

# PLAYFORD BALL 2009

## NOT SURE WHAT TO WEAR TO THE BALL? SOME IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS

*It's fun to wear something different—more elegant, festive or period-inspired—to an ECD ball. There are talented people in our community who can create beautiful and unusual outfits for themselves or others—you will see some of these at the ball. It is probably a bit late to begin such a project now for this year. Here are some notes about two ways to achieve an alternate self for the evening.*

*COSTUME RENTAL: CD\*NY can get a (relatively) good price for costume rental from the TDF Costume Collection, which collects costumes donated by shows that are closing and rents them to not-for-profit organizations: \$65 or \$75 per outfit. I visited the warehouse where they store them last week, and I have to say that this is an option that will work only if you have time to spare during the week and considerable energy (as well as that kind of money to spend on a one-time fantasy). The warehouse is open Monday to Friday during office hours; we would need to go in a group of no more than four people and pull the costumes for ourselves from racks that are jammed floor to ceiling, so that you have to climb ladders for the higher racks. They are arranged roughly by period. There are some absolutely gorgeous things and some things that are in ragged condition, so finding appropriate items would definitely take some time. We would be allowed to take the costumes out three weeks before the event, to allow time to make any necessary alterations. The costumes would need to be cleaned either before we returned them or after, by the people there, at \$5 per pound. If any of this sounds like something you would like to investigate, let me know: elizabeth\_parry@pcmag.com, or 212-503-5250 (work)/718-515-0420 (home). We'd have to do this as an organization, not as individuals.*

*THRIFT SHOPS: A bit more plausible, probably! I haven't been to every thrift shop in the city, but I can tell you about a few where I've had good luck. There is a very fruitful row of thrift shops on 23rd Street, near where I work. On the north side of the street, west of Third Avenue (157 East 23rd), is a Housing Works store, where the selection can be quite high-quality and there is actually a fitting room. I bought my silver ball dress here, for about \$70 as I remember, and only this year I found an absolutely ravishing creation in ivory silk crepe, which, unfortunately, I had to let go because I couldn't do it up. On the south side, between Third and Second, you'll find in rapid succession (going east): Goodwill (220 East 23rd), the Salvation Army (also 220 East 23rd), and the City Opera Thrift Shop (222 East 23rd). Goodwill is quite spacious and well lit, and the prices are good. The prom dresses are on the left as you go in, along the wall. For the Salvation Army, you have to take a very slow elevator down to the basement, where the atmosphere is a bit depressing, but this is where I got my blue satin skirt for about \$4, so treasures can be found. City Opera is a lovely place to shop, always with pleasant music, but the merchandise is high-end and the prices reflect that.*

*The biggest Salvation Army store is on West 46th Street. I've never been there, but I'm told it's quite an experience. I investigated the Sal's on Eighth Avenue and 21st Street last week and can report that I saw several plausible candidates among the long dresses there, and that the store is spacious and pleasant. I don't think there's a fitting room, though.*

*Housing Works has seven other thrift shops, including one on Montague Street in Brooklyn. I haven't been to them all, but the ones I have been to consistently offer a superior shopping experience, though the prices are higher than at Sal's or Goodwill. They are listed at <http://www.housingworks.org/locations/category/thrift-shops/>. You can also bid online for certain items (mostly designer labels) at <http://housingworksauctions.com/>. I notice that a Bill Blass gown in primrose silk went recently for \$45.*

*While all of this is directed at women, I'd love to hear from men who have found formal wear at thrift shops or other non-traditional stores.*

ELIZABETH PARRY  
CD\*NY BOARD PRESIDENT  
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