

THE GREATEST GAY SHOW ON EARTH!

FOLLOWING YEARS OF UNCERTAINTY AND TROUBLED EVENTS, THIS YEAR SYDNEY MARDI GRAS REGAINED ITS REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE GREATEST GAY SPECTACLES ON EARTH. AND WITH CRASH, DTPM AND MORE LONDONERS THAN EVER IN TOWN, IT ALL MADE FOR ONE AMAZING OZ EXPERIENCE. CLIFF REPORTS...

FRIDAY 3RD MARCH

WHEN I arrive, it's 7am. Last night in Sydney was the annual charity fundraiser held by Sydney scene queen Malcolm Stewart. Tickets are gold dust. Top UK DJ Steve Pitron was on deck duty. I expected the dozen or so friends who'd flown out his year from London to still be going from the night before, full of beans (ok, narcotics) but I find them in bed. Even worse, Mikey's already up and been to the gym. Are these the same people I know from London?

The sun is shining, I'm in Sydney, it's Mardi Gras and I'm not wasting a minute of it. They're happy to see me, but it's 8am so they're not too over the moon by my wake up call. Tough. There's a city to enjoy.

Fast forward to night time and an effort to stay in and save ourselves for Mardi Gras collapses quick smart when Ian suggests that we pop out for a drink for an hour, so its off down to gayland on Oxford Street. Bollocks. At this point our four-day bender begins...

A brief history of my time...

My first Sydney experience was when I

lived there in 1999. The scene was vibrant and full of colourful characters. Arq had just opened, Home had been open a year and Sydney Mardi Gras was the shining jewel in the world's gay calendar. Party tickets would sell out months in advance.

Then, in 2003, I paid a return visit to find that Sydney had become a disappointing caricature of New York City's much-maligned gay scene. Drugs - in particular Crystal Meth and GHB - had taken their toll, draining the city and turning its club scene into a dark and gloomy copy of many major US scenes. Venues had closed, Mardi Gras had suffered serious financial issues and the party had waned, with it no longer attracting the numbers of previous years. For me it was a dire warning to London: we can't be diligent enough in looking after what we have at home.

In fact, the entire Sydney Mardi Gras event faced such serious financial problems that the Board decided to go the way of most large scale free Prides and source sponsorship, which is where Gaydar stepped in, committing A\$1.5million to the event over three years. Other sponsorship offers were

considered, however Gaydar, being a gay-owned company, was deemed the best choice.

I was hesitant to return to a city that, to me, seemed to be a poor shadow of its former self. What persuaded me to go back was the fact that four very good friends of mine were in town DJing at a Crash party - Steve Pitron, Paul Heron, Mikey D and Jamie Head - and another friend, Therese, was headlining the closing show at Mardi Gras. It seemed that if ever I went back to Australia, this would be the year.

It was such a relief to return to Sydney and find it had pulled itself out of its apparent 'decline'. Similar to the feel of Sydney in 1999, there was an energy and buzz on Oxford Street that was lacking three short years ago. And not just because it was Mardi Gras week.

New venues had opened - like Slide and The Colombian - which were slick and sexy, and the music was so much more uplifting, funky and current. Even the downbeat drug culture that seemed to plague my last visit seemed to have eased. The once shabby Midnight Shift even had a major facelift and the music on my first night back had the dancefloor rocking.

And, just last week, Arq rocked to the colossal beats of London's Crash DJs when they arrived for a one-off special. After a dreadful Azure Harbour Party, which saw the heaviest downpour of rain Sydney had experienced in decades, Crash proved to be the surprise of the night, placing Arq firmly back on the map. Taking over one of Sydney's best gay venues, Steve Pitron and Paul Heron commandeered the main floor, giving the Sydney queens a taste of that very distinctive Vauxhall underground sound.

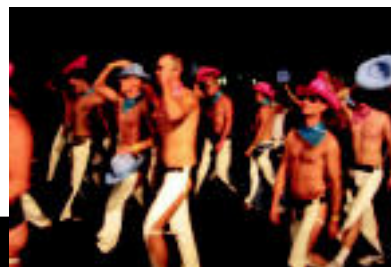
Downstairs, Jamie Head and Mikey D played back-to-back, spinning out a series of funky tracks. The night was a huge success that had the locals talking for days after.

In celebration of Sydney's liberation and newfound zeal I descended onto the Shift dance floor, whipped off my D&G tank top and danced until 3am. Oh, happy days! Leaving on a high note, we spilled out onto Oxford Street and wandered back home (via a trip to the sauna, of course).

MARDI GRAS DAY: SATURDAY 4TH MARCH

THREE hours of sleep later and I was dragging myself out of bed and throwing on a pair of shorts and vest to make it to the morning press conference. (Why can't I ever be early for anything?)

Those Sydney Mardi Gras folk are clever: you can't collect your parade passes without attending the press conference - but did they HAVE to have it at 10:30am in the morning. (Did I HAVE to go out and cane it all night?) Anyhow, I made it to the Marriott Hotel to find the place buzzing with gay journos. I quickly surveyed the scene for sexy totty but spied none. Oh well. A cup ▶



SOUTH CENTRAL BANK HOLIDAY LONG WEEKENDER BENDER

FRI

CHUNK BEAR PRIDE PARTY
DJS LIL JOHN, BEN JAMIN + SEVERINO
CHUNK CD'S + T-SHIRT GIVEAWAY
£3 B4 10:30. £5 AFTER
8PM - 4AM



SAT

EAGLE BEAR & LEATHER PARTY
DJ G.SLINGBACK
PORN CINEMA + CRUISE AREA + VISUALS
FREE B4 11PM. £4 AFTER
9PM - 3AM



SUN

HORSE MEAT DISCO
DJS NEIL, FILTHY LUKE & SEVERINO
BAR-B-Q, COCKTAILS + T-SHIRT GIVEAWAY
£5 ALL NIGHT
6PM - 2AM



MON

VAUXHALL VILLAGE BEAR FETE
BINGO, RAFFLE + BAR-B-Q
DJS MOLEY, BEN JAMIN
& STANTON V SEVERINO
£4 ALL NIGHT. 5PM - 2AM



TUE

LINES & BEARS. LEATHER & FEATHERS PARTY
BEST COSTUME PRIZE, RAFFLE + BUFFET
SIMPLY COME LINE DANCING
£4 MEMBERS, £5 ALL OTHERS
8PM - 2AM



► of tea and two biscuits later and we were seated to hear the Mardi Gras Board's speeches. Marcus Bourget, the Chair of the organisation quickly reminds us that this is more than just a party, it's a hugely important occasion where, once a year, people of all genders, cultures, ages and backgrounds are united with one common theme: sexuality. For all the glitz and flair of a parade and party, the purpose of the event is to draw the attention of the world to our right to equal representation in the eyes of the law and our right to live and love according to who we are: man-to-man, woman-to-woman and all the variations thereof.

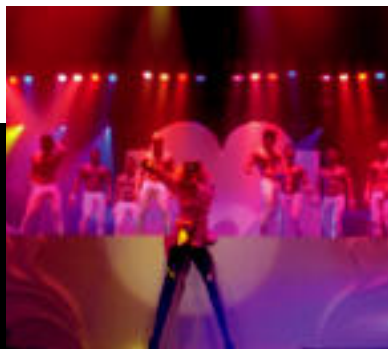
Days of our lives

Excuse me if I seem to have gone all gay activist on you, but we cannot take our freedoms for granted. For all the progress we've made in the UK with the abolishment of Section 28 and Civil Unions, other supposedly democratic and liberal countries still trail behind. You realise the value of these rights even more so when you visit a 'forward thinking' country like Australia to find that their Prime Minister of ten years did all in his power to classify marriage solely as an institution between a man and woman, and civil partnerships aren't even on the agenda. Never mind the other inequalities that exist. As gay men we not only have the right to fancy Freddie Ljungberg, want Madonna to be our mother, Kylie to be our best friend and our grandmothers to be glam like Joan Collins, but we also deserve to be treated no less than anyone else just because we fancy cock over fanny. Moving on, and the final word goes to internationally renowned soprano opera singer and actress Deborah Cheetham, this year's Chief of Parade, who took the role of leading this year's 8,400 parade participants. Deborah is of aboriginal origin and lesbian: she goes on to tell us her story of how she was one of the many thousands of indigenous Australians who were taken from her family decades ago and placed with white adoptive parents.

We hear about her coming out and how her parents couldn't come to terms with her lifestyle choice. Such an inspiring story and another reminder that there's still a way to go to equality and why Mardi Gras, Pride or whatever you want to call it is such an important event. So, now I'm fully charged and emotionally stirred. I leave the conference a proud gay man, raring to get out there and exhibit my gayness to all of Sydney! (Shock and horror I hear you say). Already the queues are forming along Oxford Street and just four hours later you cannot move for the ocean of people flooding the parade route. We have the best seats you could ask for: mobile! Our parade passes allow us to walk the route of the parade amongst the floats and to mix with the parade participants. As tradition dictates, the roaring spectacle that is the Dykes on Bikes get the crowd stirring and cheering wildly. Leather clad, tits out, nipple tassles twirling and hair dyed in every colour of the rainbow flag, these girls demand attention! Deborah Cheetham follows soon after with her partner, Maxine Kohler, and their daughter Tamara. The next two hours are filled with a steady stream of hilarious characters as only a gay parade does best! Interspersed with the more flamboyant moments are political statements, from critical messages against the homophobic government to social messages aimed at our own community, about HIV, ageism and more. Notable floats and groups this year included: The Kate Moss Line Dancers, Desperate Fishwives, Friends of Dick Cheney, The Degendered Vagina, Coming Out Of The Closet (sponsored by Ikea!) and some home grown talent in the form of Gaydar (full of hot boys, of course). Honorary mentions go to the Sisters of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence Sydney house (float 73) who were soon followed by float 98, Living Clean & Sober. Something for everyone, then!

Evening wear

And so, full of pride and maxed-out on poofery, we head away from the procession's flow and back down Oxford Street to change our clammy knickers and slip into a new vest for Part II of the evening: the Mardi Gras party. A short disco nap, a few shots and a quick change of outfit and we were hot-footing it back down through the gay zone and over to Fox Studios. Ever so conveniently located a short fifteen-minute stroll from the gay epicentre that is Oxford Street, the Studios have been the central playground for the annual Mardi Gras party for as long as memory serves. By 2am, the queue's outside have dissipated and we enter the party with ease. The atmosphere is electric. We head straight into the cavernous insides of the RHI: a huge aircraft hanger-like building where we spend the majority of our night. The music here is distinctly funkier, albeit commercially so. Still, when you're catering for 15,000 fussy queens, there is a limit to how underground and edgy you can take the music. I'm with Mikey D, Jamie Head, scene starlet Megan, Steve Pitron and wife Andy Neill, and our good pals Trashy and Ian. We decide to soak up the rest of the dance spaces before getting too comfortable here. Inside the Dome I find Paul Heron and spouse chatting away to more London queens. We hug and exchange kisses and take a moment to reflect on the fabulousness of the fact that we're in Sydney amongst great friends and it's Mardi Gras. (This happens quite a lot tonight as our excited bunch of gay Londoners overflow with emotion, something that increases exponentially with our level of intoxication). The music in the Dome is fierce: tough, deep and dirty. I could dance in here all night, but there's too much to see and do here for my Mardi Gras Virgin friends so it's off for further exploration. I decide the risk of losing everyone for several hours outweighs my need to dance in the Dome so I join them. Over in the cavernous Horden it's Trance City; not to the liking of our gang's musical taste buds but evidently to the delight of several thousand eager Sydneyites. We pay our respects, admire the superior production and then we're off in search of our dance spot. We find ourselves stumbling across the The Forum, formerly City Live. This gorgeous venue (check out the toilets!) underwent a musical makeover this year. Paying homage to the decades that spawned house music, the DJs spun out remixed and reworked disco classics from the past three decades. We particularly take our hat off to Paul Goodyear, who tore the dancefloor up, layering track-over-track so expertly. We spend the rest of our night in the middle of the dancefloor of the RHI, set adrift amongst a sea of ►





Part 1 **The Originals**
DJ Martin Confusion
Slammer
14.04.06

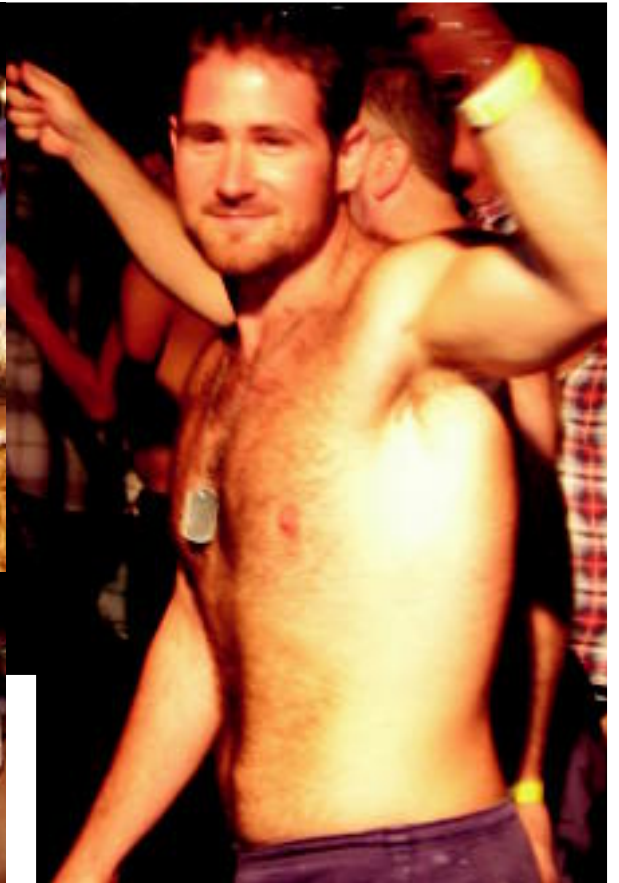
Part 2 **New & improved Formula**
DJ Martin Confusion
+ very special guests
28.04.06

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For guestlist please email
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LAUNCH PARTY
14.04.06

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► tanned and trim hot homo torsos. Megan and I intersperse our night with toilet breaks to refill bottles of water and mingle with other mashed locals. To our surprise, the influx of Brits continues! Men, men, men and many of them familiar Soho faces!

Inevitably on our return to the dancefloor, we find that we've lost our friends so occupy thirty minutes of our time on our own before we discover that they're all actually just metres away from us. The place is so vast and thick with hot, sweaty men they all begin to blend into one writhing mass. Absolutely delicious.

Early in the evening UK legend Jimmy Somerville gives a rousing PA, followed by later shows from Ibiza drag megastar La Troya Asesina's Baby Marcello and an obscure geisha-theme performance by Mary Kiani.

Come 10am it all comes to a close as we hear the familiar beats of the Stonebridge/Therese track 'Take Me Away' being played out. Therese is on for the closing PA. The stage set is amazing, packed with dancers with the Swedish bombshell in the middle of it all. The track finishes and she slips out, moth-like, from her green skimpy number to reveal a flowing white disco dress, all very butterfly-like for 'Put 'Em High', which, like everywhere, was a huge hit in Oz. And then, in a blaze of lights and exploding taffeta, she finishes it off for us: "Happy Mardi Gras!" and its all O.V.A.H.

SUNDAY 5th MARCH

Outside, the sun is blazing. It's hot - very hot! And there are thousands of queens flocking out of the studio grounds: men looking washed-out and weary in nothing more than their underwear, girls in fading neon face paint and outsized queens with bad

footwear marching back up to Oxford Street. Anywhere else in the world and there would be gay bashings aplenty, but this is Oxford Street at Mardi Gras. These are indigenous Australians. Weirdness is what the Street does best.

We skip the infamous recovery parties and decide to make our own on the roof top pool at the Vibe hotel, where Crash promoter Rod Lay is holed up. We also decide to give the much-lauded Toybox party a miss as it's A\$140 a ticket and our extensive list of contacts doesn't extend to getting free tickets for it. I later find out that the party is run by JoJo, formerly of the Frisky parties, an old contact of mine from years ago and that the party was one of the best of the year. But hey-ho, what can you do: you win some, you lose some.

Delirium Tremens Post Meridian

It's not often you arrive on the other side of the world and you have two of London's shining lights represented at one of the planet's biggest international gay events. Not only did Crash storm Sydney last week, but on Sunday 5th March - after Mardi Gras - DTPM was holding its monthly Sydney party. Rested and (partially) recuperated, we apply the Clarins Beauty Flash and head out. The fabulous Amanda Woods greets us on the door and introduces us to Tim who takes us into the venue Tank, which has to be one of the finest spaces I've ever been to in my many years of clubbing.

DTPM Sydney has done wonders to recapture the essence of DTPM London. Tank is a mini-Fabric, with its exposed brick walls, super cool unisex toilets and a trademark DT-style crowd of super-sexy hot-looking Aussie bums. Being DTPM at Mardi Gras season we run into even more London faces. The bold, the beautiful, the good and the downright naughty. We run into Chris Geary and boyfriend who had us in stitches when they arrived in full drag. Blatantly aware of their image as macho circuit muscle boys, they send themselves up in the best way possible - wearing black leather corsets and a full face of Mac.

Time flashed by as London's very own Alan Thompson and Oz superstar Kate Monroe worked the floor. Soon enough we were spilling out of DT and over to leather/cruise club Manacle for their notorious after-hours bash. Inside the basement club the most obscure collection of gay boys were escaping the Sydney heat. The upstairs room was a cruisey cocktail of leather queens and post-DTPM fags, all getting busy on the d:floor to some truly down and dirty tribal-fused house. The moment of the night had to be when one cigar-puffing leather harnessed punter, who had his bitch on their knees giving him a blow job, was asked by the management if he could please not smoke on the dancefloor.

All good things...

Four day bender over and, yes, we did get some time to do the touristy things: Bondi Beach boy watching, dinner by the Harbour Bridge, sex with a spunk in a jacuzzi and a token visit to the Olympic Stadium. But there's no room here for such trivial things. Safe to say, I'm pleased to report that this year will go down in my personal history as not only the year that the Brits invaded Mardi Gras (Crash, DTPM, Gaydar as sponsors, our possee and the endless rabble of tourists who were in town), but also the year that Mardi Gras (and Sydney) regained its joie de vivre. Here's to Sydney and her incredible ability to party: Long may she reign.

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TITTI LA CAMP
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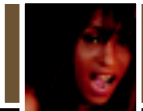


EASTER SUNDAY

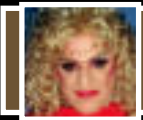


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SUNDAY 16TH APRIL

SANDRA

OPEN UNTIL 2AM



OPENING TIMES

SHUFFLEWICK BAR

MON - THURS ----12PM-1AM
FRI - SAT ----12PM - 2AM
SUN ---- 12PM - 10.30PM

CABARET BAR

MON - THURS ----10PM-2AM
FRI - SAT ----10PM - 3AM
SUN ---- 9PM - 1AM