

The Copacabana's New Home

Written by



The world-famous Copacabana, a mainstay of New York nightclubs, came to symbolize glamour and elegance.

The nightclub has had profound effect on the public recognition of many performers--their roster reads like a "who's who" of show business.

The Copacabana opened November 10, 1940 at 10 East 60th Street in New York City. Although Monte Proser's name was on the lease, he had a powerful partner: mob boss Frank Costello. Costello hired Jules Podell to look after his interests in the business and within a few years Proser was out and Podell was named the official owner.

Many entertainers made their debut at the Copacabana and helped to develop its high profile reputation. Harry Belafonte headlined the club the 1950s and Sam Cooke both performed and recorded the LP "Sam Cooke at the Copa" in 1964. Sammy Davis Jr. shattered attendance records with his run in May of the same year and in 1965, The Supremes made their debut there in July. Over the next few years, Motown Record's The Temptations, Martha and the Vandellas and Marvin Gaye graced the stage of the Copa.



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Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were also frequent performers and both gave their farewell performances at the club.

This nightclub increased in notoriety after a May 16, 1957 incident involving members of the New York Yankees. One evening, Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Hank Bauer, Yogi Berra, Johnny Kucks and Billy Martin, along with their wives arrived at the nightclub to celebrate Martin's birthday. Sammy Davis, Jr. was the headliner. During the performance, a group of bowlers, apparently intoxicated, started to interfere with Davis' act, even hurling racial slurs at him. This behavior incensed the Yankees, especially Martin, since his teammate, catcher Elston Howard was the first African American to join the team. Tensions erupted between the two factions and the resulting fracas made newspaper headlines. As a result, several of the Yankees were fined.

Podel ran the club until his death in 1973. Three years later, John Juliano, Peter Dorn and Ron Hollick took over the nightclub and in keeping up with times, turned it into a discotheque. In 1992 they moved the club from its original location of over 50 years, to 617 West 57th Street.



Since that time, the club has been a home for hip-hop, salsa and other Latin acts but its address has changed regularly. In 2001, the club was forced to move a third time to West 34th Street and Eleventh Avenue after the landlord at the previous location terminated its lease early to build office towers on the 57th St. site. It turned out even that location would be temporary because in June 2007, the club closed due to the expansion of the New York City subway. El Gran Combo was the final performer.

Over the years, the Copacabana has been the backdrop for countless artistic endeavors. The

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1978 Barry Manilow hit song "Copacabana" is about the nightclub. The club was also used as a setting in films like Goodfellas, Raging Bull, Tootsie, Carlito's Way, Martin and Lewis and Beyond the Sea, as well as several plays. More recently, part of the 2003 Yerba Buena song "Guajira" was shot there.

It is with great excitement that the Copacabana reopens in its fourth location in Times Square. With three floors of elegance, the new location includes a supper club by celebrity Chef Alex Garcia, a live music and night club venue and a fourth floor retractable rooftop space with views of the city no matter the season. Once again the famed Copacabana is open, restoring a level of class to New York City nightlife.



TIMELINE

- * 1941: At the start of the new year, the Copacabana opens for business at 10 E. 60th St. Later that year, America goes to war.
- * 1947: Groucho Marx and Carmen Miranda star in the film "Copacabana."
- * 1949: Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin start performing at the club, part of a large group of A-list performers who would frequent the Copa in the coming decades.
- * 1957: Shortly after the club's dining room is integrated, Yankees Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford and Yogi Berra are involved in an infamous tussle with alleged loudmouths who were heckling headliner Sammy Davis Jr. As usual, the Yankees recorded several hits.
- * 1965: The Supremes make their debut at the Copa.
- * 1969: The famous Copa Girl dance team is disbanded.
- * 1973: Original owner Monte Proser dies, and the club sits empty for nearly three years.



- * 1976: John Juliano, Ron Hollick and Peter Dorn take over the Copacabana and operates it like the discotheques that were popular at the time.
- * 1978: Barry Manilow's "Copacabana" crashes the Billboard charts with the tale of a one-time

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showgirl working in a disco. Juliano gets the idea to revisit the Copa's roots and host a Latin theme night. It's a hit.

* 1992: The Copa moves to 617 W. 57th St., where it operates until 2002.

* 2003: The Copa takes over a cavernous space at 560 W. 34th St. as a nightclub and special events venue.

* 2007: Construction on the rapidly developing West Side causes the Copa to close once again halfway through the year.

* 2011: The Copacabana reopens in Times Square with a live performance by salsa legend Willie Colon.

Current Photography by Josh Dehonney