

**Nightlife: The Community and The Individual**

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## **Thesis**

Through the lens of the underground dance scene, how does musical nightlife affect the individual and why is it important for culture at large?

## **History**

During the early 70's in the lower east side of Manhattan an ex hippie and master DJ, David Mancuso, began throwing events in his loft apartment that sparked the beginning of what modern club culture is based on. Any dance event that's happened after in Berlin, Manchester or Bushwick has Mancuso to thank; this is not an exaggeration. Mancuso came of age in the summer of love but lived out his prime during the disco boom of the 70's. To pay rent he would throw parties at his home, people would call The Loft, solely focused on music and dancing. The parties were invite only, there was a 2 dollar and 50 cent cover and there was never any alcohol, food or drink sold there. The focus was entirely on the music and what it made you do. The parties at The Loft were the first of its kind. The Loft was the venue that cultivated the disco sound (Garcia). Never before was there such an emphasis on a sound system. The parties were underground, completely outside of the mainstream. Before this point DJs at nightclubs were an extension of the radio and just played the popular rock and pop songs of the time. Mancuso was the first to treat DJing as an art. In a piece by The Guardian about his legacy, written after his death in 2016, they wrote "He defined the latter-day notion of a DJ not as someone who played records, but as someone who could manipulate music to create an atmosphere and tell a story; to take the crowd on a journey." At a time where even at gay bars, people in the LGBTQ community had to bring bail money in case they were wrongfully arrested, Mancuso's Loft

parties and all parties that stemmed from them soon after served as a safe space for minorities and the gay community. The dance floors at his events served as the great equalizer; there was no status, there was no race, there was no gender. His events were like semi-autonomous zones where no outside rules applied and the only governing body was the music. The individual was unimportant, what mattered was the collective feeling. In a 2003 interview he said "A party is made of many components: the group, the music. It doesn't revolve around one person. Once that starts to happen, forget about it." This was a huge draw for gay men in a post Stonewall New York where they felt unsafe everywhere. Still today, the themes and the feelings created by Mancuso's parties echo through every event that came after.

The first party Mancuso threw at his apartment was on Valentine's Day in the year 1970. It was invite only like all of his parties that came after it and the homemade invitations read "Love Saves the Day" (Orlov). From the very beginning the idea of love, acceptance and inclusivity was a key factor. The party was extremely successful and invitees wanted more. The parties became a weekly occurrence. As word spread around New York about The Loft, demand for places like it grew as well. Venues all over New York began to copy what Mancuso was doing but opened it up to the public and monetized it. The Loft parties had such an impact on New York nightlife, music historians consider the first party at The Loft to be the birth of the Disco era. In 1973, two Loft regulars Nicky Siano and his brother, Joe Siano, opened up their own club called The Gallery. Although other venues had started to catch on to the Disco trend, Nicky and The Gallery popularized a DJ technique that revolutionized the entire act of DJing. Nicky Siano, the resident DJ at his own club, began to mix two tracks, sometimes even three on top of each other at the same time to create completely unique sonic experiences. Siano was the

first person to use three turntables at once. This allowed for the music to continue nonstop, all night until the early morning. This technique is called beatmatching and was invented only five years earlier by a DJ named Francis Grasso. Grasso used beatmatching mostly at the end of songs to change from one to the other but he never used it in the way Nicky did. Although Mancuso learned how to beatmatch, he would play songs from beginning to the end and not mix at all (Brewster). He believed mixing compromised the sanctity of the musicians that made the songs. Most people would consider Mancuso a DJ but he hated the term. He considered himself a musical host. Siano learned how to use songs to craft an experience or tell a story from Mancuso and he learned how to beatmatch from Grasso but he revolutionized DJing himself. With Nicky Siano's unique high energy DJing style The Gallery quickly set itself apart from the many other venues appearing in New York during the early 70's.

Disco and the culture that rose around it created a place for traditionally marginalized and disadvantaged groups like gays, blacks, women and Latinos to be themselves, feel free and to be empowered. One of the venues that contributed heavily to this cultural awakening of the 70's was a male only gay bath house called The Continental Baths. Before Siano opened his own venue he was the resident DJ at The Baths. As well as establishing Nicky Siano as one of the best DJs of his day, The Baths cultivated two of dance music history's greatest icons, the godfathers of house music, Larry Levan and Frankie Knuckles. Larry Levan and Frankie Knuckles were two young, gay, black men who grew up frequenting The Loft from a young age. They eventually both worked at The Gallery decorating and helped set things up. Nicky taught the pair how to mix so they could take his place at The Baths when he started The Gallery. While they were both still in high school, Larry assumed the position of main DJ while Frankie would play on weekdays or

fill in for Larry when he'd go to the bathroom. Eventually, Larry moved on from The Baths and had short stints at many venues in the emerging dance scene but his biggest footprint was left at a nightclub called The Paradise Garage. Aside from The Loft, The Paradise Garage has had the most impact in the world of dance music. The Garage was the birthplace of house music and later in the 90s birthed another influential subgenre called UK garage (pronounced: garridge ). It was able to take the dance scene to new levels by massively expanding the audience. Even though The Garage was members only it was very easy to get a membership and members allowed six guests. The Paradise Garage became the place to be. Madonna, Kieth Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol and Grace Jones were just some of the artists that frequented The Garage(Complex). Kieth Haring enjoyed it so much he attended every Saturday he could. Although many DJs and artists played there, most people went to hear Larry play; he was the ringleader. People would call his sets Saturday mass. Larry combined everything he learned from Nicky, Mancuso and all the other DJs on the come up at that time and simply did it better than everyone before him.

While Larry's career took off in a major way, his friend Frankie Knuckles was out of a gig after The Continental Baths went bankrupt, where he was serving as Larry's replacement. Shortly after in 1977, Frankie was approached by a Chicago based promoter, Robert Williams, who was looking for a new DJ for his recently opened club, The Warehouse. Williams grew up in New York but moved to Chicago in the early 70's. While he was still in New York he also would go to the early Loft parties and was inspired. The more you dig into the beginnings of dance music, you find more and more people who went to David Mancuso's parties and credits them as a major source of inspiration. Williams originally approached Larry to come out to be

his resident DJ but Larry wanted to remain in New York. Frankie agreed to play for Williams but wasn't immediately successful. The Chicago crowd wasn't used to the newer sound that Frankie brought from New York. Longer, more repetitive, percussive remixes and edits of old disco hits were being played at the Paradise Garage and other venues in New York but Chicago still wanted straight disco. As mainstream popculture started to whitewash disco through the BeeGees and "Saturday Night Fever" the same minority and gay community that cultivated the rise of disco was moving to a new sound. The vast majority of the attendees at the early club events were Black and Latino gay men. It wasn't until the late 70's early 80's where whites and straights really started to catch on and attend these events much more often. By that point Frankie and Larry were unknowingly spearheading a new sound that would change the world.

Frankie Knuckles split his time between New York and Chicago, DJing at a variety of venues in both cities but he was most known for his time at The Warehouse. As time passed and Chicago's music scene grew, Frankie's unique style made The Warehouse a legendary spot in Chicago's music history. Eventually Frankie relocated permanently to Chicago. In the same way producers in New York listened to Larry Levan's DJ sets for inspiration, bedroom producers from Chicago did the same for Frankie's sets at The Warehouse. While Larry never produced his own music, Frankie Knuckles did and played them live in his sets. Frankie's new sound sent creative shock waves throughout the city. Producers in Chicago started to chop up disco samples, mainly large diva-esque vocals and layer drum machines and synths to create something completely new. A group of radio DJs called the Hot Mix 5 would play these edits on the air and massively popularized the new emerging sound (Kot). DJs all over Chicago wanted these tracks and knew that The Warehouse was known for this sound. People went to record stores asking for

“Warehouse music” and shop owners started to label crates with the name of the venue. As the sound got more and more popular and more record stores saw demand grow, shop owners shortened “warehouse music” to “house music” and thus a genre was born. From New York to Chicago to Detroit to London, house music spread quickly around the world spawning unique subgenres in each city it touched. House music was the start to a musical revolution (Complex).

In an extremely divisive time like the 70's and 80's, dance music created spaces for people to feel safe, free and be protected from the outside world. To understand the themes, mentality, and impact of dance music you need to understand how and why it became so popular. In the 70's religion played a much bigger role in the lives of Black and Latino families than it does now. As it always had and still does for many, the church played a huge part in communities and personal fulfillment in the lives of those who attended but openly gay men were not as welcome as the rest. For many early club goers, dance music filled the place religion held in their lives. Attendees treated each venue as a church and the DJs as the pastors. Many samples and vocal recordings used in the early house tracks spoke of religion, freedom and unity, something the people in the crowd didn't have a lot of outside of those walls. An example of this can be seen in one of Larry Levan's most famous selections “Stand On The Word (The Word Of God)” by Celestial Choir. A lyrical excerpt from the song: “That's how the good Lord works. We must not question the good Lord, Have faith in God and trust his words” (SongLyrics.com). It wasn't unusual for club goers to say they had religious or out of body experiences while they were dancing, in fact it was a major reason why people would go. If a track with lyrics or a sample wasn't spreading unity and love it was often some sort of sexual or body positive message. This gave way to a sexual awakening and a body positivity movement that we are still seeing today.



People felt like the DJ was responsible for making them feel like that and they were right. The music the DJ selected controlled how people felt. Places like The Loft, The Paradise Garage and The Warehouse gave a generation of disenfranchised, mistreated and ignored people, community, purpose, security and most of all, a great time.

Although the sounds, trends, fashion and everything around the dance music scene has changed many times over since its inception in the 70s, it still fulfills the same purpose it did back then. People went and still go to dance events because, when they are done well, they can fulfill people in a way very few other things can. Dancing to good, well curated music in the right environments can make people feel liberated, safe and connected. The following quote is from Jorn Andre, the author of an article on the meditative aspects of dance music featured in the well known electronic music magazine, Monument.

“There are few times I have felt more focused, energized, calm and peaceful as I have when feeling the steady and deep beat in a dark and sweaty basement. Feeling the pulse and movement of the room as one, like a wave of energy passing through us. No longer are we individual fragments of consciousness, but we melt back, together; into the primordial soup from where we came.”

### **Musical Nightlife’s Affect on the Individual: The Good Spots and the Bad Spots, Commercialization of Art**

What makes a “bad” club and what makes a “good” club? The answer to that question in its simplest form is for the music and the experience that surrounds it to be kept as the top priorities. Within that simplicity comes all the aspects that separate the high end, commercial

venues and the “underground” venues. In reality, the “underground” venues and events aren't always underground in the illegal sense. Major cities around the world are full of legal and proper nightclubs who are doing it right and following the unwritten guides passed down from the people who started it all. Dance music culture and the culture at large has adopted this term “underground” because since their inception, these events have always been scrutinized by the media and lawmakers. In turn, events are often pushed to shady “underground” places like warehouses, abandoned buildings or whatever organizers can get their hands on. No matter how much bad press raves and parties receive or how much anti-nightlife legislation is written, people will always organize and attend these events because they have a need to listen to the music they love in the context that the underground dance community provides. Love and respect for the music is the utmost important aspect of a good nightclub, rave, party or nightlife event, no matter if you're in a Berlin superclub or a basement in Brooklyn. This is a concept that David Mancuso of the Loft has instilled unknowingly into the minds of every DJ, promoter, event organizer and attendee that forms part of the underground dance scene. The set of ideas that began at David Mancuso's loft parties are sometimes the only thread that runs through every party in the underground dance world. In a scene with an immense amount of variety and sub genres, the love for the music is always constant.

There is another key aspect every event from the underground dance scene has held. There is a necessity for complete acceptance of every type of person from any walk of life. There is no tolerance for prejudice, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc. There is a fundamental love for all people that is tied tightly with the dance scene. This isn't just to be inclusive, to create a safe space or to be morally just, it is imperative to the experience of an

event as a whole. The crowd needs to be able to dance and express themselves in ways they know that they can only do there. To reiterate, the first party thrown at The Loft was held on Valentines Day and was called “Loves Saves The Day”. This idea has been tied to the underground dance scene since its inception. When you are at a good dance event you’re there for the music and to be with people who want to feel liberated.

### **Sound Systems**

Apart from the inspiration from Mancuso's events, the most influential nightclubs of the past like The Paradise Garage, Studio 54, The Copacabana, The Gallery and even The Warehouse in Chicago all had something else in common. They all had sound systems created by Alex Rosner and Richard Long. Alex Rosner is a sound engineer who got his start in the early sixties, during the golden age of HiFi audio. On multiple occasions during the early seventies he revolutionized the way music played at nightclubs. An unknown fact to many is that he created the first version of a mixer that had a cueing system (Schmidt). The cueing system allowed DJs to listen to a track in headphones before they brought the track onto the sound system. This is a DJ technique that is absolutely necessary, it’s almost impossible to mix without it. Rosner first built this custom mixer named “Rosie” for DJ Francis Grasso, the inventor of beatmatching, when Grasso grew tired of his early, primitive version of mixing. The new technology spread throughout the scene quickly and soon was adopted by almost every nightclub DJ in New York. Rosner did not stop there though. Some of his other famous inventions were his box style speakers that became the standard for clubs all around the world and the tweeter array. Before beginning to throw parties, The Lofts’s David Mancuso was also obsessed with sound systems

and audio. He asked his good friend Alex Rosner to create a one of a kind (at the time) sound system that would isolate the high end frequencies and place them above the dance floor. This made it seem like the music was coming from the dance floor. This system was called a tweeter array and eventually was adopted by many important venues around the world. Alex Rosner and his apprentice popularized massive sound systems that sound engineers today struggle to replicate.

Richard Long was Alex Rosner's apprentice. After working alongside Rosner for years, Long eventually overtook his teachers' expertise. Long took everything he learned from Rosner and became the most sought after sound engineer in the world until his untimely death in 1986 (Beta). Little is known about Richard Long's past. Even those who worked closely with him didn't know much about him. Most people knew him only through his work. One thing that is agreed on though, is that he was the best sound system designer of his day. There is no shortage of quotes from DJs that have played on Richard Long's systems, pointing out how and why they are so incredible. This is a quote by Craig Loftis a DJ and producer active in the early eighties, on Richard Long's sound system at the Warehouse, taken from the documentary "I Was There When House Took Over the World": "You could go to the Warehouse and experience the music. You can sit there high or not, it didn't matter. The music would make you high". In an interview for Red Bull Music Academy, Kenny Carpenter, a resident DJ at Studio 54 had this to say "When you throw a record like Loleatta Holloway's 'Love Sensation' on that sound system you hear some frequencies, you hear some bass frequencies and some mids and highs that you never heard in your life. You hear things in the song that you could never hear again." When Robert Williams, the owner of the club where house music was born, The Warehouse, was starting his

club in Chicago he sought after Richard Long specifically to install his system. Most people at the time Richard Long and Alex Rosner were active, if they hadn't been to a live concert, never felt strong bass before. This was a huge draw for club goers in the early days. The importance of a pristine sound system was another one of the key principles of modern nightlife that came directly from the 70's scene. The obsession with good audio is something that has always followed dance music. It was and still remains to be as much of a part of the experience as the music itself.

## **DJs**

While a good sound system is essential for a good dance event, a good DJ is necessary. A good selection of music can make up for a bad sound system but an incredible sound system can't make up for bad selection. Good and bad song selection is completely relative to the listener and a good DJ knows this. The dance scene is one with an immense amount of genres, subgenres and classifications. There are many DJs who have made entire careers only playing one genre. Some venues or events organizations are known to book DJs that play music from a certain genre but again, the crowd, the group, is the ultimate decider. A good DJ is able to adapt to what the group wants. A good DJ knows that they themselves are part of the group and that the group is there for the music and not for them. This concept correlates directly with the commodification of music by commercialized dance event organizers. Many of the DJs who play huge music festivals like Ultra Music Festival or TomorrowLand will plan their sets ahead of time and repeat the set to new crowds with small changes. Preparing a set is not inherently bad but repeating the same set without any sort of improvisation defeats the purpose of what a DJ

does. The DJ follows and controls the energy of the room at the same time. Ultimately, the songs they play are the ones that, when all other factors are in place, can alter minds, create unity and make people move uncontrollably.

There is a certain ego death that the best DJs in the underground dance scene go through to become the best. The most popular mainstage, commercial, pop DJs sometimes rely too much on their image, gimmicks and the popularity of their produced music to put on a show.

Underground DJs tend to rely more on mixing and playing undiscovered tracks to enthrall the crowd. There is no right or wrong way to DJ but one way focuses much more on the music and the experience than on one's image. This is applicable to any genre of performance, not just to DJ culture. Ashley Benzwie and Stephan Kimbel Olson are a New York City based duo who host a series of dance events called "Bob and Shirley". The couple have been active in the dance music scene for many years now and have hosted and experienced a huge variety of different events. Ashley cut her teeth organizing events in the late two thousands in Berlin. There she learned the power dance music has to create community and uplift the individual. Stephan is a fantastic DJ and knows the power a DJ has when they are tuned into the group. "Some of my most fundamental experiences on the dance floor have been quite internal" says Stephan. "Head down, letting a DJ really take me on a trip. I grew a deep fascination with the ability of the artist to take the dancefloor on a trip, where you feel like you're together and having this communal experience without interacting at all or interacting in a very fleeting manner". The feeling described by Stephan is one many people who frequent nightclubs look for and a feeling that good DJs try to produce for the crowd. There is no doubt commercial DJs can provide this same

experience for their audiences but a DJ from the underground's main goal is for the audience to have that feeling.

### **The Flow State**

Flow is a state of mind in which one operates at their peak ability; it is a state of mind where one's actions or thoughts lead seamlessly into the next without hesitation. While in flow one does not have to think about their next move, it just happens. While in flow all sense of time and self-dissipate. These claims of peak state of mind might sound inflated or seem to be pseudoscience but within the last 30 years there has been significant scientific progress proving all of these claims. In the 1970s the term "flow" was coined by psychologist and researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Pursuit of Happiness). Mihaly's early life was plagued by tragedy, he had every reason to feel horrible and he did but he took to painting and found happiness through it. When he was painting he found he was intensely engaged, focused, and immersed but most of all it brought him happiness(Headspace). This state of mind had been described by many other philosophers and psychologists throughout history, but no one had tried to figure out how to achieve this state, why it happens and what happens during and after in the same way Csikszentmihalyi did. His most well-known experiment "The Beeper Study" supported the notion that healthy challenges positively impact one's mental wellbeing.

"A group of teenagers were given beepers that went off during random times throughout the day. They were asked to record their thoughts and feelings at the time of the beeps. Most of the entries indicated that the teens were unhappy, but Csikszentmihalyi found

that when their energies were focused on a challenging task, they tended to be more upbeat.”

The happiness did not last only the length of the challenging activity but lasted long after the activity had been completed. The scientific world was puzzled by his findings and set out to figure out exactly what was happening. As brain imaging technology advanced, scientists were able to see how the brain functioned in flow. One of the major findings was that while in flow, parts of the brain we need for daily activities are shut off. The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for complex thoughts like long term planning, morality, the ego and self reflection also shuts off while in flow. Then, the brain is bombarded with 5 of the most pleasurable, addictive and performance enhancing neurochemicals: norepinephrine, dopamine, endorphins, anandamide, and serotonin. This is where the notion of becoming addicted to an activity comes from. Essentially, the same neurochemicals that are released from, drugs and sex can be released by being intensely engaged in a spread sheet. Flow is often attributed only to musicians, athletes, professional gamers, or anyone who participates in complex, high pressure situations because that is where it is most clearly seen and where much of the research has been done. Flow may come easier to people who fit into these categories but absolutely anyone can enter the flow state doing almost any activity (Kotler).

One of the most overlooked pathways to the flow state is dancing. There is something innate within us that comes out when we dance. Dancing has been a part of human culture as long as we've made music, probably even before then. Dancing to dance music connects us to our prehistoric ancestors who would beat rocks on the ground to create repetitive rhythms. When we enter the flow state on the dance floor we enact something primal that science only now is



beginning to understand. When all the things mentioned in the previous paragraphs and more are taken into consideration and put together properly, a night out can change how one thinks and feels dramatically. Stephan and Ashley's events do this exactly. Their events are known for their intense attention to detail, the creative use of new spaces and constant innovation in lighting and decorations. During an interview, Ashley spoke at length about the meditative state dance music can induce and why good event production allows for it. Ashley had this to say about how she felt on the dance floor: "When you are in these atmospheres you're letting go of so much. When you really get into it, your inhibitions are lost, your cool is lost, you're just moving. I think that is so incredibly therapeutic, and so special. You develop these intuitive connections with people without even saying words to them. I think that is an essential piece of why these settings are so important". Many people go to events like Ashley and Stephan's to be in this deep meditative state she describes. People who go to events or venues that can provide these experiences often may not know what they are feeling is flow when they dance but they know it feels good. A study done in 2017 at the Laboratory for Brain, Music and Sound Research in Montreal, Canada, found that not only does dancing to "groovy music" induce flow, it enhances it. An excerpt from the abstract of this study: "Significant correlations were found between the emotional and flow responses to music and whole-body acceleration profiles. Thus, the results highlight a distinct state of flow when dancing, which may be of use to promote well-being and to address certain clinical conditions". At the bare minimum the underground dance scene offers one the ability to let loose and have fun; it serves as an outlet of self-expression and the release of stress. The dance scene has so much more to offer than that, though. When treated with

consideration, the dance floor of nightclubs can offer real spiritual, uplifting feelings that can truly impact the individual in a positive manner.

### **Musical Nightlife's Affect on Society**

Nightclubs for many people serve as their escapes from the worlds they live in. Anything can enact flow, even something as simple as knitting a sweater on your couch but knitting and many of the routes to the flow state are not under constant scrutiny by the police, government officials and the media. Whenever there's a news story about a night club it's about how some horrible thing happened but in reality much good comes from them. They are not a den of sin. House music from its inception was focused on love, the group and acceptance. These attributes are often associated with tight knit communities. The energy that dance music gives off and the ideology that enables it creates communities. Although dance music fosters communities, they still take time to build, they don't just suddenly appear. Even before the pandemic, many independent venues and arts organizations struggled to stay open. In two thousand and eighteen one of the pillars of the Greenpoint club scene, Output, shut its doors. As popular as they were, they suffered from the same issues even the smallest venues struggle with. The Brooklyn Post interviewed co-founders Nicolas Matar, Bo Pittman and Shawn Schwartz when the announcement was made and they had this to say "The owners attributed the closure to a combination of rapidly shifting social trends, unfavorable market conditions and a weakening financial outlook" (Hanrahan).

In May 2021, the city of Berlin voted to allow nightclubs to be considered cultural institutions. After years of campaigning for this goal the Parliamentary Forum For Club Culture

& Nightlife finally were able to have their voice heard. The benefits this achievement brings to clubs allow them to operate with more ease. Venues in the program will receive tax breaks, they will be protected from displacement and they will be permitted to operate in parts of the city they weren't able to before (Akingbehin). The vote was held while venues in Berlin were still under pandemic restrictions and weren't able to make ends meet. In two thousand and eighteen alone Berlin clubs brought the city one and half billion euro (The Local). Keeping clubs open in cities like New York and Berlin where nightlife plays a huge role in many people's lives, will not only foster the growth of communities but keep people employed. Clubs and the communities that surround them can be economic power houses for cities. One venue alone can provide a variety of jobs like, box office work, social media managing, bar backing, security work, among many others.

### **Community in Urban Society**

It is a known fact that humans need social interaction to lead healthy lives. Countless studies have been done on mammals and on humans themselves that show this to be true. It is natural for humans to congregate. In recent history, as the online world continues to consume more and more of our day-to-day interactions, researchers are finding human to human interaction is even more important than we already assumed it to be. In his 2013 book, "Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect", UCLA neuroscientist, Matthew Lieberman combines thousands of published and unpublished studies of human social interaction to show why today's evolution of humans are more in need of social connection than ever before. "A growing body of research shows that the need to connect socially with others is as basic as our need for food,

water and shelter” says Lieberman. His book focuses on how inherent human to human connection is to the wellbeing of society. “Becoming more socially connected is essential to our survival. In a sense, evolution has made bets at each step that the best way to make us more successful is to make us more social.”

One of the most famous professional acknowledgements of the need for healthy human connection is seen in Maslow’s Pyramid of Needs. The American psychologist Abraham Maslow began his research for his pyramid of needs after being separated from his home and tight knit community for a long period of time. He left his home to pursue his career and was eventually consumed by his work. Although he was achieving his goals, he thought he lacked purpose in his life that his community once provided for him. He wanted to know how an individual could find purpose in an intensely capitalist society like America was at the time and continues to be (Booth). Although Maslow's pyramid of needs isn't an exact scientific benchmark it has been used as such since its inception. It's a simple, useful tool to display the needs of us complex humans to be happy. Starting with base and ending at the top, the 5 levels of Maslow's pyramid are as follows: Physiological Needs, Safety and Security, Love and Belonging, Esteem, Self-Actualization. After the basic things a human needs to survive like food, water and a warm bed the next most important thing a human needs to be happy and to be fulfilled is a sense of love and belongingness. This is something that, until very recently in human history, communities provided. After all, this loss of community is what set Maslow on his journey to create his pyramid in the first place. The modern day notion of a city dweller is one who goes to work, day in and day out to support themselves in an intensely capitalist society. The path to

finding real connections with people outside of work is difficult. For this reason, it is essential for those living in cities to find a community that will support one another.

At the bare minimum the underground dance scene provides spaces for people of all walks of life to congregate and enjoy something in unison. DJing is a form of live music and like any other sort of live music, you need an audience. Established organizations and venues in certain cities tend to have a huge group of regulars. Coming together with others and seeing the same people on a consistent basis, over a long period of time, even if you're not best friends or talk that often, creates community. The dance scene and the venues it thrives in can provide much more than just familiar faces. The importance of safe spaces for all cannot be discounted, it is a major reason why many people will come back to the same venues and trust certain organizations. Even though society as a whole is relatively becoming more accepting of others beliefs and opinions there is still a significant need for safe spaces among minority groups. Even in Brooklyn, a place known for its liberal ideology, trans people, women and gays are often harrassed and assaulted on the street just for being who they are. Actions like these are the antithesis of the dance community. The underground dance scene can provide these at-risk groups with necessary safe spaces all across the world. In cities with less liberal mentalities these spaces are even more important. Within the walls of a dance event there is no space for judgement, prejudice, sexism, racism, xenophobia or homophobia. The dance community is like any other community with bad actors and people who don't understand the rules but when people see bad behavior in the dance scene they try to get rid of it. To reiterate the constant ideology that has existed since The Loft parties, this a scene based on the full acceptance of others. In cities all

across the world, dance music offers a safe platform for like minded people to come together and enjoy something they love as a group.

Common interests, open mindedness and safe spaces are enough for communities to be centered around but some venues and dance music organizations go a step beyond that. Certain venues in the scene have become almost like multifaceted social institutions, offering much more than just drinks and a night out. One of the more prominent venues in the New York scene, Nowadays, offers seminars on narcan training, they host movie nights and allow amateur DJs access to state of the art equipment through their DJ training sessions. Nowadays is always trying new things and hosting new events outside of the regular club nights. During the 2018 World Cup they would screen all the games for free. Nowadays also has a huge outdoor area that is open to the public where you can get a coffee and hang out almost any time of day. Nowadays has become a place in Brooklyn that everyone in the local community can appreciate, not only the club kids. Deeper into Bushwick, directly in between two of the most popular local venues Bossa Nova Civic Club and Mood Ring, a community garden was opened by a prominent Brooklyn musician and mayoral candidate, Paper Boy The Prince. The garden is not run by either establishment but because of its location many of the same people who frequent Bossa Nova and Mood Ring also contribute to the garden. Paper Boy themselves is often seen at both establishments. Open for all, free produce and a space to connect with other like minded people, the garden is very much in the spirit of the community.

Since the beginning, practically everything in the underground dance scene has been and continues to be grass roots. Even though event organizers operate on shoestring budgets, most events, even with high production value, tend to be relatively cheap. This is for accessibility;

event organizers want as many people to experience what they provide because they know the good they can do. Money is always an obstacle but organizers fight for it not to be. Funding and grants are very difficult to obtain for raves, parties and nightlife focused organizations so people have to do it themselves. Since there is so much love for this type of music people often have no problem working for small amounts of money or non at all. It's not that difficult to find volunteers to help organize a dance event if you're in tune to the community. Because the scene is relatively small and the ethos of dance music is centered around love and caring for others, people tend to want to help each other out. Like any other social setting people can be cliquy and social status can create boundaries but generally, if you're a DJ, friends will try to connect you with gigs, if you're looking for work friends, will let you know about openings and if you need equipment for an event, people will lend it to you for free or for a friendly price. Whenever there is a cause that has local support venues and event organizers will often get behind the movement. Bossa Nova, Mood Ring, Bob and Shirley events and many other venues and organizations will often host events where all the proceeds go to local charities or nonprofits. Currently, due to the pandemic many venues around New York are suffering enormous rent back payments and are at great risk of having to close their doors. Most notably, another one of the staples of the Williamsburg/Greenpoint scene, Good Room was put in this situation. The community has come together in a major way to support the club. They've been experiencing a major increase in ticket sales and local DJs have been playing for free. Organizers and venue owners do so much for their patrons and right now it's time for the patrons to give back. Campaigns for other venues to get donations have been so successful because people truly love their community and are willing to foot the bill. Without these places a huge gap would be left in

the lives of so many. If these venues disappeared, it wouldn't just be nights out that don't happen, it'd be friendships that never prosper, it would be safe spaces that no longer would exist, it would be the disappearance of a place to act and feel as authentic to yourself as possible.

## **Conclusion**

Right on the border of north-east Brooklyn and Queens there exists a nightclub called Nowadays. After you've been ID'd and the bouncer lets you pass, you step into a small soundproof room with soft pink lighting and soothing ambient music, where a very friendly, young woman greets you. She asks if it's yours or anyone in your group's first time there. If it is someone's first time she'll explain the rules: there is no bottle service, no phone use on the dancefloor, no pictures, no non consensual, creepy touching and you must be open minded to anyone's beliefs, opinions, sexual orientation, race and gender. Once you've agreed to their terms and paid your ticket you can finally go in. When you walk onto the dancefloor you are no longer in Ridgewood, Queens. You are wherever the DJ wants you to be. The rules set by Nowadays let the attendee act, feel and move however they choose without feeling pressure and without being judged. You go there to listen, to see and to dance. The lighting is magnificent, and the sound is near perfect. Although Nowadays is unique in many ways, at its core it shares the same principles as every venue, night club, bar or concert hall that genuinely cares about music and its patrons. Larry Levan, Frankie Knuckles and David Mancuso have sadly passed but the ideas they set forth are alive and thriving in cities like Berlin, Brooklyn, Manchester, London and countless others around the world. Times have changed and we as a society don't have the same issues we had in the 70's and 80's but the need for an escape is just as important as it was then. Dancing,



socializing and listening to music allow us to be vulnerable with others and free ourselves from the mental weights that hold our minds down.

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