



PARTY ANIMALS: Senior members of the Beaux Arts Society have revived the nearly extinct organization.

CLARENCE SHEPPARD DAILY NEWS

GOTTA DANCE

The Disco Fogies aren't getting older, they're getting better

By TOM O'NEILL

From his perch behind the velvet ropes of the very hot dance club Peggy Sue's, the hulking doorman surveys the raucous crowd of partiers who have taken over the sidewalk — not one appears to be a day under 65.

"Is Joe Franklin here yet?" inquires a just-arrived Ginger Rogers look-alike.

Cashier Jennifer Seglia scans the goings-on and moans, "Usually we have more of a happening crowd."

Au contraire. According to Baird Jones, the veteran party-giver who threw tonight's bash in their honor, the Beaux Arts Society is "emerging as the party group of the summer."

The once prestigious society, a charitable organization that assists needy fashion and art students, bordered on extinction in the '80s, but is back with a vengeance, garnering enough attention to earn the moniker "Disco Old Fogies."

"They're the flip side of the 'Club Kids' [the under-25 models and voguers] who rule the night scene," says Jones.

Last January, Jones was approached by M. Vinson Hayes, executive director of Beaux Arts, and asked if he'd be interested in throwing parties with them. "I was so honored," Jones still remembers when "a Beaux Arts invitation meant 400 of society's biggest names in black tie."

Founded in 1906, the society was formed by prominent U.S. artists who had been students together at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Paris. For decades, their costume balls were considered the extravaganza of the year.

Since joining forces six months ago, Jones and the Beaux Arts Society, now with

200 dues-paying members and a mailing list of 500, have had a party every other week in New York's hippest nightspots.

However, the elderly guests are not always welcome. "These are survivors. No one wants them. I have them all to myself," says Jones.

Not exactly. The Old Fogies' grandchildren are begging them for invitations. Hayes reports his 20-year-old granddaughter wept when she missed a party because she got the date wrong.

Back at Peggy Sue's, 60ish Warren Richmond, once a press secretary for Dwight Eisenhower, guides Beaux Arts President Sophia Vardas onto

the packed dance floor. After dancing a fox trot to Billy Idol's "Mony, Mony," Richmond approaches a young girl and tells her she looks like Audrey Hepburn. "Stop flirting, Warren!" scolds Vardas, pulling him away.

Later, on the sidewalk, Richmond and Jimmy Russell ("the party-giver at the Stork Club in the '40s," notes Jones) share a soda (from a nearby deli — Peggy Sue's libations are too expensive). When asked the average age tonight, Russell says, "We start at 100 and go down — we're at 75 now."

Richmond, still press-savvy, scolds Russell, "Don't talk silly to a reporter."

Richard Falk, who flacks for Beaux Arts, recalls the last costume ball, which had "loads of nudity and gambling machines." Ike's ex-spokesman throws up his hands in disgust — "Don't mention that, they'll close our doors."

A Fogie in silver pigtailed walks over to the group and identifies herself as Sissy Strapless. "The party upstairs is jumping," she exults. "All those young people dancing and they never saw Glenn Miller. I really shook it up — the whole world should dance like that."

M. Vinson Hayes, bathed in sweat and pursued by an entourage of 65-year-old women, exits Peggy Sue's, declaring to no one in particular, "I'm going home now because it's very loud and I didn't bring my earplugs."

"If we're lucky, this is what we'll be when we're 70," says Jones. "Fixtures on the night-club circuit."

(Tom O'Neill did his best to keep up with this article.)

UNDISCOVERED MANHATTAN

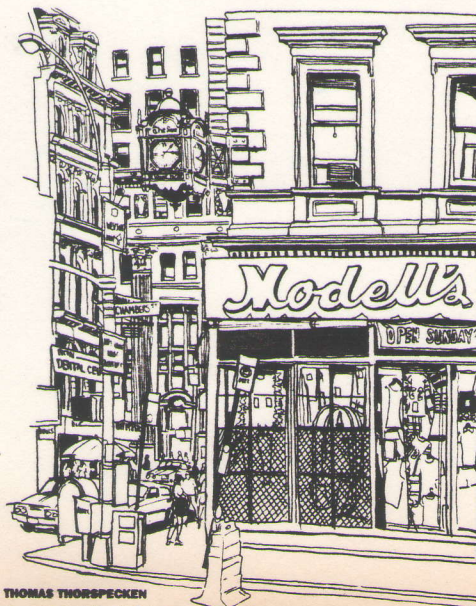
By HOPE COOKE

The Ulster merchant A.T. Stewart's store on Broadway and Chambers is a shrine for shoppers. The emporium, opened in 1846 and constructed from Tuckahoe marble, was the city's first real department store.

The vast selection of merchandise had fixed prices and Stewart pumped up sales through advertising — two necessary underpinnings of the modern department store. Until this time, most retail sales occurred in small dry goods stores around the port.

Due to the migration north of the city's elite, the store remained in operation only 15 years. Stewart turned the building into a warehouse and opened another trade palace, this time made of cast iron, at 10th St.

The Chambers St. store featured an atrium, later expanded into a courtyard, part of which still exists inside the warren of stores and government offices that now occupy the original space.



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TODAY



World mix

The international community comes out at 11 a.m. for the second annual Madison Ave. Festival. A mix of cultures and ethnic entertainment highlights the event, which lines the avenue from 34th to 50th Sts. More than 400 booths display authentic arts, crafts, jewelry, antiques, merchandise and foods from around the world. The festival kicks off International Cultures Week.

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