

Nutbush fever: How the Ike and Tina Turner hit became Australia's dance sensation

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If there's one thing that Aussies just can't resist doing at a wedding—it's

the Nutbush.

The iconic line dance to the 1973 R&B funk track Nutbush City Limits is an accepted part of Australian culture and has crossed generations so that children and adults break out the moves at weddings, parties and school formals.

Now researchers at the University of South Australia and Edith Cowan University in WA have explored the origins of the Nutbush and how it became an Australian cultural phenomenon.

UniSA's Professor Jon Stratton and Edith Cowan's Professor Panizza Allmark have [researched the history](#) of the dance to the Ike and Tina Turner hit and say it's likely to have originated in the halls of the NSW education department in 1975. The study is published in the journal *Continuum*.

"We believe the Nutbush was developed and distributed to teacher training institutions to be used as a teaching aid in creative arts classes and physical education," says Prof Stratton, a cultural studies scholar.

"Line dances work very well in classrooms because the teacher can stand at the front and give instructions to the lines. The idea must have been to provide students with an enjoyable way of exercising and learning coordination.

"Whoever designed the Nutbush succeeded beyond any success they could have hoped for. What makes it special is that it's moved out of schools to become the dance of choice at many Australian social events."

It's also been claimed that the Nutbush may have come into existence from someone trying to remember the steps to the American line dance, the Madison, but ending up with an incorrect version that went on to

become the Nutbush.

The daggy line dance that accompanied the semi-autobiographical song written by Turner is characterized by several variations of leg movements. Despite its popularity, Turner has never performed the dance and there is no recorded comment from her about it.

The song itself is based on Turner's small rural hometown of Nutbush in Tennessee and was released in July 1973, peaking in the music charts at number 87 in early December of that year.

Nutbush City Limits stayed off the Australian music charts throughout all of 1974, until something unusual happened. It climbed to number 27 on the Australian chart in March 1975 and stayed in the top 100 for 15 weeks. That same year the single climbed to number 8 in the NSW chart and reappeared in 1976. It also reached the heights of the Victorian and Queensland music charts.

Prof Stratton suspects its re-emergence in Australian music charts was not only because the song was a "dance floor filler" but was also because of the Nutbush's popularity and spread across Australian classrooms during that time.

"The last time Nutbush City Limits appeared in the Australian charts was when Tina Turner died at the age of 83 on 24 May 2023. The Nutbush is likely to remain an experience that Australians resonate with for some time."

Professor Panizza Allmark recalls dancing to the Nutbush herself in [primary school](#) in Perth around 1980 when [physical education](#) and [dance classes](#) would prepare students for highly anticipated school discos.

"Unlike formal dancing where you needed a partner, the Nutbush didn't

involve holding hands or touching anyone of the opposite sex," she says.

"In primary school, when learning folk dancing, there was great awkwardness in having to dance with a partner of the opposite sex but with the Nutbush, you didn't need 'to take a partner by the hand." You could enjoy the [dance moves](#) and be part of a communal experience without all the sweaty handholding."

The Nutbush has become such an Australian institution that there have been various attempts to create a [world record](#) for the number of people dancing it at one time.

The record stands at 6594 dancers at the 2023 Mundi Mundi Bash in remote NSW.

More information: Panizza Allmark et al, Doing the Nutbush: how Australia got its very own line dance, *Continuum* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/10304312.2024.2331796](#)

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