

You trade your five dollars for a stamp from the bouncer with a nod as you step into the dimly lit room. John Henry's is busier than you've ever seen, the counter is crowded, exhausted bartenders run around filling everyone's orders. You breathe a sigh of relief that you pre-gamed tonight and can put off that mess for at least a little while. This is more queers than you've ever seen in one room in this hippy town. Realizing this sparks some warmth in your chest. You spot your friend in the crowd and make your way over to them, exchanging pleasantries, you have to shout just to be heard. Then the music starts and all attempts at conversation are aborted as a bassline cuts through your speech about the latest friend drama, relegating all of those concerns to the back of your mind as you're possessed with the singular urge to dance the night away. A banner hangs from the DJ's table. You and your friend push to the stage to get a better look, and a pogo dancer with the sides of their head shaved, flagging in lingerie and a leather harness blows you a kiss, you tip them graciously, blushing all the while. Behind the dancer the DJ drops the beat and your eyes finally settle on the banner at the booth. "Queers Support the Resistance" with a red triangle. A symbol of the armed resistance of Palestine.

Dyke Night has two regular DJ's, DJ Vele and DJ Cumulus. The three of us sit in a park, Vele shows me a new song she's been working on while we soak up the sun. "So many people call you dyke and fag as an offensive thing, and suddenly you start saying it and it's weird and taboo." sighs Vele. "Calling it Dyke Night seems to encompass something... and the first Fag Night is in June with an adjacent group. We're reclaiming these terms, and we're gonna be freaks about it." Laughs Cumulus. If these terms upset you, this article will continue to use them unapologetically, and I invite you to attend the next Dyke Night to work that tension out on the dance floor.

"Queer is the abnormal, the strange, the dangerous. Queer

involves our sexuality and our gender, but so much more. It is our desire and fantasies and more still. Queer is the cohesion of everything in conflict with the heterosexual capitalist world. Queer is a total rejection of the regime of the Normal." – Mary Nardini Gang, *Toward the Queerest Insurrection.*

"It all started with a house party..." says Cumulus, recounting Dyke Night's inception, "There's been a need in Eugene for queer spaces to have fun and dance, and spaces that are politically informed." Dyke night rectifies this by creating a space for trans eclectic electronic dance music alongside groups like Ghost House, who's goth EDM has similarly found a home at John Henry's. But Dyke Night has put a distinctly political spin on this electrifying genre, "Dyke night is a fun rendezvous night for us to dance, for a lot of people it's the break in between to have a little release before you're out there organizing for your struggle..." adds Vele, "it's a place to recharge before we get back into the streets."

A wheat pasted poster at a crosswalk peels away slowly. The poster calls "Dykes to the Streets" in solidarity with Palestinian Liberation. Eugene's Dyke Night hearkens back to the sixty's and seventies, a time of radical queer experiences and the fight for equality and dignity. When Lesbians marched through the streets in their Doc Martens, cementing the brand as a staple of queer fashion. The University of Oregon hosts a history project on Eugene's own Lesbian history and a documentary called "Outliers and Outlaws", their website features an interactive map of radical lesbian spaces in Eugene during this time, highlighting Eugene as a "lesbian mecca". This subculture flourished for thirty years before somewhat dwindling in the 90's. The landscape of queer politics has changed since these radical beginnings, acceptance into the mainstream came at a cost, one which was known all too well to figures like Marsha P Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. Their work in the Gay Liberation Front was radical,

with mutual aid to homeless queer youth and prisoners as a focal point of their activities. As a result, they were sidelined not only by mainstream society, but by cisgender white gays as well, who's politics of optics and normalcy came at the cost born by the people they swept under the rug. In the end, according to the Oxford Academic Journal of Social History, the Gay Liberation Front found more solidarity with the Black Panthers than with liberal 'normalcy' politics, leaving us with today's landscape.

"Being queer doesn't mean you consider yourself political. There could be a dyke night that didn't have the same politic but it would still be called dyke night. It's not about the word, it's about the practice, and what you're putting out there. Sure, if you go back to the 60s and 70s, they had the Gay Liberation Front, and lots of other organizations that sprang up around queer emancipation. But since then it's been watered down significantly, so just calling something queer or dyke night doesn't mean it has a radical or revolutionary politic. We have city pride and that's... y'know, thanking the cops publicly." – DJ Vele.

The last Dyke Night just so happened to fall on March 8th, International Working Women's day, which led to the political edge of the event taking a sharper turn from the typical banner that always appears on the DJ booth, proclaiming support for the resistance. "With the space of dyke night we want to invite people to be politicized. We have a stake in fighting for collective liberation and global solidarity, and to feel that in the midst of celebrating each other." Says Cumulus. On that International Working Women's Day, Vele stood on the stage and delivered a speech before her set, one which ended on a climactic note of "over a hundred people screaming 'death to imperialism, death to America, death to zionism', and doing so joyfully. It was powerful, it felt awesome." Reminisces Vele. The crowd seemed energized by this synthesis, having gotten away with chanting something that in most places

would have you 86'd from the grounds with a call to the FBI to boot.

But both Cumulus and Vele push back on the idea that Dyke Night itself is resistance, clarifying that "we push the bounds of what's acceptable by screaming 'death to America', but aren't resisting capitalism." To these DJ's, resistance is defined as direct action, resisting capitalism and imperialism. Cumulus explained that, "There's political aspects of the container of Dyke Night, but we wouldn't want people to think that going to Dyke Night is their act of political resistance in the world... but we as an organizing team care about mutual aid and being community oriented, trying to make sure we always give a portion of what we make in a night to local orgs.". Vele jokes that what they *do* resist is price gouging by keeping the Dyke Night door fee's five dollars, a price which she emphasizes will not change.

"DYKE NIGHT EUGENE // ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE // SWEAT FOR THE END OF ALL EMPIRES"

The joy in the air was palpable with every 'Death To America' chant that cut through it, echoing ecstatically between worlds of hedonistic dance parties and mutual aid, highway blockades, and subterfuge. "A lot of people will say that joy is resistance- but I think that bypasses a lot of things that have more impact on the world." cautions Cumulus, "I have a teacher that talks about this, that joy is being your authentic self, but as a white person it doesn't stop there." Perhaps, in this author's humble opinion, it's worth dropping the language of joy as resistance, a solipsism which encourages complacency, with actively finding joy *in* resistance.

But, Vele adds, "I don't really have a strong definition of queer joy- I just call it joy. I feel joyous seeing all my queer friends and getting to dance with them.... Organizing

outside of Dyke Night, that shit brings me more than joy, it brings me optimism. So come to Dyke Night. Come say hi. Keep dancing. Organize the shit you wanna do. Get connected, because we have the fuckin' world to win." – DJ Vele.

Written by Azria Raventhorn, interviews with DJ Cumulus and DJ Vele.

Ghost House: <https://ghosthouseeug.com/>

John Henry's: <https://www.johnhenrysbar.com/>

Outlier's and Outlaws: <https://outliersoutlaws.uoregon.edu/>

GLF and BP's :
<https://academic.oup.com/jsh/article-abstract/52/3/860/4804309?redirectedFrom=PDF&login=false>

Trans exclusion:
<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/sylvia-rivera>

Toward The Queerest Insurrection:
<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/mary-nardini-gang-toward-the-queerest-insurrection>

Doc Mertens and the gays
<http://www.capilanocourier.com/2021/10/19/how-doc-martens-became-a-staple-in-lesbians-closets/>