



STEPPING OUT

Hadass Armon tells **Marianka Swain** about her European same-sex dance outreach work

Becoming co-president of the European Same-Sex Dance Association (ESSDA) has helped teacher and judge Hadass Armon fulfil a long-held ambition. “My goal has always been to promote and develop same-sex dancing, get it to a better standard and help it gain recognition. ESSDA provides a wonderful opportunity to do just that – and on a massive scale.”

Hadass became one of the UK’s two representatives on ESSDA’s board in 2010 and has since been instrumental in several key initiatives, such as establishing European-wide same-sex ballroom competition rules – vital in ensuring fairness and encouraging competitors to travel farther afield.

ESSDA has also helped to organise several major competitions, notes Hadass, including the 2008 Eurogames in Barcelona, “where same-sex dancing was virtually nonexistent,” and 2011’s Eurogames in Rotterdam, which, under ESSDA rules, saw the first-ever European Championship titles awarded. “We’re now working towards this year’s Eurogames in Budapest; an exciting challenge, as Hungary’s politics make it not



only the biggest competition in the same-sex dance calendar, but a major international event.”

As well as big projects, ESSDA’s work is often one-to-one, explains Hadass: “The UK has a very strong social same-sex dancing scene and many of our competitors grow out of that supportive environment. In

Europe, ballroom is considered a sport, thus the social side is less developed. That means some dancers aren’t sure where and when events are taking place, so ESSDA helps bridge that gap. We invite them to competitions, show them how big and exciting the same-sex dance scene has become and involve them in the community.

“Every dancer has different needs, so we don’t have a set policy; it’s more about responding to what people want from us. We have a diverse committee from different countries, so we’re constantly exchanging ideas. Every day I learn something new; I truly believe the day I stop learning, part of me will die. Based on feedback, we amend competition rules so they work even better – every comment that comes in is invaluable in helping us accommodate differences between the various countries.”

This delicate balancing act will be even more of a challenge in the new organisation: the International Federation of Same-Sex Dance Associations (IFSSDA). “We’re working on the constitution, bylaws and rules at the moment, aiming towards a world championship,” says Hadass. “I’m delighted to be one of the ESSDA officials involved, working with representatives from our North American counterpart. I’m proud that ESSDA has helped make a difference in European countries where same-sex dancing isn’t as well-established or is even considered unacceptable, and I hope IFSSDA can continue that work around the world.” ●