

# STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX  
DANCE SCENE



Former *Strictly* pros Erin Boag and Nicole Cutler talk to **Marianka Swain** about judging same-sex dance

**T**his month, Nicole Cutler makes her Pink Jukebox Trophy judging debut. "Matthew's always said if I get asked, I have to say yes, as it's such an amazingly brilliant, inspiring day," she explains. In contrast, Erin Boag wasn't sure what to expect at the Blackpool Same-Sex Dance Festival last October: "It was all new to me!"

However, her approach "was no different – I just looked at frame, posture, timing and footwork, and that adds up to a whole package. It doesn't matter about gender; it's a couple dancing together."

Nicole agrees: "I have my own criteria, whatever I'm asked to judge, and I just focus on what's presented to me on the day. I'll be judging a dance competition first and foremost, so interpretation, characteristics, techniques, topline, footwork and suitable choreography, performed to the best ability, regardless of gender."

Erin was apprehensive about costumes, "but there was nothing outrageous – lots of smart tails in the ballroom, and a bit of sequin in Latin, but no more than usual! I was pleasantly surprised by how professional everyone looked and how high the standard was, particularly at the top end. They dressed the part and they danced the part."

"The atmosphere was wonderful, and I can only see it getting bigger and better. When I tweeted about it, lots of people said they had no idea there were same-sex dance events, they'd love to go and watch – that's the next step."

"I know some couples compete in mainstream comps, and that can only help. Will it be a shock to some people? Yes, probably, but they'll get used to it. These are open competitions – British Open and so on – and we should honour that. However, I think we should also keep some comps just same-sex and some male/female."

Nicole feels it's a personal choice: "No one should be forced to integrate into a system that won't benefit them, but if same-sex couples feel they'd gain experience from it, they should do what's best for them."

As for judging same-sex couples alongside male/female, Erin doesn't see a problem: "You just have to be fair – the best couple on the floor wins, full stop. It might take a generation to make that change, but people are becoming more accepting. What I really value in the dance world is that hard work is

rewarded – if you're good enough, if you want it, you'll succeed."

Nicole would be happy to judge or coach more same-sex dancers – "Just ask!" Erin adds: "I had a fantastic experience in Blackpool, and I'd love to introduce it to more people."

What about a same-sex pairing on *Strictly*? Nicole thinks it's a great idea, and Erin agrees it's worked well abroad, "but here? It'd be interesting. Some people wouldn't like it, but as same-sex dance becomes more widely known, I think it could happen. Watch this space!" ●



Erin Boag with Blackpool Same-Sex Dance Festival organisers Sören and Bradley Stauffer-Kruse

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