

photography  
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When 61-year-old Nikki Spencer couldn't find a club night that was welcoming and played music she liked, she decided to launch her own. We hit the dance floor at one of her popular events...

**You dancing?  
I'm asking...**

**A** slender woman in a silver ballgown is gyrating under a huge disco ball on the stage, as the DJ spins his vinyl. 'Come on,' exhorts Nikki Spencer, 61, disco's mistress of ceremonies. 'It's time to boogie.' And obediently we fall in line, making swooshing arm movements to *Car Wash* by Rose Royce.

'You're never too old to dance,' insists Nikki, who hosts clubbing events inclusive of all ages. Nikki's 'Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet' nights feature Seventies and Eighties music – funk, soul and disco – for people who remember the tunes from when they were growing up. They take place around London as well as in Brighton, Maidenhead and Croydon. 'My whole philosophy is: we can still dance, so why shouldn't we?'

Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet (HSDY) runs from early evening to midnight. People come in groups to celebrate birthdays, school reunions and hen nights; mums bring their daughters in their early twenties. But it's also fine to turn up solo and dance your socks off. Fans range in age from their forties to seventies. But on the night I attended, at London's Islington Assembly Hall, there was an 86-year-old having a birthday night out with his family.

Intergenerational clubbing is key, Nikki insists. 'We never have an upper, or lower, age limit. It's more a state of mind and attitude. We always have chairs dotted around so people can sit down when they need it. Everyone can go at their own pace. Some don't stop dancing for hours; others just like listening to the great tunes.'

It all began in 2010, when Nikki, then in her late forties, wanted to go out dancing in London's Soho with a friend. 'I was a single mum bringing up my daughters and they were going to their dad's every other weekend,' says Nikki, whose children are now in their twenties. 'I wanted to go out dancing with my friends, but we wondered if the clubs would let us in. I went into central London with a friend and we queued in the rain outside this club wondering if it would be the kind of music we wanted to dance to.'

They didn't even make it through the door. The queue and possible humiliation of being turned away for being too old was too much to bear. Instead they went home and danced around Nikki's kitchen table, which was lovely but not quite what

by LIZ  
HOGGARD

they had planned. 'I thought there's got to be something better than this.' Nikki, a former BBC and Channel 4 producer and media tutor, realised there was a gap in the market. 'Talking to friends I thought why can't we still dance? And then I had my light bulb moment.' She decided to start her own clubbing night for grown-ups, with an ageless door policy and a disco playlist spun on real vinyl. 'I didn't see why the kids should have all the fun,' she laughs. 'For the first event I booked a beautiful old ballroom in Greenwich near where I live, found a couple of vinyl DJs and started selling tickets. The idea was to provide a welcoming place where everyone – groups of friends, couples, people on their own – could come to dance.'

When the 1977 disco single *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* by the band Gonzalez came on the radio late one Friday night, she knew she had the name for the night. An article appeared in the local paper and the phone rang off the hook. 'Up until then I didn't know if it was just me and a few friends who still wanted to dance to the music we grew up with, but people were saying, "I've been waiting years for this!"' The first night attracted more than 250 people; now some of the bigger events have 750 attendees.

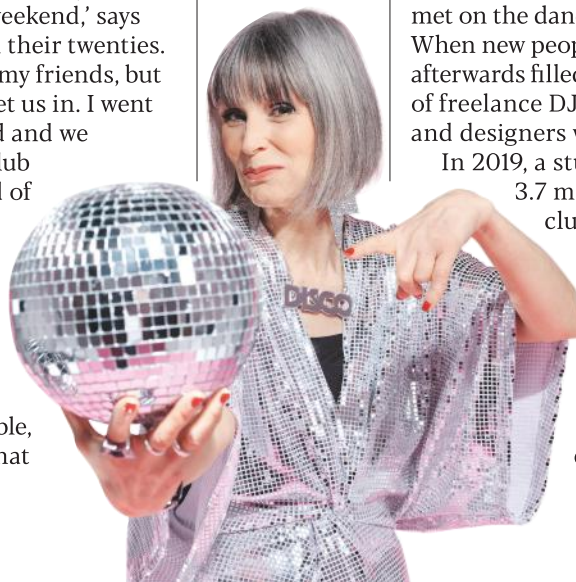
To get everyone dancing, the evening starts with a warm-up – a couple of routines to tracks such as *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* and *Car Wash*, led by Nikki's choreographer. 'I realised people might need a bit of hand-holding if they haven't been out partying for 10-15 years,' says Nikki. You can dance freestyle, of course, but it avoids an empty dance floor. And

solo clubbers can email Nikki in advance and she'll introduce them to people.

Tickets range from £10-£18, according to the venue. There's no dress code (hurrah), but regulars love to strut their stuff. The audience is around 60% women, 40% men; one couple who met on the dance floor married two years ago. When new people attend, Nikki often gets emails afterwards filled with praise. She credits her team of freelance DJs, dancers, glitter face-painters and designers with making it special.

In 2019, a study found that more than 3.7 million Brits aged 45 and up go clubbing once a week. Those of us who grew up in the Sixties and Seventies have no intention of giving up partying and many also attend festivals such as Glastonbury and Latitude. As Nikki observes, 'Why sit on the sofa and watch dancing on *Strictly* when

**'Why sit on the sofa  
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☛ we could be out dancing with our friends?’

Writer Mary-Claire Mason, 70, and her husband are regulars. ‘I heard Nikki doing a radio interview and thought, wow, that sounds fabulous,’ she says. ‘I love dancing but there is more anxiety as you get older – you sit on the sidelines. But at Nikki’s events there’s a real sense of being welcome.’

Last year, former Radio 1 DJ Annie Mac, 44, held a club night for ‘Cinderellas’ also at the Assembly Hall. Before Midnight opened at 7pm and ended at midnight ‘for people who need sleep’ and was such a success that she’s taking it on tour. Other similar nights are springing up across the UK, all targeted at older clubbers.

As well as being fun, dancing is good for your physical and mental health. A study by O2 found attending live music once every two weeks can increase life expectancy by up to nine years. You’re also making memories. Nikki believes that, more than ever, people need the feelgood vibes that HSDY brings. ‘Life is tough,’ she says. ‘When you’re in your fifties and sixties, you’ve got elderly parents, kids who maybe haven’t quite left home. To be able to just go out for one night and forget about it all, you can’t beat it.’

The feelgood atmosphere is key for HSDY regular Debbie Bateson, 63. ‘It’s a warm, fun, feel-at-home place where you can be yourself,’ she says. ‘It’s brilliant. It reminds me of school discos and brings back those happy memories.’

Nikki donates 10% of profits to Cancer Research UK. ‘Both my parents and so many of my friends have been affected by cancer and I love the fact that when we are partying our socks off we are helping to fund vital research.’

But being a disco goddess can be stressful – on my night, I saw her mopping up spilt beer with cleaning cloths attached to her feet. ‘You have to make sure everybody’s safe.’ But, she insists, it’s always a joyful experience. ‘At one point during every event, I stop for a moment at the back of the room and just watch everyone partying. I can’t help but grin from ear to ear.’ ☛

*For future club nights, see [haventstoppeddancingyet.co.uk](http://haventstoppeddancingyet.co.uk). The next events are at the Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Maidenhead, Berkshire, on 25 February and Islington Assembly Hall, London, on 18 March*

**Keep dancing**  
Nikki has seen her HSDY club nights (below left) grow in popularity. Below right: Mary-Claire Mason on the dance floor

## DON'T STOP MOVIN'

There are plenty of options around the UK for those who love to boogie

**1** Radio 2 DJ Jo Whiley is touring the country with her Nineties Anthems club nights, with dates this year in cities including Bristol, Glasgow, Blackpool and Oxford. For details, see [90santhems.com](http://90santhems.com)

**2** Annie Mac’s Before Midnight club nights from 7pm-12am are going on tour next year to cities including Manchester, Margate, Dublin and Newcastle. See [linktr.ee/anniemacmanus](http://linktr.ee/anniemacmanus)

**3** For Eighties music, check out the Rewind Festival, which bills itself as the biggest Eighties music festival in the world. Early bird tickets are available now for Rewind Scotland at Scone Palace, 21-23 July; Rewind North at Capesthorne Hall, 4-6 August; and Rewind South in Henley-on-Thames, 18-20 August. Find out more at [rewindfestival.com](http://rewindfestival.com)

**4** Try The London Cabaret Club. Watch an innovative live cabaret show in London’s Bloomsbury Square, featuring stars from the West End (with supper in the art-deco ballroom), then take to the dance floor for the DJ afterparty. Tickets from £50. See [thelondoncabaretclub.com](http://thelondoncabaretclub.com)

**5** Donaheys dance school runs Dancing with the Stars weekends. Enjoy three days of showcases as the stars of *Strictly* perform – learn to dance with them, plus hear about their journeys on the show. Hotels in Windsor and Newport are hosting next year. Find details at [donaheys.co.uk/events](http://donaheys.co.uk/events)

