



Circuit Parties

by Kenneth Cimino

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Circuit parties refer to an ongoing series of gay-themed events that take place in major metropolitan areas throughout the year. Circuit parties get their name from those who travel to various cities throughout the world--making the "circuit"--to attend several parties each year.

The gay circuit is considered an offshoot of the early 1990s rave movement, which had died out by the late 1990s. Circuit parties are characterized by huge crowds with multiple DJs spinning various permutations of house music, elaborate lighting and decoration, live musical or theatrical performances, acrobatics, nudity, and glow-stick waving. In recent years, gay activist groups have attacked circuit parties and attendees known as "circuit boys" for abundant drug use and unsafe sexual practices.

Each event is celebrated over at least a three-day period and sometimes longer during holidays. The parties often have a color theme, and feature dancing through the night and into the next day. Frequently, circuit parties have a number of related events, not all of them dance parties.

The dances usually have one or multiple DJs. A DJ leads a circuit party in the way a clergyman guides a religious event. The premise of every party is that the DJ conducts the musical journey. The general type of music depends on the nature of the event, and can range from tribal to house to trance.

The web site Circuit Noize provides details of all the parties throughout the year and posts pictures of attendees. Also, Circuit Noize produces a quarterly print magazine that details party events and schedules.

Some lesbians and some older men attend circuit parties, but they are distinct minorities. Circuit parties usually attract thousands of mostly young, mostly white gay men who dance all night. Some lesbians attend lesser known women-only circuit parties, such as Aqua Girl in Miami.

Frequently, a percentage of admission fees to circuit parties is donated to AIDS-prevention groups or gay youth programs. Indeed, some parties on the circuit originated as fund-raisers for gay charities. Circuit parties have raised millions of dollars for AIDS research, prevention, and services. On the other hand, some party promoters organize events that benefit only the organizers.

Circuit Boys

Circuit boys are those young gay males who attend the parties. They are described as the new millennium's version of the late 1970s gay clone--muscular, tan, and usually with a few tattoos. They are known for spending hours in the gym, sometimes working out twice a day, to attain that perfect body to display at circuit events. Many circuit boys go on low carb diets to make sure they have washboard abs.

Some circuit boys report using steroids as part of their workout regimes for the events. The joke goes that you can tell a circuit boy by what he is wearing: usually a red pair of Structure cargo pants, an Abercrombie tank top, and white 2Xist briefs. Or the fact that he eats tic tacs for breakfast. This joke is in reference to

the large amount of recreational drugs consumed at the parties instead of actual food.

Drug Usage and Unsafe Sex

A 2001 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey of 295 men who had attended circuit parties within the previous year indicated that 95% of them took at least one illegal drug at a party. The survey found that the men's favorite party drugs were Ecstasy (also known as "X" or "E"), which gives users a sense of well-being and unlimited energy but also can cause brain damage; the anesthetic ketamine ("Special K"); the sedative gamma hydroxybuterate (GHB); and the stimulant crystal methamphetamine ("Crystal" or "Tina").

The survey also revealed that 28% of the men reported having sex without condoms on circuit party weekends. The practice of unsafe sex by many young men at circuit parties has caused many gay charity groups to no longer sponsor circuit parties or to accept money from party promoters.

For example, in 1998, New York's Gay Men's Health Crisis announced that it would no longer accept money from Morning Party promoters after a party attendee overdosed on GHB. GMHC stated at the time, "We have found that the reputation for this particular fund-raiser as a drug party and the alarming level of drug taking that occurs are incompatible with our mission of preserving the health of the community." Michelangelo Signorile, in *Life Outside*, comments that the Morning Party became "known for its intense drug use."

Jeffrey Sanker

Jeffrey Sanker is considered the largest circuit party promoter in the United States. He is behind circuit parties such as Snow Ball in Miami, the White Party in Palm Springs, and One Mighty Party during Gay Days at Disney. It has been said that if you are a gay DJ, the only two people you ever want to meet are Madonna and Jeffrey Sanker.

In the late 1980s Sanker created the White Party in Palm Springs after witnessing 2,000 lesbians at the Dinah Shore Golf Tournament. In 2000, Sanker faced controversy after a group of Southern California gay men asked Sanker to give a larger percentage of his White Party profits to Los Angeles-based AIDS groups. Sanker refused, and his White Party was boycotted that year.

In 2001, Palm Springs police reported 13 overdoses and two citations for sex in public during the White Party weekend. Consequently, the City Council considered banning the annual party. However, after local merchants detailed the amount of tourist money the White Party brought into the desert resort area, the City Council reversed itself. In response to the controversy, at the 2002 White Party organizers emphasized the dangers of drugs and distributed condoms.

Circuit Events

Circuit parties come together in several ways depending on the scale and intent of the event. For example, the Black Party in New York is coordinated by a mysterious foursome known as the Saint at Large. Other events, such as Chicago's Fireball, use a steering committee to book DJs and performers, design and distribute promotional materials, and arrange sponsorships and hosting agreements with airlines, local hotels, and media outlets. Finally, in some cases a well known promoter--such as Jeffrey Sanker--orchestrates the entire event, as in the case of the White Party in Palm Springs. Charity fundraising parties often rely heavily on community volunteers to organize and coordinate the events.

There are usually two or three circuit party weekends a month. The circuit begins in January in Philadelphia with the Blue Ball. It continues with New York's Black Party in March, Sanker's White Party in April, the Cherry Party in Washington, D. C. in May, and Montreal's Black and Blue Ball in October. Other

events include Fireball in Chicago (February), the Purple Party in Dallas (May), and Halloween in New Orleans (October).

Also, many gay-centered events such as Gay Days at Disneyland, Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco, Southern Decadence in New Orleans, Mardi Gras in Sydney, and many gay pride festivals have circuit parties associated with them. In fact, circuit parties include events as varied as ski weekends in Canada, Carnivale in Rio de Janeiro, island parties in Spain, celebrations in Israel, and beach parties in South Beach.

Circuit parties have been the source of a great deal of money for gay charities. But perhaps the greatest attraction of circuit parties, particularly for young gay men who live in rural areas or small cities, is the opportunity they provide to become, at least temporarily, part of a larger community. The gathering of thousands of circuit boys instantly transforms resorts and other venues into queer spaces.

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