

# Club Scene:

## Huge Manhattan-style disco now open in Gowanus

by Ethan Donway

I showed up to SRB, short for “Soul, Rhythm and Blues,” around eight before the doors were even open. SRB opened in January on Second Avenue at 14th Street in Brooklyn. I chatted with the black-clad, muscle-bound bouncers while I waited; beside the velvet ropes was a sort of mini-furnace that burned brightly and provides welcome relief for those waiting in line during the winter months. Though the velvet ropes and uniformed bouncers should have tipped me off, as I went through doors and into the main space I realized that this was a real club, not just another dive bar with a stage. It soon occurred to me that this place might be a suitable replacement for Southpaw - a large music venue on Fifth Avenue that recently closed. Given its size, SRB is a fine alternative to the Bell House, (7th Street and 2nd Avenue), which has been probably the largest venue in the area for a few years now.

What I’m saying is SRB is big. The floor legally accommodates four hundred, but vastly more could be packed in, probably close to a thousand. The place is a full five-thousand square feet and the stage is sizable enough to house any act you care to mention, no matter how big the horn section is or how many dancers there are. This is a nice change from many NYC clubs with their cramped stages and low ceilings that can make one feel as though he is playing in a musky cave. Two long bars lit in an eerie red glow parallel each other across the huge floor space in front of the stage. A disco-ball slowly revolves above, sending delicate shimmers of light across the room. The place is supposed to be a throwback to the old nightclubs of the ‘60’s and ‘70’s. The ceilings are as cavernously high as an old warehouse space.

The owner, who goes only by “Doc,” is a NYC native, probably in his early fifties, and has a noticeable nervous energy as he led me around SRB. First, he showed the main floor level. The first VIP section is black-leather clad and set back in the corner of the club on the right near the entrance. The second VIP section is located above and behind the stage for a unique view of both the audience and the performers. I imagine it makes one feel a little like a roman emperor at the gladiatorial arena. Doc started extensive renovations in 2008 that took a full three years, changing the building from a marble and tile warehouse into a state-of-the-art perfor-

mance venue. I could tell that “Doc” is a real music geek and takes a genuine pleasure in what he has created. I was so impressed with the place that I not so subtly mentioned to him that my own band, “The False Alarms,” is planning a record release this summer. Then Doc showed me the green room where the bands hang out before their set. It is sizable, full of beanbag chairs and even boasts microwaves and a shower. This is all on the third floor, the top level of SRB. When compared to other green rooms, often nothing more than a glorified closets, one can appreciate the lengths to which Doc has gone to provide comfort for not only for the guests, but his performers as well.

The sound booth is top notch. Equipped with Pro-tools, it can do live recording of as many tracks as anyone could need; they will be live streaming the

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big events online in six months. The back line on stage is also extensive and as a guitar player, I was impressed with the choices in amps and just how shiny and new everything is--especially the drum set up. There is no need for lugging cumbersome amps and drums on the subway to this place, they have you covered. There are even giant subwoofers under the stage. The sound was every bit as good as I hoped it would be. To wrap up the tour, I must mention that the art at SRB was done by graff-artist Keo, and the walls feature portraits of soul singers in blacks and whites. Barry White, James Brown, Marvin Gaye--they were all there. The mini-gallery fits well with the retro 60s, 70s club vibe that Doc is going for. Altogether the décor was nothing unique, it was certainly tasteful. There is no kitchen. The drink menu seemed pretty standard.

The place does not have a hipster vibe like so many new spots in Brooklyn; it’s too fancy. The drinks were not really that cheap--a tap beer was seven dollars. It just wasn’t “divy” enough for the



The retro-looking crowd kind of goes along with the ambiance and music that SRB has been presenting. Many of these people danced in discos back in the 1970’s.

bearded, PBR crowd. It is a big spot that will attract some big acts, which means it will probably draw a diverse mix of people from around the area and may not really end up catering specifically to one genre, style or specific scene. Southpaw had a very relaxed, sort of neighborhood atmosphere. I remember the owner even had his massive, friendly dog lounging about on the floor and the bartenders were guys I knew from the neighborhood. SRB does not really feel like that. It has more of a Manhattan feel, not really the local hangout vibe that you often get in Brooklyn. You wouldn’t just drop by there for one drink. You’d plan to go see a show there. You’d make an evening of it. That is not to say however that SRB is not making contact with the locals.

Nearby rehearsal space, King Killer Stu-

dios, (69 Second Avenue at 9th Street), had a handful of the bands that rehearse there playing together at SRB when I stopped by on Friday night. “Laserbrain” (jazz, funk, indie); “Scrapers” (hardcore); “Generation Ohm,” (a hard rock band who’s front-man I recognized from his old band “Chewing Pics”); “Tin Vulva” (a sort of experimental, alt rock band); “Less Magnetic” (jazz). I was there for part of the night and though it was not especially well attended given the size of the venue, it was a friendly, fun atmosphere. It’s still too early to tell exactly what role this place will fill, but there are certainly things to like about the place. If you see show there that piques your interest, SRB is well worth checking out.

SRB, 177 2nd Avenue, Brooklyn (718) 499-1700; [www.srbbrooklyn.com](http://www.srbbrooklyn.com)



SRB seems to have spared no expense at recreating the garish disco style of the first disco era, albeit with the better sound systems available today. Photos on this page by Matt Degrosa

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