

CEILIDH STORIES

WHY WE DANCE

Tales from the dancefloor

BY THE CEILIDH CORNWALL COMMUNITY

WHY WE DANCE

Welcome

I love ceilidh dancing. I may be a little biased.

I've spent a lot of time dancing, teaching dances and standing behind a microphone watching other people dance. But one of the things that has always intrigued me is that I can't spot a 'ceilidh type'. I couldn't look at a group of people and tell you who would give it a go, who would love it, or who would still be dancing years later.

We spend a lot of our lives in our own little social bubbles, mixing with people a bit like ourselves. On a ceilidh dance floor, I see all sorts of people dancing together. And that made me curious. What brought them there? What made them stay? And what did dancing mean to them?

So I asked.

The people in these pages have all found their way to ceilidh dancing. Some have danced for much of their lives, some have returned to it after many years, and some are only just discovering it. Their experiences are their own, but as I listened to their stories, familiar threads began to appear.

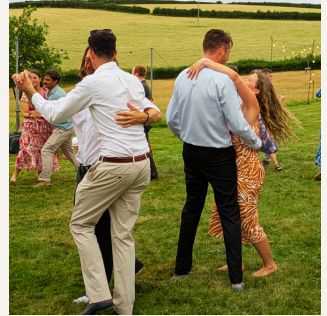
Rather than me telling you why ceilidh dancing matters, I wanted the people on the dance floor to tell you themselves.

These are their stories.

I hope that somewhere in these pages you find a story that makes you smile, one that feels familiar or touches your heart – or perhaps one that makes you think, "I might enjoy that too."

So, why do we dance?

Kate



WHAT IS A CEILIDH?

First things first: ceilidh is pronounced 'kay-lee'.

A ceilidh is an informal social dance – a chance for people to get together, dance to great music and, most importantly, enjoy themselves.

The word is Scottish Gaelic and traditionally referred to a gathering which might include music, singing, storytelling and dancing. These days, when we talk about going to a ceilidh, we usually mean a dance event, often with live music and a caller – the person who teaches the dances and calls out reminders as everyone dances.

The dances come in all sorts of shapes. Some are danced in couples, others in groups, circles or long lines of dancers facing one another. You might swing your partner, weave past other dancers, make arches, turn, skip, march or gallop. Some dances are simple; others have more intricate patterns that are enormously satisfying when everyone gets into the flow.

Although ceilidh is a Scottish word, social folk dancing isn't uniquely Scottish. Similar traditions can be found in Cornwall, Ireland, England, Wales, Europe, Scandinavia, North America and many other parts of the world. At Ceilidh Cornwall we dance plenty of Scottish favourites, but also draw on dances and traditions from elsewhere.

The music can be just as varied. Fiddles and accordions might be what first spring to mind, but modern ceilidh music can draw on everything from traditional folk tunes to rock, funk and other contemporary influences. What matters is that it makes you want to move.



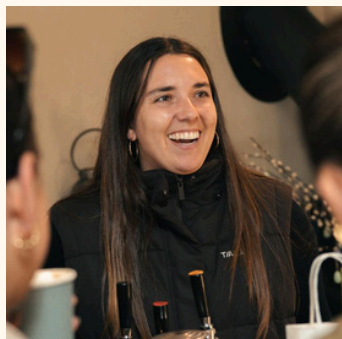
MEET THE DANCERS

*twenty stories from the ceilidh dancefloors of Cornwall - these faces and more.
Thank you all for sharing your tales.*



Amelia

FULL OF ENERGY



I was invited to come along to a ceilidh at Project 83 last winter and, to be honest, I kind of really didn't want to go.

I was like, it's a Tuesday night, I just want to go to bed! And because I had to drive home, I wasn't going to be drinking. I wasn't really sure I wanted to dance if I wasn't having a drink.

And then we went and it was just the most incredible experience.

What really struck me was the coming together of everybody. There was such a mix of ages and you danced with everyone. You can just come as you are – on your own, with a partner, with a group of friends – and I feel like everybody feels just as welcome.

My friends call me a Jack Russell because I'm just full of energy, and it really felt like a great environment to express that.

You can go out, not drink at all – or just have one drink – and dance and have a great night. It doesn't have to be about going out and partying and drinking. I've always left feeling really kind of wholesome and more connected to the community that I'm in.

Because you're not just stuck within your group. You mix around and dance with different people – people you probably wouldn't otherwise socialise with. Not in a bad way! They're just not in your group, they're not your friends already, they might be a different age. They're people you probably wouldn't otherwise have met.

And that's why I love ceilidhs so much.

Tony AND I'M STILL DANCING



My adventures with ceilidh dancing began at Christmas 2023, when my partner, Chris, gave me a Burns Night evening as a present – a meal and a ceilidh.

I had to ask her what a ceilidh was. She explained, and said we ought to get some lessons before we went to Burns Night.

The last time I'd done any dancing was ballroom classes at school.

So, on a snowy night in January, we went to a class in a barn.

I was worried I was going to make myself look like a proper idiot.

I settled into the first dance and, yes, I made a lot of mistakes. So did everyone else. But everyone just carried on and laughed about it.

By the end of that first class, I said to Chris that I'd really enjoyed it.

The Burns Night came and went – but, to Chris's amazement, I still wanted to carry on dancing.

That was nearly two years ago.

We love dancing now, go to ceilidhs quite often and have met many new friends along the way.

All from a Christmas present and one snowy night in January.

Shaz

THE MAGIC OF CEILIDH



How often in life do we get the chance to just feel joy... to laugh, to hold the hands of strangers and connect?

Thirty years ago, I regularly organised ceilidhs as fundraising events.

Often adults arrived looking nervous and uncertain, having been motivated to come by the desire to support the charitable cause. Unwilling teens, often being 'dragged' along by parents, could be seen sitting, scowling on their chairs.

Then the music started.

Without fail, they all left at the end of the evening feeling hot, exhausted and very, very happy.

Adults saying they hadn't laughed as much in years and teens seeming more at ease with others... having been touched by the magic of ceilidh.

This magic brings out the child within us all.



Shaz

THE MAGIC OF CEILIDH

For various reasons, for many years, I was in a ceilidh desert. I didn't realise how much I missed it until I returned to the fertile land of the swing, the circle, the do-si-do and the pat-a-cake, taking part once again in dances with titles such as Horse's Mane, Bottoms Up and the Dashing White Sergeant.

My arthritic knees and dodgy back often refuse to move in the way that I would choose but, as Billy Connolly (from the land of the original ceilidhs) would say... "It matters not a jot."

The music takes hold... as do your dancing partners... and away you go...
...dancing as if no one is watching.

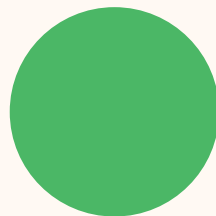
We can often be seen going in completely the wrong direction, but somehow that only adds to the laughter. With a patient caller to keep us on track, it never seems to matter if we get a few steps wrong.

Some of my fondest ceilidh memories are from my sister's wedding when all the participants, dressed in their wedding attire, abandoned their shoes, jackets, ties and, in some cases, tights, and danced barefoot on the front lawn of a small village pub to a live ceilidh band. Passers-by and other pub-goers joined in... as did the staff and the pub owner... many of whom had never previously heard of ceilidh.

What a hoolie it was!

So,... why am I writing this?

Well, ceilidh to me is an opportunity to come together as a community. It is a catalyst for awakening your inner child and, most of all... it is really great fun!



Claire

I SHOULDN'T HAVE WORRIED

Many years ago, I used to look forward to the annual Bath Potters' Christmas Ceilidh. I remember the sheer exuberant joy of dancing and how fit and energetic we were. My husband loved to spin and we would get dizzy with laughter.

I looked forward to the music and the fun of dancing, catching up with friends and meeting new people. It was such fun to see all ages joining in.

After years of only going to the occasional ceilidh, I was excited to see Kate's poster advertising weekly classes. Being in my early 70s, I was a little nervous about my physical abilities.

I shouldn't have worried. I'm slower than I was when I was young, but it's still great to dance. I enjoy the energy of it and the way it keeps both my brain and body active. And if things go wrong, we can all laugh about it together - a little chaos is all part of the fun.

Dancing can noticeably lift my mood. Getting together each week to dance and laugh is good for both my physical and mental wellbeing.

The music, the energy, the laughter and the people are what keep me coming back.



Photographer: Jamie Webb

Anita DANCING AGAIN



I LOVE dancing.

As a child and teenager I learnt tap and modern dance and danced at every opportunity. In my twenties and thirties it was live bands or nightclubs. I was always the first on the dance floor.

Then, in my forties, I got sick. I battled cancer and won, but it took its toll. I stopped dancing for years. Lethargy, painful joints and a loss of self all got in the way.

I'm never one to lose myself for long. I worked with a nutritionist and, gradually, I started to see improvements. I started moving again, gently dancing around my kitchen.

Now in my fifties, I wanted to dance regularly with other people. I searched my local area and found ceilidh classes near where I lived, so I thought, "Why not?"

It can be nerve-racking going to a new class on your own, but oh my goodness, I found the friendliest people who welcomed me into the group. People with a joint passion to get together and dance.

I left that first class beaming.

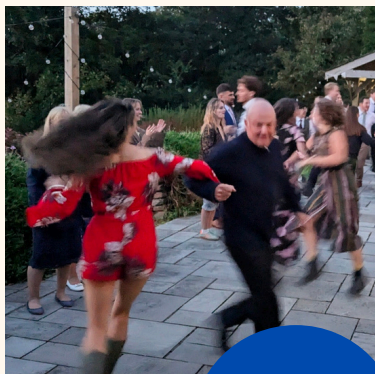
Now I go every Monday that I'm not working. I still get a happy buzz after every class and I'm dancing again.

Learning new steps, laughing openly when it all goes awry, meeting like-minded people...

I'm hooked.

Yannick

THE BEST MEDICINE



I have always liked watching folk dancers but had never done any dancing myself, so I was a total newbie!

I liked the music and wanted to try something new. I was also looking for movements that would help me recover my fitness, and I hadn't realised quite how energetic ceilidh dancing is. It turned out to be perfect.

Being a bit of a scatterbrain, I did worry about remembering the steps, but everyone is so easy-going that it simply doesn't matter. There is so much laughter and friendliness, and good people are patient.

What surprised me most is that we laugh when we get it wrong!

Usually getting something wrong is frustrating, but somehow in ceilidh it just becomes part of the fun. It really is the best medicine. There's a sense of relaxation and acceptance that I wasn't expecting.

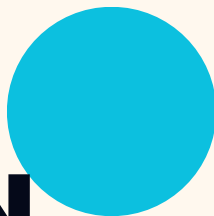
We learn together, we laugh together and we communicate. Somehow ceilidh seems to bring together really nice, friendly people, and that's become just as important to me as the dancing itself.

One of the unexpected bonuses is that, when I go to evening ceilidhs, I already know people there.

If you've never danced before, don't let that put you off. I hadn't either.

Mike and Trudy

DANCING HEAVEN ON EARTH



Mike: My first experience of ceilidh – or, as we knew it then, barn dancing – was at a dance organised by the PTA at a local school in Bedford. At last I'd found a joyful way of enjoying foot-tapping music without having to self-consciously attempt to enjoy a disco. I'd never felt comfortable on the dance floor.

I don't think there was a regular barn dancing scene in Bedford at the time, or if there was, I wasn't aware of it. It wasn't until I moved to Cornwall and met someone at a barn dance who mentioned their club and suggested I join that I started dancing regularly.

I duly did, enjoying the social side of making new friends as well as getting more dancing in, learning new dances and tackling some more complicated manoeuvres than you'd usually find at a public dance.

Then, more than thirty years ago, I discovered the Sidmouth Folk Festival: eight fantastic days of wall-to-wall dancing opportunities for all abilities and ages. Dancing heaven on earth for me.

Trudy: And that's where I come into the story.

Mike introduced me to my first ever ceilidh at Sidmouth on our first date 18 years ago, and I haven't stopped dancing since. Ceilidh brought us together and kept us together. In more ways than one, it's the best thing that ever happened to me.

Wherever you ceilidh, I've noticed people are always dancing with smiles on their faces. It's wonderful and I love it.

For years, Mike and I were only ceilidh dancing at Sidmouth, so I'm really glad Kate started the classes. Now we get to dance every week.

Mike and Trudy DANCING HEAVEN ON EARTH

Mike: Sidmouth is extremely demanding, so we try to keep exceptionally fit throughout the year because, as the years march on, we don't want to miss a single dance through exhaustion!

Since meeting Trudy, I've also been to rock and roll classes with her. Being told there that I had a good sense of rhythm gave me the confidence to express myself on a dance floor in whatever way the music moved me. Winning two bottles of bubbly for my energetic performances has only served to bolster my confidence!

For me, there's a joy and energy in the music that gets my feet tapping; a joy in mastering a dance and enjoying it; and a joy in meeting lovely people of all ages, all having a great time. Along the way, there's the chance to make lasting friendships too. Ceilidh dancing is probably the most social form of dancing around.



Photograph taken at the Sidmouth Folk Festival. Photographer: Kyle Baker

Jax **FINDING THE COURAGE**



Not long ago, if I'd seen people dancing together at a festival, I would have been standing or sitting at the side, wishing I'd had enough courage to join in.

This summer, at the Festival Interceltique in Lorient, I joined in with several dance sessions. That makes me smile because it wasn't always like that.

I first came to the ceilidh classes because I was looking for a new exercise class and saw an advert. Of course I was nervous before my first class, so I invited a friend along so that I wouldn't be on my own. Unsurprisingly, we both signed up.

Since then I've made new friends and even reconnected with friends from the past. What surprised me most was how friendly everyone was and how accepting they were of a newcomer.

What keeps me coming back is the atmosphere, the sense of belonging and the fact that I'm exercising, but in a really fun way.

The biggest change, though, has been the confidence I've gained and freedom I feel. One thing I hadn't realised about myself was how nervous I was about touching people I didn't know. Now I'll dance with anyone, leading or being led. It's such a lovely feeling to stop worrying and just let the moves happen.

We've built lovely friendships and always have a laugh. My attendance is often a bit sporadic, but that doesn't seem to matter. I haven't made it to any of the activities outside class yet, although many others have enjoyed going to ceilidhs together and even a summer walk. It's nice knowing those friendships continue beyond the classes too.

If you're wondering whether to give ceilidh a try, I'd simply say this: beginners really are welcome. You don't have to be super fit, you don't have to get everything right and you can always sit a dance out if you need to. Just come and give it a go.

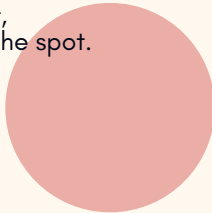
Alison
CEILIDH



Ceilidh...

Swirly, twirly, skip and hop,
Joyous, scrumptious, gallop and trot.
Weaving, streaming, getting hot,
Carefree laughter, care not a jot.
if you've lost the plot,
make mistake, it matters not.
Gaiety, frivolity, always got.

Cornwall Ceilidh, brought by a Scot.
If I could, I'd be there like a shot
Celebrate wed, birthday, babe in cot.
Indoor outdoor, worth a shot,
Fabulous memories that hit the spot.



K **BE MORE ALEX**



I think the whole world needs to be a bit more Alex.

Years ago, I went to the Dartmoor Folk Festival in South Zeal with Alex and other friends. It should have been a lovely weekend, but my relationship was in a bad place and there was so much going on that I completely missed doing all the good stuff.

A couple of years later, we went back.

Mostly Alex was a very happy person, although everyone has their black dogs, and he was having one of those moments.

I remember saying that the last time we'd been there I'd been in such a bad place that I'd missed everything.

He looked at me and said, "You wouldn't have done this anyway."

I said, "Actually, yes I would."

So, we joined in every dance.

We had absolutely no idea what we were doing, but it didn't matter. It was wonderful. It was the most fun I'd had since I was a child. I danced the whole afternoon barefoot because I didn't like shoes back then. I still don't, really. Somehow nobody even stood on my feet. It was just perfect.

Life carried on after that. There was work and all the usual things that get in the way. I know Alex went back to the festival a few more times, but I never did. That evening became one of those memories that has always stayed with me.

K

BE MORE ALEX

I first met Alex completely by chance. I'd gone to visit a school friend, but somehow ended up spending the afternoon talking to her brother instead. We talked about books, philosophy and all the things you are desperately serious about when you're a teenager. I stayed friends with him for years.

He would try anything. He got on with everybody. He travelled around the country, made friends wherever he went, lived on a boat, lived in bedsits and just embraced whatever life threw at him. He was endlessly interested in people and places. Even on the day we danced together, when he was having one of his black dog moments, he still joined in. Sometimes he'd arrive at my house with the most random things he'd found on his travels, or bits of lost property from the library where he'd been working. Somehow it always seemed perfectly normal because it was just Alex.

Four years ago, he died very suddenly in a tragic accident.

At his funeral, one thing kept being said: "We should all be more Alex."

I've tried, although it doesn't come very easily. He's the reason I got my job. He's the reason I started volunteering.

One day I was having a sad day. It was one of his anniversaries - his birthday or something like that - and an advert for a ceilidh class popped up. I remember thinking, That would be a "be more Alex" thing to do. I couldn't work out the logistics of getting there. Then life got in the way and I forgot about it.

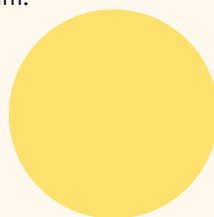
Later, another class came up within walking distance of home. Even then, I nearly didn't come. I think the first time I walked part of the way there, walked part of the way home, and then walked back again.

I'm really glad I did. Everyone has been so lovely.

It's nice that it reminds me of that really lovely day.

I miss the "just... just... just do it". It's hard. I'm sure there are Alexes in the world who find it really easy. It's the thing I miss most about him.

I still think the whole world needs to be a bit more Alex.



Lesley

IT KEEPS ME SMILING



Some years ago, as a student, I went to folk festivals where traditional dancing was an integral part of the activities. The focus was always on participating and having fun. There was no need to be an expert to participate – everyone was welcome and encouraged.

I remember the dances in the big tents of an evening and dancing until I couldn't stand. My feet hurt soooo much, but it was always joyful. Hot, crowded, sweaty, chaotic, but such fun. I danced with so many people I didn't know, who would nod to me the following day.

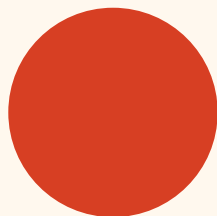
After the pubs closed, we'd often end up dancing on the beach at Sidmouth. A group would get together, play music and dance like no one was watching. I can't promise the correct steps were strictly followed, but we threw ourselves into it. I even played an instrument... a washboard... and sang a solo!

I fondly remember the impromptu singing in every pub, every night, after a few ciders! The songs raised the roof as everyone joined in and got more enthusiastic. It didn't matter if you couldn't sing a note. Before long, everyone was joining in.

I don't miss sleeping in the back of the car quite so much, but I do miss those days when I was more carefree and much more energetic.

Those memories stayed with me.

Dancing at Carleen Tea Treat, Photographer: Si Colgan



Lesley

IT KEEPS ME SMILING



Years later, when I was teaching in primary school, I used ceilidh dancing as a cross-curricular approach to learning. The children weren't always keen at first, particularly some of the boys, but those reluctant first steps became much more enthusiastic over the weeks. They laughed loudest when I got it wrong and groaned loudest when we went back to the eight times table! It always caused giggles when they had to teach their own dances and realised that counting to eight could be quite tricky once you added music, movement and other people's interpretations. The younger children were always a hoot, no rhythm and 2 left feet, but we had great fun jumping around to the music.

When I first saw the local ceilidh group advertised on Facebook, all those positive memories, and the linked emotions, re-emerged. I wanted to become part of the community but found it daunting because I had no one to go along with.

For a few weeks I kept telling myself, "Next week." Then next week came and went. It took a while before I finally plucked up the courage to get in touch. When I was told I could come a little later because I needed to walk the dogs first, I'd run out of excuses. I pulled on my big girl pants and turned up.

I am so glad that I did.

Everyone has been welcoming and friendly, with mistakes greeted with humour and friendship. The moments that keep me smiling usually revolve around the feelings of warmth and friendship, laughing together (but never at someone) when we get it wrong, the collective "Yes!" when we finally get it right, and the warm greeting as you walk through the door before being thrown in at the deep end.

As I've got older, I appreciate more those activities that provide a social connection and help me to keep fit. Some of the dances certainly fulfil that role, whilst the more genteel dances keep muscles and joints moving, giving a gentle workout. There's never any pressure to join in with every dance or get every step right.

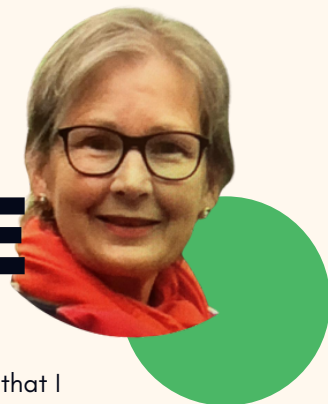
Why do I keep coming back?

It's fun. It's inclusive. It's social. It keeps me fit.

But most of all, it keeps me smiling.

Chris

MORE THAN JUST DANCE



I first came to ceilidh because I wanted to do exercise that I actually enjoyed.

I was nervous before my first class. I'd danced many years ago and worried about whether I'd be good enough, whether I'd be able to keep up and even what to wear!

What surprised me most was how welcoming and friendly everyone was. There was so much laughter and absolutely no judgement about my inadequacies.

One of my biggest worries was that I wouldn't be able to keep up or remember anything. Having a caller guiding everyone through the dances makes such a difference.

I keep coming back because it's a physical workout, a mental workout and, most importantly, a laughter workout.

I hadn't expected ceilidh to become something that's just for me, outside of family commitments. Now it's something I really look forward to.

The people, the laughter, the fun... that's what I enjoy most.

If you're curious but unsure, I'd simply say: try it, whatever your reason. You may find it's far more than just dance.

Contributor has chosen to remain anonymous

ONE SMALL STEP



After my partner died, I found it very hard to imagine what came next.

People would tell me I needed to stop living in the past. I knew they meant well, but it wasn't really that simple.

It wasn't that I wanted to live in the past. It was just that reminders seemed to be everywhere. A programme on television. Something in the news. A place I'd visit. Someone I'd meet who knew her, or knew her family. Sometimes the memories came when I expected them. More often they didn't.

Part of me knew I wanted to get back into dating one day. But it felt disloyal. I wasn't ready for dating websites or romantic evenings out. Even spending time with another woman felt like a much bigger step than I was ready to take.

Then someone sent me a Facebook post about ceilidh classes.

ONE SMALL STEP

One thing that made me think it was worth trying was that ceilidh was something we'd never done together. That mattered. It wasn't already tied to memories in the way so many other things in my life were. It felt like something that belonged to the present rather than the past.

I thought it might be one small step.

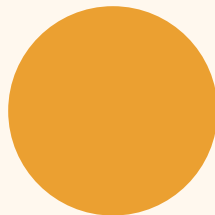
At a ceilidh you dance with everyone. You hold hands, change partners and share a laugh. That's simply how ceilidhs work.

For me, that made all the difference. It meant I could dance with women, enjoy their company and simply spend time with them without the pressure of a date. There wasn't any expectation that it had to mean anything more. It just felt like a gentle first step, without feeling I was somehow being disloyal to the person I'd loved.

I still don't know exactly where life goes from here.

I'm quite a private person, and I don't find any of this easy to talk about. I wasn't looking for a dramatic change. I just wanted to take one small step towards feeling that, one day, I might be ready to date again.

I'm glad I walked through the door.



Sarah and Gordon

LAUGHING AND MUDDLING THROUGH

Sarah: I first came to ceilidh classes in January 2025. I'd heard about them from a friend in my widows group and saw it as a way to meet people and have a bit of fun.

I remember that first class. We were absolutely hopeless! I hadn't laughed so much in a long time, and we laughed for the full hour and a half. It was a hit for me and I just had to keep going.

I was lucky enough to meet someone special in the summer of 2025, and in the autumn Gordon joined the ceilidh group too.



Sarah and Gordon

LAUGHING AND MUDDLING THROUGH

Gordon: I came along because I'd met someone special who was already going, and she asked me if I'd like to try it.

At first I wasn't sure. I'd imagined it would be too complicated because I'm not good at remembering sequences of steps. The last time I'd done anything ceilidh-like was once or twice at senior school in Helensburgh – a very long time ago!

But I tried it and loved it.

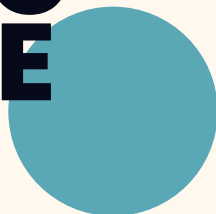
I still forget the sequences, but I manage to muddle through and just laugh at myself – along with everyone else laughing at me!

I'm hooked now. It's great fun, it's a great thing to do with my partner, I meet new people and get some good exercise.

Sarah: I still love every class and ceilidh I go to – and I still laugh from beginning to end.

GevaAnn

THE MUSIC MAKES ME MOVE



I don't think I've ever really stopped dancing.

I recently found photographs of myself at primary school doing maypole dancing. Later, one of the parents, who was Scottish, started an after-school country dancing group. I loved it, and Mum was always good at spotting something we enjoyed and finding ways for us to do more of it. As a teenager we went to ceilidhs and folk festivals around Hampshire, and dancing simply became part of life.

Then I left home, went to college and that community disappeared. I still danced whenever the opportunity came along, but in different ways. I've tried circle dance, tribal dance, dancing to African drumming, and I've been known to stop in a village square in Spain or an almost empty café in America because a musician was playing and the music simply made me move.

For me, the music dictates the dance. Sometimes there's no thought involved at all. You just respond.

Years later, I was standing in Chacewater Garden Centre reading the noticeboard when I spotted a poster for the ceilidh classes. It was local, it was in the afternoon, and I thought, "I can do this."

I was still apprehensive about walking into a room full of new people on my own, but I needn't have worried. The welcome was warm and inclusive, and the biggest surprise was that my body remembered. My head wasn't quite sure what it was doing, but my body completely remembered how to dance.

GevaAnn

THE MUSIC MAKES ME MOVE

Of course it's exercise, but it never feels like exercise. I've never been someone who enjoys going to the gym. I'd much rather be gardening or walking. Dancing gives me movement without it feeling like a chore, and along the way I've got to know new people and become part of a community.

What fascinates me is that dance has so many functions. It's exercise, it's celebration, it's courtship, it's history, it's storytelling and it's a way of bringing people together. Whether it's circle dance, ceilidh, Morris dancing or the dances I watched women doing in a village in India, they all create community in different ways.

I like that feeling of continuity. These dances have travelled, changed and evolved over generations, but the thread is still there.

One of the things I especially appreciate about a called ceilidh is that you don't have to know everything before you begin. Someone is there to guide you. You're allowed to learn. You're allowed to get it wrong. When it all goes a bit pear-shaped, we usually just collapse laughing.

That's important.

It's not about making somebody wrong. It's about creating something together.

Perhaps that's why I've always come back to dancing, whatever form it has taken. It helps us relate to one another in a way that words sometimes can't. It reminds us that communities are built one step at a time.



Karen

I LOVE DANCING



I love dancing, I'm a real disco girl. If the music comes on, I'm straight up. I've reached that stage in my life where I don't really care what people think once I'm on the dance floor, I'm happy.

When I was little, I always wanted to go to dance classes. There were ballet classes in the village where I lived, but after my dad died, they were just too expensive, so it never happened. We did a bit of folk dancing at school, which I loved, but after that life just took over.

Before lockdown I started going to some old-time dancing with a friend, and I really enjoyed that too. Then everything stopped.

The thing that finally gave me the push to try Ceilidh, was my daughter's wedding. She was having a ceilidh, and I thought I really ought to learn a few dances before the big day.

I'd actually contacted Kate a couple of years earlier about coming to a class, but never quite got round to it. This time I built myself up to attend a class on my own.

Then a friend from work said, "I'll come with you."

I remember thinking, I don't think you're really going to enjoy it, but she did. We've both carried on coming and absolutely love it.

Karen

I LOVE DANCING



I was still nervous that first evening, but I didn't need to be. One of the things I love about ceilidh dancing is that you don't need to know what you're doing before you arrive. There's a caller to tell you what to do, where to stand and where to go next. You don't need to bring a partner either. If you get something wrong, you laugh, have another go and, most of the time, you get away with it! You will not be the only one wondering which is your left or right!

When my daughter's wedding came around, I absolutely loved the ceilidh. I remember dancing with someone who had grown up in Scotland and took it all very seriously. I think I probably got the best dancer there!

These days I come back for lots of reasons.

It's social. It breaks up the week. I'm learning a new skill, which keeps my brain going, and it's good exercise too. I do lots of things, but I could quite easily stay indoors if I let myself, especially if I'm feeling a bit low. Having somewhere to go gives me a reason to get out.

Once the dancing starts, you're totally focused. You're listening, watching and thinking about where you're supposed to be next. In a sense, it's mindfulness.

The Wednesday class has a lovely sense of community now. We have a chat before we start, we laugh a lot, and people help each other. I think most of us still want to learn the dancing, but we're also there because we enjoy seeing the people we've met.

I know how it feels to wonder whether to come on your own because that was me.

If someone was thinking about coming to the Wednesday class or any class, but was nervous about walking through the door by themselves, I'd happily come in with them.

I've always wanted to dance and now I am!

I'm so glad I finally did.

Helen

A DOER, NOT AN OBSERVER

It was a long time since I'd danced when a poster at Jubilee Wharf caught my eye.

Dance as much-needed exercise? Fun? Friendly? Lovely music? I was tempted.

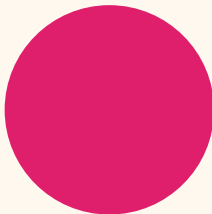
Very serious Scottish dancing classes, circle dancing and occasional barn dances with a husband with two left feet were distant memories. Our once enjoyable, energetic life was ended six years ago by Alzheimer's.

I can no longer leave the house without arranging for a paid carer, but ceilidh class and two choirs are my weekly escapes.

Moving once more to melodic music is wonderful. There's friendship, warmth, laughter, gentle kindness and that much-needed exercise. Concentrating on the pattern of each dance wipes away normal cares.

I feel part of the world again, a doer rather than an observer of others having fun.

That's why Mondays are so special.



Ann

IT'S BEEN MY LIFESAVER

I have always loved to dance. Earlier this year I had the chance to go to a ceilidh at Tresemple Farm and loved every minute. Afterwards I discovered there were regular weekly ceilidh classes. A group of us who used to go tap dancing together keep in touch on WhatsApp and often suggest different events to each other. That's how I ended up going to Tresemple Farm.

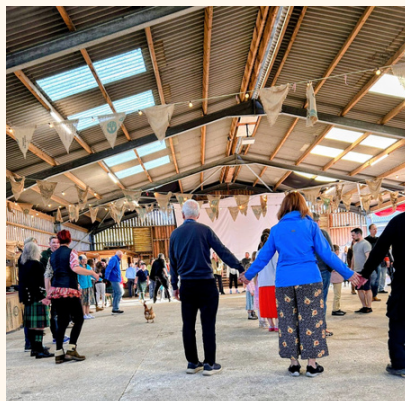
I had been through a difficult few months. My mum had nearly died twice. It was an emotional rollercoaster.

The laughter and the sheer joy of dancing were the tonic I needed. For an hour and a half I could stop worrying, forget everything else and simply enjoy the moment. No one seems to mind if left becomes right, or a lead dancer becomes a follower, or the chaos that can happen in an instant. Somehow it all adds to the enjoyment.

Everyone is kind and friendly, and it's absolutely fine to turn up on your own because there is always someone to dance with. If there's an odd number, the caller cheerfully dances with "the invisible friend" so everyone else has a partner.

Ceilidh is now a very important part of my life. For an hour and a half each week I can forget everything else.

It's been my lifesaver.



Tresemple farm ceilidh with The Brim Ceilidh Band
Photographer: Lukas Drinkwater

Val

SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

I first came along because I'd enjoyed barn dancing in the local village and wished I could do it more often. It was fun and great exercise together.

My day job requires long hours in front of a computer, so I love the freedom to move! It's good to get some steps in, and I feel better afterwards.

Then there's the social side. Socialise, socialise, socialise!

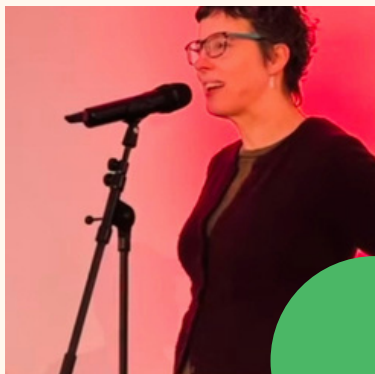
I've met lots of lovely, friendly people and we have a good laugh while we're dancing. We even meet up when ceilidh isn't on now, and I've made some lovely friends.

I like learning something different too. There's no need to be an expert because we're guided through the dances. Once you've been a few times, there's a nice mixture: I recognise some of the dances already and then there'll be something new to learn. I also enjoy hearing a bit about the dances and where they come from.

And it's something to look forward to. I love having ceilidh as a regular part of my week, as well as the extra special ceilidh events I sometimes go to.



Kate FROM BEHIND THE MIC



I learned to dance in the kitchen at home, to Robbie Shepherd's Take the Floor on the radio. Dad taught me pas de basque, waltz and polka. He'd put a hat on the floor and make me jump over it to get some height into my steps and encouraged me to point my toes.

My formal Highland dancing career was less successful. I got kicked out of class after using my wooden swords to build a bridge and snapping them. I also remember feeling I wasn't very good at it. There were older girls who seemed perfect, competing and winning prizes, while little ones like me didn't always feel particularly inspired or encouraged.

Ceilidh dancing was different. We danced at weddings, Burns Suppers and in school PE lessons. I loved being birlled round at great speed by farmers at ceilidhs. It was exciting, slightly terrifying and enormous fun. You learned a good hold so you didn't go flying, although I did occasionally end up on my bum. At the end of the evening everyone would get up for The Slosh, and then we'd all hold hands in a big circle for Auld Lang Syne.

I loved it.

I hated school discos. As a teenager I was far too self-conscious and self-critical. But ceilidh and country dancing made sense to me. I liked the patterns and the music, and the way one well-choreographed movement led into another.

Later, Thursday nights at the Caley Brewery in Edinburgh became a favourite. Some of the best ceilidh bands in Scotland played there, mixing traditional tunes and instruments with rock, salsa and reggae beats. I once fell for someone who played guitar and sang, had a twinkle in his eye and a great smile - and would dance the Gay Gordons with me down an Edinburgh street late at night after a Caley ceilidh.

Kate

FROM BEHIND THE MIC



When I moved to Reykjavik, I knew very few people. I tried salsa and tango classes and met some lovely people, but after a while I missed ceilidh dancing. So I started teaching dances to friends in a warehouse space we could use, and later in a tiny Nissan hut by the beach, beyond the airfield on the edge of town. It was a fairly unlikely, rather desolate place to go dancing, but people came – Icelanders and people from all over the world.

Some were amazing bluegrass and folk musicians and started staying to play afterwards. Before long we had a huge ceilidh band, The Reel Thing, and ended up playing everywhere from weddings and nightclubs to city-centre festivals with squares full of people dancing.

It was great fun. And I still have friends from those days.

When I moved to Cornwall, I missed dancing again. Then, by chance, some musicians asked me to call a one-off ceilidh with them. I was nervous – I knew Scottish dancing, but hardly any Cornish or English dances and it had been a while – but I said yes. That was fun too. So I did more of it.

I like learning dances and becoming good at them. I still love an Eightsome Reel, and it really does work best when everyone knows what's coming next and the whole thing flies.

What I don't like is making people feel bad when they get something wrong. I once went to a formal ball in Edinburgh where there was an expectation that you knew the dances and danced them correctly. I could dance, but I made one mistake and felt very conscious of the disapproval around me. I didn't like that feeling.

These days I spend quite a lot of time behind a mic, which means I get to watch everyone else. I love seeing dads dancing with their sons, couples, families and friends dancing together, and children properly joining in. When a set needs one more dancer, somebody puts a hand in the air and someone who's been hovering at the side suddenly joins in. You really can turn up on your own and know people by the end of the evening.

Weddings are particularly good for seeing different generations together. At one, we played a waltz especially so the groom could dance with his granny. It's one reason we now almost always include a waltz. Some people want something a bit gentler, and sometimes a couple just want a few minutes to dance together.

Kate

FROM BEHIND THE MIC

And ceilidh dancing can be romantic. You can fall in love with someone and gaze into their eyes while you're spinning around together. Or you can spin around with someone you have absolutely no romantic interest in whatsoever. Both work.

One of my favourite things is watching someone who is convinced they can't dance decide to have a go. At first they're concentrating desperately on what their feet are doing. Then gradually they stop thinking quite so hard. They hear the music, start interacting with the other dancers, smile and laugh. Sometimes you can actually see someone blossom when they realise they can dance.

But I don't only like watching other people dance. I want to dance too.

I nearly always feel happier after a ceilidh. That's especially true if I've been dancing, but even after an evening calling I usually come away feeling better than I did when I arrived.

The music is a big part of it. I don't generally sit at home listening to jigs and reels, but give me that music with a room full of people to dance with and it lifts me up, however bad a day I've had.

It's one of the things I love about working with The Brim, the band I most often call with. They're great dance musicians. They watch what's happening on the floor and play for the dancers, and when the band and the dancing really connect, it's brilliant.

And then there's the dancing itself.

I love a couple dance like the Military Two Step or the Gay Gordons where you can really travel around the room. I love birling, Tulloch turns, a flying basket, a grand chain and being swept down the line in an Orcadian Strip the Willow. And I love dancing with an experienced dancer. When you both know what you're doing and you're listening to the same music, you don't have to think about every move. It just flows.

I've danced in kitchens, barns, warehouses, Nissan huts, pubs, nightclubs, concert halls, grand ballrooms, village halls, gardens, parks and streets. I've met some wonderful people along the way.

Now I quite often get to stand behind a mic and watch everyone else have the fun.

But given half a chance, I'll be on the dance floor too.

Where can I dance **REGULAR CEILDH VENUES**



Fancy giving it a go?

We run public ceilidhs throughout the year at venues around Cornwall. Some are big nights with the full Brim Ceilidh Band, others are smaller evenings with The Brim Duo.

Tresemple Farm, near Truro

Big ceilidh nights in the barn at Tresemple Farm, home of The Farmyard Market, just outside Truro.

Project 83, Newquay

Monthly ceilidhs with The Brim Duo from October to March, usually on the second Tuesday of the month, at this award-winning bar in the centre of Newquay.

Halwyn, Crantock

Regular ceilidhs with The Brim Duo at Halwyn, near Crantock and Newquay.

The 'Hangover' Ceilidh, Falmouth

Our annual January 'Hangover' ceilidh at the Falmouth Hotel, often featuring the big-band version of The Brim.

We also pop up at community events and other venues around Cornwall, so keep an eye on our social media to see where we're dancing next.

And it isn't just us. There's lots going on in Cornwall's ceilidh and folk-dance scene. The Ceilidh Cornwall calendar lists our public events alongside ceilidhs and dances organised by other bands and venues around the county.

[See the Cornwall ceilidh calendar](#)

If you're organising a public ceilidh or folk-dance event in Cornwall and would like it added to the calendar, please let Kate know.



Weekly dancing

CEILIDH CORNWALL CLASSES

People come to ceilidh classes for all sorts of reasons – to learn the dances, keep active, build confidence, meet people or simply because they love dancing.

Kate from Ceilidh Cornwall runs regular classes around West and Central Cornwall. We learn dances from Cornwall, Scotland, England and further afield, from old favourites to more intricate dances that are really satisfying when they all come together.

People come with all sorts of experience too, from complete beginners to those who have been dancing for years.

You don't need to bring a partner, and people often come on their own – you will always have someone to dance with.

There are complete beginners alongside people who have been dancing for years. We learn as we go and, as you've probably gathered from the stories in this booklet, there's usually plenty of laughter along the way. New dancers are very welcome.

Mondays, 13:15-14:45

The ZedShed, Penryn

Tuesdays, 11:00-12:30

St Erth Church Hall

Tuesdays, 19:30-21:00

The Ladder, Redruth

Wednesdays, 18:30-20:00

Ladock Community Hall /
Sir Robert Harvey Memorial Hall,
Grampound Road *



**The Wednesday class moves between Ladock and Grampound Road. Check the website or calendar, or contact Kate to find out where we're dancing next.*

For current dates, prices and class information, visit www.ceilidhcornwall.com or contact Kate.

CONTACT US

Join the dance

**the
brim**
Ceilidh Band



Email: alanpengelly@hotmail.com

Website: www.brimceilidh.co.uk

Instagram: [@thebrimceilidhband](https://www.instagram.com/thebrimceilidhband)

The Brim Ceilidh Band brings together some of Cornwall's most experienced folk musicians, playing lively, energetic music for dancing at weddings, celebrations, Burns Suppers, corporate events, festivals and more.

With two to five musicians plus caller, the line-up is flexible: usually three musicians, a Duo for smaller venues and budgets, or four or five for a bigger sound.

Ceilidh Cornwall 

Kate Smith runs Ceilidh Cornwall and is a ceilidh and barn dance caller, dancer and teacher based in Cornwall. She runs regular classes and workshops, organises public ceilidhs and calls for weddings, parties, festivals and community events - with The Brim Ceilidh Band, other bands and musicians, or recorded music.

Alongside the ceilidhs, barn dances, classes and workshops, there's the occasional hoedown or Regency ball too.

Email: ceilidh.cornwall@gmail.com

Website: www.ceilidhcornwall.com

Instagram: [@ceilidhcornwall](https://www.instagram.com/ceilidhcornwall)

Facebook: Ceilidh Cornwall



*Thank you for reading our stories.
Happy dancing!*