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How Breweries Are Helping Save Berlin's Club Scene

March 27, 2020

Germany is under strict quarantine measures right now to slow the spread of COVID-19. Bars and nightclubs are closed, restaurants are takeaway-only, and gatherings of more than two people are banned.

That's bad news for the craft beer scene in the capital Berlin. Independent brewers figure they're losing up to 90 percent sales. But instead of hustling every man for himself, they're banding together and even taking on an extra commitment: saving Berlin clubs from extinction.

"It's a time when we need to think not just about ourselves, but also our partners," says Annika Brümmer, spokesperson for Quartiermeister, an independent Berlin beer brand. "Clubs have zero chance to earn money right now."

Quartiermeister has helped kick off the Stay Home Club, a small collaboration of local independent businesses, like the cider-maker Ostmost, craft cola brand Soli, Abye distillery, and others. Every 60 euro order includes delivery and a 5 euro donation to Berlin's Club Commission to help the local nightlife industry.

Meanwhile, craft brewer Berliner Berg is also offering the proceeds of 500 cases of beer to the Club Commission on its website. So far, it's already sold half that and raised over 5,000 euros.

"We are delaying invoicing for small bars in big trouble, but we knew that wasn't enough," says Michele Hengst, Berliner Berg's managing director. "They need cash. We started looking at how to donate, but the problem is bars would receive it and have to pay a lot of taxes on it. Since the Club Commission is a non-profit, they can give it to their members, so it was the best way to move as quickly and unbureaucratic as possible."



By Barbara Woolsey





Photo courtesy of Berliner Berg.

The Club Commission is currently in a fundraising frenzy with its [United We Stream](#) initiative. Every night, DJ sets are broadcast from Berlin's empty nightclubs during lockdown with the goal of raising one million euros to be later distributed by a jury according to financial need.

Berlin is a global headquarters for techno music, boasting iconic nightclubs with famous DJs as residents, 48-hour parties, and open-minded, sex-positive house rules. But despite the scene's prominence, several clubs face bankruptcy thanks to gentrification's kisses of death: rising rents, opportunistic landlords and speculative buying in one of the world's fastest-growing real estate markets.

The coronavirus crisis has only exacerbated these threats, says the Club Commission's spokesman Lutz Leichsenring.

"The situation is critical at the moment (for both large and small clubs)," he explains, pointing out that about 9,000 Berliners work in the nightlife industry. "Large clubs have even more costs. The small ones perhaps had a smaller revenue, and perhaps also a smaller chance to be financially prepared, but bigger clubs have more rent and more employees."

Paul Döcker, co-founder of Ostmost, which makes ciders and juices, came up with the idea for Stay Home Club, rounding up the other businesses. In less than a week, the website was up, thanks to swift video-conferencing teamwork across elements like web design and branding.

"It was important for me to do something because this is where I come from, I used to be big into clubbing. I met a whole network of people by clubbing on Sundays in Berghain," he says, referring to Berlin's most famous techno haven located in a power plant. "I even met my wife there, and now we have a daughter."

According to Brümmer and Döcker, the Stay Home Club works because each company has a social or environmental mission. Quartiermeister works with independent, regional breweries to produce its beer and donates 10 cents per liter to neighborhood social projects, while Ostmost plants fruit orchards, and Soli supports refugee projects.





Photo courtesy of Quartiermeister.

According to Berliner Berg's Hengst, their donation also marks a full-circle moment of giving back. The brewery comes from humble beginnings as a gypsy brewer, and in 2015, it raised 65,000 euros to expand thanks to a crowdfunding campaign.

"That's how we started back then, and we saw how well it works if you really manage to create a passionate community," says the managing director, who's even doing some deliveries herself.

The Stay Home Club and Berliner Berg's campaigns, as well as the Club Commission's United We Stream, proves that even despite social distancing, Berliners are still collaborating more than ever right now. That team spirit is what defines the city, and makes its craft beer scene special, says Brümmer of Quartiermeister.

"People living here are open-minded, and care about each other," she says.

United We Stream has already raised 270,000 euros so far. Berliner Berg's contribution of 11,000 euros will make a big difference, according to press spokesman Leichsenring.

"It helps a lot because it will go to those cases with the most hardship, perhaps in a precarious position when it comes to rent or not having savings," he says. "We think it's super because we haven't gotten a firm commitment from the state so far, and with that, we could at least help the most critical cases now."

Meanwhile, Stay Home Club has plans to expand across German cities like Hamburg, Leipzig, and Dresden, potentially continuing the delivery service after the crisis.

"This situation has definitely taught us to be flexible with our business models," says Döcker. "We want to keep earning money for our businesses but also supporting the common good."

Top photo courtesy of Stay Home Club.

ZX Ventures, a division within AB InBev, is an investor in October

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