

STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX
DANCE SCENE



Marianka Swain

samples some spicy salsa

This year, Salsa Rosada celebrates its 20th anniversary, making it London's longest-running same-sex salsa class. It began after co-founder Roger Taylor noticed gay men and women attending mixed-sex Salsa Fusion, "and I thought it would be great to create a space where they could come and dance with same-sex friends and partners".

Roger and his team built up the weekly class from nine to 40–50 students, with a wide range of ages. "The key to our success is the emphasis on dancing being fun and friendly. Of course people want to learn as well, but we never make anyone feel silly or inadequate. Students who started off nervous beginners are now accomplished and spectacular dancers,

and, in turn, help others make that transition. Some incredible friendships have been forged and the socialising continues after class in the bar upstairs."

Beginner-turned-teacher Ruth Whitworth first spotted Salsa Rosada on BBC2's *Gaytime TV*. "The music, the performance, the sensuality... I knew instantly it was the dance for me. But for the first six months I kept looking at my

feet, trying so hard to get everything right. When I finally lifted my eyes, Roger said: 'Oh, that's what your face looks like!'"

Ruth now helps instil Salsa Rosada's authentic Colombian movement, though likes that "everyone develops their own style". Roger loves the lack of boundaries: "You can lead or follow, so no wallflowers, and you meet the whole class by swapping partners throughout. The music's so happy and infectious, it's impossible

to stay still."

That music varies from traditional Puerto Rican to DJ Ruth's urban salsa, "with contemporary pop thrown in to help newcomers bridge the gap". Ruth loves watching those newcomers develop: "Whenever I see the happy looks on people's faces once they've mastered a step, I remember experiencing that too; it's the best thing that's ever happened to me. It's not just dancing, but achievement, fitness and community – we're a salsa family."

Roger adds: "It's opened up a new, diverse social scene, entering people's lives and lifting their spirits at a time when perhaps things weren't going so well." Ruth agrees: "It's given me an extraordinary sense of well-being. Here's to the next 20 years!" ●



Salsa Rosada

www.salsa-rosada.co.uk