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TIËSTO AT AVALON / PHOTO BY LAUREN DOBKIN

The Global DJ

TIËSTO @ AVALON | SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 2004

Article by Matt Kalkhoff

In today's travel-oriented economy and sprawling worldwide marketplace, the concept of the global DJ just makes sense. Certain musical styles will always be geographically linked to some degree. But technological advancements have fostered a cross-pollination of diverse genres in even the most isolated areas of the planet, and have broken down traditional boundaries that have led to an unprecedented proliferation of multi-cultural live performances.

Despite the inherent challenges of transporting cumbersome collections of CDs and vinyl from city to city, DJs by and large have been more than happy to meet the demands of faraway fans. But who would have imagined that our generation would witness the emergence of a thriving nightlife scene in such exotic locales as Jakarta, Moscow and Tel Aviv, just to name a few?

Perhaps beginning at Twilo about a decade ago, never has this foreign exchange phenomenon been more evident here in the United States. That is, until now.

New York's hottest clubs are routinely booked months in advance with special events featuring the world's most famous visiting DJs. Paul van Dyk, Paul Oakenfold, Carl Cox, Sander Kleinberg, Deep Dish, Sasha & Digweed: coming to a club near you! The problem is that it seems only they are pulling in the big numbers anymore and energizing crowds into frenzied fits of fanatic hysteria and unabashed idol worship.

One has to wonder, What the heck happened to our local boys and girls, a legendary trend-setting talent pool in its own right that seems vastly, if not inexplicably, underutilized and under -appreciated lately?

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TIËSTO AT AVALON / PHOTO BY LAUREN DOBKIN

When Tiësto -- the ever-popular Dutch mix-master who is arguably the most popular DJ/producer in the world right now -- recently played a gig at Avalon, the infamous disco church's ample walls could barely contain the massive throngs of revelers, let alone the intense energy and unbridled enthusiasm that accompanied them. When he took over the decks just after 1am, the crowd chanted his name -- TI-ES-TO, TI-ES-TO, TI-ES-TO -- so loudly that the music was barely audible for several minutes.

There was a day not so long ago when Manhattan marquees bearing the names of such legendary luminaries as Junior Vasquez, Victor Calderone, Danny Tenaglia, Jonathan Peters and Frankie Knuckles would pack 'em in by the thousands week after week. In all fairness, each of these jocks and others around town still do so on occasion (Calderone's "Light" party at Crobar over Gay Pride Weekend is a prime example). But the days of super-sized residencies appear to be over here in the former Nightclub Capital of the World, driving the five-figure superstars to play smaller rooms, focus on out-of-town and overseas bookings, or simply limit local performances to a handful of special events throughout the year.

Perhaps those controversial DJ polls offer some insight. After all, most Americans usually don't chart very well nationally or internationally. In fact, Danny Tenaglia is often the only hometown hero to break the top 10 or 20. But even his future in New York clubland seems uncertain ever since Arc closed in April, effectively leaving his long-running "Be Yourself" residency without a home. What gives?

Misguided government officials, overzealous authorities and oppressive bureaucracy are certainly valid scapegoats for some of what plagues New York City nightlife these days. Our past and present mayors have worked hard to stifle our particular brand of fun, and too often have succeeded. Yet new mega-clubs are still emerging, others have undergone radical transformations, and, as evidenced by the aforementioned Tiësto spectacle, there are still plenty of party people left in Manhattan anxious to dance till dawn and beyond.

Have we New Yorkers just finally become too finicky for our own good? Spoiled, perhaps, by too many choices, becoming ironic victims of our own ever-changing demands? Or are these other DJs really just that much better at delivering what local audiences want to hear?

Clearly there's more than enough room in New York City



for everyone, and talent from abroad should and always will be welcome here. But unless we want the flyers for practically every major gig around town to continue listing the DJ's hometown underneath his or her name, we had better start thinking about the answers to these questions.



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