NEWS LESSON

What a Crowded Dancefloor Offers That an App Cannot



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What does a social occasion have to provide that an app cannot?
2. Why do old forms sometimes return with a new audience?
3. Is loneliness best addressed individually or by changing what is on offer?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**generational**	☐	A	a person who tells dancers which steps to do next
2	**renaissance**	☐	B	connected with one age group of people
3	**communal**	☐	C	shared by everyone in a group
4	**polished**	☐	D	very neat and professional, with no rough edges
5	**virtues**	☐	E	a time when something becomes popular again
6	**caller**	☐	F	your feeling of how important you are
7	**acoustic**	☐	G	played on instruments that do not use electric power
8	**ego**	☐	H	good qualities that make something worth admiring

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The ceilidh revival is being read as a verdict on dating apps and screens. The more interesting explanation is in the design of the dance itself.

1 A ceilidh is not an obvious candidate for a youth trend. The music is acoustic, the dances are centuries old, the instructions are shouted by someone with a microphone, and at no point does anybody look good. Yet last Friday the Ivy House in Nunhead, a south London pub with a history of raucous gigs, was full of people in their twenties and thirties learning to strip the willow.

2 The commentary around this tends to reach immediately for a diagnosis: a lonely generation, exhausted by dating apps, seeking something analogue. There is evidence that something is happening. Eventbrite reports that UK ticket sales for ceilidh events grew 16% between 2024 and 2025, and 15% globally, and a spokesperson describes demand for occasions that are communal and less polished. A touring musical has arrived to meet the moment.

3 The explanation worth taking seriously, though, is structural rather than generational. A ceilidh is unusually well designed for strangers. A caller teaches each dance in advance, which means nobody is expected to arrive competent. Partners rotate by the logic of the figures, so joining alone carries no social cost and standing at the edge is not really an option. The steps are, as one charity worker put it, accessible enough that anyone can join in but complex enough to be fun, which is a precise description of a good game.

4 The dancers' own accounts point the same way. George, 35, said he liked how silly it was and that it made him feel alive. Louise, 32, valued that nobody was assessing anyone's ability: strip away the ego, she said, and people become their childlike selves. Ed McCabe of the London Ceilidh Club argues that the inability to look cool is a feature, since you are sweaty and smiling and therefore unguarded. Musicians in the band note that the dances assign roles as ones and twos rather than men and women, which quietly removes a set of assumptions nobody has to discuss.

5 Put together, these are not nostalgic virtues. They are the things most social occasions are bad at. A party requires you to already know someone. A dating app requires you to perform a version of yourself and then meet the consequences alone. A ceilidh gives you a structure, a task, a reason to touch hands with a stranger and an excuse to laugh when it goes wrong, and it ends at a fixed time.

6 Some caution is warranted before declaring a movement. Growth figures from one ticketing platform describe a market, not a culture, and a crowded pub in Nunhead is one evening in one city. Scottish and Irish communities have been holding ceilidhs continuously for well over a century, so the renaissance belongs to the people discovering them, not to the form.

7 Still, the appeal is not mysterious. A local anti-loneliness charity took the ticket money and said the revival had helped it reach new people. Whatever else is going on, a room where nobody can look cool turns out to be an efficient way to meet somebody.

Sources: The Guardian, ‘Ceilidh renaissance’ lures gen Z offline in search of real-life joy. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer thinks dating apps ask people to present a version of themselves. T F NG
2. The writer treats the Nunhead evening as proof of a national movement. T F NG
3. Most dancers interviewed said they had come to the pub to get away from dating apps. T F NG
4. The writer thinks a ceilidh asks less prior social knowledge of strangers than a party does. T F NG
5. The writer believes the ceilidh itself has changed to attract younger people. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

accessible	assign	dormant	nostalgic	obsolete	rotate	structural	warranted

1. Given the scale of the losses, an investigation is fully _____ .
2. Older viewers felt _____ when the theme tune from their childhood returned.
3. Because the flaw is _____ , built into the system itself, replacing managers will not fix it.
4. Museums have worked to make their collections more _____ to visitors with disabilities.
5. Staff _____ between the two offices every month, so nobody stays in one place.
6. The teacher decided to _____ each pupil a different task.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The commentary jumped to a quick _____ of a lonely generation. **(DIAGNOSE)**
2. Careful readers will challenge the _____ behind such claims. **(ASSUME)**
3. The tradition has survived _____ in Scottish and Irish communities. **(CONTINUE)**
4. Some critics see the _____ to look cool as the main strength of the dance. **(ABLE)**
5. The two explanations are not _____ exclusive, so both may be partly true. **(MUTUAL)**

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level, collocations are often verb plus abstract noun. Ask which verb the noun expects, and do not trust a direct translation.

allay	bar	draw	foster	pose	run	strike

1. Sales figures from one platform are too narrow a base from which to _____ sweeping conclusions.
2. Critics argue that treating ceilidhs as a cure for loneliness may _____ a threat to the tradition itself.
3. Organisers must _____ a balance between welcoming beginners and keeping the dances lively.
4. A good caller can _____ a sense of belonging in a room of strangers.
5. A clear structure can _____ the fears of anxious newcomers.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. How much should we read into growth figures from a single ticketing platform?
2. The article credits the design of the dance rather than the generation. Which explanation convinces you?
3. What would be lost if a tradition became mainly a cure for loneliness?

9 Role-play: a Friday night out

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the friend who wants to go

You went to a ceilidh last week and loved it. Invite your friend for Friday. Explain what it is like, answer their worries and try to agree a plan.

Student B · the friend who is not sure

You are tired and think dancing in front of strangers sounds embarrassing. Ask questions, say what worries you, and decide if you can agree a plan you both like.

Useful phrases

Why don't you come to a ceilidh with me?

I'm not very good at dancing.

Don't worry, you don't need a partner.

That's not really my kind of evening.

How about we try it for an hour? If you're not enjoying it, we'll leave.

Let's meet at seven, then.

Afterwards, tell the class: are you going to the ceilidh, and what changed your mind?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 E · 3 C · 4 D · 5 H · 6 A · 7 G · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 warranted · 2 nostalgic · 3 structural · 4 accessible · 5 rotate · 6 assign

6 Word forms

1 diagnosis · 2 assumptions · 3 continuously · 4 inability · 5 mutually

7 Language focus

1 draw · 2 pose · 3 strike · 4 foster · 5 allay

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**