

BLACKPOOL REMEMBERED

Marianka Swain asked readers to share their favourite moments from Blackpool Dance Festival, the most prestigious ballroom competition in the world

The year 2020 will be a very special one in the dance calendar: 100 years since dancers first stepped onto the magnificent floor of the Empress Ballroom at the Winter Gardens for the first Blackpool Dance Festival.

The criteria might have changed considerably since then (in 1920, the more sedate styles of choice were sequence dances in three tempi – waltz, two-step and foxtrot), but the tradition of excellence has remained unbroken.

When new management dared to suggest suspending the festival in 1927, *Dancing Times* stepped into the breach; since then, the event has only paused briefly for World War II, and has introduced key innovations such as the skating system, a Latin American section and a competition for Professionals.

We asked *Dance Today* readers to help us look back at some of the moments that made the festival a world leader.

TOP TEN MEMORIES

10 OLD RIVALS AND NEW CHALLENGERS, 1994 "I was sad to hear Standard champions John Wood and Anne Lewis announce their retirement, as I loved their dynamic style and always thought they brought the best out of their competitors, Marcus and Karen Hilton. But though the Hiltons came first in every dance that year, they had new challengers in the form of the very charismatic Luca Baricchi and Loraine Barry, who definitely caught the crowd's attention!" **Hilary Richardson**

9 TAKING NOTES, 2008 "Always love the lectures at the festival, and thought Sergey Surkov and Melia gave a particularly good talk about

paso doble – how they draw on legendary writers, like Lorca, to tell stories through dance rather than just focus on the technical side of things. My favourite speakers are Bryan Watson and Carmen – frank, charismatic and full of wisdom." **Mark Henes**

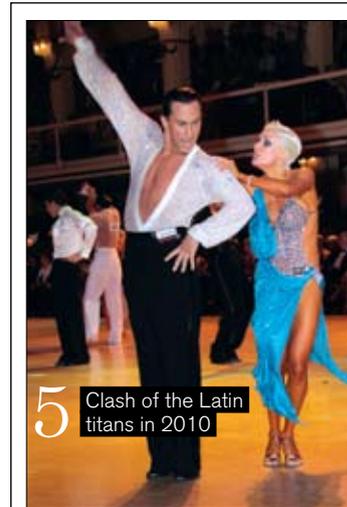
8 TEAM SPIRIT, 1982 "I was blown away by

my first experience of team matches – it was a whole new dimension of ballroom dancing. Of course I remember the Brits being the best!" **Ellie Barnes**

7 FINAL FAREWELL, 2007 "Bryan Watson and Carmen's retirement announcement brought all of us to tears. I remember thinking 'What a



Not a dry eye in the house: Bryan Watson and Carmen retire at Blackpool in 2007



5 Clash of the Latin titans in 2010



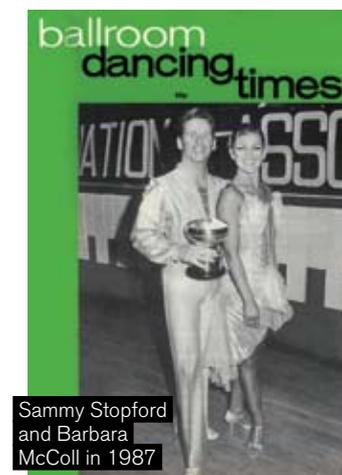
huge loss', but they definitely went out on a high with that amazing final rumba." **G Short**

6 INSPIRATIONS, 1975 "My first Blackpool was magical. I used to dance around the house like Janet Gleave, imagining I had my very own Richard! Watching them was like being in a fairytale." **Harriet Ann Simmonds**

5 LATIN CLASH, 2010 "I'm a big Michael [Malitowski] and Joanna [Leunis] fan (pictured above left), but it was interesting to see Riccardo Cocchi and Yulia [Zagoruychenko] (pictured above right) start to really challenge them. That's the hardest I've seen two couples fight for floor domination." **Peter Whitlock**

4 TOP CAMEOS, 2007 "When superstars Donnie Burns and Gaynor Fairweather and Marcus and Karen Hilton performed in the opening section of the team match, the cheer

almost lifted the roof off the Winter Gardens!" **Denis Ni Gamhna**



Sammy Stopford and Barbara McColl in 1987

3 CLOSE CALL, 1998 "I want to mention Karen [Hardy] and Bryan [Watson] missing out on the Latin title by the narrowest of margins – and unfairly in my opinion, and the crowd's. Not that we were biased! I've never heard anything like it when that result was announced." **Martha Bailey**

2 DANCE DUEL, 1966 "The buzz within the Empress Ballroom was like a racing car Grand Prix – [that was] the level of sheer excitement," says **Jack Reavely** as he recalls the epic battle between defending champions Peter Eggleton and Brenda Winslade and returning greats Bill and Bobbie Irvine in our December 2011 issue.

1 KEEPING IT SIMPLE, 1987 "We'll never forget Sammy's [Stopford] basic rumba at the British Open. Donnie Burns and the other male pros were all about flash and 'cool' moves or making it overly sexy, but he and Barbara McColl just did these basic syllabus steps, so beautifully. "It was mesmerising – you couldn't look anywhere else." **Lizzy and Graham White** ●

HAVE WE MISSED YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY? IF YOU HAVE A HIGHLIGHT FROM BLACKPOOL DANCE FESTIVAL YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE, DO LET US KNOW THROUGH THE CONTACT DETAILS ON PAGE 5, EMAIL DANCETODAY@DANCE-TODAY.CO.UK OR THROUGH FACEBOOK OR TWITTER.