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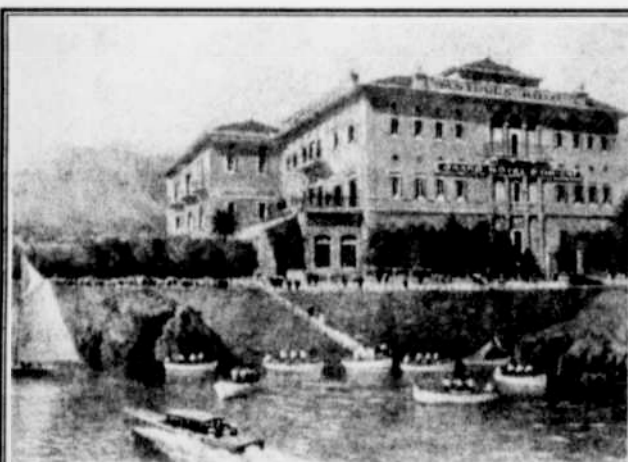
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All Fired Up

Pauline Miriam's growing empire proves it's no (Hot) Flash in the pan

BY KIRA LESLEY

Pauline Miriam recalls that when she first started going to lesbian bars in the 1970s, the scene was very different than it is today. Patrons would traverse alleys and climb stairs, looking for unmarked doors. You never entered through the front door.

Today, Miriam's Hot Flash women's dance is a loud and proud celebration. It is the biggest women's dance party in Portland, Miriam

says, and her Hot Flash/Inferno dances (hotflashdances.com) have spread to seven other cities nationwide. "We don't deserve back alley bars anymore," she says. "We deserve beautiful venues. We deserve to respect ourselves and be in places where we will be respected."

Once a month, 250-300 women pack the lower level of popular downtown club Barracuda. DJs move through the decades spinning songs from the 1970s to today's radio hits. Earlier music starts earlier in the night and the dance itself starts and ends earlier than most nightclub parties (6-10 p.m.). That way, Miriam says, patrons can head over to CC Slaughters, Blow Pony or their beds.

Originally, Miriam, now 60, created the event with women ages 36 and older in mind. Whereas ladies in their twenties may meet and socialize at bars, at a certain age the bar scene doesn't fit, she says: "When you get past around 33, the clubs are not geared to suit the

needs of women—so women don't go."

She chose the number 36 because, she explains, "In Judaism, 36 is a hallowed number and I wanted to give [the dance] all the good luck I could give it." However, Hot Flash has no minimum age and plenty of younger women attend. Miriam says she welcomes this age inclusiveness.

"Finally, after seven years, we have women in their twenties who are coming and women in their sixties who are coming and they all seem to be happy. I don't know how I pulled that off but it's a major coup," she observes. Still, women ages 33-48 form "the core group who come and keep us going."

While there are no age restrictions for those of legal drinking age, there are restrictions based on gender. According to Miriam, she has faced questions and challenges from those who disagree with the idea of, or need for, a women-only dance. "I have had to de-

fend that point over and over and over again," she says. Hot Flash attendees include straight, bi, trans, queer and lesbian women. "What you're not gonna find is bio men," she says.

Describing herself as an "old-time lesbian separatist feminist from the early '70s," Miriam says she currently sees a strong need for women to reinforce their worth. She fears that sex-role stereotyping may be experiencing a resurgence. Of the women-only nature of Hot



MARTY DAVIS

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-PAULINE MIRIAM



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