



THE ART OF THE PARTY New York and Long Island

*Sunday, October 7th
to Thursday, October 11th, 2001*

From time immemorial, men and women have congregated for the purposes of public conviviality, to celebrate food and drink, music and merriment. But just as primal as the need for celebration is the need to define one's place in the social order. Historically, the party has served both of these functions. It is a setting for frivolity, for consumption and enjoyment, but also an opportunity for the establishment of dominion and willing subjugation. Indeed, at its very essence, the party is a ritual in which society transgresses boundaries, while at the same time endorses them by expressing a social hierarchy of host and guest (and servant). The party is a kind of theater, one in which the host invites the guests to act as players in a script he has devised; it is meant to transform and to transport its participants, and the power of the host is manifested in the degree and intensity of those transportations and transformations. When the guests forget and surrender themselves, when they drink deeply of the cup, the host has established himself – or herself – as master of his domain.

In this program we will explore – and luxuriate – in the transformative power of the party, looking back to the great Hosts of History – to the Medicis in Italy, with their elaborate stage sets, costumes and tables of sugar spun fantasies; to the courts of Louis XV and Louis XVI, with his fantasy garden fêtes. Through an appreciation of these historical antecedents, we will examine the party as it has existed in its most extravagant forms in our own country, the sumptuousness and the seemingly reckless way in which money was spent. Was it really worth it, or was it just a midsummer night's dream played over and over again? As we recreate these parties in this program one is rewarded, for in fact we see that they were living fairy tales where exquisite charming people acted out their fantasies with the help of others. In so doing they also created a new aristocracy, and helped define social dynamics.

First, we will explore some of the grandest mansions of the **Gilded Age** in New York City, sites of some of the most extravagant parties of the late nineteenth century, expressing America's newfound confidence in its ascendancy and cultural taste. We will be entertained by tales of the furtive diplomacy and Byzantine intrigue required to secure a spot on the invitation list of society matrons such as **Caroline Astor**, then **Queen of New York Society**, crowned by the southern dandy **Ward McAllister**, whose **Select Four Hundred**, measured by the number of people who could fit in her ballroom, defined the American aristocracy. At the time, many of these great houses harbored fantastic artistic treasures, released onto the market by Europe's royal families, who faced declining fortunes as the new American aristocracy began their climb. This great transatlantic artistic shift led to the creation of **The Morgan** collection and **The Frick Collection**. In a nineteenth century mansion, we recreate the court life of Louis XIV and Louis XVI, whose mistress and Queen made the gardens of Versailles into pleasure grounds for enjoyment and for the staging of history's most magical garden fêtes. We create a dinner where each table is a silver fantasy, transformed by world-famous silver artist, Patrick Mavros.

Mr. Mavros has agreed to design for the occasion original table settings based on the African jungle, with herds of wild elephant trooping across the table, past candelabra that resemble giant African trees, and with life-like gorillas lounging nearby. Delicate birds, ostriches, guinea fowl or zebra and giraffe serve as silver place card holders while a monkey balances a spoon that reaches into a mustard pot. Mr. Mavros' artistry, reminds us once again of the theatrical elements of the party, with the dinner table as an exotic stage on which the night's drama will unfold.

Next, we will leave the city behind and travel an hour into the heart of the legendary Gold Coast on the northern shore of Long Island. The next three days will be spent visiting castle-like

mansions and encountering families whose names and homes are woven into the fabric of American history. We will lunch with Mrs. Phipps on her estate, visit Old Westbury Gardens and party in the old Woolworth mansion. C.Z. Guest will talk about her magnificent gardens on her estate while a fantasy masquerade dinner at Knole takes us into one of the most fabulous mansions on the gold coast, once the home of Bradley Martin.

In our travels, we will recreate the Golden Age of Parties in America, that heady exuberant decade of the 1920s, when men and women attempted to outdo each other in the spending of a wealth newly minted and thus all the more extravagant. There were all-night parties, in which, as **F. Scott Fitzgerald** described it in his *Great Gatsby*, the denizens of this land “*came and went like moths among the whisperings, champagne and the stars.*” In a private home in Old Westbury, where the interior and hostess lend themselves to the grace and charm of Belle Époque and where the gardens have been extensively landscaped to create rooms where one can wander between ponds with statues, rose gardens, parterres, meadows and a racing track with thoroughbred horses, the world of the **Comtesse de la Greffulhe**, cousin to **Robert de Montesquiou** whose portrait by Whistler hangs in the **Frick Collection** is brought to life. The hostess creates a **Belle Époque Parisian Salon** such as those described in the novels of **Marcel Proust**. It was here in Paris in the 1890s that America’s new rich learned the sophistication of centuries of European social diplomacy. The theme of the party *Remembrance of Things Past* calls for a soirée complete with costumed actors playing the part of characters such as the Marquise de Saint-Loup, music, and a night of mystical involvement when everyone will speak the language of another age.

Please contact Arts to Life on 646-792-2340 for the Full Program and Schedule.

The fee for a day of lectures is \$250. The fee for a day of lectures and the first night dinner is \$600; the dinner will include a five course period French menu, as well as a scene from an opera from the time of Marie Antoinette. The splendid room where we dine will be transformed to resemble an outdoor garden. The fee for the entire program with accommodation at The Carlyle Hotel in New York and The Roslyn Claremont Hotel on Long Island, all parties, meals, and events is \$3,000 with a \$500 single supplement. (Four nights and five days.)



Courtesy: John Lane