



Stepping Out

The same-sex ballroom and Latin dance scene

DJ Jacky Logan tells **Marianka Swain** about two trailblazing decades in dance

“When I first started doing same-sex

ballroom classes with Ralf Schiller in 1995, I immediately loved the music and wanted to investigate it more,” recalls Jacky Logan. She found the perfect venue when a group from the class began going to social nights at London’s beautiful Rivoli Ballroom. “We got a mixed reception from the regulars, but Bill and Jeannie [Mannix], who ran it, were really supportive of us, and gradually a lot of those who objected started to change their minds once they saw that gay people dancing together aren’t that scary!”

Bill approached Jacky about DJ-ing a gay ballroom night, “and I said yes, but not a gay night – it shouldn’t exclude anybody. For 22 years, it’s been word of mouth rather than advertising, because people like telling others about a proper dance night that welcomes everyone.” The more traditional crowd adjusted to the monthly Jacky’s Jukebox social, with one 82-year-old man “insisting on coming up on stage and taking the mic. He said he’d been worried that ballroom was an old people’s activity and it would die out – he didn’t care whether we were gay or straight, dancing with men or women, he was just thrilled to see all these young people on the floor.”

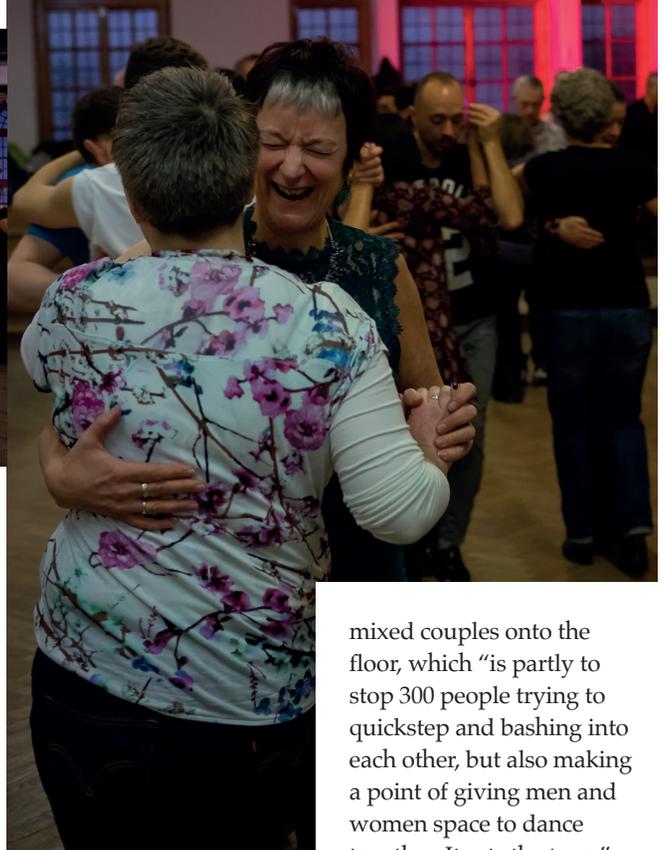
The event quickly grew,



up from “80 to 280 in four months, and the average age dropped by about 50 years. Back then, it was really unusual to have both straight and gay people dancing in a club, so I started introducing Old Time dances to get everyone on the floor together. They came from my childhood – I used to do ballroom with my mum and dad at holiday camps, learning to waltz standing on my dad’s toes.”

Changing-partner styles meant “you’d get someone in their seventies dancing with his wife, and then we’d switch and all of a sudden he’d be leading a young gay man. He’d look a bit surprised, but that age group was very formal on the floor, so there’s no way he wouldn’t do the dance. After a few months, it just became normal.”

There was a big shift in opinion, notes Jacky, who recalls dancing at the Festival Hall, when “an older man got very cross about these gay men dancing together and started swearing at them – he was escorted out. Whereas when we started, ten years before that, we’d been to dances at Battersea Arts Centre where someone would complain and the gay couples were



told to leave. People forget that whole history.”

Jacky’s thrilled to keep bringing newcomers into the ballroom world. “There’s a culture we have at the Pink Jukebox that carries over to the Rivoli: if you see someone new, you make a point of welcoming them and asking them to dance – you don’t always get that at other socials. We’ve also got line dances you can do individually, without knowing any ballroom, and once people notice you’re keen to dance they’ll be lining up.”

“Other DJs don’t tend to get involved – they just play nice music – but I’ll say things like ‘Everyone on the left side of the room, walk over and ask someone on the right side to dance.’” There’s also the three-dance system, with Jacky calling men, women and then

mixed couples onto the floor, which “is partly to stop 300 people trying to quickstep and bashing into each other, but also making a point of giving men and women space to dance together. It sets the tone.”

Music-wise, Jacky’s selections have always spanned from traditional to current. “I wanted to attract younger people and keep it fresh. As a dancer myself, I know what feels right to dance to, and I’m open to requests. It’s fantastic to see three generations of a family out there, all enjoying themselves. I’m a great believer in helping people step outside their comfort zone – anything that lets you express yourself and have a laugh is fantastic. Whatever’s going on in your life, you look round the Rivoli and you can’t help but smile.”

Jacky’s now DJ-ing for ballroom holidays and would like to do the same on cruises, and has also trained as a FitSteps instructor – “lots of my pupils come along to the Rivoli. I just want to keep doing whatever involves people, gives them joy and gets them dancing.” ■

Above: Jacky Logan dancing at the Pink Jukebox Christmas party.