

Rainbow Times article about JP Dance



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Boston Area Orgs. & Clubs Cater to LGBTQ Community & Inclusion

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BOSTON, Mass.—Earlier in the year, *The Rainbow Times* published an article about LGBTQ-themed and -friendly dance nights throughout the Boston area. The piece featured groups such as Gays for Patsy, OUT to Dance, Boston Open DanceSport, Swingtime, and events like those held at Bella Luna Restaurant and Milky Way Lounge, including Dyke Night, Boyfriends, La Boum, If You Can Feel It, Speak It, and Dirty Water Saloon. However, we quickly realized these were only some of the groups and organizations hosting queer and LGBT-specific dance in the city.

Every second and fourth Saturday, the Gay and Lesbian Contra Dance is held in Jamaica Plain through the umbrella group Lavender Country & Folk Dances (LCFD). For 25 years, this group has been holding what they call “gender free dances” for LGBTQ people and allies. Organizer and board member John Gintell started dancing with the group in 1997 and said he has missed very few dances and camps ever since.

“I think this dance has formed a very well knit community, and we have parties and do other things together,” Gintell said. “In contra dancing—related to square dance—couples line up in a line, setup into sets of four. A caller teaches the dance and then continues to call while the band plays. A sequence of moves get done and then the couple progresses to the next set. By the end of the evening, you will have danced with everyone in the hall.”



The Gay and Lesbian Contra Dance has been held in Jamaica Plain for 25 years. Photo by Doug Plummer

Gintell explained how the gender free dances they host are special. “In traditional contra dancing, the roles are called gents and ladies, but in the early days of our dance some people objected to this terminology, so we adopted a convention of calling them bare arms and arm bands,” he said. “At NEFFA [New England Folk Festival Association], there is always a gender free session, but even more interesting is now at many of the regular dance series you will see men dancing with men and women dancing with women or people reversing roles. We feel that our appearance in NEFFA has helped this transition.”

LCFD helps form dance series and operates a twice-a-year dance camp. They also host dances in other cities, such as New York, San Francisco, Oakland, Atlanta and Montague. Additionally, The Jamaica Plain group hosts a twice-monthly gender free English Country Dance series, held on the second and fourth Tuesdays.

Gintell shared more about how the gender free language serves to make everyone feel included.

“Some people don’t like to be referred by the opposite gender. At a gender free dance, a person can ask anyone to dance regardless of gender, so it is likely that there will be many people dancing the opposite gender role,” Gintell said. “Some transgender people don’t identify themselves as either male or female, so appreciate not being referenced as one or the other of gent or ladies. Others care very much about their gender tag even if their appearance is ambiguous, perhaps because they are [in a] transitional stage.”

He explained why it is important for LGBTQ people to have places like this to dance.

“Although LGBTQ people are seeing much less prejudice and homophobia—particularly true in New England—there are still some people who like to dance with someone of the same gender and don’t want to be treated with disrespect or worse,” he said. “It is great to have a place where no matter what your gender-ID or sexual preference is, you will feel welcomed since there are still lots of places where that isn’t true.”

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