

STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX
DANCE SCENE



This month, **Marianka Swain** reports on a landmark competition win

As we discussed in our May issue, same-sex dancers' participation in mainstream ballroom competitions is still the subject of fierce debate. Nevertheless, we have to salute the courage of those trailblazing couples who are taking on the challenge and bringing same-sex dance to a wider audience.

In July, John Church and Alexandre Lewalle's determination paid off, as they became the first same-sex partnership to hold a UK Closed title when they were crowned Over-35 Pre-Championship winners (pictured above) at the Dance Promoters' Association's 24th annual UK Closed Championships in Bournemouth. Their victory is significant, as this is not only

one of the biggest British dancesport festivals, but one of the most respected.

"We drove home exhausted but totally elated!" recalls John.

"In addition to that amazing win, we took second place in the Bournemouth Festival's Over-23 Pre-Championship competition and we also reached the semi-finals of the UK Closed Senior I Ballroom Championships. All in all, a great few days of dancing!"

"We've been competing in mainstream events for a while, predominantly in the south of England, but we had no idea what to expect when we set off for Bournemouth," admits Alex. "We'd never entered such a large and prestigious event, and



we were all too aware that this could be the first time our judges and fellow dancers had even seen same-sex ballroom, so we didn't know how we'd be received."

However, their fears were groundless, says John: "We were bowled over by the many positive comments we received from the other dancers, spectators and organisers. The cheers of support and wide smiles from around the competition floor when we were announced Over-35 Pre-Championship winners will remain with us forever.

"We're really proud at having achieved so much over the course of one weekend. To be the first same-sex couple to win a UK Closed title at a major competition, to come runners-up in the Bournemouth Festival event and to reach the semi-finals of the

Senior I Championship, competing against a large and very talented field, was more than we had dared dream of.

"This experience has fuelled our belief that same-sex dancers can be fully integrated into mainstream competitions, and our desire to work as hard as we can with our incredible coaches to improve our technique and performance." Let's hope this is the first of many successes to come. ●

YOU SHALL GO TO THE BALL

Tickets are now on sale for the Pink Dancers' Annual Ball at London's beautiful Carisbrooke Hall on November 16. To book your place, email Jacky Logan at jacjoke@aol.com – tickets cost £16 and they sell out fast!

What do you think of introducing same-sex dance to mainstream competitions? Write to us at *Dance Today*, 45–47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0EB, email dancetoday@dance-today.co.uk or contact us via Facebook or Twitter.