

Five!... Four!... Three!... Two!... One!... Happy New Year!, cheered most of the crowds in the early hours of the new year. But not all the crowds were so cheerful. Most of the crowds at organized parties were bitter with disappointment, as some of the parties failed to achieve expectancies once again.

To start on a positive note, one has to praise the fact that most of the organized parties were not open bars, as Sedqa and other organizations have been trying to achieve in the past years. This meant that one was more careful when it came to alcohol consumption and money spending. Refunds for tokens of drinks in some parties were given back to those who bought the tokens but did not make use of all of them. This showed that you drink according to how much you spend, without risking the chance of having left-over tokens and wasted money. Some Parties also catered different styles of music by dividing the venue into different music tastes. Such an idea was ideal for those who wanted to listen to a variety of styles without having to leave one club and go to another as what happens in Paceville. Some Parties also opted to be a bit more innovative by having a party in the South part of Malta, making sure that they get a new taste of experience rather than having them in the usual Northern places. One cannot forget the memorable and well praised event that took place at it-Tokk Victoria, Gozo, where there was a mini-National event, with Wintermoods being the main music attraction – all for free. Such an event ensured that all ages would get together, united by the expectancy of a New Year. Police, and all Emergency Teams including Ambulances did an excellent job, as they were as always on alert, hoping that they wouldn't be needed.

On the other hand, many have already started complaining and writing on Newspapers about their disappointing experiences in some New Year's Parties. One particular party, the Caraffa Vaults in Birgu is taken as an example. Safety seemed to be last on the list, as cables and wires supplying electricity were running around people's feet. There were also wires and cables dangling from the ceiling, down to head level. All people needed to do was just raise a hand, and actually pull the cable for amusement, (if drunk). Strong disapprovals from the customers was the fact that the place was too overcrowded. Many people were seen trying to get out of the place, but were unable to move as the people were packed like sardines. Some people actually panicked and when they succeeded in going out of the venue, they did not go back in, in fear that they would have to go through the same tiring and unsafe experience. Many people were left outside during the countdown because the place was too crowded with people. Some people did not actually need to show their tickets as the security did not even bother to check and approve their tickets. Many of these people still have their ticket intact at home, just the way they bought it. Without tickets being checked, one wonders whether people who did not purchase a ticket helped to overcrowd the place.

Extractors (if present) were not effective at all. There were no signs of extractors, but at least some of the windows were open for some ventilation, although this was not so effective, even to the fact that some people were smoking cigarettes and cigars. Security was also very weak, as they were not recognizable. One would have to actually take a chance to try to see an ear-piece, and recognize them. They were all in black, not all in recognizable uniforms. One would expect Security not to wear black as most of the people in such parties wear black, thus making it more difficult for people to ask for their help if somebody was in need. Some people actually experienced a drizzling rain experience as the ceiling above them was made of wood. Some form of liquid, either alcohol being dropped by the ceiling or even from the bars, was dripping between the wooden slabs. This was not such a good

experience for those who actually spent a lot of money on their suits or coats. One wonders whether having an overcrowded room with a wooden floor is an ideal safe for a crowd to be in and under. The count-down was also a huge confusion. There was no official countdown, resulting in some groups in the same room celebrating the New Year's a minute after another group's celebrations, according to their watches.

Another party, The Steve Caesar Party at the Melita Gardens in Balzan, was also showed thumbs down according to some clients. Again, no official count-down was organized and many people felt that such a small activity would have helped to show the peak of the party. But the downfall of it all was the fact that even if they had actually done the official count-down, they would only have one hour to celebrate it, as the party was over by 1am. One has to keep in mind that Balzan is a residential area, and so it is a good idea to be thoughtful to the residents. But clients at this party were not advised that this party was to finish at 1am, where for some people that time IS the beginning of the New Year Celebrations. Such people feel cheated and have been falsely advertised.

Some people also complained that the Ruby Party at the Monte Kristo Wine Vaults in Hal Farrug was not well equipped to entertain such an overcrowded place with just two restrooms for each sex. People were reported to almost fight against the security to use the restrooms as the queue was so long and becoming impatient. Some also reported to have "rested" wherever they could, as they could not wait any longer in the huge queues. Also, some people did not have their tickets checked and approved in this particular party. Some of these people still have their tickets intact at home. According to these sources, security was also very weak and un-effective. An amusing fact is that those who were not satisfied with the over-all party took the opportunity to write their disapproval of the party on DJ Ruby's website message-board. With a lot of negative comments, a few hours later, the website message-board was not available. Fireworks were also set in the venue in order to make that different entertainment. Unfortunately this was rather dangerous as the place was too overcrowded and the fireworks were set off in a very close distance to the crowd. One also has to praise the fact that the party was not an open bar, although there were some complaints about the tokens as being too expensive, with 2 tokens in exchange for one bottle of beer.

MTV and Uniting Nations Party was praised for its reasonable prices for drinks and the fact that it was not an Open-Bar. But with a wide promotion, Uniting Nations let most of the crowd down by only playing two songs, with their main vocalist missing! The DJ played the same songs two or three times in the space of three hours indicating that he must have had a limited repertoire. When spending an average of Lm10.50c without tokens, and seeing such great advertisement for the event, one expected a bit more respect from the DJ's and the Guest of the night, Uniting Nations. Hitting a good note in this party was the fact that the Cloak-room was well organized and that the toilet facilities were up to standard, thus the event seemed like a satisfactory one with most of the clients.

These disappointments seem to have become a yearly saga. In the past, we have often heard about coats gone missing or stolen from cloak-rooms, over-selling of tickets, over-crowded arenas and yet nothing seems to change. One must ask, is there any form of Authority that does inspections on these events? If there isn't, then it seems like we do need one. We need a body of Authority composed of

not only Health and Safety rules, but also real inspection of fair trade. We need a committee or a Board that would set a set of regulations and standards for these events and parties to abide. Inspections should be made

1. When an application to organize a party or event is handed in. The inspection should include inspection of the proposed venue to check whether such a venue is up to standard, suitable for the approximate proposed number of tickets to be sold and whether the venue has good safety exits or not.
2. Upon approval of the venue and party, the Inspectors must make sure that while installing lights, bars and so on, the standards and regulations are kept. The inspectors must also make sure that the organizers have explained to all staff that will be present for the near Event, what to do in case of an emergency such as a fire. Inspectors should make sure that Fire-Exit indicators are clear and visible. They must make sure that there are enough restrooms. They must also make sure that no reckless and unsafe apparatus such as wires, wobbling chairs etc are around.
3. One would also expect the board to have some inspectors together with the Organizers during the party to make sure that everything is up to standard, so that if any complaints arise after the party, the Inspector or member of the board can testify in favour or against it. If the Party fails to meet certain standards then, the Organizers would be due to a fine, as it meant risking and failing safety regulations.

Another alternative for New Year's Eve could be a National Event such as the Notte Bianca. Seeing that it was a great success, so much so that Notte Magica also followed it, one would expect such an event to take place next year. Again, it would be a clean and safe environment where all ages and all forms of entertainment can be held. Such an event was held this New Year's Eve in Gozo in it-Tokk, Victoria, where it was widely applauded.

Our main conclusion is this. We are not proposing a boycott against such parties. We are not trying to compete against such parties. All we want is, the safest environment possible with a satisfactory entertainment and value for money. With all the downs mentioned, one cannot forget to praise all the organizers' efforts to make their parties satisfactory. What we are doing, is showing what went wrong, giving a voice to the customers of what they expected, what they disapproved of and what they expect for the next forthcoming events by the respective organizers. This is a real chance, where the customer can show that the organizers' next success is built upon their response: either positive or negative feedback.

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