# The Gay Tea Dances: from protests to a modern celebration at The Londoner



Can you imagine a law that prohibited the serving of alcoholic liquor – or booze! – to anyone you suspected of being homosexual? Even the idea of keeping a gay man away from strong liquor defies modern ideas of human rights.

But such was the case in the United States in the 1960s leading to peaceful protests like the Matachine Society’s ‘Sip Ins’, where protestors in smart suits and ties would go into bars, declare their homosexuality and order a cocktail. Julius’, perhaps the most joyous and historic gay bar in all of the Americas, was the location for many of these ‘Sip Ins’… and the gays are still sipping in right there in Greenwich Village.

The prohibition also led, not only to most ‘gay bars’ (we put the inverted commas because they had little to do with what anyone would call a gay bar in this day and age) being owned and run by the Mafia but to them being raided by the police on a regular basis. This practice led eventually the events of the Stonewall riots, where one too many cop mistreated one too many gay/trans drinker and got a brick in the face in return.

But it was due to this prohibition that the concept of the Gay Tea Dance was invented. Firstly, if you were serving tea, then they couldn’t get you (mind you, in pure prohibition style, we’re sure many of those teapots contained something a little stronger than a Lady Grey!) Secondly, seeing as many of the best Gay Tea Dances were out of Manhattan – Fire Island [pictured], principally – and the gay tea dancer needed to get back into town before the ferries finished, many of the tea dances were held in the afternoon.

The concept, it must be said, is solid gold and the idea that on a dreary Sunday afternoon you can go out for drinks and dancing and still be home in bed ready for Monday morning caught on with Gay Tea Dances springing up across the US and even in France, where it was called Le Thé Dansant, and the UK, where a funny little spot down an alley where G-A-Y used to be would start Sunday afternoon with soft drinks and soft music before turning into a regular Big Gay Night Out. Yes, on a Sunday (well, hairdressers don’t work Mondays).

And now JAKE is bringing back the tradition with Summer Sunday, a Gay Tea Dance (with drinks from the very start!) on the Rooftop at the world’s first super-boutique hotel, The Londoner, in Leicester Square. Taking place on Sunday 8th June, with a pre-lunch for those downstairs who want to carb load, expect a sophisticated afternoon/evening of light drinking, light disco and heavy fun.

Tickets from jakeldncom/events

## Bibliography

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_%28restaurant%29> - This article details the 1966 'Sip-In' at Julius', a pivotal event where members of the Mattachine Society openly declared their homosexuality to challenge the denial of service to gay patrons, leading to significant legal changes in New York.
* <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-stonewall-riot> - This source provides an overview of the Stonewall Riots, highlighting how frequent police raids on gay bars, including the Stonewall Inn, led to the 1969 uprising, a turning point in the LGBTQ rights movement.
* <https://www.history.com/topics/lgbtq/the-stonewall-riots> - This article discusses the Stonewall Inn's operation under the Mafia and its significance as a gathering place for the LGBTQ community, culminating in the 1969 riots that sparked the modern gay rights movement.