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MattUnleashed on Nightlife :: Black Party, New Kid on the Deck

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Nightlife options in New York City fluctuate as wildly as the whims of the revelers who keep the multi-billion dollar industry churning. Sometimes the choices can seem overwhelming, especially on holiday weekends. Other times, it can feel like there's just nothing new or enticing enough to leave the house. Of course, the latter is never really true in a city which boasts a practically infinite number of entertainment diversions. But gays can be a fickle bunch, and while there are still plenty of establishments catering to the GLBT community, even the trendiest, most popular destinations can become stale or tiresome at times.

Saturday night offers the perfect example. Let's say you and your friends want to go out dancing at a primarily gay venue -- a perfectly respectable and common objective among locals and visitors alike. While some of the more adventurous homos are off discovering exotic new worlds and foreign-influenced musical styles at any number of straight (albeit often mixed) venues like Crobar, Pacha, Cielo, etc., those looking for a heavier male-to-male dance floor ratio are rather limited in choices.



Not surprisingly, the world-famous Roxy is the natural default for most. The club's been around for more than two decades and has always catered to the gay boys. Its hallowed halls also attract the likes of Madonna (when she's got a new record to promote, anyway) and the some of the industry's biggest DJs who spin there weekly for hordes of the hottest men around.

But the space really hasn't changed much aesthetically since it was converted from a roller rink back in the early 80s. For those who go out regularly, or are just looking for something new and different, for that matter, this can present a problem. Splash is another longtime survivor that offers the only other (semi-large) primarily gay Saturday night dance experience. Both clubs still pack them in on any given weekend, but I think most would agree that Saturday nights just aren't what they used to be -- and certainly not what they should be -- here in Manhattan.

Sunday nights, however, are absolutely rocking with a plethora of super fun parties that, I'm a bit embarrassed to admit, have until now mostly flown under my radar. But after recent visits to Hiro and Josh Wood's monthly Master's Class party at Cielo featuring DJ Junior Vasquez (both reasonably early affairs, it should be noted, which helps alleviate any Monday morning work anxiety), I might just have to modify my weekend strategy in order to take full advantage of that old-school vibe and carefree energy I've been missing so much lately. And for those who are still raring to go later at night, there's always Spirit, Avalon or any number of other venues in which to carry on.

Add to that weekly parties at Asseteria, Tea @ Pink (for the Fire Island/lighter music crowd), Danny Krivit's 718 Sessions, Victor Calderone's monthly Evolve after-hours at Crobar and Ric Sena's Alegria on holiday weekends, and one cannot help but wonder, Is Sunday the new Saturday?

Black Party Cometh

As a clever scribe once wrote, "Spring comes just once a year. But at one event, the average patron comes at least twice." And so it will be on Saturday, March 25, when the Saint-At-Large takes over the Roseland Ballroom for the 27th incarnation of its infamous signature event, the Black Party.

The inevitably controversial posters should be arriving shortly announcing the much speculated DJ roster. But fret not during the delay for the two gentlemen chosen to headline this year's event are more than capable of delivering a deliciously dark, dirty and -- dare I say -- dramatic dance floor journey to rival those of any of their esteemed predecessors.

Each hailing from faraway lands, this year will mark both DJs' Black Party debut, but these global superstars' names will no doubt be familiar to anyone who's taken the time to read this far into a nightlife column. And any fears one might have of the music becoming a monochromatic onslaught this year should be swiftly put to rest as the organizers and DJs have promised to integrate more vocals throughout the sets to help nudge this party back towards its legendary roots while honoring its auspicious traditions.

Joining the throngs of porn stars and erotic entertainers will be FTM transgender performance artist Buck Angel (aka The Man with a Pussy) who will be doing Lord knows what on stage, but is certain to shock, offend or amaze while defying the laws of nature, anatomy and good taste. (Make of this what you will.)

Another intriguing if less perverse twist to this year's weekend line-up is a new SAL-affiliated event that picks up where Black Party leaves off with an all-day after-hours party helmed by the legendary Junior Vasquez at Pacha. To ensure a safe and successful transition between venues, SAL has even arranged for a shuttle bus -- appropriately anointed The Disorient Express -- to whisk all manner of patrons west to the 46th Street venue. All this and Alegria to boot. Guess it's a good thing I've scheduled Monday and Tuesday off from work!



New Kid on the Deck

Lest you think only the big names score all the prime gigs anymore, I'd like to give a special shout-out to relative newcomer Joe Hickerson who is taking the city by storm this year. While the 26-year-old Southerner has been working hard to establish his name by honing his craft at smaller venues around town, a breakthrough gig during MLK weekend at Roxy opening for none other than Junior Vasquez promptly shifted this talented young man's career into high gear. Watch for headlining gigs at Roxy on Saturday, February 18 (a holiday weekend, no less!) and Spirit on Sunday, February 26. Congrats and good

luck, Joe!

Until next time: Be Smart. Be Safe. Be Yourself.

[Embedded links :: www.saintatlarge.com :: www.alegriaevents.com :: www.buckangel.com :: www.juniorvasquezmusic.com :: www.victorcaldereone.com :: www.roxynyc.com :: www.splashbar.com :: www.pachanyc.com :: www.crobar.com :: www.cieloclub.com :: www.teaatpink.com :: www.djjoehickerson.com]

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