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Robbie Rivera

# Hollywood Babylon

*In the glitzy heart of Tinseltown sits Avalon, Hollywood's big-budget blockbuster of a club...*

**A**ppropriately enough for the most famous/infamous club in all of Hollywood, Avalon looks like it belongs in a movie — specifically, a glossy action-thriller starring Jason Statham, during which Statham is pursued into a nightclub by hit-men, barging clubbers and bouncers as they go, before engaging them in a pandemonium-inducing dancefloor shoot-out. The exterior looks how your parents probably imagine a nightclub to look, with a lengthy queue of oddly, expensively dressed punters patiently waiting to pass through a velvet rope, controlled by a stern-faced, all-in-black door-girl sniping into an ear-piece and clutching an all-important, all-powerful clipboard. (No need to feel too intimidated, though — while there is a dress-code in effect, getting inside is hardly a Studio-54-circa-1979 humiliation-filled nightmare.) The building itself is imposingly grand and extravagantly lit, and boasts a suitably showbiz background, having been variously known throughout its 84-year history as Hollywood Playhouse, The WPA Federal Theatre, El Capitan Theatre, The Jerry Lewis Theatre, The

Hollywood Palace and The Palace, before being re-christened Avalon in 2002. It's a richly storied venue that's hosted its fair share of famous faces — Judy Garland, Louis Armstrong, Groucho Marx and Richard Nixon have all graced the stage, while proto-punkers The Ramones played their last-ever gig here.

Once you've passed the scary door-girl and her magic velvet rope, Avalon's interior hits you with a weird-but-winning mixture of high-end refit, old-skool glamour and low-down rave-sleaze. The club's earlier incarnations as a theatre and a TV-broadcast studio — and its current weeknight moonlighting job as a live-music venue — are immediately apparent. The roof is high and cavernous, and the DJ booth sits on a large, raised stage (which seems to encourage that weird urge many clubbers have to obediently face towards the DJ while dancing). The layout won't be for everybody — particularly those who like their clubs dimly-lit and claustrophobic — but, oh sweet and tender Jesus, that soundsystem is flawless. Without wishing to go all chin-stroking-audiophile, Avalon's sound design

really is properly stunning — one of the best that DJmag has ever heard, right up there with the likes of The End or New York's Cielo. Loud as fuck but still as clear as a bell, it totally dominates the room while still allowing you to talk to fellow clubbers without yelling like a pissed-up loon. And the bass is just lush — warmly vibrating every molecule in your body without ever distorting one teensy bit (even during the clowniest of clown-shoed dubstep tracks). It's the kind of soundsystem that makes you feel miffed for putting up with the bodged-together, sorry-will-this-do? PAs that most clubs offer.

And it's little wonder, because Avalon's owner is none other than John Lyons, founder and president of John Lyons Systems, suppliers of high-end tailor-made soundsystems to the rich, grand and fancy. Something of a US clubland legend, Lyons has been running clubs since he was still in school, using his

instinctive knack for spotting to expertly steer through the funk, disco, punk, electro, house rave eras. His hugely successful sideline in soundsystem design began by accident in the early 1980s when the PA in a club he was DJing died mid-event. There and then he vowed to learn how to design, install and fix speaker systems; by the late 1980s, he'd ascended to doing that at the world-famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Lyons's philosophy of club-ownership is refreshingly straightforward: "You can break the nightclub business down into really simple components: Your place has to be clean; you have to have a lot of people who are taking care of your customers; the air conditioning has to work; and you have to pay attention to your entertainment. Make sure that it's as good — or better — than what else is out there." Over its nine-year lifespan, Avalon has played host to a variety of







## LIKE, OHMYGOD, SO HOT RIGHT NOW?

Four other clubs currently heating up Hollywood and Downtown...



### STANDARD HOTEL ROOFTOP

[standardhotels.com/los-angeles](http://standardhotels.com/los-angeles)

If you fancy a sun-kissed, Sunday afternoon shimmy (or you've made it all the way through Saturday night and can't stop now), then head to Downtown LA's trendiest hotel for some 13-floors-up fun. The Standard's strongest events are the Droog collective's monthly tech house-flavoured Culprit parties.



### VANGUARD

[vanguardla.com](http://vanguardla.com)

One of the few real rivals to Avalon's Hollywood dominance, Vanguard boasts a feisty Funktion One soundsystem and three separate dancefloors, including a "Miami-style" outdoor patio. Expect louche disco and/or house and/or hip-hop — recent guests have included Kid Capri, Mark Farina and Tortured Soul.



### KING KING

[kingkinghollywood.com](http://kingkinghollywood.com)

King King serves up deep and soulful dance music to discerning clubbers — plus the odd theatre event, just to mix things up a bit. A good bet if you're looking to avoid lairy Ed Hardy/bottle-service/fake-tan types. Past headliners: Craig Richards, François K, John Tejada, Moodymann, Kenny Dope.



### PLAYHOUSE

[playhousehollywood.com](http://playhousehollywood.com)

Glitz, glamour, guestlists and VIP tables ahoy at this two-year-old Hollywood Boulevard hotspot. Playhouse tends to book the kind of DJs who have their own logos and Flash-animated websites — the likes of Lil Jon, Tiësto and Dubfire.

nights, but at the time of writing it's Tigerheat (unashamed frothy pop) on Thursdays; Control (techno, electro, dubstep) on Fridays; and Avaland (house music all night long, baby) on Saturdays. Given LA's goldfish-like attention span and love of all things hot, new and shiny, those monikers are highly likely to change in the near future, but if you are planning to pay a visit, the club can always be guaranteed to stick to these hard-and-fast rules: Fridays are for tough, lairy beats, and tend to draw in a young crowd; Saturdays are for slightly older punters who prefer a deeper, more underground sound (kinda like Fabric).

As DJmag is nothing if not staunchly committed to leaving no rave-stone left unturned, we

attended both a Friday and Saturday night at Avalon over one weekend. The Friday night saw Control hosting a Dirtybird crew special, with Claude Von Stroke, Justin Martin and J Phlip dishing out the angular electro, nasty house, low-blowing dubstep and tough-titted techno. All three (Von Stroke particularly) aim their selections towards gritty dirtiness rather than tasteful deepness, perhaps mindful of the fact that most of the crowd are barely out of their teens (if that) and seem to be 'enjoying their chewing gum' a great deal. Whatever the motivation, the Dirtybirds' ribald din goes over very well — particularly with the lewd young lady who spends much of CVS's set performing a weird sort of techno-bogle while gripping

onto the stage barriers. Saturday night, and as foretold, the crowd is older, slightly calmer, and the music is of a less electroid and aggy nature. Headliners Robbie Rivera and Justin Sheppard keep the house music jumpin' until dawn (on Saturday nights, Avalon pushes through to 8am on Sunday), and while the place isn't as packed-out as on the previous night (mostly due to Steve Lawler playing just around the corner, thereby splitting the mainstream-house vote) it's still ten tons of fun.

Avalon, then: the superclub that doesn't believe in treating punters like cattle, and pays attention to the little things to make the big picture work.

**JOE MADDEN**

