

out in dc GREG MARZULLO

# Babylonian pleasures

Annual Babylon Tour, inspired by 'Queer as Folk,' returns to D.C.

THE ANCIENT CITY OF BABYLON HAD a reputation for decadence, so it was a brilliant name choice for the dance club, bar and sexual cruising ground in Showtime's hit gay series "Queer As Folk," which came to an end last summer after five seasons.

Cashing in on the notorious nature of the show's club, the City of Babylon Tour, an annual traveling gay dance party, began in the summer of 2002, and the latest incarnation will be debauching its way into VelvetNation in Southeast on Sat., May 20.

"With 'Queer As Folk' ending last season, we have now made the Babylon Tour its own entertainment brand," says Embrace Productions' Adam Gill, the creator and producer of the tour. "It's keeping the ethos of 'Queer as Folk,' which is not just a circuit party."

According to Gill, there will be different areas set up in Nation that mimic the club from the show. There will be a back room

space for those looking for some extra thrills, and of course, there's the main floor reserved for the dancing queens and circuit boys.

This year's DJ for the D.C. leg of the tour is Roland Belmares who has played many of the big parties across the country, including the Winter Party in Miami, Fla., the Fireball in Chicago, Ill., and Alegria in New York.

Belmares was one of the DJs on last year's edition of the tour, which stopped in D.C.

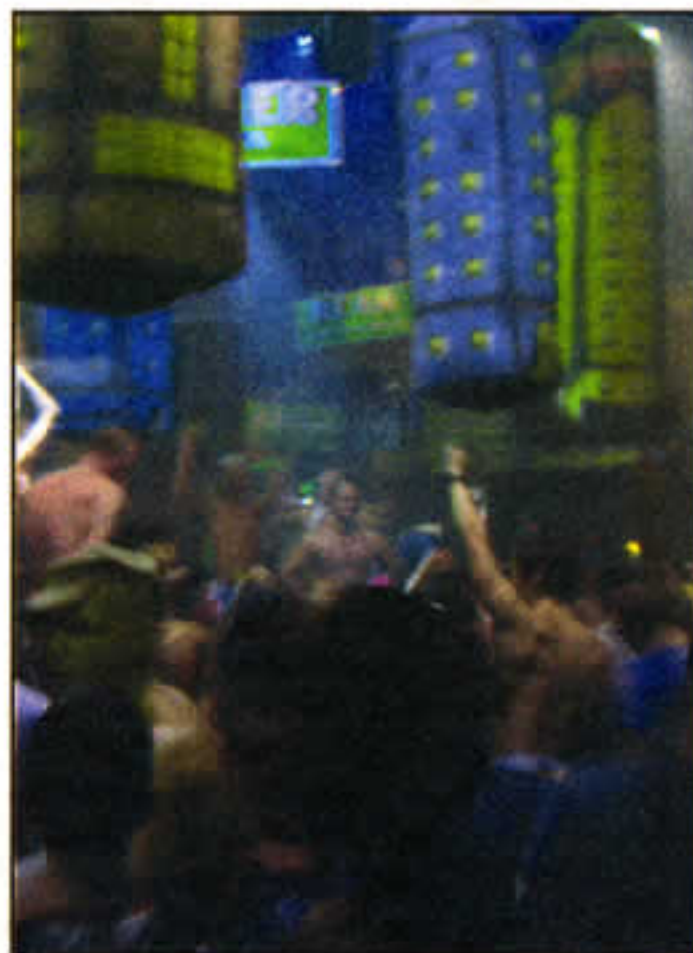
"All the work they put in makes it something a little more special than your everyday event," says Belmares, 34, who is gay. "The show that was associated with it brings an extra something to it."

Belmares says he doesn't know what he'll be spinning in D.C., because he enjoys playing off the energy of the crowd.

"I've always been true to the tribal house diva vocal," says Belmares. "I change a little bit with the times, but that's always the core sound of my set."

The first 300 people who show up for Babylon will get a free CD of Belmares' work called "The Midori Mix," named after the tour's primary corporate sponsor, Midori, maker of the famed Midori melon liqueur.

"We try to pick DJs that fit our brand in the environment we try to create," says Gill, 26, who is straight. "This year the



Embrace Productions' City of Babylon Tour comes to D.C.'s Nation nightclub, transforming the dance floor into a gay fantasyland. (Photo courtesy of Embrace Productions)

theme we tried to go with is celebrating life. We're not pushing the whole tribal, after-hours thing. We want everyone to have a good time and dance with their friends. It's 'Queer as Folk' all over again"

WITH "QUEER AS FOLK" NO LONGER on television (the final season is available on DVD) the promoters face a unique challenge

## **i** MORE INFO

City of Babylon Tour  
Saturday, May 20  
VelvetNation  
1015 Half St., SE  
\$8 from 10-11p.m.  
\$15 after 11 p.m.

marketing the tour to today's partygoers.

"When an event attaches itself to something nationally recognized, it gains a kind of notoriety that seems to be larger than just a party," says Ed Bailey, co-producer of VelvetNation. "There seems to be something that people get excited about when they know that it's a tour."

Gill agrees, saying that he and his promoters make sure to include big venues like New York's gay super club Roxy, L.A.'s Avalon and D.C.'s Nation to generate buzz for the tour's smaller destinations like Denver. Babylon will travel to 19 cities this year, which is the customary number that Gill chooses, thereby suggesting there's no slowdown in demand.

"I do think it is a little awkward [the tour] is associated with something that no longer really exists," says Bailey. He's quick to add, however, that there will be a large group of people who won't even know the TV show has come to a close.

"[The tour] has a reputation of being a good event and being well attended in the past," Bailey says.