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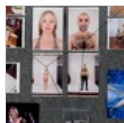
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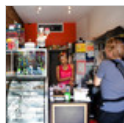
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NY CULTURE | Updated July 5, 2013, 10:04 p.m. ET

# The Riverboat Ball on the Hudson River Brought Some '20s Soul to the City

Michael Arenella and his Dreamland Orchestra embarked on the crew's first ever Riverboat Ball on the Hudson River

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By REBECCA BRATBURD



Walter Wlodarczyk

Champagne flowed at the Riverboat Ball.

On Thursday evening, Michael Arenella and his Dreamland Orchestra embarked on the crew's first ever Riverboat Ball on the Hudson River.

On board, 250 guests enjoyed oysters, shrimp and Champagne, not to mention the joy of dressing up in 1920s garb. On the dance floor were ladies in pearls, feathered headbands and flapper dresses and gentlemen in straw boater hats, seersucker suits and suede oxfords.

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Grace Gotham

time. There's no sense of date.

Everybody's here living for the moment, celebrating life and celebrating America," Mr. Arenella said between songs.

Jazz music arrived in New York by way of riverboat bands from the South, he said. This bit of history led him to the idea of throwing a Fourth of July party aboard the Queen of Hearts riverboat.

"There are plenty of tourist-trap boats going around the island, so I wanted to create something different with a romantic undertone and make people feel happy and want to celebrate," he said. "I didn't want it to be obvious. I wanted it to feel private, like something you had to discover. I turned this boat into a floating speakeasy for a night."

The evening's entertainment included Mr. Arenella on trumpet and vocals and



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Walter Wlodarczyk

Michael Arenella and His Dreamland Orchestra

a small incarnation of the full orchestra including ragtime pianist Terry Waldo and banjo player Alan Cary. Grace Gotham, an Upper East Side-based chanteuse, also performed.



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Walter Wlodarczyk

Helen Pontani

"Live music and theater are becoming rarer and rarer," Ms. Gotham said. "This harkens back to those times. For an evening, you get to be on a riverboat, enjoying music from yesteryear and acts you don't see very often."

Helen Pontani, known as "The Tapping Tornado," of the World Famous Pontani Sisters burlesque revue, also performed. Ms. Pontani said she lives

for the 1920s. "It was simpler times. Things now are so complicated, but you can forget about everything here, let it all go and leave your worries behind," she said over a glass of Champagne.



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Ragtime piano man Terry Waldo.

Indeed, it appeared that guests welcomed the opportunity to stash their phones for a few hours and converse over cocktails and crab cakes. The Queen of Hearts sailed north to the George Washington Bridge and back down the Hudson River, providing breathtaking views of Manhattan's West Side.

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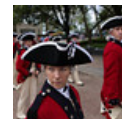


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In this week's photos from around New York, Coney Island holds its annual hot dog-eating contest, Jersey City gets a new mayor and the Statue of Liberty reopens



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Divers on Friday afternoon recovered the bodies of a man and woman they believe are two jet skiers who disappeared into waters off Coney Island on the Fourth of July, New York City Police said.



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allowed for a distinct level of intimacy only possible with a small crowd.

"I decided not to sell it out to capacity because it would have been too crowded," Mr. Arenella said. "I took a bit of a financial hit, but it was worth it to me for the party to feel intimate and let people have room to breathe."

On the top deck, guests observed the fireworks display with Manhattan shining with life on the horizon. Mirrored buildings reflected the shimmering fireworks, One World Trade Center towered in red, white and blue, and the Empire State Building's bright new lights sparkled with patriotic colors. Afterward, many guests returned to the dance floor for a last dance before the boat docked at Pier 79.

The Riverboat Ball is likely to become a yearly tradition like the company's Jazz Age Lawn Party on Governors Island, Mr. Arenella said, giving New Yorkers another chance to escape to the Roaring Twenties.

"We're at a time in our culture now where we're looking for happiness. We're looking for hope. That's what the '20s were about," Mr. Arenella said. "We've got all of the technology now and social media, but what we're missing today is romance and soul. The '20s had soul and that's my little contribution to the city. It's OK to let yourself go and to celebrate."

*A version of this article appeared July 5, 2013, on page A19 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Some 1920s Soul by Way of Riverboat.*

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