

ACID REFLUX Max Blagg

As a callow youth I made a kind of living by tending bar, dispensing vast quantities of alcohol to gatherings of drunkards not unlike myself. After performing this circus act at various filling stations around Lower Manhattan I eventually found myself working in an abandoned garment factory on West 37th Street, the epic first incarnation of the nightclub Danceteria. Open on weekends from midnight to 7 a.m., the joint was packed during those hours with the curdled cream of downtown's wildest and most creative denizens.

There were lots of drugs around, but my own preference was the 'sweet machine,' amphetamine, marketed as Desoxyn, which usually created the perfect blend of charm and hostility required to face the teeming hordes who swarmed round the club's various bars. Some of the staff smoked reefer and some did cocaine, and some tripped the light fandango. I avoided psychedelics, having already done more than my share in London, '68 and '69. No balmy Woodstock vibes there—Altamonstrous years they were, burned down in Belsize Park, pulverized on Primrose Hill. The doors of my perception violently removed from their hinges.

Until this one particular night. Moonshine, an older guy whose job it was to make sure the bartenders did not steal—as if!—handed a pill across the bar with a knowing smile. I took it from him, washed it down with a Bud, then asked what it was.

“White lightnin’!” he growled with a swampy Louisiana cackle, and indeed just as the rush for the bars started around two minutes after midnight, my own rush started. A human zoo was stampeding toward my tiny basement bar, every cracketeer, dope diddler, clitlicker, bum bandit, every downtown dandy, dave dee dozy beaky mick and titchy itchy booze puppet came thundering my way as the lightning snapped and crackled in my brain. They were shouting and breaking glasses, claiming to be personally acquainted with the owners, cawing ‘Max! Max! Max!’ like crows in a rookery, banging on my glockenspiel. My bonce was on fire, a roaming candle, and yet I clacked the flywheel, took their money, two for the house and one for me, shredding my fingers with Budweiser screwcaps that would not unscrew, as the befuddled masses buzzed around my honeybar.

By break time the initial panic had passed. I was larfing and lollygagging, feeding free drinks to a gorgeously tan girl, clocking her balustrade as she wrapped herself around the barstool like a snake. My busboy, whom I had warned of a possible mental crackup, was a lanky street kid named David. He kept it all flowing, dunking cases of warm Budweiser into the melting ice. Who could have known 30 years later he would be having a retrospective at the new downtown Whitney, a famous artist, but alas he would also be dead. David Wojnarowicz, one of many talented kids who worked there—a list as long as it is glorious; Keith Haring, Peter McGough, Chuck Nanney, Zoe Leonard, Iolo Carew, Aleph and Taylor, Haoui Montaug, Anita Sarko, Alexa Hunter, Barbara Porter, all of them so very fuckable. I sent David's first brilliant manuscript ‘Sounds in the Distance’ to my old friend Jim Pennington at Aloes Books in London, who printed it in 1982. That original version is now as rare as hens' teeth, and far more expensive.

Where was I? I was peaking on MDA or PCP or whatever Moonshine had slipped me and now I was going to cool my paws for 20 minutes. The python girl slithered after me into a back room office, where a cruddy sofa morphed into a four poster bed. Sweat was cascading off me like Niagara but she slid around in it like a worker from Soap World, slippery as a golden eel, and golden-eyed she was and dark below, fur below yes pure cashmere soft as very heaven's clouds and the slit sunlit, emanating a certain slant of sunlight, my brutish brain comprehending Emily Dickinson while simultaneously slamming someone who looked more like Angie Dickinson. The basement tapes were playing somewhere, Tiny Montgomery says hello, beauty was everywhere, squeezing my inflamed and purple heart. I came, she went, break was over, the rush of the drug had evolved into a delightfully tender descent, the cabin crew so solicitous of my safe return, congratulating me on a dry landing as I wandered back around the other floors. The Nightclubbing team, Pat and Emily, were showing a Cramps clip in the video lounge, Pat told me to ignore the alligator people in the basement, so I did. Keith Haring's drawings adorned the walls, radiant babies, barking dogs and flying saucers. Mobs of attractive people swayed back and forth, up and down the stairs, frantic music packing the dance floor, Madonna dancing her brains out, already clawing her way upward, she would be banging the DJ later. Golden years, who knew?

This kind of hothouse behavior went on all over the club on a regular basis, so it was no surprise when Pat and Emily asked me and about 45 other miscreants, drawn from the staff and the other artistic riffraff who frequented the joint, to participate in their latest art piece, a video installation entitled *Alone at Last*. The two videographers wanted to capture a sense, a whiff, a taste of the sweaty, druggy, sensual world in which we nightly immersed ourselves. And so they filmed these little ‘capsules,’ ‘come-ons,’

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verbal video seductions in which each of us attempted to explain in grimy detail what we wanted or in some cases what we didn't know that we wanted. It stands now as a vivid document of an extraordinary time, when 'love could be found anywhere,' and nobody dreamed that having wild sex with a beautiful stranger might kill you way before your time.

Danceteria's sparkling moments dim like bulbs on the midway as the carnival folds its tents.... Those of us still standing must continue hacking through the thickets, defusing the obstacles placed like improvised explosive devices beneath our path to the stars, where Anita and Haoui and the rest of the crew are rehearsing a celestial *No Entiendes*. ■