

ELECTRIC FLING

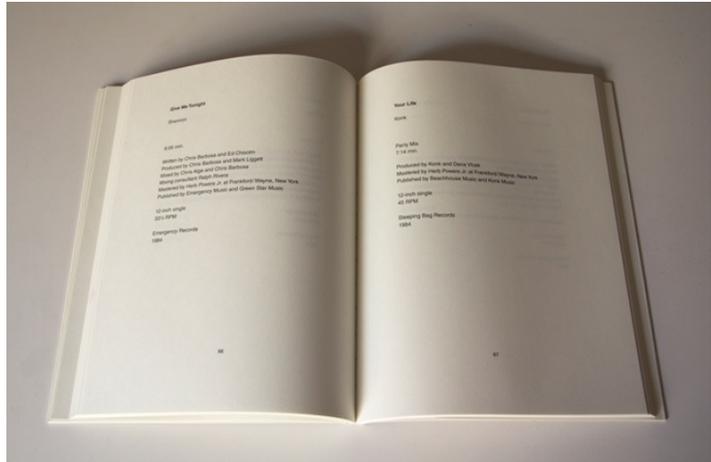
New York Nights

Andy Beta scours New York—from a museum to a summer camp upstate—trying to locate the essence of classic dancefloors via memory, imagination, and bass.

By Andy Beta , October 8, 2014

A1 “Last Night”

In the same way that images from pop culture can present you with a degree of seeming familiarity with New York City without ever actually stepping in a Chinatown puddle, waiting in vain for the 7 train, or inhaling the steam rising out from a manhole cover in Midtown, I knew about David Mancuso's *The Loft* before I knew anything about *The Loft*. At the turn of the century, a tip on a message board from New York DJ Dan Selzer mentioned that the best way to hear the music of a neglected dance producer named Arthur Russell would be via a compilation called *David Mancuso Presents the Loft*. Situated in the heart of Texas at the time, I special ordered the set from a CD store, waited three weeks for it to arrive, and then



experienced a strain of leffield disco far removed from the “Jammin’ Oldies” rotation. The fact that *The Loft* parties were ground zero for modern dance music was an epiphany, as was learning that Mancuso's intent involved reenacting the joys of childhood—early fliers often depicted scenes from “*The Little Rascals*”—to frame a sense of innocent wonder amid the dangerous climes of NYC in the early 1970s.

Within a year, I was in the city myself, but it would be almost a decade before I experienced *The Loft* in the flesh. Recently, Mancuso's *Loft* resurfaced in two different ways. New York's long-running *Beats in Space* radio show invited Douglas Sherman (who now helms *The Loft* parties, thrown semi-annually at the Ukrainian National Home) and *The Loft Crew* into the studio for a live mix. And out at MoMA PS1, the West Village-based *White Columns Gallery* hosted a party for the release of visual artist Martin Beck's new book, *Last Night*.

It's not your typical art book. Across 118 pages typed up in Helvetica font, Beck presents a list of all the records that Mancuso played the night of the last *Loft* party, at its original location at 99 Prince Street, on June 2, 1984. “I came upon the so-called *Prince Street Reels*, a tape recording of the party from that night, so I started to collect the songs and listen to them in sequence,” Beck tells me a few days later. “It struck me as a timely document of a changing environment in mid 1984, as something very pleasurable in the midst of massive change: the growing AIDS crisis, gentrification in SoHo, digitization of music, etc.”

It took 13 hours to play through the songs listed in *Last Night*, which range from Strafe's “*Set It Off*” to Michael Jackson's “*Thriller*”, Dinosaur L's “*Go Bang #5*” (a classic Arthur Russell disco production) to the entire side of a Pat Metheny album. Each page of *Last Night* is not unlike a Discogs entry, listing the runtime, production credits, record label, and year of release. Sure enough, a copy of the book was set up near the turntables as Beck and others played each selection in order while turning the pages.

Beck's re-assembling of Mancuso's set is a much easier task today than it might have been even 10 years ago. The experiment started out simply enough, he says: “I wanted to hear the songs in sequence on a good sound system in a room with other people and see what happens.” His expectations were also

set low: “A recreation would be impossible, given the specificity of The Loft parties, so the event was conceived as a listening session with the option to dance.”

Last Night's 13-hour dance party won't soon be mistaken for a night at the original Loft. The disco ball was about a tenth of the normal size, there was no balloon drop, and the two speakers set up in PS1's Print Shop didn't quite achieve the same transportive effect as a battery of painstakingly tuned Klipschorn floorstanding behemoths. The revelers weren't Loft regulars executing wild dance moves, but rather mostly art kids with their tote bags wiggling, a few politely applauding after each unmixed selection. Even so, there were moments when a wormhole could open on these songs—during the skipping electro-soca beat of Eddy Grant's “California Style” (page 81), or the extended cavernous percussion break of Risco Connection's “Ain't No Stopping Us Now” (page 99), for instance—making the passing of time irrelevant.

Douglas Sherman and The Loft Crew: Beats in Space Mix (Part 1) (via [SoundCloud](#))

Douglas Sherman and The Loft Crew: Beats in Space Mix (Part 2) (via [SoundCloud](#))