

NEW YORK OBSERVER

20th Anniversary Celebrations See A Real Barn Burner in Bryant Park

By Rebecca Webb 9/26



Yeehaw. (Angelito Jusay)

Square dancing brings a lot of things to mind; the Empire State building just isn't one of them. Yet, there it was, all aglow in its red and blue, standing over a crowd of do-si-doing New Yorkers—hipster toddlers in mini-knits and European grandmothers, tangled in an unapologetic mess. We had heard about it, but when we took a peek this Monday, we weren't expecting to stumble upon the sea of cowboy hats that stretched before us in Bryant park, and neither were our neighboring spectators. But such is the surprise of the city.

One of our fellow passersby could hardly contain her excitement.

“Oh my god, I love New York.”

And this is the reaction the Bryant Park Corporation was looking for. Bryant Park Square Dance is new to the roster of park activities this year, part of the 20th Anniversary series. Beginning on Sept. 10, the festivities included Appalachian musical stylings, pulled pork, overpriced apple cider and several bails of hay. White plastic cowboy hats were being handed out, representative—albeit unintentionally—in their industrial stiffness the anachronistic quality of the evening.

We found ourselves next to a businesswoman in all her pencil-skirted glory, a tourist couple, and an elderly lady with brilliant white pigtails. We also spied a pair of drag queens looking fabulous in patent-leather go-go boots, and a group of twenty-somethings in dime store floral dresses. Everyone, it seemed, was here.

The dancing, on the whole, was bad. After an hour and a half, we were only able to master circling left and right. While slightly reluctant to admit to the chaos that was erupting unabashedly around him, Dave Harvey, the dance's "caller," explained that he could still "handle dancers who don't know which end of a fiddle to blow into," though, honestly, we really weren't sure what this meant.

"Some people come in an ironic spirit, and that's fine," Mr. Harvey said, "but I take it seriously."

Looking around, we hoped to find someone who shared Mr. Harvey's spirit. And that's when we saw her—our beckoning teacher of all things Western—from across the lawn: a woman in a floor-length gingham hoop skirt.

Did you attend the other events?

"Yes, the one last week. Without the dress."

Did you buy it for tonight?

"No. I owned it."

Where are you from?

"Germany."

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