

STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX
DANCE SCENE



Jacky Logan talks to **Marianka Swain** about dramatic changes in social dance

“**A**t a Festival Hall dance in 2003, an elderly gentleman verbally abused two men dancing together, and the organisers escorted him out,” recalls Jacky Logan. That might not sound revolutionary, but it shows how much times have changed.

“The same thing happened at a Battersea Arts Centre dance ten years earlier, and the same-sex couple were asked to leave, because they were ‘upsetting regular clientele.’”

Jacky was part of the vanguard of same-sex ballroom, taking lessons from Ralf Schiller at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1989, and she remembers initial opposition wasn’t just to same-sex dance, but challenging the traditional approach to ballroom. “It was still very old-fashioned gender roles – men asked women to dance, and if no one asked you, you just sat there on the sidelines.”

When same-sex dancers started attending the Rivoli Ballroom social

night, a few locals complained to manager Bill Mannix, “and he said everyone’s welcome. Some were put out, but a man in his seventies grabbed the microphone and announced he didn’t care who was dancing with whom – it was just great seeing young people on the floor.”

Jacky began DJing there in 1995, and found any negative response “wasn’t to the gay-friendly ethos, but the music! I introduced non-strict tempo pop tracks, because I wanted to bring ballroom into the modern world.” She also split the travelling styles into three rounds – male, female and mixed, “mainly because the floor gets so crowded, but it’s also a brilliant way of making same-sex dance visible. Plus you can try following in one, leading in another – more chances to dance.”

Her progressive circle dances encourage partner swapping, “and the tolerance level now means it’s not an issue – you’ll see an older

guy leading a young gay man, not batting an eyelid, even asking them to dance later. Ballroom people love dancing with a good partner, whatever their gender.”

That ethos has influenced mainstream classes and socials, with more integration and respect for equal partnering. “Lots of teachers now say ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ rather than ‘man’ and ‘woman’, and I’d love to see that attitude on *Strictly*, rather than big guys throwing tiny girls in the air. Artem and Robin are brilliant at challenging some of those conventions.

“When we first went to Blackpool, the biggest reaction was to women leading men – it’s fear of change.” However, there’s progress:

“Recently my partner Mary led an older man at Broadwalk Ballroom. He said he hadn’t danced for 50 years, and how wonderful [that] anyone could dance with anyone now.

“Same-sex partnering and swapping lead doesn’t endanger the ballroom world – it opens it up to new possibilities and keeps it relevant. I’m celebrating my 19th year DJing at the Rivoli, and it’s just getting bigger and better.” ●

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Jacky leading line dance at Fulham Town Hall