For nearly a century, “gay nightlife” has provided a crucial landscape for all kinds of gay mayhem and magic to ensue, for survival technologies to brew, and for queer world building and culture-making to flourish outside the constraints of heteronormative productivity and daytime capitalist surveillance. Throughout history we can uncover stories and anecdotes that highlight the significance of queer nightlife in the struggle for liberation, its central role in affirming queer and trans identities and forging connections between kindred strangers, is only the tip of the iceberg.

We’ve seen queer leather bars historically become sites for critical community organizing, allowing people to address issues from police harassment to the AIDS epidemic, from sex worker support groups to harm reduction supply distro. We know by now that many direct action campaigns and mutual aid networks have been created and maintained through relationships built in queer galleys after sundown. Nightlife venues have long been sites of struggle that queers have fought to protect: Stonewall in Greenwich Village, Comptons 24hr Cafeteria in the Tenderloin. We know the By Hook or by Crook dive-bar love story settings, and the locking of eyes on the dance floor or across the pool table, or under the stars in the forest…we do come from a lineage of raving homosexuals, for fucks sake.

Thinking about this inspired me to have a conversation with DJ EnriqueDammit, a DJ and party promoter who moved from Los Angeles to Eugene eight years ago and has built a rotating slate of queer-plus pop-up parties in this city with no dedicated queer venue.

At 62, Eugene-based DJ, EnriqueDammit, has spent much of his life curating queer sonic safe havens for his communities. In this conversation, Dammit reflects on his years in Los Angeles, the origins and evolutions of current projects, and why he sees nightlife as a form of crucial, liberatory world-building.…

Mx Rahi Tea: Welcome! It’s an honor to be interviewing one of the great local icons of queer nightlife! For people who have the audacity to not know of you, could you please introduce yourself?

EnriqueDammit: I am DJ EnriqueDammit, I moved to Eugene about 8 years ago and have been doing a number of queer-plus-targeted parties around Eugene and Springfield for some years. My DJ influences are Dimitri from Paris, Horse Meat Disco, DJ Harvey, Victor Rodriguez, Chris Cruse, Purple Disco Machine, James Hype, L.P. Rhythm, Nicky Siano, Frankie Knuckles, Larry Levan, and Chuck E. Starr, to name a few.

Mx Rahi Tea: Oh shit, I have some queer ethnomusicology homework to do! Before we dive into the queer cultural placemaking magic you’re responsible for in this town, tell us a little about your history as a DJ and queer party promoter before moving to Eugene.

Dammit: I first started DJing in 1994 in Los Angeles. My best friend Jeffrey

and I, along with two other people, were celebrating our 30th birthdays - which if you do the math, makes me 62! We approached the owner of one of our favorite dive bars in Thai Town, an Asian drag bar, and asked if we could have our joint birthday party there. It was a tiny, postage-stamp-sized bar, but 200 people showed up! The owner asked if we wanted to do more parties, so we started throwing them every Friday. This was pre-digital, so everything was word of mouth. It was a different time, before digital marketing, so we made and sent post cards to each other with the original tagline, “Cheap Drinks, Crappy Music, Slutty Men.”

Mx Rahi Tea: Hot! I’d kill for a framed piece of that ephemera! Nowadays, you’re most well known in these parts for starting and sustaining the queer dance party in town called CHUB, as well as for the local DIY community nightlife calendar you created, The Gay Agenda. Tell us more about what inspired these projects.

Damnit: Well, we started CHUB for two reasons. One, we were tired of queer people saying there was nothing to do in the area after Spectrum shut down, and two, we didn’t like that people had to drive two hours just to get to a supposedly fun party. Everything I’ve personally done has been targeted to the Eugene-Springfield areas. My goal has always been to serve this community, because not everybody has the means to go to out of town parties! We’re gay! We’ve always known how to create our own fun. No one else is going to do it for us, so we do it for each other!

When we came up with the name, we thought it would be a play on the sexual innuendo, and it was initially more cis gay male targeted. As the party grew, queer people with a wide variety of body types, desires and kinks across the gender diversity spectrum showed up and were encouraged to be in their power, to dance up on the stage as impromptu go-go’s, etcetera. It has become very much a queer party about celebrating your body, and inhabiting your most provocative self expression.

Mx Rahi Tea: The community go-go dancing seems especially important. Unlike many parties where dancers go through pre-audition processes before being hired to go-go onstage, your method gives people a rare opportunity to be legible in the joy of being a consentingly slutty spectacle!

Dammit: Yes! My intention is always to reach people who had never done it before, who had always felt insecure about how their body currently is, or who didn’t feel desired or attractive. We need to know and feel our beauty, and everyone deserves to take up space on a visible platform. I can’t tell you how many people, when I’m able to convince them to jump up on stage, have told me it was the first time they’d ever done anything like that, and that the rush they get and the sense of empowerment are really gratifying. CHUB is a very sexually charged space, but often we’ve heard from people who identify on the ace spectrum as having felt deeply in their power and beauty while go-go dancing in the space as well.

Mx Rahi Tea: Interesting, so these world-building techniques crack open space for an embodied experience of queer dancing, thats not necessarily sexual in the nature of its empowerment. It also queers the false binary between actor

and spectator, performer and audience…

Damnit: It's little things like that that really matter. Also when this boundary between entertainer and patron disappears, people will come up to me and engage throughout the night, and everyone becomes just as entitled to the stage as I am. It's for the community, for the people who show up, so I want to make sure everybody enjoys themselves and feels seen.

Mx Rahi Tea: What other ways does your queer world-building manifest in these spaces? One of the things that stands out about CHUB is the way it so successfully portals you into a different environment once you've crossed over a threshold from the world outside.

Dammit: Yes, this is very intentional. One way of achieving this is that we started a clothing check for people who might not feel comfortable traveling in club or fetish wear. They can come in, change out of their street clothes and be more authentic to themselves. Many of the male patrons will strip down to a jockstrap or a harness. As the crowd expanded and people saw that happening, it gave others permission to express themselves, too. It is a place meant to feel safe to show up to in non-normative, visually provocative form, with the freedom to conduct ourselves in queer fashions we see fit. We used to get some looky-lews at first, but now its really come into its own pretty robust, autonomous scene.

Mx Rahi Tea: In addition to your commitment to providing spaces that house and generate queer joy, you're also invested in the longterm project of queer folx keeping each other alive…

Damnit: Yes, we always have rapid HIV testing available onsite at CHUB, as well as a harm reduction bar to distribute Narcan, condoms and gloves, information on PreP, and clean injection supplies for trans folks.

Mx Rahi Tea: CHUB has also developed a distinctive approach to photography. The images feel like a record of community events rather than a glossy, carefully staged club advertisement for a party. What are you hoping to capture?

Dammit: Yes, our photos are highly stylized. We're really proud of that visual aspect and the memories we're helping people make! We work with Chris Hampton of Chris Hampton Photography. I told him, capture candid moments of joy! I want pictures of people hugging, kissing, acting risque in the go-go cage, feeling themselves. We want to document the event, but we also want to support people in preserving these empowering late-night memories.

We generally release a slideshow about two weeks after the event. The photos are available for people to download in high resolution from Chris's website, at no cost. Its about documenting our communities when they come together.

Mx Rahi Tea: Yes! Which asks an important question about the role of historical documentation under capitalism; who gets to preserve memories? What's considered archival, and what's considered disposable? I must say that your investment in the documented preservation of queer cultural spaces

throughout time is something that helps us imagine ourselves into a future. In regards to the here and now, you've also been clear about the importance of making current information about local queer nightlife events easily accessible an in one place! Will you share how this philosophy informed the creation of our local Gay Agenda calendar?

Dammit:

Yes, it's about making participation accessible. I want queer people to feel beautiful, powerful and comfortable expressing themselves. I want people to know that they deserve a multitude of spaces where they can be themselves, celebrate who they are and connect with each other. Throughout the 90s, queer party promoters were very tightly knit. We took care of each other, promoted each other's events and extended hospitality to one another. We weren't in competition with each other or loyal to commercial venues. We just wanted our communities to know about local queer goings-on so we could find each other. That's the mentality that led me to create the Gay Agenda.

Over the last couple of years, the community of promoters around town has created a really solid scene, especially for a city with no dedicated queer space. There's CHUB, Dyke Night, Fag Night, Gaymeson's and others. As more people attend these events, the next wave of organizers feel empowered to do their own thing. And I think the pop-up model is fun because everything is a new adventure. We don't necessarily need a dedicated queer space, (although one would be great). Straight people have a ton of options for places to gather and celebrate. Why shouldn't we have the same liberty to occupy and create a multitude of safer queer spaces in the town where we live and work?

Mx Rahi Tea: There's also something significant about bringing queer events into venues that aren't traditionally queer, as well as refusing to be kept in one predictable place every night of the week…

Dammit: Absolutely. In order to get into these spaces, we had to start a dialogue with venue and bar owners. We'd say, "Hey, we want to do this type of event in your space, which isn't traditionally queer. Would you be open to it?". In doing so, we get a lot of information about which venues do or don't have our backs….we're looking to open doors and build bridges between our queer communities and everybody else.

Mx Rahi Tea: Well, thank you so much Enrique– it has been my sincere, homotextual pleasure to conduct this interview with you. Is there anything else on your mind that you'd like to share before we close out?

Dammit: Because the parties that I'm currently doing are mostly for 21 plus bars, it feels like the younger queers are being underserved, period. I plan to start an 18-plus event soon at one of the local venues, most likely starting in November. I can't really discuss the details now since we're still working out the deal, but that's my next goal– to create an event for younger patrons to give them access to queer nightlife as well.

Mx Rahi Tea: Hell yes. Way to put those anti-adult supremacy values into action! You're the best!

CHUB, the local dance party iconically slated as being "*for all who appreciate Gays, Glamour, and Sleaze*" is themed and happens on the first Saturday of every month. You can get more information about this and other queer nighttime shenanigans here or check out The Gay Agenda hanging IRL at The Lavender Network building.