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Live, from Los Angeles, California...

Pete's Wicked pint in fist, I settle dainty as I can be on the top stair of my apartment's front stoop. I often sit like this musing. I like to watch the blue shadows of late afternoon grow softer, darker, longer, run together. Between sips of ale I pull strips of sticky fruit roll-up off plastic, twirl them around my index finger, and (not so primly) plunge that finger into my mouth. I am flooded with an unexpected contentment, surprisingly unrelated to the beer or the juicy goo melting on my tongue. It is, instead, the waning light, and the idea that all the little lives we lead run together like the shadows. An evening at "the Derby" exemplifies this.

Northeast of "House of Pies" in Los Feliz is the dimly lit swing club of which I speak. I really dig it. At "the Derby," the little lives (normally separated by place, time, or circumstance) merge. Quite possibly it is an anomaly in the space-time continuum. Stepping across the threshold one is transported back in time to the 40s swing era. Formerly the "Hollywood Brown Derby," the club has recently been restored to its past splendor.

Super swank (admittedly pretentious) clientele come dressed in rags their grandparents would have worn fifty years ago. They are a more romantic mob than those frequenting L.A.'s retro-discos. Certainly they squander the opportunity of aimlessly shaking ones booty "like a funky chicken" (word). They somehow find solace, however, in the regulated steps of swinging, pretzeling, and Lindy-hopping. Swing cheered and consoled this nation through the Great Depression and WWII. The same eighth note patterns are now brightening the evenings of not a few embittered and bereaved Generation (gag me with a label) X-ers. They come for the atmosphere, and for the music of the king cats of swing, the "Royal Crown Review."

The driving horns, slick guitar, bopping base, dig-me drums, and suave crooning of the "Crown" set the crowd near swooning. The band sways casually in their pastel zoot suits and wing tips. The singer, Eddie-looks-just-like-James-Cagney-Nichols, advises the kids of a break after the next number. They play a resounding rendition of "Hey, Pachucho" made famous by their appearance in *The Mask*. As regulars (a euphemism for 'groupies,' I think) my friends and I generally drift toward the bar at this point. Even at the divine Derby some social evils are constants.

There is this oldish square who's distinct super power is his ability to make eye contact with a girl, after which he pounces on her for a painfully pungent spin around the dance floor. One martini in him and he won't let a dame alone. "Your boyfriend's looking this way," my friend warns, and we skiddaddle for a drink.

Eying the bartender with interest, my anonymous friend Shelley asks, "Do you think I should tell him he's foxy?" "A splendid idea! A really, *really* good idea, but, um, hold on till he's tended to my spiritual needs, would you?" We run into kids from work, and even, incredibly, come across someone I knew in high school. Everyone is quite polite- some trying a bit too hard to stay in character. (Pardon me, daddio, but you're stepping on my pant cuff with those fine looking Hushpuppies." "Excuse me, cat, my mistake. Allow me to light your cigar?")

Perhaps the 90s will only be considered the decade of stolen fads. The rediscoveries, however, are no less effective because they are unoriginal. Swing lives, just as Thoreau does, when the shadows run together: "Both place and time were changed, and I dwelt nearer to those parts of the universe and to those eras in history which most attracted me." The street nearly dark in the twilight now, I drain my beer, crumple up the plastic from my fruit roll-up, and head inside to put on a Louis Jordan CD.

\*Anne Osborne

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