

# VARIETY®

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## THE SCENE



## Nightclubbing as theater

**S**imon Hammerstein is wary of interviews; he doesn't want his new nightclub to get the wrong label, or put in the wrong box, as it were.

Sure, when it officially opens this spring, the Box will be in hipster territory down on Chrystie Street on the Lower East Side. And yes, there will be food, drinks and beautiful people (the preopening private parties featured Hammerstein's business partners and buddies like Jude Law and Josh Lucas) late into the night, but don't jump to conclusions.

"It is not a club, there is no dance floor," emphasizes this Off Off Broadway director. "This is a theater."

But this 5,000-square-foot space is not a traditional theater that his grandfather, the legendary musical writer Oscar Hammerstein II,

would recognize; nor is it something his great-great-grandfather, opera impresario and uptown theater builder Oscar Hammerstein I, would have gone for.



Hammerstein

No, this unique theater harkens back to great-grandfather Willie Hammerstein, a king among vaudeville producers — as the man who put Helen Keller on-stage and supposedly invented the pie-in-the-face routine, he'd be right at home in the Box.

"We want to bring back the variety theater, the dinner theater, the concert hall saloon," Hammerstein says. "There's no room for subtext and there's no fourth wall. When you're trying to captivate 400 people who are talking, eating and drinking, there's no room for pre-text. You have to engage the audience. And you better be damn good."

— Stuart Miller