

Dancing QUEENS



Dancing is fun, healthy and good for your mind too.

Which is why Nikki Spencer set up a disco night for grown-ups...



At Nikki's HSDY nights the dance floor is packed with people having fun



Let's dance

➤ **Love Strictly Come Dancing and want to learn from the experts?** Donahey's Dance School run Dancing with the Stars of Strictly Weekends at hotels around the UK. On 14-16 June, Anton du Beke and Erin Boag are among the teachers at their three-night event at the De Vere Beaumont Estate, Berkshire; donaheys.co.uk

➤ **If you like disco you'll love FunkFit's dance fitness classes in Brighton and Sussex.** There's no complicated choreography to follow – you just strut your stuff to uplifting funk, soul, disco and Motown tunes led by "Funkmaster" JP Omari or one of his team. Founder JP is planning to take FunkFit national in 2019, so watch this space; funkfituk.co.uk

➤ **If the 80s is your era, check out the Rewind Festival, which bills itself as "the biggest 80s music festival in the world",** with events at Scone Palace in Perthshire (19-21 July), Capesthorpe Hall in Cheshire (2-4 August), and Henley-on-Thames in Berkshire (16-18 August). Last year's line-up included Kool & The Gang, OMD and Shalamar; rewindfestival.com

➤ **Or join Throwback: The 80s Festival at Sea on 11-14 October,** which promises all the fun of an 80s festival without the mud, on-board a cruise ship. The Royal Caribbean's Explorer of the Seas sails from Southampton to Le Havre and has non-stop 80s events and activities, and theme nights; floatingfestivals.co.uk

➤ **If you want to cha-cha-cha around the Caribbean or mambo around the Med, US-based Dancers at Sea offer ballroom dance cruises that include group dance workshops, a private lesson and hosted social dancing.** Upcoming dates include a seven-night West Caribbean cruise on 7 April, and a 10-night Mediterranean Rivas cruise on 21 August; dancersatsea.com w&h

Since my teens I have always loved dancing, but when I hit my mid-forties I realised that I just wasn't doing enough of it. There was the occasional bop at a family wedding or significant birthday party but that was about it.

I was separated from the father of my kids and they stayed with him every other weekend, so I could quite easily go out to nightclubs. But where could I go where I could dance without feeling like I was gatecrashing one of my teenage daughters' parties? My friends and I would often end up dancing round my kitchen table instead.

I had my "eureka" moment when *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*, the 1979 track by Gonzalez, came on the radio late one night. The idea of starting an event for people like me started to

come together. Those words – haven't stopped dancing yet – just summed up what my friends and I were feeling. We could still dance to all those feel-good 70s and 80s soul, funk and disco tunes – so why the hell shouldn't we?

It was nerve-wracking planning my first event. I had organised a few fundraisers for my daughters' school, but this was new territory. I fixed a date and booked a venue, and persuaded a friend who was a vinyl DJ to come down from Birmingham for the night. I enlisted the help of my daughters' dance teacher to lead some flashmob-style dance line-ups to classic tunes like *Disco Inferno* by The Trammps, and *Blame it on the Boogie* by The Jacksons, to get everyone up and dancing right from the start.

Another friend designed some

posters and then all I had to do was get people to come. That was the stressful bit! I had more than a few sleepless nights but it helped hugely when the local paper ran an article about it. My phone didn't stop ringing with people saying, "This is brilliant! I have been waiting 10 years for this and I'm bringing a bunch of friends."

Over 250 people turned out for that first night back in 2010, and the dance floor was packed with happy people. I reckon that if you could bottle the atmosphere, you'd have world peace!

Eight years on, the demand has grown – although it hasn't been without incident. Two years ago a burst water main and flood near the venue meant we were faced with having to turn over 700 people away from our Christmas party, but thankfully

couples who have met after meeting on the dance floor; the group of women who have come to party in memory of their best mate, and the widow in her forties who got her groove back after finding *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*.

The memory that will stay with me forever is of Hazel, a friend with terminal bowel cancer. She came to our first night and a few years later, just before Christmas, she dressed up in her favourite colour purple, nail varnish and all, and left the local hospice for a few hours to have one last dance.

Cancer hits us all, so as soon as I broke even I started giving 10% of my profits to Cancer Research UK.

I love that while we are all dancing our socks off we're also doing a small bit to try and beat the disease.

It's great that I now get to dance regularly, but for me the best bit is when the night is in full swing and I stop for a moment and watch everyone else having a ball. You can't beat it.

it was fixed with only hours to spare.

We now run a dozen events a year in London, and have launched this year in Croydon and Brighton too. We also do private parties and festivals as well.

There have been so many great stories over the years. There are

WHY DANCING IS GOOD FOR YOU

➤ **Dance contributes to heart and lung health,** and is a great workout for muscles. It also helps maintain a healthy weight and strengthens bones.

➤ **Dancing is a great mental break.** A 2014 Polish study found positive changes in mood for recreational dancers who had higher energy levels and were less tense. Rhythmic movements trigger the release of endorphins, which boost your mood.

➤ **Not only does dancing make you feel good,** but it can also improve the way your brain functions. A study led by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City showed that freestyle dancing dramatically reduced the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's by 76%. Constantly changing your moves forces your brain to rewire its neural pathways, which keep you on your toes.