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NITE LIFE



Clubland under siege
 Were problems with Pacha's opening party part of a greater police crackdown on nightlife?
Friday, December 16, 2005

Despite some disturbing developments in clubland lately, I've been trying to remain cautiously optimistic about what it might all mean. But now I'm beginning to think that New York nightlife is indeed under siege yet again!

When Roxy was shuttered on Halloween weekend, just minutes before the Motherfucker party was to begin on Friday night, Chelsea's new Tenth Precinct commander, Stephen Hughes, effectively put all clubs in his district on notice that he wasn't going to tolerate so much as a single fruit fly anywhere near the liquor. Much like the controversial (and notoriously misused) Cabaret Law that Mayor Giuliani so recklessly wielded (and continues to haunt us even today), the commander's weapon of choice is the city's Nuisance & Abatement Law, which he isn't hesitating to use to shut down establishments for even relatively minor violations.

The courts will ultimately determine if the Roxy, a well-regarded nightclub that has generally enjoyed a good relationship with local authorities during its 20-plus years on West 18th Street, improperly allowed a couple of underage undercover agents to purchase alcoholic beverages. Whatever the outcome, one thing is clear: Hughes isn't particularly interested in preserving New York's \$9.7 billion nightlife industry or the 95,000 jobs it provides.

At a recent Community Board 4 public meeting on West Chelsea Nightlife, Hughes expressed disapproval of the late-night lifestyle and even suggested that he'd prefer to see all clubs close by 4 a.m. He went on to admit, "I'd rather be an adversary to clubs right now," leaving little question as to whose side he's on.

That's not to say that Hughes isn't facing some very serious challenges as quality-of-life problems continue to escalate around an area that's seen licensed club capacity steadily climb from less than 2,000 patrons in 2001 to more than 10,000 this year. But closing down nightclubs for unrelated issues isn't going to solve these problems. Instead, it's hoped that the many constructive ideas discussed at the public meeting, including several



Pacha, the new superclub that takes over the former Sound Factory space, hit a few snags with its opening last weekend. The venue will play host to the Saint at Large's New Year's Day bash.

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requests to lobby the police commissioner to change the ordinance that currently forbids clubs from employing Paid Police Detail (uniformed off-duty officers), will be seriously considered as reasonable alternatives.

The problems aren't limited to Chelsea, though. A proliferation of new liquor licenses on Avenue B and throughout the East Village has led to a significant increase in 311 complaints, to which the Ninth Precinct has overreacted by raiding more than a dozen bars in past weeks. Again, it seems unlikely that harassing local business owners is going to fix anything, but the increased police presence on the streets there lately has helped immensely.

I'd much rather tell you about the amazing time I had at the pre-grand opening party for the new Hell's Kitchen superclub Pacha last Wednesday. Instead, I'm sorry to report that the former Sound Factory space has already been caught in the crossfire of this war on nightlife.

For those who could actually gain entry to the club's grand opening party last Friday (friends who purchased advance tickets and arrived a half hour before the club opened gave up around midnight, frustrated and frozen, after failing to make even the slightest progress in line), the fun was cut short when police shut down the venue sometime around 2 a.m.

Details are sketchy as to the exact reasons, but a statement released by the club indicated that cops had shut the block down due to the large number of people outside the club. Several sources point to an unconscious woman in the club's VIP area who required medical attention as the catalyst. But even if that's true, was it really necessary to completely shut the club down for the night? I'm not suggesting that Pacha was unfairly targeted by police (it's too soon to know for sure), but in light of everything else that's going on in the city, it's not implausible.

Either way, it's a shame that Pacha's owners, staff and revelers had to suffer such a disastrous opening. Eddie Dean, Pacha's owner, said in the statement that guests who had purchased advance tickets will be given free admission to the club any night the space is open through January, with the exception of New Year's Eve.

The club reopened the NEXT night, though, and presumably all other parties will go on as planned, including the Saint at Large's New Year's Day party. Beginning at 8 p.m. on Jan. 1 through 8 a.m. Monday morning, DJs Chris Cox and David Knapp (and JonJon Battles in the Louis XVII lounge) will provide the tunes to keep you dancing to one of the best sound systems I've ever heard under a gyrating octopus-like lighting rig.

This might not give you much time to rest after Victor Calderone's Evolve party at Crobar (beginning at 8 a.m. Sunday morning) or Junior Vasquez's Land of the Living soiree on New Year's Eve at Roxy. But whatever you choose, just remember that all these nightlife options we currently enjoy are privileges that could be taken away from us at any moment if we're not careful.

Until next time: Be smart. Be safe.

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