

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/big-sound-bumps-up-disco-dance-party-1451249090>

U.S. | NEW YORK | NY CULTURE

Big Sound Bumps Up Disco Dance Party

New Year's Eve bash to be held at Coney Island bumper-car ride equipped with majestic sound system



Nicky Siano, a DJ and party impresario, in the bumper-car space at Coney Island's Eldorado Auto Skooter, where he will host a New Year's Eve party. *PHOTO: CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

Dec. 27, 2015 3:44 p.m. ET

Nicky Siano knows a good throbbing bass tone when he hears one. The DJ and party impresario has been behind the controls of some serious sound systems, running the music at Studio 54 and other legendary New York disco hot spots during their thumping, bumping 1970s heyday.

This New Year's Eve he will preside over an all-night disco-homage dance party in a setting with one of the best, and perhaps least-known, sound systems in New York City: a historic bumper-car ride in Coney Island.

“They’re really legendary, and they’re nowhere else,” Mr. Siano said of the four big speaker cabinets looming at the edge of the bumper-car track at Eldorado Auto Skooter, home to laser-lit bumper cars and an arcade filled with Skee-Ball and assorted carnival games.

Built on location after the ride opened in 1973, the vintage, state-of-the-art system was created and installed by Richard Long, renowned in the ’70s and ’80s as the premier sound designer for some of the era’s most popular nightclubs, including Studio 54, Paradise Garage, Club Zanzibar and the Palladium. He went on to design sound for clubs internationally before succumbing in 1986 to AIDS.

Nicky Siano's Timely 90-Second DJ Mix

Listen to specially mixed snippets of five songs by First Choice

00:00 |
01:30

Scott Fitlin, operator of the family-owned bumper-car business then, was an audio aficionado and devoted disco fan, so he contracted Mr. Long to make the ride sound not just loud, but also discerning and highly refined.

“Our sound is extremely powerful yet very easy to listen to, it doesn’t hurt the ear,” he told the carnival blog Amusing the Zillion shortly before his death in 2010. “Our bass is tremendous, and I play dance music, the sound that has energy and life.”

Mr. Long’s system at Eldorado, a rare relic from that era, features special “J-horn” speakers, known for the way they curve at the bottom, sending sound through a scoop to rise up from the floor. The speakers are esteemed among connoisseurs of bass for their unusual range of sounds, with tones as low as 24 hertz. The threshold for human hearing generally stops at 20.

“It’s hard to hear—you more feel the air moving,” said Dan Prosseda, owner of Sound Control, an acoustical-consulting firm and operator of sound for other Coney Island rides such as the Polar Express.

“They don’t bother coming down this low,” Mr. Siano said of most speakers these days, which tend toward tones measuring 50 hertz and above. “But there’s sound out there, and it makes a difference.”

Another component designed by Mr. Long was a bank of tweeter arrays hung from the ceiling, little silver speakers that emphasize the high-end sounds of drum cymbals splashing and clashing shut.

“You don’t hear that anymore,” Mr. Siano said of the hypnotic tszt-tsz-tsz effect when the sound system is cranked up in full.

For the New Year’s party, which is open to the public, Mr. Siano will resume a role he has played in the New York nightlife scene since the early ’70s, when he helped turn an underground dance movement based in tiny lofts and clubs into a global phenomenon.

The event follows another that Mr. Siano threw for his 60th birthday this summer, for 600 revelers who danced—directly on the track with the bumper cars pulled off to the side—to classics from a time before disco became vilified.

“The term is often associated with a lot of cheesy records that came out en masse because record companies just wanted to make money off the disco experience,” Mr. Siano said.

His specialty as a DJ, which he developed at his own storied proto-disco club the Gallery beginning in 1973, remains soaring R&B and soulful funk records of a sort that seeded disco from the start.

Some songs—such as “Love Is the Message” by MFSB and “Armed and Extremely Dangerous” by First Choice—became anthems both downtown and at glitzy uptown clubs like Studio 54, where flair and showmanship ruled.

Rochelle Fleming, founder of First Choice and a solo singer set to perform at the party on New Year’s Eve, remembered a night at Studio 54 during disco’s heyday. In tribute to an equestrian theme on her group’s then-current album sleeve, she said, a local radio personality rode into the club on a white horse.

“He came in after we performed and it blew everybody’s mind,” Ms. Fleming said.

For those like Gordon Lee, owner of the bumper-car ride since taking it over from the Fitlin family, the setting for the New Year’s party will likely channel some of the spirit of such storied party nights of yore.

“The Eldorado at one point,” he said, “was the disco palace of Coney Island.”