

Anarch(ism)y on the Dance Floor

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Underground dance spaces, or raves, have historically been a breeding ground for self-exploration, liberation and community. This is due in part to the experimental and impactful nature of electronic dance music and the anti-corporate ethos of the spaces themselves.

Raves emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, and were characterized as “grassroots organized, antiestablishment, unlicensed all-night dance parties, featuring electronically produced music (EDM)” (T. L. Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007, pg. 500; source E. Waite, 2024).

The rave scene connects individuals through the shared experience of music and movement. The synchronous – albeit varied – social, psychological, emotional and spiritual impacts of dance foster a sense of community and solidarity among individuals – impacts that can extend to social and political movements beyond dance spaces.

Halifax became well known for its rave boom in the 1990s, which opened doors to more accessible, free movement spaces. Christopher Reynolds – known as CPR – is a local DJ and event organizer who remembers this time:

"The 90s were clique-y in terms of subcultures, but suddenly there was this new larger subculture that everyone found a place in. From there you got fresh cross-pollination and collaboration to create a new culture surrounding these events."

Since the late 2000s, Halifax has seen the rise of “post-rave dance parties”. The music remains, but the energy has shifted. Jump the Fence collective explains why:

“After the popularity of ‘raving’ rose, most parties became -and are currently- highly regulated, curated and take place at established clubs and bars. Raving was outlawed, and the dance parties became ‘soulless’. Profit motivations overtook the space, pushing alcohol sales and not dancing. The scene became a microcosm of the capitalist regime”

This transition stripped away the original, punk nature of these spaces. Even when event organizers desire this vibe, it comes out pre-fabricated and sanitized. People aren't discussing the so-called “radical” or “anti-establishment” movement anymore. The dance floor had become devoid of the social and political discussions and actions that originally characterized raves.

Then COVID-19 arrived. The pandemic became a pivotal time to re-examine the dance floor. Restricted access to dance spaces reminded people of the collective power imbued in the organized connection that dancing facilitates. The Halifax scene has seen a resurgence of the foundational movements that put Halifax on the map in international music and culture communities.

TAKE ACTION

Engage! Talk to people, ask questions and see what really matters to you in your community. Attend local arts events, dance as you can/if you wish, and remind yourself that these spaces and the ultimate goal of them is for connection, to inspire the creativity and critical thinking of yourself & others.

The power of these spaces has become re-invigorated, and re-radicalized. New initiatives such as Nectar Collective and Jump the Fence (JTF) are reconciling the original intention of rave by re-embedding the dance scene with social inclusivity and political intention. As obscure – yet very real – pushes for Israel Defence Force raves emerge, as BoilerRoom gets purchased by the private equity firm KKR, it becomes crucial to remember that these spaces were meant to serve as opposition to oppressive power.

Jump the Fence is a donation-based fundraiser. Their first three shows of 2025 have raised a collective \$3,642.75 for causes ranging from local Mi’kma’ki mutual aid to the Sanabel team, a Palestinian food distribution project. The organizers of JTF note: “something beautiful happens when we take the profit out of it. It removes the barrier between the people playing, attending and organizing.”

As the political world becomes increasingly scary, we must look to our community spaces to find comfort and action. "It's the politics that makes this special. This is an invitation, and we want everybody's voices there," says JTF.



Poster for a Jump the Fence event, October 2025. @blackboxsoundcru (Instagram)

Izzy (she/her) & Lenka (they/she) are ravers and community members at large in K'ijipuktuk. They met on the dance floor and now consider it to be home in many ways. Izzy's background is in neuroscience, Lenka's sustainability, but they find their common ground in movement, and local organization.