

STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX
DANCE SCENE



Marianka Swain explores same-sex Scottish country dancing

Feeling limited by the standard ten ballroom styles? “There are about 4,800 approved Scottish country dances,” observes Richard Clarke, keen member of LGBT-friendly club the Gay Gordons, founded in 2005, which runs classes and events in London, Edinburgh and Manchester. Those thousands include historic and modern versions. “The pattern-making appeals to people of a mathematical bent – one of our regulars, who likes devising dances, is a leading scientist at CERN.”

Those dances have to work for a “set” of multiple couples, using varied geometric patterns and sequences. They also have to flow. “Some older dances are beautiful for one partner and a nightmare for the other,”

explains Richard. Nevertheless, the heritage is fascinating, with dances created for birthdays, jubilees, weddings and memorials, plus reflecting innovations like the introduction of the first tractor.

Scottish country dancing is easier initially than ballroom, “as there’s no closed hold, and the established framework of steps is reassuring. You can watch a demonstration and then join in straightaway doing a similar version.” Gay Gordons’ more

advanced dancers work on details like foot positioning and arm height.

“Our aim is to ensure everyone enjoys themselves. The social side is significant, as many from the LGBT community really value this public forum that offers safety and support, rather than judgement.

“Some older members remember when it was illegal to be homosexual, and not long ago, if two men were partnering, the MC at a ceilidh would stop the dance until they split up. Now, because of the patterns, you often get a male follower

interacting with a male leader who hasn’t experienced that before, which helps enormously to make it widely accepted.”

Richard would love to see younger people trying Scottish country dancing, and stresses its cheeky aspects. “It’s sometimes called ‘dancing with the eyes’. When you pass someone, you hold that lingering gaze. It’s all about recognising their existence – and having a little flirt!”

Kilts aren’t compulsory, but anything that helps people “get into the spirit of it is great. I once took a meeting at the Treasury in a kilt because I was on my way to a charity event!” Most important, “it’s about going to bed happier for having experienced something joyful”. ●



Burns' Night celebrations at the Glass Works pub

www.thegaygordons.org