

# Dancing

THROUGH ADVERSITY  
TO CELEBRATE JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH

## FROM YACHT PARTIES TO THE HOUSE OF BLUES

JEWISH OWNED EVENT COMPANIES UNITE JEWS  
& ALLIES IN CHICAGO'S HOUSE MUSIC SCENE

By Ina Bochian

Photo Credits: David @swggrbck

As a prequel to summertime Chi, the first couple of weeks of May have been filled with extraordinary events hosted by some of the best members of the tribe. On April 30th, to celebrate Israel's Independence Day, Yom Ha'atzmaut (Hebrew: יום העצמאות) and the one year anniversary of Chai Chi, an organization co-founded by David Pawlan, Josh Horowitz, Harrison Lippy, and Josh Bilaosky, along with the Branzino Boys as DJ's, hosted YOM HAATZMAYACHT on the Anita Dee Yacht to benefit ALYN Hospital. A few days later, Brandon Friedman and Josh Bialosky, founder of Excelsior Limited event company, hosted a CINCO DE MAYO celebration at Loft 22 (located on the second floor of UMMO Chicago) featuring DJ's Eliana Garcia and Gavin Rathjen.



DJ Mikey Novak | ½ Branzino Boys | Diskonect  
at YOM HAATZMAYACHT on Anita Dee Yacht

The following Friday, on May 9th, Josh Horowitz's arts and entertainment event company, Diskonect, the Branzino Boys, Alex Kislov, Harrison Lippy, the founder of First Choice Presents, and Danny Zeidan, hosted HOUSE OF GROOVE at House of Blues, an extravagant house music event across two floors of the Foundation Room inside HOB featuring simultaneous DJ sets on each floor. In addition to Alex Kislov and Danny Zeidan, two well known Chicago house DJ's, Jordan Prostel (m.o.n.r.o.e.\_music), Ivano Lima and a few others also kept the music going all night.

Having attended these events within a short period of time, I loved seeing some of the same people collaborating to curate unique experiences centered around good music and dance. While these events are hosted or co-hosted by members of the tribe, one of the co-founders of Chai Chi, Harrison Lippy, made it very evident that "everyone is welcome as long as they are an ally (to Jewish people) and are kind, good people." Looking around, feeling the vitality of the crowd that gave off positive vibes, echoed the overall mission statement of Chai Chi, which "was founded post October 7th as a safe place for the Jewish community and its allies to celebrate Jewish culture and Israel," as Harrison put it.

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Harrison Lippy| First Choice Presents & Chai Chi  
at YOM HAATZMAYACHT on Anita Dee Yacht  
Photo Credits: David @swggrbck



“Despite these obstacles, the Jewish American community in Chicago demonstrates remarkable resilience and creativity.”



Photo Credit: Ina Bochian



Brandon Freidman at Loft 22 | UMMO | CINCO DE MAYO

Photo Credit: Artists Box

The recent rise in antisemitism, particularly within certain segments of the music scene, presents significant challenges for Jewish artists and entrepreneurs. In Chicago, where fans of Ye (formerly Kanye West) have embraced his antisemitic messages, the atmosphere can feel particularly daunting. His recent song “Hail Hitler,” which has been banned on multiple platforms, underscores the troubling normalization of such rhetoric in mainstream culture. Despite these obstacles, the Jewish American community in Chicago demonstrates remarkable resilience and creativity.



Many Jewish entertainers and business owners are transforming “tragedy into triumph” (to ironically quote the old Kanye), drawing on their rich cultural heritage to create art that celebrates their identity while fostering dialogue and understanding. This determination serves as a form of resistance against antisemitism, strengthening community solidarity and allyship. By sharing their narratives and collaborating across cultural boundaries, they challenge stereotypes and craft a hopeful counter-narrative that emphasizes inclusivity and diversity. While the current climate may be difficult, the Jewish American community in Chicago stands as a testament to perseverance, reminding us of art’s power as a vehicle for personal expression and collective resistance.

While protestors and individuals aligning themselves with hateful ideologies aim to undermine the existence of the State of Israel, Chai Chi and other sponsors courageously hosted a celebration for Yom Ha'atzmaut, marking Israel's 77th Independence Day with their event YOM HAAZMAYACHT. The event unfolded seamlessly, fostering a sense of unity among Jewish young professionals and allies. Despite earlier rain showers, the weather cleared just in time, allowing guests to enjoy the top deck of the yacht, taking in Chicago's stunning skyline and vibrant DJ sets.



David Pawlan | co-founder Chai Chi

Photo Credits: David @swggrbck

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David Pawlan | Brittany Levy | Ina Bochian  
Photo Credits: David @swggrbck

Accompanied by one of my favorite plus-ones, we approached the yacht and encountered two sponsors from American Friends of ALYN Hospital (AFAH), who had flown in from New York for the occasion. Once aboard, we mingled and split up to socialize. The only awkwardness that accompanies the joy of gathering Jewish young professionals is the game of Jewish geography, where you navigate who to avoid and who to reconnect with. With a bit of luck and divine blessings, it's even possible to meet your soulmate, or "beshert," a Yiddish and Hebrew term that signifies destiny. Depending on your attitude and intention, an event can serve as a serendipitous opportunity to encounter your fate or cross paths with someone who might connect you to your forever partner.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, embracing your fears can sometimes attract less desirable individuals. However, choosing to believe that everything happens for your higher good allows for a more constructive interpretation of negative experiences, framing them as opportunities that guide you toward the right path. Every gathering inevitably includes a mix of attendees—those who make unwelcome comments, exes, or failed talking stages—counterbalanced by those who genuinely uplift the atmosphere. What made this yacht party particularly special was the overwhelming presence of joyful, positive attendees whose good energy drowned out the negativity from those who might have otherwise dampened the vibe.

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When attending events populated by Jewish individuals, it is important to recognize that our community is close-knit enough that everyone you've encountered within a 20-mile radius may end up at the same gathering. Like any community, we face both internal and external conflicts; however, in light of the rising antisemitism, it's crucial to prioritize harmony and resolve any internal disputes. On this particular occasion, as we all found ourselves literally in the same boat, I was reminded of the Jewish principle of "Hakarat HaTov" (הכרת הטוב), which roughly translates to "recognizing the good."

Everything that transpired on the "Anita Dee" that night seemed to align perfectly for my highest good, including several meaningful conversations I shared with others. Unexpectedly, I encountered someone who had left me hanging on my birthday; however, I had completely forgotten about him and the incident until he reintroduced himself. Given our history, his kindness and demeanor at the yacht party allowed me to forgive and forget. That single encounter transformed my perspective for the evening, reinforcing my optimistic belief that people can change. It is up to us if we choose to recognize the good in them.

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Photo Credit: Artists Box



Loft 22 | UMMO | CINCO DE MAYO

Photo Credits: David @swggrbck



YOM HAATZMAYACHT | Anita Dee



Feeling grateful for the pleasant exchange, I was even more excited to reconnect with the Branzino Boys, particularly David, who was also the photographer for the evening. We exchanged stories about mutual friends in the music industry and discussed our upcoming projects. Inspired by our conversation, I was thrilled to catch up with the other half of the duo, Mikey Novak. After congratulating him on his recent engagement, we discussed how both love and heartbreak can serve as powerful catalysts for art and creativity.

Conversing with Mikey genuinely made me feel understood in light of a recent heartbreak. We both agreed that some individuals we encounter seem like true counterparts or soulmates, making it even more difficult to move on. Despite this, we recognized that channeling our emotions into music or art allows us to encapsulate those significant people in a way that immortalizes them in our lives, providing an alternative outlet for our pain. This epiphany has further solidified my understanding of Jewish resilience. Regardless of the challenges [rejections, opposition, or feelings of being misunderstood] the Jewish community consistently finds creative ways to counteract everything that seeks to dim our light.

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Mikey Novak (1/2 Branzino Boys) | Ina Bochian  
on Anita Dee Yacht



Photo Credits: David @swggrbck



Feeling elated and energized after YOM HAATZMAYACHT, David Pawlan and his girlfriend, Brittany Levy, who is also dedicated to building Jewish communities in New York, invited me to join them at Trader Todd's, a karaoke bar in Lakeview. Accompanying us were Jonah Fialkow, also known as Jewish Jonah, Harrison Lippy, a couple of my dear friends from the Chicago Jewish Alliance, and a few others. The highlight of the night was when Jonah convinced me to try karaoke for the first time. Rising to the challenge, I decided to sing a classic: "Mr. Brightside" by The Killers. Fortunately for me, Jonah joined me on stage, which helped me forget my stage fright, truly making this moment the highlight of the night.



Adir Phalavani | Josh Weiner | Ina Bochian |  
Ethan Ramer on Anita Dee

Photo Credits: David @swggrbck



David Pawlan & Brittany Levy at Trader Todd's



Jewish Jonah | Natalie P. | Brittany Levy |  
Harrison Lippy at Trader Todd's

Photo Credit: Ina Bochian





DJ Gavin Rathjen (Rath) | Loft 22 | UMMO | CINCO DE MAYO

Photo Credit: Ina Bochian

With a full heart, I eagerly anticipated the CINCO DE MAYO event at Loft 22. Although hosted by a different event company, Excelsior Limited, I knew some attendees from YOM HAATZMAYACHT would also be there, heightening my expectations for an unforgettable night. After the enjoyment I experienced at the previous gathering, I was excited to dance the night away, enjoy great music, share stories, and laugh with friends.

With an optimistic mindset, I was greeted by the very person who had been kind to me on the yacht, the guy I had chosen to forgive. Prior to that week, nearly a year had passed without our paths crossing, and now it seemed he was front and center at every event. He started off by saying, “I’m so happy to see another Jewish person here. You really understand things that I have to break down for others.” Taken aback by his comment, I assumed there were more non-Jewish attendees than Jewish ones at this event and that he needed to share something that only resonated with me.

We chatted about the importance of connecting more deeply with the Jewish community. Later, he asked for advice on how to rekindle his relationship with Judaism and what events he might consider attending. Our conversation naturally shifted to a sincere apology regarding the past—an issue I had already chosen to forgive before our discussion began. Nevertheless, I appreciated sharing this moment, as it demonstrated his genuine effort to heal and grow.



DJ Eliana Garcia | Loft 22 | UMMO | CINCO DE MAYO

Photo Credit: Artists Box

With house music as a backdrop and Eliana DJing, this unique moment in the midst of a house party felt more profoundly Jewish than sitting in a synagogue praying; it was Judaism in action. Our exchange exemplified the true meaning of accountability, demonstrating how we can actively participate in healing ourselves and the world around us [a concept central to the Jewish principle of “tikkun olam,” which means “to repair the world” and embodies the social responsibility of every Jew]. While fully embarking on this journey may seem daunting, those who understand and believe in the idea can execute it effortlessly, one action at a time. Each positive action has the potential to create countless ripple effects that move others towards greater good.

The purpose of sharing this intimate exchange at a house party is to emphasize that Judaism is a way of life, transcending the confines of religion. Practicing Judaism can occur just as meaningfully in a vibrant loft during a house music party as it can on a quiet Shabbat evening while lighting candles. There are no limits to how Judaism can enhance our lives, making us stronger from within and better equipped to withstand external hostility—from those who genuinely hate us or are simply misguided. When the call comes from inside the house (our own community), it can become nearly impossible to combat external hate; no one can wage a full war alone while simultaneously battling internal struggles. By choosing to recognize the good and treating every experience as an opportunity for growth, we connect more deeply to our own “neshama,” or soul, and to each other.

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By the following week, reflecting on what transpired at Brandon's party inspired me to continue recognizing the good in others while also focusing on my own self-improvement. I sent out my weekly "Shabbat Shalom" texts to friends, accompanied by a picture of freshly lit candles, expecting little to no responses, as people often overlook them. When I received an invitation from Mikey Novak to THE HOUSE OF GROOVE event at the Foundation Room, I decided to go since I had no one to spend Shabbat with and wanted to avoid feeling sad. I chose Jewish joy over sorrow, eager to keep riding the wave of positivity, while acknowledging my own inner turmoil and unhealed heart.

Choosing joy over sorrow, led to meeting more Jewish individuals and non-Jewish allies that night, pushing the compass of goodness a little further along. At that event, which I will detail in a separate article, I encountered a kindred spirit who shared my name, Ina. Meeting her and laughing together on the same bench where I had cried a few months prior felt like a full-circle moment, transforming my narrative. Reflecting on these connections and the people who contributed to transforming THE HOUSE OF BLUES (and sorrow) into THE HOUSE OF GROOVE (and "simcha"—joy) has revolutionized my perspective on how a few event companies can help carve a path out of the matrix and toward a more hopeful spiritually enlightening future.



Shabbat Candles & "Love Through Fear" Original Painting  
Photo Credit: Ina Bochian



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Alex Kislov | HOUSE OF GROOVE at House of Blues Foundation Room

House music parties and event companies may seem unrelated to spirituality, but it's not the venue or the event that connects us to Judaism and illustrates what it truly means to be Jewish; it is the driving force of the individuals who organize these gatherings. While some may not adhere to religious practices in the traditional sense, every Jewish person is interconnected with every other Jewish soul in the world, and each one has the potential to create a positive impact through simple actions. Good intentions and genuine joy can foster greater unity among Jews and non-Jews alike, demonstrating that we cannot be rattled by external chaos if we lead from a place of love and happiness. By continually striving to improve our character through creative means, we can embody the essence of what it means to be Jewish and inspire others to do the same.

If you're Jewish and reading this with a desire to connect to the community, or if you're not Jewish but want to support the Jewish community, consider attending events that promote connections through music and dance. You might have the most reflective experience of your life, or you may even meet your soulmate. In either case, seeking out opportunities to embrace happiness and share in the joys of others can open doors to a more fulfilling and exciting life.

To keep up with upcoming events, be sure to follow [Chai Chi](#) (@chai.chicago), [Excelsior Limited](#) (@excelsiorlimited), [Diskonect](#) (@thediskonect), [First Choice Presents](#) (@firstchoicepresents) on Instagram. More details and articles to come about these companies and the people behind them.