



STEPPING OUT

Marianka Swain reports on the increasing visibility of same-sex ballroom, from national TV exposure in Israel to a growing crop of regional dance clubs

Israel's version of "Strictly Come Dancing", "Rokdim Im Kokhavim", has become the first incarnation of the show to feature a same-sex couple – TV anchor Gili Shem Tov and professional Dorit Milman. Gili explained that dancing with another woman feels natural, as she shares her life with a woman, and that dance "is about co-ordination and energy between two people, whether female or male".

Responding to news that some viewers had decided not to let their children watch the show because of their pairing, Gili said: "It makes me want to do it more. If only a few people become more tolerant and open-minded, my work here is done." Gili hopes other versions of the show will follow suit. Might "Strictly" be brave enough to take that step? Watch this space...

Although we don't yet have a same-sex couple on our primetime show, we do have classes springing up all over the country. Pat Sharkey started Incognito (incognito-now@ntlworld.com) in

Lincoln in February to coincide with Gay History Month. He now has a number of regulars, "plus new people coming all the time. We all go to the pub afterwards, so it's very sociable; we've got a Christmas dinner-dance on December 22. It's really bringing the gay community together. Now they're confident with the basics, it would be great to see them trying out other same-sex events and competitions."

Pat would also like to link up with the university, something that Richard Miller has achieved at the Miller Dance Centre (www.millerdance.org.uk) in Norwich, where his same-sex class (pictured left) has been running since August 2009. "I already had same-sex couples at the studio, so it seemed logical. It's wonderful to see how far they've come – a few have already competed at the Rivoli, and are looking forward to more competitions and exams. There's nothing else like this in the area, so it means a lot to them, not just as a class, but as a supportive social scene."

Brighton's Cheek2Cheek (www.cheek2cheekbrighton.org.uk), which has been going for 15 years and is holding its annual New Year's Ball on January 15, has a similar attraction for Giorgina Bainbridge: "You can learn a new skill while dancing with members of the same sex in a safe and friendly atmosphere. I love being able to waltz round with whomever I choose, and either lead or follow, depending on how confident I feel with a particular dance. Most important, I've made lots of new friends." ●

