

Days and nights of SXSW enough to fill year's social calendar

A cabbie said it best: "Can't they stretch this out over the rest of the year? It's all too much at once."

South by Southwest advertises the city at its finest: hills in spring glory; broad sidewalks — well, still goat paths, in some cases — flocked with stylish pedestrians; cafes, clubs, theaters and concert halls reverberating with talent.

There's no way to condense the experience of attending more than 50 social events during the course of 10 days into 850 words, so let's settle for a morphology of SXSW parties.

Pre-parties: Before the big show, artists, technicians, publicists and journalists mix at minor gatherings designed to brace everyone for the onslaught. Giant Noise threw an intimate affair at Grúv, for instance, while several film groups squeezed onto the balcony of the Belmont the same night. Later, music licensing biggie BMI served barbecue at Stubb's and the mayor's office gathered folks on his windy balcony, well before the music portion of the festival had begun. The most lush pre-party was held at a certain athlete-turned-advocate's Mount Bonnell palace the night before the Austin Film Society's essential Texas Film Hall of Fame ceremony.

Red-carpet parties: These well-trod events allow press and fans an opportunity to glimpse the biggest stars in the stage-managed space in front of a theater or party tent. By now, the drill is so familiar from media saturation that the ritual seems stale. That

is, until someone stunningly accomplished engages you in a personal conversation, and all your hard-won cynicism melts. These parties often glow after the main event, with notables rubbing satin at some chic retreat or ultra-lounge.

Industry parties: While the famous SXSW day parties are marketed to biz types, the true industry mixers are by invitation only, meant for fierce networking, often at night, after the panels and speeches are done. During the SXSW Interactive Conference, for instance, techies massed at the Mexican American Cultural Center for Frog Design's annual bash, while Game Tap threw what was, for me, the best party of the week at Parkside, retaining the new restaurant's fabulous food, but decking the Sixth Street space with organically shaped game tables instead of the usual dining arrangements.

Day parties: The number of these events — staged before 8 p.m. to avoid conflicts with



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OUT & ABOUT

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official SXSW showcases — has grown so large that whole Web sites have been founded to track them. More than a few took place at Club de Ville, Stubb's and Emo's this year. We ate fresh conch during the Florida Fish Fry at Wave, sampled Wenite wines and prawn corn dogs at Moonshine, downed domestic beer at the New West party, explored the rock labyrinth at the Fader Fort and, of course, heard the buzziest bands at the Spin bash.

Showcase parties: These come in two varieties: official and unofficial. They can happen day or night. The essential ingredient is a band, or a series of bands, often under the same management, or linked to the same label or nationality. Some are attended, sadly, by just friends and family, such as the delightful Argentinian showcase at Ninety

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SXSW Film Pre-party, the Belmont

1. Peter Brauer, Jill McGuckin, Victor Pineiro-Escoriaza, Juan Carlos Pineiro-Escoriaza
2. Elijah Slate, Greg Omelchuck, Tre Zeiman
3. Suzanne Koneful, Taylor Phillips, Beth Casama

BARNES: Scientific classification of SXSW parties, sorted by scene

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SXSW Frog Design Party at Mexican American Cultural Center

4. Ariel Aberg-Riger, Scott DiPerna, Farah Miller, Richard Huffaker
 5. Bijoy Goswami, Marcy Hoen, Marcus Mateus
 6. Phillip Kerman, Brandie Heinel, Geoff Stearns



SXSW Game Tap Party at Parkside

7. Stephanie Cohen, Kalia Bonner, Tracy Gray
 8. John Teinert, Chris Pelligrino, Paul Alvarado-Dykstra, Lisa Layer, Jeff Fisher
 9. Jay Srinivasan, Ellen Simonetti, Prabhakar Gopalan



Proof, while others required hours of line-waiting, (I don't do that. Life's too short.)

Street and park parties: These, too have proliferated during SXSW, wherever pedestrians tend to wander. Sixth Street, South Congress Avenue, South First Street, Auditorium Shores and Waterloo Park were seldom short of performers and partiers during the weekend, at least after the break of noon.

Tent parties: Just street parties with temporary roofing. The official ones, toasting national themes or groups such as Armed Forces Entertainment, are grouped in Brush Square, conveniently across the street from the Austin Convention Center, which serves as SXSW headquarters. But they've popped up all over the place, in vacant lots and on green patches, devised by a confusing array of sponsors.

House parties: As if they didn't see each other enough, artists often gather during SXSW at the homes of locals, who might offer outdoor entertainment, or just some lawn chairs and brew. I attended none of these gatherings this time around, but happily waved at blissful backyard revelers in my South Austin neighborhood while walking to and from SXSW events.

Anomalous parties: These events are not at all related to SXSW, but have, by accident or design, landed during the 10 busiest days of the social calendar. Among the delightful landmarks this year: the Long Center Sneak Peek, the President's MASKED Ball for Huston-Tillotson University, the Fuse Box Cocktail Party and the Austin Under 40 Awards.

After-parties: The most famous is the Sunday SXSW softball game, but the SXSW Film Bash on March 10, spun out after the main movie madness had ended, was among the most unbuttoned I attended, with bacchantes streaming in and out of La Zona Rosa for conversation, dancing and horseplay.

And if any party stood out this week, it had to be a winner.

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SXSW Film Opening Party at Buffalo Billiards

1. Meredith Munn, Anish Savjani
 2. Blair Redford, Mike Milligan, Josephine Decker