Thursday, May 3, 2018

Letter to the Office of Nightlife

By Katy Dammers and Cecilia Lynn-Jacobs



Dear Shira and Ariel,

We are writing as representatives of the Dance/NYC Junior Committee (JComm), a proactive working committee of emerging leaders in the field. As a project of Dance/NYC, we initiate significant projects in research, advocacy, and career development while strengthening each member's relationship to the dance community. As an incubator for the next generation of dance leadership we chaired a panel discussion at the Dance/NYC annual Symposium this past February entitled Nightlife, Social Dance, and the Underground. Moderating a discussion with Brian Polite of AfroMosaic Soul and Christopher Rogicki of Cuban Salsa New York we considered how dance practices situated in clubs, bars, warehouses, and neighborhood centers have historically helped to shape community bonds, and how they continue to challenge and inform the NYC dance scene today. Together we had an in-depth discussion with leaders from NYC's vibrant social dance scene, and performers and choreographers working in bars, clubs and for-profit enterprises. Our conversation had a particular resonance in the wake of the recent striking down of the Cabaret Law in 2017, the establishment of the Office of Nightlife, and the (in February) imminent establishment of the Nightlife Mayor position.

However, as Greg Miller of the Dance Parade noted, the Cabaret Law legislation has only partially been repealed, leaving a number of laws and regulations around dancing in bars and nightclubs regarding the types of spaces, communities, and security. We urge you to continue to address existing legislation and bureaucracy, committing to making it accessible, easy to read, and a supportive environment for all members of the community.

We write to you both today, as the Senior Executive Director of Policy and Programs of the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment and the newly appointed Nightlife Mayor, to share information about our discussion and suggestions for action as this office continues to develop.

During our community conversation we affirmed the importance of nightlife in creating spaces for all New Yorkers to dance and express themselves. Attendees expressed a strong desire for spaces to continue to support intergenerational communities that are safe for people of all races, genders, and sexualities. It is important that these spaces also be made accessible to all, and space owners acknowledged that they will need both financial and administrative support from the Office of NIghtlife to restructure their spaces to be more welcoming to people with disabilities.

In meetings we have attended with Save NYC Spaces the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment has cited specifically the importance of nightlife as a profit generator for the city, particularly through music and nightclubs. While we acknowledge the power of the arts as both sources of economic value and employment, we continue to uphold the intangible, qualitative importance of the arts that go beyond quantitative measures. We look forward to hearing how you will balance efforts to ensuring the economic viability of nightlife while maintaining support for its cultural value.

In our conversation together we solicited community feedback that we hope the Office of Nightlife, the Nightlife Mayor, and the attendant advisory council will consider moving forward. Communities seek the following:

Collaboration with zoning and other city offices to support New Yorkers leading community spaces, ensuring consistent locations for dance parties rather than requiring communities to frequently shift locations.

General operating support and other financial assistance, similar to that given by the Department of Cultural Affairs to nonprofits, which is particularly important for organizations not primarily supported through liquor or food sales.

Assistance navigating the complicated licensing and zoning processes to be in line with government standards.

Ongoing conversation about the role of the Office of Night Life and the job of the Night Mayor in particular. Community members acknowledged in particular that the title "Night Mayor" implies that the appointed representative will be concerned solely with events happening at night, leaving out parties that may extend into the daytime or begin in the morning.

In conclusion, we thank you for your service to New York City, our community, and the dance field. We look forward to our continued work together and appreciate your consideration moving forward.

Sincerely,

Katy Dammers and Cecilia Lynn-Jacobs

Symposium Chairs for the Dance/NYC Junior Committee

< back

previous listing • next listing