

Lindy by the sea



Social dancers on the floor at the University of Sussex. Below, Simon Selmon and Jessica Willis on Brighton Pier



Brighton dusted off its two-tone shoes and put flowers in its hair to welcome its first Lindy Hop Festival. Held at the University of Sussex at the end of April, the weekend was blessed with sunshine and the magic of springtime.

Organised by Sussex Swing, run by Lizzie Abrahams, in association with Simon Selmon's London Swing Dance Society (LSDS), the festival attracted 150 people, from Brighton, London and even from abroad.

On the Friday, April 26, Simon and his glamorous partner, Jessica Willis, taught the famous Big Apple. Originally from the US Afro-American community, the Big Apple was danced at the beginning of the 20th century and it is both a circle dance and a partner dance. The leader of the

group calls out the steps, which means that minimum memory is required. However, a little practice is advisable for steps such as the "Scarecrow" or "Frankenstein".

Saturday was the key day for classes, with one in the morning, two in the afternoon, plus a Charleston lesson at the start of the evening ball – and a blues lesson at midnight.

Festival-goers were divided into three groups, according to their experience. However, the three levels were taught with the same sequences of steps,

increasing in complexity for the most advanced dancers. This is particularly clever because it means that, if people want to practise their newly learned steps at the social dancing, they are able to dance with anyone.

Simon and Jessica, Lizzie and Lithuanian teachers Ichtiantras Veliulis and Solveiga Griušyte rotated between the three groups. The University of Sussex provided ample spaces and a friendly atmosphere for the classes. The highlight of the Saturday night ball was the live band Wally's Wheel Tappers and a dance show by the teachers, with acrobatics galore.

Even though Saturday was a busy day, the dancefloor was still crowded when, at the witching hour, the lights went down and the sweet, slow motion of blues came on for the dance lesson.

On Sunday morning, we Charlestone around Brighton Pier – with the videos to

prove it! A balboa class and a friendly tea party in the afternoon were the send-off for people who come from afar.

Brighton Lindy Hop Festival could benefit from deciding whether it's a weekend dance festival, or a strong one-day event, with a spot of dancing at either end. But the human quality was superb, the dances fun and the lessons very good. Watch out for next year's fest around the same time. ●

GENY CALOISI