



Over-forties club nights

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Where to go clubbing in London if you're a grown-up that hasn't stopped dancing yet

Where do you go clubbing if you're getting on, but still getting down? **Kate Hutchinson** meets some grown-up clubbers who've created a scene all of their own

It started with a letter. Mr Peter Moore, a fiftysomething reader from south west London, wrote in to us to ask where 'active middle-aged people could dance the night away without feeling like fish out of water among a sea of 20-year-olds'. These sorts of nights, he continued, did not seem to appear in our listings. Now, let it be known that these pages are not ageist. Rather, they adhere to the somewhat rose-tinted ideal that clubbing is inclusive and doesn't discriminate against age, race or class. The reality is, however, that London is incredibly tribal and Mr Moore's sentiment is one that many other dancefloor lovers his age share.

Dave Swindells, who was Time Out's Nightlife editor for more than 20 years, concurs. 'The original one-nighter generation, which started in the early '80s at the Blitz and Club For Heroes, are now 45 to 50-plus and the late '80s rave generation are now in their forties,' he says. 'There are many people for whom clubbing was a way of life but are no longer sure where they should go.'

Where, indeed. In general, nights to avoid are those aimed squarely at drum 'n' bass, dubstep and UK bass fans, lest you come face to face with those same 20-year-olds. Alternatively, Latin, tropical, global beats and reggae events generally have a broader age mix, partly because they reflect cultures where it's normal to welcome cross-generational party people. Vintage dress-up and reunion nights are obvious options too – the former with its focus on refined dancing and the latter often popping up to celebrate 20 years since its glory days of partying, marketed via various nostalgic Facebook groups. But they are not all London has to offer...

Nikki Spencer, a journalist and lecturer from south-east London in her early fifties, runs one such night with this in mind. She started the quarterly party Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet in 2010 and it attracts around 150 people to her local church hall in Hither Green. 'We used to go clubbing quite a lot but we had kids and now we feel like we don't fit into the club scene anymore,' she says of herself and her friends, echoing the concern that there can be a stigma attached to being an over-forties clubber. 'You have to book a babysitter, trek into the West End, queue to get in and not even know whether you'll be let in because you look a bit older.'

At Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet, there is no such snooty door policy, but its crowd of late thirties to fifties movers and shakers take the party's '70s vibe quite literally. There are prizes for the best retro outfits and soul, funk and disco are the dominant sounds of the evening that keep the glittery Afro wigs bouncing till the last-train-home-friendly time of 11.30pm.

The concept is something of a suburban phenomenon, a mature reinvention of the over-thirties home counties discos that still take place in hotels and halls from Dorking to Woodford. Up north, it's a similar story: in March, The Guardian reported that a night called Bop Local was gripping the late-thirties to forties market in places like Chorlton, Didsbury and Salford in Greater Manchester. As clubbers get older, the goal posts keep moving, and nights like these are a welcome slice of safe disco fun not too far from home.

To others, as one Guardian reader pointed out, it sounds about as fun as a school reunion. Perhaps they'd fancy a club night where the music is just as fresh as any youth rave instead. And for that London has plenty: nights like Afro-house party Tribe and its spin-off soirée Can You Dance to My Beat at the Notting Hill Arts Club – and, in fact many other NHAC nights like Funk Royale and 70-year-old DJ Derek's Sweet Memory Sounds – attract a dancefloor-focused crowd to their eclectic spread of music. They welcome older clubbers but they don't set out to attract them.

Another party that successfully attempts to integrate, while keeping a contemporary music policy, is Thunder at The Waiting Room in Stoke Newington. Its line-ups feature cult DJs (Neville Watson, Sven Weisemann, Patrice Scott) whose sophisticated blends of both classic and modern house music are appreciated by old-school and new-school dance fans alike.

'Our focus is definitely on the music and the experience, but the nature of that means that we're aimed at a slightly older crowd,' says Miles Simpson, one of the DJs behind the night. 'But it's not an old crowd. Maybe I'd call it "grown up clubbing". It's not about a thousand 18 to 25-year-olds wearing sunglasses in a warehouse listening to Hot Creation records. That's

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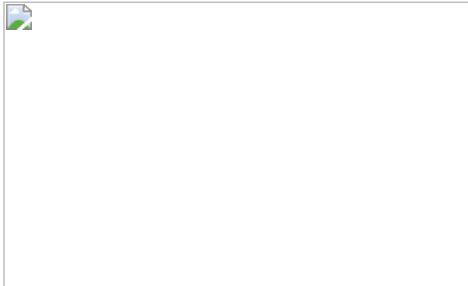
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pretty exciting if you're 18 to 25, but we offer musical authenticity in a more intimate setting, allowing for a more personal party.' And one with a guarantee that it won't turn into a Bacardi Breezer-swigging scene from 'Hollyoaks' by the end.

Still, with the increasing number of older people going to festivals, especially ones such as Camp Bestival, Big Chill and End of the Road, where they are encouraged to take their kids, Swindells thinks it's a shame that there aren't more clubs geared up for this demographic. Still, even he admits: 'The fact is, that "senior clubbers" go out far more rarely and are not such a reliable market. If you want to go out more, you need to go out more.' So, Mr Moore, do take another look at the listings this week – you might just be pleasantly surprised by what you find.



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