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MattUnleashed on Nightlife :: Pines Party Review / Ascension Preview

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Superheros from Pines Party 2006

One could make a pretty good argument that gay men, particularly those who frequent Fire Island Pines each summer, have a tough time resisting temptation. So it is especially notable the level of restraint that was exercised by so many of them this past Saturday at the Pines Party. No, I'm not referring to booze or other recreational substances (sadly, at least one patron did overdo it and was airlifted off the island

towards the end of the party), but rather the astonishing absence of even a single gender-bending homage to Lynda Carter's iconic Amazonian princess. The theme was, after all, Heroes & Villains, and what gay man hasn't wanted to be Wonder Woman, or at least dress up like her? Some sort of collective subconscious fear of appearing too cliché, perhaps? Whatever the reason, I would have lost a lot of money had anyone actually taken me up on my bet as to how many golden tiaras, bullet-proof bracelets and magic lassos we'd see.

Instead it was Underdog - yes, Underdog - who ruled the roost on that beach. A prominent dance floor-adjacent tent and a generous display of video clips on the big screen was a fitting if not unexpected tribute to this obscure relic of cartoon outcasts. Who would have guessed? We are a creative people, though, as was further evidenced by the diverse cast of characters on display, like the meticulously costumed Poison Ivy, that ridiculously sexy and nearly naked Riddler and at least a few hundred bare-chested caped crusaders and masked marvels who looked more Bel-Ami than Justice League. Yum!

It's also nothing short of superhuman that the event's producer - TIGS (The Impression Group South) - managed to pull off this feat at all. Yet somehow they once again succeeded in not only transporting all the raw materials necessary to create a 3,000+ capacity makeshift nightclub on the remote shores of this island oasis, but executed the monolithic task with such impressive precision and grandiose flair.

Guy Smith held his own with a customarily brilliant lighting design complete with laser-guided illusions, as did DJs David Knapp and Roland Belmares who each nailed their respective sets with a beach party-appropriate blend of vocals and energetic, uplifting grooves. LA's Flava tore it up onstage working Mary J. Blige's ubiquitous summer anthem, "Be Without You," as did a hunky troupe of aerial acrobats who dangled above the crowd in all states of undress while demonstrating remarkable balance, strength and sex appeal. Later, a gospel choir serenaded the crowd as the sun peeked out from the horizon, beautifully closing what was a tremendously fun and well-organized event.

Proceeds from the party benefit the FIPPOA Charitable Foundation and the Stonewall Community Foundation. Check out www.pinesparty.com for pictures and other info.

Now let's see if we can repeat the magic in a few weeks when the Ascension Party debuts on Sunday, August 20. I'm not sure if a daytime beach party (12:00-6:00pm) is going to fly on what will likely be one the hotter weekends of the summer, but the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Fire Island Pines Foundation and DJ Brett Henrichson are apparently willing to take that risk. And for that, they should be applauded.

A slew of other parties boasting some major talent (DJs Wendy Hunt, Phil B, and Tony Moran, to name a few) that weekend could potentially make this rookie event a full-fledged Circuit sensation right out of the gate. Or, the bafflingly high cover charges could sink this ship before it sets sail. At \$85 (\$100 at the door), the main event seems reasonable (relative to other similar events on the island, that is). But \$40-60 on Saturday and Sunday nights at the Pavilion, a venue that has struggled to fill even half its dance floor most weekends this summer? Good luck with that. I mean, I'd really like to see Ascension succeed. But the buzz so far has been minimal, and I still haven't gotten all of the sand out of my shoes from Pines Party, so we shall see. Visit www.ascensionparty.com for more info.

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

Matt Kalkhoff is a New York-based freelance writer whose love for dance music is only surpassed by the depth and passion with which he writes about it. A full collection of Matt's work can be viewed at his website :: <http://www.mattunleashed.com>

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