

I Entered the Enticing World of *The Stranger*,
You Should Too!

By Erianne Lewis

The line to enter Joe Jonas' "favorite NYC club" was quite long and filled with a younger crowd of eager 20-somethings waiting to witness the oddity firsthand (and maybe catch a glimpse of a celebrity too). *The Stranger* is the newer version of the ultra-exclusive, high-dollar club *The Box*. Although they share the same owners, there isn't much you can find about it online other than articles from Time Out, WWD and a few short TikToks. Their website resembles a lottery system and has the days the club is open listed as "the next drawing," an early hint to the eccentric nature of the club.

My friends and I arrived around 12:10 a.m., 10 minutes after designed entry slot ended. We were escorted to a separate line for people with reserved tickets. I liked that even though we missed our entry time, we were still able to join the reserved ticket line.

Once our tickets were scanned, a star stamp was placed on our wrists and we were ushered into the madness. We paid \$30 presale for the tickets that usually start at \$50 and can go up to \$80 the night of. I honestly think the money was worth it for the spectacle inside.

Caution tape swung from the ceiling of the main dance area as Missy Elliott's "Pass That Dutch" blasted from the speakers. I was immediately hooked. Dancers in latex, mesh shirts, tattered jeans and trash bags captivated the audience's attention on the main stage. Smoke swirled behind them as red LED lights shined down on everyone.

The performers moved into the crowd, throwing trash bags filled with balloons into the air. Reminiscent of beach balls passed through the audience at festivals, I really enjoyed this added feature.

Up the dimly lit staircase and to the left, the hall of mirrors caught my eye. I've been hesitant to enter one of these amusement park attractions since Jordan Peele's blockbuster film, "Us", spooked me in 2019, but I allowed my curiosity to lead me (and I'll never miss a good photo op).

Past the mirror hall, a balcony peered onto the dance floor we had just exited. Bubbles emerged from a giant fishnet wand being controlled by a lady donning blue lingerie and an oversized blue bow on top of her blonde wig.

Venturing further into the second floor, my friends and I discovered the Frick Frack Blackjack table where the wager was simple: anything but money. My friend Ana loves Blackjack, so I convinced her to join. Behind the purple-haired dealer lie all sorts of random possessions like beanies, necklaces, perfume and watches, all of which were lost by eager players. The riskier participants wagered clothing items or shoes, but Ana convinced the dealer to let her hand over her lip gloss from her purse.

I know nothing about Blackjack, but Ana won the first round and lost the second. We decided to pivot and spin the wheel tucked away in the corner.

Ana was instructed to let the game's operator read her search history out loud, I had to propose to a stranger and Ana's friend was hit lightly across the butt with a whip. The wheel showed more mercy to some of us than others.

On our way back to the main dance floor, we stumbled into a karaoke room where "We are Young" by fun. had just started. The performers weren't giving the song the energy it deserved (they weren't belting it like their life depended on it), so I *had* to step in.

Grabbing the mic, I was transported to my 2014 bedroom, where I memorized the lyrics to this song, hoping to find a future opportunity to sing it badly with strangers. I'm forever indebted to *The Stranger* for presenting me with this chance.

After we laughed about my horrible karaoke skills (which probably should have stayed in my bedroom after all), we returned to the main dance floor where a magician was levitating someone on stage. A dancing panda grooved in one of the rooms hovering above the stage, which was a nice touch to the randomness occurring.

The DJ began to play Azealia Banks' "212" and it felt like I was also levitating. This is one of my absolute favorite songs to hear in any club atmosphere. If I could give the DJs a pat on the back, I would. Every song/mix just built off the previous one perfectly. We somehow wound up on an elevated platform in the middle of dance floor. The dancers hyped us up as we badly got down to the music and danced under a giant octopus inflatable until nearly 3 a.m.

My aching feet, sore legs, and raspy voice were a sign *The Stranger* owed me nothing. Despite how peculiar it may be, *The Stranger* is somewhere I would definitely return, but not frequent.

A TikTok commentor described the club as being how they imagined clubs to be when they were younger: a little chaos, dab of bizarreness, amusing themed rooms and some unrecognizable (but still good) music. I couldn't agree more and I can't wait to go again.