

**A** deafening audio assault of techno-funk. A kaleidoscope of lasers. Flamboyantly dressed characters lost in a sea of sweetly scented smoke.

They call it a rave, a live underground dance party, not to be confused with the cantina scene from Star Wars. And its popularity is sweeping across the country in a maddening rush.

The concept arrived from England almost five years ago. And as these underground festivals have emerged into the mainstream, college students have been swept away by them in surprising numbers. The idea of dancing until dawn in a hip, surreal atmosphere has proved to be an attractive alternative to ordinary (and legal) dance clubs.

"A rave party is just a party playing a lot of techno with eight hours of pure energy and dancing," says Western Kentucky U. junior Kevin Todd. "It's like the nineties version of a disco party. When the music gets going you're just riding the beat."

The fire ignited in Los Angeles and New York City but has spread quickly to college campuses from Arizona to Kentucky. Despite their reputation as drug havens, raves have become all the rage.

This explosion of popularity has been chronicled in movies and television, a sure sign that raves are not just for those in the know. "Madonna's new video and movies like *Bad Influence* and *Basic Instinct* are making them more mainstream," Todd says. "*Beverly Hills 90210* even did an episode about it." Yet many contend this attention will not make raves lose their appeal. Katy Ramirez, a sophomore at American U., says raves will outlast the hype. "Raves were not meant to be fads," she says.

Held in abandoned warehouses, clubs or vacant fields, raves entail elaborate light shows, techno-music and mood-enhancing substances. They've spawned a unique style and look for this generation. Wild print shirts, leggings, Doc Martins, crushed velvet dresses, masks and extravagant hats are common attire. The music is



RAMU MATTERS CALIFORNIA AGUE U. OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

and energy is enough for some ravers. "A rave is the loudest, most exhilarating, sensual experience on earth, even without drugs," says Laura Wilford, a junior at Western Kentucky. "It's a chance to vent all of your energy and just dance."

But all this venting sometimes does attract the attention of the local authorities. Part of the thrill of an underground party is the secrecy. Most raves are not publicized; partiers find out about them through fliers which give a location where maps are distributed.

Because some raves are held in abandoned warehouses or vacant lots, the potential for conflict with police is great. Ramirez says raves often are broken up because the crowd is huge, there are fire law violations or complaints come from neighbors.

The reputation raves have for drug and alcohol use also attracts the police. "The police will associate a huge mass of frenzied kids with drugs," she says.

In Milwaukee, police arrested more than 900 people at a "Grave Rave" on Halloween. The event was

held in a warehouse, and police said the rave was disrupted because the location was unsafe and sponsors were operating without a license.

This crackdown is what has forced the rave scene above ground and discouraged entrepreneurs from using the events as a get-rich-quick scene. Some of the first underground raves in Los Angeles were put on by financiers, producers and backers interested in making a fast buck.

By legitimizing raves, some say big-name sponsors have taken away the novelty of the concept and replaced it with just another club alternative. Norman Berrios, who has frequented Los Angeles and San Diego raves says, "When raves moved above ground they lost their spirit. Raves may be safer and legal, but they're also boring."

Former Los Angeles local Kelli Tyler also longs for the days of the early, underground rave scene. "It was really a wild time. You felt like you could escape into Wonderland and not have to come out until 5 the next morning."

Maria Burnham, College Heights Herald, Western Kentucky U., and Heather Gascoigne, Marquette Tribune, Marquette U., contributed to this article.

# Rave On!

## L.A. & N.Y.C. PHENOM GOES TO COLLEGE



most often a sampling of disco favorites with the latest in synth-pop technology. The audio aspect of a rave is one of the biggest attractions for ravers.

"People who are big music fans will criticize the music and say it's all synthetic. But it evokes feeling," Ramirez says. "Rave music is a good beat that gives you the opportunity to let go."

She says the raves are absolutely exhilarating. "It's like one big unified mass of people dancing around and letting out their aggressions to a beat."

To some rave-goers, riding the beat requires the assistance of a mind-altering substance. "The first rave I went to was in New York," says Bethany Stevens, a sopho-

more at Western Kentucky U. "It was wild; drugs were everywhere. There was acid, ecstasy. People were walking out of the bathrooms after using coke; it was crazy."

Raves in cities like Louisville, Ky., and Nashville, Tenn., are not quite as intense. Drugs do not play such a dominant role, and the crowd is more diverse, Todd says.

Many others also are quick to point out that drugs are not the main attraction. At any club or dance scene there may be drugs, Ramirez says, but they are not as prevalent at raves.

"It's not really a drug thing; it's the unification."

A natural high from the atmosphere

**"A rave is the loudest, most exhilarating, sensual experience on earth, even without drugs."**

By Tracy Mercer, *The Graphic*, Pepperdine U.