

TECHNO SHUFFLE

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TECHNO SHUFFLE

RAVE CULTURE &
THE MELBOURNE UNDERGROUND

PAUL FLECKNEY

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MELBOURNE BOOKS

Chapter 1

DANCING QUEENS

This is Disco

Greenwich Village, New York, 21 June 1969. A dozen police officers are trapped inside the Stonewall Inn after a raid gone wrong. Out on the street, an angry rabble throws beer bottles and bricks that break the windows and bounce off the barricades. With each hurl, the Stonewall Inn's clientele of gay men, lesbians and drag queens unwind decades of oppression. Three men uproot a parking meter and thrust it like a battering ram against the door. The crowd swells and when backup police arrive, the scene deteriorates into a riot. Unable to sleep for the noise, local residents stand on their stoops and stare.

A few doors down on Christopher Street, an after-hours underground gay haunt called the Haven throbs to a soundtrack of intense rhythm and blues and funky rock. There's no break in the

music, just a barrage of wrist-pumping, body-shaking records. The man responsible for this rhythm overdose is a young amphetamine-fuelled Italian-American called DJ Francis Grasso. Out on the dancefloor, his disciples rejoice in the freedom to be themselves, twisting and jiving to a music that sings their joy and howls their heartache. This is what the Stonewall rioters are fighting for. This is disco.

* * *

Disco is the thread that ties sixties New York to nineties Melbourne. I don't mean the cheesy retro-rubbish that has you making letters above your head at your uncle's wedding. I mean *real* disco, born of hippie idealism and mixed with the angst of a generation that had grown up not only with Stonewall, but also Martin Luther King and the Vietnam War. 'Disco was the revolution,' Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton write in *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life*. 'Disco was secret, underground, dangerous. It was non-blond, queer, hungry. It was emancipation.'¹ But this freedom was temporary. As the disco tribe poured out of underground clubs into the cold morning light, they returned to a world that cast them as degenerate and undesirable.

The first discothèques had sprung up in cellars and subterranean taverns in occupied Paris during World War II. These discothèques often played jazz, which the Nazis despised as *Negermusik* (Negro music). 'To run a discothèque in wartime Paris was to participate in an act of civil disobedience,' Brewster and Broughton write. They continue: 'The discothèque's lasting reputation as a place where outlaws gathered was sealed in smoky basements in occupied territory.'² In seventies New York, gay and African-American minorities reinvented the discothèque as their own refuge from straight, white society.

The Disc Jockey, the Refugee and the Orphan

Prior to the Haven the DJ's role had been little more than a jukebox with a human face. DJ Francis changed all that. These days, synchronising the drumbeats between one track and the next to create the illusion of a single unbroken song is one of the first techniques any aspiring DJ learns. In the early seventies, however, beat matching was fiendishly tricky given the complexity of mixing live drumming: programmable drum machines and sliding pitch controls were still a decade away. Yet DJ Francis relished the challenge, as writer Matthew Collin explains:

[He] would layer the orgasmic moans from Led Zeppelin's 'Whole Lotta Love' over a heavy percussion break, cutting the bass and treble frequencies in and out to heighten the energy level, segueing from soul to rock then on into hypnotic African drums and chants.³

DJ Francis matched his mastery of the decks with his immodesty. 'Nobody mixed like me,' he told Brewster and Broughton, '[n]obody was willing to hang on that long. Because if you hang on that long, the chances of mistakes are that much greater. But to me it was second nature. I did it like I walk my dog.'⁴ DJ Francis bequeathed two gifts to dance music: beat-mixing and the egomaniac DJ.

DJ Francis persuaded the Haven's owners to install a stereophonic sound system and the world's first stereo DJ mixer. For these innovations, he owes a debt to Polish émigré and Holocaust survivor Alex Rosner. Around 1971, Rosner sold one of his sound systems to a shy Puerto Rican called David Mancuso. Raised in an orphanage in upstate New York, Mancuso recalls how Sister Alicia profoundly influenced his musical journey when she would put on records for the children to sing and dance to.⁵ In his twenties, he hosted underground dance parties at his Greenwich Village home (known as The Loft) playing little known records from his eclectic collection of psychedelic rock, Afro funk, Latin and soul. In contrast

to DJ Francis, Mancuso eschewed tight mixing and technical tricks in favour of letting the music tell a story or create a mood.⁶ His parties were invitation-only and alcohol free, bringing together gays, straights, blacks, whites, poor and rich in an intimate environment where longstanding social and racial barriers faded away.⁷ By 1977, The Loft had spawned dozens of copycat discothèques throughout New York's five boroughs. One of them, a former truck garage in the Hudson Square district of Manhattan, became the empire of Mancuso's most talented and ultimately tragic disciple: the inimitable Larry Levan.

Dirty Disco and the Velvet Rope

The Paradise Garage is the ancestor of all modern dance clubs and Larry Levan, a heroin addict who died of heart failure at thirty-eight, inspired a generation of DJs. At the Garage, patrons fucked on the dancefloor, indulged in a plethora of drugs and drank the acid-spiked punch.⁸ And all the time watching over them was Levan, ready to churn them up or wind them down with his twists, turns, peaks and drops. A black, gay man playing to a black, gay crowd whose enthusiasm for hard drugs and sex almost matched his own, the Paradise Garage was New York underground 'dirty disco' at its finest.

Levan (born Lawrence Philpot) redefined the DJ's role even more than DJ Francis and helped cement dance music as a credible genre. Every Saturday night from 1977 to 1986, Levan played 'disco, soul, gospel, rock, reggae, European electro-pop [and] even German *kosmiche* synthesiser epics like Manuel Göttsching's *E2:E4*—all sixty minutes of it.'⁹ Whereas earlier DJs had played album tracks, Levan took advantage of the newly available 12-inch single format that offered extended playing time and better sound quality—ideal for the dancefloor. He set a standard for taste making, mixing, remixing and set building that few have surpassed. Many of his remixes remain

classics to this day: tunes such as the disco anthem 'Is It All Over My Face' by Loose Joints and Skyy's 'First Time Around'. 'He really was an engineering genius as far as sound was concerned—they even have speakers named after him,' Paradise Garage co-owner Mel Cheren told Collin. 'He was brilliant. He wasn't an easy person but most artists aren't.'¹⁰

In New York in the late seventies, Paradise Garage was the place to go if you were African-American, gay and male; for everyone else, it was Studio 54. For young hedonists hell-bent on having a good time Studio 54 was like heaven, except harder to get into. It was the place to be seen and the scene to be part of. Studio 54 was bigger than Paradise Garage, with brighter lights, better sound and more commercial music; Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' became a club favourite after it was 'discovered' by resident DJ Richie Kaczor.¹¹ 'Studio 54 was nice, but it was really for the uptown, glitzy crowd,' DJ François Kevorkian told Brewster and Broughton.¹² In the balconies and alcoves, busty waitresses and bare-chested busboys plied celebrities with champagne and cocaine. The managers enforced a notoriously elitist and brutal door policy, setting a precedent for pretentious dress codes, power-tripping bouncers and velvet ropes that persists to this day. When I was nineteen, I queued for two hours in February snow outside a Nottingham nightclub wearing nothing more than a dress shirt and trousers only for a bouncer to turn me away because I wasn't handsome or rich enough. For this humiliating and potentially life-threatening experience, I can thank Studio 54.

For the disco purists sold on Mancuso's vision of acceptance and inclusion Studio 54 was too much. 'It was the beginning of disco becoming a business,' journalist Vince Aletti told Brewster and Broughton. 'I think it was destructive to have a velvet rope. It was completely against the idealism of disco and the community of disco.'¹³ I see Aletti's point but can't help thinking that blaming the velvet rope for disco's demise is a sleight of hand. Mancuso's

parties at The Loft were similarly exclusive, if not more so, given they were invitation-only. Perhaps instead this is an early example of a disgruntled old skool purist reacting to losing their secret underground scene to the mainstream. Yet things were about to get much worse.

From Night Fever to Fever Pitch

The early disco sound embraced a wide range of black music styles, including soul, funk, rock, Motown, and rhythm and blues. Disco as its own distinct and marketable genre didn't emerge until the release of *Saturday Night Fever* in 1977. If Studio 54 turned disco into a 'business', *Saturday Night Fever* made it a multi-million-dollar industry. Starring John Travolta and featuring music from Australian pop group the Bee Gees, the surprise global box office smash propelled disco into the public consciousness. The film's portrayal of white heterosexual youths seeking escape from their dreary suburban lives through dancing is admittedly some distance from disco's black, gay, underground roots. And yet this seems to be dance music's unavoidable destiny, as Matthew Collin explains:

Black and gay clubs have consistently served as breeding grounds for new developments in popular culture, laboratories where music, drugs and sex are interbred to create stylistic innovations that slowly filter through to straight, white society.¹⁴

I suspect Collin uses *straight* in both senses of the word here: heterosexual certainly but also straight-laced, conservative and mainstream. No longer restricted to underground Manhattan clubs, disco had jumped the East River and landed in picket-fenced suburbia. Musically it had shifted too; gone were the soulful vocals and lushly orchestrated backing tracks, replaced with a four-on-the-floor beat and chauvinistic undertones. The revolution was over.

Freedom had been won. It was time to don a chest wig, wear a lime green shirt and make triangles in the air to 'YMCA'.

By 1979 a commercial and cheesier flavour of disco had taken over America's airwaves, charts and dancefloors. Eurodisco, also known as Hi-NRG, Euro pop or simply Euro, delivered a manufactured sound using synthesisers and drum machines in place of acoustic instruments. The definitive Eurodisco record is Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love', released in 1977 and produced by Italian Giorgio Moroder and Englishman Pete Bellotte. Summer was a black woman but the sound is unmistakably white.

But not everyone succumbed to the night fever. For God-fearing, rock-loving Middle America, disco was the devil's music. The hatred and hysteria reached fever pitch in July 1979 when Detroit DJ Steve Dahl organised a 'Disco Demolition Derby' at Chicago's Comiskey Park baseball stadium. Mobs of disco haters blew up 10,000 disco records and rampaged onto the field.¹⁵ Chicago DJ RA Feutz was there:

People were only charged a dollar to enter the park if they brought a record for the demolition. It was supposed to be a double-header game. Obviously the second game was cancelled due to the destruction and mayhem.

Author Simon Reynolds compares the scenes at Comiskey Park to the Nazi book burnings of 1933.¹⁶ Witnesses observed white fans burning not just disco records but any black music.¹⁷ Disco's brief reign was over and rock music reclaimed the ears of the American public. Yet dance music would have the last laugh. Six years after Comiskey Park, Dahl's hometown of Detroit gave birth to techno, a genre so far removed from traditional notions of musicality that if disco was rock'n'roll's bastard child, techno was Frankenstein's monster.

Ten thousand miles away in Melbourne, it was as if Comiskey Park had never happened. This will not surprise Australian readers.

We're used to inheriting the world's cultural cast-offs long after their sell-by date. While the vinyl popped and smouldered on a Chicago baseball field, Melbourne's disco explosion was about to ignite.

The Kings of King Street

New York, 1979. A young Greek kid from Melbourne's western suburbs waits in the queue for Studio 54. Behind him, a seemingly endless trail of people stretches along West 54th Street and around the corner onto 8th Avenue. He's spent the day at the Billboard Music Conference watching Larry Levan tear it up on the turntables. Now, wearing a knitted shirt and brown leather pants, Sam Frantzeskos is dressed for success. He approaches the bouncers, grins broadly and starts to chat. Whether it's on account of his boyish good looks, the not-from-round-here brogue or the high-profile company he's keeping, Sam passes through the velvet rope and into the pleasure zone. It's like nothing he's seen before. Multiple levels filled with illicit alcoves and bacchanalian balconies; huge lighting rigs hanging from the ceiling; and wave after wave of smooth raunchy disco floating above a sweaty sea of flesh. We're not in Footscray any more.

Hollywood has given us two templates for the nightclub boss: the villainous gangster with ties to the Mob or Mike Myers's sleazy portrayal of Studio 54 founder Steve Rubell in the 1998 film *54*. Sam Frantzeskos fits neither stereotype. The black curls of his youth are long gone but the wide smile and piercing eyes remain. Currently a respected Melbourne restaurateur, Sam is warm and self-assured. When we meet in 2015, he talks candidly with the air of a man who has nothing to hide. 'Studio was a game changer for me,' he tells me as we sit watching the Yarra wend its way around Herring Island. 'As soon as I walked into that place, I said to myself, "this is what I want to be doing."'

In 1976, Sam and brother George got their first break in the Melbourne nightclub industry when they bought Peanuts Gallery

from Brian Goldsmith ‘for just a few lire and the kiss of [his] ring.’¹⁸ Peanuts occupied the basement of 459 Swanston Street in the city. After seeing Studio 54 in New York, Sam knew he had to find a larger venue to accommodate his vision. The brothers approached entrepreneur George Nelson Frew who offered them the old Commodore Hotels head office building at 60 King Street. ‘When we opened Inflation Nightclub [in November 1979], technology in this industry had grown so much in a short time that we brought in a three-watt argon-neon laser,’ Sam tells me. ‘We also imported two holograms and dressed our female lighting operator in this glam silver jump suit with a headpiece and goggles.’

Peanuts had a single Thorens belt-driven turntable; the DJs announced the songs during the pause between tracks while they changed the records over. Having seen beatmixing in New York, Sam knew the Thorens had to go. He imported two direct drive Technics turntables (probably SL-1200MK2s) and a Citronics mixer and then instructed his in-house DJ, Noel Russell, to learn beatmixing. ‘Before you knew it, every DJ on their night off would come and see Noel mix records,’ Sam says. Noel and fellow DJs Peta Tollic and Paul Minchell played commercial disco in the Studio 54 vein. Yet Sam knew it was about more than just the music; the whole experience mattered. He hired Avairs Cizevski to build him a sound system. ‘Not great in retrospect, but at the time it was pretty good,’ Sam admits. Avairs also installed moving isolators, infinity walls and 500 pinlights. Sam based the interior design for Inflation on New York, New York, a club that soaked up the almost-beautiful and not-so-famous turned away by Studio 54. ‘[New York, New York] was a brilliant three-storey concept and since Inflation was also a three-storey building, it made the inspiration easy,’ he explains. The main dancefloor was in the basement while the upper floors contained a café, private function rooms and a video lounge.

A few doors down from Inflation, Brian Goldsmith had opened Underground in a century-old bluestone factory in 1977.¹⁹ *The*

Age credits Brian with having ‘practically invented Melbourne’s nightclub scene.’²⁰ While Sam looked to the New York underground music scene for inspiration, Brian chose the London Underground (aka the Tube) for his. ‘There were lots of railway references,’ says Timmy Byrne, who began his DJing career at Underground in 1980 and later became resident DJ:

There was an old red carriage in the middle of the place. The front part of it was the DJ booth where the driver or guard would go and the rest of it was set up for fifteen to twenty people to have dinner in there.

Underground became a renowned celebrity hangout where Brian hosted people like Rod Stewart, Liza Minnelli, Harry Belafonte and John Travolta. ‘Brian’s wife was Rona Newton-John, Olivia’s sister,’ Timmy says, ‘so, you had that sort of calibre of people coming through the venue.’ Not to be outdone, at Inflation Sam entertained Grace Jones, Bette Midler, George Michael and the rock band KISS. It was all very decadent. Photographer Rennie Ellis visited Inflation in 1980. His images reveal a lost era of suits, furs, breasts and buttocks on the dancefloor.²¹

Today, King Street is lined with offices and fast food joints sandwiched between strip clubs and tacky bars. It’s a 24/7 precinct catering for the overworked and oversexed corporate male during the week and the heavy-drinking working-class man at the weekends. Inflation lingers on although nowadays it markets itself as an ‘Entertainment Complex’, whatever that means. In the late seventies, however, King Street looked very different: quiet during the day and desolate at night. ‘That area was the warehouse district ... it was the dark city part of town,’ Sam says. ‘Because it wasn’t a brightly lit area, it meant that people could come dressed up.’ In the seventies, most Melburnians had little time for black culture, whether of the homegrown Aboriginal kind or the imported African-American variety. And while thankfully the Melbourne Cricket Ground was

never tainted with the acrid smell of burning vinyl, disco was still a dirty word for the mainstream crowd. Sam knew he had to safeguard his finely feathered patrons inside and outside the club. Whatever he did, it worked. ‘We were just kids from the ’burbs living a fucking dream,’ he says.

Italo Disco and the Melbourne ‘Wog’

While Giorgio Moroder was busy taking over America’s airwaves in the late seventies, back in his native Italy producers and DJs were cutting their own records because they couldn’t afford expensive imports. Italo disco, as it became known, relied on drum machines, synthesisers and overdubbed English vocals to make experimental music with a pop music sensibility.²² Originally intended for the local dance music scene, italo disco found an eager export market in Germany, Spain, France, Scandinavia, Japan, Canada, the United States (US) and Australia.²³ Writer Dan Sicko describes italo disco as the ‘missing link’ between disco and new wave in the US. When the US government lifted trade restrictions on importing records in 1980 disco-starved DJs and dance music audiences ‘devoured’ the new sound.²⁴

‘Italians and Greeks started disco in Melbourne,’ Dominic Tenuta, co-founder of Snoopy’s Discotheque in Brunswick, told *The Age* in 1986. ‘They liked to dress up and show off. The Anglos were always in the pub and when they came here all they did was start fights.’²⁵ By 1982, ‘Italian Disco Nights’ had become the ‘vogue’ for Italian-Australian youth in Melbourne.²⁶ British-born Brewster B. felt like a minority whenever he went nightclubbing in Melbourne’s southeastern suburbs:

The music at discos in Melbourne in the early eighties was italo disco. A good eighty per cent of the crowd were Italians and Greeks. It was almost a turf war mentality within these clubs ... the Anglo Aussies on one side of the club and the

Greeks and Italians on the other. We wouldn't cross to the other side of the dancefloor.

These Italian and Greek kids were the children of refugees who had fled post-war Europe in the fifties and sixties. The Australian government, at that time worried about the 'Asian invasion' from the north, pursued an aggressive immigration policy dubbed 'Populate or Perish'. When British immigrants failed to arrive in the requisite numbers, southern Europeans became the 'non-preferred' but 'have to have' alternative; they weren't 'quite white' but they were 'white enough'.²⁷ But not everyone agreed. Some of the Anglo-Irish majority called the new arrivals 'European refuse' or 'wogs'.²⁸

Nineteenth-century British colonialists used the term 'wog' to vilify people of Arabic and Asian backgrounds. The word is possibly a contraction of 'western oriental gentleman' or 'wily oriental gentleman'. Australian diggers picked up the term from their British comrades in the trenches of World War I and brought it back home.²⁹ According to Greek-Australian actor George Kapiniaris, wog was a 'killing word', a reason to fight.³⁰ Melbourne's Italian, Greek and Yugoslavian communities were already marginalised from mainstream Australian society due to their higher rates of unemployment, lower paid jobs and poor English language skills.³¹ Wog hardened these divisions. Stereotypically, the sons of southern European migrants drove 'wogmobiles', played 'wog ball' [soccer] and danced at 'wog clubs'. In Melbourne, the disco became a refuge for Mediterranean youth much like it had for gay men in New York a decade earlier.

Yet again, the marginalised 'other' had pioneered new forms of dance music. While young Greeks and Italians brought italo disco to the forefront of the Melbourne nightclubbing experience, another ostracised group found their own revolution in Hi-NRG and its derivative dance-pop. By the early eighties, Hi-NRG had become the 'lingua franca' of white gay dancefloors the world over.³² Melbourne was no exception.

Hedonism and Heartache

For many in Melbourne's gay and lesbian community, the seventies was a time they'd sooner forget. Michael Hurley writes of unsolved murders, raids on bars and 'beats' and frequent police harassment.³³ Prominent gay or gay-friendly clubs in the late seventies included Pokeys at the Prince of Wales in St Kilda, Chaps and Babes at the Chevron in Prahran, the University Club on Collins Street and Sweethearts (later Mandate) on Barkly Street, St Kilda.³⁴ Venues advertised via word of mouth or the lesbian and gay street press. To gain entry into some venues, you had to knock or buzz and wait for a slot to slide open and a pair of eyes to check you over.³⁵

On 24 June 1978, the Gay Solidarity Group organised the first Mardi Gras parade in Sydney to commemorate the nine year anniversary of the Stonewall riots.³⁶ The police attacked some revellers and arrested fifty-three.³⁷ The subsequent printing of the names, addresses and occupations of those fifty-three by the *Sydney Morning Herald* triggered marches and protests around the country, including in Melbourne.³⁸ The following June, 3000 people attended the second Gay Mardi Gras parade—this time without violence or arrests. While it lacked the gravitas of a Stonewall moment, it demonstrated that the mood was changing. In January 1981, the Victorian government decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting adults. And although the stigma of being queer did not disappear overnight—the Australian Medical Association kept homosexuality on its list of illnesses until 1984—gay and gay-friendly venues could now advertise more openly. In the seventies, gay nightspots had been scattered all around the inner city. From 1980, however, venues began to consolidate into two distinct gay and lesbian 'precincts': one in Collingwood and a larger hub centred on Chapel Street and Commercial Road in Prahran.³⁹ Never one to miss a beat, Sam Frantzeskos started a gay night on Wednesdays at Inflation in 1981. 'We brought the gays from south of the Yarra ... No gay night had ever worked in the city. Later on they did. But we

were a straight club doing a gay night.’ Until one night in 1983 when suddenly, it wasn’t any more. “Fuck off you AIDS-infected faggot” was how the new door policy was communicated to me by the door staff when I arrived ready for a good night,’ Chris Gill writes on Facebook. ‘I never went back.’

The first reported case of AIDS in Australia was in Sydney in 1982. At that time, the disease was known as gay-related immune deficiency (GRID) or gay cancer. Andrew Peter Collins was a prominent DJ in the Melbourne gay scene during the eighties:

In 1980, we were buoyant and enthusiastic ... We had the straight community behind us, we were finally getting out of that homophobic rut that was the seventies. It didn’t last. By the mid-eighties, we were pushing shit uphill against the religious right, the politicians and the homophobes ... it’s such a shame. To think what might have been if HIV had never happened.

Melbourne experienced its first AIDS-related death in 1983. In 1987, 523 people contracted HIV in Australia and 290 died the same year. 86 percent of the victims were gay or bisexual men.⁴⁰ Until the widespread availability of combination antiretroviral therapy in the mid-nineties, an HIV diagnosis was akin to a death sentence. Very few patients survived longer than two years. Hundreds of men died—sons, lovers, brothers and dear friends. Kim’s uncle, schoolteacher Ken McClelland, was one of them. Ken had served time in Pentridge prison after police arrested him in his classroom for resisting the Vietnam War draft. One of Gough Whitlam’s first acts when he became prime minister in 1972 was to free Ken and six fellow protestors.⁴¹ In the eighties, Ken turned his attention to the growing AIDS crisis. A ‘stalwart’ and courageous campaigner, he set up the first teams of carers for AIDS sufferers north of the river.⁴² Ken died from AIDS-related complications in his Northcote home in 1992, aged forty-seven.

The Alternative Lifestyle Organisation (ALSO) had been established in Melbourne in 1980 to address the needs of ageing gays and lesbians. The AIDS crisis suddenly gave the organisation a new impetus. ALSO issued media releases and held community meetings to counter the inaccurate statistics and misinformation emerging from the mainstream press.⁴³ They also raised funds to support AIDS victims and their families. For over a decade, the organisation's most lucrative fundraiser was the dance party.

Red Raw and Winter Daze

Australian history seems to place the birth of the gay dance party at the 1980 Mardi Gras post-parade party and subsequent Recreational Arts Team (RAT) parties at Sydney's Hordern Pavilion.⁴⁴ However, Michael Hurley reports that almost all of the national homosexual conferences between 1975 and 1983 ended with a dance.⁴⁵ In Melbourne, church halls and reception centres in South Yarra and St Kilda had been hosting regular 'camp dances' since at least 1969.⁴⁶ David (surname withheld) tells me he attended a Jackaroos party in 1979 in a condemned four-storey building on Flinders Lane. He had recently moved to Melbourne from the country. 'I remember they played disco music,' he says. 'It was quite an eye opener!'

In December 1982, ALSO threw its first dance party, called Raw Hide, at a warehouse in Little Grey Street, St Kilda. Seven-hundred men dressed up as cowboys for the all-male party.⁴⁷ In 1984, Raw Hide became an annual event on the Australia Day weekend in January. Two years later, ALSO partnered with the Victorian AIDS Council to launch a second dance party, called Winter Daze, on the Queen's Birthday weekend in June. The parties featured live shows and big budgets. One year, the organisers flew in international pop star Grace Jones.⁴⁸ Martina Navratilova attended the 1988 Raw Hide in a West Melbourne warehouse, just hours after winning the Australian Open women's doubles final with Pam Shriver.

Andrew Peter Collins played at dozens of ALSO parties along with Debbie Walters and Sydney disco legend Stephen Allkins. 'We weren't educating the crowd with new material,' Andrew tells me. 'We played whatever was current in the clubs ... we kept the music all girly and wonderful.' In 1989, the DJs earned \$100 each (\$200 in today's money) for an all-night shift. Today, superstar DJs can command up to \$300,000 per set, even if some of them spend half the time watching football on their iPhone.⁴⁹ But back then it wasn't about the money. Some wouldn't even take it: 'I'd seen friend after friend die from HIV,' Andrew says. 'I refused to be paid because I had a conscience.'

In 1989, Raw Hide became Red Raw. By now, the parties were attracting almost 3000 patrons. ALSO added an annual New Year's Eve party and the Women's Own Warehouse party to its busy social calendar. Finding bigger venues to accommodate the growing crowds became an ongoing challenge for Geraldine Kirby's team of organisers. Between 1982 and 1992, ALSO used at least thirteen different locations for the parties: four warehouses in South Melbourne; Station Pier and the Melbourne Film Studio in Port Melbourne; Festival Hall on Dudley Street; a shed on the Maribyrnong riverfront in Footscray; and three different warehouses in what is now Docklands. ALSO furnished each venue with stages, bars, toilets, dancefloors and gender-exclusive 'fuck rooms'. While it meant extra work for the organisers, the excitement of exploring a new venue each time became part of the attraction.

By the late eighties, dancing all night to electronic dance music appealed to heterosexuals, as well as the usual clientele of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. ALSO welcomed straights' dollars but cautioned their attitude. One Red Raw flyer spells out 'Party Correct' and 'Party Incorrect' behaviour, the latter including 'Straight men trying to pick up women', 'Straights being sleazy' and 'Straight couples bonking'. The bottom of the flyer reads: 'Remember that ALSO parties celebrate lesbian and gay pride, not sexual liberation for everyone.'

In his book *Pleasure Consuming Medicine*, Kane Race argues that the gay dance party made a political statement of resilience and possibility:

The massed bodies, decorations, lights, drugs, costumes and music combined to produce a powerful and widely accessed perception of presence, belonging, shared circumstance, and vitality at a time when the image of the gay man, dying alone, ostracized from family, was the publicly proffered alternative.⁵⁰

Dance parties in the AIDS era engendered a mindset of living in the moment: have fun now because this could be your last time. My interviewee Marcus (surname withheld) exemplifies this attitude. He partied ‘heavily’ from 1975 to 2001, the first eleven years in London and from 1986 onwards in Melbourne. ‘What happened with AIDS is that we became even more hedonistic,’ he tells me over coffee. He sees in my face it wasn’t the answer I expected. ‘You name it, I’ve done it,’ he laughs. Marcus attended pubs, clubs and private parties but it was the dance parties that lit up his social calendar: ‘you wouldn’t miss a Red Raw or a Winter Daze.’ In 1998, Red Raw attracted a crowd of 6500, its largest ever.⁵¹

As the parties grew, they became more difficult to run. The organisers relied on unpaid helpers; without them, the overheads were prohibitive. But each year, the volunteer base shrank. ‘HIV made such a dent in the number of talented people,’ Andrew Peter Collins says. ‘So many were dying or burning out ... those of us who were left were like slaves hauling pieces of marble to build the pyramids.’ Andrew tells me they received little support from the straight dance music scene where people weren’t dying of AIDS but were mortally afraid of it. ‘People didn’t want to work with poofers,’ he says bluntly. By 2001, labour shortages and falling profits led the organisers to outsource the parties to an external events management company.⁵² The format had outlived its role as a fundraiser but retained symbolic value for the gay community. Red

Raw lasted until 2007. Three years later, ALSO disbanded.

The dance party not only mobilised the Melbourne gay scene during a challenging period but it also became a first-rate prototype for rave. Many of my interviewees cite Red Raw and Winterdaze as important influences. The ALSO parties pioneered all-night dancing to electronic music in Melbourne and taught future rave promoters the value of attracting a mixed crowd and finding a new venue for each party.

The Six O'clock Swill

Alcohol had always made an appearance at the dance party. However, much of the twentieth century had been one long hangover from a powerful temperance movement that had held sway over Australians' drinking culture from the 1880s to the 1960s. In 1916, during World War I, the Victorian government introduced six o'clock closing for all hotel bars (it had previously been 11pm). Pro-temperance campaigners concerned about the impact of drink on the working classes leveraged wartime concerns about drunken soldiers and the patriotic need for self-sacrifice to win support for early closing.⁵³ The *Australian Christian World* claimed God had allowed the war so that 'Australia might realise the necessity for cleaning up the moral hearthstone'.⁵⁴ Interestingly, the 'moral hearthstone' only applied to the working class; those who could afford their own cellars or drank in private clubs were exempted from the rules.⁵⁵

Each day, working men poured out of their offices and factories at five o'clock and indulged in an hour-long alcoholic binge at the nearest hotel before retreating to their suburban homes and housebound wives. It was like an evening with Don Draper compressed into sixty minutes. They called it the 'six o'clock swill'. John Brack's 1954 painting *The Bar* brilliantly captures the mood: a sour-faced barmaid stands with her back to a throng of grim middle-aged men downing schooners of beer. Journalist John Larkin recounts the experience:

ankle deep at 5.30pm in a morass of cigarette butts decomposing in slopped grog, a howling thirsty mass crawling over each other to demand fifteen beers each to drink in the last, desperate guzzling minutes.⁵⁶

The term 'swill' was no accident; contemporary media compared the scenes to hungry pigs feeding at a trough.⁵⁷ In contrast to the farmyard scenes at the pub, dancing was typically a sober affair. Almost all of the discotheques at that time, venues like Bertie's, Sebastian's and the Thumpin' Tum, were unlicensed and open to all ages.⁵⁸

By the sixties, the rise of commuting by private car meant the six o'clock swill wasn't just anti-social, it was lethal. In 1964, its supporters finally conceded that 'the hours of sale did not determine the quantity of liquor consumed; only the conditions and manner in which much of it was consumed'.⁵⁹ Two years later, the Victorian government ended fifty years of early closing when it extended regular trading hours until 10pm and permitted music venues to apply for a 3am cabaret licence. This was the era of Melbourne's first licensed nightclubs, places like Whisky A Go Go with its go-go girls in cages and satanic orgies on stage,⁶⁰ and a few suburban pubs with a 'disco' attached at the back. 'The nightclubs back then were very glamorous,' Brewster B. remembers. 'They all had raised dancefloors with handrails, flashing lights and parquet flooring. It was all quite lush.' But the cabaret licence came with conditions, as Sam Frantzeskos explains:

The cover charge for the entertainment was actually disguised as a food charge. You had to charge \$3 or whatever and then you had to give [your patrons] a roast chicken and mash or fish and chips. Many ordered and ate the food but most didn't, leaving some dollars over to pay for the talent and security.

Further relaxation of liquor licensing laws in the eighties meant that

many nightclubs could serve alcohol until 7am. Social engineering was out, the free market was in, and dancefloors everywhere became saturated with booze.

'Alcohol and Plenty of Sex'

Melbourne, February 2015. I ring the bell at Sean Kelly's apartment and his partner opens the door. 'He'll be ready in a few minutes, he's just getting up,' she tells me. It's 11am. She smiles and reads my mind. 'He still keeps nightclub hours.' Sean stopped DJing in 1989, but it seems the habit is hard to kick. His lounge room betrays the tell-tale trappings of having spent countless nights behind turntables: unidentifiable audio equipment in the corner, shelves of neatly stacked vinyl against the wall and a faint trace of nicotine in the air. As I strain to read the titles on the record sleeves, Sean appears, coffee in one hand, cigarette in the other. These days he's swapped DJing for day-trading; where once he played New York disco now he plays the New York stock exchange. My eyes wander around his spacious and beautiful home and I tell him they don't make apartments as big as this anymore. 'This was built in the early nineties,' he replies. 'It was one of the first apartments in the CBD.'

Melbourne hasn't always been a 24-hour city. Until the late eighties, the central business district was, as its name suggests, a bustling paean to Mammon in the daytime and practically a ghost town at night once the shops and offices had closed. In 1982, the city centre had 685 dwellings, compared to almost 30,000 in 2010.⁶¹ In 1983, the central business district had two kerbside cafes; in 2016, Melbourne averaged ten coffee machines per city block.⁶²

In 1980, Sean worked the bar at Inflation. He says straight clubbing in the eighties meant social drinking and picking up:

You had different crowds but principally people went out to be friendly because the drug of choice was alcohol. So you'd have a few beers, you'd meet somebody and you'd go, 'What

are you doing tomorrow night?' It had a really heavy social angle to it ... it was alcohol and plenty of sex.

At venues like Inflation and Chasers, artists and socialites clinked champagne glasses and snorted cocaine with fashion designers and Patrick Bateman stockbroker types flying high on a decade of glamour and greed. According to Sean, 'It was a music scene, it was a dance scene, a fashion scene. It was haircuts, photography, models.'

The eighties heralded the golden era of nightclubbing in Melbourne. In 1986, the Frantzeskos brothers sold Inflation and began work on a new club that would dwarf its competitors in size, cost and ambition. When the Metro opened in the former Palace Theatre on Bourke Street on 25 November 1987, it was Australia's first superclub. Sam hired celebrity architects Biltmoderne to transform the old theatre.⁶³ The redevelopment cost \$10 million. 'In the design sense, what we actually built was superior to anything Studio 54 had,' Sam explains. 'We had the best architects, the best designers, we had the best people putting together a magnificent nightclub.' The lighting alone cost \$1 million dollars and included fifty moving lights, a ten-watt argon laser and a robotic lighting rig that moved above the dancefloor. And then there were the numerous bars, VIP rooms and metres upon metre of velvet rope.

The Metro represented a new breed of clubbing that became the de facto Saturday night entertainment for a generation of Melbourne youth. Commercially oriented from the outset, throughout the eighties and nineties, Metro hosted fashion parades, MTV broadcasts and live music including dance music heavyweights The Prodigy, Chemical Brothers, Moby and Fatboy Slim.⁶⁴ But things didn't get off to a great start. The venue's 7am licence and superclub status attracted much attention, some of it unwelcome. One night, MTV filmed live from the club. Some parents watching at home recognised their underage children on the screen. 'I think the powers at hand wanted to make an example of us and so they sent about forty coppers in on a Saturday night "Gestapo style" to check IDs,' Sam

tells me. 'They bolted the doors, turned on the cleaning lights and turned off the music. Out of nearly 2000 people they found eleven underage girls, all with false IDs.' The Liquor Licensing Commission tried to close them down just a week before Christmas. Sam and his partners successfully defended the charge but the damage was done: 'Channel 7 had publicised it pretty badly ... we lost a million dollars in revenue and then had to spend a ton of money to relaunch it.'

But the Metro had other enemies too. Its dazzling lights and glitzy decor could never seduce the Melbourne underground.