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NITE LIFE

And how was your Black Party Weekend?

The city's annual flesh fest drew thousands to Roseland. DJ reviews were mixed, but it was certainly arousing. And after 30 years, we say goodbye to the Gaiety.

By [Matt Kalkhoff](#)
 Friday, March 25, 2005

Spring comes just once a year. But at one event, the average patron comes at least twice. And so it was this past weekend, at the 25th annual festival of flesh otherwise known as the Saint At Large Black Party.

While some may lament that the decadence factor has waned in recent years, I personally found the party to be as raunchy and erotic as ever (observed from a purely journalistic perspective, of course). I missed all of the "performances" upstairs on the main stage.

But I did manage to indulge a few voyeuristic fantasies while strolling past the fully aroused and fully exposed boytoys stationed in the "Red Light District" along the upper level's back wall. Apparently willing to indulge anyone with wandering hands (or lips) and no shame, these frisky fellows were like living, gyrating billboards for Viagra.

Down on the dance floor, it was business as usual. And by business, I mean even more questionable behavior, interspersed with occasional mingling, dancing and the requisite parade of freaks and outrageous fashion. Maybe next year they could get Joan Rivers to cover the "red leather carpet" arrivals for Logo, the new gay cable channel that MTV is launching. Or maybe not, considering how publicity-shy the party's producers are.

I'm not even really not sure how much of this I should be committing to print. ("What happens at Black Party stays at Black Party" has become a mantra.) But since the editor of this paper already holds the dubious title of "The Bitch Who Ruined the Black Party" following his controversial behind-the-scenes exposé in the Village Voice a few years ago, I can't imagine that these relatively tame revelations will come as a surprise to anyone or jeopardize this time-honored tradition.

Not to say that the party's all about the sex, though. Nor is it all about the music either, as I finally came to realize during this, my eighth consecutive escapade celebrating the vernal equinox on the Roseland Ballroom's hallowed dance floor. More than any other, this massive dance party actually transcends the music, relying more on its fabulously deviant nature, ritualistic heritage and liberating, welcoming vibe than any one particular aspect.

Yet the music is obviously still a crucial element at any dance party, so don't think for a moment that I'm going to let this year's DJs off without some sort of analysis.

Marking their first American appearance in front of a gay audience were Chus & Ceballos. Unfamiliar to many attendees, the Iberian DJ/production duo seemed to come out of nowhere



Crews worked feverishly on Saturday afternoon to construct the dome at Roseland for that night's Black Party.

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to nail their opening set with an appropriately rousing blend of deep house grooves and vibrant melodic rhythms.

The stage seemed set, as it were, for a triumphant return by one of New York's most missed hometown heroes, Victor Calderone. Unfortunately, his fourth performance at the event was perceived by many to be his least impressive.

Was it just an off night? (Every DJ has them.) Or maybe a sign of a growing disconnect between a DJ who now plays mostly for straight audiences and the overwhelmingly gay male crowd of finicky music enthusiasts who are at the core of the Saint At Large audience? Not unlike the age-old "chicken vs. egg" quandary, one is left to ponder whether it was the crowd's lukewarm response that left the DJ uninspired, or uninspired music that left the audience unimpressed. Discuss.

Moving right along, I'm truly sorry that I didn't have the energy to stay for Randy Bettis' closing set. But after more than 10 hours on that dance floor, I just didn't have any more to give. From what I've heard, though, it sounds like he did a great job of wrapping up the party with his own unique take on both the new and the classics.

Guy Smith and Ross Berger never cease to amaze revelers with innovative lighting installations and clever visual effects. Inspired by the original Saint's legendary domed ceiling, this year a huge white canopy was installed over the center of the dance floor. (Accordingly, both the DJ and lighting booths were moved down to the main stage.) While many of the effects were indeed mesmerizing, and the Saint At Large deserves much credit for attempting such an ambitious undertaking, I must say that I hope that's the last we'll be seeing of the dome.

Because of its size and dominance, other lighting was somewhat limited. Yet it was still as bright as a CVS underneath that thing for much of the night. As a friend of mine commented at one point, "I should never be able to read the fine print on my contract with the devil from the dance floor." I couldn't agree more.

More than anything else, though — at least for me personally — the Black Party is about bonding with friends, both old and new. It truly is a spiritually uplifting tribal gathering, a family reunion of sorts, and a celebration of the renewal of life.

Among the masses: SAL's Stephen Pevner, Steve Kasko and Jason McCarthy; Terry Jackson, Shaun Coley & Jason Gilbert, Mike O'Neil, Mo'niques Fiancé, Frank Steiminger, Rick Harper, Craig Leonard, Bryan Quilliams, Ida Halcyon, Moody Mustafa, Chad Cipiti, Paul Richard, Alan Brown, Kat Coric & Rosa from Montreal, Alan Flippen & Joey Juan, Jeff Trentham, Christine "Nurse" Embon, Joe Caro, Donald Stockman & Chris, Joey Alvarado, Shane Smith, Eugene Lumpkin, Steve Weinstein & Steve Sparling, Athena Calderone, DJ Warren Gluck, DJ That Kid Chris & Melanie, DJ Eddie Elias, Clovis Thorn, Scott Himmelrich & Barbara, Gregory T. Angelo, David Kniazuk, Frank Conway, birthday boy Bobby McGuire, Dean from the Roxy, Mitch Amtrak, Chris Davis & Dennis Voorheis, Mitchell Greenberg, Chris Dooley, Stephanie Nathanson, Derek Scott Graves, Tony Hayden & Jose, John Martin, Anthony Dean, Mark Thompson & Robert Doyle, Brian Mehmel, Billy Whalen, Patrick Forreth, Petr Pronsanti & Stas, John Farley and so many others.

For those who couldn't get enough, Junior Vasquez brought revelers into the "Heart of Darkness" at Spirit. At least that was how it was advertised. Reports were, however, that the spinmeister played a lot of anthems, which the crowd adored.

Junior ended his set on Sunday night, when Alegria was only beginning around the corner at Crobar. Producer Ric Sena once again managed to wedge seemingly every hot, muscular gay man in both hemispheres onto the dance floor, while Abel spun his signature tribal style. When I left on Monday morning, it was still going strong.

In other X-rated news, the so-called Disneyfication of Times Square has claimed yet another victim.

After 30 lustful years of glorious male objectification, the Gaiety Theater has apparently hosted its final striptease. Destined to follow in the ill-fated footsteps of such other landmark institutions as the Saint and Palladium, the historic theater that was immortalized in the pages of Madonna's "Sex" book will soon be torn down and redeveloped. The end of an era, yes, but a recorded message offers hopes that the Gaiety will eventually find a new home here in the city. Stay tuned.

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