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WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH SILENT DISCOS?

THE NEW DANCE PARTY FEATURED AT ACL PROVIDES YOUR FAVORITE TUNES THROUGH HEADPHONES

BY RACHEL COOPER



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PHOTO BY NELSON MAK

It's Friday night at the [ACL Music Festival](#). You can see a crowd is dancing, yelling, and singing. Strobe lights are flashing, and everyone is having fun—just like you'd expect at the live music capital's biggest music festival—except there's no music to be heard.

This year, ACL added a new headliner to its lineup: the Silent Disco. The three-day event usually closes out each night with two big performers on opposite ends of Zilker Park, but this year ACL gave festivalgoers a third option located in the middle of the park in the Tito's Handmade Vodka tent with a two-hour party every day of the fest.

Put on by [Quiet Events](#), the new attraction provided a place for people to dance to the music of their choice from one of three local DJs without the blaring speakers and instead with personal headphones. I saw some of my friends had attended it the week before, so I had to stop by and see for myself what the hype was all about during Weekend 2

I arrived at the stage about five minutes before its start time at 8 p.m., thinking that with the big headliner of JAY-Z that night I'd be dancing in a small crowd of older people who didn't care to see the rapper. Instead, I walked up to a line of people of all ages that snaked around the tent. It didn't take long for me to make it inside, where I was handed a pair of padded headphones glowing blue. I stepped into a party that already had the crowd singing and dancing despite only starting five minutes earlier. The music pumping through the headphones was at the perfect volume, and after some confusion on how to change the channel to one of the other two DJs—blue was for hip hop; red for '80s, '90s, and 2000s throwbacks; green for top 40 and EDM — I was flipping freely between channels to whatever song I liked best.

Pretty quickly, the novel concept made total sense. Unlike a normal club, everyone was dancing like no one was watching. I didn't have to listen to something I didn't like. Bonus: I didn't have any ringing in my ears afterward. But I was still wondering what exactly drew these huge crowds of people to the event.

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Photo courtesy of Quiet Events

"It's three parties in one," explains Quiet Events founder [William Petz](#). "We have Top 40, we have '80s and '90s; we have it all playing. Each DJ has a different color associated with them, so it also becomes a battle. It's a show as well—the DJs get the crowd involved, saying stuff, doing stuff ... it's much more interactive."

Petz says the concept of silent discos [originally started in the U.K.](#) as a way to get around noise ordinances, but it never caught on to the U.S. because it was solely EDM. Petz started Quiet Events in New York City in 2012 and widened its appeal by making it more like a regular club by playing more popular tunes.

Quiet Events' popularity grew when they began to call their parties "[Quiet Clubbing](#)," because Petz says the phrase "Silent Disco" can give the impression of older music and people. The company has since quickly expanded across the country and internationally and recently opened an office in Austin in September of last year.

"One of the things we've realized is, because [Austin] is the Live Music Capital of the World, it's a little bit more challenging because there's always something going on," says Petz. "We're competing with something live everywhere."

Despite this challenge, Petz says they have gained a base in the city, and their parties are now selling out. Petz also mentions the challenge of myth-busting the perception of the parties being anti-social, but rather that they connect people with the colored teams and allow people to talk without having to yell over loud music.

"The generation we're in now, it's what we're used to," Petz says. "People no longer listen to the radio. They use Spotify; they use Pandora; they have playlists. If they don't like something, they switch. In the club, you basically only get to listen to one DJ, and the people really have no choice. It's one of those things where you think you can't please all people all the time, but we get pretty damn close because we have options. You now control the DJ—the DJ doesn't control you."

So will silent discos sweep the nation and change dancing at clubs as we know it? Only time will tell, but Petz says they are the party of the future.

"Thirty-three percent of people are coming back to our parties, which means we're not a fad but just a better way to party," says Petz.

And I agree. If you want to check it out yourself, Quiet Events is hosting a [Halloween party](#) Friday, Oct. 27 at Old School Bar & Grill, so grab your friends, dress up, and sing and dance to the music you choose.



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