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# GOOD NIGHT MR. LEWIS

## Looking Back Softly

By [Steve Lewis](#)

May 06, 2010



Okay, busy day, so let's get to it. The 30th anniversary party of Danceteria (one of the greatest clubs ever) will be held this Saturday at [Aspen Social Club](#) in Times Square. Hordes of '80s nightlife survivors will migrate from all over the planet to attend this soiree. It's either: attend or wait for the 50th anniversary event. People who look like shadows of themselves will talk about love, music, fashion and ghosts of nightlife past and everyone will say, "You look amazing !" 100 times. Some will be better at this remembering game than others. There's an old saying ... "It's hard to be nostalgic when you can't remember anything."

Back in the day, some people were...clouded. As a result of all the internet chatter about this party, a younger sister of an old friend found me. She's looking for information about someone she hardly knew as Cat Martines died in 1986. Scott Severin and I filled in some of the blanks, and she'll attend the event to ask about more. This led to another memory: Jillian Schwartz (aka Jillian Black) died of a heroin overdose around the same time. She was my bestest friend and overdosed on her second try of the drug. I have no photos to remind me of her. All that I have is a warm but very sad feeling which can't fill the hole that will always be in my heart. Scott says he found a picture of her and is getting it to me. My goosebumps have goosebumps. The people who are attending this event Sunday have survived an era that took so many. Between rampant drug use and an uncontrollable AIDS epidemic, a generation was decimated. I met my first wife Jennifer Hamdan at Danceteria (who celebrates her birthday today). My memory comes with it's own set of rose-colored glasses, and I'm sure Peter De Vries was right when he said "Nostalgia isn't what it used to be."

I caught Christopher Walken and Sam Rockwell in a *Behanding In Spokane* which was a bag of chuckles with a couple of guffaws. Walken is a man with young eyes and a complexion that takes a long hard time to acquire. I remember a conversation many years ago with legendary director Abel Ferrara at the premier of *The King of New York* at my Union Square joint, The Palace de Beaute. Abel was tossing 'em down like we might run out of the stuff and I said something. He replied, "You think I'm bad... wait till you meet Walken."

I'm obsessed with Bon Vivant , Kenny Kenny's photo exhibit at Collective Gallery this Saturday. Everyone will be there, as Kenny has been there and done that and keeps on doing it. He is the energizer bunny of nightlife. Last night at Amanda Lapore's Big Top party, he held court over the old and the very new. Big Top is the next big thing for those who find inspiration from the past without wallowing in nostalgia. The photo

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exhibit promises to be a revelation. I spoke to the curator Virgine Sommet about it.

**Kenny is often very shy and certainly modest. How did this show come about?**

I have tea with my friend Lola, and one Thursday afternoons she talked to me about the pictures of Kenny Kenny. She told me that his body of work was very impressive and refreshing. I decided to contact him to see the pictures. We met at Collective Gallery and he showed me many powerful photographs in black and white from India and two different series about nightlife. I was seduced by everything and I decided to do his first solo show about the two nightlife series in black and white and in color. As an artist and as a curator, I always refused banalities of ordinary life and massification in art and in life, so this “Bon Vivant in New York” exhibition is exactly what I was looking to show. Collective Gallery’s focus is about The Others: subculture, urban tribe, minorities and microgroups of people.

**Tell me about the charity involved.**

It was Kenny Kenny’s idea to involve a charity in the “Bon Vivant in New York” exhibition. He met Beverly Bronson in Manhattan and she told him her story. She was traveling in Nepal and found two little children in a dumpster. The kids were two and five years old and she couldn’t find anyone to take care of them, so she decided to rent a 12-room house after many fund raising and financial commitments. It’s now the “Ghar Sita Mutu, House with a Heart” which welcomes 20 abandoned children at a time, providing nutritious meals, education and health care. It’s also a work place for women so they can stop the cycle of misery and be part of a training program. 45% of the art sale will be donated to this non-profit foundation. (Visit [www.gharsitamutu.com](http://www.gharsitamutu.com) for more information or contact 212-529-0832/info@gharsitamutu.com)

**What do you see in Kenny’s photos?**

In “Bon Vivant in New York” there are two different series. One series is 18 portraits of Kenny Kenny’s entourage. The colors are very murky with a lot of shadows, very gloomy. This atmosphere reminds me of German expressionism. He met many people in the underground life in a time when being gay was more difficult from a societal perspective. These portraits are people who don’t want to be part of the mainstream today. I take this as an aesthetic creative recognition. It’s a hymn of subversion to normalcy, against our dominant societal standards. The second series is 22 photographs of photo journalism with different nightlife moments of people who dress very creatively. They’re black and white, very realistic. This creativity around clothing or accessories that people have made or found allow them to develop a sense of identity. The photographs are messages sent to the mainstream, and at the same time, an extension of Kenny Kenny’s body. His camera is always with him, as jewelry, very distinctive, as he wanted to restore an aesthetic vision of life. I see these photographic series as a voice to subculture.

**You’ve known Kenny Kenny for quite some time. Speak to his evolution, his change.**

Kenny Kenny started in Manhattan by running nightclub doors and then became a successful promoter. His camera never left him for ten years, during his traveling overseas (Morocco, Bali, South America, Egypt, Prague, Italy, Thailand and India) or during his nocturnal life. He learned a lot in these different activities and always with this instinctive shooting. It’s a natural evolution. He “dresses” inventively, so he has an artistic eye. The use of the camera is a continuity of his view. The desire to express himself aesthetically with photography seems like a normal evolution. It is also a testimony of a small group of people in a world which has a tendency to ask us to be all the same. This evolution is going perhaps further than we can even expect.

**KENNY KENNY: “BON VIVANT IN NEW YORK”**  
 May 8-June 15  
 COLLECTIVE GALLERY 173-171 Canal Street, 5th Floor  
 Opening Reception Saturday May 8th, 6-9pm

Lastly, I’d like to congratulate DOWNTOWN DIARIES on their one year anniversary. I’ll be at the Eldridge tonight to support.

Email  Print  **Tags:** Good Night Mr. Lewis, New York, Nightlife, Aspen Social, Steve Lewis

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Posted by kennykenny on Sat May 8, 2010 at 12:20 am #1  
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Posted by Scott Severin on Fri May 14, 2010 at 01:11 pm

#2

Steve,

I DO have a photo of Jillian, it's on a color slide. I WILL get it converted to a jpeg as soon as I am able.

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