They also need food, so I thought I should start putting my money where my mouth is."

Inside, Reese grabbed a basket to stock up on tasty canine treats, which she had already arranged for the store to deliver to the Queens Community Animal Shelter the following day.

"We have \$43 for food and a \$5 tip for the driver," she said. But first, she picked up a box of Bunny Kraze Greens for Hector and Achilles (\$3.99). "These are greens that you grow yourself and then feed to the hamster," she explained. When asked what she had against pre-made greens (or, ummm, goldfish), Reese laughed. "You're right! This is like growing Triops in a tank. The whole process is very exciting."

We would expect nothing less from the daughter of a research scientist whose idea of childhood fun was to accompany her dad — the head of neurobiology at the National Institutes of Health — to the lab on weekends, where they'd have horseshoe crab races or spray silicone on the floors and "skate" down the halls.

"We were around all these animals, though I was always really disturbed by the experimentation," she recalled. "I wrote my college essay on animal cruelty instead of on myself, so this goes way back...To the dog food we go!"

She placed her basket on the floor and began filling it with enticingly named Wellness and Merrick puppy products. Campfire Trout, Thanksgiving Turkey, Chicken Drumette, Wild Buffalo and even Grammy's Pot Pie went into the pile.

"That would be a great burrito," Reese opined of the vegetarian Sweet Potato formula. "And you can't go wrong with Cowboy Cookout. I'm so happy about this... What is venison?" We reply as she's poised to toss another can in the cart.

"Oh gross," she shuddered. "I can't buy that. It just feels wrong, with Christmas and reindeer and all that. Blitzen almost got blitzed! I'm going to put this back."

The burgeoning activist counted the cans (17, at \$1.79 and \$1.89 each) and decided to spend her last \$3 on some Waggers Originals Natural Treats, which included Savory Casserole, Hearty Stew and a yummy-sounding Peanut Butter and Rolled Oats cookie (*woof!*).

The cashier entered the shelter's delivery information into the computer and tallied up the damage (\$46.59, with tax and driver's tip), bringing Reese's grand FWD Shopping With total to \$99.51. Guess paying attention in third grade math class really does pay off.

"My main interest has always been helping others, but performing and creative expression is crucial, too," Reese said as she buttoned her coat before heading back outside. "So putting them together, like for the Red Cross thing, is great because it uses everything. Today was perfect, too, because I got something for myself, which is really fun, but then I did something good, as well. It's the perfect balance."

Like the complex icon she so skillfully portrays in "Cirque Jacqueline," Reese is the true embodiment of a multifaceted Renaissance Woman, circa — make that *cirque* — 2005.

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