

Keep on dancing

College Station rave scene continues unhindered despite national setbacks

By Jessica Crutcher
THE BATTALION

Shawn Gourley, a senior economics major and half the brains behind the electronic music club Paragon in downtown Bryan, says his venue is faring well despite the widespread prevalence of new anti-rave laws.

Small clubs such as Paragon are the wave of the future, Gourley said.

He said tougher regulations and law enforcement methods in cities such as Austin and Houston have made it almost impossible for promoters to put on large electronic music festivals, commonly known as raves.

"Raves are a thing of the past," said Ryan Locker, a techno DJ and class of 2001. Locker, who now lives in Austin and is a second year University of Texas law student, said the electronic music scene has moved to clubs, where it is smaller and more easily controlled.

The College Station electronic music scene's small size causes a more "cohesive" atmosphere, Locker said. Therefore, there is a steady group of people who can be counted on to show up for most electronic music events in College Station.

"It's more like a group of friends than a commercial enterprise," Locker said.

Locker, who has been deejaying, or spinning, for about five years, said the friendliness of the College Station scene members encouraged him to get started.

He said he originally got interested in electronic music growing up in Germany, where the club scene is huge. However, he never had an opportunity to get more involved until his freshman year at A&M.

"I lived in Moore Hall, and this guy down the hall who had turntables gave me lessons," Locker said.

Gourley said Paragon's small size is one of the reasons he thinks the club will survive. The College Station scene is relatively small — about 100-150 regular members, according to Locker — so everyone pretty much knows everyone else.

This sort of closeness brings a heightened awareness of the drawbacks of illegal drug use, Gourley said. "People realize their actions have repercussions against everybody," he said.

Gourley said, unlike some larger rave scenes, he hasn't

noticed any of the telltale signs of drug use at Paragon. "I don't have time to go around and look in everyone's eyes, but I haven't seen anybody grinding their teeth or rocking back and forth," he said.

Gourley said he thinks the electronic music scene has been

"scapegoated" about drugs. Many people think recreational drug use, especially of ecstasy, stems from the electronic music, he said. However, although Gourley said drug use does go on in some rave scenes, the two do not go hand in hand. He said drug use spreads across all ages, class lines and social groups.

"I was at this club in Dallas and had some old lady ask if I could find her pills," Gourley said. "She said she had just come from a Dallas Stars game and said her alcohol was wearing off."

Many electronic music enthusiasts say perception of raves as drug users is responsible for the virtual extinction of large electronic music festivals. One such festival was Electric Daisy, a well known Austin rave that was cancelled at the last minute in August because of insurance and regulations issues, according to the *Austin Chronicle*.

The most recent legal manifestation of widespread opinion is shown in the Reducing American's Vulnerability to Ecstasy Act of 2002, or the RAVE Act. The Act would widen existing "crack-house" laws, which were originally put in place to get rid of crack cocaine dealers, and add harsh civil penalties, according to the *Philadelphia Enquirer*.

This could make promoters and producers legally responsible for any drug use discovered during their event.

The RAVE bill targets dance club venues, which has raised the hackles of electronic music advocates.

"A lot of venues are going to be afraid to even rent to someone doing a rave-type party," Gary Blitz, coordinator of the Electronic Music Defense and Education Fund, said in an interview with the *Philadelphia Enquirer*. "The law equates raves with drugs. The crack-house statute should be for crack houses, not for concerts or venues."

The House of Representatives has not voted on the RAVE Act, but according to the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, the U.S. Senate is expected to pass the bill by unanimous consent.

However, even with the new regulations, Gourley is not worried about the fate of Paragon, which he said would be around for a while.

"We're not a music festival or a rave," he said. "We've had zero problems and we're pretty clean."



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