

10 years of BUTCH, PLEASE!

ELLA GAUCI tracks the last decade of partying, protest and radical fun at the revolutionary lesbian night founded by Tabs Benjamin

Tag line lorem XX
Headline lorem ispums

Headline from the Story XX

“This is a pull quote lorem ipsu-m sit maet”

Lorem ipsum sit amet consectuetur omnes ipsum amet quested

Tag line lorem XX
Headline lorem ispums

Ten years ago there was a rumbling in the lesbian nightlife scene. Armed with leather harnesses, cropped haircuts and enough carabiners to hold a city’s worth of keys, Butch, Please! erupted in pure dyke glory. But before Tabs Benjamin (she/her, pictured right) opened the door to 250 queers gagging for a good dance, there was a moment of hesitation. “I really wasn’t sure anyone would come,” Tabs tells me. “I started the club because I didn’t feel like there was anywhere that I really wanted to go out. There weren’t very many lesbian-specific spaces. The 80s and 90s had been amazing, but a lot of the bars were shutting down in the 2000s when I was coming out.” »



Butch, Please! photography by Cherry Au @Cherryauhoni and Henri T @documentedbyhenrit
Portrait of Tabs by Christa Holka @christaholkastudio



“It felt like I’d come home”

» Despite Tabs' nerves about how many people would show up, from its launch Butch, Please! was a hit. Tabs watched on in wonder as the gyrating crowd filled up the dancerfloor to a soundtrack of Lein Sangster and Puja Maneer DJing. The crowd took notes when Tabs' friends talked about how to repair a bicycle puncture on stage and nodded along to Tabs' guitar playing skills. "I was blown away. It felt like I'd come home."

It's no wonder that Butch, Please! has been dubbed "the coolest lesbian night in London". For the last 10 years, this trans-inclusive space has grown into the leather-wearing beast that it is today, bringing butches, dykes and queers of all kinds together to dance until the sun rises. Inclusion has always been integral to the ethos of the night. As Tabs says, "It's important we keep fighting for trans rights and trans inclusion."

This radical space is about a lot more than dancing; it's about butches carving out a space where they are celebrated and centred. Honouring the lesbian nightlife that characterised the beating heart of the 80s, Butch, Please! echoes the roaring legacy of nights like Venus Rising or events like The Summer Rites. It's also been a place for community, culture and (importantly) romance to blossom.

Rightly so, hundreds of butches have come

"I WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL BEAUTIFUL, SEXY AND COOL. I WANT THEM TO FEEL LIKE THEY HAVE PLACE IN THE WORLD"

away feeling empowered. "I want people to feel like they can really be themselves," Tabs reflects. "I want people to feel beautiful, sexy and cool. I want them to feel like they have a place in the world. I want them to feel seen and I want them to see."

Butch, Please! is, in short, fucking awesome. Over the last 10 years, the stunts, celebs and events have become wilder and wilder. Tabs has ridden on stage on a Harley Davison for the legendary Dykes on Bikes and even met k.d lang. But whether you're in a bustling crowd at Clapham Grand or on the beach in Brighton, one thing remains: Butch, Please! will always be about community first.

"Butch is still a pretty niche, underground, working class identity rooted a lot in people of colour communities," Tabs tells me. "I think in some ways it will always be outside of the mainstream scene. At one time it felt like I was the only person on my soapbox banging on about butchness. Then all of a sudden it was like everybody got on board and it became this word people actually used."

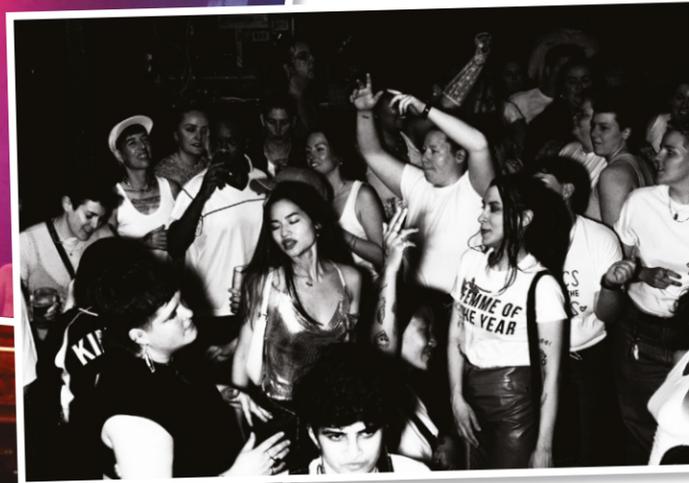
Ray (she/her) laughs as she recounts the first time she saw Tabs. She was in her early teens when she spotted Tabs walking her dog around Clissold Park in East London, resplendent in all her butch glory. Wishing she could cut her hair and dress more masculine, Ray remembers watching Tabs from her window at school and wondering if one

day she would be able to do that too. "When you're butch and you see an older butch, it sticks in your head," Ray tells me nostalgically. "I never forgot her face."

Barely 19, Ray went to her first Butch, Please! in 2015 at one of the first-ever events. Initially, Ray was too shy to tell Tabs the impact that she'd had on her teen years. "I didn't want her to think I was a weird stalker!" Ray laughs. But a few years later, Ray eventually did tell Tabs about the monumental impact that visibility had had on her teenage self. The pair are now firm friends, and Ray tells me that she's been to pretty much every Butch, Please! Ray's even brought along her mum, who absolutely "loved" it.

For Ray, who had searched for butch representation since her teens, it's been powerful to see representation all in one place. While she didn't see that many young butches when she was a teen, now Ray is noticing younger lesbians expressing themselves at the events. While Butch, Please! is a great way to let your hair (or undercut) down, it's also provided Ray with a whole host of mentors. "I'm now one of those people that talks to, helps out and gives advice to some of the younger people now."

Butch, Please! has become a hub for finding friends and making memories for Ray. Friends that have been made on the dancefloor and smoking area now regularly come round for roast dinners or trips to the pub. "As a lesbian, we don't have those pubs you go to where everyone is a regular. We've got bars or intense nightclubs. Butch, Please! has that pub garden, smoking area vibe."



BUTCH, PLEASE! TIMELINE

11.2015
The first event takes place in Brixton

06.2016
The infamous Dykes on Bikes night features a real Harley Davison

06.2019
k.d lang lip sync competition winners get to meet the star afterwards

06.2022
Butch, Please! takes over Mighty Hoopla

07.2022
Butch, Please! hosts their first Saturday night at RVT

03.2023
The legendary lesbian night wins a DIVA Award!

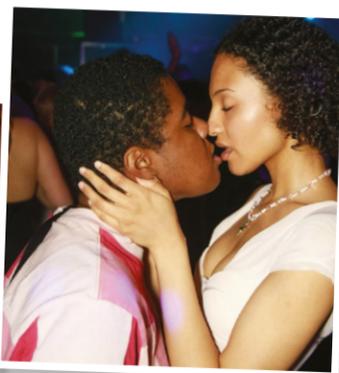
09.2023
The event moves to Clapham Grand, making it the biggest lesbian, trans and non-binary night since Venus Rising

10.2024
First Butch, Please! Leather Ball at Earth Hackney

05.2025
The iconic Butch, Please! Boat Party on the Thames

06.2025
Butch, Please! puts on their Summer Dykes '25 Day Festival in Hackney

"EVERY TYPE OF LESBIAN HAS WALKED THROUGH THE DOORS, FROM SCARED BABY BUTCHES TO 70 YEAR OLD SILVERBACKS"



» Intergenerational connections are a huge part of why Butch, Please! has been so vital for the last decade. Emily Witham (she/her), Butch, Please!'s "door femme", tells me that she's seen lesbians of all kinds coming to events. "I have seen every type of lesbian walk through the doors, from scared baby butches who have come alone and taken two flights to get here to 70 year old silverbacks who have been partying hard since Dusty Springfield was in the charts."

The "sacred space" is open for everyone. While some LGBTQIA+ events can feel exclusive or inaccessible, Butch, Please! calls upon the radically inclusive legacy of butches from yesteryear to make sure that everyone has a space on the dancefloor. Despite the name, Emily explains that femmes are indeed very much welcome. "We are not just here to give you a really good time, but also to bring you closer to your community," she adds. "People come to party when really bad things in their lives have happened. It's our job to not only offer escapism, but also a sense of belonging, a sense of being held by people that really care about you."

For the last 10 years, Butch, Please! has been a movement. While our LGBTQIA+ spaces are rapidly declining, the longevity of this night shows the sheer power of sapphic culture and identity.

For award-winning poet and playwright Joelle Taylor (she/her),

Butch, Please! has been a "home", and a "safe space" to find herself connected to community. "Butch, Please! is a kind of lighthouse pulling us toward it and into safer waters," she tells me. "It feels radical in its insistence on making dykes central, in celebrating the width of us from leather dykes to enbies, femmes to trans mascs. And it has a real sense of legacy to it now after a decade. So few examples of dyke infrastructure remain as long, and that's to be applauded."

For Joelle, seeing Butch, Please! on tour was one of her biggest highlights from the last decade. Particularly, the night in Brighton stood out, bringing together dykes that she hadn't seen in years. Bringing Butch, Please! out of London has allowed so many more butches and sapphics to connect, something which Trill Moss, described by Tabs as an "an original rebel dyke", greatly appreciates.

"In Brighton, there's really nowhere for lesbians to go anymore," Trill says. "I come from the golden age of lesbian

clubs in the 80s and 90s. Everything fell away after that. People became isolated and had nowhere to go to establish communities. The resurgence of something like Butch, Please! is so welcome."

Partying on the beach at the Brighton Butch, Please! night, Trill was ecstatic to find a space that welcomed all ages and brought the community together. She describes the outfits as being "pretty outrageous", reminiscent of the 80s. Trill recounts a story of meeting Tabs in Lesbos (of course!) and mentioning that Butch, Please! felt like a return to the days of Venus Rising. "She cried," Trill tells me. "For such a long time, all

of our club nights stopped and it became a wasteland in the lesbian scene. Something like Butch, Please! is providing a service to the lesbian community. It's that sense of belonging to something again."

"What I admire about Tabs is that she doesn't forget who did things before," Trill adds. "She does recognise the women who put the work in all those years ago."

"Butch, Please! has always been very nostalgic," Tabs admits. "One of my greatest pleasures has been to see a lot of the older dykes come back to going out. I think we do build on what people have done before. Just because something's not on Instagram doesn't mean it didn't happen! I've always felt like all the people who came before me stand with me in my head when I do Butch, Please!"

The golden age of lesbian nightlife has not died, despite what the papers might tell you. It's nights like Butch, Please! which have kept that fire burning, even

in exceptionally hard times for the LGBTQIA+ community. With all the hedonism and hope that Venus Rising once embodied, Butch, Please! is the new torch leading the charge for how we can come as one right now. It's never just dancing – it's demonstration. In the radical act of running to the dancefloor, we are rallying together. Every white tank top is a testament to our history. Every leather harness a declaration that we belong. And every Jägerbomb knocked back a call for justice.

As Tabs puts it, "It's not just a party. It's a radical getting together of people who are creating space for ourselves in a world that doesn't give us any space." **D**

butchplease.co.uk
[@butchpleaselondon](https://www.instagram.com/butchpleaselondon)

Get to know Tabs The founder of Butch, Please!

I knew I was butch when...
I fell in love with my PE teacher.

My butch icon is...
Alice Temple

The best thing about being butch is...
Having great hair.

My favourite Butch, Please! memory is...
Meeting kd lang, saying, "I'm Tabs" and her replying, "I know".

What I wish people knew about butches is...
We cry more than femmes.

My advice to other butches is...
Just be you.