

# STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX  
DANCE SCENE



**Marianka Swain** reports on the rise of troupe *Is That Allowed?*!

**W**hen Jill Shackleton was at a competition, she overheard someone watching a same-sex couple ask “Is that allowed?!” The remark has been reclaimed by a group that grew out of Norwich Dance Studios’ weekly class.

“Last year, there was increased interest in attending competitions,” explains Richard Miller, who started the class in 2009. “Then I was asked to put together a performance for the Theatre Royal’s Peter Tatchell Foundation fundraiser. I had competitive Youth couples raring to go, and it seemed like the perfect event to showcase same-sex dancers too.”

Richard added another weekly same-sex class and rehearsal, with teacher Melodie Brannan spurring everyone into action. “We choreographed a formation routine for 14 dancers of mixed ability, and it was really about them connecting as a

group,” she explains. The performance took place in June 2013, and “we got an overwhelming response,” recalls Melodie. “So many people said it embodied the theme of the evening.”

Peter Tatchell, a leading LGBT rights campaigner, was “incredibly touched,” adds Richard. Peter Wilson enjoyed

did a series of duets covering different dances – lots of couples brought their own ideas,” reports Melodie. “Then we finished with a big group cha cha.”

“Not many people at Pride had seen same-sex ballroom before,” says Richard. “They performed on the Forum, so there was a huge crowd from the parade and a brilliant atmosphere. It was a special moment of two worlds coming together.”

together and being part of a team. That makes it less intimidating, as it’s all about having a great experience.”

Polly Morgan loves the group’s inclusivity, with its range of ages, abilities and sexualities, as does Jill: “Hopefully it demonstrates what fun dancing is and encourages everyone to have a go.”

Martin adds: “As a straight man, I’m enormously proud to be part of this troupe and

what it represents.”

Richard is proud of “giving dancers outside London new goals and opportunities”. He’d love to do more in future, and group member Katie Lord is already planning routines.

“A few years ago, I was the only one regularly competing;

in Blackpool, we had 12 competitors and a coachload of supporters,” notes Jill. “It’s pretty unusual that a place the size of Norwich has same-sex dancing at all, and this has enabled us to take what we’re doing at Miller and share it with a wider community.” ●



**Is That Allowed?!**  
performed at Norwich Pride

“the roar of appreciation from the audience when we appeared. They’d just seen world-class male/female couples, but I think it was extra-special for them to see ‘their family’ dancing together on stage.”

Next stop was Norwich Pride, with an expanded group. “We

Last October, the group headed to Blackpool for the Same-Sex Dance Festival, which Martin Berry found “the most welcoming, friendly comp I’ve ever been to”, and then London’s Pink Jukebox Trophy in February. Melodie focused on “the camaraderie – travelling