

## *Keep On Movin’\**

Heather Galbraith

Living outside of Aotearoa for most of the 1990s and early 2000s I missed out on a big chunk of how DIY dance parties and gatherings evolved here. I never went to The Gathering, or Splore, or other festivals or club-based dance parties during that period, which all three collaborators on *Everybody SoundSystem* were highly active in across Aotearoa and Melbourne.

Living in London, friends were heading to raves and festivals in fields and illicit indoor venues where ceilings rained sweat and condensation. I was hanging with Indie shoegazers in pubs with sticky floors, hordes of metalheads at festivals in satellite cities, art-wanks at the Southbank Centre, and at Pontin’s Holiday Camp for All Tomorrow’s Parties festivals. All these contexts felt very, very male, or at the very least I was hyper aware of being in a minority. Dance parties and rave culture were outside of my experience.

Within art galleries and museums plenty of artists were tapping into different music cultures, including rave as a social and political force of collectiveness. There were dance floors as sculptures (works by Piotr Uklański and by Tom Dale, spring to mind), and a growing number of invited DJ sets were held, but seldom was there an interrogation of the dance party as form, content and context.

I think about British artist Jeremy Deller’s *Acid Brass* and witnessing the mind-bending scene of a colliery brass band comprised of out-of-work coal miners and their kids in Katowice, southern Poland in 2002, play orchestrations of a raft of Acid House tracks. *Acid Brass* was first shown in 1997 with Manchester-based Fairey Brass Band building on the earlier work *The History of the World*, where Deller mind-mapped the rise of Acid House music with the social disruption that Thatcherite Britain wrecked on communities developed around mining, and other aspects of deindustrialisation and the rise of the free market economy. Watching the 2002 performance in the street outside the Katowice City Art Gallery, the vibe was a mixture of celebratory and confused, as the recognition-factor of the Acid House tracks was modest among the local populace, yet the pride in seeing their brass band shiny and ready for business (long after the coal mine had been mothballed) was palpable.

In the video documentary by Deller *Everybody in The Place: An Incomplete History of Britain 1984-1992* (2018), he weaves a series of interconnections between house music's evolution during the 1980s in the gay clubs of Chicago and Detroit, through sound systems of British-Caribbean communities, rogue up-shoots in Ibiza, and the subsequent migration into British rave and dancefloor culture, where a space of resistance and counter culture was created through music (and arguably recreational drugs) for collective catharsis and shared joy, with a side-serving of deep political agency. This counter-status shifted as the music became more mainstream in the mid 1990s.

Closer to home my mind wavers between Maddie Leach's *Take Me Down to Your Dance Floor* (2004) at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, which created a physical space for community and recreational dance groups from the Otago region to stage dance performances in the Gallery, and Gap Filler's *Dance-O-Mat* which was a grassroots manifest of a social space that emerged through the urgent desire for creating social spaces for connection and jubilation post Canterbury Earthquakes, but which still lives on today, a much loved platform where you can plug-and-play your own sounds and move in any way you want. I also think about D.A.N.C.E Art Club, a multi-format, interactive and collaborative art collective forged in 2008 by Tuafale Tanoa'I, Vaimaila Urale, Chris Fitzgerald and Ahilapalapa Rands in Tāmaki Makaurau. The name expands to 'Distinguished All Night Community Entertainers', and the collective have mounted around 40 events between 2008-2014, and a series of online noho and wananga during COVID-19 impacted times. They always bring a mash-up of digital and analogue sounds, infectious grooves, fly uniforms and an unassailable generosity of manaakitanga. In a 2009 publication, in conversation with artist Nova Paul, the collective noted that "D.A.N.C.E was initiated out of a necessity for a public platform, where art students and the wider arts community could socialise and share ideas. Not content with the usual restrictive time frames of making and exhibiting art, we have developed events that cater for late night activity."<sup>1</sup> They have installed in community venues, within gallery-settings, in public space, and have even been involved in an attempt for a Guinness World Record for the longest DJ set.

*Everybody SoundSystem* shares an interest in creating spaces of broad connection and conviviality. Arriving at a soft-launch of the project slightly ahead of the Saturday opening, I felt and heard the bass before I arrived at the door. I was welcomed by an onslaught of colour, with hung and stuffed textiles and lighting demarcating the dance area. Fluro accents abound, elongated, exaggerated stuffed body forms (hands, legs)

---

<sup>1</sup> D.A.N.C.E publication, 2009, edited and designed by Janson Chau, interviewer, Nova Paul. Tāmaki Makaurau.

pepper the space, propped and hung. Silver eye-forms festoon the speaker stems, bring an crazy sensory mash-up to the fore; hearing, seeing, feeling are simultaneous. I was welcomed, hugged and then offered a cup of tea or a dance. I chose the latter and parked self-consciousness to be in the space with the three co-creators Eve Armstrong, Gabby O'Connor and Josephine Cachemaille, who were rotating across the desks, dancefloor and kitchen.

The installation evolved over an intense two-week period with the three artists feeling their way through this first-time collaboration (for this trio – all are very experienced collaborators and have long-held interests in how collective endeavours can open up spaces of inclusion and transformation). We laughed about the 'old lady ravers' taking over, and talked about how younger generations might experience and read this conscious 'return' to a mode of working that spoke to all three artists histories as dance party DIY collaborators during the late 1990s/early 2000s. There is a politics in the collaboration, a visibility of the female-ness of this initiative, and that the primary collective are all visual artists with many discipline feathers in their quivers.

The Saturday event (which I took my six year old daughter to) was heaving, with folk dancing, and hanging in the kitchen or outside the Gallery, ranging from toddlers to octogenarians. It was a highly inclusive vibe, with manaakitanga at its centre. DJs of all genders and generations were invited to spin tunes. There was a strong representation of masked-up dancers in their 40s through to 60s, clearly relishing the chance to move to sounds of their respective periods of youth, but folk of other generations didn't hold back either. The atmosphere was not one of rarefied or exclusive nostalgia, more a channelling of potent strains of optimism and a commitment to the power of social fabric, and how important connectivity through collective revelry is. Following on from the extended periods of separation and home isolation that COVID-19 has begat, this felt liberating, and also uncertain and a bit scary, given that we are not out the 'other' side of this pandemic. But there are metallic lilac and fluorescent orange glimmers of hope and transcendence

*Heather Galbraith is a 52 year old curator and educator, who has to listen to a lot of Dua Lipa and Taylor Swift (through being Mum to a six year old daughter), and whose hips and back ache after dancing, dammit.*

*\*Keep on Movin', Soul II Soul, feat. Caron Wheeler, from Club Classics Vol. One, 1989*