

# DANCE TO YOUR OWN BEAT!

Clubbers find their own frequency — and favorite music mix — at city's booming 'quiet' parties

By GREGORY E. MILLER

IT'S nearly midnight on a Saturday, and more than a hundred people are crammed into the lower-level dance floor at Midtown's Croton Reservoir Tavern.

A linebacker of a bro fist pumps as a young woman backs into him while bending over parallel to the floor. Nearby, a group of middle-aged women employ the classic mom's night-out move: stepping left to right while snapping their fingers. Just inches away, a young couple attempts a salsa variation in the 1-foot radius of space they've carved out for themselves.

It's all par for the course for a night out in Manhattan — except there's no music playing.

At least not loud. Each dancer sports a pair of chunky, hipster-approved headphones emitting blue, red or green LED lights, which lend the place a supernatural glow.

In Europe, they call it silent disco. But when Will Petz, 33, discovered the concept on a Royal Caribbean cruise to Bermuda and decided to start a business of the party in New York, he renamed it quiet clubbing.

"I looked around, and there was no one that was doing it for someone like me," he says, referring to casual clubbers in their 20s and 30s put off by the hard-core dance scene. "So I'm like, 'I could do this. I could pull this off.'"

At Petz's events, hosted at indoor and outdoor venues throughout the city, partiers receive a set of headphones at the door, where they typically pay a \$25 cover charge. Via radio frequency, each headset can be tuned to one of three stations, at least two of which feature live DJs playing at the event. The colors

glowing on the front indicate which station the person is listening to. This particular night, the green station is manned by a DJ spinning Top 40, blue is home to a DJ playing '80s music and red is a pre-made international mix by Petz himself.

The result? People are quite literally dancing to their own beat. That's not to say that this is the equivalent of jamming out alone in your bedroom.

"We're all sort of communicating nonverbally," says Tyrone Dennis, a 28-year-old from Astoria, who came with a birthday-party group. "But it's not aggressively like in a club where

guards are up."

Want to chat

up a hottie? Just take the headphones off, and voila — you can actually speak and hear each other.

"Usually you leave a club with hurt ears and a sore throat," laughs 31-year-old Debbie Nicholl of Chelsea. "This is worth experiencing."

Quite often, strangers will approach one another based on the color of their headphones. This can lead to raucous singalongs to crowd favorites like Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'."

"People love the songs that you would never, ever consider playing in a club — wedding songs, like 'Twist and Shout,'" says Petz, who works in mobile technology by day.

Ironically, though clubbers have plenty of musical options, they often choose to go along with the crowd.

"I think what happens is that everyone wants to feel like they're part of a group. They don't want to be soloed out. It's fun, but no one wants to admit it," Petz adds.

It's common for someone to shout out, "Go to blue!" and after a few moments of confusion and fear of being left out, everyone does so.

"It typically is a good song like 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun,'" says Petz. "All the girls go, 'Ahhhh!' Everyone goes, 'What are they listening to?' They switch to blue, and they go, 'Oh, OK. I get it.'"

This means DJs can get real-time reactions to their work.

"It's a much better position for anyone that's dancing because now

## CHANNELS

- Top 40
- Indie & Latin
- '80s



At a quiet party at Croton Reservoir Tavern, revelers choose different DJ mixes via headphones: Ashley Michael (left) and Courtney Cuomo opt for an indie mix.



Christine Casil (left) and Carrie Shon groove to Top 40 tunes.



Patron Tyrone Dennis gets down to an '80s mix.

Brian Beidler ©

you have a DJ that's looking out at the crowd going, 'No one's listening to me. I'm going to switch it up,'" says Petz. "We now own the DJ. The DJ doesn't own us."

For bar owners, there's another benefit. With the city pestering clubs to keep the noise down, quiet clubbing can provide a more harmonious way to pack in patrons late into the night. Mark Evangelista, owner of Midtown's Overlook, has had frequent problems with noise complaints from residential neighbors. Last Saturday, he hosted his first quiet clubbing event to utilize his outdoor patio, which he normally has to shut down at night.

"It's not a total solution, but it's definitely a remedy for a lot of the unnecessary noise that comes from music and people talking over the

music," says Evangelista.

Perhaps that's one reason why business is booming. Petz recently purchased 300 additional headsets, bringing his total to 650. He has two parties next week (visit quietevents.com for info), and numerous new endeavors this summer, including a subway pub crawl. He's also working on a play in which the headphone channels would feature the characters' inner thoughts.

Through it all, though, one thing's constant: This is not the pill-popping party scene you'd expect on a sweaty, neon-lit dance floor.

"It brings out both cool and uncool people," says Petz. "I don't know the druggy crowd. I know the hey-we-wanna-have-fun crowd."

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