

Christmas Eve: The biggest night of the year for Jewish singles

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By **Lisa Bonos** December 24   [Follow @lisabonos](#)



The 2014 Matzo Ball at Washington's Eden night club (Photo courtesy of Matzo Ball)

My friend Josh Novikoff is married, but he can't stay away from Jewish singles' parties on Christmas Eve. "When you go and you're not looking, you can just go and be a wing-person or observer," he tells me.

Josh's wife once played wing-woman for me at one of these events, pointing out cute guys she spotted. We thought it made sense: After all, Josh and I briefly dated, so his wife and I would have similar taste in men, right?

If an ex's wife scouting a crowd on your behalf sounds uncomfortable, you might want to stick with Chinese food and a movie on Christmas Eve. When hundreds of Jews gather on Dec. 24, you're likely to run into any or all of the following: former flames, current crushes, and lots of people you've never met.

If you can embrace the awkward, go. Bring a few friends who can get you out of any undesirable conversations and dance circles, rope you into good ones — or scoop you up off the bathroom floor, should the night come to that.

In just about every big city across the country, there's a big Christmas Eve bash (or two or three) marketed toward Jews in their 20s to 40s: The [Matzo Ball](#) got the party started in Boston in 1987 and now has events in 15 metropolitan areas. In addition to the Ball, Washington also has the [Falafel Frenzy](#) and [Gefilte Fish Gala](#), both of which raise money for charity. And New York has the [Jewbilee](#), which attracts more than 1,000 gay men from all over the Northeast.

(Full disclosure: The past few years, I've been on the Falafel Frenzy's organizing committee, but this year I'm unaffiliated.)

Andy Rudnick, the Matzo Ball's founder, [started the event in 1987](#) after going to a Jewish singles mixer at a hotel on Christmas Eve, which he thought was horrible. "I found it to be challenging in that environment," he says. So the next year, he organized his own party at a club in Boston that would've otherwise been closed on Christmas Eve.

A decade later, he met his now-wife while she was bartending at a Matzo Ball. Rudnick was engaged to someone else at that point, but "I knew right away when I saw her," he says. "If you've been through 10 years of Matzo Balls, you know what you want and you know what you don't want. I was ready — I really wanted to settle down at that point."

So he broke up with the fiancée and went back to the bar in February and asked her out; they were engaged by the time next year's Matzo Ball rolled around.

Now 51, Rudnick says he's "getting a little too old for this stuff."

"Crawling around nightclubs with 20-year-olds gets a little creepy," he says, adding that he hopes to pass the franchise on to his daughters someday.

The Matzo Ball has been around so long that Rudnick's family isn't the only one where the tradition is passed down from generation to generation. Rudnick says he knows of a woman who met her husband at the 1989 Boca Raton bash whose daughters are going to the Matzo Ball as adults.

When asked about the competing Christmas Eve events that have sprung up across the country, Rudnick says he welcomes them; the additional events give partygoers more room to breathe at what can be an overcrowded scene. This year's Matzo Ball, [at Midtown DC](#), could get close to 800 people, he says.

One of those competitors, the Falafel Frenzy, began in 2010, when Stephanie Heller and her friends wanted to create an alternative to the Matzo Ball where all the proceeds would go to charity. The event — now held at the Howard Theatre and done in partnership with the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington — typically attracts 500 to 600 attendees, Heller says, bringing in about \$10,000 to \$15,000 that goes toward local food programs and impoverished Holocaust survivors.



Jason Langsner and Yael Bortnick at the Howard Theatre during the 2013 Falafel Frenzy. (Photo courtesy Jason Langsner)

The Falafel Frenzy attracts couples as well as singles, and has less of a meat-market vibe than the Matzo Balls I attended in my 20s. But love connections are still made. "It doesn't matter whether it's a funeral or a fundraiser — anything turns into a Jewish singles thing," says Avi Ben-Moshe, who met his wife, Donna, at the 2012 Falafel Frenzy.

Ben-Moshe remembers not really wanting to go to the Frenzy that night. "But then when I walked in, the mood changed," he says. "I did see Donna and I was like: I'm gonna talk to that girl by the end of the night. I'm gonna get her phone number."

They said hello to each other early on but only got to chatting while closing out their bar tabs at the end of the night. "I think I said something along the lines of: 'Do you give your phone number to tall, handsome guys who ask you for it?'" Ben-Moshe recalls. She said "certain guys," and handed over her digits. Ben-Moshe called her two days later and they went on their first date early in the new year.

Of course, not everyone goes to these events with the expectation that their soul mate will be in attendance. A 40-year-old Washingtonian who usually attends the gay Jewbilee in New York told me he tries to get in the mind-set of: "I'm just gonna go and have fun. If I happen to meet someone, great."

Jayson Littman started the Jewbilee in 2008, after recently coming out and wanting to have a Matzo Ball-type event for the gay crowd. Littman says the event, held at Stage 48, a concert venue in Hell's Kitchen, usually attracts more than 1,000 people, not all of them Jewish.



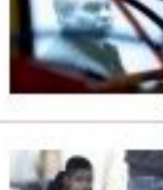



The Jewbilee in Midtown Manhattan attracts more than 1,000 gay men on Christmas Eve. (Photo courtesy Jewbilee)




"There are people who've done Christmas with their families. There are a lot of non-Jewish folks who can't go home for their holidays because of family dynamics, and they love coming to a Jewish Christmas Eve party that makes them forget it's even Christmas Eve." There are also straight women who come "because they think it's more fun than the other parties that are out there," Littman adds.

And of course, anywhere there are Jewish singles, there are wannabe yentas. Mothers have bought tickets for their sons, Littman says, and then e-mailed him to say: "I bought a ticket for my son; here's his photo. Please look out for him."

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