



STEPPING OUT

This month, **Marianka Swain** learns about a match made in heaven

Finding love on the dancefloor is a well-established tradition, from Johnny and Baby to champions like Marcus and Karen Hilton, and the same-sex dance world is no exception, as Dutch couple Simone Taverne and Lisette van Bruggen explain. “We both started dancing with our girlfriends at the time, partly because we wanted to learn how to dance and partly as a slightly different kind of date!” recalls Simone.

Those former relationships may not have lasted, but their passion for dance certainly has, as Simone and Lisette are now perfect partners in ballroom and in life.

“We started dancing together in 2001 – I lost my partner when my relationship ended, and Simone volunteered to be a ‘stand-in’ in class,” recalls Lisette. “It was at the Outgames in Montreal that, after six years of dancing together as friends, we realised being a couple on the dancefloor wasn’t enough – we had fallen in love. We moved in together and got married in August 2010.”

Simone began their dance journey with more technical experience, but the pair are now more equal, “so we try to help each other,” says Lisette. “Sometimes we’ll disagree on



Simone Taverne (left) and Lisette van Bruggen

a figure, if I think it’s a bit too difficult and Simone wants to keep trying to get it – she’s definitely more competitive than me, and we don’t always agree on when to stop practising!”

The combination has certainly worked, as Simone and Lisette have represented the Netherlands at a number of big competitions. “The 2004 Munich EuroGames was Lisette’s first international experience, and she ended up crying on the edge of the floor because it was so overwhelming,” notes Simone.

“Since then, we’ve been to nearly every EuroGames, Outgames and Gay Games, not just because of the dancing, but also for that extraordinary

celebration of life, love, sports and the gay community.”

“We’ve competed in a few mainstream competitions, but we prefer the atmosphere of same-sex ones,” observes Lisette. “We’d love to see more support for same-sex partnerships, particularly dance schools and the social side. Unless we can keep building that community, we won’t have enough couples to maintain same-sex competitions.

“There are some great couples dancing for the Netherlands, but there aren’t enough new people taking up same-sex ballroom and helping increase its visibility. Public performances like *Britain’s Got Talent* definitely help, but if we talk about dancing in competitions to people at work, we still get the feeling that they don’t know what to make of it.”

“Same-sex dance is the sport where it’s most obvious the participants are gay, so it makes a serious point about accepting differences, but in a joyful way – it’s kind of like a feel-good movie!” adds Simone. “But we think being a gay couple who say hi to their neighbours and are part of ‘normal’ everyday life makes a huge difference too.” ●

This year’s World Outgames will be held in Antwerp from July 31 to August 11. See www.woga2013.org for more information.

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