

HOME PAGE MY TIMES TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS

The New York Times

Music



WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE

AUTOS

ART & DESIGN BOOKS DANCE MOVIES MUSIC TELEVISION THEATER

## Party Boats and Concert Cruises Sail Into the Fall

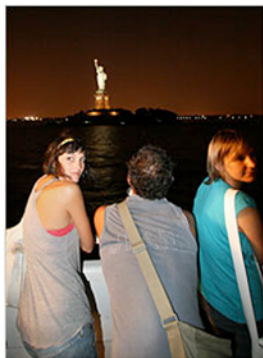


Julien Jourdes for The New York Times

Passengers at the seagoing dance party held on the cruise ship the Temptress listening to music spun by the D.J. Kid Koala.

By MELENA RYZIK  
Published: September 28, 2007

In his decade-long career, Kid Koala has D.J.'ed in clubs, basements, parks and even a planetarium. But until recently, he had never performed on a moving ship.



Julien Jourdes for The New York Times

The end of summer doesn't mean the end of cruising around New York Harbor accompanied by music and cocktails. And the city's boat-party offerings are expanding, with techno, a Guns N' Roses tribute band and a boatful of karaoke all setting sail in the coming weeks.

So when he boarded the Temptress, a 160-foot, two-deck cruise ship, from a pier on the West Side Highway a few weeks ago, he really didn't know what to expect. He set up his turntables and the video screen that gives viewers a close-up of his hands. (Kid Koala, born Eric San, is known for his scratching skills.) And as the orange sun set over New Jersey, he waited for the party to start.

It did. Hundreds of people turned up: D.J.-heads, young tourists, New Yorkers sick of the club scene. They packed the decks, drinking beer and cocktails, watching the glittering Manhattan skyline recede, swaying and then jumping on the dance floor. The trip was smooth; Kid Koala was a convert. He even found inspiration in the setting, mixing "New York, New York" just as the Temptress passed the Statue of Liberty. "Hey, you guys know the words!" he shouted. And yes, even some of this too-cool crowd sang along.

One-off concert cruises have long been a staple summertime activity. But recently they have expanded, offering more frequent outings and greater variety in their acts, with electronica and campy tribute cover bands added to the traditional nostalgia acts. Both New York Water Taxi and Circle Line Downtown added regular music tours to their lineup this year and plan to continue them next year. And the six-year-old Rocks Off series, which booked the Kid Koala gig, has been growing rapidly. It will do 104 cruises this year, up from 66 two years ago, said Jake Szufnarowski, the company's owner.

Thanks to its increasing popularity, the boat-party season has expanded as well. The Circle Line's newest attraction, a karaoke cruise, is scheduled for next Friday; Rocks Off has shows through mid-November. And even the Staten Island Ferry is in on the action: through this weekend, it plays host to the FM Ferry Experiment, an installation by the artists Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere, which turns the ship into a floating radio transmitter. (A performance schedule is at [fmferryexperiment.net](http://fmferryexperiment.net).)

"Once you say 'boat party,' people just go for it," said Taimur Agha, a D.J. and promoter whose company, Blk Market Membership, sponsored its first cruise last month. It was so popular that the company did another three weeks later; a final outing is planned for late October.

The cruises last anywhere from two to four hours, and usually have a cash bar; many also offer food (buffet or sandwiches). Ticket prices are higher than for a night at a club, but then, a night at a club doesn't have a view of the [Empire State Building](#) and a river breeze.

The bragging rights are hard to beat. Marja Tikka, 25, a graphic designer from Finland visiting New York for the summer, brought some friends from back home. "This was the kind of experience they won't get anywhere else," she said.

Even New Yorkers might prefer floating clubs to those onshore, simply because they are easier to navigate. In an effort to eliminate crowding, and quicken boarding, many cruise organizers say they undersell tickets. "We're the most comfortable sold-out venue in Manhattan," said Mr. Szufnarowski, who rents two boats for the Rocks Off series, neither filled to capacity. Similarly, the Circle Line Downtown limits its new karaoke cruises to 250 people, even though the boat, the Zephyr, can hold 400, said William Buckley, the company's general manager.

But camaraderie isn't lacking. The karaoke cruises quickly become mass singalongs, with strangers passing one another the microphone, Mr. Buckley said. "By the end of the evening, it turns into a dance cruise."

Of course, there are technical challenges. The Zephyr has added 10 flat-screen monitors so that people can follow along with "Livin' on a Prayer" from anywhere on the ship. The Temptress has 16 speakers. "Sightlines were a bit of an issue," Mr. Szufnarowski said of preparing a vessel. "There are no boats that are built with music in mind."

Mr. Szufnarowski, a former booker at the Knitting Factory, strives to give the Rocks Off series street cred. His talent has included the electronica auteur and sample wizard Amon Tobin, who has performed twice despite a bout of seasickness on his first trip, and the vintage punk rockers the Bad Brains, who threw the release party for their comeback CD aboard the Temptress.

"That's the first time I've ever seen a mosh pit on a boat," Mr. Szufnarowski said. "Just seeing people crowd-surfing on a boat with open windows, I was thinking, why did I think this was a good idea?"

In the end, no life vests were necessary, and mishaps and seasickness seem rare. More common, Mr. Szufnarowski said, are "people looking like they've had way too much too drink lying down for the last 20 minutes."

"People forget that they're stuck there," he added.

But for some, that's the point.

"I like getting away from the city," said Kirk Faulkner, 27, a Brooklyn screenwriter who went on the Kid Koala cruise after a fight with his girlfriend.

"It's like a minivacation," added Lisa Pettersson, 26, an actress (and not the cause of Mr. Faulkner's troubles).

On Kid Koala's dance floor, the disco ball's glitter competed with the river's shimmer. By the time the boat approached the dock, the setting had cast its spell: couples were making out everywhere. Everyone else stood rapt as Kid Koala scratched and mixed "Moon River." Manhattan floated by.

Marc, 24, a theater director, and Chelsea, 23, a writer, spent most of the cruise outside on the deck. It was their first date. Did they like Kid Koala's set?

"We didn't see any of it," Marc said. "We wanted to be alone."

They wouldn't give their full names: They weren't supposed to be out together.

"This is a great place for a secret date," Chelsea said.

#### **Hitting the Water and Dance Floor**

In the summer, concert cruises proliferate. But fall tours are increasingly common. Here are a few companies that offer cruises this weekend and in the coming weeks:

**CIRCLE LINE DOWNTOWN** Departs from the South Street Seaport, Pier 16, at the foot of Fulton Street in Lower Manhattan. Tomorrow, a Saturday Night Dance Cruise. Next Friday, a Karaoke Cruise. Both board at 9 p.m. and leave at 9:30. \$25, \$23 in advance. (866) 925-4631; [circlelinedowntown.com](http://circlelinedowntown.com).

**ROCKS OFF CONCERT CRUISES** Boats depart from Skyport Marina, 23rd Street at the East River, and Pier 81, 41st Street at the Hudson. Concerts through Nov. 17. "Appetite for Destruction," a Guns 'n' Roses tribute cruise, leaves tomorrow night at midnight (boarding at 11:30 p.m.) from the West Side. A cruise with the band Chesterfield Kings leaves tomorrow at 8 p.m. (boarding, 7 p.m.) from the East Side. Each, \$20 in advance, \$25 at the boat; (212) 571-3304; [rocksoffnyc.com](http://rocksoffnyc.com).

**BLK MARKET MEMBERSHIP** A techno cruise is planned for late October. Check the Web site for details: [blkmarketmembership.com](http://blkmarketmembership.com).