

NEW YORK PRIDE 2003

MY first taste of New York Pride was in 1999; relatively young and a newcomer to London's gay scene and club underworld, I found myself leaving on a jet plane across the Atlantic with Fat Tony, Steve Thomas, Malcolm Duffy and Mr Laurence Malice for Trade's debut at the legendary Twilo on the eve of the New York Pride weekend. Suffice to say that this led to seeing very little of the Pride experience, as the rest of the weekend was spent confined within the four corners of a hotel room stoned and unable to make conversation let alone attend a parade.

This year I was determined to make the effort and ensured that the Friday night was not as debauched and ill-ending as it was four years previous.

We were lucky enough to be staying in the same hotel as some friends from LA, who we met in the hotel and who took it upon themselves to give us all the 'information' on New York we needed. Then we headed uptown, toward 5th Avenue, to find a good vantage point to see the March.

On arrival, I was imagining chaos. The kind of chaos that you would expect on a hot summers day when over one million camp queens, lipstick lesbians, muscle marys, butch dykes, fag hags, hairy bears, leather lovers, pre-op trannies and three Londoners descend upon Manhattan, parading their bodies and voices out on the streets of New York being proud, loud and very real. This was certainly spectacle, and tourists looked on in awe, confusion and bewilderment as the 35th Annual Pride March 2003 unfurled down 6th Avenue. It is here that I should point out, to those who don't know their history, that it was this city where 'Pride' was born. One month after the Stonewall riots, in June 1969, about 500 people gathered for a 'gay power' demonstration. That event, really the first NYC Pride Rally, took place in Washington Square and was followed by a candlelight vigil in Sheringdon Square. In the last three decades since, the rally has known many different 'homes' finally moving to Bryant Park in 1997, where it has remained ever since.

We were, in fact, en route to said park when I chose to break from my group of friends who were shuffling amongst the masses, along the pavement of Christopher Street (the equivalent of our Old Compton St). I began to cross the road and head toward a cluster of loosely clad Latinos, who had caught my attention earlier and whom I promised to say 'hello' to should I see them again. Armed with a big smile and under an 'under the influence-infused' sense of confidence, I braved the procession and crossed the street.

Cue speeding, bearded motorcyclists, some sporting Mohawks, who seemed to come from nowhere. Suddenly I found myself surrounded by an armada of two-wheeled menaces, followed closely by a fleet of electric wheelchairs that had now blocked me from continuing my journey, I turned to make a hasty retreat. As if that was not enough to blight my attempt to impress Mr Right, I was then heckled by the occasional drag queens that were weaving in and out of my path on giant motorised stilettoes. I finally collided with one of them, sending her spinning out of control into the unsuspecting public. Seeking retreat from this traumatised Tranny, I slipped back into the crowd and tried to forget the fiasco I had caused.

Pride Weekend in New York is as good excuse as any to grab as much quality outdoor time as possible, most aptly displayed in the convergence of the gym pumped masses at the Annual Pier Dance held on Pier 52. Incidentally this dilapidated structure is set to be demolished next year and is the



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actual pier that the Titanic was meant to dock many years ago. From 4pm till 11pm a sea of bodies gyrated as best they could to this year's headlining DJ, Brett Henrichsen - if only he could play as well as he is photographed (see pic). Perhaps I just wasn't ready for his Californian good looks and his blend of "Happy, Hi-NRG" which left me craving for something with more substance.

That substance was apparently to be found at 'Beautiful', the Junior Vasquez event at Roxy. For 12 years now, since the early days of the original Sound Factory, music minded club denizens have made it their business to celebrate Pride by converging upon wherever Junior is playing. Arriving somewhat early, and actually paying our entrance (a new experience), we sat around and drunk our way into a drunken stupor. A huge monument constructed on the far side of the dance floor caught my eye so we headed toward it to get a closer look. It turned out to be a huge two-storey DJ booth that Junior had built especially, with its own VIP lounge to one side of it. "What Junior wants Junior gets!" blurted some insipid queen with glee as he showed us round this extravagant homage to their disco god. Now, in London, he would be lucky to get a hand full of drinks tickets and half a gram of chang!

Unimpressed by this extravagance, we left and headed to the other big night Alegria at The Sound Factory. Now this was everything that we were looking for - and not just here but here in abundance! New York is definitely a great city to party in and New York Pride Weekend was as good as any that I've had back in London. Words and pics by Christian Russell

QX recommends staying at the Incentra Village House, New York's Premier gay inn located in the West Village at 32 Eighth Avenue. Tel: (USA) + 212 206 0007 or visit www.iloveinns.com/incentravillagehouse.inn

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