

# Conscientious objectors

In "honor" of the GOP shindig, NYC's arts community is putting on some performances with a purpose By **Elisabeth Vincentelli**



## Imagine Festival of Arts, Issues and Ideas

Organizing a sprawling arts festival in New York is a daunting task at any time; holding it while the Republican National Convention is in session would scare off most mortals with a grain of sense. But then, Chris Wangro has worked on a traveling circus, *The New Yorker* festival and the Pope's appearance in Central Park. Thousands of Republicans, black-clad anarchists and art-loving locals are nothing to a man who's had to contend with the Vatican.

"The Republicans coming to New York was an act of hubris," Wangro says, "but it was also an opportunity for us to reach out to all these people." To get the Imagine Festival going, he started by calling venues; before long, the 46-year-old producer had enlisted nearly 200 events over six days as bookers, curators, artists, organizations and even other festivals (including the Fringe) came on board. And so the city will overflow with concerts headlined by names big and small (from Moby to art-song interpreter Theo Bleckmann), as well as screenings, plays, forums, comedy shows, and other events.

While the idea of so much politically inspired art is appealing to many locals who can't get enough of attacks aimed at the current administration, Wangro stresses that "Imagine is a free-speech zone—as long as it's about issues and not Bush bashing or the elevation of one party above the other." For him, an arts festival was the most appropriate answer to the convention. After all, as he points out, "New York is home to the finest creative community in America, and the artists the city has fostered are among our great national resources. When these people come together, America should listen."

*Various venues and prices. Sat 28–Thu 2 (www.imagine04.org). See also "Burning Issues," page 127, for more on Theo Bleckmann.*