

STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX
DANCE SCENE



This month, **Marianka Swain** reports on the Vienna Dance Contest

The eighth annual competition, which took place on September 28, was a rather different experience for the organising team. "It was our baby boom!" explains Roswitha Wetschka. "We had three under a year old, including my daughter. She already loves dancing, so she's a proper Vienna Dance Contest baby."

The results reflected this theme of new beginnings, with Christian Wagner and Martino Moreno taking the men's A Latin title in their same-sex competitive debut. "They represent Austria in top mainstream competitions and plan to do same-sex events in parallel," says Roswitha. "They

really want to encourage more same-sex dancers – they've already convinced their dance club to introduce it."

Rono Alam and Andreas Ramakrishnan, another new couple, won the men's C Standard representing a local mainstream dancesport club, "which is a big step forward – while some clubs are supportive, others feel differently," notes Roswitha. The pair brought a large group of supporters, "who made good use of the pompoms we provided!"

Austria's Agnes Schneider and Helga Eberrer dominated the field in the women's A, winning both Standard and Latin, while in the men's, balancing out the influx of newcomers,

we said farewell to retiring Holger Wenzel and Andreas Schöpp from Germany, who finished on a high with wins in Standard and Viennese waltz. They narrowly defeated Csaba Csetneki and Balázs Gáti in both events, and we shall miss the competitive edge Holger and Andreas brought to such title clashes.

Roswitha was pleased with the wide spectrum, from top competitors to strong representation in the D class. "Our A couples performed jaw-dropping solos, and we had a wonderfully expressive foxtrot/rumba showcase from Britain's Tori and Yvonne Settle during our Pink Dance Night. I'm sure those performances hugely inspired the newcomers."

The Vienna Dance Contest also became something of a political asset ahead of the Austrian elections, with sponsorship from the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party, although, notes Roswitha, the latter "only supports us in an election year!" The Green Party's European Parliament representative, Ulrika

Lunace, handed out prizes "and gave a wonderful speech pointing out that same-sex dance illustrates the flexibility of gender roles and the importance of encouraging individuals to pursue their strengths. It's fantastic to get support at that level!"

The event included tours of Vienna, mixing sightseeing with a history of same-sex dance. "In 1982, I'd just moved to Vienna to study and had my coming out, and I saw a leaflet about women's tango in a lesbian and gay café," recalls Roswitha. "At that time, we couldn't just go to a class or a ball – we were hidden away, dancing in the café basement. Eight years later, we rented a table at a Viennese ball and caused a big stir! It's amazing to look back and see how far we've come, with same-sex dance schools and competitions and much more public acceptance. It's just getting better and better." ●

The next Vienna Dance Contest is on September 27, 2014. Find out more at www.viennadancecontest.at

Men's ballroom A class finalists

