

Being 'in' at the local disco

By CRAIG PIECHURA

The mission: Find out if the average man-on-the-street is admitted into Southfield's so-called exclusive Oscar's discotheque.

The undercover agent: The average man-on-the-street reporter for a major metropolitan twice-weekly newspaper.

Biographical info: Agent hasn't danced since the hully-gully went belly up and thinks Calvin Klein is lead singer with the Chipmunks. Agent is known to wear brown shoes with gum soles.

Report follows:

Having picked up female cohort for rendezvous, I wheel dinged-up brown Horizon into parking lot full of Trans Ams, TR-6s and an occasional Cordoba. Stash paper bag from cheapo hamburger stand under seat as parking lot attendant approaches to park car. As ignition is turned off and agents walk away, engine keeps coughing due to run-on problem. Run-on problem makes parking lot attendant look askance at vehicle.

Entering the chi-chi establishment, we are met by a Phil Coughon, doorman, who stands behind a wooden pulpit with the words "Homies from the church" carved into it. Coughon is sorry to inform this agent that we will not be admitted because aforementioned agent neglected to wear a suit coat, sport coat or reasonable facsimile.

"No jeans, no corduroys, no leather," Coughon informs us. "Men must wear a jacket and women must have suitable evening wear." Female cohort told her attire is acceptable.

In subsequent conversation the following day with general manager John Rogers, I learn that more formal attire is expected to be worn on weekends. I'm also told that on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays a reservation — which must be made in person ahead of time — is expected.

We take this to mean suit coats, not sport coats and dresses, not fancy pants. Reservations are needed if the establishment is crowded. A half hour after being denied entrance into establishment, we return with this agent in white sport coat. This time doorman willing to take \$3 cover charge from each of us but reluctant to be interviewed about admission policy.

BECAUSE both of us are on duty, we order non-alcoholic, but trendy, glasses of carbonated water substance known as Perrier. Bill for two tumblers of fizzy water comes to \$4.50, lime included. Music not as loud as we were led to expect in briefing. Most of the disco

tunes, we discover, have "Boogie" in title. "Get down" is also popular theme. Disc jockey Gizelle St. John informs that "Boogie with Me" by a group called Possees is the biggest song at the moment among Oscar's regulars.

"And they love 'Hot Stuff' by Donna Summer," she adds. When Ms. St. John goes home, does she listen to disco, much like a mailman goes home and takes a walk?

"I listen to jazz mostly. When I go home it takes me an hour to unwind, believe it or not."

I take note of that comment because many people tell me disco helps them unwind. In fact, without bringing up the topic of tension, most persons I talk to that evening say disco dancing is a tension release for them.

Suki Frewericks, a photographer from Birmingham says the attraction of disco for her is "human contact, the physicality, sensuality and eroticism. Strike eroticism in the article, will you please?"

Mary Taylor of Fenton says disco is "a sign of the tension in our culture."

"It reminds me of the old Shirley Temple movies," Mrs. Taylor explains. "She allowed people to fantasize for a while, to forget about their problems. I'm sure today, with all our financial problems, there is a need for fantasies to get away from realities."

Her husband Marvin almost didn't get into Oscar's that night because he, like this agent, didn't wear a sportcoat in the 90 degree weather.

WITH THE help of his companion and frequent visitor to the disco, Harvey Fink of Southfield, Marvin Taylor was admitted sans sport coat and spared the embarrassment of heading back to Fenton without a dance.

Fink was asked if he approved of the exclusionary admittance policy that almost kept his friend out.

"No, that doesn't bother me," Fink said. "I've been in similar situations. A great deal of life comes down to who you know and what you know. If I was in that position (being denied entrance) I'd either go around it or go through it; whatever you're capable of."

Fink said he lives close to Oscar's and frequents the place.

"They (the Taylors) asked me how this place was different," Fink said. "There's more glamour, more style in the way a person moves, they're more into their appearance here and I would say Oscar's attracts more of a wit-it crowd in the society today."

"The typical disco crowd is not a very cultured crowd."

While celebrities are synonymous with New York's Studio 54, the grand-

daddy of exclusionary disco clubs, the only luminary to be found at Oscar's Thursday night was Bill Bonds, TV newscaster, sitting at the end of the bar in the singles section after the 11 p.m. newscast.

Bonds declined to be interviewed on the sociological significance of disco music, explaining that he came to Oscar's to meet former Detroit Lion Mel Farr on a business matter. Farr, an auto dealer, couldn't make it so Bonds chatted with three women and a man at the bar.

Rogers, Oscar's general manager, said while "there is a little bit of an aura" about the place, the club doesn't use the same admission policy found at Studio 54.

"Our policy here is basically make reservations in person, especially on your busier nights when you have to tighten up the policy. Certain people tend to make reservations and certain people try to get in without making reservations."

I asked Rogers whether a nerd dressed in white shoes, polyester slacks

and sport coat who made a reservation well in advance would be admitted into Oscar's on a busy night. Would a nerd who followed the rules be excluded for not meeting the beautiful people (B.P.) standard?

"I KNOW what you're angling for," Rogers said. "We've had enough press and publicity comparing us to Studio 54's policy. We try to be as selective as possible without offending anyone. I think that for the people who come here often, we owe them this."

"If somebody's acting a little weird, we don't want him in to offend them. But it's not like that at Studio 54 which has a person in a tux admitted one minute and a person in blue jeans the next. Here, if people dress properly and know how to conduct themselves and make a reservation in advance, they'll be admitted."

With that, my sociological fact-finding mission was complete. I slurped the dregs of my fizzy water and headed out into the night to ponder problems like cars that refuse to turn off.



Disco time at Oscar's happens five nights a week. But just what does it take to be judged hip enough to enter the portals of the discotheque? (Staff photo by Gary Friedman)

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