

# Ball skills

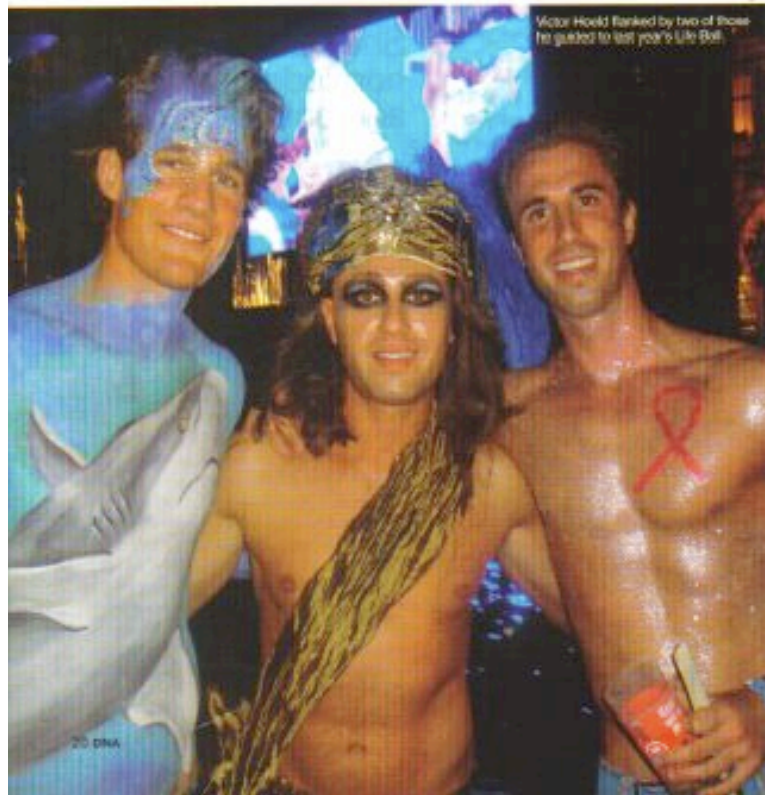
Vienna's Life Ball is the world's biggest and most glamorous social event, raising millions to fight AIDS and attracting high-calibre celebrities. As Nick Cook explains, tickets are rarer than hen's teeth but you may still get to the ball...

When it comes to fundraising events, they don't get any more impressive than Vienna's annual Life Ball, the world's biggest money-spinner in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Entry is so highly sought that within Austria it's impossible to actually buy tickets and everybody has to go into an SMS draw in which only those lucky enough to win are allowed to pay their way past the door. The only alternative is to spend big money in sponsorship dollars to secure a table.

For Australians, there is just one man who holds the key to the party - Victor Hoeld of

gay boutique travel company, Hautes Vacances. He'll be guiding a group of 20 people to Austria for the ball, which has a different theme every year. "They go to a huge amount of effort. Last year's theme was water so they put a big pool, just for that night, in front and had gondolas and other things on it," says Victor. "You can go in black tie, but if you dress up in whatever the theme happens to be you're allowed to walk down the red carpet with people waving and cheering all around you." This year's theme is going to be Earth, continuing the series of Four Elements that

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Victor Hoeld flanked by two of those he's guided to last year's Life Ball.

began with Water and will feature Wind and Fire in coming years.

The event is usually held in May but this year it will be in July to coincide with the XVIII International AIDS Conference, which will take place the day after the red carpet has been rolled up and put away. Making it even more special is the fact that this year's ball will be much bigger than usual and will take place in three separate locations. As well as the traditional Life Ball in Vienna City Hall, there will also be the amFAR (Foundation For AIDS Research) gala in the Parliament and the Elton John AIDS Foundation Red Ribbon Cotillion in the Burgtheater.

According to Victor, the size and scale of Life Ball far outstrips anything witnessed in Australia. "The big thing about it is seeing people you wouldn't normally see. Last year we were checking into our hotel at the same time as stars like Fran Drescher and Katy Perry, while one of the guys met Bill Clinton," he says. "All these famous and important people are there supporting the Life Ball and you rub shoulders with them." Comedian and actress Whoopi Goldberg has been confirmed as this year's guest of honour.

The ball may be one of Europe's great social events but it also has a very serious purpose, raising money for the global fight against HIV/AIDS, and to Victor that's what makes it so special. "It's really impressive what they do because at the same as you're having a lot of fun you're also helping to save lives in places like Africa," he says. "That's why it attracts all sorts of people. I mainly get guys who have travelled all over the world and want to see or do something different. Life Ball is an awesome experience. Everybody wants to be there and there's only so many tickets."

DNA has extensively covered Life Ball in the past and its worth dipping into our archives to pull out some of the snippets from our experiences at the event. These words come from DNA's New York correspondent Matthew Philip, who wrote about the fairy tale-themed 2007 ball: "When we got out of the car the roar was more or less deafening. One thing I learned, though, is that after the first two minutes it's a lot easier to swan around being photographed by screaming press than you'd think... People of all ages, genders and sexual orientations blended into one homogenous group to celebrate pagantry and, as the title suggests, life itself... The *House of Grand* style wedding chapel down in the courtyard would host the marriage of Ritchie Rich and his boyfriend Joe Korniewicz at 1am. Amanda Lepore was to be the presiding minister... On the flight back to New York a publicist gave someone a rim-job at the back of the plane. I can't be sure who, I was asleep."

For more information on Life Ball visit [www.lifeball.org](http://www.lifeball.org). To join Victor's tour visit [www.hautesvacances.com](http://www.hautesvacances.com).