



FOR the past two years the second week in August has come to mean only one thing – it's time to pack a bag of tunes, grab a change of clothes, jump on Eurostar with a bunch of DJ mates (and their 'plus-ones') and head off to Antwerp for Belgium's answer to the US style Circuit event, the quaintly named Navigation!

This year was only the second year but already improvements could be seen and the crowd had swollen to around 15,000, pulling gay boys and their friends from all over Europe. Party revellers had travelled from the likes of France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium and of course the UK. This year our own posse had grown too with nine of us in total, so as soon as the train pulled out of Waterloo we knew we were in for a scream.

Two and a half hours later we were in Brussels and were immediately picked up by our connecting driver, Davy who whisked us off and had us racing into Antwerp within thirty-five minutes. As we drove into town, posters for Navigation seemed to be splashed all over the place and, whilst providing a sense of impending excitement, also made me consider the support that was being given to the event by the town as a community. I wondered if this would be the same at home after the last few years of Gay Pride and its struggle for recognition?

We approached the harbour side where the party was situated and could see the crowds already pouring in as the ships on the quayside pumped out the funky, chunky tunes that since last year have thankfully become so popular (goodbye Eurotranz hello Disco).

We arrived at our hotel in time for a quick freshen-up and headed for room 411 to meet the advance reconnaissance party, which included DJs Luke Hope and Jon Dennis plus Rock promoters Marky B and Paul Elsey in its ranks. Entering the room was like throwing oneself into a dressing room at a Madonna gig with

CARRY ON CRUISING

**DJs Alan X, Luke Hope and
Jon Dennis plus
Rock promoters Marky B
and Paul Elsey were at Belgium's
Navigation 2004! ALAN X reports...**



Pics by Alan X



everyone involved in various preparatory rituals. Dennis was holding court in the corner and was already complaining that the hotel was not up to last year's standards – once a Diva always a Diva, dear! He did have a point. However, it is all about 'Location, Location, Location' and this year instead of having to rely on limos to ferry us around town we were right in the middle of the action.

Before you could scream Eurostar (or You're-a-Star as it became known) we were trolling around the back of the hotel with boyfriends, lovers and record bags in tow, ready to give these Euro-Boys a taste of some serious London dance floor action on the decks of our allocated ship, the PP Rubens. Miss 'Diva' Dennis managed of course to keep her feet dry and had bagged a prime slot on the main stage situated on the harbour side... more of that later.

We minced our way through the growing crowds of muscle boys, Eurochicks, Drag Queens and Disco Freaks, dropped our bags with security, grabbed a bunch of drink tokens and headed straight for the cutest barman. Tequila and lemonade is such a leveller in these situations and after almost twenty-five years in a discotheque cannot be recommended more highly – especially in those large Euro measures! Drinks in hand, we parked ourselves under the nearest gazebo and contemplated the day so far. It was quickly decided that everything was gorgeous – a good way to get in the right mood to play a rocking set. Luckily

Luke 'Lucy Dope' Hope, being the budding green scout that he is, had managed to score the previous night and set us up with a nice phat spliff.

The site for this year was different to last year and wrapped around a corner of the harbour. This allowed more boats (ten in total) to dock and meant that quieter areas and a food boat could be tucked away around the one end with noisier activities taking place around the corner at the other end. This was good planning and further testament to the impeccable organisational skills of our hosts, headed up by Tom Stoop and his colleague, Liesbeth.

Bellies full we grabbed the posse and headed for the PP Rubens. I was first to be propped up in front of the decks and after a day full of anticipation took no time to swing into action and deliver a classic, late-afternoon, funk X-travaganza to an adorable crowd. It was a riot. We had three decks packed with crazed clubbers screaming past the crowds of everyday people waving at us joyfully from the safety of dry land with every turn as the ship headed out through the old docks to the open sea. It was all the more dramatic for the ominous clouds forming above our happy heads although it never managed to rain and, with the setting sun blazing through, the temperature was hot enough for shirts to fly off.

It was a memorable two-hour trip out to sea and back again. The ship was leaning, the crowds were staggering, the wind did its best to blow the stylus across the records! As on-lookers shouted we screamed back. One group of security guards standing next to an old factory even did a strip-tease for us (I am not sure if that was a good thing or not).

As we returned to the harbour the sun was down low and it was time to pull out some deeper tribal tunes to set things up nicely for



Luke who was next to grace the decks. As more boats came and went we docked alongside the harbour party, which by now was in full swing with several thousand bodies locked into the dance. We faded the music to avoid a catastrophic sound clash and with Luke Hope I watched the boys from our ship's decks disembark leaving just the two of us on board waiting for the next passengers. Jon Dennis hurried off the boat and was just in time to start his 'diva Dennis show biz' performance with record decks set up in a white speed-boat that was placed in the middle of the main stage – how camp is that! True to form Jon loved it and proceeded to let the whole world share his happiness.

I stayed on board and kept Luke company. Thankfully we had another full serving of funsters to party with as we set sail once more. By now the view was quite beautiful as we left dry land and all the lighting rigs on shore kicked in. As the noise grew more distant Luke cranked up the sound with an acetate of our new studio collaboration, 'Magic & Miracles' which, with its haunting ethnic vibe, quickly caught the imagination of the boys on board. This was just the beginning of another classic set, this time it was Luke's.

As our minds and bodies drifted away to sea it seemed like no time before we were back in the harbour where we made a bee-line to hear the end of Jon's tribal anthem ho'down. It was awesome – he had them begging for more. By the time he finished at midnight the place was one big beautiful mess!

After the needle was lifted from the last tune we were treated to a grand finale of acrobats and gymnasts hanging from giant ribbons suspended over the dark rippling waters from an industrial crane (earlier used for bumpy jumps). Classical music was piped over the airwaves as the performers, dressed as mermaids and drenched in aqua-blue light closed the night. Onlookers from the surrounding flats and apartments stood on their balconies with quiet respect as Navigation 2004 came to a close with almost military precision. It was a memorable day and showed once again that, with a little support from the community at large, a noisy event of this scale in the centre of town can somehow be acceptable - if only once a year. There seemed to be far more co-operation and tolerance in Belgium than we find in our own back yard!

We headed back round the harbour to the hotel and decided to give the Glam-As-You After Party a miss – was it something about that name! Instead we spent the rest of the evening roaming the shadows of the immaculate brick vaulted Red & Blue club where DJ Arun treated us to his cooler than cool US Circuit beats and dark Tribal grooves. It was not long before we all passed out and flopped into our beds, exhausted but satisfied.

Looking out of the window from the luxury of first class Eurostar comfort it all seemed like a distant dream. Never mind – there are only another 364 days until we can do it all again. Put it in your diary and we will see you next year!