# Is the dancefloor your 'happy place' as a gay man?



Emma Warren, author of Dance Your Way Home and co-curator of an upcoming festival at London’s Southbank Centre, describes the dancefloor as her 'happy place' — a lively, collective space where movement intertwines with others in a vibrant, shared energy. Reflecting on a drum’n’bass night in Manchester in 1996, Warren captures the essence of what dancing can evoke: a whole-body experience, often described as trance-like, where prolonged movement grounds you in yourself while simultaneously connecting you to the crowd. For her, dancing is a universal human act that transcends social barriers and historical constraints, including harsh restrictions like Ireland’s Public Dance Halls Act of the 1930s or the UK’s Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of the 1990s. It is about friendship, resilience, and collaboration, a space to reclaim one’s attention and emotions amid a world saturated with distractions. Even a simple groove, Warren notes, can quickly lift spirits and foster wellbeing.

This ethos echoes powerfully in the story of Dennis Bovell, a monumental figure in the British reggae scene. Bovell’s journey from Barbados to London in the 1960s set the stage for his vital role in pioneering sound system culture, notably with his own system, Sufferer’s Hi-Fi, active roughly between 1969 and 1974. His sound system experiences captured the essence of community building and musical innovation, with 'soundclashes' serving as all-out celebrations of dancefloor appeal rather than conflicts. Despite police challenges over noise levels, these vibrant gatherings thrived, pushing volume boundaries and musical creativity—from early amplifiers at 2,000 watts to modern systems reaching beyond 20,000 watts. Bovell fondly recalls dancing to protest songs like Ken Boothe’s Freedom Street and Eddy Grant’s Black Skin Blue Eyed Boys, milestones that celebrated racial integration and politicised dance music. His band Matumbi’s breakthrough gig at a US airbase, where they introduced American servicemen to reggae, further highlights the dancefloor’s power as a site of cultural exchange and joyous transformation.

The deep connection between rhythm and identity is also central to Saskia Horton’s work with Sensoria, an organisation advocating for disabled and chronically ill people within dance and music spaces. Horton’s background in hip-hop, house, waacking, and krump fuelled her understanding of dance as a vehicle for self-discovery and community. Through house music’s hypnotic 'four to the floor' beat and immersive DJ journeys, she found family and freedom. After falling ill in 2019, Horton recognised the barriers that disabled and neurodiverse people face in accessing traditional dance events—physical, sensory, and social. Sensoria’s creation of the Sensory Safe Cypher fosters an inclusive environment prioritising slowness, sustainability, and accessibility, challenging the 'go hard or go home' mentality often associated with hip-hop dance culture and opening new pathways back to dancing’s emotional and bodily joy.

Choreographer Jeremy Nedd brings an insightful perspective rooted in his Caribbean family heritage and formal training. Growing up in Brooklyn, his earliest dance memories come from unstructured family gatherings where Soca and soul filled the air, fostering a sense of freedom and self-ownership over movement. His recent work From Rock to Rock playfully and critically engages with viral social dances like the Milly Rock, highlighting important conversations around copyright, cultural appropriation, and the ownership of Black creative forms. Nedd underscores how dance remains a 'beautiful space' for sharing energy and joy, even as it has become increasingly digital and global—tutorials teaching the Milly Rock in far-flung places like eastern Europe still honour its Brooklyn roots.

Together, these voices map a fascinating and multi-dimensional portrait of the dancefloor as a site of identity, resistance, cultural dialogue, healing, and joy. Dance, in its myriad forms and histories, continues to defy restrictions, forge communities, and nurture the individual and collective spirit. Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jul/14/dancefloor-devotees-emma-warren-dennis-bovell-southbank-centre-dance-your-way-home> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jul/14/dancefloor-devotees-emma-warren-dennis-bovell-southbank-centre-dance-your-way-home> - In this article, Emma Warren, author of 'Dance Your Way Home' and co-curator of a festival at London's Southbank Centre, discusses the profound connection she feels on the dancefloor. She describes it as a 'whole-body experience' where movement is intertwined with others, creating a collective energy. Warren reflects on a memorable drum'n'bass night in Manchester in 1996, highlighting the intense, trance-like state achieved after hours of dancing. She emphasizes that dancing is a universal human activity, fostering friendship, internal strength, and collaboration, whether in village greens or modern clubs.
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/arts-entertainment/music/features/dennis-bovell-the-dub-master-6105037.html> - This feature delves into the life of Dennis Bovell, a pivotal figure in the UK reggae scene. Born in Barbados and relocating to London in 1965, Bovell formed the band Matumbi in 1972, known for their roots reggae style. The article highlights his dual role as a musician and sound system operator, emphasizing his contributions to the dub genre and his collaborations with artists like Linton Kwesi Johnson. Bovell's innovative approach to dub and his influence on the reggae landscape are central themes in this piece.
4. <https://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/dennis-bovell-bass-culture/> - In this lecture, Dennis Bovell discusses his journey from Barbados to London and his immersion into the UK's sound system culture. He shares insights into his early experiments with tape loops and dub techniques, recounting how he created dub plates at school and the subsequent rise of his sound system, Sufferer's Hi-Fi. Bovell reflects on the challenges and triumphs of establishing a unique sound in a competitive environment, offering a personal perspective on the evolution of dub music in the UK.
5. <https://www.thequietus.com/interviews/dennis-bovell-interview/> - This interview with Dennis Bovell explores his roots in sound system culture, tracing his journey from his father's Tropical Soundmaster system to his own Sufferer's Hi-Fi. Bovell discusses the dynamics of sound system clashes, the evolution of dub music, and his experiences with various sound systems in London. The conversation provides a deep dive into the cultural significance of sound systems and Bovell's pivotal role in shaping the UK's reggae and dub scenes.
6. <https://www.pressure.co.uk/store/PS39/dennis-bovell-decibel-more-cuts-dubs-1976-to-1983> - This release, 'Decibel – More Cuts & Dubs 1976 to 1983', compiles sixteen rare dub and instrumental tracks by Dennis Bovell. The album showcases his contributions to the English reggae and dub scenes, featuring collaborations with artists like Matumbi and Aswad. The collection includes tracks such as 'The Grunwick Affair' and 'Harmoniser Dub', highlighting Bovell's innovative approach to dub production and his influence on the genre during the late 70s and early 80s.