



STEPPING OUT

This month, **Marianka Swain** reports on the Budapest EuroGames

Of all the things dancers worry about at a big international competition, security and safety are generally way down the list, below “Will the venue be hard to find?” and “Did we pack enough hairspray?” However, for same-sex competitors at this year’s EuroGames, the political climate in Hungary was a definite consideration.

“When Budapest won the Games bid, the left-wing government promised to back it, but since then, a right-wing government has come in and refused to contribute financially, so we had to run it purely on registration fees,” explains head judge Heather Gladding. “There’s also vocal opposition to the gay community, so of course dancers were concerned.

“However, European Same-Sex Dance Association (ESSDA) co-president Hadass Armon did a fantastic job liaising with the Hungarians and EuroGames organisers to ensure ample security and, once we’d advertised that, there was a big



Heather Gladding (right) and Hadass Armon

upsurge in registration.” The security measures included metal detectors, searches and ID checks and no photography without written consent.

“We’re so fortunate to live in a country where it’s easy to be out, but obviously that’s not the case everywhere – and for lots of us, that struggle is within living memory, so we’re sensitive to it. The odd part was being in a European country, where homosexuality isn’t illegal, yet still being aware that it’s potentially dangerous to broadcast it; we wouldn’t hold hands walking in the street.”

Nevertheless, many local

businesses backed them: “We competed in a great sports hall and a lovely hotel opened its doors to us. There’s really only a small minority that’s ardently homophobic, so it was ultimately an uplifting experience. The Hungarian dancers made a wonderful speech saying how proud they were to host the community that’s welcomed them over the years – this was their first opportunity to repay that hospitality.”

The growth of the international community, aided by ESSDA’s outreach work, was evident in the range of dancers present, from Greece and America to Australia, “plus, for the first time, couples from Russia. It was incredibly brave of them to come and I’m thrilled we were there to support them. Although we all wanted to win medals, many British dancers

went to make a point – ‘You can’t tell me not to dance with my partner’ – and show that same-sex dancing isn’t going anywhere.

“Our main aim is to be a team. ESSDA is joining forces with American and Australian bodies so that everyone in the dance community gets a say and we can grow together; we don’t want a schism like in the mainstream. Despite the political challenges, this event ran brilliantly because we have well-established rules and everyone knows what to expect, so we can just enjoy dancing and come together as an international family.” ●