

*Local National Commentary Beyond the Beltway*

## MERGE Brings New Lifeto DC's Party Scene

By Meredith Moise

*If you haven't heard of Inhertwined Entertainment, you've been in hibernation. The emerging party throwing juggernaut opened shop in the winter of 2002 when business partners, Alana and TJ, talked about their dissatisfaction of black lesbian nightlife. They wondered if they could do something on their own to satisfy their jones for a kick ass party with gorgeous women. They joined forces with Jay to create MERGE, a monthly happy hour/party catering to women who love women. Their first party had 50 ladies. Now, MERGE boasts attendance upwards of 250-300 women every second Friday of each month. The party doesn't feature strippers or exotic dancers and don't expect to get into MERGE with jeans and work boots. Its attraction comes from the wall-to-wall beautiful women clad in business casual from MD, DC and VA. Although the party, held at DC's Club Daedalus, has a decidedly Black flavor, an ethnic panoply is emerging. We spoke to Alana, TJ and Jay about MERGE, where it's has been and where it's about to go.*



**Baltimore Outloud: Give us the MERGE creation story.**

**Alana:** in December of 2002, TJ and I were at a diner after a party lamenting about lesbian nightlife for black women. "Can we do something for our own on a trial and error thing?" we thought.

**Baltimore OUTloud: What did you think women want?**

**Alana:** We believed that women wanted better attire. Maybe better attire will encourage people to act in a better way. We wanted to raise the attire bar. We also wanted to raise the venue bar. We wanted a variety of music in a classy, upscale environment.

**TJ:** Unfortunately, as a whole, I think that in their minds, people think if they look better, they will act better.

**Jay:** There are people who complain about [the standards] of our party. If you look at some of the white clubs, people dress how they want. I think our women appreciate a higher standard of dress.

**Baltimore OUTloud: How did your website, Inhertwine Entertainment, evolve?**

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**Alana:** We want our website to be a clearinghouse for information for the lesbian community. We wanted to create a section for culture and have segments for the community. IE Sports, for example, will also grow on the site. Right now, we sponsor a boxer and we plan to enter other ventures.



**Jay:** We want the IE sports section to be a one stop shop for lesbian sports. We want this section to be for women who enjoy sports. Overall, we want to be known for quality entertainment. We don't advertise parties featuring strippers.

**Baltimore Outloud: Why? What about the strippers?**

**Jay:** If people want to see strippers they can go to a strip club. We cater to a different clientele. Some of the ladies who come to our party still go to the strip clubs. There are options.

**TJ:** MERGE gave a lot of women the chance to come out again without the strippers [type entertainment]. Not having strippers has helped our party.

**Baltimore OUTloud: Really?**

**TJ:** Yes. We attract a more mature and discreet crowd because we don't have the strippers. A lot of women appreciate this because they have been there and done that.

**Baltimore OUTloud: What about the younger women? Do they attend MERGE?**

**Jay:** When I came out in '99, there was a transition of sorts [in the DC/MD party scene]. But the younger women still go to the Delta. At MERGE, women can be who they are.

**TJ:** Because we deal with a more mature crowd, lots of ladies who go to our party want discretion. MERGE is a safe haven with no drama.

**Baltimore OUTloud: Since there aren't any strippers, will you ever have a drag show?**

**Alana:** At MERGE, we will probably never have a drag show. We want to stay like we are. If there is a drag show, it will be on a different level like everything else we do.

**Baltimore OUTloud: Why is your event different than most lesbian events for black women?**

**Alana:** We [black women] want more options. In our community, there is usually just one option. Promoters will lower standards to attract more people then the whole club becomes seedy.

**TJ:** Many times, we are used to certain things and we won't go elsewhere to find places. If we are used to a venue, we will go there [all the time]. New promoters are opening the nights for every one. We can have nice places also. Environment and

dress always helps to attract a more sophisticated crowd.

**Baltimore OUTloud: What are your plans for Baltimore? Any plans on creating an event up here?**

**TJ:** We plan on bringing the same class and style featured in MERGE to Baltimore. Our Baltimore ladies will be impressed.

**Jay:** People keep asking us when we are coming to Baltimore. We'll be there soon.

**Baltimore OUTloud: Can you share details with us?**

**Alana:** No, but we can say you'll know when Intertwined Entertainment is in town. Expect to see us soon

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