

DO YOU DANCE OR DESIGN?

By Yolanda Muelas*

A day in 1999... A few months away from the year 2000... A little less than 200 days. How many hours that is. I don't know. I don't know where we will be dancing then. I suppose, more or less, at the same places as now. I hope in more. Barcelona is a nice city but there aren't that many clubs to go to. If you trail around the clothes and record shops, visit the bars, if you normally follow the regular route (you know. Zsu-Zsa. Revólver. CD Drom. Oh La La! And all that) you will always end up with your backpack full of flyers. It's as if Barcelona was sensational and every night you were faced with the terrible dilemma of choosing from endless interesting offerings. But the truth is there are only a few clubs that operate on a stable basis. You never know how long the others are going to last. Nevertheless, it is better than it was a few years ago, when the design bars were on their last day, where the rum and coke boys and really cute girls would meet up (and still do, of course) in discos to the rhythms of Top 40. When acid house fever faded away, Studio 54 was pushed to the brink of disaster. Shortly afterwards, some "enlightened ones" of the local nightlife ended up wrecking what was the temple of Barcelona modernity in the eighties (if Otto Zutz with its mega-cool-supermodel version will excuse me). Studio 54 is now being converted into a hall for weddings and banquets, complete with mariachi bands. Sniff, sniff.

The early nineties were horrendous, years in which Cobi (the Olympic mascot) appeared even in your worst nightmares. Why? Because Barcelona had dressed itself up, yet with no place to go, we were so bored it became unbearable. It was a city, both posh and tacky, cosmopolitan and provincial, yet proud and supportive. And, as the song goes, Friends for Ever. Yet what was most important: Barcelona was no longer a flea on the map. Anybody and everybody, including the most muddle-headed Japanese knew about Barcelona '92.

Olympic euphoria was a disturbance but the hangover was worse. Post-Olympic Barcelona turned into an apathetic city filled with guiris (northern Europeans and Americans) who came here to enjoy all the marvels they had read about in the guidebooks. At that point, club culture was something from the beyond. At least, beyond our frontiers. The only flyers you could find were pretty photocopies listing the prices of litres of beer, litres of rum and coke, calimochos (a cocktail made of cheap wine and Coca-Cola) and the rest, from the "exquisite" sawdust-carpeted bars on Escudellers street. But things started to change. People began to discover, by word of mouth, an interesting club called San Francisco. Though it didn't last long, it was enough to turn the tables on a situation that had reached the brink of suicide. That was six or seven years ago. Do you remember what you were doing six years ago? Can you remember? I myself, to be honest, find it a bit difficult. My interest led me to the parties the mods held in the more or less presentable venues. Wonderful allnighters full of soul, r'n'b and jazz. Nights in which you'd dance until your feet gave out. I became interested in what they called "acid jazz". Eddie Piller is a funny cat, whom I like. A bloke with class, mad on the black sounds which were

fashionable during his teens and who now sported the hippest look with some serious locks and a medallion dangling on his chest. If you spent half your life hooked on the Motown sounds and Stax, if a Chuck Brown song made your hair stand on end, or if your feet run away from themselves while hearing any number by Jimmy Smith, then it isn't surprising that your curiosity was aroused by my Pat Piller's new venture. Curiosity turned into enthusiasm with new propositions such as Corduroy and the James Taylos Quartet. And it was this enthusiasm. I suppose, together with a desire to shake off the Olympic drowsiness, that encouraged a group of friends, in a sudden fit of lucidity, to form one of the promoters without which this city would definitely have not been the same. I'm talking about Producciones Animadas and of those groovy nights at Monumental full of jazz. Latin soul and funk. At last, the club as a meeting place, as a place where things happen and where people with common interests meet up to enjoy themselves and music. The disc-jockey stopped being a wallflower and became that interesting guy who carries around in his case the best records you could imagine. And around here there were quite a few DJs. In fact, some formed part of Producciones Animadas, while others created the organisation called Disc-Jockeys Without Frontiers. They even had their own fanzine, a few photocopied pages which, with the passing of time, became one of the most interesting magazines you can buy in a kiosk. I'm referring, of course, to Disco 2000. From that point on, things accelerated. Or maybe not, but the truth is new clubs appeared, and at that time this in itself was a big deal. Apart from Producciones Animadas, there was also Vots, who should end up sorking with clubs such as Apolo. Trocadero (which the Vots baptised as La Piscina), and Polyester. And not only that, when britpop was wreaking havoc in the British charts, the indie phenomenon was a rising star in Barcelona. A Saco in L' Hospitalet was the first. Later New York, a recycled red-light joint on Escudellers, was converted into the undisputed temple of poppier sounds, where hundreds of kids would dance every night, moving their little heads and humming Blur's Girls & Boys. And if we add to this the girls and boys jumping ship from A Saco, disembarking at Zeleste, we'll understand why Barcelona was flooded with brightly coloured flyers with nice pictures, and the streets filled with slim girls in extra-small T-shirts and anorexic lads, tiltintg their pretty heads as if they were posing for Melody Maker. Someone in a magazine here, some time later, spoke of the Peter Pan generation and although I think placing labels on people is stupid, the truth is, few have been as accurate as this.

We are now in 1994, the year when the first Festival of Advanced Music and Multimedia Art was held, or to be concise: Sonar. If we admit that Producciones Animadas were the first to introduce club culture, we must acknowledge that it was the people from Advanced Music who put the city on the electronic music world map. Scarcely a few hundred people turned up at the first Sonar. Five years later, Advanced Music managed to bring together more than thirty thousand over three days: Who said they were scared? Who said that electronic music (whether dance or not) was only for a handful of enlightened ones and E-heads and a couple of clever-clog critics fond of easy labels? The evolution of Sonar indicates fairly clearly the extent to which Barcelona has changed over this period. Not only because Barcelona has entered the

definitive DJs club circuit (people that have passed through here include Surgeon, Jeff Mills, Basement Jaxx, Joey Beltram, DJ Sneak, Amon Tobin. Stacey Pullen, Josh Wink, Jedi Knights, Laurent Garnier and Dave Clark, to name but a few), but because, finally, there are some interesting places to go. Its not that there are tonnes of thousands, as I pointed out in the beginning, but we could say (let's be a bit more positive) that it is not bad. And all this, thanks to people like Night Sun Group, who were responsible for the Fellini club and La Terraza, or to MurmurtownLaGloria, promoters of one of the city's essential clubs, and organisers of the dance tent at the Festival Internacional de Benicàssim. The club is, of course, the Nitsa. Five years in the thick of things, this indispensable weekend meeting point, with some really flashy flyers courtesy of Rafamateo and Typerware, has a line-up which, years ago, we weren't capable of dreaming of. Was anyone there the day of Granja Kru? That's what I'm talking about. At the Nitsa, people dance to house, electro, drum'n'bass, breakbeat, techno or whatever. Trendy clothes are shown off as if they weren't important, and if that wasn't enough, it turns your weekends upside down. That's why you won't get out of queuing at the door. But we aren't going to complain. However, on the subject of queues, let us not forget the troubles they had the day they opened the Moog, the first club to open its doors to the public every night of the week. Being next to the Ramblas has its advantages, I suppose. That was a couple of years ago, and together with the Nitsa, it is another place you must visit. Is there anything else? There is, I'm not going to forget itinerant clubs such as Touché (now in the Star's Club) or Sporting Club (their sessions at the Veneno were incredible), Octopussy (essential in the summer, with its terrace), the Picasso (once again the Vots) or the penultimate fashionable club in the city. Dot.

It seems like you hear the same sounds everywhere. Now, there's a lot of breakbeat, drum'n'bass and hip hop, and some electro. But, for example, can anybody tell me where you can listen to deep house and garage in Barcelona? In the Nitsa? Yeah, sometimes. But we miss, for example. Qué? Te Dije (why the devil did they close?). Also there are other things we miss, but maybe this is not the moment to list of each one of them. Yes, we already have a scene (I detest that word) to indulge ourselves in. We have nice clubs, nice flyers, interesting record labels (Minifunk, Cosmos, Boozo, Novophonic, Donna Lee, Yo Gano y Tú Pierdes, Zona Bruta...), magazines (Disco 2000, Self, Undersounds, Dance de Lux, aB) and terrific DJs who make us want to dance. It's not everything, but it's something. It's enough for us to want more. To be able to look back in the year 2001 and see that something very small has become big. Now that would be good.

**director of aB and Micro magazines and Florida Dance Magazine.*