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Meet NYC's New Nightlife Mayor!

By Will Noling

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Ceci Lynn-Jacobs

Last month, JComm organized a panel discussion as part of the Dance/NYC Symposium on Nightlife, Social Dance, and the Underground, where panelists Brian Polite ([Afro Mosaic Soul](#)) and Chris Rogicki ([Fuákata Cuban Salsa NY](#)) shared their insight and experience with the challenges and threats faced by underground dance communities. We discussed (among other topics) the recent repeal of the Cabaret Law, the establishment of an Office of Nightlife in the city government, and the newly created position of Nightlife Mayor. Since our panel discussion, the city's first Nightlife Mayor has been appointed: Ariel Palitz, a native New Yorker, former bar owner, and community board member. This week, in her first official outing in her new position, Ms. Palitz attended a meeting of the NYC Artist Coalition, an organization involved in many of the final efforts to repeal the Cabaret Law. A couple of JComm members were in attendance to hear the conversation that took place.

Ms. Palitz said very little: in her introduction, she expressed a desire at this point to listen to the needs and concerns of those present, as she begins what she has called her "listening tour." A panel of community leaders, venue-owners, and artists (including Brian Polite!) each had a few minutes to voice their main concerns, and then the conversation opened up for more back and forth and questions from the assembled meeting. The conversation quickly expanded to cover a wide range of topics. For example:

- Why is the timing of the Cabaret Law's repeal significant? Communities of color have been fighting for its repeal and for safe space to convene for decades, and it is only as gentrification brings more white residents into these social spaces that city government begins to prioritize protection for social dancing. How do we ensure that people of color are protected in these spaces, and that white residents are not the only people reaping the benefits of the new Office of Nightlife?
- How do we prevent sexual harassment on our dance floors and in our clubs?
- How do we decriminalize and devillainize nightlife? How can we increase conversation between government agencies and space owners so venues can be safe and up to code without being shut down, usually with little explanation or time for addressing violations?
- How do we stop displacement of nightlife venues and the communities (especially communities of color) that enjoy them (Commercial Rent Control? Lease Protection?)?
- How do we make sure the Office of Nightlife has an expansive definition of "culture" and what is deemed "valuable" or worthy of protection (one issue that came up at our Symposium event is that, unlike the music industry, social dance gatherings are less likely to be a source of economic profit, with less emphasis placed on buying drinks; how does this prevent social dance from being seen as valuable and worthy of protection in the eyes of the city government?)
- What is needed to change the zoning laws so social dancing is fully legal in all areas of NYC?

It was a wide-ranging conversation, and hopefully the new Nightlife Mayor will continue to listen to the needs of these communities. In the meantime, there are many actions YOU can take right now to continue to push for the protection of New York City's essential nightlife and underground scene:

- Vote in local elections, or even run for local office!
- Call City Council and encourage them to support measures like commercial rent control, and lease protections for small businesses! They don't get as many calls as our nationally-elected representatives, so just a few calls can make a difference!
- After years of increasing rent and pressures toward displacement, the Bushwick DIY venue Silent Barn will be closing. However, in their closing, they are encouraging their supporters to channel support to an organization called Educated Little Monsters, "a music and arts group serving Bushwick youth whose communities are severely impacted by gentrification. ELM has been running classes and programming out of Silent Barn since 2014 and is now fundraising to launch a new all-ages space with their community partners" (from

Silent Barn's press release). You can support ELM's campaign to purchase the Silent Barn venue as their own by donating [here!](#)

- Attend the next NYC Artist Coalition Meeting to learn more!
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Further Reading:

- [Educated Little Monsters Facebook Page](#)
 - ["New York City Appoints Its First Nightlife Mayor" \(New York Times\)](#)
 - [NYC Artist Coalition Facebook Page](#)
 - [NYC's Nightlife Mayor Officially Hits the Town for the First Time \(NY1\)](#)
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