



Bradley (left) and Sören (right) Stauffer-Kruse

All photographs courtesy of the dancers

**Marianka Swain** asks the committee members of the UK Same Sex Dance Council about what they've achieved and their hopes for the future

**"T**he UK's same-sex dance scene has grown so much over the past few years, and we felt that dancers, teachers, promoters, judges and spectators needed a unified voice," explains Vernon Kemp, chairman of the UK Same Sex Dance Council (UKSSDC; [www.ukssdc.co.uk](http://www.ukssdc.co.uk)).

The UKSSDC was established in May 2006, and one of its earliest acts was to set out competition rules, "the first published in the UK", notes secretary Bradley Stauffer-Kruse, who competes with his partner Sören. "It helps organisers keep things fair, and it helps dancers

enormously. It's intimidating entering a competition for the first time, so if we communicate how everything works, hopefully more people will take that step."

Creating the comprehensive rules was a big job, recalls webmaster Heather Gladding, who, with partner Hadass Armon, runs Studio La Danza: "It took other committees a lot longer to do. We

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were fortunate to have a sub-committee that worked incredibly hard, and now we're approached by groups in other countries asking for advice." Hadass adds: "The scene is evolving all the time, so we don't assume that everything's set in stone, but it's great to have a starting point to work from."

Ralf Schiller, organiser of the Pink Jukebox Trophy (PJT, covered next month), is in the perfect position to observe the committee's progress: "We wanted to apply rules that make it fun and fair for everyone, and I can see the result of that at

the PJT. We try to get as much feedback as possible, so we can address concerns and respond to ideas. Our job isn't telling people what to do; it's listening to what they want for their community and working out the best way of putting that into practice." Bradley agrees: "It's about representing current dancers and encouraging the next generation."

Treasurer Tori Leach, one of the non-professionals on the committee, would love to see more competitions like the PJT in the UK: "as it's expensive for people to go abroad, so it might put off newcomers or supporters". George Tzoulas, leading competitor with partner Michael Hall, believes the solution is more integration with the mainstream dance world: "Wouldn't it be wonderful to see a same-sex competition alongside the British National events in Blackpool? It happens in Holland and Germany. Same-sex dancers are as serious as any other competitors. It's the passion and love for dancing that drives us all."

Ralf adds: "We're becoming more accepted into the wider dance community, and it would be great if organisations such as the British Dance Council acknowledged us." Tori's pleased that there's more acceptance, but cautions: "We should keep supporting our own competitions as well. Lots of mainstream judges rave about how welcoming and positive the PJT is, so it would be a shame to lose that."

Hadass, who judges at both same-sex and mainstream

competitions, thinks the key is pushing standards up: "It would be great to get to the stage where dancers are judged on merit, rather than preconceived ideas. If we produce more and more amazing couples and show the strength and depth of same-sex dance, it'll have to be recognised."

However, the UKSSDC doesn't just represent competitors, explains Mary White: "One of the great joys I've had is watching competitions and cheering people on – if you go abroad, you get a nice holiday as well! I'm trying to build up a network of supporters, people who don't want to or are unable to compete, but still want to be involved. The same-sex competitions have such a fantastic atmosphere, so you don't have to be a top couple to have a great time."

Vice-chair Jacky Logan, who DJs at the Rivoli Ballroom's monthly same-sex social, is concerned that participation is far less common outside big cities: "You see same-sex dancers in London at various public events, but it's not the same across the country."

"Our outreach programme is a big part of the committee's work, and it's definitely paying off. We're hoping to develop a competition in Manchester soon, and we'll keep offering support for people who want to build up dance clubs in the regions."

Bradley is pleased their website has become "a centrepoint – it draws people in when they Google 'same-sex dancing' and helps us spread the word". Vernon notes the UKSSDC is also playing a crucial role in the wider gay community: "We're in consultation with the team putting together a bid for the Gay Games 2018, which is a great honour."

Heather and Hadass have a Studio La Danza float in the Pride London Parade and are proud of their contribution, says Heather: "It's been a slow process, but you have to keep working for something you believe in. The formation of the UKSSDC is a landmark achievement, and we hope there'll be plenty more in the future." ●



Main, Heather Gladding (right) and Hadass Armon (left) Inset, George Tzoulas (left) and Michael Hall (right)