

## Rave Culture is Back in Melbourne.



*Photo by Saxon Williams(?), 2023.*

It's likely your social media has been flooded with videos of young people dancing to DJ sets under bridges or in abandoned warehouses.

Since the global Covid-19 pandemic began, Melbourne has been the host to a significantly growing number of raves.

Melbourne was the longest lock downed city in the world, all venues such as clubs closed, and face to face gathering were banned. With people facing expensive fines if these rules were broken.

Feeling like their youths were being wasted, this resulted in frustrated young people organising illegal secret open-air rave in undisclosed, remote, or abandoned locations.

Prophecy Girl is a Melbourne based DJ who notably toured with singer Charlie XCX this year. They were regularly booked to perform sets at different raves in Melbourne.

"Raves after the pandemic were so fun, it reminded people the reason why live music is so popular and such a celebrated industry. We were locked away for two years straight and suddenly we can go out dancing," Prophecy Girl says, "it does feel like a whole chunk of time stolen but it's nice to see that people didn't give up".

Saxon Williams is a rave organiser for 'Subsekt', which hosts exclusive popular open-air raves around Melbourne.

In 2023 rave culture has taken Melbourne by storm. This is evident by the electric dance music (EDM) being played in nightclubs, the current Euro-trash and 90's fashion trends, and the growing drug culture amongst nightlife.

"You can really chart a rise in something's popularity by the amount of young people interested and invest in that kind of sub-culture," Williams says.

These are all fixtures that have been birthed by rave culture. Acid house rave parties started becoming popular in Chicago during the mid 1980's. Named after the sub-genre of electric house music because of the churning acid sounds produced by the 303 bass synthesizer.

Acid house parties were illegal raves thrown in abandoned warehouses and often attendees were fuelled by MDMA and LSD. These raves eventually caught on overseas, seen prominently in the UK around Manchester and London.

This led into the second 'Summer of Love', a social phenomenon that took place around the UK. It was characterised by the youth culture of free parties, drugs, and Hedonism.

Expats brought these rave parties over to Australia. Being an industrial city with ample abandoned warehouses, Melbourne became a prime rave location.

"They moved over here so they could continue the summer and they brought the idea of raves over. So, it's very deeply entrenched in European culture," Williams says.

Raves are described as illegal or free parties; an important feature is that they are self-run by members of the public. The organisers are not businesses, there are no licenses or permits, and are not for profit.

They are usually held in abandoned infrastructure such as warehouses and basements. Or if they're open-air raves they are held in fields, forests, and under bridges.

These locations are often discrete to make it difficult for police to find and shut down events, Westgate Park is a popular rave location in Melbourne.

"Usually on council land, large areas of public parks, away from residential areas. If you want to do it on private property then there's quite a large chance of a lawsuit," Williams says.

In recent years it's become common for organisers to post the details and directions to the events Instagram accounts.

To keep off the authorities' radars, the locations are not publicised until a few hours before the rave starts, then left up for less than an hour.

"If you have nine hundred people following your account and you have story notifications on, you're going to get around 500 people seeing that," Williams says.

"Whereas the raves that were put online like weeks in advance and then they just get spread like crazy. Everyone's looking forward to it, everyone's talking about it," Prophecy Girl says.

If organisers make the mistake of posting the location too early, they also run the risk of cultivating large crowds. As security guards are rarely hired for raves, these crowds can become out of control and violent.

“You can say it’s really good, that raves are keeping on going. But then what happens is it’s endangering public safety. That’s why you’ve got to be careful about the location put up,” Williams says.

The growing number of raves in Melbourne can be linked with the rise of the social media platform TikTok. The platform is well known for having an algorithm that projects videos into virality.

Young people are posting rave parties to TikTok, which are then spreading these events to a larger audience pool than ever before.

This has caused controversy, as too many people are showing up to events. These new ravers are often underage and displaying violent or disrespectful behaviour.

“I feel like TikTok kind of ruined rave culture in Melbourne. Just the wrong people started hearing about it, the wrong people started coming. It felt unsafe being there,” Prophecy Girl says.

Because raves are self-organised with little security or enforced rules, it is extremely hard to check attendees ages.

This is alluring for underage people who can’t go to bars or clubs, and living with parents means they can’t drink or indulge in drugs at house parties.

“I was playing a rave and there were these 16-year-olds kicking the barrier that was in front of the decks. I was just like, ‘why am I here? Why are you here? We’ve set up this rave so we can dance and you’re the ones coming and destroying it’,” Prophecy Girl says.

A traditional characteristic of rave culture was the exclusivity, you would only get invited by word of mouth, receiving flyers, or searching for posters.

This ensured the crowds who attended were a certain demographic. Rave culture is intertwined with diversity and social outcasts such, as the LGBTQ+ community and people of colour.

“Rave culture was something that was created by queer and diverse people because the clubs were unsafe for us,” Prophecy Girl says, “We would create these raves and invite only these people to feel safe and to have somewhere they can celebrate queerness or celebrate the colour of their skin”.

On 19 February, a Watergate Park rave hosted by Al Gharib was the scene of an alleged hate crime and stabbing.

Two transgender women were bashed and robbed by two men who yelled homophobic and transphobic slurs.

This incident spread awareness about the anti-social behaviour that has been happening at recent Melbourne raves and has encouraged others to speak out.

A ‘Go Fund Me’ was created which has raised over 25,900 dollars for the women’s medical expenses and stolen belongings.

“Before there were spaces that socially outcast people or queer people could go to and just express themselves free of fear,” Williams says, “I think it’s incredibly important to keep a space open for them. Which I think sadly is a concept that a lot of people involved, not organisers, but people who go to these events tend to forget”.

The current violent incidences show why rave parties may need to remain an exclusive sub-culture.

The culture promotes and thrives with tolerance, freedom of expression and fun. Therefore, participants need to be aligned with these views.

“It’s brought back the importance on why some things need to stay exclusive, given the reason people aren’t feeling safe anymore,” Prophecy Girl says.

Trends and fads often rise and quickly fall these days, the boom of Melbourne’s rave culture might be one of them.

Modern rave organisers are learning from previous mistakes for how to safely advertise and run these events.

“It’s kind of losing its spark and I think it will go back underground. It’s what happened in the 90’s as well. Trends come and go, this is just another trend,” Williams says.

*By Katelin Cameron.*

[https://youtu.be/X5qpIVH\\_jyk](https://youtu.be/X5qpIVH_jyk)